TO BE SEEN AND ALSO HEARD: TOWARD A MORE TRULY PUBLIC BROADCASTING SYSTEM FOR CHILDREN

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TO BE SEEN AND ALSO HEARD: TOWARD A MORE TRULY PUBLIC BROADCASTING SYSTEM FOR CHILDREN (217 pp)

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The purpose of this humanities-based study is to evaluate how the American public broadcasting system has traditionally served children, how it currently fulfills that role, and finally to propose a new approach to children's public broadcasting that is more democratic and attentive to children's interests. American broadcasting developed as a series of compromises amongst ideologically-opposed voters and organizations. Further, public broadcasters are reliant on private donors, thus diluting the democratic quality of their programming. The author argues that this paradigm violates children's rights. The unsatisfied adult consumer of public broadcasting has political recourse by which they can attempt to influence regulations that affect public broadcasting. Children lack such political agency, so extra care must be taken to protect their interests; public content generated for them should be as free of market influence as possible, until they gain the agency to decide for themselves their thoughts on the interplay of public and private

goods. The current public broadcasting paradigm does not evidently or obviously seek out children's thoughts on the programming provided for them. The author argues that by allowing children a more direct voice in the shaping of programming created for them, public broadcasters may both serve their traditional, recognized function better by empirically demonstrating that their content matches their publics' interests while also helping to ensure that children's right to speak is being respected.

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This dissertation was begun as my marriage began it final deterioration. It was in its final stages when my mother died in October of 2019. It was defended via teleconference in March of 2020, as our society began our first tentative steps toward adjusting to a post-coronavirus world.

I am now frantically crossing my T's and dotting my I's, hoping against hope that I'm getting this close to properly prepared. I've massive stacks of grading to do, as I struggle with transitioning the one hundred high school sophomores I'm teaching this semester to distance learning, a format with which they, like I, am uncomfortable. The world is burning.

This lengthy preamble is my way of contextualizing an apology. I am sorry to those to whom I am indebted for the completion of this dissertation and of my doctoral degree, because I just haven't the time nor the cognitive bandwidth to thank them properly.

And so I simply say thanks to: Kathleen Carey, Maranda Shrewsberry, Danielle Shirey, Jason Judy; and to my dissertation director, Natasha Levinson, whose patience and kindness are surpassed only by her intellect. I once found her mind intimidating; I find it now instead to be inspiring; and thanks finally to the rest of my committee, whose insights and support were invaluable: Quentin Wheeler-Bell, William Kist, and Todd Hawley. I love and appreciate you all, although I'll concede to loving some of you significantly more than the rest.

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CHAPTER I

BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN BROADCASTING REGULATION

This chapter briefly sketches a history of American broadcasting, seeing it as the product of ongoing ideological conflicts. This sketch will provide the context needed in later chapters to address three core queries: (a) how public systems were designed to address perceived shortcomings in the conflict-driven creation of American broadcasting; (b) how this solution to those perceived problems displeased some groups it was intended to appease *and* some groups that opposed its implementation; and (c) how these ideological conflicts continue to this day.

This historical context is needed to support the argument to consider reforming American broadcasting. If private broadcasters are indeed private entities with all the inherent rights thereof, then arguing for a normative vision of American broadcasting, rather than a libertarian one, becomes especially difficult. At the center of this dissertation is the question: By what right does the government regulate broadcasters and their content, and what might the reasoning be to do so further? If I assume *a priori* that private and public broadcasters are independent organizations that are entitled to unimpeded First Amendment rights, then an argument for a normative vision involving regulating the content produced by those organizations is *prima facie* invalid. On the other hand, if by tracing the history of broadcasting, I can show that these entities did not receive their broadcasting capabilities and the permission to use them as a product of their natural and inalienable rights but as a product of democratic deliberations that may or may not have gone awry, then I can argue that those rights may possibly be justifiably

amended, abridged, or otherwise regulated. Most simply, I can argue that such modifications may justly be re-evaluated.

Public Versus Private Goods: Parallels Between Histories of Television and Schooling

Education, as it has taken and continues to take place in classrooms and on screens, is largely a product of ideological clashes over which resources are public and which resources are private. Regarding schools, Labaree (1997) argues that the "the problem [with schools] is not that we do not know how to make schools better but that we are fighting among ourselves about what goals schools should pursue" (p. 40). A central bone of contention for Labaree is the degree to which education should be publicly oriented compared to privately oriented. Asked another way, is education a commodity for an individual's personal gain or are individuals educated for society's gain? Consequently, multiple perspectives of education, all of them to some degree mutually incompatible, battle to define the role of schools in society.

The history of television is punctuated by a similar ideological clash. For example, researchers, content creators, and policymakers may know what kinds of children's programming achieve what kinds of results, but as a collective group they are unable to resolve ideological arguments over how that programming should be produced or broadcast. Consider one example from the dawn of the 1970s. Although the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee was charged in 1969 with the task of examining television's *negative* impact, Surgeon General William Stewart said at the time, "If television can have a negative effect on children, it can also be a positive

stimulus.… We must learn more about how to promote this latter capacity while we learn how to avoid the hazards of the former" (qtd. in Sprafkin, Gadow, & Abelman, 1992).

In the ensuing decades, some scholars took Stewart up on his call and turned their attention to the effects of television in general and the effects of educational television specifically. One such early monograph, undertaken as a direct response to Stewart's challenge, seemed especially promising: Friedrich (later Cofer) and Stein (1973) found that preschoolers in a nursery school setting who were exposed to *Misterogers' Neighborhood*[1] [*sic*] showed higher levels of self-control, more task persistence, greater rule obedience, and more patience with delayed gratification of their requests than children who viewed neutral programming or aggressive cartoons. They further found that children of lower socioeconomic statuses who viewed *Misterogers* were more cooperative and nurturing and more verbally expressive about their feelings than other children. This latter finding seems particularly encouraging given the heightened risk for negative television effects associated with children from such backgrounds (Warren, 2005). Friedrich and Stein (1975) later found that certain kinds of television viewing led children to be more helpful more often. Collectively, their findings supported the Surgeon General's assertion that television could also have positive effects for society.

Such definitive research findings on the social good of television could have launched and sustained additional research and inspired significant new legislation, or at least might have resulted in calls for a more active, protective FCC, one that took

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[1] The precursor to the celebrated prosocial children's program *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (Rogers, 1968).

seriously the interests of the nation's youngest citizens. Instead, research of *prosocial television*, programming designed to promote emotional well-being and positive social interactions rather than intellectual development, has steadily declined since the 1970s. Mares and Woodard (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 34 prosocial television studies. As of 2005, they noted that the most recent study on prosocial television had been published in 1989 and 24 of the 34 studies had been conducted and published a decade earlier, in the 1970s. Why had there been such a precipitous decline in this line of research, from 24 studies in the 1970s, to 10 in the 1980s, to none in the 1990s?

One of the authors of the aforementioned monograph that researched *Misterogers* believed that the indifference with which legislators, regulators, and broadcasters received their research could be attributed to money, saying, "I overestimated the power of empirical research to affect public policy where enormous financial interests are involved" (Cofer, 1996, pp. 150-1). Right or not, Cofer's perception that lawmakers and television content producers/distributors prioritize money over civic and professional duties underscores an ideological divide akin to the one Labaree (1997) noted in looking at the history of education. It is as though Cofer were saying: We know what kinds of television work, we just can't agree on how it should be paid for, or who is responsible for distributing it.

Early Enthusiasm About and Conflict Over Television

If the telegraph compelled Samuel Morse to ask what God had wrought, how must an entire nation have felt about the television? Like the radio and the telegraph before it, it separated distance from communication. While it did not accelerate the speed

of information to an unprecedented rate, it did alter that transmission qualitatively. The onset of television in society was a different experience than instantly transmitted dots and dashes, a technology that had also transformed society. Indeed, some of the wonderment of Morse surfaced in the wake of television's invention. According to CBS-executive-turned-public-television-executive Roger P. Smith (2002), "For makers and viewers alike, in the years just after our victory in World War II, television was a vehicle for hope for America's future that was nearly palpable" (p. 1). No less a luminary than Harry S. Truman, speaking to the Radio and Television Executives Society, claimed television had the "potential [to be] the greatest educational asset" yet invented ("Truman," 1954, p. 14). Exactly what that potential was, or how it could be reached, was either unsaid by the former president or unreported by the author, but at least one educator in the 1950s saw within the medium the potential to save the entire American educational system. In 1952, the *New York Times* reported,

> Dr. Arthur S. Adams, president of the American Council on Education, said today that educational television was probably the "ideal vehicle" for countering "the planned attacks of those anti-intellectual forces that are looking to the destruction of the educative process as we have known it in this country.… [W]e know there are those who, for reasons not at all clear, would destroy our present educational system.… It is entirely possible that that this electronic tool is the ideal vehicle for bringing the public … into the classroom itself and to broaden the general understanding of the educative process.… For instance, when a textbook is under attack, we could use educational television to present the text intelligently and to

> illuminate the teaching that derives from that text so that we can depend on the reasonableness of the American public to see what was valuable there in the first place." (Popham, 1952, p. 23)

Although Dr. Adams was more explicit than Truman in his explanation of how television might benefit education, he was in his own way equally vague, or at least the *Times* was again vague in its reporting. Who were these shadowy forces, this cabal of anti-education saboteurs bent on the destruction of America's educational system? Whoever they were, their existence, or just Adams' perception of their existence, speaks to the ongoing conflict of clashing ideologies over education. If whatever educational potential television had was to be realized, those who saw television as a vehicle for hope would have to overcome, or at least compromise with, those who would use it as a vehicle for financial gain.

Congressional compromise: 1927 Radio Act. These voices echoed a similar conflict from decades before, when educational experts battled over the future of radio. In the 1920s and 30s, "the Payne Fund and the American Association of Colleges and Universities battled vainly against the specter of pitchmen being allowed to transmute the educational potential of broadcasting into a vehicle for what was seen as vulgar commercial gain" (Smith, p. 2). Early support for what became known as noncommercial radio also came from "educational, religious, labor, [and] civic or municipal government institutions" (Noam & Waltermann, 1998, p. 17). These entities comprised "only a tiny minority among the licensees of the Congress [and] conceived of radio as a form of education, as an art form, as an entity with cultural significance, as a

part of human history" (Smith, p. 18). Thus, without greater influence, these voices ran too counter to dominant American capitalistic ideals to gain a solid foothold in the struggle to define radio, and so they lost the war.

Congress' solution to the conflict was the 1927 Radio Act, which placed the regulation of the radio industry, including the allocation of frequencies, under the jurisdiction of the Department of Commerce. Radio would remain primarily a commercial interest, with the precious, limited frequencies being entrusted, free of charge, to privately-owned stations that met with the approval of the Federal Radio Commission (FRC). Those stations would have to serve the public interest, but what precisely that meant was left undefined, and the Radio Act did not provide for noncommercial radio. Lawrence K. Grossman, a former president of both NBC and PBS, has called this move "The greatest giveaway of publicly owned resources in history, the free distribution of the nation's airwaves for commercial use" (Smith, 2002, pp. 15-16). Walter Lippmann called it "fraud" (p. 16). Other contemporary voices, reflecting the concerns of those more interested in the private than the public, applauded the move. Journalist Eddy Dowling criticized the idea of publicly-owned or funded stations, saying, "Radio is becoming too nearly a branch of journalism to warrant any form of government ownership or operation" (p. 17).

Continued Congressional compromise: Television and the FCC. Dowling's concerns would be transposed by like-minded people to the new medium of television. For example, "Television is dangerous," said the Executive Vice Chancellor of New York University in 1953, "for it might improperly become the means of a state control of

ideas" (p. 89). Indicating the pervasiveness of this viewpoint, George W. Stoddard, president of the University of Illinois, told the National Conference on Educational Television that they must remain adamant in their fight for and support of educational television in spite of the accusations of "rampant socialism" ("Educational," 1953). He "attributed [these] attacks on educational TV to fear" (p. 41). The article does not tell us what he believed his opponents feared, but it seems likely he was alluding to the creeping threat of which he had earlier spoke.

Eventually, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the descendant of the FRC, sought to appease those voices who were unsatisfied with the way commercial broadcasters were meeting the public-service requirement of their licenses. In the late 1930s, the FCC created a new classification of stations, "noncommercial educational," and set aside a number of FM frequencies for their use. Unfortunately, FM was not yet an available frequency, as the technology was still being refined and made available to the public, and even once it was widely available, many people were reluctant to give up their working AM receivers for the new AM/FM sets. Furthermore, some critics were not appeased by the inference they drew from the name for this new class of stations, that this was not going to be the kind of public broadcasting for which they had hoped and which was being developed elsewhere in the world:

> The name ["public broadcasting"] evoked something far less popular, much more local and considerably less universal than the concept of national public-service broadcasting being developed abroad. This form of radio in the U.S. was seen to

> be necessary only in a relatively restricted domain of instructional, formally pedagogic service. (Smith, p. 19)

Unfortunately for those unsatisfied with this arrangement, it would remain essentially unchanged after the advent of television. The FCC issued free licenses to those broadcasters it deemed worthy, and a relatively small number of frequencies were set aside for what would continue to be known as "noncommercial educational" stations. Their "models were principally those of the classroom – the lecture, the textbook, and the training film" (p. 19).

The broadcasting model adopted by the United States was an attempted compromise between the public approach being undertaken to broadcasting in the U.K., and much of the rest of the world, and the American ideal of private capitalism. This model constructed

> A government protected and regulated system without the element of public accountability that a fully public system might require. Through rules and regulations that privileged and protected a small group of national corporations, and often very explicitly shut out any true competition or challenge, the U.S. commercial model allowed a range of popular diversity not often seen in public service systems; but at the same time it kept many other possibilities from developing, especially any form of programming that lay outside the broad mainstream.… If the British insisted that commercial and public service were opposite, contradictory, and mutually exclusive, the American system tried to

> prove that they were one and the same and thus failed to examine the places where that easy equation breaks down. (Hilmes, 2012, pp. 58-59)

Being a compromise, this arrangement was of course unsatisfying to most everyone. It was, however, largely satisfactory to those who privileged capitalistic, commercial interests, and more or less satisfactory to those who perceived a need for broadcasting to serve a public, educational function and who also conceived of education narrowly – as the teaching of skills and information that could be conveyed in a lecture format. Left out in the cold in this arrangement were those who envisioned a more active form of public broadcasting, one that encompassed broader intellectual and cultural concerns. These voices had been assured that when left to the free market, the broadcasting industry would rise to their high-brow expectations. However, multiple governmental and nongovernmental reports in the 1940s commented on "inconsistencies between the priorities of libertarian expectations for the several mass media and their actual performances," reports that were "couched in terms of what was becoming known as the social-responsibility theory of the press and media behavior" (Smith, 2002, p. 19). This theory holds that "Freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society" (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956, p. 74). And so, the press is responsible for certain tasks, such as "enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government … [and] safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog

against government" (p. 74). In other words, this theory held that the press must at times surrender some of their freedoms in service to these responsibilities.

Parties to the Compromise: Three Competing Ideologies of American Television History

At this point in this brief history, three distinct perspectives on broadcasting were vying for dominance. One point-of-view believed that broadcasting should be a purely private venture, one that will satisfy educational and higher-brow demands when those demands are coming from the market. Another perspective considered broadcasting a valuable public resource to be used for the quantitative betterment of the nation: for the transmission of skills and knowledge that could improve the incomes and statuses of individuals for the sake of the market. A third viewpoint conceived of broadcasting as a valuable public resource to be used for cultural and intellectual pursuits, for a more abstract form of betterment.

In these three points-of-view, one can see reflections of three ideological segments of the public identified by Labaree (1997) as conflicting over the purpose of education. The *democratic equality* philosophy sees it as the responsibility of schools to promote both citizenship and equality – all students must be given equal access to the table, and the meal being served is a civic-centered one that cherishes American democracy. The *social efficiency* philosophy sees education's mission as being the transmission of skills needed to create economically successful participants in the market for the sake of the market's betterment. Finally, the *social mobility* philosophy sees the goal of education as transmitting social skills needed for economic success for individual

betterment. In other words, social efficiency says we should transmit knowledge and skills to one another, via education, for the betterment of the marketplace, whereas social mobility says we should use education to receive knowledge and skills for our own betterment.

For Labaree (1997), democratic equality and social efficiency were *public* views of education; education is a public good for the betterment of everyone. These two public views of education differ in their assessments of the nature of that public good. To the former, it is a public vehicle for fostering equality and furthering a noble conceptualization of democracy. To the latter, it is a public vehicle for the transmission of skills needed to maintain a capitalistic society. According to Labaree, the social mobility view of education conceived of education as a private good, a vehicle to take the individual student as far as he or she can go. To the two former ideologies, education is for *us*, and for the latter ideology, education is for *me*.

The aforementioned three perspectives of educational television reflect these three views of education in general. Furthermore, these three perspectives of educational broadcasting are all, to one degree or another, incompatible. Extending Labaree's (1997) terms into the realm of television, I refer to the conceptualization of educational television as a public good for the transmission of high-brow culture and intellectual pursuits as *democratic equality television*. The perspective that educational television should be a public vehicle for transmitting skills and knowledge necessary for market participation is *social efficiency television*. Finally, the point-of-view that believes that educational television should be a purely private venture is *social mobility television*.

Labaree's (1997) conceptualization of the history of American education is that it is the story of conflicting ideologies and goals that battle over the definition and direction of education and that in turn conflict and form alliances with one another in a constant give and take of public versus private ideologies. In other words, it is a story of strange bedfellows and uneasy, temporary alliances. The public ideologies put aside differences to struggle against the private ideology; then the social efficiency proponents recognized that in some regards they had more in common with the private camp, and so aligned with it against the democratic equality camp. This tug-of-war continues in pendulous cycles, intermittently punctuated by compromises and fleeting alliances that satisfy no one very much and not for very long. In the history of educational television, one can see the same sort of dynamic leading to the same kinds of compromises.

As I have written, the allocation of broadcasting licenses by the federal government to private companies pleased social efficiency television and social mobility television adherents, while displeasing the democratic equality camp. This displeasure was evident early in the history of educational television. "Dr. Donald Horton, a Chicago sociologist speaking for the National Association of Educational Broadcasters" testified "before the Federal Communications Commission that New York City was not well served by its video stations […and that programming was] too superficial to be called educational" (Furman, 1951, p. 27). The report continued:

> Dr. Horton declared New York news events were being neglected, the city's culture not shown, its educational interests ignored.… "Art, the dance, and serious drama were nearly empty categories," he said. "There was little in the physical,

> natural, social or medical sciences or in technology. There were no in-school programs, none for handicapped children, no extension courses, no vocational course, and no courses for adults" (p. 27).

The broader, cultural conceptualization of education espoused by Horton seems compatible with Labaree's (1997) democratic equality category, which explains his dissatisfaction with educational television. However, individuals espousing opinions closer to a social efficiency perspective were not long pleased, either. It became quickly apparent to them that the market was not going to produce the kind or quantity of educational content they had originally envisioned. The divide between the expectation that the market would create educational broadcasting and the reality of a dearth of quality programming could be seen even before the advent of television. Under the aforementioned system of publicly-allocated radio frequencies to private broadcasters, the number of educational stations declined from more than 180 between 1921 to 1926 to 38 by 1937 (Hilmes, 2012, p. 54).

Clearly, the system was not behaving as some had predicted; educational stations were not receiving the funding that had been envisioned, and the product they were producing was lacking in those critics' eyes as well. The preferred method of educational content from both those private broadcasters fulfilling their FCC license requirements and noncommercial stations was simply pointing a camera at a simulation of a classroom lecture. Smith (2002) called this the "telly teacher … a product of a conjoining of monetary and imaginative poverty that rightly alienated a generation of schoolchildren" (p. 71).

Democratic equality adherents naturally found this style of educational television lacking. In a 1953 article, not an editorial, in the *New York Times*, the author laments the commercialism necessary in the American broadcasting system. He or she writes of a contemporary children's program that sounds more than a little similar to *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (Rogers, 1968) of nearly two decades later. On *Ding Dong School*, host Dr. Frances Horwich, "appearing alone before the cameras, for the full half hour … imbues in the youngster a sense of friendliness, confidence and faith that is truly magical television" ('Ding Dong School,' 1953, p. 41). This magic was disrupted in one episode when Horwich "was forced to exploit the confidence of mere tots and warn them to cut out the labels from [an] advertised product. 'Be sure to do it today,' she said, in the accepted style of the average pitchman" (p. 41).

It was not this kind of commercial crassness to which the social efficiency advocates objected, nor was it uncreative and uneducative television they opposed. Instead, they objected to the dearth of educational programming. There was contemporary support for the telly teacher from those we could call social efficiency proponents, as it was seen as an efficient and cost-effective way to transmit knowledge and skills necessary to serve the market. In an article with the title "TV Can Solve our Educational Problem," Constance Warren (1954), a former president of Sarah Lawrence College, pointed to a predicted explosion in demand for college education caused by the baby boom as well as "the growing feeling throughout the country that college, like high school, should be available to those capable of profiting by it, whether they can afford the tuition or not." Nevertheless, education spending had declined, in a large part because

"we are very reluctant to pay for the increased school costs…. But the really hopeless shortage will not be money; it will be teachers.… New ways must be found to make more effective use of our increasingly limited supply of good college teachers" (p. 17).

Warren argued that broadcasting classroom content was the way to meet these twin demands of lack of resources and lack of qualified teachers. One teacher could now teach hundreds or thousands, and this solution would result in lower tuition costs because of increased class sizes. Warren couched this argument in both economic and democratic terms. Economically, she writes "young people are demanding the right to marry younger than formerly. This means they are increasingly eager to being earning their living. At the same time, the business and professional worlds are insisting on increased training for their neophytes" (p. 20). Hers is not purely a market argument, however. She notes that the airwaves over which television was broadcast are "a form of real estate owned by the government" (p. 16), and likened the need to find public funding for expansion of educational television to the highway system. She noted that her father thought nothing significant would come of the automobile because the U.S. was a

> country of long distances and bad roads.… Now we can bring the classroom into each living room and train our young people to take full advantage of that fact. Are we going to take as dim a view of the future of educational television as my father did of American highways? (p. 24)

Notice the echoes here of a social efficiency perspective; the public must create the infrastructure upon which individuals can acquire the skills needed for their livings and to satisfy employers. Warren was not alone in her call for more, not more imaginative,

educational television. In the prior year, the city of Baltimore responded to a labor strike by custodians and garbage collectors by televising classes so that not all schools had to be opened. The programming was simply televised classes, described thus by one contemporary account:

> Here is how the television school works. Public school teachers selected by the city's Department of Education report to the city's television stations. Because the teachers find it easier to give instruction before an audience of pupils, school children living near by [*sic*] are gathered in the studio. The "set" is made to look as much as possible like a schoolroom. There is a blackboard and other classroom equipment. The teacher simply conducts the class as she would if she had a full complement of students before her. Children before the television set at home take notes and make a report that they must turn in the next day at school. (Campbell, 1953, p. 24)

Gutek (2013) writes that "By the late 1960s, more than 10 million students were receiving instruction via television" (p. 225). This kind of televised class, consistent with Warren's call, was also conducted at a collegiate level. Freelance reporter Robert Bendiner (1953) reported that

> If you happen to have lived in the Cleveland area during the past year, you probably know, for example, that several Western Reserve University courses were available to you in your own living room. You could have taken Elementary Psychology on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (three credits).… [S]ixty-six TV students put down the $48 fee, cash on the barrelhead, entitling them to materials

> and the term examination required for credit. Their median score, by the way, was 67, while that of the campus students taking the same course was 54. Another 472 enrolled as auditors for $5, which entitled them to syllabus and textbook. (p. 51)

In contrast to Warren, Bendiner (1953) also recognizes the educative potential for television content that went beyond a broadcasted classroom, noting that there were televised symphonies as well as arts and sciences programs on traditional broadcast television. Nevertheless, he noted the dearth of such programming, alleging that only "3 per cent [of commercial TV was dedicated to] informational matters such as science and travel" (p. 52). There is a view here that education is a public good, and that the private market is not supplying it adequately. In the very same edition of the *New York Times* where Bendiner's article was published, there was an article about 20,000 New York and New Jersey high school students who watched the first New York Scientific and Engineering Career Conference via closed-circuit television, and used two-way radio to interact with presenters ("N.Y. students").

Typical of the American tendency to attempt to resolve irreconcilable differences such as these, many voices called for compromise between the views of education as a public and private good. The month after Bendiner's (1953) article, one reader wrote

> [The] great potentials of educational television [have] been dependent to date on … voluntary effort [and] charity or subsidy.… If we are prepared to concede that education – or more exactly, public knowledge – is a priceless commodity in a free society, then it would seem that great numbers of persons would gladly pay

> small sums [for] subscription TV. If such a "tuition fee" could be charged only for a few premium programs each week, it should provide sufficient revenue, on a nonprofit basis, so that such stations could broadcast many more hours per week on a truly free basis – free of the obligations to subsidy of any sort and no longer dependent on charity as to money or service. Ideas, knowledge and culture in many forms could then compete in the marketplace for what they are worth in time and money to the people themselves. ("N.Y. students," 1953, p. 14)

Notice the contradictions inherent in this solution: Education is a commodity, ergo a private good whose value is determined by the market, but it is priceless in – and, it is implied, *to* – a free society, so it must not be beholden to any entities. Yet it is beholden to an entity, the market, so how can this vision of TV be free if it relies on market support? Clearly, it cannot. This letter writer is attempting to reconcile a social efficiency and/or democracy perspective (a free society needs educated citizens, either for market or democratic purposes) to a social mobility view (education is a commodity for personal consumption) with a market-based solution that cannot serve the former philosophies. Some compromises are inherently transient.

So it was with the compromise between social efficiency television and social mobility television adherents. When the former began to realize that their vision for educational television was not going to be realized by the market, they began to form alliances with those who supported a broader view of educational television that could. Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman said in 1967 that "We seek for the artist, the technician, the journalist, the scholar and the public servant freedom to create, freedom to

innovate, freedom to be heard" (Smith, p. 89). Compare this concept of freedom for educational television content producers to the freedom the letter writer in the preceding paragraph envisioned for them. Freeman's is a vision unfettered by the market that consequently assumes a broader mandate; one that is not merely about facilitating that market for the good of the market, but facilitating the market out of a belief that doing so will benefit society broadly.

On that social efficiency side, this alliance had "reflected the interest among various national centers of private and public powers and among many state governments and associated local private interests in increasing the number of public television and radio facilities" (Noam & Waltermann, p. 24). In other words, their motivation had been about quantity, not quality per se. Regardless, to achieve their ends, they had to compromise with entities that had a more democratic equality bent. Therefore, "Various philanthropies, industrial interests, and other cultural organizations at the local level … had influenced other more traditional educational interests to encourage … programming that was less formally instructional in nature. [This included] drama, music, children's programming, and even public affairs" (p. 25). The social efficiency television and democratic equality television camps had moved into the same tent.

Democratic Equality and National Identity Prior to Broadcasting

If the new tent was a patchwork creation, that is only fitting as the old tents tended to be stitched together out of compromise as well. Although the democratic equality argument sees education as a public good for the betterment of the entire society, the means by which to obtain that betterment might be disputed amongst the proponents.

As early as Thomas Jefferson, one can detect one form of the democratic equality argument, although one could see it as a compromise between social mobility and efficiency bents at first glance. Jefferson proposed the Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, which, in a nutshell, suggested that all children in Virginia would receive, at public expense, a limited, three-year elementary education. After that, their parents would need to provide for tuitions should they want their children to receive more schooling. However, those students who proved the most capable would continue to be educated at the public's expense, all the way up to the College of William and Mary. Along the way, those incapable or undeserving of educational advancement would be winnowed out and sifted into a life and career path that suited the educational attainment they had achieved. As a consequence, students would find themselves with the knowledge and training appropriate to their skills, or commensurate to what their parents could afford, meaning they would be prepared to serve society efficiently. Those who would make the best farmers or laborers would now be prepared to do so, as would those who would make the best leaders. Those who were not naturally predisposed to higher educational attainment and subsequent lucrative life paths could still undertake those pursuits if they had the financial means to do so (Gutek, 2013, p. 50). Thus this proposal can be seen as serving both social efficiency and social mobility ends. Education here is a limited public good and a private good that is limited only by an individual's wealth.

However, this approach was actually closer to a democratic equality philosophy when considered against the ideological underpinnings of Jefferson's proposal.

Education was not a public good to benefit the market or a private good to benefit the individual, but a public good to benefit the republic. The bill was a product of Jefferson's belief that "republican government requires educated and literate citizens," and that the responsibility of educating children therefore fell to the government (Gutek, 2013, p. 49).

Jefferson's version of democracy equality education is echoed in the beliefs of some of his contemporaries, and his bill "anticipated the nineteenth-century common school movement that led to the establishment of state school systems" (Gutek, 2013, p. 50). Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster shared a view of education as a public good for the betterment of the republic, but saw schools as needing to be agents of shared socialization and acculturation in order to achieve that betterment. To Rush (as cited in Gutek), "schools in the new republic should instill a strong sense of American cultural identity … to take on the civic mission of the republican political socialization of the young" (p. 53). Similarly, to Webster (as cited in Gutek), schools "would be the key agency in constructing an American identity" (p. 56). One specific means of doing so was via the standardization of language achievable in the classroom and in textbooks, and language would be a "powerful force for building a sense of national unity" (p. 56).

This particular manifestation of a democratic equality impulse would be reflected in the 19th-century common school movement. Waves of immigrants provided cheap labor for an industrializing nation, which would have pleased advocates of social efficiency and social mobility. However, some "saw them as a potential threat to the established American political order. These policy makers looked to common schools as agencies to assimilate and Americanize the country's newest residents" (Gutek, p. 76).

Thus, "proponents of common schools reiterated an argument advanced earlier by the likes of Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster that the United States needed to construct a unique American identity" (Gutek, p. 82) and that schools were an ideal vehicle for doing so.

Democratic Equality, National Identity, and Broadcasting

This 19th century view of education as a cultural normalizer and of schools as devices of acculturation and homogenization is reflected in one particular manifestation of democratic equality educational broadcasting thinking:

> The most common recurring element in early discussions of radio, in the United States and in other countries, was the notion of national unity.… The new medium … promised to aid beneficial cultural standards of unification…. There was thought radio would be a cultural unifier with gatekeepers concerned with quality and public interest. (Hilmes, 2012, p. 55-56)

This line of thinking was in line with Rush and Webster, and extended to issues of language:

> States contained pockets of ethnic groups who, despite having been born here, and perhaps even having parents who were born here, continued to speak another language at home, attend church services in that tongue, and read foreign-language newspapers. Now they could be brought into the English-speaking fold … learning how to speak properly and avoid the working class *ain't* and double negative. (p. 57)

Don E. Gilman, future head of West Coast programming for NBC, elaborated on broadcasting's role in this process:

> In America, no homogeneity exists, or can be obtained, until the entire population has been taught to speak the same language, adopt the same customs, yield to the same laws, from childhood. Now, thanks to radio, the whole country is flooded in the English language spoken by master-elocutionists. American history, American laws, American social customs are the theme of countless radio broadcasters whose words are reaching millions of our people, shaping their lives toward common understanding of American principles, American standards of living…. Wholesale broadcasting, coupled with restrictive immigration, cannot fail eventually to unite the entire American people into closer communication than anything yet achieved in the history of our development. (Hilmes, 2012, p. 358)

As I have said, the democratic equality television thinkers more or less had been locked out in the cold in the formation of the American broadcasting system, advocating as they were for a model closer to the one being followed in Britain, where taxes collected from television owners were used to generate television content. This kind of public broadcasting obviously runs counter to American capitalistic ideals, but proponents of this kind of broadcasting in America saw it as potentially being able to bring those on the outside of those ideals inside, thus making it consistent with democratic equality values.

