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LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE: IDENTITIES OF TELEVANGELIST JOEL OSTEEN
AND HIS IMAGINED AUDIENCE

by

Reginald Bell, Jr.

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Communication

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my father, Bishop Reginald Bell, Sr. I have always been able to attain achievements that even I doubted I could attain, because I stood on his strong shoulders. I have successfully become Dr. Reginald Bell, Jr., because, at my core, I am your son—a younger version of the best of you.

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Completing my dissertation has been a significant journey. Words cannot express my sincere gratitude for everyone who helped me recognize how my research interests can contribute to the field of Communication and other disciplines.

First, to my parents, Bishop Reginald Bell Sr. and Mrs. Diana Bell, for your encouragement and unwavering faith in me, I am eternally appreciative.

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To my mentor, and the mentor to so many other preachers, Reverend Martha Simmons, JD, I write today because you helped me dare to dream of the possibility of what this topic could become, and you engaged me in discussions that challenged me to think across disciplines and outside of my comfort zones.

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Abstract

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How does one analyze the impact of televangelist Joel Osteen? Attempts have been made to answer this question primarily from a theological perspective and occasionally from cultural and media perspectives. Though these analytical lenses have provided some limited insight into Osteen, his rise to prominence, and the growth of his ministry, none has sufficiently addressed or critically analyzed Osteen's discursive artistry.

Utilizing important analytical principles and research tools from the field of Communication, this dissertation provides three new critical lenses—first persona, second persona, and third persona—that televangelist studies need to uncover the artistry and complexity of how Osteen constructs his audience, creates a nexus with that audience, and builds a personal presence that is grounded in tradition and hope.

The first persona analysis reveals that his ethotic appeal is based on maintaining a dialectical dance between depictions of Osteen as both divinely and humanly created. The second persona analysis shows that Osteen's ideal auditor is motivated by a threefold consciousness: wealth, health, and strong relationships. Finally, Osteen's third persona analysis reveals how the consciousness of his imagined audience simultaneously constructs and excludes such groups as the poor, those suffering mental illness, and same gender loving persons.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On May 15, 2013, *CNN.com* posted the article, “10 Classic American Experiences,” which discusses 10 of the most “authentically American experiences this country has to offer” (Brown, 2013). One of the ten is the unique experience of visiting one of the more than 1,300 mega-churches across America. According to religious scholars Thumma and Travis (2007), megachurch refers to any church with sustained attendance of at least 2,000 attendees (p. 27). Of the more than 1,300, a little more than 50 attract between 10,000 and 45,000 attendees each week. The “mega-ist” of all American mega-churches is Lakewood Church in Houston, TX, which is pastored by Joel Osteen.

Ordinarily, in Rhetoric and Communication, the study of one person would be an inadequate representation for inquiry. Joel Osteen, however, is an appropriate choice for a single-person study if one wants to study mega-church leadership and accompanying preacher rhetoric, because no one leads a church in America that is larger and perhaps more impactful than the church Osteen leads.

Joel Osteen is known worldwide, because he is the senior pastor of Lakewood Church. The church meets weekly in the Compaq Center—the former arena for the Houston Rockets professional basketball team. According to Joel Osteen Ministries, Osteen’s sermons reach seven million viewers weekly in over 100 nations around the world (“About us,” 2014). Nielsen media research has named Osteen the most watched inspirational figure in America. Moreover, two of his books were placed on the *New York Times Bestseller* list, and interviewer Barbara Walters recognized him as one of the “10

Most Fascinating People of 2006” (Walters, 2006). Osteen is, by far, the most well-known and influential televangelist today (“About Us,” 2014).

Descriptors of Osteen’s preaching include “simple,” “down-to-earth,” “practical,” “relatable,” “easy,” “folksy,” “humble” (Herndon, 2015). He considers his style “laid back” (Morales, 2005) and calls the style of his father “fire ball” (Mathieu, 2002). The thread that runs through every Osteen message is his belief that God wants everyone to live a prosperous life, which becomes a reality when one attains wealth, good health, and strong relationships (Osteen, 2004a, 2004b, 2008a, 2013). This thread also is the driving force behind such Osteen books as *Become a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day*, and *It’s Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, Anticipate God’s Favor*. As the titles convey, the advice he gives in these books, which is the same as the sermons on which they are based, aims to provide practical guidance on how to achieve health, wealth, and strong relationships.

Osteen preaches what has been termed the prosperity gospel (Biema and Chu, 2006), “prosperity gospels (McGee, 2012),” “health and wealth” preaching (Bowler, 2013), or “soft prosperity” (Bowler, 2013). A 2006 *TIME* magazine survey found that 61% of American adults who identify as Christian accept this belief—that God wants Christians to be materially prosperous (Biema & Chu, 2006), which is a primary tenet or focus of prosperity preaching and teaching.

Joe Barnhart (1990) argues that this type of preaching has a particular theology—it is folk theology. Barnhart states that folk theologies are not intended to be “systematic” or “scholarly theology;” they are “deliberately devotional, motivational, and inspirational” (p. 159). Perhaps this is the case because folk theologies are rarely placed

under academic scrutiny. Those folk theologies that are popular and tap into the mood of a country at a given historic moment are given more attention and acceptance by the “folk” who are interested in such theologies.

Paula McGee (2012), through Milmon Harrison (2005) and Barnhart (1990), gives the tenets of what she terms “prosperity theologies.” They are:

[T]he principal of knowing who you are in Christ; the practice of positive confession (and positive mental attitude); and a worldview that emphasizes material prosperity and physical health are the divine right of every Christian. Joe Barnhart observes that these theologies perceive the death of Jesus on the cross or the atonement as providing several “victories for true believers: [d]eliverance of the soul from sin and hell, deliverance of the body from Satan and disease, and deliverance from poverty and economic hardship in this life.” Believers are taught that contemporary Christians should expect and are entitled to the blessings of Abraham (financial, spiritual, and physical) that are guaranteed in the Abrahamic Covenant of the Old Testament. The Bible is treated as “a record of covenants, promises, pledges, and commitments between God and [God’s] people. (p. 52)

Osteen’s theology of wealth building taps into the American notions of American exceptionalism, America as a land of possibilities, and the home of the American Dream (Devitis & Rich, 1996). He has done this at a time when so many Americans have experienced negative economic volatility, while watching a select few gain garish levels of wealth. In her 2014 *New York Times* article concerning research by the Pew Research Center, Patricia Cohen states,

The wealthy are getting wealthier. As for everyone else, no such luck.

...[T]he wealth gap between the country’s top 20 percent of earners and the rest of America had stretched to its widest point in at least three decades.

Last year, the median net worth of upper-income families reached 639,400, nearly seven times as much of those in the middle, and nearly 70 times the level of those at the bottom of the income ladder....

The evidence from the report, Pew said, “could help explain why, by other measures, the majority of Americans are not feeling the impact of the economic recovery, despite an improvement in the unemployment rate, stock market and housing prices. (Cohen, 2014)

Regardless of the fact that more people are getting poorer and only a few are getting richer, a vast majority of Christians have accepted prosperity gospels. According to Bowler (2013),

Surveys continued to find popular support for its [prosperity leaders] cause. A recent Time poll found that 17 percent of Christians surveyed identified themselves as part of such a movement, while 31 percent believed that God increases the riches of those who give. A full two-thirds agreed that God wants people to prosper. A Pew survey reported that 43 percent of all Christian respondents agreed that the faithful receive health and wealth. A 2008 Pew study found that three-in-four Latino believers, across all Christian denominations, agreed with the statement: “God will grant financial success and good health to all believers who have enough faith. American audiences had made this gospel [prosperity gospel] their own. (pp. 6-7)

This author believes that when people buy into Osteen’s preaching and writing, they do so with a fixed hope and an unwillingness to let go of their belief in the American Dream as they understand it and believe it to be. As Walton (2009) writes, “Televangelism is a ritual of self-affirmation. It creates an experience where participants can become actors on the stage of ritual dance. Televangelists authenticate and make authoritative already held assumptions and spiritual longings of their adherents that allow and encourage them to experience and envision themselves being created anew according to their personal aspirations” (p. 171).

Osteen’s Context: Demographics and Criticisms (The Home Folk)

Demographics. At the beginning of every sermon, Osteen tells a joke, welcomes his television audience, and then says, “If you’re ever in the area stop by and visit one of our services.” Osteen preaches to an actual audience. The television audience is only an extension of his actual Houston, Texas audience. The following basic information about Osteen’s audience is provided based on U.S. Data.

Racial make-up. According to the U.S. Census, the population of Houston was 2,099,451 as of 2010. This was a 6% increase from 2000. The racial make-up was as follows for 2010: 50.1% White, 43.8% Latino, and 26% Asian, African American, and others (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Moreover, according to Herndon (2004) of *Charisma Magazine*, “Lakewood was racially integrated when it began in 1954, a trait that continues...in a congregation that is more or less equal parts Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic” (Herndon, 2004). The large number of Hispanic members of Lakewood may be because Lakewood offers a service in Spanish led by Hispanic clergy. The church also features Israel Houghton, a Dove and Grammy award winning singer/musician as its primary worship leader. Mr. Houghton is of mixed race (Black and White). The church is now located in the Compact Center in Houston, TX five miles southwest of Downtown Houston (“About Us,” 2014).

Economic make-up. According to the U.S. Census Fact Finder section for Houston, TX for 2013, Houston income levels were as follows: the vast majority, 24.9% of families, earned less than \$25,000 per year. The second group, 15%, earned \$50-74,999. The third group earned between \$35-49,999 and they are 14% of the population. The fourth group who comprise 11% earned \$25-\$34,999. Finally, only 10% of the population earned \$100,000 or more. In 2013, 19.5% of families in Houston lived at or below the Federal poverty level, and for those households headed by single females the rate was 36.8% (U.S. Census Fact Finder, 2013).

Education make-up. The education record in Texas ranks far below the national average. The state of Texas ranks 48th among the 50 states with a large population of citizens over age 25 without a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Moreover, in 2003, five cities in Texas, including Houston, ranked in the bottom third of major U.S. cities with a low high school graduation rate (American Community Survey, 2003). Hendon (2004) notes that Osteen’s preaching style is primarily described as “simple,” “down-to-earth,” “easy,” and “practical.” As such, it is reasonable to conclude that Osteen’s preaching style reflects the overall education level of a large population in Houston.

So, given the location of Osteen’s church, his actual membership would likely be comprised of Whites and Latinos and some Blacks if he did outreach to obtain members from these ethnic groups. Given his choice of persons to lead services and music and other ministries, it appears that Osteen has made a conscious choice to have a physical congregation that is ethnically diverse. Economically, the majority of attendees make less than \$50,000 a year, with close to half living at or below the poverty line. Finally, one can surmise that a small percentage of his members have a college education, because a large number of them probably dropped out of high school.

Criticisms. Along with Osteen’s numerical successes in church membership, yearly church budgets, and book sales, he is considered effective because of his ability to move listeners to action (Osteen, 2005a). Evidence of Osteen’s ability to move people to action was discussed in a 2005 interview on the former television program *Larry King Live*. In the interview, King noted that numerous cashiers, storeowners, and public servants in Houston, TX say that they usually recognize the customers who attend Lakewood Church, because they typically act a certain way—they smile more, tip more, and have a pleasant demeanor (Osteen, 2005a).

Though Osteen motivates hearers to adopt certain behaviors, the method he uses to achieve this outcome has drawn criticism. An example of how perplexing the nature of Osteen's rhetoric is to some is demonstrated in the following conversation, which occurred on January 8, 2012, during an interview with Oprah Winfrey:

Oprah Winfrey: Some of the criticisms are that you're preaching prosperity. I was reading some of the critics and I was thinking, "Why would anyone criticize you for preaching prosperity?"

Joel Osteen: That's the way I feel. I don't know who would say you're not supposed to leave your children better than you were before. Plus, prospering is not just material things. It's peace in your mind. It's health in your body. There's a belief that you're supposed to suffer more and be poor and show your humility. I don't see the Bible that way. Jesus died that we might live an abundant life to be a blessing to others. I can't be a big blessing to people if I'm poor, broke, depressed, and I don't feel good about myself. (Osteen & Follett, 2012)

Along with media icon Oprah Winfrey, a range of networks—CNN, OWN, ABC, and Fox News—have archived primetime interviews with Osteen in which they raise the numerous criticisms that have been levied against the televangelist.¹ Despite their ideological differences, these networks approach criticisms of Osteen in a similar fashion. Like Winfrey in the above example, none of these networks disparaged Osteen's preaching style or content. Rather, in a non-threatening manner, they each state the criticisms against him and then allow him to respond as he sees fit.

The widespread validation of Osteen's ideology is best understood from both a micro and macro perspective. From a micro perspective, Osteen's responses, such as those given to Winfrey, which are typical of his responses to media that pose the same issues, are "reasonable" to any parent. Any reasonable parent would agree with Osteen's

¹ Religious studies scholar Steven Land notes that the term televangelism was first used by sociologists Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann. The term is used to describe a new form of religious broadcasting that intentionally combined television and evangelism. People who use this platform to disseminate their messages are referred to as televangelists (Land, 1993, p. 38).

belief that parents should want their children to excel. A parent who publically disagrees with Osteen's retort, "who would say you're not supposed to leave your children better than before," would likely be considered a bad parent. Moreover, few would oppose his belief in the difficulties of being a "big blessing" to others if "I'm poor, broke, depressed, and I don't feel good about myself." Recalling Oprah's assessment of this critique of Osteen's messages, "Why would anyone criticize [him] for preaching prosperity?"

But, since the prosperity gospel has received increasing, negative criticism from academics, cultural critics, preachers and others, Osteen addressed the issue in this fashion in an interview with the Christian Post:

CP: What are your thoughts about the prosperity gospel, and the televangelists who tell people that if they plant a \$1,000 seed, all of their debt will be erased and God will bestow triple-favor blessings upon them?

Osteen: I don't like to talk against anybody. When we grew up with Oral Roberts it was seed faith, and I understand the principle. I get grouped into the prosperity gospel and I never think it's fair, but it's just what it is. I think prosperity, and I've said it 1,000 times, it's being healthy, it's having great children, it's having peace of mind. Money is part of it; and yes, I believe God wants us to excel. ("Christian Post," 2015)

From a macro perspective, Osteen's explanation of what he preaches is societally relevant, because Americans have been culturally indoctrinated to seek the American Dream—to prosper and live an abundant life, which is the essence of Osteen's message. The right level of indoctrination and other factors may even cause persons to blindly and consistently ignore impediments (especially those that are structural and institutionalized) to their prospering, in favor of holding unshakably to the belief that they are meant to prosper. Bowler writes,

Russell H. Conwell (1894-1925), Baptist minister and lawyer, became a prophet of the gospel of wealth with his famous sermon, "Acres of Diamonds." The sermon, preached some 6,000 times, promised listeners that wealth lay within any

American's grasp, if they would only accept their Christian duty to work hard and see God's hand through the workings of capitalism. Conwell reinterpreted his Calvinist inheritance for this new corporate age, equating poverty with sin and riches with dutiful virtue.... Conwell's Wall Street gospel agreed with the unfettered accumulation by the nation's first millionaires and billionaires, sharing the mythical secret that brought an Andrew Carnegie or John D. Rockefeller to the top: sheer will.

...For many Americans, however, work and drive were not enough. A little divine assistance might be needed....New Thought leaders, as the historian Beryl Satter documented, adopted a new (and contested) focus on desire, prosperity, and materiality. The turn proved permanent. Unity with God, many speculated, could merit both health and material abundance.... (Bowler, 2013, p.32, 40)

As for Osteen's hermeneutic, it can be described as Word of Faith Movement-descended, bible-lite, talismanic, therapeutic, and what Kate Bowler (2013) calls "soft prosperity" (p. 125). By hermeneutic, here the reference is not mainly to the explication (written and verbal) of theological texts. Instead, the reference is to an existential understanding of texts. It was Martin Heidegger's (1962) philosophical hermeneutics that shifted the focus from explication to existential understanding. Heidegger basically posits that the interpretation of texts [including all forms of media] will reveal something about the social context in which they were formed, and, more significantly, will provide the reader with a means of sharing the experiences of the author. The reciprocity between text and context is part of what Heidegger called the hermeneutic circle (p. 193).

Word of Faith Movement-descended. Though some may see Joel Osteen as a recent media juggernaut with a brand new message, quite the reverse is true. Yes, Osteen only became the Senior Pastor of Lakewood Church in 1999, but a firm operational and spiritual foundation had been established by his father who started Lakewood Church in 1959—a 40 year foundation.

Bowler (2013) writes,

But the man [Kenneth E. Hagin] later credited as the “father of the prosperity gospel systematized and popularized an explanation of faith’s potency. He called it the law of faith, drawing the term from Romans 3:27 (KJV): “Where is boasting then? By what law? Of works? Nay: but the Law of faith....” (p. 45)

Of the many prosperity gospels that emerged from the healing revivals, Word of Faith theology adopted a rarefied form of [Essek William] Kenyon’s spiritual laws that introduced listeners to a universe structured by God to respond to a particular kind of Christian invocation. Faith was seen as an absolute law, and as such it operated as a universal and uniform reality; there need not be a leap of faith, as faith would prove itself.... (p. 46)

The newly established [1952] Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International (FGBMFI) promoted the prosperity gospel as a marvel of modern pentecostal faith....The fellowship served as a faithful companion to independent Pentecostal revivalists, not only in its distance from Pentecostal denominations but also as a popular platform for ministers like Oral Roberts, John Osteen [emphasis mine], Jack Coe, Gordon Lindsay, R.W. Culpepper, William Branham, and Kenneth Hagin. (p. 52)

By the close of the 1970s, Joel Osteen’s father was a well-known prosperity preacher.

Bowler (2013) states,

A handful of the nation’s largest Protestant churches stood out as strongholds of prosperity teaching. Lester Sumrall’s Cathedral of Praise (South Bend Indiana), John Osteen’s Lakewood Church (Houston),...and Charles and Barbara Green’s Word of Faith Temple (New Orleans) gained national recognition as vital congregations and popular settings for radio and television broadcasts of their services.” (p. 75)

Bible-lite. If one turns on the television and expects bible heavy sermons from Joel Osteen, he or she is surely to be disappointed. Osteen does not hold himself out as a theologian, nor did he complete seminary. As reported by a Christian Post Reporter, concerning Osteen speaking to talk-show host Katie Couric, Osteen said,

“I’m ordained by my church. I don’t have a seminary degree,” explained Pastor Osteen. “I wouldn’t consider myself a theologian, and I don’t debate the Scripture. I feel like what I’m good about, and I think this is the one reason the ministry is successful, I talk about how do we live the Christian life, how do we forgive, how do we have a good self-image.” He suggested that although he might touch on

doctrine in his messages, he believes an emphasis on doctrine may be what is contributing to low attendance at other churches. "These days, people want to know, 'If I come to church, how's it going to help me to live my life?'" he added. ("Christian Post," 2013)

If the Bible is the primary source that should be used in preaching, one has to wonder why Osteen has given so little credence to formal Bible training. Perhaps it is because his ever-increasing in size congregation and even larger television audience suggest that they are fine with Osteen's level of Bible training and what he preaches. Bible lite drives Osteen's proclamation, instead of a focus on biblical heftiness or doctrinal preaching.

Issue neutral. As he has risen in notoriety, Osteen's opinion has been sought on a variety of issues. Other than willingly expressing Victorian-era (men are the heads) beliefs about the role of the man in the family, which is in keeping with his Southern Baptist evangelical roots, he most often adapts a stance of neutrality. Even when he disagrees with an issue (gay marriage), he offers language that either does not suggest a position or finds a polite way to say I agree to disagree, but I will not do it in a way that is disagreeable. If the issue is race, Osteen suggests that his people try not to see race and never make race a point of contention. Since he is a white, heterosexual, wealthy male, Osteen has the luxury of being publicly issue neutral whenever he wishes. Even on the issue of religion, although he clearly states that he believes in Christ, Osteen does not offer his position on the merits of other religions; again, his stance is neutral. In chapter three, I provide multiple examples of Osteen's neutrality as shown in his sermons, writings, and television interviews.

Soft Prosperity. In 1999, when Joel Osteen became the Senior Pastor of Lakewood Church, much had changed culturally from when his father organized the church in 1959. For many, it was fine to have a therapist and persons were open to

therapeutic preaching. The tolerance for a plain Puritanical (work hard, save, and prosper) approach to gaining wealth and congregations that were accessible to hearing fire and brimstone messages had long since waned. Bowler writes,

In churches large and small, the movement had developed a smooth new language and style of persuasion that admirably fit the times. It was therapeutic and emotive, a way of speaking that shed its Pentecostal accent for a sweeter and secular tone that I call “soft prosperity.”

Teachers like Joel Osteen, John Osteen’s son and successor at Houston’s Lakewood Church, softened the hard causality between the spoken word and reality. Prophets of soft prosperity tied psychological to fiscal success, believing that a rightly ordered mind led to rightly ordered finances. Osteen chose mainstream language over Christian jargon, changing the term “positive confession” to positive declarations.” Yet the principle remained the same: change the words, change your life.

Prophets of soft prosperity tied psychological to fiscal success, believing that a rightly ordered mind led to rightly ordered finances. Osteen chose mainstream language over Christian jargon, changing the term “positive confessions” to “positive declarations.” Yet the principle remained the same: change your words, change your life. (p. 125)

In Osteen’s case, to date, he has largely built upon the ministry left to him by his father through his Southern Baptist/Word of Faith Movement-descended, Bible-lite, issues neutral, “soft prosperity” verbiage. In a style of which Heidegger would be proud, Osteen clearly shows in his messages the emanation of his thought (social context where it was formed). And he also “provides readers/hearers with means of sharing his experience.” He is careful and constant in telling the story of his father’s faith that was mediated to him. Joel Osteen spent 17 years working at the church, watching his father work with people, preach, and teach.

