

**MEDIA MONSTERS: MILITARISM, VIOLENCE,
AND CRUELTY IN CHILDREN'S CULTURE**

By Heidi Tilney Kramer

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**For Alex and the children everywhere:
May we leave your world in a better state than when we
arrived.**

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PREFACE:

“10 percent of any population is cruel, no matter what, and 10 percent is merciful, no matter what, and the remaining 80 percent can be moved in either direction.”

- Susan Sontag

“We can never be gods, after all – but we can become something less than human with frightening ease.”

- N.K. Jemisin

“In a cruel land, you either learned to laugh at cruelty or spent your life weeping.”

- Robert Jordan

“More action! Less tears!”

- Thee Silver Mount Zion

I am a daughter. My father joined the Marines at age seventeen and caught the tail end of World War II. He lived in China for years and was involved in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. My father was a nurse, police officer, and drill sergeant who served in two branches of the military – the Marines and the Army. I was born at Fort McPherson in Georgia, where my dad ran the OB/GYN clinic, and I lived in Yokohama, Japan, for four years during his service. He retired after putting in twenty years of duty to our country. My mother read Winnie-the-Pooh stories to me and I was delighted with the blustery day adventures. I am also a mother. My son was born in 1996 and I began taking him to see movies when he was about three-years old. This was often a weekly – and sometimes daily – event. In 2001, I noticed a serious change in content: torture in G rated films.

His life began like the lives of many: Dressed in fuzzy onesies, his head cautiously cradled, he rested in the perfectly chosen crib lined with Beatrix Potter linens. Upon waking, he saw hand-painted images of Peter Rabbit and Jeremy Fisher on his wall. We gave him the finest clothes, the best of nutrition, tons of hugs. As a parent, I did all the things I thought imperative: Teaching him to be kind, making sure he knew the world was a nice place, reading *Goodnight Moon* and *I Love You as Much* on a daily basis. I began our collection of Disney movies early on, earnestly wanting to share with him my memories of Herbie, the anthropomorphic 1963 Volkswagen Beetle, from *The Love Bug*, and *Pollyanna*, the girl with the happy streak who convinces those around her to find reasons to be glad.

Even before noticing disturbing content in Pixar's *Toy Story*, we bought the direct-to-video *Brave Little Toaster* series. Despite the adorable voices, bright colors, and catchy songs, we sat with dropped jaws as the air conditioner character got so upset, he blew up, and we endured the horror trope action where horrid scenarios are faced by the anthropomorphized characters – little did I know this was only the beginning of swaying youth to appreciate ruthlessness. Violent, cruel, frightening, and militaristic images and messages now regularly appear in many films made especially for children and youth, including the following: A cow having a difficult calf delivery is abandoned by her veterinarian in *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs 2* (PG, 2013); an entire family is placed on a torture rack and 9/11 imagery of a plane bent on destruction is seen approaching a city in *The Incredibles* (PG, 2004); Buzz Lightyear is shown as brutal captor over his friends in the surveillance-laden dystopia and prison/concentration camp satire, *Toy Story 3* (G, 2010); gruesome horror action is presented as a house is taken over by the spirit of a woman teased literally to death in *Monster House*

(PG, 2006); women are depicted as psychotics in *Ratatouille* (G, 2007); there's a chilling amount of assorted weaponry in *Despicable Me* and *Despicable Me 2*, as well as subordination of non-English speaking workers (PG, 2010, 2013); and *Maleficent* (PG, 2014) basically shows a roofie date rape scene where she is drugged and her body viciously violated.

Thankfully, my return to college taught me how to be media literate; that is, I learned to deconstruct the messages raining down on us hourly and I taught this to my son. He is now better equipped than most – including me – to catch when the media tries to scare us and make us mean. This is the answer to what I consider the most pressing problem of our time: Learn the many ways in which our views are formed and teach what you learn to youth. We do not have to be helpless and allow our work as parents, educators, and responsible adults to be cast aside in favor of the latest video game or television show. I am not for censorship of any kind; I, too, love this media, but I do think there's a problem. Once we show our youngsters what is happening, the battle should ease; when the new generation sees how they are being manipulated by big media and its obsession with brutality, they themselves will take over the work that we are starting, and they will want to be a part of creating a more caring world. Whether real violence or representations of violence, there are well over a thousand studies which state that violence – even between cartoon characters – is harmful to children. Period.

Glorification of militarism has real-life implications. In addition to the countless on both sides injured and killed during wartime, there is another statistic: “Every day, 22 veterans take their own lives...As shocking as the number is, it may actually

be higher.”¹ And another: “[In 2012] there were 349 suicides among active duty personnel – almost one a day. That means that there are now more suicides among active duty soldiers than there are combat deaths.”² On duty one winter decades ago, my father accidentally killed a man he mistakenly thought was trying to steal food/weapons from a military storage facility in China, having aimed to injure from a great distance. He had yelled for him to stop twice in Chinese beforehand. He tried to find the family of the man to explain what happened, to apologize, and to take care of them the rest of his life but he was unable to accomplish that mission. This haunted him all of his days. The point is: War takes a toll. My book is ultimately dedicated to those who try to do the right thing under difficult circumstances and to the humanity in all of us, especially since there are fewer and fewer depictions of that humanity for children.

¹ Moni Basu. “Veteran suicides may be more than 22 a day.” CNN. Updated 12:08 PM EST Nov. 14, 2013. <http://www.cnn.com.html>.

² Melanie Haiken. “Suicide Rate Among Vets and Active Duty Military Jumps – Now 22 A Day.” *Forbes*. 2/05/2013. <http://www.forbes.com.html>.

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INTRODUCTION:

“The technique is wonderful. I didn’t even dream it would be so good. But I would never let my children come close to the thing.”

- Vladimir Zworykin: Comments of the developer of television, interviewed on his 92nd birthday, 31 Dec ’81.

Nick Bilton, interviewer: “So, your kids must love the iPad?”

Steve Jobs: “They haven’t used it...We limit how much technology our kids use at home.”

“My kids accuse me and my wife of being fascists and overly concerned about tech, and they say that none of their friends have the same rules...That’s because we have seen the dangers [his list includes harmful content, becoming addicted to devices, bullying from other kids] of technology firsthand. I’ve seen it in myself, I don’t want to see that happen to my kids.”

- Chris Anderson, former editor of “Wired” and now chief executive of 3D Robotics, a drone maker.³

Increased violence, militarism, and cruelty are occurring across media: in music videos; in songs on the radio; in educational settings, materials, and books for students and the general public; in children’s health and family realms; on television; on the Internet; in newspapers and magazines; in print and other advertising; in video games; at sports and other promotional events; at science centers and amusement parks; and in films for general through mature audiences. This barrage of messages thereby significantly affects the American population and those who receive these exports. I call this phenomenon the Circuit of Cruelty or the Mean Matrix because there is a cumulative effect on new generations as multiple

³ Nick Bilton. “Steve Jobs Was a Low-Tech Parent.” *The New York Times*. Sept. 10, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com.html>.

genres pummel them with messages couched in the coolness of a business empire's popular culture. While life seems incomplete without entertainment – and we truly love these songs, shows, and films – U.S. media is changing our collective perspective and personality for the worse at an alarming rate.

I contend that this is part of a collective effort: one-track representations of women in music videos; songs which speak of death and destruction; classroom activities teaching cruelty; television programming which promotes fear-based subject matter and unrealistic views of women and minorities; tightening control over Internet, newspaper, and magazine content which minimizes democracy; women made to look like they've just been raped and left for dead in ads; mean-spirited first-person shooter video games, one actually named "Left for Dead," complete with scary, clinging zombie hand on the cover; science centers showing human and animal bodies without skin which takes away the uniqueness of creatures; films for adults that include gore and dismemberment like *Blades of Glory* (PG-13, 2007), in which a shot of a head being chopped off is shown repeatedly in between otherwise great comedy, Michael Sera's skewering while very much alive in *This Is the End* (R, 2013), a flying finger in *Dinner for Schmucks* (PG-13, 2010), a finger chopped off in *Four Rooms* (R, 1995), the severed head and multiple finger chopping in *The Grand Hotel Budapest* (R, 2014), and decapitation of the giraffe and casual attitude of its new owner after the event in *The Hangover 3* (R, 2013); and, of course, G-rated children's films with torture, militarism, and cruelty.

My intent is not to give a balanced view of media – there are plenty of well-done, kind-hearted programs for children and others and there are positive messages even inside of problematic media. It's not that there aren't examples of this

in earlier media, it's that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find media without such content. My goal is to present the new, disturbing trends which are in vogue in American society. Though I cite specific examples throughout this book, please note that these examples are but a drop in an ocean of similar content. Whether you are a parent, a grandparent, or a person who knows a child exposed to other children, media, or society in general, it is hoped that once you become aware of this content, you will begin identifying it in multiple spheres and that you will share your findings with friends and family; it is also hoped that you will help to create a paradigm shift by expressing a wish for exemplary work for kids and others the world over; moreover, once you identify what is occurring in the world of youth, it is hoped that you will be more aware of the ways in which we and the world are being influenced daily.

When one realizes there are only five media companies – all predominantly conservative – responsible for most of the information we are fed, it seems undeniably intentional that they are complicit in promoting such content.⁴ The Big Five are AOL Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, Bertelsmann, and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp; the latter owns or is affiliated with twenty-three stations and “has a reputation for the network with the most violent shows on TV.”⁵ A substantial amount of programming is sexist, racist, classist, and bloodthirsty. Is this simply a coincidence? “This notion that media companies are just giving us what the public wants. No, they're giving us what the media companies want, they're giving us what the advertisers want, and they're packaging it in such a way as to

⁴ Ben H. Bagdikian. *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 27-54.

⁵ Bagdikian, 41.

make it sound like it's our fault and it's not.”⁶ Perhaps media conglomerates are complicit in the promotion of cruelty. Whether or not this is actually the case, the effect is the same: New generations are being subjected to excessively violent content.

As the line between entertainment and violence/militarism blurs, the most evident and devastating effects are seen in the world of children. In 2011 – just two days after the disturbing event – Disney attempted to trademark “SEAL Team 6,” the title of the elite military force which killed Osama bin Laden in order to use it for “clothing, footwear and headwear,” “entertainment and education services,” and “toys, games and playthings.”⁷ Christmas stockings and snow globes are included on the list. Thankfully, protest from the public and the Navy stopped their attempt.⁸ Then in 2013, they tried to trademark Mexico's sacred celebration honoring those who have died, Day of the Dead, in conjunction with a new Pixar film, but online protests stopped that as well.⁹ A friend tells me she's having dreams with graphic killings after watching too many CSI shows on TV; another confides she cut herself in elementary school after seeing a character on “Degrassi High” do it. In 1997, a video game playing Kentucky 14-year old who'd never fired a handgun in real life fired eight shots and hit

⁶ Jennifer Siebel Newsom. *Miss Representation*. DVD. Perf. Jean Kilbourne, Katie Couric, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Geena Davis, Malkia Cyril (San Francisco: Girls' Club Entertainment, 2011).

⁷ “Disney Trademarks ‘Seal Team 6,’ Name of Unit That Killed Bin Laden.” *The Huffington Post*. 7/14/11. <http://www.huffpost.com.html>.

⁸ “Disney withdraws Seal Team 6 trademark application.” *The Guardian*. Thursday, 26 May 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com.html>.

⁹ Ben Child. “Disney drops bid to trademark Day of the Dead.” *The Guardian*. Wednesday, 8 May 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com.html>.

eight people at his school.¹⁰ School shootings have prompted lawsuits from victims' families who are suing gun manufacturers, school and other public officials, parents of the shooters, and even the media companies "that produce violent video games, movies, and websites" for inducing violence.¹¹ Teens call radio request lines and tap their feet to lyrics from *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1* song, "The Hanging Tree," which include: "Are you, are you coming to the tree? They strung up a man they say who murdered three....Wear a necklace of rope, side by side with me."¹² Meanwhile, a child is physically hurt at a "Hunger Games" camp at Country Day School in Largo, Florida.¹³ Kids play "Call of Duty," the first-person shooter game, on X-box Live with strangers and bond through virtual, but realistic melees. An eight-year old Louisiana boy shoots and kills his 90-year old relative after playing Play Station III's "Grand Theft Auto IV."¹⁴ Two Wisconsin twelve-year old girls try to murder their friend to prove themselves worthy to Slender Man, an imaginary evil Internet character who stalks children.¹⁵ A six-year old girl

¹⁰ Dave Grossman. "Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence." *Killology*.
<http://www.killology.com.html>.

¹¹ "The Killer at Thurston High: A summary of the civil lawsuits being filed in school shootings, as of January 2000." *Frontline*. PBS.
<http://www.pbs.org.html>.

¹² <http://www.metrolyrics.com.html>.

¹³ Lisa Gartner. "At 'Hunger Games' camp, children want to fight to the 'death.'" *Tampa Bay Times*. March 11, 2014.
<http://www.tampabay.com.html>.

¹⁴ Kiri Blakeley. "8-Year-Old Boy Watches Violent Video Game & Kills Elderly Relative." *The Stir*. August 24, 2013.
<http://www.thestir.cafemom.com.html>.

¹⁵ Abigail Jones. "The Girls Who Tried to Kill for Slender Man." *Newsweek*. August 13, 2014. <http://www.newsweek.com.html>.

throws a tantrum at her Georgia school and is handcuffed, arrested, and brought to the local police station.¹⁶ A five-year old wrestling champion brags to fellow athletes on his team that he hasn't eaten for a day in his quest to lose weight.¹⁷ And, on any given day, three-year olds watch repeatedly as a terrified Boo in G-rated *Monsters, Inc.* is strapped into the torture chair screaming "no," one of two words in the toddler's limited vocabulary. How did we get to this point in American society?

¹⁶ Judith Browne Dianis. "Interrupting the School-To-Prison Pipeline." *America's Wire: Maynard Media Center on Structural Inequality*. <http://www.americaswire.org.html>. Please also see Erik Eckholm's *New York Times* article from April 12, 2013: "With Police in Schools, More Children in Court." <http://www.nytimes.com.html>. In addition, *Noddy's* "Teach Your Child How to Survive Being Arrested at School." Jan. 30, 2012 at <http://www.dailykos.com.html>.

¹⁷ Mark Hyman. *Until It Hurts: America's Obsession With Youth Sports and How It Harms Our Kids* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 102.

I. HISTORY OF U.S. MEDIA:

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

- George Santayana, philosopher

“As everyone has observed, there is a mounting level of acceptable violence and sadism in mass culture: films, television, comics, computer games. Imagery that would have had an audience cringing and recoiling in disgust forty years ago is watched without so much as a blink by every teenager in the multiplex. Indeed, mayhem is entertaining rather than shocking to many people.”

- Susan Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others,” original article in the New York Times

“There must have been a moment, at the beginning, where we could have said – no. But somehow we missed it.”

- Tom Stoppard

In order to fully understand why these extreme media messages matter, we must first understand the link between militarism and nationalism. Militarism is defined as “an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals...[as well as] the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action.”¹⁸ Popular culture is spilling over with these militaristic ideals. Henry A. Giroux has identified that clothes, popular film, “Hummers,” video games, military recruiting, and even schools have become militarized zones of surveillance: “The not-so-hidden curriculum here is that kids cannot be trusted and that their rights are not worth protecting. At the same time, they

¹⁸ Catherine Lutz. “Making war at home in the United States: Militarization and the current crisis.” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 723.

are being educated to passively accept military sanctioned practices organized around maintaining control, surveillance, and unquestioned authority, all conditions central to a police state.”¹⁹ Coinciding with militarism is nationalism, and how the priming of national identification can encourage sentiments and actions which would not be tolerated during times of peace. Qiong Li and Marilyn B. Brewer explain how this is occurring during the “war on terror” and the difference between patriotism and nationalism:

Of particular concern is the question of whether identification with one’s country – in the form of national attachment, pride, and loyalty – is or is not necessarily associated with derogation and contempt of nations and cultures other than one’s own...On the downside, high levels of national identification (“hypernationalism”) have been associated with authoritarianism, intolerance, and warmongering. The differentiation between the positive and negative manifestations of national identification is represented in social psychology by drawing a distinction between ‘patriotism’ and ‘nationalism,’ with the former connoting pride and love for country and the latter referring to chauvinistic arrogance and desire for dominance in international relations.²⁰

When we reach past the elements of entertainment (animation, comedy, etc.) and look at media through the lens of contemporary warmongering and warfare – surveillance,

¹⁹ Henry A. Giroux. “War on Terror: The Militarizing of Public Space and Culture in the United States.” *Third Text* 18, no. 4 (2004): 213.

²⁰ Qiong Li and Marilyn B. Brewer. “What Does It Mean to Be an American? Patriotism, Nationalism, and American Identity After 9/11.” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004), 728.

military action, cruelty, torture – we recognize that nationalism is often the core message.

Media has long been used to promote all types of messages: holidays help promote patriotic and religious themes; music is a tool that encourages sentimentality; the big and small screens are used to establish particular ways of viewing the world; and the school setting is ripe for indoctrination of certain lifestyle choices. Media and its violence are not new problems – parents and others have long complained about content. But the types and intensity of violence have suddenly changed and there have been drastic shifts in technological format such that younger audiences are being exposed to it repeatedly. Let's look at some historical examples of how propaganda has been used to affect the general population.

MUSIC:

Music has always been used to get across messages, as both a source for stirring revolutionary anti-government thinking and as a sentimental tool for war support. “Yankee Doodle” comes to mind as a current childhood favorite which originated during the American Revolution.²¹ Originally a camp-meeting hymn, the Civil War song, “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” (a.k.a., “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory”) lyrics by Julia Ward Howe and music by William Steffe (using the tune from “John Brown’s Body”) with its “Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!” is still a part of the American collective.²² “After declaring on April 16, 1917 that American troops were joining in the war, President Wilson faced the task of swaying public

²¹ Keith and Rusty McNeil. “Colonial and Revolution Songs (With Historical Narratives).” *McNeil Music*. <http://www.mcneilmusic.com/rev.html>.

²² “Contemplations from the Marianas Trench: Music and Deep Thoughts.” <http://www.contemplator.com/America/battle.html>.

opinion in favor of the conscription and mobilization of troops. Anti-war sentiment was still strong among American citizens, and had been an important part of the foundation on which Wilson was reelected. The day after Wilson's declaration of war against Germany, George M. Cohen composed 'Over There,' a march containing lyrics that stressed patriotism and a sense of national identity."²³ Norman Rockwell even did the cover art for the sheet music which showed soldiers happily singing the tune.²⁴ World War II inspired some of the finest sentimental and patriotic music ever produced: "As Time Goes By," "I'll Be Seeing You," and "Cleanin' My Rifle (And Dreamin' of You)" are well-known favorites. There is no shortage of war songs given that the U.S. has been at war nearly continually since 1776. "In the past 236 years we have been fighting some type of conflict for 214 years or about 90% of the time."²⁵

In our time, hits such as "Courtesy of the Red, White & Blue (The Angry American)," (2002) by Toby Keith, openly state hostilities toward a perceived enemy: "There's a lot of men dead so we can sleep in peace at night...Man, we lit up your world like the 4th of July...And you'll be sorry that you messed with the U.S. of A. 'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass. It's the American way...And it feels like the whole wide world is raining down on you. Brought to you courtesy of the Red White and Blue."²⁶ Controversy surrounded the song when Dixie Chicks' Natalie Maines called the song ignorant and ABC's Peter Jennings decided he didn't want Keith at his

²³ K.A. Wells. "Music As War Propaganda: Did Music Help Win the First World War?" *The Parlor Songs Academy*, Lessons in America's Popular Music History. <http://parlorsongs.com.html>.

²⁴ Wells.

²⁵ Bob Morris. "United States' Endless Wars: Started with King Philip's War." *IVN (Independent Voter Network)*. <http://ivn.us2012/06/25.html>.

²⁶ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

patriotic special after he read the lyrics of the song. “Have You Forgotten,” (2003) recorded by Darryl Worley, was created to remind citizens of the reason the United States went to war despite a controversial casus belli.

The aforementioned tunes are considered patriotic, while “Letters From Home,” (2004) by John Michael Montgomery, is sentimental across the board, even though it was inspired by the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.²⁷ In recent years, country music, especially given that its fans tend to be conservative and pro-war, has produced more patriotic music than any other genre. Music is ideal for arousing passions and keeping the front lines packed no matter where a person lives, regardless of the time period.

WAR AND U.S. PROPAGANDA:

Propaganda and persuasion have a breadth and depth spanning centuries and dynasties. Early in the last century, George Creel, leader of the Committee on Public Information, published *How We Advertised America* (1920) detailing the ways in which he used advertising principles to sway Americans to go to war against Germany; this information was later used by Hitler to brainwash the German people.²⁸ Theodore Geisel (a.k.a. Dr. Seuss) got his start by making anti-Japanese comic war-bond propaganda posters before becoming the beloved and legendary children’s book author and illustrator. His depictions of pig-snouted Japanese persons seem shocking in today’s world, but it is true that “almost every war

²⁷ Sarah Wyland. “GAC’s Top 20 Patriotic Songs.” *Great American Country*. <http://blog.gactv.com.html>.

²⁸ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 10.

in modern times has been accompanied by characterizations of the enemy as less than human.”²⁹ Even folksong hero, Woody Guthrie, worked for the U.S. Public Health Service creating anti-STD (formerly venereal disease) songs and tunes which promoted the Bonneville Power Administration’s dam building because he loved the common worker and the Columbia River; Guthrie also supported the war effort against Hitler, his guitar sporting the handwritten scrawl, “This machine kills fascists.”³⁰

The WWII era major film studios did their patriotic duty to rally the country, and “between one-third and one-half of all Hollywood films between 1942 and 1945 depicted the war in some manner.”³¹ While the Germans, Japanese, and Italians had their own propaganda machines, the U.S. enlisted the efforts of Frank Capra’s “Why We Fight” seven-film series, and the O.W.I. (Office of War Information) boosted efforts to undermine morale of enemies abroad and increase support at home through posters, films, and even cartoons. Betty Grable as a USO entertainer in 1944’s *Pin-Up* and Warner Brothers’ Bugs Bunny and Popeye certainly helped the cause.³² While soldiers were sent to see war films as part of their training, no mention was made of racial conflict within the services, homeland duties were set forth as patriotic, only uplifting stories were presented to the public, and (for nearly two years) no shots of dead

²⁹ Richard H. Minear. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War* (New York: The New Press, 1999) and “Dr. Seuss Went to War” at the library of the University of California at San Diego.

<http://www.libraries.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dswenttowar/html>.

³⁰ Matthew Fiander. “Woody Guthrie: American Radical Patriot.” *Pop Matters*. <http://www.popmatters.com.html>.

³¹ John Markert. *POST-9/11 CINEMA: Through A Lens Darkly* (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), viii.

³² “The Man Behind Hitler.” People and Events: World War II Propaganda. *The American Experience*. PBS. 4/25/06. <http://www.pbs.org.html>. Page 11.

soldiers were allowed in the press (similar dictates are in effect currently).³³ “When it comes to propaganda, we suspected our enemies of it, but we never figured we were using propaganda. We felt like our country was too honest to use propaganda on us, and we honestly were not conscious that they were.”³⁴ Whether a John Wayne film, Frank Capra’s “Why We Fight” series, or the more recent Madblast.com which uses Flash animation to mimic WWII cartoons both in graphic style and pro-nationalist sentiment, the effect on the population is the same: “simplifying complex geopolitics into a reductionist narrative” and “stimula[ting] an emotional response by reprocessing historical propaganda forms from the war.”³⁵ Seeing beloved characters facing wartime crises surely helps calm viewers and it is easier to destroy when one is convinced that the opposing team is somehow evil in nature; similarly, a soldier’s job is seen as especially heroic when she or he is defending traditional values. But now, due to technological advances with interactive qualities, Madblast’s anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, pro-war pieces give viewers the chance to forward to a friend.³⁶

“Popular culture both reflects and shapes the larger society.”³⁷ This insightful comment comes from LeRoy Ashby

³³ “The War: At Home/Communication.” Accompanying guide to *The War*, directed and produced by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. PBS.

<http://www.pbs.org/thewar.html>. Page 3.

³⁴ Burns and Novick.

³⁵ Christine Holmlund and Justin Wyatt, eds. *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (Oxford and NY: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 257.

³⁶ Holmlund and Wyatt, 257.

³⁷ LeRoy Ashby. *With Amusement For All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), vii.

who documents the history of American entertainment as it moves, early in the nation's history, from the fringes and individual localities of society, to the United States' mainstream, to its current status as a leading export of the country. Amusement, in all its forms, is big business and the country's holidays are part of a hegemonic, cooperative effort to promote God, country, Mom, and apple pie ideologies.

HOLIDAYS:

For centuries, the Christmas holiday had been a time of pagan revelry and misrule which the church tolerated and intentionally selected, in the fourth century, as the birthdate of Christ because it fell after the harvest ended and coincided with the winter solstice. These celebrations were "rowdy, sometimes violent festivities that included masking [and] role reversals...[during which time] wandering bands of poor young males demanded food and drink from wealthy families."³⁸ In fact, "an early form of wassailing – or caroling – included the threat: 'We've come here to claim our right/And if you don't open up your door /We will lay you flat upon the floor.'"³⁹ The Protestant Reformation wanted nothing to do with these celebrations, in the 1600s the English parliament criticized Christmas, and the Massachusetts Bay colony made the festivities illegal but these efforts proved ineffective against the partiers.

Terrified aristocratic citizenry, led by New York's Knickerbockers, decided on a new tactic to quell excessive mob misconduct in the early nineteenth century: They engaged

³⁸ LeRoy Ashby. *With Amusement For All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 57-58.

³⁹ Ashby, 58.

writers to reframe Christmas as a child and family centered holiday which ought to take place inside homes and not on the streets. Washington Irving, who penned short stories like “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” wrote fictional accounts in 1819 about all classes celebrating Christmas ceremoniously and courteously; then, Clement Clark Moore wrote “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” which also presented the holiday as calm, orderly, with children safe at home, and no poor visitors clamoring for help. The middle class jumped to refine the holiday as part of domestic bliss and retailers paraded as the holiday turned ritualistic. Charles Dickens’ novella, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), further promoted the holiday as sentimental and a leading fashion magazine, “Godey’s Lady’s Book,” popular since the 1830s, described Christmas with presents for all under the parlor’s evergreen tree.⁴⁰

This marks a separation from the earlier American Revolution groupthink which warned against excessive spending; now, commercialism – in the form of a giving Santa Claus working hard in his workshop to reward good children – had joined in the festivities and shop owners began using Santa to get children to their shops by the 1840s. Christmas tree decoration ads began appearing at this time as well.⁴¹ Soon fashionable parlors everywhere had a towering fir tree and the obligatory plate of cookies and glass of milk awaiting the cheery man who would sneak down the chimney to place beautifully wrapped presents under the boughs.

⁴⁰ LeRoy Ashby. *With Amusement For All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 58-60.

⁴¹ Ashby, 60-61.

Santa himself originates, of course, from the legend of St. Nicholas of Myra (in present day Turkey), who was raised by his bishop uncle and who himself became a bishop in the 4th century. It is said that he helped a poor man who had three daughters with nothing in their dowries by throwing bags of gold in the man's house under cover of darkness. Variations exist which include the gold landing in stockings hung by the fire to dry and that the gold was dropped down the chimney. Hilariously – at least by today's standards – a 1686 pamphlet was published by Josiah King which put Father Christmas (a.k.a. Saint Nicholas, Santa Claus, Kris Kringle) on trial for making the Christmas holiday too materialistic. Father Christmas wore a green coat and was thin; Clement Clark Moore's 1823 story, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," first changed his look, then Thomas Nast did illustrations which show the more familiar jolly fellow from the North Pole. The new look and stories became exceedingly popular. The most reproduced editorial letter ever run in an English-speaking paper is 8-year old Virginia O'Hanlon asking about Santa's authenticity (1897). Francis Pharcellus Church kindly reassured her that, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus." Since children believe strongly in the character, his image has been used to hawk innumerable items.⁴²

There's the 1920s Coca-Cola Santa Claus and the WWII Santa wearing a helmet reminding Americans to send presents to our boys fighting in the Pacific and European theaters, and countless other advertising incarnations. Critics include Fred Rinne, whose book, *God Santa Christ* (2003), paints Santa as part of consumerist culture. In the same way that it's all about

⁴² Rebecca Vogler. "A Visit From St. Nicholas (and other tales of Santa Claus)." December 18, 2012. Special Collections and Rare Books, University of Missouri libraries. <http://library.missouri.edu.html>.

the cards and flowers and not St. Valentine, all about the green beer and not about St. Patrick, and all about candy rather than the souls who have departed this level at Halloween, Christmas too seems less about the birth of Jesus or the generous St. Nicholas and more about selecting presents which make us seem worthy.⁴³

Other holiday characters are based in America's economy as well. Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer, humbly began in the Chicago-based Montgomery Ward company. For years, the chain had been giving their customers coloring books as Christmas gifts, but one of their copywriters, Robert L. May, was asked to create a book in 1939 to save money. Millions of copies were given away over the next several years, despite the wartime paper shortage. May used his own experience as a frail, teased youth and the tale of "The Ugly Duckling" to create the story of the misfit reindeer. In 1947, the story was printed commercially, a cartoon was shown in theaters a year later, and the author's brother-in-law, Johnny Marks, wrote the song which Gene Autry recorded in 1949; in 1964 the television special was narrated by Burl Ives, and it is still a Christmas classic.⁴⁴

Many holidays have become warped by financial interests since their original creation. Before it was commercialized, Mother's Day was "a time for mourning

⁴³ Rebecca Vogler. "A Visit From St. Nicholas (and other tales of Santa Claus)." December 18, 2012. Special Collections and Rare Books, University of Missouri libraries. <http://library.missouri.edu.html>.

⁴⁴ "Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer." *The Narcissistic Anthropologist*. <http://thenarcissisticanthropologist.com.html>.

women to remember fallen soldiers and work for peace.”⁴⁵ Ann Jarvis, along with “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” composer, Julia Ward Howe, worked during the Civil War; afterward, they organized Mother’s Friendship Day picnics hoping to unite former enemies, while another aim was for women to promote peace by becoming politically active. Ann’s daughter, Anna, tried to continue the tradition her mother started and wished the holiday to exist in order to thank one’s own mother, not all mothers, hence the name Mother’s Day, not Mothers’ Day. As the holiday became more about buying for one’s mother, Jarvis became incensed. She set about to reform Mother’s Day into a reverent holiday but, alas, it was not to be. Jarvis died penniless in a sanitarium, brokenhearted that her protests were not able to return the holiday to its former glory. On a bright note, the holiday grew into a worldwide celebration – in the Arabic world, it coincides with spring; in Panama, it is celebrated in December when the Catholic Church honors the Virgin Mary; in Thailand, it coincides with the August birth of the mother to all Thais, Queen Sirikit.⁴⁶

We must pay attention to our holidays, including biased Halloween costumes. “Animal costumes are intended almost exclusively for infants and toddlers...almost none of the photographs [in catalogs] depict models of color...costumes depicting Asian culture tend to promote subservience or violence, depending on gender...there are a lot of ‘princess’ costumes for girls/women.”⁴⁷ It is common to simply take

⁴⁵ Brian Handwerk. “Mother’s Day’s Dark History: Fight for holiday said to cost originator ‘everything, financially and physically.’” *National Geographic*. May 11, 2012. <http://www.nationalgeographic.com.news.html>.

⁴⁶ Handwerk.

⁴⁷ “What Do Halloween Costumes Say?” *Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center*. <http://www.teachingtolerance.org.html>.

what's offered on the racks and not logically process what these outfits are really saying. "Costume type [ranges from] animal, job roles, consumer brands (e.g., 'Star Wars' or 'Pirates of the Caribbean'), superheroes, fairy tale roles (e.g., 'princess' or 'prince'), violent or military costumes (e.g., 'Ninja' or 'G.I.'), death and evil (e.g., 'the Grim Reaper' or 'Devilish Barbie')." ⁴⁸ Age is a dividing line and some are intended for males, others for females, some are for white kids and others for kids of color, some "represent specific racial or ethnic group[s]." ⁴⁹ These types of silent segregations make it even more difficult for marginalized groups to find their place in society.

So many holidays and events which have an emotional place in our lives originate in or were lured into consumerism yet this does not stop us from giving the little ones lessons in Halloween origami witches, making tissue paper flowers for Mom, or hiding eggs for Easter. These traditional celebrations are deeply ingrained in our culture and, in our busy and stressful day to day existence, they become dates to which we look forward. Every culture has its festivities, but are these as money and stuff oriented as ours? While Ramadan, Diwali, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, and all manner of holidays exist within the United States, it is a white Christian perspective seen every time a store decorates with red and green and when Linus exclaims in "A Charlie Brown Christmas" played annually: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you this day is born in the City of Bethlehem, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord...Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good

⁴⁸ "What Do Halloween Costumes Say?" *Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center*. <http://www.teachingtolerance.org.html>.

⁴⁹ *Teaching Tolerance*.

will toward men [as opposed to all].”⁵⁰ Why are we not simply celebrating winter or spring for the changes in nature?

CONSUMERISM/CONSUMPTION:

In addition to holiday purchases, buying throughout the year eventually became the norm. As early as the late 1800s, children’s spaces, especially girls’ bedrooms, were established as places where materiality flourished, were examples of one’s very morality, and were considered examples of youth character development. Journals of the day spoke to the middle class of the importance of these places in developing personality through purchase of items and their particular arrangement in the rooms now specifically created for kids; in this way, consumption was excused for the greater good of a youth’s training.⁵¹ Advertisers did their best to encourage a consumerist society and the White House, too, directly assisted in the promotion of consumption:

The [U.S.] federal government played a major role in defining childhood. In 1929, Herbert Hoover sponsored a White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. The conference report, *The Home and the Child*, concluded that children were independent beings with particular concerns of their own...The report

⁵⁰ “The spirit of Christmas lives on.” *Daily Herald Tribune*. Monday, December 23, 2013. <http://www.dailyheraldtribune.com.html>.

⁵¹ Daniel Thomas Cook. “Moral Order and Moral Ordering in Public Advice About American Children’s Rooms, 1876-1909.” In Renonciat Annie (ed.), *Proceedings from the International Conference, The Child’s Room as a Cultural Microcosm: Space, Pedagogy, and Consumption* at the National Museum of Education – CNDP/CANOPE, Rouen, 7-10 Apr. 2013. Strenae: Recherches sur les livres et objets culturels de l’enfance. <http://www.strenae.revues.org.html>.

advised parents to give their children their own [furniture, toys, playrooms, etc.]. ‘Generally a sleeping room for each person is desirable,’ it noted...Take them shopping for their own ‘things and let them pick them out for themselves.’ Through such experiences personality develops...[These] experiences have the advantage of also creating in the child a sense of personal as well as family pride in ownership... eventually **teaching him that his personality can be expressed through things.**⁵²

Parents suddenly were faced with the task of providing bigger homes with more stuff in order to help their children develop proper mental health.

Even before this, Sigmund Freud’s nephew, Edward Bernays, used his uncle’s theories about suppression of primitive aggressive and sexual desires for mass crowd control in a number of ways: to drive sales for companies by appealing to people’s subconscious inner desires so they would buy things they didn’t need; working for the U.S. government’s WWII Committee on Public Information promoting war efforts in the press; popularizing U.S. politicians; aiding the CIA in ousting democratic leaders in Guatemala; making it socially acceptable for women to smoke in public; and creating a docile U.S. population. By turning psychoanalytical principles into a science in order to engineer consent for big business and the government, Bernays found ways to train the American public. It was felt that leaders could not trust the predictability of the

⁵² Anup Shah. “Children as Consumers.” *Global Issues*. 21 Nov. 2010. Web 04 Nov. 2014. <http://www.globalissues.org.html>. (Quoting the White House, 1931 [Emphasis added by Robbins]); Also Richard Robbins. *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 24-25.

average person in their purchasing and voting capacities; therefore, the populous would come under the spell of psychoanalysts who sold out and duped a trusting constituency by using their training for focus groups. The result when lifestyle marketing was applied to politics was a new, greedy self-interest and respectability in denying compassion to others.

⁵³ Advertisers learned that the suppression of sex, aggression, and horror is why people love to buy items linked to anything taboo – sexuality, assault and death. ⁵⁴ To keep people purchasing, those marketing products continually increase levels of sex and violence.

Children and Post WWII Spending:

All those John Wayne films – not to mention Disney – with cowboys versus Native Americans and cops and robbers taught a whole generation the “us versus them” mentality which remains today. It wouldn’t be long until companies realized the influential benefits of advertising directly and solely to children through movies and television shows specifically made for that young audience: “Strikingly, one of the first TV advertisements directed at children appeared on ‘The Mickey Mouse Club’ and offered for sale the Burp gun, a cap-firing machine gun developed by Mattel to look like machine guns used in World War II. Before Christmas 1955, Mattel sold more than 1 million Burp guns; the company quickly followed with a line of toy .45 six-shooters like those wielded in westerns so that children

⁵³ Adam Curtis. “Century of the Self.” TV Mini-Series. Perf. Adam Curtis, Wilhelm Reich, Werner Erhard, Martin S. Bergman, Jerry Rubin (London UK: BBC, 2002).

⁵⁴ Jeff Warrick. *Programming the Nation?* DVD. Perf. Noam Chomsky, Amy Goodman, Dennis Kucinich, John B. Alexander, Christopher Coppola (Aptos CA and Santa Cruz CA: Ignite Productions and Digital Media Factory, 2011).

could pretend to kill their friends just like they saw on TV.”⁵⁵ The toy market exploded once advertisers realized that even the poor spend money on their children.

The economic boom of World War II made many Americans wealthier, despite Cold War anxieties. As consumer culture promoted chocolate candy cigarettes and plastic toy tanks, a third of post-war children in the United States were raised in or near poverty.⁵⁶ But in the freshly created suburbia, a place generally away from extended family relatives, trends were growing which would result in a separation of youth from their parents; still, the new child-centered commercialism prompted grandparents and parents to spend more than ever on children: “Toy sales soared from \$84 million in 1940 to \$1.25 billion two decades later.” As toys encouraged what were thought of then as proper gender roles – that is, guns for boys and dolls and primping accoutrement for girls – a flourishing teen culture came into its own.⁵⁷ Consumer fellowship stole young people away from their families, the rules of this world of peers intensified and, by the mid-1950s, adolescents were spending an annual \$555.00 on cosmetics, record albums, and products they saw advertised on their own TV shows.⁵⁸ This pronounced demarcation between teen and other would continue to grow as television programming and film production divided audiences by age.

⁵⁵ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 149.

⁵⁶ Steven Mintz. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 275-276.

⁵⁷ Mintz, 287-288, 282.

⁵⁸ Mintz, 277-278, 308.

What's happened in the world of toys more recently? According to Joepedia, "COBRA is a ruthless terrorist organization determined to rule the world."⁵⁹ By the late '80s, "G.I. Joe and other action-figure lines celebrated the United States as high-tech policemen – especially when COBRA figures look like Arabs."⁶⁰ The success of *Star Wars* films and Reagan politics launched another good guys versus bad guys script for kids to play and helped with the reintroduction of G.I. Joe, who'd been discontinued in '78, as part of team Mobile Strike Force. G.I. Joe, thanks to \$4 million spent on advertising targeting five- to eight-year olds fifty times, became the 1982 holiday season's leading toy.⁶¹ This led to other counterterrorist loners like Rambo becoming a child's toy. The publicity read like this: "Our beloved country (and, indeed, the entire world) has been thrown into peril by international terrorists."⁶² G.I. Joe helped to glorify the American invasion of Granada, although Hasbro insisted this was unrelated.

Today's toys have advanced their violent and bizarre origins. Walk through the toy aisles at any Wal-mart and see the panoply of AMC's "Walking Dead" toys ranging from "Figure Packs" to "Daryl with Chopper" to the "Don't Look Back Dice Game" to the "Trivia Box" and "Prison Tower." There's a "Would You Rather" board game, whose latest edition promises "crazier dilemmas." The next aisle over offers "Halo" and "Call of Duty" as MegaBlocs, including the latter's "Welcome to Nuketown" and "Mob of the Dead" collector series box sets. WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment, formerly World

⁵⁹ "Joepedia – Wikia." <http://www.gijoe.wikia.com.html>.

⁶⁰ Gary Cross. *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 204.

⁶¹ Cross, 202-204.

⁶² Cross, 206.

Wrestling Federation) presents a “Smack Down” series. There are bulked-up action figures, masks, battle packs which include two figures, a mock steel cage in which kids can place their fighters, a built-in ultra large ab lined “Never Give Up, 10 Years Strong” shirt available for purchase, and a WWE tag team championship big belt buckle so one can pretend to be one of the winners. And Adventure Force offers an “Army Ranger” 5-piece set with rifle, grenades, binoculars, water bottle, and granny pack with adjustable straps.⁶³

Also in Wal-mart, there’s “an aisle of weaponry, with names like Firestrike, Rampage and Hail-Fire, advertising quick firing ammunition chips and ‘semi-automatic’ capability. ‘Build your arsenal!’ read the box for one, sitting next to a ‘tactical vest’ meant to repel barrages of...foam darts...[Parents are] buying something that is reinforcing shooting.”⁶⁴ These mock weapons are looking more and more realistic and the kids want them.⁶⁵ But children themselves could be at risk having one. A high school went into lockdown because a student brought one to school, even with its neon colors. And remember the African-American young man shot and killed holding a toy gun in an Ohio Wal-mart?⁶⁶ What about the 12-year old who had an “airsoft” replica toy gun at a rec center who was killed by

⁶³ From the author’s personal experience.

⁶⁴ Jesse McKinley and Matt Richtel. “Not Always Fun & Games: Parents Are Facing A Loaded Question.” *The New York Times*. February 8, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com.html>.

⁶⁵ “Behind The Scenes At Nerf HQ And The Making Of The Slingfire Zombie Blaster!” *Fast Company*. <http://www.fastcompany.com.html>.

⁶⁶ Nisha Chittal. “Cops shoot and kill man holding toy gun in Wal-mart.” MSNBC. Aug. 9, 2014. <http://www.msnbc.com.html>.

police? ⁶⁷ There are so many of these incidents now, it is hard to keep track.

Meanwhile, in Tampa Bay, Florida, a civil review board, which would involve community input and empowerment while emphasizing and enforcing police responsibility, was greatly opposed months before the mayor ceded to implementing one which is primarily composed of his own representatives, thus denying external investigative power. The issue here is denial of public voice and power from the members of the community to have authority to mandate just policing in their own city, a city which has the highest level of Black arrests and ticketing in Florida; the number of Blacks and Latinos targeted is “dramatically high” and in Tampa and cities across the nation, innocent people are stopped and harassed not because of suspicion of wrongdoing but because of an assumption of wrongdoing because of race. Racial profiling is responsible for police targeting those in neighborhoods of color – some as young as three-years old – by stopping drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists and issuing tickets most cannot afford for simple breaches, such as not having paperwork on them to prove they own a bike. ⁶⁸ Better keep that receipt from Wal-mart. Oh, and don’t pick up a toy gun while there.

Wal-mart is an important part of the promotional puzzle. “In the United States, close to 100 million shoppers patronize Wal-mart stores every week. Its scope of operations uses the world’s largest computer (surpassing the Pentagon’s) and the world’s largest fleet of trucks...Despite a well-publicized

⁶⁷ Michelle Richinick. “Ohio police fatally shoot child carrying toy gun.” MSNBC. 11/23/14. <http://www.msnbc.com.html>.

⁶⁸ Nusrat Choudhury. “If You’re Black or Brown and Ride a Bike in Tampa, Watch Out: Police Find That Suspicious.” *ACLU Racial Justice Program*. May 14, 2015. <http://www.aclu.org.html>.

‘Made in the U.S.’ campaign, 85% of the stores’ items are made overseas, often in Third World sweatshops...They [impose] cultural censorship...” In addition, Wal-mart robs the environment “every 2 days [as it opens a new megastore that measures] over 200,000 square feet in size.” Wal-mart offers mostly part-time “entry-level jobs” (so the corporation does not have to supply benefits), and does not give back to the community “in spite of its large volume of sales.” Wal-mart’s contribution is “four-tenths of a percent of its earnings, well behind its competitors...U.S. corporations average just over 1%.”⁶⁹

Among the top five largest employers in the world are the U.S. Department of Defense (3.2 million), Wal-mart (2.1 million), and McDonald’s (1.7 million).⁷⁰ No wonder so many of our toys are militaristic or involve fighting, or are shopping or food oriented. What we do for work becomes our entertainment.⁷¹ Welcome, kids, to the toys which will prepare

⁶⁹ “Store Wars.” PBS. <http://www.pbs.org.html>.

⁷⁰ Linette Lopez and Eric Goldscheine. “The 10 Biggest Employers In The World.” *Business Insider*. Sept. 12, 2011. <http://www.businessinsider.com.html>.

⁷¹ Please see the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, eds. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). This can also be found at <http://www.monoskop.org.pdf>. Adorno and Horkheimer state the following: “[The culture industry’s] influence over the consumer is established by entertainment...Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. What happens at work in the factory or in the office can only be escaped from by approximation to it in one’s leisure time.” There’s also a summary of “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” (1944) available at <http://www.culturalstudiesnow.blogspot.com.html> which presents the quote: “Adorno and Horkheimer assert that [the] culture industry eradicates autonomous thinking and criticism, serving to preserve the

you for a life of menial labor: The McDonald's Drive-Thru Food Cart, Scan-It Operation Checkpoint Toy X-Ray, Bruder Mercedes-Benz Garbage Truck, Just Like Home My Cleaning Trolley with Vacuum (a.k.a. Janitor Cart), Breyer Stable Cleaning Set, Child Taxi Toy Pedal Car, Mailbox & Mail Set, Light & Sound Gas Station, and the i-Tattoo Electronic Tattoo Pen.⁷² Nice! A good break from learning to kill from video games and creepy TV shows.

Another problem in the world of toys is the rigid gender divide. Divided toys are the result of capitalism, of course – toys cannot be shared among differently gendered children without them being made to feel weird about it, which is a shame – but this also acts to stereotype and gender police. There's a new campaign called "Let Toys Be Toys" and stores are finally going back to the way they were long ago, with no signage indicating which sections are for girls or boys. And customers are beginning to catch on.

The pink and blue distinction is a relatively new phenomenon, by the way. In the Victorian era, all babies were dressed in white gowns, and in the 20th century's first half many felt that blue was the proper color for girls because it's related

reigning order. It provides easy entertainment which distracts masses from the wrongs and sickness of the ruling order. They argue that [the] culture industry has taken over reality as the prism through which people experience reality, thus completely shaping and conditioning their experience of life. In addition, [it] serves to keep workers busy...Popular culture appears to be offering a refuge and distraction [from] work, but in fact it causes the worker to further dwell into a world of products and consumerism. The only freedom [it] has to really offer [is] a freedom from thinking."

⁷² Colin Perkins. "9 Toys That Prepare Children for a Life of Menial Labor." *Cracked*. July 14, 2009. <http://www.cracked.com.html>.

to Saint Mary. But today's princess culture has taken over the pink zone and many toys are associated with particular TV programs and films – and those are marketed to either boys or girls. “By the ’50s, pink had become strongly associated with femininity, but boys still often wore it, while by the ’70s, the two colors certainly didn’t dominate the toy market. The heyday of unisex parenting [was] 1965 to 1985.”⁷³ Interestingly, these days common, inexpensive clothing for males is typically colored with blues, greens, browns, etc. whereas expensive, designer clothing for males highlights fun, bright colors – and even pastels!

Emulating Iceland's blindness to culturally constructed assumptions of gender, England's Hamley's department store has banished pink and blue distinctions. Toys ‘R’ Us is even ridding its U.K. stores of gendered aisles.⁷⁴ Now to get toy manufacturers on board. Easy Bake Oven makers had come out with a boys' version called the Queasy Bake Cookerator which was marketed with a boy on the box cover unfortunately making only gross food such as Mud ‘N Crud cake and Blend-A-Booger drink, as if boys can only enjoy cooking for the sake of grossing out others.⁷⁵

Boys especially are taunted when they like purportedly feminine hobbies and colors, which can result in bullying; moreover, this segregation limits a child's interests because a

⁷³ Kira Cochrane. “The fightback against gendered toys.” *The Guardian*. April 22, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com.html>.

⁷⁴ Kristen Chase. “Toys ‘R’ Us ditches gender marketing in U.K. stores.” *Baby Center*. Sept. 12, 2013. <http://www.blogs.babycenter.com.html>. See also *Ms. Magazine's* “Kids’ Toys: More gendered than ever,” by Ponta Abadi. June 5, 2013. <http://www.msmagazine.com.html>.

⁷⁵ See *About Face's* “Ding! The Easy Bake Oven is finally going to start catering to boys.” Dec. 19, 2012. <http://www.about-face.org.html>.

girl might be afraid to want a microscope and pursue the hard sciences, whereas a boy might decide not to become a chef or fashion designer. Advertising definitely guards against people being themselves because it's hard to fight billions of dollars pouring out gender defining messages. And these messages have been around for a long time.

MAGAZINES/ADS FOR PRODUCTS:

Photography of the 1930s centered on the major event of the time: The Depression. FSA photographers were sent by government officials to document the people's strife in order to raise money for programs which would be initiated under Keynesian economic principles, but these pictorial records also served to expand the thinking of the masses to accept their fate: To be cognizant that someone out there is always doing worse and to be grateful for whatever non-rewarding job at hand. Never before had the average person come face-to-face with the extreme dichotomy of wealth and prosperity versus scantiness and deficiency. "The periodical in which the FSA images achieved perhaps the widest circulation was also the one that presented the most tightly controlled poverty narratives: *Look* magazine. Through the new genre of the 'picture magazine' in the pages of *Look*, the Historical Section images were made to communicate a spectacle-driven, 'popular' rhetoric of poverty."

⁷⁶ The disturbing images of poverty and disaster in *Life* and *Look* magazines were juxtaposed with images of movie stars and luxury items, thereby playing a substantial role in making the nation want to consume. This not only drove the country and a stingy Congress to support funding for programs but it

⁷⁶ Cara A. Finnegan. *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 167.

popularized values of small town America and helped to define what the nation would become.

This was the picture magazines' circulation heyday. For the first time, Americans could read about – and see – what was going on in their nation: “A nationwide mass culture now started to replace the local and regional economics of the nineteenth century. The leading advertising agency explained in 1926 that the advent of nationally circulated magazines, chain stores, syndicated news features, motion pictures, national brand names, and radio programs were creating ‘a nation which lives to [the same] pattern everywhere.’”⁷⁷ Although the incorporation of American culture goes back to the 1890s, this homogenous culture would now have the capacity to be dominated by corporate and governmental forces, whose mission was seemingly two-fold: To create a yearning to spend by new consumers and to instill a new dependence on authority.

These photos made the public aware that they were not alone in experiencing dire circumstances and this gave a false sense of security but also calmed the masses: We are all in this together. Times were so difficult for the multitudes that the period is marked with hostility: union appeals and strike busters; ethnic clashes as new citizens vied for jobs; thievery of the basics; crowds riding the rails; the selling of fruit on street corners to make ends meet; as many as “900,000...children simply left home and joined the army of homeless tramps” because relatives could not feed them.⁷⁸ Although Roosevelt created jobs, they were only a fraction of what was needed, plus

⁷⁷ Tindall, George Brown, David E. Shi and Thomas Lee Pearcy. *The Essential America: A Narrative History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 446-447.

⁷⁸ Tindall, et al., 463.

the system was biased against women and minorities.⁷⁹ Those not experiencing difficult times found it easy to imagine the misery since it came to them via the new picture-and-word editorial technique.

Coupled with the addiction created for goods, the public grew to relish the glory and anguish of individual tales never before seen realistically – now presented in newspapers and on large, glossy pages of magazines. Imagine – for the first time – being able to read about the fate of a family thousands of miles away with photos so close up you can see the tears in their eyes. Filmmaker John Ford mimicked FSA photographs for his movie, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), since the black and white bleakness added a sense of the authentic for viewers who had become accustomed to the latest vivid documentary-style printed form.⁸⁰ As the population grew to accept that the government would be a central figure in their lives from this point forward, a more sinister element became business as usual: People began to crave disturbing images.

A *New Republic* writer commented on the effectiveness of picture magazines in 1937: “Hardly any mental effort is required to look at a picture and to spell out a few lines of accompanying caption, written in primer English. The attractiveness of such periodicals is enhanced if the pictures are themselves sensational, faintly salacious, or gruesome.”⁸¹ *Life*

⁷⁹ “Franklin Delano Roosevelt: The American Franchise.” *Miller Center: History, Policy, Impact*. University of Virginia.
<http://www.millercenter.org.html>.

⁸⁰ David E. Tyvig. *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940: How Americans Lived Through the ‘Roaring Twenties’ and the Great Depression* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2004), 254-255.

⁸¹ Cara A. Finnegan. *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 168.

magazine's 12 May 1947 full-page image by Robert C. Wiles of the suicide of a young woman is a prime example. The caption beneath the seemingly restful body, hand still clutching her pearls, atop the car her body just crushed reads: "At the bottom of the Empire State Building the body of Evelyn McHale reposes calmly in grotesque bier, her falling body punched into the top of a car." Images such as this haunt the viewer and leave one wanting more. In combination with stories about and glossy photographs of their favorite stars and coveted new products for sale, Americans quickly could not exist without a regular spoonful of exploitative reporting.

Advertising was the way for companies to get messages across and new photographic technology made it possible to influence the masses on a greater scale than ever before. The introduction of FSA photographs in magazine format made the pictures accessible to all, even to the person who could ill afford extras. Radio soap operas, President Roosevelt's fireside chats (needed to generate support for his New Deal programs), silent movies turned talkies, and big band musical productions inculcated an entire generation but it was the magazine which visually took an unsuspecting public to places advertisers wanted them to see. "Print advertising...captured by far the largest share of the ad market during the 1920s and 1930s."⁸² Although trademarks, brand names, and copyrights go back to the mass production and consumption of the nineteenth century, this era renewed American awareness of brand names such as Heinz and Borden and of memorable products like Milky Way and Scotch tape. "One advertising agency executive asserted, 'A magazine is simply a device to induce people to read

⁸² David E. Tyvig. *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940: How Americans Lived Through the 'Roaring Twenties' and the Great Depression* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 2004), 190.

advertising.”⁸³ The magazine could be read leisurely in the comfort of one’s home – and was seen in high traffic places, like railroad stations – and had the same visual imprinting impact that television would garner years later.

Ads grew in their realism, which made people want that sleek new car, house, or luxury item. When halftones became customarily used, not only were the photographs for articles better, but photographic display of products in magazines improved, erasing the need for artists’ renderings of goods. “Nearly 4,500 periodicals were published each year by 1925 [which] circulated a combined 180 million copies per issue...New advertising-laden magazines continued to appear, among them *Time* (1923), *Better Homes and Gardens* (1924), *The New Yorker* (1925), *Fortune* (1930), *Newsweek* (1933), *Life* (1936), and *Look* (1937)...The latter two in particular relied on striking photographs even more than text to gain large audiences.”⁸⁴ And so it began.

Product advertising by companies required the most advanced photographic methods alongside attractive, attention-getting copy. The result? Feelings of inadequacy during the Depression greatly assisted sales because many felt that having a particular product (advertised with photographic evidence showing one’s pleasure in ownership) was proof of success. The American public thus acquiesced to corporate and capitalist pressure, becoming simply delighted with the virtually impossible idea of keeping up with the Joneses.

⁸³ David E. Tyvig. *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940: How Americans Lived Through the ‘Roaring Twenties’ and the Great Depression* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 2004), 190-191.

⁸⁴ Tyvig, 190-191.

Public opinion was influenced by big business more than ever as people moved from small towns and farms to cities and businesses. Because the lure of work in factories had culled so many from the countryside, there was a need for items created by the new industrial era. Previously, if a family needed a doll or a shirt, one was made from scratch; however, once the populous worked some twelve hours a day in factories, it became necessary to purchase finished items due to time constraints. Factories worked employees so hard at such low wages, even the employees were able to purchase the low-priced items they were making. Companies began offering buying on credit for items most could not afford; consumption of big ticket items was facilitated by installment and layaway plans and after WWII by the GI Bill. Society became more mobile and chain stores catapulted in popularity as loyal customers supported particular retail brands. Thus, a debt servitude nation was created as lust for items formerly afforded only by the upper classes became available to the average person.

It would not be simply products alone whose beauty was exemplified by photographic enhancement – entire lifestyles were taught to the new consumer: “A 1956 *Life* magazine cover story pronounced the ideal woman a ‘pretty and popular’ suburban housewife who ‘attends club or charity meetings, drives the children to school, does the weekly grocery shopping, makes ceramics, and is planning to study French.’”⁸⁵ Americans were trained to believe in certain lifestyles – so it was that the identical homes of Levittown, New York, came to

⁸⁵ Tindall, George Brown, David E. Shi and Thomas Lee Pearcy. *The Essential America: A Narrative History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 534.

be in fashion and consumers were made to feel left out if there were no Frigidaire in the kitchen nor Ford in the driveway.

This is a far cry from the rugged individualism of generations past whose farming or other business, socialization, and schooling were about self-sufficiency, conducted as private matters and hallmarks of the American way of life. It became normal for people to believe rhetoric from advertisers, businesses, and the soon-to-be military industrial complex, all of whom convinced them to buy according to brand loyalty in a quest to keep fighting for the many advantages afforded this great nation. When the country's pockets filled post World War II – in part due to rationing and personal saving during wartime – people joyously began spending more than ever before: bigger houses, fruits and vegetables from around the globe, automobiles with new annual styles and colors. A dramatic shift had occurred in advertising – from safety, labor saving, and necessity to glamour and convenience.

Soon magazines and newspapers became the primary way Americans received news, although this news was becoming standardized – through the process of corporate dissemination, our society became homogenous and singularly focused on what corporations told us was important. The photography was so bold in nature that the lack of written material escaped notice and the photos related individual stories rather than the reality of the political or social. When viewers focused on the photos, designed to solicit sympathy in order to sell magazines, no one questioned what was going on behind the photographs: Why were improper farming techniques encouraged which turned the Great Plains to dust? Why is it that the banks were allowed speculative investments which crashed the financial system? Who was responsible for interfering with the gold standard which caused worldwide markets to plummet?

Far too many key businesses had kept profits to themselves while keeping wages frozen. But people became enamored of the keen visuals, and no one cared about the missing words which would have explained the cause of the misery.

Unfortunately, the impact of spending over the years has been negative in two areas: debt for the average American, and environmental damage for the planet. “The culture of capitalism is devoted to encouraging the production and sale of commodities. For capitalists, the culture encourages...profit; for laborers...wages; for consumers...the accumulation of goods...capitalism defines sets of people who, behaving according to a set of learned rules, act as they must act.”⁸⁶ The exploitation of the consumer continued with ever-expanding schemes, such as marketing to children and introducing debt capital rationality to younger audiences, while admonishing traditional monetary values; to keep capitalism going, buying on credit soon became the norm, with retailers and bankers instilling the idea that everybody does it.

This powerful ideological tool proceeded to take over public relations. “The shift [never before possible] to a culture of sight and sound was of profound importance; it increased our self-awareness as a culture; it helped create unity of response and action [also] not previously possible; it made us more susceptible than ever to those who would mold culture and thought.”⁸⁷ Mass media culture grew in power: Now, every home has a computer and a television set, whose volume for commercials is louder than the programming, and that

⁸⁶ Richard H. Robbins. *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism* (New York: Pearson, 2008), 14.

⁸⁷ Warren Susman. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 159-160.

programming constantly tries to cross established lines with topics that sell: sex, wealth, death, ruin. Early photojournalism started a trend which has kept Americans reaching – and working and paying – for the latest and the best in order to be thought of as having attained top status; its sensationalist techniques are still with us in magazines and newer mediums. We are a population transfixed by images of poverty and terror, and a people enthralled by the spell of consuming luxury with no thought of who's suffering to make the products and no concern for tomorrow's landfills.

And mindless spending under the control of corporate imperialism is destroying us: "The planet and [human]kind are in grave danger of irreversible catastrophe...There are four interconnected threats to the planet – wars of mass destruction, over-population, pollution, and the depletion of resources. They have a cumulative effect. A problem in one area renders it more difficult to solve the problems in any other area...The basis of all four problems is the inadequacy of the sovereign states to manage the affairs of [human]kind in the 20th century." ⁸⁸ The U.N. State of Human Development Report relates the world's "global priorities in \$U.S. billions: Cosmetics in the US – 8, Ice cream in Europe – 11, Perfumes in Europe and the US – 12, Pet foods in Europe and the US – 17, Business entertainment in Japan – 35, Cigarettes in Europe – 50, Alcoholic drinks in Europe – 105, Narcotic drugs in the world – 400, and Military spending in the world – 780." ⁸⁹ That (unbelievable!) total is

⁸⁸ Benjamin Kline. Quoting Prof. A. Falk of Princeton University. *A Brief History of the U.S. Environmental Movement* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 172.

⁸⁹ "The State of Human Development." United Nations. *UN Development Report*, 1998. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global.hdr1998.html>. 23 Nov. 2007.

\$1,418,000,000,000.00 or nearly one and a half trillion dollars. That same UN report explains the world's "global priorities in \$U.S. billions related to the cost of improving social services in all developing nations: Basic education for all – 6, Water and sanitation for all – 9, Reproductive health for all women – 12, Basic health and nutrition – 13.”⁹⁰ It would cost just \$40 billion to give basic health, nutrition, water, sanitation, and education to all developing countries.

As Mahatma Gandhi warned: “There is enough on this planet for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed.” The U.N. report also states that the world’s wealthiest 20% consume 86% of the world’s resources. What’s happening in the US? “In each of the past 8 years more Americans have declared personal bankruptcy than graduated from college. Our annual production of solid waste would fill a convoy of garbage trucks stretching halfway to the moon. We have twice as many shopping centers as high schools. We now work more hours each year than do citizens of any other industrialized country, including Japan. Though we constitute 4.7% of the earth’s people, we account for 25% of its global warming greenhouse gas emissions [and the US still hasn’t ratified the Kyoto Protocol]. 95% of our workers say they wish they could spend more time with their families. 40% of our lakes and streams are too polluted for swimming or fishing. A CEO now earns 475 times as much as the average worker, a tenfold increase since 1980. Since 1950, we Americans have used up more resources than **everyone who ever lived on Earth before then.**”⁹¹ Ouch.

⁹⁰ “The State of Human Development.” United Nations. *UN Development Report*, 1998. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global.hdr1998.html>. 23 Nov. 2007.

⁹¹ John de Graaf, David Wann and Thomas H. Naylor. *Affluence: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (Oakland CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2002), 4.

Through advertising, the American people became willing participants in consumerism. “[The ‘technological progress’] revolution...provided the means by which both the productive and the consumptive capacities of people could be detached from household and community and made to serve other people’s purely economic ends. It...provided as well a glamour of newness, ease, and affluence that made it seductive **even to those who suffered most from it.** In more recent history especially, this revolution has been successful in putting unheard-of quantities of consumer goods and services within the reach of ordinary people.”⁹² While the population is further becoming uniform thanks to distraction by corporations, “the technical means of this popular ‘affluence’ has...made possible the gathering of the real property and the real power of the country into fewer and fewer hands.”⁹³ One wonders when the glory age of speculative investment, dangerously high credit allowances, and unwitting consumer demand will end.

TELEVISION:

Television became the next media medium used to program the country – in the form of re-domesticating women. After the war, women who had replaced men in the workforce wanted to keep their jobs; however, when the men returned home, the aircraft industry and others fired women and part of the capitalist agenda for the commodity boom involved the government imperative of keeping women at home. Along with magazines, television advertised new washing machines and stoves and discouraged women who wished to be independent. When two million women were forced out of the workforce

⁹² Wendell Berry. *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 185-186. [Emphasis added by author quoting Berry.]

⁹³ Berry, 186.

after World War II, it was the box in the living room which convinced the country that the ideal woman was one perfecting meals in the kitchen. Shows like “I Love Lucy,” “Leave It to Beaver,” and “Father Knows Best” encouraged dutiful gendered servitude and helped define what it meant to be a good wife and mother – with the aim of selling shiny new products.⁹⁴ Ads “[targeting] women, depicting them in the kitchen, conversing with children, serving dinner, cleaning, and otherwise espousing the joy of a clean home or the latest kitchen appliance” with slogans like Hoover’s “Christmas Morning She’ll be Happier With a Hoover” removed the threat to the social order and kept women chained to their households as the ones appointed to be responsible for the family’s happiness.⁹⁵ Even today, companies generally advertise domestic products toward women.

While Eisenhower was revitalizing and rebuilding cities – during which the poor lost their housing, which sparked unrest – housewives in suburbia struggled to create flawless Jell-o molds.⁹⁶ As Ronald and Nancy Reagan opened their General Electric sponsored “Home of the Future” to the country through extended television commercials, parading a host of sparkling appliances in front of potential consumers, citizens were able to escape the dreariness of racial inequality, blacklisting, juvenile delinquency, rock and roll, and Cold War

⁹⁴ Jennifer Siebel Newsom. *Miss Representation*. DVD. Perf. Jean Kilbourne, Katie Couric, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Geena Davis, Malkia Cyril (San Francisco: Girls’ Club Entertainment, 2011).

⁹⁵ “American Memory of the 1950s Housewife.” Bowling Green State University.
<http://americanmemoryofthe1950shousewif.bgsu.wikispaces.net/Stereotypes.html>.

⁹⁶ “The Economy of the 1950s and its Effects.”
<http://conservative1950s.tripod.com/id2.html>.

anxieties; Reagan eventually felt the danger to big business Kennedy initiated and ran for political office.⁹⁷ Media was also used to help situate the society for war efforts to come and regular programming often eclipsed the film industry as the choice medium for government-approved propaganda.

The history of needing military approval is a long one which includes television. “The Mickey Mouse Club” of the 1950s regularly showed “Mouse Reels” which were “approved and prescreened by the Pentagon before they were aired.”⁹⁸ These films showed the thrills of the USS Nautilus as well as the 5004th Air Intelligence Service Squadron’s dogsled teams (and skipped their interrogation of prisoners and spying on our Soviet neighbors) in hopes of getting new recruits.⁹⁹ Walt Disney himself created the Nautilus’ official insignia and the logo for the Marines’ “Toys for Tots” program. Disney – the man and the corporation – has always been complicit in promoting military objectives (and still is with Disney Channel original movies like 2004’s *Tiger Cruise* and *Cadet Kelly* in 2002), but it is just one of many media companies doing the same.

Plenty of other television programs have been enlisted. In the 1960s, “Lassie” incorporated suggestions from Pentagon advisors to feature the Air Force Academy prominently and even changed a script so Cessna and the Army L-19 reconnaissance “Bird Dog” plane appeared flawless.¹⁰⁰ Weekly TV shows “Annapolis” and “West Point” also worked with the

⁹⁷ Carl Anthony. “Inside Reagan’s 1950s General Electric ‘Home of the Future.’” February 5, 2014. <http://carlanthonyonline.com.html>.

⁹⁸ David L. Robb. *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 307.

⁹⁹ Robb, 307-310.

¹⁰⁰ Robb, 303-306.

Department of Defense to create episodes favorable for attracting kids and teens to branches of the service.¹⁰¹ “Dragnet” was produced with major assistance from the LAPD and “Steve Canyon,” a show about an Air Force pilot, reached millions of viewers with DOD assistance from 1958-1960.¹⁰² Alongside the military, the U.S. space program provides footage from its huge film library and “NASA....routinely provided technical assistance and advice to Hollywood, as with the many permutations of ‘Star Trek,’ [and] provided entire series storylines, as with ‘I Dream of Jeannie.’”¹⁰³ Of course, television is still a main vehicle transmitting messages for the military and promoting racism, sexism, and classism, but convincing populations has an expanded history far beyond the period mentioned here.

FILM:

Movies are “propaganda disguised as entertainment” and these can be dangerous tools in certain hands.¹⁰⁴ “Following WWI, Adolph Zuker, the head of Paramount Pictures” said that the war years “register[ed] indisputably the fact that as an avenue of propaganda, as a channel for conveying thought and opinion, the movies are unequaled by any form of communication.”¹⁰⁵ We carry with us images and words created by others which we come to think of as our own.

¹⁰¹ David L. Robb. *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 311.

¹⁰² Robb, 312-313.

¹⁰³ “Space Program and Television.” Museum of Broadcast Communications. <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/spaceprogram.htm>.

¹⁰⁴ Jack G. Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York and Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 27.

¹⁰⁵ Shaheen, 27.

We've all heard about how the Lumiere brothers' film, *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, shocked audiences in 1896 because they thought a real train was heading toward them. The film was less than a minute long but that's all it took to alter viewers' reality.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the 12-minute film, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), unintentionally terrified audiences who felt that the shot fired from a pistol was real.¹⁰⁷ WWII planes passing overhead South Pacific islanders created such a stir of unfamiliarity that a religion was created. Known as the Cargo Cult, one of their deities was, in fact, a plane, whose image was recreated in honor with sticks. The origin of the religion actually came long before when Europeans arrived bringing what the islanders thought was cargo sent to them from their ancestors.¹⁰⁸ These examples illustrate how easily humans are affected by the visual and how society has a problem controlling its thoughts:

All of your internal images...(at least partially) originate from [media]...We really can't differentiate between real and unreal images. We can describe the difference, but we can't manage it...Humans have existed for 130,000 years. The Great Train Robbery was made in 1903. For roughly 129,900 years, any moving image a human saw was actually real...For 129,900 years, we were conditioned to understand that seeing something in motion had a specific meaning. But that understanding no longer exists; today, we constantly 'see things' that

¹⁰⁶ Auguste and Louis Lumiere. *L'Arrivee d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (France: Societe Lumiere, 1896).

¹⁰⁷ Edwin S. Porter. *The Great Train Robbery*. Perf. A.C. Abadie, Gilbert M. "Broncho Billy" Anderson, Justus D. Barnes, George Barnes, Walter Cameron (New York: Edison Studios, 1903).

¹⁰⁸ "The Cargo Cult of the South Pacific." San Jose State University. <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/cargocult.htm>.

aren't actually there...Is there any possible way that 129,900 years of psychological evolution can be altered within the span of a single century? ¹⁰⁹

We simply don't know the effect of thinking that government and corporate designed images originate in our own brains but we know the bulk of our images come from screens, whether we are imagining what it is like to be in outer space or picturing the ideal tap-dancing child.

Shirley Temple:

In the 1930s, Shirley Temple was the first major star whose image was recreated as a doll; additionally, hair bows, dresses, and countless other items began to be directed toward children via multiple types of media. People purchased these trappings hoping to make their little girls as adorable as Shirley, the biggest star of her time, as well as one of the most meteoric stars of all time. Thought of today as children's films, they were originally frequented by young and old, female and male, because grown men enduring hardships felt that if Shirley – with all her challenging abandonment – could survive in good spirits, maybe they could as well. And so, the films came to embody the spirit of a country struggling to remain positive in spite of dire circumstances. Notably, Shirley Temple films were created during the U.S. president's mandate to Hollywood to use their medium to enhance the mood of the nation during the Depression and Shirley herself received special commemoration from President Roosevelt. This was not an accident: "Politicians directly charged Hollywood with the task of 'cheering Americans up'...but far more significant pressures arose out of

¹⁰⁹ Chuck Klosterman. "Fail" from *Eating the Dinosaur* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

the grim economic histories of the major studios which saw all of them by 1936 come under the financial control of either Morgan or Rockefeller financial interests.”¹¹⁰ As big business and government used movies to inculcate society, little Shirley was deliberately and distinctly used for political causes.

Her image was manipulated in upsetting ways, since Germany especially used blue-eyed, blond-haired Shirley Temple likenesses to further their own cause despite the fact that the actress’ locks were a very dark blond and her eyes brown. The actress later became a representative for the Republican Party and a U.S. goodwill ambassador to both Ghana and Czechoslovakia under Republican presidents. Thus, her image was used by many authoritative entities to promote their ideologies, not to mention that several of her films featured blackface. *The Littlest Rebel* (1935), for example, is racist – in this case, glorifying Confederate ideals and showing little Shirley herself in blackface as a way to avoid capture by the Yankees – and unfortunately, like many films of the era, it depicts people of color as delighted to be slaves.¹¹¹ In real life, Shirley and her partner in several films, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, were the first onscreen dancing interracial couple (when she was 6 years old and he in his 50s) and the two were the best of friends despite his having to play the role of a slave ready at her bidding. She attributed learning how to tap-dance successfully to him and, as a child, noticed racism but wasn’t

¹¹⁰ Charles Eckert. “Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller.” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1974, 2004.

<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC02folder/shirleytemple.html>. See also: Dr. D.F. Klingender and Stuart Legg, *MA’s Money Behind the Screen* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), 63-79.

¹¹¹ Keertana Sastry. “Shame on Hollywood: These Are The Most Racist Films Of All Time.” *Business Insider*. Jun. 1, 2012. <http://www.businessinsider.com.html>.

fully aware of its implications when Robinson wasn't allowed to stay in the same hotel as she; when she asked him about this, he didn't want her to worry and told her he was fine because the chauffeur was staying with him.¹¹² The films also denigrate women; for example, "in the movie *Dimples*, each major adult woman is an idiot, an evil authoritarian, or narrow-minded dominatrix."¹¹³ The iconic actress' films are still screened repeatedly by pageant girls attempting to re-create the captivating and adorable nature of a star who influenced millions, illustrating yet another way her image has been/is used by others and showing that new generations are under this influence. For this reason especially, Shirley's life as consummate child performer should be examined.

Shirley's career began early. Her fan club website explains, "Temple began her career [at three-years old] playing adult roles in a series of 1932, *Baby Burlesk* [sic], short subjects that today would be considered highly inappropriate. She played characters named 'Morelegs Sweet-trick' (a play on Marlene Dietrich's name) and 'Mme. Cradlebait.' But when Fox signed her...the studio abandoned the infant sexpot image and let her be what she really was – an energetic, resilient, good-natured little girl."¹¹⁴ *Baby Burlesk* never met with success, but its creation came as a way to compete with the infinitely more popular and professionally done series, *The Little Rascals*. *The Little Rascals* (or *Our Gang* or *Hal Roach's Rascals*) was about

¹¹² Elizabeth Blair. "Shirley Temple and Bojangles: Two Stars, One Lifelong Friendship." *National Public Radio*. February 14, 2014. <http://www.npr.org.html>.

¹¹³ Lauren Berlant. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 52.

¹¹⁴ The Shirley Temple Fan Club. <http://www.shirleytemplefans.com/hist/hist/htm>.

children behaving generally as children, whereas *Baby Burlesk* was an attempt to recreate popular adult movies with children playing adult roles, all while wearing diapers with huge pins beneath their grown-up, sometimes alluring, tops.

Shirley's mother, Gertrude, insisted that her daughter be given top billing and the most lines. Despite her denial of being a monstrous stage mother, she lied about Shirley's age, making her one year younger than in actuality, in order to make her talent seem all the more miraculous. Even Shirley herself was not told the truth about this until she was thirteen-years old.¹¹⁵ In the middle of the Depression, Shirley was earning \$15,000 a week, but this came at quite a price.¹¹⁶ "Temple learned to rely on herself. In her first films, she was banished to a black box if she behaved – at age 4! – childishly. Rather than becoming petulant and rebellious, Temple later wrote that 'this lesson of life was profound and unforgettable. Time spent working is more fun than standing in an icy black box and getting an earache.'" ¹¹⁷ America's curly tot was put away for being a child? Where was her mother? On the set.

The child in peril plot has been popular since silent films, yet silent films could not convey the warm, cuddly feeling that a dancing, singing prodigy like Shirley Temple could muster, nor the courageous optimistic enthusiasm she spread so easily. This popular theme – Shirley orphaned with no resources – repeated yet couched in different circumstances in

¹¹⁵ Rita Dubas. *Shirley Temple: A Pictorial History of the World's Greatest Child Star* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2006), 34.

¹¹⁶ "Little Known Facts About Shirley Temple." *Associated Content*.
[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/381155/
little_known_facts_about_shirley_temple.html](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/381155/little_known_facts_about_shirley_temple.html).

¹¹⁷ The Shirley Temple Fan Club.
<http://www.shirleytemplefans.com/hist/hist/htm>.

each film must have made it easier to write several films per year. Plus, it resonated with audiences whose own children were facing such predicaments.

Meanwhile, Shirley was the hardest working kid in show business – not just making films but advertising the products spawned from them. This period marks the beginning of the idolization of child stars because Shirley Temple was the first ‘Hanna Montana.’ *Bright Eyes* is the first feature written especially with her in mind that entire families flocked to in order to see the little girl.¹¹⁸ These first films featuring Shirley rescued Fox Films from financial ruin.¹¹⁹ “Fans loved her as she was bright, bouncy and cheerful in her films and they ultimately bought millions of dollars’ worth of products that had her likeness on them. Dolls, phonograph records, mugs, hats, dresses, whatever it was, if it had her picture on there, they bought it.”¹²⁰ Shirley was often promised a cherished Coca-Cola after scenes were shot.¹²¹ After working on her films all day, she proudly posed with each product at her mother’s behest: “Shirley...posed for more than twenty product shots every few days at the height of her career. In retrospect, it’s

¹¹⁸ The Internet Movie Database.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024914.html>.

¹¹⁹ Charles Eckert. “Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller.” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*.

<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC02folder/shirleytemple.html>.

¹²⁰ The Internet Movie Database.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000073/bio.html>.

