Jacquelyn Weinbrenner

Cultural Change:

Its Critical Role In Activism & The Dangers of Dismissing It

PAF9190 Capstone Seminar, CUNY Baruch, School of Public Affairs

Dr. Sonia Jarvis, Esq.

December, 2012

Abstract

Cultural change is often treated as the frivolous part of activism; less important than legal change. Even among Feminists, a group which tends to take cultural change more seriously, attempts to change the culture, or call out negative aspects of culture, are often met with complaints that it is distracting from issues that "really" matter. For this paper, I synthesized data from several nonprofits working for positive cultural change, interviewed the founder of one such nonprofit, and consulted several books on a range of different social issues which advance the argument that cultural change is critical.

Introduction

This paper aims to make the argument that cultural change is an essential component of activism and societal change; that it creates the space for legal change to happen, if it is needed, and is ultimately the work we need to do to continuously mold and remold the world into a place with the greatest measure of justice possible. In this paper, I discuss two main strategies for creating cultural change; media and direct action. The bulk of the paper will focus on the former. I will argue that successful social movements create cultural change; if the larger culture does not adopt some of the ideas of the counter cultures which are often responsible for social movements, then cultural change does not happen and success will be limited. In these instances, a law might be passed, amounting to some not insignificant success; however, without cultural change a vital piece is missing. For example, laws were passed to desegregate schools racially, but racism has not been eliminated. That is the job of cultural change.Racist beliefs are still very much imbedded in mainstream American culture. Many of the honorable

social movements of the twentieth century made great accomplishments, but failed to finish their work or anticipate the battle against cultural backlash.

The work of cultural change is often derided as trivial, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Feminists who protest sexism in media are often told by others who identify as feminists that they should focus on something that matters, such as domestic violence. What these individuals don't understand is the link between culture and behavior. My research paper aims to make these connections clear and address relevant topics, such as rape culture.

The working definition of cultural change I used for the paper was simple; changes in culture, as opposed to law. Our governments can mandate legal (de jure) change and enforce certain behavior, but that does not constitute cultural change- though it can encourage it. Cultural change (de-facto) happens when the way we look at things, as a society, changes; when norms or mores shift. For example, women's working outside the home has become far more common over several decades and social acceptance of gay and lesbian people has become more mainstream over the past decade or two.

As a feminist, I feel a sense of frustration when I encounter the popular opinion that feminism is no longer necessary because women can vote, have paid careers, and open a bank account without their husband's permission. This singular focus on legal successes obscures the fact that there is still much work to be done on the cultural front. Violence against women and disordered eating & body hatred are frighteningly common, for example. These problems require a change in our culture; the way we glamorize violence and use it as an indication of masculinity; the way we normalize extreme and incessant dieting; the way we exclude most

body types from representation in media. Similarly, people who think racism is no longer a problem and claim that black people are disproportionately poor because of personal flaws, are missing, along with other information, the importance of cultural change left undone after the emancipation proclamation and the civil rights act. If the cultural work of educating the public about the realities of redlining, the real dangers of political ads defaming "welfare queens" or the barrage of commercials aimed at heightening women's insecurity to boost their consumerism were done, I believe we would be further on our way to a more equitable world. Taking cultural change seriously is crucial to our ability to prevent ourselves from being manipulated and misinformed. The idea that sexism, racism, classism, and the like are allowed to influence our societies because our societies falsely believe that the mediums through which they are delivered are trivial and that they are impervious to the messages sent is a dangerous one.

It is not difficult to find examples to point to which illustrate the importance of culture. The recent occurrence of comedian Daniel Tosh remarking that "rape is always funny" before staring down a woman in the audience who dared defy him, while asking venomously 'wouldn't it be funny if she were raped by five guys, right now?' is a prime example. The most disturbing part of which may be the fierce support he received from many other comedians and a large segment of the public. At the time I am writing this, Tosh continues to enjoy employment by Comedy Central on a widely watched television show. Some defend acts like his as "just a joke", but what we laugh at matters. What we laugh at can break down or build up taboos. It can normalize behavior; ostracize individuals or groups. It can bring people together or break us apart. Comedian Jamie Kilstein and others have pointed out that comedians often

have in common the experience of being outcasts as kids and turn to comedy as a tool to knock down their oppressors. He argues that turning a joke on victims; on the vulnerable instead of on those with power, is not what comedy should be about. And yet, those who speak out against such things are met with derision. Recently, rapper Lupe Fiasco has considered leaving the music business, after a fellow rapper verbally attacked him on the social networking site, Twitter, over a song he wrote that calls on listeners to consider the impact the ubiquitous and degrading use of the word "bitch" has on young listeners.

The issue of cultural change is one that touches all other issues in society's collective life. Cultural and social changes are won one battle at a time, but "big-picture" solutions can also be useful for strategizing. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said that "the arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice". Perhaps it is our job to continuously grab the universe and bend it back toward justice as often and in as many places as is necessary. Certainly, there are still legal battles to be won and it is changes in culture that make those victories possible. I don't think we're going to be OK if the media that is influencing and hurting us is allowed to continue to do so because media illiterate people continue to say "it's just a movie/joke/commercial/show, etc".

The ideas that media affects culture and that culture is important are not new ones. My paper aims to connect these ideas in a meaningful way and encourage activists and those who care to take cultural change seriously.

Recently, at a panel discussion on progressive politics, provided by *The Nation* magazine via The New School, journalists Ilyse Houge and Chris Hayes spoke about the environmental

movement's best options for effecting change in today's political climate. One of them made the case that environmentalists should forget about the house and senate for the time being and focus on direct action. It was said that those institutions are not, at this point, viable avenues for change. Ms. Houge said that it is important to create an informed citizenry. If the people do not know what is at stake and what it will take to solve the problems, they cannot demand what is needed or advocate for the proper paths to achieve helpful goals.

In history class, many of us are taught, as children, that the most fantastic changes have come through the pen of a politician signing a law or some "Great Man" enacting change out of his own benevolence; whether this be Lyndon Johnson or even Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. What historian Howard Zinn, and others, show us is that behind those men were myriad other people pushing for change in all manner of grass roots action. As Margaret Mead has said, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has". Sometimes, this "small" group can be quite large.

As Ms. Houge observed, in order for the grass roots work of cultural change to happen, the people need to be informed. If we don't know that marginalizing women and people of color in media leads to lower self-confidence for kids in those groups; or that misrepresenting them leads to real societal biases; or that unrealistic images of women in media leads to eating disorders, we will not demand better from our media. If we do not understand the gravity of climate change and where the problem is coming from, we cannot demand a more sustainable future.

Literature Review

The following is a summary of some of the literature I found relevant to the topics included in my paper, which contribute in some manner to the contention that cultural change is a powerful took for activism and that trivializing it will, far from allowing us to "focus on what matters" only set us back from achieving real progress on anything that matters.

A few of the works that I looked at made the case for pieces of media that have had a significant impact on American culture and, it could be argued, changed the course American history. Two such pieces of media are the books, *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *How the Other Half Lives* by Jacob Riis. In the introduction to *Silent Spring,* Vice President Al Gore writes that "Rachel Carson's landmark book offers undeniable proof that the power of an idea can be far greater than the power of politicians". Gore talks about the way Carson's book took the then obscure issue of environmentalism in the public eye. He presents the idea that a single piece of media can occasionally dramatically change the world, or act as a catalyst for such change and talks about the book as an example of a single piece of media that changed public opinion and from there pushed the government into action. Gore continues with this point of view in his contribution to *Courage for the Earth: Writers, Scientists, and Activists Celebrate the Life and Writing of Rachel Carson.* This book is a collection of writings by different authors about the life and legacy of Rachel Carson. It contains more testimony to the wide-ranging effects of Carson's book. Again, Al Gore has compelling words to say about Carson's impact; pointing out that the Environmental Protection Agency was established, to some degree, in response to the raised consciousness that resulted from Carson's book. Another contributor, John Hay, speaks to the power of calling something by its true name, "Carson brought the full

extent of the problems of DDT to the attention of the general public, and that was her crime, as far as representatives of the petrochemical industry were concerned. They found her book offensive because she was calling things by their real names, learning the actual facts about them". Calling something by its true name has long been acknowledged as a powerful act by Feminists who know that enabling women to talk about things like sexual harassment and date rape with a validating and descriptive nomenclature is empowering. The Feminist organization entitled 'Name It. Change It' is based on this premise.

Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives*, similarly, is said to be a written work that had a dramatic impact on public opinion and government action. Riis' use of photography, which was a new medium at the time, in conjunction with the written word gave the more fortunate citizens an eye-opening insight into how the poor of New York City lived. Riis wrote the book with the explicit intention to spur social change. A *New York Times* article, entitled "Jacob A. Riis Tells of His Early Trials" says that President Franklin Roosevelt personally called Riis after reading his book. Although Riis supported solutions such as private charities as opposed to the public remedies enacted by FDR, he clearly awakened the public's compassion for the poor and brought the issue to the forefront.

Not On Our Watch: The Mission To End Genocide In Darfur And Beyond by John Prendergast & Don Cheadle is a book was written with the explicit purpose of raising awareness among young Americans about the genocide in Darfur. It is an example of how media can be used to create cultural change because it acts as a medium for such change *and* informs its readers how to participate in cultural change themselves. The use of activist and actor Don Cheadle to co-write the book is an example of the influence that celebrities have in our society.

They can make us hate our bodies by acting out hate on theirs, or they can encourage us to be activists by publicly being so themselves. One of the book's goals, with its accessibility; tips; photographs; guides; and celeb co-author, is to get young people to believe that activism works and to let them know that there are things that they have the power to do. This is cultural change; creating a culture of activism among young people. This book was written in 2007 when the internet was becoming bigger and being utilized in new and innovative ways. Internet activism was in a more juvenile state and Occupy Wallstreet was not yet born. It was more common to say that the current batch of youth were apathetic. Of course, this book did not single handedly change all of that, but it is one example of a push for a change in the culture of youth; an effort to tap into the compassion and outrage that was there all along.

Oftentimes, it is not a single book that spurs the change, but zeitgeist created by many members of the media. In their book, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, And The Awakening of a Nation*, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff tell the story of the press in the United States coming to realize the importance of the civil rights movement and ceasing to be silent and therefore compliant. The book tells of the powerful way news writers at the time changed public perception, particularly of northeastern white people. The press's new dedication to the movement and their encouragement to comply with desegregation essentially changed the culture to one where it was a moderate, not radical, position to take.

A predecessor to the civil rights movement was the fight to end lynching. In chapter two of *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000*, Adam Fairclough writes about Ida B. Wells, a young black journalist in the 1890's. Wells "denounced lynching in such forthright terms…that the issue became a national, and then international, *cause célèbre"*. This was

accomplished during a time when lynching was "defended with a vehemence" by many white southerners and often took place in broad daylight and displayed as photographs on postcards. Wells' reporting lead to the formation of a national movement by black women's clubs in 1896 and is a clear example of the potential power of reporting.