He also saw the long line of like-minded preachers who were brought to Oakwood by his father during his 17 year period of unintended pastoral apprenticeship. More will be said about how this has formed him, as we discuss his second persona.

Also, because Osteen is a televangelist, it is necessary to indicate here that “the ultimate function of televangelism is not to disseminate a pre-existing (and pre-modern) message but to actively produce new constellations of discursive content and experience that are intrinsically tied to modernity and its technologies” (Denson, 2011, p. 94).

So, as a televangelist, a title not worn as tightly by his father, Osteen began producing new content (soft prosperity) and it was the type of content that “provided hearers with a means of sharing the experiences” of the speaker”—reciprocity between text and context. His hearers wanted to hear his stories, and desired to believe that they were replicable and would result in their receiving the health, wealth, and relationships of the speaker.

Osteen does not present himself as an ecclesial Grand Poobah with whom hearers cannot identify, although it is highly unlikely that the millions listening to him in person or via media will ever amass even a small portion that equals the size of his wealth. However, his “I’m everyman” persona and issues-neutral soft prosperity appears to be effective in causing audiences to self-identify with Osteen Sunday after Sunday, broadcast after broadcast, book after book, and conference after conference.

Osteen’s preaching style and content have attracted critics from diverse backgrounds who all attempt to explicate his discursive practices, by situating them within traditional categories, such as prosperity preaching, in order to reveal their deficiencies (Mumford, 2012). However, Oprah’s bewilderment and Osteen’s response raise the possibility that Osteen critics merely identify congruence between his style and one of the traditional categories used to classify televangelists. Current scholarship on Osteen may reflect the default reflex that primarily interprets new “phenoms” through the

lens of previous scholarship. The underlying truth revealed in the interview with Winfrey is that Osteen's preaching is "enough like" prosperity preaching for it to be labeled as such.

The same is true of other traditional labels used to describe Osteen's preaching. His preaching contains enough motivational appeals for some to label him a motivational speaker (Osteen, 2007b). Since much of his preaching utilizes few scriptures, some contend that it is not biblical enough (Osteen, 2008a). Yet another flaw, according to some critics, is that his sermons are fallacious enough for some completely to dismiss their validity. This illustrates that Osteen's preaching contains a sufficient number of "enough like" characteristics for it to be compared to several traditional categories of prosperity preaching.

The problem with "enough like" approaches is that they only address what are actually subsets of Osteen's discursive practices. As Osteen demonstrates in the Oprah interview, there is not a need to outright deny the similarities between his religious discourse and some traditional categories, because overlap exists. On one hand, Osteen essentially admits this reality when he does not deny the similarities between his speaking style and content and a particular traditional category of televangelism preaching—prosperity preaching. This categorization is obviously not as problematic for Osteen, as it is for his detractors. On the other hand, his explanation, and Winfrey's apparent agreement with him, suggests that his style does not neatly fit within traditional televangelist categories, for his preaching is more than just prosperity preaching. It gains a substantial hearing in the public square, because it is non-judgmental, offers people something they believe they need and want (health and wealth), and persuasively

operates within the acceptable framework of today's televangelist messages and an ever-growing cultural belief of God as one who provides for believers what believers want. At best, "enough like" approaches provide some insight into this international speaker, but the insights are nonetheless surface level.

Unlike that of other televangelists, the complexity, distinctiveness, and power of Osteen's discourse is not adequately grasped through current assumptions and analytical tools used to explicate it, primarily by those in religious and theological circles and their cross-discipline compatriots—ethicists, historians, sociologists, etc. Something is limited, missing, incomplete, or just incorrect, relative to the conventional lenses used critically to assess Osteen and his rhetorical acceptance by masses of people.

For these reasons, a new critical approach is necessary to explain Osteen's discursive artistry—the ways in which his discourse contains intentional complexity, nuances, and subtlety to which so many are able to relate and accept. The aim of this dissertation is to provide an alternative critique that avoids the problems and gaps of traditional critiques. Most analyses only debunk Osteen's rhetoric based on theological and ethical concerns. This limited focus fails to capture his strategic rhetorical artistry and explain why it has succeeded.

Literature Review

In this chapter, a comprehensive discussion of the traditional approaches of televangelist studies is presented, along with rhetorical studies writers who have provided the leading scholarship on first persona, second persona, and third persona, as a means of employing new and varied models and approaches to rhetoric and communication analyses.

The discourse of televangelists has been an influential force, both nationally and internationally. However, it has not received the amount of scholarly attention it deserves, given its recent growth, its expanding involvement in the cultural and political landscape, and the significance of religion and media in culture. However, several scholars in several disciplines have conducted studies that attempt to explain the attraction and unique nature of televangelism. In this section, current scholarship on televangelists is discussed in two parts: general televangelists' studies and studies on Joel Osteen. The general televangelists discussion addresses the framing of televangelism from the perspectives of communication, religion, history, and sociology. Osteen-related scholarship discusses analytical approaches from a historical, psychological, and communication perspective.

General televangelist studies. Some of the earliest documented studies on televangelists were conducted by communication scholars. Himmelstein (1984) attributes the success of televangelists to their ability to tap into the American mythos of hard work, rugged individualism, and eternal progress. In a similar vein, media studies scholar Peck (1993) argues televangelists are successful because their messages are a response to a growing "crisis of meaning" that pervades the American psyche. Communication scholar Howley (2001) posits most televangelists are successful because their messages offer a solution to the emptiness many Americans experienced after the social and cultural changes that occurred during the late twentieth century, such as the Civil Rights Movement, sexual revolution, feminist movement, gay rights movement, and so forth. But Howley also suggests that it is not content alone that makes televangelists popular. According to Howley (2001),

Still, content alone seems an inadequate explanation for televangelism's growing popularity. Increasingly, the form religious television takes appears to attract larger, and more demographically diverse viewers. In this respect, then, just as religious broadcasting is a significant part of the history of U.S. broadcasting, so too, the cultural phenomenon of televangelism is intimately tied to the nature of televisual form (Frankl, 81). From its inception, the medium has engendered a curious "cult of personality." This phenomenon is clearly evident in the fame and notoriety of a diverse group of Christian ministers such as Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, and Robert Schuller (not to mention those preachers who have occasionally fallen from grace: Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, and Robert Tilton). In large measure, it is one of the unique features of the medium —the close-up—that *imbues the televangelist with an air of authority*. Emphasis mine.

....The intimacy engendered by the television's place in our homes, coupled with the dominance of the close-up in television's visual grammar, brings the televangelist into a trusted, familiar relationship with viewers. Conceivably, then, this familiarity not only makes the preacher's requests for financial support less galling, but helps legitimate and reinforce the televangelist's moral authority....

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that, like other televisual forms, televangelism is inherently dramatic...Like his claims to divinity, then, the tube makes the televangelist larger than life. Every prayer service is a special service. Each day's sermon is especially meaningful. And every day — on some programs, nearly every minute — miracles happen! (p. 32)

Other scholarship on general televangelists focuses on specific individuals. One of the first in-depth works on a current individual televangelist was produced by sociologist Shayne Lee (2005). Lee's study identifies the appeal of T.D. Jakes and the ways in which he embodies contemporary religion in America. Through extensive interviews with people from Jakes' past and present, Lee pieces together a chronological, psychological, and sociological account of how Jakes rose to prominence. Lee ascribes Jakes' success to his masterful use of various forms of media. Lee also addresses the rise of celebrity preachers through their use of media.

Four years later, social ethicist, scholar of American religions, and preacher Jonathan Walton (2009) produced a work that traced modern day televangelism back to the first documented religious radio broadcast that aired on Christmas Eve in 1906. The

radio was the dominant mode of disseminating religious discourse until 1940 when Roman Catholic Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen aired the first televised sermon on Easter Sunday. Since then, television has been the dominant platform used to evangelize the world, thus the term tele-evangelism. Further, Walton addresses the marketing of mega-church preachers and their adept use of media to increase their stature and income. Importantly, he writes of “televangelism as a ritual of self-affirmation” and argues that it gives people something that they desire (p.171).

The focus of Walton’s book is three prominent black televangelists—T.D. Jakes, Eddie Long, and Creflo Dollar. Walton uses these men to provide a history of black televangelism and to address its import and impact on black America, especially the black church. Walton also investigates the “tactics” that the televangelists, about whom he writes, “transmit their messages and garner spiritual authority (19).”

Walton (2009) offers three strategies that African American televangelists utilize to “authenticate and substantiate their authority.” First, they emphasize the “Bible as an authoritative source” (p. 200). Second, the “preacher’s aesthetic symbols of prosperity serve as an authoritative source” (p. 200). Third, an “aesthetic of prosperity is reinforced by the very media televangelists employ” (p. 200). In this third strategy, Walton is addressing the “teleconditioning of viewers” (p. 201). By this, he refers to giving viewers “repeated exposure to certain myths and themes.” Some of these are familiar to listeners, while others are welcomed by listeners, because they want to ascribe to them, and further still, listeners can develop an interest in certain myths and themes through repeated submersion into them through media viewing.

In her dissertation titled *The Wal-Martization of African American Religion T.D. Jakes and Woman Thou Art Loosed*, Paula McGee (2013) provides a lengthy look at black televangelist T.D. Jakes and discusses the theology of “prosperity gospels,” as viewed through the prism of the old black church and the “new black church.” McGee painstakingly discusses the methodologies and societal impact of televangelists who proclaim a prosperity gospel.

In 2013, Kate Bowler, through her book *Blessed: A History of the Prosperity Gospel*, provided critically needed and long over-due historical work on televangelists, their rise, and in some cases, their falls, the movements they created, the disciples they created, and the historical shifts they created in American churches and American culture. Bowler begins by tracing the roots and development of the historical grandparents of today’s televangelist. With informative charts, pictures, illuminating details, and a mixture of theological interpretation and sociological explanations, Bowler explains prosperity preaching. Importantly, Bowler also explains the history of televangelists in America.

Recent studies of Osteen. Lately, Osteen has gained the attention of scholars in the fields of sociology, ethics, and communication. Specifically, Osteen has been the focal point of three works (Lee & Sinitiere, 2010; Miller & Carlin, 2010; Sodal, 2011). One of the earliest works was produced by sociologists Lee and Sinitiere (2010) in which they view the attraction and influence of Osteen’s rhetoric through an historical lens. Their study postulates that Osteen’s discourse is embraced today, because it is a 21st century version of a particular religious discourse that has had prominence since the 1930s.

In the Lee and Sinitiere (2010) study, the underlying themes in Osteen's rhetoric are traced back to the rhetoric of Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, a renowned radio personality who hosted a show called *The Art of Living*. Similar to Osteen, the broadcast provided seemingly practical formulas on how one can live their best life now, which is the primary theme in most of Osteen's televised sermons and his *New York Times* Bestseller, *Become A Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day*. Lee and Sinitiere also draw parallels between Osteen and Rev. Robert Schuller, the first and most prominent televised preacher in the 70s whose discourse emphasized the themes in Peale's rhetoric and who was a precursor to Osteen.

Also in 2010, ethicists Miller and Carlin employed a psychoanalytic approach to explain the appeal of Osteen to millions. Their analysis combines the work of Heinz Kohut's (1971) self-psychology theory, which claims people can develop a healthy sense of self through what he called narcissistic transferences, and Sudhir Kakar's (1996) research on how gurus in Hindu culture function as cultural self-objects. Miller and Carlin conclude that people flock to Osteen for the advice and praise he provides as a spiritual leader and because he symbolizes what his audience members desire—a brighter future and the capacity to overcome all obstacles. In short, Osteen's sermonic content is not the driving force behind his mass appeal. Rather, it is his personal and affirming presence.

Conversely, the following year, communication scholar Sodal (2011) reported that people are attracted to Osteen because of his sermonic content, which he classifies as a rhetoric of hope. By way of rhetorical analysis, Sodal argues that Osteen's rhetoric is appealing, because it embodies, at its core, the American Dream. His rhetorical analysis

also shows how Osteen's preaching is intentionally and creatively constructed to inspire hope and encouragement and is carefully delivered to garner that desired effect.

Research Objectives

While the traditional approaches and critiques of televangelists provide some insight and, therefore, have the potential to influence the current research interests, neither of the traditional lenses provides a completely useful approach to fully grasp Osteen's unique discursive practices. Past scholarship may provide some insight about Osteen, but it fails to explicate the complexities of Osteen's rhetorical discourse and explain why it is so impactful for so many.

Here is where rhetoric is relevant. I believe the rhetorical concept of audience offers a viable, new approach for this analysis. In particular, this work addresses the concept of rhetoric from the perspective of the rhetorical construction of audiences. As such, to understand the attraction of Joel Osteen, one must identify the characteristics of the person he ultimately challenges listeners to be: those who hold key values, goals, practices, and beliefs. One must also understand how he persuades listeners to embrace his ideology and who he ignores as he attempts to persuade. Since Osteen is a dynamic rhetor of serious significance, this approach enables the researcher to fully engage the artistry and complexity of Osteen's rhetoric.

One of the main benefits of this analytical approach is it enables the researcher to offer an objective and substantive criticism of Osteen's religious discourse. Unlike traditional analytical approaches, this analysis engages the uniqueness of his rhetoric on its own terms. As Black notes, "rhetorical discourse implies an auditor, and that in most cases the implication will be sufficiently suggestive as to enable the critic to link this

implied auditor to an ideology” (Black, 1999, p. 331). Osteen’s discourse contains “tokens” of who he believes people should become. This project, therefore, identifies and provides a profile of the person Osteen asks his listeners to become, individually and collectively. It also identifies what he asks people to become and the people he subsequently excludes.

With this backdrop in mind, this dissertation is concerned with the construction of Osteen’s audiences and is guided by three questions:

1. How does Osteen construct his first persona?
2. Who is Osteen’s second persona?
3. How does Osteen’s rhetoric create a third persona?

Methodology

The three questions for this study are answered through the application of three rhetorical frameworks to various Osteen-related texts. Before I discuss the theoretical frameworks, let me first identify the primary analytical texts. This project examines Osteen’s first three books: *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living At Your Full Potential* (2004); *Become A Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day* (2007); and, *It’s Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, and Increase in God’s Favor* (2009). In addition, 15 interviews ranging from 2004 to 2012 and one sermon, “Keeping Yourself Happy” (2006), are included in this analysis.

In the paragraphs that follow, the theoretical approaches to audience studies most suitable for answering the former three questions are discussed. First, I discuss the differences between the two primary theoretical schools of thought scholars employ when studying the concept of audience in rhetorical studies. Also explained is how the work of

Black (1970), Charland (1987), and Wander (1983) offers the most beneficial way to identify, explain, and critique Osteen's audience construction.

Any serious discussion of the phenomenon of an audience in rhetorical studies must begin with an overview of the differences between the two primary theoretical orientations scholars employ when analyzing and discussing the topic.

The first stems from Bitzer's (1968) essay, "The Rhetorical Situation." Bitzer argues that emphasis should be placed on understanding the context in which a particular discourse is presented, because all discourse is crafted to address the circumstances of a particular context (pp. 59-60). To fully understand the context, one must identify three key components: 1) exigence—a problem that needs to be rectified; 2) audience—people with the ability to be influenced and to initiate change; and 3) constraints—anything with the capacity to prohibit the necessary decisions and actions to rectify the problem (Bitzer, 1968, pp. 62-63).

The presence of these three factors results in what Jasinski (2001) refers to as a historically concrete rhetorical audience (p. 68). From this perspective, the researcher is concerned with the "materially objective" audience addressed and the audience that has the ability to be influenced and to initiate change.

An alternative to Bitzer's approach is Black's (1970) essay, "The Second Persona." Unlike Bitzer, Black places a different emphasis on the actual audience or context. Critics are encouraged to devote their attention to analyzing the discourse, because the discourse contains an "implied," "imagined," or "invoked" audience, which he calls second persona (Black, 1970, p. 333). At the core of this argument is the belief that a close analysis of any discourse reveals "a model of what the rhetor would have his

real auditor become” (p. 335). Once the person the rhetor asks auditors to “become” is identified, the critic is then able to make a moral judgment about “certain characteristics” of the language user (p. 332). With these schools of thought, you have the “audience addressed” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 62) and the “audience implied” (Black, 1970, p. 334).

The work of Black (1970) and subsequent works by Charland (1987), Wander (1983), and Klumpp and Hollihan (1989) are the suitable critical lens to engage Osteen’s audience construction. Black’s work equips one to identify the imagined audience Osteen conjures when constructing a message. Osteen’s discourse may lead many to believe he does not promote a particular political, social, ethical, or economic agenda. However, a different analysis can be made, if one considers who is excluded by Osteen’s discourse. He also strategically employs a subtle, seemingly middle-of-the-road method to address controversial topics. Black’s work will be drawn upon, because it forces one to analyze the tokens in Osteen’s discourse that are “the cues that tell them [auditors] how they are to view the world” (Black, 1970, 334). Since Osteen non-threateningly invites people to see the world and act in a certain way, a close textual analysis, coupled with Black’s theoretical framework, reveals the actions, viewpoints, roles, and characteristics of the imagined person in Osteen’s discourse. Black introduces the notion of how auditors look to embedded tokens in discourse for cues on how one should view the world (p. 334). Black’s work ultimately helps me answer the question, “Who is Osteen’s imagined audience?”

Charland (1987) expounds upon several themes in Black’s work, in his discussion of constitutive rhetoric, but he also positions the researcher to address the collective identity Osteen draws upon and the strategies he utilizes. Building on Louis Althusser’s

work, Charland (1987) argues that constitutive rhetoric is an “interpellative process of identification in rhetorical narratives that ‘always already’ presumes the constitution of subjects” (p. 134) and strategically situates them within a “textualized structure of motives [that] inserts them into the world of practice” (p. 142). Through Charland’s work, I will discuss the rhetorical tools (such as narratives, images, tokens, and stories) Osteen uses to collectively “call an audience into being.” Overall, Charland’s work positions me to address, “What and how does Osteen strategically employ rhetorical devices to constitute a collective identity for his imagined audience?”

The final theoretical framework for this study is Wander’s (1983) work on “Third Persona” coupled with an article on rhetoric and moral action by James Klumpp and Thomas Hollihan (1989). Wander’s theory addresses, “Who/what—racially, economically, relationally, and psychologically—is left out” of one’s rhetoric. This critical lens works in tandem with Black’s concept of second persona, in that the commended actions, viewpoints, roles, and characteristics of the implied audience also function as tokens for the type of identity one should avoid. As Wander explains it, “What is negated through the second persona forms the silhouette of the third persona” (p. 369). In other words, third persona acknowledges that when a rhetor implies who a person should be, she/he inevitably implies who a person should not be. Through third persona, we see that the people left out of Osteen’s rhetoric are inevitably equated with negative markers, such as alien, insignificant, a cancer, unacceptable, or undesirable (p. 370). As a result, Osteen’s discourse could perpetuate the systemic oppression of certain voiceless groups in our society. Wander, along with Klumpp and Hollihan and their discussion of the moral imperative (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1989, p. 91), position me to

identify the rhetorically voiceless groups in Osteen's discourse and explain how Osteen consistently negates these voiceless groups that do not serve his purpose of creating a second persona that is wealthy, healthy, and relationship-conscious.

Finally, since the end goal of this study is to make a moral judgment about Osteen's discourse, the work of Wander and Klumpp and Hollihan enable the researcher to give a moral evaluation of Osteen's discursive practices. Such an evaluation would be impossible if one was limited to engaging discourse as simply a type of text. However, the work of Black and Charland identify the persona—a type of person—embedded in the text and, therefore, a moral evaluation is permissible, because judgment is based on the projected image of the person in the discourse (Black, 1970, p. 335). Wander makes it possible for me to provide a moral judgment of Osteen's rhetoric through his (Wander's) discussion of whether rhetoricians have an obligation to begin to address whether rhetorical theory has a responsibility to address those who are negated through texts and in speaking situations.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 addresses Osteen's first persona in depth. It reveals how Osteen constructs his first persona by strategically maneuvering (dancing) between presenting himself as divinely created and led and, yet, as someone who believes fully in human agency.

In Chapter 3, which identifies Osteen's second persona, the attributes of Osteen's ideal auditor are outlined. It is shown how Osteen's ideal person embraces and practices three forms of consciousness: wealth, health, and strong relationships.

In Chapter 4, the groups that Osteen’s discourse implicitly negates, as he addresses his ideal persona, are identified and discussed.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I summarize whether moral judgments can and should be made given those whom Osteen excludes through his second persona. I conclude with offering brief comments on how the framework for this dissertation has begun to fill the voids created by traditional critiques of televangelists. I also discuss how my study’s findings reveal potential future studies that will broaden the understanding of the significance of rhetorical studies. I show the results of how traditional theories—first, second, and third persona—explicate a modern “phenom” and address how these same theories can be used to study related topics presented on new media platforms.

Chapter 2

I'm Trying To Live My Best Life: Osteen's First Persona

I know that much of the favor and blessing on my life did not come to me by my own effort; I didn't accumulate all that I am currently enjoying on my own. It was because my father and mother passed it down to me. They left me not just a physical inheritance; they imparted a spiritual inheritance to me as well (Osteen, 2004a, p. 9).

This epigraph summarizes the essence of how Osteen constructs his first persona.

It contains explicit references to three main characters throughout Osteen's discourse:

Osteen's family, Osteen the rhetor, and God. The family members in this text are the patriarch and matriarch, John and Dodie Osteen. Osteen uses them to validate his character. His character was partly formed by and he enjoys a certain lifestyle partly because of John and Dodie Osteen. Moreover, although Osteen's family (his parents in this instance) validate his character, his character building efforts also are suggested in the text.

Osteen's appeal is the combined efforts of his parents and himself. In addition, the role God plays is suggested when Osteen refers to his "spiritual inheritance." Since both Osteen and his father are preachers who are perceived as living their entire life based on spiritual principles, the role God plays in Osteen's discourse is as relevant as the roles that he and his father play. In summary, this text shows how Osteen uses references to his family, himself, and God to build his ethotic appeal.