¹²¹ Rita Dubas. *Shirley Temple: A Pictorial History of the World’s Greatest Child Star* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2006), 28.

evident that she's just holding on until the last shot in some of the photographs.”¹²²

A mature star in today's age would be hard-pressed to keep up with the maddening pace this child faced daily: public appearances, photo shoots for movie stills and product advertisements, song recording studio time, and the hectic scheduling involved in making several films per year. All press releases from her mother and the studio claimed Shirley didn't work hard; for her, it was all playtime. Some think this narrative was intentionally presented in order to minimize the subject of work during the Depression.¹²³ Either way, the talented girl, with her mother by her side – as both helpmate and hairdresser doing those fifty-plus curls – managed to become one of few household name child actors who would appear not to have fall under the strain. Shirley not only became a world renowned figure of joy but she was highly regarded by her co-stars – many who had top billing before she came along and were eclipsed by her fame still considered her professional, serious, well-tempered, and kind.

These movies were a vehicle for mass marketing, particularly toward the youth of the day, and “a major shift in playthings began in the 1930s during the Great Depression. In response to reduced sales, toy makers offered cheaper toys, often sold by the piece rather than in sets (as they had been in the past). This tended to encourage children to purchase their own toys, bypassing parental control. Toy companies also

¹²² Rita Dubas. *Shirley Temple: A Pictorial History of the World's Greatest Child Star* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2006), 31.

¹²³ Charles Eckert. “Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller.” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*.
<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC02folder/shirleytemple.html>.

began to use licensed images of popular radio and movie personalities in their toys to increase sales. Buck Rogers toy guns, Little Orphan Annie decoder rings, Popeye wind-up figures, and Shirley Temple dolls served as props to reenact stories or to identify with heroes.”¹²⁴ As previously mentioned, toys became more and more gendered as a way to increase sales.

As for Shirley Temple dolls, every little girl wanted one (and these are still collectible). A plethora of goods became available, including albums featuring her singing voice, newspaper and magazine articles describing her daily life (minus the black box, one assumes), clothes with her own label, hats designed with her in mind, and even cigarette cases with her image! In addition to this bevy of well-packaged goods, it is claimed that a delicious beverage was invented and named for her while she was on vacation: The Shirley Temple, made at the famous Royal Hawaiian Hotel, at Waikiki, Honolulu, Hawaii, where she was a frequent visitor.¹²⁵

But Shirley was not allowed on an airplane and her life insurance contract at seven-years old stipulated that “no benefits would be paid if the child film star met with death or injury while intoxicated.”¹²⁶ More of the seamy side of Hollywood’s realities come out when we take a second look at the little girl sometimes featured in print with different color eyes and hair than her own, when we study the glued on smile, when we see her sometimes sexualized with too much make-up. “When she

¹²⁴ “Growing Fantasy and Autonomy in Toys.”

<http://www.fags.org/childhood/Th-W/Toys.html>.

¹²⁵ “The Honolulu Advertiser.”

<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2007/Sep/28/In/hawaii.html>.

¹²⁶ The Internet Movie Database.

<http://www.imdb.com.name/nm0000073/bio.html>.

was 11, Hollywood producer (*The Wizard of Oz*) and lyricist (*Singin' in the Rain*) Arthur Freed exposed himself to Temple.”¹²⁷ She reports this herself in her autobiography, *Child Star*. Today’s pageant toddlers are singing songs obviously written for adults, yet one must also review certain Shirley Temple songs. “When I’m With You,” from *Poor Little Rich Girl*, has the following lyrics: “Darling, look what you’ve done to me...Every street I walk on becomes a lover’s lane...When I’m with you...Oh Daddy, how I miss you...You’re busy all your life...I long to hug and kiss you...Marry me and let me be your wife.” Such wording seems inappropriate for a child to sing since it is filled with innuendo. The lyrics to “On the Good Ship Lollipop” (actually written about a plane) seem innocent enough, but while she’s asking if the men around her will be her crew when she flies, they are passing her around and pressing sweets to her in order to leave frosting and such on her face. There is a creepy element to this.

The United States’ obsession with adorable girls dancing, singing, and looking substantially older than they are stems from the world of pageantry. JonBenet Ramsey, like so many other pageant girls, loved Shirley Temple movies and it is unknown if the mysterious slaying of the six-year old child had anything to do with the sexualizing, displaying, and parading of children; however, directing single-digit age girls to flaunt themselves singing suggestive lyrics and gyrating with shoulders bare should give us pause. Valerie Walkerdine examines an overlooked group in cultural studies: the preteen. She claims that, “[putting daughters on the stage is] an investment in little girls as objects of a suppressed but

¹²⁷ Notable Names Database. *Soylent Communications*.
<http://www.nndb.com/people/089/000023020.html>.

nonetheless erotic gaze.”¹²⁸ This has not gone unnoticed by everyone.

Writer Graham Greene got in trouble in 1938 for his review of Shirley Temple’s *Wee Willie Winkie* in a small magazine. In it, he refers to her body repeatedly and how she “measures a man with agile studio eyes, with dimpled depravity.”¹²⁹ Obviously, slut shaming a nine-year old who is just doing her best to satisfy the adults directing her is wrong – children do not understand the ways in which adult viewers view and Mr. Greene worded his critique in a hurtful way, but he does raise an interesting point: “Infancy is her disguise, her appeal is more secret and more adult...Her admirers – middle-aged men and clergymen – respond to her dubious coquetry, to the sight of her well-shaped and desirable little body, packed with enormous vitality, only because the safety curtain of story and dialogue drops between their intelligence and their desire.”¹³⁰ His observation of how audiences despair over young stars aging and his assertion that part of this has to do with the way society fetishizes youth is legitimate. The author fled to Mexico to avoid prosecution, but was sued by her parents – who won the libel suit – to get the paragraph out of the public’s view and rightly so; after all, Shirley wasn’t ever deliberately courting the attention of unwanted advances. But the male gaze was with our society then and it continues now, which leaves us with a looming dilemma.

¹²⁸ Valerie Walkerdine. *Daddy’s Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 142.

¹²⁹ Michelle Dean. “That Time Nine-Year-Old Shirley Temple Got Slut-Shamed by Graham Greene.” *Flavorwire*. Feb. 11, 2014. <http://www.flavorwire.com.html>.

¹³⁰ Dean.

What happens to these pint-sized dancers, singers, and actors? The consummate entertainer, Shirley Temple was left with next to nothing due to her father's poor investment choices.¹³¹ And her movies beg further analysis, particularly in relation to what our society expects from its children. Youth are being taught that there are few molds in which to fit and films such as these perpetuate this problem. There are potential abuses specific to child entertainers. "In theatre, the union has negotiated that there should be 'wranglers' appointed by the producers to manage the children – these people take over from the parents because backstage conditions in a theatre cannot physically accommodate all the parents."¹³² The term wrangler is telling since this word is generally reserved for herding livestock. Is this how our society views the child performer, as one who is herded on stage to do our bidding then put away for the night once we are entertained?

As the Depression came to a close and Shirley Temple films reached their pinnacle of success, a huge film entered the scene – and Shirley nearly won the lead role in *The Wizard of Oz*. (Was it the speculated weak singing voice which lost her the role of Dorothy or that the film's producer remembered the 11-year old laughing and leaving when he exposed himself to her behind closed doors?) *The Wizard of Oz* was first a store-front display intended to draw children – and their parents' pockets and pocketbooks – into a Chicago retail establishment. The same year L. Frank Baum's book *The Wizard of Oz* was published, his *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and*

¹³¹ Laura Fisher. "Sparkle, Shirley, Sparkle!" *The New Inquiry*. March 3, 2014. <http://thenewinquiry.com.html>.

¹³² Katherine Sand. *Child performers working in the entertainment industry around the world: An analysis of the problems faced* (Geneva: International Labour Office Press, 2001), 34.

Interiors came out.¹³³ The real-life man behind the curtain was well-acquainted with smoke and mirrors and warned his child reading audience to beware of such magic.¹³⁴ That advice seems to have gone largely unnoticed.

The Motion Picture Association of America:

The history of film propaganda is as old as the history of film itself but during the early days of the M.P.A.A. things took an ugly turn. Let's take a look at how the M.P.A.A. ratings board was formed. Richard Heffner, former ratings board chairman, explains: "When Jack Valenti became the president of the M.P.A.A. back in...1966, he came from Washington, he came from the president's office where he had been Lyndon Johnson's man and he became the man of Lew Wasserman and of the other owners of Hollywood. He came to serve their interest. He came as their lobbyist."¹³⁵ There has always been a rhetorical disdain for censorship among media moguls and the government alike, as Dotty Hamilton explains: "The M.P.A.A. uses the fear of government censorship to keep power and control in the motion picture industry."¹³⁶ But, in truth, the U.S. government and the film industry have worked together to promote a particular ideology since the film industry's inception.

Having D.C. connections not only calmed Hollywood's elite decision makers, but made clear Valenti's role – and those

¹³³ Max Mosher. "Window Dressing: The Art and Artists." *Worn Fashion Journal*. March/April 2012. *Utne Reader*. <http://www.utne.com.html>.

¹³⁴ Mosher.

¹³⁵ Kirby Dick. *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. DVD. Perf. Matt Stone, Theresa Webb, Kimberly Peirce (London and Los Gatos CA: BBC Films and Netflix, 2006).

¹³⁶ Dick.

who came before and since – in promoting Washington-approved agendas. Jon Lewis relates the film industry's past: "You can't talk about the history of film without talking about the history of censorship, and most people see Will Hays as this sort of first formal attempt on the part of the industry as a whole to institute self-regulation."¹³⁷ Due to Hollywood's reputation of being "Sin City," the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association put Hays in charge of a strict production code. Lewis continues:

The current ratings system is unconstitutional...If somebody wanted to mount a constitutional case against it, well, it's an agreement, it's an industry agreement. Now, the industry's never been competitive. It's always been collusive. Really from the very beginning, the studios were vertically integrated monopolies. They controlled development, they controlled production, they controlled post-production, they controlled distribution, and they controlled exhibition. There were two big strikes. There was the 1941 Disney strike in which labor won a sort of a fairly clear victory. And then you had the 1945 Warner Brothers strike in which you had the battle between the two big industry unions, and you had the studios hiring scabs, and you had high-powered water hoses used on picketers, and one way of dealing with these increasingly powerful unions was to make participation, membership in a union, dangerous. So during the blacklist [the House Un-American Activities Committee], the two questions that were asked routinely at the hearings [by New Jersey's Jay Parnell Thomas,

¹³⁷ Kirby Dick. *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. DVD. Perf. Matt Stone, Theresa Webb, Kimberly Peirce (London and Los Gatos CA: BBC Films and Netflix, 2006).

Chairman, with Richard Nixon by his side] were: ‘Are you a member of the Communist Party?’ and ‘Have you ever held any position in the Screen Writers’ Guild?’ First of all, asking the two questions together suggests that there’s a connection between the two and asking the second question makes saying yes a dangerous act, so to – confess seems the wrong word, but to – confess membership in a union would be tantamount to accepting a life sentence of blacklist. People generally associate this with McCarthyism...it had nothing to do with McCarthyism at all. Once the M.P.A.A. got on board, the M.P.A.A. did it all themselves, and the blacklist was implemented by the very body that controlled the industry.¹³⁸

This dark period in American history destroyed creativity, careers, and lives but the Disney name never tarnished in the scuffle, and it went on to enjoy varying degrees of success as the nation’s primary kids’ film creator. No one questions Walt’s patriotism – or the fact that he “named a number of former employees who had organized a labor strike as ‘Communists.’”¹³⁹

The M.P.A.A. today – whose list of members was anonymous until 2006’s *This Film Is Not Yet Rated* – is actually comprised of members of big film and movie theater conglomerates plus a few Christian religious types for good measure, so they are definitely not a body of regulation or

¹³⁸ Kirby Dick. *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. DVD. Perf. Matt Stone, Theresa Webb, Kimberly Peirce (London and Los Gatos CA: BBC Films and Netflix, 2006).

¹³⁹ Henry A. Giroux. “Disney, Militarization and the National Security State After 9/11.” Aug. 23, 2011. <http://www.truth-out.org.html> or <http://www.henryagiroux.com.html>.

oversight. There is no true rating beyond making sure films which show any alternate to mainstream U.S. media get an NC-17 rating so they won't be shown in regular theaters. This means it is a censorship bureau which began when D.C. sent one of its own to supposedly control Hollywood; in actuality, it exists to promote a certain agenda. This has always been the case and it continues to be.¹⁴⁰ Which means you will typically see a non-rainbow of sexuality at theaters along with a nationalistic perspective – and that nationalism seems increasingly promoted in kids' films.

CHILDREN'S FILM:

Disney's Origins and Growth:

In 1923, Walt and Roy Disney established The Disney Brothers Studio and 1928 saw the creation of "Steamboat Willie." California's Disneyland opened in 1955 and its counterpart in Florida opened in 1971. TV's Disney Channel premiered in 1983 as well as Tokyo Disney, two theme parks and three Disney hotels. 1992 brought Euro Disney with two theme parks and seven hotels. As of 2012, "Disney has over 11 theme parks and approximately 44 hotels surrounding the properties."¹⁴¹ In 1993, Disney purchased Miramax Film Corporation and it later operated as a separate unit of Disney: "[At first], the Weinstein brothers continued to run Miramax under the supervision of Disney Executives...The relationship

¹⁴⁰ Kirby Dick. *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. DVD. Perf. Matt Stone, Theresa Webb, Kimberly Peirce (London and Los Gatos CA: BBC Films and Netflix, 2006).

¹⁴¹ Carlos Carillo, Jeremy Crumley, Kendree Thieringer and Jeffrey S. Harrison. "The Walt Disney Company: A Corporate Strategy Analysis." Robins School of Business, University of Richmond. Nov. 2012. <http://www.robins.richmond.edu/documents/cases/WaltDisney.pdf>.

between Disney and the Weinstein brothers was filled with disagreements, both financial and strategic. One of the more significant disagreements came over the controversial film *Fahrenheit 9/11* [2004] that targeted President Bush during the terrorist attacks.”¹⁴² Finally, the Weinstein brothers left Miramax in 2005 to pursue different interests and in 2010 it was sold to Tutor-Saliba Corporation. In 1995, Disney bought Capital Cities/ABC, giving Disney “access to the television and cable networks of ABC and ESPN.”¹⁴³ Disney purchased Pixar in 2006, though their relationship goes back to 1997. In 2009, they bought Marvel Entertainment “[giving] Disney access to several comic book characters, such as Spider-Man, X-Men, Captain America and Thor.”¹⁴⁴ Disney acquired Lucasfilm in 2012 so more *Star Wars* films will come along, beginning in 2015. The range and power of this company should not be underestimated.

Early Disney Misrepresentations on Replay Mode:

As the first studio devoted to making children’s films, most are aware of examples of early Disney racism, sexism, classism, their bias against the physically or mentally challenged, their narrow gender roles, and their contribution to politics but this piece would be incomplete without a cursory glance at its beginnings – and the continuation of these narrow-minded representations – which reflect segments of the larger society, act as a teaching tool, and are permission-giver for little ones and adults in perpetuating misconceptions. When writers

¹⁴² Carlos Carillo, Jeremy Crumley, Kendree Thieringer and Jeffrey S. Harrison. “The Walt Disney Company: A Corporate Strategy Analysis.” Robins School of Business, University of Richmond. Nov. 2012. <http://www.robins.richmond.edu/documents/cases/WaltDisney.pdf>.

¹⁴³ Carillo.

¹⁴⁴ Carillo.

point out that early Disney merely reflected a time when it was culturally acceptable to make fun of various types of people or lifestyle choices, I disagree, in part because the company still does this today and also because there were plenty of people around who helped people of color escape via the underground railroad when slavery was legal, a number of devoted souls who rescued Jewish and other persecuted people under Hitler, and today, there are allies who are kind-hearted, fair-minded humans fighting for the rights of the LGBTQ ¹⁴⁵ community and others.

There are other indications revealing the company's stern ultra-conservative stance. As early as 1938, Disney did not allow women to be trained for their animation department. ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ In order to be more inclusive in covering the fluidity (identities, orientations, lifestyles, relationship models) of gender and sexuality, the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, the first two initials being interchangeable depending on whether one is speaking with Gays or Lesbians) community became LGBTQIA (with Q standing for Queer or Questioning, I for Intersex, and A for Asexual or Ally), then LGBTQQIAAP (P being Pansexual, people who refuse to be charted on the Kinsey scale) and LGBTSTGNC (for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Trans, and Gender Nonconforming) then LGBTQQIP2SAA (2S referring to the Native American concept of Two-Spirit, wherein a person encompasses both female and male spirituality). Recently, new acronyms are being proposed in order to reduce the lengthiness of the aforementioned, such as GSD (Gender and Sexual Diversities) and GSM (Gender and Sexual Minorities). Please see Patricia Zohn's *Vanity Fair* article, "Coloring the Kingdom." March 2010. <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture.html> and *Queerty* at <http://www.queerty.com.html>.

¹⁴⁶ "No Women Need Apply: A Disheartening 1938 Rejection Letter from Disney Animation." *Open Culture: The best free cultural and educational media on the web*. April 29, 2013. <http://www.openculture.com.html>. For further details, please see Brian Cronin's "Movie Legends Revealed – Did Disney Really Not Allow Women Animators?" CBR (Comic Book Resources).

And their racist sentiments go far beyond films because in the 1950s they had racist displays of “redskins,” as opposed to Native Americans (or Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, known as First Nations in Canada), in Frontierland; similarly, “the main restaurant in Frontierland featured the real life figure of a former slave, Aunt Jemima, who would sign autographs for the tourists outside of her ‘Pancake House.’”¹⁴⁷ Thankfully, Disney got rid of these attractions but only because of civil rights groups criticizing and because the Native American guides were trying to unionize.¹⁴⁸ But these misrepresentations can be seen in most of their films, including today’s movies, and we’ll look at cultural insensitivity and racism further in this chapter.

Disney Public Service and the War Effort:

Disney educational films began in the ’40s. There’s the sex education piece, *The Story of Menstruation* (1946) created for Kimberly-Clark, makers of Kotex, and *Family Planning* (1968) presented in the interest of public service, but also cognizant of over-population problems because it was done for

June 4, 2012.

<http://www.spinoff.comicbookresources.com/2014/06/04.html>.

¹⁴⁷ Henry A. Giroux. “Animating Youth: The Disnification of Children’s Culture.” 1995. <http://www.henryagiroux.com.html>. Please also see: Henry A. Giroux. “Disney, Militarization and the National Security State After 9/11.” Aug. 23, 2011. <http://www.henryagiroux.com.html>. To learn about general representations in film of Muslims and Arabs, please consult: Evelyn Alsultany. *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* (New York: NYU Press, 2012). Also see Sut Jhally’s film: *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Villifies a People* (Northampton MA: Media Education Foundation, 2006). And the book with the same title by Jack G. Shaheen.

¹⁴⁸ Giroux.

the Population Council.¹⁴⁹ The latter features a lead couple with pale complexions but who are speaking with accents – they could be Mexican farmers – and only one out of seven worldwide representations is wearing U.S.-style clothing. The message appears to be that everyone but Americans should practice birth control. Before these, a number of wartime shorts were created supporting the fight against the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan): *Commando Duck* (1944); *Der Fuehrer's Face: Donald Duck as a Nazi* (1943); *The Old Army Game* (1943); *The Spirit of '43* (about the importance of paying taxes to help the war effort); and *Donald Duck Gets Drafted* (1942). Like Frank Capra's 1943 *Prelude to War*, the first in a series of propaganda films commissioned by the OWI (Office of War Information), meant to arouse the nation's war cry, and the Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck wartime cartoons, Disney did his/their part in leading the country.¹⁵⁰ And still does in a partisan fashion with films such as *The Path to 9/11* (2006).¹⁵¹ Leaders have paid back their loyalty, as in President Bush telling the American public immediately after 9/11 to "get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life,

¹⁴⁹ Please see "Watch *Family Planning*, Walt Disney's 1967 Sex Ed Production, Starring Donald Duck." *Open Culture: The best free cultural & educational media on the web*. Aug. 27, 2013. <http://www.openculture.com.html>.

¹⁵⁰ "Donald Duck's Bad Nazi Dream and Four Other Disney Propaganda Cartoons from World War II." Animation, Film, History. December 18, 2012. *Open Culture: The best free cultural & educational media on the web*. <http://www.openculture.com.html>. See also at *Open Culture: The best free cultural & educational media on the web*. "Donald Duck Wants You to Pay Your Taxes (1943)." Nov. 25, 2010.

¹⁵¹ Henry A. Giroux. "Disney, Militarization and the National Security State After 9/11." Aug. 23, 2011. <http://www.truth-out.org.html>. This article can also be found on Henry A. Giroux's website at <http://www.henryagiroux.com.html>.

the way we want it to be enjoyed.”¹⁵² In a similar vein, could the more recent inclusion of torture and other militarism in children’s films exist for the sake of encouraging extreme nationalism?

Altering the Past:

Some point out that the original fairy tales contained violence. While this is true, fairy tales were told as stories and weren’t graphic, moving pictures viewed repeatedly; in addition, fairy tales had good moral lessons despite the terror. Bruno Bettelheim feels that these tales assist children in knowing how to deal with life’s difficulties through symbolic learning.¹⁵³ But once Disney got ahold of fairy tales, they sanitized them in one way but created whole new dimensions of weirdness. For example, compare the original story of *The Little Mermaid* with the Disney film version. Further, stories of historical significance have been changed to reflect the company’s agenda – in real life, John Smith and Pocahontas never had a romantic relationship.

Historical Violence in Disney and Other Film Companies:

There are numerous examples of general violence in kids’ films regardless of company: *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971) shows a child drowning, a terrifying boat ride where we see a chicken’s head cut off, and a giant lizard eating a child; *Pinocchio* (1940) features boys turned into donkeys working in salt mines; *Dumbo* (1941) gets drunk and

¹⁵² Andrew J. Bacevich. “Going for Broke: He Told Us to Go Shopping. Now the Bill is Due.” *The Washington Post*. Oct. 5, 2008.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com.html>.

¹⁵³ Bruno Bettelheim. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2010).

it's like a bad LSD trip; Donald Duck has a starvation meltdown and is about to turn psychotic killer until restrained in *Mickey and the Beanstalk* (1947); a child-catcher can smell the blood of the children he's hunting down to kill in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968); and, of course, there's the huntsman who nearly carves out Snow White's heart in order to present it to his queen as proof of her death in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).¹⁵⁴ Need more? Check out *The Never Ending Story's* (1984) sinking horse; Satanic treats which include demons burning in hell and nipples in the "Night on Bald Mountain" sequence of *Fantasia* (1940); the bloody, back-lighted scenes of *The Secret of N.I.M.H.* (1982); and *All Dogs Go to Heaven's* (1989) revelation that some dogs go to hell.¹⁵⁵ All rated G or PG. But, without question, Disney has perfected the negative.

Representations of Physical and Mental Challenges:

Disney representations of mental and physical challenges are filled with disability stereotypes; relying on stereotypes both erases individuality and negates the realities of disability. Minority groups count on positive portrayals in media – most especially those made for youth – for self-identity and their overall image. From *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Dumbo* (1941) to *Finding Nemo* (2003) and beyond, the company has engaged in seven decades of presenting challenges in ways which perpetuate Otherness. Hollywood generally has long used disability "to get a laugh, a

¹⁵⁴ Fitzgerald Smith. "7 Horrifying Moments from Classic Kids' Movies." *Cracked*. Oct. 15, 2009. <http://www.cracked.com.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Jacopo della Quercia. "9 Traumatizing Moments from Classic Kids' Movies." *Cracked*. June 22, 2011. <http://www.cracked.com.html>.

scream and ultimately to make a profit.”¹⁵⁶ *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* features Doc and Dopey and their disorders of verbal communication while the other dwarves possess personality disorders.¹⁵⁷ So begins the Disney foray into disability in all its forms.

Finding Nemo’s lead character negotiates his world in much the same way physically challenged persons survive: rejected by some, accepted by some, pegged as socially and physically different but rejecting assumptions made about him. The story’s catalyst is the protective father and how his loving but restrictive actions affect his son, and the film does not devote much time to the fact that Nemo’s small fin is either a genetic error (birth defect) or the “congenital result of a fatal attack on his mother and sibling eggs.”¹⁵⁸ The film does a good job of presenting characters which nearly all have difference yet who also have complete personalities beyond the traditional narrative that “typecast[s] disabled characters as misfortunate tragedies or sentimental, largely patronized heroes.”¹⁵⁹ Yet we are left to wonder why the 150+ year old sea turtles seem like teenagers physically and psychically, how the neurotic group in the Sydney dentist office will survive, what is driving the sadistic little girl in the office, why Dory has short-term

¹⁵⁶ Stephanie R. Thompson. “From Dumbo to Nemo: Disability Stereotypes and Representation Over 60 Years in Disney Animated Films.” University of Cincinnati. <http://www.ahead.org.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Iftah Biran, MD, and Israel Steiner, MD. “The speech disorder of Doc in Walt Disney’s ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.’” The Department of Neurology, Hadassah University Hospital, Jerusalem, Israel. doi: 10.1212/WNL.57.2.363 *Neurology* July 24, 2001 vol. no. 2 363-364.

¹⁵⁸ Ann Millett. “‘Other’ Fish in the Sea: ‘Finding Nemo’ as an Epic Representation of Disability.” Book and Film Review. *Disabilities Studies Quarterly*. Winter 2004, Volume 24, No. 1.

¹⁵⁹ Millett.

memory loss, and whether Marlin's emotional disability and anxiety will fade. It appears as though Dory and Marlin will become a couple – no surprise there, it's Disney! – and we are led to believe that the spectacled bodies on display will overcome their supposed intellectual and physical difficulties or prevail in spite of them as seen in traditional narratives.

Criminality:

Given that criminal deviance is often Disney fare, it is significant that Disney removes any social conditions such as poverty when portraying criminality, instead making the culprit an individual's inherent qualities; that is, people are either good or evil. These can be divided into the following groups: The Status-Seekers, like Lady Tremaine in *Cinderella* (1950) or Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), although female villains are chastised, whereas Gaston-type figures still make young women swoon and never pay for their sexist bumbling.¹⁶⁰ The Wealth-Seekers, such as Cruella de Vil in *101 Dalmatians* (1961) and Mr. Clayton in *Tarzan* (1999). The Throne-Seekers, as illustrated by Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and Yzma in *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000). The Revenge-Seekers, like Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* (1953). The Evil-Seekers, such as Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and Madame Mim in *The Sword and the Stone* (1963).¹⁶¹ “The Disney representation of criminality as deriving from an internal quality is consistent with how Americans generally view crime in the United States.”¹⁶² And what is the effect of viewing crime in this manner? Removing social problems as contributors to the

¹⁶⁰ Rebecca Rabison. “Deviance in Disney: Representations of Crime in Disney Films, A Qualitative Analysis.” Wesleyan University, 2008. p. 40-45.

¹⁶¹ Rabison, 45-69.

¹⁶² Rabison, 69.

behavior of criminals “not only makes it easier to kill them but also to distance ourselves from any sense of responsibility for the roots of the problem itself.”¹⁶³ Teaching children to view crime in this manner and making judgments about race and class has real-world consequences but it is not the only depiction which is problematic.

Animal Abuse:

One example of problematic anthropomorphized creatures is seen in a 2013 Disney TV cartoon called “Gasp!” In trying to save his pet fish, Mickey throws his pet cat out of a four-story high window. The viewer does not see if the cat is okay before the end of the short. In “Mickey’s Good Deed,” from 1932, Mickey sells his beloved pal, Pluto, to help a cat family with many (about twenty) kids for whom there are no presents at Christmas, even though he and Pluto have no money for food. “O Come All Ye Faithful” plays in the background. We see the mother crying and a portrait of a man behind bars which is labeled “Father.” A fish which is only bones swims in a fish bowl. After witnessing this, Mickey – with hands around Pluto’s neck – drags his pet to be sold to the wealthy man whose child wants him. Pluto is abused by the toddler, who bangs him on the head with a mallet, tries to run over him with a toy train, and ties things to his tail. Finally, the dad has their butler throw Pluto out: We then see a bare bottom, and we overhear the crying child whose father administers at least ten hits/slaps. While Mickey and Pluto end up together again, the audience has seen the betrayal of a friend, the imposed hunger of a friend, and child abuse but, because these are all animals, these situations are presented as acceptable.

¹⁶³ Rebecca Rabison. “Deviance in Disney: Representations of Crime in Disney Films, A Qualitative Analysis.” Wesleyan University, 2008. p. 70.

Sexism/Gender Misrepresentation:

Women have always been objectified in the company's movies. Besides creating all supposedly good females with the same body type, see *Beauty and the Beast*, which is a primer for teaching women how to endure being in an abusive relationship. This has a cumulative effect which tells girls how to behave (and look!) in order to get the prince, yet boys too are taught how to interact with women – that women are either servants or objects of pleasure or both – and they are instructed to be attracted only to stereotypically Disney versions of attractiveness. Women's bodies are generally large-breasted with tiny waists, while men's bodies are large-shouldered, huge-armed, big-chested, and chiseled – those men who do not fit into this mold are either outcast or seen in subservient roles. Many a climactic scene is shown in Disney films with two males fighting either to maintain/gain power or win the love of a woman. Since themes of vengeance define masculinity and projections of servitude and sexuality define womanhood, there is little room for more well-rounded characters. ¹⁶⁴

Pro-Disney articles talk about how they're finally coming around and the proof is in *Mulan* (1998) and *Pocahontas* (1995), but these female leads look and act pretty much the same as all the other female leads – and end up interested in male heroes. Ho-hum. Sure, some of the new films like *Brave* (2012) also offer women on horseback. And I suppose it says something that a female hero can choose not to marry – Wait! In what year was that finally allowed? Often, the new leads are subjected to the same patriarchy, the same wardrobes, make-up artists, and evil personal trainers (who

¹⁶⁴ Sanjay Newton. YouTube. "Sexism, Strength & Dominance: Images of Masculinity in Disney Films." Also YouTube: "Disney and Sexism."

appear to use the same stretching devices on their new clients as used to achieve the slim bodies of earlier female heroes). Why is it that the one character who isn't interested in a man – like the lead character in *Brave*, Princess Merida – is presented as suspect in the media's discussion of whether or not she is meant to be seen as asexual or a lesbian? Because viewers of these films have so often, and for so long, been exposed to the same script: Pretty girl gets the handsome guy. In our collective consciousness, that's just what she's destined to do. In *Brave*, Pixar's 13th movie, we see a medieval “Katniss,” the first female lead in seventeen years.¹⁶⁵ Maybe that's something.

What does it say about our society that we are so desperate to crawl back into the womb of false retro security – whether presented through toys many of us saw as kids or in lands with occasionally benevolent royalty – that we are willing to go along with what we know is wrong, such as laughing when Ken is severely bullied by Barbie in *Toy Story 3* (2010)? Basically, every Disney/Pixar film is problematic for using stereotypical and derogatory representations like the aforementioned and there seems no limit to the varieties of prejudice. Virtually every Spanish-speaking character is presented as criminal or lazy or as some sort of misogynistic flirt – see Buzz Lightyear when he's switched to Spanish mode in *Toy Story 3* as an example. And it isn't just Disney/Pixar. *The Lego Movie* (2014) – produced by Warner Bros., Village Roadshow Pictures, and others – gives the Lego version of Dumbledore an extra high voice presumably because the author of the *Harry Potter* character stated he was gay after she completed the series.

¹⁶⁵ Mary Pols. “Why Pixar's *Brave* Is a Failure of Female Empowerment.” *Time*. June 22, 2012. <http://www.ideas.time.com.html>.

Racism:

In the 1890s, Populist leader Tom Watson addressed poor Black and white farmers: “You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars you both.”¹⁶⁶ The opposition enforced white working class supremacy through which whites were taught lifestyle changes to purportedly express their superiority. It didn’t take media long to reflect racist sentiments which further segregated the races; it has existed in film since its inception and Disney has been expert in promoting such. Real-life ramification in today’s world? “Upturns in teen suicide rates...for white males crept up only 22 percent between 1980 and 1995 while the rate for Black males jumped 146 percent.”¹⁶⁷ Keep in mind that Black men with college degrees earn the **same** as white men with high school diplomas.¹⁶⁸ We have a problem.

Disney racism and cultural insensitivity extends to books released by the company, including *Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse and the Boy Thursday* from 1948. The children’s book tells the tale of a West African who arrives at Mickey’s house in a crate of bananas and the boy is presented as an unintelligent person who does not understand a supposedly civilized society. Goofy refers to him as a “dim-witted little

¹⁶⁶ Martha R. Mahoney. “Constructing Solidarity: Interest and white workers.” University of Pennsylvania Law School. <https://www.law.upenn.edu.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Barry Glassner. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 109.

¹⁶⁸ Glassner, 109.

monkey” in a clear case of Othering.¹⁶⁹ When Mickey speaks to Boy Thursday, he uses typically racist Western film language made to be used by Native Americans and those communicating with them such as “You washum” when instructing him to get clean. Minnie calls the boy a beast and tells Mickey: “You can’t keep a savage in your home.” The character destroys items, is heard speaking gibberish, and worships Goofy because he resembles an African totem pole. At first, Mickey recognizes that the youngster needs a patient hand to guide him, but he mainly says “No, no, no” to the boy – and he ends up dumping him off at the circus to get rid of him, presenting him to the head of the circus as “a real wild man.”¹⁷⁰ This is merely one example of hundreds of breaches by the company over the years.

You don’t have to look too long to find other examples of racism in Disney productions: How about Pedro, the Mexican Chihuahua, in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955)? Or Tito, the Chihuahua with a temper in *Oliver and Company* (1988)? There’s the Siamese cat who uses chopsticks to play the piano in *The Aristocats* (1970), Chip ‘n’ Dale’s “Rescue Ranger” series’ (1989) Siamese Twin Gang (with the character Juice Lee, karate expert), and Si and Am, the *Lady and the Tramp*

¹⁶⁹ “Othering is a process that identifies those that are thought to be different from oneself or the mainstream, and it can reinforce and reproduce positions of domination and subordination.” This is according to J.L. Johnson, J.L. Bottorff, A.J. Browne, S. Grewal, B.A. Hilton, and H. Clarke. “Othering and being othered in the context of health care services.” School of Nursing, University of British Columbia. *Health Commun.* 2004; 16(2):255-71.

¹⁷⁰ “The Dark Side of Disney.”

<http://www.darksideofdisney.wordpress.com.html>. See also *Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse and the Boy Thursday* (Racine, Wisconsin: Whitman Publishing Company, 1948).

(1955) Siamese cats. Disney continued *101 Dalmatians* on TV with “101 Dalmatians: The Series,” which had the character, Persian Pete, who was a bully with “Petting Deficit Syndrome.” There’s the denigration of Native Americans in *Peter Pan* (1953), whose “What Made the Red Man Red” song explains that a guy got kissed and blushed and then the whole of Native Americans were that color – “a deep Crayola red” – ever after, as opposed to – what? – the regular default mode of white skin.¹⁷¹ The film shows Native Americans as misogynistic and adds a supposedly traditional dance where Tiger Lily seems more like a strip tease dancer.¹⁷² King Louie from *The Jungle Book* (1967) and his “I want to be like you” song is classic racism.¹⁷³ More currently, how about 1989’s *The Little Mermaid* and its Jamaican-sounding crab who explains to Ariel that it’s better “Under the Sea” because “Up on the shore they work all day/Out in the sun they slave away/While we devotin’/Full time to floatin’/Under the sea!” Study the depictions of “the duke of soul” and the blackfish in the film and decide for yourself if these representations help civil rights or perpetuate unkind stereotypes. Or check out the even more recent *Planes* (2013) and *Planes: Fire and Rescue* (2014) Mexican character El Chupacabra who serenades a female plane with a fast version of The Miracles’ 1975 song “(I’m Just a) Love Machine” as well as a slow version with Mariachi style band backup. This raced-plane is obviously a womanizer and DisneyToon Studios (which usually does direct-to-video DVDs for the company) has repeatedly created Latino characters in a similar vein. “Surely it’s no longer acceptable to have a Mexican character in a

¹⁷¹ Tshepo Mokoena. “Is Disney Racist?” Friday 22nd April, 2011. *Don’t Panic*. <http://www.dontpaniconline.com.html>.

¹⁷² Ben Joseph. “The 9 Most Racist Disney Characters.” *Cracked*. November 16, 2007. <http://www.cracked.com.html>.

¹⁷³ Joseph.

luchador mask whose onscreen appearances are announced by a strum of flamenco guitar.”¹⁷⁴ We agree.

Included on the “Business Insider” list of the most racist films of all time are several Disney films: *Fantasia* (1940), which features a half-donkey, half-human Black centaur who is “giddy and sloppy and [before Disney removed the scene – and even denied Sunflower’s existence rather than simply apologizing! – in the 1960s and beyond versions of the film] was seen at one point polishing the hoofs of her white-centaur counterpart.”¹⁷⁵ *Dumbo* (1941) has black birds (voiced by a white person sounding like the company’s idea of African-American¹⁷⁶) whose leader’s name is Jim, as in Jim Crow. Yikes. *Song of the South* (1946) had stereotypical African-American characters in nearly every scene and erased Civil War era plantation life tensions and hardships by making it seem as if Uncle Remus loved his “zip-a-dee-doo-dah” life. The website includes the treatment of Native Americans in *Peter Pan* (1953), the Asian stereotyping of the Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), and expounds upon the ways in which the more current *Aladdin* (1992) portrays the Arabic community “as violent people who treat women abusively” and, of course, recites lyrics from its song “Arabian Nights”: “Where they cut off your ear/ if they don’t like your face/ It’s barbaric, but hey,

¹⁷⁴ “‘Planes’: Crash Landing.” *The Economist*. Aug. 16, 2013.

<http://www.economist.com.html>.

¹⁷⁵ Keertana Sastry. “Shame on Hollywood: These Are The Most Racist Films Of All Time.” *Business Insider*. Jun. 1, 2012.

<http://www.businessinsider.com.html>.

¹⁷⁶ Ben Joseph. “The 9 Most Racist Disney Characters.” *Cracked*. November 16, 2007. <http://www.cracked.com.html>.

it's home.”¹⁷⁷ [Beginning lines were finally changed – after repeated attempts from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee which began even before the film's original release – on the 1993 video release to: “Where it's flat and immense/ and the heat is intense/ It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.” The film's original soundtrack album features the previous version but subsequent re-releases don't.¹⁷⁸ It is interesting that the voices which replace the edited lines are noticeably deeper than the original, as if to make an obvious point; further, when the original lyrics are used, the chosen words act to make the listener keenly aware of the words ear and face and the brutality of what is being said because the rest of the stanzas' third and fourth lines and the refrain's second and third lines rhyme with one another – by/fly...not/hot...guard/hard... ear/face? – and there is a dissonance.]

Kids' Films' Contemporary Political and Wartime Value:

Let's look more closely at Disney during the Gulf War because their portrayals of the Arabic world as conniving and mean-spirited in the film *Aladdin* (1992) went a long way in convincing viewers that most in the distant land were unusually cruel. Further, Disney's racist tone against Arab culture did not completely stop even when protests occurred. Executives changed one line, but “mispronunciation of Arab names in the film, the racial coding of accents, and the use of nonsensical scrawl as a substitute for an actual written Arabic language

¹⁷⁷ Keertana Sastry. “Shame on Hollywood: These Are The Most Racist Films Of All Time.” *Business Insider*. Jun. 1, 2012.

<http://www.businessinsider.com.html>.

¹⁷⁸ “Aladdin (1992): Alternate Versions.” Internet Movie Database.

<http://www.imdb.com.html>.

were not removed.”¹⁷⁹ The film reiterated news and other media misrepresentations of the culture during the Gulf War. As Jasmine and Aladdin, the heroes in the film, are given pleasing features and American accents – Aladdin even being modeled after popular actor Tom Cruise – the supposedly bad characters are given hideous features and heavy accents.¹⁸⁰ This is little different than when “the despicable hyena storm troopers speak through the voices of Whoopi Goldberg and Cheech Marin in racially coded accents that take on the nuances of the discourse of a decidedly urban, black and Latino youth...[so] children are taught that cultural differences that do not bear the imprint of white, middle-class ethnicity are deviant, inferior, unintelligent, and a threat to be overcome.”¹⁸¹ Two years after *Aladdin*, the video sequel, *The Return of Jafar* (1994) included the lyrics: “Arabian nights like Arabian days...they shock and amaze. Pack your shield, pack your sword, You won’t ever get bored, Though [get] beaten and gored, you might.”¹⁸² These offensive lyrics were unchallenged by most: The film is “one of the 20 top-selling videos of all time.”¹⁸³ [The “shock and amaze” wording reminds us of George W. Bush’s “shock and awe” campaign for Operation Iraqi Freedom.]

¹⁷⁹ Henry A. Giroux. “Animating Youth: the Disnification of Children’s Culture.” <http://www.henryagiroux.com.html>.

¹⁸⁰ This is repeated today through news stories of beheadings, as if the U.S. electric chair is somehow more humane; similarly, the 2015 Charlie Hebdo and more recent attacks in France garner attention, whereas the reasons behind their occurrence are neglected in media. Ask what is missing from your screens which might cause some to react in such a desperate way.

¹⁸¹ Henry A. Giroux. “Animating Youth...”

¹⁸² Jack G. Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York and Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 52.

¹⁸³ Shaheen, 52.

Disney has been in the service of promoting right-wing political requests since its inception and it continues to do so in today's world. Disney has routinely promoted the "isms" (sexism, classism, racism, etc.), encouraged the sexual binary and heterosexual stance, and created a particular semi-clad body image for women and girls to follow, but it is the increasing violence and militarism – often promoted through offspring companies – which should be the primary focus because its pervasive cruelty is changing society adversely here and abroad. One potential problem is that these violent films tell others that the United States deserves return violence; another problem is that those who are marginalized/accused become targets.

The Vilification of Arabs and Muslims:

While there are contemporary examples of racism through stereotyping in kids' films against Latinos, Native Americans, Asians and others, Arabic and Islamic slams have existed for more than 100 years and are on the rise. The Arab or an American of Arab heritage is never portrayed as a regular person. Since 1896, celluloid Arabs are portrayed as "brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural 'others' bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews."¹⁸⁴ Audiences never question why Arabs are consistently presented thusly: "Black beard, headdress, dark sunglasses. In the background – a limousine, harem maidens, oil wells, camels. Or perhaps he is brandishing an automatic weapon, crazy hate in his eyes and Allah on his lips."¹⁸⁵ But there are deeply political reasons why this is the case.

¹⁸⁴ Jack G. Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York and Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 2.

¹⁸⁵ Shaheen, 2.

First, the facts: “The term ‘Arab’ [refers] to the 265 million people who reside in, and the many more millions around the world who are from, the 22 Arab states.”¹⁸⁶ There is a mixed ethnicity due to occupation by Europeans, so “some Arabs have dark hair, dark eyes, and olive complexions [while] others...have freckles, red hair, and blue eyes.”¹⁸⁷ Think all those in Arabic countries are Muslim? Nope. “About 15 million Arab Christians reside there as well” and their lifestyles, careers, and dress “defy stereotyping.”¹⁸⁸ In actuality, “their dress is traditional and Western. The majority are peaceful, not violent; poor, not rich; most do not dwell in desert tents; none are surrounded by harem maidens; most have never seen an oil well or mounted a camel.”¹⁸⁹ Moviegoers will not see “Arab immigrants and their children making good in America.”¹⁹⁰ There are no representations of those who fought – and still are – America’s wars or work/ed in American factories.¹⁹¹ Of the over 900 largely Hollywood films made between 1896 and 2001 [Shaheen dissects], only a handful depict heroic Arabs.¹⁹² Even making fun of the Arabic word for God, “Allah,” which Arab Christians and Muslims use, producers imply that these cultures are not worshipping the “‘true God’ of the Christians and Jews.”¹⁹³

Here’s a history lesson: “As for Americans of Arab heritage, prior to World War I, nearly all the Arabs immigrating

¹⁸⁶ Jack G. Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York and Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 2.

¹⁸⁷ Shaheen, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Shaheen, 3.

¹⁸⁹ Shaheen, 3.

¹⁹⁰ Shaheen, 4.

¹⁹¹ Shaheen, 4.

¹⁹² Shaheen, 10-11.

¹⁹³ Shaheen. 11.

to America were Christians: Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians. Today, the majority of the United States' Arab-American population is also Christian; about 40 percent are Muslim...Most of the world's 1.1 billion Muslims are Indonesian, Indian, or Malaysian. Only 12 percent of the world's Muslims are Arab. Yet, moviemakers ignore this reality, depicting Arabs and Muslims as one and the same people. Repeatedly, they falsely project all Arabs as Muslims and all Muslims as Arabs. As a result, viewers, too, tend to link the same attributes to both peoples. In reality, of course, Mideast Arabs – and Arab-Americans – are more than a bit like you and me.”¹⁹⁴ If you shake to the core every time you see someone wearing a hijab, you've been programmed by U.S. media to be fearful. If you think all Italians are part of the Mafia, that all Jewish people are part of an international conspiracy, and that all Muslims are fanatics, please think again because, as Sydney Harris points out, “in the world today, more than ever, barriers of this kind must be broken, for we are all more alike than we are different.”¹⁹⁵

What is the real world effect of xenophobia? Hate. “One can certainly make the case that movie land's pernicious Arab images are sometimes reflected in the attitudes and actions of journalists and government officials. Consider the aftermath of the 19 April 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Though no American of Arab descent was involved, they were instantly targeted as suspects. Speculative reporting, combined with decades of harmful stereotyping, resulted in more than 300 hate crimes against them.”¹⁹⁶ Even Henry

¹⁹⁴ Jack G. Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York and Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 3-4.

¹⁹⁵ Shaheen, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Shaheen, 7.

Kissinger cautioned after the tragedy: “In an age when far more people gain their understanding from movies...than from the written word, the truth is not a responsibility filmmakers can shrug off as an incidental byproduct of creative license.”¹⁹⁷ Over time, “a steady stream of bigoted images does, in fact, tarnish our judgment of a people and their culture.” How sad – and destructive – to hate before even meeting someone.

The Islamic faith especially is shown as obsessed with holy war, and made up of male supremacists. Mosques are typically shown on screen only before civilians are massacred by those who just prayed.¹⁹⁸ American audiences shamefully rose, clapped, and cheered during the 2000 film, *Rules of Engagement*, when U.S. Marines gunned down 83 Yemini men, women, and children...“not necessarily because of cultural insensitivity, but because for more than 100 years Hollywood has singled out the Arab as our enemy.”¹⁹⁹ Islamophobia and Arabophobia continue, in part, due to military backing.

“More than fourteen feature films, all of which show Americans killing Arabs, credit the DOD for providing needed equipment, personnel, and technical assistance...[condoning] Arab-bashing ventures.”²⁰⁰ This vilification is seen even in places one would not expect: “Shockingly, producers insert egregious, amoral Villains, Sheikhs, Egyptians, and Palestinians in more than 250 movies that have absolutely nothing to do with Arabs or the Middle East...[referred] to...as cameos. Appearing like unexpected jumbo potholes on paved streets, nasty Arabs clutter hundreds of non-Arab scenarios – and even

¹⁹⁷ Jack G. Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York and Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 7.

¹⁹⁸ Shaheen, 9.

¹⁹⁹ Shaheen, 15.

²⁰⁰ Shaheen, 15.

noted filmmakers...participate in this...Renowned writers such as Neil Simon, Tom Wolfe, and Paddy Chayefsky also tarnished Arabs. About 40 films, including *Network* (1976), *Chapter Two* (1979), and *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990) contain discriminatory dialogue...Between 1980-2001, Hollywood released more than 120...insidious Anti-Arab insertions.”²⁰¹ In 2002, at a DOD-funded bash for M.P.A.A. president, Jack Valenti, hosted by Defense Secretary William Cohen, spokesman Kenneth Bacon explained why the DOD fraternizes with image-makers: “If we can have television shows and movies that show the excitement and importance of military life, they can help generate a favorable atmosphere for recruiting.”²⁰² So there it is.

You might want to ask yourself: Why don’t Americans know the word “sheikh” means “literally a wise elderly person, the head of the family...[and that] throughout the Arab world, to show respect, people address Muslim religious leaders” in this way?²⁰³ Do you know the difference between a hijab, a niqab, a burka, a chador, and a khimar? That’s because you haven’t – and won’t – see a primer for such on TV or in film. Why do we think Iran is an Arab country, not Persian? Why do Israeli-Palestinian conflict films never show Israelis as oppressors? Why are Arab-American soldiers never seen in our films, even though plenty of them defend the homeland? Why are directors like Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott, and Francis Ford Coppola complicit in perpetuating bigotry by inserting Anti-Arab sentiments in films [like *The Black Stallion* (1979), *Back to the Future* (1985), *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985), and

²⁰¹ Jack G. Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York and Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 27.

²⁰² Shaheen, 16.

²⁰³ Shaheen, 19.

G.I. Jane (1997)]? All stereotypes are hateful but perhaps the most poisonous are the ones with a long history, encouraged in present day. Isn't it time for a change?

Disney, Pixar, and the New Order:

Back to Disney...Just as the studio's popularity was beginning to wane, a new order of architects took over. A main concern is the introduction, inculcation, and enculturation of violence to youth and, while certainly not alone, Disney/Pixar is a major player. The 1980s saw new animators replacing the old at Disney, as Tim Burton, director extraordinaire, Brad Bird of "The Simpsons" fame and later director of *The Iron Giant* (1999), Pixar's *The Incredibles* (2004) and *Ratatouille* (2007), and John Lasseter, future Pixar guru and eventual Disney executive overran the place like mice.²⁰⁴ In 1984, Michael Eisner came from Paramount to boost a faltering Disney but his "ruthless management style" left many in his wake; after two decades at the helm, he was ousted in 2005 by Walt's nephew.²⁰⁵ After his time at Disney, he had a talk show, started a media holding company, and spent his own money to make TV's "Glenn Martin, D.D.S." before hooking up with Universal Pictures/Comcast for marketing and distribution of his own movies.²⁰⁶

Before he left, he and head of Disney's film unit and former Eisner buddy at Paramount, Jeffrey Katzenberg, developed a nasty working relationship which caused

²⁰⁴ M. Keith Booker. *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children's Films* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 40.

²⁰⁵ Booker, 41.

²⁰⁶ Fred Prouser/Reuters. "Former Disney CEO Eisner back in moviemaking with Universal." 13 Nov. 2013. *New York Daily News*.
<http://www.nydailynews.com.html>.

Katzenberg to leave in 1994. Katzenberg, Steven Spielberg, and David Geffen then founded DreamWorks SKG.²⁰⁷ But before the split, Eisner and Katzenberg began filming *The Brave Little Toaster*, with Lasseter as director. The anthropomorphic machines in *The Brave Little Toaster* face such dire horror genre circumstances that one begins to think that this is a film made for adults pretending to be a kids' film.²⁰⁸ Of course, Lasseter would continue and expand the troubling themes of cruelty and torture when promoting Pixar's upcoming films like *Toy Story*.

The film was slashed by Disney mid-production and Lasseter was fired because Disney saw no promise in the idea of using computers. Of course, Pixar became the fruition of Lasseter's dream while *The Brave Little Toaster* was finished at loosely related Hyperion Pictures (so named for the street of the original Disney studio), which had been founded by former Disney staff. The film was co-written by Joe Ranft, who did voiceovers for Pixar, but Lasseter worked on the picture even when it was at Hyperion.²⁰⁹ Disney was supposed to distribute but there were problems and in 1991 it was subsequently released on video.

The Brave Little Toaster is, in essence, a Pixar prototype in its retro-toy theme and its dark nature with horror tropes and adult subject matter.²¹⁰ This film shows the distinction between Disney and Pixar, even though Pixar is owned by Disney today. Perhaps the Walt Disney Company felt more comfortable releasing films of a more violent nature under Pixar in the same

²⁰⁷ M. Keith Booker. *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children's Films* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 41-42.

²⁰⁸ Booker, 45.

²⁰⁹ Booker, 43.

²¹⁰ Booker, 42-43.

way they began Touchstone Pictures brand in 1983 in order to release movies which have dark and or mature themes so as to not tarnish the idealized innocent Disney image.

The collaborative efforts of technology hotshots continued as the new animation style developed, perhaps more by accident than design. George Lucas was able to create the outstanding special effects at his Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) which made *Star Wars* a success. When it struggled financially in the 1980s, Apple giant Steve Jobs bought it thinking “the group might be able to turn a profit by developing and marketing computer software and (especially) hardware for the government and medical community with a potential secondary market for the use of movie studios (Disney was a key early customer) in creating computer-generated special effects.”²¹¹ The shorts ILM created to generate income caught on and, of course, the rest is history. “Former Pixar head, Steve Jobs, [was in 2010] Disney’s largest shareholder and Pixar’s Lasseter...is now chief creative officer of the animation studios of both Disney and Pixar.”²¹² Now George Lucas is “the second-largest single shareholder in the entertainment giant after the estate of Steve Jobs...Disney has hired J.J. Abrams to direct a new ‘Star Wars’ movie and is looking to launch spin-offs around certain characters.”²¹³ Meanwhile, Pixar has become not only a leader in technological advances, but is a brand whose very name draws crowds to its latest films.

²¹¹ M. Keith Booker. *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children’s Films* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 77.

²¹² Booker, 43.

²¹³ Lucas Shaw. “Disney Transfers \$2B in Stock to George Lucas to Complete Lucasfilm Sale.” *The Wrap: Covering Hollywood*. Feb. 6, 2013. <http://www.thewrap.com.html>.

The point is that these top technological geniuses contributed to very new content (read: torture, cruelty, militarism, and the grotesque) in children's film, which seems to have started with *The Brave Little Toaster* series, a trilogy which includes not only the horror genre, but an animal experimentation lab, the killing of anthropomorphized machines, cannibalism of the aforementioned, etc. In the middle of this exciting computer age, new studios were created which actively promote adult-level violence in content.

EDUCATION:

Education, too, has a past which explains how we got in this mess. In most of the 19th century and earlier, individual schools were independent but the Committee of Ten and other bureaucratic organizations took charge of the education system during the Progressive era. Therefore, a new standardized institution was created, one which implemented policies to dictate new rules that demanded professional credentials, oversaw tardiness and absenteeism, and changed curriculum, etc. Taylorism's factory goals were homogenization, centralization, and sorting and these were initiated in the schools. James B. Conant worked as a chemist on poison gases during World War I, was a president of Harvard University, and was chairman of the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC) overseeing the Manhattan Project making atomic bombs before he again turned his attention to the education system and making sure there would be enough workers in place to keep the country going. His closure of more than 100,000 small schools meant "the size of the average high school increased 300 percent, with many urban high schools ballooning to over 3,000 students." A promoter of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, Conant believed only fifteen to twenty percent were worthy of college, and his aptitude testing,

tracking, and ability grouping are still with us today (which is why, beginning in middle school or earlier, little Timmy will either be in Math or Advanced Math and why high school counselors dictate a student's course selection resulting in their course for life).²¹⁴

Despite rhetoric stating that these new institutional reforms were to aid in democracy and broaden opportunity for all (like all educational reforms since claim is the case), the truth is that "these reforms instilled resentment among students over the paternalism, regimentation, and inflexibility of the modern public school."²¹⁵ The effects of prolonged schooling, the splintering of academics according to perceived abilities, the favoring of upper-middle class kids in testing which promoted social and ethnic divisions, and gigantic schools following a central dictate unwittingly pushed an alienated youth into a rebellious state.²¹⁶

This distrust of institutions spilled into politics as youth of successive generations came to question the inequality of sexism, racism, and classism now inherent in the system. They came to realize that their own forced school incarceration was created to prevent a disrupted labor market; likewise, they came to recognize they were being used as cheap labor once they had fulfilled educational requirements.²¹⁷ But after-school positions the service factor came to depend on gave teens the money for snacks, CDs, and clothes; in addition, it was now normalized

²¹⁴ Please see <http://www.scholarcommons.usf.edu.html> for my thesis on the topic: "Visionary of Control: The Efficiency, Expertise, and Exclusion of James B. Conant." University of South Florida, 2010.

²¹⁵ Steven Mintz. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 291.

²¹⁶ Mintz, 287-291.

²¹⁷ Mintz, 328.

that parents would give toys year-round.²¹⁸ The result is an even greater amount of disposable income being spent on what youth are led to believe is hip, because the assault on consecutive generations has been armed with heavier ammunition.

²¹⁸ Steven Mintz. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 343.

II. MUSIC:

“I’m sick to death of being fucked about by men in suits sitting on their fat arses in the City.”

- John Lennon, expressing his frustration over The Beatles not legally owning their own songs

“Media culture is the result of the industrialization of information and culture. Images, sounds and spectacles help produce the fabric of life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their identities.”

- Douglas Kellner, author

“I think that we have created a new kind of person in a way. We have created a child who will be so exposed to the media that he will be lost to his parents by the time he is 12.”

- David Bowie, British singer/song writer

MUSIC VIDEOS:

“Bitches” n “Hoes”:

Seen on television channels, online, and on one’s phone, music videos, as accompaniment to songs played on the radio, often incorporate cruel or dark storylines; yet it is the abuse against women which should be noted especially. If it looks like many music videos are made by porn directors, it is because this is the case. The limited view of female sexuality – as seen through heteronormative male fantasy (and the overwhelming majority of writers, editors, and directors are male) – serves to keep women in degraded situations and instigates real-life violence against them.

Rape Culture Ramifications:

Male entitlement in music video acted as catalyst for real-life violence toward women during New York City's Puerto Rican Day Pride parade in 2000 when men reenacted scenes by dowsing women, removing their clothing, and sexually assaulting them. The Seattle, Washington, 2001 Mardi Gras festival saw a woman sexually assaulted by many men publically. With no objection from audiences who view such scenes in media, this behavior is seemingly condoned by our society.²¹⁹ When women are shown only as sexual bodies, their full, unique humanness is erased, leading to dehumanization which allows mistreatment and justification of abuse, and since these depictions are seen across genres, whether country, hip-hop, or rock, young viewers may come to think that these filmed interactions are how people are supposed to act in daily life: that is, women are always sexual tricksters who exist to happily be playthings or who enjoy punishment and the role of men is to conquer as many as possible.²²⁰ These images are seen repeatedly in our rape culture. When *Sleeping Beauty's* Princess Aurora is kissed by the prince and she pulls back from him, then he pursues her and she acquiesces, we learn that it's okay for men to do what they want to women; similarly, more recent pop culture illustrates that women and girls are mere objects to be ruled by a masculine hand. Remember that nine

²¹⁹ Sut Jhally. *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video* (Northampton MA: The Media Education Foundation, 2007). A free version can be seen at <http://www.kaltura.com.html>. Also recommended is the documentary about female street harassment, *War Zone*, by Maggie Hadleigh-West (1998).

²²⁰ Bill Yousman, Jeremy Earp and Jake Geissman. *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video*. Media Education Foundation Study Guide. 2007.
http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/223/studyguide_223.pdf.html.

out of ten rape victims were female in 2003, that 44% are under age 18, and that 15% of rape and sexual assault victims are under age 12.²²¹

Female Condemnation:

When Justin Timberlake's "Cry Me a River" video shows him stalking an ex and when he exposes part of Janet Jackson's body as an act of power during the Super Bowl XXXVIII performance, he sends the message that this is how women should be treated. Frighteningly, Timberlake enjoyed continued status as a male superstar after the event, while Jackson was criticized for having her body exposed. He sings "I'll have you naked by the end of this song" from "Rock Your Body," and tears off her breastplate, leading to what became known in popular culture as Nipplegate – and a downfall of her career. The controversy shouldn't have aimed at whether nudity is acceptable but why the male hand which caused the incident was not held accountable.

Given that every year over a million women are stalked by intimate partners, that one in five college women are either the victim of rape or attempted rape, that on college campuses ninety percent of rape victims are attacked by someone they know, that a sexual assault happens in the U.S. every 2 ½ minutes, and that one in six women have been the victim of sexual assault, isn't it time that we reconsider these images?²²² It is easy to say that parents should monitor what their children view, but technology has advanced to the point that such images

²²¹ "Who Are the Victims?" *RAINN* (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network). <http://www.rainn.org.html>.

²²² Sut Jhally. *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video* (Northampton MA: The Media Education Foundation, 2007). A free version can be seen at <http://www.kaltura.com.html>.

and messages are actually in the hands of kids themselves – and, if not your kids, then others will show them at lunch or they will see it or hear it when flipping channels on television or going up and down the radio’s dial or when on the Internet submitting an assignment, often the only way to get credit in today’s school system.

Portraits of women as hypersexual and minorities as lesser take many demeaning forms. Nelly’s “Tip Drill” shows a credit card being swiped down a woman’s rear; the term tip drill means a woman having sex for money with many partners so, with the visual action of the card being swiped, viewers may think that women are only interested in men for their money or that female prostitutes deserve punishment.

Slasher/Horror Film Tropes:

Some music videos use the idea of women’s bodies – but not their personalities – being available for men to a frightening extreme. Take, for instance, Kanye West’s “Monster” video (from his 2010 album, “My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy,” featuring Rick Ross, Jay-Z, Bon Iver, and Nicki Minaj), where dead-looking women are posed nearly naked in underwear, sexy stockings, and high heels lying in pools of blood with blood splattered on the walls. Kanye even holds up a freshly severed woman’s head, clearly commenting that women are but mutilated trophies devoid of thoughts, feelings, or personhood. A statement before the video claims that: “The following content is in no way to be interpreted as misogynistic or negative towards any groups of people. It is an art piece and it shall be taken as such.” This is perhaps allowable for those with training in deconstructing art but the majority of the audience is untrained youth who are stimulated by images not words. Women hanged by chains around the neck

swinging, the weight of their dead bodies causing movement; the male lead putting the arm of one dead woman around another in bed to arrange them in a fashion he deems appropriate; two people eating the bloody innards of a body; and a woman abusing a tied up woman with torture trope black head wrap covering her face give one pause.²²³ Obviously, the artist is enjoying playing with zombie and monster routines but this blending of sexuality with horror is an increasing trend.

Horror film tropes continue in the video “What Do You Mean?” (2015) by Justin Bieber. Justin is seen giving a guy a big wad of cash. He requests, “make sure the girl doesn’t get hurt.” The man responds: “You play with fire, you just might get burnt.” We discover that he’s paid for psycho-killer mask wearing thugs to interrupt the couple’s romantic time to terrorize them but, because of the comment the man he’s paid made, we do not know if she will be harmed and, in fact, she has to fight off being attacked. He asks her if she trusts him just before they jump out of the upper story window. Forward to he and his supposed love at a skate-boarding rave which includes the masked killer dudes. Hey, Justin, what the hell do **you** mean?

Sexuality, Stereotyping, and Self-Esteem Issues:

It is not that there is anything wrong with portraying sexuality, but it is diversity which is lacking. Rarely are healthy relationships shown; gay men and other examples illustrating the range of sexuality are not shown, though women on women male fantasies are commonplace; moreover, Black women are further denigrated because they are often shown as prostitutes, strippers, or as being out to take advantage of men in some way;

²²³ “Monster by Kanye West.” <http://www.vimeo.com.html>.

and Black men in videos are often forced to appear drunk or as if they are using drugs, and as violent and misogynistic. Female music stars are encouraged to display their bodies as a way of gaining acceptance in the culture, erasing any positive role-models for young women.²²⁴ And Miley, you didn't help when you attacked Sinéad O'Connor for trying to help you – ask yourself how the music industry negatively affected her mental health. Girls learn early that their worth comes from their looks, which is having a devastating impact on their collective self-esteem and has led to eating disorders, body dysmorphic disorder, anxiety and depression, and self-injurious behavior.²²⁵

The ideal image of beauty is more extreme and impossible than ever before. In the old days, the perfection was achieved through cosmetics and airbrushing but now it's possible for that image to be absolutely perfect because of computers. You never see the photograph of a woman considered beautiful that hasn't been digitally altered to make her absolutely inhumanly perfect. Girls are being encouraged to achieve that ideal at younger and younger ages all the time. They end up measuring themselves against an impossible standard and feeling themselves wanting as a result of it. Also not surprisingly, young men who are shown lots of photographs of supermodels then judge real women more harshly. The most important thing to understand about all of these images and how they affect

²²⁴ Bill Yousman, Jeremy Earp and Jake Geissman. *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video*. Media Education Foundation Study Guide, 2007.

http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/223/studyguide_223.pdf.html.

²²⁵ Jennifer Siebel Newsom. *Miss Representation*. DVD. Perf. Jean Kilbourne, Katie Couric, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Geena Davis, Malkia Cyril (San Francisco: Girls' Club Entertainment, 2011).

us is that the effect is primarily subconscious and that it is very harmful but that for the most part we're not really aware of that, which is why we need to pay conscious effort to these images.²²⁶

Children are particularly impacted by the images they see because these images shape the way in which they view themselves and their role in life. Young men and women are essentially being trained to pattern themselves after video scripts.

Repressive Relationships:

An example of morose visuals having little to do with lyrics comes in Maroon 5's "Maps" (2014). Girlfriend of the protagonist (played by lead singer, Adam Levine) witnesses him kissing another girl at a party so she leaves, is hounded by a homeless person and, as she turns abruptly to get the begging hand off of her, she's hit by a passing vehicle. Levine arrives at the hospital's ER and the song ends with the girlfriend's heart monitor flat-lining. So, where does the "I was there for you / In your darkest times / I was there for you / In your darkest night" part come in? Seeing the bloodied and cut face of the victim of a car accident and a boyfriend's lack of caring seems only like a lesson in destruction.²²⁷ This tendency to elevate violence and unhealthy relationships is growing.

²²⁶ Jennifer Siebel Newsom. *Miss Representation*. DVD. Perf. Jean Kilbourne, Katie Couric, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Geena Davis, Malkia Cyril (San Francisco: Girls' Club Entertainment, 2011).

²²⁷ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

Tricks of the Trade:

Youth are certainly not trained to question the messages presented to them but, even when one is aware, advertisers know how to manipulate audiences; those in charge have many ways to disable the brain's capacity to deconstruct messages: "Many short scene changes [like] an MTV video; the use of strange camera angles; [and] the playing of fast, rhythmic music in the background." Another method is time compression as seen in TV advertisements. Mild distractions like these prevent counter-arguing against messages.²²⁸ So, we are programmed to accept that which is portrayed as normalcy.

Music videos are essentially advertisements for the music industry and musical acts are often not given permission to create their own videos or images. As consumers, purchases – or lack thereof – are the best way to send a message to huge music companies but even when music is not bought, songs surround us in movies, on television, on the Internet, and in advertising.

RADIO:

Programming Problems:

Of course, radio is the main vehicle promoting today's music. In addition to support from advertisers, the commercial medium presents biased talk radio programs and snippets of news which do not explain both sides of an issue; further, features covered by morning disc jockeys tend to separate women and men through reviewing problem dates or tricking

²²⁸ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 187-188.

someone in order to find out if one in a couple is cheating; afternoon programs track the latest Hollywood stars; evening presents Delilah's request and dedication show revealing listeners' personal love and life secrets while the host assists in choosing songs to encourage listeners. This programming, while highly entertaining, serves as distraction from actual news events which affect the public. Warping real-life, healthy interactions between men and women by pitting one against the other and making weight-gain of females headline news gives listeners a false sense of what matters in life. Radio stations also announce TV programming schedules so listeners can become viewers later in the day – but only the shows of stations the parent company owns. These are presented in an exciting manner and as if everyone will tune in.

Corporate Control:

Further, radio stations commonly speed up songs so that there is more time to run advertisements, the station can advertise playing more tunes per hour than their competitors, and the songs sound more upbeat; this has been noticed on iTunes songs as well. Television ads are often run slightly faster in order to disable the brain's ability to develop counter-arguments against advertisers' messages; perhaps increasing the speed of music has the same effect on audiences. These techniques are being implemented by conglomerates whose main objective is making money but who also carry tremendous influence over audiences. Most of the companies in the recording industry are subsidiaries of the Big Five media giants.

²²⁹ For example, AOL Time Warner owns fifty-two different record labels.²³⁰

Fewer and fewer listener stations are independently owned. For example, an overwhelming majority of channels are under the control of Clear Channel Communications, who own and operate over 1200 radio stations across the United States.²³¹ Therefore, the information presented to listeners has a corporate slant, is limited in scope, and is simultaneously repeated on every channel they own. Clear Channel Media and Entertainment reaches 243 million monthly listeners in the U.S. alone.²³² This control takes away diversity on the airwaves, leaving listeners at the mercy of corporate giants. And adults are only part of the listening audience.

The Children Are Listening:

Little ears are also tuning in to the airwaves. According to Arbitron's (now owned by Nielsen Audio) *Radio Today 2013: How America Listens to Radio*, "92% of consumers aged 12 years and older listen to the radio each week."²³³ Further, the average teenager "listens to 10,500 hours of rock music during the years between the 7th and 12th grades."²³⁴ Younger

²²⁹ Ben H. Bagdikian. *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 66.

²³⁰ Bagdikian, 31.

²³¹ <http://www.clearchannel.com.html>.

²³² "Media and Entertainment." <http://www.clearchannel.com.html>.

²³³ Arbitron Executive Summary. *Radio Today 2013: How America Listens to Radio*.

http://www.arbitron.com/downloads/Radio_Today_2013_execsum.pdf.html.

²³⁴ "Children, Violence, and the Media: A Report for Parents and Policy Makers." Prepared by Majority Staff, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Utah, Chairperson. Sept. 14, 1999. The Center for

children listen as well to increasingly negative content with graphic lyrics such as the following. Please note that my interest is in pointing out trends in violence, militarism, and cruelty; therefore, I do not include abounding messages about sex, recreational drugs, alcohol, or messages which essentially instruct how to behave. Children and teens hear lyrics from “Cool Kids” by Echosmith (2013) which tell them “I wish that I could be like the cool kids, ‘Cause all the cool kids, they seem to fit in.” Will some of them aspire to join the popular group at any cost rather than work to be the best version of who they are? Meanwhile, messages featuring war and medical terms, sadomasochistic and misogynistic sentiments, suicide and revenge themes, and references to animalistic behavior – not ever speaking of the natural world’s creatures’ gentleness – rock our listening pleasure. We are made to fall in love with pop singers and their introductory innocent songs which turn progressively darker...turning into Katy Perry’s anti-gay songs (“Ur So Gay” and “It’s A Choice” – uh, maybe it is a choice for **her**) and Taylor Swift’s latest which has a direct reference to a current war.

War Language:

Use of military and murderous language helps to normalize conflict as part of everyday life and conditions culture to the idea of being in a perennial state of war. Major Lazer and DJ Snake’s “Lean On” (2015) has the following lyrics: “Blow a kiss, fire a gun. All we need is somebody to lean on.”²³⁵ Wait...what? Is it the “blow a kiss” or the “fire a gun” part which is supposedly offering the comfort of “somebody to

Sport Policy and Conduct (CSPC) in the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Indiana University, Bloomington.

²³⁵ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

lean on?" Jay Sean's "Down" (featuring Lil Wayne, 2009) includes the following by Lil Wayne: "Down like she's suppose to be. She gets down low for me. Down like her temperature. 'Cause to me she's zero degrees. She's cold, over freeze. I got that girl from overseas. Now she's my Miss America. Now can I be her soldier, please? I'm fighting for this girl on the battlefield of love."²³⁶ Sade's LP "Soldier of Love" (2010) and single of the same title includes the following lyrics: "I'm in the front line of this battle of mine. But I'm still alive. I'm a soldier of love. Every day and night, I'm a soldier of love. All the days of my life, I've been torn up inside. I've been left behind."²³⁷ Maroon 5's "One More Night" (2012) continues the theme: "You and I go hard at each other like we're going to war. You and I go rough, we keep throwing things and slamming the door. You and I get so damned dysfunctional, we stopped keeping score...So I cross my heart and I hope to die, that I'll only stay with you one more night."²³⁸ The listening audience thus becomes primed – that is, subconsciously prepared – for expecting life to unreservedly include war.

This seems especially distasteful when specific wars are mentioned. Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood" (Remix, 2015), featuring Kendrick Lamar, includes the following war language: "Hey! I can't take it back, look where I'm at! We was on D like DOC, remember that? (Remember that) My TLC was quite OD, ID my facts (ID my). Now POV of you and me, similar **Iraq**. I don't hate you but I hate to critique, overrate you. These beats of a dark heart, use basslines to replace you. Take time and erase you, love don't hear no more. No I don't fear no more, better yet respect, ain't quite sincere no more...Hey! Remember

²³⁶ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²³⁷ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²³⁸ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

when you tried to write me off? Remember when you thought I'd take a loss? Don't you remember? You thought that I would need yah. Follow procedure, remember? Oh wait you got amnesia? It was my season for battle wounds, battle scars. Body bumped, bruised. Stabbed in the back; brimstone, fire jumping through. Still, all my life, I got money and power. And you gotta live with the bad blood now." The song's bridge includes the lines: "Band-aids don't fix bullet holes, You say sorry just for show. If you live like that, you live with ghosts. (You forgive, you forget, but you never let it go)...If you love like that blood runs cold." ²³⁹ Comparing a specific current war with a relationship pushes the metaphorical battlefield boundary and negates suffering during wartime. What about the children getting their arms blown off in war-ravaged countries?

Sometimes conflict images appear even when lyrics have no connection as seen in Katy Perry's (featuring Kanye West, 2010) "E.T." Several wounded animals are presented, including one half-alive still writhing and wriggling under the lion which has attacked it; a fast-motion decomposing fox; animals attacking each other; animals having sex; the remains of an extinct bird in a bag; a nuclear explosion; a falling piece of Arctic ice; and a war scene with explosion. There is a vested interest in keeping the public consciousness focused on the military considering that the Pentagon base budget increased 43 percent from 2001 to 2011 and that the Homeland Security budget increased 301 percent during the same time period (both figures inflation-adjusted). ²⁴⁰

²³⁹ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁴⁰ "U.S. Security Spending Since 9/11." *National Priorities Project*. May 26, 2011. <http://www.nationalpriorities.org.html>.

Fierce Depictions of Animals:

Animals have always been included in songs, but there's been a shift ever since Duran Duran's "Hungry Like the Wolf" (1982) whose lyrics include: "I'm on the hunt I'm after you...Stalked in the forest, too close to hide. I'll be upon you by the moonlight side...High blood drumming on your skin."²⁴¹ Forward to Maroon 5's "Animals" (2014) lyrics: "Baby, I'm preying on you tonight, Hunt you down eat you alive, Just like animals, animals, like animals-mals...Maybe you think that you can hide. I can smell your scent from miles...It's like we can't stop we're enemies but we get along when I'm inside you. You're like a drug that's killing me...But you can't stay away from me. I can still hear you making that sound, Taking me down, Rolling on the ground...You can't deny-ny-ny, That beast inside-side-side." In the video, Levine works as a butcher and enjoys hanging beside chunks of meat in the freezer and rubbing blood all over himself. He stalks a woman, even getting close enough to take a photo of her while she sleeps. In the end, we see that this has just been a dream but the video shows the couple embracing while blood is poured over them.²⁴² Another "Animals" tune was released in 2013 by Martin Garrix, where hard-shell furry head costumes are worn by a gang of men who dance in a club, then smash in a car's windows, pour gasoline on it, and set it on fire. Bruno Mars' "Gorilla" (2013) says, "In this jungle you can't run, Cause what I got for you, I promise it's a killer. You'll be banging on my chest, Bang, bang, gorilla...I got a fistful of your hair...Oh, you and me baby

²⁴¹ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁴² Jessica Chasmar. "Adam Levine accused of promoting stalker rape in new 'Animals' video." *The Washington Times*. Thurs., Oct. 2, 2014. <http://www.washingtontimes.com.html>.

making love like gorillas.”²⁴³ Could this tune have inspired the question asked on Tampa Bay’s party station, WILD 94.1 (1/25/15): “Would you rather lick butter from a homeless person’s toes or have sex with a gorilla?” It seems ridiculous that radio stations will bleep out supposedly bad words artists intended to have in their songs but will ask such disrespectful and disturbing questions (making fun of someone forced to beg on the streets and beastiality) of their audiences.

Medical Terminology/Body Parts:

“Bleeding Love” by Leona Lewis (2007): “My heart melts into the ground...My heart’s crippled by the vein that I keep on closing...You cut me open and I keep bleeding...keep keep bleeding love...I keep bleeding, I keep keep bleeding love, keep bleeding, keep keep bleeding love...you cut me open...and it’s draining all of me...I’ll be wearing these scars for everyone to see.”²⁴⁴ This was among the first songs using graphic medically oriented depictions well beyond Olivia Newton John’s “Heart Attack” of the 1980s. Curiously, perhaps a result of economic downturn, the 1980s marked an interesting time in American music in that it was the first time many songs were released with sad messages accompanied by upbeat tunes. One of the latest in this mode is Enrique Iglesias’ 2013 “Heart Attack,” written to explain the shock a person feels when they’ve lost a romantic partner. Enter Sharon Van Etten’s “Your Love is Killing Me” (2014): “Break my legs so I won’t walk to you. Cut my tongue so I can’t talk to you. Burn my skin so I can’t feel you. Stab my eyes so I can’t see...Your love is killing me.”²⁴⁵ Take 2015’s “Stitches,” by Shawn Mendes. The video

²⁴³ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁴⁴ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁴⁵ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

shows him with a black and blue face and bloodied lip from being beaten by an invisible competitor and his head smashing through a car window. Another is Silento's "Watch Me (Whip/Nae Nae)" from 2015: "Now watch me whip (Kill it!), Watch me nae nae (Okay!), Now watch me whip whip...Do the stanky leg...Now break your legs, Break your legs." ²⁴⁶ The Weekend's 2015 "Can't Feel My Face" could be included in multiple categories for its death language and for insulting women, but the idea of not being able to feel one's face yet loving it seems odd indeed: "And I know she'll be the death of me, at least we'll both be numb, And she'll always get the best of me, the worst is yet to come...I can't feel my face when I'm with you, but I love it, but I love it..." ²⁴⁷ As Meghan Trainor tries to bring average and plus-size women back into fashion, a noble aspiration, she ends up shaming women for their bodies because her song, "All About That Bass," (2015) pits thin women against those who are heavier: "You know I won't be no stick-figure, silicone Barbie doll...I'm bringing booty back. Go ahead and tell them skinny bitches." ²⁴⁸ These references to bodies get ickier when romance and sexuality enter the equation.

