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“Magic Redefined”

A flyer distributed to passing students on a college campus, no context or explanation given, shows a black-and-white photo of a good-looking man, one eyebrow raised, his stark blue eyes the only color on the picture. He has black tape over his mouth, and on the tape are the words “Magic Redefined” (“Illusionist”). The only other pieces of information on the flyer are a date, time, and location. An advertisement for a magic show? The student receiving the flyer only knows what the image tells her. Clearly, the flyer’s purpose is to convince her to attend the show, but even more important than what *is in* the image is what *has been* left *out*—namely, that the show is *not* simply a magic show, but a Christian event where the magic elements are used to make a religious point (Atteberry). When the show’s attempt to proselytize to non-Christians became clear after the audience was already drawn in, an attendee reports that “a large number of students left” (Atteberry), from which one can infer that the religious aspect of the show was deliberately omitted from the advertisement in order to draw in as many students as possible. Aimed at the general and non-religious student populace, the image focuses on using the rhetorical appeal of ethos to make the depicted man and his magic show look enticing, as well as using pathos to generate interest in the show by heightening drama and intrigue with the colors and atmosphere—deliberately leaving out any mention of the Christian nature of the event to avoid alienating non-religious students.

A strong ethos appeal is made by the main subject of this image, the man whose face takes up most of the space, whose expression exudes a confidence in his ability to put on a good

show and whose youthful attractiveness appeals to the target demographic of college students. The man's expression, particularly his raised eyebrow, tells the viewers that he believes he knows what he is doing. He almost seems to be issuing a challenge, as though he wants to goad doubters, telling them that it does not matter what they think because he knows he can prove them wrong. He is dressed sharply, in a clean black suit that represents success and self-confidence ("Illusionist"). And his belief in himself is contagious; the viewer cannot help but be swept along by him, believing that a man with that much confidence in himself *must* have the skills to back it up. Looking at this flyer, whether the audience is interested in magic shows or not, they can't help but believe that his will be a good one—and this draws them in. The image's ethos appeal spikes viewers' interest in the *man*, creating a desire to see him in action. In the same way, the simple fact that the man is young and attractive draws in the audience, inviting them to attend the show. Putting an attractive face on an advertisement is an undeniably effective rhetorical tactic, if a simple one. His appearance—a young, apparently healthy, attractive man who exudes strength and confidence—helps build up his ethos. The audience cannot help but feel drawn to him. Of course, important to note here is the fact that the image gives absolutely no indication that the man or his show is religious. The show's attendee states that "the advertisements simply described the show as something that would make one wonder, 'How can I know what is really true?' There was nothing that would suggest that the show's answer to this question was Jesus" (Atteberry). This, again, helps the image appeal to non-religious students, relying on the ethos of the man to draw in a broader demographic than just the Christian student population. If the image's purpose is to engender interest in this show in order to draw in non-religious students—getting them in the door, regardless of whatever happens afterward—then one of the main strategies used is the ethos appeal of the man depicted, his confidence and

attractiveness appealing to all students without any indication of religion to alert non-religious students of the Christian nature of the show.

The other main strategy this image employs to draw in its audience is making a pathos appeal using dramatic coloration and atmosphere. The stark blue of the man's eyes being the only color in the black and white photo of his face creates a remarkably strong focal point right at his eyes, having the emotional effect of unsettling the viewer. The color is an uncanny blue, much brighter than any natural eyes, which makes the image dramatic and piques the interest of the viewer ("Illusionist"). This also fits with the magical theme of the show, contributing to the audience's impression that the magic show will be worth their while; in the flyer, he already looks a bit like a savvy magic trick, himself. Without necessarily knowing why, the viewer has the emotional reaction of believing that his magic show will be uncanny, interesting, and well-executed. Likewise, the tape over the man's mouth makes a strong pathos appeal by creating drama. In the same way that the bright blue eyes are uncanny and a bit magical, the taped mouth feels like a magic trick—like the man is trapped and intends to do a Houdini style escape. Coupled with the starkly contrasting confidence in his expression, this helps convince the viewer that the show is going to be a good one. The audience gets the emotional impression of danger and the excitement of seeing him overcome the danger, and so they want to watch the show. More directly, of course, the words "Magic Redefined" themselves create this sense of drama and intrigue. Not only does the show claim to execute awesome magic, but it suggests that it will change what magic even *means*. This draws the audience in all the more, since it promises not only something great, but something new—something never before seen. The audience's curiosity and excitement are piqued, a very emotional response to the pathos of the image. Once again, what makes this such a strong appeal is that it does not hint at the religious nature of this

“magic” show. The words refer to a redefining of what magic and faith mean by relating illusion to Christian beliefs, but the strength of the rhetoric lies in the omission of the latter aspect. When there is no indication that the redefinition of magic is religious, it makes it seem as though the redefinition will be something more magical, mystical, and intriguing. The image does not lie, it simply leaves out strategic information to let the viewers come to their own, more emotionally enticing conclusion. This image’s appeal is in part a pathos of omission, creating mystery and therefore intrigue. Thus, the image’s ethos appeal, which makes us trust that the depicted man will put on a good show, is intensified by the pathos appeal that makes the show appear dramatic and intriguing, and therefore enticing.

What really makes this advertisement effective at drawing non-religious students to this Christian show is that while the man’s charismatic ethos and the heightened dramatic pathos make this magic show enticing, the omission of any religious elements in the image avoids putting off the non-Christian students who don’t want to be proselytized to. Of course, this omission and the consequent inclusion of non-religious audience members lasts only until the moment that the religious theme is revealed during the show. This image carefully caters to a widely inclusive audience with a clear sense of its purpose, drawing in as many students as possible, including non-Christian ones, to make a religious point with a lot of punch—but the *image’s* and the *show’s* purposes do not necessarily coincide. If the show’s goal is to proselytize, then the omission of crucial information in the advertisement, which caused many students to leave the show midway through, was apparently not an effective strategy. However, for the image itself, if the goal is simply to *spark interest and increase attendance*—regardless of what happens after students get into their seats—then the rhetoric of omission is remarkably effective.

Works Cited

- Atteberry, Emily. "Magic Show Surprises Audience with Christian Message." *TCU 360*, Texas Christian University, 18 Jan 2011, www.tcu360.com/story/maze-event-s-purpose-misleading-12434226/.
- "Illusionist: The Maze" advertisement. *University of Wisconsin Milwaukee*, 2017, <https://uwm.edu/welcome/event/illusionist-the-maze/>.