Journal of Mass Media Ethics, *20*(4), 250–268

The Propaganda War on Terrorism: An Analysis of the United States' "Shared Values" Public-Diplomacy Campaign After September 11, 2001

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❑ *Drawing from midcentury and contemporary theoretical work on propaganda, this study provides an analysis of the propagandistic properties of the "Shared Values" initiative developed by Charlotte Beers, former chief of public diplomacy under U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. The campaign was broadcast in several Muslim countries before it was abandoned in 2003. The campaign's utilization of truth, its treatment of Muslim audiences as means to serve broader policy objectives rather than as a population to be engaged on its own terms, and its use of palaver all suggest the "Shared Values" videos, as an example of mass communication, had serious ethical shortcomings.*

The video clip shows Abdul Hammuda talking and laughing with family members while attending a carnival, with a brightly lit Ferris wheel in the background. The scene is all-American, and his voice-over is casual yet earnest: "Religious freedom here is something that is very important, and no one ever bothered us," says Hammuda, owner of Tiger Lebanese Bakery in Toledo, Ohio. "Since 9/11, we've had an overwhelming sense of support from our customers and clients."

The scene is featured in one of five video segments produced by the U.S. State Department as part of an innovative and controversial public-diplomacy strategy. Titled the "Shared Values" campaign, the videos were an attempt to dispel myths about persecution and discrimination of American Muslims, and were broadcast in several Muslim countries, including Indonesia and Jordan, in 2002. However, the $15 million effort was abandoned in early 2003 and has raised fundamental questions regarding American

public-diplomacy efforts. What exactly is the intent of such a strategy, and what was its actual impact? Can its effectiveness be measured? Should the "Shared Values" initiative be described as admirable outreach or misguided propaganda? Extensive field research would be required to address the questions about the campaign's impact and effectiveness. However, the existing body of literature on propaganda theory can be usefully brought to bear on the campaign to analyze its intent and its techniques of persuasion. Such an analysis also provides a solid basis to suggest an affirmative answer to the question of whether this campaign can be accurately described as a piece of propaganda. This study will first provide an analytical context drawn from the body of propaganda theory and then will attempt a methodical exploration some of the key divisions outlined by Jowett and O'Donnell (1999) that are clearly most relevant to an examination of the ethical dimension of the "Shared Values" video campaign. The campaign's utilization of truth, its treatment of Muslim audiences as means to achieve broader policy objectives rather than as a population to be engaged on its own terms, and its use of "palaver," or innocuous talk, all suggest that the campaign had serious ethical shortcomings.

Literature

Much of the propaganda literature (Altheide & Johnson, 1980; Combs & Nimmo, 1993; Cunningham, 2002; Doob, 1935; Sproule, 1988) *explores* and *describes* propagandistic features of communication but stops short of actually *defining* the term. Most of these theorists suggest that any clear-cut definition will inevitably be inadequate because of the protean nature of persuasive rhetoric. Jowett and O'Donnell (1999) attempted to move beyond description by providing a "plan of analysis" that features a 10-point schema intended to help pinpoint propagandistic tendencies of a communication campaign. This 10-step process simultaneously helps identify important details of a campaign and addresses broader social and cultural sources on which propaganda campaigns generally rely. Jowett and O'Donnell's 10 divisions for propaganda analysis are as follows:

1. The ideology and purpose of the propaganda campaign
2. The context in which the campaign occurs
3. Identification of the propagandist
4. The structure of the propaganda organization
5. The target audience
6. Media utilization techniques
7. Special techniques to maximize effect
8. Audience reaction to various techniques

9. Counterpropaganda, if present
10. Effects and evaluation. (p. 280)

As Jowett and O'Donnell (1999) acknowledged, analysis of the propagandistic tendencies of any campaign may not necessarily focus on all of these divisions because each campaign is different and information available for one or more areas may be sketchy or nonexistent. Still, their analysis plan provides a solid, theoretically grounded starting point for addressing propagandistic tendencies. This study will first provide an analytical context drawn from the body of propaganda theory and then attempt a methodical exploration of some of the key divisions outlined by Jowett and O'Donnell that are clearly most relevant to examining the ethical dimension of the "Shared Values" video campaign.