I found a significant body of literature on the topic of media effects, most of which seem to agree that media plays a role in shaping culture and individuals. Among these sources, was *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV.* Media critic Jennifer L. Pozner "aims a critical, analytical lens at a trend most people dismiss as harmless fluff". Pozner argues that viewing this form of media, without a critical lens and without media literacy skills, is far from harmless. She makes clear the racial and gender biases that underlie the distorted version of reality laid before us by what is called "Reality TV". Pozner's book makes clear that there is a dark side to the potential for media to change attitudes, cultivate beliefs, and change the way we relate to one another and ourselves. This concept is supported in Naomi Wolf's fabulous book, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women.* Wolf writes a compelling guide to the dangers of a media with something to gain from hurting us and an effective way to do it. Wolf writes powerfully about the damage that women's magazines, diet commercials, cosmetics ads, and plastic surgery hucksters have been doing to women in the twentieth century. *Same Difference: How Gender Myths Are Hurting Our Relationships, Our Children, And Our Jobs* is a book that makes one of the best arguments about how harmful the myths perpetuated by media are. One of the largest culprits they point to is a book called *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. The authors of *Same Difference* lay out different gender myths and provide very practical examples of the danger they pose. Although the

subtitle can sound like an off-putting fear-tactic, these threats could not have less in common with the overblown fears peddled to us on the nightly news and written about by *Culture of Fear*'s Barry Glassner. In this book, Rosalind Barnett and Caryl Rivers point to some very real, and seldom acknowledged, consequences of our culture of gender difference. There is no law that says one must believe that women are inherently better at child-rearing and home-making, but the culture that imposes those beliefs is very powerful indeed. Barnett and Rivers do an excellent job of combining science and anecdotes to successfully relay the message that these beliefs hurt us in all the ways the subtitle suggests. Their book is an excellent case for the idea that cultural change is the work left undone after suffrage has been granted and laws preventing women from opening their own bank accounts without spousal permission have been overturned. American Political Science Review recently published a study by Karpowitz, Mendelber, and Shaker, entitled *Gender Inequality in Deliberative Participation*, which shows that women tend to speak dramatically less when outnumbered by men in collaborative group settings. They found that "the time that women spoke was significantly less than their proportional representation—amounting to less than 75 percent of the time that men spoke." The authors point out that "in school boards, governing boards of organizations and firms, and legislative committees, women are often a minority of members and the group uses majority rule to make its decisions," Mendelberg said. "These settings will produce a dramatic inequality in women's floor time and in many other ways. Women are less likely to be viewed and to view themselves as influential in the group and to feel that their 'voice is heard.'" This speaks to the need for cultural change. Jessica Valenti's piece in *The Nation* magazine, 'Anatomy of a Successful Rape Joke', addresses the recent controversy over comedian Daniel Tosh's rape

"joke" which threatened a female audience member. She points out that comedy at its best takes on the power structures and empowers victims. She says that even feminists appreciate some jokes about rape: "these jokes point out absurdity, they shed light on what's wrong with rape—what they don't do is threaten. And that's what Tosh did. Just because it was uttered by a comedian doesn't make it any less of a verbal assault." Valenti also talks about the outpouring of support Tosh received from other comedians eager to protect their practice of saying whatever they want. She points out that "threatening women with rape, making light of rape, and suggesting that women who speak up be raped is not edgy or controversial. It's the norm. This is what women deal with every day. Maintaining the status quo around violence against women isn't exactly revolutionary." In fact, it is a part of what is referred to as "rape culture". The theory of rape culture says that what our culture, allows, encourages, values, and blames all contribute to the real safety of women's lives.

On the other side of the spectrum of potential for media effects is *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street.* In his book, Michael Davis writes about the history of the most thoroughly researched and tested television show ever produced. Sesame Street all began when Lloyd Morrisett, an employee of the Carnegie Corporation, observed his young daughter memorizing commercial jingles and wondered if television could teach children more useful things. A dinner with PBS employee Joan Ganz Cooney set in motion the next steps to finding out, including Cooney's travels and research, producing "a distilled, neatly structured fifty-five-page report entitled 'The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education'". Her results suggested a "resounding yes" and set in motion an experiment that would lead to forty-three years, and counting, of television aimed at leveling the playing field for children who

have no other form of Pre-Kindergarten education. In a recent *New York Times* article, *Don't Mess With Big Bird*, Charles M. Blow argues strongly that *Sesame Street* in particular and public television in general enabled him personally to succeed despite growing up poor, with no Pre-school education and attending a high school that didn't cover themes used in the ACT college acceptance exam. Blow argues that it is not only possible for media to have this kind of positive impact on children; it is critical for many of our nation's children.

All of these examples of cultural change sparked by some form of media are great examples of one method of achieving that change. The other main method is direct action; a very recent example of which is the Occupy Wall Street movement. Although its detractors claim that it has accomplished nothing and, indeed, had no real goals; the movement aimed at creating a more equitable United States and world has brought inequality back into the public dialogue. The recent *New York Times* article, by Jennifer Preston, *Wall Street Protest Spurs Online Dialogue on Inequity*, talks about the cultural change beginning after the initial Occupy Wall Street protests. The article talks about the ways social media is being used to continue the conversation and points to the vast proliferation of Facebook pages and Youtube videos tagged "Occupy Wall Street" as evidence that the conversation taking place on a large scale. The movement is also making use of more traditional media in the form of 'The Occupied Wall Street Journal', a newspaper. *Occupy Your Victories,* a *Nation of Change* article, talks about the derision directed toward the movement by many in the mainstream media; calling it as aimless because of its lack of concrete or immediate demands. In this, article Rebecca Solnit articulates one of "…Occupy's…signal achievement[s]: we articulated, clearly, loudly, incontrovertibly, how appalling and destructive the current economic system is. To name something is a

powerful action. To speak the truth changes reality…" In her New York Times article, 'Survey Finds Rising Perception of Class Tension', Sabrina Tavernise writes that, "about two-thirds of Americans now believe there are "strong conflicts" between rich and poor in the United States, a survey by the Pew Research Center found, a sign that the message of income inequality brandished by the Occupy Wall Street movement and pressed by Democrats may be seeping into the national consciousness." Another article that points to the conversation-changing power of direct action, regarding Occupy Wall Street, is *Camps Are Cleared, but '99 Percent' Still Occupies the Lexicon*, in the *New York Times*, Brian Stelter. Stelter points out that "within weeks of the first encampment in Zuccotti Park in New York, politicians seized on the phrase. Democrats in Congress began to invoke the "99 percent" to press for passage of President Obama's jobs act — but also to pursue action on mine safety, Internet access rules and voter identification laws, among others." He writes "perhaps most important for the movement, there was a sevenfold increase in Google searches for the term "99 percent" from September to October and a spike in news articles about income inequality throughout the fall, heaping attention on the issues raised by activists." A new study, finding that feminist movements are more important for change than a number of other measures, falls somewhere between direct action and media. Feminist movements have long utilized direct action, but the modern feminist movement takes place largely online. An article regarding the study, *Largest Global Study on Violence Against Women Finds Feminist Movements Hold the Key to Change*, states "a new study on violence against women conducted over four decades and in 70 countries reveals the mobilization of feminist movements is more important for change than the wealth of nations, left-wing political parties, or the number of women politicians." This study shows that

even while governments are important, social movements that create cultural change are the most effective catalyst for change; "strong movements commanded public support and attention, and convinced the media the issues were important for public discussion." One study I found, *Impact of prejudice-prevention television program on young children's ideas about race*, seems to contradict the theory that media is a powerful player in culture creation and alteration. However, the findings were somewhat mixed, with some children studied showing changes in attitude produced by media and some not. Another study, *Reexamination of Young Children's Racial Attitudes and Skin Tone Preferences*, "continues the line of research on children's racial preferences that dates to Kenneth and Mamie Clark's classic research that revealed that Black children preferred White dolls and attributed more positive characteristics to White dolls than to Black dolls. In the current research, the authors examined Black and White preschool children's preferences for cartoon characters of different skin tones and whether their preferences shifted after listening to a moral story depicting a Black child as a hero. Findings are discussed in the context of how method of presentation may affect young children's responses and children's preferences in relation to race awareness and self-identification." The findings here were mixed.

I found various sources which provide statistics and other compelling information about the effect media is being shown to have on various groups. For example, the *Geena Davis Institue on Gender in Media* "has commissioned over 12 groundbreaking research studies, and has amassed the largest body of research on gender prevalence in family entertainment, spanning more than 20 years". These studies lay out the gender inequity in film and television and act as a tool for education and media literacy. Similarly, a 2011 documentary, *Miss*

Representation, makes the connection between under-representation of women in media with under-representation of women in positions of power in the United States. The film cites statistics and brings real women's voices to the forefront by show casing interviews with powerful women, women who work in media, and high school aged girls. *Race/Gender/Media: Considering Diversity Across Audiences, Content, and Producers*, Rebecca Ann Lind's text, presents a collection of forty-four readings that "approach the matter of race and gender in the media from rhetorical, social scientific, and critical/cultural perspectives". The book is broken down into sections like "Considerations of Media Effects" and "Audience Reception, Use, and Interpretation of Media Content" which contain writings on topics including body image, framing, news, and construction of race and gender. Together these pieces paint a picture of the power of media and the very specific things it has been used to do. A recent study, *Using Time Series Analysis To Measure Intermedia Agenda-Setting Influence In Traditional Media And Political Blog Networks*, found that mainstream media was not able to affect political blogs, but the blogs were able to affect the agenda setting of mainstream media. This is encouraging for the democracy inherent in internet blogging. In *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, James W. Loewen writes, not just the historical truths about such figures as Christopher Columbus, but also about the effect of teaching untrue, power-maintaining history and the strong opposition that exists to telling the truth. Loewen presents history textbooks as an influential form of media that helps to set the foundation for many "American values". He talks about the "worrisome…impact of American history courses" and the systems in place that keep the truth-telling, inclusive textbooks out of classrooms. If a change in culture produced by a new kind of history were not dangerous to the status-quo,

there would not be such strong opposition toward it. A study entitled *Following the Opinion Leaders? The Dynamics of Influence Among Media Opinion, the Public, and Politicians* may prove useful, if I can gain access to it. The abstract states, in part: "Media elites strive to shape the policy preferences of their audience through the publication of their opinions. Scholars, however, have not fully distilled whether the opinions communicated by media elites are successful in moving the public or politicians toward their preferred policy position, or whether media is responsive to these actors. This article offers a means of assessing media influence." A *Washington Post* article recently touched on this topic, providing a graph that suggests that the media does in fact have an impact on opinion regarding presidential candidates, and although the impact shown is small, it is greater than the impact of the candidates actual performance in debates. The article, *Do presidential debates usually matter? Political scientists say no*, by Dylan Matthews, addresses political science studies done using national polling which find that, while presidential debates don't have much effect on polling, the media spin seems to matter more than the candidate's actual performance. Providing charts and graphs, he briefly describes the study's findings. Although the debates don't seem to alter polling on which candidate is winning much, whatever change there is seems to be attributable to the media's coverage.

