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## Child Abuse : Creating the Public in the Public Service Advertisement

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# **CHILD ABUSE:**

## **Creating the Public in the Public Service Advertisement**

**Mark Brennan**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Award of  
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Media Studies  
At the Faculty of Communications, Health and Science,  
Department of Media Studies,  
Edith Cowan University  
1999

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis seeks to examine the discursive construction of the public. Unlike studies before it, it explores a site that has yet to be analysed in depth – the public service advertisement. While the characteristics of this genre are understood in cultural common sense, what has been neglected is a consideration of how these advertisements can be understood to address an entity that is amorphous and unknowable. This study argues that such an address is only possible in this genre through the discourse of childhood.

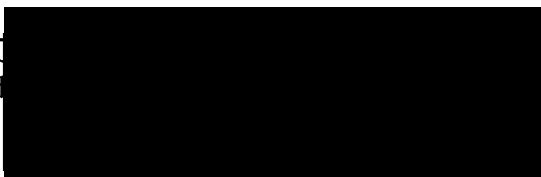
By employing an interdisciplinary approach that includes cultural and media studies, political theory and sociology, the history of the ‘public’ and the history of ‘childhood’ are explored as a means to understanding how and why they are evoked through sites such as the public service advertisement. The implications of these strategies is what drives this dissertation and is what situates it as a contribution to the continued debates surrounding the media and notions of the public sphere.

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I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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Signed



Date. 25.6.99

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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***“Going down to South Park...”***

In a recent series of the television comedy, South Park, an episode centred on the arrival in the eponymous small town of a multi-national coffee company. In an effort to rid the town of the corporation, legislation entitled “Proposition 10” (“Prop 10) is suggested and lobbied via a public service advertisement.

An American flag waving in the wind fills the screen

VOICE OVER: What is the future of America?

A dollar bill is superimposed over the flag

VO: Is it the money we make?

The dollar bill is replaced by an image of an astronaut on the moon

VO: Is it the quests we conquer?

The well-known children of South Park and their friend ‘Squeak’ are now superimposed over the flag

VO: No. It’s children. So what do children have to say about Prop 10?

Each child’s head passes across the flag giving ‘their’ opinion of the issue. For example “I hate big business”, “I believe in the freedom of the family owned enterprise”, before cutting back to the Flag

VO: It’s time to stop large corporations

The children reappear on the flag with the text YES ON 10

VO: Proposition 10 is about children. Vote Prop 10..

The text YES ON 10 is replaced by a question mark

VO: ..or else you hate children. You don’t hate children, do you? Remember, keep American businesses small, or else...

The five children’s heads explode in flames.

## INTRODUCTION

An important stream of cultural studies centres on studying the media in order to explain how individuals make sense of texts. It is now generally accepted within this discipline that the media are one of the ways audiences make sense of the world and their place in it. Although much of the early work within this field originating from the Birmingham Centre of Cultural studies focused on popular culture, there was a trend which centred on non-fictional sites, such as news and current affairs. These studies, which understood the sites as “essential for the workings of democracy” (Fiske, 1983, p.281), implied the media possessed the ability to inform and educate citizens through audiences participating in this sense making process.

A recent trend in media studies writing considers the media as part of the workings of democracy via the concept of the “public sphere” (see, for example, Paletz & Entman, 1981, Wilson, 1989, Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991, Corner, 1995, Dahlgren, 1995). Here, the media is seen as a tool of political education that “can help citizens learn about the world, debate their responses to it, and reach informed decisions about what courses of action to adopt” (Dahlgren, 1991, p.1). While these explorations provide further insight into the consideration of the media’s role in society, the narrow parameters of analysis employed in such work suggest a restricted understanding of how audiences use texts. In these debates, to be an ‘informed’ citizen is to rely on the genres of news and current affairs, suggesting that political activity only takes place within those genres.

A related strand of writing in recent media studies has been that which is concerned with public service broadcasting. In this work, more than simply 'informing' citizens, public service broadcasting is understood as "part of the task of constructing a public culture" (Poole, 1989, pp.23/24) by supposedly providing a forum for representing the public. To this end, public service broadcasting is seen "as an embodiment of the principals of the public sphere" (Garnham, 1986, p.45) and as such, its apparent demise is the cause for lament amongst some academics (see Williams, 1996). As Ang (1991, p.6) notes however, "the defence of public service broadcasting is often articulated in terms of some a priori notion of the 'public interest' that it pretends to represent", demonstrating the suggestion there is a knowable public who can be serviced by a body of broadcasting. As Bonney and Wilson (1983, p.77) have argued "there is no such thing as the public interest....[and] to suggest that there is such a thing...is to suppose that there is a single public with a unified set of interests".

The latest turn in this writing has been one that is more informed by cultural studies than the more media studies or sociologically oriented work that has previously addressed the "public sphere". This work considers many areas of popular culture as informing citizens about the world. "Tabloid Television" (see Langer, 1998) and talk back shows (see Livingstone & Hunt, 1994, Shattuc, 1997) are genres that have been analysed as examples of the postmodern public sphere, where private matters become public providing a "participatory democracy" (Shattuc, p.94) that far exceeds the one way communication model of traditional news and public service broadcasting. John Hartley's (1992, 1996, 1999) work goes further in this tradition by suggesting that all forms and genres of the media

should be understood as acting as sites of the public sphere rather than suggesting that only specific genres perform the task. What these recent explorations have in common is the suggestion that the public is a fluid identity and that the exclusionary nature of this entity often remains unproblematised in debates over the public sphere.

Stuart Cunningham (1992, p.71) suggests that “advertising...is the truly ‘unworthy discourse’ as far as cultural theory is concerned” implying why this genre has been ignored in discussions of the media and the public sphere. But as Irene Meijer (1998, p.235) notes, advertising has a “potential as a form of public communication and a setting for the actualization of notions of contemporary citizenship” and as such it is imperative to debates about the role of the media in the public sphere. This thesis undertakes such a task by looking at a form of broadcasting which explicitly calls into being ‘the public’ – the public service advertisement. Through an analysis of this genre of programming in Western Australia, this thesis explores the exclusionary nature of the imagined homogenous public in the public sphere debate.

To analyse every representation within this genre is outside the limits of this dissertation. This thesis will instead analyse a series of advertisements, which use a similar theme in an attempt to address and inform the public, such as the example taken from South Park. Throughout the past two decades a variety of approaches have been taken in these advertisements, however when the genre is analysed certain recurring themes emerge. It is one of these that I intend to examine in this thesis: the way in which notions of childhood and images of

children are insistently employed in public service advertisements. Indeed, this thesis suggests that in their persistent use of this theme, these advertisements can be understood as representative of a broader move in the Australian public discourse to construct the public as people who have children, or more importantly, people who are united by caring about children.

The quest for the public is not, or not only, a quest for a 'real' collective of human beings or organized populations; it is a quest for discourses, imaginings and communicative strategies by means of which these populations might be **recognized, organized [and] mobilized**...to take **collective action** [emphasis added] in their own name, the name of the public. (Hartley, 1992, p.122)

The four stages in the discursive construction of the public (highlighted above) noted by Hartley provide the structure for this thesis. The first chapter of this thesis explores the disciplinary search for the public and suggests that the public is a discursive object rather than a knowable entity that pre-exists its entry into the public sphere. This chapter argues that the discursive nature of the public demonstrates the importance of genres such as the public service advertisement as sites where the public can be "recognised". Analysis of two public service campaigns argues that the public is recognisable within this site as being united in its feelings towards children and argues that this recognition is a construction rather than a true reflection of 'reality'.

The second chapter explores the ways in which the interpellation of texts such as these advertisements work to "organise" the public. Tracing a history of childhood, it argues that like the public, the concept of childhood is a discursive

category that is employed to organise the public. The chapter suggests that the refusal to grant agency to children is an important element in the binary organisation of children and adults as, respectively, those who are powerless innocents and those who have the responsibility to protect them. Textual analysis of these advertisements demonstrates how the discourses of the public service genre create the idealised child-adult relation, and work to organise the public into a single, idealised social structure.