This study also draws from important concepts of critical discourse analysis and of symbolic interactionist theory. Critical discourse analysis is a branch of linguistics that focuses on identifying and explicating hints of cultural and ideological meaning in spoken and written texts (Fairclough, 1989; Hodge & Kress, 1993; O'Halloran, 2003). With their focus on the use of language in the context of power relations, critical discourse analysts look at how individuals and groups use (and manipulate) linguistic strategies to exercise or oppose power and uphold or challenge ideological assumptions. Hodge and Kress, for example, claimed that propaganda typically operates on two broad strategies: manipulation of reality and manipulation of the orientation to reality. "It is possible for propaganda to be fully successful without needing to resort to actual or demonstrable lies, so a form of analysis is necessary that can isolate these processes and mechanisms, irrespective of claims to truth" (p. 161).

Charlotte Beers and her producers … were engaged in the determined construction of a specific, purposeful reality.

This project will not engage the collectivist or individualist tension inherent in how we confer meaning through gesture, a central concern of Mead's (1964) symbolic interactionist theory. However, Mead's argument regarding "representation" through language may be helpful in understanding a communication campaign such as the "Shared Values" videos. In contrast to earlier theorists who argued that individual actors define the meaning of the objects with which they interact, Mead argued that mean-

ing is *independent* of such action and instead is found in symbols—primarily language. Language, Mead said

> does not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object, for it is part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object was created. (p. 165)

Charlotte Beers and her producers, this study argues, were engaged in the determined construction of a specific, purposeful reality, and the enterprise relied on particular imagery and uses and representations of truth dependent on the values of certain sense-making symbols, or cues.

"Shared Values": Brainchild of Charlotte Beers

As the nation was reeling from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the military operations in Afghanistan were being discussed, the Bush administration became eager to open up a diplomatic front in what has become known as the war on terrorism. Less than a month after the attacks, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell named Charlotte Beers to the post of Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to lead those efforts. Once described as the "Queen of Madison Avenue" by *Business Week* (Neuborne, 1999), Beers was a pioneer of branding strategies who led, at different times, two of the largest advertising firms in the world: Ogilvy & Mather and J. Walter Thompson. In the news media, Powell was enthusiastic and blunt about bringing Beers's advertising skills to bear on American diplomatic efforts. "We are selling a product," he was quoted as saying. "There is nothing wrong with getting somebody who knows how to sell something. We need someone who can rebrand American policy" (Klein, 2003, B5). Elsewhere, he referred to the advertising campaign for Uncle Ben's Rice, one of numerous campaigns produced by Beers. "Didn't you buy Uncle Ben's Rice? And that's exactly what I want … somebody who can get out there and mix it up in the kind of world we're living in" (Neuman, 2002, A24).

In her new role as diplomat, Beers sought to jump-start the long-dormant "public-diplomacy" office of the State Department, persuading the foreign-service corps that devising strategies to get the U.S. message out should be a critical part of foreign-policy decisions. She produced a glossy brochure that detailed, with grisly photos, the human carnage of the September 11 attacks. She also added a feature on the State Department Web site called "Muslim life in America," which showed pictures of mosques and smiling American Muslim families. "We have all been made aware of the polls which report

our eroding goodwill with the rest of the world," Beers (2002b) said during a December 2002 speech at the National Press Club:

> But it's considerably more intense and more deliberately manipulated by extremist factions in the Middle East … . These distortions happen every day in their press, in their magazines and from their pulpits. Our share of the mainstream voices is at an all-time low in terms of being heard. Our silence, I believe, is dangerous. (p. 4)

The centerpiece of her effort to address Muslim misperceptions of American life was the already-mentioned series of short video presentations of Muslims describing their lives in the United States. The "Shared Values" campaign featured Muslims from several walks of life, including Hammuda, the baker in Toledo, and Elias Zerhouni, the director of the National Institutes of Health. Through the news media, Beers repeatedly argued that her job was to help get the word out that the United States was badly misunderstood and that American Muslims live in safety and are free from persecution. "The whole idea of building a brand is to create a relationship between the product and its user," Beers said during an interview during her first month on the job. "We're going to have to communicate the intangible assets of the United States—things like our belief system and our values" (Starr, 2001, p. 56). The videos were targeted to be broadcast in Muslim countries through Ramadan, the traditional period of fasting and reflection for Muslims that lasts from early November to early December.

