Rhetoric Transforms Lives:

An Analysis of LiveOnNY's *Life After Death* Campaign with Apologia

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Over 100,00 people are currently waiting for an organ transplant in the United States (UNOS). With hundreds of thousands in need of lifesaving organs and a shortage of those organs, organ procurement organizations (OPOs) are tasked with the responsibility of informing the public and persuading them to register as a donor. Because of this, it's essential that OPOs produce rhetorically effective media.

Unfortunately, OPOs have their work cut out for them. Many people only encounter organ donation when it appears as a plot on their favorite medical drama or when the DMV asks if they'd like check *yes* to become a donor. The myths and lack of information surrounding organ donation "interfere with the willingness to be an organ donor." (Sellers et al.). Many people believe they're too old or unhealthy to be a donor, that the rich will be prioritized over those in need, that donation interferes with open casket viewings, and that doctors won't save their lives if registered (Mayo Clinic).

Early unethical practices and the mistreatment of marginalized communities within the healthcare system fuel some of these myths. Examples like the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, wherein doctors neglected to treat black men with syphilis to examine the natural course of the disease process (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and the first heart transplant in Virginia where VCU did not obtain consent from the family of an unconscious black man to donate his organs (Virginia Commonwealth University) are prevalent throughout the history of medicine. Because of this mistreatment, marginalized communities do not trust the healthcare

system, which makes certain populations, like African Americans, less likely to choose donation (Siminoff et al. 999).

To address myths and the lack of knowledge about the donation process, OPOs launch awareness campaigns to disseminate information and increase engagement. Many OPOs utilize an arsenal of tools to achieve this. Infographics circulate social media in April during National Donate Life Month. Videos of recipients celebrating how organ transplant transformed their lives pop up on platforms like YouTube, and "honor walks"—an emotional tribute in which people gather in hospital corridors as an organ donor is wheeled into surgery—are shared on Facebook.

Over the years, OPOs have cultivated a social media presence in this digital age. The OPO Live On New York (LiveOnNY) posts flyers and other media to platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly *Twitter*). Here is a flyer LiveOnNY recently released:



Figure 1 LiveOnNY organ donation campaign flyer

This flyer is posted to LiveOnNY's Instagram. It can also be found in high foot traffic areas around the city, like the subway, where millions of people will see it during their commute.

The visual design is minimalistic and created to make an impact in just a glance. It draws connections to organ donation and LiveOnNY's brand through the use of color and typography.

The designers chose blue as the primary color of the flyer because the official colors of organ and tissue donation are blue and green (Donate Life America), and the typography was

used because it's the same one used in the LiveOnNY's logo, which connects the artifact to the brand.

The flyer uses visual design to create meaning for the reader. Every element is intentional. The "visual aspects of a document [or rhetorical artifact] have a huge impact on how well the document works" (Kimbal and Hawkins 7).

Color is, arguably, the most noticeable element within this artifact. While it was previously pointed out that the designers chose blue as the primary color because it creates connection to organ donation, this connection is only meaningful when you know *what* the official colors of organ donation are. It is important to note that "different cultures interpret colors differently around the world," (Ball et al. 46). The use of color within this artifact may be interpreted differently depending on who is looking at it. "Cool colors (like blues and greens) usually read as calming" (Ball et al. 46). Because this flyer involves a heavy topic that often terrifies people, the blue may be interpreted as calm and comforting. The color white can symbolize purity or new beginnings, a popular choice for western brides, but it can also symbolize mourning and "paleness, bloodlessness, lack of vigor, and death" (Hui-Chih 50, 65).

These two colors create contrast. "Contrast is the difference between elements where a combination of those elements makes one element stand out from another," (Ball et al. 45). The dark blue background makes the white font *pop*, drawing our attention to the words on the flyer.

The font impacts the readability of the message. Designers may have chosen the font not only because it associates the messaging with the brand, but because it is a serif typeface. Serifs are:

"The small feet" at the beginning of or more commonly, end of vertical strokes.

The serif typeface increases readability by creating a subtle horizontal line. This

> horizontal line guides our attention through the message (Kimball and Hawkins 160).

The designers chose a serif typeface because it may be easier to read at a glance. However, the next statement *Be an organ donor* is in a sans serif typeface. If serif typefaces increase readability, then sans serifs decrease it. In this context, decreasing readability is intentional. The size of the font also decreases readability. When we decrease readability the reader slows down to think about the call to action. "The sans serifs look more vertical than serif faces" which can be used to "direct the readers gaze down rather than across" (Kimbal and Hawkins 160). There is also a space between the eye-catching statement and the call to action. This space also gives us time to sit with the message. At this point in the artifact, the designers are attempting to guide the reader to the logo of the OPO, where they can be directed to learn more information about organ donation.

The typeface and font size assists with alignment and organization. Alignment allows designers to "control how our eyes move across the text" (Ball et al. 48). The artifact moves us vertically through the message using the serif typeface, then down through the call-to-action (*Be an organ donor)* to the LiveOnNY logo. The font size creates organization by providing us with a starting point (the biggest font size) and an end point (the smallest font size).

