COLD WAR CHILDREN’S TELEVISION IN THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE:

A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Childhood Studies

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May 2019
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cold War Children’s Television in the City of Brotherly Love:
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This dissertation is both a history and a critical analysis of a culturally significant phenomenon of the Cold War—the locally produced hosted children’s show. The hosted children’s show utilized a format that was ubiquitous throughout the United States during this era. Using Philadelphia as a case study I examine the specific elements of performance that the hosts used to create a parasocial bond with the child viewer that was simultaneously non-threatening and non-conforming. Situating the performances of these hosts within the framework of narrative theory and television studies, I analyze how hosts pushed boundaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality in their shows, while presenting material that embedded stereotypes. While simultaneously pioneering and conservative in their messages, the hosts carefully navigated cultural anxieties in the Cold War’s approach to addressing and raising children.

The Cold War era and the coming of age of commercial television were entwined not only chronologically but culturally. Cultural and media historians like Sammond, Spigel, Englehardt, and Slotkin have examined how national anxieties and the debates over what it meant to be “American” were represented in popular culture and particularly the new mass media of television. The scholars noted above posited that the storylines
and characterizations of early commercial television shows were sites of mediation for
the American viewer serving as visual representations of evolving concepts: a prosperous
suburban class, manhood, womanhood and childhood. The children who watched the
enormously popular hosted cartoon shows were part of this national conversation and the
hosts of these shows were a nexus of this mediation of American identity. The era of the
locally produced hosted show closed in the wake of Sesame Street due to shifts in social
policy, industry economics, and rising expectations for children programming. A cloak of
nostalgia now surrounds these shows in the memories of the former viewers and industry
participants. However, this project’s study reveals that beyond that nostalgia lies a vital
cultural form that thrived in the Cold War era; one that reflected the ideals of childhood,
media, and nation of a cultural terrain from which the children’s television host emerged.
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INTRODUCTION

About This Work

This dissertation is both a history and a critical analysis of a now defunct format of children’s television—the locally produced hosted children’s show. These shows were produced during an era of American history fraught with political and societal unrest which has become known as the Cold War. These shows utilized a format that was ubiquitous throughout the United States during the early days of commercial television. Well over 1,000 such shows were produced nationwide from the late 1940s until the early 1970s. Briefly the format consisted of cartoon introduced by a local performer who served as host and also who performed the commercials. The shows were broadcast at times during the day that station programmers assumed children would be watching. Other histories of early children’s television, including a history of early children’s programming in Philadelphia, exist as do other scholarly discussions that make mention of the local shows. What makes my work different is that in addition to providing a historical and cultural context I use literary textual analysis to critique the format, content of the shows and, perhaps most importantly, the performances of the hosts. To date, there is scant in-depth scholarship regarding this format of show and the local performers that starred in them other than chronologies and studies of early children’s television with

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1 Historians use the term “Cold War” to define the era of nuclear tension and diplomatic hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union. The bookends of this era are the end of World War II and the use of the atom bomb (1945) and the dissolution of the USSR in the early 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

2 This number is derived from my count of hosted shows as cataloged by television historian Tim Hollis in his book Hi There Boys and Girls! American’s Local Children’s TV Programs (2001).
relation to marketing and consumerism. There are documentaries such as the WHYY-produced *Philly’s Favorite Kids Show Hosts* (2007) and television history websites, such as Philadelphia’s Broadcast Pioneers (http://www.broadcastpioneers.com) that highlight these local shows and while these resources are important for their archival functions, they are typically are uncritical in their approach.

The research on this topic was challenging since the material I set out to evaluate consisted of televised live performances from the 1950s and 1960s. Scant physical evidence remains for the shows and many of the industry participants are now deceased. I was fortunate enough to interview in-person four of the five performers that are profiled in this work as well as several members of the production and technical teams. As will be discussed later, I was also fortunate to be given access to behind-the-scene footage and memorabilia.

This dissertation is grounded in the field of childhood studies and therefore takes a child-centric approach with regard to the scholarship presented. While I am of the cohort of child viewers who watched these shows I make no claims of having access to the actual lived experiences of those viewers; nor do I attempt to recreate those experiences with this study. While the memories of the shows and the hosts that the former viewers that I collected contributed interesting insights regarding the success of the shows, I recognized these memories as nostalgia-tinged narratives. As such, any search for the “real” child viewer would be both futile and disingenuous. Instead I set out to explore the shows and the performances as texts; texts reflecting and exploring adult constructions of an American Cold War childhood by the content creators of a new mass medium. These adult constructions of children’s entertainment were broadcast daily into
homes via this new technology that provided entertainment with previously unimagined level of intimacy and immediacy via the use of sight and sound. This dissertation is therefore an “unpacking” of mid-century constructions of “children” and “childhood” and all the political and societal elements implicit in their performance on local children’s television.

It is a basic tenet of Childhood Studies to acknowledge that the notion of “child” and “childhood” are social constructs whose natures are debated in public discourse. In Cold War America, the early decades of which coincided with the rise of commercial broadcasting, television was part of that discourse. Nicholas Sammond in his analysis the children’s television programming produced by the Disney studios notes that: “‘the child’ is a unique and valuable object of understanding how social and material relations are imagined at that moment” (371). As I will explore more completely in the chapters that follow these “social and material relations” which include considerations of gender, race, and class. These constructions and relationships underwent re-examination and re-negotiation during this post-War time period which was an era of rising prosperity and economic growth but also rising civil unrest and anxiety about the use of the atomic bomb. “The child” was a crucible, or as Sammond writes “a homunculus (361),” of these hopes and fears and anxieties. The figure of “the child” was the site of a post-War idealization for a future and triumphant American democratic capitalist society (10). The locally produced children’s shows represent one such cultural expression of this Cold War construction of childhood; one, which I will argue, which was both commercially successful and culturally influential.

I became interested in the topic of the local children’s show for personal and
scholarly reasons. I was a child viewer of these shows and had my own fond memories of both the hosts and the programs. When I began this project friends my age who knew of my interest in local television history were eager to share their memories of these shows. Among my extended circle of friends are former local station employees who, after first stating they were surprised by the fact that a researcher was interested in this history, generously shared with me their personal stories and memorabilia. As I began researching the topic, I quickly became aware that these shows had largely been ignored by both cultural critics and television historians. Volumes have been written both in the scholarly and popular press on television and children (particularly with regard to consumerism, sex, and violence), but virtually none that critically examines the these shows and their hosts. I found this perplexing given the facts: these shows were produced by nearly every local station nationwide; they were profitable and drew large audiences; and they figure largely in Baby Boomer nostalgia. This work, therefore, is intended to fill what I perceive to be a significant gap in scholarship with regard to an important artifact in the history of children’s visual culture—the local children’s show.

When I began this research, I set out to establish what were the key factors contributed to the commercial success and decades-long durability of these shows. The answer became quickly obvious. It was the performance of the host and the relationship the host established with the viewer. As I will explore in this work this performance served as an interface between the viewer and television both as a new form of communication and entertainment as well as a new technology. Television scholars such as Tim Hollis and Lynn Spigel and cultural historians such as Richard Butsch discuss the importance of the host and the relationships they forged with viewers/listeners as the
prime factor in the success of hosted radio and television shows. As a Childhood Studies scholar I was intrigued not only by the ubiquitousness and profitability of these (mostly) low-budget children’s shows but also by the loyalty and personal engagement that the former child viewers demonstrated towards the hosts. While this loyalty and engagement cannot be quantified there is a preponderance of qualitative evidence that points to esteem in which the television hosts were held. In addition to the reminiscences of former viewers that I collected, evidence of the high regard that these viewers still had for these shows is demonstrated by the large number of fan sites and Facebook tribute pages honoring local children show hosts nationwide, and the new coverage, broadcast, print, and online, profiling these local stars when they pass. Local Philadelphia host Sally Starr’s death, for instance, was front page news for both Philadelphia’s newspapers and was a lead story on the local newscasts. The hosts engendered fondness and loyalty and basically sold the shows.

In this work I will take critical look at the performance of the hosts and at the format and content of the shows themselves. In the process of doing so I addresses two central questions. First, when these grown-up friends visited mid-century child television viewers, what were the complex sets of values, relational parameters, and narrative performances they represented? Second, did the personas of the hosts challenge or reify mid-century American notions of race, gender, and class? To answer these questions, I will be examining the stagecraft that the hosts used in their performances as well as the cultural context of the personas that they developed to address the children at home. The framework that I use for this critical analysis is based on the assumptions that: the shows can be read and analyzed as texts; these texts can be read as political and social
commentaries of the era in which they were created; and that both the performance of the
hosts and the content and structure of the shows are reflections a construct of childhood
prevalent in mid-twentieth century America.

As mentioned above the key factor in the success of the local children shows was
that the hosts engaged in creating a parasocial relationship with the home viewer. In a
parasocial relationship the performer creates the illusion of a personal bond with the
listener/viewer. This form of stagecraft was utilized by hosts on television's immediate
predecessor, radio. In the subsequent chapters I explore how the hosts, both radio and
television performers used a variety of techniques to foster this connection. The addition
of the visual to the aural gave the television performer even more elements to utilize in
creating this friendship. An additional element in creating the host/viewer bond was that
local television children show performers routinely made personal appearances at local
events (such as parades) and commercial venues (e.g., store openings or scheduled
appearances at amusement parks) where children and their parents could meet the
performers and engage in one-to-one interactions with them. These in-person visits
further served to strengthen the host/child bond. On the viewer’s side of this parasocial
relationship, in addition to loyal viewership, the children demonstrated their commitment
to hosts and the shows through various responses such as: letter-writing; the production
of the fan art which was displayed on the shows; attendance at the aforementioned
personal appearances; and—depending on the format of the show—attendance at the
shows themselves as part of a “peanut gallery.”

3 The term “peanut gallery” is used here as it was used by the interviewees and by previous children’s how
hosts such as Buffalo Bob of Howdy Doody fame to denote an on-set child audience sitting in the “cheap
seats.” The reader should note that modern scholars are now more cognizant of and sensitive to the racist
connotations of the phrase. In the American vaudeville circuit the term referred to the segregated seating
As I engaged in the project and began interviewing the hosts themselves, themes emerged in their characterizations of their relationship to the child viewer: respect for the child; never “talking down” to them; and an appreciation of the fans’ support through viewership and attendance at their live events. Thus, while this relationship between child and host could be termed “parasocial,” there was a strong element of connectedness that seemed to break the “fourth wall” both literally and figuratively. Various narrative and performative strategies fostered this sense of performer-to-viewer collaboration. Generally, these included the use of eye contact, direct address, the performance technique of visualizing an idealized individual child recipient, as well as the opportunities for actual face-to-face meetings with viewers at local venues and thus the shoring up of the illusion of a personal relationship.

In this work I utilize the Philadelphia shows that I have selected as case studies to examine both the structure and content of the programs and to uncover the patterns that existed in the performances of the hosts. According to structuralist critic David Richter, “everything that we do that is specifically human is expressed in language”—a language that included deeply coded gestures, signals, and visual cues (809.) The language, visual images, and body language used by the hosts are signifiers of cultural messages. In works of performing art and in literature, the performer/author mediates the relationship between viewer/reader and the content of the work. For the local children’s show host this content included his/her performance, the ads (which he/she typically presented), as well as cartoons, and live-action shorts. The mediation was achieved through the use of stagecraft, the host’s use of persona (character or persona), and through the function of arrangements meant to ostracize African American theater-goers.
serving as the narrator/presenter for the show. Based on this concept of host as narrator/mediator, I explore the relationship between the hosted children’s shows and fairy, folk, and literary tales particularly with regard to the tradition of the storyteller/narrator. From the first print advertising campaigns for sets, television was marketed as the hearth around which the family gathered for a shared storytelling experience. Children were central to these marketing campaigns as the industry quickly discovered that families with children were more likely to buy televisions than those without. “Magic” and “Fantasy” were common motifs in these early ad campaigns and children’s shows borrowed liberally from fantasy tales. I use the concepts established by the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim regarding the importance of fairy and folk tales on childhood development of “self” and the resolution of anxieties as the basis for my connections between children’s fantasy literature and television.

Using the framework outlined above I will analyze the performances of the key children’s show hosts from the Delaware Valley viewing area. How did the hosts’ performances on the shows reflect or trouble the era’s prevailing notions of race gender, and ethnicity? How did the hosts negotiate with the child viewer and the parents the tensions between art and commerce particularly with regard to presenting entertaining yet morally uplifting messages while promoting the sponsor’s product? Finally, what was the role of nostalgia over time in both the success and the ultimate demise of the shows? The shows stood on the cusp of a changing culture, yet in some ways they became frozen in time. Even as they destabilized some of the period’s conservative ethos, they were left behind and remembered as a sort of yesteryear.
Scholarship Regarding Hosted Children’s Shows

The difficulty of presenting a precise history of these shows as a genre is reflected in current scholarship. The main print resource which serves as a compendium of the local children’s programs is Tim Hollis’s *Hi There Boys and Girls! American’s Local Children’s TV Programs*. Hollis’ research is notable; he created a listing, with descriptions, of all the locally produced children’s shows on-record in the United States. It is the only print resource of its kind. Unfortunately, due to the lack of record-keeping by the local station during the industry’s early days, much potentially useful information for television historians (such as the dates for the show’s length of run, program times, and the themes of the shows) has been lost. Thus, there are gaps in what Hollis was able to chronicle. I discovered that such information, if it exists at all, is only available from the personal narratives of the industry’s early participants.

In her Master’s thesis “Love, Luck and Lollipops: Children’s Television Programming in Philadelphia, 1948-1969” television historian Brandi Scardilli presents a concise history of Philadelphia children’s shows during the Cold War Era. While Ms. Scardilli’s work presents an excellent outline and overview, my work differs from hers in that in that in addition to the history, I present a broader historical context and critically examine the shows as cultural and political texts. Also, in this work I draw upon original source material, specifically the oral histories of creators and producers of the shows.

A scholarly work that does take a critical approach to children’s show hosts is *Welcome to the Dreamhouse* by Lynn Spigel. In her chapter “Seducing the Innocent” Spigel discusses adult reactions to children’s television such as anxieties about
commercialization. Her thesis is that by “blurring the boundaries between adult and child identities” the hosts of children’s shows “presented a ripe environment through which to address children as consumers” (204). She also examines how concerns about the commercialization of childhood resulted in increased monitoring and regulation of children’s television (209). Spigel analyzes hosts of nationally broadcast shows such as Buffalo Bob from *Howdy Doody* and Jimmy Dodd from *The Mickey Mouse Club*. She is primarily concerned with adult reaction to children’s culture. My work differs from Spigel’s in that it focuses on the local shows and is a critical analysis of the format centered on the role of the host. Consumption is only one element of the parasocial relationship I examine.

Various scholars have examined the creation of the child-audience and the child-consumer with regard to national shows. Cross discusses the importance of *The Mickey Mouse Club* and Mattel’s sponsorship in the rise of Barbie (190-191). Stark examines the first fad of the 1950s, Davy Crockett coon-skin caps, popularized by the showing of *Davy Crockett* episodes on the *Disneyland* prime-time show in the 1954-55 season (54-55). No one has yet examined the importance of the host/child relationship in the commercial success and longevity of these shows. I believe that an understanding of this relationship is crucial in studies of relating to “the child,” television advertising, and the child consumer in fields such as television and media studies, American studies, and childhood studies.

Central to this work is the notion that the early children’s shows that I am examining were rooted in the social milieu of the American Cold War and, therefore, reflective of the social constructions of “childhood” as well as the anxieties and
aspirations for the new commercial medium and the new technology of television.

Several scholars have commented on the politics surrounding the notion of an imagined child with regard to television. Sammond, referenced above, examined Disney programming as a reflection of the American Cold War emphasis on the importance of the nuclear family with regard to continued American exceptionalism. David Oswell noted the importance of historical reception studies in that this provide “leverage for introducing important questions regarding specificity and singularity of the cultural forms of children’s television and the modes of address to imagined viewers at home” (11); viewers as imagined and constructed by adult content makers. Dan Cook in his examination of the rise and growth of century children’s clothing industry as a reflection of the commodification of childhood in the twentieth century discusses the politics inherent in adult claims of speaking for “the child.” Cook notes that parental approval or disapproval of various television programming choices are reflective of the social values and norms that parents wish to enforce or deter (14-15). Berry theorizes that television was and continues to be a medium for social learning and modeling behavior (95) and that television can serve as a “social agent” for messages and about “one’s place and prestige in society” (99).

**The Framework**

An underlying assumption of this work is the premise that television, the medium, can be read, analyzed, and criticized the same as other cultural products such as film, art, and literature. In the academic area of television studies this has been an issue of some
debate. In his overview of theoretical approaches to television studies Glen Creeber notes how scholars have differed on whether such scholarship should be based in the social sciences or in literary theory. Creeber writes about this dilemma from the perspective of a scholar based in textual analysis:

Empirical history, audience and reception studies, institutional policy, politics and society took the central ground as colleagues around me talked in a language I recognized as coming from the Social Sciences rather than the Arts and the Humanities. Textual analysis may not have been completely outlawed by the television academy, but I did increasingly feel I now harboured a love that dare not speak its name. (83)

Creeber states that the future of television studies lies in an interdisciplinary approach to such work; one that should be approached from multiple “critical angles” including textual, historical, and viewer response analysis (86).

Fiske and Hartley wrote that while television is indeed a text it not a literary text; rather it should be approached as a “bardic” one (15). The authors coined this term for the critical analysis of television to indicate how the medium serves as society’s bard, i.e., storyteller. Fiske and Hartley delineated the bardic functions which television performs as follows: it articulates a “cultural consensus about the nature of reality;” implicates members of the culture into “its dominant value-system;” celebrates the “culture’s representative” through mythologies; assures the society of the culture’s affirming ideologies; exposes any inadequacies in the culture and creates pressure for a
reorientation to a “new ideological stance;” convinces the “audience that their status and identity as individuals in guaranteed by the culture as a whole;” and transmits a sense of “cultural membership” (88). Utilizing this framework, I would argue that Cold War children’s television performed this bardic function and explained, examine, advance and challenge the social anxieties of the period.

The local children’s shows of the Cold War era drew heavily upon children’s literature, American folklore, and classic fairy tales for their formats and characters. The hosts served as storyteller and narrators of cultural values. Even the non-character hosts, such as Philadelphia’s Wee Willie Webber, articulated social norms for middle-class children such as politeness, obedience, and respect for God and country. The local shows represented an odd juxtaposition of progressive v. white patriarchal values. On one hand the hosts were advocating the values of a post-war American society based in inclusion and the value of all children’s creative potential while the content of the shows, the shorts and the cartoons, were grounded in what Tavia Nyong'o termed “racial kitsch” as well as outdated gender stereotypes. Based on an analysis of the content of the shows and the performances of the hosts, I believe that the locally produced children’s shows represented bardic tales of American values. However, the shows represented a paradox in that conflicting tales were being told at once: the cartoons and shorts represented the values of a white patriarchal pre-War America and the performances of the hosts represented a re-examination of those values with strides towards inclusion and more nuanced presentations of race, gender, and class.

Methodology
I utilized two major strategies to undertake this critique and analysis of the local children’s shows: interviews with the principals; and an analysis of the both the performance of the hosts and the content of the shows based on primary materials (tapes and photographs) and secondary sources (such as Hollis’ compendium).

*The Interviews*

For the purposes of this project I used the qualitative research strategy of the interview. The intent was to gather the personal narratives of the creative and technical people involved in the production of these shows. I located my interviewees through personal connections that I have in the Philadelphia area. A family friend, Joanne Gasbarro, is the widow of one of the original cameramen from the founding of Philadelphia Channel 6 (the ABC affiliate). Ms. Gasbarro introduced me to former station technicians who agreed to be interviewed. I also used personal contacts that I made through my membership in Philadelphia’s Broadcast Pioneers particularly with the help of Gerry Wilkinson who is a founding member of the organization. Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia is comprised of communication professionals and dedicated to preserving the history of the city’s radio and television heritage.

Since the analysis of these oral histories is filtered through my own personal experiences and prejudices, I feel it important to situate myself in relation to my interviewees. I am a member of the Baby Boom Generation (1946-1964) and, as such, I am part of the first cohort that was raised with the television set as a common household appliance. My childhood was spent watching the locally produced hosted children’s that
are the object of this investigation. When I met these local children’s shows celebrities at their homes in the process of collecting their oral histories for this project, I was in awe. At the time of the interviews I was an adult in my late fifties. Even so, the dynamics of “child viewer” and “children’s show host” surfaced. The octogenarian hosts would tell me their personal tales—tales that had obviously been told many times before. Inevitably at some point we would sing together one of the songs from the show. Each of the hosts seemed enthusiastic about my project when I explained it to them and were anxious to share their stories with me. After my first in-person interview I became acutely aware that there was a question of “power” that would need to be addressed.

Kathy Charmaz discusses the construction of power negotiations during the interview process: Relative differences in power and status may be acted on and played out during an interview. Powerful people may take charge, turn the interview questions to address topics on their own terms, and control the timing, pacing and length of the interview (27). She goes on to suggest that preparation, reflexivity, and flexible interviewing techniques are practical ways to offset the imbalance (28). I heeded Charmaz and, with practice and self-reflection, I was able to establish the professional sang-froid to keep the interviews on-track and to work with the material that I had gathered. Indeed, Rubin and Rubin caution against being overly empathetic as an interviewer and suggest a healthy dose of self-awareness (81). However, the pull of nostalgia was very strong. Biklen writes that “ethnographers’ own memories of youth infiltrate their fieldwork” (260). Biklen is discussing here how an adult ethnographer’s memories of her own childhood can color her work with children. I would argue that, with regard to my project, the problem of remembered childhoods also holds true for the
adult/former child viewer participants—including this author and the hosts themselves. Memory constructs us and constructs “our current approaches to others” (257).

I experienced this expertise firsthand when I interviewed Ms. Norman for this project. The interview took place at Ms. Norman’s penthouse apartment in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. When I arrived, Ms. Norman ushered me to the couch, and she seated herself in front of me on a white, mushroom-shaped hassock. She was dressed in a black jogging suit. Her ensemble and demeanor, down to her choice of seating, was highly evocative of her character of Pixanne, who would open her show each day by greeting her viewers from atop a toadstool in the Magic Forest. Throughout the interview Ms. Norman was gracious and polite. From the outset she expressed concern about making sure that I got the materials and the stories that I would need:

JN: Right … you want to know the whole truth about Pixanne?

VBC: I’m going to put this closer to you then [referring to the tape recorder].

JN: It [the show] started on Saturday mornings only. Do you want interesting anecdotes for this?

VBC: Absolutely, anything.

JN: Would you like to know how it all started? (Norman interview)

When we were finished, she played her most recent CD of American standards for me. When I prepared to leave, she gave me a gift (a set of her CDs) walked me to the door, hugged me goodbye, wished me well with my project, and told me to stay in-touch. As I waited in the hallway for the elevator the thought struck me that the interview had been a
Jane Norman Production: intelligent, positive, polished, and skillfully packaged. Ms. Norman spent several decades of her adult life producing her own shows and I realized that she had “produced” the interview much in the careful way that way that she took with her show. This interview experience very much made me cognizant of the tug of nostalgia and the appeal of recreating that “lost state” of an “imagined childhood” described by Jacqueline Rose (9).

In addition to the hosts, I interviewed several men and women who were involved in the making of the shows: cameramen, lighting technicians, and office staff. The majority of these connections I made through Ms. Gasbarro; the rest through my professional connections with Broadcast Pioneers. I met with the production folks in a variety of settings including as a group at Ms. Gasbarro’s home and individually over lunch. Unlike the interviews with the hosts the “power” dynamic did not arise. Rather, to a person, these industry retirees were all curious and bemused as to why anyone would be interested in hearing their stories from the era. But, as with the hosts, once the interview began, they were all eager to share their experiences.

Obviously, these people and these shows have a special place in my personal history. But, as evidenced from the social media responses and personal narratives that I reviewed, this personal connection to these shows and to these men and women holds true for many of my fellow Boomers who spent their afternoons in front of a set with their TV pals. I believe that the hosted children’s show represents an important artifact of post-World War II America. I also believe that the format of the show and the interplay between the performers and the children at home provides a fascinating tool for understanding constructions of children and childhood in American popular culture from
the Cold War era. However, the very issues engendered by the interview process
demonstrate a major theme of this study: that hosts are performers engaging negotiating
the role of host in particular ways.

The Critical Analysis of the Shows

In addition to the interviews my primary source materials included the shows
themselves. Finding copies of the original shows proved to be problematic since during
this era the programs were performed live and, therefore, little filmed footage has been
preserved. However, I had the very good fortune being gifted “behind the scene” films
taken by one of the original Channel 6 cameramen, Vince Gasbarro, through the
generosity of his wife, Joanne. Ms. Gasbarro gave me access to several hours of footage
that her husband filmed of the locally produced shows he worked on such as American
Bandstand, Popeye Theater, and The Rex Morgan Show. The Peabody Award online
archive was a good source for shows produced by WCAU. Broadcast Pioneers, a
professional organization dedicated to preserving Philadelphia’s radio and television
history, also has some streaming video from all three of the affiliates. As a framework
and model for my analysis I turned to noted scholars who have used this approach for
critical readings of post-War II visual culture such as Spigel (Make Way for Television),
Engelhardt (The End of Victory Culture) and Nicholas Sammond (Babes in
Tomorrowland). After isolating the footage specific to the hosted children’s shows, I
watched the segments at least twice and took notes regarding: costuming; gestures;
methods of direct address to the viewer; techniques for engaging the viewer (such as

4 Unfortunately, no Philadelphia shows were available from either the Library of Congress’s Television
collection (Washington, DC) or from the Paley Center for Media (New York).
inviting the viewer to send letters or artwork); and content of the entertainment. I present a rhetorical analysis of the stagecraft, performances, and show content based on feminist and queer theory. This theoretical approach became most useful because hosts inhabited a liminal space between a culture with expectations of traditional gender roles and vaudeville entertainment styles; while they articulated moral messages such as respecting parents, they acted in non-traditionally gendered roles and therefore destabilized cultural norms.5

Since I was using Philadelphia as a case study and making the claim that the Philadelphia shows were representative of the local children’s programs seen nationwide, I felt it important to verify this claim. As such I did a quantitative analysis of the motifs and characters utilized. I used Hollis’s compendium which lists all the shows produced during the era and grouped them by keywords found in the descriptions of the shows and the hosts. I then counted the recurring themes and types of hosts and out the results in spreadsheets. These tables are included in the appendix. I analyzed these motifs by placing them in historical and social context. Indeed, Philadelphia made use of the popular motifs of the time which included: the circus; fairy tales; the Wild West; and space exploration.

There are also historical reasons for selecting Philadelphia as a case study having to do with the development of the industry as well as access to archival materials. The Greater Philadelphia area has been part of the television industry since its infancy. The

5 In my discussion I use the terms “queerness” and “liminality” in the sense utilized by cultural and literary critics, i.e. in reference to a character who is “othered”—one who inhabits a space in between clearly delineated binary categories (such as “child and adult,” “male and female”) or who challenges or “troubles” these categories.
two men credited with the invention of the modern television—Philo T. Farnsworth and Vladimir Zworkyn—ran research labs at Philco (Philadelphia) and RCA (Camden, New Jersey) respectively. One of the first documented television transmissions was from the RCA lab in Camden to a remote site in nearby Collingswood, New Jersey. Philadelphia was an early entrant into the commercial television industry. The FCC did not keep statistics on individual television advertising markets until 1966 but by that date Philadelphia ranked fourth for television advertising revenues in the United States (Steinberg 227). The local affiliates (WFIL, WCAU, and WPTZ) were major innovators in these early days and responsible for trendsetting programs such as *The Ernie Kovacs Show* (1952-1955) and *American Bandstand* (1952-1989). Philadelphia also had a vibrant children’s television industry. Two Philadelphia children shows, *Pixanne* (1960-1969) and *Captain Noah* (1967-1994), were syndicated nationally. Also, in the process of analyzing the themes and characters utilized on the local hosted shows it became apparent that the Philadelphia shows were representative of what was being broadcast at local affiliates across the country with regard to characterizations, content, and structure.

Finally, another reason for selecting Philadelphia is that since it is my home town, I had access to networks of people affiliated with the industry and archival materials associated with the local channels. There exists in the area an active community of former hosts and production people who were anxious and willing to share their memories and experiences. This, too, overlaps with issues in interview methodology, memory, and nostalgia, a theme that will be directly addressed in the conclusion.

**Overview of the Chapters**
In the following chapters I analyze specific hosts and shows to explore the techniques and stagecraft that the hosts used to construct and bond with their perceived child viewer. I place their performances in a cultural context and discuss their portrayals with regard to prevailing cultural norms regarding race, class, gender, and adult-child relationships and authorities. In what ways did their performances conform to or trouble those norms?

In Chapter One I present an overview of the industry which, during the Cold War era, was in its nascent stage. In order to present an informed discussion of the locally produced children’s show I believe that it is essential that I situated them in a historically and culturally. At this stage, television was still an experimental medium searching for an audience and for a profitable business model. While the men and women of early television operated within a number of constraints—technically and financially—the newness of the medium also allowed for innovation and experimentation. There were societal constraints as well and, with rare exception, power in the industry was held by white males. This power hierarchy was reflected on-screen as were Cold War constructions of gender, specifically Cold War femininity, through an analysis of the performance of Philadelphia most beloved children’s show host the cowgirl Sally Starr. Ms. Starr represents an interesting juxtaposition of conflicting notions of American womanhood. On one hand, as a blonde and buxom young woman she fit the Hollywood template for a mid-century American starlet. However, she was also a cowgirl, wore guns, had a big and effusive personality, and was the star of her own show. As will be explored, Ms. Starr was able to push the boundaries of televised femininity by embracing the mythos of the American West and utilizing the freedom of expression afforded to a
character from that mythology, the Girl of the Golden West.

Chapter Three focuses on another woman host from the Delaware Valley viewing area, Jane Norman, aka Pixanne. Ms. Norman, like many other hosts from the era, borrowed a character from children’s literature for her persona. Ms. Norman reinvented J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* as a female figure and created a long-running popular children’s show with sophisticated production values. Ms. Norman who was a former teacher, imbued the show with many of the elements that would be come to be associated with the educational programs on PBS children’s shows such as *Sesame Street*. She was a female performer unique for the era in that she was involved in all the creative and many of the business aspects of the show. She scripted the stories, wrote the music and lyrics, and retained the rights to her show so that she could continue the show in syndication after the local station canceled it. A critical reading of *Pixanne* provides insight into the old War notion of television as an educational tool and part of a larger national initiative to produce a well-educated next generation of Americans who could go to-to-toe with the U.S.S.R. in the race for scientific and technological supremacy.

The performance of masculinity in these early children’s shows is the subject of Chapter Four. Using Philadelphia’s Gene London as a case study, I examine how the male hosts presented various templates of masculinity to their child viewers and how those gendered performances reinforced or challenged conventional notions. Mr. London drew upon the figure of the child-man which has a long history in American popular culture perhaps most famously with the character of Chaplin’s Little Tramp in silent films. The guise of the foolish and ineffectual child-man also served to on many levels to emasculate the male hosts making them a “safer” and this a more approachable adult
friend for the child viewer in the all-important parasocial relationship; one capable of getting past parental gatekeepers. Chapter Five investigates another male host, Chief Halftown. Traynor Ora Halftown represents a unique figure in the history of children’s television. His Philadelphia-based show holds the record as the longest running local children’s program. Additionally, Mr. Halftown was only one of two non-white local hosts color. Each of these hosts was a Native American. I examine how Mr. Halftown was able to succeed as a person of color in the television industry during an era when persons of color were excluded from positions of power. Similar to Sally Starr, Mr. Halftown was able to draw upon the mythology of the American West, so important in the popular culture of the Cold War era, and the figure of “The Indian” to racially indemnify himself and, as with his contemporary Gene London, become a safe adult male friend for his child viewers.

I conclude with an investigation of the demise of the hosted show in the chapter “The End of the Hosted Shows.” Various societal and commercial factors were responsible for the cancellations of these shows which, for the most part, were gone by the early 1970s. Sesame Street itself was also a factor. With its innovative approach, high production values, mission of inclusion, Jim Henson’s Muppets, and the presentation of diversity in its cast the show was groundbreaking and set new standards for children’s television entertainment. I examine the role of nostalgia in the construction and performance of the original hosted shows both as a component of the shows themselves as well as how they continue to figure in memory and in popular culture.

Nostalgia permeates the history of the locally produced children’s shows. As a former child viewer of these Philadelphia shows, the problem of nostalgia and
unrealizable personal childhood memories, further complicated by the ephemeral nature of the material under analysis, specifically live television for which scant physical evidence exists, presented challenges that I needed to acknowledge from the outset of this study. However, I believe the industry artifacts that have survived and the interviews of both industry insiders and former viewers provide a persuasive compendium of evidence from which to make an analysis and to draw conclusions. I also contend that this evidence serves to demonstrate that the Philadelphia shows are representative of characteristics of these local hosted shows nationwide. These Philadelphia performers are also emblematic of the power and resonance that children’s show hosts had on a generation of television viewers.
SITUATING CHILDREN’S TELEVISION WITHIN THE “GOLDEN AGE”

I believe that an historical-cultural perspective is crucial to a critical analysis of the performance of the hosts. While the hosts were indeed the central figure, the content and framework for the shows were also crafted by the advertisers, program directors, and other creative and technical staff, all of whom were influenced by societal norms regarding notions of masculinity/femininity, race, class, and civic-minded American citizenry in the Age of Nuclear Anxiety—an era which coincided with television’s Golden Age. To this end I begin with some background information regarding the milieu of the fledgling commercial television industry in which local hosted shows originated and define what is meant by the “Golden Age of Television” specifically as it relates to children’s programming. Next, I examine the development of the concept of a “child audience” as it evolved over the twentieth century and how that concept was integrated in the early days of television. I follow this with a brief history of the emergence of the Philadelphia television affiliates and how this notion of a child audience was incorporated in the business models of the local stations. Since the hosts employed by the local stations were a crucial component of these children’s shows I explore the evolution of the role of the host from its origins in the tradition of the “narrator,” to Master of Ceremonies, and into the modern era and the function of the host in the mass media of radio and television. The host/narrator, as both a performance and literary tradition, was influential in shaping

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6 The term “Age of Nuclear Anxiety” describes the societal tension surrounding the testing and use of nuclear weapons. The origin can be traced to a poem by W.H. Auden published in 1947, *The Age of Anxiety.*
both the various personas of the children’s show hosts and, in turn, the underpinning for the parasocial relationship that the hosts fostered with the child viewer.