> The public service model of broadcasting, developed in Great Britain and adopted over much of the globe, fit in with notions of reform, uplift, and cultural control. Though it might provide top-down culture (a system by which the license fees of many supported the cultural tastes of a few), it also invited the masses of the public to participate freely, to pull themselves up by their cultural bootstraps, to enter into the authorized public life of the nation.[2] (Hilmes, 2012, p. 58)

To the other voices in the educational broadcasting debate, however, bootstrap pulling was to be done individually, not culturally. It was to be accomplished either by means of a conceptualization of education as a public good to benefit social efficiency (in which case personal advancement was an acceptable byproduct, but not the mission, of education) or as a private good to be used for individual benefit (i.e. social mobility). Regardless, education as a public good for public betterment was not a concern for either camp, at least not until social efficiency proponents noticed the market was not creating the educational broadcasting for which they had hoped. Then diverse voices who viewed education as a public good found common ground. This coalition would eventually culminate in the creation of *national* public broadcasting, as opposed to the local, independent nonprofits that ran the individual educational television stations. The concept of national public television is most associated with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Before it even launched in 1970, however, the alliance of democratic

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[2] Ironically, this line of thinking was not necessarily one that encouraged the kind of unity imagined by the democratic equality broadcasting thinkers, as the invitation into the mainstream's tent that was extended to outsiders implied that their own tastes, ideas, and cultures were not as fit or suitable for propagation, and it was decades before the BBC recognized that subordinated groups like the working class or women might desire, and benefit from, material that treated their own experiences as equally important and legitimate (Hilmes).

equality and social efficiency proponents found themselves encountering the very same obstacles that had led to educational concerns in the domain of broadcasting being subordinated to the market. The obstacles included the fact that the government could not serve the newly developed broadcasting entity too enthusiastically without inviting political battles with those stakeholders who were opposed to any particular program being created. Broadcasters therefore simultaneously had to court the market to raise needed funds and stave off the government when programming was not politically popular.

In one famous example of this public broadcasting balancing act, then-unknown children's show host Fred Rogers appeared before a Senate subcommittee to testify to the need for 10 million dollars of public television funding to be kept in the budget after the Nixon administration had proposed cutting it (Won't You be my Neighbor, n.d.). Rogers made an emotional plea to subcommittee chairman John Pastore, a notoriously cantankerous legislator who was, judging by video of the encounter, not overly kind to Rogers' position at the outset of his testimony. By the end of the video, however, Pastore admitted to having "goosebumps," and added "Looks like you just earned the twenty million dollars."

The video is adored now by Rogers fans and public broadcasting devotees, and it is held up as an example of how their cause can triumph over political agendas. On the other hand, this conflict – the tension between the democratic-equality and social-efficiency camps on one side and the social mobility adherents on the other – did not end with that testimony, and instead has continued on through the decades. I wrote earlier in

this chapter about the promising findings in the monograph written by Friedrich and Stein (1973), and how their findings resulted in little real-world impact. I also noted how one of the authors of that monograph believed she knew what led to the resounding indifference with which their work was met, and although she did not use the terms democratic equality, social efficiency, or social mobility, the kind of private versus public tension to which she referred can clearly be seen as fitting into this paradigm. The salient quote, again: "My view of the role of science in society was remarkably naïve at the time of our studies. I overestimated the power of empirical research to affect public policy where enormous financial interests are involved" (Cofer, 1996, p. 150). Even armed with overwhelming, empirical evidence of the benefits of some kinds of children's television, a public view of educational television could not compete with a market-based, private understanding of the role of education, television, and educational television in American society.

Cofer's assessment has been echoed by other voices favoring the democracy-efficiency end of the public versus private spectrum. Smith (2002) wrote of his own fruitful efforts in public broadcasting and the indifference with which they were received:

> We learned that television provides affect better than information. We learned that story can stimulate … it can open a mind to issues.… We learned that television can be a part of a rich, interactive classroom experience, in which theater, video and students are antiphonal elements. The educational establishment met our discoveries with thundering indifference. Then, in the 1980s, a US president who thought films were a business joined forces with school managements who

> wanted computers to secure jobs for their students when they grew up. Pragmatic, utilitarian power stopped instructional television[3] dead in its tracks. (p. 75)

Smith's remarks illustrate that, over the course of the years between the advent of television and the rise of neoliberalism, the ideological conflicts that shaped both the American education and broadcast systems continued. An alliance between democratic equality and social efficiency adherents led to the creation of PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting after an alliance between social efficiency and mobility supporters had proven unsatisfactory to the former.[4] Then, less than 20 years later, unsatisfied with the product of their uneasy alliance, at least some social efficiency adherents abandoned their democracy partners to align with the social mobility camp. With neoliberalism plotting the course, the Reagan administration steered the ship of public broadcasting into a decidedly private goods direction. Securing jobs for students became the prime directive of both American schooling and public broadcasting, with less and less thought given to the ways in which public broadcasting might give a voice to the voiceless or serve interests that conflict with market interest.

This ideological battle over educational television continues unabated. During the 2012 presidential campaign, Mitt Romney famously mocked the idea that public

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[3] "Instructional television," "noncommercial television," and "nonprofit television" were often used interchangeably in the medium's early decades, just as radio variations of those terms were often used interchangeably. The terms all connoted some kind of content, usually highbrow, that fell outside of the dominant interests of the market.

[4] This alliance had been presaged by the aforementioned president of the University of Illinois, George W. Stoddard, when he said "some method must be devised to allow each [educational] station throughout the country to make use of the better programs produced by each of the other stations" ("Educational").

resources should continue to be used to fund such programming. *Time* magazine television critic James Poniewozik (2012) noted that this was a new twist on an old strategy:

> I wasn't surprised that he said [he planned to defund PBS]; it's been a conservative goal for about as long as there's been PBS and NPR. But I was surprised by how he said it, as he was speaking to Jim Lehrer (ironically, of PBS): "I'm sorry, Jim. I'm going to stop the subsidy to PBS. I'm going to stop other things. I like PBS. I love Big Bird. I actually like you too. But I'm not going to — I'm not going to keep on spending money on things to borrow money from China to pay for it." I've been covering the waxing-and-waning threats to cut public-media funding long enough to know one thing. It's the defenders of public money who bring up Big Bird — and Elmo and Arthur — whenever this happens. It personalizes the debate. It gets people worried about their favorite characters and educational TV for their kids; it conjures the specter of heartless politicians killing Big Bird. And if you're a conservative budget cutter or culture warrior, you do whatever you can not to cite Big Bird, or *Sesame Street*, or any cuddly figure that millions of people love.… It's an interesting tack: Romney is essentially saying, "Hey, I like the things you like too. We just can't afford them." It takes the debate out of the usual culture-warrior frame (liberals are using our money to undermine our values!) and puts it in a dollars-and-cents frame. (para. 2-8)

Despite the use of the broader terms "liberal" and "conservative," Poniewozik is summarizing the historical nature of the public versus private argument over education generally and television specifically, and showing how Romney argued for a private goal using a public argument – "Educational television may be a public good for all of us, but we cannot afford it." In other words, he was attempting to use a social efficiency argument to achieve a social mobility end.

If past is prologue, Romney's strategy was doomed to failure, or at least to temporary success at best. All of these uneasy alliances among ideological factions satisfy no one for very long, and as unhappy as Romney might be at the continued funding of PBS, democratic equality adherents are unhappy with it as well. Although Smith never uses the terminology developed by Labaree, (1997) his understanding of educational television as a public good for the benefit of all is apparent, as is his dissatisfaction with the hybrid public-private model that has been developed in America.

> The CPB board, heavy with political appointees, disagrees over what the Congress should fund. The Board wants broadcasting that will reflect and promote its worldview. The Congress will authorize only that which promotes *its* worldview. "We won't authorize THAT!" say the Congress. "We won't appropriate for THAT!" say the president's appointees. By and large, the content of American public broadcasting consists of a middle ground of subjects found agreeable to both sides in this contest. (p. 88)

Conclusion

And so it goes. A system designed to displease the fewest in its effort to serve the market as well as loftier educational ideals continues to require constant renegotiations in order to displease those fewest, even if in so doing it pleases none. In this chapter, I have tried to show that this continuing failure to please multiple segments of American society is in part a consequence of America's failure to (a) define the specific obligations private and public broadcasters have to the American people and (b) define the specific obligations of the government, as an entity acting on behalf of the American people, to fund and regulate those broadcasters. If this situation sufficiently dissatisfies enough Americans, they can exert political pressure via their votes and through communications with elected officials to affect change. Children, however, are almost devoid of political power. If this arrangement is unfair to them, and I will try to show as this dissertation unfolds that it is indeed unfair to them, then we have a societal responsibility to offer them something new.

CHAPTER II

SALIENT CHANGES TO BROADCASTING IN RECENT DECADES

In Chapter 1, I presented a brief overview of American broadcasting history in order to show that the public broadcasting systems in the United States were established in a patchwork fashion, attempting to appease stakeholders of opposing ideologies without ever fully supporting public broadcasting. The result was a public system wherein public is defined simply as receiving some funding directly or indirectly from the federal government. Left unanswered were larger, more nuanced questions about what it means for a broadcasting product to be "public" and what private broadcasters' responsibilities to the public good are.

Private broadcasters are loathe to take on any more nonrevenue-generating responsibilities than they absolutely must, and so have spent much of the history of American broadcasting resisting calls to relinquish valuable broadcast schedule real estate on programs that may or may not advance some conceptualization of the public good but are definitely less profitable than other programming options. They have traditionally labeled as censorious any efforts to curtail the content they wish to air and any efforts to compel them to air certain content via FCC decree or federal legislation. Proponents of a more robust public broadcasting system have traditionally countered by pointing out that broadcasters did not own their licenses, but instead were given them in exchange for meeting certain demands imposed by the public via the government. In short, to advocates for a more robust, public-centered conceptualization of broadcasting,

there is nothing censorious about demanding broadcasters use the airwaves in certain ways, for those airwaves belong to the public, not the broadcasters.

Chapter 1 also demonstrated that the courts, legislators, and FCC have not often favored the side of public advocates in their ensuing conflicts with broadcasters. Thus from the perspective of those advocates, the history of American broadcasting can be described as an ongoing series of clashes between those advocates and private broadcasters, with regulators routinely favoring the interests of the latter. To those who interpret this history as such, the events and technological developments of recent decades can only have exacerbated their anxieties over the future of American broadcasting.

In this chapter, I will try to show that in recent decades the broadcasting landscape in the United States has changed to the point where most broadcasting regulations, and indeed the very existence of government-supported broadcasting systems, can now be seen as largely irrelevant. This process has occurred in five distinct but interrelated ways. First, policy has limited the FCC's ability to regulate content. Second, the viewership for traditional broadcasting has and is eroding. Third, the ideological camps that have clashed over the societal role of broadcasting have reorganized into new configurations. Fourth, one of the American broadcasting system's missions has been fulfilled: enhancing the public sphere by expanding people's abilities to share messages and to contemplate the messages of others. Fifth, there is no apparent, widespread demand for new legislation to regulate broadcasting. Together, these five components have rendered earlier broadcasting regulation moot.

Content Regulation of Non-Traditional Broadcasters

The FCC website lists only a few attempts at regulation of cable content that are salient here (Federal Communications Commission, 2015). The Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 included, amongst other provisions, a requirement that cable providers who carried indecent (by FCC standards) material had to provide, free of charge to any subscribers who requested it, a lockbox that would prevent that material from airing on those respective subscribers' televisions. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 reasserted the lockbox requirement, but also extended over cable television the Safe Harbor concept (see *FCC v. Pacifica*) the FCC had applied to traditional, over-the-air broadcasters. This section of the Act set aside the hours from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. as times when children were more likely to be watching television and so indecent material was to be banned during this time.

Playboy Entertainment Group sued over this safe harbor provision (*United States v. Playboy*, 2000), arguing that as a subscription service, they were obligated to do less to protect viewers from exposure to indecent material. A traditional broadcaster might have such a duty, their argument went, because they are using the public airwaves free of charge, and anyone with a television might inadvertently encounter, and be offended by, the material in question. Cable broadcasters, they went on to argue, were deliberately selected by consumers; they knew what they were purchasing, and chose to go ahead with the transaction. If they decided they did not want that content after all, they could always cancel their subscription. This course of action would obviously be the solution that imposed the smaller burden upon broadcasters' free speech rights, and the courts

have long held that where limitations on free speech are acceptable, they are only acceptable insofar as the limitations imposed are the least restrictive limitations possible to achieve the desired end. In this case, the desired end was the protection of consumers from materials to which they objected, but the federal court held that those consumers were entitled to less protection here due to the different natures of traditional broadcasting and cable.

Thus the first way in which the modern broadcasting landscape may render traditional regulations moot is by severely limiting the FCC's ability to regulate content. As more channels have opened up due to digital broadcasting, and as so-called over-the-top broadcasters who take their content directly to audiences via the internet continue to expand both in number and in size, traditional broadcasting has seen more and more competition for audience share. Over the past decade, traditional broadcasters have seen their total audience numbers decline and skew increasingly older, a problem for advertising-based content providers as advertisers privilege younger audiences (Maheshwari & Koblin, 2018).

One can assume based on the logic of precedents that any attempt by the FCC or Congress to regulate the content of over-the-top broadcasters such as Netflix, Hulu, or HBO Go would meet with rejection from the courts. If cable providers are not subject to the same regulatory requirements as traditional broadcasters, how much less so must over-the-top providers be? Just like cable providers, over-the-top broadcasters are invited into the home by subscribers. Furthermore, unlike their older cousins in cable, these broadcasters do not occupy a space on the broadcast spectrum, and are therefore truly

operating as free companies, neither using the public's airwaves nor slipping surreptitiously into the homes of unsuspecting viewers.

Thus, as more and more viewers access more and more content via over-the-top distributors, it is reasonable to question how long broadcast television will even be around. Furthermore, this new way to view content begs the question of how heavy a regulatory hand the government can legitimately bring to bear against broadcasting content as fewer entities seek broadcast licenses and fewer Americans turn to traditional broadcasting for content, choosing instead to sift themselves through all the available programming from Netflix, HBO, Hulu, Amazon Prime, etc. For example, the sixth season premiere of Netflix's popular series *Orange is the New Black* (Burley, 2013) "Scored More Viewers in TV's Most Coveted Demo Than Anything on Broadcast," as one Adweek headline touted (Lynch, 2008). In August of 2018, the ratings used to measure the value of television advertising real estate during primetime fell by 12% in the most coveted demographic for both broadcast and cable television (Lafayette, 2018). That was on top of a 13% decline the month before.

This trend seems unlikely to stop, based not only on recent history but on reasonable extrapolations derived from the current broadcasting climate. Broadcasters have responded to dwindling primetime audiences by raising a broadcast measure called cost per thousand impressions (CPM; Crupi, 2017). CPM measures advertisers' costs not in total dollars but in how much money it costs them to reach one thousand viewers. In short, as their audience has dwindled, traditional broadcasters have offset the decline in

advertising dollars by raising advertising costs. How long can such an approach be sustainable before advertisers refuse to pay higher prices to reach fewer eyeballs?

Parallels to 21st Century Broadcasting in 20th Century Magazines

The current broadcasting paradigm echoes in some ways the expansion and constrictions of the magazine industry's history. With the ascension of television, magazine publishers of the 1950s and 1960s found themselves struggling in the face of declining ad revenue. Readership had not declined, but companies' advertising budgets are of course finite, and television offered the newest, hottest way of reaching consumers. Some publishers responded by raising ad rates. This strategy might have been viable for publications that attracted audience demographics that were particularly desirable to advertisers, but it was not an effective approach for magazines with a large, general audience. Some of those less prestigious publications responded to the threat of television by cutting their circulation, lowering costs in the process and making up for the loss of ad revenue. However, the very appeal to advertisers of those magazines was that they offered a cost-effective way of reaching massive amounts of consumers; by cutting circulation, many of those magazines lowered both their costs *and* their advertising revenue, for advertisers were less interested in smaller general audiences than they were large general audiences. Less offensive to advertisers was another common strategy among publishers: raising cover prices and subscription rates. Ultimately, this too proved unsuccessful. By raising prices, publishers still ended up with declining readership, becoming less attractive to advertisers in the process.

The magazines that survived this era utilized some common strategies. These survivors responded to lost revenue by seeking cost-cutting measures that affected neither content nor circulation. They also offered specialized content, seeking out audiences that were so interested in one particular subject that they would pay a premium to find that content, allowing the publishers to charge an above-average cover price in exchange for being able to offer advertisers highly-prized demographics. The CPM of a general interest magazine like *Look* might have been much smaller than, say, *Sports Illustrated*, but the latter's total advertising costs would be lower, and it could offer a demographic so targeted that advertisers could more accurately predict the reach of their message among those consumers to whom they most wanted to connect. One of the most iconic American magazines, *TV Guide*, epitomized these survivor publications. It lowered costs not by cutting circulation or content, but by cutting size. The magazine's digest size lowered costs at the same time that its specialized content made it a more desirable purchase than a similarly-priced publication that may only have one or two articles of interest to any given consumer.

The parallels between magazine and television history are self-evident here. The broadcast television industry, like magazines before it, has been responding to competition by raising its advertising costs, but if these downward trends continue, as they seem likely to, that option will only be viable for so long. Advertisers are willing to meet traditional broadcasting's demands now, because traditional broadcasting is the only way to reach a massive general audience. This reach is a valuable service for advertisers looking to move product with a wide appeal – such as a crowd-pleasing tent-pole movie

or a moderately-priced car. However, if audiences continue to dwindle (as they seem likely to), and costs therefore continue to rise (as they would seem likely to given the former condition), inevitably the time will come when the return on the advertisers' investments in networks' CPM is no longer an attractive (or even viable) option for advertisers. Although no doubt decades away, the eventual demise of traditional broadcasting seems to be written on the wall.

Over-the-top broadcasters, on the other hand, offer the same attractive qualities that were offered by those magazines that survived the dawn of television. First, over-the-top broadcasters offer consumers an attractively priced option. A service like Amazon Prime can more than match a broadcast network in terms of content offered, with the additional benefit of being much more affordable than a cable subscription, the way most viewers of broadcast networks access that content. Comparing over-the-top services to cable networks also indicates the attractiveness of the former to consumers. Again, in terms of content, an over-the-top service is more than competitive with any cable network, but cable networks are traditionally available only via subscribing to a cable provider's package of programming, with some individual channels and content available a la carte but most programming accessible only as part of a package of channels. On the other hand, many programs and even whole channels are available a la carte via Amazon Prime. It seems likely, based on historical evidence, that over-the-top services are going to be the special interest magazines of our current media paradigm, outlasting the no-longer-viable, traditional general interest broadcasters.

Historical Support for the Eventual Demise of Traditional Broadcasting

Historical parallels between television and magazines aside, there remain other reasons to predict that the downward trend of traditional broadcasting will continue. First, as was previously stated, over-the-top content is subject to less regulatory oversight than broadcast or even cable content, making it an attractive option for content producers and investors alike. Second, and as a consequence of the aforementioned lack of regulation, there is no need for over-the-top broadcasters to earn and maintain an FCC license, lowering the bar of entry for new players seeking to get in the game. Third, the trends of (a) the exodus of viewers that were once watching network content and (b) consumers who used to be cable subscribers but have since "cut the cord" seem unlikely to abate. These trends have inspired mainstream press headlines describing the plight of cable providers and networks in dire language. Two headlines from recent publications illustrate this point: "Cable Television Needs You More Than You Need Cable Television" (Pullen, 2017) and "Why Traditional TV is in Trouble" (Maheshwari & Koblin, 2018). Unfortunately for broadcasters, these dire headlines are generally followed by articles offering justifications for the pessimism, such as:

> In the last quarter, 527,000 subscribers cut the cord. In the three months prior, more than 750,000 people cancelled their accounts — the industry's worst stretch yet. It seems the only things stopping the rest us from defecting are hassle, uncertainty and incentive. And tech companies are on the verge of changing that. (Pullen)

Corporations are unlikely to continue to toil in fields that are not fruitful, and the downward trends in broadcasting are likely to continue, suggesting that unless there is a game-changing variable on the horizon, traditional broadcasting's days seem numbered. If Americans continue to desert their traditional broadcasting systems, broadcasters will have even more and more incentive to abandon their over-the-air activities in favor of the quickly-becoming-more-popular and less-regulated option of over-the-top broadcasting. This would rob the government of its philosophical motivation for intercession: the need to police the people's airwaves. If both consumers and producers continue to pursue other options, options that are beyond extensive regulatory oversight, what justification is there for the government to continue to police the airwaves? It would be the slippery slope fallacy to conclude from these points that broadcasting television will absolutely go the way of the dodo, but it seems no exaggeration to me at all to say this particular bird is on the endangered species list. Thus, the second way in which the modern broadcasting landscape may render traditional regulations moot is by eroding the viewership for traditional broadcasting and making it no longer financially attractive to broadcasters.

Modified Versions of Labaree's Classifications and the Modern Broadcasting Paradigm

A third way in which the modern broadcasting paradigm has largely rendered old regulations moot is by reorganizing some of the ideological camps who have traditionally clashed over broadcasting. In the first chapter, I referenced Labaree's (1997) classifications of the dominant conflicting ideologies that have shaped the history of

education, and argued that one could see parallels among the conflicting ideologies that have shaped the history of American broadcasting.

Labaree (1997) calls one of these clashing educational ideologies the *democratic equality* perspective. This perspective asserts that it is the responsibility of schools to promote both citizenship and equality to advance the goal of enlightened national self-leadership. A second camp, the *social efficiency* philosophy, sees schools' purpose as nurturing students' future economic well-being by teaching them skills needed to be financially successful participants in the market, for the sake of having a smooth running and robust economy. Finally, and similarly, the *social mobility* philosophy sees the goal of education as transmitting social skills needed for economic success for individual betterment, not the gain of the economy as a whole. Labaree further delineated these groups by whether they approached education as a public or private good. Democratic equality and social efficiency are public approaches in that they perceive education as being about the betterment of society, not the individual. The latter does, however, see society as benefiting when individuals collectively benefit, and is therefore closer to the social mobility perspective. This third approach sees education as a strictly private good, to be used for individual personal gain.

At the dawn of American broadcasting, three similar camps emerged and clashed over the futures of the new industries. Later, after American broadcasting systems were firmly established as private industries within the market, these ideologies again conflicted over the idea of public broadcasting, of radio and television content that exists outside of the market and responds instead to the needs and interests of all Americans,

not just those affluent enough to influence the market. Public broadcasting advocates, much akin to democratic equality supporters, viewed the idea as a strictly public good that could benefit society. The social efficiency perspective, being neither completely public nor private in its orientation, also supported the idea, assuming it could impart knowledge and skills to individuals that the market wasn't adequately serving. Finally, as a purely privately-oriented philosophy, the social mobility camp rejected the idea of public broadcasting outright; it was not the job of the government or society to provide Americans with programming that was not produced by the free market.

These public perspectives would make for uneasy bedfellows. If a point should be arrived at where the kind of content public broadcasting produces, reflecting as it does perceived corrections to perceived flaws in the programming produced by the free market, can be and is provided by private means, then their motivation for arguing for public broadcasting diminishes. They are not advocates of public broadcasting because they believe the public airwaves should be a public good, but because they want people to learn money-making skills. If those skills are imparted by the private market, then what good is public broadcasting? Under such a paradigm, the social efficiency camp would have every motivation to align with the social mobility proponents, and none to align with democratic equality. In 21st century broadcasting, such a paradigm exists: Modern broadcasting technology has removed from social efficiency proponents their motivation for supporting public broadcasting.

Case Study: Past Interaction Between Democratic Equality and Social Efficiency TV Camps

A commercial featuring Grammy-winner Esperanza Spalding (KCTS 9, 2012), in which she reflected on an important element in her own education, aptly illustrates the positive influence public broadcasting can have on a given child. I mean "education" here writ large, as educational historian Cremin (1976) meant it when he coined the term "educational ecology." To Cremin, education, or miseducation, can come from any part of the family or the society at large. Thus, television is as much an educator as a teacher, as TV was for Spaulding:

> The first moment I realized that music was something I wanted to do was when I saw Yo-Yo Ma performing on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* on PBS. The songs Mister Rogers wrote and the way that he spoke to young children gave little kids confidence. I think that's inspiring. It inspires you to embrace what may be different about you. So that music coming out of the TV and there's people that I really trusted and respected was really impactful [*sic*]. You feel like "Wow, that is so powerful and so moving and so beautiful. I wish I could do that." Once that aspiration really takes root in your mind, you can't stop. PBS certainly opened the doors to many possibilities. For me it opened up the avenue of music, which is probably the most important presence in my life, and it was first triggered when I saw Mister Rogers on PBS. (KCTS)

This anecdote illustrates the symbiotic relationship that has traditionally existed amongst proponents of public broadcasting in democracy equality and social efficiency

camps. The private market provided little classical music on television, and schools have limited time windows each day, meaning the arts often get the short shrift. However, here the public good of television was used to expose one individual to the path they would take in their adult lives for personal fulfillment and, more importantly to social efficiency proponents, economic gain.

Speaking not specifically of broadcasting but of all of the various educators in individuals' educational ecologies, Cremin (1976) said, "Comprehensively, one must recognize that education occurs not within the classroom alone but within the student's world at large. Relationally, one must think about how the aspects within that education-writ-large macrocosm interact with one another." Cremin further wrote:

> It may be the best the school can do is engage the instruction of the other educators and seek to strengthen or complement or correct or neutralize or countereducate or, most importantly, perhaps, try to develop in students an awareness of the other educators and an ability to deal with them on their own. (p. 62)

Brighouse (2006) recognized the need for "bridges" that connect the world of the school to the world-at-small, which is to say the world outside of the school, but specifically that world that is underrepresented or neglected by the world-at-large. He wrote that

> A school ethos that strongly identifies with mainstream popular culture and, for example, places special emphasis on mainstream professional sports ... tilts the experience of the children towards the interests that they would be likely to encounter and become enthusiastic about outside of school anyway. But a school

> that is not exactly countercultural, but perhaps extra-popular-cultural, would deliberately valorize numerous different kinds of activity not readily promoted outside the school. (880)

In other words, most of the educational influences in a student's ecology are echoed by popular culture and domestic life. In order that students have as many options as possible in their future lives, and as much freedom as possible as a consequence, they need to be exposed to as many worldviews and ways of life as possible.

Spalding's anecdote is an in-action demonstration of the kinds of bridges Brighouse meant, even if the "extra-popular-cultural" bridge here was built by public broadcasting and not public schools. Framed this way, public television was a co-educator for Spalding, and ideally what she learned in her schooling were lessons that informed or influenced her perceptions of public television, and what she learned from the latter were lessons that helped inform the lessons of the former. In Spalding's case, it appears her educational ecology functioned well and helped her to realize a thriving life.

YouTube, Yoyo Ma, and the Social Efficiency Perspective

Exposure to YoYo Ma changed Spalding's life and was a valuable part of her educational ecology. As I have written, this is an example of how interactions between democratic equality and social efficiency camps have traditionally worked (when they have worked). The private market did not provide adequate exposure to classical music content to reach Spalding, so public broadcasting filled that void. Note, however, that the social efficiency camp cares that we are providing a free public education to everyone for the economic betterment of everyone; ideologically, the camp does not particularly care

where that education comes from. Private broadcasters may not give classical music much attention, but in the modern broadcasting paradigm, one need not rely on any specific broadcasters, public or private, to provide the audio-video materials one seeks. A search of YouTube for "Yoyo Ma" returns hundreds of results. Young Esperanza Spalding might have needed PBS to introduce her to Ma, but today's young Spaldings need only an internet connection. From a social mobility perspective, public television has never served a purpose, and from a social efficiency perspective it no longer serves a unique purpose. The argument that public broadcasting is vital because it serves publics not well served by the market has undoubtedly been weakened by new technologies that can provide the same service but at no cost to taxpayers. Thus, the third way in which the modern broadcasting landscape may render traditional regulations moot is by providing the kinds of programming that current regulations were designed to foster from public broadcasters.

The Public Sphere and the Obsolescence of the American Broadcasting Systems

A fourth way in which the modern broadcasting landscape may render traditional regulations moot is by fulfilling one of the American broadcasting system's missions: enhancing the public sphere by expanding people's abilities to share messages and to contemplate the messages of others. I use the term *public sphere* as Habermas (1991) used it: a space to which all citizens have access and in which various publics deliberate freely about problems and possible solutions. Public opinion is created by "open communication and popular participation through which alternative directions for social life are collectively reflected upon and adjudicated" (Emirbayer & Sheller, 1999, p. 155).

One vision of early broadcast optimists was of media systems that facilitated the public sphere by democratizing, on a mass scale, the dissemination of opinions and facilitating the public deliberations vital to the maintenance of the public sphere. Some of these optimists consequently saw a need for broadcast systems to be as unfettered from government regulation as possible, to avoid the threat of censorship and facilitate public debate. From the perspective of the well-being of the public sphere, this is not an unreasonable concern. Price (1995) notes that for Habermas, "a properly working public sphere must actually have a limiting impact on the state" (p. 25). It is not hard to imagine how one might fear that too heavy a regulatory hand could lead to broadcast industries unable to exert a corrective influence on the government. So the concern was not unfounded, even if the actions taken as a result of this concern had unintended consequences, as I will address in the next paragraph. The optimists who viewed the future American broadcasting systems as enhancing access to the table of public discourse also pointed out the low bar for technical achievement needed by any citizens who sought to utilize the systems for self-expression. To read and write requires a great deal of education; to read and write well requires even more. On the other hand, even the least eloquent of writers, these optimists reasoned, can stand in front of a microphone and say what is on their minds.

Ironically, by leaving broadcasting largely to the whims of the market, these publics instead contributed to the undermining of the public sphere. Price (1995) noted that unrestricted access for citizens to the public sphere was, in the Habermasian conceptualization, a necessity for the sphere's proper maintenance and functioning.

However, by placing broadcasting in the marketplace, entry became limited to the very affluent and to large corporations because "the costs to participate are bid way up and entry is scarce and difficult" making the discourse of the broadcast industries not a new kind of Habermasian ideal but "a poor version of the public sphere" that has been "distorted, if not mutilated, by imbalances of access, wealth, and power" (p. 26). Thus, although "Broadcasting often creates the illusion of a public sphere" (p. 29), "there is something about the emergence and history of radio (and later television) that is almost antithetical to the idealized notions of the public sphere" (p. 27). Education and skill are not necessary to stand in front of a microphone and speak, but a great deal of money or a great deal of specialized training are necessary to either purchase time on television or to acquire employment in the industry. Both in terms of the content of its messages and the cost of broadcasting individual-level messages via the systems, the American broadcasting systems have failed to be truly representative or accessible.

