“SESAME STREET” AND THE MEDIA:
THE ENVIRONMENTS, FRAMES, AND REPRESENTATIONS
CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS

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Television to viewers of all ages in the 1960s was a budding medium, and children by 1961 proved to be a loyal—and later profitable—target audience for networks. But debates appeared questioning whether or not children’s television negatively influenced its young viewers. “Sesame Street” debuted in 1969 and quickly became the most successful children’s program in television history. Its production continues today.

The thesis, in its entirety, found that “Sesame Street” happened “in the right place at the right time.” It found that the show was an exception to a plethora of the low-quality, violent, and commercial children’s programming that print media characterized before its debut; was overwhelmingly supported after its debut by print media, political figures and public audiences; was overwhelmingly framed positively by authors of articles who pinned traditional educators fearing television may replace their roles against “Sesame Street” creators in a public debate over the show’s merits; and was changed over the past three decades in response to vocal opinions about the characters’ representations of gender, race, and class.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Urban legend has it that in the winter of 1928, “Uncle Don” of WOR radio in New York finished an educational broadcast and said, “There! I guess that’ll hold the little bastards.” The microphone still was on.¹

Such a children’s radio show may have set a precedent for television programming three decades later—American parents in the late 1960s were disgusted by commercial networks’ lack of quality, educational programming. Most of children’s programming was low budget, filled with violence and bombarded with commercials.²

“Our concern is that children’s shows do nothing,” said Evelyn Sarson, a mother of two and founder of Boston’s Action for Children’s Television (ACT) group. “Children’s programs today, particularly the Saturday-morning cartoons, are merely fill-ins between a string of commercials.”³ The group originated in 1970 to advocate quality children’s programming comparable to that of Joan Ganz Cooney’s 1969 creation, “Sesame Street.”

The purpose of this study was to detail historically “Sesame Street” from its March 1966 inception through the last article published about the show in 1994, analyzing the environments, frames, and representations that may have contributed to the

¹ “Who’s Afraid of Big, Bad TV?,” *Time*, 23 November 1970, 68 and http://www.snopes2.com/radioTV/radio/uncledon. “Uncle Don,” or Howard Rice, was born 1897 in St. Joseph, Michigan. He changed his name at fifteen to Don Carney while performing in Vaudeville. In September 1928 he debuted as “Uncle Don” on a New York radio’s children’s program that aired six nights a week from 1928 through 1947. The earliest account of his on-air flub came in a *Variety* article dated April 23, 1930. Whether or not the rumor was true, “Uncle Don’s” reputation was tarnished, but he never lost his job—he retired in 1947.
² Evan McLeod Wylie, “‘Sesame Street’ Opens the Door,” *Reader’s Digest*, May 1970, 112. And Lloyd Morrisett, written communication, 2 June 2002. Morrisett noted that 20,000 members enlisted as members of ACT during its peak to fight poor quality children’s programming.
³ “TV’s Switched-on School,” *Newsweek*, 1 June 1970, 71. ACT challenged commercial networks with three demands: offer at least fourteen hours of children’s television each week, cut sponsorships and commercials, and delete performers’ product mentions.
show’s unparalleled success. The study was the first of its kind—more than 1,000 studies exist researching how cognitively “Sesame Street” has affected viewers, but no known study exists analyzing the historical context of “Sesame Street” in terms of the interrelationships with political power holders, the way media framed children’s television before and after the advent of “Sesame Street,” and the ways in which the show changed its representations perhaps in response to public and private opinion.

This study analyzed the environment of children’s television in the 1960s prior to the debut of “Sesame Street.” Furthermore, the program’s interrelationship with print media and how “Sesame Street” changed in content over the past thirty years to continue being a successful, international icon was explored. This study is anticipated to serve as an infrastructure for future research into the formulas, relationships, and environments that exist to facilitate the success of long-running television programs. Therefore, providing such analyses was the sole purpose of this in-depth, exploratory thesis.

The thesis, in its entirety, found that “Sesame Street” happened “in the right place at the right time.” It found that the show was an exception to a plethora of the low-quality, violent, and commercial children’s programming that print media characterized before its debut; was overwhelmingly supported after its debut by print media, political figures and public audiences; was overwhelmingly framed positively by authors of articles who pinned traditional educators fearing television may replace their roles against “Sesame Street” creators in a public debate over the show’s merits; and was changed over the past three decades in response to vocal opinions about the characters’ representations of gender, race, and class.
One drawback to the study was an inherent characteristic of media that made impossible studying the media’s interrelationship with “Sesame Street”—newsworthiness. The show had won eight Emmy Awards by 1972 and influenced legislation for public broadcasting. After 1972, magazine articles published about the show dropped dramatically, presumably because the show had become an accepted cultural icon and was, therefore, no longer newsworthy. Therefore, the majority of the study’s articles was published prior to 1972, and then was scattered throughout the years until 1994, when the last article was published according to the Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature. This fact actually became more significant to the study and for future research because it illustrated how quickly “Sesame Street” moved through the stages of speculation, debate and finally, acceptance, all within the first three years of its production.

Exploratory research, including frequency and trend explorations, provided this study’s basis because no known research exists in this field. Future research and greater access to resources—such as the Children’s Television Workshop’s (CTW) annual reports or their clipping services—can use this exploratory piece as a basis to build statistical significance of the program’s relationship with the media and the program’s changing representations. The researcher hopes to open a field to do research and is not trying to examine an entire field. The researcher intends to find general categories that may aid understanding of the non-cognitive aspects of “Sesame Street.”

Communication researchers may benefit by understanding some of the components that may have contributed to the show’s unprecedented success. The study also may be beneficial to children’s broadcasting industry entrepreneurs who seek such
success for their own programs and would gain from understanding the factors that influenced “Sesame Street,” apart from sheer content research.

**Background of “Sesame Street”**

Lloyd Morrisett, one of the original creator’s of “Sesame Street,” told the researcher that no one person or factor influenced the show’s success, and that, since the debut of “Sesame Street,” many people have tried to duplicate the original formula. Mr. Morrisett himself is pleased that such a thesis was devoted entirely to exploring those environments, frames, and relationships that may lead to further explorations and, ideally, a concrete formula for success. The ability to duplicate such a conceptual formula is out of the researcher’s hands, but the building blocks are detailed in the following histories and trends associated with the beginnings of “Sesame Street:”

I suspect that many children grow up these days with feelings toward television like those I had as a child about the old copies of *Esquire* stored not quite safely out of my reach. The sensations which come with peering at something over which one’s parents show so much anguish (“Television time’s up!” “That show isn’t for children!” “Be a good boy or there will be no television for you!”) must be almost erotic, like those which accompany the first cup of watered-down coffee, or the drink that looks like a Manhattan but isn’t.¹

Television to viewers of all ages was a budding media, but children by 1961 proved to be a loyal—and later profitable—target audience for networks.² Advertisers vied for exposure on prime-time television and sunk their teeth into the new and expanding “$50 billion-dollar industry” known as children’s television.³ But concerned

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parents and advocacy groups questioned whether or not children’s television was a positive influence. Their voices finally led to federal investigations to determine if TV violence and commercialism contributed to social disorder.7

This section’s purpose is to detail historically the background of “Sesame Street” from March 1966 through June 1972. Nineteen sixty-six marked the inception of the idea that led to “Sesame Street,” and by 1972 the show had garnered Emmy-award winning acclaim and may have raised the federal government’s awareness of public broadcasting during Richard Nixon’s term in office. Perhaps influenced by the success of “Sesame Street,” Nixon approved a plan in June 1972 that provided an additional $15 million to public broadcasting to develop more children’s programming. This section also intends to explain print, public and political responses to “Sesame Street” by examining children’s television magazine articles from 1968 through 1994 that, according to the Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature, were the years in which “Sesame Street” articles were published.

The show’s idea began at a dinner party Cooney and her husband Timothy hosted in March 1966. One guest was Lloyd Morrisett, vice-president of the Carnegie Corporation and a childhood education associate. He joined Cooney and Lewis Freedman in a discussion about TV. Freedman was the director of programming with Cooney at WNDT, New York City’s educational television channel. At the time, 90% of households with less than a $5,000 annual income owned a TV, a rate more than those

who owned bathtubs. There were an estimated 12 million three- to five-year-old kids in the United States who watched more than thirty hours of television per week. Morrisett and Cooney considered the idea that television could be used to educate preschoolers nationwide and to reach disadvantaged, inner-city youth.

Morrisett apparently thought about the idea, and in June 1966, the Carnegie Corporation awarded Cooney a grant to study educational television programs through WNDT for fourteen to eighteen weeks. She was named president of the Children’s Television Workshop (CTW), which was the organization Morrisett and the grant helped to create for children’s television research. The study’s objective was to determine the feasibility of a preschool education project that used television entertainment to teach.

Cooney had already won an Emmy award in 1966 for her work on urban poverty. She said of the idea, “I suddenly saw that I could go on doing documentaries about poverty and the educational deficit that poverty causes. I could do them forever and have no impact, and then I saw this could have an impact.” The feasibility study was pivotal in the Carnegie Corporation’s agreement to nurture Cooney’s brainchild. The Carnegie Corporation liked it. Cooney’s work confirmed her abilities as an investigator and organizer and made her one of the leading authorities on television as education.

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9 Ibid., 39.
10 Ibid., 9.
12 Ibid., 10—11.
14 Polsky, Getting to ‘Sesame Street,’ the Origins of the Children’s Television Workshop,” 22. The study pushed the educational project forward and proposed that television could have influence as an educational tool.
Public broadcasting in the mid-1960s was financed by state and local taxes in combination with philanthropy, minimal underwriting profits, and institutional budgets.\(^\text{16}\) Little money was provided to educational programming development. The Carnegie Corporation helped create the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in 1967 before Nixon took office. The agency was concerned with commissioning national programs to local television stations. Morrisett recalled that he felt Nixon’s administration was not affected or interested—and, in fact, consistently attacked—public broadcasting.\(^\text{17}\) However, the federal government passed the Public Broadcasting Act in 1967 calling for the creation of more local stations across the United States.\(^\text{18}\)

While the government tackled public broadcasting, Cooney and her team conducted research on pre-schoolers’ television viewing habits and found that kids best retained information from television commercial jingles and short, segmented construction.\(^\text{19}\) Like commercials, she, too, wanted to sell something to 12 million preschoolers—learning. Cooney said she wanted a program that resembled the 1960s variety show “Laugh-in” by using commercial-like construction to teach children, but with a mixture of fantasy and reality. The segments would be less than six minutes long and, like commercials, have quick editing and catchy, educational jingles.\(^\text{20}\)

Cooney presented her final proposal in January 1968, almost two years after the dinner party. She submitted the proposal after receiving help from Morrisett, freelance writer Linda Gottlieb, Executive Associate for the Carnegie Corporation Barbara Finberg, and John Witherspoon and Roselle Kovitz, \textit{A History of Public Broadcasting} (Washington, D.C.: Public Telecommunications Newspaper, 1987), 49.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid., 50 and Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview with author, 2 March 2002.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^\text{17}\) Witherspoon and Kovitz, \textit{A History of Public Broadcasting}, 51.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{18}\) Christopher Finch, \textit{Jim Henson: The Art, the Magic, the Imagination} (New York City, NY: Random House, 1993), 55.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 56.\(^\text{20}\)
and Program Officer for the Ford Foundation Stuart Sucherman. The latter worked with
Cooney to develop guidelines for CTW’s relationship with National Educational
Television (NET), which was the organization that agreed to air the program on its 170
stations. The fifty-five-page document was broken into six subsections that asked for
between $5 and 10 million to reach at least 6 million three- to five-year-old kids. In
other words, the coordinators hoped to reach at least half of the 12 million children. The
plan kept the backgrounds, problems and needs of disadvantaged kids primary during
planning and promotion. Cooney noted in the proposal that the nation would spend
more than $2.75 billion to put all three-to-five-year-old kids in school at the public’s
expense. Her proposal emphasized a design that was strong in cognition, instructional in
nature, and methodologically rapid and repetitive.

By February 1968, CTW had secured a total of $8 million from financial
contributors—$6.25 million from the contributions of the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford
Foundation, and the Office of Education, in addition to $1.75 million from other
governmental sponsors such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Office
of Economic Opportunity, and the National Institute of Child Heath and Human
Development.

On March 20, 1968, the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and the U.S.
Office of Education held a press conference at New York City’s Waldorf Astoria Hotel to
publicly announce the formation of their experimental project. The press release stated:

21 Polsky, Getting to ‘Sesame Street,’ the Origins of the Children’s Television Workshop, 39.
22 Ibid., 41—42.
23 Ibid., 10—11.
24 Ibid., 64.
The aim [of CTW] is to stimulate the intellectual and cultural growth of young children—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Television professionals will work in partnership with educators, psychologists and other child-development specialists to fuse education and entertainment into taped programs that will interest, engage and instruct four-and-five-year-olds. The most professional and sophisticated techniques of television will be used to teach subject matter ranging from concepts of numbers and shapes to recognition of the alphabet, and to advance such skills as language and reasoning.\textsuperscript{25}

The press conference also formally announced the creation of the CTW and its goals. Morrisett recalled that CTW had briefed influential *New York Times* television critic Jack Gould about the program.\textsuperscript{26} CTW’s public affairs and publicity department, under the leadership of Robert Hatch, was extensive and unprecedented for a non-commercial children’s television show. The PR campaign kicked off with the influential Gould’s article, which later read:

> Electronically and educationally, the announcement last week of the creation of the Children’s Television Workshop is a step both thoroughly welcome and long overdue. The harnessing of the home screen to prepare youngsters of four and five for the school days that lie ahead could go a long way toward meeting a national social need.\textsuperscript{27}

In May, Cooney chose David Connell, formerly executive producer of “Captain Kangaroo,” to be executive producer and vice president for CTW. He joined others on the CTW staff such as Jon Stone, the senior producer and head writer. Edward L. Palmer, vice president and director of research for CTW, helped coordinate research efforts.\textsuperscript{28}

In order to achieve the fantasy Cooney desired, Stone suggested she seek the talents of Jim Henson.\textsuperscript{29} He was a puppeteer who got his start at WRC-TV in

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{26} Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, 2 March 2002.
\textsuperscript{27} Polsky, *Getting to *Sesame Street,* the Origins of the Children’s Television Workshop, 68.
\textsuperscript{28} Kratochival, “‘Sesame Street:’ Developed by Children’s Workshop,” 22.
\textsuperscript{29} Finch, *Jim Henson: The Art, the Magic, the Imagination,* 53.
Washington, where he was given his own late-night show. He called the show “Sam and Friends.” It was five minutes long and lasted only two weeks, but it was while doing this television program that Henson invented the “Muppet,” which was a mixture of a marionette and a puppet.  

During the summer of 1968, CTW held five, three-day seminars in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New York City to prepare educators, producers, writers, psychologists and other staff members for the debut of “Sesame Street.” Cooney recalled that it was the time that Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were shot. Cooney became uncomfortable during one seminar when she saw a man arrive “dressed in what appeared to me to be hippie clothes with a hippie beard.” The man sat completely stiff in the last row, away from others, and stared ahead. Cooney turned to Morrisett and asked, “How do we know that man isn’t going to kill us?” He responded, “It isn’t very likely. That’s Jim Henson.”

Henson was hesitant about accepting Cooney’s offer to create Muppets for teaching children until she mentioned that adults also would be interested in the program because of special guests and adult humor. The Muppets would join four hosts in a gender-diverse community of blacks, whites and Hispanics. Henson accepted and began creating some of the characters on “Sesame Street” with which children could identify, such as “Bert,” a gullible but honest pessimist, and “Ernie,” a charming but sneaky

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30 Ibid., 53—54. Stone felt so strongly about getting Henson and his Muppets to perform on “Sesame Street” that he told Cooney without Henson, the show would have to go on without any puppets at all. Cooney had seen some of Henson’s work and, although she had never met him, felt that Henson was a creative genius.

31 Polsky, Getting to ‘Sesame Street,’ the Origins of the Children’s Television Workshop, 72.

32 Finch, Jim Henson: the Art, the Magic, the Imagination, 54.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 55.
optimist.\textsuperscript{35} Other Henson characters were “Cookie Monster,” for kids who sometimes ate cookies before dinner, “Count von Count,” a character who counted everything, “Oscar the Grouch,” a trash-can inhabitant who was always in a terrible mood, and “Big Bird,” a more than seven-foot tall, three-and-a-half-year-old yellow bird.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to Stone’s recommendation to hire Henson, he suggested the program’s scene resemble an inner-city street. Cooney “paled” at the suggestion because although the target audience was disadvantaged children, she feared that not everyone would find an urban setting appropriate.\textsuperscript{37} Morrisett recalled that the creators realized that in order to have a popular show, the program must appeal to as many kids as possible.\textsuperscript{38} Cooney later realized that to reach inner-city kids, the program must be something with which urban preschoolers could identify. The scene was designed complete with sidewalks, trees, a newspaper-candy store, a mailbox, a trash can, a boarded-up excavation site and a stoop of stairs leading to a brownstone apartment building.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., and Smith, “Biography Close-up: ‘Sesame Street.’” Henson wanted to create characters in which children could identify. Cooney agreed that Henson’s goal was a good one, and asked writers to develop scripts in which Bert and Ernie quarrel but value their friendship and Cookie Monster gets caught with his paw in the cookie jar. The creators hoped balancing good and bad would create an air of reality. Henson had constructed a formula of presentation that was new to the televised puppetry field—performers placed their hands inside a Muppet’s head to create facial expressions while simultaneously moving the Muppet’s arms using thin rods attached to each of the Muppet’s hands. Some of the puppets were created to accommodate human hands inserted into the puppets’ arms to operate the fingers, instead of using the traditional rods. The performers held the puppets above their heads with one arm and operated the rods, or hands depending on the puppet, with their other arm. The camera then shot above the Muppets’ waists. Television monitors were situated on the ground for puppeteers’ to see how their actions appeared onscreen.
\textsuperscript{37} Smith, “Biography Close-up: ‘Sesame Street.’”
\textsuperscript{38} Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, 2 March 2002..
\textsuperscript{39} Wylie, “‘Sesame Street’ Opens the Door,” 115.
In June 1969, CTW paid 100 families from inner city Philadelphia $100 each to allow their children to watch five of its test shows on closed-circuit television. At that time, the program had yet to decide upon a name. The planners used formative research, meaning the children’s responses dictated material choices, when studying children’s reactions to the program. What the researchers found was startling; as soon as the Muppets were removed from the picture, children’s attention drastically dropped. The show’s creators had been advised to separate humans from Muppets so that preschoolers could better differentiate fantasy from reality. But as Stone recalled:

We did the test shows that way—no “Oscar,” no “Big Bird”—and we realized right away that we had a problem because the people on the street couldn’t compete with the puppets. So the information we got from these test shows demonstrated that we needed a transition from the fantasy to the reality and puppets on the street seemed a good way to do it.

*Reader’s Digest* published a story foreshadowing the educational program’s debut that said, “This is one television experiment—the Workshop was formed last spring with impressive financial support from foundations and the federal government—that has the money and will take the time to get ready.” The article’s author questioned if teachers, producers, and a research team could cooperate with educational consultants.

In May, *Newsweek* published an article that asked, “Can these genuinely funny bits and lively, one-minute ‘commercials’ actually be educational TV? Can they really ‘sell’ pre-school lessons to the 12 million 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds across the country, but

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42 Finch, *Jim Henson: The Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 71.
43 Ibid.
44 Wylie, “‘Sesame Street’ Opens the Door,” 115.
particularly in the ghetto?”  

Also skeptical was a June 1969 article in *U.S. News and World Report*. “The new shows being developed for the noncommercial networks will be watched closely to see whether they meet this test.”  The test was the creation of better kids’ television, which according to several Congressmen, was needed to boost funding for further development of educational programming.  

That same month, writer Virginia Schone suggested the show be called “Sesame Street.”  “Sesame” was meant to stir up feelings of excitement and adventure associated with the “Arabian Nights” command, “Open sesame,” which was the command that opened a magic door to a treasure cave. Creators hoped to open the door to learning for millions of preschoolers. Because it represented a street setting in urban life, “Street” seemed an ideal partner. 