**About the “Golden Age”**

Children have been closely associated with television—on various levels—since its beginning as a commercial venture in the United States. Initially images of children were heavily used by advertisers to promulgate the notion that television ownership was an essential component of a normative, middle-class American childhood. As the broadcast day became established, children’s shows were seen by program managers as a means of building a television viewing audience through loyal (i.e., daily) child viewers. These shows were designed to “sell TV sets by enhancing television’s appeal to the entire family” (Alexander 2). Children’s programs had been an important feature of network radio and were especially popular among sponsors since they were typically inexpensive to produce and engendered a large audience share. The advertisers marketed to the parents indirectly through the child. This indirect marketing strategy carried over to TV (Von Schilling 96). Children’s television shows were specifically designed to engage a daily viewership of children—“to keep the kids occupied while Mom makes dinner” (96). Children’s shows were also popular with the sponsors since the advertising rates for the children’s shows were cheaper than prime time and the host could segue seamlessly back and forth between entertainment and selling product. Consequently, first on radio and then on television, the hosts of these shows were not only performers engaging the child audience member but also a spokesperson for the program sponsor’s product. This
dual role not only situated the child as a consumer but also demanded the host’s parasocial approach and influence in terms of promoting values.

Television historians and critics refer to the early decade of commercial television as a “Golden Age” because of the high production values (particularly with regard to writing and acting) but also because of the era’s experimentation with the visual elements unique to television. Critically acclaimed programs of this era include the network anthology series such as CBS’ *Playhouse 90* (1956-1960) and NBC’s *Philco Television Playhouse* (1948-1955). There were also outstanding children’s specials such as Gian Carlo Menotti’s opera, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (commissioned for NBC and originally broadcast in 1951) and *Art Carney Meets Peter and the Wolf* (ABC, 1958), which featured the music of Prokofiev, lyrics by Ogden Nash, and the Bill Baird Marionettes.

The locally produced children’s shows were very much part of this tradition of television’s lively arts. The shows were largely unscripted and performed live. They relied on several forms of artistry including puppetry, storytelling, illustration, as well as music and dance. While the endeavors of the hosts on the shows could not always be characterized as “acting” (as in a role) they could be characterized as a performance. An important, if subtle, aspect of this performance was the portrayal of gender, race, and ethnicity. Societal reflections of these culturally constructed characteristics were present not only in the performance of the hosts but also in the cartoons and the live shorts shown on the programs as well. As will be discussed, these cultural constructs were bound within the framework of the American Cold War—a period of foment which culminated in the rise of the civil rights and personal politics movements of the 1960s and 1970s.
Mass Media and the “Child Audience”

In the United States mass media are overwhelmingly commercial concerns reliant on consumers who both the purchase the medium and respond to the advertisers through consumption. As such, any discussion of a “child audience” is intertwined with a discussion of the child as consumer. Norma Odom Pecora notes: “Beginning with the introduction of mass-produced magazines and dime novels in the 1890s, children have been part of the media audience” (“The Changing Nature” 24). With the beginning of the twentieth century various mass media industries began to explore in earnest the notion of the American child as a potential audience member and also as either a direct or indirect consumer of the goods and services related to the entertainment provided. Indeed, Luke writes that “by the late 1940s children and adolescents had been transformed into consumers of mass culture and mass media” (57). With regard specifically to television, by the close of the twentieth century the children’s programming had become so lucrative and specialized that entire cable networks (such as Nickelodeon and The Disney Channel) competed for child viewers (Benet-Weiser 64). Other models for the production and delivery of children’s media exist throughout the evolution of children’s television and radio programming. There were (are)
publicly funded radio and television children’s shows such as those on the BBC in Great Britain and in the U.S. However, the American public television model for the U.S. did not take shape in its present form until the late 1960s. For radio and television, aural/visual media broadcast into domestic spaces, children have always been potential recipients of the programming and commercial messages made available through the networks.

From the early decades of the twentieth century the notion of “the child” as a consumer created public concerns, concerns which were voiced in the popular press. The rapid introduction of new technologies gave rise to both utopian hopes and dystopian fears regarding their uses and their effects on (what were perceived to be) vulnerable populations such as children. As a result, throughout 20th century:

Reformers, educators, clergy and other human service professional wrote extensively about the dangers of movies, radio, and television, as each became popular. Intellectuals and cultural critics blamed these media for the decline in culture. They expressed little faith in the average person’s ability to manage mass media and, in the spirit of mass culture criticism, characterized the masses s in danger of becoming helpless victims. (Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* 280)

Children were seen as particularly vulnerable to the pernicious effects of mass media. These popular press “panics” were based on the assumption of “the child” as an “innocent,” i.e., a malleable recipient of the images and messages supplied by the media.
In the first decades of the 20th century, concerns surfaced in public discourse about immigrant and working-class boys and girls frequenting the movies; concerns about their unsupervised socializing with each other as well as about the values that they were absorbing through the movies they were watching. Progressive activist Jane Addams stated that the nickelodeons were “houses of dreams” which implanted useless fantasies into the heads of impressionable youths. Movies were, therefore, putting these children at risk for not being properly inculcated with mainstream of American, middle-class values (Butsch, The Making of American Audiences 152). There were also concerns about the safety and cleanliness of the nickelodeons, about the unsavoriness of the adults who frequented them, and about the content of the films with regard to violence, sexuality, and anti-authoritarianism (152).

As the film audience and the industry grew so did the movie exhibition business. Storefront nickelodeons gave way to movie theaters and movie palaces. Public anxiety about movie-going children and youth grew as well. Large numbers of unchaperoned boys and girls went to the new larger movie theaters which quickly gained a reputation as places where delinquent boys and sexually immoral girls congregated in the darkened spaces away from adult gaze (Butsch, The Making of American Audiences 152). There was a widely expressed belief that movies “implanted” ideas in children’s heads (153); immigrant youths were seen as being particularly “susceptible to the tempting images in ‘crime’ pictures” (Nasaw 15). Public action in response to these concerns about these dystopian aspects of movies surfaced early. The Chicago Better Films Committee formed in 1916 to address worries about lower class movie-goers absorbing anti-social ideas; the sentiment was expressed that “undeveloped people” (i.e., ethnic and racial minorities) as
well as children were more deeply affected by movies (Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* 156 -157). According to Nasaw, child reformers sought to restrict children’s access to movies and put pressure on distributors about content. In major cities laws were enacted which attempted to curtail the attendance of unaccompanied minors at movie theaters; however, movie theater owners routinely ignored these laws and local police found them to be unenforceable (17).

As would also be the case with radio and television, the public outcries about the movies would drive research and public policy. Luke notes that: “In response to the significant amount of time children purportedly spent at the movies, serious academic debate about potential effects on children began in the 1920s with an early paper on children’s viewing habits appearing in *Social Service Review* in 1917 (32). The Payne Fund studies (1929-1932) which investigated the effects of film on children and adolescents made the era’s most significant contribution to that body of knowledge. According to Luke, “The Payne Fund studies “formed the first comprehensive textual unity in the mass media-children discourse, a formalized body of research not reproduced in scope until many decades later” (35). A one volume summary of the research, *Motion Pictures and Youth*, was authored by W. W. Charters (1933) which popularized the findings of the research. Luke states the Payne Studies were “representative of early research that conceptualized mass media as having a powerful influence on audiences in relation to intervening variables” (36). The authors of the studies emphasize the importance of social variables in the way that the child related to the movies; they rejected the “hypodermic” theory of viewing stating that a “simple cause and effect relationship does not prevail” (38). Thus, mass media, like movies, could influence a
child attitudinally, but that influence was mitigated by the cultural experiences of the child.

Sammond states that the Payne Studies, while groundbreaking, were “gradually discredited in professional circles;” in popular discourse, however, they served to “stabilize the notion of a generic child American child that could be negatively or positively affected by the movies” (69). Sammond notes that the Payne Studies had “significant impact” and that during mind-1930s Congressional hearings regarding the film industry “preregulation forces relied heavily on the studies in making their argument” (69). Self-regulation and “diligent parental management” were the agreed upon solution to the movie question by the industry and government (69). The Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association began a systematic enforcement of the Hays Code, which set strict industry standards about on-screen sex and violence, in 1934 in an effort to mollify public opinion and forestall further regulation.

Debates about children and movies and the reactions by academic and policy makers set a template for public discourse regarding child audiences. The discourse about movie audiences reveals several things underlying attitudes and constructions of “the child” and mass media. First, the “at risk” population invoked is a group “othered” from hegemonic white, middle-class males; i.e., young and perhaps an ethnic or racial minority. As Butsch notes the concern in the public discourse is not for oneself but for “them” (The Citizen Audience 118). Secondly, when the audience is comprised of children and youths it is of special concern because of their perceived physical and psychological vulnerability. There is also the notion that children are the nation’s future and in need of the proper socialization for good citizenry (The Making of American
In addition to being perceived as customers who plunked down a nickel to see a movie, children were increasingly constituted as being a market for goods either directly (as being the purchasers of dime novels, comics, and candy) or indirectly as the recipients of goods purchased for them by loving parents and grandparents. Advertisers also took note of children’s ability to be influencers in the family and enlisted children’s “pester power” in print ads. Jacobson notes that these ads often gave detailed instructions to children on how to construct their discussions with their parents to best make their case (Jacobson, *Children and Consumer Culture* 14). The merchandising of icons of children’s culture, while not new to the movies (print creations such as Buster Brown had been licensed for a variety of purposes), but the movie industry ushered in a new era of mass marketing. According to Cook, child actors such as Shirley Temple, Judy Garland, Deanna Durbin, and Mickey Rooney all had “lines of clothing or endorsed clothes for children” (91). Walt Disney used product licensing and product tie-ins to promote his cartoons and films starting in the 1930s (Sammond 35). With the coming of radio, however, advertisers had new tools to reach the child and their parents through programs broadcasted directly into their homes and to promote and utilize a national children’s culture. Through radio, particularly through the use of children’s radio “clubs,” advertisers “… expanded and systemized their earlier quest to tap children’s powers of persuasion and created new opportunities with children’s popular culture for demanding child consumers to ply their craft (Jacobson, *Raising Consumers* 190)*. 

Butsch traces the rise of radio from a hobby for enthusiastic amateurs in the early 1900s to a mass media market by the beginning of the 1930s. As the number of stations
grew in the early 1920s, Butsch notes that there was “radio euphoria.” There were utopian visions for radio expressed in the popular press that radio in “pulling voices out of the air” was a “triumph of science.” There were also worries and concerns expressed that radio was an “unnatural” phenomenon which killed birds, caused atmospheric disturbances, and “conjured ghosts” from the ether (The Making of American Audiences 174-175). These initial anxieties were overcome and within a sixteen-year period, 1924 to 1940, radio changed in public perception from a toy for hobbyists to an ubiquitous domestic fixture. By 1940 81.1% of American homes owned at least one radio (176).

Radio was viewed as “an ear to the world” connecting lonely and isolated listeners to mainstream America (Butsch, The Making of American Audiences 210-211). Its rise took place during the Great Depression. Cox notes that during an era of unparalleled economic hardship a radio set was seen as a “virtual necessity,” a “dependable source of inexpensive amusement, news, and information for the masses. It was a comfort to families that huddled around it for economic survival and recovery with successive global war” (26). As would pioneers of the World Wide Web sixty years later, early radio broadcasters were uncertain that it could be turned into a commercial enterprise. At a radio conference in 1922 participants from the radio industry and government officials took a “dim view of ether advertising.” Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover stated, “It is inconceivable that we should allow so great a possibility for service to be drowned in advertising chatter” (18).

The business model of the sponsored show evolved during the 1920s as did a daily program schedule. This line-up reflected who the perceived listening audience was at particular times of day: adults and kids early morning; young children mid-morning;
women in the afternoon, children after-school and early evening; and adult shows “prime
time.” This schedule would be emulated by television program managers to construct a
broadcast day in the 1940s. Radio spurred the rise of the advertising industry. With the
business model of sponsored shows, the advertisers “fashioned and formed whole
programs ... and determined the content ... The influence of advertising was pervasive”
(Cox 35). Understanding the composition of the audience was crucial and was undertaken
by professional rating gathers such as Crossley, Hooper, and Nielsen (43). Marketers
took note of their child audience and fashioned children’s radio clubs to interest children
in their products “by appealing to their sense of fun.” Advertisers used these clubs to
court both child and parent by cultivating their goodwill by “transforming consumption
into a game” (Jacobson, Raising Consumers 184). Little Orphan Annie, Jack Armstrong,
and Buck Rogers all had radio clubs which exhorted the child listener to buy the sponsors
product. To become a member the child would send in the proof of purchase. He would
then receive tokens of membership such as decoder rings and maps which would be used
in the course of the program. The children were thus loyal to the product, loyal to the
show, participated in an interactive listening experience with the show, and formed a
community of child listeners through the club.

Jacobson notes that there was resistance to the radio clubs and to the construction
to the child listener as consumer by child-advocate groups like PTAs and by child
experts. However, the radio advertisers failed to “arouse substantial organized
opposition” because they “successfully aligned themselves with the very institutions of
early twentieth century childhood” such as educational and child-based organizations
(such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts) by providing advertising-based instructional
materials and much-needed advertising dollars (Jacobson, *Raising Consumers* 36). Thus, while there were some concerns about the role of radio in selling products to children, the main concern was about the deleterious psychological effects of radio on child listeners. The principal concern was about “thriller” shows, crime-themed programs, that caused distress and anxiety in children. As summarized by Butsch: “While movie reformers had worried about the wayward effects on working-class children, radio reformers worried about their own middle-class children” (*The Making of American Audiences* 231).

In 1930 the Payne Fund had set up a National Committee on Education by Radio to investigate using radio as a tool to promote education and culture. In 1931 the Committee proposed an agenda for radio research which began in 1933 (Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* 233). According to Butsch: BY the mid-1930s the Payne Fund had succeeded in shaping radio audience research ... It established “effects” research as the core of academic study of radio” (233). Butsch notes that the Rockefeller Foundation began funding radio research in the mid-1930s in an effort to improve programming. It funded the Radio Research Program in 1936 which was headed by Paul Lazarfeld:

Lazarfeld’s approach, while eclectic in method, presumed a psychological model of communication between broadcaster and individual listeners, isolated from historical and social context. Effects were narrowly conceived as the immediate and direct effect on individuals of a single program ... Lazarfeld’s prodigious fund-raising, research, and publishing made his approach the standard and shaped audience research for years to come. (234)
As in the Payne Film Studies, the child was constructed as an audience “at risk” and in need of parental regulation, education, and guidance.

Radio networks attempted to address public anxieties by creating its own standards, modeled after the movie industry’s, in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. By 1939 the National Association of Broadcasters established a list of “Accepted Standards of Good Taste” which included prohibitions against disturbing content and unseemly language. The outbreak of World War II side lighted public “panics” about radio. However, during the war years communications research emerged as a new academic field. There were concerns in the scholarly community about mass media and about how “mass audiences were vulnerable to manipulation.” Questions were raised about how Americans in the age of mass media messages and influence would be able to perform their roles as citizens; some researchers were concerned that the mass media audience represented “a population that needed guidance by elites for the good of democracy” (Butsch, *The Citizen Audience* 125).

Radio was a medium which reached the child listener in her own home. Advertisers constituted the child audience both as influencers with “pester power” and as future consumers to be instructed in the ways of a consumer society. Product tie-ins and radio clubs were means to this end. These radio clubs also promoted a national children’s culture which would be further expanded by television advertisers. Market research on radio listeners gained new sophistication in order to pinpoint where best to place advertising dollars. Public discourse and anxieties about the pernicious effects of mass media on vulnerable children continued to influence research agendas. Industry
executives used self-imposed industry codes to avoid government regulations. As will be seen in the next section television as a mass media will face many of the same panics, research agendas, and regulatory challenges.

**Television and “The Child”**

In a growth spurt that mirrored radio’s in the 1930s, television went from a novelty for the rich to a fixture in nearly every living room in America. In 1950 9% of American homes had televisions by 1962 90% did so (Butsch *The Making of American Audiences*, 237). Butsch notes that the television industry “inherited the practices of radio listening” (235). Many of the shows, both adult and child-oriented, migrated from radio to TV: Burns and Allen, Jack Benny, and Buster Brown Shoes’ *Smilin’ Ed’s Gang*. Television also inherited some of the utopian visions that initially greeted radio as a mass medium: it would be a tool for education and culture; it would be a “window on the world;” it would bring families close together around an electronic hearth. According to Butsch:

“Television recapitulated the phases of radio audience development: from communal to domestic viewing, from rapt attention to use of television as background, from family hearth to individual use, and from early feat and promise to disappointment (237).”

Advertising imagery and language used to promote the new industry utilized the notion of “family” extensively. The image of “the child” was featured prominently in ads for television receivers from the late 1940s and the 1950s. Industry statistics indicated that families with children were a large market for the new medium (Alexander 2). As such, advertising copy highlighted the educational and aspirational aspects of television.
Not only would the purchase of a set provide a child with knowledge and entertainment, but it was also what a middle-class parent was expected to do (Spigel, *Make Way for Television* 43-44). Television came of age during the Post-World War II Age of Nuclear Anxiety. Young families were moving to the suburbs and raising families due to a convergence of post-war consumer prosperity and domestic policies which promoted single-home ownership. Television became the domestic center of these new suburban lives and part a vital consumer purchase to complement the nesting impulse of the Baby Boom families (45).

Thus, children became closely associated with television early on. In the first days of television children’s shows were seen by program managers as a means of building a television viewing audience. They were designed to “sell TV sets by enhancing television’s appeal to the entire family” (Alexander 2). As the television market became saturated, “Children’s programs were an important feature of network radio and were especially popular among sponsors” (Von Schilling 96). This sponsor relationship carried over to TV. Children’s shows were typically inexpensive to produce and popular with advertisers since the advertising rates for the children’s shows were cheaper than prime time and the children’s show host could segue seamlessly back and forth between entertainment and selling product. *The Howdy Doody Show* (initially *Puppet Playhouse*) debuted in 1947. It was successful and local station program managers took note; many decided to add hosted children’s shows to the late afternoon time slot “to keep the kids occupied while Mom makes dinner” (Van Schilling, 96). Local hosted children’s shows would become a television staple of the 1950s throughout the 1960s until their demise in the 1970s.
The notion of television as babysitter or “Pied Piper” – with both positive and negative connotations – surfaced early in public discourse about television (Seiter 26). Worries about children and television surfaced in public discourse early on as well. “Around 1950 numerous articles appeared in magazines about the effects of television on children and gave advice about the effect of television in the rearing of children” (Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* 255). These concerns ranged from concerns about the aesthetics of television, to lack of exercise, to concerns about physical ailments such as eye strain (Spigel, *Make Way for Television* 50-51). Concerns quickly shifted from the uses of television to its content (Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* 254). By the mid-1950s discourse was centered on the moral effects of violent and sexually suggestive shows on television. These themes still dominate public discourse about television. As with radio, child as the member of the audience is constructed as vulnerable and in need of protection from the undue psychological influences that television can inflict. The worry for parents was of exposing children to adult knowledge, such as sex and death, which lay outside the realm of a “protected childhood.”

Another concern that surfaced was the commodification of childhood. Broadcast networks were recognizing the “marketability of the child audience” (Pecora, “The Changing Nature” 32). A watershed moment in children’s television was the debut of *The Mickey Mouse Club* (1955) which “brought in a new formula attractive enough to appeal to advertisers” on a national basis (Kline 123). Mattel was one of shows sponsors and launched ads for Barbie on the show. Disney television was also responsible for the first television inspired fad, Davy Crockett’s coonskin cap, which became an icon of the 1950s (123). The concern about children and consumerism deepened in the 1960s. Pecora
writes that occurred because of two trends: the increased sophistication of television marketing tools for pinpointing potential audiences and the shift of children’s programming to the Saturday morning hours. With children’s programming collapsed into a defined slot, advertisers could easily reach their target audience. Also, their advertising dollar could go further because of the lower rates for those hours. By the 1970s “the major debate over children’s television ... was its commercialization (Pecora, “The Changing Nature” 32-33).” Advertisers of the Saturday morning shows had identified a child audience who was also a child consumer and could promote a popular culture tailored to him.

The construct of the child audience that underlies this concern is that of the passive viewer (Seiter 31). The argument, which continues in public discourse today, is a concern about hedonism and compulsive acquisitiveness: “Commercials tend to put ideas in children’s head of what they must have” (Seiter 38). Child as consumer cut against the grain of the “sacralized “childhood of Zelizer’s “priceless child” (52). Thus, two paradigms of the child as audience came into conflict: the sacralized childhood free from commercial concerns that is the prevailing notion of the generic American childhood (held by parents) and the construct of the child as a member of the American consumer nation (held by marketers). The concerns about children and television brought calls for action and reform in the 1950s and the 1960s. In the mid-1950s Senator Estes Kefauver held Senate hearing on juvenile delinquency which included testimony about the role that television violence played. Newton Minnow, an FCC Chairman, famously decried TV as a “vast wasteland” in 1961 and parents and children advocacy groups called for reform. Action for Children’s Television which became a powerful grassroots lobbying group
was founded in 1968. The Surgeon General issued a statement in 1972 about televised violence and called for reform. In response the early 1970s saw federal regulations limiting advertising in children’s programming and new self-regulatory policies by the industry regarding language and violence on TV.

**Early Television and “The Child”**

As noted, children and television have been interconnected since the rise of commercial television in post-War America. As the industry developed so did the role and the influence of the child on that industry. Indeed, advertising insiders were savvy to the potential for this new medium as evidenced in an industry ad that appeared in Fortune magazine from 1948 in which television is referred to as a “lusty infant.” The figure of “The Child” evolved from serving as an advertising metaphor for the new medium, to a conduit for advertising messages to parents, and finally to the role of a targeted consumer. As the role of the child viewer changed so did the content of the children’s shows in response to the industry’s notions of child agency. In the discussion below I will trace this interrelationship between the evolving industry and an evolving construct of American childhood.

Commercial television industry began with the invention of the electronic TV in the late 1920s and slowly developed in the period between the two World Wars (Genova “Television Facts”). In 1941, there were 7,000 television sets in the United States (Steinberg 141) and approximately fifty hours of combined national and local programming per week (Genova “Television Facts”). When the US entered World War II
in 1942, the production of television sets in America was temporarily halted, although limited program broadcasting continued. In 1946, commercial production began anew (Genova “Television Facts”). With the rise of post-War consumerism in the 1950s, the industry hit its stride. Spigel writes that: “Between 1948 and 1955, television was installed in nearly two-thirds of the nation’s homes … By 1960, almost 90 percent of American households had at least one receiver, with the average person watching approximately five hours of television each day” (Make Way for Television 1). She notes that within a decade television went from a curiosity to part of “people’s daily routine” (2). The late 1940s through the early 1950s represents a period when a significant attitudinal shift towards “television” occurred. TV began to find its place literally and figuratively in the average American home; a home that was rapidly being filled with the children. This post-War period of economic growth and consumerism was also marked by a spike in the birth-rate. The children born in this era—the first Americans to grow-up watching TV—would become known as the “Baby Boomers.” As TVs entered the domestic space children’s fascination with the medium was noticed by potential advertisers. In the late 1940s industry surveys reported that families with children bought more television sets than childless couples (Spigel, Make Way for Television 59). Early on TV manufacturers, advertisers, and broadcasters noted an important relationship between the new medium and the American child. This relationship played out in several arenas: public discourse regarding the utopian/dystopian impact of television on society in general as well as the potential benefits/threats to the intellectual and physical well-being of child viewers; advertising campaigns utilizing the images of children gathered with their families happily around a set; and a cultural meme fostered by the television
industry was that television ownership was a marker of the new suburban lifestyle.

Spigel states that even though the early days of television represented an era “when spectator amusements were being transported from the public to the private sphere” (*Make Way for Television* 187), women (wives and mothers) did not unreflectively “make room for TV” in their domestic spaces. Utopian and dystopian visions of the new technology were debated and portrayed in popular media, which in turn served to “establish rules for ways in which to achieve pleasure in television and avoid its discomfort” (187). Much of this public debate centered on the potential physical and psychological effects that television-viewing would have on children. Academics, doctors, and social reformers weighed in regarding the pros and cons of television’s impact on the intellectual and moral development of American youth (Spigel, *Make Way for Television* 57-60). Anxieties and concerns were discussed in newspapers and magazines articles, on the radio, and portrayed in the text and graphics of print advertisements. What was the place (actual and metaphorical) of television in the home? How would this unknown technology affect the family structure? Would excessive television—watching cause eye-strain? According to Spigel, other health concerns included whether television-viewing would cause cancer or conditions like “malocclusion—an abnormal arrangement of the teeth likely to be caused by Junior’s cradling his jaw in hand as he watches television” (3).

The television industry answered these concerns with ad campaigns that emphasized the medium’s wholesome and benign aspects. An ad from 1950 placed in the *Daily News* (New York) by an industry association, American Television Dealers and Manufacturers, states that through the “magic” of television families would experience
increased togetherness through shared viewing and children would have access to educational and cultural programming. The ad also includes an “endorsement” of television as a medium by “Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.” Advertisements also worked to dispel health and societal concerns particularly about the impact of television on the family structure. These print campaigns addressed concerns over the new mass medium through carefully constructed images (including some by noted illustrator Norman Rockwell) and text which presented scenes of stability, middle-class values, prosperity, and happiness with a television set as a focal point. While one must be careful not to read too much into the ads, especially from the vantage point of hindsight, I would argue that as artifacts of popular culture, they represent a window into the thoughts and sensibilities of a specific time and place. As suggested by Spigel, ads from The Golden Age of Children’s Television can provide historical insight into on how TV became assimilated into the American home (1992, 187).

In order to ascertain how families, but most particularly children, figured into the “selling” of the television industry to the American public, as part of this project I analyzed the “Television” collection of the Ad*Access Project. This is an advertising image database maintained by Duke University Libraries. My model for this study was the aforementioned work done by Spigel with regard to the discourse on television as presented in women’s magazines of the era. The online Duke collection: “represents images and database information for over 7,000 advertisements printed in U.S. and Canadian newspapers and magazines between 1911 and 1955” (Duke University Libraries, 2008). These advertisements originally appeared in periodicals such as Saturday Evening Post, Good Housekeeping, and The New Yorker. Newspapers and some
trade journal ads are included in the database.

The “Television” collection of this database covers 1939 to 1957 and contains 865 entries. On the date that I collected the data, there were 749 items listed under “Television” for the time period 1948 to 1955. According to my analysis, 151 or approximately 20% of the television advertising images centered on a child, families, and/or children. The largest category, however, was those ads which featured a lone television. These ads accounted for approximately 45% of the images surveyed (Table 1).

I next took the family/child-centric ads and analyzed their content. Was the child presented alone or with an adult; what was the gender of the child; what was the gender of the adult; was the child (or children) shown with a mother alone, a father alone or with both parents (Table 2)? Over 47% of the ads depicted a family—Mom, Dad, and a child or children. The next highest category (approximately 26%) was for those ads which showed a child (or children) interacting with a TV with no adult present in the frame.

While this ad analysis is limited in scope, it does present some evidence of how children were used as leverage to persuade parents to purchase sets. The analysis also suggests that children were thought to have a special relationship with the “magical world” of this new medium, which offered adventure, excitement, and culture. As the era progressed, for example, the percentage of ads that featured children with televisions but without adults present rose from 13% in 1949 to a high of 54% in 1952. This increase may suggest that these ads were laying the groundwork for one of the tropes of the Golden Age of Children’s television—the TV as friend and babysitter. A 1952 ad from The Saturday Evening Post shows two mothers standing amidst the detritus of a children’s birthday party. The children are shown all quietly watching TV with rapt
attention. The one mother comments to her friend: “Next year we’ll turn on the TV first.” Television is mother’s helper.

Ads such as this can be read for what was being displayed as a normative, middle-class child’s experience with television: Dad was at work; Mom busy with domestic chores; the child/children were happily alone in the room with the TV, and the TV happily teaching and selling to them. The ads depicted as normative child-viewers communing with the set, the shows, and the entertainers in a space physically and psychologically apart from Mother and Father. As illustrated by these advertising images, the dynamic of child/host relationship that began with radio became intensified through this new technology spatially, aurally, and visually. The host-child relationship simulated an adult-child pairing but not a parental one.

The Philadelphia’s Local Affiliates

In television’s Golden Age national programming was limited, for the most part, to the three broadcasting systems—ABC (American Broadcasting Company), CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System), and NBC (National Broadcasting System). The DuMont Network also had a presence in these early days from 1946 until the network’s demise in 1956. National networks did not begin their weekday broadcasts until after seven o’clock at night. An exception was NBC which had a daily morning show, The Today Show. The bulk of the broadcast day consisted of locally produced programming. The Philadelphia affiliates were key players in this new industry. No governmental agency gathered and/or published statistics on market share and advertising revenue in the first decades of the
industry. In 1966 the FCC began publishing statistics on individual television markets. At that point in time Philadelphia represented the fourth largest market for advertising revenues (with New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago in first, second, and third place respectively) (Steinberg 227).

The local stations, Channels 3 (the NBC affiliate), 6 (the ABC affiliate), and 10 (the CBS affiliate), were major innovators and responsible for nationally trendsetting programs. They were also responsible for pioneering and refining broadcasting techniques such as color broadcasting, “green screen” special effects, and on-location remote broadcasts. These three original VHF (Very High Frequency) band stations (which are all still extant) have had complicated corporate histories; they have changed ownership, network affiliation, and call letters over their life spans. From the late 1940s until the early 1960s Channels 3, 6, and 10 were—for most homes in the Delaware Valley—the only providers of television programming. Although inaugurated in 1957 as one of the experimental UHF educational stations (Channel 35) the educational/public television station WHYY did not receive its VHF designation as Channel 12 until 1963. During television’s early era, due to a number of technological and regulatory issues, UHF (Ultra High Frequency) band stations struggled to establish themselves and did not become commercially viable until the end of the 1960s. For similar reasons cable television did not find its consumer market until the 1970s. Viewer choices were, therefore, limited and local affiliates were responsible the majority of the broadcast day. Because of this responsibility for the bulk of the daily content the local stations, of which Philadelphia is a prime example, were a major force in shaping the early television industry.
In addition to the central figure of the hosts the mainstays of these programs were the cartoons and live action shorts. These materials were originally produced by movie studios (like MGM and Warner Brothers) for theatrical release in the 1930s and 40s. In the early 1950s the studios packaged and distributed the short features for television. In between this content the host would deliver the commercials for the show’s sponsor. The program directors would purchase the rights to these features from controlling motion picture studios as they became available for TV broadcast. The price, and not the aesthetics or content, was the main criterion for their selection for inclusion in the show. The role of the hosts for the cartoon shows was analogous to the role of a disc jockey on the radio. Indeed, many popular children’s show hosts in the Philadelphia area were originally radio personalities including Sally Starr (Popeye Theater) and Wee Willie Webber (Breakfast Time). Although the shows were low-budget, they were fast-paced and humorous. However, it was the hosts, whose personalities transcended the shows’ limited production values, who gave the shows their appeal.

Since the locally produced hosted children’s shows are no more, a brief description of the format appears in order. Typically, these shows were shown Monday through Friday in the morning (from before school until lunch time) and then later in the afternoon from about 4 to 6 PM (after school and before the local evening news). Some shows were also shown early Saturday or Sunday morning. These time periods were designated “child friendly” by station managers according to a template established decades earlier by radio broadcasters. The show hosts (as well as the local station executives) were predominately white and male. The programs were typically thirty to sixty minutes in length. The production values were usually minimal although there were
exceptions. The content of the show, which was introduced by the host, consisted of cartoons and live-action short films.

Since I make the claim that the Philadelphia shows were representative of the local shows nationwide—a conclusion based the frequent mention by television historians regarding the commonality of their format and character types—I thought it important to verify this assumption. To do so I decided to do a thematic survey of these shows using the list and descriptions found in *Hi There Boys and Girls!* To compile my count I created a fairly simple definition for inclusion: the show had to have a host (human or puppet); it had to be produced by a local affiliate (the original shows which later went national like those hosted by Shari Lewis and Soupy Sales were included); and it had to have commercials. Shows that were excluded were: educational and religious shows; “news for kids” shows; and those shows which originated as nationally broadcast shows (such as *Captain Kangaroo*).

As I started counting the kinds of shows certain themes began to arise. There were a total of 1,040 shows that fell within the parameters I set. The largest groups within this were: “Clowns and Circuses” (total of 84); “Fantasy”—into which I grouped fairy and literary tale based hosts including magic toymakers, magicians and wizards, and enchanted forests (total of 102); “Nautical” —which included skippers, sailors, pirates, and one mermaid (total of 107); “Space and Science Fiction” —robots, astronauts, aliens and monsters (total of 61); and “Western” —cowboys, cowgirls, Native Americans, and pioneers (total of 173). By far nearly the largest group was the “Miscellaneous” group at 449 shows. I placed shows in this group that either had no specific theme (like the local Soupy Sales show) or where available information (from Hollis or from online television
(archives) was insufficient to make a determination.

Parenthetically, one interesting format that local stations used during the 1950s and early 1960s was the children’s auction show. Under this format the host would invite the children to save the sponsor’s bottle caps (from milk or soda) and bid on prizes by sending their collections into the station. Hollis lists only five such locally produced shows including *Gandy’s Bid and Buy* (Abilene, Texas) and *Juvenile Auction* (Minneapolis), which was later franchised nationally as *Junior Auction*. A complete list of the themes that I utilized in coding these shows is found at the end of this chapter in Table 3. Indeed, based on the descriptions provided, the Philadelphia stations were in-sync with the other affiliates nationwide and were representative of all the major categories.

Hollis notes that during this era there were “character” and “non-character” hosts (166). The non-character host was not costumed; he was the friendly “cartoon jockey” (analogous to a radio disc jockey) that greeted the children and filled in the spaces between the animation and live-action shorts with jokes or stories. The non-character host sometimes had human or puppet sidekicks. Examples of this kind of host include “Wee” Willie Webber in Philadelphia and Torey Southwick in Kansas City. In contrast was the character host. Character hosts appeared in shows themed around a motif drawn from American popular culture (such as astronauts and space explorers; firemen and policemen and sailors and train engineers; cowboys and Indians; clowns and ringmasters) or from literature and fairy tales (knights, kings, princesses, pirates, pixies, and fairies). Examples of character hosts include the Western-themed personalities Sally Starr and Chief Halftown both of whom appeared on WFIL, Philadelphia; clowns such as Whizzo star of
Whizzo's Wonderland, KMBC, Kansas City, Missouri; and The Blue Fairy starring thirteen-year old Bridget Bazlen in a fairy tale setting on WGN, Chicago. While various hosts drew upon different genres, all deployed the conventions of mass media in defining an interface between mass produced cartoons or items and the viewer at home.