Medical Terminology/Body Parts with Sexual Overtones:

There's a whole list dedicated to "Songs with Body Parts in the Title" at Songfacts (<http://www.songfacts.com.html>). It is an interesting if incomplete list because it is only mentioning such in titles. A new fad seems to be the combining of romance and sexuality with body parts and or medical terminology.

²⁴⁶ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁴⁷ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁴⁸ <http://www.metrolyrics.com.html>.

“In the Dark” by Dev (2011): “When you work on me...Open me up and do some surgery.” ²⁴⁹ This song references medical procedure from a female invitational perspective. “Talking Body” by Tove Lo (2015) says: “Bite me while I taste your fingertips...Bodies, our baby making bodies we just use for fun. Bodies, let’s use them up til every little piece is gone.” ²⁵⁰ Another pop hit (from 2009) is Lady Gaga’s “Teeth,” which instructs: “Don’t be scared, I’ve done this before. Show me your teeth. Don’t want no money, that shit is ugly. Just want your sex. Take a bite of my bad girl meat...Take a bite of me boy. Show me your teeth...Let me see your mean...I’m gonna love you with my hands tied...Open your mouth boy. Show me your teeth...Now show me your fangs.” ²⁵¹ Body parts are simply the beginning of problematic discourse.

Female Abduction:

Female abduction is another popular topic. “E.T.” by Katy Perry, featuring Kanye West (2010): (Kanye:) “I got a dirty mind, I got filthy ways...I’m tryna bathe my ape, in your milky way...(Katy:) Kiss me, Kiss me...Infect me with your love and fill me with your poison...Take me, take me, wanna be your victim...Ready for abduction...(Kanye:) Pockets on shrek, rockets on deck...Tell me what’s next? Alien sex. Imma disrobe you. Then Imma probe you. See I’ve abducted you, so I’ll tell you what to do. I tell you what to do.” ²⁵² The idea of abducting a woman, whether or not an extra-terrestrial is involved, is

²⁴⁹ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁵⁰ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁵¹ <http://www.metrolyrics.com.html>.

²⁵² <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

troublesome, particularly since the woman is saying she wants to be a victim.

Condescension of Women by Men:

“Gold Digger,” by Kanye West (featuring Jamie Foxx, from 2009), refers to a woman taking advantage of a man for his money. Although the term “gold digger” can refer to a male or female, it is stereotypically derogatorily used against women. This seems like an unfair characterization of women generally, but specifically because women typically earn less than men for the same work and are the ones who additionally care for children and other family members. This song not only accuses the woman of taking the money a man needs but suggests she isn’t spending the money well: (Jamie Foxx) “She take my money when I’m in need”...(Kanye West) “18 years, 18 years, She got one of your kids, got you for 18 years. I know somebody paying child support for one of his kids. His baby mamma’s car and crib is bigger than his...She was supposed to buy your shorty TYCO with your money. She went to the doctor got lypo with your money...”²⁵³ Another song which denigrates women is Chris Brown’s (featuring Lil Wayne and French Montana) “(These Girls Ain’t) Loyal” from 2013. One YouTube video version of the song and several lyrics websites replace the word girls with hoes.²⁵⁴ Lyrics like (Lil Wayne): “Why give a bitch your heart when she’d rather have a purse?” and “You all about her, and she all about hers...”²⁵⁵ continue the misperception that all women are just interested in men for financial remuneration and expand the intentionally created divide between men and women. Then there’s Bruno Mars’

²⁵³ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁵⁴ See <http://rapgenius.com.html> and <http://www.directlyrics.com.html>.

²⁵⁵ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

great 2013 tune “Treasure,” but the song begins with the line (not given radio play but on the purchased version): “Baby squirrel, you’s a sexy mother fucker.” Are women like baby squirrels? But it’s not just men who are putting down women.

Condescension of Women by Women:

Women seem to be better at it than ever these days. Take “Black Widow,” by Iggy Azalea, featuring Rita Ora, whose 2014 lyrics include: “I’m gonna love ya, Until you hate me. I’m gonna show ya, What’s really crazy. You should’ve known better, Than to mess with me, honey. I’m gonna love ya, I’m gonna love ya, Like a black widow, baby.”²⁵⁶ Meghan Trainor’s second release from 2015, “Dear Future Husband,” seems like an anti-feminist themed novelty song. In the same way her first release pits women against women, the second pits women against men and proposes a mean-spirited approach to marriage as she tells her unwise future mate: “Take me on a date. I deserve it, babe. And don’t forget the flowers every anniversary. Cause if you’ll treat me right, I’ll be the perfect wife. Buying groceries, buy-buying what you need...After every fight, just apologize. And maybe then I’ll let you try and rock my body right. Even if I was wrong, you know I’m never wrong. Why disagree? Why, why disagree...You gotta know how to treat me like a lady, Even when I’m acting crazy...Dear future husband, make time for me. Don’t leave me lonely. And know we’ll never see your family more than mine...I’ll be sleeping on the left side of the bed. Open doors for me and you might get some kisses. Don’t have a dirty mind, Just be a classy guy. Buy me a ring. Buy-buy me a ring...If you wanna get that special loving, Tell me I’m beautiful each and every night (that’s right). Oh-woah. Future husband, better love me right.”

²⁵⁶ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁵⁷ Woe is right. Advertising for the song shows photos of her in heels, an apron, headband, and rubber gloves. She's on a kitchen floor scrubbing it with a brush and there's a bucket of soapy water, a sponge, and a bottle of cleaning fluid next to her. David Guetta's (featuring Nicki Minaj and Afrojack) 2014 hit, "Hey Mama" echoes these sentiments: "Yes, I do the cooking. Yes, I do the cleaning. Plus I keep the na-na real sweet for your eating. Yes, you be the boss and yes, I be respecting, whatever that you tell me 'cause it's game you be spitting." ²⁵⁸ Hey, why don't we go back to the days of using Lysol to keep those vajayjays suitable enough for a man? ²⁵⁹ It's ideas like this which contribute to women's subjugation.

Intimate Partner Abuse:

One idea that seems to be growing in media is that jealousy is correct and even expected behavior, especially for men. Nick Jonas' "Jealous" (2014) is the perfect example: "I don't like the way he's looking at you. I'm starting to think you want him too...I'm puffing my chest. I'm getting red in the face. You can call me obsessed...It's my right to be **hellish**. I still get jealous...I wish you didn't have to post it all. I wish you'd save a little bit just for me. Protective or possessive. Call it passive or aggressive." ²⁶⁰ How about calling it passive aggressive and possibly worthy of arrest? Women participate in this, as we can see in DJ Snake and AlunaGeorge's "You Know You Like It," (2013) where the line is uttered: "If you wanna train me, like an animal, Better keep your eye on my every

²⁵⁷ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁵⁸ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁵⁹ "Could 'Douchebag' Be a Feminist Insult?" *Everyday Feminism*. Dec. 30, 2013. <http://www.everydayfeminism.com.html>.

²⁶⁰ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

move.”²⁶¹ A mild example of intimate partner abuse – a statement of survival in a clearly emotionally abusive relationship – is “Titanium” by David Guetta, featuring Sia (2011): “You shout it out. But I can’t hear a word you say. I’m talking loud not saying much. But all your bullets ricochet. Shoot me down, but I get up. I’m bulletproof, nothing to lose. Fire away, fire away. Ricochet, you take your aim. Fire away, fire away. You shoot me down but I won’t fall. I am titanium. Cut me down. But it’s you who’ll have further to fall. Ghost town and haunted love. Raise your voice, sticks and stones may break my bones [borrowing from Rihanna’s “S & M”] ...Stone-hard, machine gun. Firing at the ones who run. Stone-hard as bulletproof glass...”²⁶² Undoubtedly, this person is in a relationship with someone who isn’t kind so it is a good thing to defend one’s self, but the line “firing at the ones who run” does not seem like a good message in today’s mass shooting culture: From January 1, 2015 to October 1, 2015, there were 294 mass shootings in the U.S.; in fact, “the death toll [from U.S. gun fire] between 1968 and 2011 eclipses all wars ever fought by the country.”²⁶³

Let’s check out “Love the Way you Lie” by Rihanna, featuring Eminem (2010): (Intro – Rihanna:) “Just gonna stand there and watch me burn. But that’s alright because I like the way it hurts. Just gonna stand there and hear me cry. But that’s alright because I love the way you lie...(Verse – Eminem:) Right now there’s a steel knife in my windpipe. I can’t breathe

²⁶¹ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁶² <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁶³ “Oregon shooting: Statistics behind ‘routine’ US gun violence.” BBC. 2 October 2015. <http://www.bbc.com.html>. (1.4 million US firearm deaths versus 1.2 million US deaths in every conflict from the Revolutionary War to Iraq.)

but I still fight while I can fight. As long as the wrong feels right it's like I'm in flight. High off a love, drunk from my hate. It's like I'm huffing paint and I love it the more I suffer, I suffocate. And right before I'm about to drown, she resuscitates me. She fucking hates me and I love it...Who's that dude? 'I don't even know his name.' I laid hands on her, I'll never stoop so low again. I guess I don't know my own strength...You swore you'd never hit 'em; never do nothing to hurt 'em. Now you're in each other's face spewing venom in your words when you spit them. You push, pull each other's hair, scratch, claw, bit 'em. Throw 'em down, pin 'em. So lost in the moments when you're in them. It's the rage that took over it controls you both...Next time you show restraint...But you lied again. Now you get to watch her leave out the window. Guess that's why they call it window pane. But your temper's just as bad as mine is. You're the same as me...Come inside, pick up your bags off the sidewalk. Don't you hear sincerity in my voice when I talk. Told you this was my fault. Look me in the eyeball. Next time I'm pissed, I'll lay my fist at the drywall...I apologize even though I know it's lies. I'm tired of the games I just want her back. I know I'm a liar. If she ever tries to fucking leave again, Ima tie her to the bed and set this house on fire. I'm just gonna."

²⁶⁴ This video is difficult to watch because it is so closely aligned with the lyrics even though the couple is seen sleeping at the end, suggesting the alternately sexual/violent depictions of the characters' relationship ordeal were merely a dream.

"We are Young" by Fun. [stylized as fun.] (2011): "My lover she's waiting for me just across the bar. My seat's been taken by some sunglasses asking 'bout a scar, and I know I gave it to you months ago. I know you're trying to forget." ²⁶⁵ Again,

²⁶⁴ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁶⁵ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

references to hurting one's significant other need not be included as matter-of-fact popular discourse given how many people – mostly women – are victims of a lover's rage.

“Drunk in Love” by Beyonce, featuring Jay Z (2013): (Jay Z) “Hold up. Stumble all in the house tryna back up all of that mouth. That you had all in the car, talking 'bout you the baddest bitch thus far. Talking 'bout you be repping that third, I wanna see all the shit that I heard. Know I sling Clint Eastwood, hope you can handle this curve. Foreplay in the foyer, fucked up my Warhol. Slid the panties right to the side. Ain't got the time to take draws off, on site. Catch a charge I might, beat the box up like Mike. In '97 I bite, I'm Ike, Turner, turn up. Baby no I don't play, now eat the cake, Anna Mae. Said, 'Eat the cake, Anna Mae!' I'm nice, for y'all to reach these heights we gon' need G3, 4, 5, 6 flights, sleep tight. We sex again in the morning, your breasts is my breakfast. We going in, we be all night.” (Beyonce) “Never tired, never tired. I been sipping, that's the only thing that's keeping me on fire, me on fire. Didn't mean to spill that liquor all on my attire. I've been drinking watermelon. I want your body right here, daddy I want you, right now. Can't keep your eyes off my fatty. Daddy I want you.”²⁶⁶ First of all, referring to one's lover as “Daddy” is disrespectful toward the many who have been sexually abused by their fathers and other (predominantly male) authority figures. Is Jay Z referring to “beat up the box,” box being euphemistic for vagina, “like Mike” a reference to Mike Tyson's behavior in and out of the ring when abusing his now ex-wife? Either way, current slang terms among male adolescents and young adult males for having sexual relations are: smash it, kill it, and beat it – all violent terms alluding to dominance, and the violence component is multicultural.

²⁶⁶ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

Moreover, alluding to Ike Turner's abuse of Tina Turner, whose real name is Anna Mae, is upsetting.²⁶⁷ And given Beyonce's response in the song, it appears – once again – as if a woman is asking for brutal treatment. Shockingly, twenty percent of all nonfatal violent crime experienced by women in 2001 was due to intimate partner violence.²⁶⁸ Moreover, “one in five female high school students reports being physically or sexually abused by a dating partner.”²⁶⁹ Pop culture's promotion of abuse by male perpetrators must cease due to its real life consequences. Enter *Fifty Shades of*...disturbing.

Sadomasochism:

“S & M” by Rihanna (2010): “Feels so good being bad...There's no way I'm turning back...Now the pain is my pleasure...Cause nothing could measure...Cause I may be bad but I'm perfectly good at it...Sex in the air, I don't care...I love the smell of it...Sticks and stones may break my bones but chains and whips excite me...Oh I love the feeling you bring to me...Oh you turn me on...It's exactly what I've been yearning for...Give it to me strong.”²⁷⁰ In the mind of the listener, it may or may not be problematic to have a song extolling the virtues of an increasingly mainstreamed alternative way of conducting sexuality; however, what is problematic is releasing the song not long after Rihanna's then boyfriend, Chris Brown, brutally punched and bit her and her decision to take him back, and the

²⁶⁷ Amethyst Tate. “Beyonce ‘Anna Mae’ reference in ‘Drunk in Love’ causes controversy: Is Jay Z mocking domestic violence?” December 18, 2013. <http://www.ibtimes.com.html>.

²⁶⁸ “Domestic Violence Statistics.” *American Bar Association*. <http://www.americanbar.org.html>.

²⁶⁹ “Intimate Partner Violence Facts and Resources.” *American Psychological Association*. <http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/partner.aspx>.

²⁷⁰ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

fact that pornography is increasingly directed toward abusing women. After the fact, Chris Brown got a tattoo on his neck which he and the tattoo artist insist is not a depiction of Rihanna, although it greatly resembles her. Brown says that the image is supposed to be a type of sugar skull homage to Mexico's Day of the Dead celebration but it is a woman's face with the same split lip and bruised eye injuries Rihanna suffered and is definitely not a skull. Brown has become a bigger success than ever since the attack on his former girlfriend.²⁷¹

"Blurred Lines" by Robin Thicke, featuring T. I. & Pharrell Williams (2013): "You're an animal, baby, it's in your nature...You the hottest bitch in this place...Yeah, I had a bitch, but she ain't as bad as you...So hit me up when you pass through. I'll give you something big enough to **tear your ass in two**...Nothing like your last guy, he too square for you. He don't smack that ass and pull your hair like that. So I just watch and wait for you to salute. But you didn't pick. Not many women can refuse this pimpin'. I'm a nice guy, but don't get it if you get with me...Shake the vibe, get down, get up. Do it like it hurt, like it hurt. What you don't like work?"²⁷² References to sadomasochism might be considered inappropriate for pop radio, yet they are occurring with increased frequency. As porn images of women being anally penetrated while kneeling in coffins appear on the screens of younger and younger viewers – the average age of eleven is when boys are first exposed to

²⁷¹ Kira Cochrane. "Chris Brown's new tattoo is sickening." *The Guardian*. Tues. 11 Sept. 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com>. Maane Khatchatourian. "Chris Brown shows off new neck tattoo, denies it's Rihanna's face." *Entertainment: The Music Mix*. Sept. 11, 2012. <http://music.mix.ew.com>. Daily Mail Reporter. "Chris Brown reveals new tattoo of a 'beaten woman'...but denies it's his ex, Rihanna." *Daily Mail*. 11 Sept. 2012. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk.html>.

²⁷² <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

porn, easily accessible on laptops, on cell phones, and in video games – sexually abusive behavior is, not surprisingly, normalized and legitimized and real sexual assaults are beginning to mimic violent portrayals.²⁷³

Self-Abuse/Suicide/Death:

Is it helpful or instructional to hear songs about suicide or dying young or laughing at funerals? Bare Naked Ladies' "One Week" (1998) includes the line, "I'm the kind of guy who laughs at a funeral. Can't understand what I mean? Well, you soon will."²⁷⁴ Hozier's "Take Me to Church" (2014) line is "My lover's got humor – She's the giggle at a funeral."²⁷⁵ Katy Perry says (in 2010's "Teenage Dream") "We can dance until we die. You and I will be young forever."²⁷⁶ "If I Die Young," by The Band Perry (2010), is a dark country pop tune which received cross-over air time. The song reportedly prevented the suicide of a fan.²⁷⁷ The song "How to Save a Life," by The Fray (2004), is digital history's second best-selling rock song and was inspired by the lead singer's experience working at a camp for troubled youth with a boy who didn't survive his despondent state. Sarah McLachlan's song "Angel" (1998) is in homage to the Smashing Pumpkins' touring keyboardist who died in 1996 of a heroin overdose. "Everybody Hurts," by

²⁷³ Julie Bindel. "The truth about the porn industry." *The Guardian*. 2 July 2010. <http://www.theguardian.com.html>. Please also see Kelly Nourdet's "Why Talking About Violence in Pornography Is Important." *Motherboard*. Feb. 22, 2013. <http://www.motherboard.vice.com.html>. Also, "Porn Leads to Violence" at <http://www.fightthenewdrug.org.html>.

²⁷⁴ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁷⁵ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁷⁶ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁷⁷ Wikipedia. Category: "Songs About Suicide." <http://en.wikipedia.org.html>.

R.E.M. (1993) is one of the only R.E.M. songs played on today's radio.²⁷⁸ It is as if the band's "Shiny Happy People" (1991) had never been recorded. Even Kelly Clarkson's upbeat "Heartbeat Song" (2014) includes the line: "I got pins and needles on my tongue, Anticipating what's to come, Like a finger on a loaded gun."²⁷⁹ Is the idea of pulling a trigger synonymous with romance?

Troubled Homicidal Youth:

The following song was written to bring attention to the plight of teenage mental illness – one of the band members has a cousin who, although physically unharmed, was at Columbine High School when the tragic school shooting happened.²⁸⁰ However, in part due to the song's happy melody, it is possible to interpret the tune as an anthem for school killings. "Pumped Up Kicks" by Foster the People (2010): "Robert's got a quick hand, He'll look around the room, he won't tell you his plan. He's got a rolled cigarette hanging out his mouth, he's a cowboy kid. Yeah, he found a six shooter gun in his dad's closet hidden with a box of fun things. And I don't even know what but he's coming for you, yeah, he's coming for you. All the other kids with the pumped up kicks you better run, better run, outrun my gun. All the other kids with the pumped up kicks you better run, better run faster than my bullet. Dad – he works a long day. He'll be coming home late, he's coming home late. And he's bringing me a dark surprise. 'Cause dinner's in the kitchen and it's packed in ice. I've waited a long time. Yeah, the sleight of my hand is now a quick-pull trigger. I reason with my

²⁷⁸ Wikipedia. Category: "Songs About Suicide."

<http://en.wikipedia.org.html>.

²⁷⁹ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁸⁰ Wikipedia. Category: "Pumped Up Kicks."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pumped_Up_Kicks.html.

cigarette. And say, ‘Your hair’s on fire, you must have lost your wits, yeah.’”²⁸¹ Here is a prime example of a song with negative lyrics accompanied by such an upbeat tune that it is difficult to turn off.

Destruction/Revenge:

“I Love It” by Icona Pop, featuring Charli XCX (2012): “I got this feeling on the summer day when you were gone. I crashed my car into the bridge. I watched, I let it burn. I threw your shit into a bag and pushed it down the stairs. I crashed my car into the bridge. I don’t care. I love it. I don’t care.”²⁸² Maybe it is a nice change of pace that here is a female vindictive perspective but, like on the big screen, females are increasingly depicted as violent and this is being misinterpreted as empowerment. I refer you to the hyper-sexualized *Lara Croft* series, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*’s (2009) brutal rape and then the equally brutal return rape, and the lead female in the *Kick-Ass* series, whose actions are worse than the moves by the bad guys.

Carrie Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” (2005) contains similar lyrics directed toward a philandering partner: “And he don’t know...That I dug my key into the side of his pretty little souped up 4 wheel drive, carved my name into his leather seats...I took a Louisville slugger to both headlights, slashed a hole in all 4 tires...Maybe next time he’ll think before he cheats.”²⁸³ Maybe next time he’ll have to find another woman because this one will be in jail. Welcome America’s sweetheart, Taylor Swift, and one of her latest (2014) tunes, “Blank Space,” where she croons “It’ll leave you breathless, Or

²⁸¹ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁸² <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁸³ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

with a nasty scar. Got a long list of ex-lovers, They'll tell you I'm insane..." while the video shows her going berserk and knifing the ex's painting, poisoning him with an apple, and attacking his car, then lining up a new victim.²⁸⁴ Here is a good example of an artist starting out with cute songs, then the content of subsequent releases becomes considerably darker.

Women on Fire:

The website ultimateclassicrock.com has compiled a list of the "Top 10 Fire Songs" and it tells us "of all the elements, fire is the one that shows up in songs the most."²⁸⁵ *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* logically uses songs with the words "flames," "fire," and "burn(s)."²⁸⁶ The concept of warmth or startling energy can be used literally and metaphorically, but lately the idea of women and fire or burning seems to be on the rise. From the positive Alicia Keys' "Girl On Fire" (2012) and Ellie Goulding's "Burn" (2013) to the aforementioned "Love the Way You Lie" (2010) and its visuals and lyrics of actually setting a woman on fire, this imagery connecting women in particular to flame is potentially problematic. "Stay the Night" by Zedd (featuring Hayley Williams, 2013) again offers the proposition from a woman's voice, as she sings: "I am fire, you're gasoline, Come pour yourself all over me. We'll let this place go down in flames only one more time...Are you gonna stay the night (when we get burned)..."²⁸⁷ Globally, women in real life are burned and maimed with acid by husbands, boyfriends, and families for purported sins, including not

²⁸⁴ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html> and the Vevo video.

²⁸⁵ Michael Gallucci. "Top 10 Fire Songs." *Ultimate Classic Rock*.
<http://www.ultimateclassicrock.com.html>.

²⁸⁶ <http://www.metrolyrics.com.html>.

²⁸⁷ <http://www.metrolyrics.com.html>.

having sufficient dowries, so this creative avenue seems a disturbing dead end indeed.

Glorification of the Gory:

General violence can be heard in one of the latest (2014) Justin Timberlake songs, “Not a Bad Thing,” which describes in a graphic manner the torment of losing love: “When someone cuts your heart open with a knife, and you’re bleeding...Then someone cuts your heart open with a knife. Now you’re bleeding.”²⁸⁸ A Leona Lewis throwback is thus introduced to a new generation.

“Royals” by Lorde (2013): “But every song’s like gold teeth, grey goose, trippin’ in the bathroom. Blood stains, ball gowns, trashin’ the hotel room. We don’t care, we’re driving Cadillacs in our dreams.”²⁸⁹ How, exactly, do the blood stains fit with this otherwise delightful tune about enjoying one’s self despite not being of regal lineage? Lorde’s deep voice and serious topics never betray the fact that she is a mere teenager. This song is presented as Lorde’s warning against the trappings of fame and is controversial in that it may contain racial overtones against rappers; in addition, the video features two young white men in a hotel room practicing for some sort of battle: shaving heads, sparring with punching gloves, resisting boredom by putting a flame to one’s hand, chilling out in a swimming pool, laughing at one’s bloody visage in a blood-splattered mirror, lying prostate near train tracks, sitting with like-dressed warriors looking out of windows while traveling. These images leave the audience wondering about the meaning

²⁸⁸ <http://www.metrolyrics.com.html>.

²⁸⁹ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

of the tune with *Fight Club* memories in its collective head.²⁹⁰ Better to check out Maimouna Youssef's (a.k.a. Mumu Fresh) remake, "We're Already Royal," which fights against corporate views.

Horror Tropes:

There is no question that the previously mentioned "Monster," by Kanye West (2010), is a multi-dimensional visual statement yet the lyrics should be critically analyzed. (Bon Iver:) "Are you willing to sacrifice your life?" (Rich Ross:) "Bitch I'm a monster. No good blood sucker." (Kanye:) "The best living or dead hands down huh? Less talk more head right now huh? And my eyes more red than the devil is. And I'm bout to take it to another level bitch...Argue with my older bitch acting like I owe her shit...Have you ever had sex with a pharaoh. I put the pussy in a sarcophagus. Head of the class and she just want a swallowship..." (Jay-Z:) "Sasquatch, Godzilla, King Kong, Lochness, Goblin, Ghoul, a zombie with no conscience. Question what do all these things have in common. Everybody knows I'm a motherfucking monster...Nonsense, none of you niggas know where the swamp is. None of you niggas have seen the carnage that I've seen. I still hear friends scream in my dreams. Murder murder in black convertibles. I kill a block I murder avenues. Rape and pillage a village, women and children...I smell a massacre. Seems to be the only way to back you bastards up." (Nicki Minaj:) "OK first things first I'll eat your brains. Then I'mma start rocking gold teeth and fangs – cause that's what a motherfucking monster do...But

²⁹⁰ "Royals" by Lorde. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niclKh6sBtc.html>, <http://www.news.radio.com.html>, Veronica Bayetti Flores' "Wow, that Lorde song Royals is racist." 10/3/2013, and "A little more on Lorde, Royals, and Racism." *Feministing*. 10/10/2013. <http://www.feministing.com.html>.

really really I don't give a F-U-C-K. Forget Barbie fuck Nicki she's fake. She's on a diet but her pockets eating cheese cake. And I'll say Bride of Chucky is child's play. Just killed another career it's a mild day...I think me, you and Am should ménage Friday..." (Bon Iver:) "I-I crossed the line-line. And I'll-I'll let God decide-cide."²⁹¹ The concepts of silencing women, raping, destroying towns, and pitting woman against woman disguised as an ode to the genre of horror as escape from too brutal a reality is questionable. It seems considerably inappropriate for a general audience.

From Lady Gaga's "Monster" single (2009) with lyrics "he ate my heart" to Tech N9ne's "This Is Hip Hop," (featuring Brotha Lynch Hung, 2011) with lyrics "I eat Carrion I got body parts in my Cary On. It's when the Party starts Nigga I'm very Hung. Been ripping up Niggas since I was very young. Scary looking motha fucka ready to kill ya daddys mom. Ready to eat that meat with a meat cleaver...Put her in the back with the flat tire, I'm Fire till I retire. I tie her up then fry her up and then give her to the higher up,"²⁹² the blending of sexuality with horror is a trend which dispenses with guilt because either the ghastly has occurred to the one telling the musical tale or the sociopathic perpetrator is fine with whatever menacing act he or she chooses because it was simply an act like any other and neither good nor bad or because a divine entity will straighten it out, thus erasing any guilt, anxiety, or even involvement in the act.

²⁹¹ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁹² <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

Serial Killer Exaltation:

Cruelty references reach new heights when highlighting verified serial killers. In Katy Perry's song, "Dark Horse," featuring Juicy J (2013), the lyrics are rife with disturbance: (Katy:) "But you better choose carefully. 'Cause I, I'm capable of anything. Of anything and everything... Don't make me your enemy...Cause I'm coming at you like a dark horse...(Juicy J:) She's a beast. I call her Karma (come back). She eats your heart out. Like Jeffrey Dahmer (woo). Be careful. Try not to lead her on. Shawty's heart was on steroids. Cause her love was so strong...She's sweet as pie but if you break her heart. She'll turn cold as a freezer. That fairy tale ending with a knight in shining armor. She can be my Sleeping Beauty. I'm gon' put her in a coma. Woo!"²⁹³ Other songs referring to Dahmer are: Ke\$ha's "Cannibal" (2010) (with the lines "I want your liver on a platter. Use your finger to stir my tea. And for dessert I'll suck your teeth. Be too sweet and you'll be a goner. Yep, I'll pull a Jeffrey Dahmer."); Eminem's "Must Be the Ganja" (2009) (with lines "Faced with a dilemma. I can be a Dalai Lama and be calmer. Bring drama, I step beyond a Jeffrey Dahmer."); apparently, once was not enough for Eminem because there's also "Fubba U Cubba Cubba" (2005) ("You think I'm the new Osama, press thinks I'm the new Madonna. Jeffrey Dahmer left me with his legacy to carry on."); and "Black Friday" by Lil Kim (2011) (with the lines: "I smell a massacre. I'm Charles Manson, you don't stand a chance with her. Jeffrey Dahmer and you lookin' like lunch to me. 'Bout to kill all you bitches like Ted Bundy.")).²⁹⁴ Still another song mentioning Dahmer is

²⁹³ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

²⁹⁴ <http://www.azlyrics.com.html>.

“Electric City,” (2009) by the Black Eyed Peas.²⁹⁵ Considering that Jeffrey Dahmer “raped, killed, dismembered and ate at least seventeen men and boys over a thirteen year period,” what is the point of increasing this person’s – or any other serial killer’s – notoriety?²⁹⁶

Prophetically, serial killer Ted Bundy warned society on the day before his execution of the effects on borderline personalities: “There are those loose in their towns and communities, like me, whose dangerous impulses are being fueled, day in and day out, by violence in the media in its various forms – particularly sexualized violence.”²⁹⁷ In the interview, he takes responsibility for his own actions, but his forewarning is worth considering given that he felt he would never have come to look upon women as mere objects without media influence.

Children’s Film Lyrics – References to Weaponry and Disregard for Others:

But lyrics for a PG rated children’s film would not be violent, right? Wrong. Take the theme song to “Despicable Me,” by Pharrell Williams. The film version repeats only the primary non-offensive lyrics: “I’m havin’ a bad, bad day. It’s about time that I get my way. Steamrolling whatever I see. Huh, despicable me. I’m havin’ a bad, bad day. If you take it personal, that’s okay. Watch, this is so fun to see. Ah, despicable me.” Looping these lyrics with a catchy beat seems

²⁹⁵ “Jeffrey Dahmer is Rap’s Favorite Serial Killer.” *Celebuzz!*

<http://www.celebuzz.com.html>.

²⁹⁶ *Celebuzz!*

²⁹⁷ Kathleen Gilbert. “Serial Killer Ted Bundy’s Warnings about Pornography Re-Aired on 20th Anniversary of Execution.” *LifeSiteNews*. 1/27/09.

<http://freerepublic.com.html>.

innocuous enough; however, the other lyrics to the tune are problematic, as included on “YouTube’s ‘Just Dance Kids 2 – Despicable Me (Wii Rip)’” with children dancing to overt references to killing with assorted weaponry, self-absorbed civil disturbance, and offensive attitudes toward parents: “Why ask you? Better yet ‘Why not?’ Why are you marking X on that spot? Why use a blowtorch, isn’t that hot? Why use a chainsaw? Is that all you got? Why do you like seeing people in shock? But my question to you is ‘Why not?’ Why go to the baker, stand in line. Just use a freeze gun, it saves me time...Why ask why when this is art? Why parallel when I could just park? Why does Vector think that he’s smart? And does his dad know I know his part? Why did I have to live with my mom? Why do you think that I should be calm? Why want the moon, the world’s in my palm. Is it crazy you think I’ve gone?...Excuse me if you will. You look like you have time to kill. Can you chill? ’Cause Groove’s got the speakers. And the trunk to make you bounce, bounce, bounce...”²⁹⁸ When kids like a song they hear in a film, they often purchase the tune; accordingly, the version with full lyrics would be the one to which they would ultimately be listening. Introducing negative content to the youngest of viewers/listeners could have negative consequences.

AGGRESSION MODELS:

While there are many opinions regarding how children react to media violence (despite the American Academy of Pediatrics’ consistent view that exposure to it is harmful), it is clear how violence affects some adults. Take for instance the

²⁹⁸ <http://www.metrolyrics.com.html>. For whatever reason, A-Z Lyrics has chosen to print only the refrain and does not include the more disturbing verses.

fact that three or four days after well-publicized boxing matches, there are eleven killings of those who resemble the fighters beaten by winners. The fact that some citizens murder in cold blood after seeing violence glorified indicates how people can be influenced by those on television they admire.²⁹⁹ At Hebrew University, cognitive scientists proved that subliminal flashing (at 15 milliseconds on the screens of a computer survey) of the Israeli flag, a nationally important symbol, influenced thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of people voting.³⁰⁰ And how are children affected? The famous Bandura experiments done in the 1960s proved that children who watched an adult beating Bobo, a large plastic doll, on television were likely to display the same behavior on a Bobo doll in the room; that is, they **learned** aggression through observation.³⁰¹ This should come as no surprise if you've ever seen children reenact scenes from films with toy characters.

The Bobo experiment was not the only one with conclusive results. "Much subsequent research supports Bandura's initial findings. Aggressive models have been shown to influence the aggression of both males and females, children and adults; to influence behavior in and out of the laboratory; to teach aggression regardless of whether the model is a cartoon

²⁹⁹ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 146-149. This part of the book also reveals that teenagers are adversely affected by newscasts about suicide and murdering classmates, which result in copycat deaths and killings.

³⁰⁰ Jeff Warrick. *Programming the Nation?* DVD. Perf. Noam Chomsky, Amy Goodman, Dennis Kucinich, John B. Alexander, Christopher Coppola (Aptos CA and Santa Cruz CA: Ignite Productions and Digital Media Factory, 2011).

³⁰¹ "Bandura and Bobo: How A Doll Revolutionized Social-Learning Theory." *Observations*. Association for Psychological Science, <http://www.psychologicalscience.org.html>.

character or a real person and whether the aggression is an isolated act or part of a complex plot, such as a television crime story. Watching aggressive models has led people to kick a Bobo doll, electrically shock a classmate, verbally assault a stranger, and harm a small animal.”³⁰² There will be a further analysis of the ways in which children are affected by violence in their programming, but let’s first look at what is occurring in American classrooms.

³⁰² Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 149.

III. EDUCATION:

“The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next.”

- Abraham Lincoln

“It is no longer enough simply to read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual images. Our children must learn how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché, and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from banter, and important news from coverage.”

- Ernest Boyer, President of Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Former U.S. Commissioner of Education

“Violent crime is down, yet the easy delight taken in violence seems to have grown. From the harshest torments inflicted on incoming students in many American suburban high schools – depicted in Richard Linklater’s 1993 film “Dazed and Confused” – to the hazing rituals of physical brutality and sexual humiliation in college fraternities and on sports teams, America has become a country in which the fantasies and the practice of violence are seen as good entertainment, fun.”

- Susan Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others,” original article in the New York Times

Getting the Jump on Education:

American society tells parents that their children will be lacking if they aren’t in school early on, but there can be problems from enrolling too soon. “One of the issues with large numbers of little people in group care settings is the issue of peer orientation. This means having small children attach to

their peers, rather than to adults.”³⁰³ One expert says that we are putting young children in social environments when they aren’t ready and improved socialization does not come from early peer interaction. He states that premature socialization “was always considered by developmentalists to be the greatest sin in raising children...[when] you put children together prematurely before they can hold on to themselves, they become like [the others] and it crushes the individuality rather than hones it.”³⁰⁴ Indeed, “infants readily imitate actions they see performed by peers in day-care, and will bring those lessons home with them.”³⁰⁵ As children – and babies – are enrolled in daycare centers and pre-kindergartens (by parents told that waiting until kindergarten will harm their young), they may become hostile to being taught or parented by adults because they can become simply peer attached; given how few adults are in charge of multitudes of children, this seems an area of genuine concern.

The Homework Battle:

Children in the United States are also besieged with huge amounts of homework early on and there’s no proof that homework makes students smarter; in fact, “evidence indicates...that homework provides absolutely no academic benefits for younger students. It also raises serious questions about whether homework is necessary for older students, and it challenges the belief that homework promotes independence

³⁰³ Andrea Mrozek. “Nurturing Children: Why ‘early learning’ doesn’t help.” *Institute of Marriage and Family Canada (IMFC)*. August 30, 2012. <http://www.imfcanada.org.html>.

³⁰⁴ Mrozek.

³⁰⁵ Andrew N. Meltzoff. “Born to Learn: What Infants Learn from Watching Us.” From N. Fox & J.G. Worhol, eds. *The Role of Early Experience in Infant Development* (Skillman NJ: Pediatric Institute Publications, 1999), 5.

and good work habits.”³⁰⁶ If research indicates that it is not necessary or beneficial, why have so many of us spent the bulk of our time being bullies for the school system nagging our children to do the work? Teachers send work home which typically amounts to busy work and it’s detrimental to inundate kids with hours of homework. “Assigning homework appeared to be a remedial strategy (a consequence of not covering topics in class, exercises for students struggling, a way to supplement poor quality educational settings) and not an advancement strategy (work designed to accelerate, improve or get students to excel). Piling on homework doesn’t help kids do better in school. In fact, it can lower their test scores.”³⁰⁷ And if your kids are having problems with their eyes, it could be from flashing ads which sometimes appear on websites they’re instructed to visit as part of their homework. This can be seen even on some school-sponsored homework sites themselves but getting on has its advantages – if your children’s teachers find the time to post assignments, that is. Meanwhile, what is happening when children are at school trapped behind all those fences theoretically designed to keep dangerous forces from entering?

³⁰⁶ Alfie Kohn. *The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing* (Philadelphia: De Capo Press, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2006), back cover. Also see John Buell’s *Closing the Book on Homework: Enhancing Public Education and Freeing Family Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004) and Harris Cooper’s *The Battle Over Homework: Common Ground for Administrators, Teachers, and Parents* (Thousand Oaks CA: Corwin Press, a SAGE Publications Company, 2007).

³⁰⁷ Natalie Wolchover. “Too Much Homework Can Lower Test Scores, Researchers Say.” *Huffington Post*. 3/31/12.
<http://www.huffpost.com.html>.

Lessons in Terror:

The education system is a training tool in and of itself and, as such, is another source of indoctrination. Schools are conducting rather strange experimental lessons, which sometimes include tying children up or duct taping their wrists together, then simulating their being transported in a slave ship by making them squeeze together in a darkened room.³⁰⁸ Further, mock slave auctions – dividing children into slaves and masters – are occurring in classrooms across the U.S. One teacher in Ohio encouraged students who were appointed masters to touch and inspect students selected as slaves to see if they were worthy of purchasing. One young child made to be a slave at Gahanna’s Chapelfield Elementary School was humiliated by the experience, especially because the other children later picked on him. The district spokesperson said the slave auction was “part of state required curriculum.”³⁰⁹ At Sewells Point Elementary School in Norfolk, Virginia, Jessica Boyle divided her class according to race, making mixed-race and Black kids stand while white students decided who to buy.

³⁰⁸ “Examining the Middle Passage.” Please see The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History at <http://www.gilderlehman.org.html> and multiple other websites for various instructions on how teachers are to conduct slave related activities, including Plattsburgh State University of New York’s “Introduction to Slave Narratives” at <http://student.plattsburgh.edu/mayv1489/website/slavelesson.htm> and “Classroom Resources Transatlantic Slave Trade Complete Lessons and Activities CD-ROM,” which features “simulation and role play activities on slave ship conditions...and slave auctions.” <http://www.classroom-resources.co.uk/catalog.html>.

³⁰⁹ “School Apologizes for Elementary ‘Slave Auction.’” WBNS – 10TV. March 3, 2011. <http://www.10tv.com.html>.

³¹⁰ A white social studies teacher, Eileen Bernstein, at White Plains, New York's Haverstraw Middle School, bound "the hands and feet of two black girls" with tape and made them "crawl under a desk to simulate the [slave ship] experience."³¹¹ During a field trip where students were unaware of what was to come, a seventh grade Connecticut class was made to perform a role-playing simulation reenacting the slave ship experience; they were crammed together in a darkened space, and were told to imagine they'd just watched their father being killed. They were then chased through the woods – made to pretend they were trying to escape slavery – being emotionally terrorized and called racial slurs. Instructors told an eleven year old girl that if she ran "they would whip me until I bled on the floor and then either cut my Achilles so I can't run again or hang me." Not only were students uninformed about the field trip – which they thought was to explore nature – but parents, too, were left out of the loop.³¹²

A private Catholic elementary school, Sacred Heart School in Pinellas County, Florida, whose charity work involves helping the homeless, arranged a homeless-themed retreat for students intended to teach compassion. Spending the night in a tent city the students constructed on school grounds included the rude awakening of students in the middle of the night by actual police officers who made them move to a different location on the grounds, supposedly to give students a first-hand experience of what it is really like to be homeless and

³¹⁰ Kayla Webley. "Teacher Puts Black Fourth Graders 'Up For Sale' in Mock Slave Auction." *Time Newsfeed*. Apr. 12, 2011.

<http://www.newsfeed.time.com.html>.

³¹¹ "New York Teacher Binds Hands and Feet of Black Girls for Slavery Lesson." *Associated Press*. 12/5/08. <http://www.FoxNews.com.html>.

³¹² Jonathan Anker. "Parents stunned as field trip re-enacts slavery." *HLN-TV*. Sept. 23, 2013. <http://www.hlnTV.com.html>.

treated with no respect even by authorities. Although parents/guardians signed slips giving permission for the retreat, neither parents nor their children knew participants would be awakened abruptly during the cold autumn night.³¹³

Pride or Panic?:

A variant of these activities is the purported teaching of freedom, where children entered the classrooms and, when they questioned why their chairs were missing from desks, were told that freedom was not free and that they had not earned their freedom yet; soon after, the entire elementary school population was led to the main hall where military personnel were standing in formation ready to shake the hands of students and give them their chairs.³¹⁴ This exercise was performed at Pinellas Preparatory Academy, a charter school in Largo, Florida – again, without consent or forewarning for children or parents/guardians. The following year, the same school planned a field trip which involved going to Largo’s Armed Forces Military Museum.

Alternative Methods of Teaching Empathy:

Bringing awareness to current or historical plights is important but to induce terror on such a primal level – during which students are possibly harmed emotionally or physically – does not convey the lesson intended; indeed, it merely makes them aware of the fact that they are helpless in a system which has no respect for them. This is not the best way to use active learning principles. There are documentary films, music, slave narratives, homeless poetry, etc. which could be used to teach empathy without using shock or fear tactics; further, pride in

³¹³ From the author’s personal experience.

³¹⁴ From the author’s personal experience.

country already comes in part from American flags in every classroom (a state dictate in Florida's public universities) and repeating the "Pledge of Allegiance" every morning in grades K-12 to begin the day's lessons.

Introducing military or civil personnel and hearing their tales – without taking away chairs – would be a good way to support the people who defend and maintain the country; similarly, a talk by an immigrant who has found a better life in the United States would go a long way toward helping kids understand the value of their homeland. Instead, these new, experimental activities seem designed to instill fear and degradation, as opposed to teaching appreciation of citizenship and sympathy for suffering; sadly, the callous nature of these activities inculcates acquiescence to brutality.³¹⁵

Repercussions:

We know from Zimbardo's 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment that division and role play – even when supervised

³¹⁵ The Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida, brings trunks with appropriate materials to classrooms to teach students about the horrors of the innocent men, women, and children who suffered or died in the Holocaust because of the importance of keeping this memory alive; the museum also tracks current atrocities around the globe. Please visit in person or at <http://www.flholocaustmuseum.org.html>. Also, Southern Poverty Law Center fights injustice. Their civil rights law firm website has a Hate Map which shows current hate group numbers by state and also has activities which teach acceptance in all its forms, including how to deal effectively with bullying. Please learn how to incorporate these lessons both in the classroom and at home at <http://www.tolerance.org.html> and at <http://www.splcenter.org.html>. Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, has an excellent overview article, "Classroom Simulations: Proceed With Caution," in its *Teaching Tolerance* magazine, Number 33, Spring 2008 at <http://www.tolerance.org.html>.

by professionals – is a risky endeavor even for adult students. That experiment had to be stopped early because those who were prisoners became depressed and suffered from excessive stress and those chosen to be guards became sadistic; in other words, the simulated became reality.³¹⁶ Five-year-olds certainly cannot comprehend that lesson plans which include live slave auctions are intended to teach about an unfair past. The mother of one Alabama kindergartner who was told to participate in such an activity explained: “He said he didn’t want to get on the table at the auction block.” Not only did the unidentified teacher choose fair-skinned children to be the masters, he or she told the students to go home and ask their parents if they’d “ever go back into slavery” to get the conversation rolling.³¹⁷ Considering neighbor state Mississippi finally – due to a clerical error – got around to ratifying the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery in 2013 (nearly 150 years after its adoption), one wonders the place of such divisions.³¹⁸ Given that there are only so many hours in the classroom, this is time which could be spent covering important topics such as slavery, homelessness, and gratitude for service in an inclusive, contributory fashion without terror.

Death Education:

Like the aforementioned, the following is so shocking that it seems completely unbelievable, yet it is well-

³¹⁶ “Stanford Prison Experiment: A Simulation Study of the Psychology of Imprisonment Conducted at Stanford University.” <http://www.prisonexp.org.html>.

³¹⁷ C. Roberts. “School kids ‘act out’ slavery in Alabama classroom.” *New York Daily News*. Feb. 21, 2013. <http://nydailynews.com.html>.

³¹⁸ Adam Edelman. “After oversight, Mississippi ratifies 13th Amendment abolishing slavery almost 150 years after its adoption.” *New York Daily News*. Feb. 18, 2013. <http://www.nydailynews.com.html>.

documented. I suggest viewing the following information from Barbara Walters' 1990 "20/20" report on YouTube.³¹⁹ In sum, children in elementary schools and high schools are being taught death education; frighteningly, there is no across the board curriculum designed by professionals, so kids are learning what individual authority figures think happens after death. Insufficiently trained teachers are inducing trance-like states during which children are expected to re-live real or imagine hypothetical deaths of close friends and family. Needless to say, some students experience trauma from said lessons. Parents are not always informed that their children are taking these courses (sometimes folded into health or other courses and often now called Forensic Science class) yet one out of every ten schools in the country is including death education in the classroom. For elementary school aged children, visits to the local funeral home include viewing and touching coffins; for high school kids, viewing and touching corpses and seeing ashes come out from the crematorium still warm is not uncommon. Proponents claim that death is invading children's lives at ever-increasing rates due to auto accidents and other tragedies, but practicing writing one's own obituary at such a tender age seems an onerous task. One girl at Columbine High School nearly committed suicide as a solution to common teen angst because the teacher believed in reincarnation and made the prospect of death seem very appealing.³²⁰ Her story is included in the ABC 1990 report and, yes, death education was still in force when the tragedy at Columbine occurred and one wonders the connection between teaching "no moral absolutes while fostering a morbid

³¹⁹ "Death in the classroom 20/20: Startling and Shocking! Overly morbid." <http://youtube.com/watch?v=vbiY6Fz6Few.html>. Please also see "Death Education at Columbine in CRTF Archives Forum" at <http://www.signofthetimes.yuku.com.html>.

³²⁰ "Death in the classroom 20/20...."

fixation on death” in the Values Clarification and Death and Suicide Education course and murdering one’s peers. Kids engaged in activities like the lifeboat game, where students had to select which four out of ten fellow students would be thrown overboard so the others could live. One boy who suggested that Jesus came along with another boat so no one had to drown received an F.³²¹

Frightening Contemporary Vocabulary Words and Concepts:

Vocabulary words which describe violent crimes such as heinous and stalking have worked their way into classrooms as well. Free teacher resources, such as www.myvocabulary.com, have compiled lists such as “Violence Vocabulary” and “Bullying and Gangs Vocabulary” accompanied by the following invitation: “We encourage individuals, particularly students, teachers and families to copy these lists for verbal development.” Yes, it seems a worthy endeavor to come up with conversations or sentences which use the terms “trauma,” “prey on,” “merciless,” and “assault” as weekly lesson plans.³²² Another free vocabulary list is “Types of Violence and Cruelty” at www.musicalenglishlessons.org which encourages the brainstorming exercise of dividing students into groups, coming up with as many different examples of violence as possible, categorizing them, and then mixing up the student groups in order to compare notes; the website from England, primarily intended to assist those learning English as a second language, has seemingly endless lists of the many ways in which cruelty and violence can be enacted, such as child abuse, bullying,

³²¹ “Tragedy at Columbine: The Curriculum Connection.” *Education Reporter*, the Newspaper of Education Rights. Number 162. July 1999. <http://www.eagleforum.org/educate/1999/july99/columbine.html>.

³²² <http://www.myvocabulary.com.html>.

cruelty toward pets, rape, sexual harassment, ethnic cleansing, and euthanasia.³²³ The object of lessons should be to sensitize not desensitize students but, increasingly, classroom exercises designed to shock and eventually deaden sensitivity appear to be the norm.

Gender Regulation:

In addition to caustic curricula, savagery continues in the classroom, in locker rooms, in hallways between classes, and on playgrounds. Boys especially are targeted with homophobic slurs, whether or not they have homosexual leanings. The ‘faggot’ discourse “functions as a regulatory mechanism of gender for contemporary American adolescent boys.”³²⁴ Thus, the epithet ‘fag’ is a disciplinary tool used to keep males in place by denying masculinity and power among homosexual and heterosexual alike. As boys use words like this to joke around with and genuinely insult one another, a construct of masculinity is created which leads males to monitor themselves in such a way as to avoid any behavior remotely linked to sweeping assumptions about femininity and what it supposedly means to be a man. This gendered homophobia does not include lesbians; female gay people are societally generally seen as a good thing “because of their place in heterosexual male fantasy not necessarily because of some enlightened approach to same-sex relationships.”³²⁵ The word ‘gay’ is used synonymously with the word ‘stupid’ and is applied to girls, boys, and objects, whereas the word ‘fag’ is typically used to

³²³ <http://www.musicalenglishlessons.org.html>.

³²⁴ C.J. Pascoe. “‘Dude, You’re a Fag’: Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse.” *Sexualities* 2005 8:329
<http://sex.sagepub.com/content/8/3/329-346>. p. 329.

³²⁵ Pascoe, p. 335-336.

“[denote] only un-masculine males [or what is perceived as being un-masculine behavior].”³²⁶

Deadly Derision:

As boys bond through “humorous imitation [of an imagined and exaggerated homosexual male] and through lobbing the epithet at one another,” they are proving that they, themselves, are not homosexual, and such language serves as a reminder to behave in a sufficiently masculine way.³²⁷ The culture in the United States is encouraging a narrowly defined gender binary, fueled by fears of homosexuality, and this rhetoric – and the repercussions for not following it – is plaguing our boys as they attempt dangerous behaviors in pursuit of what this society considers manhood. It is time to look at the role of gender, especially, but also race and class: “Of 28 school shootings between 1982 and 2001, all but one were in rural or suburban schools [and] all but 2 were committed by a white boy or boys.”³²⁸ Despite the thinking that inner-city youth are somehow more violent or that all of these killers were psychologically disturbed or from broken homes, the facts tell a different story which begs telling.

Often presented as harmless fun and a rite of passage among adolescent males, this type of “sexualized teasing often leads to deadly results, as evidenced by the spate of school

³²⁶ C.J. Pascoe. “‘Dude, You’re a Fag’: Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse.” *Sexualities* 2005 8:329

<http://sex.sagepub.com/content/8/3/329-346>. p. 336-337.

³²⁷ Pascoe, 338-339.

³²⁸ Michael S. Kimmel and Matthew Mahler. “Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 46 No. 10, June 2003. p. 1439.

shootings in the 1990s.”³²⁹ School shooters lived in places which voted Republican, and “most of the boys who opened fire were mercilessly and routinely teased and bullied.”³³⁰ In the jock culture that was Columbine High School, the school newspaper allowed publication of a rumor that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were lovers. They weren’t but who was the adult responsible for discouraging cruelty? Some teachers are bullies, it’s as plain as that, and students and colleagues typically remain silent about the abuse. A Massachusetts study found that 53% of students had heard homophobic remarks from school **staff**. “At present, 49 states have passed laws intended to address bullying; most include policy guidelines for schools...Conspicuously absent from [new training programs, resources, and ‘bully-proof’ curricula], however, is an emphasis on how to address abuses of power by educators toward the students they serve.”³³¹ Maybe supportive adults would have made all the difference in the world of these kids.

Many students somehow achieve the psychological resilience to survive cruel taunting, but the students who eventually turned to guns did so as the only way they found to defend their manhood.³³² No school principal rescued them, no teachers came to their aid, no friends offered help, and no

³²⁹ C.J. Pascoe. “‘Dude, You’re a Fag’: Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse.” *Sexualities* 2005 8:329

<http://sex.sagepub.com/content/8/3/329-346>. p. 343.

³³⁰ Michael S. Kimmel and Matthew Mahler. “Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 46 No. 10, June 2003. p. 1439.

³³¹ “Abuse of Power.” *Teaching Tolerance*. Number 48: Fall 2014. Southern Poverty Law Center. <http://www.tolerance.org.html>.

³³² Michael S. Kimmel and Matthew Mahler. “Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 46 No. 10, June 2003. p. 1439.

parents were able to give alternatives to their deadly and desperate decision to kill; these students saw no way out, no other way to prove their masculinity and establish social power. Luke Woodham, Pearl, Mississippi's shooter – constantly called gay and teased for being a nerd and overweight – said, "The world has wronged me." He was right, yet as a society we cast blame quickly and look away.

Despite the varied places chosen to place blame – from saying the shooters had psychological problems [if they had any, they were minor] to broken families [all shooters came from intact families]³³³ – researchers have found a real need to focus on their environments: on normative gender ideologies, peer interactions, school cultures and hierarchies, tolerance of bullying, teacher attitudes, conservative politics, and gun culture.³³⁴ Was the institutionalized violence on which the area thrives – in the form of Littleton's [near Columbine] huge defense contractors, such as Lockheed Martin – partly responsible, as Michael Moore suggests in *Bowling for Columbine*?

The pattern of "being constantly bullied, beat up...and 'gay-baited'" is consistent for the perpetrators: "Nearly all had stories of being mercilessly and constantly teased, picked on, and threatened. And most strikingly, it was *not* because they were gay (at least there is no evidence to suggest that any of them were gay) but because they were *different* from the other boys – shy, bookish, honor students, artistic, musical, theatrical, nonathletic, 'geekish,' or [viewed as] weird. Theirs are stories

³³³ Michael S. Kimmel and Matthew Mahler. "Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 46 No. 10, June 2003. p. 1442.

³³⁴ Kimmel and Mahler. p. 1444.

of ‘cultural marginalization’ based on criteria for adequate gender performance, specifically the enactment of codes of masculinity.”³³⁵ As boys are made to feel inadequate by other boys – and even by school officials – the cruelty of a violent boy culture is taking a toll: Peer harassment is seen as the most significant cause of school shootings.³³⁶ Often, new students are targeted simply because they are on unfamiliar ground. What happens when adults are complicit in the torment of an entire school district? Shockingly, this is sometimes the case.

Ritual Ridicule:

The culture war in Rep. Michele Bachmann’s congressional territory is an example. Self-titled Christian activist members of her former conservative church “who considered gays an abomination forced a measure through the school board forbidding the discussion of homosexuality in the district’s public schools,” leading to deadly outcomes like suicides among students.³³⁷ Nine suicides in two years to be exact.³³⁸ Minnesota public health officials “have labeled the area a ‘suicide contagion area’ because of the unusually high death rate.” Not all victims were gay but they were perceived as such by classmates and were bullied in the “climate of tolerance that allowed bullying to flourish.”³³⁹ As Bachmann’s husband,

³³⁵ Michael S. Kimmel and Matthew Mahler. “Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 46 No. 10, June 2003. p. 1445.

³³⁶ Kimmel and Mahler. p. 1448.

³³⁷ Sabrina Rubin Erdely. “One Town’s War on Gay Teens.” *Rolling Stone*. Feb. 2, 2012. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics.html>.

³³⁸ Stephanie Mencimer. “The Teen Suicide Epidemic in Michele Bachmann’s District.” *Mother Jones*. Mon. July 25, 2011. <http://www.motherjones.com.html>.

³³⁹ Mencimer.

Marcus, ran clinics teaching how to “pray away the gay,” anti-gay sentiments and bullying led to instances such as a student being called a ‘faggot’ and being violently assaulted while a teacher stood by watching; when the student reported what happened, a school official “blamed him for provoking the attack.”³⁴⁰ Regardless of conversion or reparative therapy being proven ineffective, Bachmann and Associates, Michelle and Marcus’ reparative therapy business, has changed its name to Counseling Care and is still spreading its toxic sermonizing.³⁴¹ Meanwhile, children are being led – and hurt – by evangelical cruelty, as opposed to the idea of loving one another. How can children learn when they do not feel safe at school?

Enforced Bullying:

While children are being trained to sit in their seats, to do rote memorization, and are given the same tasks to do simultaneously, they are also expected to be the same and, unfortunately, kids are rarely appreciated for any sort of difference in the classroom setting, a difference which could simply be kindness. Bullying is still a problem despite a public newly informed on the topic and in spite of school boards who rhetoricize to the contrary, and often any form of perceived difference is purportedly justified cause to attack, leaving

³⁴⁰ Stephanie Mencimer. “The Teen Suicide Epidemic in Michele Bachmann’s District.” *Mother Jones*. Mon. July 25, 2011. <http://www.motherjones.com.html>.

³⁴¹ Olivia LaVecchia. “Marcus Bachmann’s Bachmann and Associates is no more.” *City Pages*. Monday, Dec. 9, 2013. <http://blogs.citypages.com.php>. See also Mark Benjamin’s “The Truth Behind Marcus Bachmann’s Controversial Christian Therapy Clinic.” <http://www.swampland.time.com/2011/07/15.html>. And Sheryl Gay Stolberg’s “Christian Counseling by Hopeful’s Spouse Prompts Questions.” *The New York Times*. July 16, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com.html>.

students on their own to defend themselves in a system which seems to turn its back on the most vulnerable. Disabled and mentally or physically challenged children are more at risk than most.

Parents of autistic children are especially worried as their trusting children are mainstreamed into public schools. There are more autistic diagnoses than ever before: “In 1985, one out of 2,500 Americans were diagnosed with the disorder, which impairs social interactions and the ability to communicate. Today, one in 68 Americans are being diagnosed...In 2000, there were about 94,000 children with autism enrolled in public schools. In 2011, that figure rose to about 417,000...”³⁴² Autistic children are four times as likely to be targeted by bullies as kids without developmental disabilities.³⁴³ Unfortunately, most teachers are not trained in how to spot or handle these situations.

Bullying takes a toll whether or not a person has a disability: “Some studies have suggested that any child who is bullied has a greater risk for everything from headaches and stomachaches to anxiety, depression, and suicide.”³⁴⁴ Most instances of bullying occur during middle school, at ages where children are often afraid to tell parents of the misery they are enduring and a stage where there seems no way out. It is estimated that “only 20-30 percent of students who are bullied

³⁴² Petula Dvorak. “Parents of autistic children fear their children being bullied – for good reason.” *The Washington Post*. April 24, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com.html>.

³⁴³ Dvorak.

³⁴⁴ Alice G. Walton. “Why Autistic Children Are Bullied More – And Bully In Return.” *Forbes*. 4/24/2012. <http://www.forbes.com.html>.

tell adults or authorities about their situation.”³⁴⁵ According to a study by the Department of Health and Human Services, 29.3 percent of middle school students have experienced bullying in the classroom, 29 percent experienced it in hallways or locker rooms, 23.4 percent in the cafeteria, 19.5 during gym class, and 12.2 percent in the bathroom. Further, 70.6 percent of teens have seen bullying occur and 30 percent of young people admit to bullying. Within ten seconds, bullying stops 57 percent of the time when someone intervenes, so children – and authorities – need to be taught to watch for signs of mistreatment.³⁴⁶

And what happens to the abusers? “Not shockingly, students who are bullies as young adults continue the trend of abuse and violence into adulthood. By the age of 30, approximately 40 percent of boys who were identified as bullies in middle and high school had been arrested three or more times.”³⁴⁷ And who knows the torment those who are bullied face for a lifetime? Bullying, despite all the talk about it, has not subsided, although it is known that schools with bullying prevention programs decrease bullying by up to 25 percent.³⁴⁸ Let this be a call to all to organize “No Bullying” programs in our schools which are mindful of teacher harassment – and enforce them.

School Punishment:

While in school, children are sometimes subjected to harsh and even barbaric punishments and restraints for behavioral problems, like skin-shock therapy where students are

³⁴⁵ “Bullying Statistics 2014.” NOBullying.com. The Movement Against Bullying. <http://www.nobullying.com.html>.

³⁴⁶ “Bullying Statistics....” NOBullying.com.

³⁴⁷ “Bullying Statistics....” NOBullying.com.

³⁴⁸ “Bullying Statistics....” NOBullying.com.

shocked with 60-volts of electricity. Students are also being stuffed into duffel bags specifically designed for restraint, even when the child is autistic, and they are increasingly removed from the classroom only to be placed in seclusion or “scream” rooms being installed in schools across the country. The latter are small dark rooms with no windows – essentially solitary confinement booths – where no one can hear a youngster scream. The reality is daunting: “Only 17 states have specific laws protecting students,” and some children have emotional and physical problems resulting from the use of these restraints; some have died.³⁴⁹

Zero tolerance programs began as a way to foster a safer environment in schools but these policies have created negative consequences such as contributing to drop out rates. In fact, 68% of all males in state and federal prison do not have a high school diploma.³⁵⁰ Further, these inconsistent and unstandardized rules negatively impact students with disabilities to a greater degree than students without special needs and, even when controlling for socio-economic status, there is racist application.³⁵¹ “Students are suspended, expelled or even arrested for minor offenses that leave visits to the principal’s

³⁴⁹ Angela M. Hill and Matthew Mosk. Special Report ABC’s World News. *Brian Ross Nightline Investigations*. <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/death-school-parents-protest-dangerous-discipline-autistic-disabled/story?id=17702216#ULhvOoPomw0.html>.

³⁵⁰ Carla Amuras. *Tavis Smiley Reports*. Episode 6: Education Under Arrest. “Fact Sheet: How Bad Is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?” <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/tsr/education-under-arrest/school-to-prison-pipeline-fact-sheet/html>.

³⁵¹ “Zero Tolerance and Alternative Strategies: A Fact Sheet for Educators and Policymakers.” *National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)*. NASP Resources: Helping Children Thrive in School, at Home, and in Life. http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheet/zt_fs.aspx.html.

office a thing of the past...these policies disproportionately target students of color and those with a history of abuse, neglect, poverty, or learning difficulties.”³⁵² This institutionalized social injustice leads to further disadvantages for those already at a disadvantage.

And good luck to those kids who do end up in the juvenile justice system. From working at Pinellas Safe Harbor, a homeless shelter in Clearwater, to securing the jail entrance, to transporting prisoners, privatized security guards are being used (as opposed to sheriffs, so the cost is 50% less) in juvenile assessment centers and facilities as well.³⁵³ Rioting juveniles were under the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice’s contracted G4S which runs the Avon Park Youth Academy near Frostproof and “houses 138 inmates aged 16 to 19.”³⁵⁴ There are no security cameras at the facility.³⁵⁵ G4S Secure Solutions USA promotes itself as a security guard service; it was formerly the Wackenhut Corrections Corporation, founded by three former FBI agents. Private prison firms have given over half a million dollars to Florida Republican candidates to maintain their place in the system. Outside groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center have reported allegations of abuse but Florida hasn’t done a good job following up. Neglect, beatings, and sexual abuse are but some of the allegations of abuse but,

³⁵² Carla Amuras. *Tavis Smiley Reports*. Episode 6: Education Under Arrest. “Fact Sheet: How Bad Is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?” <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/tsr/education-under-arrest/school-to-prison-pipeline-fact-sheet/html>.

³⁵³ Stephen Thompson. “Pinellas sheriff turning over more work to private firm.” *The St. Petersburg Tribune*. May 25, 2015.

³⁵⁴ Richard Luscombe. “Riot erupts at Florida juvenile detention center over Cup O’ Noodles.” *The Guardian*. Mon. 19 Aug. 2013. <http://www.theguardian.html>.

³⁵⁵ Luscombe.

because companies such as Youth Services International “[have pulled] out of contracts before the government takes official action,” they’ve kept a clean record and there is no governmental security over kids who desperately need help – they’ve gone from a bad situation to one that is even worse.³⁵⁶ “Nearly 40 percent of the nation’s juvenile delinquents are today committed to private facilities, according to the most recent federal data from 2011, up from about 33 percent twelve years earlier.”³⁵⁷ Long-term contracts make it so states are obliged to keep prison beds full and over two decades, 40,000 girls and boys have suffered through boot camps, prisons, and detention centers in 16 states.³⁵⁸ Sometimes these facilities are for children who have been kicked out of school for one reason or another; some for simply **getting behind** in their schoolwork. No one is protecting them. No one. No wonder there are riots.

If you think enrolling kids in a religious group home might teach them valuable morals in a safe environment, think again, because reports of abuse have surfaced there as well. Several group children’s homes, some with distinctions as girls or military academies with a religious bent, have been accused of shackling students for days, seclusion, corporal punishment, and other forms of extreme discipline. Because these facilities claim to be religious, they are not subjected to being licensed by the state; therefore, authority figures continue to humiliate, isolate, and tie up kids, and encourage students to pick on their peers with beatings and racial and other derogatory slurs – and the only regulation comes from a group (Florida Association of

³⁵⁶ Chris Kirkham. “Private Prison Empire Rises Despite Startling Record of Juvenile Abuse.” *The Huffington Post*. Oct. 22, 2013.

<http://www.projects.huffingtonpost.com/prisoners-of-profit.html>.

³⁵⁷ Kirkham.

³⁵⁸ Kirkham.

Christian Child Caring Agencies or FACCCA) made up largely of owners of the homes themselves.³⁵⁹ Evidence was found supporting more than a third of allegations which include “physical injury, medical neglect, environmental hazards, threatened harm, bizarre punishment, inadequate supervision, mental injury, asphyxiation and sexual abuse.”³⁶⁰ While quoting scripture, “teens have been denounced as sinners, called ‘faggots’ and ‘whores,’ and humiliated in front of their peers for menstrual stains and suspicions of masturbation.”³⁶¹

Meanwhile, Dr. Robert L. Spitzer, creator of “so-called reparative therapy to ‘cure’ homosexuality for people strongly motivated to change,” recanted his theory that people could change their orientation and admitted his study was not backed by real scientific evidence. In fact, the World Health Organization issued a report calling the therapy “a serious threat to the health and well-being – even the lives – of affected people.”³⁶² It was the psychiatrist’s dying wish that he renounce his judgments and apologize to the gay community. Schools and juvenile detention centers are thought of as safe places where responsible, kind adults care for, guide, and protect young minds and bodies from the outside world but sometimes this is not the case.

³⁵⁹ Alexandra Zayas. “Religious exemption at some Florida children’s homes shields prying eyes.” *Tampa Bay Times*. Fri., Oct. 26, 2012. From the series, “In God’s name: Unlicensed religious children’s homes.” <http://www.tampabay.com/news/publicsafety/religious-exemption-at-some-florida-children-s-shields-prying-eyes/1258390.html>.

³⁶⁰ Zayas.

³⁶¹ Zayas.

³⁶² Benedict Carey. “Psychiatry Giant Sorry for Backing Gay ‘Cure.’” *The New York Times*. May 19, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com.html>.

Psychiatric Care:

Another problem is that “at the national level an estimated 657,000 youth aged 12 to 17 years received residential mental health treatment between 2002 and 2006.”³⁶³ Some children need help with emotional or mental difficulties – and some don’t. If it is suggested that your child has ADHD, for instance, don’t take a supposed expert’s advice as necessarily true: Take the time to investigate non-chemical alternatives. The problem is that children have no say in what happens to them. “Children (i.e., legal minors) are considered legally incompetent...most states continue to allow a child’s parent or guardian to approve admission to a psychiatric hospital (or residential treatment center or therapeutic boarding school) regardless of the child’s wishes.”³⁶⁴ Flaws in the child welfare system, the legal system, and the medical system have created a situation wherein children are misdiagnosed with the latest psychiatric disorders and are forced to take psychotropic medications against their will; often, this occurs in situations where group homes receive money. A leader in the field explains:

There are now many new players, tellingly referred to as ‘stakeholders,’ and there is a lot of money being made from these abused and neglected children. In fact, in some jurisdictions the obscurity of a child’s diagnosis is directly related to the fee that is paid to the group home

³⁶³ Svetlana Yampolskaya, Debra Mowery, and Norin Dollard. “Profile of Children Placed in Residential Psychiatric Program: Association With Delinquency, Involuntary Mental Health Commitment, and Reentry Into Care.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Vol. 84, No. 3, pp. 234-243 (2014).

³⁶⁴ John A. Menninger, MD. “Involuntary Treatment: Hospitalization and Medication.” p. 4. <http://www.brown.edu.html>.

or foster parent and is also related to the fees that the practitioner is allowed to charge, the latter fee ostensibly being based on the assumption that these obscure diagnoses take extra time to assess, greater caution and the need to rule out more commonplace conditions. In reality, however, these diagnoses are frequently made without any medical examination of the child, no blood or other laboratory tests, and on the basis of checklists filled out by third parties who have their own vested interests...Research demonstrates that financial relationships with pharmaceutical companies have strong correlations to diagnostic and prescribing behavior of physicians, even when the practitioner is unaware of this linkage. Sadly for the child, when he or she is administered a drug based on a misdiagnosis the drugs will not have the expected effect and, when the drugs do not work, more diagnoses are likely to follow with more drugs prescribed, often in higher doses. A vicious cycle can arise where no one stops to question whether the diagnoses could be wrong – though they are almost always wrong, in my experience.³⁶⁵

That children are being used in such an invasive and life-altering way to line the pockets of professionals and organizations who are in charge of their care and protection is disturbing, but it happens daily.

Arresting Kids:

The reality is that children are being arrested at school for everything from arson to skipping class to minor behavioral

³⁶⁵ M. McKay, Ph.D. "Forced Drugging of Children in Foster Care: Turning Child Abuse Victims into Involuntary Psychiatric Patients." (2007). p. 2-3. <http://www.psychrights.org/articles/JoMv22No2.html>.

problems like disruption, giving kids a record early on and feeding the school-to-prison pipeline which fuels the prison-industrial-complex. This cruel and unusual practice criminalizes communities of color and disenfranchises voters while adding numbers to prison locales which, ironically, gives the areas more voting power because of the sheer number of prisoners included in population counts (even though the prisoners themselves cannot vote). In addition, a burgeoning prison population supports huge corporations because prisoners may end up being used as non-union workers; even if they don't, the companies are still making a fortune as suppliers to the prison system, providing everything from food to care products on a grand scale.³⁶⁶ There are "twice as many people suffering from mental illness who are in jails and prisons than there are in all psychiatric hospitals in the U.S. combined."³⁶⁷

Given the diabolical treatment aimed at some during their school days, it is no shock that students may end up not doing well in school, especially when they are removed from the classroom for minor infractions; moreover, as schools in poor communities of color "replicate the structures and regimes of the prison," the struggling members of said communities thence become the perfect candidates for prison and the perfect workers for industry inside the block walls and barbed wire.³⁶⁸ One Pinellas County, Florida, community group is fighting using arrest as the first and often only response to a problem and is asking the school chief for help in curbing the excessive number of students taken into custody, where 20% of arrests are

³⁶⁶ Angela Y. Davis. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), summary.

³⁶⁷ Davis, 10.

³⁶⁸ Davis, 16.

for disruption (a broad and ill-defined term) and 70% are for misdemeanors.³⁶⁹

Let's look at a few examples: In Forest Hills, New York, a 12-year old girl wrote the following with a green marker on her classroom desk: "I love my friends Abby and Faith. Lex was here 2/1/10 ☺." Rather than detention or a lecture, the principal called police who took her to the police station after handcuffing her in front of fellow students. Another child in 2007 wrote one word on her desk – "okay" – and she too was handcuffed by police and arrested; others that day faced the same for putting stickers on school walls. In Chicago, kids as young as eleven-years old were arrested for a food fight. In 2008, the Los Angeles police department issued 12,000+ tickets by school security officers and the police for tardiness and truancy under new zero-tolerance policy guidelines. Some faced fines as they were brought into the juvenile court system. 1998 saw New York City hire nearly 5,000 school security officers under the NYPD School Safety Division versus only 3,000 NYC public school counselors. The students are often subjected to unlawful search and seizure aggressively. Even a principal was arrested in 2005 when he "tried to stop an officer from handcuffing one of his students."³⁷⁰ Often kids are made to stay after school for detention when their only crime was arriving late to school because of a traffic jam their parents encountered.³⁷¹ How can kids study when they're always afraid?

³⁶⁹ Lisa Gartner. "Community group FAST quizzes Pinellas school leader about student arrests." *Tampa Bay Times*. Tues., Mar. 10, 2014. <http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/html>.

³⁷⁰ Stephanie Chen. "Girl's arrest for doodling raises concerns about zero tolerance." CNN. Feb. 18, 2010. <http://www.cnn.com.html>.

³⁷¹ From the author's personal experience.

Campus Security:

As zero-tolerance policies proliferate, our society is spending more money on prison guards than teachers and “the new security in schools comes with an emphasis on barbed-wire security fences, banned book bags and pagers...lock down drills and SWAT team rehearsals, to say nothing of metal detectors, drug-sniffing dogs, strip searches, and the scanning of genital orifices.”³⁷² As the United States criminalizes teenagers all over the country, it is also torturing children in the war on terror in a purported effort to secure the nation.³⁷³

Torturing Children:

As of 9/11/2001, the United States began not simply relying on third-party torturers or using off-shore prisons in the quest to find terrorists: “The attacks of 9/11 freed U.S. authorities from moral and legal constraints. President Barack Obama not only continues to permit the torture authorized by George W. Bush but has gone on to embrace his predecessor’s radical secrecy laws...documents released from the International Committee of the Red Cross, from the U.S. Justice Department’s Office of Legal Council (OLC), and from the House Armed Services Committee illustrate that torture is a tactic routinely employed by the CIA and the U.S. Military.”³⁷⁴ Occasionally, youth are included in this high level approved routine.

One boy, Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen seriously wounded in Afghanistan, says he was interrogated “42 times in

³⁷² Henry A. Giroux. *Hearts of Darkness: Torturing Children in the War on Terror* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010), 27-28.

³⁷³ Giroux, ix.

³⁷⁴ Giroux, xi.

90 days.” Interrogators employed the gamut of technique on the child: they threw cold water on him; threatened to have him raped; placed him in solitary confinement; hooded and threatened him with barking dogs; beat him brutally; and refused to allow him to go to the bathroom causing him to urinate on himself, after which he was handcuffed with his hands and feet behind him while “military police poured pine oil on the floor and on me...[and] dragged me back and forth through the mixture of urine and pine oil on the floor.”³⁷⁵ Using an underage (in this case, a fifteen-year old) prisoner as a human mop is certainly not something one would think of as possible – certainly not something done by the good guys. Another child, Chad-citizen Mohammed El-Gharani, was just fourteen when he was arrested in Pakistan in 2001 and given to the United States in 2002. This boy had been tortured while in Pakistani custody and was then sold to the U.S. He says that one particular soldier, “would hold my penis, with scissors, and say he’d cut it off.” He was subjected to racial abuse, hung from his wrists on a number of occasions, sleep-deprived, forced to experience prolonged isolation, and made to stay in painful stress positions.³⁷⁶

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (C.R.C.), Article 37 states: “No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,” (a) and that “no child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child...shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.” The article also states (b): “Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity

³⁷⁵ Henry A. Giroux. *Hearts of Darkness: Torturing Children in the War on Terror* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010), 70.

³⁷⁶ Giroux, 71-72.

and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence or visits, save in exceptional circumstances." Further (c): "Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action."³⁷⁷ These rules are obviously not always adhered to by the United States.

Killing Youth:

Despite the country's supposed reputation for adoring and caring for its children, the United States is among few countries (the others are China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia) who, since 1990, have executed juvenile offenders, whether mentally challenged or not; other nations recognize that doing such goes against the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international agreements and treaties.³⁷⁸ Beginning with a Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts, youth killing in 1642, there have been 365 juvenile executions among

³⁷⁷ United Nations' "Convention on the Rights of the Child." 1990. <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>.

³⁷⁸ According to an Amnesty International report issued by "Signs of Our Times," executions of child offenders since 1990 include: 1 in Congo, 1 in Nigeria, 1 in Saudi Arabia, 1 in Yemen, 2 in China, 2 in Sudan, 3 in Pakistan, 18 in Iran, and 19 in the U.S. <http://www.signsofourtimes.info.html> or Amnesty International USA at <http://www.amnestyusa.org.html>.

the approximately 20,000 executions since that time, twenty-two of which are since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976.³⁷⁹ Although the Supreme Court ruled in 2005 that executing juveniles is unconstitutional, 3000 children under the age of 17 (some as young as 13) have been sentenced to imprisonment until death “through life-without-parole sentences imposed with very little scrutiny or review.”³⁸⁰ The U.S. last executed a juvenile in 2003, but the U.S. and Israel were the only two countries in 2007 with juvenile offenders who received life without parole (LWOP).³⁸¹ Many of the crimes for which they are serving time do not involve injury or homicide; in fact, many were convicted even though an older teen or adult was responsible for the crime.³⁸² There are other inherent problems with the system as it exists.