Chapter three considers the way in which the selection of issues in the public service genre, along with discourse and the conventions of advertising work to “mobilise” a public that has been “recognised” and “organised”. It argues that these advertisements, rather than pitch a product, pitch a preferred mode of conduct through the advertising conventions of persuasion and ‘value transfer’. In addition it demonstrates how this practice is assisted by the exclusionary selection of issues and the incorporation of discourses that circulate outside the text. The shared public responsibility that is signified by these texts is seen to mobilise the public into taking collective action in their own name – a problematic assumption that is explored in the final chapter.

The final chapter of this thesis explores the impossibility of public “collective action” as it is currently conceptualised. By situating the public service advertisement as part of a ‘disciplinary process’, the chapter confirms the exclusionary nature of the public and the implications of this practice. By invoking the work of Michel Foucault, I argue that notions of power within the public sphere can be understood to be articulated by the public service

advertisement. By asking who is rendered powerful and who powerless in this imagined public, this chapter suggests that these advertisements structure their imagined public in ways which create whole excluded classes of social pariahs. This structuring, which plagues many models of the public sphere, in this instance, is masked by the use and abuse of the childhood discourse.

## CHAPTER ONE: RECOGNITION

### THE SEARCH FOR THE PUBLIC

Within the realm of media studies and cultural studies little attention has been paid to public service advertisements, and within this field there has yet to be a substantial analysis of the genre. If we acknowledge that these advertisements are “a special form of packaging news and views...[which] shapes the public consciousness and the public agenda” (Phelan, 1991, p.76) the lack of critique regarding this genre demands explanation.

The work that has considered this genre lies mainly with disciplines other than media or cultural studies. Paletz and Entman (1981, p.243) for example, working within the same political discipline as Phelan, suggest public service advertisements are “a vacuous form of political activity” which encourages pseudo political participation. Meanwhile, in the paradigm of advertising studies, they are noted for their difference to product-based advertising in that they “ask for sacrifice...if they ask for anything at all” (Schudson, 1993, p.222). These suggestions, while valid, contribute little to a critical understanding of these advertisements in addressing – as they explicitly do – the public. Recent media theory’s attention to discussions of the public sphere and public broadcasting (see, for example, Keane, 1991) provide a way forward to address this lack by suggesting a relationship between broadcasting and the construction of the public. Yet within this critical paradigm, there is again an absence of discussion regarding the public service advertisement. Within a discipline that seeks to theorise the



public the lack of analysis for a genre that explicitly addresses this object bears consideration.

### ***1.1 The Gap: Theories of Advertising, Theories of the Public Sphere***

The lack of attention given to these advertisements can be attributed to the ways disciplinary approaches construct their objects of study. Elspeth Probyn (1996, p.134) argues that disciplines and objects of study tend to be mutually implicated and mutually constructed suggesting this process ignores other possibilities outside of their disciplines. For example, with the media as an object of study, sociologists will consider ‘media effects’, political theorists will consider the medium for its ability to represent the ‘real’, while cultural studies may consider ideology and visual representations in their approach. Probyn is suggesting that with these parameters in place critical analysis limits itself in the construction of objects of study. Within media theory, neither studies of advertising, nor discussions of the public sphere have yet to consider the public service advertisement in detail as a site that is valuable to both disciplinary approaches.

The considerable volume of work that has been published celebrating advertising as an industry can be seen to originate from the discipline of advertising (see, for example, Ogilvy, 1983, Hart, 1990, Belch & Belch, 1995, Arens, 1996). In media and cultural studies most works tend to concentrate on the pernicious effects of product based advertising. Judith Williamson’s (1978, p.12) classic study suggested that advertising “creates structures of meaning” and demonstrated how these structures perpetrate ideological atrocities in their representation of, for example, gender and race. Marxist thought provides the most common employed

paradigm of analysis (see, for example, Myers, 1986, Willis, 1991, Dyer, 1992) and has been used to argue that through advertisements “our desires are aroused and shaped by the demands of the systems of production, not by the needs of society or of the individual” (Dyer, p.6). More recently, analysis has considered the relation between advertising and social identity (see, for example, Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1990, Wernick, 1991, Schudson) in a move that argues “product advertising has become one of the great vehicles of social communication” (Leiss et al, p1). What all these critiques have in common is the foregrounding of the argument that advertising relies on discourses and ideology to displace social contradictions - such as gender roles, understandings of race, and inequalities amongst social classes - in order to address the audience as a homogenised mass. Whilst these studies provide a way of understanding how this masking process assists in addressing the audience as consumer, there is a failure to acknowledge the same masking technique being employed in public service advertisements where the audience is addressed as a homogenised *public*.

Discussions of the public sphere within media studies suffers from the same theoretical restrictions that marginalises the public service advertisement in studies of advertising. In an attempt to understand the construction of the public through the media, the presence of public service advertisements may be acknowledged in this work, but it is neglected as a site for the construction of the public. Instead, analysis has largely focused on news and current affairs (see, for example, Dalgren & Sparks, 1991, Corner, 1995, Dalgren, 1995) and more recently talk back shows (see, for example, Livingstone & Hunt, 1994, Shattuc, 1997). These genres are all understood as non-fictional sites that allow “modes of

participation and types of influence” (Livingstone and Hunt, p.12). The failure to consider fictional sites has recently been addressed by John Hartley (1992, 1996, 1999) who argues that the public and the public sphere can be found in all forms and all genres of the media. To date however, his analyses have yet to consider the public service advertisement in any detail.

Public service advertisements have fallen through the gap of disciplinary consideration; too ‘real’ or serious to be considered as part of the problem of advertising, yet not serious enough to be considered as part of the public sphere. This lack reveals the assumptions of both sites of critical investigation.

### ***1.2 Bridging the Gap: Locating the Public***

Originating in Greece and passed on by the Romans, Hölscher (in Peters, 1995, p.7) traces the term public as coming from “the Latin *poplicus*, an early form of *populus* (people) and [it] was influenced by the related word *pubes*, that is, the adult male population”. Peters (p.7) argues that “from the Greeks on down, public life has been conceived in overwhelmingly male terms” suggesting as a sign, the word public can be seen to signify a privileged position rather than an all-encompassing space for all subjects to occupy. To this end, the idea of the public can be seen as analogous to the idea of the nation and nationality which Anderson (1983, p.4) argues are “cultural artefacts of a particular kind”. He argues that the construct of the nation is achieved by comparison with other nations and inclusiveness is suggested by the differences from other geographical locals. This sense of shared identity works to encourage the notion that nationality, is “fundamentally constituted by a principal of equivalence or equality” (Sengal &

Handlee, 1992, p.3) within a locality and between individuals. The public, though less inclined to rely on geographical differences, is underwritten by the same principals of equality that are assumed in the concept of the nation, and like the nation, the construction of the public works to achieve a preferred sense of identity through the process of inclusion and exclusion.

The arguments that surround the idea of inclusion and exclusion in the public make sense in light of political theory and the notion of the public sphere which is understood to play a pivotal role in the democratic ruling of the state. Habermas (quoted in Livingstone & Hunt, 1994, p.16) states that the public sphere “is a space where private individuals discuss public matters” and that it may be seen as a “domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1997, p.105). Habermas’ theory of the public sphere is based on an analysis of 18<sup>th</sup> century practices and can be seen to rely on the modernist binary of private/public inferring a selective process where gender arrangements ensure it is the male who participates in the public domain. Parkins (1997, p.38) notes at the turn of last century “women’s bodies in public, political spaces were seen as by definition disruptive [and] as outside the legitimate domain of politics and public affairs” and as such had no access to participate in the discussion of public matters nor the formation of a public opinion. With the modernist binary of private/public understood to have now been eroded at some cultural sites the exclusion of women from the public sphere may have altered but a huge amount of feminist writing continues to insist that the gendered nature of the public sphere remains problematic (see, for example, Squires, 1998).