Design is an important element as it guides us through the rhetorical artifact, but word choice and grammar are just as important. In the context of this particular artifact, grammar is used to convey emphasis and meaning. The first phrase *"It's official"* uses a contraction. The contraction makes the statement feel more personal and less formal. Conversely, the second statement *"There is life after death*" does not use the contraction *there's.* Not using a contraction gives the statement emphasis and authority. There *is* life after death. Existence *continues*.

The next statement is the call-to-action. It is written as a command to create urgency and authority. A command takes decision out of the equation. We see this type of call to action in our daily lives. Infomercials demand that we *call now* and webpages urge us to *click here*.

After the logo is the tag line *"Life. Pass it on."* The designers use the full stops of the periods to create emphasis and a sense of finality. We have finally reached the end.

OPOs are intentional with the language they use when speaking about donation. As an organ and tissue donation coordinator, we were taught to avoid certain words and phrases, and to replace them with softer substitutes. For instance, tissues like corneas, skin, and bone are rarely referred to as tissues or grafts. Instead, they are referred to as *gifts*.

Culturally, we avoid talking about death. We, as humans, fear our mortality, and talking about organ donation reminds us that we *will* die one day. LiveOnNY acknowledges our fear of mortality and spiritual ideas surrounding death to create an effective rhetorical situation. The artifact posits organ donation as a sort of afterlife. Religion is powerful "because [it] provide[s] cosmic significance and directly addresses the fear of death by claiming that death is not the end of existence" (Jonas and Fischer 565).

Because of our fear of death, we've created euphemisms to avoid it. LiveOnNY cleverly plays on the euphemism *passing on.* The turn of phrase is used to describe someone dying, but in this context, "*pass it on"* refers to providing life.

Organ donation is a tough conversation, and researchers within psychology and the public health domain are exploring the best ways to broach it. A study conducted in 2017 found that participants were more likely to choose organ donation for themselves and their loved ones when presented with the stories of recipients who provided personal details about themselves (Harel et al.). The same study also found the opposite when presented with stories about a donor; they were

less likely to choose donation because the story of the donor made them confront their mortality (Harel et al.). If OPOs are to effectively persuade people to organ donation, then they need to be aware of the types of messaging that their audience is most receptive to. “Every successful document designer invests time to analyze users and their situation, needs, and desires” (Kimball and Hawkins 11). It is essential that OPOs know their audiences, and tailor their messaging when targeting specific communities. OPOs should consider how people’s identities and their communities influence how they interact with the world and interpret information. For instance, as previously mentioned, the health care system has caused harm to the black community, and because of that, they’re less likely to choose donation despite being disproportionately affected by things like kidney failure. (Siminoff et al. 995). If OPOs wanted to reach this population, then they would need to consider the community’s historical treatment in the United States.

As a whole, LiveOnNY’s flyer is rhetorically interesting. This particular artifact is an enthymeme — a rhetorical device that “works because the [receiver] supplies the ‘missing pieces,’” allowing them to actively participate in the argument presented (Fredal 24). The assumptions the receiver supplies to the argument rely heavily on their cultural identities and lived experiences. A person’s interpretation of a rhetorical artifact is just as important as its intended meaning.

Throughout history, rhetoric has been viewed negatively. Plato thought rhetoric was “not an artful pursuit at all, but belong[ed] to a soul that’s good at guessing, brave, and clever by nature at dealing with people” (Plato 47) He believed that early rhetors and sophists taught manipulation to gain power (Conley 9). Despite Plato’s disdain for the discipline of rhetoric, Plato often engaged in it by attempting to peel back the layers to discredit it. Attempting to tear down rhetoric and those who taught it demonstrates how deconstruction is at the heart of rhetoric. Disassembling something

allows you to figure out how it works. If you understand how a rhetorical artifact works, you're able to think critically about the creator's intentions and whether you want to be persuaded. You become a more effective communicator if you understand the purpose of a rhetorical artifact and how an intended audience may interpret it. "[An artifact] is useless if the purpose is unclear" (Ball et al. 39).

The purpose of rhetoric is to create artifacts that "effectively persuade an audience toward change" (Ball et al. 35). Rhetoric is King's *I Have a Dream* speech. It's LiveOnNY's *Life After Death* flyer, and it's this paper that's attempted to persuade you that the *Life After Death* flyer is rhetorically effective.

For rhetoric to work most effectively, we need to consider our cultural identities, our location in space and time, and our lived experiences. Who we are and where we're from inform our interpretations. For instance, the propaganda that was prevalent shortly after the attack on 9/11 was created for the time and would not have the same meaning to someone in the 1980s.

If the purpose of rhetoric is to persuade us to change, but in order to persuade we must understand, then rhetoric requires understanding. Collectively, rhetoric requires us to understand how our parts—our experiences, languages, communities, and cultures—intersect to create identity. Rhetoric stiches a tapestry of relationships among those who create, those who interpret, and their "cultures, societies, and environments" (Kimball and Hawkins 3). It helps us understand those who are different than us so that we may "communicate in more globally aware…ethical, and accessible ways, making our society a better place" (Ball et al. 6-7). But conversely, Plato thought rhetoric was a tool of manipulation. When one group understands more about another group, it creates a power imbalance between the two. Those with power are more easily able to manipulate and control those who have less.

Negative connotations aside, rhetoric creates relationships and persuades us to be a force of good in the world. It calls us to action: *stop smoking, be an organ donor, be the change you want to see in the world.*

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