The pilot was taped in July 1969 complete with “Big Bird,” which was operated by puppeteer Caroll Spinney. He also supplied the voice and movements for “Oscar the Grouch.” Henson performed “Ernie,” “Rolf” the piano-playing dog, and “Kermit the Frog.” Joe Raposo was the resident composer who wrote “Kermit the Frog’s” first song, “It’s Not Easy Bein’ Green.”

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47 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Woods, *Jim Henson From Puppets to Muppets*, 30, and Finch, *Jim Henson, the Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 54.
51 Polsky, Getting to ‘Sesame Street,’ *Origins of the Children’s Television Workshop*, 90, and Finch, *Jim Henson: The Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 244, 58, 55. Before the song’s debut, Raposo stated, “I want to describe the promise of every morning and the curiosity and hope on every child’s face. I would like to think that this theme of hope and wonder is at the root of all my work.” “Kermit the Frog,” got his name from one of Henson’s childhood friends Kermit Scott, who was a classmate in Henson’s class in Leland, Mississippi. Kermit was a regular on each show during the first three seasons. He played a reporter and introduced himself as “Kermit the Frog of ‘Sesame Street’ News.” Other main operators included Jerry
The major commercial networks in 1969 were CBS, NBC and ABC. Other educational programs, both commercial and non-commercial, had varying success—”Mr. I Magination” lost sponsorship, “Ding Dong School” failed, and “Mr. Wizard” was suspended in 1965 after fourteen years. “Captain Kangaroo” was beginning its sixteenth season on CBS, and NET’s “Mister Roger’s Neighborhood” was criticized for being “too Christian.” Commercial stations experimented with children’s programs, too, such as CBS’s cartoon “Archie’s Funhouse” and NBC’s cartoons “H.R. Pufnstuf” and “The Bugaloos.” “Romper Room” was criticized for training kids to be consumers, to which the producer Bert Claster responded, “This is commercial television, isn’t it?”

The commercial promotion of “Sesame Street” was rare for a non-commercial program. NBC held a thirty-minute, prime time preview in addition to interviews with Cooney and Palmer. ABC also conducted interviews with Cooney and Palmer, and CBS allowed “Sesame Street” to run commercials free of charge. Before the show debuted, more than fourteen periodicals published articles. Cooney said of the pre-reviews:

I could not have understood what a smash it would be and what that would feel like in terms of the ‘swoosh’ of press interest, the ‘swoosh’ of public acclaim, the phone ringing off the wall with every toy maker in the world wanting to buy ‘Sesame Street,’ I mean, commercial people.

Nelson performing “Count von Count,” and Frank Oz performing “Bert.” Don Sahlin was a Muppets Inc. veteran designer who supplied puppeteers with a variety of characters with the help of artist Caroly Wilcox. “Who’s Afraid of Big, Bad TV?,” 68.

Ibid., 69.

Ibid.

Smith, “Biography Close-up: ‘Sesame Street.’”

Kratchivall, “‘Sesame Street:’ Developed by Children’s Workshop,” 13.


Smith, “Biography Close-up: ‘Sesame Street.’” A sweep of advanced publicity came in the form of major newspapers, magazines, journals, and radio plugs. Word spread that November 10, 1969 would bring an unprecedented children’s program to the airwaves.
After more than two years of planning, funding and research, “Sesame Street” made its debut on November 10, 1969. The first season, which ran from November 1969 through May 1970, had a budget of $8 million and produced 130 shows. It aired at least once a day from 10—11 a.m., five days a week. The hosts played such roles as a schoolteacher, a wife, and a storekeeper. “Big Bird,” “Cookie Monster,” “Bert” and “Ernie,” “Oscar the Grouch,” “Kermit the Frog,” “Rolf,” and “Count von Count” were introduced as main characters to the show.

Regarding the anxiety before the debut and reaction immediately following, Cooney said, “I remember the last days going around like a woman 10 months pregnant. We knew we had a baby, a great baby. You just felt it. It was an overnight success, without a question. It has become a huge part of the culture.” Morrisett said that the staff members tried to get the best possible perception from the media, but the CTW creators did not know if the show would be successful.

Thousands of mail responses flooded CTW headquarters in New York City and thousands more gave feedback via letters or phone calls to various broadcasting outlets. A Boston station reported receiving 13,000 calls and 7,000 letters of appreciation. A New York City station received so much fan mail that “Sesame Street” started airing six times a day. President Nixon even wrote a fan letter.

“Sesame Street” had its share of skeptics and suspicious adults. A reporter for *Time* stated four days after the debut of “Sesame Street,” “Some [techniques] are based

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59 Kratochival, “‘Sesame Street:’ Developed by Children’s Workshop,” 13.
60 Smith, “Biography Close-up: ‘Sesame Street.’”
61 Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, 2 March 2002..
63 “Who’s Afraid of Big, Bad TV?” 60.
on a sort of psychedelic flash card system that assaults young minds with a pleasant barrage of sights, sounds and colors repeated over and over . . . Muppets, ingenious hand puppets with all the comfortable soft sell of a favorite doll, talk about ideas.  

Morrisett said that the show’s editing was the primary criticism from traditional educators. “In the beginning, the initial criticisms, I think, were that the show was too fast-paced and might lead kids to hyperactive behavior. But our research indicated that wasn’t true.”

In praise of the new program was an article by The Saturday Review. Five days after the debut, the magazine wrote:

The product of a happy collaboration of leading educators, child-development specialists, psychologists, school teachers, film-makers, writers and artists, “Sesame Street” is a delightful, fast-paced variety show whose quality of humor, intelligence and artistry will make many an adult envious . . . “Sesame Street” has become not only a major experiment in truly educational television, but the nation’s first experiment in truly public television as well.

A Today’s Health article in November reported that teenagers, adults without children, and parents were all intrigued by the show. A January 1970 article in Ebony applauded the diversity both onscreen and behind the scenes, citing black staff members such as cartoonist Tee Collins, actress Loretta Long, actor Matt Robinson, and producer Lutrelle Horne. The article detailed areas of concern to Robinson, who played “Gordon” on the show. He said, “These kids need less fantasy and . . . more realism in black-oriented problems.” He believed the show was too diluted by attempting to reach every preschooler.

Morrisett responded that the show decided to teach standard English

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64 “The Forgotten 12 Million,” 96.
65 Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, 2 March 2002.
instead of “Black English,” which led to criticisms that the program was racist and oppressive. On the other hand, he also recalled that some people thought that “Sesame Street” was too black because it was set in an urban area and employed a diverse cast.\(^69\)

In February 1970, a reporter for the *Saturday Review* criticized the program, stating, “Middle age usually represents maturity, yet I have often wondered whether ‘Sesame Street’ is still in a preschool age itself.” He expressed concern that fantasy and reality were already mixed up in a child’s head and advised “Sesame Street” to aim its program to eight- to thirteen-year-old kids who already differentiated fantasy and reality.\(^70\)

Regardless of its critics, “Sesame Street” managed to draw 6 million children to the show, which was the highest audience rating of any NET production.\(^71\) In April, CTW broke its relationship with NET and expanded its media to include comic books, records, educational games, and toys.\(^72\) It became an independent, non-profit corporation and elected its own board of trustees, headed by Morrisett as chairman, in order to mandate the widest possible audience.\(^73\) Morrisett said CTW was a seed program that was funded with the intent that after a few years it would become independent from foundation or federal support. Suzanne Roberts, director of Outreach children’s programming at Ohio

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\(^69\) Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, 2 March 2002.

\(^70\) Robert Lewis Shayon, “Cutting Oedipal Ties,” *Saturday Review*, 14 February 1970, 50. He continued by criticizing “Sesame Street” for not addressing people’s emotional lives, citing that cognitive confidence will not help relieve social and personal ills associated with established roots and attitudes.

\(^71\) Wylie, “‘Sesame Street’ Opens the Door,” 116.

\(^72\) “‘Sesame’ Opens Up,” *Newsweek*, 20 April 1972, 102. It was able to create basic contracts and television unions, talent, film producers, and broadcast groups internationally.

\(^73\) Kratochival, “‘Sesame Street’ Developed by Children’s Workshop.” 14. CTW hoped to place “Sesame Street” on commercial TV to help accommodate a larger segment of society. CTW also was able to contract with commercial firms that wanted to create materials for CTW programming.
University, stated, “It was a non-profit organization, and it didn’t get millions of dollars in commercial advertising.”

“Sesame Street” affected governmental support of educational programming. Also in April 1970, FCC Chairman Dean Burch heard of ACT’s mission to get commercial stations committed to improving educational television. He told the National Association of Broadcasters to consider themselves responsible for bringing kids “healthy entertainment and healthy learning.”

Commercial stations already were responding. CBS created 130 mini-documentaries in addition to its expensive “Children’s Playhouse” and “Captain Kangaroo.” ABC took action by releasing “Curiosity Shop,” a one-hour program exploring mechanical and natural phenomena, in addition to its already produced “Discovery Series,” which was in its ninth year. NBC released “H.R. Pufnstuf,” using actors instead of cartoons, in addition to “American Rainbow,” which was a series of hour-long dramas. It also was running “Goggles,” a program that explored color, and “Hot Dog,” a series that demonstrated how things were created.

But at least for its second season, CTW did not have to worry about financial support. The Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education combined with several private contributors to provide $6 million for the second season of “Sesame Street,” which began October 19, 1970. Earlier that year, CTW established a products group called the Nonbroadcast Materials Division to license

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75 “TV’s Switched-on School,” 71.
76 Ibid. NBC’s Vice President of Children’s Programming, George Heinemann, said that “Sesame Street” did not pose a threat to NBC, but that the program came along at an opportune time.
77 Little, “From A to Z on ‘Sesame Street,’” 62.
books, records, clothes, dolls, school supplies, and developmental toys based on “Sesame Street.” The profits were used solely to continue production of the series.  

A *Newsweek* article commented on CTW’s separation from NET and then stated, “It’s already apparent that the widely-acclaimed program for preschool children is not only an interesting experiment in educational television, but a rousing popular hit.”

Another *Newsweek* article read:

For the first time in memory, the television season’s most talked about success is not a new variety act or situation comedy, but, of all things, an educational program for children. The show’s popularity has shaken stereotypes in the ratings conscious world of commercial television and its fresh, witty and exhilarating approach to learning has moved many educators to take a second look at the creative powers of electronic communication.

By the end of the first season in May 1970, “Sesame Street” had won an Emmy for excellence in children’s programming and a Peabody Award for the best children’s show. Twenty-six countries had picked up the program in addition to it being carried on 207 stations in America.

The show had its critics, though. An author for *New Republic* wrote a highly critical review of “Sesame Street” in June 1970. The author, Sedulus, charged that many first grade teachers found that kids who have the hardest time reading did not make connections between learning the alphabet and reading. In addition, the author stated that “Sesame Street” did not account for the fact that many kids did not succeed in reading because they may be tired, hungry, or frightened. Sedulus continued that it taught in a

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78 Fisch, “The Children’s Television Workshop: the Experiment Continues,” 316. That same year, the first “Sesame Street” album and original cast albums were released.
80 “TV’s Switched-on School,” 69.
81 Ibid., 68.
passive and sedentary way, it did not teach kids new material but rather how to
categorize old material, and it did not allow for adults to take cues from kids like good
teachers took from their classes. Sedulus said:

Some kind of physical or ‘movement’ education on ‘Sesame Street’ would be a
welcome relief, perk the kids up, and cultivate their formidable talents for
physical awareness and self-expression. Nobody on ‘Sesame Street’ is ever
miserable, terrified or exultant. Problems cure themselves. ‘Sesame Street’
doesn’t provoke real emotions, and a good example is their circulating
literature, which is bland beyond description. The lions in the stories ‘Gordon’
reads are the sort that go to barbershops and eat cake at birthday parties, not the
kind that eat up little girls.83

The next issue of New Republic published six responses to the anonymous
author’s critique. Two responses were offended by Sedulus’s remarks. Martin Mayor of
New York City wrote, “It is bad enough to read an ignorant attack on ‘Sesame Street’ in
the pages of NR. To find that the attack has been made pseudonymously is infuriating.”
Judith A. Cohen of Ann Arbor, Michigan, wrote, “Perhaps children need more physical
activity, but we should not expect this of TV.”84 Three other responses were in
agreement with Sedulus’ criticisms. Grayce Scholt of Flint, Michigan, agreed with the
original author, and wrote, “[‘Sesame Street’ is] perhaps one cut above the old ‘Romper
Room’ of some time back, but only one.” A professor of education at Arizona State
University, Jeannete Veatch, said, “That was easily the best review of ‘Sesame Street’
I’ve seen.” John Holt from Boston said, “Thank you and congratulations for your
excellent article on ‘Sesame Street,’ which says better than anything else I have seen
what is so wrong about that very entertaining program.”85

85 Ibid., 32.
About the same time in the early 1970s, local stations in the public broadcasting system were growing increasingly apprehensive of CPB’s overseeing role, fearful that it was becoming too powerful in controlling programs. In early June 1970, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was created so local stations could choose nationally produced programs. It established its own formal journalistic standards and guidelines separate from those of its supervisor, the CPB.

“Sesame Street” inspired independent media organizations as well. As Today’s Health noted, “Major networks, even educators themselves, are now developing programs designed to improve the minds of youngsters.” A Bloomington, Indiana group called the National Instructional Television Center created “Ripples,” which was a series of fifteen-minute educational segments for both classroom use and public broadcasting channels. Another example was “Metooshow,” a Chicago-based production by the Erikson Institute for Early Education aimed at stimulating adult-child activities.

However, Maria Piers, dean of the Erikson Institute, criticized “Sesame Street” for being shallow, stating, “Television is an excellent tool for education, not a substitute for live people.” Her program, “Metooshow,” was concerned with adult-child interactions. Robert Gilstrap, a National Education Association administrator, agreed with Piers, stating that television did not teach without adult reinforcement.

Morrisett recalled that an implicit criticism was that the show would lead kids to be unresponsive in school. “There was a criticism that we were teaching kids things they

87 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
would have learned in school,” he said. “I think that criticism usually came from traditional educators.” He noted that CTW’s research proved the opposite—kids generally were more responsive and motivated when beginning school following the advent of “Sesame Street.”92 Roberts stated, “Those who opposed it had to remember that it wasn’t for adults. ‘Sesame Street’ was real sensitive to kids. Adults who didn’t like it couldn’t relate to it. That’s why kids bought into it, but adults didn’t.”93

Cooney responded to those critics who said that the show used too many complicated symbols by noting that most three year olds were already television addicts and had been exposed to more complex ideas.94 She responded to criticisms that “Sesame Street” was a “switched-on school” aiming to replace teachers by saying that the instructional program was never intended to replace real experience.95

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a professor of psychology at Cornell University, was quoted in Time:

The children [on the show] are charming. Among the adults, there are no cross words, no conflicts, no difficulties, nor for that matter, any obligations or visible attachments. The old, the ugly or the unwanted is simply made to disappear through a manhole.96

Cooney somewhat agreed with this statement, admitting that the CTW had erred during the first season by underestimating preschoolers’ intelligence.97 To combat this and other public criticisms, the second season expanded the number counting above ten, hired a Hispanic actress, incorporated both English and Spanish words, and tackled

92 Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, 2 March 2002.
93 Suzanne Roberts, personal interview, 6 February 2002.
94 “Who’s Afraid of Big, Bad TV?,” 66.
95 Little, “From A to Z on ‘Sesame Street,’” 62.
97 “Who’s Afraid of Big, Bad TV?,” 66. Cooney said TV can’t replace a loving teacher who cares for kids.
reasoning and problem solving.\textsuperscript{98} In addition, Cooney admitted that the first season presented kids as being too manipulated because the program was tightly run, so the second season allowed freer dialogue between adults, Muppets and children. CTW also added more ethnic characters, Muppets, and female writers.\textsuperscript{99}

Morrisett said that the transition to more female Muppets and writers was slow-going because of the orientation of the writers and puppet designers. “If we’d always had a male club and someone asks us to put more women in it, the change had to be gradual,” he said.\textsuperscript{100} The 1970—1971 season would be the first to take “Sesame Street” overseas under the direction of Michael H. Dann, vice president and assistant to the president for CTW. The second season included 150 shows instead of 130 and ran on a budget of $6 million.\textsuperscript{101}

A Neilson survey in 1970 estimated that “Sesame Street” consistently had reached 7 million three- to five-year-old kids.\textsuperscript{102} The Educational Testing Service (ETS) of New Jersey was hired to conduct a national study, funded by CBS, to determine the show’s effectiveness in reaching its goals. The ETS returned in November 1970 with a report card that gave the program “All A’s” for achieving each of its predetermined goals. Cooney responded, “We placed our bets and we won. I hope that the word keeps spreading to mothers in the inner city. The study has vindicated TV—it can teach and teach well.”\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{98} “Sesame at One,” \textit{Newsweek}, 16 November 1970, 76.
\textsuperscript{99} “Who’s Afraid of Big, Bad TV?,” 66.
\textsuperscript{100} Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, 2 March 2002.
\textsuperscript{101} Rosenthal, “The ‘Sesame Street’ Generation Arrives,” 45.
\textsuperscript{102} “TV’s Switched-on School,” 69.
The achieved goals included recognition of numbers one through ten and simple counting abilities, recognition of the letters of the alphabet and the sounds most commonly associated with them, the concepts of space and time, beginning logical concepts, the maturity of reasoning abilities, and the beginning awareness of basic emotions as a step toward mastering them.\textsuperscript{104}

As the second season began in October 1970, \textit{Time} wrote, “For openers, the Street looks as if a toy truck had overturned in Harlem. The place is in the unavoidable present; the clothing of the cast is well worn, the umber colors and grit of inner-city life are vital components of the show.”\textsuperscript{105} The article continued:

By now, even the most cynical promoters have begun to realize that ‘Sesame Street’ is no fluke and that it is excellent in even its own right, but merely relative to the rest of the junior TV scene. In its new series, just begun, the program proves that it is not only the best children’s show in TV history; it is one of the best parents’ shows as well.\textsuperscript{106}

Cooney submitted her final report of the first year of “Sesame Street” to the CTW Board of Trustees in December 1970. She noted that CTW was still an experiment that allowed for constant revision, evaluation, and planning.\textsuperscript{107} Not only did the series appear internationally, but it performed on commercial television as well. “Sesame Street” characters appeared on “The Flip Wilson Show,” a Goldie Hawn special called “Pure Goldie,” “Tom Jones…at Fantasy Fair,” and a Dick Cavett special. In addition, the Muppets were featured in “Nancy Sinatra’s Las Vegas Nightclub Act and Television

\textsuperscript{104} Polsky, \textit{Getting to ‘Sesame Street,’ the Origins of the Children’s Television Workshop}, 42.
\textsuperscript{105} “Who’s Afraid of Big, Bad TV?,” 60. The magazine devoted a cover story to “Big Bird” with nine pages and color photographs inside.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
“Kermit the Frog,” Henson’s green creation that played a reporter, appeared several times on NBC’s “Today Show.”

Stone recalled that when kids visited the studio, they were instantly pulled to the Muppets, not the puppeteers or surrounding television monitors on which the puppeteers could watch their puppets’ movements onscreen. Stone said his stepfather was a pediatrician who found that after a few months of “Sesame Street,” kids who were non-communicative with parents and siblings suddenly opened up to the puppets on TV. Therapists nationwide started using such puppets with autistic children. “I think there was a kind of collective genius about the core group that created ‘Sesame Street,’” Cooney stated. “But there was only one real genius in our midst, and that was Jim [Henson].” Stone admitted that he directed Muppet-only segments free of charge for “Sesame Street” just to be a part of “the exciting process.”

By the end of the second season in 1971, the Muppets had won three Emmy awards for individual achievement in children’s educational programming and “Sesame Street” had been awarded two dozen other prizes for excellence in addition to four more Emmy’s and another Peabody Award. In that same year, the Muppets appeared on the “Perry Como Christmas Show.”