The Evolution of Radio and Television Hosts

While the above analysis of ads demonstrates how the role of TV itself was offered as a host to children in need of entertainment and teaching in the house, we have to understand that the host performer has a far longer cultural history. “The Host” on both radio and television can trace its origins back to the earliest tradition of live performances, including the narrator function in the ancient oral tradition of storytelling. The venerable Oxford English Dictionary gives a thumbnail sketch of the origin of the term “host” with the most recent editions defining the term as: “one who hosts a programme of entertainment, a compère; esp. the presenter of a television or radio show to which guests are invited or which is broadcast before a live audience” (OED “Host”). The related term, “master of ceremonies,” has its origins in the papal court. The Master of Ceremonies “instructs ministers before liturgical functions.” The title dates back until at least the seventeenth century. Masters of Ceremonies were also found in European royal courts (Kavanagh 314). All of these various shades of meaning inform the understanding of the institution of “host” as it relates to the MC of children’s programs. The host as Master of Ceremonies (MC) is more closely tied to a tradition of variety performances given before theater audiences such as vaudeville, musical halls, and burlesque. Circuses, which feature clowns, gymnasts, animal and other variety acts, have
had ringmasters as MCs since at least the mid-eighteenth century (Wiles and Dymkowski 212-213).\textsuperscript{7} Indeed, many children’s radio and early children’s television shows were circus-themed with ringmasters presiding over the entertainment offered to the child listeners (then viewers). Radio broadcasts (and later television) adopted the convention of using a host or MC for variety and quiz shows.

Linked to the concept of the “host” is the concept of “narrator.” The narrator springs from a tradition as old as storytelling itself. It can be traced from \textit{Gilgamesh}, to classic Greek theater, through epic poetry and sagas, classic, modern and children’s literature as well as to modern storytelling through digital media. According to Phelan and Rabinowitz a narrative is a “\textit{multidimensional purposive communication from a teller to an audience}” [italics in original] (3) and the narrator is the device through which that communication flows. Literary critic Wayne C. Booth identified the tasks of the narrator: to report; to interpret; and to evaluate (153-155). The narrator “hosts” the reader through the experience of the written work. It is important to note, however, that narrative voice is not always reliable. In \textit{The Case of Peter Pan} Jacqueline Rose discusses what she terms “the impossibility of children’s fiction” (1). Using Barrie’s \textit{Peter Pan} as a case study, Rose examines the “impossible” relationship between the adult author and the imagined child reader:

Children’s fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter the space in between . . . Children’s fiction sets up the child as an

\textsuperscript{7} Philip Astley (1742-1814) is referenced by circus scholars as the driving force in the re-invention of the circus in the modern era.
outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child in. (2)

Based on Rose’s assumptions, one could say that children’s fiction is a literature that explores, even celebrates, the liminal places, spaces, and constructions of identity between childhood and adulthood, although it is an adult-driven mirage. Spigel mentions this aspect of the children’s show hosts during her discussion of the downfall of Pee-wee Herman. She refers to the hosts as “liminal figures ... clowns, fairies, and cowboys who functioned as modern-day Peter Pans” and who “engaged the hearts of children” (*Welcome to the Dreamhouse* 186). Since all the hosts were adults and the intended viewers children, questions arise about the suitability and equality of such relationships. While radio and television children hosts often adopted the honorific of “Aunt” and “Uncle,” as gender studies scholar Eve Sedgwick notes in literature there is frequently a problem with avunculate relatives in both adult and children’s literature. Their motives and intentions can be dubious (*Tendencies* 52).

Children’s show hosts of radio and television used the tradition of the narrator of classic children’s literature—particularly Victorian children’s literature—as the model for their interplay with the child viewers. Indeed, many of the characters and tropes used on both children’s radio and television shows were grounded in these works. Since the narrator/host guides the audience and propels the motion as the story/show unfolds the role of the host/narrator is of the utmost importance; he/she is intertwined with the telling of the tale or the exposition of the show and is part of the structure and the experience. In fact, they call the intended young audience into being.

Butsch describes the relationship of radio show hosts to their audience members.
He writes that radio listeners did not perceive of themselves as “passive receivers,” rather:

For them radio was a form of imaginative yet real interaction, what television researchers would later call parasocial interaction. People often wrote that they felt like the person on the radio was actually in their home … letters from all over … were filled with open-hearted responsiveness to announcers and entertainers they heard on the radio. (The Making of American Audiences 180)

Television program managers, administrators, sponsors, and performers drew upon their experience and audience expectations—based on the paradigm of radio—to utilize this parasocial relationship to build a child audience and sell product and air time. To do so they utilized a variety of theatrical (such as costume, tone of voice, manner of delivery) and technological techniques (e.g., framing of shots, close ups, special effects).

One theatrical device that hosts used to create a sense of intimacy and immediacy between themselves and the boys and girls at home would be to pierce the “fourth wall” and speak directly to the viewer. This device of piercing the imaginary curtain between viewer and players has been used for effect in theater for centuries. In the era of early television, George Allen used it on The Burns and Allen Show (1950–1958) for comedic effect. George would address the home viewer to comment on, and distance himself from, Gracie’s antics. While other hosts of comedy/variety shows would speak to the home audience (such as Jackie Gleason, Red Skelton, and Jack Benny) they would do so by incorporating the home as an extension of the studio audience. Theater conventions
were followed. Typically, Gleason, Skelton, and Benny would appear in front of a curtain at the beginning and end of the show to give a welcome, introduce a new segment, or say good-night, often in a robe and makeup towel. While Burns and Allen would also open and close the show in front of a curtain, Burns would break through the fourth wall during the action and directly address the audience. This address was delivered in an ironic and subversive manner for humorous effect. Warner Brother Cartoon characters, like Bugs Bunny, would use the same device. They would highlight the conventions of the “normal” cartoon experience and then subvert them for a laugh.

Children’s show hosts did not break the fourth wall to be humorous or ironic but to create a bond with their child-viewers. Philadelphia children’s show host, Jane Norman (Pixanne, 1960-1969), stated that she used direct address so that her home viewers would feel that she was speaking specifically and exclusively to them (Norman interview). Ms. Norman commented that not having a “peanut gallery,” an in-studio audience of children, was another deliberate creative choice. She stated that if the home viewer saw other children on the set it would destroy the illusion of visiting one-to-one with Pixanne in the Enchanted Forest. Ms. Norman said it was her intention for the show to create a fantasy space—one in which a child would be encouraged to get involved with her in imaginative play and learning (Norman interview). Conversations with other Philadelphia children’s show hosts have elicited similar comments. An in-studio audience would detract children at home from the illusion that the host was having a personal conversation with them.

The host used a number of techniques, devices, and traditions in a deliberate and thoughtful manner to engage with their intended child audience. One such tradition with regard to the production of children’s culture is based in the Western Romantic notion of
childhood as a period of magic and fantasy. The motif of the magic of childhood, which can be found in classic children’s literary tales such as Barrie’s *Peter Pan* and Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, has played an important part in television history, particularly children’s television, since the industry’s inception (Joyrich “The Magic of Television”).

It is with the phrase “I introduce you to the magic of television” that BBC announcer Leslie Mitchell began the first public television broadcast on August 26, 1936 (Wheen 49). Advertisements for television sets during the industry’s early days frequently utilized magic as a theme in images and texts. A 1949 ad for Dumont televisions that appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* featured a little girl being transported to a storybook land through an “enchanted mirror” a.k.a. TV.

In addition to characters based on fantasy, folk tale, and children’s literature, hosts adopted personas based on familiar and recognizable figures, both heroic and comic. These included Western characters, policemen, sea captains (which Hollis notes worked well with the *Popeye* cartoons [7]), spacemen, and clowns. Overwhelmingly, the hosts were white males performing some version of Cold War American masculinity.

There were exceptions including Philadelphia’s cowgirl, Sally Starr, who performed her own particular brand of 1950s/1960s femininity (as examined in Chapter Two). Race, gender, and ethnicity were factors behind the scenes at the local affiliates and governed the power structure of the stations responsible for producing the hosted children’s shows. In the study that follows, I examine problematic as well as progressive elements of the archetypes the hosts used to situate the parasocial relationship; doing so gets to the heart of tensions about whether the hosts functioned as conservative agents or encouraged social change. The question of whether children’s media and literature generate
reproduction or change is a central question in childhood studies scholarship. While the host stood for an unusual relationship in children’s lives and challenged certain norms, over time they changed less slowly than cultural expectations.

**Conclusion**

Children and television were linked in a symbiotic relationship from television’s earliest days. In the trade journals television was a “lusty infant;” images of children were used to sell the sets; television was touted as an electronic hearth of the home and a trustworthy “babysitter”; children’s “pester power” was harnessed by the hosts for the sponsors to reach the parents; and, as will be explore more fully in the chapters which follow, an intimate relationship between the host and the child viewer was fostered by the host in order to have the child return every day to “tune in.” All across the United States for a period of two decades “Uncles” (and some “Aunts”), space explorers, denizens of the Wild West, and clowns were the hosts of these shows. The format of the shows (host’s patter, cartoons and shorts, host performing the commercials) was a template used across the country. The cartoons and short features were similar from market to market because of the economics of the syndicated packages. The television industry in the era in which these shows first appeared—male dominated, white, and outwardly heteronormative—was reflective of an era before the Civil Rights Movement changed American’s collective social conscience. It was an era in which African Americans and women were initially shut out of the more lucrative union technical jobs and an era in which members of the LGBQT community, for reasons of self-preservation, were “invisible.”
In the next chapter I begin the critical analysis of the performance of the Philadelphia children show hosts as bounded by the era in which they were situated. I begin with Sally Starr who was not only Philadelphia’s most beloved and best remembered host but, arguably, one of the most intriguing televised representation of Cold War femininity. She troubled some norms and circulated others, conformed to stereotypes and transcended them. As an example of the complex way the host functioned to define media as an interface with culture the cowgirl, Sally Starr, will sets the stage for this analysis of performance and content of the children shows that gained prominence in television’s Golden Age.
SEX, SALLY STARR, AND THE PARADOX OF THE AMERICAN COWGIRL

Back in TV’s early days, there was a surprising variety of children’s shows. In Philadelphia alone, there was Willie the Worm, Happy the Clown, Bertie the Bunyip, not to mention pixies, elves…But none could hold a candle to cowgirl Sally Starr, who, aside from broadcasting such shameless paeans to adolescent testosterone as The Three Stooges, presided over the whole pre-dinner affair like a protective—though seductive—mother. (Kelly “The Life and Times of Sally Starr”)

General Overview of the Host Analyses

In this and subsequent chapters I will be analyzing the performances of the hosts of Philadelphia children’s shows. It should be clear from the start that these are not performances in the conventional sense for, except for the show Pixanne, these were not scripted like a play. All the hosts, including Ms. Norman (Pixanne) were primarily concerned with creating a compelling persona that would keep the child viewer tuning in on a regular basis. The host persona developed and performed by these local stars served as the lynchpin for the parasocial relationship between the host and the child viewer. The various personas were based on a variety of traditions and cultural conventions. They were based on archetypes and figures from literary and folk tales that were the common currency of children’s popular culture in mid-century America.

In my discussions I will place these personas in historical/cultural context. Since I
read these performances as texts it is essential to locate their meaning in a particular time and place. As I will argue, these personas were based on familiar characters from Cold War popular culture. The hosts utilized them to telegraph prevailing values and norms. Sally Starr and Traynor Ora Halftown drew upon the mythology of the American West; Jane Norman as Pixanne referenced the literary figure of Peter Pan; and Gene London drew on a filmic trope of the Chaplinesque Child Man.

In each of these chapters, after presenting a brief biography of the performer, I will investigate specific Cold War cultural constructions of race, gender, and class that were implicit in the host’s performances for their child audiences. Arguably each of these hosts could be analyzed through myriad lenses but for this work I chose to discuss: Ms. Starr in terms of her performance of femininity; Mr. London and masculinity; Mr. Halftown with regard to race; and Ms. Norman in terms of class. This critical analysis of texts (i.e., performances) is based in childhood studies and utilizes psychoanalytic literary theorists (such as Winnicott and Bettelheim), feminist theorists (e.g., Sedgwick), and cultural historians (such as Engelhardt, Sammonds, and Spigel). In my analysis I will make no claims as to the mindset of the performer. For example, I do not claim that Ms. Starr was a feminist nor that she consciously imbued her performance with proto-feminist sensibilities. Indeed, during our interviews I asked both Ms. Starr and Ms. Norman if they considered themselves feminists and each stated, no. Rather each insisted that they were just performers; ones who worked hard and tried to stay on-air and succeed in a male dominated industry. Nor do I claim to speak for the “child viewers” and their reception of these performances. Instead, with my analyses I intend to explore the complexities and paradoxes inherent in the performances in these children shows and how these
performances reflected and/or challenged these social constructs in Cold War America.

I use the term “paradox” in a Winnicottian sense. Winnicott held that as part of her development a child simultaneously holds conflicting constructs to be true/real as she navigates the spaces between in internal, imaginative life and the real world. Winnicott stated that in the “creative landscapes” of imaginative play and the experience of cultural performances are the spaces that a child can work through perceived paradoxes. “Transitional objects” such as the child’s mother or a performer who engages the child in that play help the child to mediate this liminal space. Similarly, Bettelheim posits that folk and fairy tales help a child negotiate and mediate feelings and emotions as they move in the world of adults. Ms. Starr is one such example of a performer who could, in Winnicottian terms, serve as a transitional object for a child navigating and mediating this liminal creative space.

On network television the Cold War audience, which included children, had access to a variety of performances of femininity through news shows, comedies, dramas, talk shows. The visual costuming for a “normative” Cold War femininity was a neo-Victorian hourglass look made popular in mid-century America by First Lady Mamie Eisenhower. The societal values associated with American Womanhood publicly expressed were stereotypically those of what Elaine Tyler May termed “domestic containment,” i.e., those of a wife and mother cultivating and nurturing a nuclear family. These constructs were at odds with the actual lived experiences of a majority of American women and women of color and of lower socio-economic status were absent from this definition of “normative.” While Ms. Starr conformed to the “look” with regard to costuming she made some artistic choices which “troubled” that conformity. She was
simultaneously sexy and wholesome; she signaled outlier through her adopted name of “Starr” which is associated with infamous female outlaw, Belle Starr) while preaching patriotism and courtesy to her child viewers; she worked hard to cultivate the on-screen figure of a hetero-normative beloved aunt while her complicated private life provided fodder for rumor and innuendo. I contend that performances like Ms. Starr’s provided an artistic microcosm of the cultural complexities and contradictions which the Cold War American audiences were in the process of mediating. Artists and writers grappled with the meaning ascribed to masculinity, femininity, race, and equality and explored these meanings with their audiences through their art in various media. I argue that on a limited but influential level the performances by the local children's show hosts and their child viewers were also part of this cultural conversation and reflective of the public discourse of the era. As I “read” and analyze the performances of the hosts I will theorize as to what made their performances so popular and appealing and how they served as cultural touchstones with regard to complicated social constructs through their warm, relatable, and nuanced performances.

An Introduction to Sally Starr

When local children’s show host Sally Starr died on January 27, 2013 it was front page news in The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Philadelphia Daily News. Local television and radio broadcasts led with the story and provided detailed coverage of her funeral. Her memorial service was attended by several hundred fans, including a Sally Starr impersonator (Nark 7). The Philadelphia Daily News declared: “Starr in Heaven:
Remembering Our Gal Sal” using the affectionate nickname by which she was known throughout her television career. These outpourings and tributes were sincere. Ms. Starr is the most beloved and best remembered of the children’s show hosts in Philadelphia. Even in her final years she was a continuing presence in the Delaware Valley, making personal appearances and hosting an oldies show on a local radio station until her health faltered.

What made Ms. Starr memorable was her personality. She exuded warmth, good humor, and charisma. When I interviewed her for this project she was in her late eighty’s. Even though she was not in good health (she was experiencing chronic pain and had difficulties walking as a result of an accident years before) she treated me with a graciousness that made the experience feel like a homecoming. Within minutes she was laughing, telling me to call her “Aunt Sally,” and recounting (slightly) off-color stories about the show and her long career. The force of her presence was palpable. When she was hosting Popeye Theater in the 1950s and 1960s her charm, combined with her Marilyn Monroe-like good looks, made her a female force to be reckoned with on local television. During the course of its run her show Popeye Theater became the most highly rated children’s show on local Philadelphia TV and steadily and reliably sold air time (Chang “Family and Friends”; Starr interview).

I chose to begin my analysis with Sally Starr for several reasons. She was a successful woman entertainer in a predominantly male field, and she was one of only two cowgirls nationwide to star in a local hosted children’s show. At the same time, she shared many characteristics with other hosts of this period: her background in radio; the content of the shows; and her casual, friendly, and playful rapport with the audience. In
addition, Ms. Starr, through her aunt-like rapport and her cowgirl persona, illustrates the paradoxes that surrounded the figure of the host; paradoxes regarding: “normalcy” and “liminality” with regard to adult/child relationships; sexual and non-sexual displays of femininity; and individuality and conformity. Parents bought the products that Ms. Starr promoted and took their children to see her at her various and frequent personal appearances. However, as for many other children’s show hosts, this parental acceptance was complicated. Throughout her career Ms. Starr was the object of “whisper campaigns” regarding her sexuality and sexual orientation. While during the 1950s and 1960s such allegations did not find their way into mass media (newspapers, radio, or television news stories) the pervasiveness of these speculations and their encapsulation into the cultural consciousness of the region are still evidenced in the social media postings of former child viewers and in the oral histories of former industry participants.

In this chapter, using Ms. Starr as a case study, I analyze these paradoxes through a critical reading of her performance on the shows. This critical reading is augmented by: my interviews with her and production team members; her autobiography; and written accounts by former viewers. To give perspective to an analysis of her persona Cowgirl Sally Starr, a brief biographical sketch of the performer seems in order.

Sally Starr was born Alleen Mae Beller on January 25, 1923. Her life, as she narrated it in interviews and in her autobiography (Me, Thee and TV), had the elements of a classic country western ballad. She grew up in Harlem, a small town near Kansas City,
Missouri and had a hard-scrabble childhood as one of seven children. She left home at the age of sixteen and got a job as an elevator operator in an office building in Kansas City. Here she met Jess Rogers, a well-known country western singer and national radio personality. According to Ms. Starr she “ran off with him at 17 only to discover that he was married” when Rogers’ wife tracked her down and confronted her (Starr, Me, Thee and TV 31-32). The Rogers divorced shortly after the incident and Ms. Starr and Rogers married even though she was still a teenager. Through Rogers she became involved in the country western music industry both behind the scenes and as a singer. In 1941 she legally changed her name to Sally Starr. By the end of the 1940s Rogers and Starr located to the Philadelphia area to work on a country western radio show for WFIL, “Hayloft Hoe-Down.” During this era, she was a disc-jockey on Philadelphia’s WJMJ and appeared in a variety of local venues. In 1955, based on the success of her radio shows, Roger Clipp, the General Manager for WFIL (the Philadelphia ABC affiliate), approached her with the idea of hosting a daily children’s television show, Popeye Theater. Ms. Starr accepted and her career as a local television personality began (Starr interview).

In the 1950s Sally Starr transformed herself from a country western/Rockabilly singer to beloved children’s show host. During this period her marriage to Rogers floundered. Starr states that their relationship was destroyed by his many infidelities, his

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9 For the biographical details of Sally Starr I drew upon my interviews with her, her book, newspaper interviews, my interviews with other local television professionals, and her obituaries. In piecing together her biography I often found it difficult to get exact dates and to independently verify the details of her anecdotes. This is a problem that I encountered with most of the local hosts. I present the material as I gathered them and present them as their narratives of the events of their lives.

10 In her autobiography Ms. Starr states that the offer of the show came from television executive Jack Steck. In our interviews she stated that it was Roger Clipp. Lew Klein corroborated that it was Mr. Clipp.

11 In the 1950s Ms. Starr and the Crickets Buddy Holly’s band recorded some of Holly’s songs. For a sample of her rockabilly vocals see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF68_M7Q3NI.
alcoholism, and the bouts of physical abuse he inflicted upon her. The marriage ended in the late 1950s; she divorced Rogers and moved into an apartment with a female friend, Terry Woods (Starr, *Me, Thee and TV* 44–48). Ms. Starr states that she had a number of affairs with “good ol’ boys” whose names read like “Who’s Who of Show Business:”

Aunt Sally had quite a few affairs in her career. I loved every second of each one, and it was always something that I chose to do. I was never forced in a romance. And I never entered into a romance to get a contract. I did what I did because I wanted to be with that person and that person wanted to be with me … there were never any wings on my shoulders, no halo around my head. (Starr, *Me, Thee and TV* 51-52)

Eventually she bought a house in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, which she shared with Ms. Woods and Ms. Woods’ daughter, Little Sally: “Little Sally was the little girl I never had, but always wanted. I am grateful that Terry let me share Sally.” After Mary (Ms. Starr’s sister) marriage ended, Mary and her three sons moved in with Ms. Starr and Ms. Woods as well (Starr, *Me, Thee and TV* 76).

Ms. Starr met her second husband, Mark Gray (whom she frequently referred to as the great love of her life), at WFIL where he was a technician. He became her business manager and lover:

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12 During our interview Ms. Starr was eager to talk about her many affairs but protective of the names. She told me that she had hopes to write a follow-up book in which she would reveal the details of her love life but she died before she realized that project. In her autobiography Ms. Starr does mention that one of her lovers was Country star, Jimmy Dean. “I had a relationship with Jimmy for three years, and we are still friends” (Starr, 1994, 51).
Living with Mark outside of marriage was a very touchy situation in those days. I was doing a children’s program and more or less living in a glass house. I went to my bosses at Channel Six and told them that Mark and I planned to live together for a year before getting married. They understood, but told me to be very discreet. This was in the summertime … We got married in West Palm Beach on the 17th of January 1961. (Starr, Me, Thee and TV 59 – 60)

Sally Starr lived life large during her heyday at Channel 6. She had all the trappings of wealth and success: a farm in Voorhees, New Jersey (The Sally Starr Ranch); her Palomino, Pal; an Arabian saddle for Pal detailed with silver and gold; a boat (The Frivolous Sal); and bespoke cowgirl ensembles, “a different colored outfits for each day of the week,” supplied by the country’s premier Western wear designer, Rodeo Ben (Starr, Me, Thee and TV 60–64). Ms. Starr would frequently hire helicopters or private planes to travel to her many personal appearances (60). She had a penchant for showy cars and spoke about them frequently in our interview and in her autobiography. She was particularly fond of a white Biarritz Cadillac convertible with a red leather interior which she drove to work. In our interview Ms. Starr remembered warmly the impressive entrance she would make driving up to the WFIL studios in her gleaming white Caddy respondent in her sparkling cowgirl regalia (Starr interview).

The end of the era of the hosted children’s show also marked the decline of Ms. Starr’s fortunes. Mark Gray died of a heart attack in 1968. Her television show was cancelled in 1971. Due to a number of poorly placed financial investments she was
bankrupt. “The years following Mark’s death were painful … I lost my home, my car, and everything else I had worked a lifetime to obtain” (Starr, *Me, Thee and TV* 86). Ms. Woods and her daughter moved to Florida and Ms. Starr joined her sister and her family in Missouri. “I missed Little Sally and Terry because they had been with me since before Little Sally was born” (Starr, *Me, Thee and TV* 93). Eventually Ms. Starr joined Ms. Woods in Florida where they lived during the 1980s. A fire in 1987 destroyed their home and Ms. Starr lost all her personal possessions, including her treasured collection of costumes. Afterwards, Ms. Starr moved to a modest house in Atco, New Jersey. For her remaining decades she struggled to find economic security by doing personal appearances and hosting a radio show on small, local station, WVLT-FM in Vineland, New Jersey. She died on January 27, 2013 shortly after her ninetieth birthday. Evidence of the esteem with which she is still held by her Baby Boomer fans abounds. Her Facebook fan page, for example, is still active and has tens of thousands of fans even though Ms. Starr is deceased and her show off-air for over four decades.

The paradox of Sally Starr was the great love and respect with which she was (and still is) held in the region while simultaneously being held in suspicion with regard to her sexuality. This ambiguity was an undercurrent throughout her career in Philadelphia. For decades she was the object of intense speculation and rumors as summarized in an online tribute piece after she died. The story quoted noted Philadelphia journalist Clark DeLeon:

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13 I believe that the rumor about Ms. Starr being a stripper is based on a conflation of Ms. Starr’s name with a famous striptease artist of the period Blaze Starr (of national notoriety as the mistress of Louisiana governor, Huey Long) who appeared at Philadelphia’s burlesque house, The Troc.
“Sally was a siren, a cowgirl presenting male-oriented entertainment. I couldn’t believe they could put on a show like that,” DeLeon marvels … “There was a Marilyn element to Sally,” recalls DeLeon. “We’d heard that she was a stripper; we’d heard that she was doin’ it with her horse… (Kelly “The Life and Times of Sally Starr”)

The defamation of character lawsuit involving Ms. Starr illustrates these speculations as well. In 1998 Trenton radio personality, Jeff Deminski of WKXW-FM referred to Ms. Starr on-air as the “lesbian cowgirl.” Starr responded with a five-million-dollar suit. At a press conference she stated:

If I was a lesbian, I'd say so because that's no big deal … but to me it was an out-and-out lie—a way to boost his ratings … I could handle it better if he called me a bitch … because it's true that sometimes I am a bitch. (O’Boye “Sally Starr”)

In the court documents Deminski stated that he considered Starr’s homosexuality a matter of “common knowledge” throughout the Delaware Valley. His belief was based on conversations that he had with friends, associates, and neighbors of Ms. Starr; according to Mr. Deminski, she was an “out” lesbian. As further evidence he pointed to her charity in work in behalf of funding AIDS research (Superior Court of New Jersey 5). Ms. Starr’s lawyers countered that Diminski’s “false and defamatory” statements had caused Starr to lose lucrative personal appearance bookings and had hurt her financially. In their statement her lawyers wrote:
Despite the long strides in acceptance and tolerance gained by the gay community, “the time has not yet arrived where falsely stating that someone is gay or lesbian leaves his or her reputation intact.” (Arned as qtd. in Superior Court of New Jersey 7)

The case ultimately ended with an undisclosed settlement between the two parties.

Public speculation was further fueled by some of the facts of Ms. Starr’s life and some of her public statements. She lived for long stretches with her female friend, Ms. Woods and they raised Woods’ daughter together. Ms. Starr would also recount incidences from her own history, both in interviews and her autobiography, which easily lend themselves to a “queered” or “othered” reading of femininity. For example, Ms. Starr would often tell stories about how as a child she rejected the trappings of a “normative” girlhood:

Starr: [in response to the interviewer’s question of how she came to choose the name “Sally Starr”] I was supposed to have been a boy. My mother would not accept me as a girl … no, she wouldn’t… because she wanted a boy and she had a name all picked out which was my Dad’s name, Charles. (Starr interview)

In her autobiography Ms. Starr describes her childhood self as a “tomboy” who would “chase my sister around the house and throw toads on her” (Starr, Me, Thee and TV 16). She prided herself on being a “tough old bird” (Starr interview) and “no princess” (Me,
A chapter in her autobiography tells the tale of how she faced down a motorcycle gang. After her show was canceled in the early 1970s, she helped run an amusement park in Reading, Pennsylvania with a couple of her long-time friends. According to Ms. Starr, one night a group of bikers showed up at the park intent on what Ms. Starr characterized as “Hoop-Dee-Doo.” She took out her Colt 45s (which she had worn daily on the show) and shot one of their motorcycles. The group backed off and the leader returned a few days later to apologize (Starr, Me, Thee and TV 89-91).

One of the stories that Ms. Starr relished telling, she did so in many interviews, was about her on-screen “cat fight.” When the Three Stooges made their final feature film, The Outlaws Is Coming (1965), they invited several of the local children’s television hosts from around the country to appear in minor roles as a thank you for helping them to restart their careers (Hollis 8). Ms. Starr was cast as Belle Starr. In this cameo role she was costumed in a plaid shirt and form-fitting jeans. The actress she played opposite from wore a breakaway dress. In her scene, Ms. Starr recounts that the role required her to wrestle, punch, and tear off the dress of her co-star. “I didn’t like it but I did it,” Ms. Starr said with a laugh in our interview (Starr interview).

Ms. Starr’s audience appeal came from her charismatic performance as cowgirl/beloved aunt. With Ms. Starr, the line between person and the persona was porous. Her lived experiences, specifically her background as a country-western performer and humble beginnings, gave an authenticity to her performance. She was also very attractive in a wholesome way. WFIL executives were fully aware that her appeal went beyond just the children and as alluded to by Kelly in the opening quote to this section teenage brothers and fathers were watching Ms. Starr along with the younger
children in the viewing household. The sections which follow will take a critical look at Ms. Starr’s on-screen persona and the techniques that she used in the development and performance of “Sally Starr.”

Sally Starr inhabited the role of “cowgirl.” As Cowgirl Sally Starr she utilized the chivalrous myth of the American West which was a strong cultural influence during the era. Ms. Starr dressed in cowgirl rodeo regalia complete with fringe, sequins, and a rhinestone-studded white hat. In parades, she rode a Palomino horse named Pal.\textsuperscript{14} She spoke in a folksy manner and established a fictive kinship with the child viewer by referring to herself as “Aunt Sally.”

While much of Ms. Starr’s performance as host was common to the era and this genre of show, there is much about her performance that was unique. Many other hosts used the Western motif and many other hosts referred to themselves as “Aunt” and “Uncle” but Ms. Starr represented a paradox. She simultaneously conformed to and troubled Cold War notions of femininity. Ms. Starr presented the image of a wholesome, patriotic, All-American cowgirl who taught the children at home manners, respect for elders, and civic values; yet she exuded a movie-star-like sex appeal. In her visual presentation, Ms. Starr did not conform to the carefully coded presentations of femininity prevalent on television during this era (mother, teacher, wife, or waif) and in her personal life Sally Starr was closer to the portrait of 1950’s womanly “deviance” as painted by Breines (\textit{Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties}) and May (\textit{Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era}). However, her presentation of “cowgirl” enabled her to exude the image of a positive adult female figure by

\textsuperscript{14} Palominos were particularly popular in the 1940s and 1950s. Roy Rogers rode a Palomino named Trigger and the star of the 1960s sitcom \textit{Mr. Ed} was also a Palomino.
channeling the virtues of an imagined chivalrous and triumphant America as represented by the American West. Ms. Starr was a loud, gregarious extrovert; she had no male partner on the show; and she wore six-shooters strapped on her hips. She was a non-conforming representation of American womanhood in an era that was steeped in the values of conformity and promulgated a domesticated role for women. She was also “Aunt Sally” and “Our Gal Sal” to the children of the Philadelphia viewing region.

The parasocial relationships crafted by hosts like Ms. Starr indirectly and intentionally extended beyond the child and to the parent. The indirect marketing techniques\textsuperscript{15} of the era implicated the parents in the formation of the parasocial bond between the entertainer and the child audience member. Parents served as the gatekeepers to the hosts in many ways. It was they who purchased the sets and permitted the children to watch the show. It was the parents who were the ultimate intended consumer for the goods advertised. Parents also served to perpetuate and strengthen the host/child bond by enabling the reach of the host beyond the illusionary and theatrical space of television into the “real world” space of the child. They did this by accompanying children to personal appearances, purchasing of the sponsors’ products and bringing the goods into the home, and by facilitating the child’s participation on the shows either via mail (fan letters and drawings sent to the hosts) at actual attendance on set at the show. Ultimately, the commercial success of these shows relied on the tacit approval and consumer participation of the parents. Although they were an indirect audience for the hosts’ performances, parents were an audience, nonetheless. As such the

\textsuperscript{15} Sponsors for the local children shows included producers of food items, drinks, or local businesses like service stations. The intent was that the child would use “pester power,” i.e., try to persuade parents to purchase the product or service advocated by the host.
parents of the era watching these shows were confronted with their own mediations of the paradoxes represented by figures like Ms. Starr, specifically regarding sexuality and conformity in the Age of Nuclear Anxiety.\textsuperscript{16}

Historians have stated that post-World War II America, with its social upheavals and ideological divides, was the most divisive era since the Civil War (Isserman and Kazin 1). The anxieties of the time are reflected by the notable non-fiction best-sellers of the era: David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), which examined the inner-directed versus the other directed individual; Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which ignited what came to be known as “second wave” feminism in the United States through the discussion of “the problem that has no name”—the dissatisfaction felt by highly educated and underutilized women in middle-class American society; and the two highly controversial Kinsey reports (*Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 1948 and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, 1953) which frankly discussed homosexuality and the various sexual proclivities of American men and women. Popular and critically acclaimed films of this era such as *High Noon* (1952), *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *The Children’s Hour* (1961), and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) explored notions of conformity and individualism as well as the comforts, dangers, and anxieties that lie within both. Television, including children’s television, was part of this cultural conversation and mediation. Early television was a commercial enterprise steeped in the theatrical tradition of live performance art but

\textsuperscript{16} The characterization of the post-War world as an “Age of Anxiety” is from a 1948 poem by W. H. Auden. The term represents the “sense of emptiness” and a “loss of meaning” that many Americans and Europeans experienced after the horrors of World War II (Auden xv). I use it interchangeably with the term “Cold War” and represents the era from the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945) until the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989).
coming of age in a conservative political and social cultural climate, which key works were beginning to challenge and critique.