Racial Retribution:

Reflecting the overall justice system’s bias against people of color and the targeting thereof, “when prosecutors instead of judges decide which children should be treated as adults in Cook County [Chicago] criminal court, they overwhelmingly choose children of color.”³⁸³ Given that schools get funding from property taxes – meaning that schools

³⁷⁹ “The Execution of Juveniles in the U.S.” *Death Penalty Information Center*. <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org.html>.

³⁸⁰ “Death in Prison Sentences for Children.” *Equal Justice Initiative*. <http://www.eji.org.html>.

³⁸¹ Henry A. Giroux. *Hearts of Darkness: Torturing Children in the War on Terror* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010), 27-28.

³⁸² “Death in Prison Sentences for Children.” *Equal Justice Initiative*. <http://www.eji.org.html>.

³⁸³ “All but one of the hundreds of kids sent to adult court by Chicago prosecutors are children of color.” *Equal Justice Initiative*. May 23, 2014. <http://www.eji.org.html>.

in wealthier areas get better equipment, teachers, etc. – these children are already at a disadvantage. And let’s not forget that schools in disadvantaged areas are mimicking the prison system’s routines, presumably to get the kids used to the incarceration they’ll face at some point. According to the Equal Justice Initiative: “83 percent of kids that prosecutors sent directly to adult court were African American [and] sixteen percent were Hispanic. Of all 257 children, only one was white.”³⁸⁴ Children sent to adult prisons are “five times more likely to be sexually assaulted and twice as likely to be violently attacked by inmates or staff.”³⁸⁵ Moreover, when a child is prosecuted in an adult court, the child is more likely to re-offend.³⁸⁶ This is a commentary on childhood gone wrong – quite intentionally.

Corporatization of Prisons:

Concentration camp victims were used as slave labor during WWII by big German and American companies like DuPont, Siemens, BASF, Coca-Cola, Ford, Thyssen-Krupp, etc. and IBM took care of identifying a single grandparent, rounding up, disposing of, and coming up with the 5-digit tattoo as key-punch code for victims.³⁸⁷ In the 1800s, Black Codes (laws) were invented as a way to arrest only Blacks for crimes which

³⁸⁴ “All but one of the hundreds of kids sent to adult court by Chicago prosecutors are children of color.” *Equal Justice Initiative*. May 23, 2014. <http://www.eji.org.html>.

³⁸⁵ “All but one....” *Equal Justice Initiative*.

³⁸⁶ “All but one....” *Equal Justice Initiative*.

³⁸⁷ “Foundations of Holocaust: Corporate America, Camp Inmates, and Slave Labor.” *The Jerusalem Post* blog. 1/18/13. <http://www.blogs.jpost.com.html>.

whites were not held accountable for.³⁸⁸ Those imprisoned were then leased by prisons to companies for labor.³⁸⁹ Again in the U.S. there are those who are making a fine profit from prisons. Businesses included on the corrections.com website who act as suppliers to the prison system are: Ace Hardware, Archer Daniels Midland, Nestle Food Service, Verizon, AT&T, Hewlett-Packard, Dial soap, and health-care providers. Now defense contractors like Westinghouse Electric Corporation and GDE Systems (a division of the old General Dynamics) are investing in prisons because they sense that militarism will soon be needed on America's streets.³⁹⁰ Traditionally, prisoners have been used by the pharmaceutical industry against their will.³⁹¹ But now big corporations like Wackenhut (G4S), CCA, and Capital Corrections Resources "have a stake in retaining prisoners as long as possible" in order to use them as labor.³⁹²

For private business prison labor is like a pot of gold. No strikes. No union organizing. No health benefits, unemployment insurance, or workers' compensation to pay. No language barriers, as in foreign countries. New leviathan prisons are being built on thousands of eerie acres of factories inside the walls. Prisoners do data entry for Chevron, make telephone reservations for TWA, raise hogs, shovel manure, and make circuit boards, limousines, waterbeds, and lingerie for

³⁸⁸ Angela Y. Davis. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 28-29.

³⁸⁹ Davis, 35.

³⁹⁰ Davis, 87.

³⁹¹ Davis, 89.

³⁹² Davis, 95.

Victoria's Secret, all at a fraction of the cost of 'free labor.'³⁹³

Privatization of prisons is occurring in the same way hospitals and schools are being taken over. "At least 37 states have legalized the contracting of prison labor by private corporations."³⁹⁴ The facts are draconian and appalling: "Three decades ago...the prison population was comprised of a tenth of the present numbers," "two-thirds of existing prisons were opened during the eighties and nineties," and there are now about "sixty super-maximum security federal and state prisons located in thirty-six states."³⁹⁵ How many of our children are slated for these facilities?

Our society paints a picture of childhood perfection which exists for fewer and fewer little ones. Sometimes these young criminals were in the wrong place at the wrong time or had no real understanding of right or wrong or of the ramifications of their actions. Often poor and underrepresented in courts of law, many never knew the niceties with which all children should be raised. This situation is more a commentary of a neglectful or methodical society than wayward youth. For those remaining in school, reading seems an essential skill and enjoyable activity but caution should be taken in this area as well.

³⁹³ Angela Y. Davis. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 84.

³⁹⁴ *Global Research*. Dec. 8, 2013. <http://www.globalresearch.com.html>.

³⁹⁵ Angela Y. Davis. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 93, 17, 49.

Grim Books for Children:

There are many complications when it comes to reading. One stumbling block is equal gender representation, a problem found across media. There is a pro-male character gender bias in children's books from 1900-2000 – a full century of symbolic annihilation! In the 1990s, even “male animal characters outnumbered their female counterparts 2 to 1.”³⁹⁶ Authors of the study suggest that “this gender disparity sends the message that men and boys occupy a more important role in our culture. Books...contribute to how children understand what is expected of women and men and shape the way children will think about their own place in the world.”³⁹⁷ Gender representation is only part of the problem, especially when one considers the primary book ordering service for elementary and middle school aged children.

One wonders where teachers get the lists distributed in classrooms from which children must choose books to read because often the selections are filled with graphic violence and are obviously not chosen from the NEA's (National Education Association) “Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children,” which mostly features actual good books. Nor are they from “Diversity Book Lists and Resources for Teachers and Parents,” whose website informs that “of 3,200 children's books released in 2013, a mere 223 were by authors of color, and 253 were about people of color.”³⁹⁸ Right-wing and supposedly family-oriented organization, Scholastic, distributes leaflets with books and

³⁹⁶ “New College of Florida Professor Emily Fairchild Finds Gender Bias in a Century of Children's Books.” *West Coast Woman*. August 2011.

³⁹⁷ “New College of Florida....” *West Coast Woman*.

³⁹⁸ “Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children.” *National Education Association*. <http://www.nea.org.html>. “Diversity Book Lists and Resources for Teachers and Parents.” <http://www.multiculturalchildrensbookday.com.html>.

other items for sale and holds events at elementary schools (to financially assist the company and the schools). Their collection includes a whole host of ghastly, gory, mean-spirited books like *The Hunger Games* series. The question is whether they carry these types of books because they are popular or if they become popular because children are given a limited selection from which to choose – that is, these materials are presented as popular and so they become.

In the September 2010 issue, the final book of the *Hunger Games* series, *Mockingjay*, is featured dead center on the cover with the excerpt: “My name is Katniss Everdeen. Why am I not dead? I should be dead.” To entice purchase, a pin is exclusively offered and a caution that the book is “super top-secret” and will be sent to classrooms only on the official release date, which is a common advertising persuasion technique used to make buyers excited about an impending release. The “Gross, Daring and Totally Wicked” section features the following: *A Zombie’s Guide to the Human Body*, on whose cover is a startled looking toothed skeleton with one eyeball facing the viewer and the other about to bulge out; *100 Most Disgusting Things on the Planet*; and a book called *At the Edge: Daring Acts in Desperate Times* featuring “more than 20 true stories of people forced to make split-second decisions in life-threatening situations – from an avalanche to a terrorist attack!” But there’s more on offer for high-tech types.

The “Interactive” section offers several interesting choices: an app marketed to girls so they may practice styling hair, putting on makeup, and using nail décor and accessories with their own image (or a friend’s, taken with the Nintendo DSi camera) on the “Style Lab Makeover” Nintendo DS – it includes personality tests and in-game expert advice on the best looks; Wii “Boot Camp Academy,” where youth can join the

Army and drive a tank; and “Combat Wings: Battle of Britain” PC-DVD for “realistic missions as a fighter pilot, tail gunner, and AA [anti-aircraft] gun commander.” An “Immortal Journal” is on offer so kids can “make [their] memories last forever” (a shift from predecessor diaries in that students can write their ideas down for posterity since they are made to recognize they are merely mortal); a quiz book so children can find out and log information about their fellow classmates; and the *Spy High* series with the following titles: *I’d Tell You I Love You, But Then I’d Have to Kill You*; *Cross My Heart and Hope to Spy*; and *Only the Good Spy Young*.

Feature sections are carved out. The “School Discussion of the Month” in this issue is “A World at War,” which features seven books about war, from “death-defying rescuers” in Afghanistan (*Battle Heroes: Voices from Afghanistan*) to the true tale of a boy who attempts to tell WWII Germany its leaders are lying and is tried for treason and sentenced to death (*The Boy Who Dared*). The “Realistic Fiction” section offers a book about Vietnam with a mature content warning (*Fallen Angels*) and a book whose main character has leukemia (*Ways to Live Forever*). The “Vampires and Ghosts” section features a number of scary stories: A series actually called *Scary Stories*; thrillers with titles such as *Ninth Grade Slays* and *Tenth Grade Bleeds*; and the book, *Bad Girls Don’t Die*, whose description includes the line, “Could her dead sister Kasey be at the bottom of [unexplained ghostly events]?”

In this one eight-page issue, the words *murder*, *death*, *deadly*, *dead*, *die*, *deadliest*, and *war* are used twenty-eight times! Clearly, the same programming which has transformed seen, heard, and read content for adults has invaded the world of children: pro-war ideology; the savage; the gruesome; the fear-based; and the death-focused. When elementary school aged

kids are being subjected to this perspective for entertainment, something is amiss in society.

The Militarization of Schools:

The federally-sponsored U.S. Armed Forces' JROTC (Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps) is in high schools across the land. Many groups oppose military indoctrination in schools due to its high cost, lack of local school district control over staff and curriculum, and mandatory enrollment. The American Civil Liberties Union points out that targeting the young for recruitment is a violation of the United Nations sponsored "Convention on the Rights of the Child," which the U.S. has not yet ratified, although it did ratify "The Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict" (2000) optional protocol.³⁹⁹ The U.S. declaration states that one can join the Armed Forces at age 17 with parental or guardian permission, that recruitment can't be forced or coerced, and asks that state parties raise the minimum age of voluntary recruitment to 15-years old. Students begin middle school at age 10, so it seems a conflict of interest that the military is attempting to attract even younger than high school aged children: "The Army is collaborating with the National Association of School Boards to develop a so-called JROTC-plus program that would use the high-school JROTC curriculum as a basis for a middle school program, Army JROTC director Col. John Vanderbleek said."⁴⁰⁰ Top Army officials are studying current unofficial military middle school programs in Kansas "to see if they could be a model for others nationwide."

³⁹⁹ "Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps." Wikipedia.
<http://en.wikipedia.org.html>.

⁴⁰⁰ "Army considers middle-school JROTC program." *Army Times*. Oct. 12, 2009. <http://www.armytimes.com.html> or access through Democratic Underground at <http://www.democraticunderground.com.html>.

⁴⁰¹ Unofficial middle school programs are already in place across the country and a widespread official program is already in force in Chicago.

Funded by the Department of Defense as part of a \$3 billion annual recruitment budget, the Middle School Cadet Corps (MSCC) is in twenty-six Chicago schools. The elementary school MSCC program trains students “as young as 11 years old to march in formation and carry [fake] guns.” ⁴⁰² As part of the largest JROTC in the country, students entering high school can choose from forty-five high schools with JROTC programs. President Bush’s 2002 “No Child Left Behind Act” is responsible for expanding militarization in education: Section 9528’s **unpublicized** provision, “‘Armed Forces Recruiter Access to Students and Student Recruitment Information’ requires high schools to give all student contact information to the military. Most students [and their parents] aren’t aware they can opt out by filling out a form.” ⁴⁰³ Students are frequently called by military officials trying to get them to sign up for military service. While recruitment officers promise money for college and a secure military career, “two-thirds of recruits never receive college funding and only 15% graduate with a four-year degree. As for a ‘secure’ career, the unemployment rate for veterans is 3x higher than non-veterans.” ⁴⁰⁴ Plus, ethnic profiling is used to target low-income and minority areas. There are “only five schools in all of the more

⁴⁰¹ “Army considers middle-school JROTC program.” *Army Times*. Oct. 12, 2009. <http://www.armytimes.com.html>.

⁴⁰² Jennifer Wedekind. “The Children’s Crusade: Military programs move into middle schools to fish for future soldiers.” *In These Times*. June 3, 2005. <http://www.inthesetimes.com.html>.

⁴⁰³ Wedekind. I personally attempted on many occasions to opt out my high-school child but the link to do so was disabled.

⁴⁰⁴ Wedekind.

affluent [read: predominantly white] Chicago suburbs [which] have JROTC programs.”⁴⁰⁵ Although proponents point to the importance of leadership skills and civics lessons learned in these programs, former Defense Secretary, Gen. William Cohen, called JROTC “one of the best recruiting services that we could have.”⁴⁰⁶

Academic Programs:

In addition to beginning military life at younger and younger ages, high school sports stars are being heavily recruited, but it isn’t just the strong, popular football jock that’s wanted. A new marketing ploy purportedly for highly intelligent 11th graders who scored phenomenally well on the PSAT or are nominated by teachers or guidance counselors receive invitations on watermarked stationery inviting them to attend Envision’s “National Youth Leadership Forum on Careers in National Security – Diplomacy, Intelligence, and Defense” through the capitol’s George Mason University. There are other companies out there offering similar expensive programs which may introduce students to Washington insiders or at least give them new ideas about possible government careers.

Another program is a true scholarly enterprise in which high school students are offered funding to attend summer S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) camps. For over fifty years, the U.S. Army Educational Outreach Program (A.E.O.P.) has offered programs designed for elementary school age children and above. The Academy of Applied Science, Army Research Center, whose sponsors

⁴⁰⁵ Jennifer Wedekind. “The Children’s Crusade: Military programs move into middle schools to fish for future soldiers.” *In These Times*. June 3, 2005. <http://www.inthesetimes.com.html>.

⁴⁰⁶ Wedekind.

include the Army and Navy, works through universities to bring science-oriented kids of all ages to universities to learn the latest in the aforementioned fields. Only those with top grades need apply. Another program – also military funded – for those not historically represented in these disciplines is R.E.A.P. (Research and Engineering Apprenticeship Program), whose mission is to mentor while also introducing “students to the Army’s interest and investment in science and engineering research.”⁴⁰⁷ In this way, the higher echelon of future leaders and decision-makers are theoretically created who will plan activities for enlisted troops.

What students private companies and university programs may miss will surely be caught directly by the U.S. government. The Department of Defense’s joint marketing communications and market research and studies program (JAMRS) is hiring firms to discover “weak points in the public’s growing resistance to joining the armed services” through projects like the following: “Hispanic Barriers to Enlistment,” which is battling under-representation of Latino youth; “College Drop Outs/Stop Outs Study,” which has identified that those in college freshman classes have the highest dropout rate, lacking “both the direction and funds to fully pursue their education,” and are therefore potential enlisters; and “Mothers’ Attitude Study,” which gauges the target audience’s (10th and 11th graders) mothers’ attitudes and found that “if they could get ‘guidance counselors, teachers, and coaches’ to lobby moms, they could make far greater recruitment inroads.”⁴⁰⁸ It is obvious that the Department of

⁴⁰⁷ “The REAP Experience.” <http://www.aas-world.org/REAP/REAPprogram.html>.

⁴⁰⁸ Nick Turse. *The Complex: How The Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 158-159.

Defense wishes to specifically offer the military as an option for those who cannot easily afford college.

Target Audiences:

There is something troubling about both the immersion in youth culture and the compartmentalized racial element in the Armed Forces' plan to increase their numbers. In an effort to pick up so-called urban recruits, custom ultra-equipped Hummer H2s with "Yo Soy El Army" (I Am the Army) painted on the sides frequently arrive at college campuses, car shows, sporting events, and music festivals; indeed, the Army is heavily invested in sponsoring lowrider car events hoping to specifically target Latino Americans. There's now a Spanish TV commercial which translates to: "This moment of your independence is protected by the U.S. Army." African-American youth are treated to the Army's "Takin' It to the Streets" campaign – with regulation-size basketball hoops on the rear of the Hummers – at select schools, NAACP conventions, and hip-hop events. The other branches have similar vehicles designed to impress unsuspecting youngsters who are eager to get free rap CDs and T-shirts. For those who miss the military presence at events, surely exciting ads at the movie theater, on the computer, or on television will capture their attention.

No matter what their eventual path, children are stressed because teachers tell parents the kids must be responsible even in the first grade, sometimes resulting in getting an F because a child forgot to turn in an assignment. Current teenage volunteerism as a college requirement for those encouraged on a scholarly path means that teens are busy. It is reminiscent of when the middle class and the Boy Scouts were told during the Depression to help the desperate while the wealthy experienced

increased tax cuts and the poor were left to help each other; in that case, President Roosevelt was able to create a few hundred thousand temporary jobs but 20 million were needed. As graduating collegiate populations face \$700/month loan payments but can't find jobs, they, along with the general population, are being heavily encouraged to buy, buy, buy.

IV. TELEVISION:

“Film and television, newspapers, books and radio together have an influence over individuals that was unimagined a hundred years ago. This power confers great responsibility on all who work in the media...[as well as] each of us who, as individuals, listen and read and watch...It is not the case that we have no power over what we take from the media...When the media focuses too closely on the negative aspects of human nature, there is a danger that we become persuaded that violence and aggression are its principle characteristics...Good news is not remarked on precisely because there is so much of it.”

- Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso's) 1999 book *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World: Ethics For a New Millenium*, p. 210-212

“The use of horror for its own sake will be eliminated; the use of visual or aural effects which would shock or alarm the viewer, and the detailed presentation of brutality or physical agony by sight or sound are not permissible.”

- The Television Code of the National Association of Broadcasters, which fell out of use over 20 years ago

“In the marketing world they're called ‘tinys.’ At just six months of age, babies are already forming mental images of corporate logos. One in four children utters a brand name as their first recognizable word.”

- *Mothering*, the Home for Natural Family Living

That's Not Real News:

Video News Releases (or VNRs) are used by corporations and the government to promote a particular ideology. A fake reporter (generally a PR expert) is used for a story which is sent to newsrooms around the country but viewers at home think it's actual news; however, these are

really paid advertisements.⁴⁰⁹ As media conglomeration continues, one has to ask who owns those channels and question their agendas in order to protect democracy. These few media corporations share board members with each other and work in collaboration, thereby presenting a limited view which can silence dissent or even discussion and, as Amy Goodman of “Democracy Now” says, present who is good or evil, right or wrong.⁴¹⁰

When Iraq was presented as the “axis of evil” and Americans came to believe there was an imminent threat to our safety, we willingly sent troops overseas. We all now know there were no “weapons of mass destruction,” yet troops remain in countries we were not attacked or threatened by. Turns out, Saddam Hussein was a cruel dictator but there were and are plenty of other dictators left by the U.S. to carry on their cruelty – and Iraq continues to have human rights abuses under U.S. control.⁴¹¹ After 9/11, Muslims and or those of Arabic descent were arrested in the United States for supposedly being part of conspiratorial cells which would commit crimes within the country, but **all** of the accused were cleared of any wrong doing.⁴¹² One supposes history will place these actions on the same

⁴⁰⁹ For tricks invented by Fox News which other channels copied, such as the continual “Breaking News” banner at your screen’s bottom, please see *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism*, directed by Robert Greenwald, 2004.

⁴¹⁰ Jeff Warrick. *Programming the Nation?* DVD. Perf. Noam Chomsky, Amy Goodman, Dennis Kucinich, John B. Alexander, Christopher Coppola (Aptos CA and Santa Cruz CA: Ignite Productions and Digital Media Factory, 2011).

⁴¹¹ “Iraq: A decade of abuses.” *Amnesty International*. Mar. 11, 2013. <http://www.amnestyusa.html>.

⁴¹² Nina Bernstein. “Held in 9/11 Net, Muslims Return to Accuse U.S.” *The New York Times*. January 23, 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com.html>. Please also see the ACLU (*American Civil Liberties Union*) report, “Worlds Apart:

page as WWII's Japanese Internment Camps. What liberties were lost for all Americans due to this warmongering advertising campaign?

Competitive and Disturbing Nature of Reality and Other TV Shows:

Television programming is another area which has become more savage. "Reality" (read: this isn't that real and we expect participants to behave in the most ridiculous manner possible to get ratings) programming's tricks are being borrowed by commonplace shows because it is cheaper to follow people around while filming than to hire writers and actors; in addition to being less expensive to produce, the viciousness encouraged gets ratings, even if it is two pageant moms arguing over which of their children should win, as seen on The Learning Channel's "Toddlers and Tiaras" or part-Disney-owned ABC, whose show, "The Bachelor," keeps women competing as Cinderellas for men's attention. Shows which travel to faraway lands delight in strange to Americans, exotic cuisine like guinea pig, cow udder, pig testicle and brain, and horse (see The Travel Channel's "Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern") and seem to be created for the "yuck" factor one gets watching the Discovery Channel's "Dirty Jobs." Other tough ways to earn a living featured on TV include Discovery's "Deadliest Catch," "Catching Hell," and "Cold Water Captains" depicting the harshness of working on the ocean, the latter two brought to you by The Weather Channel in between shows about weather disasters. "American Muscle," on Discovery Health and Fitness, follows the sometimes brutal

How Deporting Immigrants After 9/11 Tore Families Apart and Shattered Communities." December 2004. <http://www.aclu.org.html>.

methods of trainer and former U-M coach, Mike Barwis, at his gym. There are innumerable other shows.

Developing Difference:

Beyond “America’s Got Talent” in spectacle – and reminiscent of a P.T. Barnum promotion – are the shows which feature those physically challenged. For example, The Learning Channel’s conjoined twins’ reality show, “Abby and Brittany,” both informs misinformed viewers of perceived difference and relies on ancient Rome’s lure of the arena tactics to attract viewers. The same network’s “Little People, Big World” introduces viewers to the difficulties of being a little person. In competition with TLC, AMC’s take at reviewing a whole host of unusual physicalities is insultingly called “Freakshow.” “Breaking Amish” and “Return to Amish,” other TLC programs, introduce audiences to strict religious codes as members pit themselves against other-worldliness. The network’s “Buying Naked” is the daily grind of selling real estate in nudist colonies. TLC’s “Hoarding: Buried Alive,” “Extreme Cheapskates,” and “Extreme Couponing” take us into the homes and lives of those who need serious counseling to overcome their difficulties and obsessions. The question is: Do these programs simply fulfill a viewer’s curiosity regarding difference or is their purpose to point out similarities between people? In addition, shows like the Food Network’s “Southern at Heart” and “The Pioneer Woman” seem like hyper-conservative, ultra-white throwbacks to an age when only women cooked and were solely responsible for the comfort of the family, and this too acts as delineation between men and women in dichotomizing difference. The History Channel, after long devotion to WWII and Nazi programming, now primarily concerns itself with conspiracy theory shows about religion, mythical creatures, and UFOs and has its own reality television

shows like “Counting Cars,” about car restoration, and “Swamp People” alligator hunters. Now on SCI, the Science Channel, shows such as “Oddities” and “Mega Shredders” teach how to find unusual artifacts with “Ripley’s Believe It or Not” aplomb and feature the thrills of crushing cars and the like, respectively.

Battles to the End:

Rivalries can be found even on the Food Network between chefs, as seen on “Chopped.” Not to be outdone, there’s also Bravo’s “Top Chef Duels,” which pits chefs against one another, and FOX’s “Kitchen Nightmares,” where the host helps struggling restaurants while wielding an assortment of insults. “Cupcake Wars Kids” reduces baking children to tears. Battles also exist on HGTV between real estate agents and interior designers (who each team with one side of a couple in their division between selling or fixing their house) on “Love It or List It.” Even the competitive “Property Brothers” program has started a new show, “Brother vs. Brother,” featuring the twins in an ad where the two appear to be physically fighting as one is flipped high into the air and lands hard on the ground. Dancing and singing competitions always include drama from participants and often from chastising judges. Speed’s “Car Warriors,” too, promotes rivalry between competing car restoration teams from different cities.

Apocalyptic:

Pre- and post-apocalyptic themes are in many programs, like TNT/DreamWorks Television’s “Falling Skies,” executive produced by Steven Spielberg, which follows the aftermath of an alien invasion. The Science Channel (SCI) offers “Perfect Disaster,” which teaches survival in worst-case scenarios. “Naked and Afraid” is a show where pairs of strangers learn to survive sans clothing in the wilderness for three weeks.

Survivalist competitions like “Dual Survival” pit a primitive-skills and naturalist expert against a military-trained survival instructor. There are a plethora of other survival shows, including military and survivalist expert Bear Grylls’ previous Discovery Channel “Man versus Wild” and “Escape From Hell,” with an NBC reality show “Get Out Alive” in between. His latest, for NBC, “Running Wild with Bear Grylls,” takes celebs like Zac Efron into the wilderness for survival training. Les Stroud’s long-running “Survivorman” also features an expert survivalist in the wilds of the planet.

Not to be outdone, the National Geographic Channel introduced “Doomsday Preppers,” whereas the Discovery Channel came up with “Doomsday Bunkers.” Both programs feature those arming and stockpiling for any number of end-of-the-world disasters. Often survivalist programming takes “off the grid” principles to an extremely paranoid existence, turning neighbors into potential enemies and making life a preoccupation with deadly scenarios. Living with ample gasoline and excessive ammunition, these families-turned-cammo-lovers leave viewers with unsettling and fearful thoughts about the need to prepare, if only to protect themselves from families like this. The exaltation of average people turning feral can only be outmaneuvered by the military in action.

Militarism & Torture:

Groups such as Human Rights First claim that depictions seen in TV shows such as “Lost” and “24” (changed) Americans’ views on torture – and not just the views of everyday Americans but those of American interrogators in Iraq. One “former U.S. Army specialist who questioned prisoners in Baghdad’s infamous Abu Ghraib prison and several other facilities around Iraq...said he saw instances of mock

executions like that in '24.' Once, some fellow interrogators asked an Iraqi translator to pretend he was being tortured to strike fear in a prisoner after they had just watched a similar scene on a DVD."⁴¹³ In addition to pressure by commanders to quickly extract information and an absence of proper training, one military academy professor said that "Jack Bauer [hero of '24'] represented one of his biggest training challenges."⁴¹⁴ A retired U.S. Army colonel said, "I am distressed by the fact that the good guys are depicted as successfully employing what I consider are illegal, immoral and stupid tactics, and they're succeeding...when the good guys are doing something evil and win, that bothers me."⁴¹⁵ Examples of prime-time torture scenes have been found on "Alias," "The Wire," "Law and Order," "The Shield," and even "Star Trek: Voyager." Human Rights First's "ultimate desire is to drive home the point that torture by Americans should never be tolerated," but similar scenes continue currently.⁴¹⁶

Torture is all around us, especially since 9/11 prompted the United States to engage in the activity openly in the name of terrorist control and television has been a major contributor to making it a household topic. "[The show] '24' showed 67 scenes of torture in the first five seasons...Jack Bauer has been involved in more than 160 separate instances of violence since the show began (all six seasons) and has killed at least 71 individuals."⁴¹⁷ The show ran from 2001 to 2010, according to IMDb, and marked a change in presentations of torture in that it

⁴¹³ David Bauder. "Group: TV torture influencing real life." *USA Today*. 2/11/07. <http://www.usatoday.com.html>.

⁴¹⁴ Bauder.

⁴¹⁵ Bauder.

⁴¹⁶ Bauder.

⁴¹⁷ "Parents Beware of 24." *Weekly Wrap. Parents Television Council*. November 21, 2008. <http://www.parentstv.org.html>.

wasn't the bad guys perpetrating the offense but the supposed good guys – and it was shown as being 100% effective against villains but never against heroes. “The reality is that torture is unreliable, destructive, and monstrous.”⁴¹⁸ Yet it continues and has become part of our national consciousness.

There was a time when torture wasn't seen on television. “In both 1996 and 1997, there were no prime-time TV scenes containing torture,” for instance,⁴¹⁹ “[but] since 9/11 the number of torture scenes has increased by 800% approximately.”⁴²⁰ According to Parents Television Council, “there were 110 scenes of torture on prime time broadcast programming from 1995 to 2001. From 2002 to 2005, the number increased to 624 scenes of torture. Data from 2006 to 2007 showed that there were 212 scenes of torture.”⁴²¹ Why the theoretical drop? (Statistics could not be found beyond the dates listed here.) Is it because people are finally sick of watching such barbarism? If the objective was to make the American public less squeamish and support its leaders in the “war on terror,” it worked. Now that torture scenes are included in children's films, the indoctrination begins early and there's hardly any need to highlight the topic on television anymore.

⁴¹⁸ Patrick McCormick. “The torture show.” *U.S. Catholic*.
<http://www.catholic.org.html>.

⁴¹⁹ David Bauder. “Group: TV torture influencing real life.” *USA Today*.
2/11/07. <http://www.usatoday.com.html>.

⁴²⁰ Rich Jepson. *24 – Terrorism Through Television* (Raleigh: Lulu Publishing, 2009), 57.

⁴²¹ “Parents Beware of 24.” *Weekly Wrap. Parents Television Council*.
November 21, 2008. <http://www.parentstv.org.html>.

Kids and TV Violence:

How this influences children cannot be underestimated any longer: “The deleterious effects of graphic violence in TV entertainment on children have been proven in numerous studies...A study by the National Institute on Media and the Family concluded that children who watch violent TV are ruder and meaner than those who don’t...What we found is that the kids who teachers and peers rate as the meanest were the ones who watched the most violent media.”⁴²² In 1972, Surgeon General Jesse Steinfeld testified to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications: “It is clear to me that the causal relationship between televised violence and antisocial behavior is sufficient to warrant appropriate and immediate remedial action.”⁴²³ But nothing happened nor has it since, in spite of continual warnings from medical and psychological associations, scientists, and public policy makers – even the Federal Communications Commission itself!

Since the 1950s, there has been concern and the proof is all around us. Director of the Center on Media and Children’s Health at the Children’s Hospital of Boston, Dr. Michael Rich, told Congress that the correlation between aggressive behavior and violent media “is stronger than that of calcium intake and bone mass, lead ingestion and lower IQ, condom non-use and sexually acquired HIV, and environmental tobacco smoke and

⁴²² Gregory M. Lamb. “TV’s higher threshold of pain.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. August 23, 2002. <http://www.csmonitor.com.html>.

⁴²³ “TV Bloodbath: Violence on Prime Time Broadcast TV.” A PTC State of the Television Industry Report. *Parents Television Council*. <http://www.parentstv.org.html>.

lung cancer.”⁴²⁴ The University of Michigan’s Dr. L. Rowell Huesmann says that “every exposure to violence increases the chances that some day a child will behave more violently than they otherwise would.”⁴²⁵ A 17-year longitudinal study showed that “teens who watched more than one hour of TV a day were almost four times as likely as other teens to commit aggressive acts in adulthood.”⁴²⁶ And even CBS head exec, Leslie Moonves, said: “Anyone who thinks the media has nothing to do with [the bloodshed at Columbine] is an idiot.”⁴²⁷ Still, nothing ever changes. No network, no media group, no parent group, no educational group, and no government bureaucracy like Congress or the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is going to change anything; it is up to the public to protest violence in media. By protest I mean cancel cable, turn off the TV, stop buying films with violence and write letters to film companies, TV programmers, and especially those who advertise during the shows telling them why. Enough is enough.

Military Themes:

Many channels feature military history, as opposed to simply history programming, despite the existence of the separate Military Channel, which has changed its name to the American Heroes Channel and has begun introducing new shows with the stories of modern-day heroes.⁴²⁸ From Black Ops coverage to the “Officer and a Movie” segment, the

⁴²⁴ “TV Bloodbath: Violence on Prime Time Broadcast TV.” A PTC State of the Television Industry Report. *Parents Television Council*.
<http://www.parentstv.org.html>.

⁴²⁵ “TV Bloodbath....” *Parents Television Council*.

⁴²⁶ “TV Bloodbath....” *Parents Television Council*.

⁴²⁷ “TV Bloodbath....” *Parents Television Council*.

⁴²⁸ Ellen Gray. “Mission creep hits Military Channel.” Jan. 1, 2014.
<http://www.military.discovery.com.html>.

Military Channel's former tag line when pulling up the website was: "Every weapon, war, soldier, and branch of U.S. defense has a story to be heard." There is a separate DOD (Department of Defense) news channel. The American Heroes Channel seems not to be focusing on real American heroes like firefighters and ambulance technicians and more on Nazis and Billy the Kid. Shows include/d "Greatest Tank Battles," "Triggers: Weapons That Changed the World," "Weaponology (2007-2008)," "World War II in HD Color (2009)," "Special Ops Mission," "Combat Countdown," "The Rise of the Nazi Party," "Codes and Conspiracies," "Toughest Military Jobs," the former "Deadliest Tech," "Top Secret Weapons Revealed," "Warrior POV," "Gunslingers," and the now cancelled "Alpha Company: Iraq Diary." There is rarely programming showing the trauma of war, either to civilian populations or military personnel involved in conflict – with the exception of occasional glorification of those who served; thus, the public is presented with an unrealistic view of battle which likely draws in new, young recruits eager to become the next heroes saving the realm. In addition to shows lauding various forms of vying for prizes reminiscent of "Fear Factor" and expanding programming which sensationalizes our basic fears, military exaltation helps to spread American values – rather, what may be perceived to be American values – around the globe. Travel outside of the country and you'll quickly realize that the U.S. generally exports the most base and violent of programming.

Global Reach:

There are just a handful of media conglomerates which control not only most of the information received in the U.S., but increasingly in other lands. Discovery Networks International (DNI), for instance, is "the world's #1 nonfiction media company." The company reaches "over 1 billion

cumulative subscribers in 224 countries and territories,” which distribute worldwide 46 international television brands, including Discovery, Animal Planet, TLC, Discovery World, Discovery Travel and Living, DMAX, Discovery Science, Discovery History, the Military Channel, and DFamilia.⁴²⁹ The History Channel is owned in part by the Disney Corporation and A&E Networks (Hearst Corporation), and some sister channels are H2, the Biography Channel, Military History, History en Espanol, Lifetime, and Crime and Investigation Network (CI), which devotes itself to crime dramas and documentaries like children who commit murder and exploring the psyches of serial killers in the U.S. and overseas.⁴³⁰ Power over broadcasting not only curtails the range of programming but makes clear the agendas promoted by parent companies.⁴³¹ As viewers may have noticed, television programming has become sinister, fatalistic, and tragic in focusing on base desires and fears, and such programming is bound to expand.

Here Comes Trouble:

There are already shows which either arrest people or which take place after the fact in prisons, such as the dark comedy, NBC/Netflix’s “Orange Is the New Black,” and MSNBC’s “Lockup: Raw,” a continually growing franchise. All manner of programming exists following the downtrodden in society, such as the Discovery Channel’s “Moonshiners” or

⁴²⁹ Discovery Networks International.

<http://www.corporate.discovery.com/brands/international.html>.

⁴³⁰ “Who Owns the Media?” *Free Press*.

<http://www.freepress.net/ownership/chart.html>.

⁴³¹ “Who Owns....” *Free Press* and “Digital TV Project: Who Controls the Media?” at *NOW Foundation*,

<http://www.nowfoundation.org/issues/communications/tv/mediacontrol.html>.

TLC's now defunct "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo." The Animal Planet channel not only presents programming featuring animals themselves, but its show "Monsters Inside Me" focuses on biological creatures and parasites such as the brain-eating amoeba; "Animal Cops" rescues abused animals and investigates abusers; and "Pit Bulls and Parolees" saves pit bulls and pairs them with the previously convicted, allowing both a second chance.

Other programs detail people selling their belongings, often under duress from difficult financial times, like on "Pawn Stars" and "American Pickers." There are now two fear channels and my prediction is that a Death Channel will be forthcoming where the film series *Faces of Death*, banned in 40+ countries for showing clips of those actually dying, will extend and surpass the ever-popular shows which feature video-taped mishaps similar to the "Jackass" television and film series. Even though the "Jackass" TV show had a disclaimer warning against viewers doing stunts themselves, children are compelled by images and many were hurt attempting stunts seen on the show.⁴³² The latest film in the practical joke/prank hidden camera genre is *Bad Grandpa* and there's a revival of "Candid Camera" type television programming where unsuspecting individuals are caught on camera reacting badly to set-ups.

Fear Programming:

NBC Universal Cable, who owns CNBC, Hulu, iVillage, mun2, NBC Sports, Esquire, Cloo, E, Bravo, Telemundo, Universal Parks and Resorts, Fandango, Daily

⁴³² Dean Schabner. "'Jackass' Kids Misunderstand Media." ABC News. Jan. 7, 2006. <http://www.abcnews.go.com.html>.

Candy, and Oxygen also owns the channel Chiller, a “scary good” thriller, suspense, and horror channel. “As of August, 2013, 42,227,000 American households (36.98% of households) with television [receive] Chiller.”⁴³³ Another channel promoting fear both in its programming and news content is FEARnet. A splatter of blood as part of its logo welcomes you to the webpage to get your juices flowing as you track down more thriller, horror, and suspense programming brought to you by Horror Entertainment, a joint venture between Comcast, Lionsgate, and Sony Pictures, which is available in more than 28 million homes.⁴³⁴

Science?:

The pseudoscience, “Myth Busters,” formerly on Discovery and now on SCI, offers decidedly not exact hypotheses and end results, and uses explosions, mock people (car crash dummies), and pretend animals to test suggestions from audience members which often originate from films (as in, could James Bond’s car really have done that?). Enter SCI’s “Outrageous Acts of Science,” where titles of episodes include “Sledgehammers and Fireworks Meet for Epic Explosion” and “Exploding Whale,” in which cameras film the gas exploding from a dead whale as it is chopped up for disposal. Before clips, the disclaimer on their website warns: “Outrageous Acts of Science features clips from the internet and is intended for a discerning audience. Science does not condone the activities performed and discourages anyone from trying them, especially the ones that are really, really bad ideas. Seriously...” Again, kids don’t read disclaimers.

⁴³³ <http://www.nbcuni.com/cable/chiller.html>.

⁴³⁴ <http://www.fearnet.com/about-us.html>.

The Promotion of the Gruesome:

CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) programs not only cause viewers to be suspicious of the world, they also present graphic images of crime which far surpass original crime and police show programming as seen on “Dragnet” and “Columbo” in visual and aural gruesomeness. CBS’s “NCIS” (Naval Criminal Investigative Service) mixes humor with murder, terrorism, and espionage plots around the globe, thereby advancing the idea that all good guys are good and all bad guys are bad and encouraging battle against perceived perpetrators.⁴³⁵ Showtime’s criminal, psychological, and political thriller, “Homeland,” pits American CIA against al-Qaeda type terrorists, incorporating the idea that surveillance, racial profiling, and torture are necessities in fighting fanaticism [read: Islamophobia].⁴³⁶ The Travel Channel’s “The Dead Files,” a paranormal documentary show, follows an NYPD homicide detective and a psychic medium investigating hauntings. Stephen King’s film turned miniseries, “Bag of Bones,” on A&E, continues the ghostly. TruTV’s “Forensic Files” uses forensic science to solve violent crimes. CBS’s “Criminal Minds” revisits Clarisse in *Silence of the Lambs* as FBI personnel track the minds of twisted criminals. Lifetime’s Canadian telefilm, “She Made Them Do It,” follows a real-life case. Investigation Discovery’s “I (Almost) Got Away With It” helps audiences get further inside the criminal mind. Similar programs by the network include “Swamp Murders,” “Deadline/Crime,” “Last Seen Alive,” and “Southern Fried

⁴³⁵ Mike White. “How Much is the Television *NCIS* Like the Real Thing?” Nov. 29, 2010. This article examines similarities and differences between the TV show and the real agency. <http://www.voices.yahoo.com.html>.

⁴³⁶ Deepa Kumar and Arun Kundnani. “*Homeland* and the Imagination of National Security.” <http://www.jacobinmag.com/2013/11.html>.

Homicide.” TLC’s “Sex Sent Me to the ER” highlights sex acts gone awry (or, as they advertise, “hilarious and horrifying sex-related injuries”) and Discovery Fitness and Health’s “Vegas ER” shows all manner of injury such as a man whose skull has been impaled by a crowbar. Even the show “America’s Secret Slang,” brought to us by the History Channel, reveals the history of colloquialisms, and focuses on crime, punishment, the military, the police, weapons, alcohol, circus animals, and other negatives; their graphic of the U.S. map with the word *helter-skelter* prominently placed over California calls to mind serial killings of the 1960s and 1970s.

AMC has a whole host of programming devoted to the cruel: A remake of the 1960s “The Prisoner,” a show about a trapped political prisoner; “The Killing,” with accompanying online game for true fans; “Breaking Bad,” whose plot involves a dying teacher who’s found himself in the meth game; “Better Call Saul,” which follows a criminal lawyer; “Game of Arms,” about arm wrestling championships; “Talking Dead,” an after show set up to discuss “The Walking Dead” future survival scenarios.

Reality contest shows (who’s the prettiest/who will win the prince’s hand?) have resorted to maximum carnage, such as “America’s Next Top Model” issuing a challenge to models: Pretend to be dead while sexily clad. Which is more disturbing? Models being asked to do this on television or the fact that such posing is a leading advertising trend and, therefore, a legitimate request? ⁴³⁷ Misogynistic representations of women across popular culture have damaged 1970s strides in advancement for women and girls, often under the guise of being sexually

⁴³⁷ Jennifer L. Pozner. “Media, Misogyny, and Dead Women.” *Marinagraphy*. Apr. 11, 2011. <http://www.marinagraphy.com.html>.

liberating self-expression. As if it weren't horrible enough pitting women against each other, the addition of homicidal scenes adds a whole other dimension.

Family Problems:

Then there's the family. CMT's (Country Music Television) "My Dysfunctional Family" brings a former commando – and his controversial tactics, which include lie detectors and drug-sniffing dogs – into the homes of kids and parents needing counseling. MTV's (Music Television) "Teen Mom" and "16 and Pregnant" seem to exalt what can be a primary factor in girls not achieving a college education or financial and professional freedom, leaving them at the mercy of a partner or system. These shows focus on the negatives of teen pregnancy without offering helpful advice to new mothers (such as telling them about support groups), and also make teens think if they get pregnant they will earn big bucks from being on the show, thus allowing the opportunity to get off of public assistance. "Dr. Phil" continues the family drama despite efforts to provide a therapy-style setting, and "The Maury Show" is there to solve family mysteries (e.g., who's the real dad?) with DNA tests. Presenting the most upsetting moments must be comforting to those experiencing similar difficulties but the combative nature of the confrontations is disturbing since guards are needed to break up those interactions which become physical.

PROLIFERATION OF ANIMAL, CHILD, AND GENERAL CRUELTY:

Programs using humor are able to sneak unsavory or cruel ideas across because audiences spend so much viewing time laughing at silly, recycled gags and even legitimately fresh, humorous content coming out of the mouths of beloved

characters with whom they've come to bond. Viewers are thus distracted – those watching may notice momentarily but forget jarring, mean-spirited references by the show's end. The CBS situation comedy, "The Big Bang Theory," as a prime example, continuously crosses a line with animal experimentation humor, if one can refer to it as humor because all suffering must be taken seriously – given the link between serial killers hurting animals and people makes this especially true. In the show, Sheldon's girlfriend is a neurobiologist. This is a field which sometimes experiments on animals, but humorously presenting such content on television is disturbing for those who love animals; in fact, virtually every type of cruelty ⁴³⁸ is seen in the show but our examination will begin with this all-too-common breach.

Animal Experimentation:

For example, in Season 1, Episode 8's "The Grasshopper Experiment," Penny tells the gang she needs guinea pigs (meaning them so she can try out her bartending skills), and Sheldon responds: "Okay, there's a lab animal supply company in Reseda you could try, but if your research is going to have human applications may I suggest white mice

⁴³⁸ See the handy list at

<http://www.musicalenglishlessons.org/vocabulary/violence.htm>.

MyVocabulary.com is a free resource used in over 24,000 schools. Their Word List categories include "Bullying and Gangs," "Military and Veterans," and "Sympathy and Grief." The "Violence" Vocabulary Word List includes 472 words like charred, frenzy, dread, sabotage, murder, retaliation, hit-and-run, groans, burn, atrocity, and blood – it should also have MyVocabulary.com on its list! The "Bullying and Gangs" Word List includes assault, attack, die, beat up, belittle, dominate, annoy, hopeless, neglectful, and prey on. Keep in mind that children study these words over and over.

instead? Their brain chemistry is far closer to ours.”⁴³⁹ There is also a reference to cocaine-addicted monkeys in “The Egg Salad Equivalency” (Season 6, Episode 12) as Amy offers up the creatures to avenge a woman flirting with Penny’s boyfriend.⁴⁴⁰ In Season 5, Episode 16 (“The Vacation Solution”), when Sheldon is forced to take a vacation and comes to help Amy in her laboratory, he says: “Boy, oh, boy. This vacation is off to a wonderful start. The smell of formaldehyde, the whirl of the centrifuge, the distant chatter of lab animals being dispatched for dissection. Mm, I can already feel my cares just melting away.”⁴⁴¹ Presenting animal experimentation as something that would calm a person is disgusting, yet audiences laugh because it is expected that they do so. This is but one of many times the series engages in similar humor tactics, but it is seen across programming. “The Big Bang Theory” was chosen as illustration simply because of its popularity.

Of course, most, if not all, scientific experimentation on animals is not necessary – it has never been an animal versus human proposition – especially when it is done for the beauty industry. There are enough computer models and human volunteers which can be used rather than live animals. Universities and others continue the vivisection practice for the \$18 billion per year handed out in the form of large grants despite many alternatives.⁴⁴² In fact, “there are currently 34 D.O.D. labs worldwide, with 4 outside the U.S.,” and hundreds

⁴³⁹ “The Grasshopper Experiment.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁴⁰ “The Egg Salad Equivalency.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁴¹ “The Vacation Solution.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁴² “Vivisection/Animals in Research.” *Last Chance for Animals*.

<http://www.lcanimal.org.html>.

of thousands suffer and die in “labs funded by D.O.D. contracts” as well.⁴⁴³ Perhaps this practice in academia, research institutes, independent labs working for corporations, in agricultural facilities and hospitals, and on military bases is, in itself, a way to desensitize the population and create yet another binary between which one is supposed to choose a side, but certainly airing jokes about animals – or any who cannot defend themselves – creates yet another environment in which cruelty is presented as acceptable, if not preferable.

This has real-life ramifications: For instance, the University of South Florida recently began experimenting on animals in order to compete financially with other universities. Since the U.S. government and businesses pay facilities well to keep animal experimentation going, there is a vested interest in presenting such in a positive light, which may be why Amy’s primates are repeatedly shown or presented as being outside of cages or free to move about inside a large cage, and expressing themselves; in actuality, creatures are more often than not shackled in such a way as prevent movement, their vocal cords cut so that researchers don’t have to be burdened by daily screaming.⁴⁴⁴ While the N.I.H. (National Institutes of Health)

⁴⁴³ A.H.T. Budkie. “Military Animal Research.” *Medical Research Modernization Committee: Modernizing Medical Research and Promoting Human Health*. <http://www.mrmcmed.org.html>. See also *Stop Animal Exploitation NOW!* <http://www.all.creatures.org/sean.html>.

⁴⁴⁴ Please see the following resources for information on animal experimentation: “Laws and Regulations” from *New England Anti-Vivisection Society* at <http://www.NEAVS.org.html>; *The American Anti-Vivisection Society’s* “Problems with Animal Research” at <http://www.aavs.org.html>; *The Animal Legal Defense Fund’s* “Animal Testing and the Law” at <http://www.aldf.org.html>; and *The Center for Media and Democracy’s* “Source Watch: Animal Testing” at <http://www.sourcewatch.org.html>.

donated some used chimpanzees to Louisiana's Chimp Haven for long-term care, many are too emotionally and physically scarred to exit their new facility – and who knows if/when the N.I.H. will bring these creatures back into service. Carl Safina, author of *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel*, has pointed out that the same arguments used for why we supposedly have to be mean to animals have been used on people we wanted to take advantage of and these are always self-serving.⁴⁴⁵ Part of the solution to helping the planet is respect for our fellow residents, the ones who were here long before us.

Animal Harm/Abuse:

There are plenty of other ways in which animals are on offer for the sake of humor. When his friends have an intervention in hopes of teaching him to drive (Season 2, Episode 5, “The Euclid Alternative”), the crew end up with an inexperienced Sheldon at the helm of a simulator vehicle Howard adapted “from something a friend of mine designed for the army.” Switching configuration from an up-armored Humvee in Fallujah (Afghanistan) to a Ford Taurus, Sheldon is ready to practice his driving; unfortunately, he crashes into the Glendale Galleria's pet store amid panic and animal screaming sounds. Sheldon tells Leonard to remind him to “compliment Wolowitz on the software...it's amazingly detailed.”⁴⁴⁶ His voice indicates his approval of Howard Wolowitz' work despite the gory virtual but realistic death display he's just witnessed. When Raj is interrupted by Penny entering and his singing turns

⁴⁴⁵ “Talking Animals” show on WMNF (88.5 FM) in Tampa FL. Aug. 12, 2015. <http://www.talkinganimals.net.html>.

⁴⁴⁶ “The Euclid Alternative.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

into a squawk, Penny says, “It’s the sound of a cat being run over by a lawn mower.” (“The Maternal Capacitance,” Season 2, Episode 15)⁴⁴⁷ In “The Dumpling Paradox” (Season 1, Episode 7), Penny refers to what her visitor and Howard might be doing in her apartment: “Look, I grew up on a farm, okay. From what I heard they’re either having sex or Howard’s caught in a milking machine.”⁴⁴⁸ Referring to farm or captured animals is common. In “The Santa Simulation” (Season 6, Episode 11), Penny says it makes sense Leonard got a paper cut because “[his] hands are softer than veal.”⁴⁴⁹ Another episode extols the delight of now being able to have live lobsters delivered through Amazon (Season 6, Episode 17, “The Monster Isolation”).⁴⁵⁰ There is obviously no room for discussion about how the dairy industry keeps the veal industry going nor the terrible conditions calves experience during their short lives in crates which do not allow stretching, lest their muscles develop and the meat they become becomes tough; similarly, viewers may come to enjoy live lobster delivery without considering the creature’s journey or brutal end.

Further, Raj says (“The Date Night Variable,” Season 6, Episode 1) that he sometimes gives his dog Chardonnay, and tells Stuart, “She’s kind of a mean drunk, but what are you gonna do?” but there’s no objection to the act nor examination

⁴⁴⁷ “The Maternal Capacitance.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁴⁸ “The Dumpling Paradox.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁴⁹ “The Santa Simulation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁵⁰ “The Monster Isolation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

of why this is a mean action.⁴⁵¹ This concept is one of many intended to discount the welfare of animals.

Genetic Altering:

Sheldon's friends invite him to play with a genetically altered animal (Season 6, Episode 8, "The 43 Peculiarity"). Howard: "Raj and I are heading over to the genetics lab to pet the glow-in-the-dark bunny. Want to come with us?"⁴⁵² This is the second time the show has offered the idea of a genetically altered creature – the last was goldfish⁴⁵³ – without addressing the possible pain the animal faced or presenting arguments against this kind of experimentation.

Hunting and Fishing:

In Season 6 (Episode 10, "The Fish Guts Displacement"), Howard's father-in-law says he wants to shoot some ducks on their upcoming fishing trip: "I like using a big shell. You can't eat 'em afterwards but it's fun watchin' 'em blow up!" Howard comments that he won't be able to return his fishing outfit bought for the occasion if there are chunks of duck on it.⁴⁵⁴ The concept of wasting a creature's life because it is entertaining seems psychopathic – there is no empathy toward the creature nor regard for the natural world.

⁴⁵¹ "The Date Night Variable." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁵² "The 43 Peculiarity." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁵³ "The Luminous Fish Effect." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁵⁴ "The Fish Guts Displacement." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

Taunting:

There is also the taunting of animals already being experimented on, as seen in Season 6, Episode 17, “The Monster Isolation.” Amy’s primates’ cigarette allowance has been cut back yet they have apparently gotten their hands on some, so she says, “That’s right. They’re no good without the lighter.”⁴⁵⁵ We need to cautiously heed liking the idea of teasing a creature who is already suffering.

Violent/Mean Verbal Expressions:

Sheldon remarks that he “had the good sense to drown that kitten in the river” when Penny invites him to her play (Season 6, Episode 17, “The Monster Isolation”).⁴⁵⁶ The repetition of the idea that animals being harmed intentionally or otherwise teaches that it is okay to see non-human creatures as lesser and, therefore, dispensable. Sheldon also claims that most squirrels are jerks and calls one stupid, as seen in “The Parking Spot Escalation,” Season 6, Episode 9.⁴⁵⁷ In addition, in a double insult to animals and a character, Sheldon compares Howard’s time in space: “He can look out the window and see the majesty of the universe unfolding before his eyes - his dim, uncomprehending eyes. Like a cat in an airport carrying case.”

⁴⁵⁵ “The Monster Isolation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁵⁶ “The Monster Isolation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁵⁷ “The Parking Spot Escalation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

(“The Date Night Variable,” Season 6, Episode 1) ⁴⁵⁸ This minimization of animal intelligence is disturbing.

Woman Against Woman:

Perhaps more harmful than the male characters making fun of women are the many times the women are seen turning on each other. Bernadette threatens Penny at Disneyland. “Come at me. See what happens!” (“The Contractual Obligation Implementation,” Season 6, Episode 18) Penny threatens Amy for coming near her after accidentally hitting her (instead of the intended Bernadette) with her purse – since Amy has just had a bikini wax, Penny says, “I’ll rip out what’s left of your pubes!” – and the audience later sees Penny’s black eyes from the incident. (“The Parking Spot Escalation,” Season 6, Episode 9) When Penny has Bernadette and Amy assist her with rewriting a paper, she threatens (if they tell Leonard), “I will beat both of you with a bag of oranges.” (“The Extract Obliteration,” Season 6, Episode 6) ⁴⁵⁹

Child Abuse:

As troubling, in Season 4, Episode 15 (“The Benefactor Factor”), Sheldon is wary of what the head of the university, Dr. Seibert, wants from himself and his friends and he warns: “Just because the nice man is offering you candy, doesn’t mean you should jump into his windowless van.” When he discovers what it is he wants (for them to appear at a fundraiser), Sheldon says,

⁴⁵⁸ “The Date Night Variable.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁵⁹ “The Contractual Obligation Implementation,” “The Parking Spot Escalation,” and “The Extract Obliteration.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

“Aha! The tear-stained air mattress in the back of the van.”⁴⁶⁰ This reference to child-abduction and abuse seems inexcusable indeed, yet audiences laugh because they are made to feel that it is expected of them and, eventually, through repeated exposure, some may even come to find this type of humor truly amusing. During the same episode, Dr. Seibert threatens that if they don’t help him raise money, he’ll “blind [them] with a hot spoon, like they did to that little boy in *Slumdog Millionaire*.” When Bernadette explains to Howard that she doesn’t like children because she had to take care of her siblings, she recounts the time one of them said, “This isn’t the way Mom makes waffles.” Her response? “Well, okay, put your hand in here. Let’s see how you like this waffle!” (“The Shiny Trinket Maneuver,” Season 5, Episode 12)⁴⁶¹

Body Parts and Severing:

Becoming more and more common across mediums is the idea of body parts being severed. Sheldon says to Raj: “Like a zombie that’s been eaten from the waist down, you, sir, have no leg to stand on.” (“The Parking Spot Escalation,” Season 6, Episode 9)⁴⁶² Sheldon says in another episode (“The Bus Pants Utilization,” Season 4, Episode 12): “You identified me...as a gangrenous limb that needed to be severed from the organism and tossed away.” Yet another example is when Sheldon thinks that the typo on a Chinese restaurant menu (Mobster sauce rather than Lobster sauce) means there might be actual chunks

⁴⁶⁰ “The Benefactor Factor.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁶¹ “The Shiny Trinket Maneuver.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁶² “The Parking Spot Escalation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

of killed mobsters in the food. (“The Bozeman Reaction,” Season 3, Episode 13) ⁴⁶³

More Serial Killer Mention:

Over and above general insults and excessive alcohol references, there is more objectionable scripting, such as two serial killer references: One in Season 6, Episode 18, “The Contractual Obligation Implementation,” where astronaut Howard and crew visit his old middle school and he says he’s the most famous alum “if you don’t count the serial killer who ate all those prostitutes” and the second in Episode 17 of the same season, “The Monster Isolation,” when Raj is hold up in his apartment and says he’s been humiliated by yet another woman. Howard asks him, “You didn’t kill her and chop her up - that’s not what we’re smelling, right?” ⁴⁶⁴ This kind of humor perpetuates thinking that such actions are okay, especially when Raj answers no in a matter-of-fact way.

Date Rape/Fraternity Culture:

Raj joins the women for girl’s night and he and Amy talk about their miserable romantic pasts. In a verbal sparring competitive, Amy offers that she once passed out at a fraternity house “and woke up with more clothes on!” Penny smothers a giggle and audiences recognize that the cultural expectation for a woman in such a situation is to wake up wearing less. (“The

⁴⁶³ “The Bus Pants Utilization” and “The Bozeman Reaction.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁶⁴ “The Contractual Obligation Implementation” and “The Monster Isolation.” The Big Bang Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

Santa Simulation,” Season 6, Episode 11) ⁴⁶⁵ Writing such as this validates and perpetuates a pervasive rape culture.

The Pixar Continuance:

In common pop culture cross-reference, Pixar films are referenced (*Toy Story* and *The Incredibles*). Bernadette refers to Howard as “a sexy Buzz Lightyear” (“The Decoupling Fluctuation,” Season 6, Episode 2) and he says, “To infinity and beyond” just like Buzz Lightyear in the *Toy Story* series. (“The Date Night Variable,” Season 6, Episode 1) ⁴⁶⁶ When introducing Penny as the guest on his Internet show, Sheldon mentions that she is a flag virgin but not a real virgin and that her frequent coitus once interrupted him while he was trying to watch *The Incredibles*. (“The Monster Isolation,” Season 6, Episode 17) ⁴⁶⁷

Making Fun of Disability:

The show often makes fun of mental and physical disorders, such as Raj’s difficulty in talking with women. Far more than general jokes, at one point Leonard even sets Raj up to be in an embarrassing situation with a woman he’s just met. In “The Higgs Boson Observation,” Season 6, Episode 3, Leonard tells Alex that she and Raj have the same field expertise and therefore, “You two have a lot to talk about.” He knows that Raj cannot speak with women unless he’s had

⁴⁶⁵ “The Santa Simulation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁶⁶ “The Decoupling Fluctuation” and “The Date Night Variable.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁶⁷ “The Monster Isolation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

alcohol, so Raj is forced to move silently to another table.⁴⁶⁸ There are a number of jokes about Stephen Hawking's physical difficulty, such as in Season 6, Episode 6, "The Extract Obliteration," when Sheldon wants to be friends with the esteemed scholar. He trumps the scientist and says, "That ought to let the air out of your tires, Hawking." Also, Sheldon aspires to the budding friendship leading to him being able to use the nickname "Wheels" for the wheelchair bound scientist.⁴⁶⁹ This minimization of the serious health problem Hawking faces points out difference and may tell others that such derision is acceptable to the physically challenged. Additionally, Penny imitates a mentally challenged person in "The Extract Obliteration," Season 6, Episode 6.⁴⁷⁰

The Grotesque:

The show promotes the grotesque, for instance when Amy suggests the group play real-life Operation (Season 6, Episode 4, "The Re-Entry Minimization"): "The nose doesn't light up but if the corpse is fresh enough, sometimes you can get the leg to jerk." Amy also says that her wedding registry will be at the UCLA Cadaver Lab because she's always wanted a whole human skeleton and "they are really spendy." ("The Decoupling Fluctuation," Season 6, Episode 2) When Penny and Amy beat Leonard and Sheldon in a series of games, Penny asks brilliant, fact-filled Sheldon: "Where did the expression 'got your ass handed to you' come from? I wonder if it's from

⁴⁶⁸ "The Higgs Boson Observation." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁶⁹ "The Extract Obliteration." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁷⁰ "The Extract Obliteration," "The Re-Entry Minimization," "The Contractual Obligation Implementation," and "The Decoupling Fluctuation." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

like ancient Rome where they'd actually chop someone's ass off and then go 'here.' You know, to appease Loseroneous, the god of losers." ("The Re-Entry Minimization," Season 6, Episode 4)⁴⁷¹

Bullying:

In addition to revenge plots, there is also bullying, like when Sheldon is held down and kissed against his will by Penny and Amy (Season 6, Episode 4, "The Re-Entry Minimization") or when Howard is shoved in the hallway of his old high school even as an adult ("The Contractual Obligation Implementation," Season 6, Episode 18) or when he is bullied by fellow astronauts while at the space station: "The other astronauts are being mean to me." ("The Decoupling Fluctuation," Season 6, Episode 2) In "The Bakersfield Expedition," Season 6, Episode 12, Sheldon is hit with a beverage thrown from a moving vehicle and called a nerd and Penny speaks of how she rightly bullied someone by making him "eat a mouthful of dirt" for wearing a bowtie to school.⁴⁷²

The Female and Her Body:

There are female weight expectations, such as when Howard's mother's weight is highlighted (Season 6, Episode 8, "The 43 Peculiarity") by her son: "What is forty-three? Besides my mom's neck size?" Again, in "The Habitation

⁴⁷¹ "The Re-Entry Minimization," "The Contractual Obligation Implementation," and "The Decoupling Fluctuation." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁷² "The Re-Entry Minimization," "The Contractual Obligation Implementation," "The Decoupling Fluctuation," and "The Bakersfield Expedition." The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

Configuration,” Season 6, Episode 7, Howard explains to Bernadette that his mom “likes doing [the dishes] by herself so she can lick the plates with no one looking.”⁴⁷³ That the program makes fun of a single mother who has devoted herself to her child for maybe having a glandular problem or possibly becoming addicted to food as her only pleasure is uncalled for.

In “The Santa Simulation,” Season 6, Episode 11, Raj makes it clear that he has only been attracted to Penny and Bernadette, but not to Amy. Amy’s body is occasionally the butt of jokes because she is being gender regulated for not following societal expectations of femininity by her so-called friends. When she has her first bikini wax and says she feels like she’s lost five pounds, Bernadette says, “Really? Only five?” (“The Parking Spot Escalation,” Season 6, Episode 9) When Penny gives Amy an eyelash curler after showing her how to use it, Amy says, “I don’t know. Looks like something used by Tinkerbell’s gynecologist.” Penny responds: “Who, I hope for her sake, is not Captain Hook.” (“The Decoupling Fluctuation,” Season 6, Episode 2)⁴⁷⁴ This visual of a woman or a children’s film character possibly having that part of her body abused is disheartening at best.

Women are referred to as being led by their bodily functions, like when Sheldon says on a few occasions that hormones dictate female actions (“The Egg Salad Equivalency,” Season 6, Episode 12) or when girlfriend, Amy, is angry and he suggests she eat one of her Luna bars because “very often when women think they’re angry, they’re really just hungry” (“The

⁴⁷³ “The 43 Peculiarity” and “The Habitation Configuration.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁷⁴ “The Santa Simulation,” “The Parking Spot Escalation,” and “The Decoupling Fluctuation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

Habitation Configuration,” Season 6, Episode 7) or when Bernadette asks Howard if his mother was upset because they want to live together as a married couple and he replies, “Who can tell? She yells everything. She might have been upset. She might have been hungry.” (“The Date Night Variable,” Season 6, Episode 1) ⁴⁷⁵ The program often portrays Jewish mothers as being somehow more annoying than other moms.

When Amy lies about being sick for longer than she actually was, Sheldon decides she must be punished to prevent such behavior and decides to spank her. This is presented as a fun, S&M activity for Amy who turns on slow, sexy music under the pretense of not wanting the neighbors to hear her being disciplined. She even proposes he spank her harder. (“The Fish Guts Displacement,” Season 6, Episode 10) ⁴⁷⁶ Seeing a grown woman – or anyone, for that matter – being disciplined with corporal punishment hardly seems enjoyable divertissement.

Gender Expectation/Regulation:

Masculinity expectations are seen when Penny teases the guys for being nauseated while she guts a fish. She instructs Howard how to bait a hook with a worm: “Don’t name him. Just jab a hook in his face.” Then, when the others try to encourage him, she says, “That’s great. Cheerleading – way to man things up.” (Season 6, Episode 10, “The Fish Guts Displacement”) Raj and Howard’s relationship is constantly being highlighted in a negative fashion: When Howard is

⁴⁷⁵ “The Egg Salad Equivalency,” “The Habitation Configuration,” and “The Date Night Variable.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁷⁶ “The Fish Guts Displacement.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

worried about Raj and says he can always tell when Raj is in trouble, Bernadette replies, “Geez, how close were you guys before we got married?” to which Leonard says, “Don’t look under that rock.” (“The Monster Isolation,” Season 6, Episode 17) When Raj and Howard are investigating how Sheldon is spending a mysterious twenty minutes per day and Howard gets annoyed that Raj is facing him while they are listening at the door, Raj says, in married couple speak, “I can’t do anything right for you, can I?” (“The 43 Peculiarity,” Season 6, Episode 8)⁴⁷⁷ Howard and Raj try out the kissing machine Howard has designed to help Leonard and Priya (who is in India while he’s in California) keep the fire in their long-distance relationship – Leonard is hesitant to try it so Raj fills in for him (“The Infestation Hypothesis,” Season 5, Episode 2). Raj: “I’m impressed. This is very lifelike.” Howard: “Whoa! You just bit my tongue.” Raj: “I nibbled. I was being playful.” Howard asks Raj: “Why do you have to make everything weird?” Raj: “Sorry. Better?” Howard: “Oh, yeah.” Leonard is so grossed out that he leaves.⁴⁷⁸

Similarly, Howard’s close relationship with his mom is seen negatively: “He loves his mother, a lot, some would say too much,” Leonard explains. (“The Lizard-Spock Expansion,” Season 2, Episode 8) When Raj has Howard install an apartment camera so he can make sure his pet is okay while he’s gone, Howard says: “Why can’t you just watch porn like a regular guy?” implying that real men can’t be caring or

⁴⁷⁷ “The Fish Guts Displacement,” “The Monster Isolation,” and “The 43 Peculiarity.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁷⁸ “The Infestation Hypothesis.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.

<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

concerned about their animal friends. (“The Closure Alternative,” Season 6, Episode 21) ⁴⁷⁹

Military/Brutality References:

Military references are sometimes seen, such as when Leonard tells Alex about his work with lasers and she excitedly responds, “Ooh, military?” (Season 6, Episode 3, “The Higgs Boson Observation”) In Season 2, Episode 7, “The Panty Pinata Polarization,” Howard fixates on finding a houseful of beautiful models he’s seen on TV and Leonard says he is being creepy. Howard responds: “If it’s creepy to use the Internet, military satellites, and robot aircraft to find a house...then fine, I’m creepy.” In the same episode, Howard says, “I got a buddy of mine at NORAD to have a spy drone fly over.” These references not only remind us of military action, they also prepare us for drone usage in the U.S. in the same way this technology is currently being used in Iraq and Afghanistan. ⁴⁸⁰

In yet another cruel moment, Howard has tried to run over Sheldon with his car and Leonard objects to his action. Howard says, “Oh, like you’ve never thought of doing that. Don’t hate me because I lived the dream.” In the same episode, Sheldon threatens Howard with a Chinese throwing star. (“The Parking Spot Escalation,” Season 6, Episode 9) In “The Santa Simulation,” Season 6, Episode 11, Santa Claus has been beaten and is bloody and elves have been massacred in a game of

⁴⁷⁹ “The Lizard-Spock Expansion” and “The Closure Alternative.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁸⁰ “The Higgs Boson Observation” and “The Panty Pinata Polarization.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

Dungeons and Dragons; in addition, Raj's face gets blown off by a cannon and he dies in the game.⁴⁸¹

General Violence/"It's Not Real":

It is a common and clever tactic to use a virtual presence to mention abusive behavior, whether speaking of the medium of television itself or engaging in horror, gore, or violence through electronic games. The program – and it is by all means not alone in propagating this type of cruel humor – also shows characters playing paintball with guns and, often, the ever-popular video game, “Halo.” In “The Dumpling Paradox,” Season 1, Episode 7, Penny plays the video game with the roommates. “Oh, cool. Whose head did I just blow off?” She follows up later with “Ha! Look, it's raining you!”⁴⁸² Presenting disturbing language such as this may influence unstable personality viewers who may not be able to distinguish between what is real and what is on the screen; but even for those who can distinguish, these games, their terminology, the ways in which they force us to speak to one another, and seeing the characters we've come to love playing them, could influence us. One program does not a person make but repetition of actions over time certainly has an effect, particularly on developing minds. The show even pokes fun at the research which proves this to be true, as seen in Season 6, Episode 9, “The Parking Spot Escalation.” Sheldon says about Howard, “He's trying to kill me, Leonard. Video games and rock music have desensitized him to violence.” Or is watching “The Big Bang Theory” to blame for desensitization? While we

⁴⁸¹ “The Parking Spot Escalation” and “The Santa Simulation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁸² “The Dumpling Paradox” and “The Parking Spot Escalation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts. <http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

know that these scenarios are simply presented by actors, the opinions presented are real and the characters too become real to us.

Sponsorship:

When we find out that reruns of “The Big Bang Theory” on TBS are now sponsored by Xbox One, we see that the show is influenced by its sponsor and that we, too, are being influenced. Sure, corporations control content and, in fact, shows only exist thanks to the commercials in between which essentially pay for programming. But even when we know this, we ingest the language and perspective of creators innocently and allow lasting impressions to control us. As an Xbox One transports into the now familiar apartment of Sheldon and Leonard, we accept that it is a worthy purchase because these characters like it; further, when the games appear next to an ad for the show or during play between these popular characters – among them “Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare,” “Grand Theft Auto V,” “Assassin’s Creed Unity,” “Dead Rising 3,” “The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt,” “The Evil Within,” and “Ryse: Son of Rome” – we become complicit in advancing militarism.

Background/Signage:

It is important to notice signage in shows as well. When Leonard wears a shirt with the all-seeing eye, when the university where they work has “Teach For America” posters on the wall, when astronaut “Mass” wears a N.Y.F.D. cap, we are often unaware of these intentionally placed messages. Don’t forget that stage sets and wardrobes are created from scratch for each show and the range of options is virtually unlimited, so one wonders why these particular choices were made and which political views are represented. Keep in mind that every word, every shirt, every symbol, every representation is intentional,

although none can say with assurance in which ways the writers/designers intend these portrayals. These images and sounds influence our emotions and affect how we feel about our world, ultimately contributing to our collective consciousness. If we come to think of life as nothing more than pain and cruelty isn't that what it essentially becomes, especially for young viewers? Remember that "The Big Bang Theory," like many other programs, changes its ratings depending on the episode. Sometimes it's rated PG and sometimes it is TV-14, DV. So even if you try to watch only the PG-rated episodes, some members of the household will certainly want to see the ones in-between.

Other Misrepresentations:

Television is fraught with negative images but what is missing from the small screen is upsetting as well because "in prime-time programming, males outnumber females by 3 to 1, and the women portrayed are younger than the men they encounter. Nonwhites (especially Hispanics), young children, and the elderly are underrepresented; and members of minority groups are disproportionately cast in minor roles...Characters are portrayed as professional or managerial workers. Although 67% of the work force in the U.S. is employed in blue-collar or service jobs, only 25% of TV characters hold such jobs...Crime on television is ten times more prevalent than it is in real life."

⁴⁸³ Television thus alters our perception of the world around us.

⁴⁸³ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 80-81.

Racism/Sexism:

When minorities are featured on television, often it is with a negative slant, and now the condescending tone comes from the mouths of minority actors (forced into accepting roles which highlight negative stereotypes) themselves – in this way, it appears as though the characters believe in and accept derision about their race, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, religion, body image, etc. When Raj on “The Big Bang Theory” (“The Roommate Transmogrification,” Season 4, Episode 24) refers to himself as a “brown Martha Stewart”⁴⁸⁴ (as opposed to simply Martha Stewart) everyone laughs, whereas the audience might not be as likely to if another character called him such.

Raj often defends himself and his Indian culture but sometimes even these defenses end with disparaging sentiment. At one point in “The Dumpling Paradox” (Season 1, Episode 7), Sheldon insists on playing “Halo” in teams but Howard is missing, leaving only three players. Leonard says, “Well, the only way we can play teams at this point is if we cut Raj in half.” Raj replies: “Oh, sure, cut the foreigner in half. There’s a billion more where he came from.”⁴⁸⁵ Penny takes a history class in “The Extract Obliteration,” Season 6, Episode 6. She tells Leonard: “This is my paper and my perspective is that slavery is bad. Oh, and my professor is black so I’m pretty sure that’s the right answer.”⁴⁸⁶ This implies that only African-Americans would be against slavery. Like Raj, Howard is often the one making fun of his Jewish heritage; hearing Raj,

⁴⁸⁴ “The Roommate Transmogrification.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁸⁵ “The Dumpling Paradox.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

⁴⁸⁶ “The Extract Obliteration.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

Howard, and the other characters ridicule race, ethnicity, and religion is disrespectful.

When Sheldon brings the couch cushion Howard wiggled his bare ass on to the dry cleaner, he says that Howard's diet is rich in fatty deli meats – implying that all and only Jewish people love delicatessens – but Howard has never been seen eating such on the show. In addition, Sheldon chose that dry cleaner because he read online that “SanteriaSuzi37” had a similar problem with a chicken blood stain on her pants. Santeria is an Afro-Caribbean religion which developed in the Spanish empire. So are we to assume that Howard's ethnic background somehow makes him negatively different or that Santeria Suzi's heritage means she is a chicken killer? These references dictate how we view types of people and can have a negative impact culturally. (“The Parking Spot Escalation,” Season 6, Episode 9)⁴⁸⁷

Let us not forget that Polish jokes originated during WWII – Hitler recognized that making fun of others and calling them less-than-human makes it easier to abuse and kill. Although, thankfully, such humor directed toward the African-American community has faded from fashion (but Black actors still find it nearly impossible to find non-objectionable roles), it appears as though it has been redirected against Latino, Asian, female, nerdy [read: intelligent], overweight, or poor characters, like the female restaurant worker (and want-to-be actor) character, Penny, on “The Big Bang Theory.” Jokes about her using her body and or femininity to survive abound through the mouths of the male characters, despite her objections to their characterizations of her makeup. Since the male characters on

⁴⁸⁷ “The Parking Spot Escalation.” The Big Bang Theory Transcripts.
<http://bigbangtrans.com.html>.

the show have had the advantage of a good education, it seems unfair that scripts are written making fun of the one character who does not and who, as a result, does not have the same earning capacity as the others. These racist, sexist, etc. representations of different types of people are seen across the board on television, not simply on a few programs, and this influences our perceptions negatively.

Negative Effects of Heavy Viewing:

Heavy TV viewers have an especially twisted perspective: They are more racially prejudiced, feel that women have limited abilities and interests, and find the world a sinister place where people are only looking out for themselves and will take advantage of others.⁴⁸⁸ Because TV shows never present factors which contribute to crime like unemployment and poverty and because depictions of criminals and police are presented in a consistent fashion – with the right person always in jail by the show’s end – viewers come away with an unsympathetic and unrealistic stance toward those brought to trial, often with a presumption of guilt.⁴⁸⁹ “Egregious omissions occur in the coverage of crime. Many more Black men are casualties of crime than are perpetrators, but their victimization does not attract the media spotlight the way their crimes do. When it comes to *victims* of crime...the media pay disproportionately more attention to whites and women.”⁴⁹⁰ The majority of people have not experienced violence and

⁴⁸⁸ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 82.

⁴⁸⁹ Pratkanis and Aronson, 82.

⁴⁹⁰ Barry Glassner. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 109.

crime, so mass media representations form vivid images of what the world is like:

The average fifteen year old has viewed more than 13,000 TV killings. More than half of TV's characters are involved in a violent confrontation each week; in reality, less than 1% of people in the nation are victims of criminal violence in any given year according to FBI statistics. Indeed, although violence in the U.S. has been declining over the past decade, violence on TV has not.⁴⁹¹

Furthermore,

Heavy readers of newspaper accounts of sensational and random crimes report higher levels of fear of crime. Repeated viewing of R-rated violent 'slasher' films is associated with less sympathy and empathy for victims of rape. A heavy dose of ads portraying women as sex objects induces females to believe that their current bodies are too large. When television is introduced into an area, the incidence of theft increases, perhaps due to television's promotion of consumerism, which may frustrate and anger economically deprived viewers who compare their lifestyles with those portrayed on television.⁴⁹²

Collectively, our reality is to some extent determined by representations of reality on television. "With respect to television violence alone, a 1993 report by University of

⁴⁹¹ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 81.