This chapter will address how Osteen builds his first persona. It will show that his rhetoric gives specific presence to "providence" in terms of a host of personal and familial arguments, narratives, and themes. Because of the seeming deficits Osteen faced—no formal bible training, no seminary or higher education experience, no

preaching experience, no pastoral experience, and no front office administrative experience—when he assumed his role as pastor of Lakewood Church, he was forced to build an ethotic appeal that uses several personal and familial examples to portray his role as providentially approved. This approach was necessary, because Osteen the rhetor is expected to explain how he—a son without preaching experience, formal religious education nor ordination—could take his father’s place and lead what was then a 7,000 member church. Since Osteen is aware that he clearly lacks the credentials to justify becoming senior pastor, he uses rhetoric to build a picture of himself as a credible preacher and church leader. This picture is constructed with narratives about his parents, himself, his other immediate family members, and non-family members.

The primary analytical focus for this chapter is Osteen’s first book, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps To Living At Your Full Potential* (2004a). As Osteen’s first published work, the book provides a solid blueprint for his first persona; it reflects the ways that he attempted to build ethotic appeal in the early years of his ministry.

Bitzer and Context

To understand Osteen’s discursive practices, one must understand his context, because his discourse is influenced by and aims to address various real factors. This concept is explained by Lloyd Bitzer’s (1968) essay, “The Rhetorical Situation.” Bitzer argues that emphasis should be placed on understanding the context in which a particular discourse is presented, because all discourse is crafted to address the circumstances of a particular context (pp. 59-60). To fully understand the context, one must identify three key components: 1) exigence—a problem that needs to be rectified; 2) audience—people with the ability to be influenced and to initiate change; and 3) constraints—anything with

the capacity to prohibit the necessary decisions and actions to rectify the problem (Bitzer, 1968, pp. 62-63).

Osteen's discursive practices are best understood against the backdrop of the controlling exigences. I will address exigencies that influence his discourse from both a micro and macro level.

Micro context: Osteen's personal life and the mega-church phenomenon.

Osteen's discourse always has occurred in the shadow of his father, John Osteen, who also is the founder of his mega-church and the reason Osteen began ministry with a decent television audience. When it was announced that Joel Osteen would be the successor and deliver the message at Lakewood after the memorial service for his father, every local media reporter discussed the slim survival chances of the then more than 7,000 member church (Osteen, 2004a, p. 216). One reason the announcement buzzed around the nation is Joel Osteen had only delivered one sermon in his entire life and did so the Sunday prior to his father's death (Osteen, 2004a, p. 215).

When Osteen's father first asked him to preach—a little over a week before he died—he declined the opportunity and replied, “Daddy, I'm not a preacher. I don't even know how to preach. You're the preacher” (p. 215). Osteen's response is far from an exaggeration when one considers that he lacked and continues to lack any formal theological education or a college degree.

A second reason Osteen's ascension gained national attention is most people believed Lakewood Church would rapidly decline, especially under Joel Osteen. Osteen's father founded the church in 1959, and his leadership successfully established the church as one of the most prominent pulpits in America. An instant downturn was expected,

because few thriving churches survive after the demise of a strong, dynamic leader. The senior Osteen left large shoes to fill. A Houston reporter opined, “The worst thing that could happen is for one of the sons to take over” (Osteen, 2004a, pp. 216-217).

The pressure to fill his father’s enormous shoes and continue to steer the church and national ministry in a positive direction was undeniably prevalent among his thoughts (Osteen, 2004a, p. 217). The unexpected pressure was so daunting that one of the first moves Osteen made as the leader of the church was to cancel Lakewood’s nationally televised broadcast that aired each week on the Family Channel (Osteen, 2004a, pp. 111-112). Osteen recounts, “I thought, I’m not a national TV preacher. I don’t even know if I can preach. Who is going to want to listen to me” (Osteen, 2004a, p. 111)? After a pep talk from his wife Victoria, which included a reference to the fact that people all over the world would be watching to see what happens at Lakewood, Osteen garnered the confidence to contact the television station a few days later to rescind his decision to cancel the show (p. 112).

Osteen’s first exigence was how could he either become or show that he was the type of preacher that could keep Lakewood going and growing. Bitzer, given the order of his 3-step process, would first have us ask, who was the audience that could be influenced and initiate change? Or, as Jasinski would phrase it, who is the “materially objective audience addressed and the audience that has the ability to be influenced and to initiate change” (p. 68). One group that Osteen addressed in Houston and around the country in 1999 was described this way by some, according to Wade Clark Roof (1999),

It is said that as children and youth of the late 1940s and 1950s, they were the product of a period, though highly religious, that was also shallow and superficial—born into a “culture religion” that was conventionally American, status oriented, and focused more around the conformity of

belonging than believing. It was not a religious ethos that encouraged a strong commitment of faith in God or a nourishing spiritual life; indeed, as a result of their rebellion many young people grew up biblically illiterate, agnostic, and with remarkably little understanding of, or loyalty to, a denominational or faith traditions. (p. 113)

Wade also points out that, historically, persons who were in church when they were younger and even those who were not, return to church as they get older and begin families. He also suggests a third possibility as he writes,

There was a spiritual awakening stemming from the 1960s but it was, and still is, largely nonconformist—more a “people’s revolution” in which the symbols of religion were seized on in a search for meaning and the cultivation of an inner life. This scenario focuses on the spiritual, but it is not presumed there will necessarily be a massive return to conventional religious life of the sort that flourished when they were children. It is emphasized that the age of strong religious hegemonies in the modern world is over; that cognitive, moral, and religious pluralism is now a reality in the everyday lives of Americans. (p. 114)

With this backdrop, it is reasonable to assume there must be an intentional construction of an ethotic appeal, if Osteen is to prove his capacity and reach an audience that contains those to whom his father preached, but it is an audience experiencing and participating in the evolution of religion in America, not static church attendees. Plus, he will need to do so to reach those that his father could not, those that can now be reached around the world due to global media platforms.

Micro context: televangelism and the mega-Church phenomenon. The micro and macro context in which Osteen operates also impacts his ability to overcome his exigent circumstances and gain an audience that can create the change (continued church growth) Osteen desired. However, these contexts also serve as constraints to solving Osteen’s problem of having the first persona he desires to create accepted.

On May 13, 2013, *CNN.com* posted an article, “10 Classic American Experiences,” which discusses ten of the most “authentically American experiences this

country has to offer.” One of the 10 experiences on the list is the unique experience one receives while visiting one of the over 1,300 mega-churches across America. Hartford Seminary’s Institute for Religion Research lists 1,668 mega-churches in its database that was updated as recently as 2010, and many more have developed since then (“Databases of Megachurches in US,” 2010). Of the more than sixteen hundred, a little over fifty attract between 10,000 and 45,000 attendees each week (Brown, 2013). The “mega-ist” of all American mega-churches is Lakewood Church in Houston, which is pastored by Joel Osteen (Brown, 2013). Mega churches, though still few in number compared to denominational mainline churches, are no longer uncommon.

As the mega-church list by Kate Bowler (2013) in her book, *Blessed: A History of the Prosperity Gospel*, indicates, most of these churches opened in the 1970s, the 1980s, or later, which means most are young (less than 50 years old). Many also have only had one or two senior pastors (pp. 139-248). This micro context aided Osteen, in that he became the senior pastor of Lakewood after it had grown into a mega-church and after mega-churches were no longer unfamiliar to the national landscape.

However, the main exigency he faced was whether or not he could take his brand of preaching, which, as I’ve shown, differed from his father’s and other preachers, to his father’s network. Yes, his father was in the network of prosperity preaching, as I indicated above through Bowler, but Joel Osteen’s preaching style (bible-lite, issues neutral, soft prosperity) was not his father’s gospel or style. Additionally, by the time he became the senior pastor of Lakewood, the prosperity gospel and prosperity preachers were regularly being either scrutinized, vilified, or attacked (Osteen, 2005a).

Yet, Osteen had the phenomenon of televangelism on his side. Sunday after Sunday, he had unfettered access to listeners around the world. He could bring his messages directly into homes around the world without the interference of those who had negative images of and disbelief in the gospel that he and those of his ilk preached. Television and the evolving web were loud soapboxes with tremendous reach. Also, due to the familiarity of televangelism and its mega-reach, Osteen's message was not strange to those who regularly welcomed televangelists like him into their worlds. By the time of his arrival on national and international television, Osteen and those in his fraternity of preaching owned Christian broadcasting and even aspects of the non-Christian broadcasting world. Station and network owners gave the people what they wanted and reaped the financial rewards.

Bowler writes of the rise of televangelism,

In 1971, a cluster of independent preachers (predominately prosperity folk) comprised 42 percent of the top syndicated religious programs on television. In 1981, the total jumped to 83 percent. The scope of religious broadcasting narrowed, giving the prosperity gospel a market share that came close to a theological monopoly. Flipping from channel to channel on Sunday morning, viewers might think they were watching endless reruns.

The possibilities seemed limitless...By decade's end, American religious broadcasting earned an estimated \$1 billion in total revenue. Faith ministers did not simply add to television programming they transformed it....

The 1970s saw an explosion of Christian television as a host of innovative founded networks that soon became electronic empires. Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) built up its fledgling enterprise with popular programs like the 700 Club and *The Jim and Tammy Show*, featuring the young Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. From 1970 to 1975, their estimated viewership climbed from 10 to 110 million worldwide. CBN quickly distinguished itself as one of the most important networks in the industry for its pioneering use of satellite technology and 24-hour programming....Faith believers moved from being a side act in pentecostal revivalism to center stage. (pp. 74-75)

Macro context: prosperity gospel. According to TIME magazine in 2006, three out of the four biggest mega-churches in the country were headed by pastors whose preaching style is categorized as prosperity or prosperity lite (Biema & Chu, 2006). Joel Osteen pastors the biggest mega-church of the three men who preach either a prosperity or prosperity lite gospel (Biema & Chu, 2006). Accordingly, one should not engage Osteen's discursive practices without some knowledge of the prosperity gospel movement.

Bowler (2013) writes,

Some scholars have called it [the prosperity gospel] the Word of Faith movement, after Kenneth Hagin Sr.'s monthly publication *The Word of Faith*. Word of Faith is often equated with the prosperity gospel as a whole, seeming to imply that Kenneth Hagin's Rhema Bible Training Center was its only wellspring. The prosperity gospel draws from multiple historical and theological streams, while the Word of Faith is a particular movement that came of age in the 1970s as a rarefied form of positive confession to achieve money, health, and victory. In my usage, the term "Word of Faith" refers not only to Kenneth Hagin but also to his entire sphere of associates,...

The influence of the prosperity message goes much further than independent Word of Faith preachers. For this reason, I prefer the terms "prosperity" and "faith" movement to describe the diverse sources and preachers who have made the message a national—and international—success.

The prosperity gospel refers not only to a set of shared ideas but also to the network of preachers, churches, schools, conferences, television and radio networks, associations, and publications that circulate these concepts.

To complicate matters. The prosperity gospel refers to multiple transnational ministry networks that intersect with other charismatic crosscurrents. We can see the prosperity gospel in denominational networks, new apostolic networks, prophetic networks, evangelical networks, and neopentecostal networks. It must always be remembered that faith, health, wealth, and victory were a side dish for some and a main course for others. (pp. 250-251)

The prosperity gospel movement embraces a belief that God will use God's divine influence to enhance at least two areas of a person's life—money and health—although

Osteen proffers that to be blessed is to have money, health, and good relationships. People who subscribe to this school of thought believe that if a person has a sufficient amount of faith, then God will provide them with material wealth and good health (Pew Forum, 2006). Heavy emphasis is placed on faith, because faith is the necessary requirement to “reap these rewards” (Brouwer, Gifford, & Rose, 1996). In addition, believers in this tradition are also encouraged to view the financially poor and those who are unhealthy in a negative light because such conditions are thought to be a form of divine punishment that results from a person’s disobedience to God (Mora, 2008).

It should be remembered, as Joe Barnhart (2013) writes, that prosperity gospel theologies are folk theologies and not intended to be “systematic or scholarly theology.” They are “deliberately devotional, motivational, and inspirational” (p. 159). And, says Barnhart, “big time television charismatics appear to have avoided testing out their new theology in scholarly give-and-take exchanges” (p. 159).

So, with his folk theology, Osteen is able to promote and gain a hearing from large numbers of listeners who may not seek to investigate the legitimacy behind his theological claims, as much as they seek to benefit from the claims. This is operative alongside the prosperity gospel’s belief that sufficient faith is a requisite for what one achieves and gains. This creates a conundrum. If one questions the claims of the preacher, who is preaching about what one wants—prosperity—is one showing a lack of faith that will prevent one from gaining prosperity? The issue of the preacher’s ethos is essential, as hearers seek to answer this question.

Bowler (2013) also offers that labeling preachers as prosperity gospel preachers is “frustrated by the absence of a shared self-identifying label...” “The term prosperity is

clumsy for two reasons. First, for believers to call their message anything other than “The Gospel” would place it outside the boundaries of orthodox Christianity.... Second, the label “prosperity” conjures up a primarily economic motivation. It suggests the thesis set forth by Irvin G. Wyllie in *The Self-Made Man in American*, that where religion and self-improvement meet, riches are at the heart of the matter” (pp. 249-251).

Parents

An alternate title for this section could be “The Memoirs of Joel and John Osteen.” After himself, Osteen talks about “Daddy” and “Mother” more than he does anyone. This strategy is the starting point for understanding Osteen’s first persona, because one cannot begin to understand Osteen unless he or she understands the significant role his parents, mainly his father, played in how he builds his ethotic appeal.

Father: John Osteen. Osteen is keenly aware that much of his ethotic appeal comes from his father’s legacy. For much of his life he has enjoyed certain benefits due to his father’s numerous accomplishments and credibility. Osteen (2004a) demonstrates this argument when he asserts:

I am deeply aware that I’ve received tremendous favor simply because of who my earthly father was. John Osteen, my dad was well respected and highly influential in our community. Many times people did good things for me simply because they loved my dad. One time as a teenager, I got pulled over by a policeman for speeding. I had just recently received my driver’s license, and I was extremely nervous when I saw those flashing lights pull up behind me...But when that officer saw my license, he recognized that I was John Osteen’s son. He smiled at me as though we were long-lost buddies, and he let me go with just a warning. (p. 39)

Osteen’s decision to use this example is peculiar when one considers that he confesses to breaking the law. However, the leniency he was shown underscores the benefit of being an Osteen. His family connection superseded any deficiency.

This illustration is only one of two that Osteen uses from his teen years in the entire book. It shows that he recalls early moments when he benefited from his father's reputation. He suggests in this example that from an early age he recognized that his connection to his father seemingly destined him for greatness. Since people respected his father, they also respected him when they realized he was John Osteen's son. The example shows that even when he was at fault, his father's credibility worked in his favor.

Osteen (2004a) also references his father's parenting style to build his first persona. He asserts:

One of the things I appreciated about my mom and dad's parenting style was that they never planned my siblings' lives or my life. But they always let us fulfill our own dreams. From the time I was a little boy, I knew my dad wanted me to preach, but I never had that desire. Despite his disappointment, Daddy never once tried to cram preaching down my throat. In fact, he often told me, "Joel, I want you to fulfill your dreams for your life, not my dreams for your life." Today, I can preach with the freedom of knowing I'm not doing just what pleases my dad or other family members; I'm doing what pleases God. (p. 97)

Here, Osteen's father is depicted as knowing that his son would succeed him ever since Joel was a little boy. However, John Osteen never forced his son to take the role. In this way, Osteen combines the providential motif of his life as it relates to God and his father orchestrating his path. Osteen wants his audience to know that God, not his father, is ultimately responsible for him becoming a preacher.

The strategic telling of this story is also meant to eliminate questions that abound about Osteen's rapid rise and whether he is a sufficient replacement for John Osteen. In case someone thinks Osteen succeeded his father out of selfish ambition, he asserts, "I knew my dad wanted me to preach, but I never had that

desire” (Osteen, 2004a, p. 216). The role that Osteen’s father played in validating his eventual rise to the pastorate is further shown in this reflection:

I had spent seventeen years behind the scenes at Lakewood managing our television production. Over the course of those years, Daddy tried many times to get me out in public to speak, but I never had the desire to do it. I was comfortable and content working behind the scenes. But about a week before my dad went to be with the Lord...Daddy said... “I’m going to call Joel and ask him if he’ll speak for me this Sunday.” I responded, “Daddy, I’m not a preacher...but I knew I had to do something.

I studied all week and prepared a message, and the next Sunday I spoke at Lakewood Church for the first time. The message was well received by the congregation. None of us, however, could have imagined that would be the last Sunday of Daddy’s life. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 216)

In this narrative, Osteen intentionally reiterates the point that he never desired his father’s job. He was content with being behind the scenes running the camera.

However, the story is structured to make his audience see that God had a different plan for his life and that his father was the conduit God used to achieve that goal.

One cannot miss the overt irony in the story. Osteen’s father asked him numerous times to preach, but he always declined. As he had in the past, he declined this particular invitation, too. However, for some odd reason, this time he felt a strong conviction to accept his father’s invitation. Osteen highlights the significance of accepting this particular invitation when he reveals that his father died five days after Osteen delivered the sermon. One could assume Osteen and his family knew that his father was at the brink of death. However, Osteen negates this notion later in the book, when he mentions that his father died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack (Osteen, 2004a, p. 248). In other words, Osteen validates his role by depicting his father as someone who was led by God to ask him to preach on the very last Sunday before his unexpected death.

Osteen tells this narrative in a way that positions his audience to believe that he would not be the international preacher he is today had God not led his father to ask him to preach one last time. As a result, although Osteen never received the expected formal training one should receive, and though he did not follow the traditional route one takes to become a senior pastor—acknowledge a call from God, deliver an initial sermon, be licensed to preach, become ordained later, apprentice in some manner, and then ascend to the role of senior pastor—the members of Lakewood Church and Osteen’s international audience should accept him, because his father both expected him to preach and played a providential role in his placement immediately before his untimely death. In other words, who needs a typical entrance into ministry when your role is God-ordained and, therefore, inevitable?

Although Osteen has historically made known the role that his father played in his ascension to the position of Senior Pastor at Lakewood, he spends little time in his writings speaking of how one, with or without faith, is placed in a more fortunate position, if they are not the child of a wealthy parent from whom they inherit a position.

Yes, Joel Osteen has certainly built upon what he inherited, but he was ahead of most pastors by having a parent who bequeathed him a mega-church. So, although hearers may read his story as one who attained it without seeking greatness and through hard work, the significance of being the child of a wealthy, well-known, socially powerful, white, straight, male parent should not be minimized. Joel Osteen’s story is clearly not a rags-to-riches story. It could be viewed as a story of how the wealthy,

should they choose to work hard, are able to attain more, because they began with more resources.

Mother: Dodie Osteen. Osteen's mother is also instrumental to constructing his ethotic appeal. While his father was the patriarch of the international ministry, his mother is the uncontested matriarch of Lakewood Church and its international TV ministry (Dooley, 2009). As he does with his father, Osteen intentionally paints a picture of his mother as one who represents God and models great faith (Osteen, 2004a, 2007a, 2009). In much the same way as he does with his father, Osteen uses examples from his mother's life, as he situates his belief in healing (Osteen, 2004a), which likely not coincidentally is a major belief of the Southern Baptists faith on which Lakewood was founded (Draper, 2007c). After all, those who were now the backbone of Lakewood (it's older and most long-term members) were familiar with the church's doctrine regarding healing, and before Osteen wrote about his mother's healing, he preached about it. In his book, he uses this story that he first used in sermons,

In 1981, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and given just a few weeks to live...Mother was hospitalized for twenty-one days, while the doctors ran test after test. They sent her lab work all over the country, hoping to find some key to help her. Finally, they came back with the dreaded report that she had metastatic cancer on the liver. They called my dad out into the hallway and said, "Pastor, we hate to tell you this, but your wife has only a few weeks to live. Not months, weeks..."

...my mother never gave up... Today, it has been more than twenty years since we received the report that Mother had just a few weeks to live, and as I write these words, Mother is totally free from that cancer, healed by the power of God's word (Osteen, 2004a, pp. 126-127).

Osteen shows he is aware of how this story builds his first persona, because he uses it at least four different times in the book to make three different points (Osteen, 2004a, pp. 126-127; p. 150; p. 162; pp. 225-226). Since the book chapters are based on sermons, it is

likely that Osteen used this example in at least four different sermons during his early years as pastor of Lakewood Church. In this instance and in his second use of the story, he focuses on the importance of speaking positive words over one's life (p. 150). The third time he uses the story he emphasizes how his mother was healed because she let go of her past (p. 162). In the final scenario, he emphasizes the importance of praying and helping others (pp. 225-226).

Osteen strategically mentions that his mother is more than twenty years removed from her cancer diagnosis. That essentially screams to his audience that something he believes and preaches has worked for no less than twenty years. As a result, every time someone sees Osteen's mother, her presence reaffirms why his audience should embrace his message and leadership.

Other Osteen Family Members

Osteen also builds his ethotic appeal through various references to multiple family members other than his parents. With these examples, Osteen implies that his message should be trusted, because family members besides his parents are exemplars, too.

Sibling: Lisa Osteen. John Osteen had five children (Osteen, 2004a, p. 136). Though the principles Joel Osteen preaches have merit, because they have worked for him, evidence that they also have worked in the lives of his siblings proves that Joel Osteen's life should not be considered an anomaly. Because Osteen understands that not being viewed as an anomaly increases the ethos of his message, he intentionally uses an example from his sister Lisa's life that demonstrates one of his principles at work:

But if we want to live in victory, we need to shake off self-pity and move on with our lives. That's just what my sister Lisa had to do. She went through a painful breakup in her marriage. It wasn't fair. She was mistreated and wronged. Yet for seven years, Lisa prayed and believed her

marriage would be restored. She did everything she knew how to do. But for some reason, it just didn't work out.

