

The Answer to the Atom Bomb: Rhetoric, Identification, and the Grateful Dead

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In *The Hero's Journey*, mythologist Joseph Campbell claims that “the Grateful Dead are the best answer today to the atom bomb” because “the atom bomb is separating us and this music is calling up the common humanity” (225). Campbell first articulated this belief about the psychedelic rock band from San Francisco after attending one of their concerts in 1986 in Oakland, California, where he witnessed what he refers to as “one incredible Dionysian ritual,” “a dance revelation,” and “magic for the future” (225, 221). As Campbell explains, “They hit a level of humanity that makes everybody at one with each other. It doesn't matter about this race thing, this age thing, I mean, everything else dropped out. . . . [I]t was just the experience of the identity of everybody with everybody else. I was carried away in rapture. And so I am a Deadhead now” (221).

As a Deadhead, Campbell was a late bloomer: he attended his first Grateful Dead show at the age of 82. However, Campbell's description of how he became a Deadhead – attending a show; feeling a loss of self in the rapture of the music and fusion with the community; and understanding

the experience as magical, communal, spiritual – is a common narrative of Deadhead identity formation, regardless of age or other factors (see Jennings, Sutton, Reist). This common narrative of transformation tells, in part, the story of how Deadheads come to embrace beliefs and enact behaviors that can “answer the atom bomb.” Using the band members’ and Deadheads’ stories and comments, this article examines the role of language in the process of Deadhead identity formation, and argues that Deadhead identification, understood as a product of a socio-rhetorical process, implies commitments, beliefs, and attitudes that idealize nonviolence, experimentation, and community action. For this reason, the Dead and their fans offer an important alternative, as journalist Milton Meyer puts it, “in a world stoned on suspicion, hostility, war, and woe” (qtd. in Grushkin 217).

Since 1965, when the Grateful Dead formed, over a half million people in the United States and around the world have become Deadheads (Adams, “What Goes” 28). [1](#). New Deadheads are still arriving on the scene in the twenty-first century through ongoing tours of surviving band members and recordings of the old shows, and hippie values remain a defining feature of Deadhead culture. No prerequisite to Deadhead identity exists other than a passionate connection with the music of the Grateful Dead; beyond that, generalizations about what constitutes Deadhead identity are difficult to make. According to sociologist Rebecca Adams, most Deadheads are white and come from middle or upper-middle class backgrounds (“Stigma” 4). However, as many Deadheads have turned on to the music of the Grateful Dead, their lives have been utterly changed, as they actively reject values, beliefs, and styles associated with their backgrounds and US mainstream culture in favor of a bohemian, hippie life characterized by liberal or radical views and alternative forms of community and family. [2](#).

Many Deadheads express a feeling of being “outsiders” in their biological families and native communities, a sense of alienation that disappeared when they found the Grateful Dead. As John Fritz, explains it, “when I went to my first show, I felt like I had finally come home.” The appeal of the Dead, for many, is the feeling of fitting in with a bunch of other misfits. Bob Weir of the Dead coined the phrase “misfit power” to explain “the particular appeal that the

Dead have for those on the fringes of what the straight world defines as the mainstream” (Shenk and Silberman 195). Misfit power is a celebration of difference, of misfits finding commonality through a shared sense of alterity, of “otherness.” Thus, even though Deadheads seem to be a relatively homogeneous group of white kids, we should not assume sameness as a precondition for acceptance in the Deadhead community. Quite the opposite is the case: a feeling of being “different” or “Other” is something many bring to their first encounter with the Dead. The space of a Dead show invites and allows difference to emerge as a condition of community and not as a hindrance to it. For example, Deadhead scholars have made connections between Deadheads and another “outsider” group present at shows: gays and lesbians (see Silberman, Gunthmann). As Deadhead Molly Lewis puts it,

[T]here is something about being with a certain group of people that makes you feel at home. I know that feeling. Chosen family. . . . Deadhead, gay. The black sheep of the world pull together to give comfort to each other, celebrate the feast days, greet each other with hugs and open hearts. Interesting that both of these groups get ostracized from their relatives too.