The government simultaneously was working to help aid noncommercial program development. During the CPB’s third full year of operation in 1971, the corporation grew—the total number of stations carrying “Sesame Street” was 207—with the

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108 Finch, Jim Henson: The Art, the Magic, the Imagination, 244.
109 Ibid., 74.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., 59.
additional stations, another 7.9 million potential viewers had access to public broadcast programming. The federal government increased funding to the CPB by $14 million, and the number of black homeowners who said they watched local public television increased from 35% in 1970 to 52% in 1971. Audience research also showed that the number of people watching public television each week jumped more than 600%, from 6 million viewers each week to 39 million.

Special guests were not only attracting adults. Children were responsive to their presence as well. An article in The New Yorker said “Sesame Street” had a type of unusual, but useful intelligence. The article praised “Sesame Street” for allowing Jesse Jackson to sit on the stoop during the third season and commended the creators for their wise selection of special guests. “Sesame Street’…with lapses, [is] the most intelligent and important program in television,” the author wrote. She noted that Muppets were known to ask for a handshake by saying, “Gimme some fur,” similar to, “Give me some skin,” which was a common expression in black culture.

James Earl Jones appeared on an episode and read the alphabet while staring straight into the camera. He took almost two minutes to transition from “A” to “Z.” As Roberts explained, “[The producers] had a response time for TV that was a real key. Instead of a 30-second alphabet, you had James Earl Jones giving it a full two minutes, and kids were screaming the letters during his pauses, unable to bear the anticipation for the next letter in line.”

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114 Ibid., 26.
116 Ibid., 92—95.
117 Suzanne Roberts, personal interview, 6 February 2002.
Not everyone easily accepted the diverse cast on “Sesame Street.” The CTW had seventeen, full-time community groups working with parents, teen-agers, and teachers. Paul Elkins was Appalachia’s organizer based in the Clinch Valley of St. Paul, Virginia. As a *New Yorker* article illustrated, he often had to reassure community members that the proliferation of black people on “Sesame Street” did not mean that the program was communist.¹¹⁸

In attempting to define both organizations’ duties in respect to each other, CPB and PBS ran into roadblocks and could not agree on public television’s duties and course of action. Finally, on June 30, 1972, President Nixon got involved. He vetoed a bill from CPB, stating that CPB was becoming “the center of power and the focal point of control for the entire public broadcasting system.”¹¹⁹

Following Nixon’s veto, the majority of CPB members resigned, and Henry Loomis was named the new president. PBS was allowed to retain more control over programming choices under a resolution passed by Loomis in late 1972.¹²⁰ CPB and PBS worked together to formulate a Nixon-approved plan that provided individual stations money to find sponsors that would underwrite national programs. Most of the national funds came from increased Congressional appropriation—an increase of $15 million was budgeted for the first year of the program—and was distributed proportionately among the 207 stations in the system.¹²¹ These funds gave stations buying power for the kinds of national programs each desired.

¹¹⁸ Adler, “The Air,” 100. Shortly after addressing the concerns, Elkins changed the subject.
¹²⁰ Ibid., 32. Those stations provided the essential financial backing for national productions to continue developing educational programming.
¹²¹ Ibid.
In that same June, “Sesame Street” was available in fifty countries.\textsuperscript{122} Also in 1972, the Ford Foundation granted $6 million to be distributed to CTW over seven years. The monetary award was to help CTW support itself while searching for other means of financial backing.\textsuperscript{123}

Regardless of differences in opinions, “Sesame Street” continued to be groundbreaking in its unique approach to educational television in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the time, a blended cast of males, females, blacks, whites, and Hispanics was rare.\textsuperscript{124} The show resembled a magazine-type format that used puppets and animated and live action segments to educate children. It also incorporated a fast-pace and used commercial briefs that resembled slogans. It was not uncommon to hear, “‘Sesame Street’ was brought to you by the letter ‘W’ and the number ‘3.’”\textsuperscript{125}

Cooney, in her CTW annual report’s opening statement, wrote:

Few of us at the Workshop consider ‘Sesame Street’ a complete success because, quite frankly, the series simply has not had the impact on children’s television that we had anticipated. We had hoped that the commercial networks would develop more age-specific shows and find a way to broadcast more weekday programs for children.\textsuperscript{126}

Cooney, Morrisett and the other creators behind “Sesame Street” were pioneers of educational television by using entertainment to attract children to learning. No other non-commercial, educational program prior to “Sesame Street” prepared two years in advance using formative research, nor did any secure funding comparable to the contributions of the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the U.S. Department of

\textsuperscript{122} Adler, “The Air,” 96.
\textsuperscript{123} Witherspoon and Kovitz, \textit{A History of Public Broadcasting}, 49.
\textsuperscript{124} Fisch, “The Children’s Television Workshop: The Experiment Continues,” 300.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
Education, and other private sponsors that “Sesame Street” secured. No other educational program on a non-commercial station received so much attention from commercial outlets, the media, and the government.

At the end of the 1971—1972 season, which was the third year of “Sesame Street” on the air, the program’s creators, writers, producers, educators, consultants, and audience members continued working together to provide more opportunities for all children to access the educational resource. Opponents had voiced their opinions of “Sesame Street,” but the program maintained operation with generous funding, contributions, and governmental support; and the general public purchased the organization’s merchandise, all of which helped to maintain the production of “Sesame Street.” It prompted national attention that extended beyond television into print, politics, and the public.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The three research questions, as further discussed later in the literature review, asked whether or not magazines’ frames of children’s television and “Sesame Street” contributed to the show’s success, and also whether or not “Sesame Street” changed over time to remain committed to representing its target minority audiences. Therefore, reviewing literature existing on children’s television in general, framing theory, “Sesame Street,” and the show’s representations is important to provide an understanding of current and past research in areas relating to this study. Literature on children’s television in general offers an infrastructure to determine what themes existed during the sixties in magazine articles on children’s television discourse. Presenting such broad contextual understanding will assist in the comprehension of this study’s findings.

Framing is an important theoretical component of this study because it describes how communication is shaped to elicit particular responses in receivers. This study sought to find frames associated with magazines’ coverage of children’s television in general and “Sesame Street” in specific and, therefore, will benefit from a theoretical base in which communication is categorized to deliver information that appeals to receivers’ preconceptions about a particular issue. Framing theory, employed throughout history, is valid and allows for trend exploration and variable manipulation. This study sought to discover what trends existed in magazines’ framing of “Sesame Street,” and what variables and trends existed in the surrounding debate on the merits of “Sesame Street.”

Finally, explored in this study was how “Sesame Street” changed its character representations of gender, race, and class over three decades of production from 1969—
1994. These changes may or may not have been correlated to the frames generated by public discourse about the program. Whether or not frames caused revisions in the program was not determined by this study because no valid instrument, such as in–depth qualitative interviews, was used. Rather, correlations between such frames and changing representations were explored. The question of causation, however, deserves to be asked for future researchers to concretely answer, based on this study’s explorations of the existing frames. Therefore, understanding what literature on the show’s character representations exists was necessary to more fully comprehend this study’s own explorations.

Much of the research on “Sesame Street” in general examines the program’s effects on audience members, particularly children, rather than on the external variables associated with “Sesame Street” such as environments, frames, and representations associated with the media and public. The success of “Sesame Street” may have been influenced by the efforts of magazines to make salient positive aspects of the program, which dominated the public debate of “Sesame Street” over the criticisms that critics attempted to disseminate. Reviews of the literature indicated that no known studies exist researching the environments, frames, and representations that existed during the creation of “Sesame Street” and its subsequent, three-decade production. This thesis was closely linked with framing, which was applied to magazines’ coverage of children’s television generally and of “Sesame Street,” specifically. Framing theory’s application to this study was necessary to understand media discourse in terms of its shaping of the way receivers think about a particular issue.
The Impacts of Television on Children

Children were watching the rising medium of television in the early sixties, which was problematic in that television perhaps had “such a bad reputation in the public mind,” as discussed later in this chapter. Understanding whether or not themes existed in media discourse describing television matters because this will reveal the conditions under which the show started. Therefore, considering the literature already accessible on the topic enhanced this study’s account.

The Radio Corporation of America first introduced television to the U.S. public in 1939, and, shortly thereafter, broadcasted its first image—the dollar sign. Advertisers twenty years later, in 1960, spent more than $400 million cultivating children to become consumers. Critics of television determined it was “violent, sexist, racist, and commercial.” Kaye contended that until the late 1960s, most people did not realize they had a right to stand up for their representation and end “racism, sexism and discrimination” on children’s television. Even the FCC’s Chief of the Network Office in 1960 said, “There is almost uniform agreement—both within the industry and among

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5 Evelyn Kaye, The ACT Guide to Children's Television, Or...How to Treat TV with T.L.C. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1979), 33—34. The 1934 Communications Act was created to place foremost the public’s interests in broadcasting decisions, mandating that networks operated “in the public interest, convenience and necessity.”
public groups—that much needs to be done in the kind and quality of children’s programs.”

Dorr summarized well the debates about television and children:

Opinions about television can be rather negative. Most people see the power of television to do harm or, at least, to promote mediocrity. They recognize that the ubiquity, realism, and constructed nature of television content give it a special place in American life and decry the pap, drivel, misinformation, twisted values, and dangerous ideas it dispenses. For them television becomes the idiot box, the boob tube, the seducer, the hypnotist. A few people adopt a more positive attitude to television, emphasizing the important, worthwhile education, information, attitudes, and behaviors this powerful medium can convey. For them television becomes a magic window, a master teacher, a window on the world, a ticket to the best of everything.

In 1961, Newton Minow was appointed chairman of the Federal Communication Commission and, discouraged that his own children perhaps would not receive anything of value from television, delivered in May his famous “vast wasteland speech” to the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). He said:

I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there without a book, magazine, newspaper, profit-and-loss sheet, or rating book to distract you—and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland. You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western bad men, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence and cartoons. And, endlessly, commercials—many screaming, cajoling, and offending.

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7 Dorr, Television and Children, 20.
8 Levine, See No Evil, 22—23.
9 Newton Minow, Speech Before the National Association of Broadcasters, 1961. And Joseph Turow, Entertainment, Education, and the Hard Sell (New York City, NY: Praeger, 1992), 51—53. Turow said the early and late 1960s vibrated with political and social activism on children’s television, while the middle of the decade remained quiet. Networks early on realized that advertisers, particularly snack and toy companies, were targeting only those audiences for “family programming” by filling afternoons and Saturday morning schedules with commercials. Profits shot up, people complained. Thomas Dodd was chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. He focused on television violence and called for upgrades to which responses came in the form of, “banner headlines and letters from aroused parents, educators, clergy, police, psychiatrists, and social workers.” But broadcasters by 1962 no longer feared Dodd—he focused his attention on winning a campaign, and broadcasters clung to the declaration
Attorney General Robert Kennedy supported Minow’s “vast wasteland” speech, saying that family, church, and school all were thought to be main components for socialization when he was growing up:

There is no question now that there are four things and the fourth is television. My children know all the advertising slogans, westerns, gangsters, and I would hope that they will know more when they grow up. I am counting on Newt Minow. He cannot do it by himself as far as education is concerned, but what they [Kennedy’s children] are going to be like twenty years from now depends a great deal on him and his success.  

Television during the time, as Signorielli noted, “brought considerable change. Children’s programming no longer was considered a public service economic drain; rather it had become an extremely lucrative business.” Advertisers commissioned the show’s characters to deliver many of their messages, making it hard for children to distinguish between a show and a commercial. “Children are growing up in an environment in which they must learn to organize experiences and emotional responses not only in the home, but also in relation to the omnipresent screen on which miniature people and animals talk, sing, dance, and encourage the purchase of toys, candies, and breakfast foods.”

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11 Nancy Signorielli, A Sourcebook on Children and Television (New York City, NY: Greenwood Press, 1991), 4. Commercial networks competed with each other for ratings, overhauled their morning schedules to offer more diversity for children and increased Saturday morning advertising—which was compliant with the NAB’s code, permitting up to sixteen minutes of advertising for Saturday mornings in comparison to nine-and-a-half minutes allowed during prime-time—and allowed advertisers to air commercials on “sugar-coated vitamins, outrageously expensive toys, as well as anything and everything in between.”
The average child sat in front of the “omnipresent screen” for four hours each day. “It is no wonder, then, that social scientists have been interested in investigating what the content of this information is, who ought to control it, and most important, what its impact is upon the developing child.” The medium-effects research started with movies and was supplanted by radio research during the early 30s when parents complained that their children were having nightmares after listening to thriller radio serials. “I would like to see some really good, honest-to-goodness children’s programs put on the air. The main object today seems to be to keep the children excited and sell the product they are advertising by continually giving prizes—mostly worthless—for sending in box tops,” said one Mrs. C.A.

Like radio and film, market and scholarly research on television effects came about because of fears that it corrupted more than it educated. Concerned voices

Kelly and Howard Gardner (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 22. “The child is faced with the task of determining which elements of television relate directly to the real world (as, for example, news shows), which are fantastic and exist only in the world of television (for example, monsters), and which combine both real and fantastic elements (for example, talking horses).”

Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, “Perspectives on Communication,” in Defining Media Studies, eds. Michael Gurevitch and Mark Levy (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 101. Research and scholarship in the field of communication has focused on the processes of human communication, the effects of mass communication and the connections between a country’s media and its society. And Richard Butsch, “A History of Research on Movies, Radio, and Television,” Journal of Popular Film & Television 29(3) (Fall 2001): 113—117. Research in media effects on children, specifically, has been conducted throughout history—even the first silent movies allegedly were corrupting children. In 1909, Addams concluded that, from a study of boys and girls at nickelodeons, “movie content is the root of the children’s misbehavior.” Nickelodeons, or “houses of dreams,” as Addams called them, purportedly induced fantasies in children’s minds. (Apparently, girls were learning from unsupervised theater outings about sex and boys were learning how to steal.) Cantril contributed his research, suggesting, “Radio, more than any other medium of communication, is capable of forming a crowd mind among individuals who are physically separate from one another.” And Azriel Eisenberg, Children and Radio Programs: A Study of More Than Three Thousand Children in the New York Metropolitan Area (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1936), 148, 157. Eisenberg early in children’s radio found that the majority of surveyed parents thought radio was a valuable tool to help educate their children, rather than a hindrance to their growth. A minority of parents said they don’t allow their children to listen to radio because of its, “very exciting and frightening programs, and programs that feature crime and murder.” These types of programs, “have a profound effect on high-strung youngsters,” and were the cause of some children’s nightmares, according to various parents.

Eisenberg, Children and Radio Programs, 159.
protesting TV, like radio and film before, generated efforts by the government to push the technology in a positive direction. “Through the 1950s numerous magazine articles warned of the dangers of television for children, first of its displacement of ‘healthier’ pursuits and later of its content. Almost from its beginning, commercial television was lambasted by cultural critics for its low-brow tastes.”

Research on children’s television effects, according to Levine, basically attempted to answer three main questions: Do children act more violent because of the media; do children demonstrate attitudes that are distorted, anxious and pessimistic; and are children being desensitized to violence by the media? Each question, she said, could be answered with a resounding “yes.”

In general, said Unnikrishnan and Bajpai, seven points have evolved from their research on television’s impact on children, “The more TV a child watches, the greater the influence it has on the child; watching TV for long hours adversely affects reading and writing skills; television promotes violent and aggressive behavior; television as a passive activity takes children away from other, more direct, experiences; the passivity induced by watching too much TV can lead to obesity; television may encourage and influence early sexual activity, drug, and alcohol abuse; the world as TV represents it, is not always true to reality but children who grow up with such representations tend to believe and know the world as pictured on TV.”

Specifically, Himmelweit et al. and Schramm et al.’s research marked the first serious studies on the effects of television on children. Schramm et al. found that children used television to escape, to derive information, and to withdraw from society

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16 Levine, See No Evil, 25.
and real life, and that serious television viewing began between two-and-a-half and three years of age. But he, like Himmelweit, found limited effects. Realistic, rather than stylistic, violence on TV, according to Himmelweit et al. and Schramm et al., elicited nightmares among young viewers and caused children to be more frightened than non-viewers of realistic violence on television. In other words, the results, basically, still were inconclusive by the advent of television effects research in the 1960s.

Bandura, Berkowitz, and Stein differed on their views of television violence affecting children’s aggression. Bandura believed that children only imitated aggressive behaviors on television that they saw rewarded. Berkowitz contended that viewers demonstrated aggressive behavior after learning from violent behaviors on television. Stein found “children apparently react to media more intensely than adults,” in that children responded immediately with emotion to media presentations that incorporated danger, conflict, violence and tragedy.

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19 Noble, *Children in Front of the Small Screen*, 137, and Werner J. Severin and James W. Tankard Jr., *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, and Uses in the Mass Media*, 5 ed, (New York City, NY: Longman, 2001), 318—319. Several hypotheses have been proposed by researchers of television violence effects, such as the catharsis hypothesis which, although unsupported by hundreds of studies, predicted that viewing violence actually reduced a viewer’s drive to be aggressive because that viewer lived vicariously through the characters. Another was the stimulation hypothesis, which suggested that aggressive behavior increased in people who watch violence on television. The imitation hypothesis suggested that people learned aggression from television, and the disinhibition hypothesis suggested that watching television and seeing characters act aggressively toward each other lower people’s inhibitions. And Dorr, *Television and Children*, 101. Conclusively, however, we understand that, “only some children are affected by any one particular program, series, commercial, or advertising campaign.”

20 Ibid., 130—132.


At best, television can impact information, stimulate interest, improve tastes, and widen the range of the child’s experience so that he gains some understanding of people in other walks of life; this can make him less prejudiced and more tolerant. At worst, on the other hand, viewing can lead to a reduction in knowledge (in that it takes up time which could be spent more profitably), keep children from relatively worth-while activities (like outdoor play and book-reading), and implant or accentuate one-sided, stereotyped value judgment—if the content of television is such as to convey this kind of attitude.23

Krippendorff offered a more depressing view of research on television effects on children because the adults testing children constructed the messages. He said:

What counted as messages (what the TV images depicted) was decided by the researcher, not by the children . . . He acted as the self-appointed agent of an objective, shared, and adult world in which and to which children are expected to adjust, and explored no more than his own preconceptions, using children, much as they are used in society—as convenient props. Message-driven studies obviously disrespect others’ understanding. To claim to have studied children’s understanding is not sustainable in the face of the apparent intellectual imperialism.24

Steinberg and Kincheloe said corporations were practicing imperialists, producing since the 1950s most of what children experience.25 This trend is practically unavoidable, said Witty & Bricker:

Today’s children live not merely in an age of atomic energy, but also in an age of mass communication. Many of them—unlike their elders—have never known a world without comics and movies, radio and TV. Today—directly or indirectly—these forms of entertainment inescapably touch every child, and no amount of parental care can prevent this.26

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23 Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince, Television and the Child, 41.
25 Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe, Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 16. Much media provided a private domain for children, leading to their contention, “traditional notions of childhood as a time of innocence and adult-dependency have been undermined by children’s access to popular culture during the late twentieth century.”
26 Paul Witty and Harry Bricker, Your Child and Radio, TV, Comics, and Movies (Chicago, IL: Science Research Associates, 1952), 5.
Orme said at the end of the 1960s that children’s television in 1968 was, “the worst yet…a mass of indiscriminate entertainment dominated by some forty animated program series which are, in turn, dominated by ugliness, noise and violence.” That “worst ever” year brought children’s television to the forefront. Investigations on televised violence and its effects on children began one year later, in 1969, and by the onset of the seventies, violence and advertising on children’s television had garnered the most research-related attention.

“By decade’s end, a quite consistent—and relatively homogeneous—shape to children’s television could be discerned,” Turow wrote. Those images, and the prevalence of advertising, were causing concern. Barcus found that violence “saturated” 25% of all dramas, and 22% of all comedies. “Advertising on children’s television limits the diversity of programming and encourages a reliance on violence,” Barcus said. Programs peppered with fast action or violence were used to attract a large audience and therefore could command a higher price to advertisers.

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28 Turow, *Entertainment, Education, and the Hard Sell*, 53, and Melody, *Children’s Television: The Economics of Exploitation*, 67. Homogeneous children’s programming continued because of “the necessity of networks to control the process in order to fully exploit the profit potential of the children’s television market.” And Dorr, *Television and Children*, 110. Children gave up listening to radio dramas and comics, frequented the movie theater only once a month in comparison with one to two times per week, read comics and general circulation magazines less, and checked-out books less—TV supplanted imagination with actual visual images.