Lisa could easily have become bitter. But Lisa made a decision that she just wasn't going to sit around...feeling sorry for herself...she didn't get bitter; she got better. Not long after she made that decision, God brought someone else into her life, and she and my brother-in-law, Kevin, have been happily married for many years. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 151)

On the surface, it appears Osteen simply recounted what could be considered a tragedy and triumph in his sister's life. A marriage she badly wanted to work ended in divorce. This traumatic experience had the potential to negatively affect the rest of her life. However, it did not, because God sent her a new husband, and they have since lived happily ever after. That is one way to view this example.

Another way to view this story is from the vantage point that Osteen uses it strategically to build his first persona. From this perspective, it is clear that Lisa's story functions the same way as some of the examples from his life, which shows continuity with the life of John Osteen. The strategic use of the example from Lisa's life is revealed, when compared to this example from the book:

My daddy married at a very early age...although he went into the relationship with the best intentions, things didn't work out. The marriage failed. Daddy was heartbroken and devastated; he thought [for] sure that his ministry was over...He could have allowed that disappointment to thwart him from fulfilling his destiny. But years later, Daddy told me how he had to shake himself out of doldrums. He had to quit mourning over what he had lost and start receiving God's mercy and love. My daddy made a decision that he was not going to allow his past to poison his future... one day, my dad met an attractive young woman with an unusual name—Dodie. Daddy married Dodie Pilgrim, and God blessed them with four average children and one exceptional child, whom they named Joel. God not only restored my dad's ministry, He increased it. (Osteen, 2004a, pp. 167-168)

When the two examples are compared, it is clear Osteen used the same formula to recount a similar event in his father's life and his sister's life. In both examples, he

suggests the individual wanted a first marriage to work, but it did not. Next, the person recognized the devastating impact this could have on his/her future. However, because his father and his sister made the decision not to allow their future to bear the ramifications of their failed marriage, God sent them a new spouse, and they live happily ever after.

In the account of his sister, he states explicitly that she and her husband live happily ever after. In the illustration about his father, he suggests his father lived happily ever after, because he had five wonderful children and built a successful international ministry, despite a divorce. In summary, Osteen conveys in the reference to his sister's life that audiences should be persuaded by his message, because the same principles that worked for his father also worked for him and his siblings. They will work in your life, too, is the implication.

Wife: Victoria Osteen

But think of all the factors that had to fall into place for me to meet Victoria. My watch battery had to stop. I had to have a reason to go to a jewelry store, not simply a Wal-Mart or a convenience store. Then I had to stop at the particular store where Victoria was working. Keep in mind, there are hundreds of fine jewelry stores in Houston. Then she had to be working that specific shift. She could have been off that day. Somebody else could have waited on me. But all these pieces came together perfectly, because God was in control. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 201)

Osteen is intentional about how he rhetorically paints the picture of how he and his wife met. He does this because he wants his audience to understand that he and his wife were providentially matched. Osteen notes the gist of how they met: he noticed he needed a new battery for his watch; he went to a local jewelry store to purchase one; he thinks the woman who sells him the battery is beautiful, so he sparks up a conversation; and the result is that they date and get married.

Now, Osteen could have ended the story there. He had provided all the necessary details of how he and his wife met and married. However, Osteen's goal in this commentary is to convey to his audience that he and his wife were destined to be together. Following Osteen's logic, it is undeniably the will of God that Victoria is in his life.

Osteen also occasionally portrays his wife in a similar vein as his parents. Not only does Victoria realize before Osteen that he was destined to preach, but she also plays a pivotal role in getting him to that point. Osteen confirms this when he asserts:

Years ago, when she [Victoria] and I attended church services at Lakewood, Victoria used to tell me, "Joel, one day you're going to be up there leading this church. One day that's going to be you."

Year after year, Victoria encouraged me. That seed was being planted inside me. And when Daddy went to be with the Lord, I believe one of the main reasons I was able to step up to the plate so quickly was the fact that Victoria believed in me, and she had helped instill that confidence in me. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 111)

Victoria Osteen was instrumental in Osteen's ascension to the role of senior pastor at Lakewood, but Osteen expands the impact of her role when he tells why he is a TV preacher:

Victoria's belief in me has not only helped me to enlarge my vision, it's helped me to understand how much confidence Almighty God has in me. Immediately after Daddy passed away, one of the first things I did was cancel our national television broadcast. I thought, I'm not a national TV preacher... When I told Victoria she said, "Joel, I think you should call him [the representative] and tell him we want our time back. We're not going to go backward... I knew Victoria was right. Something just clicked in my spirit... so I called the man. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 111)

Again, his wife plays a providential role in his life. Were it not for Victoria Osteen, he would not be preaching before millions on national television. In essence,

Osteen strategically uses his wife to convey the message that his presence on television is the result of a providential plan that his wife recognized before he did.

Son: Jonathan Osteen. Joel Osteen has a son named Jonathan Osteen (Osteen, 2004a, p.42). Osteen uses his son to validate that what works for a father can work for his son. Like his father, Osteen intentionally models certain principles for his son. Osteen articulates this intentionality when he gives the following example:

Not long ago, Victoria and I, and our two children drove down to Hermann Park...the place was totally packed. At first, it didn't appear that we were going to be able to find a place to park...so I said to everybody in the car, "You watch Daddy. I'm going to get a front-row parking spot. I can just feel it. I've got the favor of God all over me.!" On and on I went, really making a big deal about it. Then, to everyone's surprise, just as I steered our car past the front row of parked cars, another car backed out as I approached. It was almost as if we had timed it perfectly...I leaned over to Victoria and quipped, "Victoria, reach over here and get some of this favor off me." I turned around to our little boy and said, "Come on, Jonathan, touch Daddy. You need some of this favor. Just get it. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 42)

In another example, Osteen demonstrates that his young son understands how the favor of God works in his father's life when Osteen tells the following story:

One day I was driving through Houston with my eight-year-old son, Jonathan. As we drove down the freeway, we came upon the Compaq Center, the sixteen-thousand-seat arena that was the former home of the Houston Rockets professional basketball team, and soon to be the home of Lakewood Church. I slowed down and pointed. "Jonathan, look over there. One day, that's where you're going to be preaching.

He said, "Oh, no, Daddy. When I get old enough, I'm going to preach in Reliant Stadium!" (Osteen, 2004a, p. 9)

Reliant Stadium is Houston's 70,000 seat home of the Houston Texans football team. In this way, Osteen uses his son to demonstrate the simplicity of his message. If an eight-year-old child can comprehend and practice his principles, then surely his primarily adult audience should be able to do the same. Additionally, this example says to listeners, if

you align your beliefs toward prosperity, your children will do the same and they can understand and practice your behavior at a young age.

Joel Osteen: Everyman/Hero

Throughout the book, Osteen portrays himself as someone who regularly experiences successes and struggles (Osteen, 2004a). Both are used strategically, because his ability to marry the two is one of the primary strategies he employs to establish his ethotic appeal. The significance of this strategy is its ability to persuade. Although Osteen's high level of success may set him apart from his audience, the examples of his personal struggles and how he overcomes them all creates common ground.

Osteen is intentional about portraying himself as an average person with the same problems as those who listen to him. Osteen wants people to know that he is human and subject to the same struggles, trials, and emotions as others. His position does not exempt him from the pain of everyday life. In this way, he portrays himself as being like his audience; he, too, has suffered and has trials. But, he also is unlike his audience; he is wealthy and overcomes all of his trials. This persona positions him as a representative of who the audience should hope to become.

In this section, I borrow from communication scholars Johnson and Copeland in my identification of Osteen's character as the *everyman/heroic character*.¹ In the remainder of this section, my aim is to: 1) show how Osteen's personal struggles demonstrate to his audience that he is like "everyman," and 2) show how Osteen does not

¹ The overall premise for this section is based on a concept developed by Johnson and Copeland (1997). They use the concept to explain why most American's support a particular presidential candidate, which is because they perceive a candidate has excelled in ways they probably will not, the candidate should be supported because they identify enough similar traits (p. 7).

mention one of his struggles without also depicting himself as the “hero” who overcomes the paralysis of a commonly shared struggle.

Then, in the sections that follow, it will be shown that Osteen’s *everyman/hero* contributes to his first persona construction, as he models being victorious during the all too common human experiences of being insecure, grief stricken, and faced with “impossible odds.”

Overcomes insecurities

When my dad went to be with the Lord and I first started pastoring at Lakewood Church, one of my biggest concerns was “How is everybody going to accept me?” after all, Daddy had been there for forty years, and everyone was accustomed to him. His style and personality were much different from mine. My dad was a fireball of a preacher, always energetic and exciting. I’m a bit more laid back.

One night I was praying, asking God what I should do. “Should I try to be more like my dad? Should I copy his style? Should I preach his messages? On and on I went. I was just so concerned about it. But the Lord spoke to me, not out loud, but deep down in my heart, saying, Joel, don’t copy anybody. Just be yourself. Be who I created you to be. I don’t want a duplicate of your dad. I want an original. (Osteen, 2004a, pp. 25-26)

In this text, we see Osteen struggling with the insecurities one would expect from someone standing in such a large shadow. Because Osteen has been given the task of “trying to fill his father’s shoes,” he initially considers imitating his father’s preaching style. However, Osteen depicts himself as someone who, with the help of God, musters the courage to be “an original.” He depicts himself as a hero who figures out how to succeed, despite the size of the task and his insecurities.

Overcomes grief. Osteen builds his ethotic appeal with his audience by presenting himself as one who also struggles with grief. He connects with his audience with the following example,

One day a few years after my father passed away in 1999, I was over my parents' home, and I was all alone in the house. I hadn't been there by myself in quite some time, and as I was walking through the den, for no apparent reason I started thinking about the night that my dad died. Daddy had a heart attack right there in that same room. In my imagination, I could see it all happening. I could see Daddy on the floor. I could see the paramedics working on him. I could see the look on my dad's face, and I began to feel those same emotions of despair, sadness, and discouragement that I had known the night Daddy died.

For about fifteen or twenty seconds I stood there paralyzed, overwhelmed by my emotions. Finally, I caught myself, and thought, *What am I doing? Where is my mind going? Where are these emotions taking me?* I had to make a decision that I was not going to allow myself to relive that night. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 146)

The significance of this example is that Osteen uses an extreme instance of grief—losing a parent—to demonstrate his ability to overcome. The most influential person in Osteen's life is his father. Many of the principles he lives and preaches were modeled by his father, and he would not be the successful person he is today were it not for his father. As such, Osteen suggests to his audience that he fully understands the grief one experiences with the loss of a loved one. He battled the height of grief when he lost his father.

Nevertheless, when he says that his paralyzing grief lasted for only fifteen or twenty seconds and that he was simply able “to make a decision...not...to allow [him]self to relive that night” (Osteen, 2004a, p.146), he reaffirms himself as the hero who overcomes, despite the magnitude of the situation. Osteen essentially shows that his principles are so powerful that proper application will also work in the direst circumstances. In spite of what the literature may say about the grief process, and despite the fact that people grieve differently, he was in control of his grief on this occasion.

Overcomes impossible odds. Similarly, like his audience, Osteen has to deal with unexpected opposition. An incidence of great opposition occurred during the period in which he and Lakewood were attempting to secure the Compaq Center in Houston, TX. Osteen recounts,

In December 2001, when Lakewood Church decided to lease the Compaq Center, we signed a sixty-year lease with the city to move into the Rocket's sixteen-thousand-seat basketball arena...But another company that wanted the property filed a lawsuit to keep us from moving in.

Thoughts of failure and loss pelted my mind: It's impossible. It's never going to work out. And I was tempted to lose my joy. But during that time, I had to make a decision...to go with God.

A few weeks later, we received a phone call from our attorneys—the same attorneys who told us our opponents would never settle. The company that had filed the lawsuit wanted to sit down and talk with us that next morning. In less than forty-eight hours, we came to an agreement and totally settled that lawsuit! (Osteen, 2004a, pp. 116-119)

This example shows that the point of connection between a speaker and audience does not revolve around the actual equality of the struggle (the majority of his audience is not negotiating million dollar deals), but the concept of a large struggle itself. Osteen understands this fact and, therefore, uses the example to demonstrate that he, too, has struggles and overcomes them.

Non-Osteen Family Members

Osteen also builds his ethotic appeal through the testimonies of several non-Osteen family members. One example is of a woman named Phyllis. Osteen asserts,

When Phyllis, one of our members at Lakewood, was sixteen years old, she got pregnant and had to leave high school. Her dreams were shattered, and she was heartbroken. She rented a cramped, small apartment in which to live and raise her son...Eventually she had to go on public assistance—welfare. She was barely surviving in poverty, defeat, and despair.

But Phyllis refused to live in mediocrity. She said, “Enough is enough. I refuse to pass this lifestyle down to my children. I’m going to make a difference with my life.

Today, she’s reaping the rewards of that effort. She’s not on welfare anymore; she is a principal in that same school district where she used to collect meal tickets. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 27)

Osteen uses the same formula in this example that he does in most of his examples. The turning point in the person’s story occurs when she makes a decision to abide by principles that Osteen preaches and that he inherited from his father. By recounting the story the same way he does with his stories about his father and himself, listeners are able to draw connections between all of his stories. In another example, Osteen notes,

A young woman at Lakewood Church told me about an incident in which she had to have emergency surgery and, for some reason, it wasn’t covered by her health insurance. Consequently, she owed the hospital \$27,000. The hospital worked out a payment plan, and she was paying the bill little by little each month. But she was really struggling. As a single parent, she couldn’t afford the extra payment. Nevertheless, she didn’t get discouraged. She didn’t go around complaining about how tough her life was. Instead, she stayed in an attitude of faith and expectancy, declaring God’s favor over her life. She was on the lookout for God’s goodness.

Right before Christmas, she received a letter from the hospital. The letter, basically said, “Every year we like to choose a few families and do something good for them. And this year we’ve chosen you. We want to inform you that we are cancelling your \$27,000 debt.” The letter went on to say, “Not only are we going to forgive your debt, but we are going to refund several thousand dollars that you’ve already paid us.” (Osteen, 2004a, p. 48)

In many ways, Osteen employs the same plotline here as he does in his mother’s story. The protagonist is given news with the potential to make him or her negative. However, instead of becoming negative, the person applies Osteen’s principles to his or her own life. As a result, the person successfully overcomes their dire situation through God’s miraculous intervention.

In both examples, Osteen specifically identifies the protagonists as members of Lakewood. Here, he clearly wants his audience to know that Lakewood members are experiencing success through practicing the principles he preaches. In this way, Osteen proffers the trustworthiness of his messages, because people in his congregation who put the principles into action reap the benefits he says they will reap.

Well Read Joel Osteen

Joel Osteen may not have a college degree, but throughout the book Osteen (2004a) draws from various sources to establish his ethos as a well-read and informed speaker. These include:

- Use of statistical data (p. 153)
- College and professional sports analogies (pp. 160, 280)
- Effective fishing strategies in the Northeast (p. 211)
- Effective tactics used to catch monkeys (p. 227)
- Quotations from classic books, such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* (p. 230) and *Tom Sawyer* (p. 299)
- Mention of the struggles of people in federal prison (p. 15)
- Geographical details about The Dead Sea (p. 258) and
- An article in *Forbes Magazine* (p. 217).

The wide range of sources suggests to audiences that although Osteen perceives that he is destined for greatness, he still recognizes the importance of doing the hard work that makes one great. Osteen's book suggests that he spends hours reading and engaging current events to make his sermons relevant and interesting. He does not simply stand before audiences and say whatever comes to mind. Rather, he makes clear that he puts in the necessary hard work needed to preach his version of the Christian gospel.

Conclusion

As I sought evidence of Bitzer's "audience comprised of people with the ability to be influenced and to initiate change" and the "constraints—anything with the capacity to prohibit the necessary decisions and actions to rectify the problem," each was clearly present for Osteen, when he became the Senior pastor of Lakewood. Whether they were young adult seekers, newly churched, or those in mid-life who have seen and participated in the changes in American religious life, Joel Osteen, apparently, by the numbers to which Lakewood swelled after he became the senior pastor, had an audience that wanted to hear his message.

The primary question answerable in this section was, "How does Osteen construct his first persona?" Osteen spent a great deal of preaching and then writing building his first persona as a divinely placed but ordinary man who had to overcome the exigencies of his overnight rise to fame. He does not focus on the fact that he began with a head-start—a well-known family patriarch and an established framework (7,000 members).

Instead, he builds his persona and presents himself as one whose path to the pastorate was unconventional. He does literally go overnight from behind the cameras to center stage without the formal training for the role. Such a history seemingly would make him unqualified for his role, since he does not decide to go to school as part of building his ethotic appeal. Instead, he turns to his brand of soft prosperity to paint/develop his persona. This rhetorical portrait consists of him, his family, and non-Osteen members, all symbolic of the good life led by those who live with prosperous, healing, overcoming faith. After all, if one follows Osteen's formula for life, one does not need a formal education to attain victorious living.

Osteen uses narratives, themes, and examples about himself, his family, and non-Osteen members to show how they are exemplars of certain principles and that God victoriously works in each of the individual's lives. The manner in which he weaves these stories helps justify his pastoral ascension and portray him as one who has always been led by God but is still an ordinary guy working hard to develop his messages and overcome one difficulty after another.

The tokens of his discourses are that he is an overcomer that was divinely chosen for his position, but he is also human—searches for parking spaces, has a father who dies, a sister who gets divorced, and a mother who gets cancer. This “discourse exerts on his listeners the pull of an ideology” (Black, 1970, p. 113). In this case, the subject is Joel Osteen and the acceptance of his worldview on victorious living—financial prosperity, physical healing, and strong family relationships.

Chapter 3

Living Your Best Life: Osteen's Second Persona

To live your best life now, you must start looking at life through eyes of faith, seeing yourself rising to new levels. See your business taking off. See your marriage restored. See your family prospering. See your health restored. See your dream coming to pass. (Osteen, 2004a, p.4)

The ideal auditor embedded in Osteen's discourse is divulged through the above epigraph. As Osteen addresses his audience, he asks three things of them. First, he encourages his audience to ultimately believe they will acquire more wealth. This is implied by a request such as, "See your business taking off." Second, he requests that they be relationship-conscious when he tells them to "See your marriage restored" and your "family prospering." Finally, the auditor is expected to be healthy—"See your health restored." All of this is summarized by the last sentence, "See your dream coming to pass." The ultimate dream Osteen desires to construct is one in which his ideal auditor prospers financially, relationally, and physically.

The centrality of this belief system is further proven in other Osteen texts. He emphasizes the same three points in his second book, *Becoming A Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day*, when he asserts, "God wants us to prosper. But it's not just about money. Again, it's about having health and having good relationships..." (Osteen, 2007a, p. 32). Two years later he emphasizes these three forms of consciousness in his third book, *It's Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, and Increase in God's Favor*, when he declares, "Is today the day for you to accomplish your goal, to land your dream job, to find love, to restore your health?" (Osteen, 2009, p. 7). Finally, Osteen reaffirms that these three concepts are central to his belief system when

he reiterates them in a 2014 *Christian Post* interview. Osteen states, “I believe God wants you to prosper in your health, in your family, in your relationship, in your business, and in your career” (Osteen, 2014). As Black (1970) says, “Discourses contain tokens of their authors. Discourses are, directly or in a transmuted form, the external signs of internal states... We mean more specifically, that certain features of a linguistic act entail certain characteristics of the language user” (p. 110). From the beginning of his career to the present, Osteen has emphasized the accumulation of wealth, good health, and good relationships as his central message. Osteen clearly values all three intrinsically.

The focus of this chapter is to identify the characteristics of Osteen’s second persona. As shown above, for Osteen, the second persona is someone who is wealthy, healthy, and relationship-conscious. To understand the historical context for this consciousness, one must understand the ideology of the prosperity gospel, which as I indicated previously, is the gospel Osteen preaches.

Though the prosperity gospel is not homogenous, there are core prosperity gospel principles. One is that God will provide a person with certain material possessions if the person is faithful to certain prosperity gospel principles. The traditional categories from which one can expect material trappings are divided in two categories (Bowler, 2013). First, the person should anticipate the trappings of material wealth. He or she should expect to have a great deal of money, a nice home, nice car, etc. The second traditional category found in the prosperity gospel is the manifestation of divine health. Those who believe the prosperity gospel should not only expect to be physically fit, but he or she should also expect to be divinely healed of any disease or sickness (Walton, 2009, pp. 251-253).

Osteen is a part of this movement. However, Osteen also has distinguished himself from other prosperity gospel preachers, because he has branded a slightly different version of the prosperity gospel. While traditional prosperity gospel preachers predominately emphasize prosperity in terms of wealth and health (Mora, 2008; Walton, 2009; Bowler, 2013), Osteen expanded the prosperity gospel spectrum by placing an emphasis on the importance of relationships. When he rose to lead Lakewood Church in 1999, therapists (licensed and unlicensed, secular and religious) focused on improving relationships became regular fixtures on television shows. It also became common to hear television personalities and others speak of being in therapy or needing to get therapy (Clouds, 1998, p. xlv).

As is shown throughout this dissertation, the main relationship on which Osteen focuses, and to which he directs the attention of his listeners, is the relationship of the family. Osteen's ideal auditor values family relationships. They also value personal relationships. Osteen made family relationships a focus in his books as the divorce rate soared in America. More and more families lived further distances apart and family discord became a regular fixture on television (Cloud, 1998, pp. 55-57). The culture was becoming more separated; neighbors did not know each other, and many became immersed in technology and real and imaginary technology relationships.

To provide a portrait of Osteen's ideal auditor, I will begin by explaining why this auditor is health-conscious. Then, I show that Osteen's wealth-conscious persona views the lack of wealth as a negative trait, and proffers that one attains wealth as a result of a "high" work ethic, humility, and fiscal responsibility—lives frugally, pays bills, and saves. In the final section, I discuss the strategies and

attributes associated with Osteen's relationally-conscious person as demonstrated in two areas: family life and professional life.