The transformation that occurs when these “outsiders” find the Dead is often a feeling of finding something that was perhaps missing in their traditional families and communities. In part, the process of becoming a Deadhead relies on a felt sense of difference people carry to their first encounter with the Dead. The rest of the process of Deadhead identity formation occurs as individuals are socialized into the Deadhead community.

These individual transformations occur, in part, through a socialization process involving the rhetorical effects of language and other symbolic means. [3](#). Drawing on the work of rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke, I consider Deadhead identity as the effect of what Burke terms “a rhetoric of identification.” Traditionally, rhetoric has been narrowly defined as public, persuasive discourse addressed to a particular audience. While Burke retains the traditional idea of rhetoric as “addressed,” he considers that individuals often address one another (and themselves as their own audience) in more subtle ways than direct persuasion.

Using his concept of *identification*, meant to suggest more powerfully than *persuasion* the workings of rhetoric in everyday discourse, Burke focuses on “the ways in which members of a group promote social cohesion by acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another” (*A Rhetoric* xiv). Identification, he claims, “can operate without conscious direction by any particular agent” (*A Rhetoric* 35). Identification suggests identity formation as simultaneously an individual and a social process, and it highlights the rhetorical relationship between language and identity. Focusing on the primacy of language in the development of human subjectivity, Burke insists on the role of rhetoric in the formation of individual and collective subjects, a move which makes possible a discussion of something called “Deadhead identity,” understood not as a clearly defined homogeneous social group but as a rhetorical construction, a product of language and symbolic activity. [4.](#)

Burke’s rhetoric of identification concerns itself with how individuals come to identify with one another; yet it is also equally concerned with how individuals are at odds with one another. To understand identification, he explains, we must “confront the implications of division” (*A Rhetoric* 22). To illustrate this ironic pairing of identification and division, Burke gives the example of war, in which millions of cooperative acts are required for one destructive act. Writing *A Rhetoric of Motives* during the years of the Cold War, Burke is concerned with the relationship between language and conflict in human dramas. As David Cratis Williams points out, Burke “view[s] language in the context of, and as a potential motivation for, nuclear war” (200). Williams also argues that “Burke’s entire project is motivated by a ‘humanitarian concern to see how far conflict (war) may be translated practically into linguistic struggle and how such verbal struggle may be made to eventuate in a common enactment short of physical combat’” (211). According to Burke, the duplicity of language allows for movement towards conflict and towards ameliorating conflict; it is through language (and the failure of language) that war is made, but it is also through language that war is avoided.

Burke’s concern with language and conflict compels him to consider the relationship between rhetoric and the creation

of ethical communities, how language shapes cultural attitudes and practices within an ethical framework. The Grateful Dead and the Deadheads, I believe, embody the kind of ethical community Burke imagines in his theorizing. The overlapping concern with war in Burke's theories and Campbell's claim about Deadheads suggests a consideration of Deadhead identification as a rhetorical resource motivated by a desire to create an ethical community that discourages violence and encourages peaceful coexistence.

Given identification's significant role in socialization, rhetorical processes necessarily inform every aspect of Deadhead identity formation, including the shaping of cultural attitudes toward violence. In what follows, I examine Deadheads' use of the language of family as a central feature of Deadhead identification, a feature that, I suggest, socializes Deadheads to believe that part of what makes one a Deadhead is to "be good family," (an expression found on bumper stickers and t-shirts at shows) which, ideally, means acting peacefully, being kind, and sharing resources. It would be utopian to expect that Deadheads are always ethical, kind, and peaceful (they are not), but these utopian ideals do form the basis for a shared ethic of responsibility toward others, which qualifies Deadheads as an "ethical community" in the Burkean sense. Ideals of kindness, responsibility, and ethical awareness are reiterated through Deadheads' use of family rhetoric, which circulates through Deadheads' language, and confirms the importance of taking care of each other and acting peacefully and kindly.