The idea that culture is an important and practical tool of more tangible change was recently validated by the United Nations. A *Nation of Change* article by Thalif Deen, *Culture of Peace Should Replace Culture of Violence*, tells us that U.N. Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, addressed "the High-Level Forum on Culture of Peace" and transmitted the "message that underlines his political philosophy: all disputes need to be resolved by peaceful means, not through military might." He wrote that Ban [was] expected to reiterate the urgent need to

comply with the basic principles of the U.N. Declaration and Program of Action on the Culture of Peace adopted by consensus by the General Assembly back in September 1999." This illustrates that the idea of culture change as something that is accepted by large, global organizations and that it is taken seriously as a means to world improvement, as an alternative to legal, economic, or military force. It legitimizes the concept on a global scale and with regard to issues of life and death. Cultural change may be a non-traditional tool of inter-national foreign policy, but a culture of peace may prove to be a useful remedy for the war-hawk culture that has been pervasive for hundreds of years. After all, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has said, "darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that". *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*, by Barry Glassner, shows us "how fears are sold" through media and culture, using things like overstated statistics, exaggerated language, framing, and choices about what to focus on and what to leave out. Glassner talks about the "media effects theory" as one explanation for the misplaced and over-sized fears that plague American culture. He writes, "asked in a national poll why they believe the country has a serious crime problem, 76 percent of people cited stories they had seen in the media". He also addresses what he calls "the power of calling something P.C.". Glassner points out that conservatives in the 1990's used the charge that "political correctness" threatens our freedom of speech to scare would-be advocates away from encouraging a more respectful culture. He quotes radio host Rush Limbaugh as warning against "the equivalent of the Nazi brownshirt thought control movement". In his book, *Wired For Culture: Origins of the Human Social Mind*, Mark Pagel takes us back eighty thousand years to the development of culture. In doing so, he helps to define what culture is; he writes that our ancestors "created

shared customs and beliefs; spread ideas, skills, and technologies; formed languages; and developed dance, music, and art". "Thanks to culture" he writes, "humans could learn from one another and benefit from the support and wisdom of their communities". Understanding culture is vital to understanding and effectively utilizing cultural change. If culture is an evolutionary strategy for survival and success, as he posits, it follows that it will play an important role to the success or failure or any social movement. In his book, *Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy*, Christopher Hayes writes that most of us "…cannot verify the millions of bits of knowledge that float through our lives, we outsource the vast majority of the work of screening it all to others". He outlines three main ways in which we do this: Consensus, Proximity, and Good Faith. "A huge part of what we know rests on the foundation of consensus: if everyone agrees on something, it's probably true…But in our shared political and social life, consensus is far more elusive, if not impossible". Hayes goes on to talk about the existence of "well-credentialed… advocates arguing for mutually exclusive positions". In our society, any sense of consensus usually comes from the media. Our world is very big, our country is very big and although we are now connected through social networking websites, media still plays a huge role in our collective cultural consensus. Hayes talks about the post-9/11 consensus on using force in Afghanistan and Iraq. He points out that "there were, of course, many voices of dissent…*The Nation,* the *New York Times* editorial board, prominent members of the foreign policy establishment…not to mention millions of people on the streets opposing the war, both in the United States and around the world. But they tended to be ignored or minimized by mainstream news coverage". "A Syracuse University study looked at every single ABC and CBS news story in the run-up to the Iraq War and found that 'Bush administration officials were the

most frequently quoted sources, the voices of anti-war groups and opposition Democrats were barely audible, and the overall thrust of coverage favored a pro-war perspective.' If one were to come to one's opinion based on where the general agreement of elites stood—major media sources and the political class—there's no question that support for the war was the winning position. It wasn't quite consensus, but it was its nearest cousin". This points to a very basic human functioning mechanism. As social creatures, we take cues from one another. This suggests, for example, that little girls growing up being bombarded with media that shows girls and women primarily as objects rather than subjects will take the cue to behave accordingly. "In our public life, proximity is nearly always impossible. If you're a high school teacher in East St. Louis, there's only so close you can get to the "newsmakers" in Washington who appear on Sunday shows and drive policy decisions. So you're forced to rely instead on the media, an institution that derives its name from its role in mediating between citizens and the powerful people who shape the world in which they live".

For the most part, there seems to be consensus that media has a powerful effect on culture and that culture is a powerful shaper of individual's beliefs. My paper will attempt to synthesize these ideas into a compelling call to take make cultural change a bigger priority for activists who need a larger constituency for change.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The thesis question that this paper intends to address is the following. Is cultural change a crucial component in affecting positive social change or is it a triviality, distracting us from more important issues? Further, what is the role that media plays? My hypothesis is that

cultural change is, in fact, a crucial component for societal progress and that media plays a very large role in shaping and reinforcing cultural attitudes.

Methodology

For this paper, I used a mixed methods approach. While I focus largely on qualitative data, I incorporate quantitative data to a lesser extent in the form of statistics created by various nonprofit organizations. My paper relies heavily on books written on various topics which are touched by the importance of cultural change and which illustrate its importance either explicitly through argument or implicitly, by example. For example, Jennifer Pozner and Naomi Wolf argue explicitly that culture is the cause of many of society's ills, while Ida B. Wells and Rachel Carson serve as examples of media influencing culture and cultural change resulting in behavioral or legal change. In addition to this, I interviewed the founder of the nonprofit organization, Stop Street Harassment, her perspective on cultural change as it relates to achieving the goals of her nonprofit.

Findings

I have found that there are ample sources that suggest that culture is a powerful force in shaping our past, present, & future, which should compel us to take it more seriously. I will share some of these here and also point to evidence that shows the large role played by media in shaping culture.

Evolutionary Biologist, Mark Pagel's book, *Wired for Culture*, takes a look at the history of human culture and puts forth the argument that culture is a powerful force in human

society. He writes, "Having culture means we are the only species that acquires the rules of its daily living from the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors rather than from the genes they pass to us. Our cultures and not our genes supply the solutions we use to survive and prosper in the society of our birth; they provide the instructions for what we eat, how we live, the gods we believe in, the tools we make and use, the language we speak, the people we cooperate with and marry, and whom we might fight or even kill in a war" (Pagel, P. 3). His argument is a strong one; the phenomenon he describes could hardly be described as a trivial part of human life.

> People will risk their health and well-being, their chances to have children, or even their lives for their culture. People will treat others well or badly merely as an accident of their cultural inheritance. If there is a humbling lesson of culture, it is that we do these things even though each of us might have been someone else, with a different internal voice, likes and dislikes, and allegiances. If there is a comparison, it is to ducklings whose parents have been lost and when they hatch from their shells adopt as their parent the first animal that wanders past—even a human. Animal ethologists call this *imprinting*; it is difficult to escape the feeling that we seem to imprint on our cultures… (Pagel, P. 5)

If not culture, then from where do we acquire our opinions, biases, and understanding of the world? Some might argue that our parents teach us, but our parents had to learn about the world from somewhere too. There are things we learn through our experiences and that is what makes us each unique, but we are a peculiar species and not many of us had to touch fire to know that is burns. As Pagel says, information is passed down to us through generations. This is not only true for information about things like what is edible or not, but also for stories that we tell ourselves and beliefs we hold. Research on "mirror neurons" suggests that babies learn

facial expressions by watching adults. We look to the world around us, both physical and cultural for clues to learn about the world, and increasingly part of what we find when we look around is media. "And in his new book, Pagel's big idea is that culture is the single greatest force for both social and biological change in human history. It has proven itself to be the winning strategy for the survival of our species, bar none. As a result, it has shaped our brains so that they are primed to perpetuate it" (Schwartz). This goes against the grain of American Individualism, but Pagel says there is no denying that human beings are social creatures. "At other points in the book, Pagel even likens culture to a kind of parasite, an organism so deft at riding its host to survival, one which 'will not necessarily evolve to have our interests in mind but *theirs.*' 'Natural selection has duped us with an emotion that encourages group thinking,' Pagel writes. 'It is an emotion that makes us act as if for the good of the group; an emotion that brings pleasure, pride, or even thrills from coordinated group activity'" (Schwartz). If culture is this powerful, how could addressing it be trivial? If the messages we are sent by cultural outlets like media tell us that the group wants us to obsess over weight loss; pay surgeons to cut open healthy bodies and alter them; or make excuses for those who mistreat us, many of us do as we're implicitly told even as it hurts us.

Especially as children, we receive cultural messages from older siblings, parents, older cousins, and classmates among other places, but many of the cultural messages we receive come from the media and advances in technology have caused media's role in creating and spreading culture to become quite large. However, media has probably played some role in culture for as long as media has existed. Before there was the internet and television, of course there were books and theatre. As I mentioned in the literature review, *Silent Spring* and *How*

The Other Half Lives are two strong examples of books that had a profound and somewhat clear impact on culture and therefore on the way we as societies treat the issues of environmentalism and poverty.

The news is one big player in the influential media game. *The Race Beat* by Roberts and Klibanoff tell the story of the way news reporters had a hand in the success of the Civil Rights Movement and Barry Glassner's *Culture of Fear* illustrates the power of the news to mislead us and misplace our concerns in ways that can be damaging. Glassner tells us that news media regularly substitute scenarios for facts and bad people for bad policies. Anecdotes are often used because of their powerful emotional effect which sways listeners or readers to feel that some problems are more widespread than they actually are. Glassner argues that this "misdirection" distracts us from what really matters while sometimes causing us to support policy positions that don't make sense in light of the facts. However, *The Race Beat* shows us that the news media can be a force for good. If journalists work to enlighten those who may not know about important world events and crucial truths, they can bring empowering knowledge to those who might otherwise be ignorant. The story told in *The Race Beat* is that "the truth of the nature of segregation was exposed and the truth won" (Hayes, P. 134). Journalist, Christopher Hayes writes, "key to this truth getting out was the concentrated authority that the establishment press at the time, particularly the *New York Times*, possessed" (P. 134). Roberts and Klibanoff talk about Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal, coming to see the northern press in the United States "as the best hope for force-feeding the rest of the nation a diet so loaded with stories about the cruelty of racism that it would have to rise up in protest" (P. 5). They talk about Myrdal's theory that northern white people were apathetic about the condition of

southern black people because they were mostly ignorant of their lives. "Myrdal concluded that there was one barrier between the white northerner's ignorance and his sense of outrage…That barrier was knowledge, incontrovertible information that was strong enough, graphic enough, and constant enough to overcome "the opportunistic desire of the white for ignorance" (P. 6). It is easier to be complacent and ignore problems that do not affect you, but when the press brought those problems to the forefront, they made it more difficult to ignore. There was a shift in the culture. Congressman and civil rights leader, John Lewis, said that the Civil Rights Movement succeeded "because we had a group of men and women who were prepared to get up there to write the words or shoot the pictures, capture the sound. And I think that's changed the face of the South and, in changing the face of the South, changed this nation once and for all." "If it hadn't been for the media", he said "the print media and television—the civil rights movement would have been like a bird without wings, a choir without a song" (Roberts and Klibanoff, P. 407). There are many reasons why a particular social movement may experience success at a given time. One of the strongest of these is that people are forced to pay attention. Whether that means the people who are affected force the media to pay attention or the media force unaffected people to pay attention or the media shows the government or people with power that the public cares about an issue, it all begins with a culture of empathy instead of apathy. It begins when people have the facts and care.