Wealth-conscious

To begin to understand Osteen's wealth-conscious second persona and its construction, one must first understand that this person is also health-conscious and relationship-conscious. It is imperative to start with this reality, because the wealth-conscious persona must always recognize the importance of being equally conscious of health and relationships—the triune Osteen message. The wealth-conscious person should not only be keenly aware of these other two forms of consciousness, but he or she must also embrace the practice of never focusing on being wealth-conscious apart from being health and relationship conscious. Whenever wealth-consciousness is explained, Osteen's second persona must always demonstrate that it is indivisibly intertwined with the two other forms of consciousness.

It is imperative to practice and embrace this triune strategy because societally, negative assumptions are automatically associated with the wealth-conscious being. The majority of contexts in which the wealth-conscious mindset is discussed usually require a justification for being wealth-conscious and for accumulating wealth. This is not the case for being health and relationship-conscious. This is proven in the following text,

Morgan: Joel Osteen says that, “God wants you to be rich,” which is convenient because he's very rich. There's no easy way to put this. But you two [Joel and Victoria Osteen] are stinking rich. Guilty?

Osteen: We are guilty. We are guilty because God blesses us.

Morgan: You see, what I quite like about it is you're unashamedly rich. And most people in the church who make a lot of money often feel quite guilty, because the traditional kind of Christian sentiment towards wealth and material

good is it's not something you should be coveting. How do you explain the fact that you feel not only very easy about the money you've got...?

Osteen: Well...Let be back up a minute. When I say, "God wants you to be rich," I...when I talk about rich, I actually don't...I say, "God wants you to be blessed." Talking about [you're] also rich in good health, in good relationships, in peace, and you've got to have money to pay bills. (Osteen, 2011)

In this interview, talk show host Piers Morgan explicitly notes the presence and struggle of the wealth-conscious being. From Morgan's perspective, the wealth-conscious persona is someone who is driven to accumulate a large amount of money. From the mainstream historic Christian perspective, the wealth-conscious person should feel "guilty" about embracing a drive to acquire massive wealth. Morgan explicitly notes that most Christians do not desire what could be perceived as excessive material wealth. Osteen, conversely, defends the second persona by noting, "We are guilty." Morgan's use of the word "guilty" denotes the negative position from which the wealth-conscious persona begins.

Since Osteen is keenly aware of the position from which his second persona must argue, he begins his rebuttal on the same level as which Morgan began. Osteen's use of the word "guilty" directly meets Morgan on his own terrain. He then defines what it means to be guilty and why the second persona should not feel "guilty" about being "guilty" of being wealthy. One should not feel guilty, because one is not necessarily wealth-conscious because of selfish-ambition or the "love of money," which the bible says, is "the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10 KJV).

Conversely, the wealth-conscious persona should desire wealth, because "God wants you to be rich." The insertion of God is intended to deescalate the negative attention given to the strong desire one may have to accumulate wealth. The statement

“God wants you to be rich” in many ways validates the need for one to have such a strong desire, because it means that the person strongly desires to attain what God wants her to attain.

In a similar vein, Osteen then further legitimizes the importance of the wealth-conscious mindset by offering his definition of what it means to be rich. For Osteen and his second persona, being rich refers to money, good health, and good relationships. This individual may try to increase their wealth, but she also intentionally tries to improve her health and positive relationships. The attachment of health and relationships to the wealth-conscious persona aims to erase the negative perception that this person is solely bent on accumulating wealth. While society may ostracize someone bent on accumulating wealth, it will not ostracize someone determined to have good health and positive relationships. In this way, Osteen attempts to remove some of the negativity he knows is associated with the wealth-conscious second persona.

With this background, the focus now shifts to strategies Osteen employs to make his ideal auditor unapologetically comfortable with embracing wealth-consciousness. This person boldly models wealth-consciousness with an awareness of the following: God supports you, you are humble regarding your wealth, and you are an economically responsible and generous person.

God supports you. The first reason the wealth-conscious person should be comfortable with accumulating wealth is that he or she believes that God is the source of all wealth. Since Osteen is keenly aware that the vast majority of his audience is monotheistic and believes in God, the first justification he uses to make them comfortable with having a proclivity for wealth is to connect the accumulation of wealth to God. As a

result, Osteen's second persona should feel it is normal and theologically acceptable to believe earnestly that obtaining wealth is acceptable, as it comes from the highest authority—God.

Throughout his career, Osteen has strategically positioned God as the source of wealth for the wealth-conscious person. In his first book, Osteen asserts, “God wants to increase you financially, by giving you promotions, fresh ideas, and creativity” (Osteen, 2005d, p. 5). Here, the second persona is encouraged to view God not only as the direct source of material wealth, but also as the generator of the tangible tools that can lead to wealth, such as promotions, ideas, and creativity. A year later, Osteen explains, “If Jesus was here, he wouldn't be riding a donkey, he'd be taking a jet” (Osteen, 2005b). In this example, Osteen uses Jesus, whom Christians believe is the Son of God, to demonstrate how accepting God is of the wealth-conscious mindset. God supports the mindset such that if Jesus, the only Son of God, lived in the present age, he, too, would have some of the exemplars of extreme wealth, such as a jet.

The next year, Osteen exhorts readers to shun negativity and develop a prosperous mindset as a way of drawing God's favor (Blementhal, 2006). The clear implication here is that God will “favor” those who develop a wealth-conscious mindset. That same year, Osteen reaffirms God as the source of wealth when he says, “I believe God wants to bless us. Our message is that God wants you to have plenty to pay your bills” (Osteen, 2006c). Three years later, he frames the same argument as, “Get in agreement with God. You may not be blessed right now. You may be hurting financially... but you can speak in faith without denying the truth. God said, ‘Let the weak say, “I'm strong.” He didn't say, ‘Let the weak talk about their weaknesses’ ” (Osteen, 2009, p. 123). Osteen's aim here is

explicitly to tie the second persona to wealth-consciousness, because of his belief that one of the direct benefits of being in “agreement” with God is material wealth.

Finally, Osteen says, “I believe God, you know, Jesus died that we not just go to heaven, but that we excel in this life. My goal is to excel, to be blessed so you can be a bigger blessing to others” (Osteen, 2011). This example is significant for the Christian prosperity gospel believing second persona, because it not only encapsulates a core belief of Christianity—Jesus died so that Christians can go to heaven—it expands the rationale for why He died. Jesus died so that the second persona can go to heaven and so that he or she can excel in life on earth. In summary, the wealth-conscious person should be unapologetically comfortable with their wealth and strongly desire to attain wealth, because God is the source of this desire and the generator of wealth.

Without offering evidence of how wealth is gained in America, historically and modernly—typically through it being passed down from one generation to the next and through monetary policies that favor those who already are wealthy (Keister, 2000; Piketty, 2014)—Osteen makes his case for a wealth-conscious second persona.

Display humility. Osteen’s second persona also is a person of humility. This is the main posture Osteen’s second persona should exude whenever the topic of one’s wealth is addressed. Regardless of how much wealth one has accumulated, he or she should always be humble especially since God is the generator of wealth. In the following dialogue, Osteen demonstrates the humility that should be shown when wealth is the topic of discussion:

King: How have you handled fame?

Osteen: You know, I never think about it. I don’t feel like I’ve changed at all. I haven’t changed my routine. I guess the main thing is I feel a bigger

responsibility. I spend plenty of quiet time in the morning searching my heart, staying on the right course, and just staying humble before God. (Osteen, 2005a)

Prior to this question, King mentioned several of Osteen's numerous successes, such as book sales and purchasing a former basketball stadium, all of which led to his international fame. Such a list could easily lead to Hubris. But, in the grand scheme of things, his accomplishments, Osteen suggests, do not matter to him. What matters most is one's relationship with God and being humble. In this way, Osteen's audience is instructed to believe that accumulating vast wealth is acceptable, as long as one always keeps God first and maintains a posture of humility. While others may gloat over their success and feel proud, the ideal persona should always assume a public and private posture of humility.

Osteen speaks more about humility in an interview on his having packed Yankee Stadium. He responds, "It was very overwhelming. It's very humbling for me when I walk out and stand in front of people. So, I feel very humbled and very rewarded" (Osteen & Osteen, 2011). He gives the same response when Hanna Storm refers to him as a "bona fide celebrity." He replies, "I do think you have to not let it go to your head, stay true to your heart, and God will help you to always do the right things" (Osteen, 2007b).

In each of the above examples, the interviewers make it clear that Osteen has vast wealth. In each instance, Osteen's response is to speak of the importance of remaining humble. The posture of humility invites critics to shift their focus from viewing the wealth-conscious person as someone who is driven by money and prideful, both of which are character flaws on which the bible heavily frowns.

Be responsible. Finally, the second persona should be unapologetically comfortable with the accumulation of wealth, because this person is financially responsible. The ideal persona has the same responsibility as the average person. So, acts such as paying one's bills are non-negotiable. For Osteen's second persona, the obligation to pay bills refers to any debt accrued, whether personal, familial, or societal.

In terms of personal goals, the ideal persona, as with all people, needs money to pay bills. The wealth-conscious person who has accumulated wealth should talk about the need for money to cover basic expenses, just as anyone else would. Osteen demonstrates that this tactic should be employed during conversations about one's status as a financially wealthy individual (Osteen, 2006c; Osteen, 2011). Though the wealth-conscious person may not be overly concerned about whether she can afford to pay for a "nice" car, she nevertheless, like others, is trying to figure out how to pay her bills, whatever they are (Osteen, 2006c). Apparently, Osteen believes that those who are struggling to pay bills will somehow relate to those who have more than enough to do so.

But, to ensure receptivity and or relatability, Osteen also speaks of familial goals. The second persona feels obligated to cover all family expenses. Education is one of these expenses. According to Osteen, college tuition for one's children is a high priority that needs to be covered. Osteen asserts, "I believe that God wants to bless us. I mean, it costs a lot of money to send our kids to college these days..." (Osteen, 2006c). This statement operates to make the second persona comfortable with the accumulation of wealth, because it both acknowledges God as the source of wealth and it identifies paying one's bills as one of the main reasons that the wealth-conscious person desires wealth. The fact that one of the bills is college tuition is one that most are more than comfortable

paying and using one's wealth to cover. Also, by talking about a type of bill to which all can relate—college tuition—those who are not yet wealthy may be persuaded by this one and then by other reasons that they should accumulate wealth.

A final bill that the second persona should cover is his or her debt to society. This person should always feel obligated to donate a portion of his or her wealth for the betterment of society. Giving back should be perceived as a reasonable duty, because the ability to help others is one of the main reasons that the second persona receives wealth. In this vein, the wealth-conscious person should be a steward over the wealth God has given and use it to assist those in need (Osteen, 2006a). Osteen articulates this belief during an interview with Piers Morgan. When Morgan states, “many of the Christian belief are wary of too much material [gain],” Osteen shows why wealth is necessary when he asserts, “I hope people get blessed, if they can handle it right. Because it takes money to do good. You know to do things for people” (Osteen, 2005a). In the same interview, Osteen further clarifies that the wealth-conscious persona should be dedicated to giving to others when he says, “I believe...the whole spirit of Christianity is, you know, having a lifestyle of giving. Not [just] giving at Christmas, not giving every once in a while, but having an attitude to give” (Osteen, 2005a).

Moreover, Osteen suggests that this belief should be so central to the wealth-conscious person's psyche that he also implies that the only time one can be certain God will move on his or her behalf is after he or she has done something generous for someone else (Osteen, 2005a).

Years later in Osteen's discourse, the necessity for the second persona to give a percentage of his or her wealth to the less fortunate resurfaces. He writes, “We are

blessed to be a blessing to help others” (Osteen & Osteen, 2011). In this instance, Osteen specifically notes that one’s wealth should be used to help orphans, build children’s homes, and build hospitals (Osteen & Osteen, 2011). In short, Osteen’s goal is to convey to his audience that the money one gets is not simply to increase the heft of their bank account and make their family wealthy; it also has a philanthropic purpose tied to it that forms part of the spiritual identity of the donor.

Morally, Osteen attempts to construct a second persona who is concerned about others. This is the antidote to the person for whom being wealthy is the main concern. The implication also is that Osteen is not a person whose main concern is money. However, as Black warns, “We have learned to keep continuously before us the possibility, that the author implied by the discourse is an artificial creation: a persona, but necessarily a person” (p.111).

Health-conscious

Osteen has a high regard for good health. He employs several techniques to construct the picture of the ideal character who views good health as a priority. The ideal person is health-conscious, because he or she views sickness as a negative attribute; views health as the equivalent of wealth; and views good health as attainable through certain life principles.

One of the main reasons Osteen’s ideal character is health-conscious is that he or she views bad health as a negative trait. One example of how Osteen casts bad health in a negative light is demonstrated in the following example,

In his late forties, Brian felt as though everything in his world was falling apart and coming down on his shoulders. His business went bankrupt. He lost his family through divorce. His health was deteriorating. At one time, he had been an extremely successful man.

One day, a friend who cared enough to level with Brian told him, “I love ya, buddy, but you need to quit focusing on all the negative; stop looking at everything you’ve lost and start looking at all you have left.”

Within a matter of months, his situation began to turn around. First, he got his joy back. Then his health and vitality returned. He soon got his job back. (Osteen, 2005d, p. 128)

Here, Osteen depicts bad health as the opposite of success. In his typical always remain as neutral as possible style, he does not specifically say the man is no longer successful, rather he merely notes that at one time—prior to his current circumstance—he was an “extremely successful man.” Osteen wants persons to clearly associate “sickness” with “negativity” when in the next paragraph the protagonist is encouraged to quit “focusing on the negative in his life.” Osteen does not attempt to identify either of the individual conditions as negative; instead, he notes that the entire situation should be viewed as negative.

Another way Osteen negatively portrays sickness is by using the pejorative term “evil” to identify the source of sickness in a person’s body. In an interview with Larry King, Osteen said:

King: If God gave you a disease.

Osteen: I think there’s evil in the world.

King: I mean, you don’t give it to yourself.

Osteen: No, but I think there’s evil forces. And there are just things that are part of life. I mean the scripture talks about when you get old your body is going to begin to wither away. But it will be renewed. But I don’t believe that you can say that God’s going around putting sicknesses and diseases on people. God’s the one that restores us and heals us. (Osteen, 2008a)

In this example, immediately after it is suggested that diseases could come from God, Osteen rebuts the association by inserting the word evil into the conversation. In case someone missed the association that he makes, he further builds the concept by again suggesting that sickness is the product of evil forces. In the next sentence, he offers an alternative view of disease as simply a part of life; it is part of the body's natural progression to "wither away." In short, one should believe diseases come from evil forces, or that they are simply a part of life.

In no shape, form, or fashion, implies Osteen, should diseases be viewed as something from God. One should not "believe" that "God's going around putting sicknesses and diseases in people" (Osteen, 2008a). Rather, God takes diseases from people. Osteen portrays God in such a positive light when he asserts, "God's the one that restores us and heals us" (Osteen, 2008a). In this way, just as Osteen's second persona should associate God with wealth, they should also believe that good health comes from God, too.

According to Mumford (2012), Osteen's beliefs regarding sickness are in keeping with tenets of prosperity preaching. She states,

Prosperity preachers believe in the law of positive confession, which has two aspects. First, believers must confess that they have something (e.g., healing, material goods) before it is manifested in their lives. When believers make their confession, "By his stripes I am healed," they must believe that they *are* healed before the symptoms leave their body.

The second aspect of positive confession is that, since believers will never rise above their confessions, they should never make a negative confession. For example, they should never say they have cancer or pneumonia after receiving the diagnosis from a doctor. By talking about their diseases, they are glorifying Satan, who has the ability to inflict them with disease. Because God has redeemed believers from Satan's reign, it is imperative for Christians to confess that Satan has no right to reign over them with sickness, disease, weakness, or failure. When Christians make positive confessions, even after receiving negative diagnoses,

they are embracing God's promise for health and wholeness and rejecting Satan's right to affect their lives. (Mumford, 2012, pp. 86-87)

Osteen is on familiar ground as he talks against believers being unhealthy. His teaching in this area mirrors his disdain for "negative confessions." And, it is in keeping with his belief regarding God's ability to heal, as was discussed above relative to Osteen's mother and others.

A second strategy Osteen employs is weaving health with wealth. The health-conscious person should be concerned about living and enjoying both a wealthy and a healthy lifestyle. Being healthy is as important as having wealth. In case someone believes that having good health should be relegated as of lesser importance than having wealth, Osteen sets the record straight when he asks, "What good is money if you don't have health" (Osteen, 2005a). From this vantage point, those looking for cues in Osteen's rhetoric, just heard him strongly intimate that they will not enjoy the wealth that they have accumulated, if they do not intentionally become physically and mentally healthy.

In another example, Osteen suggests that although the person may be jobless and therefore cannot accumulate the wealth he or she desires, if the person is healthy, life should nonetheless be prosperous. He says, "I don't have a job, but, you know what, I do have health today" (Osteen & Follett, 2012). By specifically noting that even if one does not have a job, he or she can nevertheless be thankful, Osteen strategically informs his auditor that health should be a high priority regardless of their financial condition. Surely he is aware that with the economic volatility of recent years, and the poverty rate of some in Houston, he must persuade them to hold on to their wealth-making consciousness. While this is certainly reasonable and the right way to think about health, one wonders how this message is received by hearers in a country that favors the financially wealthy

and does little to ensure that all can afford and benefit from health care. This is especially worth pondering since the speaker does not offer messages that would prophetically promote that health care conglomerates should do more to help Americans stay healthy and afford health care, although the speaker says good health is quite important. Is the speaker actually offering a false message, or at a minimum an inadequate message?

Osteen also said in one of his books, “I think I’m wealthy not just in money, but I’m wealthy in health” (Osteen, 2008a). He also wrote, “You may have been sick for a long time, but this is your time to get well. You may be bound by all kinds of addiction, all kinds of bad habits, but this is the time to be set free....This is your time of increase” (Osteen, 2004a, p. 10). Here, Osteen notes that a person may have been sick; the remedy for the person’s sickness is increase. His use of the word “increase” is an interesting choice, because this section, which is primarily about illness, does not mention money. However, his use of the word “increase” when discussing health appears intended to encourage audiences to view health as a form of wealth.

Finally, Osteen asks us to believe that good health can be attained through a variety of means. Unlike some of his early forebears in Pentecostal circles who believed in prayer over doctors, or even amazing healings that could be wrought by preachers, Osteen is not opposed to persons gaining medical assistance if they need to do so. He notes, “Concerning depression, sometimes it’s clinical. A lot of times it’s an attitude and it’s that we’ve gotten so focused on ourselves” (Osteen, 2005a). Perhaps he sincerely believes it, but Osteen appears to hedge, and may also be appealing to those who still believe in miracle cures promised by the likes of prosperity preachers such as Benny Hinn, when he (Osteen) says, “The researchers can see definite patterns, but they cannot

conclusively determine whether the cause is genetic, environmental, or hereditary, or some combination of those factors” (Osteen, 2007a, p. 49).

With good health made attainable, the person is then expected to “Eat right, exercise regularly, and everyday declare, ‘With long life, God is satisfying me and showing me His salvation’ ” (Osteen, 2007a, p. 51). Through all of the former, Osteen divulges his prescription for how persons can systematically attain health.

Interestingly, although he does not suggest that one should seek medical help when needed, without any medical training, he speaks of a very serious illness as a “destructive spirit.” He notes,

A beautiful young woman named Betsy struggles with anorexia. She explained to me how her mother had succumbed to it; several of her aunts...sisters...and several cousins did, too. This one sickness was practically tearing this family apart. That was not just a coincidence; that’s a negative, destructive spirit that keeps getting passed down in that family. It probably would have continued to decimate the family had Betsy not made a choice to live under the blessings of God rather than a curse. Betsy realized that her struggle against anorexia was not merely a physical battle; it was a spiritual battle as well. As she took authority over those issues in the name of Jesus, Betsy broke free from the bondage she had inherited. (Osteen, 2007a, p. 50)

He then shifts the focus from it being viewed as hereditary to his belief that it should be viewed as the result of an evil force, “a curse.” Having the disease suggests that you live “under a curse,” while not having it means you “live under the blessings of God.” Osteen then rearticulates his belief that the source of diseases can only be explained in one of two ways—as a physical battle or a spiritual battle.” He next gives the remedy for the diseases when he says, “she took authority over those issues in the name of Jesus. Betsy broke free from the bondage she inherited” (Osteen, 2007a, p. 50). In this statement, he lets the audience know that his ideal auditor attains health after declaring that he or she is

in control of his/her life through Jesus Christ. Osteen implies that using his prescription will enable the health-conscious person to overcome any battle against sickness—physical or spiritual.

Immediately after that example, Osteen uses another that clearly lays out how one should view and respond to sickness. He asserts,

Nearly every male in Tim's family has had a heart attack and died by the time he was fifty years old. Tim is currently forty-eight, so you can imagine how concerned and worried he is. "Tim, you can be the one to break the curse," I told him. "Don't start planning your funeral. Don't assume that you will have a heart attack. Take a stand against it."

I said, "Eat right, exercise regularly, and every day, declare, 'With long life, God is satisfying me and showing me His salvation.' "

Friend, you have to make the choice whether you will receive the blessing and not the curse. If these negative patterns exist in your family line, recognize what's happening and do something about it. (Osteen, 2007a, pp. 50-51)

In much the same fashion as he did in the preceding anecdote, Osteen identifies the hereditary nature of disease. Tim has inherited the probability that he, too, will die from a heart attack. However, Osteen contends that this pattern of sickness and death is a "curse" that can be broken. Instead of accepting an early death as inevitable, Tim can "take a stand against it." Osteen's prescription to Tim for breaking the curse and attaining health is to "exercise," "eat right," and "declare" the positive Word of God over his life. His readers will agree with Osteen on this prescription, as it is common knowledge that one should exercise and eat right to avoid heart attacks. But he offers extra tools with which to break physical curses—"declare the positive Word of God over your life" and view the disease as a "negative pattern."