Propaganda: Theory and Definitions

While the concept of propaganda was a subject of commentary—and suspicion—in the 19th century (Qualter, 1962), social scientists and communication theorists began to focus research efforts on it soon after World War I (Doob, 1935; Lasswell, 1927; Lee & Lee, 1988). Lippmann (1922) suggested that increasingly sophisticated mass media and persuasion techniques demanded that journalism take on a special, collaborative role with scientists and policy experts, reflecting a longstanding view that social groups were largely and easily victimized by strategic political messages. Lasswell (1927) and Lumley (1933) sought to provide early explications on the "logic" of propaganda. However as Sproule (1987) documented, this citizen-participation paradigm gave way in the 1940s as researchers progressively drew propaganda studies into the realm of quantitative science—often in the service of postwar government objectives.

After a period of relative stagnation, research and theory-building on propaganda was reignited by the work of Jacques Ellul (1965), who argued

that propaganda was not a strategy but the all-encompassing *ethos* of an information society preoccupied with efficiency. Propaganda, he argued, has long transcended specific message campaigns and is now the primary means of cultural sense-making, "integration," and the enforcement of social norms. Ellul (1965) defined propaganda as the ongoing, pervasive socialization through mass media that legitimizes existing economic and political centers of power—what he called the penetration of an ideology by means of its sociological context. Cunningham (2002), borrowing a phrase from Wittgenstein, further argued that propaganda, rather than existing as single message-events that can be isolated and studied, is "a 'form of life' in which modern technological man lives" (p. 99).

Propaganda As a Question of Media Ethics

Once propaganda became a category of scientific communication research, theorists endeavored to describe the concept in relatively value-neutral terms, driven largely by a desire, according to Cunningham (2002), "to anchor the idea of propaganda in respectable scientific methodology" (p. 82). Researchers "increasingly treated propaganda as a neutral phenomenon whose nature and effects might be examined and objectively quantified" (Sproule, 1989, p. 15). The overtly psychological definition of propaganda provided by Henderson (1943) is characteristic of this concern for scientific objectivity: "Any anti-rational process consisting of pressure-techniques used to induce the propagandee to commit himself, before he can think the matter over freely, to such attitudes, opinions or acts as the propagandist desires of him" (p. 83). Smith (1989) argued that "ethicality" is not a defining feature of propaganda, since the use of various controversial techniques may be "unconscious" (p. 82).

Zeroing in on the ethical dimension of persuasive campaigns … is the only way to accurately understand propaganda.

Several, however, have acknowledged a broader, sobering implication for communication practitioners: An adequate definition of propaganda must acknowledge the paradox that any attempt at persuasion is eligible to fall under the rubric of propaganda, yet, as Black (2001) said, "nothing belongs exclusively to propaganda" (p. 124). This makes careful philosophical inquiry into the ethical dimension of any suspected propaganda

enterprise all the more crucial. Zeroing in on the ethical dimension of persuasive campaigns—identifying messages in which "values other than truth and honest instruction dominate communication structures and practices" as Cunningham (2002, p. 104) argued—is the only way to accurately understand propaganda.

Some early theorists explicitly denounced any propaganda enterprise as being inherently unethical; in his *Preface to Morals*, Lippmann (1929) was insistent that propaganda was by nature "deceptive" and thus evil (p. 281). Yet Cunningham (2002) argued that communication research "orthodoxy" has long insisted that propaganda is "morally indifferent or neutral" (p. 129). Compare Cunningham's description to Henderson's, from six decades earlier:

> Propaganda … exploits information; it poses as knowledge; it generates belief systems and tenacious convictions; it skews perceptions; it systematically disregards superior epistemic values such as truth and understanding; it corrupts reasoning and the respect for evidence, rigor and procedural safeguards; it supplies ersatz certainties. (p. 4)

Cunningham (2002) went on to offer a philosophical examination of the concept to establish once and for all the unethical nature of propaganda:

> The propagandist's enthronement of efficiency and his treatment of truthfulness as nothing more than a strategic tool constitutes a radical devaluation of both epistemic and ethical values. First, it amounts to an inherently disfiguring choice that belies the value of the communicative act. … This practice of instrumentalizing the truth, moreover, ultimately disfigures the work of reasoning and communication. … Second, when this epistemic diagnosis is linked more deeply to the structural level of ends and means in human acts, and their organic interconnectedness, it becomes ever more likely that propaganda, conceived as a policy of insouciantly manipulating the truth, is unavoidably unethical. Moreover, by systematically confusing ends and means, the propagandist undermines the traditional underpinning and vocabulary of moral reasoning and even moral intelligibility. (pp. 140–141)