How much influence does media have over culture? While internet is quickly overtaking television, as a medium, it is largely more democratic and diverse. Also, much of the content viewed through the internet was originally created for television, such as TV shows watched through websites like Hulu or music videos watched on Youtube. "Kids today live in a 24/7

digital media world that is ubiquitous, multidimensional and interactive" (Healthy Media

Commission, P. 1). According to the Miss Representation website, American teenagers spend

"31 hours a week watching TV". Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood found that even

the most conservative estimates show children between the ages of two and five spending 2.2

hours per day viewing screen media. This number, they report, is 4.1 to 4.6 for preschoolers

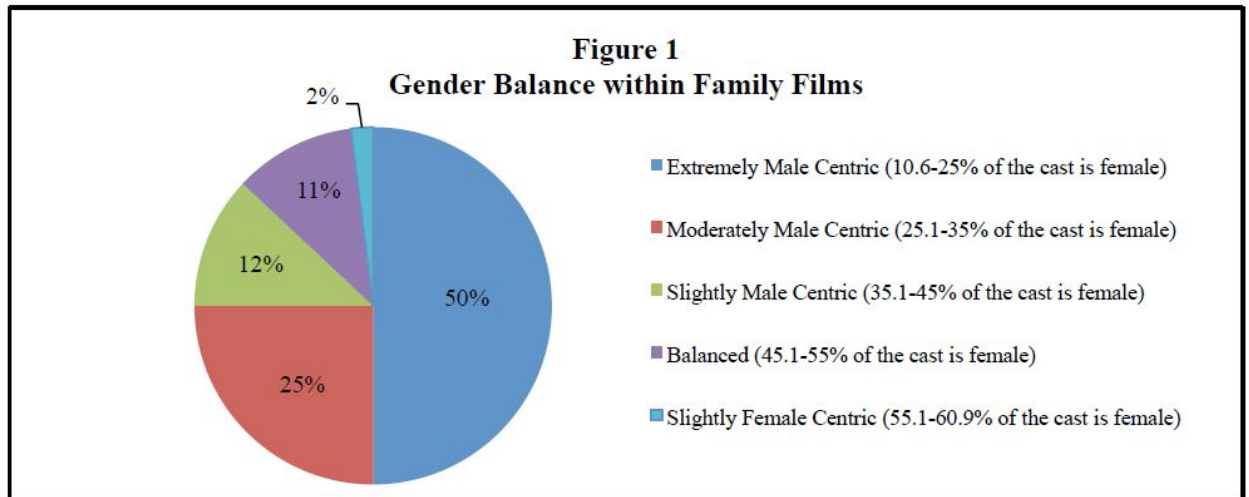and seven hours and eleven minutes per day for eight to eighteen year-olds (Linn, S., P. 4).

> **...and increases as children get older**
> *Data vary on screen time for preschoolers. But even the most conservative findings show that children between the ages of 2 and 5 average 2.2 hours per day.[5] Other studies show that preschoolers spend as much as 4.1[6] to 4.6 hours[7] per day using screen media. As children grow older, screen time increases. Including when they're multitasking, 8- to 18-year-olds consume an average of 7 hours and 11 minutes of screen media per day—an increase of 2.5 hours in just 10 years.[8]*

(Linn, S., P. 4)

Just what messages are children receiving from all of this media intake? One study

commissioned by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media looks at how G-rated films

affect children's attitudes toward possible future careers. "A meta-analysis of the gender media

research shows that repeated viewing of television is positively associated with stereotyping of

occupations along gender-linked lines. As such, a heavy diet of stereotypical occupational

content in G-rated films *may* teach and reinforce that girls have fewer employment options

than do boys. By the same token, exposure to a varied universe of jobs and activities in G-rated

films may open up and expand the occupational possibilities for boys and girls" (Smith, et al,

Occupational Aspirations).

The pie graph below shows us that, in family films, gender balance is very skewed. Fully 50% are "extremely male centric", with only 10.6-25% of the cast being female. Another 25% are "moderately male centric" and only 11% are gender "balanced". If children are looking to

Figure 1
Gender Balance within Family Films

- Extremely Male Centric (10.6-25% of the cast is female) — 50%
- Moderately Male Centric (25.1-35% of the cast is female) — 25%
- Slightly Male Centric (35.1-45% of the cast is female) — 12%
- Balanced (45.1-55% of the cast is female) — 11%
- Slightly Female Centric (55.1-60.9% of the cast is female) — 2%

(Smith, et al, *Gender Roles,*P. 2)

the world around them for clues about whose voice should be heard; whose opinions matter; who is powerful; who is interesting, then the message they receive from these films is that men & boys matter and women & girls are peripheral. Unless they are told otherwise, children do not distinguish between learning from events in real life and learning from events in a film. Often, even adults forget to question "who wrote this?" and realize that it represents the point of view of a single person or small group, which is often homogenous and certainly not omni-potent. For example, Figure 2, below, shows what is probably one of the results of having mostly heterosexual male writers; commonplace hypersexuality in female characters and rare hypersexuality in male characters.

Figure 2
Hypersexuality Measures by Character Gender in Family Films
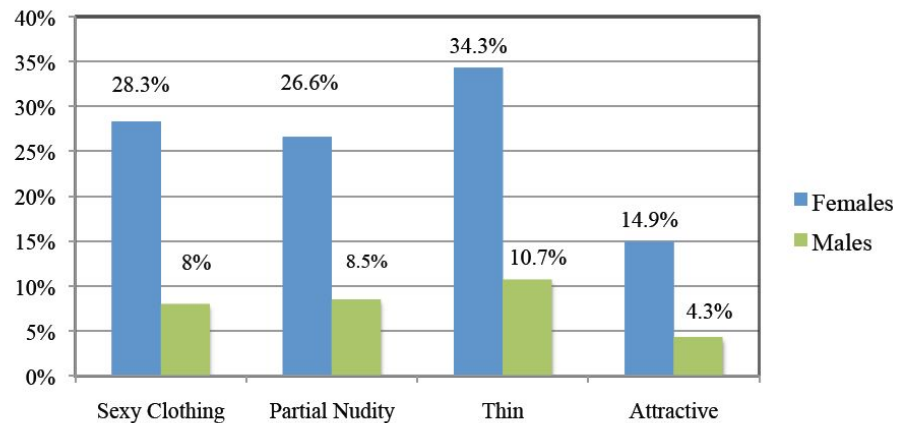
(Smith, et al, *Gender Roles,*P. 3)

Cultural messages are sent to us in many forms. Music is another ubiquitous medium through which messages are sent. Feminist blogger, Melissa Fabello, examined the way that songs can normalize behaviors in a recent blog post for Miss Representation. In addressing the song "Bleeding Love" by Leona Lewis, she writes, **"**… while music should validate our feelings and tell all kinds of stories about the vast beauty (and pain) of human relationships, it shouldn't promote unhealthy relationships by way of normalizing them. Because that's what songs about staying with someone who hurts you and ignoring the alarm of others in the name of a supposedly misunderstood love are doing: normalizing the cycle of abuse." Fabello then talks about the way these cultural messages make it into our consciousness. "Since the songs depicting emotional abuse aren't forthright, they sneak into our subconscious minds, convincing us of a false reality: that these relationships are normal – or worse, that they're romantic" she writes. "Instead of recognizing these songs as warnings, we tend to internalize them as solidarity because that's what we're trained to do. A lack of media literacy education

leaves us without the tools to critically analyze our relationships with music, and a lack of information about what healthy dating looks like leaves us without the tools to critically analyze our romantic relationships with others" (Fabello). Fabello points to the importance of media literacy. Being conscious of the fact that the messages media is sending us come from people trying to make money, people who might be wrong, or people who might gain from hurting us, can help us to think critically about how we receive those messages. We should be aware that the world view being painted for us is coming through the limited perspective and sometimes shallow goals of people in power, who often have insufficient experience to represent the rest of us well. In the Miss Representation film, Katie Couric said, "The media can be an instrument of change, it can maintain the status quo and reflect the views of the society or it can, hopefully, awaken people and change minds. I think it depends on whose piloting the plane".

In her book, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America,* Melissa Harris-Perry examines the difficulties that arise from living in a world where the dominant culture views you in limiting, myth-based tropes.

When they confront race and gender stereotypes, black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion. It may be surprising that some gyrate half-naked in degrading hip-hop videos that reinforce the images of black women's lewdness. It may be shocking that some black women actors seem willing to embody the historically degrading image of Mammy by accepting movie roles where they are cast as the nurturing caretakers of white women and children. It may seem inexplicable that a respected black woman educator

would stamp her foot, jab her finger in a black man's face, and scream while trying to

make a point on national television, thereby reconfirming the notion that black women

are irrationally angry. To understand why black women's public actions and political

strategies sometimes seem tilted in ways that accommodate the degrading stereotypes

about them, it is important to appreciate the structural constraints that influence their

behavior. It can be hard to stand up straight in a crooked room. (Harris-Perry, P. 29)

Harris-Perry speaks about stereotypes that limit the way black women are understood

in the public mind. One of the most common is that of the "mammy"; a subservient, asexual

black woman who works in the home of white people. Harris-Perry points out that, while this

stereotype was born out of a post-slavery desire among white people to assuage fears of the

older stereotype of hypersexual black women which no longer served them because white men

no longer owned their children, it was perpetuated in American pop culture through "…films,

pancake boxes, and syrup bottles…" which "imprinted Mammy on the American psyches more

than ever before." (Harris-Perry, P.74) Instead of accepting these images as harmless and

subconsciously absorbing their messages as truth, we should be aware of the history that

created them and the power that they have. Harris-Perry explains the psychological pain that

results cultural messages that are unfair, limiting, and biased are allowed to take hold.

It is hard being misunderstood. Misrecognition subverts the possibility of equal

democratic participation. It is psychically painful to hold an image of yourself while

knowing that others hold a different, more negative image of you. At the turn of the

twentieth century W.E.B Du Bois named this painful duality double-consciousness. 'It is

a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self

through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on

in an amused contempt and pity. (Harris-Perry, P. 96)

This points to problems with the idea that activist's jobs are done when the legal battles

are won. Having the right to vote, marry, or open a bank account or drive a car without

permission does not eliminate the real psychic pain that comes from double consciousness, or

all of the problems that stem from it. With some exceptions, free speech makes legal recourse

for cultural problems untenable and undesirable. That doesn't mean that there is nothing to be

done. In the recommendations and conclusions section, I will detail some ways of creating

cultural change and putting the stopper on negative cultural trends. Essentially, many of these

techniques center around intentionally shifting norms to a more egalitarian setting. This might

take the form of media criticism, protests, or even individuals taking the courageous step of

telling the people in their own lives that something is not OK. Historically, norms are often

created or changed through shaming. As social creatures, human beings often respond strongly

to the opinions of their fellows. For example, this technique seems to have been successful in

making the phrase "that's so gay" as a stand in for "that's so stupid/lame/etc." less acceptable

in just the past few years. Similarly, the word "faggot" seems to have fallen out of use to a

remarkable degree in only the past few years. Interestingly to me, this is far from the case for

the word "bitch". Freedom of speech is something precious, but making something offensive

taboo is a legal and ethical way to reduce the prevalence of damaging language. Even if a small

group of hateful people continue to use derogatory words, this is very different from the

wide-spread use of those words and broad cultural acceptability of such use. Feminist blogger,

Hugo Schwyzer, wrote for *Role Reboot* about the "important public function" that shame can

serve. "Making clear that there are consequences for disrespecting others is a helpful tool to protect ourselves and our community. It's a way of reminding people that their words and actions have consequences" (Schwyzer).