One very simple metric for demonstrating that American broadcasting is not truly representative of the American people is the presence of minorities in broadcast television, both in front of and behind the camera. The number of minorities depicted in scripted broadcast television has been on the decline, and "minorities are still underrepresented among creators of broadcast scripted TV series by a factor of 11 to 1" (Collins, 2016). As for the prohibitive cost of access to broadcasting as an advertiser, in 2014, the average cost of 30 seconds of advertising during network primetime programming was $112,000 (Ad Age, 2014). Thus both in terms of the programming it produces and the cost of advertising, American broadcasting falls far short of the

representation and accessibility envisioned by the most hopeful of early broadcasting stakeholders. Instead, it creates a distorted, skewed manifestation of the public sphere, which neglects unpopular people and voices.

Some of the early advocates for the creation of public broadcasting saw it as a corrective to this distortion of the sphere. First, by existing independently of market demands, public broadcasting could serve demographics who were heretofore underserved by private, profit- driven broadcasters. For example, opera may not be popular enough to appear amongst private broadcasters' programming. That would be a disservice to opera fans, who are as deserving as any other segment of the population of seeing their interests reflected in the content of broadcasters who profit from publicly-granted licenses. Public broadcasters, on the other hand, freed from the profit-driven quest for a massive audience, could cater to such segments. Similarly, radical political views may be deemed too unpopular to be given serious attention by private broadcasters who rely on maximizing their audiences in order to maximize profit, but public broadcasters would have no such incentive to neglect those perspectives and so could service them. Further, this independence from the market would allow public broadcasters to more fully serve the public sphere by allowing them to focus on educational and informational programming to an extent that private broadcasters would not.

Things rarely work exactly as they were intended. The design for the American public broadcasting systems implemented by Congress did not produce the hoped-for righting of the skewed version of the public sphere being transmitted across the airwaves.

Those who favored a robust, public broadcasting system noted that this model still placed public broadcasters at the mercy of government and market demands. It is easy to see how offending government figures might result in a loss of funding; perhaps more opaque is the connection between the market and public broadcasting funding.

For one illustration of the potential influence of the market on public broadcasting, consider the example of David Koch (Caldwell, Deal, & Lesson, 2013), who was one half of the Koch brothers and thus co-owner of the second largest private corporation in the United States. Koch served on the board of two PBS affiliates and donated $23 million to public broadcasting in 2012 alone. A team of independent filmmakers began work on a documentary about the influence of money in general, and the Kochs in particular, on the election process following the Citizens United case (*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 2010). Public television producer and distributor Independent Television Service (ITS) had agreed to help fund and distribute the production, known as *Citizen Koch* (Caldwell, Deal, & Lesson, 2013), but then later withdrew its support. The filmmakers allege that ITS backed out because it feared incurring David Koch's wrath. An ITS spokesperson denied that allegation, saying that support was withdrawn because a cut of the film that was submitted to ITS did not match the written proposal that had earned ITS' initial support. A PBS ombudsman writing about the incident pointed out that there was no proof per se to bolster either side's version. In doing so, that ombudsman was honest about the circumstances that make it easy to suspect there may be merit to the filmmakers' account, writing "the unspoken influence of money — especially big money — can be thought-provoking inside

organizations, especially public ones that are always scrounging and live within a unique and uncertain fund-raising environment" (Getler, 2013).

Whether or not Koch's influence, or fear of his influence, is what led to the end of the financial support, the potential for conflicts of interest within this paradigm is readily apparent. The point is not that support *was* withdrawn for fear of offending Koch, but that support *might* have been withdrawn for fear of offending Koch. Public broadcasters have to rely on private support to do their work. Those private supporters may object to some of the voices reflected in public broadcasts and may therefore withhold their support. In those instances, public broadcasters would have to choose between risking the financial support they need to perform their function, or silencing underrepresented voices, which could compel them to side with the more affluent side of the conflict. Better to make the choice that will allow you to perform some of your mission rather than the choice that could result in more than one voice being silenced. That is not, of course, to say that is what happened in this case. It is to say that Koch had motive to object to the film, public broadcasters had motive to want to appease him, and the film did not get made with public resources. By allowing private interests to exert disproportionate influence over public broadcasting, a public resource, one that should be equally accessible to all, could become more accessible to the more privileged. Instead of an extension of the public sphere, public broadcasting in such a hypothetical (or is it?) scenario functions as an extension of the market, or at least appears to.

The change in broadcasting that has arguably rendered any corrective legislative steps moot here is not in the industry itself but in technological advancements in society

at large. The content of American broadcasting may offer a skewed version of the public agenda, and the cost of advertising may render it an unviable option for the average citizen, but new technologies have provided alternative avenues by which Americans may speak to, and be heard by, each other. When anyone with a webcam and an idea can reach a potential audience of millions, it becomes hard to justify the expenditure in public broadcasting on the basis that it is a means of ensuring that underrepresented voices are heard. The internet has also introduced new sources of funding. Consider the aforementioned documentary *Citizen Koch*; despite losing their public funding, the producers were still able to complete the documentary thanks to the online crowdfunding website Kickstarter.com (Mayer, 2013). Ownership of a smartphone offers the ability to create slick, professional-level audio and video, with a relatively low entry cost and learning curve. Thus, the fourth way in which the modern broadcasting landscape may render traditional regulations moot is due to an emergence of other technological means that can be used to fulfill one of American broadcasting's most important charges: enhancing Americans' access to the public sphere.

Lack of Demand for a More Robust Public System and a more Regulated Private System

A fifth reason why the current broadcasting paradigm may arguably render broadcasting regulations moot is that there is no apparent, widespread demand for such legislation. Even if the broadcast industries, as conceived and executed by Congress decades ago, do not serve the public interest and sphere, if that is the paradigm devised by elected officials, and if the citizens those officials are serving do not seem unhappy

with the arrangement, then it becomes hard to justify regulatory intrusion upon this model. True, with a proper public sphere and appropriate deliberations, those millions of television viewers who seem satisfied with the status quo may instead call for the design of the current broadcasting systems, particularly their public manifestations, to be revisited. However, it seems paternalistic to justify implementing changes on the assumption that those meant to benefit from such changes will later appreciate it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed how the landscape of American broadcasting has changed to the point where most broadcasting regulations and public broadcasting systems are moot. I first tried to show that the government has largely diminished its own regulatory role in the enforcement of the "public good" provision of American broadcasting. Next, I tried to show that technological advancements and societal characteristics (such as citizens' indifference) have arguably made obsolete a basic argument in favor of stricter regulations and more robust public broadcasting systems: use of the public airwaves should require the public's approval. In the next chapter, I will turn to broadcasting history once again, looking this time at regulations affecting programming aimed at children. In doing so I mean to show how often that segment of the population has been poorly served by the American broadcasting systems.

CHAPTER III

BRIEF HISTORY OF BROADCASTING REGULATIONS AND CHILDREN

In this chapter, I will attempt to relate a concise history of television regulations applying specifically to children's programming. In doing so, I hope to show that despite the oft-recognized societal need to treat children as special cases and protect them from perceived threats, children nevertheless traditionally have not been well served by the American broadcasting systems.

Comedian and actor Dan Aykroyd portrayed a recurring character known as Irwin Mainway on the sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (Michaels, 1975). In these skits, Mainway appeared on a consumer affairs program to defend the children's toys produced by his company, toys that were, to any rational person, indefensible. He sold children plastic bags and rubber bands branded as an Astronaut costume, with the bag serving as a space helmet and the rubber band used to affix the helmet over a child's head. Another toy was nothing more than a bag of broken glass, another a collection of oily rags and safety pins (Sheffield, 2015). The humor in these skits derives from the earnestness with which Mainway defends the monstrous, and from the fact that the premise, as exaggerated as Mainway's cruel indifference is, has a foundation of suspected truth: Market forces do not always serve vulnerable populations effectively.

Fears for Children's Well-being

Society fears for children's well-being, obsesses over it, and perceives threats to it everywhere, including in the form of businesses that would endanger children in service to the bottom line. It is unfair to paint all businesses who serve children's needs and

interests with that brush, but there can be no doubt it applies to some. For example, "between 2004 and 2009, the [Consumer Product Safety Commission] recalled more than 180 million pieces of children's jewelry" for containing lead or cadmium (Palmer, 2013, para. 1). In 2012, the Commission filed lawsuits against manufacturers who sold toys with small magnets that could easily be swallowed by children. "The magnets can come together, pulling through or trapping their intestines," which is why many companies had voluntarily stopped producing such magnet sets, but that didn't stop those companies the Commission sued from knowingly endangering children. "They're still selling products that are dangerous to children," said Commission spokesman Scott Wolfson of the companies that were sued (Palmer, para. 4).

Benefits Associated with Some Children's Programming

In a Chapter 1, I wrote of the work of Friedrich (later Cofer) and Stein (1973), who found that when preschoolers exposed to *Misterogers' Neighborhood*[5] were compared to children who viewed neutral or aggressive programming, the former showed higher levels of self-control, task persistence, rule obedience, and patience with delayed gratification. Furthermore, they found that children of lower socioeconomic statuses, a demographic that is more susceptible to some of the negative effects of television viewing (Warren, 2005), were more cooperative and nurturing, and were more verbally expressive about their feelings after viewing *Misterogers'* than children in other conditions. Friedrich and Stein (1975) later found that certain kinds of television viewing led children to be more helpful and empathetic.

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[5] The precursor to the children's program *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

Despite the statistical significance and seemingly good news of these findings, and despite Americans' preoccupation with the well-being of children, these studies were met with little reaction from the nonscholarly world. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Cofer (1996) believed she understood why their work did not result in significant change to the American broadcasting system, saying:

> My view of the role of science in society was remarkably naïve at the time of our studies. I overestimated the power of empirical research to affect public policy where enormous financial interests are involved. I underestimated the extent to which false political chasms had withered our political discourse.... Policy makers often want "proof" from research, that is, flawless scientific data that establish direct one-way causality.... Responsible researchers cannot deliver that sort of irrefutable causal proof. Humans are far too complex and our theories and methods far too limited. I now believe that when we frame and discuss social problems primarily as scientific ones, the larger purpose may be defeated. The guises of objective, value-free sciences are dangerous, for meaningful discussion is obscured, cut short, and divorced from real concerns and lives. (pp. 150-1)

I think Cofer's story vividly illustrates some of the ways that research and policy can miss each other, so I would like to turn now to two anecdotes Cofer cited as influential in her scholarly journey. The first helped set her on her research path. When tasked by the U.S. Senate, via the Surgeon General, to examine the link between children viewing television violence and behaving aggressively, she chose also to study *Mister*

Rogers' Neighborhood (Rogers, 1968) because of the program's influence on her own son:

> Matthew loved and trusted Mister Rogers almost immediately. He soon found words and insights in the Neighborhood that became an important part of his everyday life. When he was excited about a new accomplishment or creation or frustrated by a difficult task, he used language from the program to express his feelings. The content informed his efforts to handle rules, learn new skills, and get along with playmates. He was able to tell himself – and me – that "I need to take the time to do this myself" or that "sometimes it is hard to share." If my child could find such meaning in the program, why not include it in our design to see if other young children would respond in similar ways? (Cofer, 1996, p. 146)

As we have seen, Cofer and her partner did indeed find empirical, statistically-significant evidence that other children could be and were similarly affected by the program. However, we have turned away from science for the time being, so let us look at the second anecdote presented by Cofer, one that indicates the fruitfulness of the research path upon which she set out thanks to the former anecdote.

> The findings I have described are statistically significant because enough children responded to the particular experimental conditions or experiences that the behavioral differences measured cannot be accounted for by chance. Those are the scientific, normative rules that govern researchers. But it is easy to miss the individual child in such reports. One boy [...] still frequents my memory, and he is an equally significant part of the research story. (pp. 148-9)

This boy was a member of a kindergarten class in which Cofer and her partner were conducting their research. He was an aggressive boy, "the very profile of a child who would respond to violent television with gusto" (p. 148). And yet one day, he responded to another kind of television content with gusto. On this occasion, Cofer was concealed behind a curtain and operating a puppet that she was using to act out content from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Specifically, she was roleplaying the concerns of the puppet character Henrietta Pussycat that she would be forgotten because of a new, glamorous character who was coming to her neighborhood.

> The boy raced into the room, wiggled on his chair, and pulled his hair – but just as suddenly became rapt with attention when Henrietta told of her distress…. He then placed his hand gently on the puppet's face and stroked it slowly, saying, "There's only one kitty like you, Henrietta. Don't you know that nobody can ever take your place? We love you and we will always love you no matter who else comes." He went on, speaking reassuringly and stroking the puppet's face for what seemed like many minutes. It was hard to keep to the script because tears were coming down my cheeks. I knew that for one child the program and an enabling teacher had made a difference. (p. 149)

The program made a difference for that child, but unfortunately Cofer's and Stein's research did not make a notable difference on Capitol Hill or amongst producers of for-profit children's programming. There was no legislative call from Congress for increased funding to public television producers, more research along those same lines, or for private producers to begin applying this research to their own programs. Despite

assurances dating back to the nascent days of radio that the market would supply better and more educative programming than would public broadcasters, there was no rush from for-profit producers to create programming informed by this research. Private broadcasters were obligated to serve the public, the FCC and Congress were obligated to enforce broadcasters' obligations or revoke their licenses, and Cofer and Stein had revealed a clear way broadcasting could serve the public, and yet there was no discernible consequence. It seems to me only natural that some people look at American broadcasters and see Irwin Mainway.

Broadcasters' Attempts to Elude Regulation

One can also see a Mainway-like cynicism in the way some broadcasters have traditionally tried to obey only the letter, and not the spirit, of the laws that enable their profits. In 1990, Congress passed, and President Bush allowed to enter into law without signing, a bill designed to increase children's educational television content. The Children's Television Act mandated that broadcasters "demonstrate their commitment to the educational needs of children as a condition of renewing their lucrative licenses every five years" (Andrews, 1993, para. 3). The language of the law was exploitable in its vagary, and many broadcasters responded to it "by citing the educational value of 'G.I. Joe,' 'Superboy,' and reruns of old favorites like 'Leave it to Beaver'" (para. 6). At the time of the bill's passage, the National Association of Broadcasters had "endorsed it because it appeared to give them the latitude they felt they needed" (para. 18). Citing First Amendment concerns, the law stopped short of defining "educational" in a legally

useful way and of imposing quantifiable standards for broadcasters to meet when proving said commitment to educational programming.

But little changed in broadcasting content, and by 1993 the FCC was "putting television stations on notice" (Andrews, 1993. para. 1) that obeying merely the law's spirit no longer would be tenable, and hinting that the commission may return to time quota requirements, mandating that broadcasters air X amount of approved educational content over Y amount of time. One congressperson expressed approval of this new, tougher stance, and in doing so alluded to the kind of Mainway-like image many Americans held of broadcasters: "My feeling is the F.C.C. and the broadcasters have been winking at each other for the past few years" (Andrews, para. 15). Broadcasters had incentive to make with the winking; strict enforcement of the provisions of the Children's Television Act, like strict enforcement of the Public Interest provision before it, meant broadcasters "might be obliged to produce more programming that has limited commercial and profit-making potential" (Andrews, para. 13).

Here then is another manifestation of the uneasy ideological alliances that led to the formation of the American broadcasting systems: Congress passing legislation that is crafted with the cooperation of broadcasters so as to ensure that it isn't too onerous in their eyes. The FCC imposes and enforces regulations so as to ensure the public interest. Broadcasters are meant to abide by said regulations so as to serve said interest. The public does not essentially enter into the equation; private citizens may make their thoughts known, but the active public presence of the 1970s FCC was gone, now replaced, once again, with a system wherein poultry farmer and fox agree that the

henhouse needs guarded, but only to an extent that ensures the fox maximum chicken-and-egg yield. Broadcasters did not assert that the government had no interest in encouraging educational children's programming. Nor did they assert that the legislative effort to create such an outcome was improper; they had endorsed the bill, thereby implicitly acknowledging that they had a duty to provide educational children's programming and that the government had the right to demand that duty be met. And yet, the law that was passed was one in which the government had little power to police, save through FCC action. Further, the FCC had traditionally been reluctant to treat broadcasters as targets of regulation and rather had been eager to treat broadcasters as partners in creating regulation. When asked to acknowledge that the government has a say in, and the requisite power to pass and enforce, broadcast regulations in return for their lucrative licenses, broadcasters readily did so, provided the Children's Television Act did not specify exactly what that meant. *We admit you have the right to compel us to serve the public interest,* broadcasters seemed to be saying, *but you do not have the right to articulate the consequences of failure in any meaningful, significant way*. As FCC general counsel Jeff Baumann put it, "We are surprised that the commission would even consider turning back the clock to the 1970s and imposing [quotas]" (Andrews, 1993, para. 19). In other words, *We in the government and we broadcasters acknowledge that the government has the authority to tell broadcasters what to do and punish them if they do not comply, but how dare you even consider telling them explicitly and specifically what to do or how you'll enforce those instructions?*

A Neoliberal FCC and the end to the Progressivism of the 1970s

The eventual general lack of action and enforcement in the wake of the Children's Television Act was probably a byproduct of the mania for deregulation under the Reagan administration. That administration's FCC took a laissez-faire approach to the broadcast industries which extended to its consideration of children. Under new chairman Mark Fowler, the commission's assumption was that whatever was popular with the public met the public interest obligation. In other words, popularity meant the public was interested, and whatever most interested the public should be prioritized rather than interests approved of by elites or special interest groups like educators or minority rights advocates (Minow & Lamay, 1995).

This interpretation of the public interest component of broadcasting led to at least two related consequences. First, it led to a narrower understanding of broadcasting's role in the public sphere. The entire argument behind the creation of the FCC (and the subsequent creation of the American Public Broadcasting Systems) was predicated on the assumption that "public interest" was not the same as "market interest." There were segments of the public not well served by private broadcasting, and there was a consequent understanding that those publics were still entitled to service, whether it was profitable or not. If, on the other hand, one followed the contemporary FCC's thinking, so long as programming was popular, it served the public and therefore the FCC's obligations to the people were being met. Further, so long as broadcasters were profitable (and they were always profitable), then the FCC was serving that constituent well, too. In other words, the 1980s FCC had created a perpetually successful

philosophy; so long as the ad populum fallacy won the day and ratings equaled interest, the FCC had nothing else to do but to point at the unimpeded, unregulated dance between licensee and audience and pat itself on the back.

A second consequence of the Fowler FCC's new interpretation of that agency's duties was that, now unfettered by their most onerous civic duty, private broadcasters "began to restructure, dismantle, or simply abandon ... news divisions, children's programs, standards and practices departments," (Minow & Lamay, 1995, p. 103). This was exactly the sort of course of action that democratic equality television advocates had long predicted would occur if broadcasters were ever able to shed their public interest responsibilities, and also the sort of course of action that broadcasters had promised would never be taken if only they would be allowed to shed their public interest responsibilities. "In December 1983," Newton Minow, FCC chair under President Kennedy, once wrote, "forced by a federal court to proceed with a rulemaking on children's television, Fowler's FCC issued a report on children's programming practices and said there was no need for action" (p. 104). FCC member Henry M. Rivera strenuously disagreed with the conclusion reached by a majority of his colleagues, saying:

> I wish I had the eloquence of Mark Antony for this eulogy. Our federal children's television policy commitment deserves no less at this, its interment. Make no mistake – this is a funeral and my colleagues have here written the epitaph of the FCC's involvement in children's television.… The majority has dishonored our most treasured national asset – children. It has set the notion of enforceable

> children's programming obligations on a flaming pyre, adrift from federal concern, in the hope that the concept will be consumed in its entirety and never return to the FCC's shores. (qtd. in Minnow & Lamay, p. 104).

Notice in Rivera's language a concern for and objectification of children. They are "our most treasured national asset," not citizens entitled to rights simply by virtue of having those rights. Rights are framed here as an investment in an asset, not as privileges conferred upon a human being simply for being a human being. This kind of understanding of children's rights is not at all uncommon, and I will return to it in Chapters 6 and 7.

Not long before Rivera wrote this eulogy for government involvement in children's television programming, his colleagues were writing on the wall. Chairman Fowler and FCC advisor Daniel Brennan noted that "an advertiser-supported system may be unable to meet the demand for children's programs because of the limited range of advertisers wishing to sponsor these programs" (Minnow & Lamay, 1995, p. 105). They added that cable offered an alternative source of children's programs, but acknowledged that "this service will not be offered in many communities" (p. 105). Note that the pro-market commissioners here are acknowledging that the market will not fix all problems, but note also their cold disregard for the consequences of this acknowledgement. They see here the probable imminent underserving of a segment of the public by broadcasters, the very sort of thing that the FCC was created to regulate and prevent. Their answer, however, was not to demand quality children's programming in return for broadcasters' continued ability to profit off of a public resource. Instead, the commissioners argued

that the answer was to wait for technology to enable civic duty and profitability to intersect: “For some time to come, some child audiences will remain without access to specialized cable services” (p. 105). The FCC’s stance here seems to be that the market fixes everything, and if it does not, then it is necessary to wait until it does before enjoying equal access to a good that is, at least in part, public. The reasoning continues that if some citizens enjoy favored access to this semipublic good, this injustice must be tolerated until technological markets resolve it, rather than creating regulation to even the playing field. In choosing between the rights of publics not well served by the market and the rights of broadcasters to ignore their obligation to serve all, the FCC sided with the latter.

Civics calculus like this computes when you remember Fowler’s vision of the FCC’s role in the process of broadcasting: “The commission’s task was to make commercial broadcasting[6] more economically rational, to promote competition, and to do away with what Fowler characterized as the ‘legal fictions’ of the Communications Act’s public-interest standard” (Minnow & Lamay, 1995, p. 106). In a sense, this was an FCC that sought to serve the public by making it easier for broadcasters to do whatever *they* felt served the public. It was an FCC that shielded broadcasters from legislators and citizens so that those broadcasters could maximize profits by providing whatever service they deemed appropriate.

If this is an accurate vision for the FCC’s mission, then Fowler’s disregard for the neglect children in the television marketplace were facing was understandable, but I

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6 Which was already highly lucrative.

argue that this vision is a perversion of the FCC's mission. Why would Congress create an agency meant in part to shield an industry from regulation? If shielding the broadcast industry from onerous oversight was the mission, why create an agency in the first place? Why not simply codify those rights Congress felt broadcasters had and codify limitations on the legislative burdens that broadcasters faced? In other words, wouldn't Congress cut out the regulatory intermediary and protect the broadcasting industry's profitability itself? The very existence of the FCC implies that it was meant to police the broadcast industry, not the federal government or the viewing public. Furthermore, the many times that various courts, including the Supreme Court, upheld the FCC's regulatory decisions indicates that the judiciary approved of said regulatory function. By deciding for itself that all previous salient judges, legislators, and citizens were wrong about its mission, Fowler's FCC upended the product of several decades of democratic deliberations, absconding with the right to police broadcasting and placing it not in the hands of democratically-elected and appointed officials but in the hands of the regulated industry itself.

Historical Lack of Action on Children's Behalf

I have begun this history of children's broadcasting regulations in a curious place, I admit. Beginning in the 1970s with Friedrich and Stein and then leaping forward to 1990, haven't I skipped a lot of important history? First, no, I have not skipped a lot of history. Second, I think these two points in time act as a microcosm of the entirety of the history of children's television programming regulations: Scholars and concerned citizens

advise, and legislators and broadcasters largely ignore that advice and/or the judiciary finds it legally unenforceable.

Let me first try to show that I have not skipped much history and let me tidy up where my narrative has indeed overlooked salient information. To the former goal, to show that I have not skipped much information, let me quote once again the FCC Chairman under President Kennedy, Newton Minow, who once wrote that "The 1970s were also the first decade in which special note was taken of *children* and television. Only twice before, in its 1960 programming policy statement and during my tenure as chairman, had the FCC specifically listed service to children as part of a broadcaster's public service obligations" (Minnow & Lamay, p. 99, emphasis in original). I shall wait until Chapter 6 to explain why this neglect of one specific aspect of the public interest, children's interests, strikes me as such an injustice, and merely say now that the "special note" taken in the 1970s to which Minow refers led to little in the form of long-term special interventions.

As I have previously mentioned in this chapter, FCC general counsel Jeff Baumann responded to the Clinton-era's FCC's hint that it may start requiring broadcasters to return to the days of quotas for children's and educational programming by saying "We are surprised that the commission would even consider turning back the clock to the 1970s and imposing [quotas]" (Andrews, 1993, para. 19). One could correctly infer from this quote that during that decade the FCC took a more heavy-handed regulatory approach to children's programming. That heavy hand started not with conscientious FCC commissioners or progressive legislators but with concerned citizens.

The nonprofit organization Action for Children's Television (ACT) drew attention to ways in which they saw children being underserved by the television industry. Their work gained further attention and credence in 1972 when the Surgeon General announced that scientific evidence indicated a clear connection between television content and aggressive behavior in children. Riding a seeming wave of reform and progressive intervention, the FCC in 1975 began pressuring networks to set aside the first 2 hours of prime time for "family-viewing time" (Minow & Lamay, p. 99). That family-viewing time mandate would not survive its day in court. The next time the topic of children and broadcasting was addressed was the aforementioned report issued by the Fowler FCC that found that no action was needed on the issue, the report that prompted Commissioner Henry Rivera to eulogize "the FCC's involvement in children's television" (p. 104).

It is not as though there was *no* FCC, legislative, or judicial interest in children and broadcasting between the 1970s and the passage of the Children's Television Act, but that interest generally had little efficacy. For example, at the tail end of that most progressive of broadcasting decades, in 1978, the Supreme Court handed down a victory for the FCC that had lasting effects, albeit effects that could have been longer lasting. In 1973, a New York City man reported local nonprofit radio station WBAI to the FCC for broadcasting comedian George Carlin's famously vulgar stand-up routine "Seven Deadly Words" (Bella, 2012). The FCC declined to fine the station, but did warn them that broadcasting such content violated their license and would in the future be grounds for more concrete disciplinary action. The station sued over the decision, calling it a First Amendment violation and starting a legal odyssey that would end 5 years later before the

Supreme Court. The Court upheld the FCC's right to regulate content in the interest of protecting children, finding that limited efforts at limiting offensive content are not prohibited by the Constitution (*FCC v. Pacifica*, 1978). As Justice John Paul Stevens put it in the Court's decision:

> Of all forms of communication, broadcasting has the most limited First Amendment protection. Among the reasons for [this] is the uniquely pervasive presence that medium of expression occupies in the lives of our people. Broadcasts extend into the privacy of the home and it is impossible completely to avoid those that are patently offensive. Broadcasting, moreover, is uniquely accessible to children. (qtd. in Paulu, p. 178, 1981)

This decision in the case of *Pacifica v. FCC* led to the creation of "Safe Harbor Hours," an FCC policy that funneled sexual content and indecent-but-not-obscene language into the hours between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., times when minors are not likely to be viewing. Thus, children were shielded from inappropriate content, and yet broadcasters and consenting adult audiences did not have their First Amendment rights too greatly abridged.

Before he became chair of the FCC, Fowler saw the reason in the verdict, saying the decision was potentially dangerous, but acknowledging that:

> Many children below the age of literacy watch television. This situation may justify regulation of indecent materials carried over the air. Indecent material can be withheld from distribution to children if it is in the form of print or film, and

> scheduling of adult programs for late-night viewing can and does give parents more control over what their children watch. (qtd. in Minow & Malay, p. 126)

But by the time he was FCC Chairman, Fowler had changed his mind, and as the 1970s turned to the 1980s, the new FCC held "that even 'narrow restrictions' meant to protect children were impermissible" (pp. 126-127).

Fowler's successors tried to reassert some of the Commission's authority to deem some materials inappropriate for some timeslots, but faced pushback from broadcasters who saw any timeslot-content limitations or content quotas as unconstitutional limitations on their free speech. Almost immediately, they dismissed time-slot regulations as quaint and outdated, meaningless in the age of time-shifting and cable television (p. 127).

Those death announcements were not entirely unfounded. Courts have often rejected Pacifica-inspired regulatory attempts, but those rejections had been because those specific attempts were deemed overreaches as far as the specific timeslots and materials involved, not because those courts were rejecting the very idea that that the government has any role to play in determining what kind of broadcast content is acceptable at certain times of day. As we saw earlier in this chapter, by the 1990s broadcasters were calling any quota limitations unacceptable, and decried the simple implication that they may again be invoked. Now in the digital age, most of these suggested limitations seem quaint at best. What does it matter if traditional broadcasters do not air sexual content at particular hours when any child with a smartphone can access hardcore pornography 24-7?

It would seem that those market forces that have long advocated for diminishing the FCC's oversight powers have won out in their decades-long clash with those who favored a more paternalistic approach to regulation. Newton Minnow, the aforementioned FCC chair under Kennedy, once wrote of a "child's First Amendment," an unwritten regulation that exists when reading between the lines of court decisions relating to children and free speech. Much as the Supreme Court has ruled that the right to privacy, although not explicitly listed in the Constitution, could be inferred from the Bill of Rights, Newton concluded that a child's First Amendment could be inferred from free speech cases involving children. He saw this "Amendment" as necessary given children's unique role in society:

> The assertion that a child's place in the "marketplace of ideas" is no different from an adult's, that *a child's obvious need to be protected from harm* and *to be taught the lessons of civic society* is not "compelling" enough to require broadcasters to honor it, is simply wrong.... It is a well-settled principle of common law that children are a special case under the First Amendment. (Minnow & Lamay, 1993, p. 112, emphasis mine)

And he saw children's vulnerable position in society as the impetus behind the kinds of legal decisions he believed formed the "child's First Amendment." First, there were those cases that may have overturned broadcasting regulations related to children, but wherein the court acknowledged the need to protect children from some kinds of broadcasting content, so long as said protections were narrow in their scopes and applications and did not unduly burden broadcasters. The second lineage of decisions that Newton saw as

forming this other First Amendment were those that acknowledged children's right to free expression, but that see that right as more limited than the equivalent adult right. The case that perhaps best epitomizes this line of precedent is the well-known *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969), a case involving high school students who wore black armbands to protest the Vietnam conflict, in opposition to their school's dress code. In Tinker, the Court held that children do indeed enjoy positive First Amendment protections in schools (in other words, they have the right to express themselves even when in school), but that right could be limited if said expressions impeded a school's ability to teach students because those expressions were potentially distracting, disruptive, or indecent.

Newton may have recognized a positive aspect to the freedom afforded children in their First Amendment, but he said nothing about it beyond an allusion to Tinker. In describing children's free speech rights, his focus is almost entirely on negative freedoms, on preventing children from accessing inappropriate content. Newton is hardly unique in this. Fear of negative consequences as a result of message exposure is most often what people mean when they refer to their concerns about children and their media use and regulations of that media. There is a common impulse to regulate children's media exposure by framing such regulations as negative freedoms: "We must protect children from viewing harmful materials."