⁴⁹² Pratkanis and Aronson, 83.

Washington epidemiologist Brandon S. Centerwall expresses a startling finding: ‘[If], hypothetically, television technology had never been developed, there would be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United States, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults. Violent crime would be half of what it is.’”⁴⁹³ Wow.

Heightened Lifestyle:

The corrosive effects of television on our national consciousness come not only through advertisements for products we may not be able to afford but in the sets/backgrounds of ads and programs. Ads for household products typically feature kitchens with the latest high-end stainless steel appliances and granite countertops; the only ads which portray average-looking homes are those for the military, since the call of duty is one of few options for those who cannot afford an education. Labor lawyer for the AFL-CIO, Damon Silvers, considers how these images shape our collective image of ourselves: “There is a tendency to imagine that we live in a country where the typical family makes \$150,000 a year. But half of all American households have incomes less than \$55,000 a year,” he says. “The world that is projected as middle class in the media is a world that no more than something like 15 percent of America can afford.”⁴⁹⁴ We are all familiar with

⁴⁹³ “Children, Violence, and the Media: A Report for Parents and Policy Makers.” Prepared by Majority Staff, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Utah, Chairperson. Sept. 14, 1999. The Center for Sport Policy and Conduct (CSPC) in the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Indiana University, Bloomington.

⁴⁹⁴ Krissy Clark. “The middle class through the Hollywood lens.” June 28, 2013. <http://marketplace.org/topics/wealth-poverty.htm>. See also: Ron Kaufman’s “How Television Fuels the Class War,” 2007, <http://www.turnoffyourtv.com.html>; <http://www.tvtropes.org.html>, whose

programs like “Friends” and “Sex and the City,” whose characters could never afford these digs on their salaries and, while television clearly represents a higher lifestyle than is within the reach of most, thereby continuing sales upon which the capitalist society is supposedly dependent, this lack in our own lives takes a toll as many get into debt trying to keep up with the Joneses not simply as a way to feel normal but, more disturbingly, as the only way to be treated well by others.

The Wealth Component:

In the same way the children’s game, Monopoly, was popular during the 1920s Depression – so people could at least pretend to be wealthy – reality TV further promotes the lifestyles of the rich and famous through programs like Bravo’s “Million Dollar Listings,” which follows high-end real estate agents around Miami and New York City, CNBC’s “Secret Lives of the Super Rich,” Bravo’s “Married to Medicine,” and “Real Housewives of New Jersey” (and Orange County, Beverly Hills, and Atlanta). The latter shows tend to promote women as vicious hysterics and add to the same women-at-home feeling reminisced over on the 1960s throwback, “Mad Men.” When TLC’s “Say Yes to the Dress” focuses on the

website identifies common TV tropes such as Idle Rich, Lonely Rich Kid, and Self-Made Man; “Modern Family” is the latest in a long line of shows whose inhabitants could not, in real life, actually afford where they are living – see “‘Modern Family’ is a class-blind fantasy world,” by Daniel D’Addario, at <http://www.salon.com.html>; *The Center for Media Literacy’s* “Power of Images: Creating the Myths of Our Time,” by J. Francis Davis at <http://www.medialit.org.html>; *Mother Jones’* “It’s the Inequality, Stupid: Eleven charts that explain what’s wrong with America,” by Dave Gilson and Carolyn Perot, at <http://www.motherjones.com.html>; and Richard Butsch’s “A Half Century of Class and Gender in American TV Domestic Sitcoms.” (2003) <http://www.cercles.com.html>.

goings on at a premier bridal salon, with episodes such as “Always the Pageant Girl,” wealthy females are again presented as only wanting a man. NatGeo presents “Drugs, Inc.,” which delves into the seamy yet sometimes profitable criminal underworld.

Class Depictions Versus Reality:

Since most new-fangled electronic devices, from phones to iPads to flat-screen televisions, are priced just above the average person’s grasp, these gadgets are desired by all, including children who, thanks to their exposure across media, know all too well which brands make a person cool. Consider the following: “Near the beginning of the Reagan years, one out of every nine American children lived in poverty. At the end of his term, that figure was one in four children.”⁴⁹⁵ According to USA Today, “four out of five U.S. adults struggle with joblessness, near poverty, or reliance on welfare for at least part of their lives.”⁴⁹⁶ The National Center for Children in Poverty (N.C.C.P.) informs that “more than 16 million children in the United States – 22% of all children – live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level – \$23,550 a year for a family of four. Research shows that, on average, families need an income of about twice that level to cover basic expenses. Using this standard, 45% of children live in low-income families.”⁴⁹⁷ Unstable employment and low wages contribute to

⁴⁹⁵ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 176.

⁴⁹⁶ Hope Yen. “4 in 5 in USA face near-poverty, no work.” *USA Today*, Money section.
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/07/28.html>.

⁴⁹⁷ “Child Poverty.” *National Center for Children in Poverty*.
<http://nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html>.

this situation and result in poor health, mental health difficulties, and social, behavioral, and emotional problems for children.⁴⁹⁸ Poverty creates a situation in which priorities must constantly be shifted in order to pay for the most pressing situation, thus undermining what would ordinarily be purchased.

Children and others are facing extreme difficulties in today's financial downturn. "Children...make up a disproportionate share of the poor in the United States in that they are 26% of the total population, but constitute 39% of the poor."⁴⁹⁹ More than twenty-five percent of women aged 18-24 years old are living in poverty in the U.S., compared with 18.8 percent of men in that same age group. For women in the same age group who are mothers, the percentage jumps to 40.7 compared to 24.2 for single men with children.⁵⁰⁰ For the first time, American elderly and children are not the main recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP). According to the Associated Press, one in seven "working-age people [ages 18-59] now make up the majority in U.S. households that rely on food stamps."⁵⁰¹ In cheap hotels which line the roads leading to Walt Disney World live at least 2,000 children whose parents cannot afford first and last month's rent deposit for an apartment or house to lease. Nationwide, "the Department of Education has identified 47,000 hotel kids in schools around the country, and says that the number of homeless kids in public

⁴⁹⁸ "Child Poverty." *National Center for Children in Poverty*.

<http://nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html>.

⁴⁹⁹ Henry A. Giroux. *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism* (New York: Peter Wang, 2011), 115.

⁵⁰⁰ U.S. Representative Marcy Kaptur. "However data sliced, women are more likely to be poor." *PolitiFact.com, Tampa Bay Times*. 3/27/12. p. 4A.

⁵⁰¹ Hope Yen. "The New Face of Food Stamps: Working-Age Americans." Jan. 27, 2014. http://www.hosted_ap.org.html.

schools has increased by 38 percent since 2007.”⁵⁰² As the working poor struggle to provide the basics, it doesn’t bode well for the future of the nation’s children; despite this, depictions in media continue to admonish being average, glamorize childhood, and lead us to believe that if we just spend as though there’s no tomorrow, everything will be okay. We are taught that there is more financial opportunity here than anywhere in the world and that may or may not be the case; but be aware that, as an adult, no matter which party affiliation, you can’t vote on corporate power or bank interest rates.

Narration:

As television, advertising, and movie promotion encourage a high lifestyle and violence, voices used to announce current programming are deep and menacing – voices which used to be reserved for scary films. Narration is heard in-between repeated sounds of explosions, bullets being fired, the punching of a body, metal blades, saw sounds, and metal doors slamming, along with heavy-metal style music; these add heart-stopping terror to films, shows, and products which don’t even have monsters or psycho-killers. A good example of this includes not only the latest action films, but check out the trailer for the PG rated children’s film, *Happy Feet*,⁵⁰³ where George Del Hoyo says, “In the heart of the South Pole...” in the same way one often hears the line, “In a world...” or “This summer, justice has a new name...” Just about all action/adventure films use the voices – resonant baritones urgently describing the dark-thrilled plot of an upcoming feature with dramatic inflections

⁵⁰² Saki Knafo. “Homeless Children Living on the Highway to Disney World.” *The Huffington Post*. 04/19/12.

<http://www.huffpost.com/us/entry/1420702.html>.

⁵⁰³ “Happy Feet” Trailer 1.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UDe8M6UJw.html>.

and breathlessness.⁵⁰⁴ Audiences have come to expect evil tones of voice for films where it seems appropriate but, as of late, these narrations are being used for ads and shows of all kinds.

Children and the Small Screen:

Children are exposed to violent advertisements whether or not the television is set to a violent channel due to crossover ads from networks owned by the same parent company. Get a TV with a V-Chip (most TVs made since 2000 have it built in) or other blocking technology available from cable and satellite providers (although kids have quickly learned how to disable these systems) and try to follow TV's parental guidelines ratings in the upper left corner of the screen. These are Y, Y7, Y7 FV (for Fantasy Violence, used on children's programming only), G, PG, 14, and MA (and can be used in conjunction with the other systems). Other Content Labels include D for suggestive dialogue, L for coarse or crude language, S for sexual situations, and V for violence. But even if you are using TV's rating guide, the Parents Television Council found that

⁵⁰⁴ Please see "Million Dollar Voices" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S8N2s3L4mQ.html> and "Don La Fontaine: The Voice" at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QPMvj_xeig.html. Recently on Geico ads giving customers' stories a movie ad sound, the voice-over legend has done TV show ads and film trailers. His "deep, rich, authoritative" voice is very familiar on TV shows such as "24" and "Reno 911! Miami," and in previews for "Terminator 2: Judgment Day." George Del Hoyo has been the announcer for "American Idol." YouTube's "Famous Voices" also gives a good overview of the art and players, including Mark Elliot as the voice of Disney. "Pablo Francisco Movie Guy" does a comedic routine parodying voice-over great La Fontaine at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qvv8SMTyAgk.html>.

some TV-14 “parents strongly cautioned” shows on regular TV equated “scenes of stabbings, shootings, rape, decapitation, and mutilation” found on violent cable shows with mature ratings.⁵⁰⁵ And unfortunately, you will find that certain episodes/shows/channels vary their ratings and that news, sports, religious, and home shopping shows are not rated; as already noted, television ads also escape content rating.⁵⁰⁶ This means that – on any number of channels – you or your children will definitely see the Brighthouse ad which features two children playing a video game where characters in the game are boxing, and then the children start pushing each other. Additionally, ads for scary or violent shows are seen across channels, regardless of whether you/they are watching a show with a benign rating.

Kids between the ages of 2 and 18 watch about three hours of TV every day and children’s shows have the most violence of all TV programs – some cartoons show twenty acts of violence per hour! Young children can’t distinguish between what is real and what they see on screens and those exposed extensively to TV violence can have problems with moral reasoning. Children are drawn to glamorized, entertaining violence when there is a lack of consequences for one’s actions. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “media violence can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed.”⁵⁰⁷ Yearly, 150,000 adolescents get arrested for violent crimes and some

⁵⁰⁵ Lynn Elber, Associated Press. “Inconsistent TV violence ratings fail parents.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. December 9, 2013. <http://www.csmonitor.com.html>.

⁵⁰⁶ “The TV Parental Guidelines: FAQs About the TV Parental Guidelines.” <http://www.tvguidelines.org/faqs.htm>.

⁵⁰⁷ Nicole Adams. “How Watching Violence on TV Affects Kids.” *Live Strong*. Jan. 17, 2014. <http://www.livestrong.com.html>.

carry weapons so they aren't a victim.⁵⁰⁸ Violent TV shows spark the fight-or-flight response, increase heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure and can create an increased stimulation need for more violence.⁵⁰⁹ Limits on screens should definitely be set but if you're thinking it would be preferable to sign your child up for an organized sport, you might want to read on.

⁵⁰⁸ Nicole Adams. "How Watching Violence on TV Affects Kids." *Live Strong*. Jan. 17, 2014. <http://www.livestrong.com.html>.

⁵⁰⁹ Linda Ray. "How Violence in Television Shows Desensitizes Children." *Live Strong*. Jan. 25, 2015. <http://www.livestrong.com.html>. For information on how to use media sensibly, please check out *Media Smarts: Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy* at <http://www.mediasmarts.ca.html> and "Tips on How to Deal with Media Violence" from *Common Sense Media* at <http://www.common sense media.org.html>.

V. GENERAL INFLUENCES ON KIDS:

“I’ve never wanted to look like models on the cover of magazines. I represent the majority of women and I’m very proud of that.”

- Adele

“In this century, the mass media have come to rival parents, school, and religion as the most influential institution in children’s lives.”

- Media and Values magazine, Center for Media Literacy

“Our country’s growing obsession with sports isn’t just hurting our children, but also our communities. As play is siphoned off to gyms and fields, fewer kids are playing in our streets, parks, and playgrounds.”

- Darrell Hammond

YOUTH SPORTS:

Remember when the hockey dad beat a fellow hockey dad to death over some rough play that went on between the kids during practice? Think that’s an aberration? A “Sports Illustrated for Kids” survey revealed that “74 percent of children said they had witnessed out-of-control adults at their games.”⁵¹⁰ There’s even assault protection insurance available for sports officials like umpires.⁵¹¹ It is estimated that “41 million girls and boys play on organized teams” by the National Council of Youth Sports. A 2006 Minnesota Youth Soccer Association poll found that “34 percent [of kids] said they had been yelled at or teased by a fan, and 15 percent reported that

⁵¹⁰ Mark Hyman. *Until It Hurts: America’s Obsession With Youth Sports and How It Harms Our Kids* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 115.

⁵¹¹ Hyman, 119.

their parents get angry when they [play] poorly.”⁵¹² That’s the high end of the spectrum showing how carried away we’ve gotten with youth sports in America.

Kids’ recreation in the U.S. has become big, serious business and a high-pressure enterprise where yearly “more than 3.5 million children under age fifteen require medical treatment for sports injuries, nearly half of which are the result of simple overuse.”⁵¹³ Similar to beauty pageants, adult-led youth sports has come to mean big money; from hiring private coaches to buying the latest equipment in hopes of creating tomorrow’s superstars for college scholarships and or pro-teams, most are left with unrealized dreams and ragged bodies. While ESPN promotes the Little League World Series, high school sports are highlighted on Bright House Networks, along with “Friday Night Tykes” and “The Short Game” (where, in the ad, a man asks a little girl playing golf if she’s going to be a little girl or a man) on the Esquire Network.

Even Carl Stotz, the man who started Little League Baseball in the late 1930s, later cut ties with the association because he saw the corporatization of the American institution.⁵¹⁴ By the ’50s, critics mounted and Charles Buchner, an NYU education professor and later a White House Conference on Physical Fitness delegate, claimed that Little League Baseball existed simply for the entertainment of adults, that kids aren’t mature enough for it, and that sports specialization could be harmful.⁵¹⁵ The National Education Association concluded in 1952 that “highly organized competition, patterned after high

⁵¹² Mark Hyman. *Until It Hurts: America’s Obsession With Youth Sports and How It Harms Our Kids* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 115.

⁵¹³ Hyman, back cover.

⁵¹⁴ Hyman, 11-12.

⁵¹⁵ Hyman, 7-8.

school and college sports, gives youngsters an exaggerated idea of the importance of sports and may even be harmful to them.”⁵¹⁶ Perhaps most especially for non-star players who are not encouraged and come to feel badly about themselves.⁵¹⁷ In the ’60s, Joey Jay, the first Little Leaguer who had made it to the major leagues a decade before, warned against excessive playing when he saw how his six-year old son was being pressured and he identified that adult ambition had created “a new medical ailment, ‘Little League elbow.’”⁵¹⁸ Sadly, nothing has changed. Ex-pitcher Tommy John is immortalized because an elbow operation was specifically created to keep him playing ball.

As kids are prematurely using up their bodies for supposedly upcoming rewards, most will not meet their – or their parents’ – goals. “Just 5.8 percent of high school football players, one in seventeen, will suit up for a college squad...men’s soccer (5.7 percent), baseball (5.6 percent), women’s basketball (3.1 percent), and men’s basketball (2.9 percent).”⁵¹⁹ And sports-related scholarship aid is a drop in the bucket because colleges try to give all athletes a little something: “18 percent at public colleges and universities and just 7 percent at private ones,” leaving most with hefty tuition bills despite some assistance.⁵²⁰ As elite club and travel teams are joined in hopes of attracting college coaches and kids are trucked to places like Walt Disney World for championships, year-round training is hurting kids physically and psychologically.

⁵¹⁶ Mark Hyman. *Until It Hurts: America’s Obsession With Youth Sports and How It Harms Our Kids* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 9.

⁵¹⁷ Hyman, 11.

⁵¹⁸ Hyman, 12-14.

⁵¹⁹ Hyman, 33.

⁵²⁰ Hyman, 33-34.

Let's look at physically: "Each year, as many as half of all youth sports injuries are the result of overuse – a regimen of sports play and training so intense that a child's body rebels." How much overuse could there be? Many Little Leaguers throw more pitches than "grown men pitching in big league ballparks."⁵²¹ It so happens that "pitchers who throw more than eighty pitches in a game have four times the risk of injury leading to surgery compared to pitchers who don't" but Little League officials haven't exactly followed orthopedic surgeons' advice.⁵²² Operations on youth patients used to be rare, but in one surgeon's office, UCL repair (the "Tommy John" operation) has climbed from seven players between 1988 to 1994 to 424 between 2000 and 2004.⁵²³ Perhaps as much as fifty percent of these injuries are due to overuse which means that they are preventable, according to sports doctors, and early single-sport specialization is a contributing factor – one medical expert suggests banning curveballs for those under fourteen years of age.⁵²⁴

Beyond this are other debilitating and disabling problems: "Anabolic steroids that build astounding muscle mass but leave users with damaging lifelong health effects; brain injuries resulting from multiple concussions; and eating disorders that shrink some young athletes and dangerously bulk up others."⁵²⁵ One popular supplement, Creatine, is completely legal and accessible in stores and weight rooms but "there are no studies of Creatine use by children under age eighteen and

⁵²¹ Mark Hyman. *Until It Hurts: America's Obsession With Youth Sports and How It Harms Our Kids* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 75.

⁵²² Hyman, 76.

⁵²³ Hyman, 84.

⁵²⁴ Hyman, 103, 132.

⁵²⁵ Hyman, 98-99.

little is known about its long-term effects on young bodies.”⁵²⁶ No one seems especially concerned about steroid use in youth sports, despite the American Academy of Pediatrics’ continual warning beginning in the ’90s that “mood swings and depression [are] known side effects of anabolic steroid use in children.”⁵²⁷ Some team players even feel left out as minor team members when they aren’t offered steroids like the star members because they are not aware of their destructive effects. These medications and supplements and surgeries are part of a national sports rhetoric which espouses a “whatever it takes” attitude, the likes of which would be applauded by Vince Lombardi.⁵²⁸

Promotion of Patriotism:

Expect to see militaristic promotions at professional sports events you attend with your kids because the Pentagon spent \$6.8 million in taxpayer dollars to sports teams inside the NFL, NBA, NHL, MLB and MLS over four years. So those “on-field color guard ceremonies, performances of the national anthem, and ceremonial first pitches and puck drops”⁵²⁹ aren’t just done out of the goodness of the teams’ hearts but are well-paid gimmicks funded by the American public. Thanks to Senators John McCain and Jeff Flake for bringing this to our attention and questioning the appropriateness of doing so.

⁵²⁶ Mark Hyman. *Until It Hurts: America’s Obsession With Youth Sports and How It Harms Our Kids* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 104-105.

⁵²⁷ Hyman, 108.

⁵²⁸ “The Greatest Motivational Speeches in Sports History.” May 15, 2014. <http://www.complex/sports.com.html>.

⁵²⁹ Laura Barron-Lopez and Travis Waldron. “Pentagon Paid Up to \$6.8 Million of Taxpayer Money to Pro Sports Teams for Military Tributes.” *The Huffington Post*. Nov. 4, 2015. <http://www.huffpost.com/us.html>.

WRESTLING:

Media depictions of what it means to be a man are increasingly problematic. To avoid public ridicule, men are trained by media to avoid being vulnerable – and violence is part of that taught cultural norm. “If we want to understand violence in America, we need to understand the growing connection made in our society – on both an individual and a systemic level – between being a man and being violent. And we need to understand how this has produced disastrous results for American society as a whole.”⁵³⁰ Men and boys in our society are facing a crisis because violent depictions of manhood teach them to use violence as the best problem-solving tool from an early age, and those around them – influenced by the same media sources – act to regulate any deviation from this way of behaving. Tune in to The World Wrestling Federation, now called World Wrestling Entertainment (the WWE), which has “the highest rated cable programs every week...with 4.5 million [mostly male] teens watching...[earning] millions of dollars in sales from merchandising products.”⁵³¹ These products include action figures whose muscles are substantially larger than in years’ past.

Male superheroes and their weapons have grown in size over the years – as seen in video games, professional wrestling, and action films – while female bodies are shrinking. The effect of these depictions is that anorexia among girls and women and

⁵³⁰ Jeremy Earp and Jackson Katz. “Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity Study Guide.” *Media Education Foundation*. <http://www.mediaed.org.html>. Page 7.

⁵³¹ Sut Jhally and Jackson Katz. “Wrestling With Manhood: Boys, Bullying & Battering.” Full Transcript. *Media Education Foundation*. <http://www.mediaed.org.html>. Pages 3-4.

steroid abuse by boys and men is on the rise.⁵³² Masculine codes of being heroic only through an imposing cruelty are seen by eight-year old boys watching as bulked up male figures abuse scantily clad Barbie doll types. New narratives in wrestling include women and effeminate men as a way of increasing gendered violence and making those presented as straight, tough wrestlers seem even more masculine. These story lines use women (and men who don't meet the male code) as the enemies of masculine men and make it seem as if the violence against them is justified; therefore, audiences howl and clap as a woman is hit, the crowd calls her a slut over and over again, and the announcer says she/they enjoyed the abuse.⁵³³ The story lines reflect the larger problem of intimidation against women and others – a major health concern – so society needs to question the role of this scripted but real-looking entertainment.

CHILD BEAUTY PAGEANTS:

Television has promoted a number of reality shows revolving around child [read: mostly girl] beauty pageants: WE T.V.'s "Little Miss Perfect," The Learning Channel's "Toddlers and Tiaras," The CW's "Crowned: The Mother of All Pageants," TLC's "King of the Crown," which features a pageant prep team, and "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo." Along with "Dance Moms," these programs largely show competitive moms and exhausted, overly made-up girls. An inordinate amount of time and money are spent in pursuit of the crown,

⁵³² Jeremy Earp and Jackson Katz. "Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity Study Guide." *Media Education Foundation*. <http://www.mediaed.org.html>. Page 12.

⁵³³ Sut Jhally and Jackson Katz. "Wrestling With Manhood: Boys, Bullying & Battering." Full Transcript. *Media Education Foundation*. <http://www.mediaed.org.html>.

resulting in out-of-whack budgets for households paying thousands for pageant dresses, spray tans, false eye lashes and hair pieces. Girls are being raised thinking their beauty is all-important; therefore, academic, athletic, and family time take a backseat as rehearsal of routines becomes paramount.

Heightened expectations of parents can translate to low self-esteem for the majority who do not win. “Children...learn that power and happiness do not come to women through active pursuit and assertive engagement with life, but rather through obedience, servitude, patience, and, ultimately, through the magic of cosmetic make-over.”⁵³⁴ Modern beauty pageants are reversing decades of feminist work and reinforcing gender stereotypes, sending the wrong message to America’s youth who now have a distortion of body image, often resulting in anorexia, depression, and loss of self-esteem.

The Miss America Pageant program “[teaches] girls who [are] beginning their teen years what to aspire to: beauty, poise, talent, and intelligence. But these qualities really [boil] down to doll-like beauty, an unceasing smile, an interest in a social issue that [reinforces] for the audience the girl’s femininity.” Many television shows which attract middle school girls are “beauty contests in disguise: *America’s Next Top Model*, *The Bachelor*, *For Love or Money*, *Who Wants to Marry My Dad?*, *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Model*, *Outback Jack*, and *The Swan* are just a few of the shows that line beautiful women up for choosing and do a version of the swimsuit competition.”⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin, eds. *“There She Is, Miss America”: The Politics of Sex, Beauty, and Race in America’s Most Famous Pageant* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 153.

⁵³⁵ Sharon Lamb, Ed.D., and Lyn Mikel Brown, Ed.D. *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers’ Schemes* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2006), 99-100.

This newly-packaged, but antiquated programming continues the parading of women and girls as nothing more than specimens meant to appear in spectacle.

Ironically, the rules for competition in a San Diego pageant (which follow exactly those at the national level), a Miss America preliminary, require that a woman: “Must not have been convicted of a crime of moral turpitude [in what previous century did this wording originate?]; must not have appeared nude in any photo, movie, video, publication or event and must agree not to appear in such during the year of competition in the Fairest of the Fair/Miss San Diego County competition; must be female, single, have never been married, never been a mother, and must be of good moral character.”⁵³⁶ It is interesting that these women are not allowed nudity, yet they are forced to saunter on stage as close to semi-nude as a person can be without showing one’s belly button (another rule); it is even more telling, perhaps, that one is not allowed to have given birth to a child, the very – supposedly cherished – pool from which the pageants feed.

P.T. Barnum, circus magnate extraordinaire, started hosting baby shows in 1855, “giving cash prizes in such categories as the ‘finest twin,’ the ‘finest triplet,’ and the ‘finest baby.’”⁵³⁷ Over a four day period, the shows attracted over sixty thousand people, “touched a middle-class chord,” and “inspired a song sheet, ‘Barnum’s Baby Show Polka.’”⁵³⁸ The shows of yesteryear may have sparked fond thoughts of

⁵³⁶ Sarah Banet-Weiser. *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 51.

⁵³⁷ LeRoy Ashby. *With Amusement For All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 51.

⁵³⁸ Ashby, 51.

motherhood and cooing children, yet today's pageants are hardly wholesome fun; rather, the stage is set for something more like a Las Vegas showgirl revue. Child beauty pageants exist around the globe, but France recently proposed making it illegal to "help, encourage or tolerate" those under age sixteen to participate in a pageant because they no longer wished to see the sexualization of their young girls.⁵³⁹ The United States perpetuates one-dimensional views of women and girls which harms men and boys as well in creating false representations of what it means to be a person.

Child beauty pageants are a round-the-clock pursuit for over 300,000 children in the U.S. and it is a five-billion dollar per year industry.⁵⁴⁰ These pageants are linked to adult female beauty pageants, since many are called "youth development programs" – some 35,000 local, state, and national competitions feed into several national contests – which prepare the girls for the big pageants entered in one's teens. It is felt that the younger one starts, the greater chance to become properly groomed and trained for the big time in contests like the prized Miss America Pageant.⁵⁴¹ Yet early entry requires a hefty budget.

This latest fad has spawned a burgeoning industry: There are talent coaches, pageant photographers, promotion and business managers, wardrobe designers, and hair designers all wanting to be a part of the festivities. There are movies revolving around the pageant world, such as "Painted Babies,"

⁵³⁹ Hannah Miet. "How Child Beauty Pageants Got Weird: From party dresses to cone-bra-striptease, the evolution of America's ickiest pastime." *Vocativ: Culture*. <http://www.vocativ.com.html>.

⁵⁴⁰ "About Toddlers and Tiaras." The Learning Channel. <http://www.tlc.discovery.com.html>.

⁵⁴¹ Judy Alter. *Beauty Pageants: Tiaras, Roses, and Runways* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1997), 9-11.

which follows the paths of two five-year old girls, Brooke and Asia, as they walk down the runways; later came “Painted Babies at 17,” a look at the same girls twelve years later.⁵⁴² Independent magazines also exist for pageant contestants and their families along with how-to publications like the tape, “The Power to Win,” the book “101 Secrets to Winning Beauty Pageants,” and the “International Directory of Pageants.”⁵⁴³

Over the years, the Miss America Pageant has seen varying degrees of popularity and had its share of controversy. The aforementioned beauty contest began as the Fall Pageant in 1921 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, as a way of extending tourist visits. The contest has often been criticized as objectifying women, and some still find it degrading that women must have a talent, be judged in a luxurious evening gown, and even, of course, in a bathing suit. Pageant officials felt that having the women take off their heels and walk barefoot during the swimsuit competition made the women look less like sex objects. Another criticism of the pageant is that it did not represent minorities. Pageant officials say that the bylaws stated that all races were allowed to join; still, it was 1970 before an African-American was named Miss Iowa, and it was not until 1983 that the first African-American Miss America was crowned.⁵⁴⁴

Another complaint is the emphasis on old-fashioned etiquette and focusing on beauty as representing an ideal woman/girl. This beauty is often attained using unnatural methods: hair dying, wigs, and hair extensions and weaves; fake

⁵⁴² “Painted Babies.” <http://www.paintedbabies.net.html>.

⁵⁴³ Judy Alter. *Beauty Pageants: Tiaras, Roses, and Runways* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1997), 16-17.

⁵⁴⁴ Alter, 35-37.

tanning; “flippers,” an insert which gives one a perfect smile, or other extensive dental work; cosmetic surgery to increase one’s bust size, reduce cellulite, and minimize nose size; laser hair removal; false eyelashes, etc. Caked on make-up is encouraged even in child pageants which claim they desire a natural look. And let’s not forget that hairspray can stunt growth and cause lung cancer.⁵⁴⁵

This is fine for adults who willingly give consent to endure these procedures, but not for children who have just been born. Parents should not have the right to thrust such treatment onto their children, but legally they do have the right. It is troubling that a child has no right to say no to being entered in a pageant. The parents of these children say that if the children tell them they no longer wish to participate, they will be allowed to stop. Yet these are the same parents who are subjecting their children to grueling rehearsal schedules, and a baby cannot utter words to explain discontent.

The average schedule for youngsters on the pageant track is daunting: practicing routines, hair and make-up makeovers, fittings for clothes, tanning, learning to walk correctly, etc. Some children/infants have make-up applied while they are sleeping because they are so tired; often, siblings of contestants are asleep on parents as well. The emphasis on one’s appearance rules out learning the lesson that what is inside a person is what matters. In addition, children are spending the bulk of their time trying to please parents, so the pressure of parental expectations is exceptional. All children want to participate in whatever it is that their parents find fun or

⁵⁴⁵ “5 reasons child pageants are bad for kids.” *The Week*. March 14, 2012. <http://www.theweek.com.html>.

important, but – even when they are doing their best – more is constantly demanded of them.

Being told what they are doing wrong consistently must take a toll. One educational psychology professor says that in addition to children perceiving that the route to success and popularity is through one's looks, they may also come to feel that their beauty makes them better than someone else. She also cites jealousy and envy as potential psychological difficulties. She says that some adults push their children to win as a way of gaining prestige and small children should not have adult pressures. "We are denying some of these children their childhood, which is something you can never get back."⁵⁴⁶

Retouched photos of girls and babies make them look like robotic dolls with digitally enlarged eyes, porcelain skin, and more pouty lips. It is popular among pageant parents to have dolls made which resemble their children. The message is clear: Society adores its children, or rather, its perfect children who resemble adults. The other message appears to be that everybody loves a winner, particularly pageant parents, who encourage children to keep their eyes on the prize. Sadly, out of two thousand contestants for the Miss America Pageant, for example, only fifty will be chosen; out of those, only ten finalists; and of those, only one winner. The chances of winning become smaller as a child rises to teen years.

Many parents believe so strongly in promoting their offspring in such an exploitative manner that they are willing to spend a fortune in time and money on the pursuit. This level of importance overrides all else in the household, and devotion can

⁵⁴⁶ Marc Ransford. "Professor says beauty pageants aren't for kids." *Ball State University Newscenter*. 2/17/1997.
<http://www.bsu.edu/news/article.html>.

become completely obsessive. Pageant parents have a tendency to keep their homes, other family members, and bank accounts in chaos trying to keep up with what is required. Bathing suits for four-hundred dollars (needing “butt tape” to keep them in place on tiny bodies), and evening gowns fetching a thousand dollars, add up fast. That parents and grandparents are willing to usurp so much energy and funding from themselves and other family members indicates there are few personal goals for the adults in charge.

The answer from both the industry and pageant parents is that they hope to send their children to college with a scholarship, but what they just paid for that glitz dress could buy a full-semester class at a local college. Proponents of these contests state that the girls learn important elements, including: the thrills of competition; self-confidence boosting; expertise in public speaking; how to win (and presumably how to lose); how to earn a beauty pageant scholarship (although if given more time on academic work, an academic-based scholarship would be more of a definite); how to handle pressure; how to assert one’s self; how to make friends; and how to have fun. A common reason given by pageant mothers is that they want their little girls to have an opportunity they never had the chance to enjoy; thus, there is a socio-economic component in attempting an upper class pursuit and linking with the royal. It isn’t just pageants: Many families sign up junior members for lessons (dance, piano, horseback riding, etc.) as a way of providing luxuries never afforded the parents as children.

As mentioned, France has been brave enough to attempt to ban child beauty pageants for their hyper-sexualization of children after a debate was sparked by a “French Vogue” photo spread in 2010 showing a 10-year old girl pouting provocatively in high heels, tight clothes, and heavy make-up – could the U.S.

follow suit? Probably not since participating in a single competition costs between \$3000 to \$5000 and none of the big businesses which have been established around these competitions would want to lose those investments but especially because the shows are thought of as appropriate American entertainment.⁵⁴⁷

As these children – mainly girls – endure potentially problematic perceptions of body image now and later, a loss of self-esteem, and physical and mental exhaustion, one wonders about the risks involved in encouragement of the male gaze and whether any gate-keepers are in place to check members in the audience who may target children. Obviously, anyone can view videotaped performances by pageant children which can easily be watched via Internet sources like YouTube or pageant websites directly. “Girls involved in pageants are promoting sexuality by their make-up, their clothes, the routines they perform, their whole demeanor, and it is the very innocence of these children that is being sexualized.”⁵⁴⁸ One assumes that parents and tour organizers do not see it that way, since often children are encouraged to sing and dance to provocative lyrics. Many parents tell their little girls they look “sassy” upon completion of a song with flirtatious lyrics or when gesturing in sexy adult poses; it is interesting to note the similarity between the words “sexy” and “sassy.” One wonders about the consequences of promoting a sexual image on youth, especially when regular television programming encourages the princess scenario for young women viewed through the male gaze in shows like “The Bachelorette.” The demarcation between adult

⁵⁴⁷ Michelle Healy. “Could child beauty pageants be banned in the USA?” *USA Today*. Sept. 25, 2013. <http://www.usatoday.com.html>.

⁵⁴⁸ Jolanda Charles. “Exploring Child Beauty Pageants: Empowerment or Sexualization?” *The Guardian*. May 27, 2009. <http://guardian.co.uk.html>.

and child has been blurred, with potentially dangerous consequences. Society needs to examine why U.S. parents and officials are insisting their children look a decade older than they are, because children are not miniature adults.

GENDERED CLOTHING:

Our perception that child beauty pageants are a small part of the society and that they don't influence children overall is incorrect. The result is sexist t-shirts at J.C. Penney's like: "I'm too pretty to do homework, so my brother has to do it for me" or the bright pink "My Best Subjects: Boys, Shopping, Music, Dancing."⁵⁴⁹ Similarly, messages like the light pink "Born to Wear Diamonds" versus the blue and red lettered "Big Bro Super Hero" are intended to present will-be men as tough and indicate that little girls are destined to be divas at any cost.⁵⁵⁰ Not only do these t-shirts minimize the potential of our children by defining them before they have a chance to define themselves, but they perpetuate the sexual binary by once again pitting men/boys against women/girls. As McDonald's asks, "Is it for a boy or a girl?" when ordering a Happy Meal, and toys are segregated between those for girls and boys in most toy stores, it seems in order to remember that blue and pink were not gender signifiers until the 20th century.⁵⁵¹ Since then, marketers have worked fast to encourage a gendered division,

⁵⁴⁹ Carolyn Robertson. "JC Penney's sexist shirts for back-to-school." *BabyCenter*. August 31, 2011. <http://blogs.babycenter.com.html>.

⁵⁵⁰ Bianca London. "'It's sexist c**p!': Parents slam 'disturbing' T-shirts for girls who love diamonds and shopping – but hate maths – and boys who love sport and superheroes." *The Daily Mail*. 06 Aug 2013. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk.html>.

⁵⁵¹ "When Did Girls Start Wearing Pink?" *Smithsonian*. April 7, 2011. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com.html>.

few males are willing to admit they love pink, and girls are left to be nothing more than painted dolls.

CHILDREN'S NUTRITION:

Advertising for clothes is only part of the problem, because ads for food are also taking a toll and, of course, a child can't think and learn without quality food. The food supply for and diet of American children is the worst human history has ever known, the result of which is heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other mental and physical aberrations. More foods and beverages are available than ever before, but the types and choices are contributing to health failure in children at a startling rate. No one would have guessed that advances in food production would, in fact, harm children in record numbers, but this is what is occurring.

Some would argue that variety in food choices is helping children, but this greater variety is produced through factory farming and alternate growing techniques which are harmful. Members of the European Union, which will not allow genetically-modified food from the U.S., are paying a premium for their sustenance. No one really knows the ramifications over time of the relatively inexpensive foodstuffs commonly available for American children.

Though food prices remain reasonable, the United States introduced genetically-modified products into its market some time ago with no upheaval – because there was no press coverage or education regarding such. Currently, foods which are irradiated or genetically modified have no warning label to inform consumers of their presence. Pesticides on foods grown in the U.S. abound, and an even bigger source of pesticide and insecticide poisoning may exist on foods from other countries, which may or may not be regulated for allowable amounts.

Crops are full of pollutants from acidic rainfall. Due to factory farming, there is added potential for disease from contamination in large processing plants. Many additives and colorings in processed foods are causing allergic reactions in children and others. Too many foods – the most frequently advertised – contain high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated fats, enriched whole wheat flour (wheat which has been stripped of its original vitamins and minerals), and other synthetics which are contributing to weight gain and disease. Hormones and antibiotics are fed to animals which then are transferred to America's meat and dairy supplies, possibly responsible for early maturation in today's youth. Moreover, youngsters tend to want to drink carbonated soft drinks, rather than low-fat milk, fruit juice, or water, which is causing them to gain unprecedented amounts of weight. Obesity is linked to the amount of food advertisements children see and marketers scheme with toy and movie producers to attract children to high-calorie restaurants with toys. These problems are taking a toll on America's littlest consumers.

Corporate Influences:

In the early 1970s, soda machines were introduced to campuses; not coincidentally, this was also the onset of weight gain in children living in the United States. Schools were previously a harbor for academic pursuits, as well as beacons of independence yet, during this era, business and academic worlds mingled. In cafeterias across the nation, twenty percent of campuses have brand-name products. In grades kindergarten through high school, over twenty thousand feature vending machines. School campuses gave an estimated \$750 million to

the vending machine industry in 1997.⁵⁵² Schools actually encourage students to drink soda via the message: Drink soft drinks and support your school. If soft drink companies were not on campuses, the number of students drinking soda would go down.⁵⁵³ With the help of General Mills and their “Box Tops for Education” program, students are further encouraged to ingest the worst of additive-rich foods. Let’s not forget those candy bar, gift wrap, and greenery for the holidays campaigns. And don’t be surprised if your child goes to a factory or retailer on a field trip. The eventual result of this business connection has not been just soda and snack machines, but sporting events, book fairs, and fundraiser promotions by brand-name food products, and even advertising of unhealthy products on Channel One televisions during class time.⁵⁵⁴

Channel One, with its 12-minute current events programming (which includes two minutes of advertising), is in forty percent of American secondary schools – and is now being placed on buses – and ZapMe runs their ads on students’ computer screens for at least four hours per day (in 1400 schools nationwide) in exchange for giving schools free Internet browsing software.⁵⁵⁵ Companies are even sending products for use as teaching tools (using M&Ms to teach kids how to count,

⁵⁵² Deron R. Boyles. *Schools or Markets?: Commercialism, Privatization, and School-Business Partnerships* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associated, 2005), 2-3.

⁵⁵³ Susan Linn. *Consuming Kids: Protecting Our Children From the Onslaught of Marketing and Advertising* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 86.

⁵⁵⁴ Juliet B. Schor. *Born to Buy* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 121.

⁵⁵⁵ Steve Barsanti, ed. “Advertising at Schools: Is There Room in Public Education for Sodas and Snacks?” *The LegiSchool Project: An educational collaboration between California State University, Sacramento, and the California State Legislature* (Darby PA: Diana Publishing Co., 2000), 5, 12, 24.

for example). Not only are grain-based companies sponsoring curricula through incentive programs but fast-food chains are also invested in food domination.⁵⁵⁶ Some schools even give certificates to local restaurants as prizes for getting on the principal's list.

And no wonder there is such an effort to recruit children as consumers: "School kids [elementary] in the United States spend between \$11-15 billion annually and influence an additional \$160 billion in spending by adults and others."⁵⁵⁷ Further, "teenagers spend \$57 billion of their own money every year and \$36 billion of their families' money."⁵⁵⁸ Schools increasingly desperate for funding have entered into exclusive agreements with soft drink companies (in order to keep competitors out) and have even offered up "advertising space and class time to media companies in exchange for television equipment or Internet software."⁵⁵⁹ Free scoreboards, marquees, and technological equipment – adding up to hundreds of thousands of dollars – are hard to turn down when school budgets are being cut. As previously noted, since school funding is largely dependent on property taxes, schools in poorer areas are already behind in funding. As parents contribute less because of a weakened economy, marketers and schools are turning to the kids.

Marketing firms have increased advertising targeted toward children. From 1980 to 2004, advertisers increased

⁵⁵⁶ Juliet B. Schor. *Born to Buy* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 121.

⁵⁵⁷ Steve Barsanti, ed. "Advertising at Schools: Is There Room in Public Education for Sodas and Snacks?" *The LegiSchool Project: An educational collaboration between California State University, Sacramento, and the California State Legislature* (Darby PA: Diana Publishing Co., 2000), 1.

⁵⁵⁸ Barsanti, 12.

⁵⁵⁹ Barsanti, 5.

spending on children's advertising from one-hundred million to fifteen billion a year, 15,000 percent! ⁵⁶⁰ As a result, kids in America see about 40,000 commercials a year on television alone, many for unhealthy food choices. ⁵⁶¹ "Some countries, like Sweden and Norway, have banned ads that target children, and others are considering a similar action." ⁵⁶² But in the United States, when eight-year olds were asked if they would rather have their fathers, teachers, grandparents, Ronald McDonald, or Tony the Tiger accompany them on an outing, they chose the latter two. Between 1977 and 1996, fast food diets for children increased three-hundred percent. Since genetics account for only twenty-five to forty percent of their body weight, a minimum of sixty percent is influenced by the environment. ⁵⁶³ What we see, we eat. And the inclusion of a toy doesn't hurt.

U.S. companies move factories across borders because doing so allows them to avoid the majority of taxes. The business alliance between Disney Corporation and McDonald's is highly successful. The two opened a factory in Vietnam which exposes young women to terrible work conditions. Seventeen-year old girls who work for ten hours a day, and earn

⁵⁶⁰ John deGraaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor. *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2005), 55.

⁵⁶¹ Susan Linn. *Consuming Kids: Protecting Our Children From the Onslaught of Marketing and Advertising* (New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House), back cover.

⁵⁶² Steve Barsanti, ed. "Advertising at Schools: Is There Room in Public Education for Sodas and Snacks?" *The LegiSchool Project: An educational collaboration between California State University, Sacramento, and the California State Legislature* (Darby PA: Diana Publishing Co., 2000), 23.

⁵⁶³ Sharna Olfman. *Childhood Lost: How American Culture is Failing Our Kids* (London: Praeger, 2005), 124-126.

six cents an hour, make Disney character toys for McDonald's Happy Meals. In February 1997, two-hundred of the young women got sick from exposure to toxic chemicals while trying to earn their \$4.20 per seventy-hour a week salary. Twenty-five collapsed and some were taken to the hospital.⁵⁶⁴ One wonders about the message our culture is sending to other parts of the world, not to mention to our own children.

While they're gulping down McNuggets, consider the following: "Junk food chains, including KFC and Pizza Hut, are under attack from major environmental groups in the U.S. and other developed countries because of their environmental impact. Intensive breeding of livestock and poultry for such restaurants leads to deforestation, land degradation, and contamination of water sources and other natural resources. For every pound of red meat, poultry, eggs, and milk produced, farm fields lose about 5 lbs. of irreplaceable top soil. The water necessary for meat breeding comes to about 190 gallons per animal per day, or 10 times what a normal Indian family is supposed to use in one day, if it gets water at all."⁵⁶⁵ We are complicit in damaging the planet every time we go through a drive-thru. Consumption is ever-present in American minds. The nation is spoon-fed a list of must-haves from an unregulated corporate hierarchy. If you slide through that mock Italian café corporate coffee house after dropping the kids off at school, check out this ambience-breaker: "The \$3 many Americans shell out for a latte at Starbucks is equivalent to the daily wage of a Central American coffee picker. Here's another heart-stopper, specially designed for the non-gourmet coffee

⁵⁶⁴ Joe L. Kincheloe. *The Sign of the Burger: McDonald's and the Culture of Power* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 67.

⁵⁶⁵ Vandana Shiva. *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 70-71.

drinker. Those \$3.95 cans of Maxwell House and Folgers you pick up at your local supermarket...the beans that fill them are bought for around a quarter and come from corporate farms that use environmentally poisonous pesticides and clear-cut forests to produce the highest possible yields.”⁵⁶⁶ What’s the answer? Fair Trade coffee has enabled farmers’ annual incomes to double so that “more than 500,000 people in 20 developing nations are now living above the poverty line.”⁵⁶⁷ To demand that places like Starbucks carry only Fair Trade coffee is a good way to make that delicious beverage easier to swallow; somehow, McDonald’s restaurants in France serve only fair trade, so why is the U.S. exempt from this policy?

Corporate leaders are known for one thing: Increasing profits. As James U. McNeal, professor of marketing at Texas A&M, said: “There are only two ways to increase customers. Either you switch them to your brand or you grow them from birth.” Another famous quote, from General Mills executive, Wayne Chilicki: “When it comes to targeting kid consumers, we at General Mills follow the Proctor and Gamble model of ‘cradle to grave.’ We believe in getting them early and having them for life.”⁵⁶⁸ This type of thinking is working incredibly well. Maybe this unethical stance would fare better if the products themselves were of good quality; sadly, this is not the case.

It is clear that the foods most popular with children are causing them harm. One of the problems facing youth is ADHD

⁵⁶⁶ Tamara Straus. “Starbucks Campaign Background Information.” *Organic Consumers Association*. 21 Nov. 2007.

<http://www.organicconsumers.org.html>.

⁵⁶⁷ Straus. “Starbucks Campaign...”

⁵⁶⁸ Tim Kasser. *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 91.

diagnosing, and the most likely cause is food additives. Preservatives, synthetic colorings, and flavorings, which are all in processed foods, increase hyperactivity and may lead to a doctor or school official proclamation of ADHD – and then comes the medication. The fact is there have been many studies which confirm that when diets no longer contain synthetic color additives, hyperactivity is minimized. Excitability, restlessness, irritability, short attention span, and aggressiveness are all behaviors linked to synthetic food additives.⁵⁶⁹ Scientists and researchers are trying to decipher which are the worst culprits. For years, many have worried about the safety of terrain, caffeine, and monosodium glutamate, all often used to flavor, color, or preserve food. Many countries have banned certain additives, but others have not.⁵⁷⁰ Recent studies propose that it is the cocktail consumed via combination of processed food with soft drinks which could be contributing to behavioral problems.⁵⁷¹

As if these types of difficulties were not enough, the food-processing industry is using Olestra, just the beginning of synthetic creations meant to help society lose weight; conversely, it presents another problem: anal seepage.⁵⁷² Embarrassing though that might be, an incredible seventeen percent of the teen population in the United States – and one in

⁵⁶⁹ Randall Fitzgerald. *The Hundred-Year Lie: How to Protect Yourself from the Chemicals that are Destroying Your Health* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 45.

⁵⁷⁰ Sue Palmer. *Toxic Childhood: How the Modern World is Damaging Our Children and What We Can Do About it* (London: Orion, 2006), 28.

⁵⁷¹ Palmer, 29.

⁵⁷² Raj Patel. *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2007), 279.

seven children – is obese.⁵⁷³ This problem is a racial and class issue as well. The poor and people of color live in environments which make them more likely to become obese, but the wealthy white have greater access to fresh foods which are nutritious and lower in fat and salt. In the neighborhoods of people of color and the poor, fast-food restaurants are concentrated most heavily.⁵⁷⁴ This subjects great numbers to diabetes, high blood pressure, heart problems, and early, preventable death.

Pesticides are another difficulty facing youth, since tiny bodies are more easily affected by poisons, and it is proven that children are healthier when their diets are organic. Tests in 2002 found that pesticide residues concentrate in children who eat conventionally grown foods; as expected, these residues were six to nine times higher than in children who were given an organic diet. When exposed to high levels of organophosphorus pesticides, children are at high risk for brain and bone cancer and for childhood leukemia.⁵⁷⁵ For every person in the nation, America now uses five pounds of pesticide active ingredients.⁵⁷⁶

Perhaps an even bigger problem is genetically altered, modified, and engineered foods and crops. More than half of the planted acreage in the United States is genetically modified

⁵⁷³ Alissa Quart. *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 126.

⁵⁷⁴ Raj Patel. *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2007), 269.

⁵⁷⁵ Thomas F. Pawlick. *The End of Food: How the Food Industry is Destroying Our Food Supply – And What You Can do About it* (Fort Lee NJ: Barricade Books, Inc., 2006), 75.

⁵⁷⁶ Randall Fitzgerald. *The Hundred-Year Lie: How to Protect Yourself From the Chemicals That are Destroying Your Health* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 77.

varieties. In 2000, Taco Bell was caught using a genetically modified corn not approved by the USDA for human consumption in their brand taco shells. This led to a nationwide recall of corn products which verified this, but no one mentioned the substantial amount of genetically modified foods already approved by the EPA, FDA, and USDA.⁵⁷⁷ In 1994, the FDA approved marketing genetically modified foods; by 2001, twenty-six percent of corn and sixty-eight percent of soybeans planted in the United States were genetically modified varieties. On grocery store shelves, sixty percent of processed foods contain transgenic corn and soybean ingredients.⁵⁷⁸ But labeling won't indicate that fact. Behemoth companies like Monsanto, Cargill, and DuPont force farmers to use their GMO-patented seeds, which means they are coming to own the world's food supply.⁵⁷⁹

Another difficulty facing the nation is the overuse of antibiotics on the animals relied upon for food. As early as 1989, a branch of the National Academy of Sciences warned that the use of antibiotics by factory farmers would create antibiotic resistant bacteria that would negatively affect human health.⁵⁸⁰ That day has come. Corn-fed diets of cattle – as

⁵⁷⁷ Diana L. Brandner. "Detection of genetically modified food: Has your food been genetically modified?" *American Biology Teacher*, published by The National Association of Biology Teachers. Vol. 64, No. 6. August 2002. p. 433.

⁵⁷⁸ Randall Fitzgerald. *The Hundred-Year Lie: How to Protect Yourself From the Chemicals That are Destroying Your Health* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 77.

⁵⁷⁹ Vandana Shiva. *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000). 198.

⁵⁸⁰ Randall Fitzgerald. *The Hundred-Year Lie: How to Protect Yourself From the Chemicals That are Destroying Your Health* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 75.

opposed to hay-fed diets – and not allowing the animals to roam the pasture, has resulted in a new, dangerous strain of *E. coli* called *E. coli* O157. This would not have evolved in the stomachs of cows had they been grass-fed. In addition, factory farming does not allow the animals to move away from their own feces, which they would naturally prefer. As a result of having to stand in feces, diseases are multiplying.⁵⁸¹ So, meat-processing giants in the United States have come up with a solution to fight the problems which come from their own practices of making animals stand in feces and among carcasses of fellow beasts (who have died often as a result of neglect and whose bodies are sometimes fed to surviving cattle or added to dog food): Food irradiation.

In order to create highly charged, radioactive beams using Cesium 137 or Cobalt 60, facilities which irradiate have walls that are six feet thick. It is voluntary whether companies wish to label irradiated meat. The members of meatpacking and fast-food conglomerates, called The Beef Industry Food Safety Council, have asked that the term “irradiation” be **changed** to “cold pasteurization.”⁵⁸² As it stands, the FDA has approved many types of foods for irradiation stating that the process controls insects, delays sprouting and ripening, preserves food, prevents foodborne illness, and sterilizes. Using one of three approved methods – gamma rays, X-rays, and electron beams – the FDA approves the following for irradiation: beef and pork; poultry; molluscan shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops); shell eggs; fresh fruits and vegetables; spices and seasonings; and seeds for sprouting (e.g., alfalfa sprouts). “Bulk

⁵⁸¹ Nina Planck. *Real Food: What to Eat and Why* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 102.

⁵⁸² Eric Schlosser. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 217-218.

foods, such as fruits and vegetables, are required to be individually labeled **or** to have a label next to the sale container. The FDA does **not** require that individual ingredients in multi-ingredient foods (e.g., spices) be labeled.”⁵⁸³ This means that a sack of potatoes must be labeled but that cubed potatoes in a multi-ingredient can of soup does not. Unless your food is grown by you or is labeled stating non-GMO and non-irradiated, you simply don’t know what you’re putting into your child’s mouth.

In 1997, it was discovered that girls are physically developing more quickly than ever before. The results of a survey of 17,000 girls reported that by the age of eight, approximately one out of every two African-American girls and one in seven white girls started puberty with pubic hair and breast growth. Even more disturbingly, three out of every one-hundred African-American girls and one out of every one-hundred Caucasian girls showed these characteristics by age three! The only explanation for the onset of early puberty was found to be dietary in nature.⁵⁸⁴

As teens and children try to lose weight in order to avoid the disdain of a culture which values svelte bodies, many are given artificial sweeteners. In 1994, a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report revealed that aspartame, the artificial sweetener, can cause eighty-eight toxic symptoms in humans. Although some of these can cause death, aspartame is

⁵⁸³ “Food Irradiation: What You Need to Know.” *U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Protecting and Promoting Your Health*.
<http://www.fda.gov.html>.

⁵⁸⁴ Randall Fitzgerald. *The Hundred-Year Lie: How to Protect Yourself From the Chemicals That are Destroying Your Health* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 78.

a central ingredient in twelve-hundred food products.⁵⁸⁵ This means that the diabetic and those trying to lose weight are consuming several products containing aspartame per day and the toxic effects of ingesting this substance range from headaches and dizziness to confusion, memory loss, and heart palpitations. In fact, a whole host of adverse health effects is reported, including problems of the eyes, ears, chest, skin and allergies, gastrointestinal, endocrine and metabolic, neurologic, and psychologic-psychiatric. Physicians are “not encouraged by the FDA to report aspartame toxicity reactions,” even though pilots are “more susceptible to seizures and vertigo” when they’ve ingested aspartame.⁵⁸⁶ Often, consumers do not realize that their symptoms are related to aspartame.⁵⁸⁷

The unknown is created, treated, and owned by large chemical companies which do not have the consumer’s best interest at heart. Food grown outside of one’s local area poses a greater threat of contamination from new strains of *E. coli* and other bacteria. Animals and humans are becoming resistant to antibiotics as animals are given medications to keep them going until slaughter due to the terrible conditions in which they are now forced to live.

Another problem is energy drinks which may be even more of a threat to kids than sugar or fake sugar filled sodas: “The FDA does not set a caffeine limit for children” and that’s taking a toll on small bodies which are experiencing seizures

⁵⁸⁵ Randall Fitzgerald. *The Hundred-Year Lie: How to Protect Yourself From the Chemicals That are Destroying Your Health* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 77.

⁵⁸⁶ Mark D. Gold. “Aspartame Toxicity Information.” *U.S. Food and Drug Administration*. January 12, 2002.
<http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/dailys.html>.

⁵⁸⁷ Gold. “Aspartame....” *U.S. Food and Drug Administration*.

and abnormal heart rhythms.⁵⁸⁸ “40% of the 5,156 calls to poison centers for ‘energy drink exposure’ involved children under age 6.”⁵⁸⁹ Often parents didn’t even know their child had ingested an energy drink. A chairman of pediatrics said it only takes 100 mg of caffeine to give adolescents problems – less for younger people – but energy drinks can contain more than 300 mg and labeling of how much caffeine an energy drink contains is insufficient. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends not giving children any caffeine, but because the industry markets heavily to youth, this problem can only get worse.

And then there’s child hunger. The non-profit No Kid Hungry begs us to be mindful of the warning signs: “A child who is distracted, is often sick or struggles to learn could be one of the millions of hungry kids in America.”⁵⁹⁰ In a land with so many advantages, that there are children who struggle with nutritional deficiencies seems unimaginable, but “1 in 5 is at risk for hunger.”⁵⁹¹ It is time that teachers and society in general recognize this tragedy because “this year the United States reached a painful milestone. For the first time ever, over half the public school students in this country are from low-income families.”⁵⁹² Kids can’t think or behave well when their stomachs are growling.

The American food supply – and lack thereof – is a huge threat to growing children because, in addition to weight gain or

⁵⁸⁸ Danielle Ryan. “Study: Growing number of calls to poison centers involve kids and energy drinks.” CNN. November 17, 2014.

<http://www.cnn.com.html>.

⁵⁸⁹ Ryan.

⁵⁹⁰ No Kid Hungry. <http://www.NoKidHungry.org.html>.

⁵⁹¹ No Kid Hungry.

⁵⁹² Hunger in our Schools. <http://www.hungerinourschools.org.html>.

loss, lack of essential vitamins and minerals, allergies, and other physical and psychological problems, no one knows the effects of synthetically created foods and beverages on the young. Advertising encourages children to become addicted to unhealthy food choices and this habit formation leads to distorted body images, particularly among teens. As children walk the corridors of their schools and take in commercial messages, enter contests funded by corporate sponsors, and attend sporting events whose scoreboards tout company slogans, how can they not be influenced? It is time to stop and ask if our society prefers profit over people if not for ourselves, then for the children. America cannot begin too soon.

OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS:

As for child maltreatment deaths in the United States, according to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), in 2006 there were a total of 874. The UNICEF Innocenti Research Center estimates that this makes the U.S. and Mexico the only member nations to exceed two maltreatment deaths per 100,000 children.⁵⁹³ Childhood, then, is not the state necessarily most cherished by all adults. “One of the most damaging statistics revealing how low a priority children are in America can be seen in the fact that among the industrialized nations in the world, the United States ranks first in billionaires and in defense expenditures and yet it ranks an appalling twenty-ninth in infant mortality.”⁵⁹⁴ Where is the love?

⁵⁹³ “The United States – Child Deaths.” *Signs of Our Times: Graphics and Signs of Social Trends*. 8/12/08. <http://www.ourtimes.wordpress.com.html>.

⁵⁹⁴ Henry A. Giroux. *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 115.

Often, children are seen in subservient positions in mainstream U.S. literature and film causing the group to be marginalized. In the following American films – *Monsters, Inc.*, *Monster House*, *Toy Story 3*, *Nanny McPhee*, *The Golden Compass*, and *Planet 51* – children are threatened, coerced, and punished, and child audiences are exposed to themes of death, suicide, incest, bullying, and loss of rights. The further inclusion of torture, paramilitarism, prison themes and rhetoric, horror film tropes, patriarchal scenes, racism, classism, etc. and the general encouragement of cruelty make one question the M.P.A.A.'s priorities. Although a filter for cursing and nudity, their idea of “minimal depictions of violence” may differ from many.

The basics are fast disappearing – sleep, true educational opportunities, good nutrition and snacks in schools and at home, outside playtime, etc. – and in their place is institutionalization of misdiagnosed 4-year olds, overmedicated kids who are diagnosed with ADHD by an overanxious school system and parents who are desperate for their children to excel in school, and the disconnect between parents and children is growing. Parents are in their rooms trying to finish up the day's work; meanwhile, kids are playing “World of Tanks” or “Minecraft” in their own rooms, often until the wee hours and often while claiming to do schoolwork, strategizing with strangers the world over. It would be better if the kids were enjoying some organized entertainment in the real world, correct? Maybe not.

SCIENCE CENTERS:

Science centers are an area of concern because these places of learning used to be content with rudimentary lessons, but now the macabre is being presented as scientific discovery. Recent exhibitions, seen from coast to coast, involve actual

cadavers whose skin has been removed so that viewers – mainly children – can see what the body looks like underneath. One exhibit had an actual pregnant woman's body with a real, mature deceased fetus inside: no warning came before the exhibit, meaning that any small child could have walked up to the display without benefit of the counsel of an older person.⁵⁹⁵ Often, students attend such presentations as part of a school field trip, thus leaving guardians and parents unaware of macabre content. Sharks and other animals have been granted this same privilege of having their bodies stripped under the guise of education. What is the purpose of possibly not intentionally donating one's body to the cause of spectacle? A valid concern is from where these corpses hailed. Would these individuals have sanctioned the use of their bodies in this fashion? As importantly, this way of displaying bodies has the same effect as sexual body parts of models being shown in advertising with their faces cropped out of the frame, as seen in magazines, on billboards, and on television: An individual's personality and specialness is removed. A shark or person without its skin loses something of its uniqueness, one is not mindful of its distinguishing features and markings, one cannot read the soulfulness in the singularly colored flecks in one's eyes, there is no certain sound emanating from inside, gone are the unique fins/fingerprints. It is only a thing, a thing to be inspected in order to see what a real heart looks like, yet it removes the individuality of a creature, human or otherwise.

There are other exhibition extravaganzas which attract crowds. One of the big draws to science centers involves CSI (crime scene investigation) activities, wherein children are given the opportunity to become detectives trying to figure out

⁵⁹⁵ From the author's personal experience at the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Tampa, Florida.

the details of a person's death; this spin on whodunnit capers puts kids in the seat of the local forensic specialist replete with gory details surrounding the victim of murder. Another intricacy in science center instruction comes through Halloween programming as experienced at Sci-Port in Shreveport, Louisiana: making pie with still-alive worms who are microwaved to death and eaten; the cutting and serving of red velvet cake from behind a sheet supposedly covering a cadaver on a stretcher; an actual Tesla coil used to electrocute a Faraday cage with a young man inside pretending to be Frankenstein, whose demonstration required that cell phones be shut down and persons with pacemakers step outside; and decorating skulls as is done for "Day of the Dead" in Mexico.⁵⁹⁶ Because none of the activities covered the actual science involved, the resulting memory focuses on death and dying.

AMUSEMENT PARKS/TOURIST ATTRACTIONS:

Theme parks have joined in the fun. Some have extended hours for the Halloween holiday and many hire people to scare the heck out of visitors during the staged event. Large billboards such as those for Tampa's Busch Gardens' 2014 Howl-O-Scream Horror Night Nightmares abound with ghosts and ghouls, vampires, zombies, and people tied in straight-jackets so that, even if one does not plan on attending, the advertising for such events affects passersby, notably children. Comcast-owned Universal Studios in Orlando offers Halloween Horror Nights on select nights from September to November where fans are treated to "The Walking Dead" and other thrills, live shows, and haunted houses.

⁵⁹⁶ From the author's personal experience.

Now, near Walt Disney World, Orlando is offering a machine gun range where 13-year olds can take it up a notch from simple paint ball. Called Machine Gun America, the new facility is an impressive 13,000-square foot which entertains adults – and 6% minors – who can fire live ammo in real sub-machine guns and play with a laser fake handgun in law enforcement-grade simulators.⁵⁹⁷ Let the games begin!

⁵⁹⁷ “Machine gun range now open near Disney World.” WFLA. Feb. 25, 2015. <http://www.wfla.com.html>.

VI. WEB-BASED AND OTHER MEDIA:

“If television’s a babysitter, the Internet is a drunk librarian who won’t shut up.”

- Dorothy Gambrell, *Cat and Girl Volume I*

“It’s been my policy to view the Internet not as an ‘information highway,’ but as an electronic asylum filled with babbling loonies.”

- Mike Roy

“Advertising isn’t just the disruption of aesthetics, the insults to your intelligence and the interruption of your train of thought. At every company that sells ads, a significant portion of their engineering team spends their day tuning data mining, writing better code to collect all your personal data.”

- Jan Koum, American entrepreneur and computer engineer

THE INTERNET:

The Internet is the latest for information gathering and entertainment. Some have even cancelled cable television because a whole range of TV shows and movies are available online; in addition, social networking has made it possible to play with, display with, or meet with friends and strangers, often in real time: Facebook, Twitter, PostSecret, Instagram, Vine, Pheed, SnapChat, Pinterest, Tumblr, LinkedIN, Skype, FaceTime, and now Whisper App, where people can overshare comments and strangers can “like” your outbursts or send a private note to you (DM – direct message). But while users think of the site as anonymous, predators abound, the N.S.A. (National Security Agency) is watching just about everything nowadays, one’s IP address is connected to sites, and comments are recorded and held even when fake names are used – facts the average child (or adult, for that matter) does not recognize.

Although Whisper has no advertising so far, it likely will follow the path of other websites in this regard.⁵⁹⁸ If that should occur, ads will specifically target supposedly anonymous users by profiling according to their digital footprint preferences just like the others.

Ads on many websites already target likely interested recipients. So, while you and or your child are getting unfriended or reading a negative comment from a stranger, systems are calculating what could be of importance to you. For instance, click to learn the lyrics of a song and find an ad for joining the military, watch a music video and you may have to wait for a thirty second advertisement to run first – these are pastimes of many young people and companies and the government know it. The Internet is becoming increasingly owned by the worldwide Big Five media conglomerates.⁵⁹⁹ For example, Disney owns seventeen Internet sites.⁶⁰⁰ Remember that this ownership dictates which websites will have limitations or restrictions placed on them by Internet service providers. As if corporate tracking isn't scary enough, there are lateral threats as well.

Teens and adolescents are vulnerable to online difficulties, especially since many parents can't find the time to monitor phone or computer usage: "Over 80% of teens use a cell phone regularly, making it the most common medium for

⁵⁹⁸ Lindsey Saletta. "The Internet's Newest Time-Suck, Whisper App, Is Creepy and Potentially Dangerous." *The Huffington Post*. 2/10/14. <http://www.huffpost.com/us/entry/4731943.html>.

⁵⁹⁹ Please see <http://www.savetheinternet.com.html> and <http://www.commoncause.org.html> for information on how to keep the Internet neutral.

⁶⁰⁰ Ben H. Bagdikian. *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 36.

cyber bullying.”⁶⁰¹ According to dosomething.org’s “11 Facts About Cyber Bullying,” the numbers are frightening: “Nearly 43% of kids have been bullied online; 1 in 4 has had it happen more than once; [and] only 1 in 10 victims will inform a parent or trusted adult of their abuse.”⁶⁰² Given that teen victims are more likely to consider committing suicide as a solution because they do not know how common the problem is and they are not experienced enough to know that it does get better, something truly must be done. In addition, the N.S.A. and others can remotely turn on your phone, even once it’s turned off. If your phone feels warm when it’s turned off, “the baseband processor is still running.”⁶⁰³ The only way to guard against being listened to is to remove your phone’s battery on models where this is possible; many have batteries which cannot be removed.⁶⁰⁴

And take a look at dating websites which seem to be all the rage. IAC, now owner of Match.com, OKCupid, Chemistry, Meetic, HowAboutWe, and Tinder, has made dating site consolidation history. Turns out, consumers paid \$2.2 billion in 2013 hoping to find a mate – and that’s only part of the story because “for many social media users, sites like Facebook and Instagram serve as de facto dating sites, eliminating the need to

⁶⁰¹ “Cyber Bullying Statistics.” <http://www.bullyingstatistics.org.html>.

⁶⁰² “11 Facts About Cyber Bullying.” <http://www.dosomething.org.html>.

Please also see *The National Crime Prevention Council’s* “Cyberbullying” page at <http://www.ncpc.org.html>, the “It Gets Better Project/Give Hope to LGBT Youth” campaign at <http://www.itgetsbetter.org.html>, and *Public Justice’s* “Anti-Bullying Campaign” at <http://www.publicjustice.net.html> which holds Internet users accountable legally for their cruel actions.

⁶⁰³ “How the NSA can ‘turn on’ your phone remotely.” CNN. 6/6/2014.

<http://money.cnn.com.html>.

⁶⁰⁴ “How the NSA....” CNN.

pay for dating services.”⁶⁰⁵ Meanwhile, eHarmony and the new Zoosk are free to join but the latter has found ways to increase profits which include allowing customers to pay to see if someone’s seen your message and showing up higher on a search list.⁶⁰⁶ All manner of dating sites crowd the Internet, from sites for single pet owners to AshleyMadison.com, which is made especially for cheaters. Sparks Networks owns JDate, for Jewish singles, and Christian Mingle as well. Think all this has nothing to do with kids? You’d be mistaken.

MyLOL is the number one teen dating site in the U.S., Australia, Canada, and the U.K., and they aren’t alone. There’s also Crush.Zone, Fundatecity, and countless others. Like Facebook, it’s another perfect way for under and over 18-year olds to tell advertisers and a bunch of strangers everything about themselves. New cautions have come along with the new technology, including posting vacation plans after the fact so people don’t know you are away and being aware that telling the world your cute pet’s name makes it easy for hackers to guess your passwords (since pet names are commonly used).

A new online site, Creep Shield, uses facial recognition software to theoretically ferret out sex offenders using head shots on dating websites; this might seem like a good idea, but the system is far from perfect. The owners had also tried to offer another service, NameTag, which wanted to take users’ faces off their video feeds and display their “names, occupations and public social network profiles” instantly, but Senator Al Franken, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Technology,

⁶⁰⁵ Leslie Kaufman and Mike Isaac. “IAC, Owner of Match and Tinder, Makes Moves in Online Dating.” *The New York Times*. September 14, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com.html>.

⁶⁰⁶ Kaufman and Isaac.

Privacy and the Law asked the company to delay introducing it – and added that people should have to opt in rather than opt out; that is, officially affirm participation as opposed to automatically being included without their knowledge and then having to take steps to get out of the system. The problem with Creep Shield is that it not only pulls up sex offenders, but others who simply resemble criminals which could be you but who are quite “unlikely to be sexual predators.”⁶⁰⁷

Take notice if you’ve previously ignored what your children are posting. Now a Georgia court has set a legal precedent for parents being responsible for what kids and teens post online: “The parents of a seventh grader may be legally negligent because they didn’t get their son to delete a fake Facebook profile that allegedly defamed one of his classmates.”⁶⁰⁸ The court held that the parents were not liable for knowing what the child posted but that, once they knew, they had a responsibility to make sure the child took down the content which resulted in harm (cyberbullying and taunting) to the girl harassed.

It’s a good idea to be careful when posting online anyway because the N.S.A. will be collecting all communications like emails, web histories, phone calls, search histories, and passwords in a Utah data center. “While the First Amendment might seem to protect speech, the United States has already got involved in policing expression. And the First Amendment has a massive loophole – it only restricts Congress’ ability to legislate against speech. Other agencies – like the

⁶⁰⁷ Natasha Singer. “Creep Shield Claims to Out the Creeps in Online Dating.” *The New York Times*. Apr. 25, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com.html>.

⁶⁰⁸ Christian Webb. “In Depth: Are parents liable for what kids post online?” Bay News 9. Sat., Nov. 29, 2014. <http://www.baynews9.com.html>.

T.S.A. (Transportation Security Administration) – would seem to be able to restrict speech under ‘administrative’ grounds (the same rationale they use to gut the Fourth Amendment and search travelers without probable cause).” Already in Britain people have been arrested for what authorities consider malicious, distasteful, or threatening speech on Twitter.⁶⁰⁹ And it is increasingly common for employers to check out a person’s Facebook page before hiring someone – and that includes posts by friends or friends’ friends which show up on your/your child’s page.

PRINT AND OTHER ADVERTISING:

Advertising is constantly in front of us on the Internet, on billboards, on television, at the theater, on the radio, in magazines, in video games, at schools, at sporting events, in stores, etc. – just about everywhere we go, we are bombarded with messages and these snippets of advertising rely on making us feel badly about ourselves or frightened of the world in order to sell their products. As has been mentioned, a trick used by advertisers to “distract and disrupt message processing” is time compression, where ads run at 120% of their normal speed which increases persuasion of weak arguments by reducing one’s ability to develop counter-arguments.⁶¹⁰ Montages of images tend to leave us helpless as well. Seeing the latest in *The Hunger Games* series, *Mockingjay, Part 1*, brought two action-packed hodgepodge ads for the military along with assorted previews chosen for the PG-13 film.

⁶⁰⁹ “Thoughtcrime is Real.” *Aziconomics: Economics for the Jilted Generation*. August 8, 2012. <http://www.aziconomics.com.html>.

⁶¹⁰ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 188.

How does gender fit into advertising? Women are still marketed to as if they are solely responsible for the happiness of their families, which is why women are featured in ads for household cleaning products and groceries. Women are also expected to be beautiful at all times and are supposed to live up to a very specific beauty standard. Women trying to achieve unrealistic and unhealthy versions of themselves by mirroring those seen in media has taken a toll: “The rate of development of new cases of eating disorders has been increasing since 1950” and “there has been a rise in incidence of anorexia in young women 15-19 in each decade since 1930.”⁶¹¹ But advertising affects women and men, according to Jean Kilbourne, filmmaker of “Killing Us Softly,” author, and senior scholar at Wellesley Centers for Women: “A lot of advertising is based on making people feel anxious and feeling insecure. For men, there’s a lot of anxiety around status and power and wanting to look as if you have power – at least drive a powerful car. For women, that you’re never beautiful enough.”⁶¹² And advertising, like other media, tends to segregate.

Multiple races are rarely shown together in advertisements and featuring an interracial family on television caused such a stir from racists in 2013 on YouTube that the comments section was closed down. Despite the adorable child who wanted to save her dad’s heart with Cheerios, over 3,000 dislikes were logged in addition to 75,000 likes. Although most appreciated the company showing diverse family representation, such fair-minded depictions are few and far between on

⁶¹¹ National Eating Disorders. <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org.html>.

⁶¹² Jennifer Siebel Newsom. *Miss Representation*. DVD. Perf. Jean Kilbourne, Katie Couric, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Geena Davis, Malkia Cyril (San Francisco: Girls’ Club Entertainment, 2011). Also check out Erving Goffman’s *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

television or in print advertisements. Kudos to Cheerios for continuing to support diversity, especially given how behind the advertising world is lagging in reflecting reality: “Interracial and inter-ethnic, opposite-sex couple households jumped by 28% from 2000 to 2010.”⁶¹³ And the number of American young people who identify as more than one race has increased almost 50 percent since 2000.”⁶¹⁴ The time has come for the advertising world to bring the populous into modernity rather than continuing prejudiced and stereotypical views.

Ads on television garner perhaps the most attention and are especially cruel. California-grown Wonderful Halo mandarin oranges offer two disturbing ads. In the first, a dad wakes up and uncovers the bedclothes, revealing a decapitated stuffed animal pony horsehead. Then we see a mean-looking little girl who’s clearly threatening her parent in *The Godfather* fashion because they’re out of the juicy delights (the oranges, not horses). We later see the girl brushing the hair of the headless horse in the grocery store. The other ad shows an older sister who has duct taped her baby brother to the door of her room because the mom gave him the last of the Halo mandarins. The “If you don’t have Halos, they don’t have Halos” campaign has turned many away from their otherwise delicious product. One well-meaning ad for asthma by NoAttacks.org shows a goldfish thrashing because he’s out of water; eventually, it’s put back in water but compassionate viewers are gasping right along with the fish. Then there’s the kid who feels he must turn away from his fellow bicyclists because he feels badly that the

⁶¹³ Aimee Picchi. “Cheerios to bring back biracial family for Super Bowl ad.” CBS News: *Moneywatch*. Jan. 29, 2014. <http://www.cbsnews.com.html>.

⁶¹⁴ “For some, Cheerios commercial crossed a line by depicting mixed race family as normal.” NPR News. *The Daily Circuit*. July 11, 2013. <http://www.nprnews.org.html>.

other kids have Bright House and he does not. Or take the Zicam ad where a cute, desperate snot-nosed creature is hit by the woman trying to rid herself of a cold; similarly, Mucinex has a big bottle land on top of an adorable character which seems to represent green phlegm. A Metro PCS ad shows high testosterone images like boxers and rodeo riders. Target's ad for its store pick-up service calls kids "time thieves." A Geico ad features camels being taunted. An LG ad features a dog owner who's annoyed because her dog is acting like a dog and she says, "You know what also cleans itself? Cats." In a refrigerator ad, a mom finds her son's behavior upsetting and then the father comes in and does the same thing, so she says, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" in a disgusted tone. In 9/11 fashion, the father bear in an ad for Charmin Ultra Strong toilet paper is seen going through airport security with his family and a guard is making sure he's clean. M&M has a series of abduction ads, one of which featured a Russian mogul speaking to one of the M&M guys who has been brought to him in the trunk of a car. We read the subtitles: "First I'm going to chop you into little pieces." The latest M&M ad shows two M&M guys plus a human being held hostage. The two M&M guys think the snacky bad guy wants to eat the human, not themselves. Another cannibalism reference is seen in a Lays potato chip ad where Mr. Potato Head uncovers his wife while she's secretly eating potato chips. He says, "But you're a potato!" Lays has another upsetting ad which shows a little girl on a train taunting the man across from her and eventually making him hit his head on the window. These images contribute to negative thoughts about safety, children, families, animals, and poverty, and remind us of security measures we all face. Keep in mind that "research has revealed that by 3 years 75% of American children can name their favorite TV

program.”⁶¹⁵ Further, a jingle listening 23-month old in one study soon began singing “Coke is it, Coke is it!” and another repeated “Diet Pepsi, one less calorie.”⁶¹⁶ So, even if you are confining viewing to nice programming, ads still leave an impression. So much so that there’s a game called “Adverteasing,” the game of slogans, commercials and jingles available to test one’s memory of such.