In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf writes about many of the consequences of a culture that mythologizes and idolizes a dedication in women to making themselves beautiful. In a chapter on culture, she writes about the role of women's magazines. "In the 1950's advertising revenues soared, shifting the balance between editorial and advertising departments. Women's magazines became of interest to 'the companies that, with the war about to end, were going to have to make consumer sales take the place of war contracts" (P. 64). At the time, the products they were trying to sell were mostly household objects like vacuum cleaners and washing machines, but the focus has since shifted to cosmetics. These advertisers took advantage of the "lack of identity" many women felt in the absence of careers and autonomy. As Second Wave Feminism took hold and more women moved into the work force, magazines scrambled to reinvent themselves. How would they "make sure that busy, stimulated working women would keep consuming at the levels they had done when they had all day to do so and little else of interest to occupy them?" (P.66). Wolf writes that "a new ideology was necessary that would compel the same insecure consumerism; that ideology must be, unlike the Feminine Mystique, a briefcase-sized neurosis that the working woman could take with her to the office"(P. 66). This is when the focus shifted from making women feel guilty for not being a perfect housewife to making women feel guilty for not being a perfect beauty. This is done intentionally because it "elicits in their readers a raving, itching, parching product lust…" and creates the illusion that the reader will be happy if they could have "exactly the right skin care products, with

step-by-step instructions, and palettes of exactly the required makeup" (Wolf, P. 70). Wolf speaks about the awful censorship of women's bodies. We are not permitted to see the real, varied bodies of women- only the carefully chosen and thoroughly edited version which uses Photoshop, lighting, and makeup to alter our perceptions of reality and women's expectations of themselves. Campaign for a Commerical-Free Childhood reports that "a study of 500 models found that almost half were malnourished according to World Health Organization standards" and that "adolescent girls' discontent about body image is directly correlated to how often they read fashion magazines." Compellingly,"after television was introduced in Fiji there was a significant increase in eating disorders among adolescent girls." "Research shows that ads featuring thin models increase women's negative feelings about themselves, but also increase the positive image of the brands being advertised. Women report being more likely to buy products from ads with skinny models than ads showing average models" (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Body Image and Eating Disorders Fact Sheet). The problem goes beyond magazines, to billboards, ads on the sides of city buses, ads on the sides of internet articles, television commercials, and even into the television shows and movies themselves.

Jennifer Pozner writes, in her book *Reality Bites Back*, about the way we are presented with a genre of television given the Orwellian title "Reality" TV which incorporate corporate interests and advertisements into their plotlines. "The primary purpose of contemporary television is not to entertain, engage, or inform us. Today, the driving factor for all corporate media production is to turn tidy profits for the tiny handful of megamerged corporations that own the vast majority of media outlets and control the bulk of what we are given to watch, see, and hear on the TV and radio, in movies, video games, and more" (Pozner, P. 274). Often, those

who put forth this kind of damaging product claim that they simply give the public what they want. Pozner shows that this is often not the case. "In this climate, what viewers want will always take a back seat to what multinationals such as the Big Six media owners (Disney, News Corp, Time Warner, General Electric, Viacom, and CBS) can convince us to watch. TV shows live or die in today's media market based not on pure-and-simple ratings, but on demographics…and broader economic factors including the cost to produce a program versus the amount of profit it generates" (Pozner, P. 274). For example, Pozner talks, on page 15, about the show, *The Apprentice*, which saw its ratings plummet each year as people lost interest. "Half its audience vanished by season 4, but since sponsors were paying 'upwards of $2 million *per episode* to have their products incorporated into plotlines,' NBC kept it in their lineup for two more seasons. Because the show was so cheap and so profitable, it was able to "sustain a lower rating". "Some apologists claim that reality TV is not sexist because no one forces women to sign on" Pozner writes. "That's beside the point" she says, "the genre's real impact isn't on the handful of women who willingly appear on these programs, but in the narrative messages sent to millions of viewers tuned in to the vicious spectacles…" Pozner points out that "despite how frivolous reality TV may seem or how much producers say it's all in good fun, the psychological browbeating these shows engage in has political ramifications. These shows reinforce insecurities bred into women by years of factually inaccurate news media reports of supposed "man shortages" and broken-down biological clocks" (P. 251). Pozner theorizes that "on a more subconscious level, we continue to watch because these shows frame their narratives in ways that both play to and reinforce deeply ingrained societal biases about women and men, love and beauty, race and class, consumption and happiness in

America" says Pozner, "...these 'guilty pleasures' foment gender-war ideology with deep significance for the intellectual and political development of a generation of viewers" (Pozner, P. 17).

Along with dysfunctional relationships and eating disorders, we are sold other deadly items for the sake of corporate profit. Cancer is one of these. The former head of the FDA, David Kessler, wrote his book *A Question of Intent* about the sinister case of cigarette corporations prioritizing their own monetary profit over the health of their fellow human beings. Kessler wrote about his experience with the tobacco industry's marketing to adolescents:

> a member of Lorillard's sales force had once written: 'The base of our business is the high school student" (Kessler, P.175). He writes, "I soon realized that children and adolescents were essential to the economic health of the tobacco industry. Claude Teague of R.J. Reynolds, who understood well the complex psychology of adolescents and how to manipulate it, knew that. 'The fragile, developing self-image of the young person needs all of the support and enhancement it can get,' he wrote. 'Smoking may appear to enhance that self-image in a variety of ways...This self-image enhancement effect has traditionally been a strong promotional theme for cigarette brands and should continue to be emphasized.' (Kessler, P. 277)

Kessler also shares with us Teague's words, "realistically, if our company is to survive and prosper, over the long term we must get our share of the youth market. In my opinion, this will
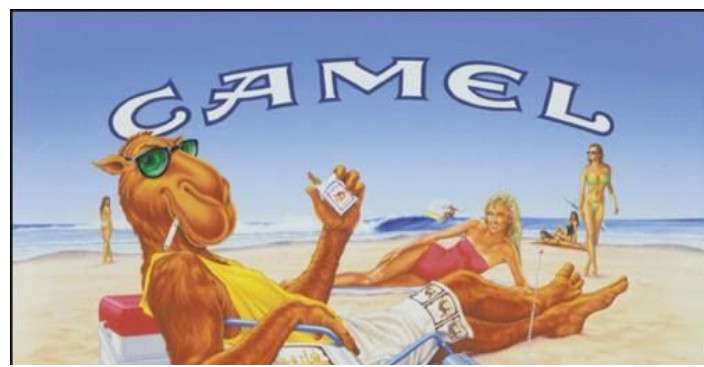
require new brands tailored to the youth market; I believe it unrealistic to expect that existing brands identified with an over-thirty 'establishment' market can ever become the 'in' products with the youth group" (Kessler, P. 278). "There were, of course, laws in every state that barred the selling of tobacco products to minors, but these were virtually ignored in most locations" (Kessler, P. 278). The cigarette industry is not the only one marketing unhealthy products to children, whose minds are vulnerable to their advertisements and bodies are vulnerable to their products.

"Junk food marketing to children and adolescents has become billion-dollar industry. According to 2006 data, the most recent numbers available, kids experience at least $1.6 billion worth of food advertising a year--the vast majority of the ads geared toward pushing high-calorie and low-nutrition snacks down kids' throat" (Gottesdiener, P.1). Laura Gottesdiener wrote in *Alternet* about seven "disturbing" trends in junk food advertising to children. She says that "according to data compiled by the nonprofit health organization Food & Water Watch, children see more nearly 5,000 TV food ads every year, and teenagers get bombarded by almost 6,000 annually." "Most disturbingly," writes Gottesdiener, "the amount of this advertising is steadily increasing.

According to a report from Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, the advertising increased dramatically in only two years, between 2007 and 2009. Children between the ages of 6 and 11 saw a staggering 56 percent more ads for Subway, and 26 percent more ads for McDonald's. African American children were disproportionately targeted by this advertising, seeing 50 percent more advertisements for fast food than white children of
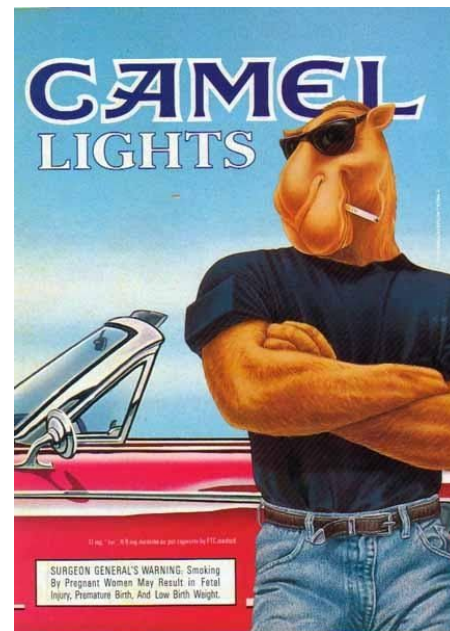
the same age" (Gottesdiener, P.1). Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood reports that "TV

viewing among 2- to 4-year-old children predicts increased intake of fast food…" (Linn, S., P. 7).

"In response to the cigarette corporation's transparent effort to market its product to young

people, Corporate Accountability International (then Infact) organized the "Send Joe Camel

Packing" campaign. In time, President Bill Clinton, the American Medical Association, the

Surgeon General, and the Federal Trade Commission would oppose the use of Joe Camel. R.J.

Reynolds ultimately agreed to end all advertising featuring the cartoon camel" (Challenging

Corporate Abuse Of Our Food, et al, Camels, Clowns, and Cartoons). Now Corporate

Accountability International is partnering with Challenging Corporate Abuse Of Our Food for the

"Retire Ronald" campaign to persuade McDonalds to stop using their clown character to

manipulate children into eating unhealthy foods. The campaign argues that "unlike adults,

children do not understand advertising's persuasive intent —and even just one 30-second

commercial can influence the brand preferences of children as young as two. For this reason

child psychologists are increasingly calling into question the ethics of marketing to children at

large" (Challenging Corporate Abuse Of Our Food, et al, Undermining Parents, Exploiting Kids).