This exclusion of women historically may in fact be linked to notions suggested by Habermas (1997, p.106) that the public sphere is a place for “rational discussion”. This suggestion must raise the question of who gets to decide what is rational, and traditionally, this is a masculine quality evoking the sense that what is considered rational is that which is supported by those who have the power to name it as such. The idea of ‘rational’ in this model signifies the presence of a gender bias but Habermas (p.108) also suggests that this rational cohesion was aided by “a relatively high standard of education” connoting an additional bias involving ideals of class. Like the idea of the public itself, the public sphere in the Habermasian sense relies on the process of inclusion and exclusion suggesting “the sphere is actually a segment” (Hartley, 1996, p.68) that relies on gender and class divisions for the “rational discussions” that lead to the formation of public opinion.

It has been suggested that the emergence of the public sphere in fact contributes to the creation of the public rather than the inverse. Derrida (quoted in Miller, 1993) considers the signing of the US Declaration of Independence and poses the question of who came first, the document for the people, or the people made sovereign by the document. He concludes “the American people did not exist as the American people before having signed...[and] it is in the signing that they conferred upon themselves the right to call themselves the American people and the right to sign” (pp. xvii-xviii). This argument provides us with a model that suggests that the idea of the public can be created via the notion of the public sphere. What should be understood is that neither site provides an egalitarian

space for the 'people'. Rather their relation to each other confirms the existence of a process of inclusion/exclusion that enables each one to construct the other.

In contemporary society, the idea of the traditional public sphere as a physical space where people meet seems impossible, and even Habermas has resigned to the belief that the sphere "exists now only as a promise" (quoted in Livingstone & Hunt, 1994, p.19). This type of thinking however denies the possibility of a reconfiguration of social space that many writers consider to be the condition of the epoch in which we currently reside – the postmodern (see Green, 1994, Morley, 1996). In this epoch "we can begin to speak of 'communities' of electronic (rather than geographical) space, and of new forms of politics conducted through these electronic media" (Morley, p.64) leading to the idea of a revised discursive space – the postmodern public sphere (Hartley, 1996). Merging political theory and cultural studies, John Hartley (1992, p.1) explores the media as the site of the new postmodern public sphere where "the public realm and the public are still to be found" both in the media's representation and address. If we accept that postmodernity is characterised by a "dynamic disjointedness" (Green, p.173) then the fragmented nature of the postmodern public informs the explicit modes of address employed to continue to create and imagine the discursive space of the public. In the postmodern public sphere, the public service advertisement serves this very purpose by providing a site where the public can be imagined, and public opinion formed. Rather than the distinction that exists within the modernist public sphere, the division between the public and the private is blurred in postmodernity. Whereas the democratic process was once imagined as existing outside the private realm, this shift finds the media, with its private reception

practices to be the “place where self and society meet, the means by which reader becomes citizen” (Hartley, 1992, p.3). With this in mind, it is imperative to reconsider the media and its formats, like the public service advertisement, as sites which contribute to the construction of, and the socialisation of the public.

### ***1.3 The Public Service Public***

Whilst the modernist public sphere is understood to rely on the binary of private/public as a way to legitimise the process of inclusion and exclusion, the dissolving of this binary in postmodernity suggests a new masking process is required to aid the illusion that the new public sphere is egalitarian. The advertisements of the public service genre can be understood as setting themselves the impossible task of addressing a fragmented public, yet close analysis of the texts will reveal how this is overcome.

The West Australian Health Department’s *Quit* Campaign confirms a process at work within the public service advertisement, with nine advertisements over a ten year period (1984-1994) utilising a recurring theme. The campaign’s launch in 1984 centred on an advertisement entitled ‘Take a Fresh Breath of Life’ and depicts a young father giving up smoking and spending more time with his wife and two children partaking in outdoor activities. In 1987, the advertisement ‘Cathy’ centred on a young girl’s anguish over her father’s habit and finishes with a voice-over that urges “if you can’t do it for yourself, then do it for your kids”. Two years later the advertisement ‘Cats in the Cradle’ (see Chapter 3 for a detailed analysis) brought home the family message while in 1991 ‘Tar Baby’ depicted a baby’s bottle being filled with a black liquid providing the analogy for

the harm you (the smoker) can cause to “those close to you”. In 1994, two advertisements, ‘Delivery Room’ and ‘Only Women Bleed’ can be understood as targeting women with the former suggesting that giving up smoking is akin to child birth, while the later uses text to state that “smoking reduces fertility”. The following year saw the release of ‘Lifelines’ (see Chapter 3 for a detailed analysis) and ‘Doctor’s Surgery’ which depicts a young boy whose respiratory system has been affected by his father’s smoking habit.

It must be acknowledged that these are not the only strategies used within the campaign, which has also included an animated series, monologues from people suffering from smoking-related illnesses and texts that identify the ‘other’ effects of smoking, such as bad breath and premature ageing. However, the sheer number of advertisements involving the dual representations of family and children suggests a unitary public being imagined within the campaign’s framework. Furthermore it is pertinent to note that the explicit address of 1987’s ‘Cathy’ which urges the viewer to “do it for **your** kids” is absent in the final advertisement, ‘Doctor’s Surgery’ where the ‘your’ is replaced by the rhetoric “smoking around children is sickening”. The discursive construction in the *Quit* campaign relies on an imaginary unitary public that is united by its feelings for children. This demonstrates a limited and exclusive position for those who can be considered the public as constructed by the public sphere of public service advertising.

The imagination of the public as a body of people unified by their care for children continues in other recent examples of public service advertisements. The



St John's Ambulance Fund's First Aid Awareness campaign released three advertisements in 1998/99. The first advertisement depicts two parents grief over the death of their toddler daughter following an accident in the tool shed which resulted in the little girl dying from blood loss. The second in the series depicts parental grief like the first advertisement, but this time it relates to the death of their teenage son in road accident and suggests his death may have been avoided with the presence of someone trained in first-aid. The last in the series, released during the summer months, discusses via a voice-over, rather than depicting, the possibility of children drowning in unattended private pools. Through the juxtapositioning of images of toddlers leaning into a pool and point of view camera shots from underwater, the preferred message encourages first-aid training as a way of ensuring children's future well being. Like the Health Department's *Quit* campaign, the St John Ambulance Fund's series creates the discursive space of the public, but in this instance this campaign relies exclusively on representations of family and children to legitimate its exclusionary practices.

Analysis of the *Quit* and the St John's Ambulance campaigns demonstrate how the impossibility of addressing the public in the public service advertisement is overcome: representations of children. Within this genre, selective representations construct the public as those who are united by their love of, and for children, and much like the public of the Habermassian public sphere, this construction is represented as being universal, natural and inclusive. While this chapter has argued that representations of the public are constructions rather than 'a true reflection of reality', the following chapter will consider in detail how childhood works as discourse to organise the public into a single idealised social structure.

## CHAPTER 2: ORGANISATION

### THE DISCOURSE OF CHILDHOOD AND THE MYTH OF FAMILY

Toby Miller (1993, p.xii) argues that as political systems come under question by emerging social movements and globalisation, “the state needs to produce a sense of oneness amongst increasingly heterogeneous populations”. This oneness, as the previous chapter discussed in relation to public service advertising, is constructed at some cultural sites in ways that rely on the ideal of childhood and the myth of family to infer a commonality amongst the discursive space of the public. But in order to understand the importance of this construction, it is necessary not simply to note the quantity of these representations throughout the genre: it is also important to consider why and how these signifiers are organised to promote the preferred meanings behind the campaigns being analysed. This chapter, whilst considering the implications of the notion of childhood within the public sphere, concentrates on how the presence of children in the public service text promotes the notion of the family as a means by which to organise the public. As Postman (1982, p.144) argues, childhood only exists when a “social environment triggers and nurtures it, that is, has a need for it” signifying that like the public, the concept of childhood, is more of a discursive creation rather than a natural site.