According to the most recent research into the topic I was able to locate, the most common strategy used by parents to mediate their children's television consumption is what scholars have called *restrictive mediation*. In restrictive mediation, parents mediate television consumption not by watching along with children and offering input or

guidance about the programming, but instead by limiting the amount or kind of consumption (Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, & Engelbertson, 1999; Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marse, 1999). This parental strategy is reflected and extended by most governmental interventions into broadcasting for children, which have tended to focus on negative freedom approaches (such as limits on when programming deemed inappropriate for children may be aired; ratings systems; the V-chip, a device that allows parents to block some programming; and regulations affecting what kind of advertising is allowed during children's programming).

Rarely is there a complementary, positive-freedom-oriented impulse focused on ensuring children can access those materials that benefit or interest them. However, such an impulse does indeed exist. The potential for television to be a positive influence on children's lives has long been recognized, even if it is not paid the attention that its alleged negative effects are.

As further evidence of this impulse to examine ways in which media use can be helpful to children, a number of scholars over the past several decades have performed quantitative studies to identify and measure the possible benefits of television exposure. For example, at least one study has shown that television content could help alleviate children's fears. Following up on a study in which "40% of parents of preschool-aged children spontaneously mentioned the television series *The Incredible Hulk* as a program that had caused their child to become emotionally upset," these researchers found that exposure to an episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* significantly reduced children's fears of the former program (Cantor, Sparks, & Hoffner, p. 272, 1988).

Cantor, Sparks, and Hoffner's (1988) study (seemingly unintentionally) illustrates something about this positive freedom impulse: It is often the product of public broadcasting, and in those instances can be seen as a corrective to the excesses of private broadcasting. It was the market that frightened children with *The Incredible Hulk* (Johnson, 1978). It was the publicly-funded *Mister Rogers Neighborhood* that tried to set that right. The market tends to create media products that are "radically 'privatizing' or 'individualizing' our use of leisure time," leading to declines in community identity and activities (Putnam, 1995, p. 75). Public broadcasting can[7] treat those viewers as people instead of products, as in the case of this specific example of children's public programming.

Nevertheless, even if one accepts Minnow's argument for a child's First Amendment that sees the need to provide both positive and negative self-expression rights to children, and even if one accepts that public television represents the domain in which the former group of rights is most often respected, that does not necessarily mean that it is the duty of the American taxpayer to fund such public programming. Just because something is a good does not mean it is a public responsibility. Nevertheless, I do think that Minnow's conceptualization of a child's First Amendment is too limited and too preoccupied with negative freedoms. Public broadcasting represents one excellent way to serve those positive freedoms that have traditionally been ignored by the worlds of scholarship and law; further, the creation and financing of a robust public broadcasting

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[7] Public broadcasting can do this, but often does not. In Chapter 7, I will look in detail at some ways I think public broadcasting does not serve the American people well and some changes to the industry that I think would make it more responsive to those people's interests and needs.

system is, both for the sake of children and by virtue of their special position in the public sphere, a public responsibility.

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN IMPROVED PUBLIC BROADCASTING SYSTEM FOR CHILDREN

In this chapter, I will attempt to lay the foundations for a vision of a public broadcasting system that I think would be more robust and of better service to children. I will begin by trying to explain how the impulse to educate and the impulse to censor are often intertwined, and how that entanglement is both unjust and often to the detriment of children. Next, I will briefly address Brighouse's (2006) conceptualization of flourishing, and go on to try to explain how an education for flourishing must necessarily be (a) positive-freedom-oriented and (b) diverse enough to serve the future flourishing of as wide a range of children possible. The implications of these premises for education writ large and public broadcasting specifically may not be immediately clear, but I will then attempt to clarify those issues in Chapter 5.

Intersections of Censorship and Education

Concern about media's influence on children is nothing new, of course. Former television executives William F. Baker and George Dessart (1998) note that the earliest legal action brought against a media product in the United States was a case in Massachusetts in 1821, the same decade, they note, in which that state became the first to establish compulsory schooling. The authors make no explicit assertion of some shared mechanism at work behind an impulse to school and an impulse to censor. Nevertheless, by juxtaposing the legal case with an aside about its historical adjacency to public schooling, the authors seem at least to insinuate a connection.

Because I do not want to put words in Baker and Dessart's mouths, I will put words in my own: The impulse to educate[8] and the impulse to censor are often distinct branches on a shared tree. Many of the activities, traditions, and institutions commonly associated with the label "education" are preoccupied with concerns about children's negative freedoms. In loco parentis, schools act to protect children from harms real and perceived, ostensibly and theoretically to protect them from want and need in their futures. Education here is not perceived as a vehicle to take children to their own individualized flourishing lives, as in the case of a conceptualization of schooling that we will encounter later in this chapter. Nor is it, à la Dewey, conceived as a vehicle to take children into adult society, to be welcomed into the historical stream of *e pluribus unum*. Instead, here education is conceived in part as a call to prevent students from becoming anything other than an adult who functions within societal niches approved by elected officials, industries, schools, and society. It is the institutional equivalent of the parental cry "No child of mine is going to…"

Consider one manifestation of this tendency to conflate education and censorship, and note how it denied some people their rightful place at the table of public discourse. PBS once opted not to distribute an episode of the cartoon *Postcards from Buster* that prominently featured a lesbian couple and their children after word of its impending broadcast met with backlash (Salamon, 2005). An executive at Alabama Public Television, who said he would not have aired the episode even if it had been nationally distributed, framed this as a parental issue, not a children's one. He pointed out that

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[8] Be it in or out of a school setting.

Alabama PBS affiliates aired programs "that deal with gay lifestyles all the time." However, he argued, to air such programming as children's fare denies parents their role in deciding to what issues their children are exposed. "Parents can make the decision about when they want to talk about lesbian parents. If PBS sent a program down that said there was no Santa Claus, I wouldn't air that one either. Parents should make that decision, too" (Salamon, 2005, para. 5).

From the perspective of public broadcasting as a public good, I find the argument for preempting the program (that the topic of same-sex couples should be left to parents to discuss, or not discuss, with their children) problematic for two reasons. First, although there is no doubt that some topics are inappropriate for children, children are also entitled to participate within the public sphere, even if it is to a more limited extent than adults (I will return to this point in Chapter 6). Limiting their ability to be made aware of homosexual-led families is an imposition on that entitlement. It cuts them off from participation by hiding items on the public agenda from view. Their parents may not approve of that content, but, as Brighouse (2006) argues, children have to be exposed to lives that differ from their parents' worldviews. Simply knowing that some households are led by two men or two women doesn't necessarily require children to be introduced to content that is inappropriate for them, any more than seeing a televised heterosexual couple necessarily means they've been introduced to sexual content. However, gaining access to knowledge of public affairs is a necessity if children are to grown into flourishing adults. Further, consider how impactful it might be to a lonely homosexual child being raised by strict homophobes to simply learn of the possibility of

one day being in a healthy, happy same-sex relationship. It is unlikely such a child would ever be shown such a pathway to flourishing by his or her parents, and thus for that child the odds of finding a self-satisfying life path would be significantly curtailed. This is one of the reasons, ostensibly, for the creation of our public broadcasting systems: The market and the home may not provide all of the materials needed for each individual to flourish.

In addition to limiting children's rights to be aware of other worldviews and to participate in the public sphere, the second problem in deciding not to air this program was that it infringed upon the right of a minority to be heard via a public outlet. Parents who objected to the program could always change the channel if it had been aired, but some parents who might welcome such programming could not access it once the decision had been made not to distribute it nationally. An unpopular program, an unpopular voice, that had a right to be heard was stifled. Further, it was a voice that was not well-served by the market, exactly the sort of voice public broadcasting is supposed to amplify, not stifle.

The lack of attention afforded to some less-popular content in mainstream media may not be censorship per se, but these market-based omissions function in much the same way. Some programming may not be of interest to a large enough, or an adequately advertiser-friendly, audience. Consequently, such programing is not privileged by the market, and its presence in mainstream media will be negligible should it exist at all. Such programming may, nonetheless, contribute to viewers' flourishing, and thus those

viewers have a right to access such content and to see themselves reflected in public media just as other members of the public may.

Invalidity of a Negative-Freedom-Oriented Approach to Education

The no-child-of-mine approach to education says, "We know better than you, children," and why not? Don't we know better than they? As Brighouse (2006) noted, a child left to his or her own devices will invariably choose to eat ice cream to excess. Children require adult guidance in order to navigate and survive childhood in order to negotiate and thrive in adulthood. As we know, adults never make poor eating choices, and they all lead flourishing lives, so clearly they know what is best. Lest my sarcasm be misread, let me make my thoughts explicit: Oftentimes – and I am not saying all times or even most times, but oftentimes – children know what they need more than, or at least as well as, the adults in their lives do.

Consider a long and widely held opinion about the purpose of schooling: We teach children so that they can be financially prosperous in their adult lives. Dewey (2011) acknowledged (or, perhaps, lamented) that "the great majority of those who pass under the tuition of the school regard it only as a narrowly practical tool with which to get bread and butter enough to eke out a restricted life."

> If we were to conceive our educational end and aim in a less exclusive way, if we were to introduce into educational processes the activities which appeal to those whose dominant interest is to do and make, we should find the hold of the school upon its members to be more vital, more prolonged, containing more of culture. (pp. 19-20)

"Introduce into," Dewey wrote, not "replace with." He did not call for the elimination of the "daily bread" approach to schooling but for enhancing it with others. Again, I think the takeaway is the need to once more be critical and reflexive about schooling's aims. On the one hand, the need to attend to children's future economic well-being is perhaps not frequently critically examined; is so often taken for granted, simply because it is so deeply engrained in a capitalist society. On the other hand, perhaps it is sometimes so ignored because it indeed has genuine prima facie validity. After all, what good is an education if one cannot eat? However, even if we presuppose that schooling is about ensuring economic success, how do we do that? "We are not good at predicting what jobs are going to be required in 5 years and 10 years down the road," as Debra Humphreys, a senior vice president at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, puts it (Cohen, 2016, para. 23). Consequently, prioritizing future economic success in schooling is problematic.

Flourishing as a Fundamental Concept in Education

Brighouse (2006) offers what I think is a more compelling focus for schooling: trying to enable children to lead what he calls *flourishing*, rather than economically-successful, lives. Flourishing , for Brighouse, consists of two components: objective goods and a sense of identification. People must have enough objectively good things in their lives for them to flourish, but they must also identify with those objectively good things. For example, if an individual lives a life of luxury but feels unsatisfied with how one acquired and maintains that status, they are living an inauthentic life that is therefore devoid of flourishing. As what is subjectively good to one person may not be to another,

education, to Brighouse, must prepare children to enter into lives unlike those of their parents if those children so choose. Students should be exposed in school to a variety of ways of living and given the tools needed to pursue those ways one day. In this manner, they can choose for themselves the futures they would like to pursue, regardless of whether those futures would benefit the marketplace or those students' respective individual financial statuses. This is not to say that Brighouse is necessarily right; rather, the current school-is-for-employment paradigm unreflexively assumes the child is not. Although she does not invoke Labaree (1997) or his language, Noddings (2003) also sees the current approach to schooling as economically driven, and calls for a more critical examination and determination of the purposes of schooling.

> In the past, great educators have devoted much thought to the issue of aims, but today we hear little such debate. It is as though our society has simply decided that the purpose of schooling is economic – to improve the financial condition of individuals and to advance the prosperity of the nation. Hence students should do well on standardized tests, get into good colleges, obtain well-paying jobs, and buy lots more things. (Introduction)

A Flourishing Education is Personalized, Individualized, and Positive-Freedom-Oriented

We are not good at predicting what school content and skills will and will not help children economically succeed, and yet adult hubris about the management of children's lives continues, and that management routinely concerns what children should be forbidden from doing rather than what they should have the right to do. However,

positive freedoms are important if children are to identify for themselves the paths likely to lead them to flourishing.

Fred Rogers once told of visiting his grandparents' home when he was a small child. The house was on a large farm, surrounded by a network of seemingly ancient, crumbling stone walls. Rogers longed to climb the walls as he had seen other children do, but his mother would not allow it. On one visit, his grandfather, whom Rogers knew by the family nickname "Ding-Dong," insisted the boy be given a little latitude in which to risk hurting himself.

> "Now hold on just a minute," I heard him say. "So the boy wants to climb the stone walls? Then let the boy climb the walls! He has to learn to do things for himself. Now scoot on out of here," he said to me with a wink. "And come see me when you get back."
>
> "Yes, sir," I stammered, my heart pounding with excitement.
>
> For the next two and a half hours I climbed those old walls – skinned my knee, tore my pants, and had the time of my life. Later, when I met with Ding-Dong to tell him about my adventures, I never forgot what he said.
>
> "Fred," he grinned, "you made this day a special day, just by being yourself. Always remember there's just one person in this whole world like you – and I like you just the way you are." (Rogers & Brinckerhoff, 1980, p. 2)

It became a defining moment in Rogers' life, not only because he would go on to use his grandfather's words to him that day about being special as his closing remarks in nearly a thousand episodes of his television program, but because of how those words later helped

point him in the direction of his flourishing life. Reflecting upon that day of wall climbing years later, Rogers had an epiphany. He had been visiting the now-elderly Ding-Dong, who was navigating his own internal labyrinth of walls created by his dementia-addled brain. Rogers was a neophyte in the world of television, working as a page for NBC and uncertain of how exactly to make the kind of mark he wanted to make in this strange new world. He had been praying for an answer, and felt he had found it upon considering his visit.

> Something very special had happened that afternoon. In a very personal way, God had answered my prayers. I was beginning to understand what it was He wanted me to do with my television career: He wanted me to offer children the same kind of reassurance, encouragement and sense of self-worth that Ding-Dong had given me. I didn't know exactly how or when the right opportunities would arise, but I felt confident now that I would be ready to meet them. A few weeks later, I received an invitation to leave New York and join a small educational television station in Pittsburgh that was looking for a person to develop new programming. I jumped at the chance. And it was from those small beginnings -- hand-built sets, props and puppets – that the themes and characters that now populate *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* evolved. That was 26 years ago. Today, through the wonder of television, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is visited each day by millions of children throughout America and other lands. There have been changes over the years; characters and special guests to the *Neighborhood* come and go. But one thing – my message to children at the close of every show –

> remains the same. "There's just one person in the whole world like you," the kids can count on hearing me say, "And people can like you just the way you are." (p. 5)

It took a loving adult who knew young Fred personally to understand what he had needed on that day of wall climbing: the positive freedom to explore his own interests and limits, and the recognition that by doing so, he was (a) discovering himself and (b) likable, even as this new person he was discovering. That license and that acceptance helped an adult Rogers find a path that led to a public and celebrated flourishing, and so he tried, via television, to give the same gift. In our concerns for children's future flourishing, we must not forget that they cannot get there without some risk, some self-discovery, and the rights they need to pursue their paths.

Perhaps the reluctance to acknowledge not only that children *have* rights but that they *need* rights to become flourishing adults is an extension of the tendency of adults to forget much of what childhood was like as they get caught up in the Sisyphean rhythms of grown-up life. Rogers was once asked to write a chapter for a book for ophthalmologists that would help them deal with scared children in their offices. The task was assigned to one of his employees, who wrote a draft that Rogers felt missed the mark because it forgot to emphasize the need to see things from children's perspectives. Rogers "crossed it all out and wrote a sentence addressed directly to the doctors who would be reading it: 'You were a child once, too.' And that's how the chapter began" (Junod, p. 134).

Whatever the origination of this adult hubris towards children's lives, the fact of it remains. Consider the issue of children's media. So often the effects on children of consuming various kinds of media are debated, but rarely are related questions asked: What media do children have a right to consume, regardless of effect? To what extent can we ethically decide what parts of public discourse they can be made aware of and what parts they cannot? How can children be prepared to enter adult life if they aren't even allowed access to the various messages that characterize that life?

I see adult hubris easily as I look back on my own youth. Video games were a pleasant and enriching part of my childhood. I would not want even to imagine life without the music of The Beatles. My comic book collection is massive. I know my societal ancestors meant well when they sought to curtail children's ability to access those media, but they were wrong (at least in my case). Similarly, I could be wrong about children's media consumption of which I disapprove. I suggest humility in our considerations of children's media use, and that those considerations must take into account children's input. I also suggest that the people best equipped to help a child navigate their media choices are those who know the child best. A loving adult who knows a child personally is better equipped to help guide them towards subjective flourishing that any professional stranger. To know what will help children to flourish, they must be listened to, and further, listened to (to the extent possible) as individuals whose flourishing lives may be far from the mark for their listeners.

Need for Individualized Education

Educator and writer Herbert Kohl (1988) once wrote of only glancing at the beginning of each new school year at students' permanent records once before locking them away, because

> Each child, each new school year, is potentially many things, only one of which the cumulative record card documents. It is amazing how "emotional" problems can disappear, how the dullest child can be transformed into the keenest and the brightest into the most ordinary when the prefabricated judgements of other teachers are forgotten (p. 13).

Kohl points out here an institutional practice that strips students of their identities and replaces them with labels and categories that make schooling more efficient but less human. Students, both as the people they are now and the people they will become, are here secondary to schools' aims to: (a) quickly and simultaneously educate vast numbers of students and (b) sort students into pathways to their future societal niches based not on their interests or needs as individuals but on educators' evaluations of their work. In essence, the educator becomes a manager and classes become job performance evaluations.

Students may flourish in such a paradigm, but only those students who already fit neatly, comfortably, and happily into prefabricated social niches or are very lucky. There is no room in this paradigm for artists, dreamers, and eccentrics, unless, again, they are able to monetize their interests. Students are the products of schooling instead of its beneficiaries. As Kohl observed, textbooks are written to appeal to teachers, not

students, as students are not customers in that marketplace. Schooling as it exists is an adult-centered undertaking. Adults determine what children should learn, what materials and classroom content will help them do it, and then evaluate how well the whole process works based on adult-standards.

Sociologist Paul Willis (1977) famously examined the obscured mechanisms by which the British working class replicated itself across generations despite the existence of schools through which social mobility was possible, if not likely. He concluded that for students, the comforts, familiarities, and tangible gratifications of working class culture trumped the illusory and elusive promises of better tomorrows made by schools. Perhaps a cooperating variable in this social reproduction is the adult-centered structure of schooling I described in the above paragraph: If adults decide what is studied, how it is studied, and how to evaluate students on their mastery of what is studied, how can one reasonably expect students to do anything but reproduce the generation that came before them? If society at large has decided (as it indeed seems to have) that schooling is about future economic success, and we as a society are not good at predicting what will lead to future economic success, why should we as adults be the ones constructing schooling?

I am not trying to suggest that children have the experience and knowledge necessary to craft their educational experiences independently. Nevertheless, if (a) we make schooling about trying to turn children into the adults we want them to be and not the ones they want to be, and (b) if we are not good at figuring out what will help them become the adults we want them to be, then (c) clearly what we have is a highly flawed system. Perhaps the remedy for such flaws is to attend to children, to ask them what

kinds of lives they want to live and do our best as a society to give them through schooling, broadcasting, and any other viable means the tools they need to live those lives. I will return to this idea in Chapters 6 and 7.

One of the flaws of our system is that it privileges what the majority sees as worthwhile and marginalizes what they do not. One result of this shortcoming is the focus by politicians on so-called STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering, and math. Many elected officials have become explicit in their disdain for liberal arts education, as well as in their reasoning for that disdain. Education as conceived by these politicians is strictly an economic endeavor. Some politicians have suggested removing federal financial aid from students who pursue liberal arts degrees; at least 15 states allocate higher education funding in a way that favors "high demand degrees"; and, again, some politicians have been explicit in their opinions, like former Kentucky governor Matt Bevin:

> There will be more incentives to electrical engineers than French literature majors, there just will.... All the people in the world who want to study French literature can do so; they're just not going to be subsidized by the taxpayers like engineers will be, for example. (Cohen, 2016, para. 4)

Put more bluntly, regardless of how a given student might flourish by studying French literature, the state will not help them to the extent it helps someone whose studies are market-approved.

Markets function essentially as popularity contests. Those goods and services that are approved by the most consumers win, and those inadequately supported by

consumers lose. Furthermore, the public approves of a STEM-focused school system. First, there is the inferential support: Politicians would not broadly support this approach to schooling if it were not broadly supported by the public. There is also empirical evidence of public support. Pew Research Center found that the public believes American schools are deficient in their teaching of STEM subjects (Funk, 2015).

To say the market should be the focus of schooling presupposes that politicians and a broad swath of citizens are correct, and yet there is little evidence to defend that approach. Empirically, society does not have a good track record of picking winning future professions. Nor can one truly defend it based on its popularity, because that is the very definition of the ad populum fallacy. Just because a majority shares an opinion does not make it correct; majorities are wrong all of the time.

The Problem with Educators as Sources of Change

So if we remove the objectives of politicians and markets and even well-intentioned parents from the equation, who is left to say how children should be schooled? The most obvious response would be educators, and I would agree that as trained professionals, they are better authorities on the needs of schools than the aforementioned stakeholders. Nevertheless, they are only human beings and may be mistaken, particularly in our current, highly-flawed system. Any curriculum educators put together will, naturally, reflect their own perspectives and subjectivity.

Educator George S. Counts once famously asked "Dare the School Build a new Social Order," (1932), arguing that educators should in essence indoctrinate, crafting curricula that help create the kinds of future Americans of which Counts approved. Put

aside, for now, the hubris or charges of elitism and notice the paradox inherent in Counts' call. He was "convinced that education is the one unfailing remedy for every ill to which man is subject" and "that our schools, instead of directing the course of change, are themselves driven by the very forces that are transforming the rest of the social order" (p. 3). Education is the one thing that can fix society, but education is a product of society. How is the school supposed to reshape society when society produces the very teachers Counts sought to enlist? How are the creators of a bold new society supposed to come out of an old society that, Counts claims, produces the wrong kind of people?

Dewey disagreed with Counts' formulations, but, as Cremin (1976) pointed out, Dewey could be similarly conflicted: "Dewey was primarily concerned with reconciling the dualism between school and society," (p. 5) Cremin wrote, but Dewey "may ultimately have been victimized by the very polarity he set out to reconcile" (pp. 5-6). Counts here refers to the fact that in Dewey's famed *Democracy and Education* (2013), Dewey devoted one chapter to discussing schools and society, and the rest of the book to discussing schools. Counts sees him as having failed to properly integrate school and society because he himself was a product of that society. And how could he not have been influenced by society? Perhaps Willis asked the wrong question in wondering how classes reproduce; perhaps the question should have been "How can they not?" Like Rousseau's (2003) Emile, a hypothetical child raised outside of society's influence so as to be devoid of its vices, tabula rasa simply do not exist. In Rousseau's case, his educational scheme would never work in reality because (a) one cannot remove oneself completely from society and (b) the child's tutor, a fictional proxy for Rousseau himself,

is himself a product of society. If, as Rousseau suggests, the ideal education involves removing oneself completely from society, then the ideal education does not exist, for where is one to find the teacher, the curriculum gatekeeper, who was raised removed from the influence of society?

Students as a Source of Change

So if I do not see improvements to our current system of schooling coming from politicians, the market, citizens at large, or educators themselves, from where do I think it can come? True change comes from that which is truly new; old players already in the system may offer improvements and refinements, but those changes will necessarily be products of all the forces of society and history, and may not be objectively good for students. Further, as I have written, children will often have a better idea of what they want and need than anyone else; thus I suggest the answer to the question with which I started this paragraph is: To improve schooling, we should invite student input. Doing so not only may help us build better educational systems, but would be a positive change for another reason as well: Regardless of the efficacy of consulting them, students should have some say in the design of their educations simply because we have no right to deny them that say.

Students' Right to a Voice in Education

Let us assume that the aforementioned flaws of the current educational paradigm could be remedied. Let us assume that we could (a) improve our predictions of future demand for particular jobs, and therefore improve our understanding of the kinds of schooling that will lead to economic prosperity; and (b) effectively counter negative

societal influences on educational content, or even just agree on which societal influences were negative. Allowing politicians, educators, and interested market participants to be the sole shapers of schooling would still deny students some of their rightful agency. It is not enough for a society to justify its educational efforts on the grounds that they are thought by that society to lead to better lives for children; those better lives must be ones of which the children approve. Otherwise, we are essentially telling the child who asks "Why must I learn this?" that the answer is "Because later it will lead to you living a life that I would like." What of the rights of the governed?

Warnick (2013) makes the case for the need to consider students' agency and rights because they are a captive audience. As students are coerced into school attendance, and then subjected to the content covered there, care must be taken to infringe as little as possible on their rights, including their rights to pursue the lives of their choosing. A complicated balancing act ensues. A student who is disruptive and acts out may be within their rights generally speaking, but within the context of a classroom, the disruption that student causes may be infringing upon the rights of other students who want to attend to their lessons. Furthermore, the school and the society that produces it may indeed have a better idea, in many or even most ways, of what is good for its students. To some degree, the school is justified therefore in infringing upon the rights of students, for its curriculum may indeed help foster its students' future flourishing. However, if the school's vision of flourishing does not mesh with a student's desired life, then the school is less able to justify forcing its curriculum onto a captive audience member.

Whatever justification schools have to subject students to a curriculum those students are not involved in crafting or choosing diminishes in validity as students age. Griffin (2002) argues that because children's ability to reason and to make sound decisions (in short, their ability to exercise agency) increases as they age, respect for their agency must also increase as they age. Undoubtedly then, by the time those children are of high school age, when they are very near to adulthood both legally and biologically, reverence for their agency must be especially high. By the time they reach this point, we have no right to deny students an education that is designed to help them reach their own definitions of flourishing, not ours.

Noddings (2003) suggests that happiness be made the focus of schooling; schools should endeavor to teach children skills and information that will make them happy now and that are likely to contribute to their future happiness. Thus "Happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness" (Introduction, para. 1). While I agree broadly and in principle with Noddings, one problem with her approach is that, just like predicting future in-demand jobs, knowing what will make people happy can be difficult to ascertain. For example, Noddings believes it important to extensively incorporate maps into a classroom that is going to foster happiness. She writes that "it has been my experience that children love work with maps. Their eyes shine as they pore over" (Chapter 12, para. 64) them. My eyes glossed over as I read that, and my mind went reeling back to a dreadful day in Ms. Akers' seventh grade Ohio History class.

When I started using maps in fifth-grade, I hated them. They didn't make sense to me; my brain wasn't wired that way, and it frustrated and embarrassed me to turn in and get my assignments back. So I was already uneasy that day in Ms. Akers' class. We were doing an in-class assignment involving gigantic Ohio highway maps, and we had been told to make sure we had refolded the maps correctly when we turned in our work. However, I couldn't figure out how to return that mammoth piece of paper back to its original, compactly folded shape. I got as close as I could, and hoped she wouldn't notice.

She noticed.

"Jonathan," she said, as I was trying to slink back to my seat. "Come back here." I went uneasily back to her desk, the eyes of the class on me. "Fold that correctly, please."

So I refolded it. And refolded it. And refolded it. I just couldn't figure it out. I was already unhappy, and now I was humiliated, my classmates tittering at my comical efforts to simply fold a piece of paper. I tried to play it up like it was a joke, but no one was buying what I was selling. They knew I couldn't handle this simple task.

"It is amazing, Mr. Judy," Ms. Akers said once I had finally succeeded, "how someone so smart in so many ways can sometimes seem so slow." More laughter. I knew then, and know now, she meant nothing by it. She was only teasing me, and if the maps weren't folded correctly, they'd be unnecessarily unwieldy to store, and anyway knowing how to read a map is a vital skill, but I was still angry, embarrassed, and frustrated.

Noddings has no idea what would have made young Jon happy. She has no idea what would make any specific child happy; not unless she, not unless *we*, ask them.

As a rookie White teacher at a predominantly Black school, Kohl (1988) learned the value of getting to know students as individuals. He had invited his class to visit his home, and several students took him up on the offer. Watching them play with a tape recorder and socialize outside of the school, Kohl noticed how unlike their school selves they were, writing, "They seemed themselves in a way they couldn't in the classroom. I looked and listened, discovering how much I missed by being up in front of the room, a teacher of thirty-six souls I couldn't know individually" (p. 105).

Kohl began inviting the students back to his home on a weekly basis, and found that by getting to know his students and by letting them get to know him, he expanded his understanding of schooling and found the classroom dynamic positively changed, writing "I realized how narrow the view from the teacher's desk is. I also realized that any successful classroom has to be based upon a dialogue between students and teachers, both teaching and being taught, and both able to acknowledge that fact" (p. 107). The effort needed to get to know dozens of students individually was of course immense, and it also led at times to blurred professional lines between teachers and pupils. Kohl saw these occasions not as a deterrent from the approach he had taken but as necessary mine fields to be navigated. "I had to set limits on what I could do as an individual," he writes, "and have always had to balance what part of my life I could offer the children and what part had to remain private" (p. 108).

I think most people would find the difficulty of Kohl's balancing act self-evident. I know that I have never felt like I truly knew any one of my classes as individuals. Individual students I got to know as individuals, certainly, but not each and every individual in any of my classes. So if Kohl found it difficult to know his students individually, and if we assume any teacher would have similar difficulties, what point am I trying to make here? Wouldn't the task of knowing the audience of a television program as individuals therefore be impossible? Yes, to truly know them, but I still think there are lessons to be drawn for broadcasting from Kohl's experiences. I assert that trying to understand children as individuals and not classes or demographics is vital if educational television is to be truly educative. The only method I see for doing so is consulting children, attending to them, and inviting them to be participants in the creation of broadcast media produced for them. I will return to this in Chapter 7.

Summary

I will return in the next chapter to the topic of how we apply these lessons, but for now I simply want to establish three premises. First, we should recognize that: (a) censorship and market-based omissions often deny children their respective rights to be aware of alternative ways of flourishing, and (b) embracing positive-freedoms-oriented educative messages can nurture children's flourishing. Second, Brighouse's conceptualization of flourishing is a more useful model for education than one built on economic success, because we cannot predict what will lead to economic success and a focus on that metric denies students their right to choose their own paths. Third,

endeavoring to know children as individually as possible is vital if our educative messages to them are to contribute to flourishing to the greatest extent possible.

CHAPTER V

PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND POTENTIAL FLOURISHING

In the previous chapter, I argued that censorship and market-based omissions often deny children their right to be aware of alternative ways of flourishing, and conversely embracing positive-freedoms-oriented educative messages can nurture children's flourishing. I asserted that Brighouse's (2011) conceptualization of flourishing is a more useful model for education than one built on economic success, because we cannot predict what will lead to economic success and a focus on that metric denies students their rights to choose their own paths. Finally, I proposed that in order to support the objective of flourishing, one must endeavor to know children as individually as possible when producing educative messages for them.

Picking up on those themes in this chapter, I will now try to demonstrate that public broadcasting has the potential to circumvent market demands and thus present programming that contributes to potential flourishing by spotlighting content which (a) might be neglected by mainstream media but (b) that may nonetheless contribute to viewers' future flourishing. This content has greater potential to foster flourishing than commercial broadcasting, because the market is unconcerned with those aspects of individuals' flourishing that cannot be monetized. In other words, one of the benefits of a more robust public broadcasting system would be that it could help children find personally rewarding life paths, regardless of those paths' economic values.