Too much screen time can be harmful for children

Childhood obesity. Starting in early childhood and continuing as children grow, time with screen media is an important risk factor for childhood obesity in both low-risk and high-risk populations.[12] Increased BMI is linked to television viewing for toddlers[13] and preschoolers.[14] TV viewing among 2- to 4-year-old children predicts increased intake of fast food[15] and other high-energy, low-nutrient foods.[16] For each hour of television viewing per day, middle-school children consume an additional 167 calories.[17] Bedroom televisions are associated with obesity risk in children of all ages.[18]

Time with video games is also linked to increased food intake[19] and overweight.[20] And while active video games were once heralded as a means of encouraging exercise in children, those who own active video games, such as Nintendo Wii, do not show increased physical activity.[21]

(Linn, S., P. 7)

"On syndicated television, food advertisers spent $369 million on ads…" if the medium of television was not a powerful manipulative tool, corporations would not invest so much money in it (Brownell, P. 101). In 2004, Brownell wrote "the average American watches 1, 567 hours [of television] per year, or 3 or 4 hours per day" (Brownell, P. 100). "The Better Business Bureau noted that children watch the equivalent of a fifty-day "marathon" of television each year, most of which occurs on weekday afternoons and Saturday mornings, when parents may not be supervising" (Brownell, P. 100). This points toward another vital part of media literacy. Parents much watch TV with their kids to talk about the content, the messages, who is sending them, and what their motives might be. "Major networks show between 8.5 and 10.3 minutes of commercials per hour of programming…" (Brownell, P. 100).

Clearly, the links between media and culture and behavior are being drawn. If those in power, with amounts of money that are so high as to be difficult to comprehend, have figured out that they can influence culture and behavior through media, we are putting ourselves at a huge disadvantage to let them do all the research and have the upper hand. Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood is one nonprofit that is doing the research and working to spread awareness of media effects. They report that "boys exposed to violent sex on television, including rape, are less likely to be sympathetic to female victims of sexual violence" (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Sexualizing Childhood Fact Sheet, P. 1) and that "nearly 2 out of 3 television shows contain some violence, averaging about 6 violent acts per hour" with violence being "even more prevalent in children's shows, which average 14 violent acts per hour."Though we cannot blame any one person's violence singularly or directly on video games or television, "children who view a lot of media violence are more likely to view violence as an

effective way of settling conflicts" and "viewing media violence can lead to emotional

desensitization toward violence in real life" (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood,

Marketing Media Violence Fact Sheet).

The threat of violence is a real part of life for many women and street harassment is a

constant reminder to women of how vulnerable they are. I reached out to Holly Kearl, national

street harassment expert; writer; and founder of the nonprofit Stop Street Harassment, for

some insights about cultural change as it relates to the fight to end street harassment.

According to her website, street harassment is "any action or comment between strangers in

public places that is disrespectful, unwelcome, threatening and/or harassing and is motivated

by gender." The following are her responses to the questions I prepared:

1. **What is rape culture and how does it affect the prevalence of street harassment?**
"Rape culture" means a culture is saturated with language, images, laws, jokes, television shows, and songs that make light of rape and sexual violence, blame victims for its occurrence, do little to help survivors, and do even less to prevent rape or prosecute rapists.
Street harassment is on the spectrum of gender violence. Just like rape, street harassment is a way for someone to exhibit power over someone else, treat the other person with disrespect and disregard their feelings, and sexually objectify them against their will. Street harassment can escalate into rape and street harassment can be retriggering for survivors of rape.
Just as rape is often treated as a joke or dismissed as being a problem, street harassment is, too.
As long as our culture treats sexual violence this way, rape and street harassment will continue, as will domestic violence and sexual harassment in schools and the workplace.
2. **How does your organization, Stop Street Harassment, address the culture that enables street harassment to flourish?**
One way to allow rape culture to continue is to deny that sexual violence is actually a problem. So, to challenge that, one of the main functions of Stop Street Harassment is to document the prevalence of street harassment by posting people's stories, publishing findings of studies, and highlighting relevant news occurring worldwide.
Similarly, a lot of people are silent when it comes to sexual violence because they feel alone or to blame, so by showing people through the website and programs of SSH that they are not alone, that this is a widespread problem, and they're not to blame at all, it

helps empower people to fight back and challenge street harassment and sexual violence as the norm.

3. **How much of Stop Street Harassment's mission and goals are about cultural change?**

Street harassment is completely normalized in our society. It's seen as a given, it's like as a society we've agreed that of course girls/women have to go places in groups or keep up their guard or shouldn't go out alone at night, and that's just the way it is. We never talk specifically about WHY – that it's men's violence that keeps us unsafe – we just talk in abstracts about "safety."

Street harassment is also construed as a compliment, "flirting," a minor annoyance, or the fault of the harassed person.

So SSH works to change these harmful cultural norms and shift people's understanding of the issue so that instead of seeing it as a harmless occurrence, they see it as the human rights violation that it is.

Two of the main ways I try to do this are 1) by documenting just how often street harassment happens – and how young it begins – so that hopefully if people realized that the people they love are experiencing it, they will care and will want to stop it. And 2) by showing the impact it has: showing that it makes women and girls limit their time in public, it limits their places they can go and when. One of the principles of our country is freedom, but if girls/women aren't free to be in public spaces harassment-free, then only half of the population has freedom.

4. **Can you speak to any differences in the rates and types of street harassment across cultures? Is there any evidence to suggest that harassment less common in places where it is less culturally acceptable?**

This is an area where I want to see more research. All I can go by is anecdotes and what I've found from more than five years of research.

For example, the Scandanavian countries have the most gender equality of anywhere in the world, and I have heard almost nothing about street harassment in these countries. A few years ago, I traveled through Sweden, Norway and Denmark and faced absolutely no harassment. A few times I was alone at dark and was braced up, prepared for it and nothing ever happened. It was weird and amazing.

On the other hand, countries like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Egypt that offer women very few rights have insane amounts of street harassment.

Basically every woman has experienced it – and while most women in countries like the USA, Canada, and the UK have too – the harassment seems to include much more physical forms in the countries that have less gender equality. When I traveled to Egypt this summer, I went with my dad for safety reasons. And I hate that I had to do that. Even when I was with my dad, a few times when he stopped to take a photo and I didn't, I was immediately harassed, though thankfully nothing physical.

Across different cultures there may be different forms of harassment, for example "Pssst" versus "wolf-whistles," versus "Ptthsts" sounds, but ultimately, it all serves the same purpose: to disrespect, humiliate and sexually objectify the targets (usually women).

5. **What can every individual do to contribute to cultural change regarding street harassment and rape culture?**

Here are just a few suggestions:

1. Educate themselves about the issue. Learn what street harassment looks like, why it happens, and how to respond.
2. Learn about consent: consensual flirting and consensual sex and practice it. Make sure the other person/s is enthusiastically reciprocating.
3. Challenge friends who may be harassers or who think harassment and sexual violence are no big deal.
4. Challenge friends who use homophobic slurs, put down women, or laugh at transgender individuals.
5. Find out what the laws and policies are in your area regarding rape (state laws vary) and what ordinances there may be against forms of street harassment. Learn how to report these crimes.
6. Lead by example: be respectful, tolerant, and accepting of everyone.

6. **What was one of the first things (event/piece of media/etc.) that sparked your realization that cultural change was an important part of creating a safer, more equitable world?**

My older sister was born with many disabilities and at the hospital, the doctors told my parents to send her to live in an institution. My parents refused and as family we fought for her right to be included everywhere we went. She lived most of her short life (she died when I was 10) before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and there was not much acceptance of or equality for persons with disabilities.

While growing up I may not have conceptualized that cultural change was needed to make sure she and others with disabilities had equality and were included, but in my kid-way I did know that things needed to change. For example, she couldn't play at the playground unless she was on my dad's shoulders because she couldn't walk and the playgrounds near us were not wheelchair accessible. Because I kept pushing the issue and was upset about it, my parents were able to fundraise and create a wheelchair accessible part of the main playground at a park at the Cincinnati River Front we often went to, and while my sister died before it was completed, hopefully other kids have been able to use it and be included in the fun.

Learning about the Civil Rights Movement in school was another way I learned about the importance and power of cultural changes for making the world better for discriminated against populations.

7. **Do you have any other comments about the importance of cultural change that you would like to share?**

Cultural change takes time and it can be easy to get discouraged – as I sometimes do – when you realize we're fighting the same battles around sexual violence that people fought 10, 20, and 30 years ago. But in the scheme of human existence, a few decades is nothing. So I think it will take a few more decades and we have to keep working to create incremental change if we ever want to get there. I think about how long it took for women to get the right to vote – but they did eventually achieve it – and it makes me determined to stick with it for the long haul.

In the introduction to *How The Other Half Lives*, there are some good insights into the ways cultural change can have limited success if society becomes complacent:

> there are no more windowless rooms, double-decker tenements, cellar apartments, dwellings accessible via alleys, doughnut bakeries in basements, sweatshop franchises in slum flats—the living conditions of the poor remain abominable. New York City's homeless population, virtually nonexistent a few decades ago, is again what is was at the time Riis wrote, and now in addition there are people living on the streets of cities and towns where such a thing would have been unthinkable in the last century. The sweatshop is as much a feature of the recent immigrant's daily hell as it was in 1890. The face of misery has been altered to some degree, but not its substance. The housing project, a concept that would have sounded nearly utopian a century ago in its allowance for light and air, has proven to contain as much potential for harm as the tenements of Riis's day. For example, Riis might have seen its staircases – made of steel and set in concrete wells—as the fulfilling result of his agitation against wooden steps and wells open to the hallways, which acted as flues when fire broke out. But we know from recent instances that housing-project stairs can be firetraps just the same, thanks to cheap combustible paint applied to the walls. (Introduction, 1997, *How the Other Half Lives*, P. xiii).

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Based on the information I have reviewed here, I conclude that cultural change is a vital component of social movements and societal progress. We overlook it at our own peril.

However, as Susan Faludi shows us with her words about backlash, the work of cultural change is never done. Faludi was writing about sexism, but her words are applicable to all cultural backlash: "antifeminist backlash has been set off not by women's achievement of full equality but by the increased possibility that they might win it. It is a preemptive strike that stops women long before they reach the finish line… these codes and cajoling, these whispers and threats and myths, move overwhelmingly in one direction: they try to push women back into their 'acceptable' roles – whether as Daddy's girl or fluttery romantic, active nester or passive love object ." Chris Hayes also writes about the need to be incessant in the fight against negative forces in human society. He writes,

> Should America undergo the necessary upheaval and social transformation to bring about the third Era of Equality, we will not have arrived at some permanent state of bliss or end of history. The implacable hydraulic forces that draw power to collect and pool will continue to do their work. New tendencies for corruption will manifest themselves pining for the good old days or decrying their broken institutions once again. This is the cycle of a dynamic society. Equality is never a final state, democracy never a stable equilibrium: they are processes, they are struggles. Our task now is to recognize that that struggle is ours. (Hayes, P. 240)

Such is the cyclical struggle of cultural change. But what does this struggle entail? What is the actual work of creating and recreating cultural change and channeling it for good. The first step is awareness. This is why Media literacy is extremely important. Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood has shown us that children are especially vulnerable to media's messages. We must teach the skills they need to question those messages and conceptualize

where they are coming from. Miss Representation provides sample questions for parents to use in talking to their kids about media literacy. This is a good place to start.