Richard Dodderidge, president of Brewer advertising, said, “If the violence gets the rating, violence will get the advertising.”

The commercial television so widely debated infiltrated more than 97% of U.S. households in comparison to the 65% of households that had access to public television. Both the CPB and PBS were established in 1967 to distribute funds for noncommercial programming and to promote and distribute that programming to member stations, respectively. And it was this wide access that elicited debate. TV affectionately became known as the “plug-in drug,” associated with wide-eyed, passive children absorbing messages and becoming lazier by the second. Television did not prevent creative thinking, contended Shneider, because it was not a “plug-in” drug. “When children spend four to eight hours a day watching television, a serious problem exists at home. But this is a problem in the family, not in the television.” Similarly, Postman argued that childhood disappeared when parents no longer were able to control information and that TV harmed viewers because everyone, no matter the age, could watch the same shows and obtain information about the once-secret adult life, including

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31 Ibid. xx.
32 Palmer, *Television & America’s Children*, 62—63. Public television seemed the only outlet for such desired quality programming. Educational television also was introduced in the sixties, after being a loosely tied group of stations that attracted minimal audiences.
33 Signorielli, *A Sourcebook on Children and Television*, 5. The typical public TV kids’ program in the sixties featured a teacher, acting in a pseudo-classroom of white kids, mostly “speaking condescendingly” in easy-to-understand dialogue. Public broadcasting was born from and supported by NET until 1967, when the Public Television Act passed, providing “instructional programs for schools and colleges in return for program and operating support, which came largely from state and local education agencies.”
34 Cy Schneider, *Children’s Television* (Lincolnwood, NE: NTC Business Books, 1992), 81. And Dorr, *Television and Children*, 64—65. Hayakawa said, “Suppose…that your children…are snatched away from you for three or four or more hours a day by a powerful sorcerer. This sorcerer is a storyteller and a spinner of dreams. He plays enchanting music; he is an unfailingly entertaining companion. He makes the children laugh; he teaches them jingles to sign [sic]; he is constantly suggesting good things to eat and wonderful toys for their parents to buy them…The sorcerer is always fascinating so that ‘children’ sit there as if drugged, absorbing messages that parents did not originate and often do not even know about.”
death, sex, and violence.\textsuperscript{35} Parents were charged with setting guidelines for their children to view television with a critical eye. “Television can inform, educate, enlighten, enthuse, challenge and inspire. It can also deaden, misinform, mislead, and waylay children. As with most things technological, in and of itself, television is neither intrinsically benign nor malign—it is how it is used and abused.”\textsuperscript{36}

Children watching commercial television saw inappropriate programs that included excessive violence, stereotypical “(if not outright racist)” representations, and exploitative advertising practices, said Palmer.\textsuperscript{37} In the late 1960s, the industry’s abuses had become so apparent that some parents and teachers formed citizens’ action groups to fight, “the tidal wave that washed over children every Saturday morning.”\textsuperscript{38} Lillian Ambrosino, Judith Chalfen, Peggy Charren, and Evelyn Sarson, created ACT in 1969. In general, ACT was successful in persuading networks to, “appoint supervisors for children’s programming; eliminate commercials for drugs and vitamins from children’s programs and institute a ban on host selling (a host or major character in a children’s program could not appear in commercial aired during that program.).”\textsuperscript{39}

Palmer explained that many factors affected the low-quality of children’s television in the United States, including institutional aims and incentives, established industry traditions, precedence of commercial airtime versus non-commercial, the First

\textsuperscript{36} Clifford, \textit{Television and Children}, viii.
\textsuperscript{37} Palmer, \textit{Television & America’s Children}, 62.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, 40.
\textsuperscript{39} Signorielli, \textit{A Sourcebook on Children and Television}, 6, and Hendershot, “Endangering the Dangerous.” Muriel Cantor coined the phrase the “Kennedy explanation” to describe the “mythical” changes in angry mothers who, after Bobby Kennedy was killed, wrote letters protesting networks’ production of violent programs and demanded that producers curb sex, violence and advertising.
Amendment, and the sources and amount of institutional funding. He defined changes many concerned parents and advocates of better quality children’s programming outlined:

To maximize each year the amount of fresh, new, age-appropriate program fare for children’s out-of-school viewing, to achieve a sensible balance between purely entertaining programs and ones that are informational and educational, to schedule the children’s offering at the most convenient and appropriate hours for child viewing, to regulate or somehow adequately counter-balance the excessive candy-store diet of cartoon animations offered on the commercial stations, and to find ways to reach and serve the real needs of children in a time when their tastes in television are shaped through constant exposure to the sophisticated visual effects used in commercial programs.

ACT called for FCC intervention and regulation of the matter. ACT filed a formal complaint with the FCC that held commercial TV broadcasters grossly negligent of providing quality children’s programming and of curbing their advertising abuses directed at children. A Notice of Inquiry and Notice of Proposed Rule Making stated that research would be conducted because of the “high public interest considerations involved in the use of television, perhaps the most powerful communications medium ever devised, in relation to a large and important segment of the audience, the Nation’s Children.” A January 21, 1971, FCC news release announced that because sufficient data on children’s television programming didn’t exist, the FCC would begin conducting research to determine whether television programming for children was adequately

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41 Ibid, ix.
42 Ibid, 40. And Dean Burch, *Address Before the International Radio and Television Society*, 14 September 1971. In 1971, FCC Burch questioned, “whether a commercially-based broadcasting system is capable of serving up quality programming for an audience so sensitive and malleable as children,” and federal investigations into children’s TV programming were initiated. And Glenn Altschuler and David Grossvogel, *Changing Channels: America in TV Guide* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 24. *TV Guide* joined the advocates and pleaded with parents to monitor kids viewing habits because, they said, it seemed unlikely that the government would “reverse this disgusting trend.” And Mark Collins and Margaret Kimmel, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood: Children, Television, and Fred Rogers*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), xviii. Fred Rogers of “Mister Roger’s Neighborhood” said, “Unless you reside in a salt mine (a very specific salt mine without newspaper delivery or cable access), it’s impossible to miss the endless stories of kids in trouble. We tell ourselves that it’s not us, it’s ‘them,’ and in doing so we ignore the truth: that we all share complicity.”
meeting public consideration and if a public interest in the area really existed. The growing concerns of television violence effects on children culminated in 1972 when the Surgeon General published “Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence,” investing more than $1 million and two-and-a-half years for twenty-three projects conducted by sixty researchers. The results concluded:

Thus, there is a convergence of the fairly substantial experimental evidence for a short-run causation of aggression among some children by viewing violence on the screen, and much less certain evidence from field studies that extensive violence viewing precedes some long-run manifestations of aggressive behavior. The convergence of the two types of evidence constituted some preliminary indication of a causal relationship, but a good deal of research remains to be done before one can have confidence in these conclusions.

But the children’s television that was violent, full of commercials, of poor quality and negatively influential on children’ schooling and outside pursuits would continue until broadcasters stopped justifying industry processes and started providing services in their young, target audience’s best interests:

If children’s television is to get better, to be more socially acceptable, those who work in it must practice their art and business with greater sensitivity, knowledge, and awareness of how children react to television. The best way to improve children’s television is to begin communicating with children clearly, and with the honesty, sensitivity, and respect they deserve. We must stop treating children as helpless, gullible sheep who need to be carefully watched and protected. In reality, children are intelligent, discriminating, and skeptical. Despite their lack of experience, they are not that easily fooled.

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43 Melody, Children's Television: The Economics of Exploitation, 159.
44 Robert Hodge and David Tripp, Children and Television, A Semiotic Approach, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 193—194. And Altschuler and Grossvogel, Changing Channels, 48. The report was controversial, criticized for being “diluted” to reality and for not allowing on the panel at least four researchers from the field, including Tannenbaum, Berkowitz, Bandura and Eisenberg. “To say that the medium could turn normal people into predators was ‘plain poppycock.’ If the cumulative ‘watching of evil is turning us all gradually into depraved beings, then the cumulative watching of good must be turning us all gradually into saints! You cannot have one without the other . . . unless you can demonstrate that evil is something like cholesterol—something that slowly accumulates and clogs the system while good is something like spinach, easily digested and quickly excreted,” Edith Efron said.
45 Cy Schneider, Children's Television, 1—2.
Framing Theory

Goffman offered a general concept of frame theory in 1974, saying a situation is defined by the organization of social principles that control events and by a receiver’s involvement in the organization of those social principles. Additionally, he held the way in which an activity is portrayed or fabricated within a frame influences the receivers’ perceptions of reality. Entman more recently applied general frame analysis to media, asserting, “Media messages significantly influence what the public and the elites think, by affecting what they perceive and think about.” Entman’s definition of framing provides this study’s theoretical base:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretations, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

Entman, influenced by Gamson’s work, determined that frames define problems by distinguishing costs and benefits measured by common cultural values; diagnose causes through identification of forces; make moral judgments by analyzing causes and effects; and suggest remedies by offering justification for problems and predicting effects. Salience, according to Entman, increases the chance that receivers will recognize information because salient information is made, either consciously or

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unconsciously by the communicator, more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to that receiver.\textsuperscript{51}

Each person in a communicative process has an original, preconceived frame to categorize messages—from the sender to the receiver. Although frames may be present, audiences do not necessarily interpret and store a sender’s frames because audiences apply their personal frames to media messages and each person’s original frame of reference is different.\textsuperscript{52} Just as a communicator applies his or her personal frame while constructing a message, a receiver applies his or her personal frame while decoding that message. If a message does not fit into the receiver’s applied frame, the message may be discarded. Similarly, the interdependence model predicts that each person’s interpretation of a media message is based on ideological leanings, meaning two people with opposing ideologies can read that one message differently.\textsuperscript{53} The information processing research dictated that “schemas,” or cognitive structures that store beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas, actually organize the viewer’s thinking depending on the salience of issues. Schemas allow people to classify new information according to knowledge already organized, and help people link new ideas with previously held ideas.\textsuperscript{54}

Omission of information is as important to framing as inclusion of information, as demonstrated by Kahneman and Tversky’s study, which illustrated that audiences are

\textsuperscript{54} Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki, The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago press, 2000), 42.
influenced by frames that direct attention away from some aspects while simultaneously highlighting others.\textsuperscript{55} Edelman similarly described inclusion and omission, saying, “the character, causes, and consequences of any phenomenon become radically different as changes are made in what is prominently displayed, what is repressed and especially in how observations are classified.”\textsuperscript{56}

According to the assumption of audience autonomy, viewers either selectively omit information that does not agree with their views, or they lack enough attention even to be influenced.\textsuperscript{57} These audiences gain their abilities to process information from socialization, which is constantly altered by parents, teachers, friends, and others who all use the media. The ways in which those media outlets are organized, according to Tuchman, determines how information is constructed.\textsuperscript{58} The ways in which information is constructed also could influence society, according to Gamson, whose illustration of such a widely encased frame was the phrase, “affirmative action.”\textsuperscript{59}

A component of the study explored specifically how magazines framed “Sesame Street” and the debate surrounding it. Criticisms of “Sesame Street” obviously were not salient enough to elicit widespread disapproval and subsequent failure of the program. Perhaps authors’ deliberate selection of sources influenced the success of “Sesame Street.” “Sources provide reporters with the frames and themes to structure the

\textsuperscript{57} Entman, \textit{Democracy Without Citizens: Media & the Decay of American Politics}, 35.
\textsuperscript{59} Gamson, \textit{Talking Politics}, 90.
news…when elite sources conflict, the press will contain a diversity of views about issues, problems, events.”

Paletz described the process journalists go through in limiting the number of themes and explanations surrounding an issue based on culturally pervasive assumptions about values and beliefs—to the point at which such themes and explanations are considered fact, not frame. Fraser noted that the recurring themes function in television discourse to define the object of discussion and relate the discussant in a position to others while condensing broader moral and social anxieties. Components of this study will explore shared perceptions, which, according to Liebes and Katz, occur among people of the same culture, by using the analyst’s original frame of reference. And the presence of media frames, as noted by Ashley and Olson, may influence reality by shaping what that audience understands about issues. Communication in its most basic forms creates and maintains what society believes is reality.

Studying the trends of how one medium frames another medium is necessary today to provide a more thorough context and understanding of an historical period. Howard perhaps best described her collection of print media and how generally it has framed television’s influence on children:

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61 Ibid., and Entman, *Media, Power, Politics*, 93.
64 Laura Ashley and Beth Olson, “Constructing Reality: Print Media's Framing of The Women's Movement, 1966—1986,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 75 (1998): 263—277. This source particularly is useful because it examines frames surrounding a debate, similar to this study’s explorations of the debate surrounding “Sesame Street.”
As I riffle through my file of newspaper and magazine clippings collected over the last few years, television, it appears, has been responsible for making children fat, lazy, murderous, violent, greedy, disrespectful of their elders, illiterate and suicidal. These claims are contained in reports of research, in pitches by lobbyists and in the opinions of leaders as disparate as Prince Charles, Paul Keating (ex-Prime Minister of Australia), Pope John Paul II and Bob Dole, Republican candidate in the 1996 U.S. Presidential election. With press like this, it is not hard to see why television has such a bad reputation in the public mind.66

“Sesame Street” Frames and Debates

While the first component of this study sought to find what frames of children’s television in general existed prior to the debut of “Sesame Street,” the second component of the study explored how magazines framed “Sesame Street” and the debate surrounding its merits. This research expected that authors of magazines articles on “Sesame Street,” which, according to The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature were published from 1968—1994, more often made positive aspects of the program salient than negative aspects, and those salient praises dominated criticisms in the public debate of “Sesame Street.”

Under what conditions would these frames originate? Fraser identified three sides to public discourse of television relevant to the “Sesame Street” debates:

[The Right] discourse is probably the most dominant in public debate...a number of concerns are brought together: a suspicion of new cultural forms and their assumed effects, often expressed in moral panics; fears about specific social and cultural groups; a perceived decline in moral standards and organized Christianity; and the presence of sex, violence and ‘bad’ language on TV. Users of this discourse seek to construct a consensus of ‘ordinary viewers’, particularly parents, who are set against anonymous ‘manipulator’, ‘sociologist’ and other ‘so-called experts’.

[The Liberal] discourse shares the concern voiced by many on the Right...a variety of medical and cultural arguments are used here to prove that TV is both physically dangerous and intellectually inhibiting. The viewer is

66 Howard, Wired-Up, 59.
predominantly defined as a passive ‘TV addict’, helplessly enslaved by the mesmeric control exerted by the medium itself. Much of the blame here is seen to lie with ‘irresponsible’ parents, who have merely abandoned their children to an ‘electronic child minder’.

[The Left] rests on similar assumption about the ‘power’ of television…the viewer is seen as a dupe, a passive victim of ideological manipulation…It feeds into popular conceptions of ‘representation’, in which the falsehoods and stereotypes of TV are directly contrasted with ‘reality’…that [television] is largely responsible for preventing people, particularly the young, from questioning dominant values and beliefs.67

Berelson offered a general view of research on media effects when he said that “some kind of communication on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions, have some kinds of effects.”68 Perhaps the innovative use of quick editing and repetition was the key to the success of “Sesame Street,” but salient criticisms alleged the show’s format and content was detrimental to children. Possibly the CTW’s educational objectives aided its success, but studies have disproved the ETS’s original findings that “Sesame Street” met its educational objectives. Following the advent of “Sesame Street,” critics expressed concern that children would not perform as well in a structured educational setting because of some of these variables associated with the show’s content and format. Hodge and Tripp, however, suggested adults dismiss popular television because they lack knowledge and are particularly drawn to claims that those shows are unimportant or, even better, harmful.69

Gender may play a role in the ways in which “Sesame Street” was reported and, perhaps easily accepted. Zoch and Turk addressed this issue to find that men were quoted more often than women, and women of lower status were quoted more often than

67 Fraser, “How do Teachers and Students Talk About Television?”, 89.
69 Hodge and Tripp, Children and Television, A Semiotic Approach, 193—194.
higher-status women in media stories.⁷⁰ Seemingly, based on previous research, men may be quoted more often than women about “Sesame Street” and the surrounding debate. Kosicki and Pan advised that “media also have effects on the way issues are framed through the choice of journalists, institutional traditions and workways, occupational norms and values, and actions of policymakers who may be chosen as sources.”⁷¹

Ostensibly, author gender as applied to “Sesame Street” articles may influence source usage.

Shoemaker and Reese noted, “sources have a tremendous effect on mass media content, because journalists can’t include in their news reports what they don’t know…(sources) may also influence the news in subtle ways by providing the context within which all other information is evaluated.”⁷² The “Sesame Street” debate involves such potentially influential variables as the condensed and repetitive criticisms and praises, the gender of a source, the gender of an author, and the occupation of a source.

Of particular interest to this study is how the debate has changed over time, and how “Sesame Street” has changed over time perhaps in response to such debates. Drake and Donohue suggested, “although both sides come to the negotiation table with firm understandings of the problem, these notions evolve over time because each side’s arguments refine its focus on an issue, thus reframing or redefining the issue by bringing light to new considerations.”⁷³ From their communicative perspective, Drake and

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Donohue suggested that individuals focus on a dominant frame when debating. Wehr identified four main domains applicable to those dominate frames in the “Sesame Street” debate:

- Fact-based disputes focus on appraisals of reality, what is or what was. Interest-based disputes encompass future desires or aspirations. Value-based disputes concern disagreements over right and wrong, what should or ought to be, based on moral or rational foundations. Relational disputes center around the emotional tie between disputant…non-realistic because they come from outside the substantive issues and concern problems of trust, control, or intimacy in the disputants’ relational history.74

Community groups and social movements can use the media to advance their causes.75 At least one community group, ACT, attempted to voice concerns of children’s programming in the “Sesame Street” debate, and may have condensed their arguments into Wehr’s four dominant frames. But the framing of “Sesame Street” also is important to understand because of its political involvement in the history of public television. The first year of “Sesame Street” aired during a time when critics put pressure on the FCC to mandate better children’s television amid a perceived decline in quality and quantity of programming.76

Although, as mentioned previously, no studies exist that determine how magazines framed “Sesame Street” and the surrounding debate, several studies have tackled more specific sub-topics that benefit this study. After 1972, published “Sesame Street” articles decreased dramatically in magazines, as a search of the Reader’s Guide to...

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74 P. Wehr, *Conflict Regulation*, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979), 221.

Kunkel and Canepa’s study, however, found that regardless of federal intervention and subsequent implementations of Children’s Television Acts of 1974 and 1990, quality children’s television programming in 1994 still hovered around its original amount of three hours per week.
Periodical Literature indicated. Ross stated that although educational reporting fluctuates, “an emphasis on post-secondary rather than elementary and preschool education” exists in media coverage.77

Many of the common themes and criticisms of “Sesame Street” this study explores for saliency already have been researched. CTW published a bibliography of research conducted on a variety of aspects of “Sesame Street.”78 Both CTW’s team of researchers and also communication researchers not affiliated with the program have conducted several studies to prove that the show’s educational objectives were met. In general, some of these studies concluded that “Sesame Street” can teach, or that preschoolers were more prepared when entering formal schooling after watching “Sesame Street,” or that format and content choices were based on direct research of children’s attention to television and retention of information. Several researchers have attempted to substantiate common criticisms framed by the media surrounding “Sesame Street.” In general, these studies have concluded that “Sesame Street” cannot teach, or that it increases the knowledge gap between advantaged and disadvantaged youth upon entering school, or that it makes kids passive and lazy students, or that it is too commercially-profitable amid its not-for-profit slogan.79


Lesser recalled that there were no criticisms for the first several months after the debut of “Sesame Street.” He instead cited critical sources in broad references, such as “educators,” “critics,” or “psychologists.” Therefore, his piece provides background about who tended to be the critics of “Sesame Street” essential to the study, which explores the critics of “Sesame Street” and how their positions were framed.  

Similarly, Jackson’s historical recount of “Sesame Street” included substantial and specific information on criticisms and praises of the program, of which the study is particularly interested in examining those criticisms and praises. Rogers also offered a general summary of literature written before 1972 about “Sesame Street” that is pertinent to this study because his summary includes both research in opposition to CTW’s educational objectives and in congruence with CTW’s educational objectives.  