As with all hosts, Ms. Starr’s performance on the show was designed to create a loyal viewing audience, drive up viewing numbers, and sell advertising space. Likewise, in the tradition of the hosts, Ms. Starr needed to create a unique and engaging persona, i.e., to exude a “star” quality, but also a persona whose sensibilities could be embraced by the local station management, the sponsors, and the parents of the children watching the shows. In the sections below, I explore how Ms. Starr crafted a persona that negotiated boundaries carefully. She faced many boundaries and cultural anxieties as there were rumors about her personal life and discomforts with her sexual presence, as my biographical discussion demonstrates. One of the ways she circumvented suspicions about her independence was to tap into the mythology of the Cowgirl, which has a long history of complex fantasy in American culture, as I explain. However, her stagecraft presented a carefully constructed manner of paying lip service to traditional values and standing apart from women’s roles in the nuclear family. Her role as Aunt Sal likewise has a history of cultural meanings, some intimate and some suspicious. Sally Starr combined kindly Aunt—negotiating, mediating, and challenging shifting notions of intimacy—and Cowgirl—simultaneously tapping into fantasies of the West and individualism yet skirting the boundaries of a queered feminine identity. As I conclude, the host and his/her relationship with the child viewer negotiated many suspicions and intimacies presented in the medium of television itself; the way in which the host navigated acceptable and unacceptable boundaries in the parasocial relationship stood for the way the medium of television would interface with a new generation of viewers.
The Cowgirl and Cold War America

While Ms. Starr was an experience entertainer by the time she landed in Philadelphia, she had nothing in her background to specifically prepare her for her role of a children’s show host. This is true of very many of the hosts throughout the country who were typically drawn from a pool of local station talent (weatherman, newscaster) and radio personalities. A “child-friendly” persona was paramount in developing the parasocial relationship so necessary for the cultivation of a loyal viewership. During the course of my interviews with the hosts, I quickly came to the conclusion that their reputation as a kindly “Aunt,” “Uncle,” or beloved character was of utmost important to each of them for both personal and financial reasons. The characterization of Ms. Starr as “lesbian cowgirl” in the local media during the late 1990s was a devastating blow to the carefully crafted public persona that was so essential to her livelihood. The tensions between the person and persona of “Sally Starr” were in large part what made her appealing to the adults. Adults in post-War America, I contend, were mediating their relationships televised displays of gender roles and their actual lived experiences.

Sally Starr’s “large and in-charge” on-air personality was a distinctly different paradigm of femininity for this Cold War era. It was a time period when the United States government was concerned with domestic containmen which historian Stephanie Coontz states that this was a containment aimed at women (33-34). Ms. Starr was neither domestic nor contained. There were other cowgirls on network television in the 1950s, most notably Dale Evan (The Roy Rogers Show, 1951-1957) and Annie Oakley (1954-
1957), and there was at least one other cowgirl children’s show host during this decade (Susie Sidesaddle, on WJFM in Youngstown, Ohio). However, Sally Starr, with her strong but charming personality and a kind of sex appeal that was simultaneously wholesome and glamorous, had a unique persona—one that ran against the grain of televised femininity of the era. Indeed, it ran against the cultural expectations of women of the time.

According to cultural historian Wini Breines post-World War II society condemned “selfish women”: “A woman who chose career over home or childlessness over children, or from the perspective of the dominant culture, her own pleasure over her husband’s was defined as selfish” (19). Breines notes that fear, pity, and disdain for “old maids” was prevalent (53). May states that “childlessness was considered deviant, selfish, and pitiable … in the 1940s and 1950s, nearly everyone believed that family togetherness, focused on children, was the mark of a successful and wholesome personal life” (132). Ms. Starr defied convention; her cowgirl persona was not softened by a male presence (Dale Evan had second billing to Roy Rogers, her real-life husband) nor was she a care-giver as Annie Oakley (in the television series) was to her younger brother. As the host, her marital status was undetermined. She was childless on the show (no peanut gallery, no kid side-kick, no puppet side-kicks) as she was in her personal life. She was, therefore, an “othered” or queered version of 1950s womanhood. How then did she overcome or utilize this liminality to reach both child viewers and their parents? The answer partly lies in the persona of “cowgirl.” In addition to a folksy manner of speaking

17 I have been unable to locate a photograph or more complete program information about Susie Sidesaddle. The actress who played her was Jane Bailey and in one nostalgia piece about Youngstown children’s shows it was noted that many of the male viewers had crushes on Ms. Bailey (Kubik 2002).
and the Western costuming, Ms. Starr drew upon the chivalrous myth of the American West, which was a strong cultural influence during the Cold War.

*The American West and the Cold War*

Richard Slotkin cites the Cold War era as “the Golden Age of the Western: a 25-year period … that saw the genre achieve its greatest popularity” in both television shows and in film. The Western “provided a frame in which alternative approaches to the political and ideological problems of the Cold War era could be imaginatively entertained” (347). Starting in the mid-1950s Western-themed shows became increasingly popular on all three networks and by 1959 twenty-four percent of the prime-time shows were this genre. During the 1960s Westerns retained their prominence and represented 15.6 percent of the top-rated shows: “No other type of action/adventure show in the period (detective/police, combat, and the like) commanded so consistently high a share of prime time over so many years” (348). Slotkin posits that the reason that the shows resonated with television viewers is that the American West was a mythic place. It was a landscape on which could audiences could play out societal anxieties and explorations of what it meant to be an American (347). Cultural historian Tom Engelhardt writes how after Hiroshima, American’s struggled with the horrors and terrors of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation (14-15). He theorizes that the figure of the noble cowboy, in television and film, was a vehicle through which post-War Americans could construct a narrative of American exceptionalism and triumphalism, which Engelhardt terms “Victory Culture” (5).

According to Engelhardt a collective national guilt at the use of the atom bomb
led to an “un-American spirit of doubt” (6). To compensate, stories of uniquely American heroism and exceptionalism such as the “taming” of the West were celebrated in popular culture and the Baby Boomer children “grasped the pleasures of victory culture as an act of faith” (9). Engelhardt traces the Western television shows of the 1950s and 60s to a tradition of European fantasies of an Edenic life in North America (20). In this frontier narrative, the American West was a “wilderness” to be tamed and populated by the settlers; the “new” land then became a place of reinvention as well as “inclusion and hope” (27). The American Indians did not figure into this narrative; they were primitive and savage “others” that needed to stand aside for progress and enlightenment. By this logic and this narrative, the Western expansion was not a conquest, settlement not an invasion, and cowboys were heroes.

Children had access to these prime time Western-themed shows as well to the “B” Westerns movies shown on television (starring the likes of Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and Hop-along Cassidy), which celebrated the cowboy as a rugged individualist and populist heroes. 18 “Cowboys were honorable because they accepted the responsibilities of manhood—protecting the weak and setting an example for others” (Mc Gillis 25). This fascination with the American West was noted at the local programming level and reflected in the character hosts and themes of the local children shows. Hollis writes: “A quick survey of local programming from 1948 to 1950 will show a vast majority of Western-themed kids shows in most TV markets” (6).

With regard to the hosted children’s shows, according to my survey of the 591 children’s shows that had identifiable themes, 173 were Westerns or 29 percent; Western

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18 Of these Western-styled hosts five were women (Indian princesses, the two cowgirls, and granny figures) or three percent of the total number of hosts in this category.
figures, therefore, represent the largest percentage of character hosts. By wrapping herself in the mantle of the American West Ms. Starr could be a strong, adult woman, not unsexed, and yet be deemed safe as a child companion. On the show she promulgated many aspects of the “Code of the Cowboy.”¹⁹ She reminded children daily to be polite and obedient to their parents and to say their prayers. From her costuming (white hat, white boots, fringed shirt and skirt and many, many rhinestones) to her folksy delivery she epitomized the persona of the quintessential cowgirl—“The Girl of the Golden West.”²⁰ Therein lies a paradox for the television audience of the 1950s in that the “cowgirl” was both an ideal of a kind of American girlhood/womanhood and yet also a threat to the culturally entrenched model of feminine domesticity and male hegemony. While a cowgirl on one hand represented American virtues of independence and self-reliance, on the other hand she was also armed and dangerous and suspect

_The Cowgirl in American Imagination and American Popular Culture_

In the mythos of the American West, cowboys and cowgirls are unconventional but also free-spirited and God-fearing. They promulgated the notion of good citizenship

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¹⁹ Developed by Gene Autry in the 1940s for the listeners of his radio shows the Cowboy Code outlines a code of conduct for cowboy heroes (from Oakes, “Codes of the West”):

1. The Cowboy must never shoot first, hit a smaller man, or take unfair advantage.
2. He must never go back on his word, or a trust confided in him.
3. He must always tell the truth.
4. He must be gentle with children, the elderly, and animals.
5. He must not advocate or possess racially or religiously intolerant ideas.
6. He must help people in distress.
7. He must be a good worker.
8. He must keep himself clean in thought, speech, action, and personal habits.
9. He must respect women, parents, and his nation’s laws.
10. The Cowboy is a patriot.

²⁰ _The Girl of the Golden West_ (1905) by David Belasco was a melodrama that was very popular in the early part of the twentieth century. There were four film adaptations and the play served as the basis for the Puccini opera, _La Fanciulla del West_ (1910). The heroine Minnie is spunky and capable; she wields a gun, and in the end, it is she who saves the life of her lover.
through nation-building—a notion was much admired in the Age of Nuclear Anxiety. With regard to actual, historic cowgirls, Dee Brown notes that frontier women have traditionally been given more cultural leeway in their performances of femininity than their Eastern counterparts (293). As women moved west in the mid-nineteenth century, they realized that they were newly unconstrained by East coast conventions in both in mode of dress and behavior. They burst loose “from centuries of law and order” and, according to Brown, their men admired them for it (252). Because of the rigors of lengthy travel to reach their new homes and the rigors of the work, women by necessity, were engaged in, a gender fluidity and “tomboy-ism” was tolerated, even encouraged. As Brown writes:

Rigid customs and nine-teenth-century [sic] modesty in dress made overland travel difficult for the fairer sex. Recognizing this, one who had made the journey many times advised: “Side-saddles should be discarded—women should wear hunting frocks, loose pantaloons, men's hats and shoes, and ride the same as men.” (17)

Western women began being vocal about social issues like women’s suffrage and in 1869 women won the right to vote in Wyoming. Dee Brown quotes a European traveler to the American West commenting on this new paradigm of femininity:

The first woman whose acquaintance I made in the United States was a very pretty western girl … She took a particular pleasure in saying and doing things
which she knew would shock my European notions of propriety. She was slangy in her speech, careless in her pronunciation, and bent on ‘having a good time’... I met this type of young woman for the first time in 1869 and have been meeting her daily ever since. Though she may object to the name I shall call her the Aspiring Woman. (269)

This combination of fierceness, self-reliance represented a uniquely American-made construct of femininity and was represented in popular culture such as early silent films, works of fiction, and on the stage.

By the radio era, singing cowboys and cowgirls were staples in American popular culture. They were recording stars, vaudevillians and eventually radio stars. Stephanie Vander Wel notes that Country-Western radio shows such as National Barn Dance provided listeners with the notion of belonging to “an idyllic past of simpler times for those who were shaken by the chaotic conditions of the present” (212). Singing cowgirls, like Patsy Montana were predecessors and templates for country western singers like Ms. Starr with regard to vocal and sartorial style. These singers:

“… offered hope and promise to those suffering the devastating effects of rural poverty, urban unemployment and migration. In managing the doubts and fears of such realities, they also participated in the construction of a new western musical mythos of gender… [Montana] performed music that suggested a longing for a form of independence removed from the confines of domesticity at the same moment that the women were increasingly visible in the public sphere. (208, 209)
With regard to costuming Ms. Montana’s stage attire was that of a working cowgirl. She stated: “I didn’t want to look too sissy. To me a cowgirl wasn’t supposed to look sissy. I’d roll my sleeves up … and I wore a gun” (231-232). Vander Wel comments on the “authenticity” of Montana’s voice as a performer and songwriter. Ms. Montana’s’ significance lay in the ways she imparted the myths of the West with a distinctly women’s perspective (239). Like Dale Evans and Gail Davis (as Annie Oakley) on television a generation later, however, while Ms. Montana pushed gender stereotypes, but she also softened her persona with normative markers of femininity in order to keep the appeal for a general audience. Montana demonstrated this in her lyrics and singing style which privileged the identity of the “cowboy’s sweetheart” (243). The opening verse to one of her signature songs, “The She-Buckaroo,” begins with:

Some gals they like babies and houses and things,
But give me the feel of a horse that has wings,
I’d ride him straight up like all cowboys do,
I’m a man-hating lassie—a she-buckaroo.

But in the song’s conclusion she sings that if she meets the right cowboy, one who will “swear to be true,” then:

I’ll throw ‘way my chaps and get dresses instead
Learn to make biscuits and maybe cornbread
We’ll live in town I think that will do
And goodbye to Patsy, the she-buckaroo. (Vander Wel 241-242)

This cowgirl narrative, as expressed by Montana, is both one of pride of a femininity queered and an expression of acceptance of its ultimate containment.

The figure of the cowgirl was troublesome throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Was she a strong and independent woman to be lauded and emulated or was she an unmanageable shrew to be tamed? An underlying anxiety with regard to cowgirls revolved around the question of the presentation of female sexuality. The skills of sharpshooting, cattle-roping, and trick riding did not seem to prepare young ladies for the domestic life of marriage and motherhood. The “cowgirl” could be construed as operating outside the boundaries of normative American femininity. In the 1950s in particular female sexuality was only culturally sanctioned within the constraints of a monogamous, heterosexual relationship with the purpose of producing offspring. To operate outside those boundaries was to be suspect.

On television, Annie Oakley and Dale Evans were able to sidestep these questions by virtue of their hetero-normative presentation through costuming and character development. Ms. Davis (as Oakley) and Ms. Evans wore buckskin skirts. Evans’s hair was coiffed in the short curled bob that was popular during the era. Ms. Davis wore pig-tails. On the show, Evans was romantically linked to Roy Rogers and her character, “Dale,” owned and operated a restaurant which fed the hungry cowboys. In *Annie Oakley*, Annie had a little brother for whom she was the mother figure and she had a suitor named Lofty Craig. While Ms. Starr sported the ultra-feminine look of a rodeo
sweetheart (rhinestones, tightly-fitted fringed shirts, full skirts, long platinum blond hair) she was the host and, on the show, except for the occasional guest, she was alone.

This gender-bending presentation of the cowgirl has been discussed by feminist, cultural studies, and queer studies scholars. In her examination of cowgirls in American silent Western films, Laura Horak writes:

… a cross-dressed young white cowman on horseback dashing across spectacular American landscapes or working alongside a male ranch hand who falls in love with her—appeared regularly in American film between 1909 and 1913 … I argue that these films exploited audiences’ twin fascination with tough, masculine young women and the American landscape … Transitional-era American films depicted masculinized young white women as positive, national ideals—courageous, athletic, and self-reliant. (75)

The cowgirl as entertainer in modern American popular culture drew upon several traditions, particularly vaudeville and radio. Historian Kristine M. McCusker traces the vaudevillian roots of the singing cowgirls that appeared on the radio in the early part of the twentieth century. McCusker cites Annie Oakley as the original cowgirl vaudevillian (12). Ms. Oakley toured with Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show performing dazzling feats of sharp-shooting from 1885 until 1901. In vaudeville, McCusker writes that women were called upon to be a:

… steady moral hand (or at least a parody of it if the performer was a
comedienne), and physical attractiveness counted, but only in implicit ways. When Broadway revues challenged vaudeville’s popularity in the 1920s and 1930s, beauty became something more; a theatrical commodity and a skill … These theatrical traditions—a belief in a national theater that required women both as moral characters and as something pretty to consume—formed the core of the barn dance radio genre. (13)

Ms. Starr began her career as an entertainer in the barn dance circuit and elements of the singing cowgirl tradition strongly influenced TV presence including the characteristic notion of cowgirl as a moral force. Within the context of the children’s show, Ms. Starr actively cultivated and maintained the image of a child-friendly, good citizen—specifically the noble cowgirl—a respectable individual that parents could electronically invite into their living rooms and visit with in-person at parades and at other local appearances. Throughout her career these personal appearances played an important role in self-promotion. Until she was incapacitated, Ms. Starr regularly visited children’s hospitals and appeared at charity events, including fund-raisers for AIDS awareness in the 1990s (Starr interview). This is not to say that Ms. Starr did so only for publicity purposes. Her colleagues from the industry repeatedly testify to her genuine concern for the members of her child audience and her generosity with regard to her time and money (Pantarelli interview). Indeed, Ms. Pantarelli, who was the assistant to the programming manager, recounts that Ms. Starr would open and read all the fan mail from the children daily. If there was a child in special need, Ms. Starr would attempt to get that child help or services (Pantarelli 2012). While it can be argued that Ms. Starr used the
cowgirl persona as a shortcut for acceptance for a socially sanctioned child host, it can be equally argued that when Ms. Starr embraced that role, she actively lived the values that came with it.

Ms. Starr and Performance

While Ms. Starr was not acting, she was performing. As previously stated, for the most part, the hosts were ad-libbing their lines in between the cartoons and film segments and during the commercial spots. Hosts would use direct address to the child viewer and seemingly gaze at them through the television screen. While, of course, the conversations were one-sided, there were venues for the child viewer to interact, although not synchronously, with the host. Viewers would send letters and pictures, which the hosts would read or display on air. There were also the personal appearances. At these events the performers and the children could interact (even if on a limited basis). Some of the shows had “peanut galleries” which were on-camera, on-set child audiences. However, some hosts, such as Jane Norman and Sally Starr, deliberately chose not to have on-air audiences in order to further create the illusion for the child viewer that the host was speaking directly and only to him or her (Norman interview).

The tone of conversational intimacy employed by the children’s show hosts was key in the formation of the loyal child audience. This feeling of engagement, of having a personal relationship with an on-air personality, dates back to radio hosts and listeners. Indeed, many of the practices of television were patterned after those of radio, including: programming schedules; genres of shows; and conventions such as the use of product announcers (Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* 235). These announcers, on
both radio and television, were coached by station marketing directors in a certain style of delivery, one that projected warmth, friendliness, and a sense of intimacy to the home audience. This warmth and sincerity represented an element of broadcasting stagecraft; one designed to gain loyal listeners/viewers who would tune into the shows and buy the sponsors’ product (Von Schilling 102). Butsch describes how radio and television moved public entertainment from the public sphere of the theater to the private sphere of the home. This domestication of entertainment, this gathering of families and individuals around an electronic hearth, also served to promote a sense of intimacy between the performer and the audience member through a parasocial relationship (Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse* 249).

Many local children’s show hosts (including Philadelphia’s Sally Starr and Wee Willie Webber) had been radio hosts and were used to the conventions of utilizing warm, conversational tones and direct address when interacting with the home audience. As noted above, Ms. Starr was adept at engaging the child viewer through ad-libbed dialog. In her autobiography and in interviews, Ms. Starr frequently commented on her affection and respect for her child viewers and evinces a pride in never having “talked down” to them. She also discusses her deliberate choices in her conversations with her home viewers to be kind, respectful of their parents, pride in America, and faith in God (again sentiments found in the “Cowboy Code”).

The filmed record of Sally Starr on *Popeye Theater* is scant to say the least. Some video clips surface on YouTube of her later performances on UHF in the 1980s. While one can get a feel for her style, these short clips of a senior Ms. Starr, fresh off a
series of personal tragedies, do not fairly represent her work in her prime. For an analysis I had to rely on the Gasbarro behind-the-scenes material, stills, interviews, and her autobiography.

In the silent Gasbarro tape the viewer can see Ms. Starr’s use of direct eye contact (she rarely breaks her gaze from the camera—the stand-in for the child viewer), her constant smile, and her frequent bouts of laughter. The technicians that worked on her set attest to the fact of her nearly indomitable good humor. Ms. Starr, during the show, would joke with her crew and although they were never seen, the home audience could hear their laughter. The subtle but intentional display of her sex appeal is found in the framing shots for Ms. Starr that routinely were used on the show. The set of the show was that of a Western town. Ms. Starr would make her entrance through a pair of swinging doors, greet the audience, and then lean on a fence while conversing with her home viewers. The technical aspects of the show were fairly limited so that the entire show was done in the same establishing, medium shot—from the waist up (typically no close-ups, no long shots). While the choice of the shot can be attributed to the haste with which the shows were produced each day and the limitations with regard to the number of cameras, I believe that there was also an intentionality in this choice--one designed to best display Ms. Starr’s sensuality and ample hour-glass figure.

Ms. Starr’s natural and folksy manner of interacting with the audience (and off-screen technicians) added to her air of “authentic” cowgirl. One example is the signature move she would make when she made an on-air mistake; she would pull the wide brim of

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21 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMaOLZEc2xg&list=PL928B35E024193E1D
22 Lew Klein and Ms. Gasbarro discussed how the cameramen would run with the cameras when one show finished to get to the next set. See Fig. 2. 4 for a typical studio layout.
cowgirl hat down over her ears and cry, “I made a boo-boo!” (Starr interview). Ms. Starr’s mannerisms in her delivery of her dialogue have deep-roots in the “cowgirl” as entertainer. A natural and unfiltered style of speaking harkens back to the observations about the girls of the American West by the 1869 European visitor quoted by Brown. The self-deprecating and plain-spoken style of humor can be traced to the cowgirl vaudevillians discussed by McCusker. Ms. Starr used these easily recognizable elements of cowgirl dress, manner, and delivery as well as her own personal assets of good looks, personal charm, and a personal authenticity to resonate with her viewing audience and build a relationship with them that lasted for decades.

Another performance technique that Ms. Starr used was that of the illeism. When speaking to her viewers she would refer to herself in the third person (“Your Gal Sal” or “Aunt Sally”). As with the use of the title, “Aunt,” the convention of illeism has a cultural context. It is a conversational convention that parents and other caregivers use when interacting with very young children. The adult will refer herself with a noun instead of a pronoun. For example, a mother will say: “Stephen and Mommy are going to go for a walk.” The more abstract construction would be: “You and I are going for a walk.” This naming convention serves two purposes: the young child receives reinforcement for learning the names of those in his close family circle; and the use of the proper names helps the child to gradually transition to the more intellectually challenging task of using and understanding pronouns (Zwicky “Blame It on Elmo”). The use of illeism in the direct address to the child viewer underscored the familial and affectionate nature of the host’s conversation since it is a signifier of an informal and nurturing exchange.
“Aunt Sally”: The Problem and Liminality of the Avuncular

As with many children’s hosts of this era, Sally invoked a fictive kinship, specifically the role of friendly “Aunt.” She spoke directly into the camera to the boys and girls at home and referenced herself in the third-person. Ms. Starr’s signature opening for each show was the greeting: “I hope that you feel as good as you look ’cause you sure look good to your gal, Sal.” At the end of each show, using the title “Aunt Sally,” she would admonish the viewers about good behavior and wish them “love, luck, and lollipops” (Starr 2010). According to my tabulation of the hosted children’s television shows as compiled by Hollis (Hey There, Boys and Girls) at least thirty-five of the hosted shows used either “Aunt” or “Uncle” in their titles and seventeen had the titles as part of their official character name. This figure is an undercount since many more hosts, including those in the Philadelphia region like “Aunt” Sally Starr and “Uncle” Pete Boyle, regularly referred to themselves as such and so much so these titles became familiar nicknames by which they were known to their viewers.23

The use of “fictive kinship” and family titles like “Aunt,” “Uncle,” “Grandfather,” and “Grandmother” is a global cross-cultural phenomenon (Leyton 682-684). This is particularly true with regard to the use of these titles by children for adult friends of the family. According to the OED these honorary tiles are commonly used in the United States especially in New England and the South. The term “Aunt” is used “endearingly”

23 For an idea of this avuncular interaction see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5miwtqrR8oE. This is a clip of Sally Starr and Pete Boyle from the 1988 film, The In Crowd. While this clip is a recreation it gives a flavor of the tone of voice and style of address.
for “any benevolent woman who exercises these qualities to the benefit of her circle of acquaintance” and “Uncle” is used for “non-relatives, esp. [sic.] elderly men” (OED Aunt and Uncle). In the antebellum American South, plantation owners would refer to trusted enslaved people (such as their children’s care givers and personal servants) as “Aunt,” “Uncle,” and “Mammy.” A nostalgia-tinged explanation of the use of such titles in “Southern culture” interprets such naming as a means of showing respect and, particularly in the case of “Mammy,” as a signifier of affection. “Mammys,” “Aunts,” and “Uncles” were thereby included in the plantation owner’s family circle (albeit at the outermost rim) (Parkhurst 352, 361). However, as historian Micki McElya observes, these titles were actually “the ultimate expression of southern paternalism” to justify the continued enslavement and forced labor of the African American (5). The use of such euphemisms further served to “domesticate” and neuter the enslaved person making him or her less sexually threatening.24

As was commonplace with other hosts of the era, Ms. Starr utilized the cultural practice of an honorary title of fictive kinship to forge a relationship with the child viewer. While, indeed, on one level the invocation of “Aunt-hood” afforded a level of protection with regard to her motivations regarding that adult/child relationship, upon examination such a relationship is fraught with complexity and ambiguity. As part of her performance of “Our Gal Sal,” Ms. Starr invoked a fictive kinship with the child viewer by using the feminine avuncular, “Aunt.” Scholars have noted that the avuncular kinship,

24 In Uncle Tom’s Cabin as Visual Culture, Jo-Ann Morgan discusses the de-evolution of the character of Uncle Tom in Beecher’s original novel from a “large, broad-chested, powerfully made man” (6) to a frail, white-haired old man (11) on the stage and screen. Morgan theorizes that the change came about because the visualization of a virile black man hugging a golden haired little white girl would be too difficult for audiences to assimilate.
whether blood-ties or fictive, is a two-edged sword; on the one hand it serves as a means for expanding the family circles and strengthens ties of respect and affection; on the other hand such a culturally-sanctioned relationship gives a non-parental adult permission to form a relationship that involves some level of intimacy with a child outside the structure of the nuclear family.

In *Structural Anthropology* Levi-Strauss discusses “The Problem of the Avunculate.” According to Strauss, in patrilineal societies where the father is the authority figure, the maternal uncle is “considered the ‘male mother.’” He is generally treated in the same fashion, and sometimes even called by the same name as the mother.” In societies where respect characterizes the relationship between a father and a son, the relationship between the maternal uncle and his sister’s son is one of jocular familiarity. This figure of “the uncle” as a non-authoritarian, playful adult has served as a template for both Uncles and Aunts in literature (including children’s literature), theater, film, and children’s radio and television.

In psychoanalytic critical analysis, the role of the aunt and uncle is targeted for its complexity because of this ambiguity of the relationship between a child and a non-parental adult. In literature, the aunt or uncle is often depicted as a liminal or queered figure. This avuncular ambiguity is one of the central paradoxes with regard to the children’s television hosts. In post-War America a queered and liminal figure was “welcomed” into the home by the parents. Which is paradoxical for an era in which non-conformity was held suspect and queerness criminalized.

Scholars such as Rose, Sedgwick, and Spigel have explored concerns regarding the appropriateness and suitability of non-parental adults engaging in relationships with
children in literature and television. Spigel and Dolan specifically discuss the “liminality” of adult hosts of children’s shows on television and radio respectively. In examining the fall of Pee-wee Herman, who was arrested for masturbating in public in 1991 and consequently lost his lucrative CBS contract, Spigel states that he was “a liminal figure who straddled the categories of child and adult” (Welcome to the Dreamhouse 204). Spigel theorizes that “Pee-wee,” and the original mid-century hosts on which the Paul Reubens’ character was based, intentionally obfuscated the demarcations of “adult” and “child” in their performances:

By blurring the boundaries between adult and child identities, such programs presented a ripe environment through which to address children as consumers. As both authority figures and wish fulfillments, the casts of clowns and cowboys promised children a peek at toys and sweets behind their mother’s backs. The children’s show was a candy store populated by dream parents who pandered forbidden products. Even more important these programs taught children the art of persuasion, advising them how to tell their parents about the wondrous items advertised on the show. (204)

In “Aunties and Uncles: The BBC Children’s Hour and Liminal Concerns of the 1920s,” Josephine Dolan explores issues of liminality regarding the early BBC radio children show hosts. The program organizers and network administrators developed a policy that adults rather than child performers were the proper conduit for the presentation of the children’s radio entertainment. Dolan writes that with this decision the
BBC constructed a “broadcast service for children” rather than a “children’s broadcast service” (332). Indeed, by this move “proper listening and proper childhood were equated,” and “power was exercised by adult broadcasters over the constituted child audience” (332). She delineates the tensions between “matter” and “manner” in discussions by BBC management in the production of its premier children’s show, The Children’s Hour. The shows were to be educational (the matter) but also, they were to be presented in a friendly and engaging fashion (the manner). Dolan documents concerns voiced by BBC officials regarding how their “corporate dignity” was offended by use of the informal honorifics of “Aunt” and “Uncle” by the presenters, presenters who were also frequently BBC senior executives (336). In the end the presenters retained these titles when addressing their child audiences. Dolan concludes that with the casual and lighthearted delivery of the “Aunties” and “Uncles” who hosted the children’s shows, the hosts “played with liminality” and in doing so boundaries were blurred:

… between presenter and audience as child, between adult and between adult and child…. Thus “Aunties” and Uncles” threatened more than the dignity, security, and authority of the BBC; they threatened to destabilize the power relationship between adults and children in the constituted boundaries of broadcast culture. Little wonder that their place in BBC culture was never secure and was constantly attacked. (337)

Both Spigel and Dolan identify the liminality of the hosts of children’s shows in terms of the entertainers “queering” prevalent notions of adulthood in order to engage the child
viewer/listener. In American television the purpose of this engagement was commercial (high ratings, loyal audience, and satisfied sponsors); with the BBC (a non-commercial entity) the intent was also to build a loyal child audience but for the purpose of producing “exemplary citizens” to participate in Britain’s democratic process (Dolan 335).

In her essay, “Tales of the Avunculate,” Eve Sedgwick explores the liminality of “Aunties” and “Uncles” in terms of sexuality and sexual identity through a queer and feminist reading of Oscar Wilde’s play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Sedgwick notes that historically that the terms of “Aunt” and “Uncle” have “very gay-marked meaning” (59). In the early twentieth century, “aunt” was code for a “passive sodomite” or a man with “queenly demeanor;” “uncle” was used to denote an older man who takes an interest in or is patron to a younger male (59). Sedgwick notes that in the English language the terms “aunt” and “uncle” are inexact; they do not indicate maternal or paternal lineage (as is true in other languages) nor is there a term in English to denote aunts and uncle related by marriage and not by blood. The avuncular title, for both men and women, tends to be ambiguous within the structure of the family (63).

Sedgwick goes on to critique the notion that for young children all “formative identification and desire” are based on the closed system of the nuclear family and in “definition to the parents.” She states that a child is not “totally passive and incapable of relevant and effectual desire;” the child can be active in choosing with whom to identify, or in terms of the Freudian seduction theory, by whom to “be seduced” (64). Sedgwick argues that aunts and uncles, with all their ambiguity, open up the range of sexual identification and desire. Sedgwick quotes from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, “… there are a great variety in aunts. You can have aunts of any shape or size you like”
Children in many cultures are encouraged to use the titles as a mark of respect for older adults related by extended kinship or by family friendships. This avuncular role by a non-parental adult is troublesome, however, because, as previously noted, it negates the protection afforded to the child through the invocation of the sexual taboo of incest.

Conclusion

The Cold War era and the coming of age of commercial television were entwined not only chronologically but culturally. Cultural and media historians like Sammond, Spigel, Englehardt, and Slotkin have examined how national anxieties and the debates over what it meant to be “American” were represented in popular culture and particularly the new mass media of television. The storylines and characterizations of early commercial television shows were sites of mediation for the American viewer in this time of transition for visual representations of evolving concepts: a prosperous suburban class, manhood, womanhood and childhood. The children who watched the enormously popular hosted cartoon shows were part of this national conversation and part of this identity mediation. The hosts of these shows were the nexus of this mediation.

These hosts, these luminal figures like Sally Starr, were likeable and attractive people were sites of mediation for evolving but paradoxical notions of what it meant to be male or female in post-War America. Performers such as Sally Starr made accessible an expanded vocabulary of femininity through her combination of personal charm and her on-air espousal of mainstream values. For the child the parasocial relationship with
the host was a conduit for not only entertainment but also served as a site of mediation for the child to understand the outside world and gender roles. Through “conversations” with the trusted and friendly host, like Sally Starr, the child actively engaged in a relationship that addressed and reinforced the messages what it meant to be an American child of the era (say your prayers, be respectful of your parents, follow conventions of polite conversation). The relationship was further reinforced by the child’s participation in the relationship with the host through fan mail, drawings, and attendance at personal appearances to see and meet “friends” like Sally Starr in person.

Different hosts used different techniques and different personas which both troubled and validated different identity constructs prevalent during the era. The next chapter explores a different template for the host/child/parent relationship and a different “philosophy” of children’s programming. I argue that Ms. Starr complicated the “domestic containment” version of femininity that was prominent in public discourse and popular entertainment during the Cold War era. Ms. Starr enacted a vibrant and complex version of American Womanhood made non-threatening since it was packed in the guise of an American folk figure.

From spontaneity, folksiness, and the ethos of the American West, I turn to a highly orchestrated show, with significant educational content, and high production values based on literary and fairy tales: Pixanne and host Jane Norman. While the performances of both Ms. Starr and Ms. Norman troubled notions of femininity, Ms. Norman’s performance as host also was a site of mediation with regard to class, i.e. presentation of a normative, middle class Cold War childhood.
PIXANNE, CLASS, AND THE COLD WAR AMERICAN
CHILDHOOD

In this chapter I explore the show, *Pixanne* and its star/creator, Jane Norman. I will critically read the show as a text that illustrating Cold War constructs of mid-century American childhood particularly with regard to what constituted a “normative” middle-class childhood experience. Of the dozens of local shows during this era in the Philadelphia market I would argue that *Pixanne* most clearly illustrates two intersecting concerns in public discourse: what were the advantages/disadvantages of a relationship between the new mass medium and the child; and within the television industry, a discourse regarding how to simultaneously attract a child viewer while mitigating concerns/anxieties of the parents regarding the medium itself. I argue that *Pixanne* represented an artistic expression and mediation of contemporaneous notions and anxieties inherent in these discourses: constructions of socio-economic class; the educational v. commercial aspirations of children’s television; and the construct of “the child” as “hope for the future” of the continuance of American exceptionalism in the Cold War era.

From its inception a dichotomy has existed between the cultural and educational aspirations of television and the business of the medium. The fact that American television is a commercial venture supported by advertising dollars tied to the ratings associated with shows that drove the advertising rates has been construed in public discourse as being at odds with a mission to uplift and inform. Norma Pecora wrote that all media industries “have an ideological component—they are our contemporary
storytellers” but that they are indeed industries that need to “maintain and maximize profits” while working within a “context of social, political, and economic constraints” (Pecora, *The Business of Children’s Entertainment* 2-3). Pecora notes that in the earliest days of television producers and sponsors shared concerns with regard to cultivating a child audience. These adult content makers were interested in creating an audience of child viewers with a goal of establishing loyalty in those viewers to a medium/product while cultivating future viewers/consumers (Pecora, *The Business of Children’s Entertainment* 16). Examples of this industry discourse are apparent in the handbook *For the Young Viewer* (1962) which was a product of the Television Information Office of the National Association of Broadcasters. In its introduction Louis Hausman, the Office’s Director, notes that the juxtaposition of the words “children and television” evokes “powerful emotional responses … [and] “have a very special and universal impact” in public discourse (Garry v). The handbook, which at its time was the only book to win a Peabody Award, was meant to address these concerns: “this book is for all those who hold a prime concern with improving children or television—or both (v). The editors (an educational psychologist, an educator, and a scholar) note in their conclusion that it is imperative for local television producers to be mindful of creating a quality “art form” for children since these shows are reaching these young viewers in the “’prime time’ of their development, and the attitudes they form toward the medium will condition their subsequent viewing” (173).