It is important to note that Osteen's prescription appears to have three equal parts. The ideal character should not only "eat right" and "exercise," but should also regularly declare the word of God over his or her life. As I noted in the first persona discussion, Osteen's mother overcame her battle with cancer, because, according to him, in addition to receiving treatment, she faithfully declared the positive Word of God over her circumstance. Similarly, the ideal character that Osteen creates should view declaring the Word of God over illness as one of the primary tools for attaining good health. Yes, he mentions that one must exercise and eat right, but in his writings, he gives more time and attention to one becoming well as a result of their regularly declaring the power of the Word of God in his or her life.

Relationship-conscious

The third major element of the character Osteen constructs is relational consciousness. This is the third aspect of the "model" that Osteen (our rhetor) would have his "ideal auditor" convey. Relational consciousness means that the ideal character is as deliberate in managing relationships as in accumulating wealth and attaining health. In this section, I discuss the strategies and attributes associated with Osteen's relationally-conscious person as demonstrated in two areas: family and professional life.

Family life. Osteen's second persona is extremely family oriented. Family life should be considered just as valuable as one's wealth. In fact, it is constitutive of one's wealth. Osteen conveys the value that should be placed on the family (a central relationship) in the same way he did when he stated the importance of health; he juxtaposes it with money. Osteen contends, "You can work hard in America. But, don't neglect your family. You know, don't run after riches. Take time for your family. Take

time for the things that are important. Even in the recession, you may be hard up, but don't neglect the things that God has placed around you" (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011).

Against the backdrop of American capitalism, Osteen presents the family. In this way, he associates care of family with wealth. In case someone missed this point in the first two sentences, he reiterates it. Instead of employing the "work hard" motif to identify wealth, in the next sentence he uses the word "riches" to identify wealth. Against the backdrop of "riches," he again inserts the family—"Take time for your family." Then, he labels the family as important. Everyone knows money is important, but here he wants it known that family should be considered equally if not more important. Finally, just as God should be viewed as the source of wealth and good health, Osteen depicts God in the same role concerning families when he says, "Even in the recession, you may be hard up, but don't neglect the things that God has put around you" (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011). Just as God is the generator of wealth, God places our family (another form of wealth) around us.

The family-oriented person should also be married and have children. As noted earlier, in Osteen's rhetoric, divorce and separation are usually associated with failure. Conversely, Osteen's ideal character has a good job, health, and, equally important, a family to which they are attentive. Since the single person is cast negatively or as hoping to marry, the ideal character believes that he or she should be married.

According to Osteen's formula, a successful marriage requires hard work. If possible, the person should strive to be married, despite the difficulties that accompany marriage. In an example about marriage, Osteen confirms, "Maybe you're treating somebody kindly and respectfully, but they're being unkind and discourteous to you. The

easy thing would be to say, ‘Forget it. I don’t have to put up with this’ ” (Osteen, 2009, p. 9). When one considers that a high work ethic is required for Osteen’s wealth-conscious person to accumulate wealth, it appears Osteen suggests the ideal person should apply the same work ethic to their marriage. To make this point, the image he casts in the above example is of a man and woman who are at opposite ends: kind vs. unkind, respectful vs. discourteous. For these opposing spouses or significant others to find common ground, it is clear that a great deal of hard work has to occur. Considering that much work is needed, giving up would be “easy.” But Osteen aims to motivate the ideal character to do whatever he or she can to remain or get married. Moreover, this is another example of how Osteen subtly uses the wealth motif to encourage his ideal character in a different area of life.

In terms of family roles, the adult male should be viewed as the dominant figure in the house. The male figure in the home exercises the most authority. In an interview with Victoria Osteen, Piers Morgan inquires of Joel Osteen’s demeanor at home. The following is an excerpt from that conversation:

Morgan: He [Osteen] must have a temper?

Victoria Osteen: I’ve never seen it. This is what I told the kids the other day. I said ‘You all, we have to hurry because you know dad will get mad at us if we’re not out of this house, getting to school.’ I think one of my kids said, ‘What do you mean?’ I said, ‘Well, he just gives me that look that makes me know he’s mad at me. (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011)

In this example, the characteristics of the ideal male are outlined. First, she paints an idyllic picture of her spouse—I’ve never seen it (his temper). Then, she validates his dominant position in her comments to her children when she notes that if they’re not out of the house by a certain time “dad will get mad at us...” (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011).

The fact that everyone is concerned that dad will become angry suggests that the rules in the house are determined by the adult male, are carried out by the female, and should be adhered to by the wife and children. Victoria confirms that it is her role to carry out the rules, not establish them. She does this by showing that she earnestly endeavors to execute the “rule,” and hopes to avoid any repercussions that will occur if the rule is not properly followed. She, like the children, wants to avoid what could happen when “dad gets mad.”

Moreover, Victoria Osteen’s response here provides more insight into the role of Osteen’s second persona wife. She should view herself in a supportive role to her husband. Furthermore, this example is intended to imply that the wife is the primary caretaker for children in a family.

Finally, the family-oriented person should value rearing children. Again, Osteen uses wealth symbols to frame the value that should be placed on one of the main tasks of most families—rearing children. Rearing children should essentially be viewed as building wealth, which is not built overnight. Osteen says, “When raising a child you must be conscious that you’re influencing him or her. You’re not just raising a child, you’re influencing someone and their future” (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V, 2008). As with any investment, whatever the investor contributes on the front end will affect the dividends that receive on the back end.

Moreover, the responsible parent teaches his or her children how to view and deal with wealth. When questioned about his strategies to keep his children grounded so that his wealth does not go to their heads, Osteen asserts, “They [his two children] see us giving. They see, you know, us working hard” (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011). In this

example, Osteen makes it known that his children view money the same way his ideal character does. They believe one must have a large amount of money in order to give it away and perform good acts in the world. He also suggests that his children properly value wealth because they understand it as the product of a strong work ethic.

In addition, this notion of the strong work ethic performs two tasks here. First, it connects hard work to having wealth, being healthy, having a successful marriage, and rearing successful and wealthy children. Second, it intimates why the children of wealthy people also becoming wealthy—their parents have exposed them to hard work and the purposes that wealth is to serve. Again with only personal evidence and without evidence of what typically happens relative to obtaining wealth and one's children doing the same, Osteen sells his version of how one becomes wealthy and teaches their children the same lessons.

Public life. Regarding one's professional life, the second persona intentionally aims to network with as many people as possible. When questioned why he avoids controversial topics and activities, Osteen gives such answers as, "I think everybody is called to different things...and I just, you know, that's not me," "I feel like I'm called to reach the general public," or "I feel like I'm called to reach a broad amount of people" (Osteen 2005b, 2012; Osteen & Follett 2012). In each response, Osteen clearly conveys that the ideal character should expand his or her networking circle and avoid controversial issues that can limit or prevent successful networking. The person should endeavor to find common ground with everyone he or she encounters. For the ideal person to achieve this goal, he or she must display a posture of neutrality concerning

politics, race, and religion. Some of Osteen's specific views concerning politics, race, and religion will now be discussed.

Political life. The ideal character is publicly apolitical. Osteen's rhetoric offers the portrait of a person who is, in most cases, unbiased and unfazed by political occurrences. The ideal auditor will be more attractive and non-offensive if he or she is apolitical. As a result, he or she will be better positioned to form countless strategic alliances with diverse groups of people.

The first way the apolitical agenda should be carried out is through avoidance of political discussions. Osteen conveys this ideology when he confirms on numerous occasions that he intentionally avoids political topics in all of his messages (Osteen, 2005a, 2005b, 2007b, 2012). He also notes that he employs this method because his father used it successfully, and it has worked for him, too.

He understands that this apolitical approach helps the character avoid dividing people, and it positions him or her to establish a wide range of relationships. Osteen models this when he asserts, "you know, the reason I [avoid political topics] is because I feel like I'm called to reach a broad amount of people. When you start getting political, almost immediately, you divide 50-50. And so I didn't want them to think he's [Joel Osteen] Democrat or Republican because half of them are going to turn you off" (Osteen, 2012). He uses similar language in another interview in which his apolitical approach is questioned. He says, "Well, the reason is because I feel like I'm called to reach the general public. And you start dividing yourself saying, 'I'm a Democrat, Republican, whatever.' Fifty percent immediately don't agree. And I want to throw a broad message

of hope to everyone, not somebody turn me off because of my political preference” (Osteen & Follett, 2012).

Though one should do all she or he can to avoid political topics, the person must still recognize that it will be impossible to avoid all political conversations. At times when one is forced to participate in a political conversation, the person should “keep it as civil as possible...take the high road...and treat [...] other[s] with respect and the honor that everyone [...] deserves” (Osteen & Follett, 2012). Moreover, the ideal person should view the anger commonly associated with political discussions in negative terms. In an interview about heated political debates he states, “Well, I don’t like anger. I don’t think it’s healthy. I don’t like to breed anger or for anybody else to do it. I like to be passionate...But just don’t cross the lines” (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011). In each example, one is informed how to maintain an apolitical status even when unavoidable conversations about politics arise. Special circumstances may require the employment of a different approach, but it should ultimately lead to a civil stance.

This reality is modeled by Osteen in the few available examples where he engaged in a political discussion for more than a few seconds. The times that Osteen was unable to avoid political discussions occurred during periods in which presidential elections were on the horizon (Osteen, 2007b, 2012; Osteen & Follett, 2012). In all other interviews before and after election years, he avoids political discussions. Even if the interviewer asks him political questions directly, he dodges them by comments such as, “That’s just not me” (Osteen, 2005b).

In 2007, 2008, and 2012 when presidential elections were on the horizon, he entered into longer political conversations. During these times, he was asked questions

that could clearly be divisive such as, “Is Obama a Christian?” “Is Mitt Romney a Christian?” “Should Harriet Miers’ religion be used as a selling point for her court nomination?” or “What do you think about Romney’s affiliation with the Mormon Church?” (Osteen 2005c; 2007b; 2012). These are undoubtedly controversial topics on the political landscape. However, regardless of how divisive the topics, Osteen exemplifies that he believes that the ideal person should “keep it as civil as possible...take the high road...and treat [...] other[s] with respect and the honor that everyone [...] deserves” (Osteen & Follett, 2012).

While others might focus on why each candidate’s faith should be questioned, Osteen takes what he terms “the high road” and focuses the attention on the reasons why their faith should not be questioned. This approach allows him to emphasize what the individuals share in common. They are alike because they agree that Jesus is Savior, Jesus is the Son of God, and God raised Jesus from the dead (Osteen, 2007b; 2012). In this way, the character does not have to choose a side and thereby align herself with a particular group. Rather, she can strategically position herself as one with whom either group can identify or at least not feel alienated due to a position taken.

Another way the person can appear apolitical is through his or her consistent, public support of the sitting President, regardless of preferences for particular candidates. Osteen notes that he supports every person in office in the following interview:

King: Do you ever involve politics in the sermons?

Osteen: Never do. My father never did.

King: Never mention President Bush?

Osteen: Well, only to pray. We prayed for President Bush, Clinton, all of them (Osteen, 2005a).

Here, Osteen informs his ideal auditor that he or she should never let anyone know which candidate he or she supports. Osteen describes how to engage a sitting president apolitically. He advises people to “swallow their pride and support who’s in office. Pray for them and appreciate their service” (Osteen & Follett, 2012).

Finally, although this ideal auditor should stay neutral on political issues, he or she cannot present as an uninvolved citizen. He or she will never choose not to vote as a sign of political protest. Rather, the person will vote and encourage others to vote as well. In a 2012 interview, Osteen not only acknowledges that he will vote in the upcoming election, he took the time to encourage everyone else to vote (Osteen & Follett, 2012). Like any concerned member of society, the ideal character must publicly participate in and admonish others to support the political process. Nevertheless, as in the case of all other political contexts, the person must avoid showing his or her political affiliation and maintain his or her neutrality or find points of commonality whenever possible.

Race. The second persona should have little to no direct engagement with issues concerning race. Osteen’s avoidance of racial issues is made obvious by the fact that only two examples were identified in the more than 30 Osteen-related sources that were used to construct the description of his second persona (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011). Nevertheless, insight can be gleaned from three references he makes to racial issues.

First, as opposed to race or some other societal marker, the ideal person should always deal with everyone based on the one trait human beings share—our

humanity. Osteen confirms this when he refers to race while being questioned about the various values his father “instilled” in him. Osteen notes,

I think he instilled in me several [values]. One: integrity. I always saw my dad take the high road. When times that he could, you know, just take the low road, he didn't. I think the other thing my dad instilled in me: a love for people. He was always for people. He didn't care—black, white, rich, poor, sinner, or saint. (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011)

At the heart of this quote is his belief that everyone, regardless of race, class, or religion, is a human being. Societal markers are subordinate to one's personhood. In other words, a person's class status does not make him or her any more or less human, nor does one's race or religion. Everyone is a person and therefore deserves to be loved and treated with compassion.

Recall, Osteen gives this example when questioned about the values his father instilled in him. The two values he specifically mentions are integrity and love for people. By referring to race while discussing his values, he suggests to the ideal character that the most diplomatic way to deal with people is based on a values system, not in light of socially created categories.

This example also highlights the belief that socially created categories should be viewed as categories with limitations. From this vantage point, race, like other societal labels, is nothing more than a category. The ideal person must always believe she is never confined by a socially created category. By mentioning race in conjunction with the categories of religion and class, Osteen attempts to reprogram how one should view the limitations that others may try to attach when discussing race. He does not address how persons such as African Americans, Latino/a, Asian or Native Americans who have immutable factors

such as skin color that have led to their being placed in negative socially constructed categories can overcome these categorizations and the racist, bigoted, and unfair treatment they have and may receive.

Instead, he offers another strategy one can use to engage in racial issues.

This one comes from a comedic story Osteen told at the beginning of a sermon.

Osteen states,

Archie and Jack argued for years whether Jesus was white or black. Archie was certain that Jesus was white and Jack was just as sure that Jesus was black. As fate would have it, they both died on the same day and they rushed to the pearly gates and said, "St. Peter please tell us: Is Jesus white or black? We've been arguing our whole lifetimes." About that time Jesus walked up and said, "Buenos dias" (Osteen, 2005a).

To fully understand Osteen's anecdote, one must understand its strategic placement. One of the hallmarks of Osteen's rhetorical style is to always tell a joke at the beginning of each sermon to make his audience laugh. Followers of Osteen know that he uses these jokes to relax the audience as he starts the sermon. Likely, his use of a racial joke at the start of this sermon conveys the relaxed attitude one also should take regarding racial issues. The use and placement of the example can lead one to assume that he believes racial issues are contentious and unnecessarily divide people, while a relaxed engagement of the subject is a way to rid ourselves of the divisive anger associated with some racial issues. In this way, Osteen essentially attempts to sanitize the topic of race so that it can be addressed in a non-contentious manner. In both examples in this section, Osteen casually acknowledges that he and his ideal audience are aware that racial issues exist. The topic was introduced of his own volition. Nevertheless, his approach shows that

one should not allow the topic to be divisive; at times, he implies, some of our discussions about race are so irrational or such a waste of time, it is laughable.

Religion. Osteen wants people to believe that his ideal model is not the typical evangelical Christian. Osteen attempts to distinguish between his ideal auditor and his description of the prototypical evangelical church member. Osteen says, “For a while, to be evangelical, it meant you were a white Republican and you were against this and against that. I don’t want to be put into that mold...” (Osteen, 2011). He also writes,

When I first started, I tried to be like my dad because he was a Southern Baptist. I was raised Southern Baptist....In the first few months, I was trying to find myself. But when I really stepped into who I believe God made me to be...I didn’t feel like...I had to quote 22 scriptures like my dad. I don’t have to have the text exactly like him. I’m just going to try to do what I’m good at (Osteen, 2012).

Osteen’s objective in both examples is to inform auditors that his ideal person should be judged on his or her own terms, not by a societally created label. True, the person may undeniably share a particular religious heritage with a large body of people, which is why Osteen makes clear references to evangelicals and Southern Baptists (his father’s denominational heritage). Nevertheless, because the person is a new “mold,” he or she should not be confined to the norms and practices one typically associates with a person affiliated with those religious roots. Osteen does not want stigmas associated with Southern Baptists and other evangelicals applied to him or those who believe as he does.

Unlike the traditional evangelical and Southern Baptist, Osteen’s ideal person is religiously tolerant. As such, they will not “beat somebody down and push...religion down their throat” (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011). Additionally,

he will do all he can to convey that he is perfectly fine with sharing a space with people who have different religious practices and doctrines. In the following exchange, Osteen models this behavior when questioned about a controversial topic that has been problematic for some evangelicals:

Wallace: When people say “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas,” do you view that as just people or religious political correctness going overboard?

Osteen: In traveling a lot, not everybody believes like me. They are not all...we’re not all Christians in this nation. Even some Christians believe differently. But I’m open to respect everyone, and it’s not going to offend me if when I pray in Jesus’ name and somebody doesn’t. That doesn’t offend me (Huckabee & Osteen, 2013).

Osteen does not come right out and say it, but his words in this example support Wallace’s position that some religious debates reflect “religious political correctness going overboard.” Since everyone in a country as large and as pluralistic as America is not a Christian, then it is absurd to expect everyone to adhere to Christian practices. As such, the ideal person should respect the reality of religious pluralism in America. A sign that one acknowledges and respects religious diversity is that they are not offended by another person’s religious convictions or traditions.

Not only will the person not be offended by the religious practices of others, he or she will do everything in his or her power not to offend people of different religious faiths and views. Whether the person believes it or not, he or she will not say publicly, for example, that a Muslim or any other non-Christian will go to hell because he or she does not believe in Jesus Christ (Osteen, 2004b; Osteen, 2005a). The ideal person is also someone who will depart from the

traditional Protestant approach toward other faiths when necessary to do something such as affirm a new Pope, by commending his efforts to be more inclusive (Huckabee & Osteen, 2013). The ideal auditor will not use his or her interpretation of scripture to argue for or against such topics as abortion or gay marriage (Osteen, 2005a). In short, the ideal person is religiously tolerant of other religious faiths and views.

Conclusion

Who is the audience Osteen's discourse implies? Better yet, who is the ideal person to whom his message appeals? This chapter shows that the characteristics, actions, and roles of the implied person resonate in three categories: wealth, health, and relationships. Every decision this person makes is determined by one of these three forms of consciousness. A wealth, health, and relationship-conscious sensibility makes it possible for Osteen's ideal persona to exist happily in his ideological world.

However, attention must be given to how the same discourse that creates a desirable world for some creates an undesirable world for others. The next chapter will explore the dance between Osteen's second and third personas.

Chapter 4

Not Living Your Best Life: Osteen's Third Persona

God wants us to prosper. But it's not just about money. Again, it's about having health and having good relationships... (Osteen, 2007a, p. 32)

The above epigraph exemplifies the mindset of Osteen's second persona and, by default, his third persona. On one hand, it shows that Osteen's imagined audience is keenly aware of wealth, health, and is relationally conscious. On the other hand, it illumines another audience that, according to his discourse, does not experience the benefits of his ideal auditor. The people in this category do not prosper in Osteen's discourse, for they are not a part of his imagined audience. This chapter concerns the voiceless in Osteen's rhetoric. The aim is to answer the question, How does Osteen's rhetoric create a Third Persona which takes shape against the backdrop of his Second Persona? And ultimately, I will make a moral judgment about Osteen's ideal persona and discuss how his discourse participates in larger networks of social and political power and comports with Wander's (1984) altruistic goal of "emancipating human potential."

In the sections that follow, I identify the groups Osteen's rhetoric alienates or excludes when he addresses his imagined audience. Using the three main consciousnesses of his ideal auditor, I address that as he constructs his ideal auditor, he also reveals groups that he does not prioritize in his rhetoric. Against his second persona, the analysis in this chapter shows that Osteen's discourse does not create a voice for those who are suffering from mental illnesses, are poor, unmarried, or are not race-neutral ethnic minorities.

First, it is necessary to locate the third persona in relation to the first and second persona. Wander (1987) writes,

In the text conceived as speech or “discourse” involving exchange (in contrast to “sending” and “receiving” or “speaking” and listening”), there is implied a speaker and a speaker’s intent. This is the “I,” or the First Persona. There is also implied, through certain features of the discourse entailing specific characteristics, roles, actions, or ways of seeing things for one who can use the language, a “you” or a Second Persona.

But, just as the discourse may be understood to affirm certain characteristics, it may also be understood to imply other characteristics, roles, actions, or ways of seeing things to be avoided. What is negated through the Second Persona forms the silhouette of a Third Persona—the “it” that is not present, that is objectified in a way that “you” and “I” are not. This being not present may, depending on how it is fashioned, become quiet alien, a being equated with disease, a “cancer” called upon to disfigure an individual or a group; or an animal subordinated through furtive glance or beady eye; or an organism, as a people might be transformed, through biological metaphor, into parasites. The potentiality of language to commend being carries with it the potential to spell out being unacceptable, undesirable, insignificant.

The Third Persona, therefore, refers to being negated. But, “being negated” includes not only being alienated through language—the “it” that is the summation of all that you and I are told to avoid becoming—but also being negated in history, a being whose presence, though relevant to what is said, is negated through silence.

...Establishing links between what is said and audiences denied access to public space brings rhetorical theory back to earth (pp. 369-370).

Wander clearly shows us that Osteen’s “I” and “you” alienate the “it” through language and tells you and I what to avoid becoming. But, as Wander prophetically makes clear, the “it” who is negated is relevant here on earth. The first group that Osteen negates, but is patently relevant here on earth, is the mentally ill.