Abelman’s work detailed specifically several of the most salient critics’ comments but subsequently dismissed each by citing research discounting each criticism. Hendershot, like Abelman, recounted the history of “Sesame Street” criticisms. But unlike Abelman, she instead offered newer platforms from which to voice
criticisms, saying “‘Sesame Street’ is often seen as an antidote to the children’s television problem,’ but if research concentrates on the show’s production rather than on its consumption, a different picture emerges.”

One specific criticism explored in this study was the attempts of “Sesame Street” to make information more affordable and convenient to inner-city youth in order to decrease the knowledge gap. The gap occurs when knowledge, like wealth, is not equally distributed throughout social groupings, thereby rendering impoverished people information-poor in comparison to their wealthier counterparts who can afford the cost of information. However, one year after “Sesame Street” debuted, Tichenor, Donohue and Olien proposed that increasing information quantities may actually increase the knowledge gap between different social class members. Their knowledge-gap hypothesis stated:

As the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower-status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease.

Skepticism of the show’s financial involvements exists in Jarvik’s piece, “the publicly subsidized ‘educational’ programming they broadcast is making billions of dollars for a select group of insiders.” His study, like Lesser’s, is particularly relevant to this study in its devotion to citing specific criticisms about “Sesame Street,” from whom

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85 Severin and Tankard, Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, and Uses in the Mass Media, 245.
the criticisms originated, and in most instances, what was said by CTW figureheads in response to these criticisms.⁸⁸

Palmer, who worked for CTW, admitted that the Educational Testing Service’s results did not accurately depict the impact of “Sesame Street,” noting, “the evaluation studies done to date are all regrettably but necessarily limited in scope.”⁹⁹ Cook et al concluded that results found by the Educational Testing Service could not be duplicated. They asserted that CTW was ambiguous in its purpose from the beginning, citing Cooney’s statement that “Sesame Street” would stimulate all preschoolers but particularly the disadvantaged, although disadvantaged preschoolers are simply a subgroup of all preschoolers.⁹⁰ Healy offers her own critique of “Sesame Street” that touches on several of the most salient criticisms:

A brain brought up on a steady diet of noisy, fast-paced, visually demanding programs like “Sesame Street” is physically different—and thus is equipped differently for learning—than a brain which has gotten its intellectual nourishment primarily from personally absorbing play, social interactions with peers, and intelligent conversation with real adults. In fact, there is every reason to believe that “Sesame Street”-type programming is related to the fact that teachers today increasingly complain that their students can’t listen; can’t pay attention in class; can’t apply themselves to problems that demand persistence.⁹¹

[Please click here for a visual example of an early cartoon from “Sesame Street” on number counting]

However, Heusmann et al noted that most research has failed historically to convince leaders and legislators that media images and messages cause measurable harm

⁸⁸ Lesser, *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street*, 89.
A criticism of the show, CTW’s merging of fantasy and reality, was dismissed by Fowles, who said that what “might seem dysfunctional to adults in teaching certain concepts is not at all troublesome to a young child, on whom the dichotomy, should we trouble ourselves to maintain it, is lost.”

The criticisms of “Sesame Street” may have been salient enough to warrant responses and revisions on the part of CTW staff. However, as Lesser points out:

What was most disappointing in the critical reaction was that it seldom offered constructive suggestions about the problems it raised. It did ask some useful questions, however, about the educational goals we had chosen and our methods for attaining them, about “Sesame Street’s” possible unintended effects, and about the ways “Sesame Street” portrayed minority-group members and women.

“Sesame Street” Representations

Those salient criticisms may have influenced changes in gender, race, and class representations on “Sesame Street” during the past thirty years of its production. Research Question 3 seeks to determine if “Sesame Street” characters’ gender, race, and class representations changed over time and, speculates further, whether or not any changes occurred in response to media frames. Dhume’s content analysis most closely relates to this study by examining gender role stereotypes on “Sesame Street.” Dhume found that females were underrepresented and depicted passively in comparison to males.

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94 Lesser, Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street, 46.
Her study, however, examined two weeks of episodes from March 19 to 30, 1990, and did not consider how representations on “Sesame Street” evolved, as will this study.\(^9\)

This component’s importance in terms of gender, race, and class implications can be illustrated by a quotation on diversity from Bazalgette and Buckingham:

The opening credits of Sesame Street resemble *mestizaje*—the assimilation of Europeans and Africans with native Americans…Young children from about three to seven are shown playing culturally universal games and activities: drawing on the ground; swimming; bouncing; throwing and hitting balls; trustingly holding hands with each other, and with an older person, who in this case happens to be Big Bird, a large yellow Muppet. The children are of different racial origins: African-American, Hispanic, blond and dark Caucasians, Asian, and mixtures of them all. However, they are all presented as natives of New York City in the United States of America, having been brought together by the common cultural experiences firstly of play and secondly of television.\(^9\)

The authors continue to mention inadequacies of representations of gender, race, and class on “Sesame Street” by stating that “Sesame Street” had fallen short of its own high standards by not including females in its featured humans or Muppets, although they noted that the problem was somewhat corrected by the Workshop’s 25\(^{th}\) anniversary 1994 series, which was explored by this study.\(^9\) The authors continued by noting that the most famous female Muppet—”Miss Piggy”—never even appeared on “Sesame Street.” Additionally, they stated that producers of “Sesame Street” rationalized the show’s production to attract contributions and maintain substantial institutional support, but have done so by using the lower-class child as the key factor. Labov and colleagues during the late 60s were questioning the ethical use of lower-class identification for financial

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\(^9\) Bazalgette and Buckingham, *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*, 16.

\(^9\) Ibid., 28
support—especially, as they noted, when “Sesame Street” was teaching standard English instead of traditional Black English.  

The public and media criticisms of “Sesame Street” warranted responses and revisions on the part of CTW staff. However, as CTW staff member Gerald Lesser explained, criticisms of the program helped producers address the unintended effects in how “Sesame Street” represented “minority-group members and women.”  

Lesser’s work provided background essential to this study because it details which groups, in general, criticized “Sesame Street.”

Perhaps some of those contested representations were the result of a historical hierarchy of white, male domination. TV during the 1960s had yet to be explored as an educational tool and was, as Morrisett admitted, by and large controlled by white males. Gramsci’s statement may provide a foundation for understanding the historically patriarchal society when he said, “the ruling intellectual and cultural forces of the era constitute a form of hegemony, or domination by ideas and cultural forms which induce consent of the rule of the leading groups in a society.”  

This study will consider those white, male ruling ideas and cultural forms that historically have underlain media messages. This research, moreover, will explore whether or not that hegemony has

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98 D. Anderson and Stephen Levin, “Young Children's Attention to Sesame Street.” *Child Development* 47, 3 (1976): 806—11, 18
101 Morrisett, telephone interview, 2 March 2002.
changed in an attempt to satisfy critical concerns that “Sesame Street” did not truly
provide proper character representations of gender, race, and class.

“Sesame Street,” as applied to this study, introduced the idea of educating through
television, but some critics may have felt it challenged structured schooling and
threatened the status quo through its diverse cast targeting inner-city youth. Some women
during a 1960s wave of feminism may have felt the show was oppressive. Palmer’s
study is unique in that it acknowledges children’s interpretations of television messages.
“Very young children are as diverse in their ‘readings’ of, and gratifications from
television as anybody else—more so because the range of development between the ages
of two and six is so wide—and more needs to be known about these readings,” Palmer
wrote. Gray conducted a study of black representations in network television that
considered the structures and conventions of television and how current ideologies of
black representations were formulated in television’s early years.

This research, as mentioned previously, is the first of its kind in its considerations
of media frames of “Sesame Street” and of those building blocks that existed to
contribute to the show’s success. Understanding the historical context, the importance of
framing, and the ways in which a television program changes over time is crucial to this
study and its research questions.

104 Bazalgette and Buckingham, In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences, 31.
105 Herman Gray, “The Politics of Representation in Network Television,” in Adventures in Media and
Cultural Studies: Introducing the KeyWorks, eds. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (New
Research Questions

The thesis addressed, respectively, the following questions:

RQ1. How did magazines frame children’s television in general from 1960—1972 and did those frames perhaps facilitate the immediate success and acceptance of “Sesame Street”?

RQ2. How did magazines frame “Sesame Street” and the surrounding debate from 1966—1994 that may have facilitated its success?

RQ3. How did “Sesame Street” change its representations of gender, race, and class from 1969—1994, and is there a correlation between those changes and print, political and public frames of “Sesame Street”?
Grasping the importance of such variables as gender, race, class, source usage, and general trends in framing an issue is vital to understanding this study’s core of research. What was the environment of children’s television like before the debut of “Sesame Street,” as reported by magazines? Was it violent and commercial, as literature reviews have indicated? Did the immediate acceptance of “Sesame Street” happen because children’s television coverage was, in fact, negatively framed? Did frames exist in magazines’ coverage of “Sesame Street” and the surrounding debate? Did character representations of gender, race, and class on “Sesame Street” change over time? This study then reaches outside of its scope to ask if such frames and debate perhaps influenced those changes.

Textual Analysis:
Research Question 1 asked how magazines framed children’s television in general from 1960, the year in which broadcasters’ control over broadcasting was taken away by the government and given to local stations, until 1972, the year in which the Surgeon General published a $1 million study on television effects. Magazine articles for this component were gathered from The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature, which is an annual index of subjects published in popular, large-circulation consumer magazines, under the heading “children and television” from 1960—1972. Using the Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature is important because such magazines represent the largest consumer magazines by circulation, therefore reaching the most number of receivers during the
time. This large-scale readership does not, however, assume generalizability for this study’s findings. Sixty-nine magazine articles constituted this component’s universe.

Textual analysis was employed to analyze these sixty-nine articles. Text, according to Real, generates meaning in a receiver accessing its messages.¹ He explained why textual analysis is better for qualitative and cultural studies than other methods of communication research:

First in ‘effects’ research the pleasure of the text itself was largely ignored in the search for behavioral effects. Second, ‘uses and gratifications’ studies returned focus to the media experience but in relation only to the psychological or social motivations and rewards for seeking out media. Third, media ‘content analysis’ from the start restricted itself to ‘the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content, eliminating all those subtle messages only implied by texts. Textual analysis moves beyond these reflections of the old bullet transmission model to seek a richer sense of meaning in media texts of all types.²

Text, as applied to this study’s Research Question 1, involved an examination of these sixty-nine articles to seek, as Real explained, a richer understanding of the historical context of children’s television in the 1960s and early 1970s, a time that contributed to both influential research on television violence effects and commercialism effects, and that raised issues with the industry. These articles were compiled to determine how magazines—a competitive medium—framed children’s television, and what problems, relationships, and key issues of children’s television popular magazines addressed.

All articles were qualitatively analyzed by the researcher for reoccurring themes in descriptions of children’s television. Quantitative analysis of body text and headlines for keywords, based on repetition and salience, was employed to determine emerging

² Ibid., 119—120.
themes in descriptions of children’s television. Keywords, “violence” and “commercial,” were chosen based on previous research.

Textual analysis also was employed for Research Question 3. Six episodes of “Sesame Street,” two episodes from each decade, were chosen randomly from the months of November in five-year increments. Each unit of analysis was obtained from Sesame Workshop in New York City, which dubbed and sent the six episodes: Show 20 from November 1969, Show 780 from November 1974, Show 1325 from November 1979, Show 1975 from November 1984, Show 2625 from November 1989 and Show 3320 from November 1994. This allowed for a reliable sample with which observe character changes from the original season of 1969 to a season three decades subsequent.

The variables for Research Question 3 were gender, race, and class. “Sesame Street” intended to appeal to inner city, low-class minorities, and had an emphasis on gender equality. Therefore, investigating gender, race, and class representation is warranted.

Text, as mentioned before, is “whatever is encountered by the receiver’s physical senses in accessing the media presentation.” The receiver generates meaning from watching the text. Text can be in the form of visual images, such as a human host or Muppet’s visible gender and race, or through verbal text, such as a character’s indication of his or her class. A character on the show was defined as either a human or a Muppet. Gender was defined as male or female, or indeterminable, as was the case for some Muppets. Race was defined as white, black, Asian, or Hispanic, according to the show’s

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3 Lloyd Morrisett, telephone communication with the researcher, 2 March 2002.
4 Real, Exploring Media Culture, 118.
commitments to representing such races.5 Class was defined by material representations of characters such as clothing, accessories, housing, or occupation.

Content Analysis:

Quantitative content analysis was employed to answer Research Question 2. Stempel defined content analysis broadly as, "a formal system for doing something that we all do informally rather frequently, drawing conclusions from observations of content."6 This definition is particularly applicable to this study, which includes textual examinations and qualitative aspects.

Riffe et al. stated that content analysis is a reliable and valid instrument because:

in addition to modern scholars in journalism or mass communication, researchers from other disciplines, such as sociology and psychology, have focused on mass communication processes and effects, enriching and defining mass communication as a field by contributing their own most productive theoretical perspectives and research methods. Regardless of whether they were optimistic, pessimistic, certain or uncertain about mass communication’s effects, researchers have often recognized content analysis as an essential step in understanding those effects.7

Those various professions to which Riffe et al. refer have employed content analysis to explore the effects of variables on social processes. One of this study’s variables, gender, was chosen based on previous research that gender may influence source usage. The variable source occupation was chosen based on previous framing

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5 Morrisett, telephone communication, 2 March 2002.
research on public debates to determine which occupations were most salient in the
“Sesame Street” discourse.

Research Question 2 explored how magazines have framed “Sesame Street” and
the surrounding debate since the first published article about “Sesame Street” in 1968
until 1994, the last year in which articles were published debating the merits of “Sesame
Street.” This question’s universe originated in the Reader’s Guide to Periodical
Literature. The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature directs researchers of the
keyword “Sesame Street” to the subhead “Television in Education” to retrieve articles
relating to “Sesame Street.” Other subheads such as “Children’s Television Workshop”
and “Public Broadcasting Service” do not appear consistently from 1968 through 1994,
which is the time period for this study. Articles relating to “Sesame Street” that were
included under these subheads also could be found under “Television in Education.”

Forty-six articles relating to “Sesame Street” were retrieved from this time frame.
In order to identify articles directly relating to “Sesame Street,” the titles and subtitles of
articles were examined for keywords directly relating to “Sesame Street,” such as
“Sesame Street,” “Children’s Television Workshop,” “National Educational Television,”
“Public Broadcasting,” “Cooney,” “preschoolers,” “educational television,” “switched-on
school,” and “children’s television.”

All forty-six articles then were analyzed to determine how the media framed
“Sesame Street” and the surrounding debate. Content analysis was applied by involving
three coders to analyze the forty-six articles to determine what criticisms and praises
emerged and were shared by the articles in their descriptions of “Sesame Street” and the
surrounding debate. One pilot study was conducted to determine intercoder reliability and
instrument clarity. Three coders were given ten articles total, and were asked each to read the same ten articles, after a 20-minute information session on the sample and accompanying coding instrument. The pilot study aimed to determine what revisions to the coding instrument were merited, based on intercoder reliability results and feedback from coders. Clarifications then were performed based on low percentages of agreement and coder feedback. Three new coders then were given the updated coding sheet and a 25-minute information session about the study, sample, and accompanying coding sheet. These three coders then were given ten articles each, and the researcher sixteen articles, to code for emerging praises and criticisms, source genders and source occupations. The gender and occupation of sources were coded to determine if either variable had an association with frames of “Sesame Street.”

A source, as defined by this study, was any person, including the author, who made a statement in direct relation to the television show “Sesame Street.” A criticism, as defined by this study, was any statement that diverged from the CTW’s goals for “Sesame Street.” The CTW’s main goal for “Sesame Street” was to create a show that helped all children, “particularly the disadvantaged,” prepare cognitively for formal schooling by teaching basic letters and numbers. Additionally, CTW wanted “Sesame Street” to provide role models for children, be disseminated to as many households as possible—especially inner-city households—at an affordable price, provide a prototype for network stations to produce more quality children’s programming, and apply effective format and content from which children could best retain information based on extensive research by CTW staff. Therefore, a praise, as defined by this study, was any statement that agreed with the CTW’s goals for “Sesame Street.”
Intercoder reliability for this study, based on percentage of agreement, ranged from 72% for items 12, 16 and 23, to 87% for items 5, 20, 24 and 25, to 100% for items 1, 2, 8, 21 and 22. The mean intercoder reliability for this study was .88. (See Figure 6 in the Appendix A for complete coding sheet.)

Variables such as source, gender or occupation, were not analyzed for Research Question 1 to avoid descriptions of externalities and focus more on historical context. Future research may benefit from understanding who, in particular, may have played influential roles in framing the children’s television debate. Also, the findings of this study for Research Questions 1 and 2 only can be generalized to those articles found in *The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*, as it was the only source used for sampling. The small number of articles limits this study’s external validity. Exact reproduction of the findings may be difficult because researchers’ interpretations could differ due to the exploratory nature of this investigation. However, the trends found by this study are reliable and based on historical information accessible to future researchers.

This study only used a single researcher to answer Research Questions 1 and 3, which is both an advantage and a limitation to this study. Employing only one researcher provides a more in-depth and richer understanding of the historical context from a single interpretation, not disjointed by multiple researcher interpretations. Although multiple interpretations of the historical period were consulted in Research Question 2, the singular point of view presents a limitation in that only one perspective is being detailed for Research Questions 1 and 3. Future research may benefit from employing multiple perspectives in interpreting historical contexts of children’s television and “Sesame Street.”
Chapter 4: Findings

Findings for Research Question 1 indicated that magazines framed children’s television from 1960—1972 as being violent and commercial, for not having a specific decision maker, and for cultivating passivity. Findings for Research Question 2 determined that the majority of magazine authors from 1968—1994 framed “Sesame Street” favorably, and tended to pin traditional educators as critics against CTW staff members as proponents of the show. Finally, findings for Research Question 3 concluded that gender, race and class representations from 1969—1994 continued to maintain the original commitment of “Sesame Street,” incorporating more minorities into the program over time.

Research Question 1: Magazines’ frames of children’s television

The same issues found in scholarly literature and policy can be observed in this study’s universe of how the magazines framed children’s television. Addressed are violence, commercialism, blaming the broadcaster for producing poor children’s programming, blaming the government for doing nothing to sanction broadcasters, blaming the parents for not controlling their children’s viewing, and blaming the programs’ content for creating a passive audience unresponsive at school and neglecting other, “healthier” pursuits. Skornia authored a PTA Magazine article similar to most articles in this study’s universe because he addresses the question, “Is TV good or bad for children?” and answers, “It all depends.”

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1 Harry Skornia, “They Don’t All See the Same Thing,” PTA Magazine, January 1966, 7.
The same vague framing of the issues is inherent in the majority of articles in this study because, as noted before, research during this era was inconclusive. Forty-six articles of sixty-nine (67%) framed children’s television as being bad for children in general. Authors blamed the broadcasters for not producing material in children’s best interests and blamed parents for not controlling their children’s viewing habits or voicing concerns to local broadcasters. Twenty-three articles of sixty-nine (33%) framed children’s television as being good for children in general. Authors informed on advocacy groups and supported educational television. Therefore, this study has determined that magazines overwhelmingly framed children’s television negatively in terms of its violence, its commercialism, its power-holders and its cultivation of a passive audience. Table 4.1 illustrates the number of articles in which each of the most salient themes were present, and the percentage of total articles in which those themes existed.

**Table 4.1 Salient Themes of Children’s Television by Presence in Article***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of articles</th>
<th>Violence</th>
<th>Commercialism</th>
<th>Blaming</th>
<th>Passivity</th>
<th>Educational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>43 (62%)</td>
<td>23 (33%)</td>
<td>34 (49%)</td>
<td>26 (38%)</td>
<td>23 (33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Some articles exhibited more than one theme, thus accounting for the total number of themes being incongruent with the total number of articles

Shalit authored “The Outrage of Children’s TV” and summarized children’s television in the sixties and early seventies, “Violence: Too much. Commercials: Too many. Quality: What quality?” He detailed that network executives did, in fact, pay attention to concerned voices like those of Action for Children’s Television’s and that,
contrary to popular belief, “George Heinemann (NBC), Allen Ducovny (CBS) and Michael Eisner (ABC) don’t get up each morning and rub their hands in gleeful anticipation of subverting the children of America.”