Congruent with these concerns about children and television being discussed by parents and content creators was a public debate regarding the role of “the child” in post War America. There was a population expansion following World War II which has been
come to be known as the Baby Boom (1946 – 1964). Social historian Amy Ogata argues that America became increasingly child-centric and the newly middle-class parents were striving to raise “better children” (1). There were societal pressures in the midst of anxieties regarding “national renewal, future competitiveness, and national abundance” to foster creativity in the next generation of American citizens (1). “The children who appeared in postwar picture books and on television embodied the ideals and longings of the adults” (xx). I argue that the show Pixanne was part of this cultural impetus to foster the creative child and that this impetus was closely related to a postwar preoccupation with constructions of class.

The arguments I make for these converging threads regarding my reading of the show are based on: the interviews with Ms. Norman and an critical examination of the show and its central figure of Pixanne; the work of cultural historians and television historian (such as Sammond, Spigel, and Ogata; and the discourse within the children’s television industry content creators as evidenced by the handbook they produced, For the Young Viewer. In addition to the historical and cultural situation of the show itself I also include a discussion of the character of Peter Pan, the literary figure on whom the show was based. Ms. Norman’s reinterpretation of the character of Peter as Pixanne was central to the success of the show. An exploration of the cultural meanings which scholars and cultural critics have ascribed to the character is key to understanding an informed reading of the show.

Pixanne and the Creative, Child
The images on television are drawn from the sorted memories and knowledge of the individuals who are creating the social roles, and they tend to represent their understanding of the culture of that ethnic and gender group. This is this base of personal understandings … that the personal, social, intellectual, economic, political, and aesthetic attributes are selected and crafted for social role portrayals. (Berry 93)

The Philadelphia children’s show *Pixanne* was based on a character from a classic work of children’s literature, James M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. It is representative of what I characterize as a “fantasy-themed” hosted show. According to my survey of Hollis’s catalog of titles, of the shows that had identifiable themes, 102 fell into this category (see Table 1.3). I defined fantasy-themed as a show in which the host was a fairy tale or folk tale character (such as fairies, pixies, magical toy makers, princesses and kings) or a show that had a fairy/folk tale setting (magical forests, castles, toy shops, etc.). This category represents the third largest group of themed shows.²⁵ “Fantasy” is also the group with the largest number of female hosts in that thirty-six percent of the hosts were women.²⁶ A sampling of these shows nationwide includes titles such as: *The Blue Fairy*, Chicago; *Miss Boo* (a witch), Atlanta; *Cinderella and Her Friends*, Rochester; *Mary Jane’s Magical Castle* (a princess), Houston; and *Mr. Nobody* (a leprechaun), Wilkes-Barre. In the Philadelphia area, no show drew as heavily upon the tradition of children’s literature as *Pixanne* (1960-1969). The show was written and produced by its star, Jane Norman. The title character was a forest-dwelling pixie who entertained her visitors/viewers each day with stories, songs, and puppets.

²⁵ “Western” was first at 173 and “Nautical” was second at 107.
²⁶ The next two were “Circus and Clown” with four percent and “Westerns” at three percent.
Pixanne was the antithesis of Popeye Theater. Although women helmed both shows, there all similarity ends. Sally Starr’s Popeye Theater (WFIL, Channel 6, an ABC affiliate) was an unscripted and was performed on a small and simple set. Pixanne, on the other hand, produced by WCAU-Channel 10 a CBS affiliate, was a scripted show with high production values. Ms. Norman had a teaching degree from Temple University (Philadelphia) and worked as a kindergarten teacher before entering broadcasting. She was also an accomplished musician who wrote and performed original songs for the show. While Pixanne was a sponsored, children’s entertainment show on a commercial station, Ms. Norman incorporated educational features and scripted segments intended to explore complicated feelings like loneliness, anger, or sadness. In our interview, Ms. Norman stated that she intentionally used the elements of fantasy and music in the show as a way of promoting imaginative play: “Ours was a very magical, fanciful, imaginative show and I did that through these [scripts]. I wanted the kids to use their imaginations and we just went with that” (Norman interview).

Ms. Norman is representative of many of children’s show hosts who made intentional use of creative and imaginative play as a technique for forging the parasocial relationship with the child at home— a relationship key to the show’s commercial success. As with all forms of artistic expression Ms. Norman’s performance was also informed by a cultural context; in this case societal anxieties of Cold War America with regard to the constructs of gender, class, and race as well as anxieties regarding the medium of television itself. Jane Norman’s construction of the character of “Pixanne,” i.e., Barrie’s Peter Pan re-imagined as female, represents, alongside and in contrast to

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27 Ms. Norman was a child prodigy who had a musical composition of hers performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra when she was elementary-school aged. See: O’Reilly B08.
Sally Starr, an interesting case study of this era’s paradoxical representations of American femininity. However, it is how this show, which focused on fantasy and creative play, channeled the era’s understandings of the cultural capital necessary for a “normative” middle-class childhood that will be the focus of this chapter. Ms. Norman utilized her educational background for this purpose. The expressed intent of Pixanne according to its creator was to both entertain and to teach. Ms. Norman stated:

So it is really my education background, I have to say, that I think made the show as good as it was because it set it apart from every other children’s show. It was magical, fanciful, and they [the child audience] got their reading readiness there. We did science. We did everything that I was doing in kindergarten as well, you know, but it was more fanciful because a pixie or a witch was giving it to them in wonderful doses [so] that they didn’t realize. (Norman interview)

During this era, I would argue that what were perceived as “quality” American children’s shows, like Pixanne and Captain Kangaroo, imparted “normative” middle-class values, such as politeness and manners, and also provided experiential cultural background to their young viewers through “enrichment” segments which featured puppetry, storytelling, music, virtual visits to museums and zoos, French lessons, and crafts. As mentioned above, in 1962 the Television Information Office of the National Association of broadcasters produced a handbook, For the Young Viewer. This guide to contemporary children’s programs included both information and advice for local programming directors engaged in producing these programs as well as examples of
quality local programs. *Pixanne* is cited as one such example. In the work’s conclusion, the authors write:

There is no doubt, however that the keener the programmer’s awareness of the aspects of the child’s world…the greater will be the response of the young viewer…Children were the first devoted viewers. They were at least partly responsible for so many parents buying television receivers. Television is reaching young people during the “prime time” of their development, and the attitudes they form toward the medium will condition their subsequent viewing. In the last analysis, programs for the child will be worthy of the interest that the child invests in television only to the extent that creativity and talent as well as knowledge are applied to the “something very different’ that is the world of the young viewer. (Garry 172-173)

Based on such statements it is evident that that the industry was actively engaged in creating the next generation of loyal television viewers. The authors of *For the Young Viewer* also discussed the role that television can play in imparting cultural values:

We do not know the details of how television affects children’s values. We do know that children typically absorb values from their families and other persons with whom they are in regular contact and to whom they are significantly attached. A child is therefore likely to derive values from television to the extent that such values are congruent with his underlying personality, as this has derived
from persons and groups that are meaningful to him. As the naturalist John Muir said, “You can see a bird in a bush only if you have one in your heart.” If, on the other hand, the child has no relevant values stemming either from personality or from social background, television may help to provide them. (Garry 149)

In our interview, Ms. Norman stated that part of the show’s mission was to teach children the values of “caring and loving and being kind.” She also stated the importance of informing children on world events through segments like “the Pixie Press” and exposing them to cultural experiences such as music:

I really wanted to talk to that individual [child] and when I sang, I’m singing to you. Sing with me. That child was learning the song, was beginning to love music if they didn’t have it at home …I mean you know…a lot of families couldn’t afford cassette players and didn’t have them. The music they got with our show was the only music that many kids had in their lives at home. (Norman interview)

In addition to drawing upon her educational background, Ms. Norman also drew upon the popularity of the character of Peter Pan. I contend that there was a national preoccupation with Barrie’s creation in the performing arts at this time and that this preoccupation was reflective of societal concerns regarding how to perform a new college-educated and highly gendered middle class. Ms. Norman’s narrative on how the show’s origins and artistic intentions illuminate how local programmers of the era crafted an intersection of fantasy and creative play to engage the child viewer as a middle-class construct.
Pixanne: The Origin Story

You build—every job that comes after build on the first job that comes after build on the first job. Let me tell you how. Of course, the show was very much like kindergarten. You know everything on the show that I used to do [I did] with my kindergarten kids.

(Norman interview)

The origin story of the show, as told by Ms. Norman, is a quintessential narrative of show business “moxie.” According to Ms. Norman in 1960 Jane Norman contacted the programming director at WFIL to pitch him an idea for a new children’s show. The programming director, who was also a former instructor of Ms. Norman during her undergraduate days at Temple, told her that WFIL could not accommodate another children’s program in its schedule at that time. He suggested, however, that she approach the programming director at WCAU-Channel 10, the CBS affiliate. According to Ms. Norman, that meeting was one in which a twenty-something kindergarten teacher, with no prior television experience, talked her way into producing her own show for the station:

I asked to see the program director and he happened to be there. So, I went in and he said to me, “OK, Kid. You know, what can I do for you?” and I said, “Nothing.” I said, “I think it’s what I can do for you.” I said I really think I will produce for you the best children’s program that’s ever been done, and I will
bring you incredible ratings. And he thought, “This kid is nuts! I mean, really! She’s got chutzpah, lots of nerve, but maybe she’s talented.” So, I said do you have a piano somewhere in this studio and he said, “Yeah! Follow me.” He took me into this big cavernous studio … and sure enough, there was a piano … I sat down and I did exactly what I did with my kindergarten kids. I sang. I told stories. I engaged him. I got him right in there with me. The end of ten minutes he said, “You know what? You are really good!” He said go home and think of a program … that night, at the dining room table, Pixanne was born … And the next day I went back, told him the idea and you think you could, well first of all, he said there was magic, three words that everybody hopes to hear. He said, “Jane I love it! I love it! It can go on the air in two weeks.” And this is the other thing I said to kids when I tell then what to do when they get into this business, always say yes. Say yes whether you think you can do it or whether you know you can’t do it. Say yes because when you do and you’ve got the opportunity, it will happen. I said, “Oh sure. No problem. I can do it in two weeks. So, they gave me the best director in the business … they built this wonderful, magnificent, fanciful set and sure enough, two weeks later, I was on the air. Interesting really to use all this, I mean, obviously, take what you want. (Norman interview)

This “origin story” was repeated often by Ms. Norman.28 As with many of the personal narratives told to me by the former hosts, the tale became refined and part of the

“canon” of their interview responses. Even so, it illustrates several of what I consider to be Ms. Norman’s hallmark characteristics: self-confidence based on self-knowledge; keen intelligence; and an ability to recognize and seize career opportunities. I believe it is also illustrative of one of her considerable talents: storytelling. In addition to being an accomplished musician and singer of the Great American Songbook, Ms. Norman was a consummate storyteller in the tradition of children’s radio host Nila Mack (*Let’s Pretend Theater*) and children’s author and storytelling advocate/teacher Ruth Sawyer (author of *The Way of the Storyteller*, 1942). Ms. Norman’s ability to engage and pull the listener in was, I believe, a major factor in her Philadelphia show’s successful nine-year run.

The program was a showcase for Ms. Norman’s performing abilities and musical talents. According to Ms. Norman:

> I really wanted to play Peter Pan on Broadway. This is really what I wanted to do. I was more Mary Martin than Mary Martin doing it at that time. And I thought, I shall have a magic forest and every day I will fly in just like Peter Pan and the forest will be populated with wonderful creatures and the show was born.

(Norman interview)

When I asked Ms. Norman why she chose to portray Peter as female she stated that she wanted to let the girls at home that they could also have fun and be adventurous. One can also infer that the change of name and gender would side-step any legal complications regarding the use of the character for the show. In the opening segment, Pixanne flies into the Enchanted Forest to the show’s theme music (an instrumental version of the folk
song, “Johnny’s Too Long at the Fair”). She then stops to welcome the boys and girls at home. Pixanne would entertain the children with songs, puppets, and educational segments like “The Pixie Press” (a short news feature for children) or French lessons by Suzie the Witch (as played by Ms. Norman). The story lines on the show typically featured a conflict between Pixanne and her mischievous neighbor, Windy Witch (also played by Ms. Norman). The conflict, always minor and somewhat humorous, was resolved amicably by the show’s end. The show closed with Pixanne singing the farewell song and promising to meet the children the next day. Many of the commercials for the show featured Ms. Norman (as Pixanne) as the spokesperson for the advertisers. As with the other hosts, she also made personal appearances in the region on her sponsors’ behalf.

Pixanne began on a trial basis as a half-hour show on Saturday mornings and, as Ms. Norman states, “the ratings were terrific.” After several months, WCAU rescheduled it to a Monday through Friday, half-hour morning slot following the nationally broadcast children’s show, Captain Kangaroo. Within a short time, the show had such a positive response from the sponsors (as measured by advertising dollars) and the viewers (as measured by ratings) that the station expanded the show’s format to an hour (Norman interview). Jane Norman was the show’s writer, producer, songwriter, and star. From the outset she was given a sizable budget and as such the show had very high production values: a complex set (the Enchanted Forest); costumes for the show’s various characters all portrayed by Ms. Norman; puppets designed and operated by professional puppeteer Addis Williams; and one of the station’s best directors, Merrill Brockway (who went on to direct PBS’s award winning series Dance in America). At considerable expense, Ms. Norman engaged Peter Foy, who had designed the flying harness for Mary Martin’s
Broadway and television productions of *Peter Pan*, to design a customized flying harness for her to use in filming the show’s opening sequence. The show ran until 1969 when it was cancelled and replaced with a female-viewer oriented talk show despite the fact that it was still garnering good ratings. Ms. Norman had the savvy to ask for and receive from the station both the physical possession of the shows that had been taped and the rights for their use. As a result, *Pixanne* was nationally syndicated for several years in the early 1970s.

Over the decades Ms. Norman continuously reinvented herself. She was a frequent guest lecturer on the topic of television history for the Communications Department of Temple University; the author of a do-it-yourself manual for women, *Jane Norman’s Fix-It and Save* (Chilton, 1977); and the co-author of a sociological study, *The Private Life of the American Teenager: The Norman/Harris Report* (Rawson/Wade, 1981). In her final decades she concentrated on performing and recording. As evidenced by statements in her various interviews and from the information that she provided on her official Web site, Ms. Norman was very proud of the work that she accomplished on *Pixanne*: the program’s successful ratings and its strong market share for the length of its entire run; her use of (then) experimental technologies (e.g. the utilization of chroma key/green screen); and innovations such filming remote segments on site, e.g. at the New York World’s Fair, during an era when cameras were bulky and remote shots difficult to engineer. Ms. Norman passed away on May 13, 2017. The services were private.

Jane Norman’s success as one of the few women hosts nationwide and her

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29 The show’s opening sequence and short segments from the show can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdxUulN97cg.
business savvy regarding her productions are made all the more remarkable since, during this timeframe, few women held positions of power at either the local or national level in the industry. This lack of upward mobility and access to power was in keeping with the “glass ceiling” that women in the business world encountered in post-War II America. May describes this post-war era as a period of “female subordination and domesticity” (86). She states that a combination of government policies, discriminatory practices by unions and business, and shifting cultural norms “made it difficult for women to avoid economic dependence on their husbands” (75). She characterizes the ideology towards women for the period of the late 1940s through the 1960s as one of “domestic containment” (8). Coontz documents the systematic discrimination of women in the workplace during the Cold War era through to the beginning of the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s. She states that after World War II that the private sector “took extraordinary measure to purge women from non-traditional jobs” (31). However, Coontz notes that “in the twentieth century every decade showed an increase in the number of women who chose to work out of both economic necessity and the desire to break free from the bonds of domesticity” (162-63).

The “behind-the-scenes” women in the television industry during this era not only faced a lack of opportunity for advancement and unequal pay, but many of their contributions were either unacknowledged or attributed to their male supervisors. Philadelphia area women that I interviewed, now octogenarians and nonagenarians, who fall into this category speak fondly of their time at the local affiliates during the “Golden Age” but allude to the fact that while they were paid as secretaries their duties were actually those of assistant producers and directors as well as marketing and sales
professionals. However, these largely unsung television innovators remain loyal to their former employers and are some of the most active members of the Philadelphia industry’s association, Broadcast Pioneers. There were, of course, some women who made their mark both in front of and behind the camera. Jane Norman was not only Pixanne’s star but was also its producer and writer. Dr. Marguerite Farley, Executive Director of Communications Media for the School District of Philadelphia, was responsible for the production of the educational series WFIL Studio Schoolhouse, which aired throughout the 1950s and also performed in both the radio and television editions. Nonetheless, at both the local and national level women were underrepresented in management jobs in the industry. Unfortunately, according to a recent study on women television professionals, the underrepresentation of women in the industry continues to this day. Indeed: “In 2016-2017, women comprised 28% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs (Lauzen 3).”

Many factors contributed to the success of Jane Norman and her show, Pixanne: the quality of the show both in terms of production values and in artistic execution; the talent of the star; and its scheduling spot following the popular and critically well-received national children’s show, Captain Kangaroo. Another aspect of the show’s popularity had to do with the character of Peter Pan. The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up was having a cultural “moment” in the 1950s and into the early 1960s and was cropping up all over the American cultural landscape. Barrie’s stage play Peter Pan was steadily produced in New York from 1905 through to 1933 (Hanson 361-364). After World War II, the Broadway musical Peter Pan (music and lyrics by Leonard Bernstein and helmed
by Jean Arthur as Peter and Boris Karloff as Mr. Darling/Captain Hook) debuted at the Imperial Theater in 1950. The show ran for 312 performances and famed theater critic Brooks Atkinson called it a “delight” (Atkinson 27). In February 1953 the Disney studios released a feature-length animated version (with music by Sammy Cahn, Frank Churchill, Sammy Fain, and Ted Sears). This version also met with popular and critical success (the New York Times film critic characterized it as “first-class”) (Crowther 23). Peter Pan returned to Broadway in 1954. The new version starred Mary Martin and Cyril Ritchard and was directed by Jerome Robbins with a score by Jule Styne, Mark Charlap, and Trude Rittman and lyrics by Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Carolyn Leigh. This version ran for 152 performances and Martin and Ritchard were awarded Tony’s (“Peter Pan Musical” Internet Broadway Database).

The Jerome Robbins Broadway version of Peter Pan came to the small screen in 1955. It was broadcast live and in color with the original cast as part of NBC’s Producer’s Showcase. Again, the popular and critical response was enthusiastic. Ms. Martin won an Emmy for her performance. NBC broadcasted the show (again live and in color) in 1956. The 1960 version was videotaped; it is this version that was shown in the 1960s and early 1970s and is the one currently available to home audiences on DVD (Hanson 246-252). Peter Pan was also referenced politically. Operation Peter (Operación Pedro Pan), which provided air transport from Cuba to the United States for 14,000 unaccompanied minors, was a Cold War initiative organized by the Catholic Welfare Bureau with funding from US donors. The program ran from 1960 to 1962 and ceased after the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The abundance and success of all these various iterations of Barrie’s Peter Pan
are indicative of both its appeal and its cultural resonance. The character of Peter was an artistic and imaginative conceit through which mid-century America could express and come to terms with anxieties about class and postwar expectations of what constituted an upwardly-mobile, suburban middle class. In the era in which Barrie debuted the character the British Edwardians were also struggling with anxieties of class and a rapidly changing social order. Peter’s popularity during each of these eras suggests the important role that he served in mediating for the public these seismic social shifts and a fluidity of social roles.

**Peter Pan and the Mediation of Class Anxieties**

Neverland is a haunted world ... because it is not free of the spectre of social and economic pressures on the middle class. (A. Wilson 602)

Throughout the twentieth century literary critics have noted the multiple layers to the character of Peter Pan. Scholars have interrogated the novel and the play for interpretations of race, class and gender. The two time/places that I will discuss are Edwardian Britain, the era in which the character was created, and Peter Pan in Cold War America. Peter is a cultural product of early twentieth century England which was both a time and place an era infused with anxieties about modernity. Scholar Ann Wilson writes that Barrie’s play encapsulated the era’s concerns about shifts in masculine identity, the impact of new technologies, a changing economy, and the decline of the Empire (595). Barrie, one of Britain’s most popular playwrights, explored these themes in works such
as the novel *The Little Minister* (1891, later adapted to stage and film) and the play *The Admirable Crichton* (1902); but it is the character of Peter Pan that best personifies these anxieties and tensions.

Postwar America mid-century was struggling with analogous issues of national identity in the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombings marked the end of what Englehardt has termed the Victory Culture, a period of moral certitude with regard to an American identity. Public discourse in the Cold War era centered on conformity v. individualism and authoritarianism v. democracy. The mid-century Peter Pan, popular in American culture, was an adolescent boy free from convention and authority. Peter lived in an enchanted land where he survived through his intelligence and bravery. According to cultural historian Amy F. Ogata the figure of the imaginative/creative child was a focal point in these public discussions of a new American identity:

> Creativity in the postwar imagination, implied individual thought and action, and was widely considered a fundamentally human and democratic quality … Creativity as embedded in an ambitious postwar, middle-class ideal of raising exceptional children … also played a broader and more nationalistic role in attempting to ensure competitiveness … [and] provided a foil for the preoccupations of the age. (187)

In this section I will explore the class anxieties expressed in *Peter Pan* with the intent of providing background on how these anxieties informed Ms. Norman’s interpretation of
Peter and Edwardian England

The changes to the physical manifestations of Peter which surfaced over the early decades of the twentieth century serve as a window into public discourse that took place regarding class and masculinity in Edwardian England. Peter Pan first appeared in J. M. Barrie’s *The Little White Bird* (1902), which he later re-published as a stand-alone work, *Peter Pan in Kensington Garden* (1906) (Barrie xv). In print, Peter is quite different from the adolescent boy later depicted in the Disney film or the television productions starring Mary Martin. In the *Kensington Garden* stories, Barrie describes Peter as an infant, only seven days old clad in the nightgown he wore when he flew out the nursery window. Peter in *Peter and Wendy* (1911) is a slightly older boy but still a boy who is quite young: “He was a lovely boy, clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of trees, but the most entrancing thing about him was that he had all his first teeth” (12). The fact that he still had his baby teeth would place him, if he were an ordinary human child, at around six years old. Thus, in print, Barrie’s characterization of Peter morphed from an enchanted infant to a mischievous little boy. When Peter became a flesh-and-blood presence, as portrayed by an actor on stage then film, his physical manifestation morphed again to that of an adolescent boy.

Peter Pan became a “trouser role,” i.e., a youth of a boy played by a young woman. Part of the appeal of the trouser role aspect of Peter had to do with child labor laws. A young, adult female actress could approximate the physicality of an adolescent boy and yet be treated as an adult by the directors/ producers. Another consideration,
particularly during the Edwardian period, was that the young actress could be clad in leg-baring attire within the bounds of theater proprietary and thus expand the audience appeal to adult males. Sexual ambiguity has long been associated with the role and theater historians note that many of the actors who played Peter were rumored sexual non-conformists in their private lives. The character of Peter Pan, with its gender-bending implications in theatrical performance, became a space in the popular culture for liminality—the pushing of boundaries and the blurring of the binary of masculine/feminine.

As modern English society became upwardly mobile, the boundaries between working, middle, and upper class became more difficult to define and gave rise to concerns regarding the fluidity and stability of the British middle class (A. Wilson 596). According to Wilson, the instability of their middle-class status, the “strain of having limited and insecure affluence,” haunts Barrie’s Darling family (596-597). In Peter and Wendy Barrie works the Darlings’ genteel poverty and socio-economic anxieties into the trajectory of the story. The Darlings cannot afford a human nurse, so they engage Nana, a Newfoundland dog. Mr. Darling worries Nana’s that low status among the other nurses reflects poorly on him with his neighbors. He also worries that Nana, his servant, does not suitably “admire” him (Barrie 8). When Nana inadvertently causes him to lose face in front of Mrs. Darling and the children, he banishes her to the yard. With the children unguarded, Peter easily enters the nursery and lures them away. Thus Mr. Darling’s insecurities about his social standing leave his children vulnerable to encroachment by

Peter Pan.

In contrast to Mr. Darling, Peter Pan is secure, even arrogant, regarding his place in the sociological structure of Neverland. As a liminal being, one that exists outside of the British class system, he is free from the constraints of adult-world evaluations. Peter’s status is not grounded in socio-economics but in his personhood—his intelligence, bravery, cleverness, and force of personality. Unlike Mr. Darling, Peter can only lose his status through death, “an awfully big adventure” (Barrie 84) which he does not fear. The only threat to Peter in Neverland is Captain Hook, whom Barrie doubles with Mr. Darling throughout the novel and the stage play. The upper-class, Eton-educated Hook is riddled with self-doubt regarding his rightful place in the social strata of Neverland and tortured by his obsession with the classless Peter Pan. He fears above all else that Peter, with his unselfconscious natural grace and “good form,” is ultimately his superior; a fear that proves true.

In illustration and in print Peter Pan entered in 1902 as a baby, drawing upon the British folklore tradition of “the changeling” as well as a literary tradition of the transformed child such as in Charles Kingsley’s Water Babies (1863). Over the next couple of decades as the character’s popular culture status grew, Barrie found new and different artistic venues for utilizing the character (the play, 1904; the novelization, 1911; the silent movie, 1924) so did the character of Peter himself mature from an infant to an adolescent. As an adolescent Peter had more freedom of expression, could be bolder in his actions, and embody a certain mystique of sexual liminality—a character on the edge of childhood and adulthood and, on stage and in film, a character straddling the male/female binary. Thus, he became a suitable host, acting as a crucible for the shifting
societal constructs of a Britain approaching the sunset of its empirical potency.

According to Ann Wilson, *Peter Pan* is a “fable of modernity” that negotiates the uncertainties regarding social status. In discussing the ongoing appeal of the play Wilson notes that it is a “theatrical fantasy” which navigates an audience’s fear of loss of certitude, combined with a nostalgia for the comfort of times past, as they face the complexities of modernity and the challenges of societal change (608-609.) I believe that these same anxieties surfaced post World War II and the nostalgic fantasy of Peter Pan served a similar purpose for Cold War Americans as it did for the British Edwardians.

*Peter and Cold War America*

Mid-century America, fresh from the horrors of World War II, also experienced a deflated sense of national identity and was in search of heroes and escapes into flights of fancy. In short, mid-century America was struggling with an identity crisis. Young couples, including former GIs who had access to a college education and money for mortgages, moved into the new territory of middle-class suburbia, for which they had no experiential road-map. For many, they were not going to lead their parents’ lives. The ads for televisions in the late 1940s through the 1950s promulgated the notion that TV sets were one of the markers of middle-class living. As one Magnavox ad proclaimed, a television set was a must for “smart young homes.” The argument that many of these early ads presented was that both good parents and up-and-coming young couples had a television in their living room to open their home to the world of education and imagination. The shows themselves were a window into the world of the norms of suburbia and included fare such as *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), *The Donna Reed*
Show (1958-1966), and Leave It to Beaver (1957-1963). Television was a space uncontrolled by parents but a window through which the middle-class household both saw itself and its not-self reflected back.

Spigel writes that “in the postwar years the white-middle class family, living in a suburban tract home, was a government sanctioned ideal,” facilitated by federal programs like the FHA and the GI Bill (Make Way for Television 33). She goes on to note that by the 1950s the TV set had replaced the fireplace and the piano as the focal point of the communal family space of togetherness (38). According to Spigel, the network shows which portrayed this new paradigm of suburban living should be considered as “texts” which were “used and interpreted within the context of everyday life at home” (98). The prime-time shows of the 1950s and early 1960s presented a world of close-knit neighbors engaged in an active social life involving frequent and convivial get-togethers (132). Spigel suggests that the “hyperreal” social world shown on TV mitigated the anxieties of the new suburbanites, recent exiles of actual close-knit urban communities (128) by providing an “illusionary—rather than real—community of friends” (132).

Cultural historians note that both men and women struggled with identity within this framework of the new nuclear family. The suburban housewife was not only responsible for household cleaning, management, and child-rearing but was also expected to be a savvy consumer charged with the responsibility of making sure her family had the proper accouterments of the rising middle-class (Spigel, Make Way for Television 83). Gilbert states that post-War America was a time of crisis for male identity with “men moving into white-collar jobs …occupations defined by a new consumer economy… older notions of boyhood and manhood became problematic” (8). This era saw the rise of
the democratic and non-authoritarian father-figure as encapsulated on the small screen by Ozzie Nelson in the sit-com *Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966).

Midcentury the character of Peter Pan worked as a transitional object for the American viewing public of the time as it did for theater-going Edwardians. Peter served as an artistic expression of societal anxieties not only about changing notions of masculinity but also for how to perform “middle class.” The character of Mr. Darling, with his obsessions regarding maintaining his economic and social status, can be read as the embodiment of what author William H. Whyte, in his best-selling 1956 work of the same name, dubbed “The Organization Man,” i.e. the epitome of a middle-class conformist lacking in creativity and imagination. In contrast, Peter Pan represents the era’s anti-authoritarian and freethinking impulses. I contend that Peter represented for Cold War America the paradox of modernity, with the longing for comfort and security offered by the middle-class conformity and aspirations of the Darling family, and the quest for independence and self-realization as idealized by Pan. Peter as an eternal youth who never grows up—physically or emotionally—is never burdened with the responsibilities of adulthood, manhood, or fatherhood.

This construct of the eternal youth unbounded is also an essential characteristic of the children’s show host. Whether male or female the hosts, with few exceptions, were childlike adults—playmates rather than authority figures. The children show hosts, like the character of Peter Pan, in their liminality and advocacy of imagination, entertainment, and playfulness, existed outside the terrain of familiar suburban life and authoritarian structures. In discussing the role of the host for local children’s programs, the authors of *For the Young Viewer* noted that:
Hosts ought to be minimally authoritarian, especially on programs for the preschooler. Otherwise they may remind the youngster of authoritarian adults who may have been sources of disappointment… One useful image of the host is a kind of good aunt or good uncle with whom the child likes to do things. Such a nonauthority figure is not threatening and cannot affect the child’s daily reward and punishment system, even by implication (Garry 164-165)

In her study of the rise of the “cult of creativity” in postwar America, *Designing the Creative Child*, scholar Amy Ogata discusses how postwar discourse centered on the Cold War notion that children were America’s future; exceptional American children would be the bulwark against the future threats by authoritarian regimes. This quest for encouraging creativity manifested itself in all aspects of children’s culture of the era including toys, architecture, books, and television:

Creativity in the postwar imagination, implied individual thought and action, as was widely considered a fundamentally human and democratic quality … Creativity as embedded in an ambitious postwar, middle-class ideal of raising exceptional children, but it also played a broader and more nationalistic role in attempting to ensure competiveness. At an ideological level, creativity provided a foil for the preoccupations of the age. Positioned against the critique of social conformity, creativity stood for an admirable individuality … In the face of rising political tensions and fears of weakness, creativity was a useful myth of
revitalized and endless national ingenuity. (187)

Ogata notes that television “not only perpetuated the figure of the creative child as a romantic innocent on the air but also pitched kits, dolls, and other items that implicated the values of creativity and imagination in an expanding consumer culture” (28.)

Television, Fantasy, and Imaginative Play

“It was in homes with children where television was most eagerly awaited and most intensively used.” The networks did their part to make sure children tuned in … the television networks developed shows that reflected a cultural acceptance of imaginative and creative children whose curiosity and fantasy were both innocently “natural” and potentially lucrative. (Ogata 28)

The uses and meaning of imaginative play have long been topics of inquiry for child psychologists and play theorists, including many whose works pre-date the mass media of television. Foremost among these is Johan Huizinga whose work on play is foundational to both game and modern play theory. In *Homo Ludens* (first published in 1938) he examined play as a “function of culture” (5). He assigned three characteristics to “play” which differentiate it from “ordinary life.” Play is limited by time, space, and secludedness (9). I contend that these characteristics can be mapped onto the hosted children’s shows and that these elements all served to further the bonding experience of the creative play between host and child. With regard to the criteria of time, a large
number of the hosted shows were “strip shows,” i.e., they were broadcast daily at a regular time in one of the two broad time slots that program managers designated as child oriented (early to mid-morning and after school but before dinner). These shows were also bounded by time in both length and in adherence to a regular broadcast schedule.

The play space of the television “visit” involved both a literal and figurative geography and had many facets: the physical space of the home television viewing area, i.e. the space encompassing the viewer and the set; the theatrical set of the show being viewed; and the actual framing of the show by the screen of the television set itself. In the industry’s early days, television was seen as the new hearth around which families would draw for storytelling (Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* 249-250). In the mornings and afternoons, when parents were busy, it was the children drawn into the magic circle of this electronic hearth. As television saturated the consumer market during the decade of the 1950s, the set itself evolved from a luxury item for the very rich disguised in elegant cabinetry to a ubiquitous feature of the middle-class living room proudly displayed as a focal point. Spigel notes that in the early 1950s women’s magazines, such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, were offering decorating tips for creating a “family-television-room” (*Make Way for Television* 40). In addition to the physical viewing space, the play space of television included the realm of the show itself. Through stagecraft, such as songs, opening rituals, direct address, and invitations to send in drawings and letters, the host would invite the child into the show’s fantasiescape, be it the enchanted forest of Pixanne, the turn-of-the-century grocery store of *Cartoon Corners*, or Captain Noah’s Magical Ark.\(^{32}\) In *For the Young Viewers* program managers

\(^{32}\) Ms. Norman as Pixanne welcomed the viewer daily with: “Hi! I’m Pixanne! Fly with me now through my magic forest. We’ll share lots of adventures and fun today! Don’t go away!”
advised that the “unique qualities” of the medium could be used to an advantage by directors of children’s shows:

The traditional comment that the small size of the television screen contracts space and makes it difficult to present many kinds of material is perhaps less significant than the fact that the small screen may help the young viewers to feel himself the master. The small size of the screen can also stimulate the young viewer’s imagination rather than confine it, if the program is staged for the eye and ear and imagination of the child. (166)

Secludedness (which Huizinga defines as “limitedness”) was also an element of the host/child viewing experience. Like play, when the hosted show was “played out” it contained “its own course and meaning” (9), which included the creation of a “play-world” with its own rules and community where the rules of the real world did not apply (11-12). In addition to the spatial and temporal aspects of secludedness, the elements of community and memory, as stipulated by Huizigna, seem particularly applicable to the

(see: http://www.broadcastpioneers.com/bp3/10-17-07.html):

Come right on in to the General Store
We have licorice, gumdrops and sourballs;
Anything that you're hankering for,
You'll find in Cartoon Corners General Store.
There's lots of stories and songs that you know,
Toys to build and a big pot belly stove;
Cartoon fun with your favorites so,
Let's ring up the curtain on this show!
There's something else I've forgotten, let's see,
Of course, Gene London, that's me!