Education as a Menu

Every spring semester, in my capacity as a professor at a community college, I teach at the Early College Academy in Canton, Ohio. This public high school serves self-selected students who pursue high school diplomas and associate's degrees at the same time, receiving both upon successful completion of the Academy's curriculum. In my experience, most of these students come from inner-city, disadvantaged backgrounds, and their parents see this as an opportunity to get their children a free-of-charge leg up on the job market upon graduation. Also, in my experience, most of the students are less-then-enthused about being here, seeing little value in it or merely preferring to have a "normal" high school experience.

The walls of the Academy are covered in inspirational and aspirational messages, messages that: encourage students to knuckle down for standardized testing preparation; grandly describe students as future leaders and successes; and remind students of the success of select alumni. These messages contrast starkly with the implied messages of the students' larger worlds, and even with the building itself. The building housing the Academy was old when I first encountered it, more than 30 years ago, when it housed the local Red Cross where I received low-income counselling as a grade school student. The building does not appear to have been significantly redecorated or refurbished. More than one classroom requires more than one bucket during rainfall. Cabinet doors in the kitchen area hang from loosened hinges. Some of the classrooms are equipped with computers so out-of-date that they cannot open most PowerPoint presentations. Internet accessibility and functionality are limited.

In addition to these constant general reminders of the inequity of American schooling, every spring gives me specific reminders. Surrounded by messages touting their great destinies and potential, and also by subtler messages letting them know that they are not among their society's priorities, perhaps it is only natural that students sometimes dismiss the former and believe the latter. As communication scholars tell us, when confronted with a message that verbally says one thing but says another with its nonverbal actions, we tend to believe the actions. They speak louder than words.

One spring, one of my students in a public speaking course asked my opinion about a topic he was considering for a persuasive speech assignment. He wanted to convince his audience that there was a greater chance of escaping poverty via academics than there was via athletics. In my best, most ham-fisted impression of Socrates, I asked him if he thought that the antithesis of his argument – that there is a greater chance of escaping poverty via athletics than there was via academics – was a widely held belief, which was one of the requirements of the assignment. To bolster his claim that it was indeed a widely held belief, he asked one of his classmates which he thought merited more of his attention: his coursework or football.

"Football," his peer responded.

"Why?" the first student prompted him. His classmate shrugged.

"I'm good at football, but I'm not good at anything we do in school, so how can I get a job doing any of that?"

More often than not, I would describe myself as jaded, but I'll admit this exchange took me aback. It so starkly made visible a worldview that was both foreign

and tragic to me. How in a world as diverse and varied as ours could a person so young have already reduced their life paths to a single either/or question? The initial student seemed to be reading my mind when he went on to tell his friend about an article his father had recently emailed him. He said this article helped him to see that he had all sorts of viable career paths to pursue, and he did not need to stress so much over athletics. The exchange reminded me that students can find their own answers outside of school, and that they can use those answers to supplement their schoolwork and their future lives. The exchange also disappointed me, as I do not think it speaks well of our schooling if it leaves high school students with the impression that in life it is professional sports or bust. Perhaps we should doing more to let students know what life can hold for them, instead of letting them research it or not on their own.

Masschelein and Simons (2013) once wrote that "Learning refers to expanding one's world" (p. 108). I think it is about as good a terse definition of learning as I have ever encountered. As such, it also implies a succinct definition of education: If learning is expanding one's world, then education is helping others to expand their worlds. Seen thusly, education becomes a menu from which to select courses of action, having the knowledge and agency to pursue that which best fits each individual. From this perspective, I see it as a triumph for education that a student of mine should have received from his father an article that helped him see how broad his options were. I also see it as a failing that his schooling had not already accomplished that.

Broadcasting content self-evidently has the ability to educate in this sense, to expose audiences to heretofore unknown information that can potentially enrich their

lives in ways either practical or personal. I have already described in Chapter 2 the example of Esperanza Spaulding, the celebrated musician who had her interest in a musical life sparked by viewing *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (KCTS 9, 2012). I would like now to turn to other examples of ways in which broadcasting content has helped people find their ways to achieving what Brighouse called "objectively good things" that contributed to their flourishing lives, or what Dewey would call the "bread and butter" of their lives (2006).

Public Broadcasting Potential to be a "Full Menu" of Life Options

When I refer to examples of ways in which public broadcasting has helped some individuals to find career paths, I do not mean to say that those individuals could not have developed a sufficiently broad view of the world and of their future options without the educational supplement of broadcasting. Nor do I mean to suggest that they could not do so adequately with the help of private broadcasting. I mean only to say that: (a) if one of the goals of education should be broadening individuals' world views to help them find flourishing lives; and (b) if the market does not sufficiently address all viewers' interests and needs; then (c) public broadcasting, to the degree that it functions outside of the market's demands,[9] can expand viewers' worlds and make them aware of ways of being that are perhaps neglected by the market. Schooling should do this as well, obviously, but schools operate under their own form of market demands; in this case, the market consists primarily of voters, parents, and elected officials, who all seek to influence curricula, to maintain their vision of the social order, or to create their own version of a

[9] As I have tried to show, the degree to which public broadcasting does this is a highly limited one.

new one. In fact, one of the reasons I see public broadcasting as being such a potentially valuable contributor to education is that market, political, and social forces have all dovetailed in recent decades into the creation of a much more limited, much more focused form of schooling. This schooling privileges measurable outcomes that are ostensibly tied to positive financial outcomes over the rights of individual students to be made aware of possible life paths they may pursue and equipping those students with the skills needed to pursue those paths.

Standards-Choice Paradigm, and the Restriction of the Public School "Menu"

Labaree (2010) points to two school reform movements of the last few decades that have been largely successful in recreating the American school system (even if they have not necessarily been successful in fulfilling the intentions that motivated their reform efforts). The school standards movement, which had its roots in the late 20th century but which became the paradigm following the 2002 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, sought to use curriculum guidelines and high-stakes testing to raise the level of academic achievement in schools and to reduce the differences in the achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged students. The later (but not mutually exclusive) school choice movement did not so much supplant as supplement the standards movement, seeking to empower parents as consumers by allowing them to choose the schools their children attended. The intent was to thereby stimulate innovation and excellence among schools by forcing them to compete for students.

Although No Child Left Behind was largely replaced when President Obama signed the Every Child Succeeds Act into law, that replacement did not include

eliminating standardized, high-stakes testing. Instead, states now have greater flexibility in the forms that tests and test delivery may take (Korte, 2015). Just as the way in which students are evaluated has changed, so too has the evaluation of schools, in that responsibility for assessing them has shifted largely from the federal government to state level:

> The new law leaves accountability goals almost entirely up to the states. States must submit their accountability plans to the Department of Education, which still has a limited oversight role. And there are "guardrails" defining broadly what the accountability goals need to include, and test scores and graduation rates must be given "much greater weight" than the more subjective measures. (Korte, para. 9)

The bottom line is that schools are now locally evaluated in a large part by how students fare on standardized tests instead of being federally evaluated in a large part by how students fare on standardized tests. Neither approach evaluates schools on how well they contribute to their students' future flourishing, unless that flourishing is understood to be only necessarily financial in nature and unless one makes the unfounded assumption that the knowledge being tested has a direct relationship with students' future incomes.

Students' test performance remains a criterion for school evaluation, in spite of growing complaints about this approach (Strauss, 2015). The U.S. Department of Education has ordered states to administer such tests and to have plans in place for dealing with opt-out rates, or the percentage of parents who choose to stop their children from taking the tests. Additionally, the National Association of Secondary School Principals has voiced its support for standardized assessment tests and its opposition to

allowing parents to opt their children out of those tests (Gewertz, 2016). Furthermore, public opinion research indicates that parents also broadly support national standardized testing (Johnson, Rochkind, & Ott, 2010).

The American education system operates within a choice paradigm as well, also in spite of growing criticism of that approach. Scholars have found that the competition-centric approach to schooling provides incentive for schools to shift resources away from classrooms and towards marketing and encourages them to cherry-pick the best students from their pools of applicants rather than innovating to reach less achievement-oriented students (Lubienski & Myers, 2015).

Nevertheless, charter schools seem to enjoy broad approval from politicians and parents. Recently, for example, Washington's Supreme Court declared charter schools unconstitutional, and that state's legislature responded with a deal to keep its eight charter schools operating (Santos, 2016). When an Atlanta charter school faced closing its doors recently due to theft of more than $600,000 from its funds (allegedly by school administrators), parents, students, and faculty rallied to create a plan to keep its doors open (Bloom, 2016). Despite objections from the Massachusetts Teachers Association, Boston-area parents have pushed for an increase in the number of charters allowed in that state (Jonas, 2015).

Perhaps charter schools retain their broad popularity because of their rhetorical positioning. As a product of the aforementioned school choice movement, charter schools, like all products of that movement, frame themselves as innovators competing for students, thereby offering the underprivileged the same kind of benefits enjoyed by

families who send their children to costly private schools. Choice policies give students, parents, and communities freedom from the school to which they are assigned within their district – an assignment usually based on residence.

> School choice promotes the use of consumer sector style "exit" to address the perceived decline or insufficiencies of a given school so that families can enroll their children in schools thought to be of better quality. (Lubienski & Myers, p. 9)

In addition to being seductive, this kind of rhetorical framework also implicitly creates another criterion whereby schools are evaluated: consumer choice.

Charter schools are not the only manifestations of this consumer-oriented mindset towards schooling. For example, promotional materials from the aforementioned Canton City Early College Academy in Canton, Ohio, make clear the school's focus on (a) quantitative evidence meant to indicate its graduates' readiness for college beyond the associate's degrees they receive upon successfully completing the school's curriculum and (b) the economic benefit to students and to the community of the school. The school's literature touts that "The financial benefit to Stark County families and students may range between $860,000 to $5,000,000" (Rocheford, O'Neill, Gelb, & Ross, n.d., p. 4). This document trumpets testing data and graduation rates (school standards) it sees as indicative of its value as an institution, essentially advertising to parents and students as consumers, saying "You should attend this school in order to make money one day" (school choice).

I think these two paradigms of standards and choice are complimentary and co-exist easily because they are largely serving the same masters. Despite the voices opposed to both approaches, they remain broadly popular with politicians, something that is not possible without broad support from the general public. Both of these approaches are therefore measuring similar, if not identical, things. When students do well on a standardized test, it is considered evidence that they are doing well in acquiring the skills and knowledge deemed necessary by the politicians and public servants who have designed the test. What kinds of skills and knowledge do politicians deem necessary? The same kinds deemed necessary by most of the public and by business interests: those that are likely to secure jobs and economic prosperity in students' futures.

One manifestation of this impulse is the focus by politicians on so-called STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering, and math. Many elected officials have become explicit in their disdain for liberal arts education, as well as in their reasoning for that disdain. Education as conceived by these politicians is strictly an economic endeavor. Some politicians have suggested removing federal financial aid from students who pursue liberal arts degrees; at least fifteen states allocate higher education funding in a way that favors "high demand degrees"; and I already cited in Chapter 4 the example of former Kentucky governor Matt Bevin, who insisted that engineering majors should of course receive more governmental financial support than French literature majors.

In addition to the aforementioned inferential support of the public (politicians would not broadly support this approach to schooling if it were not broadly supported by the public), there is empirical evidence that this is an agenda shared by the public. Pew

Research Center found that the public believes American schools are deficient in their teaching of STEM subjects (Funk, 2015).

Thus, two major school reform movements (standards and choice) coexist because they are essentially serving the same end: to produce schools that are consistent with parents' and politicians' perceptions of how schools should function in order to lead to economic benefits for students later in life. In short, society in general has decided that schooling which schools best is that schooling that serves the market and produces students who make lots of money.

But what about the student who simply isn't cut out for a STEM job? Or who likes arts and the humanities and would flourish more in the pursuit of a less empirically-based career? When elected officials use public funds to service schooling which will produce the most money, not to create educations that produce the most well-being, they are saying that constituents have the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of what officials define as happiness. As parents in general seem satisfied with that educational scheme, it is foolish to expect the market to provide anything to counter this approach to education; the market responds to economic demands, and all the people with money in this equation seem to have accepted financial benefit as the sole purpose of education. What incentive does the market have to add to the educational menus from which children select? Society and the schools it created are on the same page here, and thus the worldviews to which students are exposed become naturally limited. As Brighouse (2006) put it,

> A school ethos that strongly identifies with mainstream popular culture and, for example, places special emphasis on mainstream professional sports ...tilts the experience of the children towards the interests that they would be likely to encounter and become enthusiastic about outside of school anyway. But a school that is not exactly countercultural, but perhaps extra-popular-cultural, would deliberately valorize numerous different kinds of activity not readily promoted outside the school. (Chapter 3, para. 30)

In other words, most of the educational influences in a student's ecology are echoed by popular culture and domestic life. In order that students have as many options as possible in their future lives, and as much freedom as possible as a consequence, they need to be exposed to as many worldviews and ways of life as possible. I see Spalding's anecdote about Mr. Rogers introducing her to Yoyo Ma as an in-action demonstration of the kinds of bridges Brighouse meant, even if the "extra-popular-cultural" bridge here was built by public broadcasting and not public schools.

Framed this way, public television was a co-educator for Spalding, and ideally what she learned in her schooling were lessons that informed or influenced her perceptions of public television, and what she learned from the latter were lessons that helped inform the lessons of the former. Of course it also follows from this perspective that public broadcasting is only a broadly valuable educational resource to the extent that it can operate outside of the market forces that dictate broadcasting content and beyond the political and social mechanisms that shape schooling in response to those market demands. To foster future flourishing as best as possible, in other words to be as

educative as possible, public broadcasting must have the funding needed to function as a truly extra-market entity, thus being able to spotlight diverse and less-publicized ways of life.

Beyond "Bread and Butter" and "Objectively Good Things"

Broadcasting content may also contribute to flourishing in ways besides helping children select a future career path. Consider the example of *Reading Rainbow* (Gluckson, 1983), a popular PBS children's program whose raison d'etre was to foster in children a love of reading. Some viewers of the program may have found in it inspiration for their future careers. Perhaps they were inspired to go into broadcasting by the work of host LeVar Burton. Maybe they pursued lives in publishing after seeing the diverse titles and authors the show spotlighted for nearly a quarter of a century. However, as the program's mission was to foster a love of reading, the likeliest explanation for whatever popularity it enjoyed is that viewers found it a satisfying companion to their leisure-time reading, not that it inspired them in their future careers.

The evidence indicates that the program was indeed popular. A YouTube video (PBS Digital Studios, 2012) produced by PBS celebrating the program has garnered more than 2 million views and 2,000 comments, all coming several years after the program's cancelation. Even more telling is the response to a Kickstarter launched by Burton in an effort to revive the brand as an app.[10] The crowdfunding campaign raised almost 6.5 million dollars in 30 days. While some of the money came in the form of large donations

[10] The brand revival proved ultimately unsuccessful as legal wrangling ensued over who had the right to use the associated trademarks, but Burton used the Kickstarter proceeds to launch the envisioned app under new branding (Lynch, 2017).

from celebrities and other affluent people, the breakdown of donations speaks to the lasting popularity of the program. More than 100,000 people contributed to the effort, and 75,555 of them ("more than the total number who sponsored the year's next-most popular project on Kickstarter) gave no more than 50 dollars (Kellogg, 2015).[11] For that many people to give that extensively to a crowdfunding campaign designed to revive a product from their childhoods implies that those donors perceived themselves as having derived great value from the *Reading Rainbow* brand, even if that value was almost certainly not monetary. They gave of the proceeds from whatever flourishing it is that they enjoy, because they saw that flourishing as springing at least in part from *Reading Rainbow*. These inferences I'm drawing about *Reading Rainbow* viewers' perceptions of the program's value are bolstered by a perusal of the comments on the aforementioned *Reading Rainbow* YouTube video, as well as by even a casual review of articles written about the program and the Kickstarter. Innumerable young people grew up with the program, and now look back on it fondly as a positive influence on their lives and well-being, regardless of its contributions to their financial well-being specifically.

Public Broadcasting and Representation

I was 12 years old before television presented to me an image of a family that I felt looked like mine. As a White male I had seen many television families who superficially resembled mine, but those families all seemed so comfortable and bland and removed from experiences that looked like those I saw my family having. That program

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[11] I will return to the example of Burton's Kickstarter in a later chapter, as I believe it models one facet of a new model public broadcasting should pursue.

was *Roseanne* (1988), a sitcom about a blue collar family living in a small Illinois town. While my mother and I lived alone for the most part, my older brother attending an out-of-town residential school for the Deaf, and my mother was a college-educated social worker and not a laborer like the fictional parents on *Roseanne*, the program enthralled me from the first and made me feel represented. Here was a family that legitimately and realistically struggled to make ends meet, who lived under the constant stress of an uncertain tomorrow. That stress often led to familial squabbling and outright fighting. Sure, the family members all loved each other and nearly every episode ended with a tidy resolution. However, harsh and loud words marked the household just as much as did the warm feel-good sentiments more closely associated with the genre. The furniture looked old and uncomfortable. What décor there was consisted of family photos and thrift store fare. The place was rarely very clean. It felt familiar in a new, thrilling way.

Actress, comedian, and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres recently spoke of the internal trauma and debate she endured when she first kissed a girl, saying,

> I just didn't know, because there is no representation, and I think it's different now because, you know, I'm on television, there are a lot of out people.... I think if you knew that your teacher is gay or your doctor is gay isn't going to be dismal that you're not going to be an outcast I think more kids would do it. (Ellen DeGeneres, 2019)

DeGeneres had made it to perhaps the pinnacle of a comedy career, appearing regularly on late night television, headlining premium cable television specials, and starring in her own network sitcom; clearly, her education and upbringing did not deprive her of the

tools she needed for financial gain. Nevertheless, as she makes clear through the course of the above interview, she was dissatisfied and emotionally troubled. Recall from the last chapter that for flourishing to occur, one must identify with one's life and with the objectively good things in it. Those charged with DeGeneres' education had equipped her well for profit but poorly for flourishing. Apparently, the media around her also failed to fully inform her of all the life paths from which she had to choose.

A failing of the American private broadcasting system is that it reflects the interests and demands of powerful entities. These powerful entities include market demands that privilege the affluent, politicians who are beholden to the affluent, and the bulk of the citizenry who have lent their implicit approval to a market-based approach to broadcasting and schooling. Mainstream television programming has never been particularly adept at representative depictions of America. minorities (2009), for example, reported that Black and White Americans were the only ethnicities represented on television at rates greater than their proportional share of the actual population of America. Furthermore, what representation on television there is of minorities is often steeped in stereotypes. The Opportunity Agenda, a self-described "communication lab that works to advance the impact of the social justice community" (Opportunity Lab, 2019) has identified some of the common negative outcomes associated with under- and misrepresentation (Opportunity Agenda, 2011). They reported that "Negative media stereotypes (thugs, criminals, fools, and the disadvantaged) are demoralizing and reduce self-esteem and expectations" and "drain cognitive resources in some contexts." In addition to the harm in being misrepresented, there comes the sting of being

unrepresented, at feeling invisible or excluded. In short, representation matters. This observation is neither unique nor new. President Lyndon Johnson established the Kerner Commission to investigate and identify the causes of race riots and civil unrest during the late 60s. Among other conclusions, the commission held that

> Most television programming ignores the fact that an appreciable part of their audience is black [*sic*]. The world that television and newspapers offer to their black [*sic*] audience is almost totally white [*sic*] in both appearance and attitude… [O]ur evidence shows that the so-called "white [*sic*] press" is at best, mistrusted, and at worst, held in contempt by black [*sic*] Americans. (Ledbetter, 1997, p. 43)

Of course, this is where public broadcasting was intended to intercede: in those instances when market-based broadcasting was neglecting portions of the market who, although perhaps smaller in number and power, had the right to share in the bounty made possible by the gift of the public's airwaves. And, indeed, public broadcasting has a much better history of representation than does mainstream, private broadcasting. For example, in a promotional video produced by the broadcaster, one PBS viewer shared a story of feeling underrepresented by the media at large, and finding joy in seeing her reflection in public media. Identified only as "Dawn" (Arthur parent, 2017), this viewer watches the popular PBS children's program *Arthur* (Brown, 1996) with her husband and three children. She related one of her daughters' excitement in seeing a character on that program and saying "Mommy, did you that know Arthur has a friend named Lydia, and Lydia uses a wheelchair just like my sister Harper uses a wheelchair?" Dawn went on to

explain the value she sees in seeing oneself and others reflected accurately in the media, and it is an explanation that echoes Brighouse's conceptualization of flourishing:

> I think that any opportunity for us to see characters who are like us or people we know or people we could know or could be someday I think is very, very important and very powerful. (Arthur parent, 2017, n.p.)

In other words, in addition to the validation one experiences in seeing oneself represented, seeing representations of others with whom one has little experience can help one build future relationships or even life paths. Seeing ourselves reflected in the media can help us to flourish now and to find relationships and life paths that might lead to future flourishing, irrespective of whether or not those relationships or paths are financially lucrative.

The marginalized will by definition always be excluded or minimalized by mainstream, private broadcasters and political entities; when business models depend on attracting the most viewers or voters, businesses have little incentive to do otherwise. This was, as I have tried to show, part of the motivation behind the creation of a public broadcasting system. I have also tried to show that in creating our public broadcasting system, we failed to adequately insulate it from market and political forces. Consequently, while it often succeeds in being more representative of a larger portion of the country than does private broadcasting, our public broadcasting system sometimes fails to provide its viewers with as full a representation of life paths as possible, to adequately represent the marginalized or underprivileged, and to make the most pedagogically sound choices when those choices run counter to market demands.

Market and Political Influences on Public Broadcasting Shortcomings

In our current paradigm, public broadcasting's precarious position as dependent on both government support and market forces results in programming that sometimes does not adequately consider the interests or needs of children. I have alluded in Chapter 4 (using the specific example of a gay couple depicted on Brown's (2004) cartoon *Postcards from Buster*) to how this paradigm deters public broadcasting from producing controversial content, regardless of whether or not such programming would be consistent with public broadcasting's mission of serving underprivileged and underrepresented audiences. Beyond that, by requiring public broadcasters to rely so heavily on private donations and ancillary revenue streams, such as licensed products and, to a lesser degree, sales of home video versions of broadcasted content, the current paradigm pressures public broadcasters to serve multiple masters, which sometimes means that children, the most vulnerable of public broadcasting's audiences, take a backseat to more affluent stakeholders.

Consider, for example, PBS' current reliance on animated programming. I will try first to demonstrate the extent of this reliance, before next explaining why it is of more service to market demands than to children's best interests. PBS' weekday lineup features 20 blocks of children's programming from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. (*TV Times*, n.d.). Of those 20 blocks, only two present programs that are live-action, and one of those, *Sesame Street* (Singer, 1969), has in recent years moved away from its famed puppet-oriented content to more emphasis on animated content. Only *Odd Squad* (Bishop,

2014), produced by Fred Rogers Productions, the company behind the celebrated *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (Rogers, 1968), is a completely live-action show.

I gained some insight into why current public children's program is so animation-oriented when I attended a promotional event put on by Fred Rogers Productions. After a panel-discussion, I had the opportunity to chat briefly with Bill Isler (personal communication, 2016, December 2), the then-president of the company. Isler said that during the creation of the animated show *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* (Sundberg, 2012), a popular spin-off of the live-action *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, the company never once considered making a live-action program. In fact, he said he does not anticipate the company dabbling in live-action programming any time soon. The perception they had, at least at the time, was that PBS would not have selected such a program for broadcast, as the network now perceives the market for children's programming to be so animation-oriented that live-action programming cannot successfully compete with animated content carried by private broadcasters.

In other words, PBS and, by extension, Fred Rogers Productions were making content decisions based on market demands for animation, without apparent consideration for how such a decision might affect their missions. Both entities see as central to their missions the creation and broadcasting of programming from which children can learn. PBS KIDS describes their mission thus:

> PBS KIDS is committed to making a positive impact on the lives of children through curriculum-based entertainment with positive role models and content designed to nurture a child's total well-being. With a 360-degree approach

> towards learning and reaching children, PBS KIDS leverages the full spectrum of media and technology to build knowledge, critical thinking, imagination and curiosity. PBS KIDS encourages children to interact as respectful citizens in a diverse society. By involving parents, teachers, caregivers and communities as learning partners,[12] PBS KIDS helps to empower children for success in school and in life. PBS' bottom line is measured by how much it contributes to the welfare of America's children. (*F.A.Q.*, n.d.)

Fred Rogers Productions espouses similar goals.

> Here at Fred Rogers Productions, kids come first, now and always. We connect with them through shows that are fun, relatable, and put their social and emotional learning front and center. That's how we've earned the trust of parents, caregivers, and teachers.
>
> We bring our one-of-a-kind expertise in early childhood development to partnerships with talented creators, writers, illustrators, animators, and producers. Together, we create shows that foster a natural enthusiasm for learning and that make kids smile while they learn big life lessons. And we are always exploring how to make the most of new ways for kids to watch and play. (*Our Productions*, n.d.)

Despite being "committed to making a positive impact on the lives of children through curriculum-based entertainment," PBS' apparent disinterest in live-action programming

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[12] Notice who is not explicitly involved in this list: children themselves. I will return to the topic of excluding children from the production and broadcasting processes later in this chapter.

is market-based, not pedagogically-derived. And although they wish to "foster a natural enthusiasm for learning," Fred Rogers Productions did not even consider a live-action program as a vehicle for fostering such enthusiasm, not because they thought it would be inferior to a live-action vehicle in achieving such a goal, but because they perceived it would not be supported by the market.

This focus on the demands of the market is troubling for two reasons. First, as I've discussed in previous chapters, American public broadcasting's entire raison d'etre was that a public broadcasting system would be able to bypass market pressure, focusing solely on meeting the demands of underserved, underrepresented people. Second, there is evidence to suggest that live-action based programming is a better vehicle for teaching.

One popular theory used by media scholars to predict and explain how learning from video presentations occur is the *social cognitive theory of mass communication* (Bandura, 2009). The first step in the vicarious learning process, which is a component of social cognitive theory (Pajares, Prestin, Chen, & Nabi, 2009), is attention. In other words, children can learn nothing from television if they do not first pay attention to it. Thus research into those characteristics of a televised program that encourage attention while not being detrimental to learning is one area of interest to researchers who seek ways to augment children's learning from television. Tower et al. (1979), for example, discovered that average-I.Q. children who watched *Sesame Street* (Singer, 1969) did not demonstrate increased cooperation, whereas those who watched *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (Rogers, 1968) did. They concluded that the rapid pace and frequent

cutting in *Sesame Street* made it too difficult for less intelligent children to process the prosocial content.

In social cognition terms, the presentation of the content may have made children pay attention to the program, but they were unable to learn from it.

Hayes and Casey (1992) noted that previous studies have shown that children's recall of televised programs parallels that of adults except when children are asked to recall characters' specific emotional reactions to stimuli, which children often could not do, even though children between 3 and 5 can recognize and identify emotions based on the facial expressions of people around them. The researchers showed programs featuring animation, puppets, and live-action to three groups of children and found that although children had trouble recalling emotional displays from the first two types of programs, which is consistent with previous research, they did not have the same problem with the live-action show. The authors suggested that young children may be unable to recognize the more abstract facial cues of unreal characters and that the nonverbal cues of humans may be more "readable" (p. 1435). This would be consistent with Persson and Musher-Eizenman's (2003) speculation that, for children, television content is too abstract from which to learn. The researchers saw this as a possible explanation for the results of a study in which they found that White preschoolers demonstrated a pro-White bias when identifying with and attributing positive or negative characteristics to White, Black, and Asian dolls and photographs both before and after exposure to television programs designed to lessen prejudice.

From a social cognitive perspective, one could hypothesize that young children will be more attentive to fantasy programming – like television content with puppets or cartoons – and rapid pacing, but will have greater difficulty learning from it. Children may be better able to learn from slower, live-action programs in which characters seem to talk to them –such as *Mister Rogers* – but may pay less attention to such programs. Lack of attention might then lead to lack of learning, so perhaps one could make a pedagogical argument for PBS and Fred Rogers Productions' foci on animated programming. However, that was not the reason specifically cited by Fred Rogers Productions' Isler for eschewing live-action productions. His was a market-based reason; the company perceived PBS as perceiving live-action programs as being unable to compete with the flashier, more attention-gathering animated productions of private broadcasters. In short, there is reason to believe that PBS and Fred Rogers' Productions' offerings could be more educative, but because of public broadcasting's precarious position of serving multiple masters and the market, they chose instead to go with a format that was less pedagogically sound.

Just as bowing to market demands may make public broadcasting content less educative empirically, outside pressure may also make that content less reflective of the lives and interests of the kinds of marginalized audiences public broadcasting was intended to serve. That is especially true when it comes to children, as "Children are among the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society" (United Nations Global Compact Programmes, n.d.), but unlike underrepresented or underprivileged adult populations, they lack an effective way to make their voices heard by the larger society.

One can see in some public broadcasters' decisions evidence to suggest that the interests of children take a backseat to the interests of other, more powerful demographics.

I wrote earlier in the chapter about the power of being reflected in media content, including one example that I argued was evidence of public broadcasting's more representative fare. A mother of a disabled child noted how positive it was for her family to see a disabled character on the animated program *Arthur* (Brown, 1996). I suggested that such a representation was a function of public broadcasting's greater capacity than private broadcasting to ignore outside demands and focus instead on representing the underrepresented. I have also consistently argued that public broadcasting's precarious position as neither truly independent nor truly public has at times compromised its ability to fulfill that function, and that this conflict of interests has been apparent throughout American broadcasting history.

As an example of this historical conflict between public broadcasting's mission to speak for the underrepresented and public broadcasting's need to appease other interests, consider the case of *Public Broadcast Laboratory* (Freedman, 1968), commonly referred to as *PBL*. This short-lived public interest program was distributed by National Education Television, one of PBS' predecessors (Ledbetter), and was initially intended to be broadcast from, and branded under, Columbia University.

Almost immediately, pressure mounted over the program's content, even before it has aired a single episode. As the production began to take shape, the trustees of Columbia rescinded their support. In the words of one of the program's producers, they had begun to realize that the program "could take political positions, economic positions

that the trustees of Columbia didn't necessarily want to endorse" (Ledbetter, p. 47). A quarter of the 119 stations to which PBL was available opted not to broadcast it, indicating that controversial programming would have nearly as hard a time finding a home on public broadcasting as it did on commercial television. While it may be difficult to say conclusively why the program was considered so distasteful, the likeliest explanation is that it was too racially charged for the White decision makers at Columbia and local public television stations: "Some of these stations cited financial pressure, while others declared the program too controversial, but there was no mistaking that the televising of outspoken racial politics created a regional blackout. No one in South Carolina, Alabama, or Georgia saw *PBL*'s first installment because none of the stations in those states broadcast it" (p. 49).