Ardmore praised one commercial station, however, for creating a non-violent format for children. Hanna-Barbera productions attracted 147 million children regularly, and as Hanna admitted, “We’ve never tried to educate children. We’ve never tried to preach to them. We’ve just tried to entertain them.” But, as Dawson contended, “it will take more than [a few] good examples to persuade [all commercial stations] to scrap their inventory of poor programs and replace them with creative new ones . . . There is no doubt that television is an effective teacher. Any medium that persuasive had better be a force for good, not evil.”

One of the most frequently cited studies of television violence was that of the Evaluation Committee of the National Association for Better Radio and Television’s research. The team analyzed programs appearing prior to 9 p.m. from November 12 to November 19, 1960, in Los Angeles. The results were alarming in that children not yet in bed were watching television and seeing:

144 murders, 143 attempted murders, 53 ‘justifiable’ killings, 14 cases of drugging, 12 jail breaks, 36 robberies, 6 thefts, 13 kidnappings (one of small boy), 6 burglaries, 7 cases of torture, 6 extortion cases, 5 blackmails, 11 planned murders, 4 attempted lynchings, 11 massacre scenes with hundreds killed, 1 mass murder by arson, 3 scenes of shootings [associated with gangs], many killed, 1 other mass gun battle.

Such statistics were not surprising to another author, Tobin, who said, “That violence on television begets real violence, particularly among the poor and disorganized,

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4 George P. Dawson, “How Dangerous is TV Violence?”, Parents, October 1969, 73.
should come as no surprise to anyone with a smattering of psychology, sociology, or for
that matter, common-sense logic.” Changes in children’s television content would not be
had, he closed, “short of legislative measure or FCC pressure.”

The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency found in 1964 that crime and
violence on TV since its original investigation ten years earlier rose 200%. 7 Merriam
offered another statistic—on American television, children between age five and fourteen
witnessed, “the violent destruction of 13,000 human beings.” 8 The National Association
of Broadcasters in 1969 earmarked more than 140 series as “too violent for children.” 9 A
federal report was issued in September the same year indicating that lower-income kids
spent five to seven hours before a TV each weekday. “A national commission, after
intensive study, concludes this: Television has been loaded with violence. It is teaching
American children moral and social values ‘inconsistent with a civilized society.’” 10 The
only improvement in broadcasting, according to Sabin, was that young viewers could,
“watch the blood flow in color.” 11

Commercialism was questionable on children’s television as well. The National
Association for Better Broadcasting (NABB) charged:

The nature of the commercial messages directed to children often indicates a
carefully planned exploitation of children’s special appetites for war games, candy, lavish dolls, soft drinks, over-sweetened cereals, etc. There is little

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8 Eve Merriam, “We’re Teaching our Children That Violence is Fun,” Reader’s Digest, February 1965, 41—43.
9 Dawson, “How Dangerous is TV Violence?”, 73.
& World Report, 6 October 1969, 55.
evidence of restraint on the part of many program ‘emcees,’ broadcasters and advertisers in the manipulation of immature viewers.”

McDaniel’s “TV: A Wasteland for Tots,” title is descriptive in itself. The text detailed how prevalent television and its commercials were in youth’s lives—only sleep surpassed television watching. A child had watched 22,000 hours of television—350,000 commercial messages in 5,000 of those 22,000 hours—by the time he or she graduated high school. He or she had spent half that time—11,000 hours—actually in school. An assistant professor of pediatrics determined that a child spent almost ten years staring at television during his or her lifetime. “Television is the candy the child molester gives your kid,” Johnson said. “The whole purpose of the enterprise is to hold the attention of the audience long enough for it to be exposed to the commercial.”

Harris said more American families had television sets than telephones or bathtubs, and a child had seen more than twenty advertisements per hour. More than 100,000 individuals, groups, and organizations worried about the commercialism of children’s television—the National Association of Broadcasters allowed twice as much advertising to appear on children’s television than on prime-time.

Minow, in a Parents Magazine article, suggested that broadcasters take responsibility. “For the first time in the history of the FCC—and broadcasting—we propose to ask licensees about their efforts to provide programs for children. There is nothing permanent or sacred about a broadcast license.” But parents also were

16 Eve Merriam, “We’re Teaching Our Children That Violence is Fun,” Ladies Home Journal, October 1964, 44.
responsible, he contended, to make known to broadcasters directly their feelings and their children’s feelings about television.\textsuperscript{17}

Lindstrom believed the trend of poor children’s programs would continue as long as parents continued to allow their children to watch programs and were unaware that their voices could be heard by contacting their local broadcaster.\textsuperscript{18} Wertham contended parents were shocked at predominately violent shows because of the visual image inclusive to television as a medium, but were not quick to control their children’s watching.\textsuperscript{19} Broadcasters could not be faulted, according to Engberg, because parents continued to watch, which, in turn, produced ratings in such a competition-less and repetitive lineup. Those ratings indicated, “a large number of set owners prefer to watch television to any of the other pleasures at hand, save perhaps those which can be indulged simultaneously, like making love, guzzling beer, smoking, munching a sandwich, or criticizing television.”\textsuperscript{20}

Sarson declared, “It is up to concerned parents to transform TV into the creative, constructive medium it has the potential to be.”\textsuperscript{21} Lindstrom believed station management is concerned, “as are all businessmen, with making money for their company. Parents don’t realize what a powerful voice they can have in this industry so sensitive to public acceptance.”\textsuperscript{22} Shayon noted that such management often held parents responsible to curb their children’s viewing. He deemed, however, broadcasters responsible for not taking

\textsuperscript{17} Newton Minow, “Is TV Cheating Our Children?”, \textit{Parents}, February 1962, 54—55.
\textsuperscript{22} Lindstrom, “Ostriches, Parents and Television,” 118.
any accountability in the growing concern about television effects. “Television increasingly plays the parent’s role in our culture. Wouldn’t it be an act of maturity for it to say authoritatively on occasion: ‘had enough, kiddies of all ages? Why not turn off the set and go to bed.’”

Seipman believed the government was at fault. “The FCC stands guilty, as guardians of the public interest, of a quarter century of flagrant default.” Little evidence pointed to the FCC doing anything, he said, “to assure more variety, taste, intelligence or entertainment in broadcasting.”

FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson summed up the blame game of children’s television and policy in the 1960s:

The FCC proposed rules to improve children’s TV, a special FCC children’s unit was established, FCC Chairman Burch has spoken out on the subject, concerned citizens sent 60,000 letters to the FCC, broadcasters at least offer promises of reform, the FCC is holding hearings on the impact of broadcast advertising, especially on children . . . But certainly 1970 witnessed a return to ‘normalcy.’

It was two years after this “normalcy” in 1972 that the Surgeon General published its two-and-a-half year, $1 million report, “Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Television Violence.” Science Magazine referred to the Surgeon General’s twelve-member research team as, “the network five, the naïve four and the scientific three”—the three major networks, (NBC, ABC, and CBS) were given veto power against any committee nominees “whom they didn’t like or were afraid of.” This is why Percy Tannenbaum, Lee Berkowitz, Leon Eisenberg and Albert Bandura were blackballed, “Cyclops” contended.

Morgenstern’s opinion of the Surgeon-General’s Scientific

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Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior’s report, which found that television violence had only a small effect on certain children, was that it:

    Misrepresented some of the data, ignored some of it and buried all of it alive in prose that was obviously meant to be unreadable and unread. The five supporting volumes are still being withheld from the public. All candidates for membership on the advisory committee that commissioned the research and later summarized it were subject to vetoes by the three commercial networks . . . NBC and ABC . . . blackballed seven candidates. (PBS) was not consulted.27

The government’s report did nothing to change opinions of the debate on television’s passive aspects. Brazelton alluded to the poor state of children’s television and its cultivation of passive minds when he said in another article, “One needs only to watch a toddler sitting in front of a television set—drained face, motionless body—to realize the physiological and psychological depletion of a child.”28 Merriam warned, rather sarcastically, “‘Good’ children—yours and mine—who do not become actively delinquent may become instead, passively jaded.”29 Shayon cited the “passively jaded” attitudes of his own daughters, both members of the “television generation,” who demonstrated immunity to death and destruction. His daughters, however, still reacted to kidnapping, which, “strikes at the most fundamental emotions of fear and tenderness.”30

A producer of “The Untouchables” advised a scriptwriter with comments that stunningly illustrate how jaded industry workers were during the era:

    On page 31 of this script, I wish we could come up with a different device than running the man down with a car, as we have done this now in three different shows. I like the idea of the sadism, but I hope we can come up with another approach to it.31

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29 Merriam, “We’re Teaching our Children That Violence is Fun,” 41—43.
31 Merriam, “We’re Teaching Our Children That Violence is Fun,” 44.
On page 40, scene 85—delete the way Johnny kills Mrs. Zagano. As described, it is not acceptable... Delete the screams and gurgles. There’s a commercial coming up... Try to cut down on the killings please.32

Violent death page 3, 19, 53, 61, 63, 64, 65. On page 4, scene 14, don’t overdo the violence here, slapping woman, rabbit punch, etc. Page 53, scene 135, I don’t see how we can do this scene acceptably... Please kill him another way. Even off camera it’s too awful.33

DeFranco’s concern with TV was that its “greatest danger” was exposing children, “to biases, attitudes, and others’ opinions that may be influential in that child’s opinion formation. Often, the effect is chilling and irreversible.”34 Spock differentiated between the passive images and the images eliciting emotional responses. “A cartoon of a mouse punching a lion in the snoot makes children chuckle... But a man’s real face being battered by the fist of snarling criminal is quite a different dose to swallow.”35 Ellison took an economically realistic approach to the passivity of children’s television. “It is useless to address mass-media editors, writers and producers, they are hirelings and must conform or be fired. The ad-men foot the bills and call the tune. All of them know what’s happening. The better ones are deeply concerned. A few have quit the business... unwilling to continue in a corrupt conspiracy.”36

In summary, this analysis found that children’s television was framed by magazines from 1960—1972 as largely violent, commercial, a product of irresponsible parents and broadcasters, and cultivating passivity in both its producers and its young viewers. That children were becoming violent because of their viewing violent television was cause for concern and governmental research. That commercials were over-running

32 Ibid, 49.
33 Ibid.
children’s programming was a concern for at least one vocal community group, ACT. That parents, broadcasters or the government were to blame for the poor state of children’s television also was observed, as was the theme that broadcasters were passive in their pursuit of providing quality programming and children were becoming unresponsive from being subjected to the passive nature of television as a medium.

**Research Question 2: Magazines’ frames of “Sesame Street”**

This component determined that magazines framed “Sesame Street” favorably, and created a traditional educator versus CTW spokesperson debate over the show’s merits. Sixty-eight percent of authors of articles praised “Sesame Street,” compared to 32% of authors of articles who criticized “Sesame Street.” Therefore, a trend emerged in that magazines overwhelmingly favored “Sesame Street.”

Table 4.2 illustrates the seven salient criticisms that emerged from a total of seventy-eight, alleging that the show was too fast-paced and narrowly focused, that it was too commercial and too successful, that it could not teach, that it increased the knowledge gap, that it didn’t reach its target audience and was unaffordable, that it mixed fantasy and reality, and that it made kids passive learners and lazy. (See Figure 1 in Appendix A for complete results on magazines’ frames of “Sesame Street” by criticism.)
Table 4.2: Magazines’ Most Salient Criticisms of “Sesame Street”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source occupation &amp; gender</th>
<th>Too fast-paced, narrow N/T/P</th>
<th>Mixes fantasy &amp; reality N/T/P</th>
<th>Can’t teach N/T/P</th>
<th>Makes kids passive/lazy N/T/P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>3/15 (21%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2/15 (33%)</td>
<td>2/15 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1/15 (7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
<td>1/15 (7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/15 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author of article</td>
<td>2/26 (14%)</td>
<td>1/26 (20%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2/26 (14%)</td>
<td>1/26 (20%)</td>
<td>1/26 (17%)</td>
<td>1/26 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
<td>3/26 (21%)</td>
<td>1/26 (20%)</td>
<td>2/26 (33%)</td>
<td>1/26 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTW staff</td>
<td>1/5 (7%)</td>
<td>1/5 (20%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1/5 (7%)</td>
<td>1/5 (20%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Critic&quot;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/8 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/8 (17%)</td>
<td>3/8 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS:</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N/T/P = Number/Total/Percent

That “Sesame Street” was too fast-paced and narrowly focused was the most salient theme with 31%. That children could not comprehend the content because of its employment of quick editing styles resembling commercials seemed problematic for some sources. The content also was criticized for not being intellectually challenging enough and for cultivating an entertained mind, rather than one programmed for learning. For example, one author said, “One of the things that probably is wrong with “Sesame Street” is the pace (‘Always fast-paced and bouncy’) which is practically subliminal in technique and enough to drive a kid out of his mind eventually.”

Another 18% of articles charged that “Sesame Street” made kids passive learners and lazy, and 12% held that “Sesame Street” could not teach. Passivity was observed both in a child’s physical response to life and formal education, and to visual images on television. Passivity also was used to define the attitudes of power-holders such as

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broadcasters, station management, the FCC and federal government in general, and of parents. Healy noted that the visual devices of “Sesame Street” are responsible for dulling children’s natural attention to life inside the classroom. According to another author, “it doesn’t matter how good the show is if it doesn’t teach its audience.”

Educational goals and format-related aspects of the program comprised praises of “Sesame Street.” Six salient praises emerged from a total of sixty-nine articles, alleging that the show provided role models, attracted everyone and was a hit, was an exception to children’s television that provides a prototype for other programs to follow, reached a wide and diverse audience, taught and prepared kids for school, and was run by an able staff that composed an applicable format and conducted significant research in the area of children’s television. Table 4.3 illustrates the most salient praises. (See Figure 2 in Appendix A for complete results on magazines’ frames of “Sesame Street” by praise.)

Table 4.3: Magazines’ Most Salient Praises of “Sesame Street”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source occupation &amp; gender</th>
<th>Attracts everyone/ it’s a hit</th>
<th>Exception to kids’ TV/ prototype</th>
<th>Teaches/ prepares kids</th>
<th>Great staff/ format/ research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/T/P</td>
<td>N/T/P</td>
<td>N/T/P</td>
<td>N/T/P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>1/5 (04%)</td>
<td>1/5 (7%)</td>
<td>1/5 (6%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDETERMINATE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author of article</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>4/55 (16%)</td>
<td>6/55 (43%)</td>
<td>4/55 (22%)</td>
<td>1/55 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>5/55 (21%)</td>
<td>2/55 (14%)</td>
<td>2/55 (11%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDETERMINATE</td>
<td>7/55 (29%)</td>
<td>2/55 (14%)</td>
<td>4/55 (22%)</td>
<td>4/55 (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTW staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>4/19 (16%)</td>
<td>1/19 (7%)</td>
<td>2/19 (11%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>2/19 (08%)</td>
<td>2/19 (14%)</td>
<td>3/19 (17%)</td>
<td>1/19 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDETERMINATE</td>
<td>1/19 (04%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2/19 (11%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N/T/P = Number/Total/Percent

38 Jane Healy, “10 Reasons ‘Sesame Street’ is Bad News for Reading,” Education Digest, February 1991, 63.
In congruence with the 33% that held “Sesame Street” attracts everyone and is a hit, one author said, “Not only has it drawn the highest audience rating of all programs ever broadcast on the national educational television network, but it is even drawing viewers in numbers that compare with big commercial television programs.”\(^{40}\) The show—as one article described, observable throughout this question’s universe—was lauded:

from the moment it leaped onto U.S. television screens… ‘Sesame Street’ has bounded from one milestone of success to another—widespread critical praise, high viewer acceptance, Emmy Awards and a whole ancillary empire of books and records.\(^{41}\)

Another 18% held that “Sesame Street” is an exception to children’s television and is a prototype for other programs to follow, as illustrated by one author, who said the show’s effects on commercial television would take time. “The major networks responded to demands for improvement with a flurry of activity—appointments of children’s programming executives, highly touted ‘informational’ shows, discussions of the proper role of commercial TV.”

Preparing kids for school was a theme 29% held about “Sesame Street.” “In the first six months, “Sesame Street” had a marked effect on the learning of three- through five-year-old children from widely diverse backgrounds—including a strong and positive effect on disadvantaged youth,” said one author.

Four salient occupations emerged in the “Sesame Street” debate from 150 total sources of both criticisms and praises. These occupations included educators, authors of articles, CTW staff members, and “critics,” which was a term sometimes used as a

general title in debate. The most salient source occupations of both criticisms and praises were eighty-one (54%) authors, twenty-four (16%) CTW staff members, and twenty (13%) educators. CTW staff members were identified in the articles as being either spokespeople, on the CTW Board of Directors, or a producer of the show.

These numbers were further examined to determine that fifteen (75%) educators were used as critical sources of “Sesame Street,” while only five (25%) educators were used as sources of praise. Educators criticized the show for creating passive children unable to learn in formal schooling, while the five educators praised “Sesame Street” for teaching children basic number and letter understandings before they entered formal education. Nineteen (79%) CTW staff members were used as sources of praise, while only five (21%) CTW staff members were used as critical sources of “Sesame Street.”

Those five critical sources thought the show did not help true, disadvantaged youth identify with the show’s characters and language development. For example, Matt Robinson played “Gordon” on the show. In an Ebony article, Robinson said, “This aim to reach the disadvantaged child just won’t be realized, I’m afraid. These kids need less fantasy and...more realism in black oriented problems.” He felt the format was too weak because it was trying to reach such a vast viewing audience.42

Therefore, a trend seemingly emerged illustrated by Figure 4.1 that the debate surrounding “Sesame Street” tended to pin traditional educators as critical sources against CTW staff members as praising sources. (See Figure 3 in Appendix A for complete results on magazines’ frames of “Sesame Street” debates by source occupation and comment.)

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Fifty-five (37%) males were used as sources and fifty-one (34%) female sources were used, while forty-four (29%) sources’ genders were either indistinguishable or not mentioned. Of the fifty-five male sources, twenty-three (42%) criticized “Sesame Street” and thirty-two (58%) praised “Sesame Street.” Of the fifty-one female sources, twenty-four (47%) criticized “Sesame Street” and twenty-seven (53%) praised “Sesame Street.” Therefore, males were not more likely than females to criticize “Sesame Street.”
All-in-all, this research question determined that magazines overwhelmingly framed “Sesame Street” as positive for children in terms of its immediate success and exceptional status as an educator and prototype for quality programming, of its ability to prepare kids for school, of its qualified staff, of its pertinent format and of its substantial research base. The debate surrounding the merits of “Sesame Street” as an educational tool tended to pin educators, who opposed the show, against CTW spokespeople, who favored the show. Also included in the debate were authors themselves, who injected their own opinions about the show’s positive influence over children more than they injected opinions about the negative influence of “Sesame Street.”

**Research Question 3: Changing representations on “Sesame Street”**

Textual analysis was applied by the researcher to each episode, which was coded for white male, white female, black male, black female, Hispanic male, Hispanic female, Asian male and Asian female characters, and whether those characters were hosts, cartoons, Muppets or subjects in video footage. Voice-overs for animation sequences were also coded because the majority of voice-overs were distinguishable as either male or female (some Spanish-speaking). Female and male characters with indistinguishable races, such as purple Muppets, also were coded. Finally, five of the six episodes included the final credits, which were coded to determine the number of male and female employees working for CTW during the sample’s three-decade time frame.

Determining class representations proved more subjective because of its basis in lifestyle—occupations, accessories, housing and clothing. However, some items or
sequences that depicted non-lower-class lifestyle—such as a host’s wearing of a gold watch or a little white girl being served vegetables on a silver platter—were noted.

More males than females have been represented both onscreen and behind-the-scenes for “Sesame Street.” However, this gender difference gap, in accordance to Morrisett’s statement, is narrowing. Thirty-four females total—including all coded races found in characters and employees—were found participating in the two sample programs of “Sesame Street” in 1969, versus 84 males in 1969. In 1994 the number of females increased substantially to 131 total, surpassing the 122 males participating that year. Therefore, as illustrated in Table 4.4, “Sesame Street” has changed its representation of females by increasing their appearances during the past three decades.