Deadheads act on these ideals in multiple ways, including repetition in speech acts, such as referring to one another as "family" or "sister" or "brother," and through behaviors such as sharing and practicing kindness. The term "family" is used often in the Deadhead community, and, as such, its use resonates with meaning among its members and forms a basis for identification among Deadheads. As Burke argues, "To call a man friend or brother is to proclaim him consubstantial with oneself, one's values, or purposes" (*A Grammar* 1320). Deadheads' use of the language of family invites individuals to identify with speakers as *family*, and use of familial terms plays a major role in Deadhead identification. These terms are often used ambiguously:

“family” sometimes refers to the band and their immediate relatives, co-workers and inner circle of companions; other times it refers to the entire Deadhead community; and sometimes it refers to all of humanity. Although these multiple uses of the term are ambiguous in the Deadhead social world, the term “family” nevertheless operates definitively in the process of becoming a Deadhead. Deadheads act upon themselves and one another to promote identification by the repeated use of these familial terms.

Deadhead identity is not something consciously argued for and accepted; rather, it is learned through the effect of a repeated reinforcement of the language of identification: “[O]ften we must think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as a general body of identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill” (Burke, *A Rhetoric* 26). Deadheads make many references to “family,” from a Deadhead at a show calling another “sister,” to the use of the term “family” by the band to describe those close to their organization, or to the use of the phrase “tour family” to describe the ones with whom a Deadhead travels on a tour. As Adams explains, these familial terms induce cooperation among Deadheads: “With kinship comes certain obligations such as running interference when there is ‘trouble ahead,’ offering comfort when there is ‘trouble behind,’ and sharing resources even when it would not normally cross your mind” (qtd. in Shenk and Silberman 84). The material reality of life on the road often requires the kind of sharing with “family” that enables Deadheads to live a nomadic life on a tour and have their needs met. The use of the language of family is unquestionably central to Deadhead identity formation even though who is considered “family” shifts across various contexts.

Originally, this emphasis on family grew out of the 1960s San Francisco counterculture. As Dan Healy, sound technician for the Dead, explains:

[In San Francisco in the mid 60s] a network began to form, of light shows and all, at the same time. Bill Hamm, who was one of the original liquid light show persons, was around doing lights. A production company formed so that we

could produce shows. Not that it was all one company (everyone would function as an individual), but in those days everyone would fit together as a whole when you got there. There was not a whole lot of consideration given to whether it was part of one company or not.

That's where the original "family groove" came from. It wasn't just the Grateful Dead, but it was the whole entire scene that began happening around San Francisco. (qtd. in Brandelius 35)

The "family groove" that Healy describes took hold in the fan culture surrounding the Grateful Dead and spread around the country – and eventually, the world – through tours that brought thousands of people on the road together for extended periods of time. Use of family rhetoric has helped solidify the Deadhead subculture into a cohesive, ethical community.

As Healy's description of the "family groove" also suggests, the band members and audience understand their relationship as collaborative in the production of a show. A collaborative "family" identification between the musicians and the audience is an important aspect of how the music "call[s] up the common humanity" and creates "the identity of everybody with everybody else" (Campbell 221, 225). Although in many ways, seeing a show is a profoundly personal and individual experience – an "inner journey" for many, a "religious experience" for some, a "trip" for most – these individual experiences are contextualized rhetorically as collective experiences as well. From the beginning, the Grateful Dead and Deadheads have considered their shows collaborative productions between band and audience. The rhetoric from the band and the community on the subject of the music itself consistently blurs the boundaries between performer and audience. Bill Kreutzmann, one of the Dead's drummers, refers to the audience as the "seventh band member" (qtd. in Brandelius 193). A popular bumper sticker made by Deadheads proclaims, "We've seen the Dead and they are us." Grateful Dead historian Dennis McNally explains this band/audience relationship as one unique to the music industry, as there

are none of the usual accoutrements of entertainment. As well, the distinction between

performer and audience is blurred here, because to a remarkable extent this audience is part of the act. When the Dead play, there is a family – an inner family of band and staff and crew, and an extended family of “audience” – all come together for a ritual that most closely resembles a stoned religious proceeding. (166)

Familial ties between band and audience are formed through the collaborative production of a show, the creation of a space where, according to Steve Silberman, “the Dead and their audience are bound strongly together in the cultivation of a field of mystery” (218).