#### *2.1 The History of Childhood*

“Unlike infancy, childhood is a social artefact, not a biological category” (Postman, 1982, p.xi) and it is possible to trace a history of this category which has come to be understood as “one of our most culturally potent signifiers” (Jenkins, 1998, p.15). Exploring the creation of “children’s culture”, Stephen

Kline (1998, p.96) finds that in medieval life children had “no autonomy, separate status, privileges [or] special rights” demonstrating an absence of the adult/child binary that was to inform the post-feudal period. In feudal society, children’s roles were largely defined by their families’ position within society and as such “children’s lives were essentially no different from those of adults” (p.97), a position that remained until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the introduction of industrialisation. As Kline notes, the factory acts of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were introduced as a means of ending cheap child labour (p.98) and can be seen to be perhaps the beginning of contemporary understandings of childhood. For at this time “a powerful idea came to prevail...that children are innocent beings in need of formation and learning [and need] to be protected from the harsher realities of industrial society” (p.98). This shift in societal positioning sees children lose their equal status and any possibility of agency in the industrial age, and instead positions them in the space in which they still reside today. Industrialisation can be seen as possibly the very first ‘threat’ to children, a notion which Spigel and Jenkins (quoted in Jenkins, p.14) suggests worked to justify the social reformers positions as cultural custodians. This justification can be seen to rely on a binary where children must be subordinated and stripped of their agency so as to ensure that custodial power and the right to subjugate lies solely with the adult population.

The idea of caring for, and protecting children which emerged in the industrialisation period lends itself to the formation of innocence and purity that is associated with childhood today. John Hartley (1999) provides a suggestion for why this may be, noting that:

the logic of democratic equivalence...[has taken] popular sovereignty from its earliest site-adult, urban males-eventually to classes of people hardly regarded as human at the time...starting with women, and moving through ethnic and colonial populations until it came to children, where it is still stuck fast...(p.53)

Prior to the project of democratic equivalence leading to suffrage for women and for colonised groups, it can be argued that through the discourse of gender and the discourse of race these classes of people were demarcated as those who would need protection. Without access to the site of sovereignty and rationality, their agency was denied, suggesting not so much a purity, as a vulnerability that must be protected. As Mark Finnane (1989, p.234), for example, notes, “ from the middle of the ninetieth century the censorship of literature...[was] as much concerned with the possible effects of obscene or depraved texts on adults as on child audiences”. The trial over Lady Chatterly’s Lover being a case in point, where discussion regarding banning the text was coined in terms of the possible effects the text may have on wives and servants (see Tribe, 1973, p.38). With the awarding of agency and democratic equivalence to these bodies, the need for protection was no longer as easily projected, suggesting it is the lack of agency that allows this notion of protection to be produced in the first place. As Hartley (1998, p.16) argues, children are “perhaps the West’s last ‘internal’ colony, in discursive terms” - that is, the last Other, who are constructed as innocent, pure and vulnerable, so as to construct the need to protect.

Children as the last Other, allows the ideal of childhood to become a discursive dumping ground where norms can be fixed and criteria elaborated for defining the public. Hartley (1998, p.15) argues that children have become “the semiotic

carrier of visualizations of [a] universalized ‘Wedom’” through a discursive construction that suggests that ‘We’, all those who are not children, are united by our desire to protect the innocent child. More than producing a sense of oneness, the discourse of childhood works much the same way as Edward Said’s (1978) notion of Orientalism. Whereas in Said’s dissertation it is argued that European culture gained a positive sense of identity by defining itself against the Orient, in this instance “childhood is the difference against which adults define themselves” (Spigel, 1998, p.110). Whereas the discourse of Orientalism relies on the binary of Europe/Other, the discourse of childhood relies on the binary of adult/child which sees “expertise...[as] the domain of the adult” (Plunkett, 1994, p.52) and childhood “defined by powerlessness and dependence upon the adult community’s directives and guidance” (Kline, 1998, p.95). Through this binary, it can be argued that an adult community is inferred which demonstrates how the discourse of childhood can be employed to create a sense of the public. Simply stated, without agency children continue to be a site of powerlessness, constructing those with agency as a universalised site united by its concerns in responsibility and protection. This construction is one of the features of the public service advertisement and its use is one of the ways the discursive space of the public may be organised. Through the discourse of childhood, individual differences within the public, such as sexual orientation or couples without children, can be masked through the connotations of responsibility and the protection of the powerless; a connotation that supposedly represents the adult population.

## ***2.2 Implications of the Childhood Discourse for Children***

In the absence of agency, the discourse of childhood presents children in limited ways. David Oswell (1998, p.271) in his article on content regulation for the Internet notes “the circulation of three images of the child: the child-as-victim, the child-in-danger and the dangerous child” which inform the culture of policy making. The notion of the ‘dangerous child’ is explored by Marise Plunkett in her thesis on youth, crime and discourse. She argues that terms such as children, juvenile and delinquent “are produced by the same discursive practice” (p.17) and suggests that “the delinquent’s offence is one of not being a child” (p.43).

Plunkett’s observations conclude that such a construction occurs when a child rejects guidance and protection and attempts to gain agency whether it be through a criminal act or simply frequenting public places such as shopping centres or city malls. In these situations, childhood is no longer understood as a site of powerlessness and these children are understood as a disruption to the discursive strategy that constructs them as such.

Notions of the ‘child-as-victim’ and the ‘child-in-danger’ rely on children being denied agency. Accordingly within media theory and policy, they are understood to be passive audiences, unable to make judgements, rather than being “understood as citizens who might be involved in public debate” (Mayrhofer, 1999, p.9). Although these same notions are evoked in the public service advertisement through explicit representation of children, the issues involved are not directed to children as an audience, as by law they cannot, for example, drink alcohol, drive, or smoke. Rather, the discourse of childhood is used to mobilise

the public to address these issues *for the sake of* the children. Considering public service advertisements as part of the postmodern public sphere allows us to demonstrate that “the politics of the public sphere...rests on the figure of the child” (Jenkins, p.31) and the ways in which the discourse of childhood is employed as a means of organising and addressing the discursive space of the public.

### ***2.3 Making Use of the Discourse of Childhood for Adults***

Examples of critical approaches which understand childhood as a discourse can be found in much writing on censorship – including that which addresses censorship of literature (see Finnane, 1989), screen violence (see Walker, 1996, and Gerrard, 1996) and more recently, the Internet (see Oswell, 1998). All these issues can be understood as relying on the binary that addresses the public as a unified mass, defined in opposition to the ‘non-public’ of children. They all demand a shared responsibility from those who are to be considered good citizens, towards those without agency and who are situated outside the discursive space of the public. Oswell (p.275) notes that the construction of children in this way enables the Internet Watch Foundation, for example, to organise the public to do the monitoring for material which may be deemed offensive, and the public service text can be seen to employ the same charter.

Making use of the discourse of childhood for adults can be understood as a discursive strategy. This concept, elaborated in the work of Michel Foucault (cited in McHoul and Grace, 1993, p.17) implies discourses contribute to the

“process of normalisation and, in the process, occlude forms of knowledge different from them, by dividing the normal person from the pathological specimen, the good citizen from the delinquent and so on”. Placing children at the centre of debates regarding crime, censorship or health and safety as depicted by the public service advertisements, mobilises a strategy that can be seen to construct the public under the notion of responsibility. Those who reject this notion are excluded from the public as “passivity...renders you guilty” (Gerrard, 1996, p86); guilty of irresponsibility towards those who are constructed as needing protection the most.

To consider how the discourse of childhood works in the public service advertisement examples from the ‘Men’s Domestic Violence’ campaign shows how “the discourse says more about the protection of childhood than the protection of children” (Oswell, 1998, p.281). A series of three advertisements released by the Domestic Violence Prevention Unit of the Women’s Policy Development Office, all place representations of children at the centre of the text rather than the act of domestic violence itself. With a soundtrack of raised, hysterical adult voices in all advertisements, the first in the series depicts a little boy tossing and turning in his bed with the text ‘this little boy is not having a nightmare, he is living one’. The second advertisement in the series depicts the same little boy and (presumably) his sister cowering in the television room with the text ‘these children are not watching a horror movie, they are watching something scarier’. The final advertisement in the campaign series shows the little girl in the back seat of a car with her parents arguing in the front seat; the text reads ‘this 5 year old hates travelling by car, because the trip often ends with



someone getting hurt'. All three advertisements utilise rapid jump cut editing, a mis-en-scene that employs dark colours with a soundtrack that is similar to a slowed heartbeat, inducing a feeling that is analogous to the 90s horror genre. The victim in these texts is not the wife/mother who is suffering the violence of her male partner, but the innocence of childhood. The way childhood is constructed generally in our culture is as a time of pleasant dreams, fun films and picnics/daytrips to the country - the exact inverse of what is depicted here. The discourse of childhood in this series of advertisements is utilised to evoke something in the perpetrator of the violent acts that the injured and abused figure of the wife would not - the loss of childhood and its sacred connotations. This notion is confirmed by Donna Paterson, the co-ordinator of the campaign, who states:

...being confronted with the real damage that violence between partners has on children was the best motivator for violent (or near-violent) men to accept responsibility for their behaviour and seek help to change. (Paterson, 1998)

In addressing the public, these advertisements suggest the preservation of childhood is first priority, a frightening reading in itself for those who are subjected to the act of domestic violence, or those who are without children. It is immediately apparent the public who are serviced by these texts is an exclusive one, and the notion that this issue may in fact affect gay men and women, and couples without children is masked by a discursive strategy that relies on the employment of the childhood discourse.