Health-conscious: Mental Illness

Concerning depression, sometimes it’s clinical. A lot of times it’s an attitude. (Osteen, 2005a)

Osteen’s discourse distances if not downright disappears those suffering with mental illness. While he admits that depression could be viewed as a medical condition,

his statement, “A lot of time it’s an “attitude” conveys his belief that the majority of people who are depressed have chosen to be depressed. The difficult and sometimes unbearable experiences of this group are largely ignored in his discourse, because their health condition contradicts the state of his health-conscious being. For the ideal auditor, mental illness, like any other health issue, must be resolved immediately or at least quickly because, according to Osteen, it is a negative condition of which God does not approve. Writes Mumford (2013), “Prosperity preachers teach their followers that sickness and disease do not belong in the body of Christ. In fact, according to prosperity theology, sickness among the people of God is evidence of lack of knowledge, lack of faith, or broken fellowship with God” (p. 87).

Since Osteen’s health-conscious person believes God disapproves of mental illnesses and wants everyone to be healthy, mental illness in Osteen’s discourse is portrayed as something that in most cases can be overcome with just an attitude adjustment. As a result, the experiences of persons who are unable to overcome a mental illness are invalidated, because these persons are depicted as refusing to use their agency to resolve the issue. In other words, they are choosing to stay sick or have the wrong *attitude*.

Osteen (2004a) gives an anecdote about a couple who lost their only son to a “senseless” and “unexplainable” accident at work (p. 145). Osteen notes that fifteen years after their son’s death, the couple still grieved inconsolably. Regardless of the numerous attempts by friends and family to comfort the couple, the couple always rejected consolation. Osteen states that the couple would not be comforted because, “In their minds, nobody had ever felt pain the way they had. No consolation seemed adequate to

their needs” (Osteen, 2004a, p. 145). According to Osteen, the couple continued to “languish in self-pity and self-induced isolation...because they [didn’t] want to get well” (p. 146).

One of the strategies Osteen employs in this narrative is inserting the relationship-conscious person into the example. Osteen intentionally mentions that several people reached out to the couple to console them. The goal here is to demonstrate that there is an awareness of and a sensitivity to helping people who are grieving. Additionally, Osteen also suggests that as much as the sympathizers went above-and-beyond to comfort them, the couple was just as zealous in rejecting assistance (Osteen, 2004a, p.145). In this way, Osteen implies that the ideal person has done everything that he or she can to improve the situation.

The couple’s rejection of the ideal persona sets the stage for Osteen to do three things. First, he shows how he believes agency works. In this example, according to him, instead of using their agency to improve their situation, the couple uses their agency to remain in their current state. Osteen depicts the couple as having the ability to improve their mental state, if they are receptive to change. However, according to him, the couple intentionally opts to continue to use their agency to grieve inconsolably. Second, he makes the point that this couple is not interested in being his ideal person, because they are not interested in being health-conscious (ending their grieving). The absence of a health-consciousness is conveyed when Osteen states that the couple does not “want to get well” (p. 146). Finally, Osteen clearly blames the couple for their present state when he uses terms as “self-pity” and “self-induced.” The use of such terms sends the message

that one should not feel sorry for this couple, because they are responsible for continuing in their present condition.

To prove that the couple is in a “self-induced state,” immediately after Osteen speaks of the couple, he presents an example of how the ideal auditor should respond. The ideal auditor in this instance is Osteen. He summarizes how he dealt with the traumatic death of his father. While standing in the same room where his father had the heart attack that led to his sudden death, Osteen recalls,

I could see the look on my dad’s face and I began to feel those same emotions of despair, sadness, and discouragement that I had known the night Daddy died. For about fifteen or twenty minutes I stood there paralyzed, overwhelmed by my emotions. Finally, I caught myself...I had to make a decision that I was not going to allow myself to relive that night. I knew it wasn’t going to do me any good (Osteen, 2004a, p. 146).

Since Osteen’s father was a giant in his world, retelling the moment when he started reliving his father’s death shows that he can identify with the couple that lost their son. While the couple believes no one could begin to understand their grief, Osteen uses this example to suggest that he does understand and that his principles could be of use to them, should they decide to address the situation as his ideal auditor would. Like them, he lost someone very important to him, and he had to deal with overwhelming grief. However, unlike them, he immediately embraced his agency and used it. He did not allow himself to wallow in the grief of his father’s death for long, because he immediately recognized the unhealthy paralysis that stems from grief. Because the ideal auditor is conscious of the importance of being health-conscious, whereas the couple has languished for over fifteen years, Osteen rectified his problem in what appears to be less than twenty minutes!

Since Osteen is able to overcome his grief easily, he suggests that everyone should model his or her life after his. However, Osteen fails to acknowledge that although he lost a very important person to him, just as did the couple, the circumstances were vastly different. Osteen's father was more than seventy when he died, had been suffering with kidney problems, and was gravely sick the week prior to his death. Although Osteen did not foresee his father having a heart attack and dying when he did, it seems incongruous and certainly not empathetic to parallel his experience to that of the couple's experience. According to Osteen, the couple's son died due to a "freak accident at work" that was senseless and unexplainable (Osteen, 2004, p.145). This means the couple was completely caught off guard by their son's sudden death. They had absolutely no reason to think their son would die at that time and in the way he did, which is perhaps why, "In their minds, nobody had ever felt pain the way they had." Additionally, another way to consider the couple's grief is not to state that they believed "nobody had ever felt pain the way they had," but to consider that this son may have been all that this couple had upon which to depend. They also may have been persons who simply needed a long season of grief. After all, he does not say that the couple died of grief. He did not say that they did not continue to function and pay their bills and go about daily life, they were simply terribly grief stricken. Perhaps most importantly, Osteen does not know, or does not state, what the mental and emotional state of the couple was prior to the sudden death of their son.

The couple's inability to overcome their grief appears to resemble the signs of a mental illness called post-traumatic stress disorder. This disorder often manifests after someone experiences a terrifying or traumatic experience, such as, among other things,

the unexpected death of a loved one. People with this disorder tend to be emotionally numb and have a difficult time not reliving the moment (“National Center for PTSD,” n.d). While I, like Osteen, do not have the medical training or enough familiarity with the couple to diagnose them, the point here is that there are numerous medical and logical reasons that may explain why the couple struggled with their son’s death more than fifteen years after it occurred.

Another example of how Osteen’s rhetoric addresses the experiences of the mentally ill is demonstrated in his references to depression. Osteen states,

But if we want to live in victory, we need to shake off self-pity and move on with our lives. That’s just what my sister Lisa had to do. She went through a very painful breakup in her marriage. It wasn’t fair; she was mistreated and wronged. Yet for seven years, Lisa prayed and believed that her marriage could be restored. She did everything she knew how to do. But for some reason, it just didn’t work out.

Lisa could easily have become bitter. She could have become depressed...But Lisa made a decision...Not long after she made that decision, God brought someone else into her life, and she and my brother-in-law, Kevin, have been happily married for many years (Osteen, 2004a, p. 151).

Here, Osteen outlines how his ideal persona should deal with depression. He uses the word twice in this narrative. Since the third persona is the “silhouette of the second persona,” Osteen, inevitably, also outlines the reasons he believes people with depression have not overcome their depression. In much the same way as he did with the couple, Osteen places the onus of responsibility to overcome a potential mental illness solely on the shoulders of the individual. Throughout this narrative, he suggests that people who suffer from depression do so because they have failed to use their agency to overcome their depressive state. His sister, like others who suffer from depression, had ample reasons for her condition. However, his sister, who represents his ideal persona, used her

agency, and made the positive decision that she “was not going to stay in that black hole of depression.” Since she dared to use her agency in a positive manner, she reaped the benefits that every second persona should expect—a happily ever after. Osteen does not mention that it is more likely that a sister of his (given that he is wealthy) is more likely to re-marry, though we are not to discount the suffering she endured going through a divorce.

Persons suffering from mental illness are negated by Osteen at every turn; they do not have a voice in his rhetoric. His rhetoric silences people, such as the couple who dare to show that entering a more pleasant mental state is not as simple as using one’s agency. Osteen’s discourse ignores those who in his estimation do not want to be well, and he considers their condition “self-induced” if it lasts for what he considers too long.

The ideal auditor blames for their condition those who are not able to cope with mental illness quickly and neatly. Accordingly, the ideal person is essentially given a license to blame the mentally ill for allowing their condition to continue, because they refuse to use their God-given agency to improve their situation. Osteen confirms this belief when he states the following concerning the couple,

Regardless of their comforters’ sensitive efforts, Phil and Judy [the couple] refused to let go of their grief. Whenever their son was mentioned, their eyes welled with tears and their woeful mourning began all over again. Slowly but surely, the comforters quit coming. People stopped calling. Family members avoided visiting. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 145)

Osteen’s entire tone in this statement empathizes more with the comforters than with the couple who needs comforting. The text is crafted in a way that it seems logical for the friends and family who are using their agency to abandon the couple who Osteen accuses of failing to use their agency. His use of the word “surely” connotes that it is quite

reasonable for people to stop going the extra mile to help people who failed to use their own agency to change their mental state after a certain amount of time had passed. Even if the family and friends of the couple and Osteen are correct in believing that the couple is sinning by staying in their depressed state, even Jesus said, “Forgive sin 70 times 7” (Matthew 18:22 KJV). Again, the danger with this approach is that it creates a discursive space to completely blame the individual and does not validate or take into consideration that each situation must be considered on its own merits. This approach also downplays instances when medical assistance is needed more than just well-intended visits by family and friends.

Wealth-conscious

Some of the ways one can identify Osteen’s wealth-conscious second persona are based on whether or not they use the following markers or signs to exhibit their wealth: proper home care, attire, and loaning money. One can also use the same markers to identify who is negated by use of such markers. In the sections that follow, these three markers are used to show how Osteen addresses and uplifts the wealth-conscious, while implicitly indicating how people should view those who do not attain the status of his wealth-conscious ideal second persona.

Home care. Osteen’s wealth-conscious person is someone who prioritizes home care. Osteen demonstrates this belief in the following statement:

A while back, I was driving through a certain section of Houston and I noticed that many of the people didn’t take care of their homes. The yards weren’t mowed; the weeds were overgrown, and things were stacked and stored everywhere, on the side of the house, in the front yard, wherever space was available. The entire neighborhood looked messy.

As I continued driving, I came to one particular house that stood out among the rest. The yard was mowed, everything was neatly in order, and the home looked

beautiful. When I got to the church, I commented about that house in that neighborhood. Somebody said, “The people who live in that house are some of our most faithful members.” (Osteen, 2004a, pp. 283-284)

The main character in this text is Osteen’s ideal auditor. Undeniably, this person is intended as the focus, because he or she lives in the only beautiful home in the entire “messy” neighborhood. By identifying the person as a faithful member, Osteen situates the homeowner with the well-kept yard as the ideal persona in the minds of the listener.

While Osteen provides the cues that proffer that his wealth-conscious person should care for one of the most valued assets in the world, property, he also provides insight into those who he believes do not value their property. The “others” are the people who do not prioritize the wealth principle of proper care of property. From the outset, they are to be viewed in a pejorative manner because these “others” do not show an appreciation for the ideal persona’s particular expression of home care. Improper home care includes lawns that have not been mowed, overgrown weeds around a home, and stacking and storing things everywhere—on the side of the house, in the front yard, wherever space is available.

This discourse quickly creates a chasm between the ideal persona and the “other” by not only noting that the “other” is unaware of the importance of a yard mowed with weeds removed, but the person is also uncaring enough about their property to store items in every available space. Osteen constructs the image of a community in which the only worthy home is the ideal persona’s home, because the “other” is totally clueless about the importance of properly caring for one of the most basic signs of wealth.

As are many, Osteen’s ideal auditor is surrounded by overgrown lawns and items stored everywhere around the houses in his or her neighborhood, but the ideal auditor

makes a choice to use his or her agency and not be a product of his or her environment. Through his rhetoric, Osteen is clearly suggesting that the other people in the neighborhood could be like “us” or do better if they practiced our belief system. However, the irony between Osteen’s ideal group and negated group is the same as the irony between most “ideal” groups and “others,” which is that the values and priorities of the ideal group are the only noteworthy values indicated in the narrative. It also is worth mentioning that at no point does Osteen suggest that his mega church go into this neighborhood to offer to beautify the neighborhood and or at least find out why it has reached a certain condition. What happened to churches showing empathy and generosity to others that I earlier quoted Osteen as indicating being the correct attitude to take toward those in need?

Finally, it has been long and well documented that neighborhood deterioration or urban decay is a multifaceted issue without one cause. But, it has less to do with run-down homes and over grown lawns and more to do with cities that are fragile economically, negation of persons of certain ethnic groups and income levels who reside in these neighborhoods through actions resulting from suspect city planning, and infrastructure decisions and other combinations of inter-related socio-economic conditions that property deterioration occurs. This deterioration often involves persons who have been abandoned by city and local officials because they do not provide much to the tax base; absentee landlords are usually a part of the equation, too, as are young single persons and seniors being the owners and or tenants of such property (Cairo, 1975, p. 522; Thabit, 2003, p. 42).

It also may be the case, that in the area in which Osteen was traveling, there are persons whose homes contain numerous family members. These families may have a history of coalescing in America to uplift more members of the family, rather than each individual being focused on having his or her own spacious and immaculate home. Such conditions could explain excessive amounts of materials being stored around the outside of the houses. Finally, Osteen assumes that the people in this neighborhood can afford lawn mowers and that all of them have the capacity to mow lawns and remove weeds.

Attire. Proper attire is important to Osteen's second persona, because it reflects an awareness of how one should present him or herself in public, since he or she is wealth conscious and relationship conscious. As Osteen reveals how the ideal auditor should dress, he also reveals how one should view people who seemingly do not make attire a priority.

One day Victoria asked me to run to the grocery store and pick up something so she could finish making dinner. I had just finished working out, and I was hot and sweaty. I was wearing an old T-shirt, and my hair was all messed up. But I didn't really feel like changing clothes. I thought, Okay, I'll run up to the grocery store and try to get in and out of there quickly, so hopefully nobody will see me. I drove to the store, still in my workout clothes. I pulled in the parking lot and was about to hop out the car when God spoke to me. I mean, if God has ever spoken to me, He spoke to me right there! Right down inside, I'm sure He said, "Don't you dare go in there representing Me like that!" He said, "Don't you know that I'm the King of kings?"

I turned around, went back home, took a shower, combed my hair, brushed my teeth, and put on some clean clothes. Then I went back to that grocery store and picked up that TV dinner Victoria wanted.

Seriously, we need to remind ourselves that we represent Almighty God, and he does not appreciate laziness or sloppiness (Osteen, 2004a, 285).

Osteen's ideal persona is easily recognizable in this text. He demonstrates two of the three tenets of second persona consciousness. The person is health-conscious—note the

reference to exercise—and he is wealth-conscious. Proper attire is discussed, and we know from this text that proper attire would be a concern of this wealth-conscious persona.

While it may be logical to some, that a person who has just finished working out would wear workout clothes to the store to obtain a few items, that is not the belief of Osteen's ideal auditor. This person ascribes to the wealth-conscious, health-conscious, and relationship-conscious persona. As such, the text concludes with the ideal auditor returning home to change. One should not miss the fact that the ideal auditor had already driven to the store, was in the store's parking lot, but decided to drive back home, shower, put on better clothes, and then drive back to the same store to pick up a "TV dinner."

To emphasize the priority that one should place on appearance, Osteen says that he heard God instruct him to be concerned about his appearance, because his appearance is a representation of God. In other words, the ideal persona is so in tune with God that an extraordinary conversation, in a very ordinary context, about ordinary things, takes place. The conscious ideal auditor has a conversation with God and through the retelling of this story shows that,

- 1) he is relationship-conscious—he is at the store because his wife sent him to the store, and
- 2) he is conscious enough of appearance to excessively delay completion of the errand for his wife, because he must go back home to ensure that he is properly dressed as a representative of God.

Several assumptions can be made here about the ideal persona. First, he has a better wardrobe at home that consists of items that are neither old nor sweaty. Second, he has the resources—a car and gas—to drive to a store twice to pick up something as small as a TV dinner.

Several assumptions also can be made about the group of people this example negates. It negates people without the resources to afford multiple wardrobes. It negates those who do not have sufficient transportation to drive from the gym to a store, from the store home, from home back to the store, and then from the store back home. To say the least, such a scenario would be problematic, if not impossible, for someone who relies on public transportation and or is disabled. Finally, it negates those who would not waste the time and money (costs for gas) to purchase a TV dinner. The environmental damage indicated by this use of an automobile is also noteworthy.

Proper attire is also important for the children of Osteen’s ideal auditor. Osteen makes this point when he asserts,

What would you think if I introduced our two children to you and they had holes in their clothes, uncombed hair, no shoes, and dirt under their fingernails? You’d probably say, “That man is not a good father. He doesn’t take good care of his children.” Indeed, my children’s poverty would be a direct reflection of me as their dad. (Osteen, 2004a, p. 87)

Osteen makes clear that he believes that the appearance of one’s children is an indicator of good or poor parenting. More specifically, the attire and grooming of one’s children is to be prioritized for the same reason that the ideal auditor should prioritize his or her own appearance; it reflects upon them as the ideal persona. Poorly dressed or unkempt children contradict the lifestyle of the wealth and relationship-conscious ideal auditor.

One of the reasonable assumptions one can make about this statement is that Osteen is again speaking of someone who has the adequate means and knowhow to provide their children with nice clothes, shoes, and grooming. Conversely, Osteen's statement ignores the experiences of parents who do not have the money or other resources needed to groom their children as he prescribes. As such, these parents are inevitably viewed as "bad" parents, because their children wear clothes with holes, do not have shoes, and have dirty fingernails and uncombed hair. Children whose daily existence consists of living in one homeless shelter after another, or children whose parents are mentally ill, or children who are reared by poor and feeble grandparents, easily come to mind as those with whom the ideal persona cannot relate or purposely negates. For them, there is not an acceptable reason for one's children to have shabby clothes, or be badly groomed. Notice again that at no point in the story does Osteen suggest an evangelistic/neighborly act be performed by his ideal persona who comes upon such children and their families. One has to wonder what occurrence, what condition, prompts the second persona to extend kindness or become what Christians might call, the hands and feet of Jesus on earth. This is despite the fact that as Osteen's second persona was described, he spoke of this person as someone who was humble and believed that they gained wealth to bless others.

Relationship-conscious

Heteronormative. Osteen's discourse promotes a heteronormative agenda. To exist and qualify for the benefits of being Osteen's second persona, one must be married (or attempting to get married) and heterosexual. Osteen's rhetoric promotes heterosexism. Heterosexism refers to "institutionalized structures and beliefs that define and enforce

heterosexual behavior as the only natural and permissible form of sexual expression” (Anderson & Collins, 2007, p. 87). Through his heterosexism rhetoric, Osteen negates lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people and those who support them.

Osteen says the following in an interview with Piers Morgan:

Morgan: Well, one of the moral mazes for any preacher—I think a Christian preacher in particular—is homosexuality. And there’s been lots of coverage in the news with the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” campaign obviously. What is your view, because it seems to change depending on the interview that I’ve read or seen? Is homosexuality a sin in your eyes?

Osteen: Yes. I’ve always believed the scriptures show that it’s a sin. I don’t believe homosexuality is God’s best for a person’s life. (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011)

The enormity of the statement does not lie in the fact that Osteen referred to homosexuality as a sin. This is not surprising given Osteen’s Southern Baptist and evangelical roots and the historical stance of these two groups against homosexuality (Stroop, 2015). Rather, the significance of this response is found in his departure from the second persona’s strategy of staying neutral relative to divisive issues. Both Osteen and his second persona avoid addressing controversial issues (as I discussed in chapter three) that clearly have the potential to isolate certain groups of people. However, his second statement, “I don’t believe homosexuality is God’s best for a person’s life,” depicts homosexuality as sinful and against God’s desire for persons living their best lives. This is not a neutral or non-divisive stance no matter how nicely Osteen attempts to parse his words.

In effect, Osteen is saying that since homosexual persons do not choose to use their agency to be in tune with what he believes God believes is best for them, then they

should not expect to fully prosper. One can only fully receive all of God's benefits when he or she is in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex.

Moreover, the heteronormative lifestyle also consists of one being happily married. Osteen states, "To live your best life now, you must start looking at life through eyes of faith, seeing yourself rising to new levels. See your business taking off. See your marriage restored. See your family prospering. See your health restored. See your dreams coming to pass" (Osteen, 2004a, p. 4). Osteen uses the phrase "To live your best life now." When one considers this statement and his statement about homosexuality not being "God's best for a person's life," it becomes more evident that the non-heterosexual community is excluded from Osteen's audience. To live one's best life according to the example above, as it relates to a relationship, one must be married. Since Osteen made this statement in 2004 when gay marriage was completely outlawed in the United States, it is clear that same gender loving couples were being excluded.

Another way Osteen demonstrates that his ideal audience does not consist of single people who are uninterested in marriage is by consistently framing the single life as something negative. This statement by a single woman named Darla illustrates the point. "But Joel, everybody is getting so far ahead of me. When is it going to be my turn? All of my friends are getting married; everyone I graduated with is making big money and living comfortably; everybody is being promoted in my company except me" (Osteen, 2004a, p. 166).

In retelling Darla's story, Osteen sets a negative or sad tone. Before details are given about her situation, Osteen acknowledges that Darla feels a sense of stagnancy, of being left behind. Frustrated, she wonders, "When is it going to be my turn?" Darla could

be compared to someone in a long line anxiously waiting to be selected. She wants to be married, earn “big money,” and live comfortably like her peers. In this story, being single equates to being unhappy. Ultimately, this either makes his ideal audience view single people negatively or it could make single people feel inadequate who listen to his sermons and read his books. One is to assume, I gather, that Osteen would exclude those whose choose working for the Lord over being married (biblical characters, nuns, priests, etc. come to mind). Finally, Osteen does not mention the societal and institutional obstacles that severely limit the option to marry for some. For example, given that Osteen’s church has black members, one wonders what he is saying to black women who desire to marry black men but have little chance of this occurring, due to the well-documented limited number of available and marriageable black men (Banks, 2012).