I also suggest following recommendations provided by the Healthy Media Commission. "The Commission's objectives are to develop recommendations supporting a more positive and gender-neutral media environment for women and to promote the healthy development of a girl's social, emotional and physical well-being" (Healthy Media Commission, P. 1). HMC breaks down recommendations for media industry, media executive, and educators. They recommend that "Industry should provide staff, writers and actors with training on gender equity in media and address social issues such as girls' self-esteem, body images and relationships; increase the amount of balanced and healthy media; provide opportunities for boys and girls to create and share media; create public service announcements on this topic; and offer opportunities for young people to participate in career exploration. Media companies should also partner with educational groups and nonprofits to provide media and gender literacy education to youth" (Healthy Media Commission, P. 2). They further break down their recommendations into three simple steps that everyone can take: "Each individual–whether a media producer, writer, educator, advocate or parent–must: LEARN and be aware of the depiction of women and girls in the media, CHOOSE media that uphold high standards, and EDUCATE others on the importance of the issue" (Healthy Media Commission, P. 2).

In addition, public service announcements could raise awareness that media literacy is an increasingly important topic for parents to be aware of and teach their children. However, laws about advertising to kids might be a viable route for protecting society's most vulnerable citizens from corporate manipulation. Support from medical community (MD's, psychologists)

will be helpful to legitimize the often trivialize issues of cultural change and media effects. Importantly, more studies should be done measuring the effect of media to create a greater consensus and give us better and more reliable insights on the topic. It will allow us to be both better informed and more persuasive. One of the problems with media's large influence on culture is that the media is mostly controlled and created by a narrow and homogenous group of people. The more diversity of voices creating the media messages, the richer and more reflective of society the messages will become.

Each individual has the power to be a part of the solution. For example, Miss Representation started an online campaign in which individuals can use the social networking site, Twitter, to protest corporations which degrade women and girls. By posting to twitter using the hashtag "#NotBuyingIt", users have persuaded several companies to take down offensive ads and issue apologies. In doing so, they are fighting negative cultural messages and creating a culture that refuses to stand to sexism. Another example of this is letter writing campaigns: "To compete with the Bratz, Hasbro planned to release a series of dolls modeled

after the Pussy Cat Dolls, a burlesque troupe turned singing group whose lyrics include "Don't cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me; Don't cha wish your girlfriend was a freak like me?" Two days after the Campaign for a

Commercial-Free Childhood launched a letter writing campaign, Hasbro stopped production on the dolls" (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Sexualizing Childhood Fact Sheet).

The recipe for success includes both resisting negative aspects of culture and cultivating positive culture. For this to happen, we must take cultural change seriously and recognize the powerful force that culture is in human society.

Research Experience and Final Observations

Writing this thesis paper was a somewhat straightforward experience. The experience was briefly interrupted by Hurricane Sandy and my subsequent evacuation for three weeks, which proved as a distraction. However, I hope I was able to create a strong argument in support of my thesis based on the information I gathered. I reached out to about six professionals for interviews, but only heard back from Ms. Kearl, to whom I am very grateful. This paper might have been much longer, given the time, due to the nature of the topic. Because of my time restraint and mathematical abilities, I chose to make this a largely qualitative paper and did not do any experiments of my own, however, in my conclusions, I recommend more research and experiments be done to measure media effects and related issues.

Works Cited

Allyn, David. *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History*. Boston:

Little Brown And Company, 2000. Print.

Barnett, Rosalind, and Caryl Rivers. *Same Difference: How Gender Myths are Hurting our Relationships, our Children, and our Jobs*. New York: Basic Books, 2004. Print.

Blow, Charles M. "Don't Mess with Big Bird." *The New York Times*October 5 2012. Print.

Brownell, Kelly D. *Food Fight*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2004. Print.

Campaign for a Commerical-Free Childhood. "Body Image and Eating Disorders Fact Sheet."Web. <http://commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/bodyimage.pdf>.

---. "Marketing Media Violence Fact Sheet."Web. <http://commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/violence.pdf>.

---. "Sexualizing Childhood Fact Sheet."Web. <http://commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/sexualization.pdf>.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring with an Introduction by Vice President Al Gore*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962, 1994. Print.

Challenging Corporate Abuse of our Food, and Corporate Accountability International. "Retire Ronald- Camels, Clowns, and Cartoons."Web. <http://www.retireronald.org/learn/about/camels_clowns_and_cartoons>.

---. "Retire Ronald- Undermining Parents, Exploiting Kids."Web. <http://www.retireronald.org/learn/about/undermining_parents_exploiting_kids>.

Davis, Michael. *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street*. New York: Viking, 2008. Print.

Deen, Thalif. "Culture of Peace should Replace Culture of Violence." *Nation of Change*

   September 10 2012Print.

Fabello, Melissa. "***Bleeding Love: Music, Media Literacy And Teen Dating Violence*** "

   MissRepresentation.org. November 13 2012.Web.

   <http://www.missrepresentation.org/pop-culture/bleeding-love/>.

Fairclough, Adam. *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000*. New York: Viking,

   2001. Print.

Glassner, Barry. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. New

   York: Basic Books, 1999. Print.

Gottesdiener, Laura. "**7 Trends in Junk Food Advertising to Children**." *Alternet* November 29

   2012Print.

Habel, Phillip. "Following the Opinion Leaders?: The Dynamics of Influence among Media

   Opinion, the Public, and Politicians." *Working Papers* Paper 7 (2012)Print.

Harris-Perry, Melissa. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New

   Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Print.

Hayes, Christopher. *Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy*. New York: Crown, 2012.

   Print.

Healthy Media Commission and The Girl Scouts of the USA. "*Report and Recommendations of

   the Healthy Media Commission for Positive Images of Women and Girls. Executive

   Summary.*

   ." November 13 2012.Web.

<http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/advocacy/healthymedia/pdf/hmc_executive_summary.pdf>.

Jordan, Phillip E., and Maria Hernandez-Reif. "A Reexamination of Young Children's Racial Attitudes and Skin Tone Preferences." 2006. Print.The University of Alabama McNair Journal: .

Karpowitz, Christopher F., Tali Mendelber, and Lee Shaker. "*Gender Inequality in Deliberative Participation*." *American Political Science Review* 106.3 (2012)Print.

Keough, William. *Punchlines: The Violence of American Humor*. New York: Paragon HousePrint.

Kessler, David. *A Question of Intent: A Great American Battle with A Deadly Industry*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2001. Print.

Lind, Rebecca Ann, ed. *Race/Gender/Media: Considering Diversity Across Audiences, Content, and Producers*. Boston: Pearson, 2004. Print.

Linn, S. "Healthy Kids in a Digital World: A Strategic Plan to Reduce Screen Time for Children 0 to 5 Through Organizational Policy and Practice Change." Ed. The Campaign for a Commerical Free-Childhood. 2012.Web. 12/15/12 <http://commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/Healthy%20Kids%20in%20a%20Digital%20World.pdf>.

Loewen, James W. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1995. Print.

Marvin, Michael. "Largest Global Study on Violence Against Women Finds Feminist

 Movements Hold the Key to Change." *San Francisco Chronicle* September 28 2012Print.

Matthews, Dylan. "Do Presidential Debates Usually Matter? Political Scientists Say no. " *The*

 *Washington Post*October 3 2012. Print.

Matthiessen, Peter. *Courage for the Earth: Writers, Scientists, and Activists Celebrate the Life*

 and Writing of Rachel Carson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007. Print.

Meraz, Sharon. "Using Time Series Analysis to Measure Intermedia Agenda-Setting Influence in

 Traditional Media and Political Blog Networks." *Journalism & Mass Communication*

 Quarterly:

 http://web.ebscohost.com.remote.baruch.cuny.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=4d21c50c

 -315e-468f-983c-3d1f2727b084%40sessionmgr114&vid=2&hid=105. Print.

Pagel, Mark. *Wired for Culture: Origins of the Human Social Mind*. New York: W. W. Norton &

 Company, 2012. Print.

Persson, Anna, and Dara R. Musher-Eizenman. "The Impact of a Prejudice-Prevention

 Television Program on Young Children's Ideas about Race." *Early Childhood Research*

 Quarterly 18.4 (2003)Print.

Pozner, Jennifer L. *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*. Berkley,

 California: Seal Press, 2010. Print.

Prendergast, John, and Don Cheadle. *Not on our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide in Darfur*

 and Beyond. New York: Hyperion, 2007. Print.

Preston, Jennifer. "Protest Spurs Online Dialouge on Inequality." *The New York Times* October 8 2011. Print.

Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives*., 1890, 2009. Print.

Roberts, Gene, and Hank Klibanoff. *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of A Nation*. New York: Knopf, 2006. Print.

Schwartz, Casey. " **Mark Pagel in 'Wired for Culture' Makes a Strong Case for Cultural Determinism**." May 4 2012.Web. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/03/04/mark-pagel-in-wired-for-culture-makes-a-strong-case-for-cultural-determinism.html>.

Schwyzer, Hugo. "**When Shaming Makes Good Sense**." October 9 2012.Web. <http://www.hugoschwyzer.net/2012/10/09/when-shaming-makes-good-sense/>.

Smith, Stacy L., Marc Choueiti, and et al. "Gender Roles & Occupations: A Look at Character Attributes and Job-Related Aspirations in Film and Television." *SeeJane.org*. 2012.Web. <http://seejane.org/downloads/FullStudy_GenderRoles.pdf>.

Smith, Stacy L., Marc Choueiti, and Jessica Stern. "Occupational Aspirations: What Are G-Rated Films Teaching Children About The World of Work?" *SeeJane.org*. 2012.Web. <http://seejane.org/downloads/KeyFindings_OccupAspirations.pdf>.

Solnit, Rebecca. "Occupy Your Victories." *Nation of Change* September 17 2012Print.

Stelter, Brian. "Camps are Cleared, but '99 Percent' Still Occupies the Lexicon." *The New York Times* November 30 2011. Print.

Tavernise, Sabrina. "Survey Finds Rising Perception of Class Tension." *The New York Times* January 11 2012. Print.

Valenti, Jessica. "Anatomy of a Successful Rape Joke." *The Nation* July 12 2012 Print.

Wolf, Naomi. *the Beauty Myth: How Images of Beuaty are used Against Women* . New York: Double Day, 1991. Print.

Appendix

(Miss Representation Website).

commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/sexualization.pdf · Google

lost Visited · Getting Started · Latest Headlines · Pin It · + Pocket · JoAnn From Bensonhu...