#### ***2.4 The Myth of Family/ Family Values***

The term family is no longer used to simply describe a grouping of peoples with biological ties. The way family is generally understood today can be described as a myth which Barthes (in Rice and Waugh, 1996, p.112) argues “is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it” and works to transform something that is culturally constructed into something that is understood to be ‘natural’. The myth of family, as called upon by the public service advertisement, is one that relies on the discourse of childhood to project the preferred signified - that is a site of safety, love, protection and responsibility. Public service advertisements employ the discourse of childhood to promote the myth of family, which then serves as a way of creating the idealised structure of the public. Poster (1978, p.xviii) argues that “the family plays an important ideological role in the stability of the social system” and without the presence of children this ideological function could not be evoked.

The interrelation of childhood, the myth of family and the notion of family values being used to address the public is explicitly realised in the first *Quit* campaign released in 1984. To the soundtrack of a jingle entitled ‘Take a Fresh Breath of Life’ the opening shot depicts our smoking protagonist as a teenager trying to impress a group of girls in cinema lobby with his smoking. The next scene involves the same man, slightly older, at a nightclub drinking and smoking with several friends. This heady social life disappears in the next shot as our smoker bounds into his kitchen, replete with two children sitting at the table, and marks his *Quit* calendar whilst his wife empties the ashtray for the last time. The remainder of the advertisement shows the now ex-smoker jogging with his wife and children, eating outdoors with them and culminates in a family camping trip

which, by the end of the text, depicts the family sitting around the campfire deliriously happy. The binaries in this advertisement suggest youth (not child) equates with irresponsibility with the adult/father signifying the inverse- the ideal healthy, respectable, outdoorsy subject who is firmly in control of himself and his family. Aries (1960, p.399) argues the concept of family, much like the concept of race, has “the same intolerance towards variety, [and] the same insistence of uniformity” implying a usefulness in the employment of the myth of family in a text which works to construct the public. This *Quit* advertisement suggests that individualism is far too problematic for the discursive construction of the public, and with these representations common throughout public service texts, suggest the public in this genre is no longer the realm of the adult, urban male, but rather the realm of the family and its shared notion of responsibility towards children.

The idea of the “dangerous family” (Plunkett, 1994, p.48), one where abuse or violent acts towards children take place, is not permitted within the discursive strategy of the public service advertisement. The discourse of childhood masks this problematic aspect of the family and encourages the myth of family as one that is embedded with “family values” which, as Jenkins (1998, p.8) suggests, “presupposes that the primary threat to our children comes from outside....[and] lets the family itself off the hook”. The *Quit* advertisements along with campaigns for drink driving, speeding, and first-aid awareness, for example, demonstrate how the public service advertisement deals explicitly with issues that threaten the family from the outside. The Men’s Domestic Violence Campaign provides a more implicit example of the outside threat. Completely absent in the representation of this social ill is the notion that violence within the home may be

caused by the structures of family, including the children themselves. By evoking the discourse of childhood this notion is masked, and the representation of fearful children within these texts suggest that their father's violence is something he has brought into the family home, rather than something that has been caused by it. To represent the problem as something that is caused within the family home may involve showing violence against children, something these advertisements cannot bring themselves to depict. The worst thing that can happen to children within this paradigm is carelessness, and as such, this campaign calls for the reinstatement of the family structure and the mythical values associated with it, rather than a reconsideration of the possible constricting parameters contained within it.

The discourse of childhood and the myth of family are central to organising the public, with the latter bringing together the idealised child with idealised adult attitudes in a single idealised social structure. The supposed universalism of this structure, constructs the ideal, unified public, who are united in their responsibility towards children. With this discursive strategy in place, the following chapter considers how this unified, organised public can now be mobilised.

## CHAPTER 3: MOBILISATION

### THE PUBLIC SERVICE GENRE – ISSUES, DISCOURSE, CONVENTIONS

As a text, the public service advertisement has more in common with its product-based counterpart that would at first be apparent. Schudson (1993, pp.221/222) suggests that like all forms of advertising, public service texts “invoke values that matter to people...[but] they do not end in a sales pitch” which is understood to be the central aspect of advertising a product. Rather than sell a product, these advertisements should be understood as pitching, or mobilising the public to a preferred *mode of conduct*. Whilst use of narrative and mode of address are characteristics of both public service and product-based advertisements, this chapter focuses on ‘value transfer’ and persuasion as conventions of advertising that are employed so that the public may modify their behaviour and act as ‘the public should act’. Furthermore, it will consider how these conventions work with discourses outside the text to promote a preferred meaning of the issues depicted by the genre.

#### ***3.1 What Makes an Issue a Public Service Issue?***

Over the past decade, the West Australian mediascape has been the site of many public service advertisements. These have presented issues such as smoking, drink driving, speeding, first aid, alcohol consumption, immunisation, domestic violence, AIDS and dietary advice. It is interesting to note that all of these topics operate within a single paradigm - that of health and safety. Other issues that could, quite reasonably, be seen as suitable topics for public discussion have not

been presented in such a way. For example, racial discrimination, sexuality, youth suicide and homelessness, while occasionally being depicted by organisations such as the Salvation Army, have not been discussed in public service advertisements. In examining these exclusions, the idea of what counts as of suitable public interest begins to emerge. It is particularly obvious when topics are examined in a systematic way, that difficult issues around the organisation of social structures are not tackled directly. As suggested in the previous chapter, these advertisements depict an idealised notion of social organisation and this is given as the unproblematic background to the supposedly central health and safety issues of the genre.

For the exclusionary practices of the public service issues to remain unproblematic, the process of inclusion and exclusion must be masked so as to infer a natural presence rather than an activity of selection taking place. This masking process can be understood as exnomination, and as Fiske (1987, p.290) explains, “that which is exnominated appears to have no alternative and is thus granted the status of the natural, the universal...[and] speaks the final truth”. The exnominated in the public service genre are the issues which are included as of obvious interest and their universal appeal is masked by the discourse of childhood. In the exclusionary process these advertisements do not deal with issues that would make apparent the difficult divisions that exist within society, such as gender, race, and sexuality. Rather through the process of exnomination a universalised culture is proposed where ‘We’ can all agree on what counts as public issues.

### ***3.2 Discourse and Meaning in the Public Service Advertisement***

Graham Turner (1993, p.296) argues that “meaning ...[results] from the mobilisation of socially acquired discourses by audiences as they read” suggesting the mechanisms by which public service advertisements make meaning cannot rely on the narrative they contain alone. Phelan (1991, pp.76/90) argues that public service campaigns work in tandem with news broadcasts, providing the latter with issues that can be shaped into ‘soft’ news thereby creating a climate of propaganda which shapes public consciousness. The problem with Phelan’s argument is that he fails to consider the importance of the reverse process whereby suggestions such as Turner’s provide an insight into how news and current affairs set up discourses that can be used throughout public service advertisements. The fact that the issues at the centre of these texts can be found at the heart of many news and current affairs stories may be deliberate, but nevertheless would be almost impossible to substantiate. Rather it is applicable to argue that with these issues appearing within the genre of news and current affairs, they are awarded a higher modality, so that the difference between representation and the ‘real’ is made less apparent (Fiske, 1983, p.76). As such, discourses which are inscribed in news and current affairs - such as law, science and morality - are taken by the viewer to their interpretations of the issues depicted within the public service genre. Accordingly news features that depict, for example, road fatalities through drink driving or medical claims regarding passive smoking, may be mobilised by the viewer of the public service advertisement, contributing to the meaning gained from the text.