Captain Noah would invite children to send their “pictures to good all Captain Noah” (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqED0ume9F8).
hosted children’s show. The notion of “community” was utilized by the sponsors and marketers of children’s television shows. They built upon the viewers’ “club” concept pioneered to great success by children’s radio. Viewers of The Mickey Club were encouraged by host Jimmie Dodd to self-identify as Mouseketeers; The Roy Rogers Show instituted “The Roy Rogers Riders Club;” local shows (such as The Cartoon Corners, Chief Halftown, and Bertie the Bunyip in Philadelphia) had fan clubs with accompanying buttons and newsletters. Finally, an additional aspect of secludedness was the “perception of separating children from their parents” (Ogata 28). The host was communing directly with the child with the tacit approval of the parent.

In The Ambiguity of Play Brian Sutton-Smith discusses television as imaginative play. He does so in the context of critiquing what he terms a Wordsworthian Romanticized notion of children and fantasy play; the prevailing notion I would argue in mid-century America. He cites both toys and television as examples of what he terms “phantasmagoria;” a term meant to recognize “the widest array of childhood imaginary potentials” (152). He argues that Western culture largely romanticizes childhood play and therefore such discussions are about “control, domestication, and direction of childhood” (152). He states that such discussions allow children “much less freedom for the irrational, wild, dark or deep play in Western culture than are adults” (151). Sutton-Smith cites classic children’s literature such as the Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan as prime examples of this Romantic notion of childhood play as a conduit for the formation of a creative adult (152). In his discussion of phantasmagoria, Sutton-Smith links literature, toys, and television as material products of children’s culture and children’s fantasy play. Such cultural expressions have been at the nexus of “a paradoxical cultural battle
between fears of mass commercial stereotyping of children’s play and the ability of the
toys to expand on the emotional life of the children who get to play with them” (152).

Sutton-Smith alludes to the uses of fantasy play (including all aspects of material
culture as fodder for that play) for both children and adults. With regard to daydreaming
and the conjuring of metaphysical paracosms he writes:

It may be that all of us, child and adult, work at fantasizing metaphysical
paracosms all out days. We are eternally making over the world in our minds, and
much of it is fantasy ... Our fantasies are the microworlds of inner life that all of
us manipulate in our own way to come to terms with feelings, conflicts, realities
and aspirations as they enter into our lives. (156)

Hosted Shows and the Uses of Enchantment

The Uses of Enchantment is the title of Bruno Bettelheim’s study of how children
use fairy tales in their quest for self-understanding. He stated that such stories help a child
“to understand himself in this complex world with which he must learn to cope” and to
make “coherent sense out of the turmoil of his feelings.” (5). Based on my reading of the
fantasy themed children’s shows, it is my contention that the “psychological truths” and
“existential dilemmas” (6) Bettelheim identified are also evident in the hosted fantasy
shows that were very popular throughout the United States during the era.33 Drawing
upon traditional fairy tales and children’s literary tales (such as the works of Hans

33 According to my tally, of the 592 shows that had discernable themes, seventeen percent were fantasy
based. This is the third largest category behind Westerns (twenty-nine percent) and Nautical (eighteen
percent).
Christian Andersen and Oscar Wilde), the hosts’ use of imaginative play served to suggest that the child negotiate an understanding of her internal self in relation to her ever-expanding outside world within the framework established by Bettelheim:

He [the child] can achieve this understanding, and with it the ability to cope, not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of his unconscious, by becoming familiar with it through spinning our daydreams—ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures … It is here that fairy tales have unequaled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child’s imagination which would be impossible for him to discover truly as his own. (7)

Winnicott also theorized the psychological uses of imaginative play specifically with regard to the child’s use of transitional objects (toys, people, objects, etc.). These transitional objects serve as a conduit for the child to make meaning of the world, forge a personal identity, and resolve the physiological conflict inherent in the process of learning to negotiate the paradox of “self” and “not self,” that is the external world. Shows like *Pixanne* incorporated the use of imaginative play and provided an in-between space for working through psychological issues in fantasy.

The industry advisors in *For the Young Viewer* specifically discussed the psychological benefits to children and fantasy through drama and narrative: “A well-told story sparks the child’s imagination. Sometimes by sound alone, sometimes with added visual elements, and sometimes by dramatic presentation, television tells its stories” (53.)
The authors go on to note that storytelling presents a means of self-discovery for a child. That through “well-presented storytelling on television, the child is helped toward a richer social life” (55) and that such programming contributes to “the child’s growth and development into a mature, creative adult” (74). In my interview with Ms. Norman she echoed this aspirational view of the use of fantasy for igniting creativity. She also noted that fantasy characters, such as her Pixanne, engaged the child, “drew them in,” and sustained their interest in the featured educational segments. Further Pixanne would both enrich the child’s imaginative life and impart the experiential background necessary for success in school (Norman interview).

**Pixanne: Stagecraft and Techniques**

As stated above, Jane Norman drew upon two frameworks in her creation and presentation of the show: children’s literature/theater and early childhood educational teaching practices. The section which follows examines the specific strategies and techniques which Norman utilized. Some of the stagecraft which she employed was common to many other of the children’s show hosts including: the breaking of the fourth wall and the direct address to the child viewer; no “peanut gallery”—a decision made by Ms. Norman so that, as she stated, the children at home would feel special and feel like Pixanne was speaking only to the them; and the use of puppets, stories, and songs. Some of the artistic decisions and stagecraft techniques were specifically informed by Norman’s theatrical and educational background.34

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34 According to her online biography Ms. Norman was a child musical prodigy. Her musical education began at the age of three and she performed in theater productions throughout high school and college.
During our interview, Ms. Norman and I discussed her teaching background and how it influenced the development and performance of the show. Ms. Norman stated that even though hers was a commercial show, she wanted to incorporate a strong educational component. We also discussed the format of the show and how its structure mirrored the techniques used in reading readiness programs such as: sequencing and repetition (each show followed a structured format which remained the same from day to day); the use of rhymes in the dialog to underscore messages about manners and appropriate behavior; rhetorical questioning of the child viewer (e.g., what would you do or what do you think that we should do next); and the use of uniform opening and closing songs that signaled the beginning and end of the show. So, while _Pixanne_ did not have a formal educational consultant Ms. Norman agreed that its structure was strongly influenced by her Early Childhood training.

In contrast to Sally Starr, Jane Norman did not use the rhetorical device of illeism. While Norman’s delivery was warm, upbeat, and conversational her dialog was always in formal and correct English. As with the other hosts that I interviewed, Ms. Norman stated that she always treated the child at home with respect and “never talked down to them.” For her this respect extended to her on-air style of speaking. Unlike many other hosts Ms. Norman did not take an avuncular stance. She did not need the protection of the fictive kinship since Pixanne, as a magical being, exuded a liminality with regard to age. Her status with regard to childhood/adulthood was moot since, like Peter Pan and the other denizens of Neverland, the inhabitants of Pixanne’s enchanted forest never grew up. This age liminality also precluded the need for the use of illeism—a signifier of an

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including being on-air with Temple University’s WRTI. Her major at Temple was Early Childhood education with a minor in radio and television (http://www.pixanne.com/#!biography/c1ktj).
adult/child power dynamic.

Through the use of the other characters which she played, Windy Witch (who was naughty but never evil) and Suzie Witch (who was alternately sophisticated and silly), and through puppetry Ms. Norman had the ability to explore different dynamics with her child viewers. If Windy caused problems in the forest (e.g. a spell gone awry), Pixanne would problem solve to set things right. Suzie, who was fluttery and forgetful in manner and flamboyant in dress, would have segments which would introduce the home audience to French phrases and French children’s songs. Puppets such as Dandelion the Lion were able to be the avatars for the child home viewer in conversing with Pixanne about common childhood worries such as loneliness and separation anxieties.35

Finally, with regard to stagecraft, the Enchanted Forest presented an ambiguity with regard to size and spatial relationships. This ambiguity enhanced its function as an imaginative play space. In the Enchanted Forest Pixanne would frequently sit atop a mushroom and chat with the child viewers. In the background are flowers and plants sized the same as the mushroom. The scale of the plants in relation to the actor gives the illusion that Pixanne is approximately six inches tall (appropriate for a miniature creature like a pixie). However, size is fluid in the Forest. The trees used on the set are sized to the scale of the human adult actor Jane Norman (who is approximately five foot tall). When adult-sized people (and zoo animals) visited the Forest, no special effects are used to miniaturize Ms. Norman. She appeared as her normal adult height next to these guests.

Plasticity of size with regard to flora and fauna was also found in the Neverland set of the television production of Peter Pan. There is also precedence for this trope of size fluidity.

35 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdxUulN97cg for examples of use of puppetry and Windy Witch.
throughout works of children’s fantasy literature, notably Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) and in Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908).

WCAU, Pixanne’s station, was a CBS affiliate. Nationally, CBS had the reputation as the “Tiffany Network” and was home to legendary journalists such as Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite. During the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s WCAU had the area’s best respected and most watched news anchor John Facenda (known locally as “the voice of God” for his authoritative and sonorous delivery) and was responsible for producing some of the most memorable and intelligent local children’s shows. In addition to *Pixanne*, there was Gene London’s Peabody-nominated *Cartoon Corners* and *Tottle* a puppet show created my Marshall Izen which featured Mr. Izen and Ms. Norman. *Tottle* was also directed by Merrill Brockway who went on to create the Dance in America series for PBS in 1976. Creative and quality programming, hallmarks of WCAU-Channel 10, were evidenced in its children’s shows by the station’s investment in production design by the station as well as the performing intelligence of hosts such as Jane Norman and Gene London (both college educated and both with significant experience in the performing arts).

During the interview, I asked Jane Norman if there was an articulated station philosophy regarding children’s programming. She answered “no.” Ms. Norman underscored the fact that she was given creative control over the show; she stated that she was never asked to have a script for *Pixanne* approved in advance by management and that most of her requests were financially supported by the station management. In my

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36 Unfortunately for this project I was not able to locate of former hosts of the NBC affiliate, WRCV-Channel 3.
conversations with the other WCAU children’s entertainers, Mr. Izen and Mr. London, the same sentiment regarding station management support was echoed. However, I think the fact that in *For the Young Viewer*, the industry guide for the era, WCAU had three shows highlighted for special mention (*Cartoon Corners*, *Pixanne*, and *Tottle*) whereas WFIL (ABC) and WRCV (NBC) each had only one (*Happy the Clown* and *Bertie the Bunyip* respectively) is testimony to the excellence of the WCAU children’s shows.

**Conclusion**

[During the postwar period] the notion of the child as the embodiment of nascent future social and material relations remained a constant and productive location for imaginary interventions into an evolving human civilization represented by American society.

(Sammond 250)

Barrie’s play *Peter Pan* challenged the Edwardians obsession with attaining and maintaining middle-class status. Peter, with his youth, self-possession, natural leadership, and grace, combined with the stagecraft of hidden femininity, acts as a foil to the comically insecure and status-obsessed male adults Hook and Mr. Darling (traditionally are played by the same actor). In the Cold War era, fifty years later, Disney essentialized Peter’s maleness for the animated feature. Disney’s Peter was a young, mischievous adolescent boy who challenged middle-class values; this characterization was signaled both aurally and visually. Disney Studio child actor Bobby Driscoll, then sixteen, was the
voice and the physical model for the animated work. 37

Within this fantasy space of Neverland, the adult author and the child participant are free to explore meanings of childhood and adulthood made safe by the positioning of that exploration in an alternate reality. In the novelization of the play, Barrie, through narrative devices, invites the child into a land created from an idealized, nostalgic childhood and accompanies the child on his (the narrator’s) exploration of that land’s boundaries. The author leads the child in and returns him safely home. The child reader, in turn, is invited to be an active participant in this journey; he enters the author’s world through the process of reading, engages with the text intellectually and emotionally, and from it constructs a personal meaning and experience. Additionally, in the novel Barrie breaks down the fourth wall and using his position as narrator ponders his selection of adventures to relate, not to mention shifting in his alliances with the various characters.

The fantasy children’s television host, including Jane Norman in *Pixanne*, drew upon the complicated narrative construct implicit in children’s literature such as *Peter Pan* to frame his/her interactions with the child viewer. Children’s show hosts like Ms. Norman and Fred Rogers (who started on local Pittsburgh television before making the move to national PBS) were deliberate in the structure and format of their shows. Each made use of opening and closing transitions which were repeated and ritualized, thus cueing the child viewer: Ms. Norman utilized opening and closing flying sequences and ushered the viewer in and out with song. While *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood* was not a

37 *Peter Pan* was Driscoll’s last major film role. His acting career ended with his adulthood. Driscoll died at age thirty-one of an apparent heart attack attributed to his long-standing problems with alcohol and drugs. Homeless and destitute he was buried in a potter’s field in NYC.
fantasy show, Fred Rogers not only opened the show in the same way each time, bringing the viewer into his home and changing clothes, but he also established the imaginative play space within the show of the Neighborhood of Make Believe and used a trolley to take the child viewer there and back again.

The fantasy hosts also made deliberate use of the liminality of their characters as part of this narrative framework. Jane Norman essentialized the stage Peter’s “hidden” femaleness. While using all the trappings of Mary Martin’s Pan (e.g., costume, Neverland-like set, flying) she was unequivocally female again in body type and voice. Calm, reassuring, and soft-spoken in manner, Ms. Norman did not minimize her bust line, nor did she add gruffness or bluster to her delivery (as did Ms. Martin). She softened and familiarized the uncanny reimagining a pixie, a figure out of Celtic pagan mythology, as a conduit of middle-class values in manners, culture, and department.

Mythical, non-parental adult playmates such as such as pixies, magical story ladies, and leprechauns were part of landscape televised fairy stories. Along with stagecraft such as the use of direct address, scripted stories, puppetry, stories and songs, the fantasy hosts engaged their viewers in a game of “let’s pretend.” Thus, these television visits provided a narrative for exploring the themes of friendship, adversity, problem solving, and self-discovery which were embedded in the fairy and folk tales from which they drew. *Pixanne*, along with other fantasy figures on television, provided the viewer with a literal and figurative flight of fancy, ameliorating social anxieties along the way.

Sammond notes that the Cold War era was a time of concern regarding child-rearing practices in the United States. He states that child-rearing authorities advocated
“natural” and “child-centered” practices (250), which would result in an American citizenry capable of negotiating the boundaries of independence and conformity. Ogata argues that this national impulse to resist rigid conformity included the production and consumption of a children’s material culture that encouraged creative play and thus creative thinking. Children’s television hosts such as Jane Norman were part of that impetus and part of that culture. According to Sammond, postwar American was heavily invested in the child as the hope of the future: “The production of a naturalized white, middle-class life as American culture, and that culture arising from the American landscape, invested in the figure of the child expectations for a more durable and vital democratic society (25).” Hosts like Ms. Norman believed that children’s television could do such important cultural work and shows like *Pixanne* situated the host as a learning tool rather than entertainer, who ushered in a firm construct of middle-class childhood and educational fantasy.
LMAO ... I guess you were a bit too young to remember the show that used to be on Channel 10 on Saturday mornings called "The Gene London Show." The guy was totally strange. Very feminine (he probably is gay but back then, we didn't know what gay was - maybe that's why my dad didn't like us watching it in fear we would marry someone like that.

Comment by Alex Berg

Gene's personal life is irrelevant. It wasn't brought into the show, the show was an educational, safe, place for children to play and learn.

Comment by John Baker38


(http://www.topix.com/forum/philly/TPBRC3E50R4SBNE51)

In this chapter I will read Gene London’s performances as a children’s show host on WCAU-Philadelphia’s (the CBS affiliate) as texts reflecting mid-century constructions of American masculinity and the paradoxes inherent in those constructions. With regard to Mr. London the paradox resides in viewer acceptance of a non-normative, i.e. “queered,”

performances of American manhood in an era on intense conformity and homophobia. As noted previously, I use “queered” here as a term used by literary and gender scholars, such as Judith Butler, to denote not aspects of sexuality but rather to denote a non-binary, non-essentialist, liminal performance of gender. Mr. London’s performance could be interrogated with regard to constructions of class as well as through the lens of the mid-century America’s concern with educational and aspirational children’s material culture and entertainment. Like his WCAU colleague Jane Norman he was college educated and professionally trained in the theater arts and his show contained educational and culturally enriching elements. However, it is his construction of Cold War masculinity with his use of the child man on-screen persona that is arguably the most interesting aspect of his legacy as a local children’s show host. As I will explore in the sections which follow, Mr. London’s presentation as “child man,” a familiar character of both stage and screen, pushed the boundaries of the stereotype of Cold War masculinity prevalent in the popular culture of the era.

Mr. London was a fixture on Philadelphia children’s television for nearly twenty years (1959 - 1979). He adopted the child man character of “Gene London,” a hapless and innocent clerk on Cartoon Corners (his Philadelphia weekend show which debuted in 1959). When Mr. London began his morning weekday strip show in 1960, he continued with the “child man” persona although he was hosting as himself—a self-effacing mild-mannered storyteller and artist—thus conflating the on-screen personalities of “Gene London” the character and Gene London the performer. This utilization of the child man persona by hosts was not unique to Mr. London and was present in various interpretations in a variety of performers during this era. It ran the
gamut from the broad, slapstick, double-entendre-based humor of Soupy Sales (whose local children’s show lunchtime children’s show in Detroit in the early 1950s) to the ultra-gentle and soft-spoken self-deprecating humor of Mr. London in Philadelphia. These Cold War depictions of the host as child man present an interesting incongruity with regard to generally accepted norms of American masculinity. Elaine Tyler May notes that in the postwar era, which emphasized domesticity, consumerism, and conformity non-normative displays of gender were considered suspect (13). It was the era of the “lavender scare” wherein non-normative displays of sexuality were considered a dangerous deviance and a marker of subversiveness. May notes that the during the McCarthy “more people lost their jobs” for allegations of homosexuality than “those who were fired for being suspected “reds”” (13). Yet, children show hosts who utilized this nonnormative persona successfully navigated the constrictions placed on a definition of mid-century of American masculinity in popular culture.

In the sections which follow I will explore how Mr. London, like Sally Starr, was able to not only insulate himself from whisper campaigns about his sexuality but become a local celebrity with a highly successful children’s show (as evidenced by its longevity and ratings) and a much beloved one at that. He accomplished this on the strength of his personality through his portrayal of “Gene London” which he used as a vehicle for creating a strong parasocial bond with his viewers which still resonates with Philadelphia Baby Boomers to this day. To interrogate his performance, I will explore and define the

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39 The term “lavender scare” was popularized by the 2004 book of the same name by David K. Johnson which was a history of a McCarthy era campaign against suspected homosexuals in government position. The term is more widely used for anti-homosexuality crusades in the United States that were prevalent until the rise of LGBT identity politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
40 WCAU nominated Mr. London for a Peabody award in 1959, 1960, and 1961. The Philadelphia Inquirer in one of its profiles of Mr. London referred to him as “legendary” (July 1, 2001).
character of the child man; situate it within the framework of the Cold War masculinity. I will provide a critical biography of Mr. London and examine the stagecraft he used in his performance. Finally, drawing upon scholars who investigate constructions of gender on television (such as Gilbert and Spigel) I will explore how performers like Mr. London expanded and mediated definitions of masculinity for a television audience in the Age of Nuclear Anxiety.

Fools, Child-Men, and Queered Masculinity

In written and oral traditions “the fool” represents the figure of a truthsayer hiding behind a mask of humorous incompetence. The fool not only provokes laughter through his comic antics but also serves as a vehicle for ridiculing the rich and the powerful through that laughter. The performance of the fool straddles the comic (laughter inducing) and the serious (social critique) by purposefully using the former for the later (Rankin, 2). An offshoot of the representation of the archetype of “the fool” is that of the “child man.” The child-man is a queered version of masculinity. He is a hapless grown man, an innocent, incapable of fully functioning within the boundaries of Western cultural expectations of male adulthood. Examples include the comedy and social satire of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Jerry Lewis, Will Farrell, and Adam Sandler. This character can be found in film and television throughout the twentieth into the twenty-first century including early children’s shows.

With regard to locally produced children’s show the male hosts were typically normative, “heroic,” models of masculinity. As evidenced from the survey that I
conducted (see Table 1.3), cowboys, space explorers, and sailors were prevalent in the landscape of the local hosted shows. However, there were also adult male hosts, such as Mr. London, who eschewed the Cold War era’s markers of stereotypical masculinity (e.g., an authoritative manner of speaking, displays of competency, and positions of power) and adopted the guise of the foolish child-man within the frame of their shows. Such hosts included Soupy Sales in Detroit and Bill Britten as Johnny Jellybean in *Time for Fun* (New York). I contend that these performers adopted this particular persona as both a comedic performance device and a guise for safety. As a liminal and emasculated child-man, an unrelated adult male could enter into an intimate, if parasocial, relationship with the child at home and could entertain, educate, and influence that child on a daily basis. The character was also one that was familiar; a character easily recognizable to television viewers since it was utilized by some of the most beloved comic film stars in the early part of the century.

*The Child-Man in Film*

Arguably, the most iconic child-man is Chaplin’s “Little Tramp.” Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977), one of the most successful and famous silent film stars he rose to fame through the portrayal of this down-on-his-luck “little fellow.” Chaplin used the character of the Little Tramp not only for comedic effect but also as a device to highlight modernity’s socials ills, specifically the de-humanizing aspects of capitalism (*Modern Times*, 1936) and the extreme poverty that existed in the United States in the midst of great wealth (*The Kid*, 1921). In analyzing the character of the Tramp, film historian Arthur Rankin, draws upon Freud’s theorization of jokes. Freud states that jokes fall into
two categories: tendentious, i.e., those that express aggression; and innocent which are those simply comic in nature. “Innocent jokes captivate the viewer’s mind by gently expressing the delightful and the absurd” (Rankin 2.) Rankin states that the genius of the character of the Tramp rests in Chaplin’s ability to combine innocent humor and its psychological safety with the tendentious comic intent of social satire:

Chaplin’s skillful blending of innocent and tendentious humour creates a cinematic world that has human appeal while also asserting social criticism. If comedy succeeds the closer it approaches tragedy, then Chaplin’s comedic because it allows innocence quite near to tendentiousness. (Rankin 6)

The Tramp serves as a mask for Chaplin to express “the secret resentment of the powerless or of the silent” (5).

Another early film comic who used the figure of “the innocent” was Stan Laurel (1890-1965.) Laurel was a contemporary of Chaplin’s; they both worked the British musical hall circuit with the Fred Karno troupe. Laurel served as Chaplin’s understudy. The troupe brought both actors to the United States in the mid-1910s where Chaplin and Laurel separately pursued film careers. Hal Roach teamed Laurel with Oliver Hardy (1892-1957) in a series of silent shorts and the duo quickly became a hit with film-going audiences.41 In these Hal Roach comedies the team refined the personas that they would use throughout their nearly thirty-year film collaboration: Hardy as the blustering, self-important blowhard, with a trademark slow burn in response to Laurel’s antics; and Laurel as the good-hearted dimwit who was easily reduced to tears (Barr 12). Barr notes

41 Laurel and Hardy were active as a film team from 1921 to 1951.
that in many of the shorts Laurel disguised himself as a woman as part of the general mayhem of the plot. He states that the intent was not to connote homosexuality but rather to underscore Laurel’s meekness, effeminacy, and asexuality (12.) As with Chaplin’s Tramp, Laurel’s on-screen incompetence and ineffectuality (which served as a foil to Hardy’s heaviness—both in both physique and in temperament) was a protective guise for the subversion of the authority figures such as bosses, policemen, and waiters, with whom he and Hardy chronically ran afoul.

According to film historian Scott Bazlcerzak these modern fools represent a specific type of queered masculinity in classic Hollywood films. He cites Chaplin and Laurel, among other comic stars such as Buster Keaton and W.C. Fields, as examples of comics whose personas were based in opposition to hegemonic notions of American masculinity (5). As outsiders their comedy consisted of their struggles with the established patriarchal order: “Each star creates humor through being a misfit who fails to conform to standard depictions of on-screen maleness specific to genre codes and the film’s period of production” (5). The child-man, as exemplified by Chaplin and Laurel are further queered by their lack of sexual prowess. The mask of the non-threatening, emasculated male also enabled the performance of pointed social satire.

Gene London drew upon the screen tradition of the Little Tramp and created an on-screen persona of a downtrodden and timid child-man. London re-crafted this figure for his role of the children’s show host of Cartoon Corners and aligned this interpretation with his own background, talents, and personality. London did not engage in the kind of slapstick, pseudo-violent humor often utilized by other child-men hosts such as Soupy Sales and Bill Britten. Rather, Mr. London’s physical comedy was gentle and in keeping
with his self-deprecating, low-key demeanor; a box of confetti falling on his head during the opening song was the extent of the physical humor in which he engaged.\textsuperscript{42} He treated the children on-stage in a respectful manner. In his direct address to the children at home he used standard and grammatically correct English. He did not invoke a fictive kinship. His characterization of “Gene London” drew upon his low status as an overworked and underpaid clerk who was unassertive and emotional—characteristics stereotypically ascribed as feminine. “Gene London” was a liminal adult straddling the worlds of adulthood and childhood as well as those of masculinity and femininity.

In the show, the character “Gene London” was childlike in his playfulness and eagerness to engage in make-believe. Gene escaped the grocery store’s work-a-day drudgery through imaginative play, storytelling, and art that he engaged in with the children at the General Store and the children at home. While London created his own unique persona, he was not alone in utilizing the mask of “child-man.” Several children’s entertainers used this guise to operate on different layers of meaning and to different purposes, such the aforementioned Soupy Sales and, in then later in the 1980s, Pee-wee Herman. These actors adopted the child-man persona in a satiric way to create a performance that would appeal to both adults and children. London’s performance, however, was not ironic or satiric. He drew upon the tradition of childlike low status of his character to project sincerity and warmth and to engage in relationship building with the child viewers. London’s carefully crafted persona served a twofold purpose: to connect with the child viewer by projecting child-like sensibilities and also to reinforce the notion that he was a safe child-companion, above suspicion or reproach, because of

\textsuperscript{42} Like his television contemporary, Fred Rogers, Gene London was opposed to television violence in any form in children’s programming.
his projected liminality. However, this foolish, downtrodden, inept child-like clerk was an adult male and the performance was at odds with conventional notions of Cold War masculinity. With his aura of sexual and worldly innocence, London represented a queered display of manhood which troubled heteronormative stereotypes of the era. As with Ms. Starr and her non-normative display of femininity cloaked in the protective mythos of the American West, Mr. London became conflated in the public consciousness with his character “Gene London’s” and his non-normative display of masculinity cloaked in the mythos of the Chaplinesque “little fellow.” Also, as with Ms. Starr, Mr. London was a very popular local children’s show host whose sexuality was the object of adult speculation.

The actual sexual orientation of Mr. London or Ms. Starr is not the purview of this discussion. What is pertinent is the paradox that these entertainers were simultaneously embraced and held-suspect by the adult gatekeepers of children’s television in the Delaware Valley. This is all the more paradoxical since during the Cold War era, a time of rigid social conformity, homosexuality was viewed as deviant, subversive, and amoral (Spigel, Welcome to the Dreamhouse 92). During the 1950s and 1960s it was also considered a mental disorder. Members of the gay and lesbian community could be institutionalized and lobotomized. With homosexuality outlawed in every state, one gay man who lived through the era discussed the dangers of being “outed”: “There was no such thing as coming out or being out. The very idea of being out was ludicrous” (Skiba Speaking Out). The next section will examine whether televised performances such as Mr. London’s which presented non-normative masculinity in a positive light, serve to negotiate a more progressive and expanded definition of
The Cold War, Gender, and Sexuality

There were a lot of faux-gay men around in the early days of television...some of them were really gay...In the sixties and seventies, even kiddie shows seemed gay, although the Liberace Syndrome saved many children and their parents from realizing it. One of the local television kiddie-show hosts in Philadelphia, Gene London, used to draw, tell stories, and cry. He later went on to collect Hollywood ball gowns. (Crimmons 145)

In post-World War II America homosexuality was pathologized and criminalized. It was unsafe both legally and professionally to be openly identified as gay. As such, the act of assessing statistically how the LGBT community participated in the early television industry presents a research challenge. In the dozen interviews I conducted, only one participant self-identified as gay and was willing to openly discussing the discrimination encountered personally as well as by the gay and lesbian community at large in the industry’s early days. I would note that this reticence by the participants now in their eighties and nineties to discuss these matters is understandable given the era which they came of age and the injustices that they experienced.

In Alternate Channels historian Steven Capsuto (former Head Archivist of the LGBT Archives at the William Way Center in Philadelphia) chronicles the participation of the LGBT community both in front of and behind the camera from the industry’s
founding thorough to the late the 1990s. Capsuto notes that, according to the industry
insiders that he interviewed from the early era, it was generally known that most (if not
all) of the shows had gay and lesbian members on their creative teams (22). Since in the
1940s and 1950s homosexuality was a crime and “in the public imagination” equated
with perversion and communism, gays and lesbians in the industry were “invisible” (3).

Few gays or lesbian characters were presented as relatable in early television. For
the most part homosexuals were portrayed as either objects of derision (e.g., an effete
“sissy” like Ernie Kovac’s Percy Dovetonsils or the effeminate wrestling villain George
Wagner as “Gorgeous George) or as psychopaths (like the lesbian sniper in an episode of
*The Asphalt Jungle*) (Capsuto, 44). There were the occasional exceptions. In a 1954 NBC
broadcast a critically acclaimed adaptation of the popular Broadway play *Lady in the
Dark* (book by Moss Hart, music by Kurt Weill and lyrics by Ira Gershwin). The male
lead of this musical is a gay photographer and is presented in a positive/sympathetic light
(Capsuto 18). Overwhelmingly, however, depictions of homosexuality on commercial
television reflected postwar sensibilities: homosexuality was deviant; and non-normative
displays of gender roles were suspect as possible indicators of such deviance.

Through the 1950s and 1960s Cold War America struggled with definitions of
masculinity and femininity and conflicts between traditional and more progressive
notions of gender were negotiated in popular culture. In *Men in the Middle: Searching for
Masculinity in the 1950s* James Gilbert notes that while the popular culture of the era was
“populated by icons of military men, sports figures, and cowboy heroes,” it was also an
era rife with contradictions and conflicts about what constituted “manhood” (7). Those
conflicts were represented in books, film and commercial television. Many World War II
vets would become the first in their families to receive a college degree and work in a white-colored job. The exodus to the suburbs and the Levittowns of the land and the ensuing concerns and anxieties which emanated from these changes were dramatized in popular culture. The critically acclaimed Academy Award winning film, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), centered on the plight of the returning GIs and their attempts to adjust to their peace-time lives. Magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies’ Home Journal* provided advice to women on how to navigate the domestic lifestyle of the suburban landscape. Fiction and non-fiction bestsellers like *The Organization Man* (1956) and *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1955) explored issues like individuality, conformity, and contemporary middle-class morality.

Television, as the era’s newest mass medium, was also part of this public discourse and was a discourse that not only included the content of the shows but also the very nature of the programming day. Following in the footsteps of radio, the television broadcast day was segmented by program managers according to the age and sex of the anticipated viewer. The formats of the shows at the various times of day reflected the era’s traditional gender stereotypes. In the evening there were sitcoms like *Leave It to Beaver* (CBS, 1957-1961) and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (ABC, 1952-1966). These shows, which typically featured a white-collar dad, a stay at home mom, and respectful yet “spunky” children, provided both family friendly entertainment and also served as visual templates for an aspirational suburban lifestyle.43 During the day, sandwiched between the morning and dinner-time children’s shows, were programs aimed at female viewers such as soap operas (broadcast by the networks) as well as

43 There were of course exceptions that centered on working-class families such as *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956) and *The Life of Riley* (1953-1958).
locally produced cooking shows. Like the “soaps,” the local cooking shows were popular with their target audience. The shows typically had female hosts who would demonstrate tips, techniques, and recipes using the sponsor’s products.\textsuperscript{44} Sports broadcasts, which were an important component in popularizing television after the War, were targeted at a male audience relaxing in the evenings and on the weekends. Early print ads for television sets frequently depicted athletes or men and boys watching sporting events.\textsuperscript{45} The networks also pioneered the talk/news/entertainment morning show, The features on the shows were timed to appeal to the various audience members expected to be watching: news at the beginning of the program for the men on their way to work; domestic features for the women; and entertainment for children such and then puppets, crafts and crafts, etc. for children.

Examples of this format during this early period include: NBC’s nationally broadcast \textit{The Today Show} which premiered in 1952 with host Dave Garroway; Shari Lewis’s \textit{Hi Mom!} (1957-1960) which was a production of New York’s local NBC affiliate WNBC; and \textit{Breakfast Time} with “Wee” Willie Webber on Philadelphia’s WFIL (1956-1963). This framework for these talk/entertainment shows is still evidenced in all three network morning shows: \textit{Today}, ABC’s \textit{Good Morning America}, and CBS’s \textit{CBS This Morning}. I argue that the deep-structure of the television viewing experience, as evidenced by a programming day, was one that was not only highly gendered but was

\textsuperscript{44} One of the first regularly scheduled cooking shows in the United States was “Television Kitchen” which debuted on Philadelphia’s WPTZ in 1949. The host was Florence Hanford, Philadelphia Electric Company’s supervisor of Home Economics.

\textsuperscript{45} As with many milestones, Philadelphia was an early entrant in sports television broadcasting. While media historians point to a 1939 baseball game between Columbia and Princeton as the first televised American sporting event on NBC, in 1940 WPTZ quickly followed suit and inaugurated its broadcasts of University of Pennsylvania’s home football games. According to the Broadcast Pioneers Archive that represents the oldest continuous televised sporting event in broadcast history.
also one laden with cultural messages regarding masculinity and femininity in America.