It is unlikely the Columbia trustees or the stations that opted not to carry the program came to regret their decision after seeing the first episode of *PBL*. A brief description of just one of the segments carried on that initial broadcast boggles the mind. It is almost inconceivable to think of such a program finding a home in primetime in the 21st century, let alone the late 60s. In this segment, *PBL* producers gave Russell Meeks, a self-described radical Black poet, "a movie camera and told him to film what it was like to live on what he called the 'stinkin' west side of Chicago'" (Ledbetter, p. 48). His film showed bombed-out buildings, children eating from dumpsters, and a dying dog convulsing in a vacant lot where children played baseball. Meeks himself derided Martin Luther King's advocacy of nonviolence as "the philosophy of the fool," called for "complete racial segregation" and said he and the new breed of activists of which he was

part would "rather die on our feet than live on our knees" (p. 48). After *PBL*'s first season, the board of directors of the nonprofit that produced the program bowed to outside pressure and their own distaste,[13] restructuring the program's production hierarchy and turning away from controversial fare. And what of those viewers who might have seen themselves in Meeks' film? Who might have found in his words solace and inspiration? They were disenfranchised and oppressed and would remain so, finding not even the cold comfort of feeling a little less alone in a society that regularly let them know they were not welcome.

As I have said, these kinds of disputes have always marked public broadcasting, and continue to do so. In a previous chapter I described the case of a controversial 2005 episode of *Postcards from Buster* (Brown, 2004), which several PBS affiliates refused to air because of its depiction of a married lesbian couple. In 2019, the aforementioned *Arthur* (Brown, 1996), from which *Postcards from Buster* was spun off, aired an episode in which a recurring male character (a schoolteacher, no less) was married to another man. This program was much better received than its predecessor, leading two reporters for *The Atlantic* (Fetters & Escobar, 2019) to speculate on how much society has changed in the last decade-plus, stating:

> That PBS's latest portrayal of a same-sex couple on children's programming has inspired such a wildly different response than the one it received 14 years ago is

[13] Some on the board wanted to see the program spotlight classical music and art criticism, echoing the divide between public broadcasting advocates from decades earlier, a divide in which one side sees the goal of public broadcasting as creating a safe, outside-of-the-market space for elitist entertainment and one side sees the goal as giving a voice to the voiceless.

> indicative of how much mainstream attitudes toward same-sex relationships have changed. Of course, in the years since *Postcards From* [*sic*] *Buster*, same-sex marriage has been legalized at the federal level. As with all changes in how people are represented on-screen, a chicken-or-egg scenario is at play: Perhaps the real-life normalization of same-sex relationships has led to better onscreen representation, or perhaps better onscreen representation has contributed to real-life normalization. Or perhaps both are true. (Fetters & Escobar, para. 6)

Perhaps both are true, but perhaps neither are as true as the rosy tone of the article might imply. At least one PBS affiliate refused to air the episode; the same affiliate refused to air the controversial *Postcards from Buster* episode as well (Romano, 2019). A spokesman for the affiliate explained:

> Parents have trusted Alabama Public Television for more than 50 years to provide children's programs that entertain, educate and inspire.... More importantly — although we strongly encourage parents to watch television with their children and talk about what they have learned afterwards — parents trust that their children can watch APT without their supervision. We also know that children who are younger than the 'target' audience for Arthur also watch the program. (Romano)

Notice that this explanation focuses not on the sorts of rights of children themselves that were discussed in Chapter 4, or on whether access to this program would have been educative to them. Further notice that the station's decision is not couched in terms of the missions of public broadcasting. Instead, the rights, needs, or interests of children are

not even addressed by a public institution that ostensibly exists in part to service the disenfranchised, children included. What of the needs of the young Ellen DeGenereses of the world? Of the thousands if not millions of young gay people who might have found in that broadcast comfort, inspiration, and a direction towards future flourishing? I suppose they will have to wait for another form of public broadcasting, one that, as of yet, does not exist.

Summary

In the previous chapter, I explained how censorship and market-based omissions often deny children their right to be aware of alternative ways of flourishing, and I argued that positive-freedoms-oriented educative messages can nurture children's flourishing. I also argued that Brighouse's conceptualization of flourishing is a more useful model for education than one built on the vague, unknowable promise of future financial well-being. Finally, I demonstrated how getting to know children as individually as possible is vital if our efforts at educating are to contribute well to flourishing.

In this chapter, I presented the argument that despite public broadcasting's potential to circumvent market demands and thus contribute more extensively to children's future flourishing, public broadcasting remains, as it has since its inception, precariously positioned so that it is too reliant on too many masters to serve the underrepresented populations to and for whom it was intended to speak. In the next chapter, I will try to draw upon the two preceding chapters to argue for a reimagining of public broadcasting, one that is less beholden to political and market forces and more

responsive to the rights and needs of children in general and, to the extent possible, to children as individuals.

CHAPTER VI

CHILDREN AS A SPECIAL CASE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BROADCASTING

In this chapter, I intend to show that children represent a special case in the public sphere, in that they are denied much of the freedom and opportunities open to adults, and therefore our society owes them protections that it does not extend to adults. Next, I intend to show how children's status as a special case in the public sphere impacts the topic of children and broadcasting. Finally, as I conclude this chapter, I intend to show how its arguments act as premises supporting the conclusion that adults have an obligation to consider and weigh the perspectives of children, not in spite of the fact that children lack political power and a space at the table of public deliberations, but because they lack that power and space.

An Example of the Exclusion of Children from the Public Sphere

On July 30, 1996, a group of broadcasters, scholars, businesspeople, politicians, and concerned adults convened at the White House for the White House Conference for Children's Television (Film Archives, 2015). For close to 2.5 hours, a parade of experts explained what was best for children when it came to television content, how broadcasters could use this information to best fulfill their mandate to serve the public interest when it came to children, and how the government and parents could help facilitate those efforts. It was self-evident that most of these people were both learned and well-intentioned. The abbreviated vitae with which they were each introduced speaks to the former quality, their very presence at the event speaks to the latter.

Among the numerous speakers, one kind of expert on children and television was missing: children. During more than 2 hours of testimony, none were consulted. An occasional speaker invoked children's opinions; for example, the dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communication, Kathleen Hall, mentioned a survey conducted at her school that found that both parents of 10-17 year-old*s and* children felt that television had done "more good than harm in the lives of their children" (Film Archives). Tipper Gore, one of the moderators, wondered aloud at one point if any of the networks had children on their advisory boards, or if they at least consulted children. The question went unanswered. Other than these two moments, children went unrepresented and, furthermore, were given no actual voice of their own.

Much of the language used that day spoke to a tendency to see children not as agents but as objects. For example, Robert Phillips, Deputy Medical Director of the American Psychiatric Association, said

> Children are like information sponges. They soak up everything that they see and then they wring out that sponge behaviorally in the actions that they engage in throughout their lifetimes. (Film Archives, n.p.)

This analogy seems no different than a tabula rasa view of young people, the idea that their minds are blank slates on which to be written, or lumps of clay to be formed. It is the kind of view of children to which Locke (n.d.) referred when he wrote, "I imagine the minds of children as easily turn'd this or that way, as water it self [*sic*]" (p. 75). As though not progressing much beyond a 17th century understanding of childhood development were not enough, insult was soon added to injury. Phillips acknowledged

the ready use of metaphors going on that day, and followed it with another that continued to betray an objectification of children and even a casual dismissal of them:

> We've used all sorts of metaphors to describe the ways in which children learn. I used one once when we [Phillips and First Lady Hillary Clinton, to whom he was speaking] were together, describing them as little VCRs that record everything and then play it back. The vice-president reminded me though that some of those VCRs just blink "twelve, twelve, twelve."

The audience chuckled. When Peggy Charren, founder of the nonprofit Action for Children's Television, promised to "glue children to the couch" to ensure eyes for advertisers if only broadcasters would produce programs that she thought were good for children, there was enthusiastic applause.

In addition to the objectification of children, the entire event had a self-congratulatory tone that I read as *Aren't we so great to care so much about children?* There is, however, one moment that flirted with confrontation. Speaking directly after an executive from the Fox television network, psychiatry professor Alvin Poussaint chastised the various networks for not truly serving children and being focused solely on their advertisers. Another participant politely and quickly disagreed, and the congratulations continued.

Defining the Public Sphere

That this conflict was not more fully explored is a shame, because this event can be seen as closely resembling an example of Habermas' (1991) conceptualization of the public sphere in action. The public sphere is a space to which all citizens have access and

in which various publics deliberate freely about problems and possible solutions. Public opinion is created by "open communication and popular participation through which alternative directions for social life are collectively reflected upon and adjudicated" (Emirbayer & Sheller, 1999, p. 155). There are, hypothetically, no barriers to participating in this sphere; anyone can come and be heard, and, via public discussions from all concerned and voluntary stakeholders, problems can be solved and ways forward determined.

Problems with the Public Sphere

Habermas described the growth of this space from its emergence in 18th-century Europe to its decline in the 19th and 20th centuries. A variety of factors contributed to this decline, but one I think most salient here is the absorption of newspapers and magazines into the machinery of capitalism as they acquired mass audiences. No longer products of people affluent enough and passionate enough to project their voices via print, these media became commercial in an unprecedented way. Instead of being printed representations of the free discussions that had occurred in coffeehouses and salons, they became more profit-driven, which then of course influenced what topics were discussed and whom was invited to the discussion. But as Habermas points out, even before its demise this public sphere did not function as it was purported to. Most people still went unheard; the poor and ethnic minorities spring to mind.

Relevance of these problems with the public sphere to the present discussion. It may seem odd to apply this conceptualization of the public sphere to modern, American children, because: we are a century or more removed from its demise; it was

half of a world away from America; and it did not truly function as the ideal model of free and open debate it was alleged to be. However, the model the public sphere was supposed to embody would be a worthy thing to which to aspire in any time or place. This seems to be Habermas' larger point. It was not that the public sphere as it was practiced in that time and place was so great; rather, it was that it had the potential to be so. Habermas spends much of his book discussing the ways in which the sphere did not live up to its purported ideal, the implication of which is that it is the *model* of the sphere (not the 18th century European sphere itself), and its potential contemporary value, that is the meat of the matter.

If there were a space where all were invited to be heard and to listen and in which logic and reason were applied to those deliberations in order to plan ways forward, it would be a boon to society. Much of the work to be done towards realizing such a space lies in identifying voices that are largely excluded from the table. A positive way to view the last century-plus of our history is as a narrative in which the invitation list to the figurative coffeehouse has gradually expanded. Racial minorities, women, immigrants, the poor, and those whose genders and sexual identities fall outside of the heteronormative have all fought for and won more secure positions at the table of public discourse in that time. Still, not all have equal voices, and some remain excluded.

Children as a group excluded from the public sphere. One of the parties whose exclusion has led to a less-than-perfect public sphere is children, as can be seen in the example of the aforementioned White House summit. They are both denied a role in governing and are largely unheard within the dialogues of the public sphere. When

children *are* given voices within the public sphere, it is generally by proxy. Some scholars have questioned the exclusion of children from public affairs and the limiting of both their normative and legal rights based solely on their ages and not on whether they have earned or deserve such rights. Arneil (2002) writes

> Liberal feminists have used rights to empower women, arguing that the public sphere must be expanded to include women as citizens. More recently, children's rights theorists have made the same claims on behalf of children. (p. 72)

Nevertheless, the reason for excluding children is self-evident to any culturally native adult and to, I would assume, any adult of any culture or nation anywhere (to my knowledge, no nation well and truly gives children either a direct role in its administration or a real voice in its deliberations). And so I assume nearly every adult everywhere would, upon being told that children were excluded from the public sphere, think it only natural, their probable reasoning being: *Of course they're excluded. They're* only *children. They're the* objects *of deliberations, not* participants *in them*.

The problem with reflexive exclusion. The danger in such a kneejerk response is that sometimes exclusions are not natural (which is to say inevitable) and logical. The propertied farmer of the 18th century no doubt thought it natural that Africans in the New World were excluded from political processes and debates, just as many men and women thought nothing of the exclusion of women from those domains right up into the last century. To uncritically and reflexively exclude is to do an injustice.

Reasons this exclusion occurs. The source of this reflexive exclusion is no doubt rooted in self-evident facts: Children are different from adults, and in many ways those

differences reflect inferiority on the part of children. On the whole, and looking at no particular age range, children are doubtlessly weaker than adults, slower than adults, less intelligent than adults. It is the last aspect of their inferiority that is the rub. The invisible logic of culture, explicitly brought to light, seems to say: Children are indeed generally less intelligent than adults, and therefore not to be trusted with a part in political processes and not to be consulted in regards to those processes.

Evidence of this invisible logic is identifiable whenever the voices of young people do get attended to by various mass and social media. Perhaps the most salient recent example of this phenomenon is the social media backlash experienced by many student survivors of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018. Several survivors have established internet and social media presences to engage in pro-gun-control activism. Their efforts have been met with often vitriolic backlash in the form of outlandish, accusatory conspiracy theories, characterizations of the survivors as "whining," and death threats (Sharman, 2018). One strain of this backlash is social media posts and political commentators who disparage these activists for their youth, implying they should not be participating in public deliberations about the future of their nation as they are only children. Conservative commentator Dinesh D'Souza, for example, tweeted "Worst news since their parents told them to get summer jobs" along with a photo of distraught Parkland alumni who were disappointed to learn that the Florida legislature was not passing a specific gun control measure supported by the students (Scot, 2018). Conservative pundit Ben Shapiro criticized the news media for giving the Parkland teens a platform, pointing

out that they had no real expertise and, as young people, their minds were not yet fully developed (Shapiro, 2018). He saw the attention given to the words of the Parkland survivors by news entities like CNN as pushing a leftist agenda, not as allowing young people their due place in public deliberations, something he saw as problematic:

> Children and teenagers are not fully rational actors. They're not capable of exercising supreme responsibilities. And we shouldn't be treating innocence as a political asset used to push the agenda of more sophisticated players. But the Left won't stand for such line-drawing. That's because for the Left, status as a rational actor, let alone as an expert, isn't actually the chief qualification for political gravitas: It's emotion. And children are as capable of emotional response as anyone else. So we should give children full leeway to express their emotions in any way they deem fit, and it should be our job to humor them so far as we can bear it — up to and including in policy considerations. That's a horrible style of parenting, let alone governing. This discussion of young people's political involvement leaves out one crucial element: the responsibility of older people to help inculcate expertise and reason in young people. The whole reason that young people are generally less capable of strong decision-making is that the emotional centers of the brain are overdeveloped in comparison with the rational centers of the brain.

Allowing children to speak their minds is not from this perspective allowing them to exercise a Constitutional right. Attending to what they have to say is not recognizing that, as the governed, their opinions about their government are relevant, if their

government is to rule justly. No, it is "humoring them," and it is both bad governing and bad parenting. Although they may exist, I have not seen equivalent think pieces and articles bemoaning man-on-the-street journalism, even though the opinions of the average voter are not informed by some personal expertise. Nor have I seen equivalent reactions to the news time dedicated to not-at-all-rational adult protestors, like the tiki-torch-carrying White supremacists of the now-infamous 2017 Charlottesville, Virginia, protests. It is their age alone on which critics base their allegation that these children should be seen and not heard, that they have not the right to express themselves nor should they be taken seriously if they do.

Journalist Rebecca Onion (2018, February 22) examined how this response from some adults to the political activity of young people mirrors several prominent activism campaigns from the past. She noted that youth activism played an important part in the 1950s Civil Rights Movement, students' rights cases from the 1960s on (*Tinker v Des Moines* [1969] being perhaps the most noteworthy), and nuclear arms proliferation protests of the 1950s. Further, Onion noted that in each of these cases there was a backlash from some circles against youth activism itself, not against the specific arguments being made by youth activists. Beyond that, Onion described how having one's place in the public sphere delegitimized has traditionally been a tool used to maintain the oppression of those delegitimized segments of society.

> It's worth noting that objections to children's activism sound a lot like those that have been mounted to the inclusion of women and people of color in the body politic. All of these groups have been variously portrayed as hysterical, irrational,

> demanding, biased, and easily manipulated. In an accusation like the one President Donald Trump levied against Judge Gonzalo Curiel (remember when the candidate insinuated during his campaign that the judge would be incapable of fairly evaluating a case against Trump because he's of Mexican descent?), you can see how the assignment of "childlike" traits of emotionality can also be used to diminish a nonwhite authority figure's power.

Ultimately, public discourse is supposed to be contingent upon being a member of given society, from one's status as one of the governed from whose consent the government ostensibly obtains its legitimacy. Even if the activists in question are young or irrational or emotional, the right to speak and be heard is still theirs. It belongs to the rational, tiki-toting racist adult, just as it belongs to the emotional, unthinking young person who has the temerity not to want to be shot.

Children's Exclusion from the Public Sphere as an Infringement on their Rights and a Detriment to Society

I argue that this hostile and dismissive reaction to the opinions of young people is both an infringement upon children's right to free expression and a detriment to the public sphere as a whole. It is an infringement upon children's rights because they have a right to express themselves, to the extent that they are able to, and that right is not dependent upon their intellectual capacity or their ability to participate, either cognitively or legally, in governing and in executing the results of deliberations within the public sphere. To demonstrate this, I turn to the topic of rights, specifically as that topic applies

to children. Doing so demonstrates how children are a special case within the public sphere.

Children's Becoming Rights

As European thinkers began questioning an understanding of society that saw all citizens as subjects of a monarch and instead began arguing for the consent of the governed as a requisite for a just state, there developed a need to determine exactly whose consent among the governed was required. Some marginalized groups were excluded from involvement, supposedly because they lacked rational thinking skills and the ability to reason. Unique amongst those excluded were children, who, if all went well, would develop into rational beings who would then therefore merit citizenship. Thus children had *becoming rights*, rights they had by virtue of the fact that they would later have other rights (Arneil).

This line of thought might have its roots in the 17th century, but the tree that grew from it has extended centuries beyond that. We can hear, for examples, echoes of the view of children as becoming in Dewey (2011). He conceptualized education as being partially a negotiation between the child and the society, and the aims of education as a negotiation among parts of that society. The goal of this process is to take that "immature, undeveloped being" and develop from him or her a person "who has gained the power of reflective attention, the power to hold problems, questions, before the mind" (p. 94). Education is then a process of becoming, of initiating the immature into the world of maturity. It follows then that the immature have at least some rights, for if those rights are not protected the irrational can never develop into citizens.

This conceptualization of children's rights is similar to the concept of developmental rights, which "we give to children in order to make possible certain rights as an adult" (Warnick, 2013, p. 35). Warnick explains that to make use of rights as an adult, individuals must be able to choose from competing options. Thus, to make the most of life, to actually profit by an individual's rights, individuals must know how to make sound choices. To deny children the right to make at least some decisions, to deny them at least some rights, is to deny their later adult selves the full use of their rights. Those rights held by those later, adult selves are known as liberty rights (such as the ability to freely speak one's mind, to practice one's religion as one sees fit, to live where one likes, to pursue the career of one's choosing, etc.).

Children's Liberty Rights

Liberty rights are often seen as being contingent upon some age threshold: They become yours when you become of age. Laura Purdy (1992) argues that children do not have the intellects or the informed world views needed to apply liberties to good decisions, and therefore they lack liberty rights and have instead only welfare rights, the rights to be protected, to have one's basic needs met, and so forth. In short, this argument goes, children do not have the mental capacity or the requisite knowledge to have good judgement, and so they are granted fewer rights. There is an undeniable logic to this argument. Brighouse (1999), for example, notes the need for children to have only a limited say in making decisions about their lives. "They must not feel themselves to have no control over their diet," he writes,

> but it is also vital, not just for their long-term well-being, but for their short-term enjoyment, that their choice is restricted somewhat (ten ice creams at a single sitting does not enhance their short-term enjoyment — nor, at least for many young children, does a ten-hour TV marathon). (p. 42)

But just because children may or may not be entitled to the same amount of rights as adults does not lead necessarily to the conclusion that children lack liberty rights altogether. Griffin (2002) argues that humans' rights derive from their abilities to envision the lives they want and then work towards realizing those goals. This is what makes humans unique, he says, so this quality is what imbues personhood. Griffin sees humans' rights as being a product of their agency; because human beings have both the desire for that which they see as good and the abilities to realize at least some of those things, they must have protected as rights those tools which will allow them to work towards those things. Therefore, Griffin says, people

> have a right to life (without it personhood is impossible), to security of person (for the same reason), to a voice in political decision (a key exercise of autonomy), to free expression, to assembly, and to a free press (without them the exercise of autonomy would be a sham). It also generates, I should say (though this is hotly disputed), a positive freedom, namely to *a right to minimum learning* and material resources needed for a human existence, that is, for more than mere physical survival. (p. 21, emphasis mine)

Although framed as *liberty rights*, I think one could interpret these rights as welfare rights; these rights must be protected if people are to live the lives they want. Griffin

goes on to note that these rights, although they are *human* rights, do not necessarily apply to all humans, as they derive from agency, and not all humans have agency to the fullest (children and the developmentally disabled, for example) or even any degree (the comatose or brain dead). Therefore, "rights of an agent do not transfer to any necessary condition for the existence of that agent" (p. 22). So while Griffin would not extend all of the above rights to children, to the extent that they have applicable agency (such as the ability to hold or express an opinion) they have associated rights (such as the right to free speech). Thus, following Griffin's line of thinking, children have a right to free expression. Griffin recognizes that rights must be limited by what he calls "practicalities," and I assume this would be one of those rights. Adults are legally entitled to free expression within time, place, and manner restrictions. One could infer from Griffin's thinking then that children are entitled to the same, but with similar restrictions. For example, one of the restrictions upon this right might be that it would be limited according to a child's parents' understandings of appropriate time, place, and manner for the expression to occur. Further, children have the right to some level of education necessary to equip them to pursue the life they want as adults. Ergo, children have some rights based on the fact that those rights are necessary in order for them to have certain later rights, whereas they have other rights because they have the agency needed to exercise those rights.

Children's liberty rights as a function of competence. Like Griffin, Warnick also recognizes children as having some limited liberty rights. He points out one problem with a line of thinking that argues that children lack liberty rights because they lack

competencies: The inferiority of children is indeed true generally, but not necessarily (and never universally) in the specific. Some children are stronger than some adults, some are faster than some adults, and, he notes, "some children are actually more knowledgeable and display better judgement than some adults" (p. 29). Thus he says competency and not age should be the measuring stick by which rights should be conferred. While Warnick stops short of suggesting wide-scale changes to the sorts of liberty rights granted to children in all areas of life (limiting his arguments to the operation of schools), he does recognize, and indeed seem to embrace, the logical extension of his argument:

> For example, if a mature 13-year-old child can demonstrate sound judgement, critical thinking skills, and knowledge of civic, political, geographic, and historical affairs equal to, or greater than, an accepted level of competency, then fairness demands that he or she, too, should be able to vote. (p. 34)

Problems with competence-based liberty rights. I see two potential problems with granting children liberty rights based on their competence. First, I fear a possible slippery slope that would lead ultimately to a restriction of recognized rights rather than an expansion. Invoking demonstrations of knowledge and competence as a requisite for rights conjures some unsavory specters from America's civil rights battles past. Slippery slopes aside, these lines of thinking about children and their rights find their foci everywhere but internally. Rights are conferred based on some externally agreed upon and applied age threshold, or they are conferred based on some external assessment of some of a child's outwardly measurable qualities, but in neither case is the child's inner

world being considered except as it is measurable by inference. *You know* these *things, ergo you have earned* this *thing*.

What is forgotten here is that children's internal selves differ from adults' inner selves regardless of any tests of knowledge. Neurology tells us that the brain does not fully develop until at least the early 20s, that the brain of an adolescent is literally physically different from the brain of an adult (National Institute of Mental Health, 2011). No matter how well an individual might do on some test designed to measure competence, an individual is still a child if not of age. In warning against the tendency to see children as a monolithic demographic, Warnick writes, "A 5-year-old is very different from a 10-year-old, and a 10-year-old is very different from a 15-year-old" (p. 27). Similarly, Griffin writes, "When is a person capable of [agency]? In the natural development of a child, the capacity appears in stages, and therefore respect for the child's autonomy should (ideally) increase in parallel stages" (p. 27). Warnick may be right about the differences among, 5, 10, and 15-year-olds, but all three are different from a 25-year-old. Griffin may be right that children develop in stages, but none of those stages end with them being fully formed adults until well beyond the age of 18 years. To the extent that some of that difference lies in their different levels of cognitive ability, I think age-based thresholds remain broadly and generally fair, even if they remain inadequate in specific instances.

Denying children liberty rights altogether. So then what is my problem with Purdy's conclusion that children lack liberty rights? Even if I accept that liberty rights should only be extended to those who have the knowledge and judgment to use them

properly, it is problematic. As I've said, Purdy argues against children even having liberty rights, for they lack intellectual development and good judgement. Warnick notes one problem with this line of thinking: By making liberty rights dependent upon intelligence and good sense, Purdy's argument, carried to its logical conclusion, would deny liberty rights to many adults. One might argue, as I have, for the need for an age threshold, but because she builds her argument upon a foundation of intelligence and knowledge, Purdy cannot easily justify extending liberty rights to adults who make poor decisions or who are unintelligent, or at least she cannot do so without predicating her argument on arbitrary grounds. The logical conclusion to her argument is that one individual cannot have liberty rights because they lack the good sense to use them due their age while another individual can have these rights because although they may lack that same sense, they have reached an arbitrarily-determined age.

Utilitarian argument for granting children liberty rights. From a societal standpoint, one problem with Purdy's argument is that denying children liberty rights could be detrimental to society as a whole, because one can make a utilitarian argument in favor of assuring children their place at the table of public discourse. As Arendt (1977) notes in her conceptualization of *natality* – the idea that each person's birth is the arrival of a new, unique thing into the world – the best hope for remaking the world in which we live lies in bringing in new people to live alongside us. If, however, we do not allow them a chance to express and exercise that newness, society cannot reap its benefits. Human life becomes merely about reproduction, about raising a new generation as similar as possible to the previous one. Of course, for some people it seems this is

indeed the ideal, but for society to innovate, for the world to become more just, for new problems resistant to old solutions to be solved, children's novelty must be fostered and their ideas entertained.

I turn now to John Stuart Mill (1986) for further support for the idea that affording children some liberty rights has utilitarian benefits for society. This is perhaps not an obvious turn to make; when formulating his argument that "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign" (p. 16), Mill explicitly excludes children. Further, he carries his argument into places that are, through 21st century eyes, troubling. He writes:

> It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties. We are not speaking of children, or of young persons below the age which the law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood. (p. 16)

Notice that Mill adorns his language in a cloak of inevitability; it is "hardly necessary" for him to note that children are excluded from his formulation of rights. *Of course they're excluded. They're* only *children.* Notice further, however, Mill's reasoning for denying children some liberty rights: "Those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others, [*sic*] must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury" (p. 16). His thinking here is similar to Purdy's. He is, in short, saying that children have welfare rights and lack liberty rights, because they lack the judgment to use them well. Even if this is so, that still only justifies denying children some liberty rights – those which might cause them or others to come to harm – not all liberty rights.

As I have said, Mill takes this line of thinking to a troubling place. If it is just to deny children some rights because they are undeveloped and lack the judgment to use them appropriately, it follows that it is just to deny anyone a right if they are undeveloped and judgment-impaired. This then opens the can of worms of who gets to set the thresholds for development and judgment. Mill writes:

> For the same reason, we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage. The early difficulties in the way of spontaneous progress are so great, that there is seldom any choice of means for overcoming them; and a ruler full of the spirit of improvement is warranted in the use of any expedients that will attain an end perhaps otherwise unattainable. Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end. (pp. 16-17)

And here again is the trouble with applying trait-based criteria to rights: It opens a door through which one can slide down a slippery slope to racist paternalism.

Yet paradoxically, it is exactly on this point – the fact that a learned intellectual could be, in the hindsight of later centuries, so very wrong on a moral issue – where I think Mill most strengthens my assertion that there is a utilitarian argument to be made for granting children liberty rights. In discussing the need for the state and for public opinion to arrive at logically-based conclusions on what is and is not appropriate behavior – and on what is and is not the domain of the government in regulating such behavior – he writes:

> Some rules of conduct, therefore, must be imposed, by law in the first place, and by opinion on many things which are not fit subjects for the operation of the law. What these rules should be is the principal question in human affairs.... No two ages, and scarcely any two countries, have decided it alike; and the decision of one age or country is a wonder to another. (p. 11)

To then answer this "principal question in human affairs" it is necessary to hear evidence, apply logic, and examine critically all propositions of morality or power hierarchies within a society.

> The rules [people of a given age or nation support] appear to them self-evident and self-judging. This all but universal illusion is one of the examples of the magical influence of custom, which is not only, as the proverb says a second nature, but is continually mistaken for the first. The effect of custom, in preventing any misgiving respecting the rules of conduct which mankind impose on one another, is all the more complete because the subject is one on which *it is not generally considered necessary that reasons should be given*. (pp. 11-12, emphasis mine)

Here one might cry "hypocrisy" at Mill, who found it "hardly necessary" to explain why children did not have sovereignty over their own lives. However, this is precisely Mills' point: He, and indeed anyone and any era, could be mistaken. Thus, a utilitarian argument for allowing children a voice within the public sphere emerges: Children may bring to the table some insight that is dismissed now and thus it may be dismissed erroneously when it could be to the betterment of us all if we were to weigh that insight.

The problem with utilitarian arguments for liberty rights. The problem, however, with a utilitarian argument is that it ignores the question of individual rights. What if children *should* have liberty rights, but their having those rights does not do society as a whole any good? After all, what are the odds that a child might have the sort of startling insight that could truly enrich the public sphere and the deliberations therein? Mills also takes this limitation of utilitarianism into consideration, crafting an argument for individuals' liberty rights that has nothing to do with those rights' value to anyone but those individuals.

> I have said that it is important to give the freest scope possible to uncustomary things, in order that it may in time appear which of these are fit to be converted into customs. But independence of action, and disregard of custom are not solely deserving of encouragement for the chance they afford that better modes of action, and customs more worthy of general adoption, may be struck out; nor is it only persons of decided mental superiority who have a just claim to carry on their lives in their own way. There is no reason that all human existences should be constructed on some one, [*sic*] or some small number of patterns. If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common-sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is the best, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode. Human beings are not like sheep; and even sheep are not undistinguishably alike. (p. 77)

To paraphrase part of Warnick's argument, some children demonstrate a "tolerable amount of common-sense." Thus, there is here an argument for children's liberty rights

that disregards their lack of "decided mental superiority" and confers those rights regardless of whether granting those rights might lead to "better modes of action" or "customs more worthy of general adoption." Children are entitled to some liberty rights simply because those rights can help them lead a life that suits them.

Children as a Special Case in the Public Sphere: In Summation

Even if one sees liberty rights as being conferred only when one has good judgment and some vague requisite level of knowledge, that still is not grounds to deny children *all* liberty rights. A 10-year-old with the physical and mental potential to drive may not have the good sense needed to earn the right to drive. Similarly, a child may have a grasp of history and government that exceeds many adults' grasps without having the experience or judgment to effectively participate in governance as a voter. Nevertheless, what judgment test could be devised for conferring the right to speak one's mind or the right to be heard at the table of the public sphere? Such a test cannot be imposed, or at least not without coming perilously close to invoking the specter of literacy tests and knowledge exams that were once used to deny African Americans their liberty right to vote.