Black (2001) also argued that the inherent manipulative nature of propaganda raises fundamental ethical questions. His definition, as does Cunningham's, focuses on the ethical dimension of persuasive techniques:

> The manifest content of propaganda contains characteristics one associates with dogmatism or closed-mindedness; … this type of communication seems noncreative and appears to have as its purpose the evaluative narrowing of its receivers. Whereas creative communication accepts pluralism and displays expectations that its receivers should conduct further investigations of

> its observations, allegations and conclusions, propaganda does not appear to do so. (p. 133)

Given this trend of emphasizing the ethical dimension of persuasive techniques, it is important to explore the question of whether the "Shared Values" video campaign devised by Beers can be rightly characterized as propaganda. Indeed, it was largely assumed to be such in many mainstream news media accounts. Beers was repeatedly referred to in media commentary as the Bush administration's "propaganda czar" or "minister of propaganda" (O'Dwyer, 2003 Steward, 2001), and the "Shared Values" campaign as "propaganda" (Goldberg, 2002; Jurgensen, 2003; Poniewozik, 2001; Starr, 2001). At the very least, many news accounts raised the question of whether the campaign amounted to state-sponsored propaganda. Of the 230 news articles and commentary pieces that mention Beers's name in 2002 and 2003, 85 of them also include the word *propaganda,* according to searches on the Lexis-Nexis database.

Situating "Shared Values" in Propaganda Theory

Although the Beers campaign has little in common with the well-documented Cold War *dezinformatsia* campaigns of the Soviet Union (Godson, 1989), it can be seen as an example of the "new propaganda" detailed by Combs and Nimmo (1993) and others. New propaganda is characterized, as Sproule (1988) argued, by its targeting of mass audiences and not just elite publics: "Mass audiences respond to conclusions, not reasons; to slogans, not complexities; to images, not ideas, to pleasing, attractive personages, not expertise or intellect; and to facts created *through* suasion, not suasion *based on* facts" (p. 474). Beers and State Department officials were explicit in their desires to target average Muslims and bypassing the filters of the opinion leaders and media elite of Muslim populations (Boucher, 2002; Perlez, 2002).

Ellul (1965, 1981), in describing the *ethos* of the new propaganda as the cumulative force of various economic and political norms, said a key feature was a preoccupation with efficiency. Both Beers and Secretary of State Colin Powell repeatedly described the need for a mass-media-based diplomacy effort in terms that reflected a business approach (Klein, 2003). In a corporate paradigm, the communication strategy is but one component intended to serve the goals of viability, profitability, or, in this case, credibility. While repeatedly downplaying suggestions that her mission was to bring business acumen to public-diplomacy efforts, Beers nonetheless spoke about her initiatives in the language of corporate strategizing. "Anyone in marketing knows they won't listen unless you're talking in their terms," she told her National Press Club audience (Beers, 2002b). Other of-

ficials continued to describe the "Shared Values" campaign as a "component" of a larger business-like strategy. "This is part of a bigger picture that this is one aspect of telling America's story on a particular part of American life," said Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher in answering questions about the "Shared Values" videos (Boucher, 2002). The approach of the Beers campaign may be seen as a model of Ellul's argument that *la technique* is a fundamental feature of modern society. Ellul argued that we have made means, "the power and might of technique" (as cited in Combs & Nimmo, 1993, p. 84), into an end in themselves. The antidialogic medium of broadcast videos is nothing if not efficient: It avoids the messiness of exchange or transaction, and its bright, "shared values" messages, transmitted through regular American Muslims instead of administration officials, can be seen as emanating above the political fray.

A strong trend has developed among propaganda researchers to focus on "sociological" or "integration" propaganda motivated by the goal of keeping the minds of a populace "closed."