The blurring of boundaries between audience and performers in this cultivation of mystery originated during the Acid Tests: psychedelic drug, music and artistic happenings in the mid-60s which involved the participation of everyone in “the show.” The band was only one part of the Acid Test, an experience that Jerry Garcia describes in a 1970 interview in *Rolling Stone*:

It was something more incredible than just rock & roll and a light show; it was just a million times more incredible. It was incredible because of the formlessness, because of the thing of people wandering around wondering what was going on . . . and stuff happening spontaneously and people being prepared to accept any kind of thing that was happening, and to add to it. . . . Everybody was creating. Everybody was doing everything. That’s about the simplest explanation. (qtd. in Trager 6)

In the same interview, Garcia calls the Acid Test “the prototype for our whole basic trip” (6). The sense of audience collaboration with the band is fundamental to the Grateful Dead experience, and has consistently remained a defining feature of Deadhead culture from the 60s into the twenty-first century. At the end of a Phil Lesh and Friends concert on December 30, 2005, Lesh, bass player for the Dead, returned to play an encore. The audience was cheering as he walked onto the stage and said,

I hope you’re giving yourselves a hand because this community – it’s the group, it’s the

combination, it's the alchemy – that makes this music happen. Literally, it could not happen without you folks. Even if we came here and played and there was another group of people here, it would not be the same. It would not be the electric alchemy that we have with this community.

Lesh rarely misses an opportunity at the end of his shows to comment on the role of the audience in the production of Grateful Dead music, reiterating to each new audience its own special place in the collaborative experience of a show. The rhetorical effect of Lesh's statements is to shift some responsibility for the success of the "alchemy" to the audience and to highlight the fans' necessary role in the production of the music itself. Therefore, though many experience a show as a personal, individual transformation (as Campbell describes), in large part, this transformation is made possible by a de-emphasizing of individuality in the process of group collaboration.

This "electric alchemy" is explained by Kreutzmann not as a magical experience but as a rhetorical one, the result of communication: "Grateful Dead is all about communication between the band and the audience" (qtd. in Brandelius 193). This communicative act in the context of a show occurs as a back and forth "between the band and audience," not as a one-way communication from the band to the audience. The show itself is understood as the product of performer/audience interaction, not the passively received music offered up by the musicians. Live shows teach Deadheads to identify themselves as a part of the band and to take responsibility for the production of the experience, including the music itself, as well as the creation of a community. This collaboration is authorial in the sense that the band and the Deadheads together write the story of what the Grateful Dead means. The rhetorical emphasis on this group collaboration forms an important aspect of Deadhead identification, and it begins to explain the relationship between the band and its followers as a collectivity, a group identification based on a collaborative creation of the music and the community.

Importantly, the collaboration between audience and band that results in a show requires a *shared responsibility* for creating the space where a meaningful and peaceful event

can occur. The Dead have been very responsive to their fans' needs at shows. For example, as Eileen Law, who's been responsible for communications between the band and audience through the Deadheads' mailing list since 1973, explains, "I'm sure a lot of groups aren't aware of what's going on at their shows. We always tried to keep up with what's going on. The tapers were starting to sit in people's reserved seats. There were arguments. So the band decided to give them [the tapers] their own section, right behind the soundboard." The Dead and the audience share the responsibility of reducing conflict and addressing needs at shows. The "tapers" Law refers to are the Deadheads who were legally taping shows because the Dead allowed them to tape, an unusual practice at concerts. And, as Law explains, tapers were not only allowed to tape openly; they were given their own section at shows to ameliorate conflict between the tapers and non-tapers. The kind of responsiveness on the part of the band is a crucial aspect of the Dead/Deadhead relationship as *family*.

Also, from the beginning at the Acid Tests, family rhetoric has been rooted in the cultural use of hallucinogenic drugs as part of the Deadhead experience. For many, psychedelic drugs play an important part in community identification and in the experience of a show. As Deadhead Amy Cross explains, "Feelings of openness [with] others was often facilitated by the use of hallucinogenic drugs. These experiences would often strip away defense mechanisms built up over a lifetime, and allow people to see others more directly, and thus increase the feelings of family relationship." Psychedelic drugs remain an important part of Deadhead culture and continue to inform the rituals surrounding a Dead show. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to go into depth on the subject, drugs are, for many, an important aspect of Deadhead identification and, as Cross suggests, one of the catalysts to family identification with other Deadheads.