While programs intended for child viewership were slotted at specific times the child, nonetheless, had access to a variety of formats throughout the broadcast day such as Westerns, adventure series, dramatic anthology series, sit-coms, and variety shows. They also had access to non-narrative formats such as sports, news, talk and game shows. While evening programs were produced by the three networks and the shows broadcast from early morning to after the evening news were produced by the local affiliates. With very few exceptions, on both the national and local levels, the shows that were hosted were hosted by males. The male leads of many of the scripted shows of the 1950s and 1960s presented traditional paradigms of American (the cowboys, policemen and detectives, and adventurers). Gilbert notes, however, that on both the big and little screens contradictory versions of American manhood were available: “boys were equally attracted to donning a Davy Crockett coonskin cap and the garish pastels worn by Elvis Presley This was never entirely John Wayne’s world anymore than it ever belonged to Liberace (8).”

Gilbert states that Golden Age family sit-coms, such as *Ozzie and Harriet*, can be read as much more than just a Cold War suburban comedy of manners. He theorizes that domesticated, compassionate fathers such as Ozzie performed a therapeutic function; these compassionate dramatized the negotiations about gender in postwar America (139).

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46 The Loretta Young Show (NBC, 1953 – 1961) was the first and also the longest-running anthology series to have a woman host. “The successful format and style or The Loretta Young Show spurred other similar shows. Jane Wyman Theater (1955-58), The DuPont Show with June Allyson (1959-61), and The Barbara Stanwyck Show (1960-61) were prime-time network series that attempted to capitalize on the Young’s success. Similar syndicated series included Ethel Barrymore Theater (1953), Crown Theater with Gloria Swanson (1954), and Ida Lupino Theater (1956)” (Museum of Broadcast Communications Encyclopedia, http://www.museum.tv/eotv/lorettayoung.htm). Women game show hosts were even scarcer until the 1970s. One exception was *Think Fast* (ABC, 1949 – 1950) which was hosted by Gypsy Rose Lee after the inaugural host, Mason Gross left the show (Timberg, 250-251).
Television families like the Nelsons “confronted the social problems of family transformation in the 1950s and especially the unresolved tension between possible versions of masculinity” (143). Gilbert notes that the popular culture of the 1950s was not monolithic with regard to gender stereotypes and that “there were and are many ‘1950s’ (1). Television had male protagonists that were of the heroic tradition of American masculinity (particularly evidenced in Westerns) as well as more nuanced and progressive portrayals modern men such as the democratic and domesticated fathers in family sit-coms.

Similar to these domesticated dads, the character “Gene London” challenged some of the era’s cultural expectations of American masculinity with his extreme gentleness, emotionality, and nurturing nature. Unlike the Ozzie Nelsons of prime time, however, Gene was further queered in his show he was not only a single adult male but one inept at heterosexual relationships. According to Spigel: “individuals who chose personal paths that did not include marriage and parenthood risked being received as perverted,’ (Spigel, Welcome to the Dreamhouse 92). I would argue that the strength of Mr. London’s performance and his ability to secure a strong parasocial relationship with both the Philadelphia viewing area indemnified him as being perceived as a security risk. Since this persona of “Gene London” was so closely related to the actor and since it was rooted in Mr. London’s professional background and education, some biographical details are needed to give context to an analysis of his performance.

**Gene London and “Gene London”**
Eugene Yulish (“Gene London”) was born June 9, 1931 in Cleveland, Ohio. London frequently recounts in interviews that his interest in the glamour of Hollywood dates back to his childhood in Cleveland. While his brothers were interested in sports, Gene was fascinated with “playing with dolls” and with going to the movies with his mother (Strauss “From TV Star to Fashion Czar”), According to Mr. London his father was a grocer and his mother an aspiring actress (she had wanted to be in the Ziegfeld Follies. “She saw in me the spark of drama… so little Eugene was destined to fall in love with the movies” (Strauss “From TV Star to Fashion Czar”),

While his brothers played ball, he dressed in his Sunday best and went with his mother to matinees, where he would weep his “heart out” during Bette Davis movies. Driving home, they'd pass by the city's mansions - pretending that movie stars lived in them - and talk about the films they'd seen, “about Bette Davis and her makeup and her hair and her clothes and the situation and why I wept. Mom was touched and wept with me…I adored the movie stars, as Mom did,” he added. “I knew one day I'd be a movie star and live in a mansion. I knew I wanted to be rich.” (Strauss “From TV Star to Fashion Czar”)

According to the Broadcast Pioneers archive, in 1944 London’s family moved from Cleveland to Miami Beach where later he would attend the University of Miami as a theater major. At the University, London studied puppetry. In the early 1950s he: “changed his name, got his teeth capped and had a nose job to look more ‘star like’” (Strauss “From TV Star to Fashion Czar”). He then moved to New York to pursue a
career in television and adopted the last name “London.” He worked as a puppeteer on the nationally broadcast science fiction themed children’s show: *Johnny Jupiter* (Dumont Network 1953 and ABC 1953-1954.) When the series moved to ABC he was cast as the character of “Reject the Robot.” In a Broadcast Pioneer interview London stated that the robot was so named because he was a factory reject: “He was kind of a sweet robot, which was perfect for me” (Broadcast Pioneers “Reject the Robot”), Reject could only be seen by the star of the show, Ernest P. Duckweather (Wright King) who was a janitor at a television repair shop.

In the 1950s London was also a puppeteer on several of Shari Lewis’s local New York shows including: *Facts N’ Fun* (WBNT, 1953), *Kartoon Klub* (WPIX, 1954-1956); and the news and entertainment show *Hi, Mom!* (WRCA, 1957-1959.) In late 1956, London was cast in the role of Tom the Tinker on WABC’s (New York) *Tinker’s Workshop* (1954-1959) a show created by Bob Keeshan. Keeshan originally starred in the show as a kindly old toymaker who worked in a magical shop. When Keeshan left to go on to *Captain Kangaroo*, London was one of a number of actors who assumed the role. According to London, he re-envisioned the role in that Keeshan played the character as an elderly grandfather-type and London played him as a young, friendly, “big-brother.” London has stated that his recreation of the role was extremely popular with the audience—so much so that he was invited to appear on a “Tinker Tom” float in the

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48 An example of *Johnny Jupiter* is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHgpw5bxyh8. Mr. Yulish used the stage name “Philip London for this show.
50 Opening Credit available https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibdtNcsa_wU. It was for this show that Ms. Lewis introduced her most popular characters: Lamb Chop, Charlie Horse, and Hush Puppy.
Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. In 1958 he departed due to creative differences with the show’s producer (Broadcast Pioneers “Gene London”). Dom Deluise replaced London in the role; the show ended shortly afterwards. London’s professional work in New York also included appearances on the Today Show. His segments on the show were aimed at child viewers and included puppetry and seasonal arts-and-craft projects. His work on these children’s shows, as both an actor and a puppeteer, would prove influential on the shows that he would later develop for WCAU-Philadelphia.

During early 1950s, Gene London worked at a Summerdale Day Camp in Bristol, Pennsylvania (a suburb of Philadelphia) as a camp counselor where he taught, arts and crafts and puppetry. Mr. London credits the owners of the camp, Sam and Ruth Browne, as mentors. It was they who encouraged him to audition at one of the one of the Philadelphia’s television affiliates after his departure from Tinker’s Workshop. He had an entrée with the local NBC affiliate (WRCV) through his relationship with Dave Garroway, host of Today. In a 2015 interview, London recounts the show’s “origin story”:

London’s pursuits led him to WRCV-TV, as Channel 3 was called when it owned by NBC in the 1950s. The general manager liked London’s show and said he would book it.

“He said he would call me in 30 days,” London recalled. “He didn’t. After 31 days, I called him. We had a meeting, and he could not give me a start date. I

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51 Mr. Browne was a locally famous high school basketball coach. In addition to Mr. London, former Temple University basketball coach John Cheney also has cited Mr. Browne as a mentor and father figure (Acker, “Samuel R. Brown, 82, Coach and Mentor”),
called Jack Snyder at WCAU. He told me to come right over. I took a bus from 16th and Walnut to City Line. Mr. Snyder told me to do, on the spot, what I had in mind. He’d interrupt and call in someone from programming. He’d interrupted again and call in someone from sales. They all said, ‘Hire him. He’ll make us a million.” (Zoren “Former Kid-Show Host”)

In interviews London often describes, in detail, the story of this interview with Jack Snyder, specifically the emotional impact that his storytelling and artistic skill had on the adult staffers at WCAU:

So I took a piece of paper and drew on it. I was always a good artist and told him Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Then I told the story to his secretaries in the outer hall. Then he rang all the buzzers and the whole building was in his office, and by the third time I told Snow White they were cheering and clapping, and I was almost carried out of his office. (Broadcast Pioneers “Gene London”)

Snyder gave London a one-hour, Saturday morning show, Cartoon Corners which proved extremely popular with advertisers and audiences alike (Broadcast Pioneers “Gene London”), London was on the air at WCAU from 1959 until 1979 with various time slots, name changes and differing formats, including a daily morning show.

After his show’s cancellation Mr. London reinvented himself as a fashion designer/consultant/curator in New York. He credits film great, Joan Crawford, with sparking his interest in professional costume curation and collecting. There are several
versions of how Mr. London met Ms. Crawford but the most plausible has to do with an appearance by Crawford on a WCAU talk show, “Betty Hughes and Friends,” hosted by former New Jersey First Lady Betty Hughes. During his run at the station Mr. London had begun acquiring a personal collection of wardrobe pieces from television and film stars. London recounts his meeting Crawford on the set of the Hughes show (late 1960s/early 1970s):

It was an amazing occasion…I remember the letter Joan sent with her conditions for an appearance. The dressing room had to be painted pink. It had to have fresh flowers of a specific kind. The studio must be kept ice cold.” After Crawford left Hughes’ set, London approached her with one of the garments he purchased, so she could autograph it. “That’s not mine,” Crawford said. “My clothing is all handmade. This is machine stitched. You were duped when you purchased this.” Crawford did not leave in a huff. She asked for London’s telephone number. The next day, he received a curt call that Crawford was sending a trunk of her unwanted clothing to him, so he would have something authentic. From that encounter, friendship grew. “Joan maintained her persona most of the time we met, but I cherish some late-night conversations, when Joan had had a little to drink, when she spoke about everything and revealed much about herself.” (Zoren “Former Kid-Show Host”)

Over the past few decades London has become a well-known collector and exhibitor of

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52 According to Jane Norman it was to make room in the schedule for this show that *Pixanne* was cancelled.
Hollywood costumes. His collections of original and recreated movie gowns and vintage memorabilia has been shown at various venues including the Reading Public Museum in Pennsylvania (2002 and 2009), the Showboat Casino, Atlantic City (2002), and at the Philadelphia Flower Show (2015). Currently, Mr. London continues to exhibit and curate costumes; he splits his between his residences in the greater Philadelphia area (Reading) and Florida.

Clearly the personal histories of the hosts were influential in the development of the personas each used in their respective shows. Many hosts, like interviewees Sally Starr and Jane Norman, drew upon their educational and/or professional backgrounds; so did Gene London. It is interesting to note that the hosts of WCAU’s most popular children’s shows, *Pixanne* and *The Gene London Show*, were both not only theatrically trained and college-educated but also chronologically were members of what has become to be known as the “Silent Generation” (1925-1945); i.e. the cohort who experienced childhood during World War II. Additionally, London and Norman were the first generation of young, college-educated professionals who launched their professional careers in the media of television whereas many children show hosts were recruited from radio and stage. Notable children’s television entertainers who fit this profile include: Shari Lewis (who attended Barnard), Bob Keeshan (who attended Fordham), and Fred Rogers (Rollins College and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary). I would argue that this cohort, the first group based professionally in the media of television, were especially savvy to the medium’s visual aesthetic and storytelling capabilities. Fred Rogers is often quoted about the power of television including his memorable speech advocating funding
for PBS before the United States Senate Subcommittee on Communications in 1969.\textsuperscript{53}

In the creation of his show Gene London fully utilized his experience in puppetry, storytelling, and art. For his persona of “Gene London,” the humble employee of the Scrooge-like Mr. Dibley (the running joke was that Gene was only paid three-and-a-half cents a week), London drew upon the tradition of the “child-man,” the loveable, childlike male—sexually innocent and humorously adrift with regard to stereotypically adult male competencies such as career and relationships. In the section which follows I will explore the stagecraft used to develop his character of the child-man “Gene London”—waif-like clerk and host.

\textbf{The Stagecraft of Cartoon Corners}

Mr. London was in his late twenties when \textit{Cartoon Corners} began its run. The actor had boyish good looks, a soft, well-modulated speaking voice, and a gentle demeanor which facilitated the warm and friendly interactions with both the children at home and on the set. By the time he arrived in Philadelphia he had nearly ten years’ worth of experience working as a television children’s entertainer. Much of \textit{Cartoon Corners} had its origins in the work that he did on those shows from the personas of the main character, the costumes, and the sets. “Gene,” the humble grocery store clerk was akin in demeanor and delivery to both Wright King as Ernest, humble television repair shop clerk in \textit{Johnny}

\textsuperscript{53} See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXEuEUQIP3Q. The clip ends with Committee Chair John Pastore stating regarding Rogers’ statement: “I think it's wonderful. Looks like you just earned the $20 million.”
Jupiter and London’s portrayal of big-brother-like Tinker Tom.\textsuperscript{54} There was also a similarity to the frame of the storylines. Gene at Cartoon Corners worked for an irascible boss, Mr. Dibley, and pined for Mr. Dibley’s daughter, Debbie. Ernest work for an irascible boss, Mr. Frisby, and pined for Frisby’s daughter Katherine. While these previous television experiences informed his new show for WCAU he was able to create a fresh permutation of these storylines and characterizations which uniquely showcased both his engaging personality and his expertise as artist and storyteller.

The Art of Storytelling and Audience Engagement

Gene London has frequently stated in interviews that one of his favorite features on Cartoon Corners was storytelling. London, an accomplished and talented storyteller, portrayed all the characters in the tales he told through gesture and voice. In an interview for a local PBS documentary he stated:

The art of storytelling is so wonderful … that one person can be an orchestra … a crew all the actors and make words come to life… there should be more of the on television…more of that at in school; more of that in home life … let’s bring the story back. (Gene London quoted in Philly’s Favorite Kid Show Hosts WHYY)

In these segments Mr. London would use several techniques to frame and present the tale. He would begin with the “Let’s Pretend” song based on the theme of Nila Mack’s Peabody Award winning children’s radio show which ran from 1934 to 1954.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} Note that Mr. London’s father ran a grocery store as well.
\textsuperscript{55} The lyrics rewritten for Cartoon Corners:
The storytelling would take place in front of the Magic Window (a rear projection screen that displaying the line drawings that Mr. London had created to illustrate the story.) His delivery was animated and emotive (he was well-known for crying as he told a tale) and it was perfectly pitched to engage the attention and imagination of his young viewers. There was also an educational component to these segments. He exposed the child audience to light classical music (used in the background) and the breadth of the material ranged from familiar Grimm fairy tales to ancient mythology to international folk tales. Although the story segments were for entertainment purposes the seriousness and intentionality with which he crafted them was evident.

London’s storytelling abilities are also on display in the educational shorts produced as a public service by WCAU and shown on weekend mornings. The Peabody Archives has available on hour-long special, “The Wonderful World of Sound,” starring Mr. London which introduces children to the world of music by presenting a sampler of genres. The description from the Peabody catalog record states:

The wonder of sound is explored here through composed and improvised song, program music and music composed for children. Philadelphia's popular children's performer, Gene London, presides over an hour featuring members of the Philadelphia Orchestra, a ballet composed and commissioned for television,

Let's pretend that its story time and I'll tell a tale to you.
I'll tell you a story of make believe
And all your dreams will come true.
And when the story's over
And when we reach the end
We'll live happily ever after, where?
In the land of “Let's Pretend.”
folk singer Ed McCurdy, The Columbus Boychoir [sic], and young musicians.

(Peabody Archives)

A particularly interesting children’s special by London from the cultural perspective of the Age of Nuclear Anxiety is “You and the Atom.”\textsuperscript{56} The show was produced in 1961, a year of increasing Cold War tensions including a mounting crisis with the Soviet Union in Germany which ended with the construction of the Berlin Wall as well as the Bay of Pigs debacle in Cuba. In the special, co-produced by the Atomic Energy Commission, Mr. London’s dialogue and body language are perfectly orchestrated to tell the tale to a child audience of how the power of the atom can be used for peaceful purposes.\textsuperscript{57} The show is mainly comprised of London seated on a set made to resemble a research lab speaking directly to the child at home about atomic energy. As the show opens London greets his viewers and addresses the ever-present specter of nuclear annihilation:

Hello! Kind of a surprise? Well it’s a surprise to me as well…Have you ever heard about the atom? My guess is that you have ... seen pictures of it in magazines, television and in the movies…The atomic bomb a great weapon of destruction. (Reading Public Museum)

This dialogue is delivered in his usual soft-spoken way, but his delivery is halting and

\textsuperscript{56} See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CoM4dwyAg4.
\textsuperscript{57} See Fig. 4.9 for a screen shot of the opening credits. The placard shows a family and a line drawing of an atomic molecule. In the film a young boy steps inside of the atomic structure and smiles.
shy. He fidgets with his fingers and casts down his eyes. This stagecraft allows him to telegraph to the children at home that he shares their anxieties about the images they have seen of atomic destruction. In the next section, however, his tone becomes become upbeat, he straightens up, he smiles, and uses his hands to illustrate his speech:

But the atom can be used for good too ... have you ever heard about a ship, a submarine that can go far beneath the seas an atomic submarine …well that too is powered by the atom. Power for good by the atom! These are amazing times we live in! (Reading Public Museum)

This short segment illustrates both the power of London’s storytelling and his use of a performance strategy designed to make an alarming reality non-threatening, positive, and understandable for a young viewer. His deliberate use of the child-man serves several purposes in this context. First, he mirrors the perceived anxieties that a child viewer may be experiencing since the bomb dominated popular culture at the time. Secondly, he models a hopeful mindset for the child as he talks about “atoms for peace.” He accomplishes this with an elegant economy of body language, facial expression, and tone of voice. This particular piece also illustrates the concept of the host as Winnicottian transitional object. In this instance the internal/external paradox faced by the child viewer was the conflict between his day-to-day personal experience of familial safety and the apocalyptic scenarios prevalent in popular discourse. London provides the child viewer with an alternate scenario that reconciles these competing realities. Nuclear anxieties and threats of war are reframed in terms of progress and protection.
While these specials focused on Mr. London as a narrator speaking with his at-home child audience, his regular programs featured an on-set audience comprised of large groups of children. Unlike some other Philadelphia children’s hosts (e.g., Ms. Starr and Ms. Norman), Mr. London did have a peanut gallery at Cartoon Corners. Over the two decades that the show was broadcast the placement of the children changed from being on-set throughout the show to being seated stadium style and called upon to be on-set. At Cartoon Corners the children gathered around Mr. London chattering and interacting with him as well as interrupting him. As evidenced from this clip these groups of children were reflective of the racial diversity of Philadelphia at the time. London hosted school groups, clubs, and Boy and Girl Scouts. He was skilled at balancing attention to the home viewer and the on-set child through body language (i.e., playfully putting an empty box on a giggling child’s head) to gentle directions on where to stand, sit, or to quiet down for story time, to frequent direct address to the cameras for the child watching at home. The female hosts Ms. Norman and Ms. Starr choose not to have an on-set audience to enhance the experience of intimacy between the adult performer and the child at home. Both of these hosts stated that theirs was a conscious decision to engage the viewer in a one-to-one conversation. Mr. London and several other Philadelphia hosts from this era (e.g., Happy the Clown and “Uncle” Pete Boyle) incorporated a child audience into the format of the show. In Cartoon Corners Mr. London was surrounded by children and through direct address the child-at-home was made to feel part of the group welcome at Cartoon Corners.

58 See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CoM4dwyAg4
59 In the weekday Gene London Show Mr. London did not have a “peanut gallery” but often had children visit or perform as part of the show.
Mr. London also made use of his professional background in puppetry. For several years on his show Mr. London performed a cartoon-length puppet segment, “Simon C. Serpent,” which featured the antics of a sweet gentle sea serpent and his friend (a clip of which is available on the Peabody Awards Web site). As the show continued into the 1970s, London dropped the puppet and moved into action-oriented storylines. These frequently involved a mystery at the Old Quigley Mansion (in the geography of Cartoon Corners the mansion was located next to the General Store and accessed through a secret tunnel) and parodies of popular movies such as The Planet of the Apes.

Sets and Costumes

As with Pixanne, WCAU invested in quality production values for Cartoon Corners. The set for the show was that of a turn-of-the-century store complete with a large and ornate cash register and a pot-bellied stove. The set harkened the “nostalgic Americana” popular in the late 1950s and utilized by Walt Disney in the construction of the Disneyland’s Main Street (M. King 116.) London often cites Disney as an influencer of his art and his aspiration of being a Disney illustrator. He frequently showed Disney cartoon-shorts on the show. As explored by cultural historians such as Englehardt, Sammond, and May, this Cold war nostalgia for a lost ethos in America was visually represented on television through Westerns, shows set in idyllic small towns, and Disney nature specials which anthropomorphized animal “families.” London utilized this construct of an idealized American small-town to establish his fantasy playspace for child

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60 http://dbs.galib.uga.edu/cgi-in/parc.cgi?userid=galileo&dbs=parc&ini=parc.ini&action=retrieve&recno=1&format=_citation
61 See, for example, http://articles.mcall.com/1990-11-22/features/2769837_1_golden-fleece-london-first-movie-star
viewers. His costuming, which was blue-collar attire that could place him in any decade of the twentieth century, also contributed to the feeling of “otherness” of the General Store for the child viewers of the Greater Philadelphia area.

The costuming of “child-men” such as Chaplin, Laurel, London, Soupy Sales, and Pee-wee Herman was an important signifier of their adult male liminality. Chaplin’s Tramp wore oversized and slightly tattered clothes and shoes. Soupy Sales sported an oversized bow-tie. Pee-wee Herman sported a too-small suit. The wrong-sizedness of their clothes sets them apart from standard male dress. Another signifier of “otheredness” was hair: Chaplin’s greasepaint moustache; Laurel’s unkempt, bristle-brush coif; and Pee-wee’s slicked back 1950s-era style. London’s use of costume spoke more to class. While his clothing on Cartoon Corners, work shirt and workpants, was conventionally male, it lacked any connotations of an authority figure. Indeed, his attire as, “Gene London,” could be worn by a child or an adult. In contrast, when he hosted the educational specials and stepped out of the Cartoon Corners persona, he wore a suit and tie.

In many ways it is difficult to extricate Gene London, the actor, from “Gene London,” the persona. The persona was closely tied to the person and was an artistic tool that Mr. London used to engage, educate, and entertain his child viewers. London’s paradigm of masculinity was non-normative, but his child-man guise served to endow him with immense popularity and good will which immunized him against criticism during an era when non-normative masculinity was held in suspicion.

**Conclusion**
Admittedly, WCAU host Gene London was not suited to everyone’s taste, but his *Cartoon Corners* program certainly made an impression one way or another. (Hollis 242)

*Cartoon Corners* was cancelled in the late 1970s. The fact that it lasted throughout the decade that saw the disappearance of the format early on is a tribute to the popularity of Mr. London. The trope of the host, including that of the child-man host, has become firmly ingrained in popular culture and examples can be found in shows like *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* (1986-1990), *Blue’s Clues* (1996-2006.) While “Gene London” provides an example of how the guise of sexual innocence can be used as protection. “Pee-wee Herman” is an example of how that expectation of sexual innocence of a fictional character can have career-ending ramifications for the actor in real life. It is a cautionary tale of the conflation of fantasy and reality which reside in the relationship of the host and the viewers and demonstrates the strict boundaries to which the child-man performer needs to adhere.

Paul Reubens, in his persona of Pee-wee Herman, had a highly successful career in television and feature films. In 1991 he was apprehended by local police in an adult movie theater in Sarasota, Florida. The officers stated that the comedian had been observed masturbating during the show; Reubens was charged with indecent exposure. Ultimately, he agreed to a plea bargain and public service work in lieu of a criminal record and jail time. The impact on Reuben’s career was swift and deleterious. Toys R Us removed all Pee-wee Herman merchandise from its shelves and Disney dropped *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* from its line-up (Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse* 185). According to Spigel, the fictional character of Pee-wee Herman (man-child) and the actual adult
Paul Reubens had become conflated in the mind of the (adult) public. While Reubens’s sexuality had long been the subject of gossip and innuendo, his “outing” and the accusations of non-normative sexual behavior were too dissonant with his persona’s child-like innocence. Pee-wee Herman/Paul Reubens as a man-child was accepted in his role of children’s host as long as he inhabited a liminal (read non-sexually active) space in-between childhood and adulthood. The alleged sexual transgressions of an adult, male Paul Reubens/Pee-wee Herman were beyond the pale of acceptance for the parents of the children who were deemed to be his primary viewing public (Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse* 185-186). It should be noted that like many a successful and beloved children’s shows, *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* show enjoyed a dual audience of adults and children. Indeed, the concept for the show was based on Paul Reuben’s night-club act from the early 1980s which featured adult humor and sexual innuendo. Even though the show was a post-modern take on the classic, hosted children’s shows, Paul Reubens as Pee-wee was held to the same standards as the hosts from television’s Golden Age. These hosts were also (in large part) liminal beings navigating the boundaries of “child” and “adult.” Reubens transgressed by crossing the boundary between innocence and knowing. As a result, he and his show were “disappeared” from children’s television.

For the most part, Gene London was able to successfully navigate the terrain of these expectations by staying within these boundaries of innocence on the show. Nonetheless, like Sally Starr, he was the focus of a whisper campaign in the Philadelphia region regarding his sexuality. As evidenced from former viewer comments left on nostalgia Web sites, such as that which opened this chapter, it was “common knowledge” in the Delaware Valley that Mr. London was gay. As with all the Philadelphia children
show hosts that I interviewed Mr. London is very protective of his reputation as a wholesome children’s show host. Speaking engagements and personal appearance bookings are contingent on the good-will and loyalty of the former child viewers as well as the persona he has carefully constructed and maintained for decades.

Nicholas Sammond in his analysis of the *Mickey Mouse Club* states the show was intended to by a “relatively adult-free zone, a clubhouse for kids (345). The adults who populated the clubhouse, Jimmy Dodd and “Big Roy” Wilkins, were “oversized children” (346). This child-man presentation, by Mr. Dodd and Mr. Wilkins on a nationally syndicated show and Mr. London on a locally produced show, was, according to Sammond, reflective of the era’s child-rearing concerns regarding the conformity, authoritarianism, and the counterbalance of imagination and creative play. Regarding this performance of the child-man, Sammond writes that:

> If television were to serve as babysitter as one could expect—one that offered a space for locating and developing skills and interests through free play, monitored by adults whose masquerade as children permitted the illusion of the absence of a constraining cultural authority that might unduly influence a child’s exploration of its natural talents and inclinations. (346)

For over fifty years, Mr. London has remained a paradox in the public imagination of Philadelphians; he is simultaneously an example of queered masculinity and a beloved local icon. In his role of child-man Mr. London was able to successfully serve as a transitional for the child viewers of the era with regard to personal childhood
experiences and the larger cultural anxieties. He was also able to gently push the boundaries of gender stereotypes and expand, in some small way, definitions of televised masculinity.
CHIEF HALFTOWN, RACE, AND NOSTALGIA

He [Chief Halftown] is my inspiration and it gives me great pleasure to tell children that I used to watch a real live Indian on television as a child.

Quotation from former child viewer

*Philly Local Kid Shows*
http://www.tvparty.com/losthalftown.html

**Introduction**

Throughout this analysis of local hosts, I have emphasized that The Philadelphia children’s performers were representative of shows across the United States. This is not the case with Traynor Ora (“Chief”) Halftown (1917-2003). He was unique. As has been noted, the composition of the industry’s participants, both in front of and behind the cameras, was almost exclusively white and mostly male. While there was a diversity of the kinds of personas and the formats of the shows, there was virtually no ethnic or racial diversity among the performers themselves. Consequently, the hosts that I have analyzed thus far have all been white. Mr. Halftown, a Seneca Indian by ancestry, was the only non-white children’s show hosts of this era in Philadelphia and only one of two non-white hosts in the nation in the 1950s.62 His non-white identity and his ethnic and cultural presentation of an American minority were integral in his performance and his pursuit of forging a successful parasocial relationship with his viewing audience. In this analysis of Mr. Halftown, I will be reading his performance as a text reflecting national anxieties

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62 The other American Indian host, Timm Williams, had a show which only ran for one season in 1958 at San Francisco’s KQED. Mr. Halftown’s show lasted five decades.
regarding race in postwar America and how his performance contributed to expanding understandings of race for his Philadelphia audience.

Every local host used various performance techniques to craft a parasocial relationship with the child viewer and to promote him/herself as an acceptable, appealing, and trustworthy adult television friend to the community at large. Adult men cloaked or coded their masculinity by presenting themselves as harmless and/or foolish uncles, clowns, and child-men or used stereotypical hero models from American popular culture like cowboys and spacemen. The women similarly downplayed their adult female sexuality under the guise of “aunties” and fairy tale characters. As such television hosts were liminal characters who straddled social constructions of gender and class. Mr. Halftown’s liminality was situated in constructions of race prevalent in Cold War America. I will explore how he carefully balanced his use of recognizable Indian tropes with his own values and beliefs to achieve an acceptance of his non-white identity. He did this through a combination personality, charisma, and stagecraft. As Philadelphia’s only non-white television friend Mr. Halftown successfully established a parasocial relationship with the Philadelphia viewing area that endured on-air for fifty years.

In this chapter I will provide historical and cultural background for my reading of Mr. Halftown and his performance as “Chief.” After a brief biography highlighting his evolution as children’s show host, I will situate race within the fledgling television industry in general and specifically within the WFIL-Channel 6 (Mr. Halftown’s employer). I discuss the figure of “The Indian” as it relates to American popular culture and particularly how whites have historically appropriated “Indianness” in a quest to forge an “authentic” American identity. This quest for identity, along with anxieties and
concerns regarding race relations were at the forefront of public discourse after World War II. Next, I contrast the rise and fall of two other well-known Indian performers, Timm Williams and Iron Eyes Cody, contemporaries of Mr. Halftown, who also contributed to children’s television. I do so to highlight how Halftown’s acceptance by his audience was firmly rooted in terms of personal authenticity as well as his ability to portray the role of Indian based viewer expectations. I examine how race was portrayed in the content of the local shows—i.e., in the short features and the cartoons. These shorts which frequently utilized derogatory racial and ethnic caricatures and stereotypes. Finally, I will analyze how through the strength of his performance Halftown mitigated these presentations of cultural racism and gave his viewers a richer and more progressive understanding of non-white ethnicity.

**Traynor Ora “Chief” Halftown: Philadelphia’s “Genuine” Indian**

Authenticity is the longtime TV star’s [Halftown’s] stock in trade ... he’s the real thing.

Don Beideman, from 11August1991 interview in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (3-DC)

Traynor Ora Halftown was born and raised in upstate New York (Jamestown). His mother and father were from nearby Seneca reservations; respectively Cattaragus in New York state and the historic Cornplanter Reservation in Pennsylvania (Phillyxpat\(^\text{63}\) “The Two Chief Halftowns”).\(^\text{64}\) Mr. Halftown’s father and grandfather were entertainers and

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\(^\text{63}\) Phillyxpat is the author of a lengthy post on the web site *Philadelphia Speaks*. The author compiled a scrapbook of clippings from New York and Pennsylvania newspaper chronicling the careers of Ora Halftown (father) and Traynor Ora Halftown (son).

\(^\text{64}\) The Cornplanter reservation, which dated back to revolutionary times, was submerged as part of the...
athletes. Mr. Halftown stated that his grandfather was a Seneca medicine man who toured with Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show (Stefanovich “Ees Da Sa Sussaway”), His father, Ora Halftown, was a noted professional middleweight boxer. Ora Halftown (Traynor’s father) was a student at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School where he played football under “Pop” Warner (Phillyxpat “The Two Chief Halftowns”). The school’s records indicate that when the Ora Halftown left Carlisle he joined the Navy and served on the USS Rhode Island (1913 - 1914). In 1916, at the start of his boxing career, Ora Halftown was profiled for a local paper. The writer noted: “Halftown … is one the most interesting talkers one would care to meet. He speaks perfect English, dresses up to the minute, is cultured and affable” (Phillyxpat “The Two Chief Halftowns”). Katie Halftown, Traynor Ora’s mother, was a traditional, stay-at-home mother/caregiver. In an interview Traynor reminisced: “I had marvelous parents …[but] mother didn’t like reservation life as a young woman” so the family moved to the city (Phillyxpat “The Two Chief Halftowns”).

Traynor Ora Halftown attended Jamestown High School. In interviews he has stated that as a youth he was a pin-setter in a local bowling alley and that he would also work odd-jobs for the circuses that came through town. His singing career began during his high school years. As the “Singing Seneca” he appeared with big bands such as Buddy Wilson’s when they performed at nearby venues (Broadcast Pioneers “Chief construction of the Kinzua Dam construction project in 1965 and the remaining inhabitants were relocated to Salamanca, New York.

65 Mr. Halftown’s father fought under the name of Chief Halftown. His boxing career that extended from 1916 to 1926 (Baker Title Town USA, 66)
66 Glenn Scobey “Pop” Warner the legendary football coach founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School team in the early 1900s.
68 Buddy Wilson was well-known African American band leader popular in the 1940s and 1950s.
Halftown”). He attended Canisius College in Buffalo where he played collegiate football. The Buffalo Courier Express ran a profile piece about him as a collegiate football player and described Traynor as the “young Chief Halftown”:

[He is] son of a Cattaragus Indian who gained considerable fame as a middleweight boxer some years ago. Young Halftown is an inch over six feet, weighs 185 pounds… P.S.—He sings with a band, too but don’t rib him about it. He's a chip off the old block, quite handy. (Phillyxpat “The Two Chief Halftowns”)

During World War II Traynor was stationed at an Army base near Carlisle, Pennsylvania where he was a member of an armed-forces inter-state championship bowling team. After his discharge in 1946 he had difficulty finding work as an entertainer. In interviews Halftown would recount that by 1949 he was ready to accept a full-time job as a toll-taker on the Pennsylvania Turnpike when he received an offer from WDAS, a Philadelphia radio station, as a DJ:

“I had an offer from [radio station] WDAS to be a DJ in 1949,” said Halftown, a 6-foot-3 a gentle bear of a man. “Grady and Hurst [two longtime Philadelphia disc jockeys] were already doing their bit. In a year, the station was sold and went to a classical music format. I was out of a job.” (Beideman 3-DC)

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69 Mr. Halftown was a talented semi-professional bowler. In the late 1950s, he played on a team in Philadelphia’s civic league. In the 1957-1958 season his team won the league title. New Brunswick Bowling hired his as a spokesperson and designated him as part of their “pro-staff” (Broadcast Pioneers “Chief Halftown”).
He pitched the idea of a children’s show to the Philadelphia ABC affiliate WFIL—one in which he would serve as an American Indian host. He would not only introduce the features and also familiarize the young viewers with Indian lore and culture.\footnote{As with many of the “origin stories” verification of names and dates is often difficult to verify. In the Beiderman interview (3-DC) Mr. Halftown states that he co-created the show with Dick Strome who was a performer, specifically a puppeteer, and a programming executive at WFIL-TV. Neither Broadcast Pioneers nor any of my interviewees has any additional information about Mr. Strome.} In an interview with Broadcast Pioneers Halftown stated:

I had no idea what it would come to, but I vowed that I would be myself. I wouldn't talk like a Hollywood Indian. I was surprised at the success of the show. …I made it clear that I was an Indian and no one was to tell me how to be an Indian. I was always disturbed that in the movies, you never saw an Indian laugh. Go into an Indian home or reservation, and the first thing you would do is hear laughter. I had firm, loving parents, so I was not going to be a dull Indian. …I've never considered myself a celebrity. …I always like best what I'm doing at the time. (Broadcast Pioneers “Chief Halftown”)

Mr. Halftown said that the idea for his show was further sparked by reaction to the negative characterizations of Indians on television including the popular, nationally broadcast children’s show \textit{Howdy Doody}:

Halftown was bothered by the non-Indian who played a character called Chief Thunderthud. “I thought to myself, look at that guy he’s not even an Indian.”
Today, Halftown knows where is going, where he has been and he passes that along to the new generation. “We’re all trying to understand each other.”