When circulars for Circuit City and Best Buy fill all screens of the televisions they are selling with the violent video game “Halo,” it is clear that we are being programmed to accept these games as part of the social environment, and so they become. Our interests are dictated to us by commercial presence which has become such a dominant thread in the social fabric that we do not even question their place in our world; we are too busy eagerly buying what we are told is the latest and greatest.

MAGAZINES:

Magazines have serious troubles of which audiences should be aware. Current U.S. women’s magazines do not differ much from those sold in the 1950s, with the exception that many products are now marketed with an environmental slant. Also, magazines now have an online presence where the same tactics are used against women, in that they are expected to make that American flag cake recipe for the family’s July 4 celebration and learn what makes their man happy in bed. In this way, the delineation between and extending dichotomization of male and female roles becomes fixed and is assumed customary and preferable. Whether on TV, on the

⁶¹⁵ Andrew N. Meltzoff. “Born to Learn: What Infants Learn from Watching Us.” From N. Fox & J.G. Worhol, eds. *The Role of Early Experience in Infant Development* (Skillman NJ: Pediatric Institute Publications, 1999), 5.

⁶¹⁶ Meltzoff, 5.

Internet, or in magazines, female politicians are commonly referred to without their official titles, as in “Mrs. Clinton,” as opposed to Senator Clinton or Secretary of State Clinton, and female politicians are described as complaining about an issue, whereas male politicians are presented as simply stating their case.⁶¹⁷ This diminishes the power of women and their ability to be taken seriously.

Female actors and models, whose bodies are already thin from cultural pressure, have their bodies further reduced by computers. Print advertisement not only features ultra-thin models, but some, like Dolce and Gabbana’s 2007 ad, seem to be showing “sexually related violence...called ‘a glorification of rape’ by Debonair magazine.”⁶¹⁸ The men are also being objectified in their shirtless, gleaming condition but the fact that the woman appears lifeless and held down makes her extremely helpless. Women are often pictured in ads in remote places or in a submissive position – lying on a deserted beach, for instance – whereas men are portrayed as strong, even down to the detail of men’s faces facing the camera while women are often seen looking off to the side or, in the case of an ad with a male and female couple, lovingly facing the man, imploring him to return emotion. But it gets worse.

A new standard of fetishizing female corpses is now fashionable, taking the women looking raped and left for dead

⁶¹⁷ Jennifer Siebel Newsom. *Miss Representation*. DVD. Perf. Jean Kilbourne, Katie Couric, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Geena Davis, Malkia Cyril (San Francisco: Girls’ Club Entertainment, 2011). Please see Irving Goffman. *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979). Also see Sut Jhally’s *The Codes of Gender* at Media Education Foundation. <https://www.mediaed.org.html>.

⁶¹⁸ Cailyn Kreitz. “How Sexy is Too Sexy?” Pennsylvania State University. Oct. 28, 2012. <http://sites.psu.edu/kreitz>.

ads to a whole new level. As pale-faced, stiff-bodied, bloody images of women fill pages and death and brutality are normalized, what is the take-away for youth? Kira Cochran points to the reason for the proliferation of these images: “If the sexualized stereotype of a woman in our culture is passive and vulnerable, the advertising industry has worked out that, taken to its logical conclusion, there is nothing more alluring than a dead girl.”⁶¹⁹ The latest in what can be called murder porn is Miley Cyrus’ contribution to Marc Jacobs’ new advertising campaign. Miley sits front right looking off in the distance contemplatively, facing away from the primarily offensive scene – a beautifully dressed dead woman lying next to her – as another woman stands in the background, also looking away. When young women, assuredly the biggest group in Miley’s fan base, look to the artist hoping to emulate her every action, what will they think?⁶²⁰ Or take the domestic abuse series featuring “Glee” star, Heather Morris, where she’s dressed in 1950s glam sporting a black eye, pictured on an ironing board with her hands tied by the iron cord.⁶²¹

Another problem is the way the genre separates different types of people; having separate magazines segregates people into categories of difference and pits groups against each other, as opposed to prioritizing similarity: men versus women; Black versus white; young versus old; this, in addition to the fact that minorities are mostly excluded from predominantly white magazines. As an exercise, take a leading magazine like

⁶¹⁹ Kira Cochran. “How female corpses became a fashion trend.” *The Guardian*. Thursday, 9 January 2014.

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/womens-blog.html>.

⁶²⁰ Cochran.

⁶²¹ Koa Beck. “Heather Morris ‘Glamorous’ Wife Beating Photos Make Domestic Abuse ‘Sexy.’” *Mommyish*. Friday, Sept. 2, 2011.

<http://www.mommyish.com.html>.

Hearst's "Good Housekeeping," which has an audience of 25 million monthly,⁶²² and count the images of whites pictured and the images of people of color. Not only will there be a mere fraction of races compared with white, but those few pictured will most likely have white-looking physical features. In addition, the range of sexual diversity is not shown; instead, families are heavily featured.

The ways in which pictures are framed affects how we think of relationships currently. In fact, even animals are pictured with a large one, a medium one, and one or two small ones, so their group reads like a family. Or take the American Museum of Natural History's new diorama of "Lucy," the *Australopithecus afarensis* thought to be one of the earliest humans, by John Holmes and Ian Tattersall. The image is of a couple, the larger male comforting the frightened female by putting his arm around her as the volcano spews in the background.⁶²³ Anthropologists aren't even sure "Lucy" was a female, but this image adds to our collective view of relationships and suggests how they are meant to be: male, strong protector; female, terrified innocent.

Now magazines such as "Garden and Gun" and "Prepper and Shooter" exist as everyday fare. As of late, magazine content has again begun carrying sensationalist, violent stories which previously reached their peak of popularity in the 1930s. There came a point when "People" magazine began featuring tales of shock in addition to articles about superstars. These include features about disaster survivors and how the families of murder victims are coping. Often

⁶²² *Good Housekeeping*. <http://www.hearst.com.html>.

⁶²³ American Museum of Natural History.
<http://images.library.amnh.org/digital/items/show/4609.html>.

highlighted in a wide range of magazines are the most disturbing of films, TV shows, and books, making readers anxious about reality when most of these offerings are fictional.

Magazines for amusement have taken on a decidedly gruesome form: “Entertainment Weekly,” retailer MovieStop’s periodic publication for members, offered especially repugnant fare in its May 23, 2014 issue. The cover shows super-fan Danny McBride standing over The Black Keys, Grammy-winning duo, who asked to be interviewed by the actor. The two are duct taped, one bruised with a black eye and apparently unconscious, while the other looks up terrified seeing McBride snapping one of his rubber glove fingers. On the contents page is the duo flanking McBride, one looking scared, one looking disgusted, as they hold a boom box covering McBride’s genital area while being hugged by him. Inside, we see McBride tearing duct tape with his teeth from a roll attached to one of the pair. The title, “Danny McBride takes on The Black Keys,” with caption “What happens when one of the world’s biggest rock bands meets comedy’s most badass heavy hitter? Taxidermy, chitchat, and a little light bondage, naturally.” The photo on the next page shows band members looking happy – at last! – while McBride holds a smiling stuffed coyote.⁶²⁴

A big problem where magazines are concerned is tightening ownership because when a single conglomerate owns abundant numbers of magazines – and cable TV channels, film studios, newspapers, and record companies – heavily marketing their own products creates a bubble over the consumer who may think reviews and ads are critically impartial. Magazines, websites, and radio stations promote the songs the record

⁶²⁴ “Danny McBride takes on The Black Keys.” *Entertainment Weekly*. May 23, 2014. Issue # 1312.

company they own made, and they advertise TV programs and movies created by the parent company or subsidiary. This crossing and blending assures continued interest in and support of brands, and influence over the social and political is mastered, thus continuing repeated points of view across genres without audiences even recognizing how or that they are swayed.

Conde Nast has control of “more than 164 million consumers across its twenty industry leading print and digital media brands: Glamour, Self, The New Yorker, Golf Digest, M, W, Teen Vogue, etc.”⁶²⁵ Hearst magazines is a huge worldwide publisher “with 20 U.S. titles and close to 300 international editions,” including 19 U.K. magazines.⁶²⁶ Their titles run the range of reader interest: Car & Driver, HGTV magazine, Cosmopolitan, Country Living, Food Network magazine, and Popular Mechanics. Time Inc. owns “21 U.S. magazines and more than 25 U.S. websites.”⁶²⁷ Its brands include Time, Health, Executive Travel, Departures, People En Espanol, Sports Illustrated for Kids, Entertainment Weekly, Essence, Life, CNNMoney.com, etc. Although the subject matter of these magazines and Internet sites differs, the political perspective is often startlingly similar. Consider, for instance, how this might influence voters during an election or citizens’ views of whether or not to go to war against a leader or population presented as more evil than most.

NEWSLETTERS AND POSTS:

Recently, Catholic and Baptist churches have bonded over the abortion issue and they distribute information through

⁶²⁵ Conde Nast. <http://www.condenast.com.html>.

⁶²⁶ Hearst. <http://www.hearst.com.html>.

⁶²⁷ Time. <http://www.timeinc.com/brands.html>.

paper and online church newsletters, often telling people how to vote. Since reparation therapy has been largely discredited in the United States, evangelicals have begun spreading their homophobia in places like Uganda. Currently, while there is probably some quality charitable work being done, American religious zealots are also teaching that homosexuality is destroying the traditional African family and this proselytizing of hate has led to proposing death or life in prison sentences for gay behavior.⁶²⁸ As supposed Christians and their newsletters and Internet posts wield influence in targeting suspects here and abroad, Ugandan tabloids spur hate by listing names of supposed homosexuals which often results in deaths.

With so much power concentrated in just a few corporate hands and now inter-connecting, burgeoning groups – armed with a click of world-wide influence – media becomes a tool for owners who can decide which information gets an audience; meanwhile, readers, viewers and listeners have the illusion of choice when, all the while, a particular viewpoint is being broadcast and printed.

NEWSPAPERS:

Perhaps the ultimate in tightening ownership has occurred with newspapers. Total control takes away multiple perspectives, presents prejudiced views of minorities, and erases a fair and balanced presentation of events. But newspapers are not only for a mature audience these days. Elementary school children are reading “CNN Student News” in classrooms, meaning that a corporate force is determining, in the same way

⁶²⁸ Jeffrey Gettleman. “Americans’ Role Seen in Uganda Anti-Gay Push.” *The New York Times*. January 3, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com.html>. Please also see *Humanosphere’s* “New law makes harsher climate for gay Ugandans.” February 25, 2014. <http://www.humanosphere.org.html>.

TV news does so, which events deserve coverage and which do not. For instance, the Sept. 22, 2009 issue, “CNN Student News Learning Activities: Hispanic Heritage Month,” covers contributions of Latino Americans but as a separate activity, further pointing out difference and potentially ostracizing heritage. The same is done during Women’s and African-American History months.⁶²⁹ If the contributions of all heritages were not presented as blocks of information to be shared only at specific times, maybe people would not label and alienate one another as different. Gannett, owner of “23 TV stations...covering 18.2 percent of the U.S. population” also owns “newspaper, web site, and mobile platforms” covering local high school sports [read: predominantly male sports, mainly football and basketball], specifically targeting online ads to men in their 20s and 30s, allowing job seeking on its careerbuilder.com website, bringing health professionals together on the nurse.com forum, offering social engagement advertising, and, of course, informing people of the same news stories through its 800+ newspapers reaching 47 million readers per week.⁶³⁰ Accordingly, a vast school-age audience is included among the general readers and viewers who never question the viewpoint or coverage presented.

⁶²⁹ “CNN Student News Learning Activities.” CNN.
<http://www.cnn.com.html>.

⁶³⁰ Gannett. <http://www.gannett.com.html>.

VII. VIDEO GAMES:

“We are no longer worried that children are missing school because of video games, though. We are worried that they are murdering their classmates because of video games.”

- Tom Bissell, journalist

“Instead of blaming media violence for kids who kill, demand more nonviolent video games. A new study shows how children display more empathy if given pro-social media to watch or play. Parents can be encouraged to demand video games and other media that teach social skills.”

- The Christian Science Monitor, Editorial Board, Feb. 18, 2013

“Resistance...must mean more than resistance against war. It is a resistance against all kinds of things that are like war.”

- From *The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward A Buddhist-Christian Awareness* by Thich Nhat Hanh and Daniel Berrigan

It all started with the *Star Wars* video games and the defense, “But, Mom, they’re only droids!” And it seemed to make sense somehow that killing a being that was only a robot was okay, but it grew into cuddly creatures like Kirby, and now it is very realistic beings. “Violent video games have an effect on children similar to that of violent television and film. Some experts suggest an even greater pernicious effect, concluding that the violent actions performed in playing video games are more conducive to children’s aggression. As one expert concludes, ‘We’re not just teaching kids to kill. We’re teaching them to like it.’”⁶³¹ In fact, Anders Breivik (the shooter in

⁶³¹ “Children, Violence, and the Media: A Report for Parents and Policy Makers.” Prepared by Majority Staff, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Utah, Chairperson. Sept. 14, 1999. The Center for

Norway) said “he actually used his video game ‘Call of Duty’ to train for mass murder...He called it training simulation.”⁶³² Caution should be applied to games like the aforementioned, “Doom,” “Mortal Kombat,” and any other first-person shooters because of their instructional qualities.

Video gaming is yet another area which needs thorough investigation since parents and educators are rarely watching as children and teens bond with one another over a favorite violent game, whether on a TV gaming system or on the computer. For those who remember when “Pong” came out and spent untold quarters on “Frogger,” video gaming has come a long way. When video games first appeared, children and others had to leave home and go to the mall in order to play but now these games are available in houses across the land. Many video games are single-player which means that the player must either play alone or join 48+ million strangers on X-Box Live worldwide.⁶³³ Commonly, video games encourage violent acts as the only way of attaining points for the player; many acts can be considered villainous or disrespectful in that they make fun of topics which would otherwise be thought of as serious, like death. In “Halo,” a setting called “Birthday Party” activates confetti flying out of a blown-up head while children’s voices scream “Yay!” Also in “Halo,” one of the least violent first-person shooter games, a further humiliation toward an enemy you’ve just killed is “tea-bagging,” wherein one crouches and rubs his or her genitals on the corpse; of course, players don’t

Sport Policy and Conduct (CSPC) in the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Indiana University, Bloomington.

⁶³² Mike Jaccarino. “‘Training Simulation’: Mass killers often share obsession with video games.” Fox News. Sept. 12, 2013.

<http://www.foxnews.com.html>.

⁶³³ X-Box. <http://www.xbox.com/en-US/live/html>.

actually see body parts but one witnesses the simulated act. Steve Jobs was angry that Microsoft bought Bungie, the maker of “Halo,” before he got the chance – a move which made X-Box a console leader.⁶³⁴ Some of these violent video games are government funded.

The Military Connection:

Violent video games have ties to U.S. and other militaries. The Kuma\War series, created by U.S. company Kuma Reality Games, takes players from the front lines of Arabic-language first-person shooter games to WWII air battles tied to the History Channel to joining U.S. soldiers in a 2007 Iraq surge to killing Osama Bin Laden to Animal Planet’s “I, Predator,” where players can engage in bloody carnage by embodying a cheetah and killing an antelope. Iranian television says Kuma Games is an international military propaganda distributor. In 2005, Syria introduced “Under Siege” and their “Under Ash” allows players to fight off Israelis as Palestinians. Hezbollah-linked developers made a Special Force series in 2003. Iranian students released “Special Operation 85: Hostage Rescue” in 2007 in response to Kuma’s “Assault on Iran.” In 2007, the free online simulation, “America’s Army,” was created by the U.S. military in order to increase recruitment. “Blood was never allowed in ‘America’s Army’ because they want to keep a T rating. If they put blood it becomes an M rating and therefore in theory cannot be played by their intended audience.”⁶³⁵ The British Army followed with “Start Thinking Soldier” hoping to attract sixteen- to twenty-four-year olds.

⁶³⁴ Ben Kuchera. “Jobs turned down Bungie...at first: how Microsoft burned Apple.” *ArsTechnica: The PC enthusiast’s resource*. Oct. 27, 2010. <http://www.arstechnica.com.html>.

⁶³⁵ “‘America’s Army’: The Official U.S. Army Game.” Blogger Whiplash27’s comment. <http://forum.americasarmy.com.html>.

China's People's Liberation Army came out with "Glorious Revolution," similar to "Call of Duty."⁶³⁶ Yet the U.S. military's devotion to video game play as war-promotion trumps all other efforts.

War-themed video games are a collaboration between the entertainment industry and the Pentagon where "real war footage is frequently inserted into narratives and battlefield sequences" in order to advance commercial virtual worlds, military training weapons systems, and recruitment through higher levels of intense violence; the physical and emotional realities are not addressed, and war becomes thrilling entertainment and an adrenaline rush. Not everyone appreciates war-themed games: The U.S. group, Iraqi Veterans Against the War, along with active duty service members, brought their "truth in recruiting" campaign to an "America's Army" game booth and chanted: "War is not a game."⁶³⁷

It is not an accident that instruments in British Challenger 2 tanks look like the PlayStation's controllers, one of the most popular consoles the year the tanks were introduced. The fact is, it was a U.S. defense contractor which developed the first home video console, the 1972 Magnavox Odyssey. The U.S. Army has given tens of millions of dollars to the Institute of Creative Technologies at U.S.C. to "build partnerships with

⁶³⁶ Alex Rayner. "Are video games just propaganda and training tools for the military?" *The Guardian*. 18 March 2012.

<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/mar/18/video-games-propaganda.html>.

⁶³⁷ Robin Andersen and Martin Kurti. "From *America's Army* to *Call of Duty*: Doing Battle with the Military Entertainment Complex."

http://faculty.fordham.edu/andersen/andersen_WarAndVideo.pdf.html.

the gaming industry and Hollywood.”⁶³⁸ “Steel Beasts,” by American eSim, was developed with the help of ex-U.S. and European Army personnel for accuracy and is used by armies for training.⁶³⁹ Historically, the video game industry and the military have been intertwined “[bringing] the war home in the form of video games” since 1929 when Edward Link created the first flight simulator; ever since, the two have forged an alliance and fought for interaction between civilians and soldiers with training and recruitment motives. Once the military realized simulation technologies could teach flying, it wasn’t long until it realized it could also teach killing.⁶⁴⁰

Walk around any GameStop store and you will see a blend of harried parents trying to fathom why their kids want savage games while calculating what part of their budget will suffer in order to pay for them and military personnel hunting for the latest versions of the same games. Military video games are not only effective recruiting and training tools - with soldiers admitting that killing in the field is easier because they were prepared by simulated killing in the games - but many soldiers continue to play during downtime from battle, making killing a round-the-clock (ad)venture which becomes a permanent part of one’s psyche.⁶⁴¹ There’s some irony in knowing that the military is now using video game technology as part of “exposure therapy” to treat P.T.S.D. (Post-Traumatic

⁶³⁸ Alex Rayner. “Are video games just propaganda and training tools for the military?” *The Guardian*. 18 March 2012.

<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/mar/18/video-games-propaganda.html>.

⁶³⁹ Rayner.

⁶⁴⁰ Nick Turse. *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 125.

⁶⁴¹ Turse, 137-139.

Stress Disorder).⁶⁴² In the virtual war world, kids and grown-ups feel the addictive rush of fighting by injecting “Close Combat: First to Fight” into consoles reenacting combat moves by “United States’ 911 shock troops...free of UN mandated ROEs [rules of engagement] that guaranteed earlier failure.” Killing by playing dirty is encouraged in many of these games but the real insurgency of concern is the way video games have been thrust onto America’s occupied youth as they beg for more in the homeland.⁶⁴³

In addition to the war game genre, video games promote violence in ways that should pique any player’s interest – from historical fiction action as an assassin (“Assassin’s Creed”) to gang warfare (“Saints Row”) to killing police officers (“Grand Theft Auto”) to modern warfare (“Call of Duty”). And even the games made for all ages contain “cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and or infrequent use of mild language.” And even Kirby is presented as mean in the U.S., while he’s shown as cute in Japanese advertising.⁶⁴⁴ The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has ratings which range from “Early Childhood” to “Adults Only” (AO). Many of these games are rated “Teen” (T) for age thirteen and over or “Mature,” for age seventeen and up; the problem is, thanks to advertising efforts at retailers (because militaristic action games are constantly shown on screens all around the stores), friends, and ads themselves, ten year olds are heavily invested in playing games rated beyond their years; besides, “Early Childhood” (eC),

⁶⁴² Hamza Shaban. “Playing War: How the Military Uses Video Games.” *The Atlantic*. Oct. 10, 2013. <http://www.theatlantic.com.html>.

⁶⁴³ Nick Turse. *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 125.

⁶⁴⁴ Martin Gaston. “Why is Kirby always angry in the US? Nintendo explains.” *Game Spot*. <http://www.gamespot.com.html>. Also see “American Kirby is Hardcore.” <http://www.tvtropes.org.html>.

“Everyone” (E), and “Everyone 10+” (E10+) games are few and far between.⁶⁴⁵ If those sources don’t encourage them, the store’s magazine most certainly will.

“Game Informer” magazine [issue number 251], released in February of 2014, shows the following: two skeletons or skulls and crossbones; two images of characters’ bodies in pieces; six dead characters lying in a pool of blood; forty-two over-sexualized female bodies or overly-feminine girls or women; and a whopping 119 characters holding one or more weapons. This magazine comes in the mail for those who join the club at GameStop and, because discounts are given for membership, most do join; while there are occasional feature stories about games rated “E” for everyone, most articles feature teen and mature games.

Playing to Win Recruits:

There is no indication that these games will go out of fashion any time soon; quite the opposite is true because there is no limit to its money-making potential and the military is heavily invested in sponsoring their continuation. The Army Gaming Championships, started in 2007, is “a tournament for hard-core gamers, ages seventeen and up, where over \$200,000 in cash and prizes” is up for grabs – all one has to do to grab some cash, aside from play well, is agree to be contacted by an Army recruiter. Included in the twelve possible contest games: “America’s Army,” “Halo,” the ultraviolent “Gears of War,” and “Call of Duty 3.” The same year, the military “signed a \$2-million deal with Global Gaming League – an online gaming community – as a way to tap into the 9.2 million players (80

⁶⁴⁵ Entertainment Software Rating Board.
http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp.html.

percent of whom are seventeen- to twenty-four-year-old males) who visit the site each month.”⁶⁴⁶ Recruiting efforts are made easier when youth are primed by the rush games of war provide.

These games are getting oodles of promotional help from surprising sources. As part of its \$300 million attempt “to lure entertainment companies to the state,” Florida is giving money to “violent action films and video games now blamed for fueling real-life aggression and gun violence,” with more than \$17.9 million going to violent movie production and more than \$144.2 million going to violent video games like the first-person shooter games “Halo,” “Call of Duty,” and “Medal of Honor.” As taxpayer funding substantially increases for excessively violent video games, mental health care funding has been greatly reduced.⁶⁴⁷ Balancing a state budget shouldn’t mean creating an unhealthy citizenry.

There are other twists in incorporating real military experience for the youth market: In addition to the U.S. government spending millions creating “America’s Army” and making free first-person shooter video games available at recruiting stations and online, there is the 2004 military creation of “Full Spectrum Warrior,” a combat simulator for Microsoft’s Xbox; plus, the military spent over \$100 million on contracts with the University of Southern California to create the Institute for Creative Technologies “to build a partnership among the entertainment industry, army and academia with the goal of creating synthetic experiences so compelling that participants

⁶⁴⁶ Nick Turse. *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 139.

⁶⁴⁷ Toluse Olorunnipa. “Bringing in Jobs Can Be Brutal.” *Tampa Bay Times*. Sun. Jan. 20, 2013.

react as if they are real,” along with similar projects at other universities.⁶⁴⁸

Collaboration with Hollywood blockbusters is nothing new, but now it is with more organization and renewed vigor: The military is trying to create actual cyborg soldiers through the Future Force Warrior (FFW) program with Hollywood design assistance; the military is setting up recruiting stations at airshows and sports events with the “Virtual Army Experience,” which is “part video game, part theme park ride and part recruiting tool,” where parents and kids can test their shooting mettle; now “America’s Army” is making digital avatars of real U.S. Army soldiers to be found on “an interactive Virtual Recruiting Center” within the “America’s Army” game; there is now a cell phone version of the game; Army designers are creating “its new quick-loading assault weapons on the design of Hasbro’s immensely popular Super-Soaker water gun” so they are learned easily; multiple devices – from guided missile robots to remote controlled spying vehicles – are using six-button keypad controllers modeled after Sony’s PlayStation 2 (PS2); and the “America’s Army” team is making “a new line of six-inch-tall ‘army-authorized’ action figures” for major retail outlets.⁶⁴⁹ If you think kids don’t think about war: As early as 1977, it was found that the two- to twelve-year old age group ranked higher in the amount of aggressive dreaming – including dreams about war – than any other stage of life.⁶⁵⁰ As immersion in military culture expands, children may be left feeling that war is the first and only solution to conflict.

⁶⁴⁸ Nick Turse. *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 119-120.

⁶⁴⁹ Turse, 117-139.

⁶⁵⁰ J.A. Hall. *Clinical Uses of Dreams* (New York: Grune & Stratton), 1977.

The Army has begun eliminating their recruitment stations and is replacing them with multi-million dollar war gaming facilities to encourage youngsters to visit, have an as-close-to-real-war experience as possible, and be at the ready for the soft sell from recruiters.⁶⁵¹ Chatting seemingly innocently with youngsters about plans after high school while they are experiencing an adrenaline rush playing at war is sensible for keeping military branches filled but real pilots – and those trained to fill the seats who are not real pilots – are sitting in an American location as this is being written bombing real human targets thousands of miles away using similar video game technology.⁶⁵²

Addicted to Play:

It is not just playing the games themselves which is of concern, but the fact that children are becoming addicted to this play. In South Korea – leaders in the advance of digital media and its fallout – the government is financing detox camps for those kids addicted to the Internet, and most of them are addicted to video game play. Some children have gone from being at the top of their class academically to being at the bottom; some have even died during long tournaments from lack of sustenance.⁶⁵³ South Korea is addressing the problem full-force, as opposed to the U.S., which seems to have lots of meetings and articles and studies about this urgent problem facing youth but does not take action in preventing it. It makes you wonder why. If you think your kid might be addicted to video games, she/he just might be. One study shows that “1/5 of

⁶⁵¹ Rachel Dretzin. *digital_nation*. DVD. Perf. Douglas Rushkoff, Jared Auche, Jeremy Bailenson, Bubbe, Ellen Colam (Boston: WGBH/PBS/Frontline, 2010).

⁶⁵² Dretzin.

⁶⁵³ Dretzin.

teenagers are addicted to video games.”⁶⁵⁴ How is it that the games are so addictive?

Creators are using the stimulus and reward work of behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner to increase video game addiction, and Microsoft is adept at making games which are intentionally designed for compulsive playing. Using photos of Skinner box rats to illustrate his game design theory, a Microsoft games researcher explains: “Each contingency is an arrangement of time, activity, and reward, and there are an infinite number of ways these elements can be combined to produce the pattern of activity you want from your players.”⁶⁵⁵

Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, a West Point psychology professor and professor of military science, has a website (<http://www.killology.com.htm>) wherein he explains how a person is taught to kill: brutalization, classical conditioning, and operant conditioning. In his work, he proposes fighting back against the madness thrust upon kids – that of teaching them to kill – through education, legislation, and litigation.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁴ Michael Jenkinson. “Bloodshed, butchery, and video games.” *Alberta Report/News magazine*. 1/17/94, Vol. 21, Issue 5, p. 32. <http://connection.ebscohost.com.html>.

⁶⁵⁵ David Wong. “5 Creepy Ways Video Games Are Trying to Get You Addicted.” *Cracked*. March 08, 2010. <http://www.cracked.com.html>.

⁶⁵⁶ Lt. Col. Dave Grossman. *Killology Research Group*. See <http://www.killology.com.htm>, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence*, by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman and Gloria DeGaetano (New York: Crown/Random, 1999), and Grossman’s *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1996). Also see Gloria DeGaetano and Kathleen Bander’s *Screen Smarts: A Family Guide to Media Literacy* (Wilmington MA: Mariner Books, 1996) and *Screen Smarts: Raising Media*

Lawsuits have arisen against the companies which create these violent games. They are being sued for conditioning and inciting children to kill and controlling training subjects' behavior through stimulus and reward. "The industry is moving toward subscription-based games like MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online) that need the subject to keep playing – and paying...there's no way they can create enough exploration or story to keep you playing for thousands of hours, so they had to change the mechanics of the game, so players would instead keep doing the same actions over and over and over, whether they liked it or not...So game developers turned to Skinner's techniques...[designed to] keep gamers subscribing during the periods when it's *not* fun, locking them into a repetitive slog using Skinner's manipulative system of carefully scheduled rewards." ⁶⁵⁷ Sometimes the rewards in these games can be purchased – "virtual goods are now a \$5 billion industry worldwide." ⁶⁵⁸ Admirably, South Korea's highest court has "ruled that virtual goods are to be legally treated the same as real goods." ⁶⁵⁹ Many a parent has been shocked to see real

Literate Kids (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996). For information on the harmful aggression caused by violent video games, which includes past and current studies, and which examines why nothing is being done about it, please see *Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents: Theory, Research, and Public Policy*, by Craig A. Anderson, Douglas A. Gentile, and Katherine E. Buckley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Another excellent title is *Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth About Violent Video Games – And What Parents Can Do*, by Lawrence Kutner and Cheryl K. Olson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008). There's also: "The Killer at Thurston High"/"Placing Blame: The Lawsuits," a PBS *Frontline* special available at <http://www.pbs.org.html>.

⁶⁵⁷ David Wong. "5 Creepy Ways Video Games Are Trying to Get You Addicted." *Cracked*. March 08, 2010. <http://www.cracked.com.html>.

⁶⁵⁸ Wong.

⁶⁵⁹ Wong.

charges on their credit cards for items purchased to advance a player inside of a game. Solutions to these problems are not as easy as removing computers/television screens from kids' rooms, especially since so many are forced to submit schoolwork via the Internet.

Try imposing limits but this gets increasingly difficult and frustrating for parents and kids because we are all convinced we need this technology and children's technical prowess increases when blocked from devices they've been programmed to use. Try to block your child going to certain websites, for instance, and watch them get around it. Try not to introduce them to the latest film or video game and listen to them beg once they've learned of it from TV or a friend at school. Prevention sounds easier than it is because non-participation can result in social death. University of Plymouth's Dr. Mark Griffith has "developed a checklist to help parents determine if their children are playing too many video games. The checklist asks if your child: Plays video games most days? Often plays for long periods of time? Plays for excitement? Gets restless if he[/she] cannot play? Plays for a personal best? Often tries unsuccessfully to limit playing? Plays instead of doing his homework? Sacrifices social activity? According to Dr. G, if the answers to more than 4 of these questions are 'yes,' your child may be playing video games excessively and parents should intervene and impose limits."⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁶⁰ "Children, Violence, and the Media: A Report for Parents and Policy Makers." Prepared by Majority Staff, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Utah, Chairperson. Sept. 14, 1999. The Center for Sport Policy and Conduct (CSPC) in the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Indiana University, Bloomington. There's also: Barbara J. Wilson. "Media and Children's Aggression, Fear, and Altruism." Journal Issue: *Children and Electronic Media*. Vol. 18, Number 1, Spring 2008. The Future of Children, Princeton-Bookings at

Good luck, because just about every kid who plays video games easily answers yes to the entire list. It's easy to blame parents and say it's up to them to regulate what their kids watch/listen to/play but the playing field is not balanced because billions are spent by conglomerates on militainment to lure kids.

Marketers are making kids shooters who gain points for kills and repeatedly hear terms like "killing spree" and "carnage report" in "Halo" and other video games, they advertise teen-slasher films, "Sports Illustrated for Kids" promotes games like "Resident Evil 2," the Internet has any number of violent, hate-filled, misogynistic websites. Despite age-based labels and thousands of studies – even congressional ones – proving harmful effects, nothing has changed. The problem is that it is difficult to find materials which do not promote violence and the industry has the money to block objection.⁶⁶¹

<http://www.futureofchildren.org.html>. Other helpful media information for parents includes: "Violent Video Games and Aggressive Behaviors" from Sutter Health, Palo Alto Medical Foundation at <http://www.pamf.org.html>; Susan Ives. "Are We Turning Kids Into Killers?" Breaking the Cycle of Violence Through Circles of Peace. *The Peace Center* at <http://www.salsa.net/peace/videoviolence.html>; Jeannie Rosenberg and Joanna Santa Barbara. "Media and entertainment violence and children." *Physicians for Global Survival*. <http://www.thefreeradical.ca.html>; "Healthy Habits for TV, Video Games, and the Internet." *Kids' Health*. Sept. 2014. <http://www.kidshealth.org.html>; and "Raising Children to Resist Violence: What You Can Do," excerpted from a brochure produced through a collaborative project of the *American Psychological Association* and the *American Academy of Pediatrics* at <http://www.apa.org.html>.

⁶⁶¹ For counter arguments, please see Christopher J. Ferguson's "Media Violence Effects and Violent Crime: Good Science or Moral Panic?" at http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/26263_3sc.pdf.html. The author also offers the following: "Blazing Angels or Resident Evil? Can Violent Video Games Be a Force for Good?" from the *American Psychological Association*,

Meanwhile, children have access to games such as “Second Life,” the 3D online virtual world where any number of mean-spirited actions are possible, but that might be the least of what’s out there. Online computer games like “World of Tanks” by Wargaming send players emails encouraging them to celebrate National Military Appreciation month while teaching how to work together in missions. An email ad for “War Thunder,” by Gaijin Entertainment says, “A true soldier fights not because of what is in front of him but because of what is behind him.”⁶⁶² And carnage against women seems the norm in many games. “Video games and other media sometimes use prostitutes as characters that are targets for the male hero. In a game from the ‘Duke Nukem’ series, prostitutes are forced to strip and are then killed. In the number one selling video game for 2001, ‘Grand Theft Auto III,’ the player can ‘clobber’ a prostitute with a baseball bat with a new game technique that

Review of General Psychology 2010, Vol. 14, No. 2, 68-81 at <http://www.apa.org.html> and “Violent video games and the Supreme Court: Lessons for the scientific community in the wake of *Brown v. Entertainment Merchants*,” available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov> or at the author’s website <http://www.christopherjferguson.com.html> for full pdf; in addition, “Critique of Physician’s Statement on Media Violence,” by the *National Coalition Against Censorship*, 12/5/01, at <http://www.ncac.org.html>; and “Media Violence Does Not Cause Youth Violence,” an excerpt from Karen Sternheimer’s *It’s Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture’s Influence on Children* (Cambridge: Westview Press, 2003) available at <http://www.ic.galegroup.com.html>. Also see the TED Talk “Jim Fallon: Exploring the mind of a killer” at <http://www.ted.com.html> which examines what forces (a particular gene – MAOA – which many of us have, a frontal lobe or temple injury, and exposure to a 3D violent event before puberty) contribute to becoming a psychopathic killer. Further, “The Positive and Negative Effects of Video Game Play,” by Sara Prot, et al. at <http://public.psych.iastate.edu/caa.html>.
⁶⁶² From the author’s personal experience.

allows the player to feel he or she is really doing this.”⁶⁶³ What are we coming to?

CROSSING MEDIA BOUNDARIES:

Crossover ads and programming by the Big Five media conglomerates has added up to big dollars and guaranteed customers for a long time. Toys have been and are being created which support the television and film industries – and now the video game industry as well – and it is more and more profitable to do so. There is a crossing of media boundaries which heightens the ways in which children and others are affected: As films are released, toys are created so that kids can use them to reenact scenes from the movies; as enticing, there are video and computer games to reconstruct the action; songs from the films – now integral to film success, and often employing the latest musical talents – are played on the radio and available on CD, thus reconnecting the listener to the film experience; it is common to view the films themselves repeatedly at home; children can read the book versions for school, having ordered through Scholastic or purchased at the local book store; television programs are often developed from film versions; newspaper articles appear; ads are constantly in our faces; children’s accoutrement – from sheets and towels to sweatshirts to backpacks – become part of the apparatus, and have an extended reach on the population. Just try to find a lunch pail without a sports logo or animated character!

There is no turning away from this assault of being used to promote the latest film lest others bully nonparticipants into becoming part of the in crowd. “After reviewing 1000 studies

⁶⁶³ “Media Influence on Youth.” *Crisis Connection*, a publication of the Stalking Resource Center.
http://www.crisisconnectioninc.org/teens/media_influence_on_youth.htm.

conducted over 30 years, a coalition of professional organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, linked violent media to aggressive behavior. Yet professional wrestling programs, which are rated TV-14, and violent movies such as ‘X-Men’ (rated PG-13) peddle violent action figures to preschoolers. As the recent FTC report confirms, the entertainment industry intentionally markets violent content to children through products it officially rates as unsuitable.”⁶⁶⁴ In a consumer culture run amok, children are being manipulated and exploited by the very companies and organizations which claim to be there to safeguard them.

As films, event planning, TV programs, video games, and the toy industry are infiltrated by the Pentagon, finding wholesome entertainment, absent from war themes, is getting progressively wearisome: Try finding a race car event without cars sponsored by the military branches; go to sporting events for yet another military or hero appreciation night; visit college promotional events and you will meet military recruiters; aim for your kids to attend Massachusetts Institute of Technology (who, in 2005, pulled in over \$600 million in Department of Defense funding), but realize it’s the 44th largest defense contractor; go shopping for a hip pair of sunglasses named “straight jacket” or “crosshair” from Oakley; watch military-assisted films like *Iron Man* (2008) or *Transformers* (2007); try avoiding hero-focused ads for the military, looking more and more like action films, before even G rated kids’ films fill the screens at theaters; get on teen social media and find links to

⁶⁶⁴ Steve Barsanti, ed. *Advertising at Schools: Is There Room in Public Education for Sodas and Snacks?* The LegiSchool Project: An educational collaboration between California State University, Sacramento, and the California State Legislature (Darby PA: Diana Publishing Co., 2000), 29.

recruiters; and good luck finding video games which aren't militaristic.

Just about all big American corporations are now a part of the military-industrial complex: Sony, Disney, Proctor & Gamble, Dell, Johnson & Johnson, M & M Mars and Hershey, Time-Warner, Nestle, ESPN, H. J. Heinz, Campbell Soup, AMF Bowling Alleys, Wal-Mart, Hewlett-Packard, Apple, Starbucks, NASCAR, Marvel Comics, Keebler, etc.⁶⁶⁵ "By co-opting the civilian 'culture of cool,' the military-corporation complex is able to create positive associations with the armed forces, immerse the young in an alluring, militarized world of fun, and make interaction with the military second nature to today's Americans."⁶⁶⁶ But bringing the war home and presenting vengeful killing as merrymaking through products and services is only part of the problem, because loss of life presented as educational discovery and relaxation is another part of this puzzling new milieu.

MEDIA VIOLENCE INVADES THE EVERYDAY:

Recently, an elementary school, Country Day School, in Largo, Florida, was lambasted for its week-long *Hunger Games* camp and, although they removed the initial pretend to fight-to-the-death idea, a student was nonetheless injured intentionally in one of the many skirmish activities.⁶⁶⁷ This could be a sign

⁶⁶⁵ Nick Turse. *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 4-9.

⁶⁶⁶ Turse, 100-101.

⁶⁶⁷ Lisa Gartner. "At 'Hunger Games' camp, children want to fight to the 'death.'" *Tampa Bay Times*. March 11, 2014.

<http://www.tampabay.com.html>. Also see "Fla. school scrutinized over Hunger Games-themed summer camp," posted Aug. 11, 2013 by WFLA News Channel 8 (NBC News) at <http://www.wncn.com.html>. Please also see

that our devotion to the latest fad has crossed into a warping of mass media as not only a reflection of supposed reality but as the public's actual social and political agenda.

We may not be able to calculate exactly how violence affects kids because it is difficult to quantify what goes on in an individual's thoughts; however, there are long-lasting effects of continual exposure to violence as a commonplace factor in the world. George Orwell's job during WWII was writing pro-British propaganda to be broadcast in India. His novel *1984* shows how propaganda is used to constantly rewrite history according to how leaders wish: "When Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought...should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words."⁶⁶⁸ Although Orwell's novel is just that – a fictional account of a future dystopia – state/corporate control and dissemination of slanted information by ideologues is at least on the horizon, if not standing right in front of us. New generations have no comprehension that there was a time when violent programming was not an across-the-board phenomenon and the lack of anxiety over such extensive programming should cause us to be fearful; after all, thought crimes exist in Orwell's novel as well as currently, the U.S. is in a perpetual state of war, omnipresent government surveillance exists, and a savage new hegemonic view is controlling our society.

The *Harry Potter* generation does not remember a time when content did not include extreme violence; therefore, many

Ben Child's 9 August 2013 "Organizers of 'Hunger Games' camp for kids deny it encourages violence" in *The Guardian* at <http://www.theguardian.com.html>.

⁶⁶⁸ George Orwell. *1984* (New York: Penguin Books, 1949), 246.

do not find torture within the films or other media problematic. Similarly, when attempting to speak with young staff members at GameStop about the “Left for Dead” series’ disturbing cover art, with the mangled, sometimes bloody, zombie hand reaching out in desperation – apparent that it’s a zombie only because of the disintegration of part of the hand – employees launch into what a great game it is; evidently, the thrills of the game outweigh anything problematic about the concept of someone actually being left for dead. As generations spring up accustomed to more and more amounts of violence, the possible effect on society is that what is seen and heard becomes our reality. Increasingly, citizens – now even children – are being taught through media how to be cruel, that violence is an everyday occurrence, and that responding violently is an acceptable way to handle life’s difficulties. Since “people learn from the behavior of those they see and admire on television [and in other media],” American society is being negatively affected.⁶⁶⁹

And how does modern technology relate? Under the umbrella of Psychological Operations Units, several groups have been formed by the U.S. military. We know from “The Report to the President on C.I.A. Activities within the U.S.” (1975) that mind control experiments such as Project MK Ultra were engaged on American citizens to test chemical effects on the psyche. Now sound is one of many techniques being tested. Look at the Waco, Texas, standoff in 1993, where authorities were warned that their techniques, such as increasing loudspeaker volume of sounds such as killing rabbits and Tibetan monk chanting, would aggravate the situation. The

⁶⁶⁹ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 147.

warnings were on target: 80 Branch Davidian sect members died, including two dozen children. No doubt, Koresh was engaging in bizarre and disturbing behaviors yet one has to question the role of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the FBI, who ultimately took charge of the siege. Frighteningly, the actions of authorities simply confirmed his prophecies and survivor beliefs.⁶⁷⁰ More than that, a mere year after the Ruby Ridge, Idaho, tragedy where Vicki Weaver was shot dead while holding her 10-month old baby, it contributed to American fears of those in control.

As Commando Solo broadcasted messages from planes over Iraq, able to piggyback a signal already in existence (TV, the Internet, radio, the electrical grid) to create anxiety and fear, DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) upgraded its 48 antennas in southern Alaska to 180. HAARP (High-Frequency Active Auroral Research Program) is a device used to modulate the ionosphere which penetrates earth and sky by punching the ionosphere to create a “giant broadcasting antenna pumping the signal back to Earth in the ELF range.”⁶⁷¹ We know that ELF (extremely low frequency) is connected to emotional distortion and physiological disorders. Vibration up to 20 Hz can subliminally influence brain activity when it’s used in conjunction with media broadcasts, and it can “incline an audience toward everything from alertness to passivity.”⁶⁷² This creates an FFR (frequency following response) or brain entrainment which brains lock on to and mirror.⁶⁷³ While the

⁶⁷⁰ John Burnett. “Two Decades Later, Some Branch Davidians Still Believe.” *National Public Radio*. April 20, 2013. <http://npr.org.html>.

⁶⁷¹ Jeff Warrick. *Programming the Nation?* DVD. Perf. Noam Chomsky, Amy Goodman, Dennis Kucinich, John B. Alexander, Christopher Coppola (Aptos CA and Santa Cruz CA: Ignite Productions and Digital Media Factory, 2011).

⁶⁷² Warrick.

⁶⁷³ Warrick.

general public is not informed of new technologies generally, we are even less informed about their potential uses – because you won't see them discussed on TV.

There used to be a U.S. law, the Smith-Mundt Act, created after WWII Nazi abuses, which protected citizens from the government using propaganda here; instead, they began planting stories in overseas news sources which worked their way back home and got quoted in the U.S.⁶⁷⁴ But changes in the law have occurred recently (July 2, 2013) which now allow the U.S. government to “use propaganda made for foreign audiences on the American public.” This is thanks to the BBG (Broadcasting Board of Governors) which broadcasts Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, etc. to promote a certain type of democracy and to “an amendment tagged onto the National Defense Authorization Act.” This rule applies only to media published by the State Department and does not involve any initiatives funded by or created through the Pentagon. So, the Smith-Mundt Modernization Act of 2012 passed with nary a whisper, despite efforts by late journalist, Michael Hastings, to identify ramifications of the alterations.⁶⁷⁵

As the U.S. continues its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, opium production in the latter has sky-rocketed 61%.⁶⁷⁶ Taliban control had effectively wiped out opium production, but

⁶⁷⁴ Jeff Warrick. *Programming the Nation?* DVD. Perf. Noam Chomsky, Amy Goodman, Dennis Kucinich, John B. Alexander, Christopher Coppola (Aptos CA and Santa Cruz CA: Ignite Productions and Digital Media Factory, 2011).

⁶⁷⁵ “US ends ban on ‘domestic propaganda.’” *RT: Question More*. July 15, 2013. <http://rt.com.html>.

⁶⁷⁶ David Williams. “Afghan drug war debacle: Blair said smashing opium trade was a major reason to invade but 10 years on heroin production is up from 185 tons a year to 5,800.” *The Daily Mail*. Feb. 16, 2012. <http://www.dailymail.com.html>.

now the U.S. Marines are guarding the fields. More than a million people worldwide have died from the region's heroin.⁶⁷⁷ The thirst for Middle East oil continues.⁶⁷⁸ And companies such as Blackwater (renamed Xe Services in 2009 and Academi in 2011), an American security consulting firm and private military company, and Haliburton, the oilfield services company connected with Cheney and the Bush administration, made a fortune cleaning up the bombed oilfields and establishing the new Iraq. The U.S. taxpayer funded security budget is a staggering \$1 trillion.⁶⁷⁹ And soldiers and innocents are dying. Yet it is the bloodthirsty "Newspeak" which must be criticized and changed since it openly promotes cruelty in the name of patriotism and the "war on terror." If not, more of the same will continue for future generations.

What does this have to do with kids? This unprotected group is now targeted. "Civilian fatalities in wartime have climbed from 5 percent at the turn of the century...to more than 90 percent in the wars of the 1990s. New weapons and patterns of conflict that include deliberate attacks against civilians are increasingly turning children into primary targets of war. 'Armed conflict kills and maims more children than soldiers,' notes a United Nations report by Graça Machel, the U.N. Secretary-General's expert on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children."⁶⁸⁰ In fact, "500,000 under-five-year olds died as a result of armed conflict in 1992 alone." As the world grapples

⁶⁷⁷ "'1 mn died' from Afghan heroin, drug production '40 times higher' since NATO op." *RT: Question More*. April 3, 2013. <http://rt.com.html>.

⁶⁷⁸ Toby Craig Jones. "America, Oil, and the War in the Middle East." *The Journal of American History*. <http://www.jah.oxfordjournals.org.html>.

⁶⁷⁹ "Our Insanely Big \$1 Trillion National Security Budget." *Mother Jones*. <http://motherjones.com.html>.

⁶⁸⁰ "Patterns in conflict: Civilians are now the target." UNICEF. <http://www.unicef.org/graca/patterns.htm>.

with the refugee problem – stemming from prolonged wars designed to include attack on schools and hospitals – be aware that “children and women make up an estimated 80 percent of displaced populations.” ⁶⁸¹ These groups aren’t just trying to escape soldiers but robotic killing machines: “The Drone Papers, leaked by an internal military whistleblower, confirm what whistleblower drone pilots as well as drone victims have reported: the outrageous fact that 90% of all drone victims are bystanders, among them many children” in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Palestine – launched from U.S. airbases. ⁶⁸² In 2015 alone, “this killer drone policy...killed over 6,000 people.” ⁶⁸³ U.S. children spend their time facing airport-like security at school, playing war at home on screens not dissimilar to the ones drone pilots use, and watching brutal playground flights on YouTube, one of the latest fads.

⁶⁸¹ “Patterns in conflict: Civilians are now the target.” UNICEF.

<http://www.unicef.org/graca/patterns.htm>.

⁶⁸² Janet Allon. “Protester to Be Jailed for Six Months: She has been protesting the U.S. drone assassination program since 2011.” AlterNet. January 18, 2016; also, Mary Anne Grady Flores. “A Grandma Drone Resister’s Letter from Prison: A jailed Catholic worker shares her motivations for protesting the U.S. government’s drone policy.” AlterNet. February 14, 2016.

⁶⁸³ Grady Flores. “A Grandma Drone Resister’s...” See the short video (6-min) “Drones of New York.” There’s also a film: *Unmanned: America’s Drone Wars*. Visit the Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars at <http://www.upstatedroneaction.org.html>.

VIII. FILM INDUSTRY/MOVIES:

“The military and the film studios have colluded for more than fifty years. It’s just a subtle form of brainwashing. I believe the fifty years of the constant drumbeat of ‘the military is good,’ ‘the soldiers are heroic and valiant,’ I think has made the American people more warlike over the last fifty years.”

- David L. Robb, author of *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*, quoted in *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*.

“If you ask me how I feel about violence in real life, well, I have a lot of feelings about it. It’s one of the worst aspects of America. In movies, violence is cool. I like it.”

- Quentin Tarantino

“Of course the people don’t want war...That is understood...But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.”

- Hermann Goering (at the Nuremberg trials)

THE ROLE OF HOLLYWOOD:

Visualization is an important sales technique. One of the methods of generating sales or another desired outcome through the use of persuasion involves self-imagining; that is, asking people to imagine – see themselves in a new car, visualize how winning a million dollars could change their lives, dream up how giving to charity will make them and the recipient happy, experience how hurting the enemy will save the world, or

picture how voting for a particular candidate will bring about the way of life promised by her or him. What about when one watches *American Sniper* or the obvious threat to North Korea in comedic form, *The Interview*? Are these portrayals giving the world our best?

The Youngest Audience:

How does this relate when filmmakers give children and others the same perspective as one sitting in a torture chair (as seen in *Monsters, Inc.*) or having Mr. Incredible's point of view (in *The Incredibles*) as darkness folds around him due to the bubbles from a new real-world supposedly less-than-lethal (also called less-lethal, non-lethal, and non-deadly) weapon? Would it make people more compliant if they have previous experience/familiarity with these weapons? What does it teach children when they see their heroes endure punishment and are made to feel the same way Woody's friends feel when abused by a cruel overlord through the hands of former best friend, Buzz Lightyear (in *Toy Story 3*)?

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT:

These films contribute to the continuation of weaponry, torture, prisons, and war as staples of culture, but they also have the power to show current and future weapons and techniques used in detention. It is interesting that creators make the audience members identify with the captive characters, though this may simply be an effort to tug on our heartstrings. When exposed to less-lethal weapons in films, the effect may be two-fold: 1.) Stay in line lest this punishment happen to me, and 2.) Harsh punishment and restraint are part of daily life and are deserved. These sentiments reflect the G-Men mob films of the middle to late 1930s where gangsters always met a brutal downfall. That era's "war against crime" allowed G-Men films

exemption from the anti-violence the Hays Office production code had previously promoted because of their law and order stance.⁶⁸⁴ What vilification and criminalization is being allowed now in the pursuit of supposedly protecting the supposed free?

A concerted effort is made to keep all manner of conflict in the public eye but to make it seem like a worthy endeavor. According to *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*: “The United States government spends more than \$400 million per year to employ more than 8,000 workers to create propaganda favorable to the United States. The result: ninety films per year, twelve magazines in twenty-two languages, and 800 hours of Voice of America programming in thirty-seven languages with an estimated audience of 75 million listeners – all describing the virtues of the American way.”⁶⁸⁵ Every country presents a favorable light to its citizens, yet caution should be advised in nations whose income is heavily dependent upon profits from the military-industrial complex, which may need to be renamed the media-military-industrial complex. “The U.S. military, having learned its lesson in Vietnam [as gory images of the war were broadcast into American homes], went to great lengths to restrict the flow of vivid images of the Persian Gulf and Kosovo wars to Americans watching on their TV sets at home.”⁶⁸⁶ People are disapproving of war when they see actual footage of the real damage done and the bulk of U.S. history has been filled with being at war, so

⁶⁸⁴ Lee Horsley. “Introduction to the Gangster Films of the 1930s.” Lancaster University. <http://www.crimeculture.com.html>.

⁶⁸⁵ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 6.

⁶⁸⁶ Pratkanis and Aronson, 178.

there is a vested interest in keeping true images limited at home and abroad.

But more than careful delivery in the U.S. of battles overseas, the proactive stance at home has become the norm. “In reality, the military has been deeply involved with the film industry since the Silent Era...Occupying a floor of a L.A. office building...the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and the Department of Defense itself have established entertainment liaison offices to help ensure that Hollywood makes movies the military way. What they have to trade, especially when it comes to blockbuster films, is access to high-tech, tax-payer funded, otherwise unavailable gear. What they get in return is usually the right to alter or shape scripts to suit their needs.”⁶⁸⁷ Although it is a worthy cause to support troops going into battle, the price of glorifying war in films like *Top Gun* and *Black Hawk Down* is paid in lives on both sides when war becomes the norm for a society:

Jerry Bruckheimer...has caved in to Pentagon demands more often than any other producer in Hollywood – on such films as *The Right Stuff*, *Armageddon*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Pearl Harbor*...Director John Woo...made every change the military asked for on *Windtalkers* [the film about the Navajo Code Talkers who made a significant contribution for the Allies during WWII], even though the changes altered history and helped make his movie a box office flop...Walt Disney...allowed the Pentagon to use *The Mickey*

⁶⁸⁷ Nick Turse. “Hollywood Is Becoming the Pentagon’s Mouthpiece for Propaganda: In the new film *Iron Man*, the people cast as terrorists take the fall for what the U.S. has done in the real world.” *Alternet*. May 21, 2008. <http://www.alternet.org.html>.

Mouse Club as a recruiting tool to target young viewers...John Wayne...set out to make a propaganda film for the Pentagon called *The Green Berets* and then concealed the Pentagon's involvement in shaping the film by agreeing that the screen credits would not contain the usual acknowledgment of the Pentagon's cooperation...and Jack Valenti, former head of the M.P.A.A....[allowed] the military to screen films at the M.P.A.A.'s offices in Washington before they [were] shown to the public.⁶⁸⁸

Some films that were denied military assistance because of their story lines include *GI Jane*, *Forrest Gump*, *Die Hard 2*, *The Thin Red Line*, and *Speed*. "There is no appellate process within the military for these filmmakers to challenge the Pentagon's decision," so filmmakers either sanitize scripts in order to make military personnel look perfect or they make another film.⁶⁸⁹

When directors and producers need military gear and soldiers to make a film or television program – resources which are paid for by the U.S. taxpayer – and the exchange of script alteration is given, artistic freedom and integrity is compromised; these seem like cornerstones to true democracy. In saving filmmakers substantial amounts of time and money, the powers that be expect three things: a positive portrayal of the military, even if inaccuracy results; continuing funding for the military from the taxpayer; and new recruits.⁶⁹⁰ Again, it is not surprising that governments wish to show themselves in the best light, but withholding funding from projects which insist

⁶⁸⁸ David L. Robb. *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 362-364.

⁶⁸⁹ Robb, summary.

⁶⁹⁰ Robb, 57.

on highlighting the real effects of war and rewarding projects which show only one viewpoint seems coercive, even fascist, not to mention that most in society have no idea that their films and TV shows are censored and or creatively and politically enhanced.

Remember that the predominance of the information we see and hear comes from just a few very powerful media companies. The ten largest media groups in 2013 in order of financial success were Comcast, The Walt Disney Company, Time Warner Inc., Viacom, News Corporation, Liberty Media, British Sky Broadcasting Group Plc, CBS Corporation, Gannett Company Inc., and Bertelsmann SE & Co. KGaA. U.S. deregulation in the 1980s enabled big media companies to become huge conglomerates which control nearly all of the information at this point.⁶⁹¹ Warner Brothers (part of Time Warner), Sony Pictures (part of Sony), 20th Century Fox (part of News Corp), Universal (part of General Electric), Paramount (part of Viacom), and Walt Disney Pictures (part of the Walt Disney Company): “These corporations control more than 95% of the U.S. film business” and their parent conglomerates “together own more than 90% of all media in the U.S.”⁶⁹² That’s ALL media, so these conglomerates also own television channels, magazines, newspapers, radio stations, etc.

⁶⁹¹ Joseph Milord. “The World’s 10 Largest Media Conglomerates.” *Elite Daily*. July 2, 2013. [www.http://elitedaily.com/money.html](http://elitedaily.com/money.html).

⁶⁹² Kirby Dick. *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. DVD. Perf. Matt Stone, Theresa Webb, Kimberly Peirce (London and Los Gatos CA: BBC Films and Netflix, 2006).

The Violent MPAA:

Rhetoric from the Motion Picture Association of America assures us that they are there to keep film-viewing safe for our children but what they are really doing is censoring for sex, especially anything beyond a very basic heterosexuality, drugs, and cursing while leaving the door propped open for extreme violence. Contrary to words of denial from former head of the M.P.A.A., Jack Valenti, “nearly four times as many films received an NC-17 for sex as opposed to violence.”⁶⁹³ Interestingly, Europe has a contrary stance: “The movie rating systems in Europe have the exact opposite view: much more open about sexual depictions, much more restrictive about violent depictions than the M.P.A.A.”⁶⁹⁴ Director Darren Aronofsky reflects:

It just seems backwards that to show human sexuality in pretty much any form is...getting into R territory while you can shoot as many bodies – as long as there’s no blood – and be PG-13...What are we training our kids for? You know, you’re not showing the result of what happens when you fire a gun, so I think it should be flipped. I think to show violence without blood it’s like fantasy and the only people that can handle that intellectually are adults, but if you show violence with blood it should be PG-13 so that people can realize the result of what it actually does.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹³ Kirby Dick. *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. DVD. Perf. Matt Stone, Theresa Webb, Kimberly Peirce (London and Los Gatos CA: BBC Films and Netflix, 2006).

⁶⁹⁴ Dick.

⁶⁹⁵ Dick.

Director Kevin Smith adds: “If I were to create a ratings system, I wouldn’t even put murder right at the top of the chief offenses. I would put rape right at the top of the chief offenses and assault against women because it’s so insanely overused and insulting how much it’s overused in movies as a plot device – a woman in peril. That, to me, is offensive yet that shit skates.”⁶⁹⁶ Indeed, violence against especially women but others as well is all-too-familiar and these story lines and images affect our reality, but the M.P.A.A. has no interest in protecting the young from such story lines and images.

As American society devours increasing amounts of violence at younger ages, will violence be the first option which comes to mind when there is a problem? There are no child behavioral experts on the M.P.A.A. to monitor the effects of violence on children. Dr. Theresa Webb of U.C.L.A.’s Southern California Prevention Research Center explains: “We studied 98 of the 100 top grossing films from 1994 for [our] study on the ratings system and what we discovered was that they aren’t doing a very good job at discriminating for violence. The film industry is engaged in producing a product and, for very fundamental reasons, violence sells especially to their target demographic but it’s not coincidental that [this] target demographic is also the most at risk for violence in American society.”⁶⁹⁷ American society is priming youth for violent behavior.

It is with this cultural hegemonic backdrop that I introduce the following information about current children’s

⁶⁹⁶ Kirby Dick. *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. DVD. Perf. Matt Stone, Theresa Webb, Kimberly Peirce (London and Los Gatos CA: BBC Films and Netflix, 2006).

⁶⁹⁷ Dick.

films. Disney/Pixar is not alone in promoting a warped vision of the world; in fact, many film production companies are advancing militarism, cruelty, and torture in movies specifically made for children. Blasted by images and sounds of negativity in their music videos, songs, books, education, television programs, newspapers, magazines, advertising, video games, science centers, and amusement parks, films created by the Big Five media conglomerates and others are yet another especially persuasive tool which can be used to boost callousness among youth, thus creating future generations which may never flinch at suffering.

IX. CHILDREN'S MOVIES:

“We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. To make money is our only objective.”

- Michael Eisner, former CEO, The Walt Disney Company (Internal memo)

“The heads of major corporations will have more impact on the values of people worldwide than the heads of government.”

- Norman Lear, on the influence of media in the future

“A 2007 study by the Federal Communications Commission found more depictions of violence in the Disney animated cartoon ‘The Little Mermaid’ than in a documentary about the Civil War.”

- The Christian Science Monitor

Children’s films fly under the critical radar because they are made for a young audience but their influence is enormous. “Children’s culture is a sphere where entertainment, advocacy, and pleasure meet to construct conceptions of what it means to be a child occupying a combination of gender, racial, and class positions in society through which one defines oneself in relation to a myriad of others...Children’s culture has been largely ignored, especially the world of animated films. An examination of children’s culture...provides a theoretical referent for ‘remembering’ that the individual and collective identities of children and youth are largely shaped politically and pedagogically in the popular visual culture of video games, television, film, and even in the leisure sites such as malls and

amusement parks.”⁶⁹⁸ Theirs is a private world of sights and sounds which daily influence and define them one piece of media at a time.

Educators, parents, and others assume that G or PG ratings mean suitable but the M.P.A.A. guards against sexual content (beyond the most mundane and traditional) and language yet does nothing to exclude – or even define – extreme violence. The M.P.A.A. even favors Disney/Pixar by issuing comparatively less harsh ratings to their productions. Today’s films are notably tied to post-9/11, fear-based rhetoric. The U.S. is already considered the most violent society on the planet and sales of these films are often split between the U.S. and overseas. Research shows that children are adversely affected by violence and – at the very least – develop what George Gerbner calls “Mean World Syndrome,” where people come to think of the world as more mean than it is. This condition forces people to be suspicious of others unlike themselves.⁶⁹⁹ The films teach the young what to expect and normalizing torture in today’s already troubled political climate is dangerous, but filmmakers continue to heighten their reign of terror on youth.

According to *Miss Representation*, “‘ratings creep’ shows that movie ratings categories contain more violence, sex, and profanity than a decade ago.” Despite warnings about increased violence from the American Medical Association, The National Institute of Mental Health, the American Psychological Association, the Centers for Disease Control and

⁶⁹⁸ Henry A. Giroux. “Animating Youth: The Disnification of Children’s Culture.” *Socialist Review* 24:3 (1995), p. 23-55.
<http://www.henryagiroux.com.html>.

⁶⁹⁹ Jeremy Earp. *The Mean World Syndrome: Media Violence and the Cultivation of Fear*. DVD. (Northampton MA: Media Education Foundation, 2010).

Prevention, the Surgeon General, and the Federal Communications Commission itself, no policy changes have occurred.⁷⁰⁰ And it is doubtful that they will; meanwhile, our children are being exposed to deeper levels of violence at younger and younger ages.

Things are getting substantially worse but they've always been bad. Just think of Peter Pan chastising the mermaids for their treatment of a visiting Wendy as one responds to his accusation: "We were only trying to drown her!"⁷⁰¹ Comparing the 45 highest-grossing animated films since 1937 found: "Cartoon characters die 2.5 times as often as characters in adult dramas, and they are frequently killed in brutal, dramatic fashion. Animated characters are also three times more likely to be murdered than characters in films for adults...Villains die most often by falling, while friends and family members die near the beginning of the film, often in an animal attack. In fact, parents die five times more often in children's films than in adult dramas."⁷⁰² Since violence levels in children's animated movies can be "just as horrific as any R-rated film for adults," one would think the powers that be would be protecting youth, but that simply is not the case.⁷⁰³

A year-long Federal Trade Commission investigation found that movie studios routinely market violent films to younger audiences than they are rated for. And the same is true of electronic games and music, even when their rating is for

⁷⁰⁰ Jennifer Siebel Newsom. *Miss Representation*. DVD. Perf. Jean Kilbourne, Katie Couric, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Geena Davis, Malkia Cyril (San Francisco: Girls' Club Entertainment, 2011).

⁷⁰¹ See the YouTube, "Peter Pan Mermaid Lagoon Scene."

⁷⁰² Josh Elliott. "Kids' cartoons are 'hotbeds of murder and mayhem': Study." CTV News. Dec. 16, 2014. <http://www.ctvnews.ca.html>.

⁷⁰³ Elliott.

mature audiences. This is frustrating for parents but it also makes ratings guidelines ineffective. The investigation found that “media violence is not the sole cause or even the most important contributing factor to violent acts committed by children” but noted that “a majority of research on this subject found ‘a high correlation between exposure to media violence and aggressive, at times, violent behavior.’”⁷⁰⁴

As PG-13 films are marketed to kids 11 and younger, and violent R-rated films are advertised during teen TV shows and in magazines like “Marvel Comics,” “Teen,” and “YM,” teens are welcomed into theaters (which often do not enforce the age-based rating system policy); often related to the films of the day, mature-rated video games, too, are consistently advertised to those younger than 17 years old.⁷⁰⁵ Watch out for DVD versions of films as well. On the (ridiculously!) PG-rated *Coraline* DVD, 9 (which is rated PG-13 for “violence and scary images”) is the preview, during which the audience sees prison garb, what looks like a baby of their kind being abducted, and a character whose missing eye is stitched over with a patch. We hear the words: “After our world ended, their mission began [to protect the future, because, you know, life goes on with or without eyes].” Produced by Tim Burton and others, this apocalyptic film gives a glimpse of war-torn land and bombed out buildings even in its preview. Before the preview runs, the screen shows: “The following preview has been approved for ALL AUDIENCES by the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc.” And expect ads for the military not only at the theater but on home media. One clever trick used by advertisers

⁷⁰⁴ Gene Bedley. “FTC Finds Hollywood Aims Violence at Kids.” *National Character Education Center*. November 1, 2000.
<http://www.ethicsusa.org.html>.

⁷⁰⁵ Bedley.

is an ad for the ways in which one can view films on multiple devices; on the DVD for *Despicable Me* (rated PG for “rude humor and mild action”) is an ad for Anywhere4U.com which includes scenes of Matt Damon engaged in heavy war action in the R-rated film, *Green Zone*, and the explosive PG-13 rated *Fast and Furious*.⁷⁰⁶ And don’t expect the film version of your child’s favorite book to be the same as the written version. Take, for instance, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, which got a PG rating, where an angry child kicks a hamster ball – with hamster inside – down the stairs, which did not occur in the book version.⁷⁰⁷

Not that G-rated films necessarily contain what one would think of as G-rated content, but it appears as though G-rated films are practically disappearing. “From 1995 to 2010, a typical year saw 15 to 20 G-rated films released and shown. But in two of the past three years there were just nine G movies. And this year? [2013] More than 250 feature films have been released, and so far only one – *Monsters University* – is G-rated.”⁷⁰⁸ PG and PG-13 releases are more profitable because they pull audiences in from the extremes of ratings and don’t ostracize adults, teens, and preteens.⁷⁰⁹ While *Despicable Me* is rated PG “for rude humor and mild action,” the film is full of violence, weapons, and gore, such as when Edith closes herself in an Iron Maiden and what looks like blood flows out from the bottom; while this substance turns out to be from a punctured juice box, some viewers might be upset, not to mention the

⁷⁰⁶ From the author’s personal experience.

⁷⁰⁷ Lynn Smith. “Morals Weigh Down the Magic of ‘Indian in the Cupboard.’” *The Los Angeles Times*. July 20, 1995. <http://www.articles.latimes.com.html>.

⁷⁰⁸ James H. Burnett III. “Rated G (Argh!)/G (as in gone): A G-Rating is now seen as the kiss of death for movies, so it’s vanishing.” *Tampa Bay Times*, PopTalk. Wednesday, July 31, 2013.

⁷⁰⁹ Burnett.

orphans being kept in a “Box of Shame” for not earning enough money for their headmistress. Or take *The Incredibles*’ (rated PG “for action violence”) incredible number of fight scenes involving child characters, that there’s a burning effigy in the film, that Mr. Incredible is led to believe that his wife and children have perished, and that Mr. Incredible is electrically shocked while being interrogated; the film later shows the entire family on the same rack possibly awaiting the same fate.⁷¹⁰ Creators act as if the addition of adult material is a clever way of entertaining the adults in the audience – and that happens to be true – but it is also a way of getting children interested in that material. Intertextuality is influencing one text (book, film, etc.) with another; an example of this is when a *Monsters, Inc.* character uses similar language as during the *Marathon Man* torture scene. That children’s films from PG-13 down, including G-rated, so regularly use these disturbing images is cause for concern, but it gets worse.

PG-13 films actually have more gun violence than R-rated movies and research shows that watching violence in films makes viewers less compassionate and more aggressive; even seeing a gun “tends to make people more aggressive.”⁷¹¹ In fact, “the amount of violence in films has more than doubled since 1950.” In 1985 – the same year the M.P.A.A. debuted – G, PG, and PG-13 films had no gun violence; in 2009, gun violence in PG-13 films was as high as in R-rated films; in 2012, gun violence in PG-13 films **exceeded** that of R-rated films. Violent media increases aggressive behavior and violent

⁷¹⁰ Please see <http://www.scholarcommons.usf.edu.html> for my thesis on the topic: “Monsters Under the Bed: An Analysis of Torture in Three Pixar Films.” University of South Florida, 2013.

⁷¹¹ Nancy Shute. “Movies Rated PG-13 Feature The Most Gun Violence.” *National Public Radio*. November 11, 2013. <http://www.npr.org.html>.

thoughts, and it also “numbs people to the pain and suffering of others.”⁷¹² No one knows the lasting effects of violent media on the human psyche – but ask any adult and they will recall in vivid detail the first time they saw something violent on a screen.

Because the M.P.A.A.’s use of the phrases “thematic elements” and “action” are murky, there are a number of other websites willing to share in-depth analyses of content. Some of these are religious based, such as The Dove Foundation and Movieguide.org. There are others: Parental Guide, Parent Previews, Kids In Mind, and Common Sense Media, the latter offering resources for those who wish to become more media savvy.⁷¹³ IMDb has a “parents guide” link. But be careful because some family movie content sites can be offensive. For example, look on “Movie Guide: The Family Guide to Movies and Entertainment,” and read their review of the film *Kinky Boots* (2005, PG-13). From calling the film’s characters “sexual deviants” to writing “the movie is also totally flawed by its abhorrent attempts to promote the vile homosexual agenda of ‘transgender politics,’” these sentiments are highly opinionated, seem anything but family-oriented or Christian, and encourage hate between groups; indeed, this type of review encourages homophobia and does nothing to end violence against the GSD (Gender and Sexual Diversities) community.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹² Nancy Shute. “Movies Rated PG-13 Feature The Most Gun Violence.” *National Public Radio*. November 11, 2013. <http://www.npr.org.html>.

⁷¹³ John Serba. “What to do when the MPAA ratings fail you.” *MLive Media Group*. July 12, 2012. <http://www.mlivemediagroup.com.html>.

⁷¹⁴ Let’s pause for a moment to think of institutional religion and militarism: If you tell people that sex is bad and the only way to find salvation is through a mere human who represents God, you are always guaranteed customers; further, if you tell your congregation that being gay is bad, you

In addition to films becoming more violent, there is a lack of female leads: “Between 1937 and 2005 there were only 13 female protagonists in animated movies. All of them except 1 had the aspiration of finding romance.”⁷¹⁵ In addition, “In G-rated movies, the female characters are just as likely to be wearing sexually revealing clothing as in R-rated movies.”⁷¹⁶ Bringing children to films which encourage objectification of girls and women reinforces the notion that women are only valued for their physical appearance and this affects the development of both girls and boys. The adult world continues the trend: “The average number of news stories about women and girls is less than 20%.”⁷¹⁷ This symbolic annihilation of women, girls, immigrants,⁷¹⁸ people of color, etc. makes for an uncomfortable situation as these groups question their role in the culture.

Racism is an interesting part of the problem because you can find a number of websites with articles about racism in classic kids’ films but rarely is the conversation directed to current films and the racist propaganda which continues. And few seem to notice the extent to which this is part of our lives.

are guaranteed future generations you can tax. When films choose to portray heterosexuality rather than the rainbow of sexual diversity, this feeds into the idea of “protecting the family back home,” often part of the march to war.

⁷¹⁵ Jennifer Siebel Newsom. *Miss Representation*. DVD. Perf. Jean Kilbourne, Katie Couric, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Geena Davis, Malkia Cyril (San Francisco: Girls’ Club Entertainment, 2011).

⁷¹⁶ Newsom.

⁷¹⁷ Newsom.

⁷¹⁸ If you object to people from other countries coming here, ask where your own relatives originated and check out Aviva Chomsky’s book *They Take Our Jobs!: And 20 Other Myths About Immigration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

Avoiding the obvious has real-life consequences. According to Southern Poverty Law Center, there are (in the year 2015) 784 active hate groups in the United States: Neo-Nazi 142; Racist Skinhead 119; White Nationalist 115; Black Separatist 113; KKK 72; Neo-Confederate 37; Christian Identity 21; and Anti-LGBT/other 165. Surely media which segregates people contributes to violence against these populations.

Unfair representation is wrong and so is the intentional cruelty which has been introduced to the child's world. This is presented in a number of ways, including degradation and distortion of women, animals, corpses, children, the disabled, the elderly, the gender ambiguous, the adorable or kind, and basically anybody who is helpless or innocent. This warping or perversion extends to various creatures who often fill in for actual humans – using robots, cyborgs, ogres, any number of household items like toasters and toys from a bygone era, animals, and a snowman – who are the ones injured. This is fortuitous because they can generally bounce back to life unscathed – and, after all, even though they **appear** to be intelligent, caring beings, they are not real. At the same time, there is a proliferation of occultism – vampires, zombies, wizards and the like – which allows for magical spells to make everything okay by the film's end. Of course, this sort of thing has long existed in the handsome prince's kiss. Well beyond threatening poses, tones, or words such as "I'm gonna kill you" or "You're gonna die" lurks the lure of the arena, barbaric entertainment in the form of coliseum-like wrestling and fight clubs even for kids. This idea that children can die from a malicious battle often involves revenge, vengeance, and or the retribution of the tormented. The minions are not children but they are small, cute, and in need of assistance. Be mindful of this when you watch one of the new *Minions* movie trailers which shows them having fun in a torture chamber. Good times.

Keep in mind that these unequal depictions and the violence component therein are not just viewed in the United States. “Disney alone is a \$37.8 billion per year...worldwide distributor of a particular kind of cultural politics...a teaching machine that not only exerts influence over consumers but also wages an aggressive campaign to peddle its political and cultural influence in the United States and overseas.”⁷¹⁹ What do children – and the adults in their lives – the world over think of the United States when one of their favorite characters is violated during their entertainment? Hypermilitarism and other problematic subject matter is now everyday fare in most G and PG rated films. While categorization of the latest fads in kids’ films follows, crossover occurs; that is, some references could fit in multiple categories (i.e., a scene could be both racist and sexist). This work will present only one or two example films from most of the top production companies, resulting in over twenty G and PG rated films which indicate troubling themes one would not expect to find in children’s movies. It is hoped that once you are given prime instances, you will begin to spot examples and alert others.

Please remember as you read the descriptions of these films that they are **all** G and PG rated. Here are the definitions of those categories directly from the Motion Picture Association of America’s website: “G – General Audiences. All Ages Admitted. A G-rated motion picture contains nothing in theme, language, nudity, sex, violence or other matters that, in the view of the Rating Board, would offend parents whose younger children view the motion picture. The G rating is not a ‘certificate of approval,’ nor does it signify a ‘children’s’ motion picture. [This is great CYA language!] Some snippets of

⁷¹⁹ Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock. *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), xiv.

language may go beyond polite conversation but they are common everyday expressions. No stronger words are present in G-rated motion pictures. **Depictions of violence are minimal.** No nudity, sex scenes or drug use are present in the motion picture. PG – Parental Guidance Suggested. Some Material May Not Be Suitable For Children. A PG-rated motion picture should be investigated by parents before they let their younger children attend. [Who has time for this in today's frenetic world? Why isn't there some board which could do this for us? Oh, wait...] The PG rating indicates, in the view of the Rating Board, that parents may consider some material unsuitable for their children, and parents should make that decision. The more mature themes in some PG-rated motion pictures may call for parental guidance. There may be some profanity and some depictions of violence or brief nudity. But these elements are **not deemed** so **intense** as to require that parents be strongly cautioned beyond the suggestion of parental guidance. There is no drug use content in a PG-rated motion picture.” The other ratings are PG-13 – Parents Strongly Cautioned. Some Material May Be Inappropriate For Children Under 13; R – Restricted. Children Under 17 Require Accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian; and NC-17 – No One 17 and Under Admitted. Clearly, the M.P.A.A. is a censorship force against alternative sexuality and pretty much any difference apart from white, conservative, middle class ideologies which has no problem at all with **extensive violence** in children's films. Sure, there won't be much in the way of drug use, profanity, or nudity in these films, but death, torture, militarism, racism, sexism, animal abuse, and general mean-spiritedness continue within a system pretending to be guardians of children's welfare.