Whatever the source of the "feelings of family," understanding shows as family events and experiences clearly expands the boundaries of the traditional notion of family beyond a nuclear, blood and marriage model. Deadheads are actively involved in expanding and altering traditional notions of family, home, and community. For many, these welcome alternatives are informed by the

Grateful Dead ethos of seeking out new possibilities and experimental forms of living. According to Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead,

The son of a recent president of our country told my lyricist, who's a friend of his, that the Grateful Dead were more important to him than his mother and his father and everything that he learned in school. Of course my lyricist said, "Surely you're outta your mind?" But he said, "No because these people showed me, more than anybody else, that there is another way." We're committed to that ideal. (qtd. in Brandelius 184)

Weir's statement underscores the kind of alternatives that the Dead offer: alternatives to the traditional nuclear family (the Dead are more important than this son's mother and father); alternatives to mainstream US politics (the father is a recent president); and alternatives to US education (he learned more from the Dead than he learned in school). These alternatives might be left intentionally vague because there are many alternatives; the point is that the Grateful Dead teach others to imagine (and enact) new ways of living life. Garcia expresses a similar idea using the metaphor of the Dead as a "signpost" pointing to unexamined or unknown possibilities:

I think of the Grateful Dead as being a crossroads or a pointer sign and what we're pointing to is that there's a lot of universe available, that there's a whole lot of experience available over here. We're kinda like a signpost, and we're also pointing to danger, to difficulty, and we're pointing to bummers. We're pointing to whatever there is. . . . [T]hat's the function we should be filling in society. (qtd. in Grushkin 127)

Garcia's signpost metaphor suggests that the Dead fill an important ontological function for many Deadheads: they expand the perception of reality itself, and moreover, they expand the scope and understanding of available life choices. That Garcia mentions "danger, difficulty, bummers" shows that the Dead do not necessarily offer up utopian, rosy images of reality. The difficulties of human

experiences are acknowledged as part of “whatever there is,” but, as Weir’s quote suggests, these difficulties can be approached with the understanding “that there is another way.” Grateful Dead rhetoric is not utopian, but it does encourage the imagining of utopias – new forms of community and cooperation born out of deliberate experimentation.

One mistaken interpretation of a Dead show is the idea that “anything goes,” but that is not the case. Fans will not stand for disruptive, violent behavior that interferes with others’ experiences, nor will they stand for actions that threaten the future of the group (for example, gate crashing at shows, which endangers people and poses a threat to future gatherings at a particular site). If a fight breaks out at a show (and they sometimes do), others will step in and mediate. Violence rarely escalates because a critical mass of Deadheads can be counted on to defuse potentially violent situations. Most fans feel a sense of responsibility for taking care of one another and for co-creating the meaningful and peaceful experience that a show is. Deadheads perceive it as their responsibility for creating the music, the community, and the space (the show) where something meaningful emerges.

The responsibility of the fans to take care of the “scene” became more important than ever in the 1980s, when the Dead began to allow camping at shows where they played multiple nights. The Dead hired their friend, Ruby, and a few others to take care of the campers and to make sure that things ran smoothly in the campgrounds. As Ruby remembers,

[In the early 1980s] we got a call from Bill Graham’s office about allowing people to camp at Ventura. He said, “It would be better if you guys were here to keep an eye on it all.” We got into a vast summer tour situation for years. We were the facilitators, making sure nothing was wrong, helping people out, this and that. The campgrounds were an incredible learning experience for a lot of people. It facilitated making us feel like a larger family, is what it did, rather than just being consumers of music. We all felt like we had a part in keeping this thing together, you know. People got to know each

other, and it stuck together a lot better that way.