Table 4.4: Total Gender Representation on “Sesame Street”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>63*</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* no employee data was available or included in the total

Representations of whites decreased during the past three decades of “Sesame Street,” beginning with forty-four appearances in 1969 versus twenty-nine appearances in the two programs from 1994. “Bob,” “Mr. Hooper,” “Gina,” and “Linda” were four, white human hosts and three Muppets, “Cont van Count,” “Bert” and “Ernie” also were noted as representing whites. Figure 4.2 illustrates the representations of whites over this sample’s three decade period.
“Sesame Street” also has increased its representations of blacks during the past three decades from twenty-three appearances in 1969 to forty in 1994. It should be noted that five hosts, “Susan,” “Gordon,” “David,” “Miles,” and “Olivia” are black. These figures do not include CTW’s employee base, as race is unidentifiable through names in the credits. These figures, and those in Figure 4.3, have been determined solely by character representation as noted from hosts, video footage, and Muppets (if able to be determined by a “human” Muppet’s color, such as “Bert” and “Ernie’s” white skin—
however, brown skinned non-humans such as “Rolf” the dog were not considered to be black skin.)

Figure 4.3: Trends in “Sesame Street” Character Representations of Black Males and Black Females, 1969—1994

Representations of both Hispanics and Asians have increased as well. Hispanics doubled their appearances from three in 1969 to six in 1994, although with eight appearances this category received more representations in 1974 and 1979 than in the 1994 episode. It should be noted that two of the main hosts of “Sesame Street,” “Luis” and “Maria” both are Hispanic. Asians increased substantially in appearance from two in 1969 to fourteen in 1994. There were no Asian hosts found in this study. The following,
Figures 4.4 and 4.5, indicate the numbers of Hispanics and the number of Asians that appeared throughout the sample’s three decade period.

Figure 4.4: Trends in “Sesame Street” Character Representations of Hispanic Males and Hispanic Females, 1969—1994
According to the credits, in 1969 seven human hosts were employed—two were black, five were white, and two were females while five were males, as determined by the episode. By 1994, there were thirteen human adult hosts and six child hosts. Of the thirteen adults’ known races, there were four whites, five blacks, and two Hispanics, plus two unknown. Of the thirteen adults’ genders, seven were females, and six were males. (For complete results of employees, staff and character representations by race and gender, see Figures 4 and 5, respectively, in Appendix A.)

Another substantial trend, in accordance with Morrisett’s statement, can be observed in the addition of female employees to CTW’s operations. Only eleven females worked for CTW in 1969 versus thirty males. In 1994 however, fifty-seven females worked for CTW versus seventy-one men. Therefore, females working for CTW
increased more than five times while males increased a bit more than two times the original figure. The genders of employees were either distinguishable as males (example: Bill) or females (example: Dorothy) or indistinguishable (examples: Dulcy, Chris, Terry). Therefore, the total number of employees does not include every person working for CTW, but rather every person whose name was gender-distinguishable by the credits.

In review, this research question determined that representations of gender on “Sesame Street” changed over time, as females representations increased both on screen and behind-the-scenes from 1969—1994 and male representations decreased. Race representations of white males decreased while white female representations increased. Black male representations decreased while black female representations increased. Asian and Hispanic male and female representations increased. Class continued to change from 1969—1994 as characters exhibited clear occupational roles in a variety of industries. Also in relation to class were visibly improved standards of living as characters increasingly wore shoddy costuming with little or no accessories (such as gold watches), and increasingly furnished their housing and attended entertainment venues such as fancy dinners or theatre performances.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

As described in the previous chapter, this study found that magazines framed children’s television from 1960—1972 in terms of its violence, commercialism, irresponsible parties and cultivation of passivity. Also included in the findings was that magazines framed “Sesame Street” favorably from 1968—1994 as a positive influence over children, and the debate surrounding the merits of “Sesame Street” as an educational tool was framed by magazines to wage between educators and CTW spokespeople. Finally, this study found that representations of gender, race, and class from 1969—1994 changed, as increased visibility of females and minorities were observed and class representations shifted. The following discussion further illustrates the importance of this study’s results.

Research Question 1: Magazines’ frames of children’s television

Many of the titles alone in Research Question 1 were indicative of salient themes in descriptions of children’s television, determined by this study as being violence, commercialism, blaming, and passivity. That children’s television was violent and full of commercials; that parents, broadcasters, and government were to blame for its poor quality; and that television was cultivating passive tendencies in children, and producers of programming were passive were all prevalent themes determined by this study. “When Violence Begets Violence” and “TV Advertising Repetition Influences Child Viewers” are just two examples of titles alone in which such trends could be observed.\(^1\) However, two of the four themes emerged based on the results and were not noted from literature

reviews of children’s television research. Therefore, these two themes were not included in the original keyword search, but rather emerged upon textual analysis: blaming and passivity.

Pointing the finger in an attempt to pass responsibility for the questionable nature of children’s television was prevalent in the findings. Blaming parents, blaming the FCC and blaming broadcasters all were mentioned throughout the articles. These different sources of blame seem to indicate that no consensus on who was controlling children’s viewing could be reached and, therefore, no basis for understanding how to change the situation existed. Even when governmental intervention came about, as was the case with the Surgeon General’s study, results were controversial and accused of catering to the networks. Until one controlling entity took responsibility to alter the situation, seemingly, nothing would change. This begs the questions as to whether or not any one source took control of the state of children’s television and, if not, if those same arguments of children’s television—its violent and commercial aspects—continue to be waged today.

The passivity as found in the articles either related to a child’s physical state from watching television, such as lower response rates and desensitization, or to the passivity of power-holders making and allowing such programming. Brazelton used terms like “assaults” and “overwhelms” to describe how children felt when watching television.2 The “electronic crime school,” “A generation of spectators,” and “A generation of juvenile delinquents” were just a few of the titles Dawson used for television and its

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2 T. Berry Brazelton, “How to Tame the TV Monster: A Pediatrician’s Advice,” *Redbook* 1972, 47.
viewing audience. Another title, attributed to television’s distortion of reality, was “a generation of cynics,” bred from the distrust that children developed from watching television, according to a *Changing Times* article. All of these metaphors work to categorize in the minds of receivers the ways in which television allegedly poured its messages into and affected the lifestyles of children. Concerns were that children were learning how to be criminals, that they were becoming nothing but wide-eyed sheep, that television was acting as parent and babysitter, and that children were becoming cynical from television’s constant blurring of reality and fantasy. All of these concerns seemingly stemmed from a fear that children were becoming dehumanized by television content because television, unlike playing outside, required passivity in its receivers by its nature as a medium. Whether or not any instrument exists to measure cynicism prior to and after the advent of television is unknown, but may be warranted for future research. Research on whether or not children were, in fact, more passive in formal education settings from watching television generally has been inconclusive. Regardless, the fear remained prevalent in this study’s findings and, because television still plays a regular role in the lives of children today, may still pose fears. Harris described his interpretation of a typical day in the life of a child, fearing television’s role as parent and babysitter, and its characteristic as being a main source for experiencing life:

> What a terrible time waster. A child gets up in the morning and trots off to the TV set. The thumb goes in the mouth and he’s transfixed for hours. Mommy is busy, so he’s told not to get in the way. As the day nears its end, Daddy gets home from work and wants to settle down in front of the television without any interruptions. Soon the day is over and not an experience has passed between

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3 George P. Dawson, “How Dangerous is TV Violence?” *Parents*, October 1969, 73.
the parents and the child . . . He shows up in the first grade with a spectator mind.\textsuperscript{5}

Determining the passivity of broadcasters in their choices of programs and writers in their scripting of such programs would require historical analyses of texts, both dialogue and visual. Again, however, this charge that broadcasters were not producing enough quality programming for children seemingly results from not knowing the true culprit behind children’s television ills. Concerned voices felt that broadcasters were content to collect their paychecks, and continue creating what garnered ratings. Economically and professionally, this seemingly is a natural and understandable reaction from decision-makers, who just were doing their jobs. Socially and morally, however, their responsibility to children may have required quite a different set of standards. That no commercial stations ever created such a universally-praised program as “Sesame Street” after its debut is, in the researcher’s opinion, an obvious passivity to allow non-commercial stations to take responsibility for creating programming in the best interests of young viewers.

Specifically in terms of violence, which is one of the four salient themes determined by this study, Cassirer stated that non-violent programming was the responsibility of noncommercial stations.\textsuperscript{6} One source expressed a minority opinion of violence particularly noteworthy to this study. Wertham said good adventure stories containing violence actually could be good for a child’s all-around development as long

\textsuperscript{5} Martin Harris, “The TV Problem,” \textit{The PTA Magazine}, May 1971, 6.
as children’s sensibilities had been kept utmost in mind, regardless of which station aired such violent programming.\(^7\)

One aspect of the debate on violence in children’s television that is not specifically considered in this study, but is important and should be an aspect of future research in the area, was the social problems plaguing the United States during the sixties. Morgenstern contended that problems of violence on television were intensified by, “racial strife, assassinations, confrontations and the war in Vietnam.” He said that in 1972, four years after Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated, television and movies reached a new apex of violence.\(^8\) This effect on children’s television could be crucial to understanding its prevalence in magazine frames. Whether or not violence on children’s TV statistically changed over time, perhaps affected by the socio-political context, is an interesting area of research that may facilitate understanding of its prevalence in magazine framing. Also, violence continues today to be debated as an area of children’s television deserving attention, perhaps again because no one party yet has claimed responsibility for instituting sweeping changes to program content.

Finally, commercialism on television, as determined to be one of four salient themes in magazines’ coverage of children’s television, was a constant in programming because, as Shayon explained, producers claimed that scholarly research on commercials’ alleged negative impact on children was forever changing. Therefore, producers had no idea as to which theory was most credible and were, supposedly, justified in continuing their practice. One example of commercialism, however, seems to the researcher to be a blatant lie—in order for a child in reality to “build strong bodies [in] twelve ways,” as

\(^7\) Ibid.
Wonder Bread promised, the FTC determined that a child each day must have eaten between forty and sixty-eight slices of the advertised bread. Shayon’s answer to distortions like these was governmental intervention. “The area of FCC regulation of children’s programming is the crucial one to be discussed.”

Again, seemingly, the trend of blaming inherently presents itself in the debate on commercialism because no one party moved to make changes. Those who did, such as ACT, were a minority voice in the grand scheme of the children’s broadcast industry that saw children as a financial jackpot, as mentioned before by Helitzer and Heyel. Monahan described that ACT was attempting to address those concerns of excessive advertising by demanding networks ban advertising from their fourteen hours of children’s programming each week. He contended, however, that ACT simply was resentful of a free enterprise system. Such assertions seemingly indicate that those who attempted to change the institution were met defensively.

A stalemate of children’s television in terms of its violence, commercialism, inactive power-holders and passivity seemed to be present, and continues today. This means, in summary, that such issues may not ever have been resolved to improve children’s programming in the 21st century. Had these trends been understood and analyzed to incite real changes early in television’s formation and rise as a medium, and the parallel rise of children as a viable audience, perhaps the continued debate of

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12 Anthony Monahan, “Television,” *PTA Magazine*, May 1973, 10, 9. Monohan contended that commercials were threatening because they created a sense of American society in children that was idealistic, and therefore, only could be seen on television.
children’s television would not be present today. Research in the field may benefit from analyzing what changes were instituted to try and change these trends, and whether or not those changes were accepted by public opinion.

**Research Question 2: Magazines’ frames of “Sesame Street”**

This question asked how magazines framed “Sesame Street” and how the debate surrounding the program’s merits was framed. Magazines, as determined by this study, seemingly framed “Sesame Street” favorably and pinned educators against CTW staff members in the program’s surrounding debate. In addition, authors of articles included their own opinions of “Sesame Street” more than three times as much as they included other sources, seemingly opposite to Shoemaker and Reese’s findings of source usage in that authors often will state their opinions about an issue through deliberate selection and use of sources. However, one of those two criticisms that focused on format was the most salient criticism, charging that the show was too fast-paced and narrowly focused. The remaining five criticisms, including the two subsequent salient criticisms that “Sesame Street” made kids passive learners and lazy, and that it could not teach, focused on the show’s educational objectives and alleged consequences.

Only one praise, that the show was run by an able staff that composed an applicable format and conducted significant research in the area of children’s television, focused on format rather than educational objectives and widespread acclaim. That this only praise focused on format was not surprising to the researcher. Based on this study’s findings, magazines rarely framed “Sesame Street” in terms of its research or the

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qualifications of its staff members. That such information was not salient to its receivers seemingly might have led readers to believe that the show, which received ample coverage on its educational objectives and immediate success, did not have as much research and background as actually existed.

Consultants or counselors, activists, and parents rarely were quoted. These findings were unforeseen to the researcher because such titles as “parents” or “consultant” often were used to describe aspects of “Sesame Street,” but were not used often for actual quotations or feedback. For example, in one article, “CTW Consultant Joyce Hakansson” was described as being a key figure in “Sesame Street,” but her opinion or duties never were discussed. Therefore, these source occupations were not considered salient, although their topical mentions were common. Parents were not salient sources in debate, either, although an article used such a title to mention that a problem of “Sesame Street” was “getting more parents in the ghetto to urge their kids to watch the show.” Seemingly, the question needing answered is why parents may not urge their children to watch, but such a question never is asked, and no parents’ opinions were sought in such an article.

Regardless, those sources who did register criticisms and praises of the program deserve further attention. In congruence with Paletz’s findings, the salient criticisms and praises of “Sesame Street” as reported by magazines are particularly limited, thus reducing the complexity of wider, socially-embedded problems for substitution into easily-classified, stereotypical frames—seven salient criticisms, six salient praises.

However, although the process of framing packed criticisms into small, easily

categorized statements, those criticisms of “Sesame Street” obviously were not salient enough to elicit widespread disapproval and subsequent failure of the program.

One example of Liebes and Katz’s notion of shared frames of reference was observed in the oft-quoted term “Grovergate,” a word mixing the name of a “Sesame Street” character (“Grover”) with Watergate, the infamous office building in which Republican campaign operatives broke into Democratic headquarters in 1972. The use of “Grovergate” is just one example of an attempt to link “Sesame Street” to frames associated with negativity and corruption.

Lang and Lang concluded that a new medium could cause disequilibrium in society. “Sesame Street” was innovative in its use of television as a potential educational tool, but did not upset the status quo. Perhaps those positive frames determined by this study to have existed influenced this maintenance of the status quo. The state of children’s television in general, as determined by this study to exhibit themes of violent, commercialism, blaming and passivity, may have affected television’s immediate reception as being innovative in using television to educate. Conversely, the attempts of “Sesame Street” to use television effectively as an educational tool were debated, so as long as dissenters believed the show was unable to teach, than universal understandings were not changed and, therefore, status quo was maintained. More extensive research is needed to determine other factors that may have influenced the success of “Sesame Street,” such as governmental support, public opinion, the number of stations carrying “Sesame Street,” and the number of households watching “Sesame Street.”

Two criticisms used for coding—that “Sesame Street” was oppressive to women and Blacks, and that content of “Sesame Street” appealed to the lowest common
denominator—emerged as possible trends. However, these two criticisms were not quoted as often as the other criticisms, and were more likely to not mention a source’s gender or occupation. Four praises used for coding—that “Sesame Street” was cost-effective, that it decreased the knowledge gap, that it provided role models and that it reached a lot of viewers from diverse backgrounds—were not as salient as other criticisms, and were more likely to not have an attributed source’s gender or occupation. Consultants, counselors, activists, and parents, as used for coding, likewise were not as often quoted as other occupations for either criticisms or praises, as mentioned before.

The criticisms and praises by educators, authors, and CTW staff members seem to resemble Wehr’s notions of fact-based disputes, which focus on appraisals of reality; interest-based disputes, which encompass future desires or aspirations; and value-based disputes, which concern disagreements over right and wrong, what should or ought to be, based on moral or rational foundations. There were no indications that Wehr’s fourth domain of dominant frames, relational disputes centering around emotional ties between two debating parties, were presented in the “Sesame Street” debate.

This study has a few limitations that may be eliminated for future research. Several of the authors of articles did not have accompanying bylines. Also, the number of authors of articles that included criticisms and praises exceeded the number of all other sources combined—such as CTW spokespeople, parents, educators, or counselors. This hindered determining a broader framing of the debate because only two sources, educators and CTW spokespeople, were cited for opinions outside of the author’s own. This is particularly noteworthy in that magazines, by pure nature of the medium, allow for more in-depth and opinionated coverage of any particular issue. Therefore, authors of
articles may have felt justified in injecting their own opinions more than seeking external sourcing, but sources were excluded who may have contributed additional information and opinions.

Additionally, inherent to framing theory is the socially embedded quality of frames in that, once such categorizations are established, alteration is difficult because universal understandings must be challenged and overhauled. Again, however, the breadth of the debate outside of authors’ own frames is constrained by the restricted source usage.

Furthermore, the number of articles published about “Sesame Street,” as mentioned previously, dramatically dropped after 1972, presumably because the show, by that time, was widely accepted and no longer deemed newsworthy by magazines. This rendered research of the debate’s evolution and changing frames of “Sesame Street” during the past 30 years difficult.

Therefore, future studies in this area may benefit by examining large-circulation newspapers’ framing of “Sesame Street.” Newspapers may provide a larger universe than magazines listed in the Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature from which to gather information and determine if and how the framing of “Sesame Street” changed over time (based on Drake and Donohue’s work on evolving debates) and if the public’s opinion changed according to frames employed by those newspapers’ articles. A newspaper may be more likely than a magazine article to include the author’s byline, to include at least one source from each side of the debate, and more likely to attribute facts to specific sources instead of generalizations, such as “critics.”
Television program guides also may help to develop a broader understanding of the debate surrounding “Sesame Street” through features not including in this study’s universe, which originated only in large-circulation consumer magazines as detailed by the Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature. In other words, a more extensive investigation of print media’s coverage of “Sesame Street” may be merited for future research in this area.

What these conclusions mean outside of this study is that “Sesame Street” seemingly was a unique program for magazines, a competitive medium, to cover in that favorable commentary and public discourse of the program may have contributed to its unparalleled success. Suppose another program, such as “Barney” or “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,” received a majority of positive comments from journalists in a competitive medium to television, especially more than 20 years subsequent to their debuts. Such conclusions beg the question of how positive media coverage may influence another media’s success. That educators today may continue to view “Sesame Street” as a threat to formal education might have been influenced by those first frames magazines used in the program’s initial years. Understanding these historically-embedded frames, then working to construct new frames, may help educators—who today may continue to oppose “Sesame Street”—to see the program’s viability as an educational tool that may further children’s abilities to comprehend upon their reaching formal schooling.
Research Question 3: Changing representations on “Sesame Street”

This question asked whether or not “Sesame Street” changed in terms of gender, race, and class from 1969—1994, and whether or not those changes may correlate with private, political or public sentiment during that time. As previously discussed, this study was able to determine correlations for the latter half of Research Question 3. However, these results do not claim to draw causal effects because no instrument, such as in-depth qualitative interviewing, was used to gather such concrete data. Understanding the frames that arose in media coverage of “Sesame Street” may serve as a basis for determining in future research whether or not such frames influenced the show’s changing representations.