THE LEGO MOVIE (Village Roadshow Pictures, Lego System A/S, Vertigo Entertainment, Animal Logic, Warner; PG

for “mild action and rude humor,” 2014): This film is surprising in that its plot is as entertaining as the brilliant visuals but there are problematic moments.

Torture:

For all its sagacity and one of the most clever endings a children’s film has ever had, the film is filled to the brim with a particularly cruel form of torture wherein the bad guy tortures his minion’s parents – by the minion’s own hand. He tries to stop this but the parents are eventually seen slimed with stickiness and seemingly permanently frozen; although the film presents the substance used as Krazy Glue, this seems a reference to one of the new less-than-lethal weapons the U.S. is using in distant lands. *The Lego Movie* is rated PG for “mild action and rude humor,” but the torture of parents in front of their grown child being used to coerce the child is a real-life torture technique and makes for an excruciatingly long scene which seems well beyond “mild action.”

Gender Policing and Bashing:

The film portrays *Harry Potter*’s Dumbledore with an ultra-high voice. Is this because J.K. Rowling said after finishing the series that the character is gay? The character in the original films did not have a high voice and there seems no other reason for the aberration.

MONSTERS, INC. (Pixar, G, 2001): This film started our obsession with all things Pixar with its single-eye and multiple-eye characters flocking to grapple with the human child lost in a monster world. As such, we are treated to “Stalk/Don’t Stalk” signs, teeth for grills on cars, and tons of slapstick humor rarely seen outside of *The Three Stooges* films, yet this masks horror

film technique, and the inclusion of torture and interrogation by the state-run public utility company in “Monstropolis.”

Torture:

There are four torture scenes in this film. It is notable that we see the visible results of torture in the film as well. When bad guy, Randall’s, assistant, Fungus, ends up in the scream extractor we see his swollen lips, then he gasps for air and passes out on the floor. Celia and her Medusa snake hair have been detained and interrogated and after the fact we see that she is bruised and both she and her snake locks are wearing neck braces. We also see the results of a decontamination process on George as he’s pinned down. He has been shaved and showered and ends up naked and embarrassed and covers his genital area. He screams when a Band-Aid is ripped roughly from him and we see a wound from the procedure. George experiences PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) from his state-sponsored abuse. Another monster is attacked and the audience hears *Psycho* violins and screaming. Someone says, “Halt! Hold him down!” and we hear a dentist drill and wild screaming. In a reference to *Scarface*’s “Say hello to my little friend,” Randall says to Mikey, “Say hello to the scream extractor.” As Mikey’s mouth is drawn open forcibly, adults in the audience will surely think of *Marathon Man*’s dentist torture scene. *Monsters, Inc.* even has two spots in the film where tools commonly used to inflict pain hang on pegboards, one of which is directly outside the room where torture is to occur. No characters use or attempt to use these tools but it is worth noting that they are prominently featured by full shots several times just outside the torture room before and after torture occurs and in a later place during a chase scene. Remember that these representations are intentionally included and that they do not simply appear without determined design.

Places and Spaces for Torture:

In the *Monsters, Inc.* torture room itself, deep within the recesses of the state-sponsored utility company, there is a separate chair with restraint bar and shackles – the holes cut out of the chair’s seat one assumes are for the unintentional release of bodily fluids, as seen in death penalty electric chairs. The secret scream extractor is meant to be forced into an uncooperative individual in order to extract their screams or to gain forced information, both for corporate/state profit, and it comes equipped with a control panel for using the aforementioned. That this space is kept from the view of employees and the public indicates its secretive nature and implies that it exists for unscrupulous reasons. The fact that areas where torture is held are already clearly established before the violence begins shows the deliberate nature of these settings. In addition to *Monsters, Inc.*, *The Incredibles*, *Toy Story 3*, and *The Lego Movie* have hidden, separate torture rooms with chairs and other accoutrement waiting behind the scenes for use against purported perpetrators. That there exist spaces reserved specifically for procedural torture means that planning and time and resources have been invested by both characters and institutions and entities – and by those who design the films.

Using corporate power and state control to position torture, the film has three characters who end up in the torture chair: Mickey by Randall, hoping to extract information, as Mikey begs him to stop and offers a bribe to assistant Fungus; Fungus, Randall’s assistant, who ends up in the chair accidentally as part of a just desserts trope; and Boo, the toddler, who is only capable of speaking a few words: “Kitty,” her name for Sullivan – used when she is crying out for him to rescue her from the abusive situation – and “No!” when she is

in the torture chair and is about to be tortured. Drills are possibly used on characters, potential torture devices hang on the walls in two separate scenes, and decontamination procedures are part of the fun.⁷²⁰

Animal Abuse:

Randall is beaten with a shovel because humans think he is an alligator.

State/Military Control:

Security measures not unlike those featured in our fear-based, terrorist-laden media are in force: SWAT rappelling troops burst in through windows, there are siren sounds, cameras, and C.D.A. (Child Detection Agency) vehicles in the pretend land. The latter resemble militaristic personnel carriers (known as “silent death” in countries where they are used). In addition, parts of the city are blocked off in an attempt to capture the child loose in their world. The team sent in for decontamination procedures screw down the human child’s sock and it is exploded in the same way the real world handles possible bombs.

Child Endangerment:

A character is made to think that little Boo is inside a machine where she is being crushed, rolled over, and sent through a guillotine. Plus, the audience is treated to sounds of children screaming from behind the doors in the factory which lead to kids’ bedrooms.

⁷²⁰ Again, please see <http://www.scholarcommons.usf.edu.html> for an in-depth analysis of the aforementioned films: “Monsters Under the Bed: An Analysis of Torture in Three Pixar Films.” University of South Florida, 2013.

Child as Monster:

In a world reversed, little Boo is demonized as the monster loose in an otherwise ordered world. This enables filmmakers to make fun of all things children – that children are disgusting, uncontrollable creatures who should be feared. Boo spends most of the film running, whimpering, and scared out of her wits, yet it is she who ends up attacking Randall in order to save Sulley's life. There is a little kid symbol on the emergency button in the factory. There are the unforgettable words of the crab-like boss, Mr. Waternoose, in charge of the utility: "There is nothing more toxic, more deadly, than a human child. A single touch could kill you."

The uses of torture in Corporate (*Monsters, Inc.*), Prison/Camp (*Toy Story 3*), and Spy Thrillers (*The Incredibles*) are commonly seen in films for more mature audiences, and they are increasingly seen in G and PG rated films. Keep in mind that *Monsters, Inc.* and *Toy Story 3* are rated G so there's no warning of the content contained within and *The Incredibles'* PG rating is simply for "action violence," but none of the film ratings warn against torture scenes.

TREASURE PLANET (Walt Disney Pictures & Walt Disney Feature Animation, PG for "adventure action and peril," 2002): This film was among the earliest big films to use a cyborg, body malformations like one-eyed and multiple-eyed characters, and bug-like creatures. Taken from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, the only real difference is that it takes place in space.

Sexism:

Disney did present a strong female lead with Captain Amelia but, of course, she gets hurt and must be rescued by a male. Someone refers to women as “floozy” in the film.

Racism:

A play on words is included, even though it is insulting to the United Negro College Fund: The forgetful robot says, “A mind is a terrible thing to lose (instead of waste).”

Child as Monster:

Children are seen as little monsters beginning with Jim, the teenager, being threatened with juvenile hall if he commits one more infraction; a policeman refers to young men like the Benbow Inn proprietor’s son as “losers.” One of the babies at the film’s end pulls on another baby’s ear and makes him cry. A child character is seen lashing out her tongue to grab Delbert’s food, while another is gulping down a big bowl of wriggling, very much alive Zorellian jelly worms.

Animal Abuse:

And speaking of animals, an eyeball pops up to the top of the soup and the cyborg eats it. Part of the music during the final celebration comes from the octopus’ foot pumping on some kind of animal and squeezing another like some sort of accordion. It’s the little pet, Morph, who can break up and come back together like Flubber and morph into other objects, who gets used to great effect: he’s used as a tool at one point; he’s hit by a bad guy’s tail after he bites it trying to defend himself; and he’s even used as a bad guy and says, “I say we kill ’em all now!”

Body Parts:

These early body styles would be repeated by Disney and other film companies: Mr. Silver, the onboard cook and resident cyborg, is missing an arm, leg, and eye, which have been replaced by mechanisms serving similar yet nefarious purposes. Mr. Arrow is a stone-faced first mate. A character's head jumps off his body and we see that his head and the separated body are independent beings. An especially gross body reference occurs when Jim and the robot come across the now all-bones Captain Flint. Jim says, "Captain Flint." The robot responds: "In the flesh. Well, sort of, except for skin, organs, or anything that...that...that resembles flesh. That's not there." Gun-toting scalawags threatening one another with death and injury is good fare but nothing compared with what's come along since.

THE BOOK OF LIFE (Reel FX Creative Studios/20th Century Fox, PG for "mild action, rude humor, some thematic elements and brief scary images," 2014): There's something captivating about an Ed Hardy-like film which includes death as a part of life, especially given its colorful, enchanting visuals and the respect displayed for the sacred Mexican festival known as "Day of the Dead," but here's another film which features negative imagery.

Animal Abuse:

A butcher sharpens blades while we see drawings on the wall of pigs boiling in pots lit with flames, and there are bullfighting scenes as well.

Body Parts:

The audience is treated to a volunteer soldier's arms falling off, a dead character's body is shown separated from his head, and there are battle scenes.

The film offers scary underworld scenes, too, but of all the films which feature missing body parts and general barbarism, perhaps *Rango* takes the lead.

RANGO (Nickelodeon, GK Films, Paramount, Blind Wink, PG for "rude humor, language, action and smoking," 2011): This film could be a refreshing visit to old westerns, if it weren't for its homage to the racist sensibilities those old films contained.

Body Parts:

Rango presents so many problematic images, it's hard to know where to begin, but perhaps the most disturbing are the chicken character who has an arrow sticking through his right eye exiting out of the back of his head (he stays like this through the entire film and only brief mention is made of his condition in a joking way), and the armadillo who asks for help after he has been run over by a vehicle, the entire middle of his body hollowed out and tire-shaped, nearly crushed to the asphalt. Sadistic language and behavior fills the film.

Rango tells the townspeople: "I don't want any of you hayseeds getting your bodily fluids on my boots!" Referring to the town he's supposedly from, he explains: "We kill a man before breakfast just to work up an appetite. Then we salt him, then we pepper him. Then we braise him in clarified butter. And then we eat him...Hell, I seen things make a grown man lose control of his glandular functions." He says he witnessed someone being killed when a thermos of pure grain alcohol

ignited leaving charcoal “and a high-pitched squeal,” the sound of which he imitates.

There’s plenty of talk around the campfire as characters try to out-do one another. One says he coughed up a Dalmatian once. Another says: “I coughed up a whole tribe of pygmies!” [Pygmies is a term with pejorative connotations.] Stepping it up a notch competitively, one says: “I found a human spinal column in my fecal matter once!” There is mean-spirited language such as when two men are fighting and one tells the other, “I’m gonna skin you alive, boy! I’m gonna whip you like a red-headed stepchild.” Rango’s tongue catches a dragonfly as he walks along slowly and the audience hears crunching as he’s eating it. An old woman is accidentally punched by Rango and she’s out cold. He apologizes and tries to revive her but her head and arm fall limp. He walks away from her, having stolen her jar. When Miss Beans is squeezed by the snake, he tells her to do what she’s told or he’ll, “squeeze them pretty brown eyes out of [her] skull!”

Animal Abuse:

There’s more denigration of animals. The Mariachi band, commonly used whenever there’s a Mexican character in children’s films, is made up of owls and they sing of Rango: “Pay close attention. He won’t be here long. As the birds pluck his eyes, the sun bleaches his bones, see his entrails get scattered, watch him lose his cajones.” As snakes and bats are vilified, *Armadillidium vulgare* (a.k.a., pill bugs, doodle bugs, and roly polies) are used as golf balls and we hear loud whacks as they are hit by the clubs. A hawk dies when the town’s water tank topples on top of him and his legs are sticking up; the little girl – who resembles Tuesday from “The Adaams Family” –

says, “Shoot, I say we cook that thing up” as she pokes at its upper leg.

Death Language and Action/Injury:

Death action and language are featured heavily. Rango introduces a scene from a play he’s written: “The princess prepares to take her own life.” The princess is the naked top half of a Barbie whose head is missing along with one arm. Imitating a woman’s voice, he says, “It is far better to nourish worms than to live without love.” He pushes what is supposed to be the poisoned chalice toward her. There’s a shot of a dead, leg-missing cockroach who is supposed to be the princess’ gravely ill father. Rango plays the role of the princess-saving hero and he refers to her as “the emotionally unstable maiden.” Rango enacts scenes he could see himself performing – they all involve him injuring himself – pretending a python is strangling him (with his own tail wrapped around his throat), etc. then pretending the half Barbie is his romantic mate. He asks her: “Are those real?” He fondles the inside of her neck which has a hole in it where the head should be connected.

At one point, a character is found dead in the desert and his eyelids are closed by the group but, when someone suggests he be buried, another proposes that the “birds gotta eat, too.” Miss Beans asks Rango if he’s ever had someone special in his life and he says yes, but that she “couldn’t keep her head,” referring to the in-pieces Barbie he’d had in his aquarium. When the older bad guy decides to summon his family, they rise up from their graves. Someone says they’ll serve soup tonight as machine guns are used against the good guys and we know that this is because fragments of meat are commonly used in soups. On the previous sheriff’s headstone is his name, “R.I.P.,” and “Thursday – Saturday,” indicating either that he had a short

life or a long, drawn out death. People in the crowd think Rango's presence is affecting the town negatively and say, "It's the newcomer," "It's his fault," "He's a witch" and "Burn him!" In another angry crowd scene, people make suggestions for the criminals: "Hang him til his head turns blue!" "Nail them to the courthouse!" and "Get them out here so we can cut off their giblets!" Rango tries to dissuade the little girl in the town from coming along to catch the criminals and she opens her suitcase and grabs two big guns inside; aiming them upward at him, she asks, "Can I gut shoot someone?" When the bank has been robbed, Rango says: "This is a crime scene now. Secure the perimeter, dust for prints, check for fibers, scan for DNA."

Rango tells the townspeople that without law and order, the town will be in trouble: "It starts slow, like a fungus. Somebody says a cross word. Accusations start flying. Neighbor turns on neighbor. Pretty soon, we're eating our children! And the cats and dogs are getting together to create all sorts of unnatural mutant aberrations!" Rango is defeated by the snake, throws his sheriff badge into the graveyard, and walks into traffic in a suicidal way. During a fight, Bad Bill draws a knife and says, "If I see your face in this town again, I'm gonna slice it off and use it to wipe my unmentionables." In response, Rango accidentally catches Bad Bill on fire. Early in the film, Miss Bones tells Rango he's eating her father's ashes. He asks if it's his remains and she responds, "No, his ashes. He loved to smoke. They never found the body." Rango talks about having lived off his own juices inside a horse carcass and offers a recipe for cooking a human.

Woman as Demon:

There are the now standard jokes against women, sometimes by women. When a dramatic troupe is nearby, a

character exclaims, “Thespians! That’s illegal in seven states!” We take it that he’s confusing this word with lesbians. Rango says Rattlesnake Jake is his brother and is questioned about this. He says, “Momma had an active social life.” When Beans and Angelique see each other, they engage in name-calling: “tart,” “floozy,” and “trollop.”

Racism:

A Native American character seems to be intentionally lifted from a racist Western film from the 1950s, his speech stilted and of few words, his facial expressions stoic. When Rango deputizes him, he says, “As my deputy, you’ll be in charge of all tracking and finding of villains, utilizing your well-developed **Injun**-uity, no offense taken [as opposed to no offense meant].” Rango asks in which direction the posse should head: “You want to sniff the air or commune with a buffalo or something?” Later, someone asks, “What’s that dad-gum Indian doing?” The Native American character, Wounded Bird, is murdered by the gun-wielding snake.

Disability:

In addition to the arrow sticking through the character’s head the entire film, disability is also made fun of in the film, such as when Rango imitates townspeople when trying to blend in – this includes parroting a character who’s missing a leg.

Child Abuse:

Child abuse is scattered throughout the film. At one point, a child comes up behind Rango and says, “Excuse me.” He’s startled and turns, cocks his gun, and says, “I will blow that ugly right off your face!” The gun is pointed at the child’s head. He hands the gun over to the child, who points it at his

own face. He looks into the barrel and says, “There’s a bullet in there.” The gun is pointing at his eye, then he puts the gun into his mouth and no adults in the scene notice or say anything to stop him from possibly hurting himself. Adult and underage children are slapped and insulted by parents in the film; one dad who’s seen combing his son’s hair tells the child, “Be still. You gotta look presentable to meet your maker.”

FROZEN (Walt Disney Animation Studios, PG for “some action and mild rude humor,” 2013) employs a new, winter related theme: In 2014, this Hans Christian Andersen inspired film became the top selling film in Disney’s history. Using a usually inanimate object like a snowperson has its advantages when filmmakers wish to abuse a character but a problem comes for viewers when personality and sentimentality is added and they, therefore, feel attached to that character.

Body Parts:

Enter adorable Olaf, snowman of all snowmen, who amuses between otherwise fairly standard plots, just like the squirrel does in the *Ice Age* series; the difference is that the squirrel is abused by coincidental circumstances, whereas Olaf seems injured at every turn. Out of fear when first seeing him, Princess Anna – the character animators chose to show as boy-crazy – kicks his head off, then she throws his head at his body, after saying, “Ew, ew, the body!” His head lands on him upside down. She goes to put his carrot nose on, but it accidentally gets shoved through his head, coming out of the back side of his head. Then a guy takes Olaf’s stick arm off and bends it. Olaf gets impaled by walking into an icicle and his bottom falls off. He even says, “I’ve been impaled.” And he giggles about it. When Olaf battles the Queen’s Abominable Snowman, he warns, “Heads up...Watch out for my butt!” as the monster is

throwing separate pieces of him at the others. After being chased, Olaf's middle body part is at the bottom. Then Olaf is kicked over the cliff's edge and his pieces bounce roughly; the same happens to the guide who gets bashed against the cliff rocks. After they land, Olaf says, "I can't feel my legs" twice and Kristoff says, "Those are MY legs!" Olaf asks him to grab his butt, meaning his bottom half. When Anna asks how the guide's head is, he says he has a "thick skull," which prompts Olaf to say, "I don't have a skull or bones." At one point, Olaf holds his own head high in his hands so he can hear a conversation. In a switch from Olaf, the Abominable Snowman has his leg sliced off, he stumbles and falls.

But back to Olaf: He nearly throws his own stick arm into the fire he's building to save Anna, almost melting in the process, then the wind outside blows him apart. Once reconstituted, he says, "Hands down, this is the best day of my life." His arm falls off and he begins melting, so he adds, "And possibly the last." Lastly, Olaf sneezes and his nose blows off; at first, we see it fly into the reindeer's mouth and we think he's eaten it but he gives it back to Olaf. These actions couldn't be done to a person, even an animated one as easily, so Olaf provides a valuable service to animators in presenting cruelty. What happens to Olaf and the Abominable Snowman seem to be a type of brutality which brings only laughter. But if they are actual beings, are we not engaging in complicitous cruel behavior by going along?

Animal Abuse:

Some may notice the admittedly inappropriate references/actions toward animals, such as presenting wolves as vicious and Anna throwing a fireball at them, and when a

reference is made to Kristoff's "thing for the reindeer that's a little outside of nature's laws."

Disability/Body Type:

Computer animation advancement makes using the non-human (or dehumanized) a substitute for abusing the alive – human or non-human alike. In this way, children are introduced to brutality before adulthood. Bodies play an important role in how people are perceived. They can be shown as unattractive, which makes us question their integrity or motives, as we've seen in *Aladdin's* depictions of the Arabic world or in the not especially attractive and mean little girl in the dentist office in *Finding Nemo*. We already know that female characters are generally drawn as sexy or hag-like (see Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*) and that Disney princesses all have the same profile, whereas male characters have more varied looks, but what does it say when a female character is presented as unattractive, then transforms into an ideal standardized form of beauty when the upsetting plot turns around?

NANNY McPHEE (StudioCanal, MGM, Working Title Films, Three Strange Angels, Nanny McPhee Productions, PG for "mild thematic elements, some rude humor and brief language," 2005 UK, 2006 US): The film was adapted from a favorite British children's story, yet there are significant differences between the two; filmmakers heightened the children's actions – in the kitchen scene, the children have bashed Cook on the head and tied her up and they're possibly making a bomb – but violence was not as pronounced in the book versions (the *Nurse Matilda* series). Also, in the books, the mother was very much alive but it is common in children's literature and film to erase this figure in order to solicit sympathy from audiences and so that child characters can get away with measures a mother

would not allow or greater violence, as seen in the *Home Alone* series.

Woman as Demon:

Nanny McPhee is presented as a witch, monstrous mother, and castrator as she wields her phallic stick.⁷²¹ That she becomes prettier (as if bushy eyebrows, moles/warts, dental problems, a large nose, a ruddy complexion, and having extra weight are necessary indicators of ugliness) and nicer as the children start to behave according to her wishes is certainly problematic because it presents only attractive women as capable of being nice and it erases her mean and abusive tactics. Close-ups of her moles and other supposed imperfections make audiences aware that, once again, a woman is presented as nothing more than a beauty pageant contestant, even though she is there to create order for a disordered family. Though the movie's motto is, "You'll learn to love her, warts and all," we aren't expected to love her this way but only once she is a pretty, young, nice version of herself.

On the DVD extras, the producer of the film states that the film crew did not change her appearance beyond what was originally in the books; this is not so. Many liberties were taken, including adding ones not mentioned by the author – in addition to the previously mentioned physical attributes, Nanny McPhee is a hundred pounds heavier at the film's beginning, she has elongated earlobes, she bears a low hairline which recedes slightly bit-by-bit as the film proceeds, and her hair changes

⁷²¹ Barbara Creed. *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 10, 106, *back cover*. This book analyzes the portrayal of the female in horror films, which are: archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, witch, possessed body, monstrous mother and castrator.

from wiry to smooth and shiny. Filmmakers encourage the notion that Nanny McPhee isn't changing in a literal sense, but it certainly is for viewers; she changes before our eyes and there's no denying this – it is not that she **seems** prettier as the children's behavior changes but that she **is** becoming prettier as they obey her vicious commands.

Mr. Brown seems terrified of the new nanny – as she pops in and out of his room at will and lies about it – but doesn't know how to get her out of their lives and seems too confounded and frazzled to do anything about the situation; and, clearly, he has no idea how to handle his own children either. To comply with the mean aunt's dictate, the former client at the funeral home which Mr. Brown tries to romance, Mrs. Quickly, appears more mean than the aunt and even Nanny McPhee because she not only tries to cozy up to the regal aunt for her money, she also destroys baby Agatha's rattle, the children's only reminder of their mother. This is the only part in the film where Nanny McPhee actually encourages the children's beastly behavior since they are trying to expel Mrs. Quickly from their lives.

Ageism/Disability:

Lady Adelaide, the family matriarch and Mr. Brown's deceased wife's aunt, controls the money in the family and so the family pretends to like her, but she is called "vile and vicious" and "blind as a bat" by the children behind her back – she confuses the children with their many pets, for example. Judgmental and cruel, her disabilities are made fun of in the film to the extent that we wonder if she is mean to others as a way of distancing herself from their criticisms. She is surprised when others are near because she did not see them coming and she's aware of her gait (in part due to her training as a lady) in

relation to people and objects around her as her eyes worsen: Once again, comedy comes at the expense of disability. Due to her poor eyesight, she has been tricked by the children into thinking Evangeline is one of the brood so they won't be separated when the aunt insists on taking one off for training – later, when Evangeline and Mr. Brown reconnect, she asks if this is incest. The film crosses a line here, as if an evil nanny and concepts surrounding death were not enough; introducing the word and idea of incest to young audiences seems appalling.

Mr. Brown's barrier is his fragile emotional state since his wife's passing; indeed, it seems he was not able to fulfill his traditional male role as breadwinner (though he works dusk until dawn, seven days per week) even before the wife died, so the character becomes a temporary mother figure. That he works in the "Midgewater and Sons" funeral parlor having conversations with corpses while applying their make-up can't be helping his already difficult situation of knowing he could be subjected to debtor's prison and that his many children could be taken away.

Classism/Sexism:

Like many Disney films which take place during times of nobility control, this Victorian era film takes advantage of archaic social rules to promote classism and sexist ideologies. As stated, Lady Adelaide's purse strings control the family so, although she is a female, she wields great power over the clan; further, as if to give her more status, filmmakers changed her from Aunt Adelaide in the books to Lady Adelaide in the film.

In addition, Mr. Brown, who is suffering from extreme melancholy, is stuck in his ineffective male role. Because he does not fit the traditional male role, he is subjected to suffering the same price women pay of being made to appear infantile

and in need of guarding; still, as if to redeem his masculinity, due to a misunderstanding because of the children's mischief, filmmakers make him seem like a sex maniac as he inadvertently attacks Mrs. Quickly for a few moments.

When Mr. Brown is finally reunited with the young woman both he and the children like, she is presented as the perfect bride. Evangeline is young, lovely, thin, and now educated; however, the Victorian age actually considered women of voluptuous size beautiful. Her only sense of worth will come from keeping herself in check and becoming the new Mrs. Brown. Even though Mr. Brown is not functioning according to society's rules, Evangeline must still do so.

Children as Monsters:

Portrayal of the children – through the eyes of the about-to-be former nanny – as methodical, scheming sociopaths who seem capable of eating the youngest sibling contributes to the children-as-monsters motif. The children tie up the cook, make a mess in the kitchen, and might be making a bomb – until Nanny McPhee comes to establish order by any means. Thus begins a tug-of-war between the new nanny and the kids which only gets worse and more intense.

While the patriarch of the family says the seven children are quite “bad,” are they really? On several occasions, the children lament not having enough time with their father and are annoyed by his obsession with finding a new wife, although they do not know the aunt's forcing him into marriage. The children's behavior – cutting heads off of dolls, putting worms in Mrs. Quickly's sandwich, pretending to be ill, etc. – is more annoying than horrible or dangerous. These are cries for attention because they've been missing their mother – and now their father. One scene shows young Christianna clasping her

father's trouser leg, hoping to keep him there; he tells her to remove herself from him.

Child Abuse/Endangerment:

That Nanny McPhee actually threatens the health and welfare of the children's infant sibling is quite disturbing; we really aren't sure if she will allow the baby to die or be severely injured in order to make the children buckle under. Before Nanny McPhee is seen as friend to the children, she makes it so the children – who are feigning illness – are stuck in bed and really aren't feeling well; in addition, they have to take swamp-looking medicine every hour as part of McPhee's retaliation against their behavior.

Time and space specifics of situated knowledges apply to many suspected and rejected groups, yet childhood endures constant markers; these complexities vary from era to era, but this group's identity seems to constantly be stigmatized: Just being a child implies some ridiculousness or criminal behavior, especially in today's world where viciousness has taken hold in the contemporary. So, child audiences gain a sense of dread as they are guided to accept subjugation – even in their entertainment – through adult characters which are incompetent and mean-spirited, willing to restrict children's movement and even catapult a baby into a pot of boiling water!

Death Language, Action, and Visuals:

The film represents death in creative visual ways in techniques similar to *Up*'s visualization of the man's partner dying and *Ice Age*'s using cave art to depict the lead character's family being killed: The father carries on a conversation with a corpse and it is not spoken of that the other two funeral home assistants sleep in coffins, nor is there mention of the displayed

taxidermied animal, a young bear, plus hunted heads, in the same way it barely registers that Gru's living room has stuffed animals of every variety in *Despicable Me*. That these visuals are not addressed by the film gives one the sense that death is commonplace but not worth mentioning. The only real language surrounding death in *Nanny McPhee* comes in the form of Mr. Brown speaking with his deceased wife as, for him, she sits in her favorite chair. As noted, one of the main differences between the book and film versions is that the mother is alive in the book; this deletion, of course, makes a Hollywood romance possible between Mr. Brown and Evangeline, one of the staff who's taken under the aunt's instruction and becomes a lady, theoretically then suitable for marrying Mr. Brown.

MONSTER HOUSE (Relativity Media, Image Movers, Amblin Entertainment, PG for "scary images and sequences, thematic elements, some crude humor and brief language," 2006): This film is among the most terrifying of all, but at least it was presented honestly as a horror film for a young audience, although this certainly shouldn't be shown to young children.

Bullying:

The source of the house's haunting turns out to be the disabled woman who's tormented her whole life and actually dies as a consequence of teasing. Gendered violence is prominent in film and increasingly in children's film. The woman is twice taunted in the film and struck by objects – tomatoes, eggs, rocks – and, the second time, she's had enough and tells the violent children she will "rip them to bits" and is wielding an axe. She dies as a result of this attack, her body falling into the pit of the house the couple are building, where she is covered with concrete.

The film does a good job presenting horror and mystery techniques – through frightening imagery, scary music, panning rapidly and unexpectedly, shots from inside the haunted house which make the house seem alive – but its thematic elements seem made for adults; further, the tension between understanding why the woman is behaving the way she is – which is, by the way, one of the saddest moments on film – and vilifying her is dynamic and terrifying. Constance is first taunted in a circus setting and the story is finally told toward the film's end when the children find photos of the happy couple in the basement, along with a sign leftover from her circus days, which says: "Constance, the Giantess." A cage with a metal heart lock is chained around its entrance. Opening it, they find Constance's form encased in concrete, her final resting place. At first, they think the husband had eaten her, but then they realize he's made a shrine devoted to her. The girl says, "Why would he build her a shrine if he murdered her?" DJ falls and is nose to nose with Constance and the concrete breaks exposing her smiling skeletal remains.

The neighbor, Mr. Nebbercracker, appears to die on top of one of the children. When he returns from the hospital, he recounts how he came to love Constance so much. He's a young man in the audience with other military men watching her perform. She's billed as being "The lady as big as a house" because she weighs 675 lbs. She's sitting on a stool, clearly afraid of the crowd, and a tomato is thrown which hits her on the shoulder, then another on her chest. There's the sound of children laughing. She gets up and starts screaming and reaching toward the crowd, then collapses, though she's still conscious. This shot of her transforms into her in the same pose but in a cage on wheels. Nebbercracker comes up to her and says hello, which scares her, but then he offers to take her away from this and she agrees. The next scene is him showing her the

land he's purchased to build a house for them. She's so happy, she picks him up and laughs with joy. This is the only time we see Constance happy in the film.

Rocks are thrown toward the house but close to her, so we aren't sure whether the mean kids behind the bushes are aiming for her or not, but she comes running toward the husband who's using an axe to tear apart her former cage. He asks if she's hurt and she says, "Yes, I'm hurt. Those criminals are attacking our house." It's Halloween and the kids are saying "trick or treat" so the husband tells her "they're just kids" to try to calm her. She returns, "No, it's my house and they're hurting me!" Just as he promises no harm will come to her as long as he's there (until later when he decides to use explosives against her), an egg hits her shoulder and bursts. She takes the axe from his hands as one of the kids calls her a "sucker," and she's swinging it and yelling, "You vandals!" While still throwing eggs at her, one says "Eat this!" She says, "You hooligans. I'll get you!" and she runs toward them. Her husband grabs the axe back and she loses her balance, tries to regain herself by grabbing the handle of the concrete machine, loses her grip, screams and falls into the pit which will become the basement and is covered with concrete.

Murder:

Mr. Nebbercracker tells the kids, "So I finished the house. She died but she didn't leave." When he decides the house containing her spirit must be destroyed, he calls her, "my sweet" to comfort her, then explains that they both knew this day would come because she's hurt people and he has to make it right. She, embodied in the house, starts attacking when she sees the dynamite he's pulled from his arm sling. Mr. Nebbercracker ends up giving the dynamite to DJ. Chowder

calls her a “shack” and an “outhouse” and is clobbering her with a dirt digger; finally, the explosives are put into the chimney and the house explodes. Her spirit dances with her husband for a few minutes and he says, “My dear” and “goodbye” as her spirit floats away. He cries and falls on his knees, clinging to the doorknob and a bit of wood, the only thing left from their life together. DJ tells him he’s sorry about his house and wife, “Your house-wife,” but he says “45 years. We’ve been trapped for 45 years. And now...we’re free!” He laughs like a person who’s endured stress for entirely too long. It turns out Mr. Nebbercracker was being mean to children who came by, especially on Halloween, in order to protect them from Constance who had become one with the house.

Militarism/Prison Terminology:

From using the term “Heat seeker!” to a child crawling military style across a lawn, there are several military references, as well as prison speak, such as when the police officer warns the children, “all three of you are going in the hole.”

Death Language and Action:

Filmmakers use a novel technique in presenting death language through a character playing video games: “You’re gonna die. You’re gonna die.” This is said as a video game screen shows a character chopping with an axe. The guy the children have come to for help is playing the video game and he says, “Did you see that? I just chopped off your head again. Your head’s rolling. You can’t even see it because your eyes are on your head.” There are other shots of the screen as we hear, “The steel of my blade is so cold.” The machine says, “Run coward” and an axe comes down on the character’s head and there is a blood fountain. “Ahh, look at that blood,” the

character says. Words appear on the screen as the Grim Reaper simultaneously says, "THOU ART DEAD." But even outside of the video game scene, we hear language such as "I'm a murderer," "his blood is on my hands," "it's going to be a bloodbath," "have fun getting killed," "you are dead," and "you killed a guy."

Child Endangerment:

One of the most disturbing parts of the film is how practically all characters are trapped in some way. A child is nearly hit by a car but the parents driving seem not to care. That DJ is left with a babysitter who is insulting and irresponsible while the parents are gone is upsetting but when the babysitter's boyfriend sadistically French kisses his stuffed animal, then pretends the stuffed animal is not breathing, then rips the stuffing out of it, we know that DJ is on his own. The children are not believed by the adults in their lives and a police officer even says to them: "I will shoot you." The children are roughly put into the back of a police cruiser once the police discover that they have cough medicine and one of the cops says, "They're gonna love you downtown, drug head." Explosives the kids run across in the haunted house are referred to as "so cool." When the children are drowning, Chowder calls for "Mommy!"

THE INCREDIBLES (Pixar, PG for "action violence," 2004): The film is filled with child endangerment, including danger to an infant. Children are struck in the face and legs by guards. There are also an inordinate amount of sexist moments in the movie, including men lying to their wives. 9/11 tropes are used like a plane bent on destruction flying into a large city and an effigy burned by a mob. This film proves itself to be not only pedagogical in the same way all kids' films are teaching tools

dictating children's viewpoints, but also as a way of teaching what may come.

Militarism:

The movie shows a new less-than-lethal weapon known as sticky foam which is dispersed with a sticky foam gun. As Mr. Incredible attempts to escape via a runway, wall-mounted guns fire sticky balls at him (us, because the viewer is seeing it through his eyes) until the screen turns black as the last sticky ball hits him in the face. Other examples of this can be seen in *The Lego Movie* and the freeze gun in *Despicable Me*. This is instructional since these weapons, created by Sandia National Labs and funded by the National Institute of Justice in hopes of using it for correctional applications and tested in law enforcement and prison scenarios, as well as being approved to assist in Operation United Shield, the Somalia Marine Corps mission, may end up being used in the U.S. for crowd control.⁷²² “[This] new type of weapon [helps] troops contend with urban environments in which militia fighters often [mix] with unarmed civilians (called Military Operations in Urban Terrain or M.O.U.T.).”⁷²³ The weapon is worn in a backpack cylinder and the idea is to “instantly immobilize someone with a heap of viscous bubbles” in order to pin down a person for crowd control rather than using rubber bullets, tear gas, and riot batons.⁷²⁴ During a demonstration on a U.S. soldier, General Anthony Zinni laughed because the serviceman looked like a dessert as the foam expanded to thirty times its stored volume.

⁷²² Steven H. Scott. “Sticky Foam As A Less-Than-Lethal Technology.” Sandia National Laboratory, Albuquerque NM.

<http://www.aquafoam.com/papers/Scott1.pdf.html>.

⁷²³ Gage McWeeny. “Weapons of Mass Reduction.” *Cabinet* magazine, Issue 22, “Insecurity.” Summer 2006. <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org.html>.

⁷²⁴ McWeeny.

⁷²⁵ As humorous as the cartoon-like effects might be, being stuck to the ground during a riot could cause a person to be trampled; moreover, if someone's face is covered by the sticky goo, suffocation could occur. Gage McWeeny recommends reading the U.S. Army's guide to crowd control called FM 3-19.15, *Civil Disturbance Operations* (Apr., 2005), in which four types of crowds are identified: Casual, Sighting, Agitated, and Mob-Like.

There are other less-than-lethals (or non-lethals and even pre-lethals, meaning temporarily incapacitated long enough for a follow-up strike to kill them). The 40 mm sponge grenade projectile is cost-effective in that it is fired from a classic grenade launcher and its deformable foam rubber nose and hard plastic body make it unlikely to actually kill. The blunt trauma from the projectile – which looks like a Nerf toy, by the way – is what incapacitates the victim. ⁷²⁶ While it is becoming impossible to distinguish between military and police forces busting into homes in the U.S. and invasions in other lands, there is a racial element to this.

The Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program's [JNLWP, under the U.S. Dept. of Defense; overseas by the U.S. Marines] website has photos of "identifiably non-American, and basically identifiably Middle Eastern, people and American soldiers, but it isn't clear if they're from real engagements or training exercises because the pictures are captionless – though they

⁷²⁵ Gage McWeeny. "Weapons of Mass Reduction." *Cabinet* magazine, Issue 22, "Insecurity." Summer 2006. <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org.html>.

⁷²⁶ Cyril Robbie, Nestor Nsiampa, and Alexander Papy. "Impact measurements of different 40 mm non-lethal sponge grenades." (Terminal Ballistics and Impact Physics) Royal Military Academy – Department of Weapons Systems and Ballistics, Brussels, Belgium. <http://www.proceedings.ndia.org.html>.

read as Iraq.” Another problem with these weapons, according to Amnesty International, is that, already, non-lethals like electro-shock devices (similar to tasers) are being used as torture devices in over fifty nations.⁷²⁷

Child Abuse/Endangerment:

Children are seen in essentially a warzone where the mother tells them the enemy will try to kill them: “Remember the bad guys on those shows you used to watch on Saturday mornings? Well, these guys are not like those guys. They won’t exercise restraint because you’re children. They will kill you if they get the chance.” The kids are presented as both threatened and threatening. The children are chased and the boy beaten. A woman’s baby is physically threatened when the city is attacked. The Incredibles’ baby, Jack-Jack, cries as he’s being lifted into the sky by Syndrome, away from his family. The baby, it turns out, is also a superhero and he ends up punching Syndrome. He is eventually cruelly threatened, with Syndrome saying, “This isn’t the end of it! I will get your son, eventually. I’ll get your son!” What seems even worse is when eccentric fashion designer, Edna Mode, is showing Elastigirl (Mrs. Incredible) the outfits she’s made for the family. The costumes are displayed by animatronic forms and are displayed under attack. The “baby” is crawling as flames engulf it, then four automatic machine guns fire repeatedly at the mock human which looks all too much like a real human baby. The other especially disturbing moment is when the mom and the older two kids are aboard the plane heading to the island. Although

⁷²⁷ Gage McWeeny. “Weapons of Mass Reduction.” *Cabinet* magazine, Issue 22, “Insecurity.” Summer 2006. <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org.html>. For more information on future weapons, check out retired Colonel John B. Alexander’s *Future War: Non-Lethal Weapons in Twenty-First-Century Warfare* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

the mother uses her body to rescue the children from approaching missiles, the plane's explosion is frighteningly realistic. Once on the ground, the son says, "We're dead! We're dead! We're still alive but we're dead!" Buddy (who wants to help Mr. Incredible as Incrediboy and later becomes Syndrome as an adult), the child super-hero wannabe, is ejected out of Mr. Incredible's car by Mr. Incredible and he lands on the pavement and grass. Mr. Incredible ignores this and dashes off to attend to a bus tour robbery.

Sadistic Language and Behavior:

Mr. Incredible is shown at his worst and not acting like his usual self. He even attempts to strangle a woman because she is Syndrome's assistant – he thinks his family has been killed and that she had something to do with that horrifying event. Earlier in the film, Mr. Incredible gets upset that his boss won't let him help someone who's being robbed, and the audience learns that Mr. Incredible needs anger management – when he loses his temper, he grabs his boss by the throat and throws him through four walls, resulting in a body cast and extensive hospitalization for the boss. There are shots of a high-speed police chase and shoot out between criminals and the cops, during which a submachine gun is seen close up. Mr. Incredible is called fat and supermodels are called stupid and selfish by Edna Mode. She further explains how a number of superheroes were killed because they were wearing capes and the audience sees several deaths; at the film's end, Syndrome is also seen being sucked into a jet's turbine engine as the whole plane explodes. A guard turns and sees the mountain he's going to crash into moments before it occurs – he and his vehicle explode in a fiery ball. Syndrome flips TV channels and is delighted at the throngs of people screaming and the weapons the military's using to try to defeat his robot sent in an SR-71-

like plane. Orders such as “Fire at will!” are heard. Guards laugh at the TV footage of the carnage and come up with a drinking game for the champagne they’re opening: “Hey, every time they run, you take a shot.”

Animal Abuse:

In attempting to rescue the cat, Squeaker, from a tree, Mr. Incredible pulls the tree out by its roots and starts shaking it vigorously trying to get the cat to let go. The cat is screeching and is being violently tossed about.

Torture:

This film is a 1960s throwback to spy thrillers like *James Bond* which engages torture scenarios. There are moments where pain is inflicted for pleasure and guards laugh at the pain of others. The entire family ends up on the torture rack – they aren’t hurt but the audience knows this is possible because it has already happened to the dad, Mr. Incredible, who was shocked during interrogation. He later becomes violent after the psychologically abusive technique of being made to think his whole family has been killed. In true 9/11 fashion, adding that women and children are not safe from terrorism, a plane is sent to attack a U.S. city.

SHREK (DreamWorks, Pacific Data Images; PG, 2001): The ogre, voiced by Mike Myers, spawned three more *Shrek* films, the spin-off film *Puss in Boots*, a stage musical, and gave Pixar some computer animation competition.

Animal Abuse:

Perhaps one of the most shocking moments on film is when the songbird explodes in part one of the series. Obviously

making fun of previous moments in kids' film – birds singing along with young women, beginning with *Snow White* – and the obsession with princesses and nature, Princess Fiona encounters a beautiful blue bird high in a tree. He begins chirping along with her but then comes the competitive part where she sings as loudly as possible; the bird tries to rise to the challenge but in doing so his chest puffs out and his eyes bulge nearly out of their sockets. Then it happens: We hear an exploding sound and see feathers fly and, when we and Princess Fiona look back, all that remains now are smoking legs with claws still grasping the branch. Fiona is not upset; she methodically takes the bird's eggs and fries them up for breakfast. There is no remorse about having killed the mother and then her would-have-been chicks.

Torture:

The torture of the gingerbread man ranks among one of the most upsetting in kids' films.

TOY STORY 3 (Pixar, G, 2010): The *Toy Story* series (Pixar, all G, 1995-2010) introduced intentional cruelty as early as 1995; brainchild of John Lasseter, *Toy Story* has the distinction of being the first feature-length fully computer-animated film.

Child Endangerment:

Child endangerment is a big part of the film, beginning with the troll orphans on the train.

Torture:

Sid, of course, was the first character in the series who mangled toys as the nice kid's neighbor, but *Toy Story 3* takes cruelty beyond the disturbed teen through prison and concentration camp tropes framing torture. In the film, Buzz is

captured, a hood in the form of a sock puppet is placed over his head, he is tied down, he is screaming “Ow!” then “Let go of me!” and “Stop!” and “No! Noo! Nooo!” and his personality is changed as a result of his torture. Later in the film, there is a black game piece bag nearly put over the monkey’s head – it is as if filmmakers are toying with us, knowing that putting a black bag over a character’s head is just a little too close to images of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and Black Sites, the horrifying which ruined the American image worldwide. Mr. Potato Head is held in solitary confinement in the playground’s sandbox.

Surveillance/Security/Fear-Based Rhetoric and Images:

Toy Story 3 is the consummate prison film in the world of children because it instructs those imprisoned how to behave and what to expect; it reviews a number of surveillance, interrogation, and punishment techniques and shows the results of torture. The audience is left to wonder if the heavy security measures at the daycare are to protect the children from outside forces getting in or the kids getting out. Woody thinks for a moment that his friends have been crushed by the back of a garbage truck. There are many horror film moments (which employ the music and technique seen in adult horror films), and these are often centered around Big Baby and the cymbal-playing monkey. Creators were able to make a TV short called *Toy Story of Terror* (2013), a 21-minute Halloween special, where members of the gang watch a scary movie on a portable DVD player in the car and then begin disappearing when they stop at a roadside motel; while there, they meet a character named Combat Carl, a G.I. Joe-type, whose signature phrase is: “Combat Carl never gives up. Combat Carl finds a way.”

Concentration Camp/Holding Facility/Prison Abuse:

A sandbox is used as disciplinary tool enacting solitary confinement as seen in films like *Cool Hand Luke*. Other Foucauldian measures like the all-seeing Panopticon can be seen in the playground's tower, security cameras, and psychological torture which robs the soul. There are four torture scenes presented in the film and one is especially upsetting since we hear a character excessively begging torturers to stop. At one point, we see Big Baby's feet hanging down from the swing, which makes us think the doll's been hanged. As the very alive toys head toward the furnace, they know they are going to die. Sure, they're rescued at the last minute, but that this scene drags on for so long (over one minute!), it is traumatic even for adults. When the group joins hands as flames fill the screen, we too are part of the terror.

Gender Policing and Bashing:

Of course, Ken, presented as effeminate, gets tortured by Barbie. When we – or a 3-year old – watch that scene repeatedly, do we not get the sense that there are circumstances which permit it or that Ken must be doing something to deserve it or that it's okay to do it for humor at least or maybe there's the thrill that there might be retribution for such an act and Ken might be able to get back at his attacker. Mr. Potato Head calls Ken a “purse with legs” and kicks him in the shin. The toys make fun of Ken's handwriting, thinking of it as too feminine.

Racism:

When Buzz is switched to Spanish mode, he turns into the cultural stereotype of a Latin lover, dropping to his knees and saying romantic things to Jessie. Spanish music plays while he dances and flirts with her. [“To its credit, Disney deleted a

sombrero-wearing character from a video game related to the hit movie *Toy Story 2* (1999). The Latino caricature never appeared in the movie itself, but the video's mustachioed villain drew fire from activist Latinos."⁷²⁸]

Sexism:

Mrs. Potato Head's mouth is removed by Lotso when she tries to defend herself and get respect; the members of his gang laugh. When Jessie tries to make Buzz remember they're all his friends, he responds as if she's trying to flirt with him: "Spare me your eyes, temptress. Your emperor is defeated and I'm immune to your bewitching good looks."

Visible Results of Torture:

Chatter telephone, featured as an old man, is seen beaten because he helped the team escape by telling them what forces they would encounter as they attempted to flee the treacherous situation. He is prodded by a guard to the edge of a wall, then another guard kicks his phone off; we see scuff marks all over him (simulating bruises), he says he's been broken, and his eye looks damaged and is swollen nearly shut. Of course, Buzz has an entire personality shift twice, the second time occurring when he is switched to Spanish mode and becomes a stereotypical dancing Romeo. And both he and Ken are impacted by their abuse from other characters. And, of course, there's Big Baby, the baby doll, whose eye has been damaged and cannot open right ever since the night they all fell off the truck; in one of the saddest moments on film – which results in long-lasting psychological damage – Lotso tells Big Baby that

⁷²⁸ See "Toy Story." *Associated Press*. 10 October 1999 and Jack G. Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York and Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 54.

his owner “don’t love you no more.” Later, Lotso cruelly says to Big Baby: “You want your mommy back? She never loved you – don’t be such a baby!” Big Baby cries and Lotso says: “This is what happens when you dummies (he pokes the baby hard in the stomach) try to think. We’re all just trash waitin’ to be thrown away!” Lotso stands by enjoying the misery as Buzz beats up his former friends. The film’s end brings an end to Lotso as well when he is tied to the front of a garbage truck and the toy strapped on next to him warns him to keep his mouth shut, lest he eat bugs.

Militarism:

A mushroom cloud is formed as the result of an explosion. The series features the green Army men so there’s plenty of military language, such as “We done our duty” and “Mission accomplished.”

CHICKEN RUN (DreamWorks, Pathe, Aardman, G, 2002): If Pixar’s *Toy Story 3* is a modern version of *Cool Hand Luke*, *Chicken Run* is the kids’ version of *The Great Escape*, Mirisch Company’s 1963 epic American retelling of the true story of a mass escape of POWs from a Nazi German camp.

Concentration Camp/Holding Facility/Prison Abuse:

This concentration camp/stalag setting reenacts prison life through using a dumpster as solitary confinement container, daily counting down the days of punishment left by scratching lines on a wall, dogs being used to guard prisoners, brutal treatment of the same, and death for those who cannot keep up the pace of productivity. The bulgy-eyed chickens are threatened repeatedly and called names by Mr. and Mrs. Tweedy, the latter attempting murder in numerous scenes, and succeeding in an early scene when she dons gloves and we see

her pick up an axe and a zero-egg production chicken is laid down in shadow; a deep thud is heard and even though this happens off camera, the audience is aware that the chicken has been killed.

Animal Abuse:

In addition to the fact that all characters are animals trapped in the concentration camp setting, the up close bones of a chicken's carcass are seen on the evening dinner table as the woman refers to chickens as "stupid, worthless creatures!"

Death Language and Action/Injury/Suicide:

Language is used extensively referring to death: Ginger says, "So laying eggs all your life and then getting plucked, stuffed and roasted is good enough for you, is it?" She reiterates the point: "We lay eggs day in and day out, and when we can't lay anymore, they kill us." Referring to the escape plan Ginger is proposing, Rocky tells her: "You can't pull off a stunt like that. That's suicide." When the couple begin fattening up the chickens, Ginger says: "They're going to kill us all." The song they dance to has the following lyrics: "Flip, flop, fly. I don't care if I die." In a moment of gender policing, one male character calls another a "Nancy" for crying and, although the two males end up dancing together, we have still heard this common male to male insult. Mrs. Tweedy explains: "It's a pie machine, you idiot. Chickens go in, pies come out." Ginger says during the grand escape: "We'll either die free chickens or die trying." A random chicken responds, "We're all gonna die!"

There are visual cues as well, such as when Babs is knitting a noose she can use to hang herself because things are so desperate. An effigy of a chicken smashes into a wall and we see goop and eyes and nose dripping down. The pie-making

machine sends the two lead characters into an oven with gas-fired flames. There's a near-miss close-up of Mrs. Tweedy using an axe on Ginger. When Mrs. Tweedy gets stuck in the pie-making machine, Mr. Tweedy backs away as if he doesn't see it, leaving her to her doom; later, he basically tells his wife he was right about everything, then a wall falls on her and one of the dogs and we don't know if they died as a result.

EPIC (Blue Sky, 20th Century Fox, PG for "mild action, some scary images, and brief rude language," 2013): It is obvious that the MPAA favors Disney/Pixar because far worse is depicted in their G rated movies, but all companies appear to be including such content. Opening scenes show cameras and sensors set up in the forest and arrows being shot at a tiny Leafman and a young woman on her way to her father's house in a taxi cab – she is about to discover that her absent-minded professor father is not mentally disturbed and that his belief in the tiny world is warranted.

Death Language and Action/Injury:

The mother has died and there's a reference to the five stages of grief when the father and daughter reunite. When the main bad guy dies, the good guys don't even admit to wiping out his family. Nim Galuu says, "The moon's coming up – that's bloom or die time." Ronin's adopted son (who's felt put upon to be a proper soldier in the Leafmen army) tells him, "It's dangerous. I might get killed. I thought you'd like that." The young man also teases M.K. by telling her his uncle was killed by one of her kind, a Stomper; when he asks Ronin if he thinks he went too far, he says: "Try it again. Maybe she'll punch you harder." When M.K. puts on the tiny helmet (a bird beak) and armor once she's miniaturized, she says, "It smells like something died in here" and Ronin says, "Something did."

When Mandrake says he gets few visitors to his lair, Ronin says, "It could be the stench of death..." Ronin ends up being beaten by the angry mob. Mandrake says to Ronin: "This time when I leave you for dead, you'll stay that way!" One of the bad guys tells Ronin, "In the end, every leaf falls and dies alone." Mandrake is forced outside and he lands in goop which engulfs him and turns into a hardened part of a tree knot.

Animal Abuse:

The old family dog, Ozzy, has an eye which doesn't function and he only has three legs since the girl last saw him. When the dad welcomes her back to her old room, he seems proud it's the way she left it as a child. "Your turtle...oh, dear," he says when he looks over and realizes he'd forgotten about it and it died. In addition to the disabled dog, which could be good for audiences in encouraging acceptability of the differently-abled, there's a negative portrayal of bats, which is unfortunate because of bats' real life problems from humans. M.K. says, knowing that these are feeling, intelligent beings, "When I get big again, I'm so coming here with a can of bug spray!"

Racism:

While Queen Tara is a strong African-American character, she dies just like most Black actors in films. The film also has a portrayal of a Spanish-speaking bad guy, although Disney is the king of choosing people of color as the bad guys in their films. Bufo, played by singer Pitbull, is other bad guy, Mandrake's, assistant.

Torture:

When Mandrake is talking about how adorable his killed in battle son was, the crowd is screaming and begging him to

“please stop!” The slug says, “Oh, your stories are boring and torturous,” and he weeps. It seems horrifying that a character in a child’s film would be made fun of for honoring the memory of his recently killed son.

Body Parts:

The language is filled with violence: Mandrake tells Bufo, “I let you keep your legs.” When the slug and snail ask a fruit fly what it’s like to have such a short life cycle, as he answers, his arms fall off and he uses one of them as a cane as he turns into an old man (fly) before our eyes, then dies. Mandrake says the Leafmen killed his son, and then he pokes the eyes of the slug and snail as he tells them, “An eye for an eye!” One of the pieces of armor/masks is a skull with the spinal cord still attached. In a moment of common cruelty, the slug says to Mandrake, “Ugly says what?” quietly so he’ll say “What?” When Ronin’s son is hanging on by the slug’s eyes and he’s asking him to move faster, the slug replies: “It’s kind of hard while you’re pulling on my brain!” One of the bad guys hits the bat Ronin’s son is riding on and it turns into a skull and bones and falls apart, leaving the young man falling in mid-air and then landing hard on the ground. Nim Galuu says when giving directions to thwart Mandrake, “When you see the janitor with the weird eye...” This shows how little respect filmmakers have for difference.

IGOR (Exodus Film Group, Sparx Animation Studios, MGM, PG for “some thematic elements, scary images, action and mild language,” 2008): In the land of Malaria, where the forecast every day is “rainy with a 100% chance of horror,” evil inventions are the only way to make a living – and that living comes from the world paying the kingdom not to use the weapons. A huge skull lighting mechanism rises up over the

Hunger Games/Coliseum death-match games where monster inventions physically battle one another. Igors are treated as lackeys (just like house elves in *Harry Potter*) to abusive mad scientists and the lead Igor's master has mother issues similar to Gru in *Despicable Me*.

Animal Abuse:

Although the Igors are not supposed to think for themselves, our lead character Igor has invented two beings: Brain (a.k.a. Brian), who is a brain in a jar, and Scamper, an eternal rabbit who is seen throughout the film wearing a cap with electrodes (such as seen on chained primates and others in animal experimentation labs), who is annoyed he can't kill himself: "Life is meaningless and nothing matters." There are scenes which involve the suicidal rabbit being used by others, such as when Igor puts dynamite into the rabbit's mouth and closes the cabinet door on him so he'll blow up; of course, he bounces back to life afterward but it is distressing to witness nonetheless. Scamper opens a Happy Mother's Day card and it explodes, leaving a large hole in the middle of his face; the audience is privy to being inside his head as the brain reforms and skin covers it. Brain is cutting fabric while Scamper saws and Scamper's hand is accidentally cut off. Scamper bites an electrical cord and is electrocuted in close-up. Igor is teased by Scamper for saying he hopes he didn't hit the deer in the road with their car. Brain has had a brainwash and when he exits, Scamper says, "What's that smell?" Brain tells him, "My new air freshener, 'Dead Dog.'"

Animals other than Scamper, the suicidal rabbit, continue to be used for humor in the film. A fly is buzzing when Igor wants Eva, his monster creation, to commit an evil act. He says: "Monster, I command you to kill that fly. Kill it! Kill it!

Kill it, girl! Come on! You're a killer! Maim it! Wound it! Insult it! Something! Kill it! Kill it!" There's a close-up of the fly as he says, "Kill! Kill! Kill!" At first, we aren't sure if she's killed it when she grabs it, but then we hear buzzing and realize she's taking it outside to release it where it will be happy. Dr. Schadenfreude's girlfriend says, "Respect isn't going to keep me in baby seal boots." In a very gory scene, Scamper rescues himself and the others from a machine they're about to be forced into with flames and metal teeth clamping together. The others are shocked the machine has stopped and Scamper says, "What? Like this is the first time I've gnawed my own feet off?" An alarm sounds and Scamper is holding his own gnawed off feet and says, "Who says rabbits' feet are lucky?" Although not a real animal, one of the competition beasts is a scary-looking teddy bear who is missing an eye.

Death Language and Action/Injury:

Death language runs throughout the film: Igor says, talking about how he's hoping his monster will learn how to be evil, "Gosh, I feel like I'm sending my kid off to school for the first time. You know, to learn how to murder." Scamper is telling Igor about a greeting card for sale: "This card teleports your enemy to you so you can destroy him in person. Call me old-fashioned, but what happened to cards that just blew your head off?" The monster – and we – see footage of people screaming and she sees what the audience only hears – a knife swiping – amid more screaming. When Igor brings Eva for treatment, he checks out what's written on their chalkboard: SPECIALS: Sunday Night Massacre, 15; Arsonist Scrub, 9.99; Axe Murderer Wash, 20; Black Lung Bath, 15. As if the writing weren't sufficient, Igor reads aloud: "'Sunday Night Massacre.' No. 'Arsonist.' Gee, they all look so good. How about the 'Axe Murderer' brain wash?" There's a close-up on the board as he

points to it. The fighting arena is referred to as the “kill-o-seum.” When Igor goes after Brain with an axe because he’s responsible for Eva being an actress, she asks what play they’re rehearsing and Scamper says “‘Brain Dead’ – it’s gonna be a smash!” Brain and Scamper allow something heavy to fall on the king and we don’t know if he’s dead, but Brain simply says, “Oops.” When Eva comes to perform, she’s angry and hurt and the crowd laughs at her. The king announces, “Let the battle begin!” so Eva must defend herself from the other monsters and she begins beating them off. We have the camera view, so it is as if she’s hitting us, then the red lens cracks. Eva in her tormented state grabs cables holding up the arena, trying to make the ceiling fall on the crowd.

Body Parts:

The film has its queasy, graphic moments, some visual and some only referred to. At one point, Brain throws tools on the floor: scissors, a knife, an axe, and a severed hand with a bone blob prominently protruding. Igor talks about how his evil scientist might recycle him: “Can you imagine being chopped up and used for body parts and God knows what else?” What else could be worse than that? When Dr. Glickenstein explodes in the lab accident, all that remains of him is his severed gloved hand which lands with his finger still raised, then the finger drops. The rabbit simply speaks of how he can now throw out a hideous rug, rather than any mourning. When Igor tries to leave, Schadenfreude pulls Glickenstein’s severed gloved hand out of the hot tub they are sharing, saying he knows about Glickenstein’s “deadliness.” The audience is treated to extensive gory images as Igor’s creation is put together – severed body parts with bones sticking out, a hand with finger missing; the team fire a shot from a gun at the creature to make sure she’s indestructible after injecting her. When given a

necklace later, Eva asks for assistance in putting it on because she's "all thumbs." Igor replies, "Yeah, sorry about that – I got the thumbs on sale."

Torture:

An announcer says, "A man who needs no introduction but who will brutally torture me if he doesn't get one." Once Eva's led to the room for treatment and is sitting in the chair for the procedure, a cap with electrodes comes down on her head and metal pincers hold her eyes open wide by touching her eyeballs. Heidi, the girlfriend in disguise, brings Dr. Glickenstein a poster which had been a 1970s favorite, now revamped. The original showed a kitten and the caption read: "Hang in there, baby." Although there have been many incarnations, the film shows a cat with a noose around its neck. Heidi says she's brought him the inspirational poster to remind him "to always make time in your day for a little torture." He dismisses her by tossing her and instructing her to leave. She says to Igor: "Who doesn't like tortured kittens?" Igor tells her that he likes kittens and she responds that she "[doesn't] like dirty little hunch people," thus insulting him.

Child Endangerment/Abuse:

Approaching a house with two big windows which resemble frightened eyes, Igor and crew hear screaming and he says, "Oh, God, she's killing blind orphans!" Later, Scamper is working with the orphans and says to one of them: "What, are you blind?" A lovely blend of murderous language used to make fun of disability.

Sexism/Intimate Partner Abuse:

Women are insulted and presented as having an evil nature. Dr. Schadenfreude calls his girlfriend a “shallow, conniving witch,” “a worthless leech,” and, when she insults him, he says, “Hey, I don’t come down to where you work and...Oh, that’s right, you don’t work! So shut your cake hole, darling!” The couple hit Igor rather than each other during their fights and during one, Igor passes out; then, Dr. Schadenfreude roughly grabs her waist and she gasps with delight and says, “Is Daddy still mad at me?” She refers to herself as “Mommy” with her boyfriend in another scene and, during that scene, Igor starts hitting himself automatically, filling in for the couple who would normally be hitting him or each other. When the couple is shrunken, he tells her: “Ironically, at an inch tall, you still have the biggest mouth in Malaria.” He warns her not to “mouth off to the man...” Dr. Glickenstein names his invention which will “[unleash] pain and misery on everyone” after his mother, “the old cow.” To incite Eva before the fight to the death contest, Schadenfreude calls her “pathetic” and an “ugly monster” and says that Heidi is “beautiful and you are not” and says “she has got talent and you have not.” She pushes him and he hits the wall, her evil bone lights up and shocks go through her body as she screams; her eyes glow green and she growls. Schadenfreude defends the time spent with his Igor to his girlfriend: “He’s a good listener, he has soft hands, and, unlike you, he sometimes shaves his legs!” Instructing Brain what to get in order to help Eva become prettier, Scamper says: “If all else fails, get me the severed head of a supermodel.” Schadenfreude asks Igor how to put the evil bone in Eva’s body: “We kick it, we slap it, we take it to the movies, call it Irene?” These relationship patterns are hurtful and disrespectful.

Disability/Ageism:

Igor's physical difference is brought up often. The king tells Igor if anything happens to Dr. Glickenstein, he'll "throw [him] down the recycling chute and use [his] hunch as a speed bump!" He is later thrown into the recycling chute by the king's henchmen and is thrust into flames at the bottom. Despite his physical difficulties, Igor is repeatedly banged on the floor by the king even as he whimpers. When Igor is given a beret as a gift, Scamper says that 'voila' is "French for 'please stop pelting me and my ridiculous hat with rocks.'" The crowd is continuously thrusting a ball in the air – inside is an Igor. Others are tormented as well. The monster Igor's created, Eva, is an amalgamation of parts, so she walks awkwardly and is insulted by Heidi: "Maybe some men like girls who don't look like they've been put together at the junkyard. You have a very ugly face." To celebrate Dr. Glickenstein's would-be invention, the king tells his guards: "C'mon boys. Let's go kick some old people."

PLANES: FIRE AND RESCUE (Walt Disney Pictures, DisneyToon Studios, Prana Studios, PG for "action and some peril," 2014): The film was not Pixar produced per se, but it was executive produced and co-written by Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios' chief creative officer, John Lasseter, director of the *Cars* films. Before the film begins, there's a customary recognition of heroes: "Dedicated to the courageous firefighters throughout the world who risk their lives to save the lives of others." In addition to incredibly realistic fires and explosions, dangerous rescue scenes, and plenty of death language and references to the military, the film engages in the usual racism, sexism, classism, and vengeance seen in many films, but also includes ageism.

Racism:

Like its stereotypical predecessor, *Planes*, the film is frighteningly racist. Switching it up from the Mexican lover boy and the Asian Mata Hari in the last film, the latest in the series offers a repressive glimpse of Native Americans as if taken directly from old, racist 1950s American western films. The Native American helicopter says in slow, broken speech, “The one the Lakota call Haokah beats his drum with the wind to make thunder. With thunder comes lightning, and with lightning comes fire.” One of the others tells Windlifter not to scare their guest, Dusty, and says she doesn’t hear anything but – because all Native Americans have secret powers in Disney minds – he’s right and a call comes in for a fire. Windlifter is shown staring silently or issuing few words throughout the film; when he’s asked for a speech, he starts chanting, then he says, “A toast to coyote.” He tells an origin tale and equates the character renewing himself with how “fire renews the earth.” Dusty says, “I’m just gonna say it. You had me up until the part where he eats his own tires,” essentially making fun of Native American tradition.

The team expose Dusty to the TV program the head of the unit used to be on, patterned after “CHiPs” from the late ’70s through the early ’80s, which revolved around California Highway Patrol’s motorcycle cops. The program starred a very white Larry Wilcox and Erik Estrada who is of Puerto Rican descent. This new version is California Helicopter Patrol or “CHoPs,” and it uses the same catchy music and stars Blazin’ Blade Ranger and Nick Loopin’ Lopez. When the team detain a potential suspect, another voice (which is a caricature of a Black person) is heard saying, “Man, why you choppies always spoiling my fun?” He’s in the form of a car which can reach fast speeds. Nick tells him, “Hey, you think it’s fun running station

wagons off the road, you punk? If I had a nickel for every crook like you..." Blade tells him, "He ain't worth it." They're interrupted by a call to a fire and we see the presumed criminal sneaking away from them. They hoist up the female stranded on top of the burning building. Blade says, "You alright, Miss?" Nick, the Latino, says, "Hey, baby." Seeing him, she responds, "Ooh, I am now." Nick says to Blade, "Nice catch today, Blade. Speaking of which, she's got a sister" and they show a twin car next to her who says "Hi" in a sexy voice. Blade says, "Good move, partner." This can be read as an overlay meant to entertain the adults in the audience who may recall the tone of the show or it can be seen as perpetuation of stereotypes.

Classism:

After hearing that Dusty cannot race anymore because of his engine trouble, Leadbottom (we assume this is a play on famous musician Lead Belly – real name Huddie William Ledbetter – because, like most Black Disney characters, he has a slang accent) offers Dusty his old job back but says, "You got to start back at minimum wage," that he's "lost all [his] vacation time," and that he's "gotta go through orientation again." These reminders of working class life and its difficulties are probably familiar to most in the audience. The vengeance seen at the film's end includes a touch of this as well because the obnoxious, mean-spirited superintendent from the park has been sent to Death Valley National Park for his behavior. A car is overheating and he says to the camera, "Is it hot?" He coughs as he says, "Yes, it is." We then know he's gotten what he supposedly deserves – and we also become aware that life is rough when one is no longer in charge.

Ageism:

Life is evidently worse when one is older because all elderly in the film are shown as incompetent. The older fireman at Dusty's regular station – who didn't use modern technology to put out the fire and is slammed by the TMST (Transportation Management Safety Team) agent for not complying with new government requirements – is threatened with extinction. The bickering couple who've returned to Piston Peak National Park end up in trouble because they go off on a search to find where they'd first kissed but no flight plan has been submitted and they find themselves in a dangerous area. The two had come before on their honeymoon and the woman says, "I was 50 years younger and half a ton lighter." The park superintendent is overheard telling his staff to fire an old lady, and he insultingly says to someone, "You're old and you have a dumb hat on." These characterizations of older people inform our collective consciousness and cause suspicion where there might not otherwise be any denigration of our national treasures.

Sexism:

The crew goes off to a place called Honkers (which we take as a play on Hooters restaurant) and on the sign the front headlights of the car flash repeatedly (as if they're breasts). Around the juke box, which is playing country tunes, there's a woman on one side and a dude on the other and they're smiling at one another. A truck is saying, "Can you believe it? She left me for a hybrid. I didn't even hear him coming." People are dancing in the Honky Tonk. A male approaches a female car and says, "Hey, sugar rims, you just fall out of a B-17? Cause you're da bomb." She sighs and says to her friend, "Pickup trucks." "Mmm-hmm," the friend agrees. At the meeting in the main hangar, Lil Dipper puts her floating device over Dusty and

says, “Yeah, they’re real.” She calls Dusty “Dust (as opposed to stud) muffin” and “Sweet Seat.” When Dusty proposes they all go to the evening’s festivities, she says back to him, “A second date! Wow. Room.” He reiterates his point and she ignores him and says, “You’re right. I should get to know your friends.” He reminds her that they are her friends. She keeps this going extensively, even saying that they should check out the party before checking in to the hotel. When the older couple talk about their romance, Lil Dipper refers to Dusty not being that romantic anymore, even though they haven’t even begun anything romantic. When he wakes up in recovery, she creepily whispers to him: “I like watching you sleep.” These depictions of women as love hungry are simply not helpful.

PLANES (Walt Disney Pictures, DisneyToon Studios, Prana Studios, PG for “some mild action and rude humor,” 2013): Of course, given the success of the whole car thing, it was only a matter of time until they tried it with planes. What next? Submarines? (No doubt called SUBS!) “Then there are the cultural stereotypes. Surely it’s no longer acceptable to have a Mexican character in a luchador mask whose onscreen appearances are announced by a strum of flamenco guitar.”⁷²⁹ One would think it is no longer acceptable but, sadly, it is. This first film in the series further exploits war memory and body part transplant, and implements a strict gender binary.

Gender Policing/Regulation:

Militaristic jet fighters – with skull and crossbones insignias on their planes – tease Dusty the crop duster by calling him a “loser” after he says, “Hello, ladies, ready to lose?” As

⁷²⁹ “New film: ‘Planes’ Crash landing.” *The Economist*. Aug. 16, 2013.
<http://www.economist.com.html>.

Dusty's daydream continues, one of the jet fighters says, "Last one to the water tower buys a round of fuel." Continuing the military speak, he's told to "drop and give me twenty," then his performance is called "ballistic" by his mechanic, Dottie. When Dusty and El Chupacabra meet, the latter tells the former they'll "laugh, cry, dance...probably not with each other." Dusty agrees saying, "Of course." Skipper refers to a military mission and tells Dusty "it's time to lug nut up and fly higher."

Child Endangerment:

When Dottie tells Dusty what will happen to him if he doesn't listen to her advice, she includes, "Oh, my gosh, the orphanage!" She makes crashing sounds as if the kids have had to fly out of harm's way and pretends she's him as she acts as if she's dying. Orphans seem to be popular with Disney and other companies – think of the orphan train scene in *Toy Story 3* or the little girls in *Despicable Me*.

Death Language and Action/Injury:

Characters are watching a TV show called "Top 10 Crashes" and two planes crashing are shown. Dusty says that's why he needs Dotty to come to the qualifiers with him. The TV show announcer says it's "the 10 best air crashes of all time!" We see the glow from the TV as a guy says "I'm okay" and then there's an explosion. The announcer says, "Ooh, that's gotta hurt." Dusty almost gets run over when a jet lands behind him at JFK airport in New York and someone says, "Go back to Jersey, you bum." Customers are viewing RSN (Racing Sports Network) at a British pub and, when someone mentions there's a crop duster in the race, a fellow patron says, "He's gonna die." Dusty tells the crew back home he had "a gruesome, near-death experience," then adds "there's nothing better than dying doing what you love best!" After helping the British guy, Dusty says

he's "dead last." Chug tells Dusty mid-race that he could die of hypothermia or an avalanche and that the good thing about being so high up in the Himalayas is that "there's not a lot of oxygen so, if you crash, no explosion." Dusty almost dies from an oncoming train because he listened to Ishani's advice about staying low in the mountains and we see the train slam on its brakes, then white clouds as ethereal music plays and Dusty says, "I'm dead." When he sees her again, he tells her he could have been killed.

War Language/Action/Militarism:

Someone suggests Dusty get help from the old man down the way who was a war hero and instructor in the Navy. There's a close up of the moon and clouds and a black flag with skull and crossbones (the bones are crisscross wrenches) and underneath it says "VF-17," which was a famous U.S. Navy fighter squadron from 1943 through 1959. The same insignia is on the hangar as they approach and the helper truck tells Dusty, "They say he shot down 50 planes. I heard stories about his squadron, the 'Jolly Wrenchers.' They were the roughest, toughest, meanest flyers in the Navy. Ruthless killers who showed no mercy. No mercy! They'd shoot ya as soon as look at you." When Dusty tells him he heard he shot down fifty planes, Skipper says, "You lookin' to be number 51?" At the qualifiers, Chug says, "I don't believe it – a red tail P-51!" Dusty says, "Oh, man, a sea fury!" We hear drums as Dusty's training with Skipper begins at "0-500 hours" military time. When Dusty has a hard time going higher than he's used to and realizes he's afraid of heights, Sparky the assistant starts talking about how war planes (P-38s) had a hard time at high altitudes but they became racers after the war. The "Jolly Wrenchers" symbol is put on Dusty. Jets fly overhead before the race begins

just like at real-life races. El Chupacabra says, “Muy macho, no?”

Skipper warns Dusty about flying over the Pacific Ocean: “Back in ’41 during the battle over Wake Island,” they ran into monsoons. Patriotically, the chart of who’s in the lead shows several U.S. flags at the top. Dusty ends up in trouble due to a competitor knocking off his antenna and a jet approaches telling him he’s in restricted air space. He identifies himself and explains he’s low on fuel so they suggest he follow them to the boat. “The boat?” he asks. They answer, “The USS Dwight D. Flysenhower.” He’s scared but lands safely on the deck of the aircraft carrier. They say let’s get back up there to “victory” and Dusty echoes “victory.” While there, he sees the “Jolly Wrenchers” Wall of Fame, where every flyer and mission is listed. He looks for the Skipper but sees only one mission: Glendal Canal. The Skipper confirms he only flew one mission but there’s no time for Dusty to discuss this with him because a tropical cyclone alert forces him to leave; once Dusty’s back in the air, however, he reviews all the battles Skipper had told him about: The Battle of Airway; the Raid in Tujunga Harbor; the Aleutians; the Battle of Wake Island; the Assault on Kunming. Dusty flies too high, then hits the water; luckily, the rescue team heard his coordinates and he’s airlifted to the hospital. He wakes to multiple injuries and Skipper tells him why he only had one mission.

It was a routine patrol, but one of his crew saw an enemy two miles ahead and asked Skipper if they should get it. Skipper says no because “our orders are to recon and report back.” The subordinate says, “It’ll be a turkey shoot!” and the others go along with this assessment so Skipper decides to go in for a closer look, but tells them to keep their distance. When they exit the clouds, one of them says, “Holy cow! It’s the

whole enemy fleet!” Skipper sadly relates to Dusty that it was “too late to pull up.” Heavenly music plays as his fellow planes are shot down in very realistic footage, and then a medic looks at a young Skipper who has been pulled from the water looking distraught. “My whole squadron. Under my command.” He explains to Dusty, “After that, I just couldn’t bring myself to fly again.” The military song “Anchors Aweigh” plays and they focus in on the USS Flysenhower with a caption stating: “Nimitz Class CVN 81. Somewhere in the North Pacific.” A commander in charge says, “Attention on deck. Victory!” All salute and say in unison “Victory!” Skipper says it’s an honor to be there and he salutes. Jets fly overhead and jet streams are released. Someone says, “Hook them up.” Dusty is painted like a military jet. He says to Skipper: “You ready, wingman?” Skipper responds, “Roger that.” One of the crew says, “An honorary Jolly Wrencher. How’s that feel, Dusty?” He says, “It feels great!” Dusty and the Skipper take off from the aircraft carrier and race off over the sea on their way back home.

Body Parts:

The crew come across two twin planes competing in the race and Dottie says she heard “they used to be one plane but they were separated at birth.” When Dusty is admitted to the “Wings Around the World” race, Skipper tells him: “Bad idea. You’ll end up a smoking hole on the side of the mountain with your parts spread over five countries!” Dottie suggests either increasing power or lowering drag to help Dusty with his height difficulty and as she’s saying this she tears off the part of the paper where she’s drawn his bottom parts; a shocked Dusty says they’ll definitely increase power. Dusty has his crop dusting tank underneath him removed so he’ll weigh less for racing. After Dusty crashes into the ocean and Dottie tells him he has “broken wing ribs, twisted gear, bent prop, and [his] main spar

is cracked bad” and that “it’s over,” Dusty gives up; despite that, El Chupacabra convinces him to rejoin the race and shows him the new wings he’s brought for him. Where did these **replacement arms** come from? Dottie says, “Hey, that’s the wing of a T-33 Shooting Star” and El Chupacabra responds: “When the great Mexican Air Force needed help, American T-33s came. They did not ask questions. They did not hesitate. They were there. Because that is what compadres do...the wings are yours.” These lines reverse Mexico assisting the U.S. militarily and also distract us from Dusty’s arm transplant.