It is worth remembering that news and current affairs works to create a discursive address that claims to speak to and on behalf of the community – the public. As a result when issues such as drink-driving, smoking, speeding etc are articulated within this genre, the idea that these issues are of public concern begins to be established. To this end, public service advertisements can be seen to work in tandem with the modality of the news and current affairs genre to continue to construct the public that they too depict. In Western Australia the public imagined by the news and current affairs broadcasts is identical to that of the public service text, demonstrating the need to consider the latter in discussions pertaining to the creation of the public and the public sphere. Like the news, which Hartley (1992:a, p.53) argues seeks “to capture and colonize the future, filling it with meanings and social relationships of the past”, public service advertisements imagine a social structure from the past with which to continue imaging the public in the present to mobilise their conduct in the future. This process is one that can be seen to be reflected in the process of value transfer and the notion of threat that is central to the genre.

### ***3.3 Value Transfer in Public Service Advertising***

John Corner (1995, p.119) notes that “the basic method by which many ads work to create positive evaluations of their product is through a process of value transfer” and that advertising “not only reinforces existing patterns of value but works to initiate new ones” (p.122). He argues that value transfer works by locating a product in positive situations, and “can also seek to work through form alone, setting up a pleasure in colours, sounds, shapes and movements which then becomes the object of transfer” (p.119). This suggestion, when applied to product-



based advertising, is often used to describe how a product, such as deodorant, becomes desirable and of value, and thus incorporated into a consumer's lifestyle. Value transfer can be best understood as relying on the concept of lack, rather than a concept of need, though the former is certainly used to imply the latter in most product-based advertising. In the public service advertisement, the idea of a lack is centred on the social structure (the family) that underpins the issues being depicted. As such, the lack is usually denoted through the loss of the notion of family either through the death of a child or the loss of a parental figure. Representations of the latter can be understood as depicting an adult figure who has reneged on his/her responsibility towards children, as explicitly demonstrated in many texts. The Department of Health's 1989 *Quit* advertisement, 'Cats in the Cradle' depicts a young boy watching a video of his father, in various scenarios, but always with a cigarette in his hand. The final two scenes depict the boy at a funeral being comforted by a gloved hand (presumably the mother) before cutting to the boy sitting alone in the family's television room crying and reaching out to the freeze framed image of his father on the television. In this instance the lack is obviously the dead father and traditional family structure that the minimal reference to the mother in the text suggests cannot be replaced by a single parent. The deceased father stands as a sign of the subject who neglects his responsibility towards children and thus creates a lack. But it can be avoided and the anti-smoking message provides the means for which to overcome, or in this instance, avoid the lack, suggesting a process of value transfer taking place. To this end, public service advertisements can be seen to utilise the same conventions as product-based advertising, and by creating an imaginary commonality that relies

on selective issues and representations works to mobilise a preferred mode of conduct from the discursive category of the public.

In much the same way as value transfer works with the loss of the parental figure, the loss of a child within a family structure again suggests the breakdown of the notion that the adult population must unite in its responsibility towards children. The Department of Transports 'Drink-Driving' campaign released an advertisement in 1997 entitled 'Bush Telegraph' depicting the death of a father and son in a road accident following the over-consumption of alcohol by the father. Two aspects of this text's narrative are worth noting. Firstly, as the father's utility speeds through a stop sign into the path of an oncoming truck, we hear the young boy scream "Dad" before the vehicle is demolished. In addition, the scene following this, depicts the reactions of the father's work colleagues upon hearing the news of the accident and the related deaths. This text depicts how adult responsibility does not solely lie within the family alone, and in this instance, suggests a lack of acceptable behaviour, on behalf of both the father and his friends that results in the gruesome death of a child. Both the *Quit* campaign and the Drink Driving text suggest how the convention of value transfer can be seen in the public service advertisement. These texts demonstrate how, in Corner's terms, advertisements rely on existing patterns of value, such as the discourse of childhood, to create new ones, which in these instances are the reinstallation of a universalised social structure. What should be understood is that these patterns of values are by no means 'natural'. Rather they are constructed in order to mobilise the public into adopting new ones.

### ***3.4 Persuasion in Public Service Advertising***

The idea that a preferred persuasion technique in public service advertising contributes to the mobilisation of the public is useful for the argument of this thesis. Threat, as a form of persuasion, will “allude to or describe unfavourable consequences that are alleged to result from the failure to adopt or adhere to the communicators conclusions” (Hovland, Janis, Irving & Kelly, 1961, p.60) and its use in these advertisements works in two ways. Firstly, these advertisements use the commonality of family and children as that/those which are under threat - as depicted by the drink driving and first-aid campaigns already discussed. But this can also be depicted in less explicit ways - as depicted by the Health Department’s 1995 *Quit* campaign entitled ‘Lifelines’ (for a full description of the texts, see Appendix 1). With a separate advertisement for men and women, each advertisement presents two columns listing the rites of passage for the smoker and the non-smoker. Non-smoking males for example, discover ‘footy’ and girls, get married, have grandchildren and drive around Australia. In contrast the non-smoker’s rites of passage comes to an end after his son’s 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. A similar comparison is made in the commercial aimed at women, with the smoker missing out on her daughter’s wedding and teaching her granddaughter how to sew.

These texts employ the discourses of heterosexuality and gender and rely on the commonality of family and children to depict the seemingly ‘natural’ rites of passage under threat. Janis (1972, p.279) notes that threat persuasion relies on the addressee responding by thinking about the resources available for dealing with the threat, and in this example, the resources are the new patterns of behaviour inferred by the *Quit* campaign. But the implications of the notion of threat goes

beyond the narrative of the texts and the messages offered by them. The presentation of a threat to the social structure that binds together the discursive space of the public asks for more than individual action. It can also be seen to be requesting a common responsibility amongst those it addresses. Like the imaginary social structure that is used to situate the public, the notion of threat to this commonality in the public service advertisement can be seen as another way of constructing a public, this time through the idea of a common *responsibility*.

### ***3.5 Promotional Responsibility***

The notion of common responsibility is an interesting one, for it holds an important place in two quite distinct disciplines: that of advertising studies; and of postmodern political theory. In the former, the idea of responsibility resonates in the rhetoric of “promotional culture” (see Wernick, 1991, Schudson, 1993) which, it is argued, shapes “our ideas of right and wrong conduct [and] our attribution of significance to ‘image’ in both public and private life” (Schudson, p.13). Within this paradigm, the subject who ignores the threat of the public service advertisement and continues to, for example, drink-drive and smoke, is deemed irresponsible in their attitude towards the social structure of the public and questions their sociability and acceptability amongst the discursive space of the public.

Postmodern political theory is linked to the notion of promotional culture through *public opinion*. The concept of ‘promotional culture’ sees advertising as shaping opinions. Postmodern political theory goes further, as it understands opinions as being shaped by all genres within the public sphere. Hartley (1992, p.36) argues

that public opinion is an “industrially produced fictionalization of citizenship” and is one of the discursive strategies by which the public is mobilised to “take collective action in their own name, the name of the public” (p.122). Public opinion, like promotional culture, does not naturally exist. It is a discursive creation that relies simultaneously on the discursive production of a public united by a commonality. Public service advertisements provide a site for these discursive constructions to take place, and by using the notion of threat, can be seen to be limiting the possible number of opinions in preference of the idea of a shared, public responsibility. In public service advertisements, “‘public’ is different from ‘social’” but through its creation “public points to particular ways of being social” (Corner, 1995, p.7), a suggestion which the next chapter will consider in detail.