Several examples of gendered dialogue are noted in determining the gender representations from 1969—1994. In 1969, a black housewife named “Susan” says, “I’ve gotta [sic.] bake some bread. I’ve promised Gordon I’d make him bread for dinner. Let’s go to the fridge and get some eggs to bake bread.” Later, her husband “Gordon” (who has no identifiable occupation) tells Susan that he heard she made him bread for dinner. She acts disappointed that someone leaked the surprise, and he responds, “You better get inside and get that together because I’m getting hungry.” She jumps to the door, saying, “Oh yeah, I better get inside and get the bread out of the oven. Goodbye.” She waves to the camera as Gordon responds, “Yeah, get that together.” Susan and Gordon both have Afros and wear tight clothing—she in a skirt and he in bell-bottoms. One of the opening scenes involves Gordon picking up trash off the street and, as the camera follows him squatting close to the sidewalk, keeps Susan’s bare legs in all shots.
In this children’s show, not are submissive characteristics being exhibited in terms of the female’s subversive role to the male, but sexual connotations are occurring. A clear decision was made to script Susan to remain standing while the camera panned down her body, following Gordon’s crouching motion, and kept her legs on screen while Gordon provided the dialogue. Susan exhibits a passive role throughout a lesson in which Gordon teaches “Oscar the Grouch” to pick up after himself so others don’t get hurt. As Gordon bends to put together pieces of a broken chair—thus enabling the home viewer to figure out that all the pieces put together make a chair—Susan remains standing. Throughout the entire lesson on consideration, Gordon is the sole teacher and Susan provides mere observations—“Oh Oscar, you’re making a mess.” And “Look at this mess, Oscar.”

Class and race delineations also are noteworthy in terms of accessories, occupations, and clothing. For example, often associated with wealth is gold, and a less expensive metal is silver. In 1969, “Bob,” the white host, was wearing a gold-faced watch with a gold band, while Gordon, the black host, wore a silver-faced watch with a black band. Gordon also has no known occupation in 1969 and meanders around the street throughout the episode, while Bob tends to the local store. Gordon also wears tight, dark clothing, contrasting Bob’s lighter-colored pants and sweater vest. Seemingly, the first episode of “Sesame Street” exhibited trends associated with race, gender and class differences, perhaps because the majority of CTW staffers at that time, according to Morrisett, were older, white males. However, also needing to be considered are the socio-political environments, such as the civil rights and women’s rights movements, which may not yet have influenced such internal processes.
Susan in the 1975 episode sings and plays a game with a young, white girl and a young, black boy. “One of these things is not like the other,” Susan sings. Both children point to the same object unlike the original, but Susan gives credit for correctly answering to Chris, the young, black boy. Variables that may have affected Susan’s decision to reward Chris for correctly answering, even though the young, white girl also answered correctly, could have been gender, race, or scripting of dialogue. Regardless, Susan’s character exhibited obvious disregard of the white, female student’s correct answer.

The trend of women’s equality can be observed as growing throughout the three decades. The 1989 episode is a celebration of Gordon and Susan’s 25th wedding anniversary. Susan plays a much more verbally-active role as she and Gordon accompany Oscar, to “La Pubelle,” a grouch restaurant. Susan is vocal about her likes and dislikes and often appears more forceful than Gordon. Gordon’s bell-bottoms have been replaced by a three-piece suit, his Afro shaved in favor of baldness and Susan’s tight skirt has been traded for a soft, knee-length dress. The camera stays above both the male and female’s waists. Gordon and Susan speak of their jobs while at dinner. Gordon now is wearing a gold watch, and Susan, gold jewelry.

Particularly striking in “Sesame Street” representations of “minorities” was their inclusion of disabled people. In 1974, a deaf, white female host appears in a short jean skirt and high heals. The Dance Theater of Harlem’s performed on the 1994 episode and included two black female ballet dancers, one white female and one white female in a wheelchair. Representations of minorities—those who are handicapped—illustrate the expansion of “Sesame Street” beyond “minority” in terms of skin color.
Another trend found from this analysis was a change in historically gendered-occupation representations. Most noted in the short segments, cartoons, and animations, females began to be represented as repair people, astronauts and construction workers rather than housewives, which was an occupation prevalent among female characters in 1969. No female Muppets were found in this study’s review of the 1969 episode of “Sesame Street.” The first female Muppet as determined by this study appears in 1974; but, following, traditionally gendered occupations continued to surface, such as in 1979, when a song about firemen played for more than three minutes:

Who’s that coming down the street in his big red truck? Fireman. Who’s gonna help you when your outta luck? The fireman, he’s ready to go, fireman. Where does the fireman stay when we don’t need his help? The firehouse. What does the fireman wait for when he’s in the house? What does he listen for when he’s in the house? The fire bell. Fireman, he’s ready to go, fireman….And what does the fireman ride on when he’s going to the fire? The fire truck. The fireman needs water in his hose…

The lyrics are gendered. Additionally, although footage shows blacks and whites alike as firemen, only the chiefs using walky-talkies are white. These gender and race issues continued to surface—most cartoons are males, and males in five of six episodes dominated voice-overs (in 1989, males and females both had eight voice-overs). Indistinguishable races, either cartoons, Muppets or animations, are majority male in every episode—in 1984, twenty-three males were identified as indistinguishable races versus only three females.

But the class representations of several females changed from poor housewives to working- and middle-class women. Maria, a Hispanic woman, got a job in the Fix-It
Shop while another semi-permanent resident named Buffy works as a cab driver.\textsuperscript{16}

Loretta Long, who played Susan, admitted,

\begin{quote}
I was too nice in the beginning, the great dispenser of milk and cookies. Just as the role of women in our society has changed in recent years, so have the roles we created changed. Now I am something besides a wife. I have an outside life as a nurse on the show. It’s affected my relationship with the children—I can ‘rap’ with them more—and with my stage husband, Gordon, who has also evolved in personality and dimensions.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

A white, female Muppet in 1979 conducts a play, which she appears to be directing, and accompanies on the piano. Her leadership holds together an otherwise struggling production. That she is the sole brains behind the production, and often has to remind the other Muppet, “Oh come on guys, get it right,” is a theme that, according to the researcher, would not have been evident ten years earlier upon the debut of “Sesame Street,” as determined by the trends in the first episode of this study’s sample.

To help reach and teach their diverse audience, “Sesame Street” beginning in the 1974 episode, taught basic Spanish—words such as “casa”—and was particularly striking in that a woman’s voice-over was used to teach. This introduction of a secondary language seemingly cut across race and class. In 1979, Maria, a Hispanic woman, seems to take over the sexual connotations from Susan ten years earlier. Maria wears a jean jacket and tight, yellow smiley face shirt, tight bell bottom blue jeans and big earrings.

Minority races increase in their representation over time, regardless of how they were represented in terms of gender or class. A 1994 episode is striking in that the first cartoon with visibly different ethnicities of its characters appears, as analyzed by this study. The auditorium of the aforementioned Dance Theater of Harlem performance is

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 8.
filled with several characters thus far unseen, such as an American Indian woman and her
daughter, black Muppets and Asian Muppets, and a Hispanic girl accompanying Maria
and Luis, purportedly their daughter. Such representations of gender and race, all of
which obviously can afford to attend a theater performance, seemingly indicate in
comparison to the beginnings of “Sesame Street” a change toward closer representations
of reality.

The major trend determined by this component is that females increasingly and
gradually had been incorporated into every aspect of “Sesame Street”—from hosting, to
cartoons, to Muppets, to voice-overs and to CTW employment. Additionally, the
presence of white males has dropped consistently since 1969 while white females and
black, Hispanic and Asian male and female representations have increased. Therefore,
“Sesame Street” did make improvements in their representations of gender by increasing
the number of females in characters, and of race by increasing the number of diverse
populations while decreasing the over-represented number of white, male characters. As
observed by the show’s set, costumes and taped footage, class representations remained
ture to reality in an attempt to help disadvantaged, inner-city youth identify with the
program and its characters, as echoed early in the production of “Sesame Street” by
media voices. The CTW’s early commitment to diversity as demonstrated by this study
was maintained as CTW included more minorities and females in its program during
three decades of production.

Perhaps a conversation between a little black and a little white boy from a
November 1989 episode of “Sesame Street” can best summarize how CTW staff
members have attempted to stray from traditional, white male hegemony. A white boy
joins a black boy, both looking out a window onto a scene that resembles the block on “Sesame Street”—complete with non-white children jumping rope and playing basketball on the sidewalks and streets next to Brown House stoops. “I guess I’m the one who’s different here,” the white boy says. “Yeah,” the black boy responds, “But it makes no difference.”

To summarize, these findings mean that “Sesame Street” continued to make attempts to represent females and minorities for which it originally aimed to be dedicated. Also, showing its versatility as a television program were its attempts to remain appealing to the urban, inner-city, while ensuring that females and minorities were visibly employed in a variety of occupations, by updating their characters’ styles in terms of housing, clothing and accessories. That characters never left the street scene in the first episode, and then hardly were observed on the street scene by 1994, illustrates the continued attempts of “Sesame Street” to represent reality and the expanding definition of community.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study

This study has concluded that magazines’ coverage of children’s television in the sixties focused on the themes of violence, commercialism, blaming and passivity, that magazines overwhelmingly framed “Sesame Street” positively and pinned traditional educators against CTW staff members in the surrounding debate, and that “Sesame Street” increased visibility of women and minority characters and remained true to the class of its target audience in terms of character representations.
This means to public broadcasting in general that a children’s television program can be wildly popular should the proper formulas exist—related to the environments, frames, and representations associated with such a program. The success of “Sesame Street,” according to Lloyd Morrisett, never has been explored in terms of the variables surrounding its inception, creation, debut and continued production. He is confident that no such formula could be duplicated. The researcher of this study, however, is confident that understanding such variables may lead to future success aside from content effects research. Those variables, as indicated by this research, that may best benefit future understanding include the state of children’s television prior to the debut of “Sesame Street” as found by this study, the media relationships with “Sesame Street” and their subsequent positive frames as illustrated by this study, and those socio-political externalities such as the women’s liberation movement, civil rights movements and war economy that projected women, minorities and the rise of affordable access to television into public discourse.

From the beginning of “Sesame Street,” the producer’s felt, as Cooney stated, they had “a baby, a great baby.” The frame associated with birth was attributed to “Sesame Street” since its inception, through pregnancy, and finally to its debut or birth. To this day “Sesame Street” continues to age, perhaps moving through its infancy when tests still were being conducted on its merits, through adolescent changes and into its established life in adulthood. “Sesame Street” represented from the beginning and today represents a life, being born of an idea and growing still. Cooney even said that Big Bird,
the main character of “Sesame Street,” represented a three-year-old when the show was created, and today has “matured” to the age of seven.\textsuperscript{18}

The majority of magazine articles from 1960—1972 framed children’s television as bad for viewing because of its violence, its commercialism, and its poor quality. Broadcasters, the government and parents were all criticized for not exercising enough control to reverse such negative trends. But, children could be saved, according to one article, if viewers realized, “For better or worse, we Americans are wedded to TV. There’s plenty wrong with our marriage partner, but we ourselves are not without fault. With effort we can make the marriage work, and our children will benefit.”\textsuperscript{19} Condry may illustrate the significance of television on children during the sixties and the impact it had on the growth of society in general:

> What are we to say to future generations when they grow older and look back on their childhood? Are we to admit that with an opportunity to teach, inform, delight, and entertain unparalleled in the history of man, we chose to fill their minds with pap? Are we to say that the short-term gain of a few selected businesses was more important that the intellectual development of an entire nation of children . . . God help us if this is our answer, because it is the response of a civilization careless and contemptuous of its future. It is the response of a society too weak and witless to survive.\textsuperscript{20}

This study has found substantial sources indicating that children’s television appeared to be violent, commercial, of poor quality and a popular issue for a minor, but vocal group of concerned citizens, like ACT, and of politicians, like Newton Minow. Should popular consumer magazines, as explored in this study, represent somewhat society’s feelings of children’s television during the sixties, then perhaps media was congruent with public and political opinion and “Sesame Street” was welcomed with

\textsuperscript{19} Nicholas Johnson, \textit{“Time Out for TV,” PTA Magazine}, December 1971, 23.
open arms as an exception to the regular, poor programming for children. Such an exceptional status and immediate lauding could have influenced the success of “Sesame Street.”

Prior to and after the debut of “Sesame Street,” magazines from 1968—1994, as determined by this study, framed the program favorably, extolling its virtues as an educator and exception to the regular smut of children’s programs. In addition, this study determined that magazine articles often cited CTW spokespeople and traditional educators as sources, both sides debating the merits of “Sesame Street.” Therefore, should popular consumer magazines, as explore in this study, represent realistically society’s feelings of “Sesame Street” after its debut, then perhaps the media’s favorable frames influenced the success of “Sesame Street.” Similar to Fraser’s results, the salient criticisms and praises of “Sesame Street” as reported by magazines are particularly limited, thus reducing the complexity of wider, socially-embedded problems for substitution into easily-classified, stereotypical frames.  

In other words, magazines tended to help their readers digest opinions of “Sesame Street” through simple repetition and categorization.

Finally, this study determined that “Sesame Street” changed its representations of gender, race, and class from 1969—1994 to include more females and more minority characters both onscreen and off-screen. Perhaps these changing representations have contributed to the show’s continued acceptance and praise as an international icon throughout the past three decades of its production.

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21 P. Fraser, "How Do Teachers and Students Talk About Television?" in Watching Media Learning, ed. David Buckingham (New York City, NY: Falmer Press, 1990), 89.
“Sesame Street” and its present parent company, Sesame Workshop, have developed into an empire still capable of producing popular and avant-garde children’s programs such as “Blues Clues” and “Sagwa.” [Please click here to view a video demonstrating, in the researcher’s opinion, the show’s continued appeal to pop culture today, and the change in format from number and letter recognition in the sixties to emotional understandings today. A band popular in 2003, The Goo Goo Dolls, change for “Sesame Street” viewers the words of their hit song, “Slide,” to teach “Elmo” about emotions, specifically “pride.”]

This research creates a background in which producers of current shows can look to gain understanding of variables that may have contributed to the show’s unparalleled success. This study does not intend to speculate in wide generalizations because of its lack of similar research on which to build. But this research intends to provide an infrastructure into further research on the true impacts of “Sesame Street” beyond television.

What the researcher believes makes this work particularly interesting is that, as mentioned before, after 1972, media coverage of “Sesame Street” dropped substantially because, assumingly, the show was widely accepted and no longer newsworthy. This provides both a problem and a highlight for future research. Problematically, an obvious lack in sample size creates obstacles for which to generalize about the show’s success in terms of media appraisals. But fortunately, this lack of interest in the highly-publicized program illustrates the unusual history of “Sesame Street” in that, after only three years of production in a more-than-thirty-year life span, the show already was accepted. Therefore, more in-depth research into these first several years may indicate other
variables that influenced the show’s immediate success that may have contributed to its incredible life span.

That such debates on the merits of children’s television and on “Sesame Street” continue today may be residual from those deeply-embedded and established frames examined in this study. Future research would benefit from determining whether or not frames regarding the early days of children’s television, when television was rising in popularity and its young audience was rising as a legitimate target, changed over time and whether or not their presence in television’s early days continue to frame debates today. Along those same lines, research would benefit from understanding if and how debates about “Sesame Street” and its ability to teach continue to wage today because of those early frames, or whether new frames regarding the show have risen.

This research, because of its exploratory nature, can only present tentative results. It merely seeks to illustrate historically and tap into some of the environments, frames, and representations of “Sesame Street” that may have contributed to its success. Future research will benefit from understanding these variables that existed in producing a successful children’s program in the public broadcasting sector. Future researchers should be aware in their extensions of this study that the purely exploratory nature of this work—which determines trends and frames from frequencies and results—may affect outcomes, though accepted and guided scholarly methodology was strictly adhered to. The researcher attempted to explore the field to provide a basis of understanding and to find general categories that may contribute to the knowledge base of the show’s non-cognitive aspects.
The researcher recommends several challenges for further explorations into “Sesame Street” and the media that go beyond the scope of this study. First, necessary in the extension of this research is to understand whether or not established frames, as found in this study, actually caused changes and revisions in the show’s content and format. In-depth, qualitative interviews with key personnel of CTW would facilitate in understanding such an inquiry. The answer may provide evidence of the media’s power in swaying decision-makers’ opinions. On a broader scale, determining whether or not children’s television producers on commercial stations may or may not have been swayed by media frames, as found in this study, also would widen the understanding of media frames’ impacts on the children’s television spectrum. As defined in this study’s historical accounts, many commercial stations did attempt to create programming in the best interests of children. Therefore, concluding if poor quality children’s programming media frames, and of the exceptional status of “Sesame Street” as a success and prototype, influenced the creation of such programs would add to knowledge of the media’s impact in inciting changes to children’s television.

In terms of samples, TV program guides published during television’s rise as a medium and children’s parallel rise as a legitimate audience could expand researchers’ grasps of children’s television and “Sesame Street” coverage. Including newspapers in queries of children’s television and “Sesame Street” also is recommended to determine the breadth of print media’s coverage.

Alice Cahn, veteran of non-commercial children’s programming and former head of TV at CTW, expresses her opinion of what external variables most influenced the success of “Sesame Street,” which relates to this exploratory analysis. Her thoughts
connect to children’s television in the sixties, frames of “Sesame Street” and the surrounding debate, and children’s abilities to identify with the program, thus helping to maintain its visibility today. Cahn, herself, adopts some of those frames determined by this study to have existed, and uses her own frames to categorize the status of “Sesame Street:”

More than anything else, a generation of parents in the late 60’s/early 70’s was comfortable with television in ways that their own parents had been comfortable with radio. It was more accepted that kids would watch TV. There was academic debate for years over “Sesame Street’s” impact on children’s attention spans and development. And to this day, the series still has its detractors.

While “Sesame Street” may not have immediately spawned what one of it founders, Lloyd Morrisett, wanted (a new generation of TV programs that was good for kids) it did change U.S. and, in fact, global consciousness about the power and potential of television as a teaching tool. “Sesame Street” is a metaphor for research-based, market-accepted, educational media…Beyond the screen, the series has become a cultural icon, a set of characters all children know and reference. It has a universal appeal and classic status similar to “Winnie the Pooh” and “Alice in Wonderland”—and as such is the first of the children’s TV series to achieve that distinction.\(^22\)

\(^{22}\) Alice Cahn, email interview with the researcher, 2 March 2003.
References

Primary


“Brightening the Boob Tube.” Newsweek, 1 April 1968, 67.


“Cooney & Kids (Incomplete).” Look, 18 November 1969, 100—102.


“Quieting the Children’s Hour.” Time, 19 April 1971, 75.


Brazelton, T. Berry. “How to Tame the TV Monster; a Pediatrician’s Advice.” *Redbook*, April 1972, 47.


Schrag, Peter. “Voices in the Classroom.” *Saturday Review*, 20 April 1968, 68.


Shayon, Robert Lewis. “Morality Building with the FBI.” *Saturday Review*, 30 July 1962, 42.

———. “Father Television Knows Best.” *Saturday Review*, 5 December 1964, 42.


Wolf, Anna W.M. “TV, Movies, Comics...Boon or Bane to Children?” *Parents*, April 1961, 60.

Secondary


Morrisett, Lloyd. Personal interview with researcher. 2 March 2002.


Roberts, Suzanne. Personal interview with researcher. 6 February 2002.


Appendices

Appendix A

Figure 1: Complete Coding Sheet

American magazine framing of “Sesame Street” / Stephanie Hay / Spring 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine Title</th>
<th>01-02/03-05/06-11/</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>03-05/06-11/</th>
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<td>06-11/</td>
<td>Page on which story begins</td>
<td>12-15/</td>
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<td>(Year/Month/Day: ex. 68 / 05 / 22 = May 22, 1968)</td>
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<td>Length (in paragraphs)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3= oppressive to women 8= too commercial</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4= makes kids hyperactive 9= doesn’t teach</td>
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Number of stations carrying “Sesame Street” as mentioned in the article (if no mention, leave blank) 40-42/ |

Number of photos 43-44/ |

Gender of article’s author 1= male | 2= female | 3= indistinguishable | 45 |
Figure 2: Magazines’ Frames of “Sesame Street” by Criticism
Figure 3: Magazines’ Frames of “Sesame Street” by Praise

- Provides role models: 4
- Cost effective: 3
- Attracts everyone/successful: 31
- Decreases knowledge gap: 2
- Exception to kid's TV prototype: 17
- Reaches large viewership/diverse audience: 27
- Teaches and prepares kids for school: 3
- Great staff/format/research: 6

Total Praises: 93
Figure 4: Magazines’ Frames of the Debate Surrounding “Sesame Street” by Source Occupation and Comment
Figure 5: Gender and Race Representations by Character on “Sesame Street”
Figure 6: Gender Representation of Employees, Voice-Overs and Indistinguishable races on “Sesame Street”