Animal Representation:

In the same way *Cars* featured tractor-tipping (like cow-tipping), this film shows tractors chewing cud in a field and going up on hind parts to watch Dusty practice. There’s a reference to Ol’ Yeller getting shot at the end of that film.

Racism:

The DVD itself has no translation of other languages nor writing of the non-English spoken words in their own language, unless one engages those subtitles, which is annoying for those who wish to immerse themselves in the other cultures presented in this globally oriented film. Depictions of each character in the film are stereotypical: The African-American delivery guy uses urban street slang; the British plane is snooty; Ishani, the pretty plane from Mumbai becomes a spy – standard Hollywood fare for women of Eastern descent; Ripslinger says he’ll eulogize Dusty when he crashes on take-off – further, that he will get good press from it; the Mexican plane, El Chupacabra, is accompanied by Mariachi band music when he introduces himself, and he says he’s also a romance novelist, telenovela star, and musician, and he’s wearing a Lucha libre mask (worn by Mexican wrestlers). The British man calls him El Cuckoo, so

El Chupacabra swishes his cape at him and says, "You have been shamed." As one of the places people watch the big race, there are many shots of a Japanese restaurant where an employee is twirling knives; later, we see the same Japanese restaurant again with knives, then fire. When they tell Dusty they're meeting him in Mexico, someone says, "I'll bring the salsa." These illustrations of other cultures are so limiting that it's embarrassing, not to mention the fact that the salsa will already be there; in an effort to continue to point to difference, the lines are not even logical.

El Chupacabra tells Dusty that he'll "win the heart of Miss Rochelle." Loud Mexican music plays from a boom box he's set up to serenade her, then it turns to "I'm Just a Love Machine." She closes her doors, so Dusty unplugs the music and erects a candle stand. Two assistants are wearing Mariachi-style hats, one with a guitar and the other maracas; another has a horn and they begin playing a romantic tune in classic Spanish guitar style; another holds up a sign which says, "How low can you go?" then he writes on another "mas suave" and holds it up to him. With a heavy accent, he starts singing "I'm Just a Love Machine" very slowly. She opens the doors and smiles at his effort, in that way that all Disney princesses eventually cave and no apparently really means yes. Evidently, the song worked and Rochelle grabs El Chupacabra and says, "My little monster, come here." He says, "Please! No!" He remarks that "she is like a jaguar now." She says, "My little burrito." He looks terrified as she again pulls him off screen and we hear him say, "Be gentle with me!" The latter is presented as gender reversal and is supposed to be funny because a man is saying it, which not only implies men never want others to be gentle with them but also acts to minimize why a woman would find it important to express this.

Sexism:

When El Chupacabra sees French Canadian Rochelle, the painted pink plane, red hearts surround her and he's immediately in love. He begins waxing poetic about her in stereotypical fashion, as if all men with that ethnicity are obsessed with romance. After the race's first leg to Iceland, El Chupacabra tries to flirt with her and she tells him to "go plow" himself, once again portraying women as either dippy and love-crazed or bitchy. El Chupacabra keeps flirting with Rochelle again and again and she continues to put him down; once again, in that horrible way women are presented as meaning yes when they say no, he tells her she can't pretend forever.

Classism:

Announcers tell TV viewers following the race that Dusty has become a working class hero and we see forklift and other lifting machine guys hanging out on a street corner watching the race on an iPad and this group has an inner city look, replicating stereotypical depictions of Black men. Then there's a crowd of people watching the race on TVs for sale. The team has to sell mementos in order to afford the cost of meeting him in Mexico.

TURBO (DreamWorks Animation, PG for "some mild action and thematic elements," 2013): Taking place in Van Nuys, California, the film focuses on two teams of brothers, one of these composed of snails, who end up split apart by the idea of following the dream of a snail racing in the Indianapolis 500. The feel good quote?: "No dream is too big, no dreamer too small."

Death Language and Action/Injury:

Turbo is mired in misery, from fellow worker snails getting plucked away by birds (In one incident, fellow workers respond in a casual, Seinfeld-like way: “Well, that’s a shame.”) to when the main character wakes up just as he’s being carried off by bugs – he’s shocked and jumps off of them, saying, “Not dead, not dead!” Speaking of his new friend’s talent and how his luck on their side-betting has changed, Tito says somebody should call the cops because he’s gonna “make a killing,” then his fellow business owners say, “Whiplash is going to eat them up,” “It’s gonna be a slaughter,” and use the term “dead meat” when talking about how ill-suited Turbo and his brother are to racing. Chet says, “We’re gonna die” twice. When the race begins and Turbo doesn’t move, Kim-ly says, “He dead.” When Turbo is chasing after his brother, who’s been taken by a bird, he knocks a child off his skateboard. After the White Shadow snail jumps on the bus windshield making the driver swerve, a girl falls out of her seat; then, the bus stops just before hitting a screaming Chet who’s trapped under a plastic cup. Turbo knocks over Tito as he races off the platform during his first public display at the strip mall. Chet tells Turbo he feels like a hostage when they’re on the way to Indy. Kim-ly says she’s “gonna go have heart attack.” (Notice how apparently all Chinese people abbreviate sentences.) Chet thinks he’s in heaven and says, “Am I dead?” He says, in an insult to the strip mall, he pictured heaven cleaner. He comments, “it’s like a minefield out here” because there’s “broken glass, rusty nails, discarded salt packets.” As the neurotic character, he touches the nail and fears he now has tetanus.

At the race, Tito grunts as Turbo (who’s in his shirt pocket) drags him over to Guy and his head hits a wall; then, he’s dragged farther through reporters who are made to fall

down in Turbo's desperation to get into the race. Tito is saying, "No, no, no!" He pants after being slammed into Guy's fancy racing car and asks Turbo if he's trying to get him arrested. When Turbo begins racing, the hobby shop guy tells all: "He's getting killed out there!" Another observer says of the catastrophe: "That snail is history!" Turbo has been whimpering and yelping because he's nearly gotten crushed; then, the fiery exhaust from the car in front of him explodes. Guy tries to kill Turbo by running him over during the race and, at one point, says, "Farewell, little snail." As Turbo flies over him, Guy slaps him hard with his hand. The older woman, Kim-ly punches fans to get them out of her way when she's trying to get to Turbo. Guy, in a last ditch effort, tries to stomp on Turbo rather than be beaten by a snail, a creature he considers his inferior. Kim-ly torments Guy to get back at him (stepping on him like he tried to do to Turbo) asking, "You like that?" She yells, "Sleeper hold!" as she grabs his neck and has to be pulled off of him.

Sexism/Gender Policing and Bashing:

There's the stereotypical flirty gal in the form of Burn who says, "Sizzle, sizzle, uh, uh" and makes a kissy noise upon meeting Turbo. Burn tells Chet, "You're gonna be my boyfriend!" She tells him she's going to call him "Boo." Toward the film's end, when Chet is an ambulance snail in charge of safety, Burn says, "Mmm, I love a man in uniform. For real!" Tito thinks Chet, Turbo's brother, is his girlfriend and Turbo snorts with laughter as the brother gives Tito a mean look. Tito says, "Ah, she's a cutie," then rubs the brother's chin so he bites his finger. As Tito walks away, he smiles at Turbo and says, "Women!" A child picks up Chet and asks, "Are you a boy or a girl?" He answers to the world at large: "Why is this confusing? I'm not a girl!" Kim-ly says to the crew while bashing Tito in the chest, "Taco Man cried in front of millions

of people,” making fun of him. Turbo is told during the race to “snail up.” When Tito sees Turbo and Chet celebrating Turbo’s win, he mistakenly says, “Wow, that’s so romantic.” After the win, Paz has four guys working for her. She tells them, “I’m not paying you guys to sit around and look pretty.”

Racism/Classism/Stereotyping:

It is worth noting that just about all representations of African-Americans in kids’ films use street slang and have urban flair. Whiplash, voiced by baritone Samuel L. Jackson, tells Turbo: “You clearly got the skills to pay the bills. If snails had to pay bills, that is, you would be able to pay them.” An old hip-hop song plays during the challenge by Whiplash. Smoove Move is the “super-cool low rider” played by Snoop Dog who wears dice around his neck. One of the snails says to Turbo: “‘I to the ‘N’ to the ‘Dizzy’ to the ‘Wizzah.’ You dig?”

Latino depictions don’t fare any better and it is problematic that Turbo’s best human friend, Tito, is presented as derogatorily Mexican: heavily accented, poor, conniving, a dreamer. American directors and writers apparently don’t get that Mexican-Americans can be lawyers and doctors. Driving around his (presented as) rundown neighborhood, he stops for a passing lights-flashing, sirens-blaring police car. At the rather defunct strip mall, security grating laces the shop windows. It is made clear that the brothers and their business associates don’t have much money because they have to pool their resources in order to have the \$20,000 for Turbo’s entry fee to the Indy 500 race. When Tito sees how well Turbo can race, he says, “Santa Maria!” Tito tells his brother, Angelo, that his promotion of the snail with their business is a “tacovolution.” Tito is seen having a beverage and then a nap under the billboard sign he’s painted; Tito theorizes that he and Turbo could have a telenovela

together. Tito is shown as a Fred Flintstone type character because of his crazy schemes and he's put down by his brother in Wilma fashion. When Tito tells his brother they should sell their taco truck for the Indy 500 entry fee, Angelo says, "You want to invest our entire life savings in a snail?" This is the film's way of telling us that all the two brothers own is their business truck. Guy, only to capture a publicity opportunity, tells a camera person to get a two-shot of he and Tito as he says, "I, like this passionate gentleman here, came from humble beginnings." (But, of course, he knows nothing about Tito's origins or financial situation. This is, again, those behind the film painting the brothers of Mexican descent as unworthy citizens.) Latin hip-hop plays from the truck speakers loudly as Turbo approaches for the race, as if all individuals of Spanish-speaking descent listen exclusively to Spanish-speaking music. The announcer tells the crowd that food trucks are really popular these days and that he likes a good torta; he also points out the t-shirts the crew wears (white with "Turbo" in black ink) and says, "It's amazing what you can do on your printer at home," again economically insulting the group.

Paz is the tough Latino car mechanic, played by Michelle Rodriguez, a visible Hollywood Latino woman. Kimly is, of course, a Chinese manicurist (because these companies seem to think that those of Chinese descent are capable of running only nail salons, laundries, and Chinese restaurants). There's more street slang as Turbo's new look is described as "suited and booted, gooted and looted, dipped and whipped" by the urban snail crew.

Child as Monster/Endangerment:

The child on his 3-wheeler delights in killing anything tiny and he laughs when he crushes a beetle. He thrills at killing

the snails and they call him the “shell crusher.” In yet another might-makes-right moment, the cruel child ends up being muscled by a revved-up Turbo and he yells for his mother and runs inside his house; therefore, he only stops being violent once violence is committed against him. When Turbo is giving the trike kid his due, the child is saying, “Stop!” repeatedly and he falls off the tricycle and bounces off the front door, obviously injured and terrified. We even see him run for his mom when he sees Turbo on the TV screen because his previous encounter with the snail was so traumatic.

Militarism/Nationalism/Big Business:

Before the Indianapolis 500, fighter jets fly over and there are red, white, and blue trails. Big business sponsors are on the sides of cars, such as Verizon. The announcer says the outside of the track becomes like a “minefield” from tire pieces breaking off.

Animal Abuse:

It’s tricky to have anthropomorphized characters because we know they have personalities, but somehow these films also feature animals which seem to not have personalities and are, therefore, dispensable. Take when brother, Chet, is taken away by a bird. The crows fight with each other in mid-air, then the birds land on a taco truck surrounding Chet. He begs them not to eat him, but they only squawk. They are not afforded the same status as the other creatures in the film so – because they haven’t been humanized – they have no voice. When saving his brother, Turbo ends up being eaten by one of the crows but, due to his new powers, the bird gets slammed up against the truck’s window many times from Turbo moving wildly inside of him. One of the crows is hit by a passing car and all we see are feathers flying from this upsetting act. When

referring to the Monkey Petting Zoo he had tried in order to drum up business, Tito says, "The babies were cute. The adults were just so mean." When the crew is on its way to Indy, a bug smashes near a gasping Chet on the windshield, so Tito sprays water and washes it off with the wiper blades. When Guy Gagne is asked how he keeps beating his own record, he says: "When a cheetah chases after a gazelle, does he ever stop to think, 'Maybe I've caught enough gazelles. Maybe I should just settle down, try the vegan thing.' No! He keeps running as long as his legs will carry him. I am like the cheetah. I never give up." A race official whimpers, grossed out, as he kicks his leg and Chet falls out from the guy's pant leg. No one cares how Chet is. A newscaster says, "Will the snail be crushed by the giant race cars?" We see a cartoon Turbo looking scared as he sees the giant wheel of a race car just behind him. His tongue flies out waving as he screams, then he's crushed and the audience sees much red which we assume is blood. As the race begins and competitors are being introduced, one is the "Brazilian Butcher," so named because "he actually was a butcher before he got into race car driving." Chet is once again trapped in an upside down cup (by the child who's brought him up to the box to view the race in supposed comfort). He screams, "Help!" and "Let me out!" and he is hyperventilating. For a second time, while trying to help his brother Turbo, Chet narrowly avoids salt, this time on a spectator's pretzel, by gliding through it.

Body Type/Disability:

A character who's above average weight is presented in a negative, theoretically humorous light because he's a snail but he is too large to tuck and roll so "Big Red," the perfect tomato, lands on top of him while he is not protected. At the film's end, the same guy is finally able to tuck but then he strains and

groans and says, “I can’t get out.” The light goes off and the credits roll, so the audience never knows if someone helps him or if he escapes his frightening dilemma.

CORALINE (Laika, Pandemonium, Universal, PG for “thematic elements, scary images, some language and suggestive humor,” 2009): Most think this film was directed by Tim Burton (he was a producer of the film) but it was actually done by Henry Selick, who also directed *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and *James and the Giant Peach* (1996). Friends with *Coraline*’s author Neil Gaiman, the director is a master of stop-motion puppetry and special effects; billed as a fantasy, the film is obviously a horror movie to the point that one wonders how it was given a PG with no 13 attached. It is common that ads for the military are shown before films in theaters and on DVDs (even those with G ratings) and it is a frequent occurrence that films with harsher ratings than the feature film are shown as well. As mentioned, PG-13 rated 9 is the only preview for this PG rated film, but it’s a doozy; Tim Burton produced and partnered with director Shane Acker to make 9.

The opening scene is a doll floating through a window which is grasped by thin, metal hands. The doll is laid on an opened box which has a tattered velvet lining; on the sides are assorted tools and scissors. One of the hands, which looks to be connected needles, pierces the doll’s back to hold it in place while scissors cut down the middle of the body. The hands remove hair bows and unwind the hair, then the metal fingers cut the string holding the eyes on and remove them. A seam ripper is used across the face along the mouth line, and the doll is held upside down as stuffing is removed from the mouth; the doll becomes limp as stuffing falls in balls to the floor. The metal hand reaches inside and turns the body of the doll inside

out. The doll is held with its upper body and mouth lying back as sand is poured into its mouth, looking like some bizarre force-feeding ritual. A needle pokes through the back of the doll as she's reassembled and returned to the universe through the open window. This scene presents the tone of the film and summarizes its eerie connections between make-believe and reality.

Animal Abuse:

Enter Coraline, the little girl who has just moved in at the Pink Palace apartments, who resembles the doll we'd seen earlier. She goes outside and strips a branch, preparing to use it for dousing. A scroungy cat follows and walks quietly on a ledge above her. A few pebbles fall and she looks up and, when there's no response to her asking who's there, she throws a rock and the cat screeches. She gasps in surprise, runs, and pants. The cat comes up behind her and growls. She's scared, then annoyed, saying: "You scared me to death, you mangy thing!" Later, the cat tells Coraline that the witch/other mother "hates cats."

Bored to death, but trying to explore the 150 year old house as her father suggested, she opens the shower curtain and sees silverfish and starts smashing them with her hands, killing five, then is horrified that their bodily remains are on her; she wipes them on her clothes, then turns on the faucet and waits, but the shower's brown water pours over her unexpectedly. A while later, she writes on her list of things she's found around the house: "12 disgusting!!! bugs!"

As if preferable to her real dad's vegan spread, Coraline is delighted that the other parents present her with a chicken for dinner. Other father prays, "We give our thanks and ask to bless our mother's golden chicken breast!" A random live chicken is

on top of boxes in Mr. Bobinsky's place when she visits; he has purchased new cheese samples, one assumes to encourage his performing circus mice – he later says maybe he's working the mice too hard. In a gesture of concern for her welfare – to make her strong – Bobinsky gives her a beet but Coraline inconsiderately tosses it away.

When Coraline visits the actresses who live downstairs, their dogs start barking and we hear one of them say, "Cease your infernal yapping!" Scary music plays once Coraline notices stuffed dogs adorning the walls, all wearing angel outfits. She asks, "Are those dogs **real**?" April answers: "Our sweet, departed angels. Couldn't bear to part with them, so we had them stuffed." She begins introducing each one to her, but is interrupted when Miriam enters with their snack – tea and stuck together taffy. The two women argue over the results of Coraline's reading of tea leaves, one saying "You are in terrible danger!" and the other revealing, "There's a tall, handsome beast in your future."

Coraline refers again to Wybie being a stalker but he says he and the cat are just hunting banana slugs. She calls his cat a "wuss puss" twice because he doesn't like getting his feet wet and is inside Wybie's jacket. He says, "Check out Slugzilla!" and shows her a large slug he's picked up with tweezers; he then gives her the camera so she can capture what he does with the slug: mimicking eating it, sticking it near his nose so it appears to be coming out of there, making it appear as if it's attacking him, pretending it's a moustache. She is amused by his antics but he throws the slug on the ground behind him. The other mother/witch offers Coraline chocolate candies, but they are wriggling; she tells her they are "cocoa beetles from Zanzibar" and bites one in half to Coraline's disgust, as the legs still writhe.

In desperation, when her parents are missing, Coraline goes to see the women downstairs, where April holds a whimpering dog on her lap while she's crocheting an angel costume on him for when he dies and will be stuffed and put on display like the others who've passed away. Coraline questions this, asking doesn't she just make costumes for the dead ones, to which April responds: "Just looking ahead, dear. Angus hasn't been feeling very well as of late."

Death Language and Action/Injury:

We see in the foreground a hand on a bicycle handle while Coraline's trying to find a well with her dousing stick. The hand honks the horn and scares her. There's a close-up of the strange-looking rider who revs his engine and rides down the hill to her. She screams because on the rider's black gloves are white skeletal bones and the face has what appears to be a metal mask with skull marks, plus three green lights where eyes would normally be and a crank on the side of the head covering. She says, "Get away from me!" as the bike passes and knocks her over. She tells him she doesn't like being stalked "by psycho nerds or their cats!" He explains the cat is feral but that he does feed it nightly, and that sometimes the cat comes to his window at night "[bringing him] little dead things." After introductions, where the audience learns the kid's name is Wybie, short for Wyborne, the two exchange unpleasantries, as in Coraline making fun of his name by calling him Why-Were-You-Born, then depart.

When visiting Bobinsky, Coraline thinks he's going to land on top of her while he's doing his acrobatics, so she covers her head, gardening shears pointing upward; luckily, he lands just above them. When she visits the fading Bobinsky toward the movie's end, rats trip her and she falls, denting the balcony

railing, causing the balcony to separate from the rest of the building and crash. When Coraline thinks she's lost the game with the witch – and everything else in her life – a rat head with ball lands next to her as she cries.

Body Parts:

It is unmissable that the doll resembling Coraline is watching her throughout the film, which intentionally leaves the audience unsettled. When Coraline meets her alternate parents once she enters the tiny door, we become aware that the doll has not only been spying on her but reporting back to these people who know all too much about her and her life. We – and Coraline – notice immediately that the new parents will not only indulge her every desire but that they are identical to the real thing with the exception of sewn on buttons where their eyes should be.

Wybie tells Coraline he's never been inside where she lives because his grandmother's twin sister disappeared or was stolen from there when they were kids. Shortly after, Coraline again visits the other parents, where the other mother refers to the other father as "your better father." Other mother has invited a button-eyed, silent version of Wybie to hang out with Coraline. She says, "You're awful cheerful considering you can't say anything." Then, upon reflection, she follows up with: "It didn't hurt, did it, when she...?" We never get the answer to that question, which is a key point the film nastily avoids. We are, therefore, left to believe that the witch's actions – stitching on smiles, stealing eyes and replacing them with buttons, etc. – are indeed painful.

When the other dad begins telling Coraline about the other mother, a gloved hand from the piano covers his mouth while the other chastises him with a finger. She says she'll go

talk with Wybie but the dad tells her, “He pulled a long face and Mother didn’t like it.” Then he grunts as the gloves grab his head, roughly covering his mouth; while the gloves are tormenting the other dad, she runs outside to find Wybie. Coraline sees the cat who suggests that the other mother might like her in order to have something to love – or something to eat. The witch refers to the cat as “vermin” when he escorts her back into the house; at the film’s end, Coraline throws the cat at the witch and the cat is screaming. The cat claws her eyes out; blind, her hand is cut off in the tunnel with Coraline. We hear her screaming, “Don’t leave me! Don’t leave me! I’ll die without you!”

Child Abuse/Endangerment:

Coraline is staring out of a rain-splashed window in the apartment, where her mother is typing away at a computer on the kitchen table behind her. She says, “I almost fell down a well yesterday, Mom.” The mother answers, “Uh-huh,” obviously not paying attention to her blue-haired daughter who is desperate for parental attention. She tries again: “I would’ve died.” The mother says, “That’s nice,” again consumed by her work. Coraline asks if she can go outside and the mom says no because “mud makes a mess,” but Coraline is upset because she wants her garden to be growing when her friends come to visit. The girl asks her, “Isn’t that why we moved here?” The mom responds, while pointing to her neck brace, “Something like that. But then we had the accident.” Coraline claims it wasn’t her fault the mother hit the truck, and the mother dismissively says, “I never said it was.” The mother says she doesn’t have time for her right now, suggests she goes to unpack, and remembers Wybie left her a package. Coraline attempts to get her dad, also busy with work, to give her permission to go outside, but this too fails; he suggests she explore the house and

write down her findings: "List everything that's blue. Just let me work!" She looks at a "The Blue Boy" style painting on the wall of a child who's dropped his ice cream, cone still in his hand, looking down sadly. She calls the painting "boring."

While looking for the doll Wybie left for her, she discovers a wallpapered over little door. She asks her mom where the door leads and the mother responds, "I'm really, really busy." She tells her, "I think it's locked," then "please!" The mother groans, but grudgingly comes in and says, "Will you stop pestering me if I do this for you?" The girl clasps her hands together, looks up, and whimpers, as if saying "yes" and "please" at the same time. The mother gets a key which has a button on the end, tears the wallpaper, and unlocks the door, but Coraline is disappointed when the door opens and it has been bricked off. When she asks the mother why the door is so small, she abruptly answers, "We made a deal! Zip it!!" When Coraline tells her mom she didn't lock the door, the mother yells in frustration.

Coraline is disgusted by the food her father's made for dinner and asks the mom why she never cooks, to which she responds, "Your dad cooks, I clean, and **you** stay out of the way!" Coraline says the chard looks "more like slime" and the dad says, "Well, it's slime or bedtime, fusspot." She says to her doll: "Think they're trying to poison me?" She moves the doll's head up and down in agreement. When Coraline falls for gloves her mom won't buy, she tells her that her other mom would get them for her and the mother unwittingly says, "Maybe she should buy all your clothes."

The other mother turns beastly when Coraline refuses to listen to her; she grabs her by the nose and leads her away as Coraline screams, "What are you doing? Ow! That hurts!" She

throws her into an inescapable place and tells her she can come out when she's learned to be a loving daughter; meanwhile, Coraline meets the ghosts of the children stolen by the witch previously. They don't remember their names but one says, "but I 'member my true mommy." They explain how the beldam spied on them with the dolls, saw that they weren't happy, and lured them to her. Then, because they wanted more, they "let her sew the buttons." They ask her to find their eyes, if she's lucky enough to escape, so their souls will be freed.

The other Wybie rescues her and we see that he has a mask over his face and, when Coraline removes the mask, he attempts to cover his face. She pulls his hands from his face and sees that he has a forced smile stitched onto his face. She asks, "Did she do this to you?" She removes the stitches and he leads her to the passage behind the door. She asks him to come with her: "Come on! She'll hurt you again!" He shakes his head no, then removes his glove and blows and his hand disappears, indicating that he cannot leave this world they're in. When Coraline arrives home, she finds the groceries her real mother had bought are filled with flies and maggots. She tells the real Wybie what's happened but he's only there for the doll which the grandmother has discovered is missing. In a particularly sad moment, when her parents are missing, Coraline makes mock parents out of pillows and such and crawls between them, crying herself to sleep.

When Coraline confronts the witch in order to rescue her parents, the witch claims she doesn't know where they are: "Perhaps they've grown bored of you and run away to France." Coraline reminds herself to be strong but when she sees the button eyes on the table, sweat drips down her forehead. She makes a deal with the witch that she'll let all the kids plus her and her parents go if Coraline wins the game she's conceived

but that she'll stay with the witch forever and will "let you sew buttons into my eyes" if she loses. As she's searching, the other dad comes up and, while trying to hurt her, says, "So sorry. Mother making me. Don't wanna hurt you." He tries to help her but is drowned in a pond.

One of the ghost children says, "Bless you, Miss, you found me. But there's two eyes still lost." She assures the child that she's working on it. In the theater, she encounters mean dog-like bats as she's racing to save everybody. When she gets to Mr. Bobinsky's place, there are feet swinging as if somebody's hanged his or herself (at least from the audience's view) but then we realize it's Wybie's clothes. She laments not being able to rescue the silent Wybie. When she encounters Bobinsky, now just a voice and clothes, he tells her that if she wins, she'll just go back to being "bored and neglected" at home. Rats scramble out of his clothes as his voice distorts. The witch tells her she loves her and Coraline counters, "You have a very funny way of showing it." She tells her she's staying there forever while holding the needle and thread. Coraline's real parents are busy and occasionally blasé, but the other mother/witch's brand of passive-aggressive love is completely abusive as she flips from adoring one moment to saying things like "You dare disobey your mother?" the next. The film is presenting the idea of appreciating what one has, but having one's eyes replaced and stealing children's souls are terrifying concepts which are long-lasting, even for adults.

Coraline does release the children's souls by finding their stolen eyes, and they are grateful. They say, "It is over and done with for us." Coraline asks, "What about me?" One of them tells her: "You're in terrible danger, girl! It's the key, Miss." He explains that there's only one key and the witch will find it; it's around Coraline's neck. One of the children tells her

it isn't all bad because, "Thou art alive. Thou art still living." The witch's cut off hand follows her as she goes outside. As she is about to throw the key into the well, the hand grabs it and is dragging Coraline by the neck. Wybie shouts and comes to the rescue, but the hand grabs his face and throws him into the well where he's barely hanging onto the edge. Coraline covers the hand with a blanket but it cuts its way through; eventually, they throw the key and hand into the well and cover it up – one assumes that, in fantasy world, this will finally stop the witch. Wybie apologizes to Coraline for not believing her about "all this evil stuff." He explains that once he saw a picture of his grandmother and her sister as children, he finally understood. In the final scene, at the big party, Coraline and Wybie plan to tell the grandmother what really happened to her sister. Coraline asks the theatrical sisters how the dog, Angus, is doing, and one of them says he's much better "but he can't duck his wings forever." The camera pans out to the big pink house on the hill where the cat sits on the Pink Palace sign. He purrs, then disappears.

PLANET 51 (Ilion Animation Studios, HandMade Films, TriStar, PG for "mild sci-fi action and some suggestive humor," 2009): This movie references other violent films such as *Star Wars*, *Aliens*, and *Terminator 2* in its sci-fi presentation of dual worlds, the mad scientist trope, and heavy militarism. There's a reference to incest as someone says, "You're not brother and sister, right?"

Sexism:

When the astronaut instructs how to attract women, it is in a derogatory fashion: "Spot your prey, make your move, show no mercy."

Militarism/Nationalism:

The film presents heavy militarism, equipment, personnel, and language such as “Tenshun!” “Fire at will,” “C’mon soldier, take that hill,” “Call the general,” and “Keep firing. Keep firing. Keep firing. Kill every last alien!” Army personnel storm in with weapons and there are soldiers aplenty, military helicopters, and gas masks. There are shots of the astronaut with the U.S. flag. There’s an explosion from a tank firing.

Animal Abuse:

Cleverly, these abuses on animals are done to a robot/mechanical ‘dog’ but the effect is the same for viewers; for example, the astronaut hits his robot dog on the head with a newspaper and says, “Bad boy.” The robot dog is seen smashing a live lizard maliciously. The mailman enjoys teasing the neighborhood dog, which results in the dog straining at his collar/leash and choking. At one point, a character is upset thinking the robot dog has died. Rover, the robot dog, is captured and put in a cage where he’s so terrified that he retreats to the back of the cage and pees oil. He is thrown against a wall and locked in solitary confinement. When asked what to do with the “alien spawn” (Rover), the commander says, “I want it destroyed, one little piece at a time.” Rover is frightened by this and backs up against the wall.

Child Abuse/Endangerment:

A mother is trying to get her son to take his medicine and she says, “Open wide or the big bad monster’ll get ya” and then the astronaut bursts in and the child begins chugging from the bottle of medicine. There’s a reference to children having to

endure a father's death, the mother having to go to work to support them, and the fact that the children are always hungry.

Body Parts:

The film includes references like: "Brains are for breakfast with cereal and milk. Dinner's organs and eyeballs." There's a reference to sharing a butt cork as a defense against alien probing. The scientist says, "What a remarkable brain you must have...an incision here and here (pointing to brain areas) and it should pop right out."

Sadistic Language and Action:

There are sadistic lines, such as: "I'd like to cause him some pain." Inside the torture chamber, someone says, "Your kind knows no decency." Orders are given to soldiers to shoot, electrocute all, and blow up the entire base. A soldier shoots another guy in the foot. During the end credits, there's an *Alien* reference as a human-looking baby is screaming with a pacifier flying out of the mouth as it's expelled from/bursting out of an alien body. The alien body's tongue is hanging out and his clothing is torn. When the soldiers see peaceful hippies, all of them break out police truncheons (a.k.a. billy clubs, night sticks). A hippie is beaten excessively off camera/out of shot. "Ouch" and hitting noises are heard as viewers see beating sticks go up and down.

Torture:

There are four torture scenes plus torture accoutrement. The idea of examining/torturing an alien is presented. A medical experimentation scene is included whereby a man's brain is removed for examination. The robot dog is tormented. When the astronaut won't cooperate, the commander puts

sunglasses on and says, “There’s another way to unlock the secrets of your brain...Professor Kipple? He’s all yours.” The evil scientist/professor enters wearing gloves and two attendants carry in torture supplies. The astronaut is strapped down on a table by leather straps. Others are also tied down on tables being wheeled around. A big lamp is seen and torture accoutrement is on tables with attendants standing by. The head and feet of the “patients” are exposed. One guy on a table has a head strap on over his bandaged head, then the camera pans to a brain in a jar. The professor says, “We’ll have that brain out in no time.” A saw is about to be used on the astronaut. The professor starts up the saw. There’s a close up of the saw. Then we see that the astronaut has his head in clamps and he’s looking upset. There’s maniacal laughter by the professor. An expression of pain or extreme fear is on the astronaut’s face; then we see a smile on the assistant doctor’s face as the torture is about to take place. Severely “lobotomized” (whole brain) guys talk about how great they feel and then they hit themselves in their faces with their drinks (because they no longer have the ability to think). The brain-removed guys find the professor and decide to perform brain surgery on him. They are holding the saw. Escorting him off under force, they are going to go at him with the saw as he screams “Nooo!”

OPEN SEASON (Sony Pictures Animation, ImageWorks, Columbia Pictures, PG for “some rude humor, mild action and brief language,” 2006):

Horror Film Technique:

The camera moves with the bear’s point of view as it approaches a woman from behind. Then we see her smiling, then perhaps looking confused or with an “I have that weird feeling” look on her face as the furriness approaches. The bear

raises its arms and extends its claws and growls, but when she growls back at him in an instructing, far scarier way, we realize they are best friends.

Death Language and Action/Injury:

Kudos to creators for using the Talking Heads song, “Wild, Wild Life” to add a sense of fun to the film’s beginning, but this seems broken when the bear taps the rifle hanging under the store sign, “Guns & Gifts,” then again when he passes weapon-carrying hunters on the street, when the “Open Season” (in three days) sign is put up, simultaneously announcing the film, and when we see the forest ranger’s show for cheering crowds which includes Boog, the bear, riding a unicycle. Finally, Boog and the audience see what appears to be a dead deer (Elliot), unconscious with tongue hanging out, strapped to the front of Shaw’s truck and, as he walks away, he says to the deer: “You’re going from one grill to another.” Although Shaw claims he accidentally hit the deer with his truck, there’s a flash to when he intentionally swerved off the road in order to kill it by striking it with his vehicle; what’s upsetting is that the officers know he has been illegally hunting but neither does anything to stop him. Boog, perhaps due to his captivity and time spent with humans, appears to have never seen a corpse so he sniffs at it, says, “Nasty!” then pokes at it with a stick. An eye opens and they both scream. The deer asks the bear if he’s dead and the response is: “Not yet.” Boog then explains that he’s on the truck owned by the “nastiest hunter in town,” as if it’s only a matter of time until he dies but, after shocking the deer by pointing out he’s missing an antler – a move Shaw made because he plans to use the deer for food, rather than as another trophy which he’ll have taxidermied – he unties the deer so he can escape.

Animal Abuse/Language:

Shaw tells the authorities that he's "just respecting the natural order: Man on top, animals on the bottom." He tells the ranger that Boog, her bear, is special and is somewhere in the middle – "between two slices of rye, smothered in gravy." She calls him a "sick, sick twisted puppy" and, to return the insult, he tells her to "put me down for a box of thin mints, will you, sweetie?" as if she's just a Girl Scout and has no authority over him, although she does (but she does not exercise this right/duty). In this film, it is the supposedly lowly rabbit who is treated in a mean way. Rabbits are thrown at Boog's window by the deer and this will not be the last time these creatures will be used viciously by the film; they are used by Boog as face towels and tossed away and, at one point, Boog thinks he's found his lost doll covered in mud but, once he realizes it's just a rabbit, he throws it aside. In one of the final scenes, even though the rabbits are helping in the effort, one is run over but no one comments or seems upset. In addition, the rabbits are roughly used as gas masks, thrown onto the other animals' faces as they head out on their mission. These creatures have already been shown as caring, feeling animals: As the flood approached, two of them clasped hands, for instance. Giving further human qualities to some – but not all – of the animals in the film seems a common device meant to further separate us from the natural world. The film ends with sentiments such as "rabbit fight!" and "eat rabbit," then a final rabbit hits the camera/screen so it is mashed directly in front of us; filmmakers choose to make fun of animal rights by ending with "No rabbits were harmed in the making of this movie." Of course we already know this since it is an animated film.

In a bizarre reference, as the deer and bear are trashing the general store, Boog addresses his newly discovered favorite

candy bars as he caresses the many on display as if they are one: “She’s my lady. Smooth and creamy. So bad, I shouldn’t. Yet I will.” Elliot, the deer, has gotten his tongue caught in the hotdog cooker rolls but there’s no obvious resolution to his predicament, just a switch to another view of the action going on in the store. Elliot escapes before the police arrive, but Boog is escorted home by Gordy after passing out from ingesting too much sugar. The next day, Shaw again tries to run over the deer with his truck; further, he is angry with the bear for releasing his catch.

To the audience in the film during the ranger’s bear show – and to us – it appears as though Boog is killing Elliot. The action is happening behind a closed curtain, so the shadows appear what they are not. At one point, Boog tells Elliot to “take off the coat” to which Elliot answers, somewhat flippantly, “No means no,” in a disrespectful reference to date rape. It looks very much like Boog is attacking Elliot and tearing out his middle. Something splashes across the curtain and the audience assumes this is blood. The crowd runs away terrified and Shaw is there ready to use the panicky moment as an opportunity to kill – he attempts to shoot the pair using only one bullet and we see the two animals he’s lining up through the scope of his gun. Police officer, Gordy, pushes the gun away but at first we think Boog’s been shot with a bullet as he falls; turns out, he’s been hit by the ranger’s dart gun, fired just to knock him out. Six darts are fired into the buttocks of the deer but it is unclear who has done the firing. The police officer tries to arrest Shaw but he’s escaped already.

Boog and Elliot are brought to above the falls, abandoned in the wilderness, where it will theoretically be safe for them. When they awaken, Boog holds Elliot over the edge of a cliff, pointing out it’s his fault that his life is missing; he

drops him and Elliot screams but Boog catches him with his other paw; he throws the deer and Elliot lands in such a way that his antler gets stuck in the ground and he's left in peril for what seems like many hours but no one comes to his rescue in a quick manner; Elliot threatens by telling Boog if he doesn't want to be partners, he can get a ride back to town on the front of a hunter's truck. Later, when Boog enters Shaw's cabin, he sees animal heads covering the walls, showing off his many kills. Shaw pulls a knife on Boog in a desperate attempt to kill him; Boog fights him off but Shaw reveals his rifle once more. Elliot saves the day and for a few we once again think he's dead but he isn't.

Militarism:

When threatened, Boog asks the Scottish squirrel commando "You and what army?" Turns out there really are a huge number of squirrels at the ready when the militaristic leader instructs, "Ready? Fire!" and Boog gets covered in pinecones. In a nod to PTSD, Boog asks two ducks for help and one puts his head under water – the other tells him not to mind because his friend hasn't been "right since the great migration." He tells the WWII invasion story: "There were thousands of us when we started in the big Vs. Then...Then it happened." One by one, we see the butts (of the ducks flying in formation as part of his memory) burst into flames as if it's old footage of airplanes from that era. The film makes it clear that the duck is suffering psychologically from his wartime experience. There's a "take cover!" comment when Shaw later fires at the two main characters; Elliot tries to comfort his friend, but Boog says, "We're gonna die and you know it!" Shaw enjoys the predicament the pair find themselves in and the audience sees his eye close-up through his rifle's scope. He smiles as he's getting ready to shoot. A propane tank is painted with a mean

face – which has traditionally been done on real bombs – and used as a bomb which is tied under one of the ducks. A very realistic explosion occurs when a flare lands next to it after it lands on a hunter’s truck.

Nationalism:

Shaw is on the hunt for Boog and Elliot and says: “A bear...and a deer, working together. How far does this conspiracy go? What other animals are involved? God bless America!” The camera pans over Shaw’s truck rifle and he adds: “I hope the bald eagle hasn’t turned!” He later states that animals are “the [enemies]” and that there could be “a total reversal of the natural order.”

Gender Regulation/Policing/Bullying:

A head worker beaver addresses the others: “Okay, ladies, this dam ain’t gonna build itself!” The beavers tease Boog when they hear that he and Elliot are going to be in a show together and Elliot calls Boog a “diva” when he says the show won’t happen. When Boog attempts to fish, the fish jump out of the water and beat him up. Elliot is made fun of by the head of the herd for returning and speaking with his partner, Giselle. Although Boog defends Elliot, the deer herd make fun of Boog once they see his doll – Ian, head of the herd, also tells Boog and Elliot: “You two are perfect for each other. You’re a loser and you’re a loser-er.” In a final bullying blow, Ian says to Boog: “See you later, backpack boy!” After the danger’s passed, Boog says, “that’s right, fool. You better run! Keep on prancing, you panty-waisted cow!” The militaristic squirrel overhears and says, “Are you not gonna buy him a drink before you kiss him? Ya big Jessie!” Several of the squirrels laugh at them and pelt them with pinecones as they leave looking sad. They lament that they are losers and start a competitive

conversation about who's worse, with Elliot saying he's "Half doe. Half buck. I'm a duck!" and Boog stating that he rides a unicycle for crackers, ending with: "I killed a man!" Great laughter ensues. When the couple tells Shaw they're scientists looking for "a real, live homo-sasquatchus," he counters, in a derisive tone, with: "Homo-say-what?" The film directly attacks the relationship between Elliot and Boog when Boog says he does not wish to perform with Elliot on stage and Elliot cruelly states, in a blow to children's security everywhere, "Oh, I see. You get to have the career while I stay home and look after Dinkleman [Boog's doll]! He's not even mine!"

Racism/Sexism:

A female skunk with a Spanish accent asks Boog, as he's trying to defecate behind a bush and already feels violated because bunnies have gathered to watch, what he's doing on her house. He says he didn't know it was her place and a second skunk with the same accent says unkindly to the first, "It would probably be an improvement!" The first responds: "What did you just say to me, Rosie?" She says, "Nothing. Why you gotta be so sensitive?" The first says, "You better watch your mouth...or you're gonna get yourself in a lot of trouble, girlfriend." Rosie: "You're just jealous because you ain't got a man." Boog complains to Elliot that he doesn't know what to do because there's a "chick fight" and Elliot encourages Boog to "show 'em who's boss" and mark his territory. Boog: "All right, ladies. I'm laying down the law." A squirrel falls dead from the spraying Boog's given by the skunks. That these skunks are portrayed as hostile, interrupting, and vicious – even to each other – is consistent with depictions of Black and Latino women across media; obviously, these mean-spirited views of women of color are introduced early. Later, one says, "Listen, girlfriend, you wanna find a man like my Ignacio, you gotta

check your look.” The other counters, “What are you talkin’ about, Rosie? I’m black and white. I go fine with everything.” In yet another female versus female moment in kids’ film, Rosie says, “You go fine with everybody. Maybe that’s your problem.” Ouch – another reference to women of color being shown as overly sexual. At the film’s end, we see the skunks and the ducks walking together. One of the skunks says to the other, “I know he’s a duck but he treats me like a lady.” In a sexist moment, there’s a twist on “Bros before hoes” which the film changes to “Bros before does.”

CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF MEATBALLS 2 (Sony Pictures Animation, PG for “mild rude humor,” 2013):

Animal Abuse:

That a calf is being born, prominently sticking out of its mother, seems odd enough, but that the mother and baby are abandoned mid-birth is just wrong.

TANGLED (Walt Disney Pictures, Walt Disney Animation Studios, PG for “brief mild violence,” 2010):

Murder:

At the end of the film, the fake mom stabs and kills her daughter’s boyfriend, she turns nearly skeletal, the chameleon trips her and she falls to her death from the tower. The boyfriend has died but the girl’s tears landing on his cheek bring him back to life. Blah blah blah. Is that considered “brief mild violence” as described by the MPAA? Fairly brief, most definitely not mild.

THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG (Walt Disney Pictures, Walt Disney Animation Studios, G, 2009):

Racism/Classism:

Wow, it took **this** long for Disney to create a Black princess? For shame, Disney, on that point, but extra shame for placing that princess in 1920s New Orleans poverty. Stereotypical depictions such as these erase the successes of African-Americans, such as Daniel Hale Williams, the doctor who performed the first open-heart surgery. “Even when the 86-year old media conglomerate tries to right decades of stereotypes in its animated movies, Disney can still manage to miss the mark.” ⁷³⁰ New Orleans is known as a land of opportunity for people of color and has been for ages, including the time period when the film takes place. Just like *Nanny McPhee*’s continuing sexism under the guise that it takes place during Victorian times or Disney’s fond remembrances of regal and other times, such as portraying happy slaves in the finally taken off the shelves, *Song of the South*, the film obviously pans from rich, presumably white housing to the shotgun shack where Tiana lives. Sure, execs made it so she works as a chef for a white family, as opposed to her originally being a maid, but to set the film in a largely Black place which – thanks to bureaucratic bumbling and lack of concern – destroyed lives and split up families who are suffering to this day seems inconsiderate at best.

⁷³⁰ M.J. Stephey. “The Princess and the Frog: Top 10 Disney Controversies.” *Time*. Dec. 9, 2009. <http://entertainment.time.com.html>.

MALEFICENT (Walt Disney Pictures, Roth Films, PG for “sequences of fantasy action and violence, including frightening images,” 2014):

Body Parts:

Wow, welcome to the world of basically a roffie date rape scene rated PG, as her wings are cut off after she’s drugged.

DESPICABLE ME (Illumination Entertainment, Universal, PG for “rude humor and mild action,” 2010): This film is beloved by all who see it, mainly due to the adorable nature of the orphan girls and the fact that the main character adopts them in the end; the audience is also drawn to the protagonist because one is able to observe his condescending mother and this makes the viewer sympathetic toward how he became evil. One of the trailers for the new spinoff *Minions* film (Illumination Entertainment, Illumination Mac Guff, Universal, PG for “action and rude humor,” 2015) shows the minions having fun in an actual torture chamber.

Child Abuse:

The film starts out with Gru manipulating a situation so he can make a child cry, pretending at first to comfort the child whose ice cream has fallen; he makes a balloon animal for the kid but then pops it, leaving the child in shock. The children – Agnes, Edith, and Margo – are trapped in an orphanage run by a mean woman, where they are made to suffer indignities like selling cookies for their keep. When they return from one such journey and ask if anyone adopted them while they were gone, the headmistress, Miss Hattie, says, “Let me think.” Then she harshly says, “No!!” She continues: “You’re never gonna get adopted. You know that, don’t you?” The child, clearly feeling

badly about herself, answers, “Yeah, I know.” The headmistress answers back, “Good.” When one of the girls asks how much they’ve sold, Miss Hattie says in a threatening tone: “Look at my face. Do you still think it’s a great sale day? Eighteen coco-nutties. I think we can do a little better than that, don’t you? Yeah, we wouldn’t want to spend the weekend in the ‘Box of Shame,’ would we? No? Go clean something of mine.” As they exit, we see a cardboard box and written in red on it are the words: Box of SHAME, in caps. A child’s face is looking out from a narrow space cut out from the box. There’s a heavy looking book atop the box, placed so a child cannot escape. As the girls leave, they say, “Hi, Penny” and the kid responds, “Hi, guys,” indicating that this solitary confinement is familiar punishment. To torment the little girls just before bedtime, Gru warns the girls about thousands of bedbugs and tells them there’s “probably something in your closet.” There are many scenes of Gru’s mother being mean to him as an adult and as a child; in a flashback, we see a young Gru telling his mom he’s going to go to the moon and the mother devastates him by telling him he’s too late because they aren’t “sending the monkeys anymore.”

Violent and Sadistic Action/Language:

Gru uses his freeze ray against those ahead of him in line, but also against an innocent guy sitting drinking his coffee who’s not in his way. There’s a reference to *The Godfather* in the movie: There’s a doll head in Gru’s bed under the sheet and Gru screams. The film’s beginning shows yet another slam against the Middle East as an Egyptian herder wearing a rural turban is run over by a tourist bus; there’s a shot of a skull and crossbones t-shirted American child holding a toy war plane while the controversially racist song, “Sweet Home Alabama,” plays. The minions are presented as both innocent and mean-

spirited as they are consistently injured in the line of duty. At one point, a fight breaks out between two minions and the others start shouting “Fight!” as one shoves another’s head into a computer multiple times. Vector plays a violent video game making one character punch another. When Vector sees an upside-down owl-like creature on his outer wall, he presses a button which releases a large, gun-like weapon to destroy it. Gru is injured numerous times – including being punched in his private parts, being eaten whole by a shark, and being burned by a laser beam – outside of Vector’s place. The girls think the many weapons pointing at them in front of Vector’s place are “cool.” When the girls arrive at Gru’s, one enters an Iron Maiden and closes the door. What looks like blood oozes out and the other girls are terrified. Gru, showing his disdain for children, remarks that the plan “will work with two.” The blood turns out to be from the girl’s punctured juice box. Gru serves the girls pancakes shaped like a skull, a knife, and a guy with a bullet hole. The middle girl says, “Yes! Mine’s shaped like a dead guy!” There is much threatening language, such as “You are in for a world of pain!” and “He is gonna kick your butt!”

Militarism:

At the beginning of the film, we see five tanks around the Great Wall of China shoot a bird – suddenly, all that remains are feathers. The film is packed with weapons of all types – innumerable guns, a saw blade machine, Oxy Acetylene tanks, a chain saw device, a regular saw, a mace, a freeze gun, a rocket launcher, etc. A new cookie robot comes up wearing a military-like hat. The girls’ beds are bombs and there is a nuclear waste barrel in their room, as well as missiles and shells. There’s a piece of armor with an axe cleaved in the helmet. There’s a NASA reference when Gru walks out in an

astronaut suit. Vector says, “Booya.” (Please Google the term to discover the history of this military term.)

Animal Abuse:

Gru’s residence features many mounted animals and former live animals used as furnishing – a stuffed rhinoceros and snake, panda rug, crocodile couch. When Gru learns another villain has outdone him, he throws his dog roughly on the couch. The most upsetting part of the film has to be the look of terror on the elephant’s face as he’s being experimented upon. Gru tells his neighbor that the neighbor’s dog can’t poop on his lawn if he’s dead. A dog whimpers from being crushed. A creature is preserved in a jar in the girls’ bedroom. Live piranhas are fired out of a gun and one is shoved back inside the gun after being shot out of it. There’s a squid-launcher weapon and the squid looks sick when it’s shot out and hits someone below. Vector presses a button and explodes Gru’s fake dog. Gru punches a shark which has jumped out of Vector’s moat.

Ageism:

The old scientist, Dr. Nefario, is criticized for his design: “Why are you so old?” Further, the older man is made fun of for his poor hearing and we see him on an electric scooter. When Gru asks him to build tiny cookie robots, the scientist is confused. Gru himself is turned down by the bank for a loan because they’ve decided to invest in the younger, hipper Vector.

Racism/Worker Abuse:

The minions, who are mainly non-English speaking, are treated in such a way as to show there’s a class difference because they are merely workers. Gru tells them that they did a

good job this year but that there will not be financial remuneration for their efforts: “No, no raises. You’re not going to get any raises.” The orphan girls are forced by the mean headmistress at the orphanage to work for their housing and board. All of the guards at the secret facility in East Asia look a bit like Chairman Mao. Gru in disguise is dressed as a Rastafarian.

Gender Policing:

Minions are teased in the films for wanting a hug. When a minion dances, another punches him. When a minion gets in line for affection, he is hit by another. Another minion is shoved for dancing.

DESPICABLE ME 2 (Illumination Entertainment, Universal, PG for “rude humor and mild action,” 2013): Similar issues abound, such as a driver hitting a character and an animal with her car and swerving wildly through a crowd; freeze guns which cover victims in ice; a man threatening to launch a woman strapped onto a rocket into a live volcano; a kidnapping; guns, knives, and other weapons; someone getting hit in the head with a bat; characters being turned into monsters once given a serum; a character appearing to be impaled with long needles – but now with the Disney-esque forming of the new little hetero family as “happily ever after.”

THE VOICELESS CHILD:

Children are already in a jam in that theirs is not to critique or criticize dominant culture, but to have their vulnerability exploited constantly. The correctives of parents, teachers, faith-based persons, the courts and legal officers, mental and physical health personnel, and home-based caregivers all contribute to a singular, repeated doctrine that one

is less than; far more insidious due to its seemingly benign character and promotion is the effect of what is thought to be their escape: entertainment. Thus, since Walt Disney's first cartoon which showed a child being spanked – seemingly misnamed “Mickey's Good Deed” (1932) – children have been surrounded by an unfriendly, unhelpful, chastising reality. If one finds in existence the abusive and then one is forced via convention to view the abusive, one will face a sense of dread regarding the world. These dominant media-enforced groups are sure to keep fear and threat at the forefront of said entertainment as a Foucauldian disciplinary measure. Influenced [read: bombarded] by the axes of military, class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality, etc. in portraying cruelty and given an overall unrealistic view of how to exist in the world, a new challenge has come into view: how to override media messages, now including torturous moments of torture, which children must endure in their supposed world of amusement.

We need to address the oppressed group known as children and include their actual lived experience in our grand scheme of dominant ideologies. Since this marginalized and penalized group is not capable of speaking for itself, we have a duty to explore and expose the language and semiotics of subordination and the power relations which keep these new humans and other creatures subjugated. It is paramount that all have a voice – we must work to reject the perspective of white, heterosexual male, American capitalist, and ruling-class European philosophies. This is imperative. Our society must recognize these undervalued Others and hear their stories – and protect them from the stories through which they learn to accept brutality. As is the case of all alternative understandings, a new vocabulary must be established to describe conditions facing those still in darkness, hidden away from inclusive discourse; a new space must be created in order to expose this hurtful

material and its effects in reality. Voiceless and powerless, the dominated have few moments of recourse against their marginalization. All dialogue and action regarding children, animals, and the Othered is couched in the derogatory, the disciplinary, and the legal. The overwhelming sense that “this is one’s lot in life” echoes what has been felt/is felt by all those devalued historically and currently. Facing these unappreciated subjects is not only a patriarchal order, legal techni-speak, and mean-spirited humor, but a resurgence of matter-of-fact “life’s a bitch” disregard for all that is good in the world. We are effectively destroying trust, community, and love with these collective intrusions which are intended to desensitize youth. These negative images and words contribute to a shocking but increasingly commonplace strategy meant to encourage acceptance of brutality in post-9/11 America as well as farther afield. Thus, the mission at hand requires becoming advocate and voice for the voiceless Other.

Because these depictions are couched in adorable characters, bright colors, and cute songs, they are escaping critical review. It is difficult to say where the line should be drawn, and this is debatable theoretically and practically, but it seems clear something is amiss when torture and other violence enters children’s film unnoticed – or at least not commented upon. Part of the responsibility of a society is guiding its youth toward being responsible and respectful citizenry, as well as citizens of the world; thus, a pedagogy which promotes cruelty, violence, and hate is counterproductive. If it is acceptable to introduce such ideologies to young viewers, society may pay a

price we've yet to imagine. That cost could be much more than that of a movie ticket.⁷³¹

When we hear lyrics like in Disney's *Aladdin*, introduced during the first Gulf War describing the Middle East as a place "where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face," when we see marginalized characters like Ken tortured by Barbie, when we see Buzz torment his friends and see them slowly and agonizingly heading toward the furnace, when we realize there are now only five media companies which control over 90% of everything we see and hear, we need to examine the deliberate intent of makers, hold them accountable, and focus on the effects of their work. We know violence is harmful to kids whether in person or as represented in media.

War Action/Language:

Judith Butler's work shows how the absence of images of war on our TV screens ensures that no dialog about war will take place.⁷³² I believe when acts of war are presented through characters in kids' films, the effect is the same; that is, we remove discussion about real life violence by minimizing its repercussions, often through humor, and we create future generations who accept war and its accoutrement as usual.

⁷³¹ Portions of this paragraph and other wording/concepts are taken from the author's thesis, "Monsters Under the Bed: An Analysis of Torture Scenes in Three Pixar Films." It is included because it bears repeating.

⁷³² Judith Butler. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London UK: Verso, 2004) and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London UK: Verso, 2010).

X. CONCLUSION:

“The average child develops over 18 to 24 years and full brain development doesn’t really occur until you’re into your early 20s so the idea that kids at 8 or 10 or 15 have the same level of intellectual and emotional maturity as an adult is nuts. They have different interpretive abilities, they have different emotional abilities, and they’re a much more vulnerable class in society.”

- Jim Steyer, CEO, Common Sense Media

“Media literacy is not just important, it’s absolutely critical. It’s going to make the difference between whether kids are a tool of the mass media or whether the mass media is a tool for kids to use.”

- Linda Ellerbe, producer/host Nick News

“You’ve got the words to change a nation
But you’re biting your tongue
You’ve spent a lifetime stuck in silence
Afraid you’ll say something wrong
If no one ever hears it how we gonna learn your song?
So put it in all of the papers, I’m not afraid
They can read all about it, read all about it.”

- “Read All About It, Pt. III” by Emeli Sande

The U.S. poverty rate is higher than three decades ago, but teen smoking and drug use is lower than in past decades, teen pregnancy is down, and youth crime is the lowest it has been since the 1960s.⁷³³ Popular stereotypical discourses would have us believe that our inner-cities are full of criminals; in fact, “inner-city youth drink less, smoke less, and use drugs less than their suburban middle-class counterparts.”⁷³⁴ So what’s the problem now? Disconnected and alienated youth who have

⁷³³ Steven Mintz. *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 344-345.

⁷³⁴ Mintz, 353.

become independent consumers, who are segregated from adults, and who, “through the instruments of mass culture...are exposed from an early age to overt sexuality, violence, and death.”⁷³⁵ There is no free time to play outside, no alone time to figure out what one wishes to do in life, no chance to be in the world learning with adults. There are only screens: Screens to do their papers on so others can read them; screens with tainted depictions of what the real world is like; skewed images of sexuality, race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity; no social bonding in real settings; no beneficial financial training; no chance to think while being themselves since parents arrange constant supervision in structured settings (mainly due to fear-based rhetoric surrounding childhood) and tell them that they must go to college in order to have a good life. Our reliance on narrow-minded institutional perspectives has become the norm and these institutions work night and day promoting dependence on formative views of the world through corporate screens.

And children – well, their world is full of signing pledges they won’t have sex or do drugs while the D.A.R.E. pledge doesn’t have any scientific legitimacy (and D.A.R.E. is a great way for the kids to discover the range of drugs out there) and schools have received federal government grants from the 1996 Welfare Reform Act if they teach abstinence only as the single way to avoid pregnancy and disease, even though half of all high school students have had intercourse. Studies show students taught sex education are **less** likely to engage in sexual

⁷³⁵ Steven Mintz. *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 347.

activity than pledge-signers.⁷³⁶ There's simply too much homework. Corporal punishment is still practiced in schools, even though the American Academy of Pediatrics told parents to reject spanking in 1998 (an embarrassingly late date especially since an angered adult might not be able to control their rage or might not know their strength – and because no one should be allowed to violate another's body). Girls continue to have low self-esteem thanks to sexual harassment and distorted body image, and they are not encouraged to pursue careers in technology, science, and math; meanwhile, boys are more likely to be held back a grade, are four times more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit disorders, are three times more likely to be enrolled in "special ed" programs, and substantially lag behind girls in reading and writing.⁷³⁷ Gender stereotyping is a big problem, along with not appreciating a person's sexuality, and bullying is a serious problem quite possibly due to gender binary depictions across media. Keep in mind the nearly 800 active hate groups in the U.S. which are fed by homophobic, racist, classist, and sexist material continually seen by new generations. You – and your children – have been sucker punched by the media if you shudder when you see someone wearing a hijab.

In 1909, Theodore Roosevelt hosted the first White House Conference on Children and Youth and Tuskegee Institute President, Booker T. Washington, addressed the crowd.

⁷³⁸ This taking time to look at what's happening in the world of

⁷³⁶ "Effective Sex Education" and "Comprehensive Sex Education: Research and Results." *Advocates for Youth*. 2009.

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org.html>.

⁷³⁷ Steven Mintz. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 361-364.

⁷³⁸ Tyler Miller. "Putting Children in the Spotlight." *The American Psychological Association*, 2009. Vol. 40, No. 4. <http://www.apa.org.html>.

children continued over part of the last century, the last full, national one occurring in 1970.⁷³⁹ It's been over forty years. Aren't we overdue to make changes now that we know the effects of media and other institutions on our dependents for their sake and to aid in a happier, healthier future for us all?

The vulnerable state of childhood creates a condition of the Other in which this marginalized group has no fundamental rights, despite rhetoric stating otherwise, in many countries including the United States. Globally, children's experiences are not included in human rights practice and there is a greater issue of gendered violence in which girlhood is further devoid of justice. Using the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" as a framework within which childhood ought to fit, and which states, "recalling that, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance,"⁷⁴⁰ this fundamentally singular and unique group should be given special status universally.

Along with Somalia and South Sudan, the U.S. has signed but refuses to ratify the C.R.C. Maybe there's a good reason beyond parental rights, which is claimed – maybe because it would work against big business/U.S. government aims. Using children for the prison-industrial complex goes against Articles 28, 29, and 40. Using them for the medical-industrial complex is against Articles 3, 20, 25, 33, and 39. Using them for the media-industrial complex is against Article 32. Using kids for the military-industrial complex goes against

⁷³⁹ Cristina Fahrenthold. "Support a White House Conference on Children and Youth." *Child Abuse Effects*. <http://www.child-abuse-effects.com.html>.

⁷⁴⁰ United Nations' "Convention on the Rights of the Child." 1990. <http://www7.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>.

Articles 37 and 38. And using children for vilifying and criminalizing them is against Articles 17, 19, 27, and 31.

This is all part of the same struggle. In *Taking Suffering Seriously: The Importance of Collective Human Rights*, William F. Felice examines the importance of worldwide humane governance and suggests “redefining the meaning and boundaries of civil society, and reaffirming the priority of civil society over the state, of popular sovereignty over state sovereignty...As we enter the twenty-first century, it is clear now that such a vision must include rights of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race within a dialectical framework of class analysis, to create a society based upon ideals of freedom, justice, and equality. The norms of both individual and collective human rights can potentially help establish such a framework.”⁷⁴¹ Felice’s inclusive recognition of all individuals and the idea of collective human rights which stand above state control are imperative to changing the status quo, but his mention of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race are missing an obvious but often overlooked group: youth. The previous situations underscore the difficulties of being under the legal age of adulthood.

There has been an extreme shift in content post-9/11 and the military-media-industrial complex has a desire to increase general acceptance of torture across all mediums. As recruitment drives kids to consider signing up – some have limited options otherwise – one should remember that “the median age for entering the military is 19...and tens of thousands [of veterans] experience PTSD and depression for

⁷⁴¹ William F. Felice. *Taking Suffering Seriously: The Importance of Collective Rights* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 183.

their experiences.”⁷⁴² Lawrence Grossberg’s *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* is not only review and analysis of the path cultural studies has taken, but is purview and predictor of what will develop in the field and especially in the world at large.

Grossberg hints at what is of paramount importance: The ways in which United States political and media moguls have crossed the proverbial line by using children in a variety of ways, not least of which is as part of a greater militarism, continue to plague us. He notes a change in how children have come to be viewed, “as little more than a series of problems to be controlled and contained, and as a potential threat and danger to society itself” and concludes “significant forces [are] redefining childhood, reshaping the lives of children and restructuring the place of children in society...these changes have been inscribed in rhetorics of children as criminals, aliens, predators, and monsters – rhetorics that ignore the rampant mistreatment of and violence directed at children.”⁷⁴³ Grossberg states that “kids are ‘caught in the crossfire’ of a struggle over our relation to the future” and he notes that “any struggle over the future could not avoid incorporating kids into

⁷⁴² Jeriah Bowser. “Horsemeat, Child-Soldiers, and Tiaras: Breaking Down Social Constructs.” *The Hampton Institute: A Working Class Think Tank*. June 21, 2013. <http://www.hamptoninstitution.org/socialconstructs.html>. In this article, Bowser asks the fundamental question: “How have we become so desensitized to violence and war that we see war as an acceptable past-time for our country, so much so that for the 237 years of our existence, we have only spent 21 of those not at war?” Indeed.

⁷⁴³ Lawrence Grossberg. *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 61. See also Grossberg’s *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America’s Future, Cultural Politics and the Promise of Democracy* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005).

the spaces of its own struggles.”⁷⁴⁴ This makes sense since kids are the next generation. He states: “When we do envision the future, it comes to us in one of two forms: in apocalyptic terms (e.g., in both religious and environmental rhetorics) as an absolute break with the familiar and normal, which can be experienced as either danger or salvation; and as a resource to be used and used up in the present, for the benefit of the present (e.g., in various military and economic discourses and practices).”⁷⁴⁵ Children are thought of in the worst terms and are being subjected to the spectacle of the media apparatus’ viciousness at increasing speeds.

Grossberg neglects to discuss the corporate and political which control said discourses, practices, and rhetorics. The fact is that among the Big Five (Bertelsmann, News Corporation, Disney, Viacom, and Time Warner in 2003), the latter has forty-five interlocking directors, thus enabling them to “manufacture a social and political world” across genres.⁷⁴⁶ As children are besieged with negative media messages, often portraying supposed enemies of the United States in a negative light (such as in *Aladdin*) or making children the victims of plots (for instance, when “Boo” is strapped in the torture chair in *Monsters, Inc.*), one wonders the impact on a generation of children upon whom adult situations are forced visually and otherwise.

Kids are increasingly regarded as tools to be used by the world, subjected to horrors most adults cannot imagine, and it is clear that the ideas brought forth by the United Nations are not

⁷⁴⁴ Lawrence Grossberg. *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 63.

⁷⁴⁵ Grossberg, 62-63.

⁷⁴⁶ Ben H. Bagdikian. *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 9.

being met in reality: “Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding...The child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.” ⁷⁴⁷ Whether in so-called developing or developed nations, societies are letting their children down. Theirs is not a blissful existence in many cases. Some are harassed for being gay or any number of perceptions of difference, some are tortured in the quest to find terrorists, some live below the poverty line, and many are being made to watch torture scenes as entertainment: Childhood is not a special state wherein this vulnerable age group can develop in good health with a solid education. Although the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” is a worthy document, if all nations – including the United States – do not sign, ratify, and uphold its principles, children will continue living torturous lives. Although the United States contributed to the creation of the C.R.C., it continues to avoid implementing the document. “The U.S. is held up to ridicule in most of the world as being almost the only country that is not a party to the C.R.C.” ⁷⁴⁸ The United States’ current and past three presidents have denied children their basic rights, along with Somalia and South Sudan; the latter two have pledged to take action, but the U.S. has not. ⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁷ “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” United Nations 1990.

<http://www7.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>.

⁷⁴⁸ “The Campaign for US Ratification of the CRC.” Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations. <http://childrightscampaign.org.html>.

⁷⁴⁹ “Give children their basic rights; Ratify the CRC!”

<http://www.change.org.html>. Please also see “U.S. ratification of the

Childhood violence is appalling, yet it receives little air-time in an imperialist, hetero-patriarchal, white-supremacist, militaristic, materialistic capitalist culture as the toughest problem facing the world today. Children are implicated and criminalized in their education and entertainment, giving them no outlet for healthy development into maturity. Not only are the requirements of the United Nations' "Convention on the Rights of the Child" not being met by all countries, torture is being used against children in many ways. According to the "United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" (1975): "Torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person..."⁷⁵⁰ When one considers what can be inscribed according to this definition in addition to actually being tortured physically and mentally during interrogation – genital mutilation (boys should be included in this regard), lack of education and economic rights, misrepresentations of the group in entertainment/advertising, death for not adhering to cultural norms, and I would include witnessing anxiety-producing torturous moments in children's film – one can see that the marginalized group of "under 18-year olds" is facing perhaps greater difficulties than that of an adult, if for no other reason than there is no recourse for them. In countries across the globe, children seem to be at the heart of adult struggles which involve them in unique, critical, and problematic ways; girlhood presents its own separate, disturbing troubles, especially when viewed in a worldwide context. It is time for the international community to insist that all follow the C.R.C. in order to protect

Convention on the Rights of the Child" for a historical review on <http://en.wikipedia.org.html>.

⁷⁵⁰ "Convention on the Rights of the Child." United Nations. 1990. <http://www7.ohchr.org.html>.

this vulnerable group against harm and injury for the sake of a brighter global community. No formal group will effect change: It is up to The People. Each individual must fight for what is right. We have a moral imperative now more than at any other time in history.

Children need to be taught how to read media, and how to become savvy consumers.⁷⁵¹ Courses in money management and media literacy should begin early and extend through adulthood. Kids who are bombarded by media messages need to know that advertisers are determined “to influence how kids spend their own money, to affect how kids influence their parents’ spending, and to build brand loyalty among future adult consumers.”⁷⁵² Children at their school computers see pop-up ads for sports shoes, have to read Exxon sponsored material teaching that the Valdez spill is “a great example of environmental protection,” are given math books teaching fractions through calculating which gaming devices kids prefer, a Colorado school district’s buses have 7-Up and Old Navy logos, and a student was suspended from school in Georgia during school-sponsored “Coke Day” for wearing a Pepsi t-shirt.⁷⁵³ While ZapMe! collects each student’s name, address, age, gender, and viewing habits in order to create custom targeted ads – students who refuse miss out on participating in

⁷⁵¹ Some good resources are: *The Media Literacy Online Project* at <http://www.medialiteracyproject.org.html>, “Taking Charge of Your TV: A Guide to Critical Viewing for Parents and Children” at http://www.secctv.org/downloads/parent_guide.pdf.html, and *The Just Think Foundation* at <http://www.justthink.org.html>.

⁷⁵² Steve Barsanti, ed. *Advertising at Schools: Is There Room in Public Education for Sodas and Snacks?* The LegiSchool Project: An educational collaboration between California State University, Sacramento, and the California State Legislature (Darby PA: Diana Publishing Co., 2000), 16.

⁷⁵³ Barsanti, 32.

the activity – and companies like Sylvan Learning Systems launch training programs via the network, where do students' privacy rights figure in the equation? ⁷⁵⁴ One wonders how distracting is it when you have to get online for a class computer lab and you are inundated by ads from ZapMe! or Campus Pipeline (college-level) which lure you to an interactive game on an advertiser's website. ⁷⁵⁵ Where does it end, this attack on our youth?

Students are a captive audience and advertisers know it – they also know that they're getting valuable information at a highly discounted cost because they are using children without parental permission as opposed to hiring firms to conduct market research. Whether tracking where students go on the Web, asking questions directly, or tracking which ads in the corner of the computer screens result in sales, millions in data mining is gained by providing schools with comparatively little in the way of reimbursement. Tapping into a kid's world while they are trying to do research on the Internet or write a paper seems like a violation but it is "a rapidly growing business model." ⁷⁵⁶ Consumption habits established early can stay with a person for life; as companies sell and give away products at schools, engage in direct and indirect advertising, and conduct market research on campuses, children are being used in ways never before imagined as they exhaustedly trudge to class carrying a heavy backpack load and jump at bells, surveilled

⁷⁵⁴ Steve Barsanti, ed. *Advertising at Schools: Is There Room in Public Education for Sodas and Snacks?* The LegiSchool Project: An educational collaboration between California State University, Sacramento, and the California State Legislature (Darby PA: Diana Publishing Co., 2000), 37-38.

⁷⁵⁵ Barsanti, 40-42.

⁷⁵⁶ Barsanti, 43.

under lock and key.⁷⁵⁷ Home-schooling is easier than you think.

⁷⁵⁷ Steve Barsanti, ed. *Advertising at Schools: Is There Room in Public Education for Sodas and Snacks?* The LegiSchool Project: An educational collaboration between California State University, Sacramento, and the California State Legislature (Darby PA: Diana Publishing Co., 2000), 73.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

This is a call to action! It is time for us to do something. I hope academics will expand on this research and I hope reporters will continue to fight injustice where children and Others are concerned. I beg parents to take a second – or first – look at what their children are viewing or playing before the kids experience it. Disney still has terrible working conditions for its employees.⁷⁵⁸ Further, despite their presentation of exceedingly cute furry and feathery creatures, they massacred vultures and illegally trapped and abused other birds⁷⁵⁹ – why didn't they simply lure the vultures to the Haunted Mansion? Do we really wish to live in fantasy and support their real-life abuses? Stop buying cheap, plastic crap. Refuse to purchase Proctor & Gamble's new collection which is supposed to make your home smell like you have a butler, especially since they are a leader in cruel and unnecessary animal experimentation. That robot swirling vacuum and new drone camera support militarism which may be used against you. Ask your kids if they really want to spend excessive amounts on Jordans or Chucks or if they'd rather give that money to Doctors Without Borders, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee or World Wildlife Fund. Ask Starbucks which of their coffees are fair trade. Think outside the box: Support independent music, art, film, etc. For example, see Leonardo DiCaprio's web films *Water Planet* and *Global Warming* or other documentaries informing you of the desperate state of our planetary home.

⁷⁵⁸ John Lichfield. "The dark side of Disneyland Paris." *The Independent*. Saturday 22 October 2011. <http://www.independent.co.uk.html>.

⁷⁵⁹ Bob Levenson. "Bird-abuse Charges Raise Questions About Disney." *The Orlando Sentinel*. September 24, 1989. <http://articles.orlandosentinel.com.html>.

Stop supporting the chain stores and find independent retailers, preferably those who sell used items in order to keep small businesses alive, save the planet, put money back into your local economy, keep your area's character, and as a way to get better service. Or visit a library. I hope school boards and principles will stop accepting bribery from companies which only want to use our kids as guinea pigs. I trust that teachers will make all kids feel like they are amazing, because they are. Every single one. And it's hard to feel good given the pressures facing youth. We all need to care about future generations and work to keep media from wreaking any more havoc. Being a patriot used to define a citizenry ready to defend itself against a corruption of democracy. Let us return to that definition as our leaders are increasingly led by big business, rather than blindly and greedily ignoring the truth of what is happening. Are we not duty-bound to initiate changes? Don't we owe it to ourselves and future generations to at least try? These efforts will allow us to die with dignity knowing we tried to save the planet. Rescue your children and yourselves from the onslaught of media. As executives implement abhorrent material, an inexcusable, impermissible, and unforgivable risk is created: A risk which is taking away our freedom, our humanity, and our future – and that of the children. Believe change is possible. Practice sustained resistance. Write letters to executives of these companies when you see something unacceptable. Write to the M.P.A.A. and let them know that you want them to include explicit and exact warnings about violence in their rating system. Listen to the kids in your lives when they tell you they're having dreams which involve video games and they feel like they can't escape, when they have nightmares from a film, and when a TV show has scared them; listen when they tell you that they need to go outside and play, when they mention that the C.S.I. show Grandma likes is awful, and when they say how

they feel when they are patted down at school or that there's been another lockdown practice; really hear them when they say they like a song except for the mean word in it; and do something when they beg to be taken out of school because there's a bully and no one is on their side. The children need help. And they can't make changes alone.

“If the facts are clear that we’re currently engaged in a mind war, how long will we remain plugged in to their weapon of choice, killing our boredom while we sit back, passively entertained, and do nothing?”

- Jeff Warrick

“Fear makes people do terrible things, Harry.”

- Remus Lupin, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, 2004

“The problem of racism, the problem of economic exploitation, and the problem of war are all tied together. These are the triple evils that are interrelated.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Consciousness, the freedom to think, is a fundamental human right. The idea of violating free will is something that even God doesn’t do and yet [humans think] they can do this.”

- Nick Begich, author of *Angels Don’t Play This H.A.A.R.P.*

“All violence is life denying.”

- Paul Kivel from *Men’s Work: How to Stop the Violence that Tears Our Lives Apart*

“We all do better when we all do better.”

- Paul Wellstone

“God bless the whole world. No exceptions.”

- Northern Sun Merchandising, 2003

“United We Stand, Divided We Fall.”

- Aesop’s “The Four Oxen and the Lion” fable is the first mention of the concept

“So let us persevere. Peace need not be impractical, and war need not be inevitable. By defining our goal more clearly, by making it seem more manageable and less remote, we can help all peoples to see it, to draw hope from it, and to move irresistibly toward it.”

- President John F. Kennedy’s (a.k.a. “Peace Speech”) Commencement Address at American University, 10 June 1963

“Well we’ll float on, good news is on the way.”

- “Float On” by Modest Mouse

“One tribe, one time, one planet, one race.”

- “One Tribe” by the Black Eyed Peas

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Monster House. DVD. Directed by Gil Kenan. Beverly Hills CA: Relativity Media; Novato CA: Image Movers; Universal City CA: Amblin Entertainment, 2006.

Monsters, Inc. DVD. Directed by Pete Docter, Lee Unkrich, David Silverman. Emeryville CA: Pixar, 2001.

Nanny McPhee. DVD. Directed by Kirk Jones. Beverly Hills CA: MGM; London UK: StudioCanal; London UK: Working Title Films; Santa Monica CA: Three Strange Angels, 2006.

Open Season. DVD. Directed by Jill Culton, Roger Allers, and Anthony Stacchi. Culver City CA: Sony Pictures Animation; Vancouver B.C.: ImageWorks; Culver City CA: Columbia Pictures, 2006.

Planes. DVD. Directed by Klay Hall. Burbank CA: Walt Disney Pictures; Glendale CA: DisneyToon Studios; Los Angeles CA and Mumbai, India: Prana Studios, 2013.

Planes: Fire and Rescue. DVD. Directed by Roberts Gannaway. Burbank CA: Walt Disney Pictures; Glendale CA: DisneyToon Studios; Los Angeles CA and Mumbai, India: Prana Studios, 2014.

Planet 51. DVD. Directed by Javier Abad, Jorge Blanco, and Marcos Martinez. Madrid, Spain: Ilion Animation Studios; London UK: HandMade Films; Culver City CA: TriStar, 2009.

The Princess and the Frog. DVD. Directed by John Musker and Ron Clements. Burbank CA: Walt Disney Pictures; Burbank CA: Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2009.

Rango. DVD. Directed by Gore Verbinski. Los Angeles CA: Nickelodeon Movies; Santa Monica CA: GK Films; Beverly Hills CA: Blind Wink Productions; San Francisco CA: Industrial Light and Magic, 2011.

Shrek. DVD. Directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson. Glendale CA: DreamWorks Animation; Redwood City CA: Pacific Data Images, 2001.

Tangled. DVD. Directed by Byron Howard and Nathan Greno. Burbank CA: Walt Disney Pictures; Burbank CA: Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2010.

Toy Story 3. DVD. Directed by Lee Unkrich. Emeryville CA: Pixar, 2010.

Treasure Planet. DVD. Directed by John Musker and Ron Clements. Burbank CA: Walt Disney Pictures; Burbank CA: Walt Disney Feature Animation (now Walt Disney Animation Studios), 2002.

Turbo. DVD. Directed by David Soren. Glendale CA: DreamWorks Animation, 2013.