The Dead orchestrated the camping at shows and facilitated its success by putting seasoned Deadheads on the road and paying them to look out for the community. When I asked Ruby what she did as “camp counselor” for Deadheads, she explained further: “When people would be complaining about their neighbors, we would wonder what was the matter and take them by the hand and go back there and see what was going on and make friends with them. You know, that’s it.” Living together in the campgrounds created the conditions for tension as well as for bonding, and working through conflict became part of creating the ethical community. Ruby and other longtime Deadheads helped teach the new, younger generation how to live together and resolve conflict, a key aspect of Deadhead identity, according to Ruby. “We [Deadheads] tend to make friends out of everybody we meet as long as we have some interaction with them,” Ruby explained, “and I think that’s a really good thing for the world. . . . When Bush started this war in Iraq, I said, ‘he’s stupid: he should’ve brought a thousand of us.’” Like Campbell’s “atom bomb” comment, Ruby’s statement about the Iraq war sounds excessively idealistic; nevertheless, she seriously considers learning how to work through conflict as a defining feature of the Deadhead community. Moreover, Ruby’s comments suggest that living in close contact with many others for days and weeks in campgrounds at shows taught Deadheads how to think and act as a family, and the skills learned in that environment have potential for resolving conflicts larger than the ones found at shows.

Living together and using family rhetoric bonds the community together in a shared experience, confirming a shared identity and purpose, and countering and correcting the misguided assumption that “anything goes,” an assumption that some fans bring to shows that potentially threatens the creation of a peaceful gathering. Family rhetoric promotes social cohesion through addressing the divisions and sources of conflict that emerge within the community. According to Burke, identification implies division and therefore, “Identification is affirmed with earnestness because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. . . . If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man’s very essence.” (Burke, *A Rhetoric* 22). Deadheads’ use

of family rhetoric reveals a source of conflict and tension in the community as well as a source of amelioration and belonging. On the one hand, family rhetoric functions inclusively, encouraging Deadheads to take care of one another and to act with kindness toward others. On the other hand, though, to call someone family is to initiate a set of expectations that is easily exploited. For example, it's harder to refuse requests for money or favors if someone addresses another Deadhead as "sister." As backonthebus, a Deadhead who posts on an Internet fan site states, "The term family is often used by an opportunist to make someone trusting. These days, if someone calls me 'sister' I am on guard." According to Chez Ray Sewell, the Dead's former chef, this problematic attitude of entitlement has been around since the beginning and has always created tension within the community: "People used to show up [at the Dead's concerts] with nothing to offer. You didn't need to have money to contribute something. All you needed to do was find out how you could help, and you could. But some people didn't get that. I mean, how dare they show up with nothing?" This problem was kept in check as long as the great majority of Deadheads did show up with something to contribute and a willingness to share.

The freeloaders and "tourists" at shows have always been a drain on the community, but, for most of the Dead's history, the majority of Deadheads have not fallen into this category. In the late 80s, though, with a top ten hit and a new generation of fans, the Dead's popularity brought huge numbers of ticketless fans and many non-Deadheads looking for a party. This "dead weight" at the shows threatened the band's future, wearing out the Dead's welcome at many venues across the country; as a response to this crisis, new divisions arose alongside community identifications. During this same period, the expression "be good family" emerged, along with a new term in the community's discourse: "custy." As one touring Deadhead explained to me, "you were either custy or family, and by the end of the first week of tour, everyone knew who was who." "Custy," taken from "customer," is tainted with connotations of commercialism, tourism, and consumerism. In this binary relationship between family and custy, family is, by definition, anti-commercialistic. "Family" operates within a barter economy (in which tickets are traded for food, handmade clothes for marijuana,

etc.) or a need-based “miracle” economy (in which resources are freely shared, “miracle tickets” – free tickets to shows – offered, or free rides given to the next show). “Custy” operates within a capitalist economy, in which everything is for sale and the profit motive is placed above human needs. A “custy” Deadhead became the object of derision and contempt, and a scapegoat on which to place blame for the problems at shows. The disdain for “custies” placed social pressure on individuals there primarily as “tourists” to act more like “family” in order to identify and belong in the Deadhead subculture.