Children should be granted some liberty rights because: (a) there is the potential for this extension of rights to benefit society; (b) some children have the competence and intellect to use some liberty rights well; (c) the extension of some liberty rights to children would in no way endanger them or others; and (d) children have some liberty rights as an extension of their becoming rights; they cannot profit from their rights as adults without opportunities to practice some of those rights as children. It is dangerous

to make rights contingent upon the acquisition of some level of knowledge and judgment, but even to the extent that one might safely do so, it would not be grounds to deny children their part in the communication exchange of the public sphere. However, it would not be enough to then say that they are simply allowed to participate. The Supreme Court held in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that African American children had the right to attend schools from which they had been excluded, but merely saying they had that right conferred it only in theory, not in practice. I cannot simply say children have the right to speak and to be heard; I assert society must do something to assure that they do and they are, or they likely will not be afforded those rights.

If a child has the right to be heard in the public sphere, but nobody is listening, has that child made a noise? This is more than some philosophical thought experiment; it has real ramifications for just democratic governance. If the legitimacy of a government relies on the consent of the governed, and children are the least free (and thus most governed) among us, then the legitimacy of our way of governing relies, at least in part, in our attending to their opinions on public issues. Consider another population whose rights have been limited, and ostensibly justifiably so: prisoners. We may decide prisoners have lost their rights to be free, but the fact that they no longer have the freedom to seek their daily bread does not mean we have the right to let them starve; no, feeding them becomes a societal responsibility precisely because we have deprived them of that freedom. Yes, children may lack the cognitive development, knowledge, and maturity to directly participate in democratically governing; nevertheless, that does not

mean they have no right to express their opinions on public matters; it means only that we have a responsibility to listen when they do.

Thus children are a special case in the public sphere because: (a) they have at least some rights by virtue of having them, not by virtue of any measuring stick or external criteria, be it age or competency; (b) their rights are nevertheless distinct from some of the rights adults are recognized as having because of children's limited competencies and the need to protect children from harm that might befall them from the exercise of their rights; (c) exercising the right to speak freely and participate in public discourse – to be participants in the public sphere – could not be expected to be likely to lead to children being harmed; (d) exercising those rights could not be expected to be likely to infringe upon anyone else's well-being; (e) in fact, exercising those rights could actually have societal benefits; (f) but those rights cannot be conferred merely in name. Children's places in the public sphere have to be protected and advocated for, because as children currently lack such places in a true sense, children cannot effectively protect and advocate for their places on their own. Our moral obligation as a society to protect children's rightful place in public deliberations has ramifications for broadcasting in general and public broadcasting specifically, as I will now try to show.

Broadcasting and the Public Sphere

In Chapter 1, in briefly trying to describe the ideologically-opposed factions who clashed over designing the American broadcasting systems, I wrote that

> George W. Stoddard, president of the University of Illinois, told the National Conference on Educational Television that they must remain adamant in their

> fight for and support of educational television in spite of the accusations of "rampant socialism" ("Educational," 1953). He "attributed [these] attacks on educational TV to fear." The article quoted here does not tell us what he believed his opponents feared, but given the privileged place capitalism and the market are given in American society, the implication, I think, is clear: "We must not be afraid of being labelled un-American, even though we are suggesting the market does not fix all."

Stoddard is not the only figure to have feared the market in this way, as Habermas' aforementioned concerns regarding the degradation of the public sphere by the demands of the market show. Stoddard seems to have feared something similar occurring when the broadcast media were ensconced firmly in the market. As I attempted to demonstrate in Chapter 1, despite promises that privatized, laissez-faire broadcasting would lead to broadcasting industries that were responsive to public needs and interests, it led instead to industries responsive only to those public needs and interests that were market-oriented. Public interests and market commercialism continued to make strange bedfellows for the next several decades.

The White House conference to which I referred in this chapter's introduction seems to be another manifestation of the market's dominance over the public interest. Repeatedly, the need to find a way to make commercially-viable programming that was good for children was discussed. No one suggested radical changes to the television industry. No one intimated that perhaps asking television to serve both children and corporations was too great a demand. No one so much as implied that the market may

not be an adequate mechanism for ensuring children's television was as beneficial as possible. It was taken as a given: *The market can fix it; we just have to figure out how to help the market do that, and when we do, we will glue the public known as children to their seats to watch, whether it is within their interests or not*. This assumption that the market is the tool best suited to solve all problems is an example of *market fundamentalism*. It is "the fervent conviction that all of social life should be organized according to market principles" (Somers, 2008, p. 73), "that when left to its own devices, the market is not only efficient and optimal; it is also the only legitimate way to organize a free society" (p. 75)."

Market fundamentalists and those concerned with public goods would seem to be often at loggerheads, and yet in the American tradition they are often compelled to make for the aforementioned strange bedfellows. The strangeness comes in part because the very goal of the participants in the marketplace, to ensure their personal profit, is often at odds with a larger public good. Thus in Habermas' vision of the public sphere, it was free "from the great and overbearing forces of the economy" (Price, p. 24). But instead of being the results of consensuses reached after thoughtful, public deliberation in a forum to which all are invited, laws and public policy "correspond in a more or less unconcealed manner to the compromising of conflicting private interests" (p. 26). And so Congress dictated that the broadcast industries would serve the public interest, without clearly defining or operationalizing that mandate. This dictum appeased business interests who sought to profit from these new media, and it also paid the requisite lip service the public good.

In Chapter II I wrote of early broadcasting optimists who viewed the new invention of television as a boon to democracy, as it would enable even the illiterate to access other citizens' messages and to create and disseminate their own messages. I noted that: (1) some of these optimists saw the need therefore for the new medium to be as unfettered as possible from government overreach; (2) those optimists' concerns were consistent with Habermas' public sphere, as he maintained that "a properly working public sphere must actually have a limiting impact on the state" (Price, 1995, p. 25); and that by leaving broadcasting largely to the whims of the market, these publics instead contributed to the undermining of the public sphere, because "by placing broadcasting in the marketplace, entry became limited to the very affluent and to large corporations"; thus the discourse of the infant broadcast industries became not a new kind of Habermasian ideal but "a poor version of the public sphere" that has been "distorted, if not mutilated, by imbalances of access, wealth, and power" (p. 26). "Thus," I wrote, "although 'Broadcasting often creates the illusion of a public sphere' (p. 29), 'there is something about the emergence and history of radio (and later television) that is almost antithetical to the idealized notions of the public sphere'" (p. 27). Price goes on to say that "Over time, the electronic media have become so pervasive, so linked not only to political institutions, but to the machinery of debate and decision, so seized with importance, that they suffuse and overwhelm other aspects of public discussion." (p. 27)

So despite reasonable concerns about the government exerting unreasonable power over the broadcast industries, there is perhaps a need, if they are truly to be servants of the public, to revisit the congressionally-created paradigm: "If a public sphere

is essential to a democracy, and the electronic media control the quality of the public sphere, the architecture of the media is of utmost importance" (Price, 1995, p. 27). Thus no matter the tenets of market fundamentalism, for broadcasting to truly serve the public interest and sphere, there is some need for governmental regulation. The questions then are what form that regulation should take and how extensive should it be, not whether or not it should even exist.

To some extent, this is becoming a moot issue, at least as it applies to adult citizens. Price's words here, written as they were more than 20 years ago, are outdated. The scarcity of the broadcast spectrum to which he alludes, and which was often used as a justification for regulation of the industries, becomes less relevant all of the time. In a world where a teenager with a webcam and low enough inhibitions can routinely reach millions of viewers online, it becomes harder and harder to argue that regulation is justified on the basis that broadcasting allows a select, powerful few to reach a mass audience. Beyond that, there is the question of the agency of adult citizens. Even if the broadcast industries as conceived and executed by Congress nearly a century ago do not serve the public interest and sphere, if that is the paradigm devised by elected officials, and if the citizens those officials are serving do not seem unhappy with the arrangement, it then becomes hard to justify regulatory intrusion upon this model. True, with a proper public sphere and appropriate deliberations, those millions of television viewers who seem satisfied with the status quo may instead call for the design of the current broadcasting systems to be revisited. However, it reeks of paternalism to justify

implementing changes on the assumption that those meant to benefit from such changes will later appreciate it.

Broadcasting, Children, and the Public Sphere

Children, on the other hand, are quasi-citizens. They do not shed all of their rights at school doors and yet have less clearly defined rights. I have argued earlier that children are a special case in the public sphere, because they legally lack complete access to the public sphere – they are not citizens in the fullest sense – and yet they merit some kind of access to public discourse. They deserve to have the freedom to exercise those liberty rights that they have the capacity to use well, or at least without harming others or themselves. On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine scenarios in which young people might be harmed by exposure to discourse, even if they could exercise their right to speak without harming themselves.

Still, there are tremendous potential benefits on both an individual and even societal basis to be gained from protecting children's positive freedom to consume certain kinds of broadcast programming. In an earlier chapter, I wrote about Cantor, Sparks, and Hoffner's (1988) study that showed that a prosocial children's television program, when properly mediated by an adult co-viewer, could lessen children's fear reactions to other kinds of programming. The ability of one specific program to lessen fears about another specific program may seem trivial, but the larger point is that children's inner states can be influenced by their consumption of media messages. That influence can be to their direct personal benefit, such as in the case of lessening fear, but it can also be in a way that benefits others, too. For example, researchers have found that after several months

of exposure to the Israeli and Palestinian versions of *Sesame Street* (Singer, 1969), children from one ethnic group were more likely to use positive words to describe photos of adults from the other ethnic group (Cole et al., 2003). The Israeli children watched alone or in classroom settings, whereas Palestinian children watched mostly with their families. The researchers noted that the Israeli version of the show featured more vignettes showing Palestinian children than the Palestinian version showed of Israeli children. So the Palestinians had more co-viewing with significant others, whereas the Israeli children saw more positive representations of the other ethnic group. Israeli children showed the greater increase in positive attributions, indicating that media exposure alone has the power to lessen racial prejudice. That finding is consistent with some older television studies (see for example Gorn, Goldberg, & Kanungo, 1976; Houser, 1978).

The personal benefits of reduced fear and prejudice are, I think, apparent. However, there are larger social benefits implied here. A society in which racial prejudice is reduced is one that would be more just and peaceful and one in which the public sphere would be more inclusive and therefore function better. Children's media could potentially then be a powerful tool for the betterment of individual lives and the functioning of a democratic society. Cremin (1976) wrote that public education must be thought of comprehensively, relationally, and publicly. Comprehensively, one must recognize that education occurs not within the classroom alone but within the student's world at large. Relationally, one must think about how the aspects within that education-writ-large macrocosm interact with one another. Cremin wrote:

> It may be the best the school can do is engage the instruction of the other educators and seek to strengthen or complement or correct or neutralize or countereducate or, most importantly, perhaps, try to develop in students an awareness of the other educators and an ability to deal with them on their own. (p. 62)

Finally, we must think publicly about these educational intersections, what Cremin called configurations. These intersections form what Cremin called one's educational ecology. Clearly, the content of broadcast media creates much of the ecologies of most children's educations. What must be grappled with then is how do we strengthen or complement or correct or neutralize or counter those media, or develop in children an awareness of these other educators?

Once broadcasting was placed within the market, and was thus made advertiser-driven, viewers become a commodity to be delivered to advertisers. Instead of citizens within an expanded public sphere, they became products in the marketplace. However, these products, unlike most, have agency. They can participate within the public sphere, get involved politically, and even vote with money as consumers in efforts to change the broadcasting paradigm.

Children, on the other hand, lack that same agency. Furthermore, at least as far as young children are concerned, children lack the cognitive ability to fully understand their place within the broadcasting universe. Marketers and broadcasters routinely frame their work as being all about the individual viewer, especially now, in a video-on-demand world. Children lack the ability to fully process and understand this message, to realize

that they are the product in this market. They are not being served *by* broadcasters, but instead are being served *to* advertisers by broadcasters, a nuance that children cannot fully grasp. As such, unlike adults, they are entitled to greater protection within this market.

When it is left to the market to decide how to serve children's interests, broadcasters do things like categorize *The Jetsons* and *The Flintstones* as educational programming (Andrews, 1993, March 4). There has long been a vital need – a significant piece of the public interest – that has not been well served by the market. As broadcasters profit from a public resource, they are both morally and legally obligated to serve that missing piece, to produce educational material that helps foster children's emotional well-being and that would serve to better the public sphere by creating citizens who are more tolerant and therefore more accepting of open, public deliberation.

When the Normative and Reality Meet

I believe that last part. I really do. I also recognize that the reality is more complicated than that. First, even if one accepts that broadcasters have some sort of legal responsibility to create materials that would benefit children and shape them into active and appropriate participants in the public sphere, how is that responsibility operationalized? What is the policy that can be created to respond to that obligation? To what extent does society even have the right to shape children into the kinds of adults deemed valuable? I run the risk of being like Counts (1932), who concluded that "impartiality is utterly impossible, [and therefore] the school must shape attitudes, develop tastes, and even impose ideas" by "stacking the cards in favor of the particular

systems of value which we may happen to possess" (pp. 19-20). On the other hand, it may be true that impartiality is unachievable, but so too is any reasonable certainty that our personal biases are correct. Society can never be sure that it is right; therefore, for the public sphere to function properly, for society's own well-being, room for new ideas must be allowed to be considered and debated (Mill, 1986). Who is to say, if I am even right and broadcasters have a moral responsibility to serve children's well-being and their developments as citizens, that society can even know what is good for their well-being, their future lives as citizens, or their future flourishing in general?

Carried to its logical ending, this line of thinking leads to the abolition not only of broadcasting regulations but of public schooling itself, a logical end I am not prepared to embrace. My point then is not to dismiss the responsibility of broadcasters or to argue that stricter enforcement of existing (and the creation of stronger) regulations of broadcasting is unjustified where children are concerned. Instead, my point is that the execution of such regulatory approaches would be necessarily complicated and messy, and would involve resolving thorny issues about indoctrination and children's agency.

So then what should our broadcasting systems look like when it comes to children? The answer must be something that respects children's agency, while recognizing that they are not yet full citizens entitled to all associated rights. Further, the answer must avoid pie-in-the-sky thinking, recognizing that broadcast regulations sufficient to ensure that broadcasters truly serve individuals over the market is unlikely to be a palatable option to either private corporations or even the public at large; were such an option viable, it would have occurred nearly a century ago. Finally, any way forward

must recognize that regulations on broadcasters become less and less justifiable and meaningful in a broadcasting world where signals received by antennae from over the airwaves are not the dominant form of broadcasting. Traditional media has fractured, and so there is no reason to think that traditionally proposed solutions to their inadequacies will have contemporary relevance. Where is the sense in greater regulation demanding broadcasters distribute educational television in a paradigm where most parents can access hundreds and hundreds of content providers?

Consider, as an example, one widely-praised children's television show, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* (Sundberg, 2012). Parents can access the program for their children via traditional over-the-air broadcasts on most PBS affiliates, on PBS' website, via PBS' Roku channel, via the streaming services Netflix and Amazon Prime, or through a smartphone app. In what Keane (2013) calls our era of communicative abundance, scarcity of the broadcasting spectrum and the difficulty of locating educational programming seem to be resolved issues.

However, children remain an underrepresented segment of the public sphere. Davies (2001) quotes Prout and James who note that "almost all political, educational, legal and administrative processes have profound effects on children, but they [children] have little or no influence over them" (Introduction). She notes that Proust and James also "have pointed out, whenever children's interests in social and political arrangements are talked about, children themselves are rarely consulted" (Chapter 5).

The golden age of the public sphere that early optimists thought would be ushered in by broadcasting never came to pass, but that doesn't mean that there isn't still work

that could be done with broadcasting, the public sphere, and the most vulnerable of members of that public sphere. Societal interventions in broadcasting may be becoming less and less justifiable and relevant, but that doesn't justify not consulting children. What are their thoughts about the media being offered to them? Do broadcasters consult them to ascertain those thoughts and then respond accordingly? Societal interventions into broadcasting may be becoming less relevant, but I think those interventions are still justified and relevant to the extent that they help broaden children's roles in the public sphere and give them more of a say in the way the public resources of the airwaves and the broadcast spectrum are used in their names. In the next chapter, I will at last attempt to describe a new kind of approach to children's public broadcasting, one that would address the issues with which this text has been grappling.

CHAPTER VII

TOWARDS A BETTER SYSTEM OF CHILDREN'S BROADCASTING

In previous chapters, I have tried to demonstrate some shortcomings I perceive in American public broadcasting, particularly in regards to how those shortcomings affect children. Amongst these shortcomings, I have tried to show that: (a) the American broadcasting paradigm privileges profit and the market over the rights of the publics that paradigm was intended to serve; (b) children are the worst-served of those publics, given that their lack of political power means they are complicit neither in the formation nor the maintenance of this paradigm; (c) the lack of government fiscal support for public broadcasting places public broadcasters in the precarious position of needing to appease politicians, citizens, *and* the market; (d) this positioning is to the detriment of public broadcasters' educational mission, as their reliance on so many shareholders results in only a broadly accepted but narrowly conceived version of "educational" making the airwaves, and thus children viewers are denied the educative value of being exposed to a robust menu of life paths; (e) this positioning is detrimental to public broadcasters' abilities to serve their mission of representing the underrepresented; (f) it is pedagogically imperative to solicit the input of children into the creation of public broadcasting content aimed at them, for that is the only way to make the standardized nature of broadcasting something that might be of individual rather than mass benefit; further, as the life paths that are best for any particular individual may not fit the interests of a mass audience, it is vital for content to be as varied and diverse as possible in order to be as educative as possible; and (g) children have a right as citizens to speak in and be attended to in the

public sphere, and yet they are afforded little influence over public broadcasting intended for their consumption, just as they are rarely attended to in other aspects of public life as well.

In this chapter, I intend to sketch a conceptualization of a new kind of public broadcasting system, one that would address these concerns and at least partially remedy them. Specifically, I intend to: (a) acknowledge some of the difficulties that would be inherent in overhauling American broadcasting, making some reforms unfeasible; (b) make an argument for a greater role for the public in shaping public broadcast entities; and (c) make an argument for children to be invited into the creation of public broadcasting content in a way that is both feasible and recognizes their current rights citizens as well as their becoming rights as future citizens with increased rights and responsibilities.

Making Public Television More Truly Public

Public television is rarely public. Decisions about its content and funding are out of the public's hands and are instead made by a privileged few: politicians, large corporations, and wealthy or otherwise influential individuals. The FCC has always issued free licenses to those broadcasters it has deemed worthy, and a relatively small number of frequencies were set aside for publicly-funded broadcast entities. The public has few options for affecting this process, except for exerting indirect influence on the FCC through voting and petitioning elected officials. As I have tried to show in Chapter 1, this broadcasting system developed as a compromise among conflicting stakeholders;

it remains the model for American broadcasting to this day, and to this day it continues to please almost no one.

During the 2012 presidential campaign, candidate Mitt Romney famously promised to cut funding for "Big Bird," saying the government could not afford to continue to subsidize public broadcasting. There was immediate pushback from PBS and its supporters, and had Romney won the election, he would likely have lost the battle over public television. On June 16, 2005, the House Appropriations Committee voted to cut $100 million, or 25%, from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's budget (Cowan, 2005). Exactly a week later, following a public relations frenzy from both NPR and PBS, the House voted to restore all of that funding (Murray & Farhi, 2005). In 1995, one of newly-elected Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich's first acts was to attempt to privatize public broadcasting, eliminating all governmental support for it. That effort of course failed (Khan, 2011). I've already alluded to anti-public-broadcasting voices that extend much farther back into history than that. Whatever the funding ambitions of politicians like Romney, public broadcasting's supporters are simply too numerous, too influential, and too assertive to be denied. A *Washington Times* poll commissioned in the wake of Romney's comments showed only 35% of Americans felt "the government cannot afford to subsidize public television," whereas 55% favored no cuts to the CPB (Blake, 2012).

From one perspective, this is simply democracy in action. The majority speaks, and the elected respond. More concerning, however, is that this debate extends so far back into time and yet is no closer to being resolved. The Trump administration has

called for defunding all forms of public broadcasting in three budgets in three straight years (McGlone, 2019). As with Romney and Gingrich before him, "Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate have signaled that isn't happening" (Eggerton, 2019, para. 3). The wishes of more than a third of Americans are being ignored when Congress reverses a subcommittee's decisions regarding public broadcasting funding 1 week after that decision was made. In the popularity contest conceptualization of democracy, all is well. From a collaborative and deliberative standpoint, something is rotten on Sesame Street.

Private broadcasters rely on public interventions and the use of public goods to make billions of dollars, and yet the public is almost completely denied a seat at the table when it comes to crafting both private and public broadcasting content. The cure would be increased public influence over both industries. Private and public broadcasters alike would both no doubt argue that such influence already exists. If Americans do not approve of private broadcasters, they can let their elected officials know, and they in turn can exert pressure on the FCC, assuming that enough voters both feel the same way and make those feelings known. If Americans do not approve of public broadcasting content or of its funding, again, they can let their elected officials know, and if enough constituents do the same, those officials will respond accordingly.

The problem in both of these hypothetical cases is that individuals' influences are mediated and diluted by layers of officials and by powerful interests. The antidote to this situation is for the public to have a more direct hand in shaping the broadcast industries and broadcast content, and this is ethically imperative given the extent to which both the

private and public industries rely on public support (through, for example, direct funding in the case of the latter, and through governmental protection of copyrights and enforcement of frequency use in the case of the latter). However, the imperative is greater for public broadcasters to comply with public wishes – for their content to be the product of democracy and deliberation – given their direct reliance on government support.

Beyond a moral imperative to allow publics to speak for themselves via their airwaves, I believe increasing public participation in and influence over public broadcasting would result in greater public satisfaction with public broadcasting, because: (a) people tend to be more satisfied with disappointing outcomes when they feel they've been attended to and had a role in the negotiations leading to those outcomes and (b) the process of face-to-face deliberations with others from one's community would possibly humanize certain issues for the participants. A fundamentalist Christian might be more accepting of the airing of a controversial episode of *Arthur* (Brown, 1996) if they understand how its broadcast was the result of a compromise that saw a child's Bible study program added to the weekend lineup.[14]

Model for Greater Public Participation in Public Broadcasting

What form, then, should this increased public participation take? I do not see a readily apparent model for how public influence over broadcasting could be increased

[14] Of course some, if not most, fundamentalists, do not see the value in a diverse population consisting of many publics, and instead desire a monolithic public that hews to Christian values. However, if one does not understand the public as a necessarily plural (i.e. morally heterogeneous) entity, then I do not imagine one would have been read this far.

directly. This may be a case where the popularity-contest model of democracy has to suffice, at least until such a time – should it ever come – that our democratic system as a whole can be reshaped into something more truly deliberative and democratic.

Nevertheless, democracy should not be seen as a zero-sum game. Just because creating truly democratic broadcasting industries would require a true overhaul of democracy does not mean that broadcast industries cannot be made more democratic, or less undemocratic, at a scaled-down, local level. We may not realistically be able to change how the forest is managed, but we could conceivably exert influence over individual trees.

Necessity of implementing change at the local level. I have argued that the nature of allocating funding to and the management of public broadcasting corporations is of questionable democratic value. Overhauling these processes would require massive changes, changes that, due to their complexity and the entrenched forces that would resist them, are unlikely to occur. To address the issues with funding, the creation of a new, more deliberative democracy is necessary, one that is more responsive to and representative of the various publics it was chosen to serve. To change the management of the large public broadcasting corporations would mean trying to overhaul existing bureaucracies, never an inviting prospect. Nevertheless, there are smaller, scaled-down, simpler changes that could be made at the local level to the public broadcasting industries. As democracy need not be viewed as a zero-sum game, these changes could make public broadcasting more democratic, more truly public, by making individual public stations more democratic. Such a change could influence the entire public

television industry in a bottom-up fashion and make broadcasting as a whole more democratic by affecting change within some of its subsections.

Strike's models of school management. I now turn to Strike (2010), who does not write about public broadcasting, but nonetheless offers an argument that can be applied to that topic to demonstrate deficiencies in the management of the industry. In suggesting models for school management that are more democratic and responsive to the specific needs of their stakeholders, Strike also offers models that could be used for more appropriate management of public broadcasters.

Strike's models can be summarized thusly: In Strike's *town meeting model*, schools' governance meetings are open to the public. Votes might be taken but are generally only advisory, as the point of the meetings is to deliberate and seek consensus. In the *school council model*, schools are managed by a representative body elected from various populations of stakeholders, such as "teachers, students, parents, and members of the local community" (p. 72). Finally, Strike identifies the *trusteeship model*, in which the school is managed by a body of experts, both from within and outside of the stakeholder community, whom are "chosen because of their expertise or commitment to quality education as well as for their commitment to the values that define the school's shared educational program" (p. 72).

Strike goes on to identify the kinds of schools he thinks are best served by these different models and by combinations thereof, saying that combining school council and town meetings works best for public schools, while combining trusteeship and town meetings works best for private schools and "quasi-public such as charter schools" (p.

73). While Strike does not explicitly explain why these combinations are best for these respective types of schools, he seems to suggest the former combination better fits public schools because it places greater emphasis on public, or democratic, involvement, as opposed to the more autocratic trusteeship model. Similarly, the trusteeship model is better suited for private organizations, in that they are indeed private and should have a greater degree of autonomy, so long as the power of trustees is offset by the input of stakeholders.

We can find a parallel between Strike's models of school governance and a more appropriate, democratic model of governance for public broadcasters. Purely private corporations, with no open availability of stock, are generally run by a board of directors that is appointed by the board itself and answers to no one. A staunch capitalist might note that there is no such equivalent in Strike's models, and that is because there is no such equivalent in the world of schooling. A private school could be owned and operated by a strictly private corporation, but as its customers (to use the vocabulary of private commerce) are, by law, guaranteed a service that meets government-imposed standards; thus they must maintain a higher degree of public accountability than a "normal" business. They must please a government elected by a population, as well as the customers that comprise a subsection of that population, and so must be more directly responsive to the public. Regardless, there is a parallel here between Strike's suggestion for private school governance and the governance of strictly private corporations, as in both cases governance is less democratic than that for more public institutions.

In the case of private businesses that are publicly traded, whose stock can be bought and sold by the general public, management normally consists of an appointed board of directors, as is the norm for strictly private companies, however that board is not autonomous but answers to shareholders. Thus, as in Strike's suggestion for school governance, the more directly the public is involved in an organization's financial support, the more directly the public is involved in its governance.

Applying Strike's models to public broadcasting. In the case of public broadcasting entities, they are governed by closed corporations, and in that regard, they function like a purely private, nontraded company. However, given the public source of much of their funding, the publicly-oriented rhetoric that secures their broadcasting license, and the allegedly public-orientation of their missions, a closed, private form of governance will not suffice for democratic purposes. Public broadcasting companies are a little like privately-owned charter schools,[15] in that their public funding and the publicly-oriented nature of their service should obligate them to allow the public a voice in their governance. Like those schools, public broadcasters must please a government elected by a population, as well as the customers that comprise a subsection of that population, and so should be more directly responsive to the public.

Large public broadcasting entities are similar to charter schools in the respect that they: (a) receive public funding; (b) function more or less autonomously; and (c) serve a publicly-oriented purpose. In keeping with Strike's suggestions then, they would best be

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[15] And, to a lesser extent, like private schools, which are privately owned but nonetheless must meet minimum, governmentally-set (which is to say publicly-set), standards.

governed by combining trusteeship and town meetings approaches. As I have said, however, such a scaled-up approach would be, to put it mildly, difficult to achieve. However, individual public broadcasting stations also function in this quasi-public regard, and would be far easier to influence. I suggest then that public stations, to be more democratic and therefore more truly public, should be governed by a combination of trusteeship and town meetings, which is indeed how they are ostensibly governed. The reality, however, is that their governance sometimes does not live up to this model.

Applying Strike's models locally: Two case studies. One problem with this model is that it does not ensure true democratic collaboration between trustees – who are almost certainly elites – and of laypeople who attend trustee meetings or sit on an advisory board. Here Marsh (2007) offers some salient thoughts on how to evaluate such collaborations:

> Within [a framework that draws on democratic theory and research on communities of practice], the act of convening a meeting between professionals and laypersons is no longer sufficient evidence of collaboration. Instead, the framework calls for a more in-depth examination of who attended, the purpose of the meeting, how participants understood the purpose, negotiated roles, and arrived at decisions, and what they achieved. (p. 5)

I would like now to look at two public broadcasting stations to demonstrate the ways in which they succeed and the ways in which they fail to live up to the model of governance described in the above paragraph.

First, I'll consider WVIZ, a Cleveland-based PBS affiliate. In conjunction with radio stations WCPN and WCLV, WVIZ constitutes ideastream, a coalition that "acquires, creates and distributes high-quality radio, television and web content that focuses on areas that have been identified as priorities by Northeast Ohio residents: arts and culture; education; health information; community assets and challenges; and issues relating to the State of Ohio" (About ideastream, 2019). The stations' website makes clear the public nature of ideastream's identity, saying "ideastream serves the people of Northeast Ohio as a trusted and dynamic multimedia source for illuminating the world around us. Publicly supported and locally owned, ideastream is indispensable and highly valued for its unique ability to strengthen our community," (About ideastream). The site boasts that the result of this coalition of broadcasters is

> the state's largest classroom, delivering broadcasts directly to Ohio students via state-of-the-art interactive video distance learning programs aired in classrooms. During the 2017-2018 school year, ideastream provided enhanced learning opportunities to 39,275 students in 306 schools and more than 2,966 educators participated in 265 professional development workshops. Ohio educators consistently rely on ideastream for the quality training sessions on the uses of the latest classroom technology as well as on superior professional development opportunities in the Idea Center learning laboratories. (About ideastream)

WVIZ's intention to position itself as a sort of nonprofit tool for education and social cohesion clearly differentiates it from private broadcasters and cements the public orientation of its mission.

The model for WVIZ's governance is one that, on paper, meets the criteria for Strike's model for the governance of quasi-public entities. First, the station is managed by a board of trustees. Second, that board is served by a Community Advisory Board (CAB) whose role is "solely advisory and in no case shall it have any authority to exercise any control over the daily management or operation" (Community Advisory Board, n.d.).

Where the democratic principles expected of a quasi-public institution begin to breakdown is in the make-up of the board of trustees. A perusal of the station's website reveals the board's makeup to be dominated by cultural elites who are unlikely to be able to adequately represent the needs and interests of the bulk of the people in the Cleveland area. Not counting trustees emeriti, the site lists 33 people as serving on the board. Of them, seven are listed as names with no additional biographical information. The provided job title for one of the remaining 26 identifies her as an "RN and Community Volunteer" (Board of Trustees, 2019). The other 25 trustees have job titles or brief job descriptions listed along with their names. Of these trustees, their job titles all imply they are cultural elites (e.g. "Consultant to Associations and Nonprofits") or all but explicitly label them as such (e.g. "CEO," "President," "President and CEO," and "VP"). Thus of the 33 active trustees, 25 of them are cultural elites and seven of them are of ambiguous backgrounds and SES.

The site does not indicate how these fortunate few were selected to lead a television station that is part of a broadcasting alliance that serves "2.8 million people in a typical month" (About). Nor does it indicate how an individual might become a member

of the board, were they so inclined. There is a schedule of upcoming meetings, implying the public is invited to attend, but there is no indication of the degree to which the public is invited to participate in those meetings. It seems the only apparent way for the general public to exert direct influence on the board would be through the assistance of the CAB, which is, I suppose, is not inherently problematic. After all, that is what the CAB is there to do: represent the community.