A strong trend has developed among propaganda researchers to focus on "sociological" or "integration" propaganda (Black, 2001, p. 126) motivated by the goal of keeping the minds of a populace "closed" (Black, 2001, p. 130). However, the Beers campaign also can be considered a classic case of more traditional "political" propaganda—the promotion of an ideology (in this case, that American egalitarianism is without exception extended to Muslims) "spread through the mass media to get the public to accept some political or economic structure or to participate in some action" (Black, 2001, p. 125). The "Shared Values" videos can be considered an innovative, if dogmatic, strategy aimed at selling the ideals of one culture to the receptive members of another. This cross-cultural enterprise meant that the campaign, of course, could not rely on modern techniques of hegemony that, as Ellul (1965) argued, presented and reinforced a certain set of values and beliefs as social and cultural norms. To achieve what Americans would call success, the campaign obviously had to rely on the "legitimacy" of American ideals. However the campaign can ultimately be considered as a message of advocacy based on earlier, hypodermic-needle notions of message effectiveness even as Beers and others claimed to be striving for a more sophisticated, integrationist approach. This paradox

helped undermine any potential persuasive power the campaign may have had.

Propagandistic Elements

This study uses Jowett and O'Donnell's (1999) 10-step "plan of analysis" as the basis to examine which features of the "Shared Values" campaign might be considered propagandistic. As the authors noted, not every factor is essential or applicable in every case. As applied to the defining features of the "Shared Values" campaign, several of the factors listed by Jowett and O'Donnell are either irrelevant to an understanding of the nature of the message (4. Structure of the propaganda organization) or are not possible to fully explore due to lack of information (8. Audience reaction to various techniques; 9. Counterpropaganda). Although more might be said about other factors, this study will focus on three of the factors—1. Ideology and purpose, 2. Context of the message, and 7. Special techniques to maximize effects—that are clearly the most relevant on a close examination of the videos.

Several elements of the "Shared Values" campaign reflect key features of the 10-point "schema" of propaganda analysis provided by Jowett and O'Donnell (1999). Although they noted that a "true understanding" (p. 279) of propaganda requires analysis of long-term effects on target audiences, this may not be known for some time. And researchers have noted the value of directly observing media utilization. Because of the unique nature of the "Shared Values" campaign as a state-sponsored communication effort directed not at its own jurisdiction but at wholly separate and "alien" audiences, several of the propagandistic elements included in Jowett and O'Donnell's analytical schema are not discussed as part of this study. Little insight can be gained by an examination of the obvious, such as "the structure of the propaganda organization" and "the target audience." Other factors, such as "group norms" as a "media utilization technique" and "counter propaganda" efforts, are beyond the scope of this study. However, bringing other key factors to bear helps raise important questions about whether the "Shared Values" campaign may have identifiable propagandistic tendencies.

Ideology and purpose. The "Shared Values" videos provide repeated verbal and visual representations of the American ideology of universal egalitarianism. The view is no less ideological for the high degree of the transparency of its discourse—both in the way Beers discussed the campaign (Beers, 2002a; Federal News Service, 2003) and in the video presentations of the selected Muslim Americans. "I've never gotten disrespected because I'm a Muslim," says Farooq Muhammed, a New York Fire Depart-

ment paramedic. "We're all brothers and sisters. Here I am as one human, taking care of another." Ohio schoolteacher Rawia Ismail, wearing a hajib, is shown bantering with White children in that most American of settings, the weekend Little League baseball game. Such imagery reinforces Jowett and O'Donnell's (1999) claim that "resonance of symbols of the past encourages people to apply previously agreed-upon ideas to the current and future goals of the propagandist" (p. 281). Such scenes also serve to "maintain the legitimacy of the institution or organization it represents and thereby to ensure the legitimacy of its activities" (p. 281).

Context of the message. Any propaganda campaign must be considered in the world cultural and social milieu in which it occurs—the "expected states of the world social system (e.g., war, peace, human rights, healthy people)," as Jowett and O'Donnell (1999, p. 282) described it. In the post-Sept. 11 video campaign, the United States, with its egalitarian culture, is presented as the wronged—and hence blameless—victim of misguided terrorists. Such a portrayal of victimhood may be seen as a rhetorical device to respond to anger at U.S. multilateralism and sole superpower status. Beers and others were clear in characterizing the video campaign as being a direct response to Muslim perceptions and misperceptions that may have cultivated individuals such as those who orchestrated the Sept. 11 attacks (Decker, 2002).