## CHAPTER 4: COLLECTIVE ACTION?

### CITIZENSHIP AND POWER

This thesis has argued that limited representations of the public in the public service advertisement rely on the discourse of childhood, and that through this strategy the process of inclusion and exclusion, through which the public is constituted, is masked. This discourse of innocence, and the insistent repetition of necessary adult responses to that innocence, are exclusionary practices when employed as the basis for addressing the public. This final chapter focuses on the public service advertisement as a site for the public to gain access to another discursive site, that of the citizen. By considering the implications of the exclusionary nature of this public, this chapter considers the position of those who are excluded and seeks to demonstrate the impossibility of public collective action as it is currently conceptualised.

#### *4.1 “Cultural Citizenship”*

J M Barbalet (1988, p.1) suggests citizenship “defines those who are, and who are not, members of a common society” and that “the basis of citizenship is the capacity to participate in the exercise of political power through the electoral process” (p.2). This political theory understands citizenship as directly relating to the practice of democratic politics where voting, for example, stands as an exercise of civic right and duty. But recent citizenship theory, emerging from cultural studies, suggests there is more to this notion than voting rights. Meijer (1998, p.235), for example, states “to be a citizen is to be included culturally, not just civically, socially and politically” suggesting the importance of being

included in representations that enact a sense of civic duty and rights. Hartley (1999, pp.163/164) uses the term “cultural citizenship” to allude to a notion of citizenship that recognises “identity, as in ‘identity politics’” so that difference could be claimed and recognised as a basic human right . With the recurring representation of the ideal unified public in the public service advertisement, the notion of difference is shunned and cultural citizenship within this genre remains a limited possibility that works only for the ideal, unified citizen. In a community where the political rhetoric is said to be for the good of the ‘common man’ [sic], the lack of cultural citizenship depicted by these texts demonstrate who this is understood to be. Those whose interests are served and addressed by this political rhetoric are those who can find a place within the idealised social structure depicted by the public service genre. Those who are united by their responsibility towards children are rewarded by being afforded cultural citizenship, leaving those who are ‘different’ with a limited space within which to understand their subjectivity.

#### **4.2 “Incompleteness”**

Toby Miller (1993, p.ix) argues that “manageable cultural subjects [are] formed and governed through institutions and discourses” and that “these institutions and discourses work by inscribing ethical incompleteness onto subjects”. This process, he argues, works “to produce loyal citizens who learn to govern themselves” (p.ix) as they succumb to the signifiers that are placed within the public sphere as sites where their incompleteness may be remedied. The institution of the public service advertisement stands as an example of this theory. By suggesting that smoking, drink driving and domestic violence, for example, are all signifiers of

ethical incompleteness, this genre suggests the appropriate steps that must be taken to remedy the situation. Rather than explicitly insist on affirmative action (ie, legislation), the discourse of childhood is employed so the public will be mobilised into performing what is perceived to be a civic duty. Altering behaviour so as to address the concerns of the public service advertisement is constructed as an act of citizenship. This is achieved by suggesting in these texts a universal responsibility is shared amongst the public. As such, those members of the public who are united by their responsible attitude towards children have the opportunity to remedy their ethical incompleteness, and by adopting the behaviour purported by the genre prove themselves to be loyal and responsible citizens. More generally, those who are failing in their duty to centre their lives on the care and nurturing of innocent children are not allowed to be the citizens of the public service advertisement.

Within the generic site of public service advertising, those who have been traditionally excluded from the realms of reproduction and child rearing are excluded from representations of the public. Gay men and women, single adult males and females, couples without children, and couples with 'bad' children for example, are unable to remedy their ethical incompleteness when subjected to a discourse that may not register among them the preferred sense of responsibility. Citizenship requires the performance of duties and the exercising of rights, and these subjects can be viewed as being denied the right to participate in either, and are marginalised accordingly within the public sphere. To remedy the ethical incompleteness suggested by the public service advertisement is to participate in its discursive strategy which evokes childhood as the commonality with which to



mobilise the public. Those not mobilised by this discourse and who continue, for example, to smoke, are recognised within this paradigm as aberrations of civic duty and can be understood to attract what is commonly termed social stigma. Charles Murray (quoted in Thompson, 1998, p.90) argues that “social stigma is an essential ingredient of social order” suggesting it is the binary opposite that gives meaning to the notion of the good citizen. The discursive strategy of the public service advertisement can be seen to articulate this, by delineating the public through the discourse of childhood which resonates in the notion of what is socially acceptable; that is, who gains access to citizenship. Without accepting the preferred meaning of the discourse of childhood, this access is not possible in the public service advertisement.

Foucault’s theory of “mode of subjection” suggests the ways in which citizenship is taught through the public service advertisement. He argues this mode “is the way which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations” (cited in Miller, 1993, p.xiii) and this not only involves the discourse of childhood. The idea of the public service advertisement itself, where issues of health and safety are granted hierarchy are offered as a way for the public to recognise their moral obligations which then allows them access to citizenship. Foucault refers to these practices as “disciplinary processes” (cited in McHoul and Grace, 1993, p.3) which restrict the subject from considering alternatives to the moral obligations being enforced. The phrase “changes of public ideas precede changes in private individuals, not visa versa” (p.3) suggests how the discursive strategies of the public service advertisement provide the mode of subjection that leaves no space for the marginal individual. Rather, the individual cannot hope to

contribute to public ideas while the genre's discursive strategy remains in place, and as such remains ethically incomplete and a non-citizen.

#### *4.3 The 'Queer' Citizen?*

The representational practices of the public service advertisement can be seen to contribute to the process whereby only some citizens have access to the supposedly 'rational' debates of the public sphere. Although it is not possible to deconstruct the discursive practices of these texts to reveal a "'surface' phenomena underpinned by a more 'real', but hidden structure" (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p.23), it is necessary to understand them as contributing to a power process that relies on marginalisation. What has come to be known as 'Queer Theory' (see, for example, Tucker, 1997, and Warner, 1993) serves as a useful tool for understanding how power is processed through discursive strategies such as those articulated by the public service genre. For the purposes of this thesis it is necessary to state that 'Queer' does not explicitly mean homosexual. "Queer is by definition, whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (Halperin, 1995, p.62) - or in the example of this thesis, those who are marginalised by the public service advertisement.

The problem with the evocation of Queer Theory "is the unchallenged assumption of a uniformed heteronormativity from which all heterosexuals benefit" (Cohen, 1997, p.452) and as such "heterosexuality is rarely...problematized" (Richardson, 1996, p.1). Within the public service genre, it is obvious that the category of sexuality is an insufficient discursive object for critical investigations that seek to explore how power through citizenship is obtained. David Halperin's

interpretation of Foucault's work suggests a useful approach to the term 'Queer'.

He argues that:

Queer...demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative-a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices: it could include some married couples without children, or even (who knows) some married couples with children-with, perhaps, very naughty children. (p.62)

Halperin seems uncertain regarding this invocation of couples with 'naughty children' as a categorisation of the Queer, and demonstrates how restrictive the notion of heteronormativity can be. His statement can be supported by the public service advertisements being critiqued here, where it is not heterosexuality that demarcates the Queer, but rather the idealised social structure of which heterosexuality plays a central role. Children, like adult responses to them, are never problematised in the public service advertisement and within this site representations of naughty children and/or parents who cannot control them have yet to be realised. The concept of the naughty child undermines the discourse of childhood and the universalism that resonates from it, demarcating who is normal (the public) and who is Queer.

Though Halperin suggests that 'Queer' is "available" to anyone, the public service advertisement suggests it is enforced on those who are not united by the discourse of childhood. Within this genre, depictions of children and their familial ties imply there is no space for the 'Queer' citizen to remedy the moral obligation suggested by the texts. While sexuality is perceived as being the domain of the private sphere (Blasius, 1997, p.341), within the public sphere "sexuality is understood as a realm of sanctioned relations for reproduction...of social

structure, and of state” (p.347) and an expression of sexuality outside of this paradigm results in marginalisation. Representation of cultural citizenship that involves couples, whether homosexual or heterosexual, without children, displays a sexuality that would deconstruct the discursive strategy that underpins the genre. The public sphere, which includes the public service genre, produces an interesting irony by marginalising sexuality to the ‘Queer’, whilst celebrating reproduction, which relies on sexuality, as a display of cultural citizenship. As such, within the public service advertisement, the ‘Queer’ citizen remains an impossibility.