Nevertheless, I find this arrangement problematic, even if it is not inherently so. First, as I have said, the CAB has no real power over the board. Theirs is strictly an advisory role, so who is to say they could ever adequately represent the Cleveland area's publics? I think the public should, if Strike's model is to be properly utilized, be advised of how they may attend board meetings, be afforded the opportunity to speak at said meetings, and be offered a pathway for possibly joining the board should they feel they are not being adequately represented by the CAB, the board is not responding adequately to the CAB, or if they simply want to be more involved in what is, ostensibly, a public institution.

Complicating matters is that the CAB itself is not made sufficiently available to individuals. Although the members of the CAB are listed on the station's website, there is no: (a) contact information given for any of the individual members; (b) contact given for the CAB as a whole; (c) information about how one can participate in CAB meetings; and (d) information on how CAB members are selected, including information on how interested individuals may try to join the CAB.

So WVIZ's website offers no information on how to attempt to communicate with either the board or the CAB; is there any indication that they are, nonetheless, listening to the publics of the Cleveland area? In short: not really. Annually, the station solicits public opinion on issues the station itself selects. There is no indication of how the chosen topics are selected. Visitors to the site are told that their opinions are appreciated through this so-called "Listening Project," and that the findings are compiled into a yearly report "to identify 'the things that matter most' to residents of Northeast Ohio. It also helps ideastream monitor the role and value of its programming" (Listening, n.d.). Currently, the site invites visitors to participate in the Listening Project via a four-question online survey about the biggest challenges faced and assets enjoyed by Northeast Ohio. Exactly how will the findings be applied to the creation of WVIZ programming? How can one hope to be listened to if one has another topic one would like to see addressed? These questions go unanswered.

None of this is to say that the station does *not* listen to the publics in its viewing area, that there is no way for individuals to join either the CAB or the board of trustees, or that the general public is not allowed a role in board or CAB meetings. Instead, I mean only to show that the station does not make it apparent that it welcomes public feedback and participation beyond the surveys the station itself selects. Further, the station does not go out of its way to communicate with the general public about its management processes or structures. Additionally, the station does not clearly invite the general public to become more involved in its management or the advising of its management. It is, in short, not overtly public, and I argue that it is therefore nowhere

near public enough. If the station truly wishes to serve the general public, the general public should be more warmly welcomed to sit at the table and discuss the station and their needs.

Turning from WVIZ, I now present WKSU, an NPR/Kent State University-affiliated radio station. In some ways, the face that it shows the public more successfully lives up to Strike's model for quasi-public institutions than WVIZ; in some ways, it falls short in ways that WVIZ does not.

Rather than a board of trustees, it appears that WKSU is managed by a front office staff[16] (People, n.d.) whose structure appears to be close to that of a traditional, private radio station. According to the National Association of Broadcasters (2008), radio station hierarchies usually extend from a station manager or general manager at the top, down through various department heads and their subordinates (e.g. a News Manager, Programming Director, Director of Sales, etc.). There is no explicit indication from the station's website of how these personnel are selected, but that does not strike me as any more problematic or any less democratic than WVIZ's board of trustees. The process by which they assumed their roles is not transparent in either case, and in both instances, it is they who are responsible for the stations' management and they are identified as such.

WKSU lists a fairly extensive biography for each of the staff members listed on its site, from the General Manager/Executive Director on down to the hosts of individual programs. Additionally, there is contact information given for each of them. In this

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[16] This appearance is deceiving, as will be explained.

regard, the management of WKSU is no less democratic than WVIZ's, differing from Strike's model in name only, and is more democratic in the sense that they are more transparent and more easily accessible to the general public.

Consistent with Strike's model and WVIZ's structure, WKSU has a Community Advisory Council (CAC). Also in keeping with WVIZ, there is no indication of how these members were selected, nor of how to join the CAC if so inclined. As with WVIZ's CAB, the CAC's exact function and role are only vaguely defined; visitors to the website are told only that it is "a member driven committee that offers strategic input and support to WKSU operations" (Community Advisory Council, n.d.). On the other hand, WKSU's CAC comes closer to being truly public in that the dates and times of their meetings are clearly listed on the website, the general public is explicitly invited to attend these meetings, and they are given clear contact info for how they may learn more about the meetings. Still, there is no evidence provided that the CAC adequately represents and advocates for the greater Kent community or that the CAC has any real influence over the station's management.

The WKSU site has a link entitled "Financial and Compliance Information" (Financial and Compliance, n.d.) which offers details on how the station tries to comply with the rules of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, federal laws such as the Communications Act of 1934, and the FCC. This webpage includes the ability to download detailed financial information about the station and learn how to access even more information by visiting the station. It also includes the opportunity to learn that most of the meetings of the various governing committees and groups that manage the

station are open to the public and learn how to find out information about attending those meetings. There is also an option to learn how to access other documents, such as the station's diversity goals reports, various FCC-required reports, its attempts to reflect community interest and needs in its programming, etc.

This information is, to an extent, "hidden" on the WKSU site; it is unlikely that the casual visitor to the website would think to click a link called "CPB Compliance" to access all of this. I am sure one could call the station, or email one of the management personnel listed on the "People" page to get this information, just as I am sure one could gain similar knowledge about WVIZ by calling the station, but why should one have to? It is possible that going through that extra step could dissuade some members of the community from interacting with WVIZ and WKSU. Therefore, they would more fully live up to their professed publicly-oriented missions by highlighting the availability of this information. They would thereby increase their transparency and thereby increase their legitimacy.

A case in point: I wrote earlier that "Rather than a board of trustees, it appears that WKSU is managed by a front office staff." By clicking on the "Financial and Compliance Information" link, I learned that, in fact, the station management answers to the Kent State University Board of Trustees. That is a fine distinction, and would, I am sure, strike most people in the Kent listening area as being of little interest. Still, if a listener truly wanted to be able to affect change at the station, it is valuable information. I also doubt they would readily think to acquire such information via a link called "Financial and Compliance Information" rather than the site's "About" link. It would be

a relatively easy thing to more completely highlight details about the station's management and about its efforts to respond to the community, and doing so could encourage members of the community interested in getting involved at WKSU or affecting change there.

The trustees and advisors of these two broadcasters are examples of *communities of practice*, when that concept is defined as Marsh (2007) uses it: a group that collaborates over time to solve a problem, in this case the management of a broadcast station. Marsh says that research indicates that the glue that binds such communities is what she calls *joint work*, and that it consists of: a "negotiated enterprise," in which participants debate and negotiate, not necessarily ever arriving at perfect agreement but all being heard and disagreements often being productive; an "indigenous enterprise," "defined and at least partially owned by participants." Their "joint work may be shaped by conditions outside of the control of members, [but] it is never fully determined by external forces"; a sense of shared community and responsibility is created via the joint work (p. 6). Marsh notes that these characteristics of joint work mean that truly evaluating the quality of a group's work requires "specific attention to how decisions are made: how participants understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as how they interact and negotiate their mission, roles, and responsibilities" (p. 7).

Marsh's (2007) concept of joint work is clearly deliberative in nature, and her specific foci illustrate some of the problems with the governance of WVIZ and WKSU. For example, her concept of an indigenous enterprise, where external forces can never fully determine a group's work, can be problematic when said group is comprised of the

decision makers for a public broadcast station. Who is the group that rightfully makes decisions for such an entity? The trustees? If they are to have legitimacy, they must demonstrate collaboration with their advisors. However, that collaboration alone is insufficient here. Their advisors must also demonstrate collaboration with the communities their stations are intended to serve. Otherwise, the joint work of running the station is not truly public, but exists only in an echo chamber made up of the trustees and advisors. The indigenous exercise in this case must also encompass those who are not officially a part of the joint work.

The negotiated nature of the work as well as the resulting sense of shared responsibility and identity are also not fully served if the groups are not transparent. Without transparency, who is to say if a group is functioning deliberatively? If it is not functioning deliberatively, how is it to create a sense of community? As Marsh (2007) says, it is not possible to evaluate joint work without "specific attention to how decisions are made" (p. 7), and that attention cannot be paid without a group being exposed to sunshine. Therefore, to be truly deliberative and truly public, stations should be as open and as accessible to the public as possible, including providing a pathway for members of the general public to become at least advisors and making their web presences as accessible and transparent as possible.

Affecting change in public broadcasting at a national level would be a Herculean, but worthwhile, task. What we can learn from the examples of WVIZ and WKSU is that while local changes would not directly offset problems at the national level, there is room for local improvements that would be more easily realized and would move public

broadcasting towards being more truly public. It may be possible to move national public broadcasting closer to being truly public via a bottom-up-approach. Regardless of efficacy, of whether or not such an approach would lead to national improvements, it would make public broadcasting more truly public and would move the institution towards being more democratic, and thus it would be worthwhile.

Therefore, public broadcasting stations should take advantage of the possibilities offered by the internet and create spaces for deeper, thicker audience interaction than surveys built around the station's interests. Further, public broadcasting stations should highlight the availability of information about their compliance with the law and efforts to serve their communities. Lastly, they should make more transparent the processes by which they are governed and highlight ways citizens can influence those processes. In short, individual stations can demystify their processes, encourage more public involvement, and thereby move towards being more truly public and towards greater realization of democratic ideals. Further, were such changes imposed from the outside, say legislatively, I think there should be little pushback from various stakeholders. Should such change not be forthcoming voluntarily, it is the moral responsibility of legislators and private citizens to undertake it.

Making Children Part of the Public in Public Broadcasting

Making the operation of public broadcasting stations more democratic and transparent could, I believe, increase public satisfaction and interest in public broadcasting. I think this could foster a sense of community and a shared stake, making

some who currently are stakeholders in public media but who feel like impotent outsiders instead feel invested in a shared public discourse.

Without further changes, however, those new participants are likely not to encourage children as participants in this new more public form of public broadcasting. Our society (and, so far as I can tell, most if not all societies) is not especially good at inviting or even tolerating the participation of children. Davies (2001) quotes Proust and James, who note that "almost all political, educational, legal and administrative processes have profound effects on children, but they [children] have little or no influence over them" (Introduction). She notes that Prout and James also observed that "whenever children's interests in social and political arrangements are talked about, children themselves are rarely consulted" (Chapter 5). I have noted one example of this phenomenon in Chapter 6, discussing the children's television summit held by the Clinton administration, an event to which no children were invited and at which no participants indicated they had invited children's input into their thoughts in any way. Children are obviously unqualified to participate in the leadership of a public broadcasting organization, and yet, as I have argued in the previous chapter, they still have a right to be heard and to be consulted in the creation of media for their consumption. Not every adult is informed or intelligent enough to contribute to the management of a public broadcasting entity either, and yet their opinions are still ostensibly considered by public media content creators and distributors. No other segment of society is required to have a certain level of intellectual achievement or skill as prerequisites for the right to speak their mind and to be attended to by public entities,

and yet when it comes to children, most people readily accept that they are to be seen and not heard on matters of public concern, including the creation and distribution of materials meant for their consumption.

What form should that participation take? Here we can ethically consider the salient differences between adults and children without being ageist. It is ageist to marginalize the opinions of children, for they have as much right as any other member of society to speak and to be served by public entities. On the other hand, there are legitimate differences between children and adults that make the former less suited to the management of broadcasting stations, public or otherwise. I do not see it as an egregious limitation on children's rights to exclude them from participating in the governance of public media, given their aforementioned general lack of intellectual capacity and life experience. Nevertheless, I think there are at least two ways to deepen their involvement with public broadcasting, and in so doing (a) their rights as a special case in the public sphere would be more respected and (b) public broadcasting would more closely achieve its mission of serving public interests over market demands.

Motives for Understanding Children vis-a-vis Broadcasting

The first way to broaden children's participation in public media and to enrich their experience with those media is to ensure that their opinions are solicited and considered in the creation of said media. The quality of such research is partially dependent on the motivations of the research. Children's media creators already spend a lot of time and money to determine what will make their programs pleasing to children, but that is not the same thing as ensuring their programming is good for children. Before

explaining the kind of opinion solicitation I envision, I will describe two different approaches to researching and understanding children in order to broadcast to them effectively. The first approach sees children as individuals with rights, and among these is the right to see the public resource of the airwaves used to better their lives.[17] The second approach sees children as a market to be tapped; it assumes that if a children's program is successful in the marketplace, then that program must be meeting the needs and interests of children.

Understanding children to serve them. The first approach, in which children are understood in order to be served, was one embraced by celebrated children's program host Fred Rogers. One journalist witnessed firsthand an application of Rogers' belief that reaching children begins with understanding their perspectives. As the journalist looked on, a woman tried to get her young son to give Rogers a hug, but the boy was preoccupied with his large toy sword and maintaining his hard, outward appearance. It was clear from this journalist's account that, despite her protestations about how much her son enjoyed Rogers' program, she was far more excited than her child about this meeting:

> Mister Rogers was sneaking his face past the big sword and the armor of the little boy's eyes and whispering something in his ear – something that, while not changing his mind about the hug, made the little boy look at Mister Rogers in a new way, with the eyes of a child at last, and nod his head yes. We were heading

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[17] Other salient rights here include the right to an education that can foster future flourishing (see Chapter Four) and the right to express their opinions and to be attended to in the public sphere (see Chapter Six).

> back to his apartment in a taxi when I asked him what he had said. "[W]henever you see a little boy carrying something like that, it means that he wants to show people that he's strong on the outside. I just wanted him to know that he was strong on the inside, too. […] Maybe it was something he needed to hear." (Junod, p. 138).

This encounter with a young "fan" typifies Rogers' belief that successful communication with children begins with meeting them on their terms and recalling the world through their eyes, before applying the knowledge acquired in adulthood to addressing the needs and concerns remembered by assuming the role of the child. Only a brief perusal of Fred Rogers' writings is required to discover that the ability to assume a child's worldview was essential to his philosophy. Recall, for example, the opening to the chapter he had contributed to a book aimed at helping ophthalmologists work with children: "You were a child once, too" (see Chapter 4).

This component of Rogers' philosophy asserts that a message for children, whether it be about how scary doctor visits may be or about their own inner strength, can only reach its intended audience if it comes from a place that sees the world through their eyes, from a person who remembers what it was to be a child. Nancy E. Curry, a child psychotherapist and psychoanalyst as well as a professor emerita in the Child Development and Child Care program at the University of Pittsburgh, recalled the training she and Rogers received from their mentor, Dr. Margaret McFarland:

> She taught us to be careful observers, to use our empathy and our own experiences as children to understand the child we were observing, to relate these

> observations to psychodynamic theory, and then respond with clinical insights to children in our care. (Curry, 1996, pp. 51-52)

Rogers confirmed this influence when he wrote that McFarland "helped me think about the child who grew inside me […] helped me really *listen* to children so that I could discover who they were and what was important in their lives, so that my communication with them through television could be meaningful" (Rogers, 1994, pp. xiii-xiv).

Understanding children to sell to them. Contrast Rogers' approach to one used by people who seek to understand children so as to market to them rather than to enhance their well-being. In a documentary about the popular 1980s toy line "Masters of the Universe" (Goldberg, Lobb, & McCallum, 2017), which would later begat a hit television series and a motion picture, interviews with former Mattel employees revealed insights into (a) how the toy company viewed children and its relationship to them, and (b) how the toy industry looked at broadcasting as a tool to move merchandise, not to serve the young residents of America.

Former Mattel designer Mark Taylor recalled marketing tests in which boys participating in the tests tried to steal toys of not only the powerful male protagonists and antagonists but of the line's only female character. Their interest in her, he said, was because "Teela was sculpted like… she was really a babe. [Some Mattel designer] got carried away, and the little boys liked that" (Goldberg, Lobb, & McCallum, 2017, n.p.). A toy that capitalized on boys' pre-adolescent sexual interests was not a problem, but rather a success story. Similarly, Mattel's research found that children enjoyed play situations in which "Power and dominance [were] desirable characteristics. […]

[Children] want to have the power to do whatever they want to do, without being told by mom or dad or someone else, so we just said 'I have the power [as the toy line's slogan],'" (n.p.) explained Paul Cleveland, former vice-president of marketing for Mattel. Mark Ellis, another former vice-president of marketing for Mattel, recalled test marketing sessions led to the company's confidence in the slogan.

> That's where we saw these little kids going, "You do this because I tell you to do it." You know, exactly the words their mother would say. So they wanted the power. So that's where the power theme came up. (n.p.)

In Rogers' philosophy, children's desire for power and to appear dominant should be understood so that one can craft messages for those children that help them progress through stages of maturity and growth. To the toymaker, the desire is to be exploited for commercial gain. Joe Morrison, former Executive Vice-President of Marketing for Mattel, said, "The development of the advertising was going to really be the key, because we didn't have a television show, weren't even thinking about it at the time" (n.p.). When broadcasting relies on market support, children stop being individuals who are to be served and start being marketing targets who are to be exploited. Television from a toy maker's perspective, then, was not to be used in the interest of children but in the interest of capitalizing on them. That alone isn't problematic; provided legislators, the general citizenry, and the FCC view the aims of television differently, as they indeed once did.

FCC's Relative Disinterest in Children, Except as Customers

As was discussed in Chapter 3, Fowler and his FCC were ideologically opposed to the public service model of broadcasting and the extra-market demands it placed upon licensees. He infamously said a television was just "a toaster with pictures" (qtd. in Hendershot, 1998, p. 128) and should be subject to no more regulation that any other appliance. Fowler asserted that "it was time to move away from thinking about broadcasters as trustees. It was time to treat them the way everyone else in society does – that is, as a business" (qtd. in Hendershot, pp. 127-8). What Fowler's FCC never attempted to address, short of this quote invoking the ad populum fallacy, was *why* it was time to let broadcasters out of the deal with the American people that they had struck via the federal government. Also left unsaid was why, if it indeed was time to let broadcasters out of the responsibilities they had willingly assumed in exchange for highly lucrative licenses, they should then be the beneficiaries of a massive giveaway of public resources in the form of the airwaves. Hendershot points out another inconsistency of Fowler's FCC: It did indeed pass moral judgment on some broadcast content, treating televisions as more than the equivalent of mere toasters.

In punishing bad boy extraordinaire Howard Stern for his use of "indecent" language, in "questioning whether or not a televised image of an aborted fetus is 'indecent,' and in judging the propriety of broadcasting condom ads, the FCC feels justified in discussing broadcast content in moral and ethical terms" (Hendershot, 1998, p. 128).

Hendershot notes that these interventions are "ostensibly" to protect children, perhaps alluding to the often-held belief that such actions are wrist-slaps meant to appease conservative "values voters" who see such content as unworthy of a spot on the table of public discourse. Motivation aside, these sorts of interventions, when coupled with the Fowler FCC's laissez-faire approach to other content issues, implies the belief that children's negative freedoms merit and need protection, but children are not necessarily entitled to related positive freedoms. As I attempted to show in Chapter 6, this view of children mirrors a view held widely in society, that children deserve protections but not freedoms. They have the right not to see condom ads, but no right to, say, age-appropriate sexually educative broadcast content, or the right to be protected from savvy adult marketers with deep pockets looking to be filled by children's piggy banks.

Consider, for example, what the Fowler FCC did in regards to so-called program-length commercials. In 1969, the FCC decreed that the ABC network's *Hot Wheels* (Asher & Freeman, 1969) cartoon was not a program but was in essence a half-hour commercial for Mattel's popular line of toy vehicles, and that said ad was supplemented throughout by additional advertising from other companies. In short, *Hot Wheels* served the network's and the manufacturer's interests, but not the American people, or at the very least American children (Hendershot, 1998). Fowler's FCC reversed this decision, clearing the way for children's programs that were just advertising-sponsored advertising. This decision also paved the way for infomercials; no longer did broadcasters have to provide content that served the public, for they now could air whatever content they were paid to air.

If democratically-elected individuals create laws and agencies that use public resources like the airwaves as simply a money-making device, and those individuals' constituents find the arrangement displeasing, it is incumbent upon those constituents to speak up and try to enact change. Children, on the other hand, have neither a vote nor, usually, a powerful voice. It is therefore the moral obligation of adults to amplify their vote-less voices and treat programming created for them differently.

Fulfilling that obligation begins by understanding children so as to serve them, not to sell to them. This would help ensure that children received the programming needed, not the programming that was profitable or competitive in the market. Understanding children that deeply would require soliciting their thoughts and genuinely attending to them. I believe Davies (2001) offers a model for how this could be done in America in her book *Dear BBC: Children, Television, Storytelling and the Public Sphere*.

Applying the *Dear BBC* model in America. Davies' book details a study commissioned by the BBC in the late 1990s, a time when more private, fee-based television options were becoming widely available to consumers. In the introduction, Davies noted that the BBC wanted to ascertain children's thoughts about their current broadcasting options "as well as their views about the new services beginning to wean them away from" their current television "relationship." As Davies put it, "The book asks whether this relationship can survive in a new millennium when traditional forms of entertainment may be displaced, and when regulation by national governments for special children's media provision may be impossible" (Introduction, para. 3).

The sort of crossroads Marie depicts here is similar to the one in which American broadcasting currently operates, with old models and longstanding hierarchies disrupted. Perusing the Nielsen top 10 rankings of most watched television shows on traditional networks and on cable stations reveals that the latter now rival, and often surpass, the former (Topten, n.d.). Keane (2013) writes that "there is widespread recognition that time is up for spectrum scarcity, mass broadcasting and predictable prime-time national audiences, and that they have been replaced by spectrum abundance, fragmented narrowcasting and [niche] audiences" (Chapter 1, para. 2). And so Marie's words about the relationship between British children and traditional television could apply just as well across the Atlantic. Consider what Davies saw as the central issue of *Dear BBC*:

> The book's most central question asks: what [*sic*] do children themselves think the future of media entertainment for them will, and should, be, and what can their explanations tell us about the changing nature of childhood, and its relationship with culture? (Chapter 1, para. 2)

When televisions are just toasters and children are just consumers, these questions become irrelevant. However, even if one views the television as just an appliance, the fact remains that it is an appliance that uses the public's airwaves. Children are members of that public, and yet had and have no say in the free allocating of their airwaves. Societal interventions into broadcasting may be becoming less relevant, but I think those interventions are still justified and relevant to the extent that they help broaden children's roles in the public sphere and give them more of a say in the way the public resources of the airwaves and the broadcast spectrum are used in their names.

But even if a Fowler-like conceptualization of broadcasting reigns, what is censorious about suggesting that society should solicit children's opinions for their own good, not for the good of the market? Further, actively using focus groups of children to gauge the interests and concerns of children in general is, it seems to me, one way to make mass communication as salient on an individual level as mass communication can be. By understanding the underlying psychological reason that children in general may prefer certain toys, Fred Rogers was able to craft a message specifically for his sword-wielding fan. Regularly and actively soliciting feedback from focus groups of children, à la *Dear BBC*, would (a) allow content producers to create materials that feel similarly personal on an individual basis despite the mass nature of public media and (b) respect children's rights to express themselves and be attended to in the public sphere.

Davies and her team conducted 2 years' worth of group meetings with more than 1,300 children between the ages of 6 and 12. Her mandate called for market research to "inform BBC policy," but she opted "to analyse [*sic*] the data far beyond the requirements of the BBC's original brief" because of

> a belief on behalf of us all that the rights of the children in the study to have their views expressed in the public sphere, having taken part in a publically [*sic*] funded exercise on behalf of a public broadcaster, should be upheld, as an aspect of children's rights more broadly. (Introduction)

The right to free expression in the public sphere is not contingent upon the validity or merit of an individual's messages, and yet children's input is often disregarded or ignored

simply because they are "just kids"; it is widely believed they have little of value to say, so what does it matter if they don't have the opportunity to speak? What is lost?

Beyond mistaking the right to speak as contingent upon some cognitive or chronological metric, this point of view is easily undermined by many of Davies' findings, which indicated a greater sensitivity to the realities and negotiations that shape broadcasting than most people would credit children for having. Davies noted that one child in a group of 8-9 year olds responded thus when asked if it had been difficult to complete a role-play activity wherein the group had to select which programs to exclude from the lineup of their hypothetical TV station:

> At first everyone agreed but as we had to get rid of each programme it got a lot harder … We had to make loads of decisions and hard ones I think. We had only about four minutes but it seemed longer because we were interested in doing it. (Introduction)

In addition to the children demonstrating engagement, the ability to assume the role of a parent or a younger child in weighing the merits of a program, and a willingness and ability to enter into open, courteous deliberations leading to group consensus, researchers were sometimes surprised that the participants defied expectations in regards to television preferences. For example,

> children in the least-privileged schools ... most valued traditional, "elitist" forms of drama – drama based on books, and historical drama, in other words, expensive drama. This is a counter-intuitive finding in terms of traditional sociological

> ideas about child audiences who are supposed to be populist in their tastes, unless paternalistically forced to consume "higher" cultural forms. (Conclusion)

So children should not have to demonstrate higher levels of thinking and communicating in order to have the right to express themselves, and yet they often do. Based on this reasoning, the justifications for denying children a right to be heard in the public sphere are wearing thin.

From a market research perspective, this kind of finding could lead to even more marginalization and exclusion of underprivileged children. If more affluent child viewers favor cheaper kinds of programming, and broadcasters want to cut costs while attracting affluent, advertising-friendly demographics, then what incentive do broadcasters have to serve the interests of the less privileged? From a public service perspective, this kind of finding should lead to invitations for greater participation from children in shaping public broadcasting. First, it is their right. Second, they can often perform beyond our expectations. Third, their input could lead to improved children's programming.

I think individual public broadcasters and content producers could tailor this approach to their own specific needs. Local broadcasters might create standing Children's Advisory Boards, that is to say a longitudinal focus group of children to regularly consult with about their interests and needs in general as well as their thoughts on specific programs currently being aired or new programs being considered for the lineup. On the other hand, there may be not enough need for such an "advisory committee" for a smaller-scale broadcaster or producer. They then might choose an "ad hoc" focus group approach. Regardless, if public media exhibitors and producers are to

live up to their missions and treat children with the respect they are due in the public sphere, they must solicit children's feedback. This feedback should be used to determine which programs would best serve the individual needs and interests of children (to the extent possible) and which would best serve their future flourishing[18] (to the extent that one can know such a thing).

Broadcasting for Children, by Children

Another change I think public broadcasters could undertake in order to better serve children and better fulfill their public mission would be a wider embrace of youth-generated programming. Previously I wrote that in the dawn of American broadcasting, many optimistic observers predicted it would be a great boon to democracy by enhancing access to public discourse. "To read and write requires a great deal of education; to read and write well even more," I wrote. "On the other hand, even the least eloquent of writers, these optimists reasoned, can stand in front of a microphone and say what is on their minds." I see no reason not to extend this thinking to children, even if it never truly manifested among adults. Using the public broadcasting infrastructure to provide a forum for youth would (a) be more respectful of their rights, (b) be a valuable learning experience for participating youth, and (c) be of relatively little additional expense, considering broadcasters already have the equipment and facilities, and most public stations already partner up with educational entities who could potentially contribute expertise and guidance.

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[18] See Chapter 3.

One model for this could be a now defunct program called Media Lab, which was housed at PBS-affiliate WCFE-TV in Plattsburgh, New York. In an email exchange with the station's Director of Communications, the program was described to me as "a wonderful initiative" wherein the station "offered media training to at-risk teens in collaboration with our local housing authority. […] The Media Lab students who worked there produced short-form videos and a few full-length documentaries and specials" (J. Kowalczyk, Personal Communication, May 28, 2019).

As one of the students, Jamaal Johnson, notes, he had moved to the area from Arkansas, where he had known of a similar program. This program, however, was distinct from Media Lab in that they did not have "the stability, the encouragement, or the funding to do anything anywhere near what the Media Lab does" (Mountain Lake PBS, 2009). The issue of funding speaks to the major drawback of the program; the Media Lab model, if followed strictly, could be a costly one. According to a promotional video released by the station (Mountain Lake PBS), students were compensated for their work. For that expenditure, however, WCFE gained a program spoken of in glowing terms by the young people they were attempting to serve. One of the recurring themes in the testimonials is of a sense of community and enhanced social interactions the participants enjoyed. Johnson said he went on to volunteer 40 hours a week at the Lab, "becoming a mentor to a lot of the kids." Participant Nathan Parrotte said that before Media Lab he "didn't really have friends. I didn't talk to people regularly." "I feel more complete as a person," he went on to say. "You learn a lot from others about yourself" (n.p.).

The testimonials also offer insight into the students' awareness of their larger community's lack of interest in them. For example, participant Spencer Gomez, when asked what he thought could improve the program, responded

> Possibly getting the community more involved in activities with the Media Lab. That way there would be more funding and more grants and stuff like that. And people would actually see what we're doing and not just look at something and be like "Oh, it's a bunch of at-risk teens doing something. We don't really want to be involved in that because they're at-risk." [...] And then they actually see our work and are impressed with it, and that's when the people actually want to keep working with us and keep seeing what we're going to do and see how we succeed and give us harder tasks to complete. And then the finished product, you look at it, and you wouldn't expect someone like me or someone like anyone else that worked in the Media Lab to have something to do with something important [...] like that.

It was unfortunately funding that led to the program's demise. Media Lab benefitted from "a mix of funding sources, including from federal funds, the State University of NY system, and through our local school district" (J. Kowalczyk, Personal Communication, May 29, 2019). But as with so many extracurricular educational programs, the money eventually dried up, and "when the grant funding for this program expired, the initiative was shut down" (J. Kowalczyk, May 28, 2019).

Conclusion

I have previously argued that our current broadcasting paradigm positions public broadcasting in a vulnerable place, wherein broadcasters are beholden to numerous societal forces and thus often must satisfy competing interests. I have also tried to show that this arrangement is to the detriment of children, a population that had no say in the creation of this system, nor a say in its maintenance. Further, I noted that many of the positive outcomes associated with public broadcasting – either empirically or through general consensus[19] – can now be achieved through YouTube, premium cable channels, smart phone apps, etc.

If public stations' adult viewers are not pleased with the service those stations provide, those viewers have political power they may apply in an effort to produce change. Children have no such option. On the other hand, nearly every conceivable change one might suggest to our current public television paradigm – such as increased funding, expansion of programming aimed at and about minority and vulnerable populations, a tax on private broadcasters' FCC licenses to augment public broadcasting services, etc. – is likely to meet with (a) strenuous objections from some camps and (b) result in little real world change.

Given that overhauling the entire public broadcasting system would be a Herculean task that is unlikely to produce much in the way of real world changes, perhaps it is time for public broadcasting to change its service model when it comes to

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[19] E.g., numerous empirical studies have found positive outcomes for children viewing *Sesame Street* (Singer, 1969), and there is just a general public perception of the program as being good for children.

children. By inviting greater participation in stations' decision making from their respective communities, public broadcasting content could become more diverse and thus more democratic. Such a change could "trickle down" to children's programming. By inviting greater input from children, public broadcasters could better fulfill their mission to serve marginalized, disadvantaged audiences who are underserved by private media. And finally, by diverting some resources dedicated to programming – programming that is now widely available from private sources – into the creation of youth media production programs, public broadcasters could provide American youth with an unprecedented and unique opportunity to utilize their becoming rights and to participate in the public sphere.

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