Special techniques to maximize effect. Jowett and O'Donnell (1999) argued that the propagandist shapes the message to maximize "resonance" by taking into account the "predispositions" of the audience as much as possible (p. 290). By using an in-their-own-words format, the video campaign "uses belief to create belief" (p. 290), as Jowett and O'Donnell said. The messages attain credibility for a skeptical Muslim audience by evoking a sense of authenticity: Real Muslims are featured praying, making music, and socializing. The messages, as a result, appear to be "resonant, for they seem to be coming from within the audience rather than from without" (p. 290). With this credibility, the message then links traditions of the past with acceptance of a desired opinion or way of thinking. Once the messages gain credibility by establishing fundamental connections between Middle Eastern Muslims and their American brethren, the message makers can then hope to "canalize" the religious beliefs of the target audience into a new direction: in this case, suggesting that American religious pluralism is compatible with the value systems of Muslims around the world.

Jowett and O'Donnell (1999) also said the propagandist makes effective use of "visual symbols of power." The video campaign features a series of visual symbols that have "iconographic denotation of power and ubiquity" (p. 293). Rather than emphasize the social or cultural power of the in-

dividual Muslims, however, the images serve to underscore individual Muslim successes by suggesting how they have been embraced and honored by American culture. Elias Zerhouni, director of the National Institutes of Health, is the most impressive of the group. He is shown interacting with colleagues, wearing his medical lab coat while leading a meeting at which he receives a standing ovation, and finally, sharing a podium with President Bush. New York City paramedic Farooq Muhammad is shown handling ambulance equipment alongside White coworkers while wearing a New York fire department uniform. Ohio school teacher Rawia Ismail also is shown teaching a class of largely White American children. All of these, as well as Ohio bakery owner Abdul Hammuda, are portrayed in ways that suggest that Muslim culture has been embraced in all walks of American life.

Music is another "special technique" that can enhance message effectiveness. In one of the videos, Abdul Hammuda, the Toledo baker, leads a group of Middle Eastern musicians in his living room. The scene is of joyous singing and cultural celebration in the middle of suburban America. Overlaid on the videos is a subtle but buoyant sound track of Middle Eastern music, suggesting how naturally Muslims fit into the American melting pot.

Effective propagandistic messages result in the "arousal of emotions," Jowett and O'Donnell (1999) said. Beers (2002b) was explicit in describing her efforts to harness the emotional power of storytelling in her various informational campaigns produced for the State Department. "It's not just the facts that are operating in the world now, it's also something as emotional as terrorists and violence and religion and spiritual issues," Beers said in a speech at the National Press Club. "So often now we turn not just to the facts or the words or even the speaker on camera, but to books and pictures and something that conveys stories" (p. 3).

Dependency on emotional resonance is a key feature of propaganda.

Moran (1979), however, suggested that this dependency on emotional resonance is a key feature of propaganda. He called such messages "pseudocommunication" because they mock genuine communicative acts, which he said tend to be "individual and critical" (p. 187) and rest on "a clear relationship between the message and supporting data" (p. 189). The emotional language of brotherhood and universal acceptance pervades the videos. "We're all brothers and sisters," says Farooq Muham-

mad, the New York City paramedic. "Here I am as one human, taking care of another." Elias Zerhouni, the National Institutes of Health director, said he has always been impressed by how he has been embraced in American culture: "I was totally embraced by the people here, my professors. Everybody told me, 'Well, we're all immigrants here, we're all from different places, and we meld together,' and I loved that."

Ethics of the "Shared Values" Campaign

As is any human communicative act, messages suspected of propagandistic tendencies are inherently enterprises with ethical dimensions and thus subject to standards of ethical assessment and accountability. The history of propaganda research has shown that many communication scientists studiously avoided most value assignment in the pursuit of methodological legitimacy in propaganda analysis, but contemporary theorists (Black, 2001; Cunningham, 1992, 2002; Ellul, 1965, 1981; Postman, 1985) have made it clear that any analysis that disregards the ethical dimension of persuasive message campaigns is inadequate. As the subject of philosophical consideration, the "Shared Values" video campaign raises serious ethical concerns in three broad areas.