SEXUALIZING CHILDHOOD

Research links sexualization with some of the most pressing and common mental health problems for girls including eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression and poor sexual health.[1] Sexualization and the objectification of women in the media is also associated with body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety.[2]

Children are bombarded with sexualized content and messages

- Sexualized messages are prevalent across a variety of mainstream media that target children including TV, the internet, games, movies, music and magazines.[3]
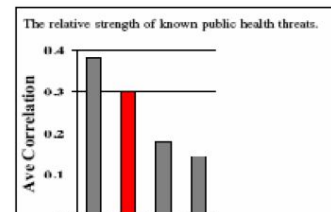
(Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Sexualizing Childhood Fact Sheet)

commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/violence.pdf · Google

Most Visited · Getting Started · Latest Headlines · Pin It · + Pocket · JoAnn From Bensonhu...
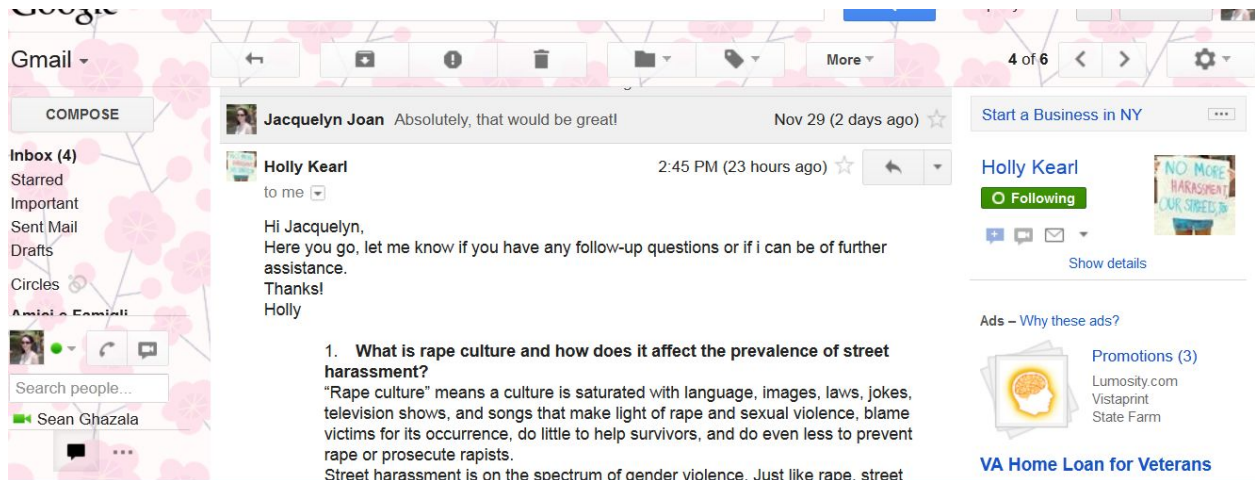
MARKETING MEDIA VIOLENCE

After reviewing more than 1000 studies based on over 30 years of research, 6 major public health organizations, including the American Medical Association, found that "viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behavior, particularly in children."

- Children who view a lot of media violence are more likely to view violence as an effective way of settling conflicts.

- Viewing media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward violence in real life.

- Entertainment violence feeds a perception that the world is a violent and mean place.

The relative strength of known public health threats.

(Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Marketing Media Violence Fact Sheet)

(Holly Kearl, Stop Street Harassment founder, agreement to interview).
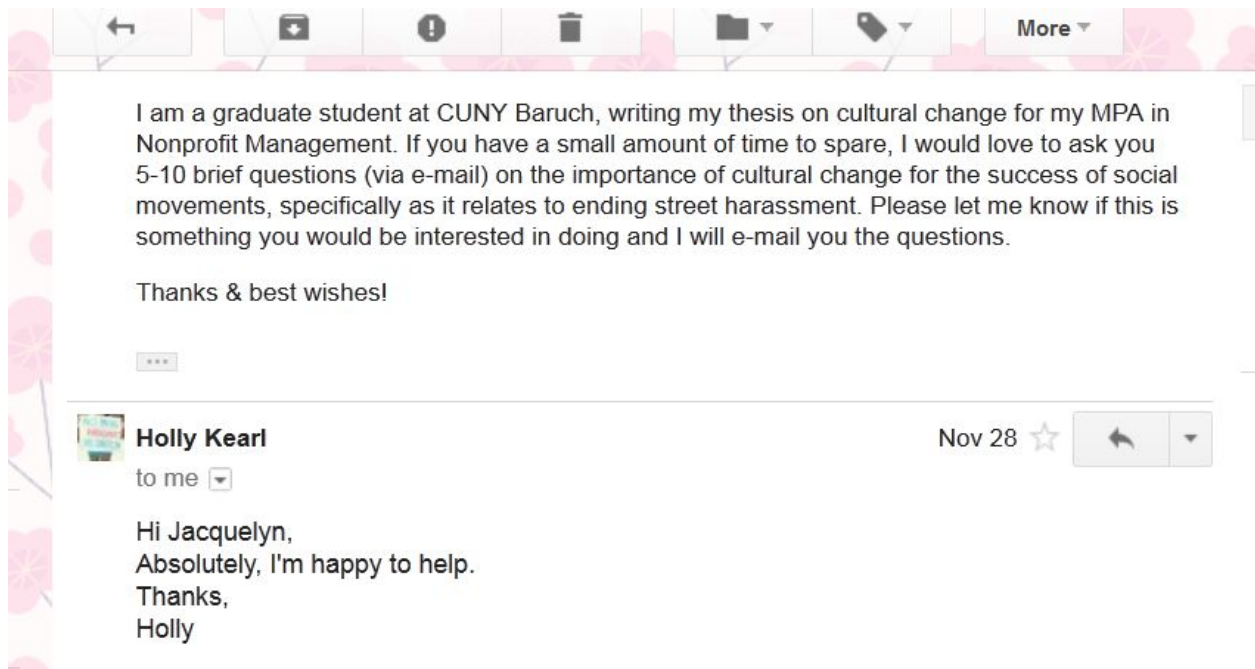
(Kearl, agreement 2)

American teenagers spend
31 hours a week **watching TV,**
17 hours a week **listening to music,**
3 hours a week **watching movies,**
4 hours a week **reading magazines,**
10 hours a week **online.**

That's 10 hours and 45 minutes
of media consumption a day.

LOVESOCIAL — IN PARTNERSHIP WITH — MISSREPRESENTATION.ORG

U.S. advertisers spent
$235.6 billion in 2009.

80% of the countries
in the world have GDPs
less than that.

LOVESOCIAL — IN PARTNERSHIP WITH — MISSREPRESENTATION.ORG

(Retire Ronald.org)

"IT'S EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN TO BE WRITING THEIR OWN STORIES, TRULY CRAFTING THOSE STORIES, WRITING THEM DOWN, DIRECTING THEM AND GIVING THEM TO PEOPLE TO REALLY EMOTIONALLY BECOME IMPACTED BY"

-ROSARIO DAWSON
Actor & Activist

MISSREPRESENTATION.ORG

(Miss Representation)

Step into Advertisers' Shoes

⚙ IMAGINE

You and your family are browsing through magazines at a newsstand in the airport terminal. You notice that nearly every fashion and health magazine cover features "flawless" pictures of celebrities and models. A magazine with a man on the cover has a headline that says "Six Weeks to Six-Pack Abs." A magazine with a woman on the front says "Beauty Secrets Every Woman Must Know."

🐦 DISCUSS

- What kind of message would a headline like "Six Weeks to Six-Pack Abs" send to boys? How might a magazine with this headline make boys feel about the way they look, and how they should spend their time and money?

- What kind of message would a headline like "Beauty Secrets Every Woman Must Know" send to girls? How might a magazine with this headline make girls feel about the way they look, and how they should spend their time and money?

- Have you ever wanted something just because of an ad you saw in a magazine or on TV? What was the ad like? How did it grab your attention? How did you feel afterward?

✍ TAKE ACTION TIPS

For families with young children

- Remember that your kids are sensitive to your reactions. When you are standing in line at the grocery store with young kids, diverting their attention from the bikini-clad babes on the covers of magazines might be all it takes. But if you notice your older kids looking at sexy images, a discussion about your family values may be beneficial. Talk about why it's unfair for magazines to make women feel like they are always supposed to be looked at or sexy in order to be desirable.

For families with preteens and teens

Celebrate Your Role Models

⚙ IMAGINE

You hear a story on the news about a video that went viral online. In the video, a teen girl stops running in the middle of her race in order to help another runner who has fallen down. She helps her opponent get up, and together they walk across the finish line.

🐦 DISCUSS

- How can media, particularly the Internet, help us discover inspiring stories about ordinary people?

- What are some small steps that your family and friends can make in their daily lives to empower girls, and to celebrate kindness and generosity?

- Who are some role models in your life? How do they inspire you?

✍ TAKE ACTION TIPS

For families with young kids

- Seek out positive role models. Help expand your children's horizons by finding role models in real life — as well as in books, TV, and movies — that show children that they can be recognized for their talents and brains rather than their looks. (You may have to search harder in film and TV for examples than in real life and or in books, but that's a valuable part of the exercise!)

For families with preteens and teens

- Show headlines, and make them teachable

Conversation Starters *for families*

MissRepresentation.org and Common Sense Media are proud to present this guide to empower parents and families to have honest conversations about the subtle, and not-so-subtle, impact of media on our lives. Open up this guide to find:

- Real-life scenarios to help you *imagine* how media messages impact our daily lives

- Questions about media and popular culture for you to *discuss* with your loved ones

- Tips to help your family *take action* to change their media habits and become more conscious consumers

(Miss Representation .org)
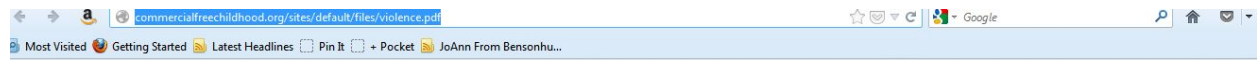
MARKETING MEDIA VIOLENCE

After reviewing more than 1000 studies based on over 30 years of research, 6 major public health organizations, including the American Medical Association, found that "viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behavior, particularly in children."

- Children who view a lot of media violence are more likely to view violence as an effective way of settling conflicts.

- Viewing media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward violence in real life.

- Entertainment violence feeds a perception that the world is a violent and mean place.

The relative strength of known public health threats.
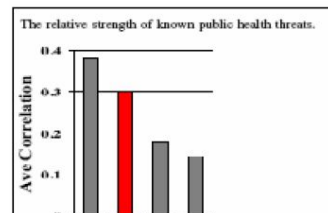
(Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood)

If the media is sending girls the message that **their value lies in their bodies**, this can only leave them feeling disempowered and **distract them from making a difference and becoming leaders**.

= JENNIFER SIEBEL NEWSOM =

LOVESOCIAL = IN PARTNERSHIP WITH = MISS REPRESENTATION.ORG

AS A CULTURE, WOMEN ARE BROUGHT UP TO BE **FUNDAMENTALLY INSECURE** AND ALWAYS LOOKING FOR THE TIME WHEN THAT KNIGHT ON A HORSE WILL COME AND RESCUE US OR PROVIDE FOR US

-LISA LING
Executive Producer and Host
OWN's *Our America*

MISS REPRESENTATION.ORG