#### ***4.4 Power***

The impossibility of the ‘Queer’ citizen is a direct result of the process of inclusion and exclusion that underpin any notion of the public sphere. Those who display a sexuality that does not reiterate the rites of reproduction are locked into the private domain which is understood to be the powerless term of the binary. Whilst this binary is depicted by the public service advertisement, these texts also demonstrate Foucault’s notion of power which he suggests should be understood “in terms of relations built consistently into the flows and practices of everyday life, rather than as some thing imposed from the top down” (cited in McHoul and Grace, 1993, p.7). In other words, power results from the hierarchy of discourses that govern that subject at any given time, suggesting who has the right to speak and why. Yet those awarded the right to speak are also constructed by discourse which “constructs them as subjective agents” and in the process it “normalizes,

responsibilizes, and disciplines” (Halperin, 1996, p.18) in the action of awarding power. The public service advertisement can be seen to demonstrate this theory through its use of the childhood discourse which highlights the subject’s/public’s obligations (discipline) and through the accepting of the preferred mode of action rewards with the notion of civic power (normal, responsible). The notion of power that results ensures the subject will “police both their own conduct and the conduct of others-and so earn, by demonstrating a capacity to exercise them, the various rights assigned [to]...citizens” (p.19). As such power belongs to the public, the discursive creation that is frequently referred to as ‘the common man’ or ‘the ordinary Australian’. In this binary, the marginalised, the excluded, the ‘Queer’ are powerless, and not only have no right to speak, but have no access to the site of citizenship and the power embedded within it.

#### ***4.5 The ‘Privateness’ of the Non-Public***

The power of the public to police both their own conduct and the conduct of others is created by texts such as the public service advertisement, and leads to another discursive categorisation in which the powerless are situated; the ‘interest group’. Popular rhetoric constructs ‘interest groups’ as arising from the private sphere (Livingstone & Hunt, 1994, p.23) and as such, as a group that speak from outside the public and the public sphere. To evoke this category is explicitly to delineate it as something that exists outside the ‘public good’, demonstrating the power awarded to those in the public discourse who can identify it as such. In addition, this binary categorisation implies the marginalised are unable to effect the politics of the public sphere, such as the issues addressed and the representations within the public service advertisement. Foucault (quoted in

Halperin, 1996, p.51) argues that power's "success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" and the construction of the public through the public service text ensures that the discourse of childhood remains a useful masking strategy for continued marginalisation and continued structures of power.

### *The Abuse Continues....*

The Department of Transport's '*Immobilise*' campaign, as seen on Channel 9, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

The advertisement begins with a long shot of a suburban home. As the camera pans towards the front door we hear the sound of a Mother and some children (possibly teenagers) reminding their husband/father that they either need to use the family car, or they need him to drive them somewhere. The husband/father then appears in shot as he walks through the front door. A look of shock on his face is reinforced by a cut to an empty carport.

VOICE OVER: From July 1<sup>st</sup>, it is compulsory to fit an approved immobiliser to every vehicle bought.

The scene cuts to an unspecified front or back yard. Tyre marks in the grass are followed by the camera, depicting a crushed flower bed before coming to a series of crushed toys and finishing on a shot of a destroyed toddler's mini-slide.

Accompanying these images is the following voice-over;

“Immobilisers will help stop the disruption,  
will help stop the destruction,  
and help protect the innocent victims of car theft”.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued for the need to consider the public service advertisement as part of debates within media studies that seek to understand the public sphere and the search for the public. It has described how, through this generic site, the public is recognised, organised and mobilised via the discourse of childhood and the idealised social structure it purports. These depictions of idealised child and adult behaviours and responses works by trying to create a sense of “Wedom” in an attempt to construct the public as an utopian ideal in which everybody is supposedly included. It is the fallacy of this assumption that has driven this dissertation.

The exclusionary nature of the public as depicted by the public service genre is reminiscent of Prime Minister John Howard’s claim, upon his election, that he would represent “all Australian’s”. Just like Howard’s claim, claims to represent the public in public service advertising are exclusionary fantasies in which ‘the public’ is in fact only those who are united in an idealised social structure that shares a common responsibility towards children. Given on-going budget considerations, tax cuts and health benefits geared towards families, it becomes apparent that the public of the public service advertisement is a mirror image of Howard’s imaginary “citizens of Australia”. With these discursive constructions being united with each other, the possibility of a new, more diverse public being realised seems an impossibility. As such, it is my hope that the work undertaken by this thesis will be expanded in ways that may make it possible to move towards a notion of the *publics*.



The ramifications of the discursive nature of the public and the idea of who is to be considered a citizen relies on the idealised social structure informed by the practices of the public service genre and should be seen to demarcate who has the 'right' to have children. The notion of 'good parenting' is that which resonates with the portrayals of the public service advertisement and the effects this has on the idea of 'alternative parenting' is pernicious. For to be understood as a good parent is to be part of the public - leaving those with alternative sexualities for example, discursively constructed as incapable of fulfilling such a role. Recent legislation that forbids lesbian couples from partaking in the IVF program stands as an example of how the construction of the public in the public sphere has real consequences for those who are marginalised in the process. This discursive construction provides the strategy for demarcating who should protect children, and infers a link for example, between paedophilia and homosexuality that resonates in the fear of the 'gay teacher'. Public service advertisements' continual employment of the childhood discourse to evoke the idealised social structure ensures a strategy remains in place that demarcates who is normal (the public) and who is not.

The creation of the public through the public service advertisement produces an interesting irony. In attempting to evoke the ideal social structure, that which is used to unite in the name of responsibility and protection is that which ends up being abused – children. The insistent stripping of children's agency within the public sphere provides the means for this discursive strategy to operate, and in the process strips agency from those who are not united by responsibility towards

children. To silence is an abuse, to demarcate is an abuse, and in the public service advertisement, the creation of the public is child abuse.

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## **APPENDIX 1.**

The Department of Health's "Lifelines" Advertisement. Part of the *Quit* Campaign

### **Advert. No.1 For Men**

BIRTH

FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

DISCOVER FOOTY

DISCOVER GIRLS

FIRST CIGARETTE

FIRST KISS

FIRST PAY PACKET

BECOME A FATHER

MOVE HOUSE

SON'S 10<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

LAST CIGARETTE

HOLIDAY UP NORTH

FIRST GRANDCHILD

DISCOVER FISHING

FIRST OVERSEAS HOLIDAY

MOVE AGAIN

BULD HOME EXTENSIONS

DRIVE AROUND AUSTRALIA

RETIRE TO BUSSELTON

TAKE UP BOWLING

GRANDDAUGHTER'S GRADUATION

BIRTH

FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

DISCOVER FOOTY

DISCOVER GIRLS

FIRST CIGARETTE

FIRST KISS

FIRST PAY PACKET

BECOME A FATHER

MOVE HOUSE

SON'S 10<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

LAST RITES

DIE

STILL DEAD

## **Advert No. 2 For Women**

BIRTH

FIRST DANCE CLASS

DISCOVER BOYS

FIRST CIGARETTE

FIRST JOB

FALL IN LOVE

PLAN WEDDING

DAUGHTER'S 5<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

RETURN TO WORK

10<sup>TH</sup> WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

LAST CIGARETTE

SCHOOL REUNION

HOLIDAY IN BALI

DAUGHTER'S WEDDING

MOVE HOUSE

DISCOVER TENNIS

BECOME A GRANDMOTHER

DRIVE AROUND AUSTRALIA

TEACH GRANDDAUGHTER HOW TO SEW

JOIN A BINGO CLUB

GRANDSON GETS MARRIED

BIRTH

FIRST DANCE CLASS

DISCOVER BOYS

FIRST CIGARETTE

FIRST JOB

FALL IN LOVE

PLAN WEDDING

DAUGHTER'S 5<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

RETURN TO WORK

10<sup>TH</sup> WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

LAST RITES

DIE

STILL DEAD