Truth versus credibility. Propaganda is a distinctive mode of *organizational* communication, and, as Altheide and Johnson (1980) argued, emphasizes an essentially utilitarian conception of truth and information. Truth is subordinated to the service of expediency. Postman's (1985) explication of presentations of reality in media argued that in many visual-communication narratives, truth is devalued and the concepts of "belief" and "credibility" become central. Ellul, Cunningham, and others pointed out that the most effective propaganda campaigns rely heavily on selective truth-telling, but it is a precision strictly in pursuit of credibility. Cunningham (2002) argued that we "disfigure" the nature of communication when we "instrumentalize" truth (p. 141) and fail in our obligations as moral beings when we lose sight of or disregard the normative objectives of human discourse:

> Truth and truthfulness are characteristically presumed in normal informative discourse to be both a constraint and the intended goal of our descriptions and statements. In a word, truth—often phrased in terms of accuracy, clarity, being correct, formal validity—is understood to be the end, the intended value in human discourse; and it is because of that normal, everyday expectation that falsity and distortion meet with our disapproval. (p. 114)

The presentation of "truth" in the "Shared Values" campaign, consequently, is a critical ethical question. The American Muslims featured in the

videos certainly may be truthful in their claims about American egalitarianism *as they have experienced it*. The videos offer these claims as proof of a larger truth: that persecution does not exist in this country. A less blatant "instrumentalization" of truth, however, might directly address the simultaneous realities of the post-Sept. 11 incarceration of more than 700 uncharged Muslims and the new, controversial policy of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (renamed the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services) that requires Middle Easterners to register with the government (Immigration and Naturalization Service News Release, 2003). This is not to criticize administration antiterror policy, but to point out the selective depiction of reality in a message campaign. This depiction should not be surprising, since the ultimate goal of the information campaign is to establish message credibility, not to provide a comprehensive picture of the contested notion of American egalitarianism. The campaign producers have, as Cunningham (2002) described, exempted "themselves" (p. 115) from the value system of truth by discouraging "higher epistemic values such as reflection, understanding and reasoning" (p. 98).

Confusing means and ends. Cunningham (2002) also argued that propaganda campaigns "undermine" our moral reasoning by confusing means and ends. "In propaganda, the truth is regularly reduced to the status of what is merely expedient or useful, to a means" (p. 115). Ellul (1981), too, claimed that "one can in no way disassociate the means of propaganda from what it claims to carry" (p. 161). Another important question, then, when examining the "Shared Values" campaign, is who or what is the means to which end. Nancy Snow, a communications professor at California State University at Fullerton and author of *Information War*, addressed the question during a news interview on the topic of Beers's campaign and other U.S. propaganda efforts with National Public Radio's Neal Conan:

The real rub is the ethics of propaganda. For instance,

> if your intentions are good—that is, if the end result is to get people to engage in some type of multilateral initiative, then is it OK, for instance, to do something that is misinformation on the front end? … If you're really presenting yourself as a free society, then you've got to be really careful how the ends and the means work together. (Snow, 2003)

The moral imperative to treat other human beings as ends and not only as means is rooted in Augustinian and Kantian thought. To fail to do so, according to Kant (1964), is to fail as moral agents.

Beers's strategy can be described as treating people as means rather than as ends—of pursuing a goal of changing the opinions that Muslims have of the United States because it benefits the United States to do so—

rather than seeking genuine, more comprehensive mutual understanding. Several columnists and scholars raised this point in news accounts of the information campaign (Brancaccio, 2003). Beers's language of branding and business strategizing posed a fundamental conflict with the notion of mutual engagement.

While most any example of persuasion communication—commercial advertisements, corporate public relations campaigns, and so on—may be said to be guilty of treating audiences as means to goals such as profitability or positive public opinion, the partisan advocacy of such communications is widely understood and accepted. What sets cases of propaganda apart is the practice of the propagandist of posing "as an objective discussant and reasonable respondent who encourages dialogue, but in such a way as to deflect audiences from harsher and more substantial truths" (Cunningham, 2002, p. 98).

Narrowing effect of "palaver." This "deflection" of audience reasoning is caused by, among other strategies, what Black (2001) referred to as "inappropriate semantic behavior" (p. 134) and brings about what he describes as an unethical "evaluative narrowing" (p. 133) by the propagandistic message of those who receive it. One common semantic strategy, as Combs and Nimmo (1993) explained, is to present a torrent of seemingly innocuous and everyday "talk" whose legitimacy and authority are presented as pervasive and thus assumed. Drawing from the claim by Lasswell (1927) that democracy in truth has become the "dictatorship of palaver" (p. 631), Combs and Nimmo argued that modern propaganda operates by generating a stream of "influence talk" that, rather than being coercive, presents simple claims and storylines that people can associate with their everyday lives and that "[involve] us in an imaginative activity of social learning that directs and mobilizes our poetic natures and pragmatic interests" (p. 25). This "expertise of guile and charm" (p. 84) has become the dominant method of persuasion communication, they argued. This "influence talk" now represents the triumph of "technique" over genuine communication—the power of propaganda lies "not in its appeal to the logic of scientific proof, nor the logic of rhetorical argument, but rather … in the logic of credulity" (p. 86). It has become the language of authority. As such, the discursive "technique" of palaver serves to manufacture the "truth" of existing mythopoetic ideals and cultural norms.