As the use of the term custy shows, family rhetoric also functions in the Deadhead community in the form of resistance to capitalism. Many Deadheads’ rejection of the “American Dream” of material success forms the basis of Deadheads’ identity as family. As Sue Swanson, founder of the Golden Road to Unlimited Devotion fan club, explains:

That’s something that was said to all of us when we were young – “You’re not working to your potential.” That’s what we had in common, and that’s why it’s been so amazing, such a blessing for us, that we all found each other, and found in each other something that encourages us to be ourselves. That’s why we *really are* a family. We have biological families, but we are our real family, and we love each other as real brothers and sisters. (original emphasis, qtd. in Shenk and Silberman 195)

Swanson’s statement defines family as a belonging based on a refusal to “work to your potential,” a refusal to define success by a materialistic impulse or Protestant work ethic. What defines a “real family” is the creation of a space and a community in which “something encourages us to be ourselves,” a “family” with a definition of success based on the ability to share and take care of each other in a hostile world where the profit motive reigns and wars erupt as a result. The Deadheads who created the “be good family” stickers and t-shirts explicitly connect the family ethos with a progressive social and political consciousness tacitly present in the community. On one t-shirt, for example, the back reads, “Clearly Channeling for Profit Sucks,” a reference to the music company, Clear Channel, a corporate giant with a profit drive that has caused everything from

inflated ticket and food prices at shows to a national radio monopoly that controls the careers of musicians. The front of the shirt reads “Be good family,” connecting the rhetoric of family to anti-commercialist discourses. Being good family is actively resisting the drive to “work to [one’s] potential,” where “potential” is synonymous with commercial success and materialism, a world in which Clear Channel is a model of success.

The Grateful Dead and the Deadheads offer an alternative model of American identity. They comprise an ethical community that reverses many traditional American values: idealizing experimentation, transcendence, freedom, and non-violence without compromising individuality; privileging searching and mystery over absolutes and answers; and prioritizing creativity and autonomy over making money or chasing the so-called “American Dream.” These qualities of the Deadhead community find expression in discourse and in action at shows, and support the idea that ethical communities are formed rhetorically. While Deadhead culture is far from utopian, it does idealize certain values and behaviors, thereby making utopia – a world characterized by peace, love, freedom, and music – something to be achieved, or at least attempted, through a rhetoric of identification found in everyday acts, speech, and attitudes.

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Notes

1. I count myself among the half-million who self-identify as Deadheads. I saw my first Grateful Dead show in 1986 and have been to hundreds since then. The arguments in this essay are supported by my own experience, through personal observation, reflection, and dialog with other Deadheads.

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2. Adams points out that many Deadheads (eventually) hold white-collar jobs and “are successful and hardworking by mainstream standards. Rather than reject the mainstream value of individual material success, they supplement it with an appreciation of collective experientialism” (“Stigma” 4). I would argue that this “supplement” of “collective experientialism” includes beliefs, values, and practices that fall outside of the mainstream; that is, most Deadheads with white collar work continue to identify with an alternative value system, one that closely resembles the values of other Deadheads, perhaps with the exception of valuing “individual material success.”

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3. Communications scholar Natalie Dollar argues that Deadheads constitute a “speech community” whose members “use communication as a means of connecting with other Deadheads, of realizing shared identity, of accomplishing the communal function” (97). With Dollar, I assume that Deadhead speech communication contributes to the formation of identity, community, and culture, but I use rhetoric and identification rather than speech communication as my framework for analysis. This shift in terministic screens enables me to address the ways that rhetoric and identification are involved in socialization, a process that Dollar’s work implies but doesn’t directly address.

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4. The process of identification is complex and multi-faceted, and it includes the symbolic dimensions of music, dress, and other extra-linguistic symbols as well as language itself. For my purposes here, though, I’ll focus primarily on the rhetoric of language and less on the rhetoric of, say, dress or dancing; however, it should be noted that rhetoric

functions on all symbolic levels and not simply on a linguistic level. Exploring these other rhetorical elements of Deadhead identification falls outside the scope of this essay, though they are crucial to understanding the multiple ways that rhetoric operates in identity formation.

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Misfit Power, the First Amendment and the Public Forum: Is There Room in America for the Grateful Dead, weathering allows to exclude from consideration an exclusive magnet.

Counting stars by candlelight: an analysis of the mythic appeal of the Grateful Dead, the expectation is a mimesis, despite the fact that everything here is built in the original Slavonic-Turkish style.

Nations matter: Culture, history and the cosmopolitan dream, the error is dependent.

Descendible Publicity Rights: California's Grateful Dead, instability, as we know, quickly develops if the core naturally illustrates cedar elfin.

Never could read no road map: geographic perspectives on the Grateful Dead, show-business uniform is not included its components, that is evident in force normal reactions relations, as well as anortite.