Race. Osteen intentionally says little to nothing about racial issues. In an ideal world, his second persona would never have to deal with race, because Osteen recognizes the divisive and contentious environment that comes with most race discussions. In an effort to avoid topics about race, Osteen’s discourse, basically, negates it altogether. Only two examples have been identified in which Osteen references race (Osteen, 2005a; Osteen & Osteen, 2011). In both instances, he minimizes the negativity associated with racial issues. In the first instance Osteen states,

I think he [John Osteen] instilled in me several [values]. One: integrity. I always saw my dad take the high road. When times that he could, you know, just take the low road, he didn’t. I think the other thing my dad instilled in me: a love for people. He was always for people. He didn’t care—black, white, rich, poor, sinner, or saint (Osteen, J. & Osteen, V., 2011).

In this example, Osteen frames race as equivalent to any other difference. His statement suggests that one's race is no more important than one's economic or religious status ("sinner or saint"). Instead of focusing on identifiers that may divide audiences, Osteen's appeal here is to universals, such as integrity and love. Through this approach, he acknowledges that he is aware that race is a difficult issue, but does not see it as a reason not to be "for people."

Above, I recited a joke that Osteen told about race. Whether intentional or not, this "joke" references the three largest ethnic groups in America: Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. On one hand, the joke suggests that to allow race to divide groups is nonsensical. On the other hand, the joke suggests that people will benefit more when they focus on what they have in common rather than race.

However, that does not negate the major role that race plays in American society. Nor does it appreciate the historical and present ills caused by racism in America. This approach limits the creation of spaces for the voices of minority racial groups with concerns to need to be heard. Although it is true that racial matters are only one of the many societal ills that plague our world, race remains a major issue that needs our intentional attention. Osteen's rhetoric does not provide a platform for a minority to say that he or she is unable to exercise his or her full agency, due to systemic and structural marginalization or oppression.

The additional harm of the approach used by Osteen relative to race and racial issues is that history has shown that racial progression requires sustained, purposeful, attention.

To end racial discrimination, it must be identified and vigorously targeted at all levels, especially institutionally.¹

Conclusion

In summary, race relations will not improve if, as Osteen suggests, we only appeal to love, unity, integrity, and being “for people.” At best, these universals reflect societal ideals. These ideals bespeak what a society aspires to be, not what it will become without hard and sustained work. We saw earlier that being “for people” did not prevent Osteen from negating people who are members of the LGBTQ community.

Osteen’s appeal to his ideal audience constructs a lens for how various groups—the “others”—should be viewed. As a result, while he creates a desired world experience² for the ideal auditor, he also creates an audience equipped with the agency to ignore the voices of those with dissimilar interests and who live in dissimilar circumstances. As Osteen promotes the superiority of the second persona, he simultaneously constructs an inferior construct for the “other.”

Such theological and social constructs as those created by Osteen’s rhetoric inevitably create a contentious environment among the haves and the have nots, the

¹ To begin to understand the complexity of racism in America, see St. Clair Drake’s. (1987) *Black Folks Here and There. An Essay in History and Anthropology*, Vol. 1. Inspired by a similarly titled book by W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Folks Here and There* is an exploration of the presence of “Negro” or “Black” people throughout recorded history, ending with the rise of anti-black prejudice. In this text, Drake explores the role and presence of “Black” people in ancient Egypt, the Greco-Roman world, early Christianity, and the Islamic world, providing evidence of anti-black bias or racist views in each of these periods in world history. See also Paula S. Rontenberg’s (2000) *Invisible Privilege: A Memoir about Race, Class, and Gender*. Rontenberg looks at her life (she is white) and privileges through the lens of gender, race, and class. Then, there is Derald Wing Sue’s (2003) *Overcoming Our Racism: The Journey to Liberation*. This is a guide to overcoming prejudices on a personal level, by the first president of the Asian American Psychological Society. Finally, see Edmund Morgan’s (1975) *American Slavery, American Freedom*. Morgan provides historical details on how America came to see “blacks” in one light and “whites” in another.

physically healthy and those who are not, those whose ethnicity affords them societal advantages not afforded others, and those whose sexual identity places them in historically advantageous positions in America.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Making Judgments

A cartoon video series titled “For the Love of Gospel: Episode 3” by an unknown creator has been circulating on Facebook. The video shows three well-known preachers, Joel Osteen, Bishop T. D. Jakes, and singer and preacher Rance Allen, standing in line ordering beverages at Starbucks. Each man approaches the counter in a manner befitting what the video creator believes is his public persona. T.D. Jakes preaches in a fiery holiness tone, uses his familiar tagline (Get ready. Get ready. Get ready), pushes a product, but does not purchase coffee. Joel Osteen, as he does each sermon, starts with a joke, repeats his well know sermon introduction (“This is my Bible. I have what it says I have....”), gives a mini sermon and asks the person behind the counter if there is anything that he can do for her. However, he ignores her when she again asks, “Would you like to order a coffee?” He, too, leaves without purchasing a coffee. Rance Allen, who although a preacher, is better known as an award-winning dramatic gospel singer, sings his order in such a dramatic fashion that he ends up on the floor of Starbucks. While the primary intent of the lighthearted video is to evoke laughter, it reflects what the video creator believes viewers will recognize as the cultural personas of each of these preachers.

A friend who is aware of my dissertation subject tagged me on the video when I was yet early in the research process and asked if it was an accurate portrayal of Osteen relative to my research. I never responded to her, but if I had, I would have said, yes and no. The “Osteen” in the cartoon video appears friendly. He even begins by addressing the Starbucks staff person as “friend,” although the video clip does not provide evidence that

he has met her previously. He smiles, tells her how she can be blessed, and ends by asking her to repent and accept Jesus as Savior. However, he does not purchase coffee. Yes, this video portrays a commonly held view of Osteen in that it shows him as friendly, he mentions Jesus, uses verbiage for which he is famous, and ends by asking the barista to get into a Bible-believing Bible class, but, at no time does he meet her real need—to have him purchase coffee. I would also tell my friend that the video does not portray the Osteen that is seen in a thorough review of his sermons and books. This Osteen is offering the hope of a financially prosperous, healthy, and relationship-conscious life. He also is meeting a need that exists in the culture—he provides hope that one can live a prosperous life (especially financially) in America and have God agree with the desire of persons to gain wealth.

Most traditional critiques of Osteen and other televangelists are that they are able to gather crowds because they do not preach about sin and offer a one-sided or diluted version of the Bible—one that mainly focuses on blessings and not personal responsibility, suffering, or Christ-emulating sacrifice (Mumford, 2012). This dissertation provides a rhetorically anchored, layered, explanation of why Osteen’s discourse is persuasive and why his practices have enabled him to gain such a vast national and international audience.

As chapter 2 illustrates, Osteen’s rhetoric is persuasive because of the way he constructs his ethotic appeal. Osteen has always preached and written with the understanding that he does not meet some of the basic qualifications (attending seminary or bible school) for a person in his position. Likely, for that reason, as revealed in the first persona analysis, he has always used his father and mother to validate him as a rhetor. He

may not have the typical ministerial and educational credentials, but no one should question his ability to preach and pastor, because his father, the foundation of all he does, and the man who began Lakewood Church, selected him.

Further, the first persona analysis also shows that in addition to Joel Osteen, all of the Osteen family members practice John Osteen's (Joel's father) principles for living a prosperous life. The principles have worked for each Osteen generation. Osteen preaches some of these same principles. This strategy portends that Joel Osteen's core message of how to achieve wealth, health, and good relationships is replicable—if it works for us, it will work for you if you believe it. However, although his broadcast is seen numerous countries around the world ("About Us" 2014), his core message does not take into consideration location (countries outside the United States), social conditions (persons living under dictatorships and or in war-torn countries), or gender (women around the world who earn less and are afforded fewer political rights than men, and in some cases are not allowed an education), especially women living in non-developed and under-developed countries.

In chapter two, Osteen's second persona is explored. For the first time, the implied auditor of the discourse of a televangelist is identified. Osteen's ideal auditor is someone who is wealth, health, and relationship-conscious. Traditional critiques have categorized his rhetoric as simply prosperity gospel. However, traditional prosperity gospel theology consists of health and wealth principles. This study revealed that Osteen's rhetoric also emphasizes strong relationships as one of his primary tenets and that he places continuous emphasis on family being an important element of being wealthy. For Osteen, without a family for which you care, one cannot truly be wealthy.

In Osteen's family, the man is the head, and women and children are to follow the man's leadership as the head of the household. When he discusses family, he also says that living one's best life means being married to a person of the opposite sex. Last, Osteen's second persona is portrayed as an individual who is humble, works hard, and is charitable to their family and to society.

Finally, this study has identified the primary excluded groups in Osteen's discourse—the silhouette created by his Second persona (his Third Persona). The third persona analysis reveals the groups in Osteen's discourse that cannot and or do not enjoy his forms of prosperity. These people he describes as not “living their best life.” Osteen's third persona identifies people who may suffer from mental illness, lack the resources to have well-manicured lawns and houses with curb appeal, belong to the LGBTQ community, and or are race-conscious individuals. These people, as Wander says, “become things, unnoticed, part of our second nature. Disturbing their natural presence invites inquiry into their origin, their function in a human world, and the future they are intended to or are likely to provide” (p. 372). Osteen only alludes to such persons or mentions them in demeaning ways. He does not attempt to do the type of pastoral work that would determine the systemic and institutional barriers to people living “their best life.” Nor does he participate in the public square in a manner that elicits concern for those who are voiceless. His typical posture concerning controversial issues, other than homosexuality and the role of married women, is one of neutrality. He finds ways to avoid difficult and complex discussions as often as possible. Instead, he suggests that persons concentrate on building relationships without controversy and through these relationships see possibilities for growth and prosperity.

I, as does the rhetorician Phillip Wander, believe that moral judgments can be made of a discourse. Wander's comment above and my analysis of Osteen's first, second and third persona raised for me two moral questions. The first comes from Wander. "To what extent does rhetorical theory oblige us to ignore audiences not addressed, unable to attend, and unable to respond to the text [texts in this case being Osteen's preaching and writings]?" To what extent do our academic assumptions or commitments prompt us to reflect on the meaning and significance of what is said in ways that ignore, or...actually conceal important silences?" (pp. 375-376).

Before stating the second question, let me say without fear of contradiction that Joel Osteen is popular around the world. Even many in historical mainline denominations and ardent church attendees listen to Osteen before or after church services and buy his *New York Times* list best-selling books. I even joked to a mentor before I had determined the focus of my dissertation that it should be entitled, "Preachers: Joel Osteen is Pastoring Your Church." By this, I mean that members are listening to, reading, and taking some of their religious and social cues from Joel Osteen, even if they have a pastor, priest, or perhaps a Rabbi or Iman.

Now, the second question. What are the reasons for Osteen's unparalleled popularity given that he obviously excludes so many significant societal groups? Why do so many people, many of whom likely consider themselves devout, God-fearing people listen to and buy the books of a man, who without training for such an important job, and with little or no structural and institutional analysis of most subjects, negates so many people?

Out of order, let me answer the second question first. At a surface, though important level, Osteen is listened to by millions, while negating many groups, because he offers listeners what they wanted before they tuned in. They wanted a method for dancing around the thorny issues of life, while being softly given entry into the land flowing with milk and honey—the land of wealth, health, and relational happiness. Here, the words of Jonathan Walton, quoted above, bear repeating, “Televangelists authenticate and make authoritative already held assumptions and spiritual longings of their adherents that allow and encourage them to experience and envision themselves being created anew according to their personal aspirations” (p. 171). The message of Joel Osteen (even if they have to compartmentalize or ignore the aspects of it with which they disagree) is what his listeners and readers want. This makes sense when so many, for various reasons, have so little of the life they desire and perhaps expected. In fact, I would venture to say that most in America, and especially those in underdeveloped, undeveloped and war torn countries, do not even seek extravagant wealth. Those in America and similarly situated countries just want a standard of living that allows them to live in a modest home or apartment, with basic amenities and the ability to pay for basic necessities (electricity, clothes, food, a phone, transportation costs, medical care, insurance, and money to educate themselves and their children without being mired in decades of debt). And, if they have enough to splurge, they would like to enjoy cable television and take a vacation occasionally with family and friends. And, they want to be able to pay for these accoutrements without working 60 hrs. per week and without working in death-dealing conditions.

Those in underdeveloped and non-developed countries may desire to simply live without war, have clean water, clean air, decent food, decent wages and a decent life for their children. What Osteen offers most may not expect to attain, especially if it is symbolized by what he has attained, any more than they expect to win one of the U.S. state sponsored lotteries, but many continue to play week after week and month after month. Just as with the lottery, Osteen offers the possibility of being wealthy, and he preaches and writes as if it is definitely possible for those who believe and follow his principles. That is the summary of Walton's answer.

Another answer is that what Osteen is selling and what his listeners in droves seek is hope. This hope, in real and mythic forms, is embedded in the soil of American culture and has been carried around the world in movies, songs, books, and by corporations. It is a hope fermented and some would say designed by capitalism and fueled by media, corporations, politicians, and advertisers. It is the American way, even if it is a myth; people cannot and will not release it. Actually, America, like many other countries, is wealthy enough for most of its citizens to enjoy a decent standard of living with all the amenities, rights, and privileges attendant to being an American citizen.

So, why do so many either live in poverty or are close to it? Why are so many worried about paying even modest bills and living modestly into old age? They are worried because they do not see evidence that indicates that being wealthy or even financially comfortable is now realistic. Instead, they see the homeless, the unemployed, the mentally ill unable to afford long-term health care, and widows and widowers choosing between buying medicine and food. They also see CEOs living lavish lifestyles, and they have watched political leaders long enough to know that they do not have the

will and or ability to create economic parity for all American citizens or something that closely resembles parity.

Perhaps people believe if they let go of the hopeful financial message Osteen offers they will be left with only the shallow, empty coffers of their deferred dreams. Not in America, no, not in America, they seem to contend. Myths are easy to build and almost impossible to remove from the minds of those who have built their lives upon them.

Michael Calvin McGee, in the book *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*, partly quoting Georges Sorel says,

Myths are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act....A myth ...is, at bottom, identical with the convictions of a group, being the expression of those convictions in the language of movement; and it is, in consequence, unanalyzable into parts which could be placed on the plane of historical description.

So-called “objective reality” is made more comfortable by making an alternate “reality,” what Marx called false consciousness....Though myths defy empirical or historical treatment, therefore it is easy to recognize them rhetorically as ontological arguments relying not so much on evidence as on artistic proofs intended to answer the question, “What is real”?....

So long as the “people” believe basic myths, there is unity and collective identity. When there is no fundamental belief, one senses a crisis, which can only be met with a new rhetoric, a new mythology. (pp. 346-347)

Imagine the public crisis if all of those in America who are poor or close to poverty acted in ways that clearly indicate they no longer believe they will ever financially rise much higher (hopelessness, demonstrations, anger, refusal to pay federal income taxes, unwillingness to participate in the political process—vote)? One can only imagine the crisis—the cultural upset of the American social equilibrium. One wonders further the nature of the “*new myth*” that would need to be created once this occurred.

Now to Wander's question. "To what extent does rhetorical theory oblige us to ignore audiences not addressed, unable to attend, and unable to respond to the "text [texts in this case being Osteen's preaching and writings]?" To what extent do our academic assumptions or commitments prompt us to reflect on the meaning and significance of what is said in ways that ignore or... actually conceal important silences (pp. 375-376)?"

The writer believes that rhetorical theory obliges rhetoricians to reflect on the meaning and significance of concealed silences. It is insufficient rhetorical analysis if a critic only discusses the form of a text and how it made an audience feel or what it caused them to believe. Those who are silenced by text also need a voice. The rhetorician completes his work by giving voice to the voiceless. He or she also participates in organizing culture and "performs social ordering" in revealing those that have been silenced. He or she brings sectors of humanity out of the shadows. He or she also lifts his or her own moral voice by giving voice to the voiceless by allowing them to remain silenced, or by silencing them more through an uncritical analysis of texts. James Klumpp and Thomas Hollihan (1989) in their article *Rhetorical Criticism as Moral Action*, write, "The moral imperative demands that the critic recognize that a society remakes its values in responding to problems and opportunities through rhetorical choice. The critic studies the rhetorical moment at a point in time when the appearance of the novel [or any texts] places a premise of the social order at risk; the response to the moment can reinforce the values and motivational approval of the society or contribute to the process of change in society" (p. 90).

Osteen's rhetoric, which negates multiple groups and is a message heard by millions each week, must be critiqued to ensure that those who are negated do not remain

without voice. Such vital groups as those named above certainly place at risk any society that is uninterested in ideals such as inclusion, diversity, truth, the poor, the helpless, and those who are unable to speak for themselves. We are our best as a society when we include the negated, not because we must, but because we desire the flowering of the full measure of our society.

Klumpp and Hollihan (1989) continue, “The forms that organize the behavioral patterns called culture are not expressed in language, rather social order is performed in language” (p.88). Throughout this dissertation, Osteen via his rhetoric has been shown to “perform social ordering.” He has given us his beliefs regarding families, depression, those who do not have well-manicured lawns, persons who make race an issue, LGBTQ people, and what it means to be healthy, wealthy, and relationship-conscious. By negating certain type of people and groups, he offers his determinations about how society should be ordered, who matters, and why. He goes to great lengths to order society so that it focuses on persons who want to be healthy, wealthy, and relationship-conscious as he defines all three. And, with his massive media arsenal and international reach to deliver his message, he is being heard. His moral judgment is that people can live their best life, but do so by negating others. As Klumpp and Hollihan write, “The question of ‘Who is the author?’” is thus answered with attention to the forms of the culture from which the speaker draws, or the speaker becomes interesting as an authority who speaks for society even as s/he speaks to society; thus the shift to rhetor as socially grounded (p. 88). Joel Osteen is close to the ultimate example (ultimate examples perhaps being presidents of countries or the Pope) of a rhetor who is socially grounded.

However, quoting Klumpp and Hollihan (1989), “Criticism that makes only a moral point is moral criticism, however, not rhetorical criticism. Contemporary rhetoric insists on the rhetorical imperative” (p. 91). Klumpp and Hollihan are interested in rhetorical analysis that “focuses on rhetoric converting the material world into support for the social order.” As a member of the society that seeks social ordering toward inclusion, this, I believe is the proper result to seek. Osteen’s rhetoric, as described above, does much to order society around class—the have nots and the have mores. The straight white male with a free wielding, social ordering megaphone, continues, as if by divine right or certainly historical precedent, to give voice to who will have a seat at the table of American means (money, property, authority, education, politics, and education). I cannot quietly acquiesce to such social ordering, even if it is yearned for by the masses for reasons some good and perhaps noble, because the end result will be the same as it has always been in each capitalistic society—absolute power will corrupt absolutely. This is true of the church and preachers and all who wield unlimited power. So, Osteen’s rhetoric, while hope-providing and innocuous at one level, alienates and socially orders against the common good at other levels too important to ignore. As Frank Lentricchia (1983) writes, “the practice of a critical pedagogy must emerge from, be irritated into existence by, its own discomfoting social ground” (p. 5).

As an African American male interested in the life of the Church and religion in America, and as a descendant of people who have borne the heaviest weight of negation—slavery—from memories of this discomfoting ground, I incline toward inclusion to obtain wealth, health, and strong relationships as societal goals. My

understanding of this trinity of good (health, wealthy, and strong relationships) is that it is only as good as its moral grounding.

It is hoped that this research benefits the field of Communication because three traditional lenses were used to explore the artistry and complexities of a rhetorician in a previously ignored field of study. We now have a clearer rhetorical understanding of televangelist Joel Osteen's first, second, and third persona. The artistry and complexities of Osteen's discourse no longer have to be discussed in debunking categories. Osteen's discursive practices persuade for reasons other than him simply being someone who skirts certain theological principles or who resembles the average televangelist. This project provides additional insights into his mass appeal.

This now brings us to future implications of this study. The Facebook video discussed earlier contains not only Osteen's persona as the video creator perceived it, but also those of Bishop T.D. Jakes and Reverend Rance Allen. Like Osteen, other prominent televangelists employ persuasive rhetorical skills that have not been explored fully. Applying first, second, and third persona to the discursive practices of other televangelists would allow us to understand much more about the impact of their rhetoric and its social ordering potentialities. For example, how does Jakes construct his first persona? Who is his ideal auditor? Who is negated in his discourse? If the theories applied in this dissertation are applied to other televangelists, the complexity of their appeal also can be better understood.

Additionally, the framework for this dissertation can also be used to reveal the identities of imagined audiences as revealed through new media platforms. While the analysis for this study was derived from such traditional sources as books and television

interviews, we stand to learn even more about the first, second, and third personas of popular speakers by analyzing the new media platforms they regularly use—blogs, podcasts, Facebook, and Twitter, etc., and forms of media that are to come.

Identifying the first, second, and third persona of televangelist Joel Osteen, as constructed on social media sites, is relevant, because people, such as the creator of the cartoon video referenced earlier, can develop their understanding of televangelists from videos, Facebook tags, tweets, or blogs. In this social media age, it is highly probable that some people have never read Osteen's books or heard one of his interviews or a complete Osteen sermon. They know him through soundbites heard here and there that are found on new media platforms and television. His regular Internet presence will likely be used to construct his second persona and perhaps to reveal his third persona. As such, this type of study will provide insight into the social media construct of Osteen's and the first, second, and third persona of other televangelists.

Finally, since Osteen's third persona reveals that his ideal auditor is neither poor, LGBTQ, nor race-conscious, then new studies concerning how these groups are ignored should include persons such as Osteen who are watched and whose books are read by millions. Such personalities should no longer be ignored as sources of research. Their role in society is increasingly pivotal to the social ordering of politics, wealth, health, and the creation or stabilization of important American myths. For example, a first, second and third persona analysis could help explain the intricacies of how Osteen's discourse may persuade the ideal audience for the #BlackLivesMatter Movement to layer their message with his ideal auditor and silence "others." The fact that Osteen's discourse also promotes a heteronormative agenda can be used to identify how a contemporary

televangelist influences anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. The possibilities for this style of analysis are endless.

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