Beers's campaign may have been predicated as much on cultivating the American "myth" of universal equality at home as it sought to project images of happy American Muslims abroad. As Ellul (1965) argued, modern man suffers from "symbolic poverty" (p. 148) and thus desires more than anything a sense-making frame of reference for a seemingly chaotic and

alienating world. Propaganda meets this need perfectly in a world overflowing with undigested—and often undigestible—information and data.

The campaign present[s] an unargued and idyllic vision that ignores fundamental truths of historical and continuing inequality and discrimination.

Given Ellul's argument for the persuasive power of *la technique*, the Beers campaign certainly can be seen as designed to effect the "evaluative narrowing" of its receivers. Although the "Shared Values" videos obviously has as its purpose the "expansion" of Muslim viewers' perceptions of American egalitarianism, the campaign certainly "narrows" and oversimplifies the reality of that ideal, presenting an unargued and idyllic vision that ignores fundamental truths of historical and continuing inequality and discrimination.

Conclusions

In a series of public statements that in themselves can be considered exercises in marketing, Beers emphasized that the purpose of her public-diplomacy initiatives was to foster "dialogue." However, an analysis that considers the "Shared Values" campaign in the context of a propaganda theoretical framework suggests a very different objective. The video campaign features several key elements detailed by propaganda theorists, and thus raises some fundamental questions regarding the campaign as ethical communication. However, no analysis of a campaign's propagandistic tendencies is comprehensive. The protean nature of propaganda militates against such capture. Language, as the site of ideological struggle, bears traces of these struggles in innumerable ways, as Hodge and Kress (1993) noted:

> The forms of analysis, the ways of reading that we seek to develop are neither unitary nor self-contained, but operate as components of a broader set of strategies of interpretation deployed on a diverse and unstable set of objects. (p. 161)

The "Shared Values" campaign's utilization of truth, its treatment of Muslim audiences as means to achieve broader policy objectives rather than as a population to be engaged on its own terms, and its use of palaver all suggest that, as an example of mass communication, the "Shared

Values" videos had serious ethical shortcomings. This is not to say that such ethical issues caused or contributed to the perceived failure of the campaign. The decision to abandon the public-diplomacy campaign undoubtedly was based on several administrative and policy variables, including accessibility to Muslim media outlets and a largely negative reception by news commentators. The failure of the campaign could also be a reflection of the argument by Black (2001) that "persuasive media that are propagandistic … would seem to be less likely to attract and convince open-minded media consumers than to reinforce the biases of the closed-minded true believers" (p. 134).

In an article by Goldberg (2002), Christopher Simpson, a communications professor at American University and author of *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare, 1945–1960*, said Beers's campaign was based on two fundamental misconceptions. The first was that selling a product simply is not the same as promoting a belief. "Advertising and propaganda are well known to have an impact on short-term decisions—are they going to buy Tide detergent or Cheer, vote Gore or Bush," Simpson said. "It's also well known to have very little impact on more fundamental beliefs." The second problem is that Beers operated on the belief that anti-American sentiment is based on a misunderstanding of America—that to know America is to love it. "The central illusion here is that the U.S. is somehow not getting its message across," Simpson said. "The large majority of people in the Middle East understand pretty well what the United States is actually saying and doing, and no amount of propaganda is really going to change that."

Even if the ethical shortcomings explored in this study were not directly related to the demise of the Beers campaign, this analysis of the "Shared Values" initiative provides important affirmation for contemporary theorists who have insisted that propagandistic techniques do indeed have significant ethical implications that cannot be ignored. Communicative acts, whether by individuals, corporations, or governments, are subject to notions of assessment, accountability, and efficacy that transcend what we normally conceive of as monetary or policy success. The ethical dimension of all communicative acts encompasses both the means and the ends of message transmission, and our behavior in both regards has an impact on our accountability as moral beings.

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