(Phillyxpat “The Two Chief Halftowns”)\textsuperscript{71}

Halftown often recounted the story of his interview and subsequent hiring at WFIL-TV. According to Mr. Halftown, in 1950 the executive with whom he met had a hard time envisioning a children’s show starring a story-telling Indian host. Mr. Halftown left the office and went to a nearby costume shop on Chestnut Street where he rented an Indian outfit.\textsuperscript{72} He returned to the studio and again advanced the idea for the show this time dressed in generic Indian regalia. He was hired for a six-week trial run which resulted in a national record of nearly fifty continuous years in children’s programming.

The interviewees for this project as well as newspaper profile pieces about Mr. Halftown all stress the strength of his personality as one of the most important factors for the enthusiastic response by the viewers to the show as well as its remarkable longevity. The question then arises what was it specifically about the performance of Mr. Halftown and his version of “Indianness” that contributed to the success of the show and the creation of a larger-than-life persona as Philadelphia’s Indian friend?

\textbf{Traynor Ora Halftown, “Indianness,” and Stagecraft}

Chief Halftown was a hero to millions of children and their parents throughout Delaware

\textsuperscript{71} Chief Thunderthud, leader of the Ooragnak tribe (kangaroo spelled backward) was played by Bill Le Cornec.
\textsuperscript{72} The television studios and offices were at 46th and Market in West Philadelphia at this time.
Valley year after year. Not publicized nor acclaimed was the work he did almost daily with adult mental health agencies, homeless indigents and programs for substance abusers.

Quotation from former child viewers

*TV Party*, “Legendary Chief Halftown”

http://www.tvparty.com/losthalftown.html

Initially the show was a standard format local children’s cartoon program. It was unscripted and live. Mr. Halftown would present the commercials for his sponsors and introduce the cartoons and shorts. The show’s original title was *Chief Halftown and His Forest Friends.* In the early versions of the show Mr. Halftown would appear in a woodland setting and would interact with woodland creatures as performed by the puppeteer Dick Strome. In later versions of the show the set used was the interior of what appeared to be a log cabin. In addition to the cartoons and shorts, the entertainment segments would include: storytelling; Indian lore; and occasional visits from Philadelphia Zoo Associate Curator (and local television personality in his own right) Joseph Bonaduce who would bring live animals from the zoo to the set.

The showed changed time slots over the first couple of years moving from an early evening show to a midday show. As the decade progressed and television soap operas gained in popularity the station moved Halftown to Saturday morning slot to free

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73 Other titles for the show over the years included: *TV TeePee, Pony Express,* and *Chief Halftown and Friends.*

74 Mr. Bonaduce appeared on many of the WFIL children’s shows. In the 1960s he moved to Hollywood and worked as a writer on nationally broadcast shows such as *Bonanza, The Dick Van Dyke Show,* and *That Girl.* He was also the father of child star and broadcast personality Danny Bonaduce and son-in-law of WFIL executive Jack Steck.
up time for the weekday soaps. The format of Halftown show also slowly changed from that of a cartoon show to one that showcased local children performers. Mr. Halftown had the talent showcase format of the show simultaneously with the cartoon show on and off through the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s the show became exclusively a talent show on Saturday mornings.

In the 1950s and 1960s WFIL-Channel 6 was heavily invested in the Western format for its locally produced shows. In addition to Mr. Halftown, the station’s children show host roster included Sally Starr (Popeye Theater), “Sawdust Sam” as portrayed by Howard Ennis, and a Saturday morning Western-themed puppet show, Saskatoon and Cedric, with Dick Strome. In advertisements, interviews, and station promotional material, Mr. Halftown’s “Indianness” was proudly bruited. He is referred to as: “genuine,” “authentic,” and “full-blooded.” Mr. Halftown, always dressed in a headdress both on-screen and in all public appearances. As Philadelphia’s own authentic Indian he exuded dignity, calm, charm, and humor. As with many other adult male children’s show hosts of the time (like Philadelphia’s “Uncle” Pete Boyle and Pittsburgh’s Fred Rogers), Halftown was very soft-spoken in his delivery and, as with Boyle and Rogers, he was known for the quality of gentleness in dealing with children. I would argue that Halftown’s “gentleness” (a genuine part of his personality) enhanced his

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75 “Sawdust Sam” as portrayed by Mr. Ennis was a “city slicker” with a handlebar mustache, a bowler hat, and a checkered suit. Ennis did not have his own show but regularly substituted for Bill Webber, Sally Starr and Happy the Clown. Saskatoon and Cedric appeared on Channel 6 in the mid-1950s. The puppeteer, Mr. Strome, was the puppeteer on Chief Halftown and His Forest Friends.

76 The use of racist language in descriptions of Indian heritage was prevalent in the mainstream press of the day. In a news item commenting on the success of a recent wartime blood drive that appeared in the Jamestown Post Journal (April 25, 1942) the writer mentions the lineage of the Halftowns as contributors to the drive: “A father and son combination yesterday were Ora Halftown and Traynor Halftown, full blooded Indians.” The same year the American Red Cross was refusing to accept blood donations for general use from African Americans (see: https://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/ps/retrieve/Narrative/BG/p-nid/338/).
level of appeal and approachability to the children in the viewing audience but that the quality fell within the boundaries of a particular Indian character, that of the wise companion and guide.

The elusive quality of “authenticity,” as defined by lineage, of Traynor Ora Halftown was indisputable and he utilized his heritage as part of his performance. Unlike other “Indians” who appeared on children’s show he was not an actor in “red face” appropriating an Indian identity. Mr. Halftown stated in interviews that he intentionally challenged the stereotypical Indian who appeared in Cold War television shows and films. Halftown spoke in standard, conversational English unlike the stilted, pidgin English dialog written for Jay Silverheels as Tonto in *The Lone Ranger*. He was warm and approachable unlike the trope of the stern and foreboding warrior exemplified by the character of the Indian Chief (and Tiger Lily’s father) in the Disney animated version of *Peter Pan* (1953). Additionally, Mr. Halftown utilized many of the same techniques as other hosts for connecting with the children at home. He used direct address and made use of a lot of eye contact (via the camera) to communicate with the child viewer. Every show he greeted the children at home with an enthusiastic “Welcome, Tribal Members!”

There was a predictable framework to the show: an opening theme song (played by the Channel 6 house musician, the noted organist Larry Ferrari), a situating shot of the chief or a placard with the name of the show, the chief introducing either the short features of the child performers, a closing theme, and a promise to see the viewer next time.

Repetition is a useful educational tool and Mr. Halftown used the repetition of words and phrases from the Seneca language as part of the structure of the show. Most children in the Philadelphia television viewing region learned at least one phrase in the Seneca
language, “Ees da sa sussaway” or “Let’s get started, which is how Halftown would introduce the cartoon portion of the show.”

Halftown is widely remembered in the Philadelphia region for his kindness and his laid-back delivery in conversations on and off screen. He also had a richly deserved reputation for being an active and involved community member. Throughout his on-air decades and after his “retirement” he engaged in educational and charitable initiatives. His volunteer work in the Delaware Valley included founding bowling leagues for children, visiting schools, and presenting educational programming for children. He went to nursing homes and hospitals and serenaded residents with Big Band era ballads. In the later part of his career Halftown would appear at a local amusement park in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Dutch Wonderland. Until 2001 he was a resident storyteller who entertained park guest in a wooded grove with tales of Indian folklore and educated them in Indian culture. Halftown died in 2003. As a tribute to his contributions as a Pennsylvanian, Congressman Curt Weldon memorialized him in a speech in the House of Representatives. In these remarks, Weldon called Halftown “legendary” and a man of “worth and character”:

Because of early exposure to substance abuse on his Seneca reservation, upper New York State, and due to a short period of personal dependency, he became known as a “sponsor healer” for others having such problems. He aided thousands of Pennsylvanians through his example and guidance for nearly 60 years. His passing is a tragic loss to many professionals who dedicated their own lives to this

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77 Mr. Halftown stated that the use of the phrase was his mother’s idea. He was originally going to say “Roll the cartoon! (Broadcast Pioneers, “Chief Halftown,” 2005).
specific health care field. (Weldon E1685)

*The Chief Halftown Show*, which in all its various iterations, was on-air from 1949 to 1999, holds the record as the longest running locally produced children’s television show in American broadcast history (Broadcast Pioneers “Chief Halftown”). Mr. Halftown’s success as an entertainer and his reputation as a local legend are all the more remarkable given the racial tensions in America during this era. Ethnic minorities, like Mr. Halftown, and women of all backgrounds routinely faced discrimination in the television industry at both the local and national level. In the next section I will explore the racism and sexism that existed in the system which Mr. Halftown had to navigate.

**Race, Gender, and Hierarchy in Early Television**

VBC: You know we were talking and I was thinking and I have a photo. I think Joanne [Gasbarro] gave it to me and it’s a group photo from the early 60’s and its everyone who worked. Do you have that one?

MP: Somewhere I do.

VBC: I will have to try and get it out and identify some of the folks.

MP: Right, there are a lot of people there that are gone. But I was there when that was done.

VBC: It’s a neat photo. You will have to show me which one is you.

MP: It’s very hard to see me I was right in front of George Kohler way up on top … but I know where I am.
While there is a significant body of scholarship that analyzes portrayals of race and ethnicity on network television shows (e.g., Larson, 2006; Davé, 2013; Squires, 2009; Torres, 1998; C. Wilson, 2003), there is virtually no scholarship examining portrayals of race with regard to locally produced television during the first decades of the industry. Uncovering statistics regarding race and ethnicity of the behind-the-scenes participants on both the local and the national level is also a challenge. Neither the Census Bureau nor the television industry associations kept such statistics during this time period. In order to gather information regarding the participation of women and minorities at the local level I had to depend upon the personal reminiscences of industry insiders and photographic or filmed evidence.

One such piece of evidence is a photograph of the “Channel 6 Family,” a group of approximately 180 people, which Ms. Pantarelli (quoted above) identified as being taken in the early 1960s. I asked various former staff members during my interviews if they could identify the individuals in the photograph since no name key accompanied it and they could identify a large number of the talent and the technical staff. My interviewees also informed me that they could identify four of the individuals as the minority employees of the station. They stated that the three men were either maintenance workers or parking lot staff and the woman was clerical staff. Notably unidentified was Ora Traynor Halftown. I found this unusual since he was a major talent for the station at this time.

(Marie Pantarelli interview)78

78 Ms. Pantarelli was Assistant to the General Manager, George Kohler at WFIL/WPVI from 1947 to 1972. 79 Former local affiliates staff interviewed for this project were Ralph DeCocco (May 16, 2010), Marie Pantarelli (June 20, 2012); and Ms. Gasbarro (December 8, 2009).
time. My interviewees posited that he may be in the photograph but if so, they were uncertain of his identity because, if so, he was one of the men dressed in business attire and Mr. Halftown never appeared in publicity photos without his Indian regalia.

The predominately white male composition of the Channel 6 staff was not unique to the station. According to interviewees the staff demographics were the same at the other two affiliates. A close reading of the photograph also reveals some of the power dynamics and the caste system which were prevalent during this era. Indeed, the photograph was a trigger with the interviewees for discussions regarding the hierarchy of cast and crew and also on the management styles of the station owners and executives. These dynamics can be gleaned by the placement of the hosts of the local shows, the anchormen, and the station executives in the photo. They are in the first row and second rows and are wearing suits or Channel 6 blazers. The exception is the children’s show host Sally Starr front and center in her cowgirl attire. To Ms. Starr’s left and on the side are the members of the Channel 6 technical crew—cameramen, set dressers and designers, and sound and light operators and designers—who are dressed in workmen’s outfits. Interviewees (DeCocco and Gasbarro) characterized them as “gas station attendant uniforms.” According to former Channel 6 crew members, who were largely college educated and from theater backgrounds, station general manager, Roger Clipp (station owner Walter Annenberg’s right-hand man) insisted on differentiating the crew as such. The interviewees noted that Channel 6 was the only affiliate whose crew

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80 Walter Annenberg is widely remembered as a philanthropist, and one-time ambassador to the Court of St. James under Richard Nixon. A critical biography of Annenberg written by Philadelphia Magazine reporter Gaeton Fonzi in 1969 chronicled his rise to power through his communications empire of newspapers, television and radio stations. Fonzi characterized Annenberg as “imperious” and given to “misuses of power.” As one close associate confided he “had a reputation for being ‘a vindictive son-of-a-bitch’” (Fonzi 6-7).
members were required to wear such uniforms; further, they stated that in their opinions these uniforms were a visual demarcation of status at Channel 6 particularly since Clipp was known to be anti-union.

Few women held positions of power at the local television affiliates, which was in keeping with the “glass ceiling” that women in the business world encountered in post-War II America. Historian Elaine Tyler May describes this post-war era as a period of “female subordination” (86). The “behind-the-scenes” women in the television industry during this era not only faced a lack of opportunity for advancement and unequal pay, but many of their contributions were either unacknowledged or attributed to their male supervisors. Philadelphia area women that I interviewed, now in their eighties, who fall into this category speak fondly of their time at the local affiliates during the “Golden Age” but allude to the fact that while they were paid as secretaries their duties were actually those of assistant producers and directors as well as marketing and sales professionals. However, these largely unsung television innovators remain loyal to their former employers and are some of the most active members of the Philadelphia industry’s association, Broadcast Pioneers.

Racial and ethnic minorities, male and female, also experienced discrimination in the industry. Media historian Gregory Adamo details the under-representation of African Americans in production aspects of the television industry. Adamo notes that the earliest studies of minorities in the behind-the-scenes jobs in television were not done until the 1970s and 1980s when “there were almost no women or minority producers” (8). As with

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81 Annenberg biographer Gaeton Fonzi writes that Clipp was known as the “Iron Duke” and that he would go to “extreme measures,” such as flying into temper tantrums, to get his point across to his subordinates” (27).
sexual discrimination, racial discrimination and under-representation continues to be of concern. The networks began to change with regard to diversity, at least in front of the camera, in the mid-1960s largely in part to the growing Civil Rights movement (MacDonald 2013).\textsuperscript{82} It should be noted that the Philadelphia market did have minority representation on-screen in its local productions in the 1960s and 1970s. Channel 10 (WCAU) hired one of the nation’s first African American women news reporters, Edie Huggins, in 1966 and the region’s inaugural African American news anchor, Jack Jones in 1971.

The on-screen masculine whiteness of the hosts in major television markets such as New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles during this era was strikingly at odds with the gender/racial/ethnic profile of the actual viewing audience. As noted, audience demographics from this era are virtually non-existent; however, assumptions can be made from the general profile of the potential viewing audience of children during this post-World War II era. Indirect evidence, such as current Baby Boomer postings on fan-based social media, photographs of the “peanut galleries,” photographs of the children present at the hosts’ personal appearances, as well as anecdotal self-reporting, indicates that both boys and girls watched the shows in equal numbers. With regard to race, Philadelphia, like other Northern cities, experienced an influx of African Americans from the rural South. In 1950 Philadelphia County was 70% white, approximately 18% black, with the remainder of the population listed as “foreign born” or “other races.” By 1970, due to “white flight” to the suburbs in the 1960s, the white population had dropped

\textsuperscript{82} Fred MacDonald cites \textit{I Spy} (on NBC from 1965-1968 and which starred Robert Culp and Philadelphia favorite son, Bill Cosby) as one of the most influential of these groundbreaking shows.
to approximately 65%, the black population had risen to 33%, and other race and ethnicities comprised the remainder of the inhabitants (Bauman 51). The region was home to a large population of children of color. By 1960, 51% of the elementary school children in Philadelphia public schools were African American (Northeast High School 32). While, in Philadelphia, according to industry veterans, no minorities were part of the shows’ technical teams, there was a non-white face in front of the camera to greet children—that of a Native American, Chief Halftown.

According to the descriptions provided by Hollis, of the 592 shows that had enough descriptive information to make them identifiable, 173 or approximately thirty percent were Western-themed. Seven of these shows had hosts presenting as American Indians—five men and two women. Four of these hosts were Anglo actors impersonating Indians. The two hosts that had actual tribal affiliations, as previously discussed, were Halftown and Williams. The remaining Indian host, Hummingbird, appeared on a children’s show in New York on WABD called The Son of the Eagle. Hollis mentions that he could not verify if the actor’s claim to an Indian identity was true or part of the mythology of the show, so his ethnicity is unconfirmed. As such, Williams and Halftown are the only documented hosts of color on locally produced children’s show of the era and Mr. Williams’s show was short-lived.

However, while Traynor Ora Halftown was a popular performer and a respected individual he was also, was in many ways, a fantasy figure as host. One could argue that

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83 Since I could discover no biographical data about the performer called “Hummingbird” and no further information about the show The Son of the Eagle, Hummingbird is not included in this discussion.
84 Hollis makes mention of a host of a puppet show on KABC in Los Angeles named “Domingo” who may have been Hispanic. However no bibliographic information is available to verify the actor’s ethnicity and no information is available for the show. As such this host is not included in this discussion.
the persona of the Chief, as portrayed by Halftown, drew upon caricatures of Indianness, specifically the Indian as wise guide and faithful friend to whites. Along with other archetypes of Indianness such as the noble savage and the fierce warrior, these stereotypes served, according to Vine Deloria, as North America’s answer to the “Jungian archetypes of Old-World mythologies.” For whites “The Indian” was a figure was task was to bear the accumulated wisdom of the New World and convey it to the continent’s new inhabitants. How did Indians come to symbolize Americanness and why were Native Americans “safe” conduits for white explorations of race but not African Americans or other minority groups?

American Indian as Paradox: “The Other” and “The Authentic American”

[American history] erased a race or two, one sex, and those social classes that did not correspond to the master narrative.

Hostetler, 409

One answer to the question posed above regarding the relationship between American Indians, African Americans, and American identity comes from Englehardt. By mid-twentieth century, the Native American population had been decimated, isolated, and mythologized and had become a nostalgic figure that populated the stories told of a long-gone American West. Few white, middle class Americans of the era would have had actual contact through work or social interactions with a Native American. According to
census statistics the American Indian population of the United States was 0.2% in 1950.\textsuperscript{85} By comparison, in the same census the African American represented approximately 20% of the population.\textsuperscript{86} Therefore, statistically, a middle-class white urban or suburban American was more likely to encounter an African American than a Native American. This lack of personal interaction made the Native American easier to “other” and transform into an exotic figure from “yesteryear.”

Another part of this answer has to do with the centuries-old blighted history of race relations in America between blacks and whites. Englehardt notes that African Americans are notably absent from Victory Culture narratives. Further, there was simply no way to culturally contain or exonerate the ever-present daily reminders of the legacies of black enslavement by whites. Since African Americans had not been removed and eradicated from the cultural mainstream like the Native American, they were instead made invisible to the white public (Englehardt 9). It is beyond the scope of this work to detail how slavery shaped the national consciousness and permeated depictions of race relations in popular culture, but by the mid-twentieth century television coverage of the Civil Rights movement brought brutal and unsettling images of African Americans who had been murdered, beaten, and dehumanized. By contrast, with regard to Native Americans, what would become known as the Red Power movement did not receive significant media coverage until the early 1970s. In mid-century popular culture the wrongs perpetrated on American Indians were regulated to the past. The Indians seen for

\textsuperscript{85} Social Statistics of American Indians. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_social_statistics_of_Native_Americans. The largest number of Native Americans were located in Arizona (8% in 1950) and New Mexico (6.2% in 1950).

the most part on television screens were the stock characters of the Westerns, i.e. the faithful companion, wise informant, or the savage warrior. This lack of contemporary context facilitated the fetishization of “The Indian” and served to indemnify the non-white hosts, Williams and Halftown, against the social anxieties and complexities that embroiled race relations between black and white America.

Finally, there is the historical connection between American Indians and a search for authentic and unique American identity. The question of “authenticity” with regard to both the figure of the American Indian and the quest for what is an American identity has been at the center of the relationship between the American European immigrants and the Native American since the groups had their first encounters on American soil. The mythology around the Pilgrims’ first Thanksgiving, which has become an iconic visual in American popular culture, documents the European memory and interpretation of their first experiences with the Amerindians. Rodriguez describes this incident as an “exalted” metaphor for meeting of two radically different cultures converging in a clearing for a mutual celebration:

Indians came to the Thanksgiving feast dressed for Halloween. They had painted their faces and stuck feathers in their hair and they wore the skins of the animals of the forest. Bird calls heralded their appearance in the clearing. Indians were theatricals impersonating Nature, portraying their place in Nature, which was also—and the Puritans saw it—their claim on the land. (52)

At the Boston Tea Party, the colonists and descendants of the Puritans dressed as Indians
to “portray themselves as authentic to their landscape” and dramatize the fact that the British could therefore lay no claim to it (Rodriguez 53). Vine Deloria states that:

Indians, the original possessors of the land, seem to haunt the collective unconscious of the white man and to the degree that one can identify the conflicting images of the Indian which stalk the white man’s waking perception of the world one can outline the deeper problems of identity and alienation that trouble him… One can start at almost any point and list the collective attributes, attitudes, and beliefs about the Indian and then strip away the external image to reveal the psyche of the American white. (x-xi)

American Indian studies scholars and activists, such as Philip and Vine DeLoria, argue that Amerindians, and the romanticized figure of “The Indian” in popular culture served as a conduit for white America in a search for the establishment of an American identity, a venue for explorations of non-white racial identity, and as a narrative for coming to terms with the genocide perpetrated against the native people by whites as well as the destruction of their culture. These understandings set the stage for non-white performers to gain a toehold in the white dominated field of children’s television entertainment. To do so, as non-white actors, their acceptance was based on the elusive concept of “authenticity.” How then was this Indian authenticity perceived and to what standards were American Indian performers held to gain acceptance by their white mid-century viewers?

Along with Williams and Halftown a third performer involved with early
children’s television who claimed Indian heritage was Iron Eyes Cody. While Cody had a long and wide-ranging career in film and television is included in this discussion since he regular appeared on television as a children’s shows. He was a frequent guest on Tim McCoy’s Wild West on KTLA (Los Angeles) which ran from 1950 to 1952 and also starred “The First Americans,” a segment about the history of American Indians that appeared on The Mickey Mouse Club in 1956-1957 (Rowan 246). Williams, Cody, and Halftown all utilized elements of American Indian culture as part of their stagecraft in their television performances. They drew upon traditional Indian dress, lore, dance, and sign language. There was a striking similarity in the presentation of “Indianness” by these performers even though they were from different tribes and diverse regions: the Yurok of Northern California (Williams), the Seneca of Central and Western New York (Halftown), and both the Cherokee87 (Oklahoma) and the Cree Nations of North Dakota and Montana respectively to which Cody laid claim. This sameness of presentation speaks to a construction of “American Indian,” deeply rooted in mid-century American visual culture, one which was targeted to a primarily white audience and it could be argued then that these performers “consciously subverted” their own unique tribal identities in order to conform to a prevailing trope of “Indianness” for mass media consumption (Guiliano 103). Buscombe notes that television and film throughout most of the twentieth century failed to reflect the diversity of Indian culture (24). Instead, starting with the early silent films, a standard visual vocabulary emerged for Indian costuming, based on the Great Plains tribes. Signifiers of the Indian included buckskin, beadwork,

87 The Cherokee Nation’s original homelands were in the Southeast United States. In 1838-1839 they, along with other tribes who lived east of the Mississippi River, were force marched to reservations in Oklahoma as part of Andrew Jackson’s Indian relocation plan. Because of the devastating loss of life this incident became known as “The Trail of Tears.”
and eagle feather headdresses. However, it could also be argued, and was by the Native American actors that adopted the standard garb, that the costuming helped to educated and make accessible Amerindian culture to a large and primarily white audience.

Timm “Prince Lightfoot” Williams (1924-1988) was born on the Yurok reservation in Northern California. He is best remembered as having served as the personification of the Stanford Indian—mascot of the university’s football team—from 1951 to 1972. In the early 1970s Stanford's administration changed the name of team from the “Indians” to the “Cardinals” after protests by students and Indian activists who decried the use of the mascot as derogatory to the Indian community. Williams was banned from performing at Stanford games. In interviews Williams stated that he began performing as Lightfoot in the early 1950s on a volunteer basis. Through his persona of Prince Lightfoot, the Stanford Indian, he wanted to promote Indian tribal traditions through music and dance (Hicks 1). During the 1950s and the 1960s Prince Lightfoot was enthusiastically embraced by Stanford fans. On the basis of his local popularity in 1958 Williams was offered the job of children’s show host at a San Francisco television station. On the show as Prince Lightfoot he chanted, danced, and told tales of Indian lore for his child viewers.88

For decades and continuing into present day the Indian mascot and Prince Lightfoot’s rightful place in the annals of Stanford University history have been a source of controversy. The Prince Lightfoot was criticized by Indian student activists as a commercialized version of Indian culture pandering to a primarily white audience. The

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88 I have been unable to establish the exact dates of the show from either the Stanford University Archives or KQED, San Francisco. Based on local television listings it appears to have only been on-air in the summer of 1958.
use of American Indian names and caricatures for use as mascots by collegiate and professional sport teams continues to be a major point of debate. In an article recounting the history of the Stanford Indian, Daniel Brown notes that the in 1970 the two dozen American Indian students at Stanford called Prince Lightfoot’s performances “a mockery;” his costume was inaccurate for the Yurok tribe and that “the ‘hex’ he put on the opposing teams ‘a prostitution of the Eagle Dance of the Plains Indians’” (Daniel Brown “Name Game”), One of the petitioners to remove Williams was Rick West who later went on to become the founding director of the Smithsonian national Museum of the American Indian. West faulted Williams for impersonating a Plains Indian in full war regalia: “He was a nice fellow and alumni loved him . . . but let's be honest his (performance) played to all of the stereotypes about what Indians were like” (Daniel Brown “Name Game”),

Williams had his defenders in both the Stanford and Bay Area communities. Mestizo author Richard Rodriguez, in his memoir Brown, discusses his time as a Stanford University student and his reaction to “The Stanford Indian.” Rodriguez compares Williams’s performance to his own search for identity as a young, gay “brown” man. The author writes that during his college days he was an “oblivious Indian” who costumed himself as a college student based on images from Esquire whereas activist Native Americans at the university adopted the pose of “angry African Americans” (54-55). Rodriguez notes that Williams found his artistic expression of identity in his portrayal of Prince Lightfoot. Williams’s Indian regalia, wrong for his Yurok heritage but right for tapping into the nostalgic appeal, channeled the “American Indian” of the silver screen. Prince Lightfoot propelled Williams from shipping clerk to local media celebrity,
children’s show host, and beloved sports figure:

What were the chances that a young man who liked to dress up as an Indian prince would find his venue? What were the chances history would find Timm Williams already suited up for the pageant of puritan dilemma—a public portrayal of his desire a theatrical resolution to identity. (58)

Williams always defended his performances as respectful and maintained that they were blatantly misunderstood by his critics. After his ouster from Stanford he continued to promote awareness of Indian culture through activism and educational initiatives. In the 1970s he served as California governor Ronald Reagan's advisor for Indian affairs. Sports historian Jennifer Guiliano writes that Williams was an active member of the Yurok tribe who “spoke frequently through his role of Prince Lightfoot” on Indian issues (103). According to Guiliano, Williams’s performance of Indian playing “Indian” can be read as a “redemptive act where one Indian’s body ‘reality,’ not just an echo of colonial encounters and a romantic past” (103). Historian Richard King notes:

Far from the sellout many thought him to be, Williams understood the pain of racism and took up the role of Prince Lightfoot, not to exploit or injure, but as a sincere endeavor, part existential affirmation and part outreach and empowerment … Williams was one of countless American Indians who, during the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, anchored efforts of EuroAmerican to reimagine themselves, invent community, and endow practices with significance through
renderings of Indianness. (254)

Questions regarding both the performance of “Indian-ness” for a white, mainstream audience and the portrayal of an Indian identity were at the heart of the career of Iron Eyes Cody. In his biographical statements, Cody (1904-1999) said his father, Thomas Long Plume was a Cherokee Indian who performed in Wild West shows and circuses and his mother, Frances Salupet, was Cree. His movie career spanned nearly sixty years (from 1930 to 1987) and included over 100 films (Waldman A15). Cody interrupted his film to enlist in the Army during World War II. Due to a back injury sustained during the filming of Cecile B. DeMille’s *The Plainsman* (1936) he served stateside as a welder and a volunteer air-raid warden. During this period Cody became close friends with Ira Hayes the American Indian Marine who was one of the flag-raisers at Iwo Jima. The two remained close until Hayes death in 1955 (Rowan 246-247). After the war Cody returned to his film career and in the 1950s also found roles in television.

In addition to his appearances on the *Tim Cody Show* and *The Mickey Mouse Club*
he also appeared on all the major network television Westerns of the 1950s and 1960s including *Gunsmoke, Wagon Train,* and *Bonanza.* However, Cody is arguably best remembered in American popular culture as the “Crying Indian” from the “Keep American Beautiful” campaign.90

On Earth Day, 1971, nonprofit organization Keep America Beautiful launched what the Ad Council would later call one of the “50 greatest commercials of all

89 This show was featured as a Disney comic book series as well.
90 Available on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7OHG7tHrNM.
time.” Dubbed “The Crying Indian,” the one-minute PSA features a Native American man paddling down a junk-infested river, surrounded by smog, pollution, and trash; as he hauls his canoe onto the plastic-infested shore, a bag of rubbish is tossed from a car window, exploding at his feet. The camera then pans to the Indian’s cheerless face just as a single tear rolls down his cheek. (Crockett “The True Story”)

In the early 1990s while conducting research for her doctoral dissertation, 91 Angela Aleiss discovered Cody’s remaining surviving sibling, Mae Abshire Duhon. Ms. Duhone verified that Iron Eyes Cody was actually Espera de Corti, the American born son of Sicilian immigrants who settle in Gueydan, Louisiana. According to Duhon, de Corti “loved playing Indians as a child and had always said that he was going to be an actor one day” (Crockett “The True Story”), When de Corti was five his father left his mother and relocated to Texas with the young de Corti and his two brothers. In 1924, de Corti left home for Hollywood and a film career. He shortened his name to “Cody” and adopted an Indian persona. “‘He just left’, recalled …Duhon, ‘and the next thing we heard was that he had turned Indian’” (Crockett “The True Story”). Aleiss published her findings in an article in The Times-Picayune (May 26, 1996). De Corti denied that story and the “revelations attracted little attention at the time” (Buscombe 161). After Cody’s death the issue resurfaced in an article by Ron Russell that appeared in the New Times (Los Angeles), “Make Believe Indian” (Aleiss, 2005: 197). At that point, the incontrovertible evidence about de Corti’s origins (birth records, baptism records, family

91 Aleiss received a PhD in 1991 from Columbia University. Her dissertation was titled “From Adversaries to Allies: The American Indian in Hollywood Films, 1930 – 1950” (Columbia University).
documents, and testimony from neighbors in Gueydan who had never publicly
contradicted de Corti’s reinvention during his lifetime) proved enough for authoritative
television and film resources to update his biography and reflect his non-Indian birth
status.

The “Indianness” of Iron Eyes Cody presents interesting questions regarding what
comprises Indian identity. In tributes and obituaries Cody was recalled as America’s
“most beloved Indian” and was, arguably, the best known and most recognizable Indian
actors of the twentieth-century Hollywood. Up until after his death, the mainstream
American public generally ignored the story of his true identity. The murkiness of the
situation was further compounded by the American Indian community’s embracement of
Cody and the fact that, for the most part, that community did not decry his false claims of
Indian birthright. Buscombe writes:

Bonnie Paradise, former executive director of the American Indian Registry of the
Performing Arts, declared that Cody “lived and breathed an Indian lifestyle. In
that sense, at least, no one can call him an imposter.” Kathleen Whitaker, chief
curator of the Southwest Museum, where Cody’s wife Bertha worked remarked:
“What difference does it make? Iron Eyes brought forth the true essence of what
being American Indian is all about.” (161)

The legacy of “Iron Eyes Cody” remains cloudy. Some Indian activists decry de Corti’s
self-invention as dishonest and as yet another example of the white-man’s usurpation of
Indian identity.\textsuperscript{92} However, many in the American Indian community honor his commitment to Indian culture and causes. Buscombe comments on this continued public acceptance of the “Indian-ness,” by both Indians and whites, of “Iron Eyes Cody” in public memory:

> It’s a testament to the overwhelming power of our preconceptions about Indians, our need to believe in the myths we have created, that someone who was not Indian at all can be seen as even more Indian that the real thing. For what real Native American could claim to actually be the “true essence” of the Indian? (161)

After de Corti’s death Aleiss wrote an article about his legacy and quoted a line from the classic John Ford film \textit{The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance}: “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” Aleiss concluded that the legend of Iron Eyes Cody is founded on a nostalgic representation of the American Indian as the epitome of an idyllic nature child; a representation of Americana that few were willing to part with (1999: 31).

As stated above, his family lineage gave an authenticity to Halftown as a Native American entertainer that was indisputable. Unlike de Corti he was not an actor in “red face” appropriating an Indian identity. Unlike Williams, there was no criticism of Halftown’s costuming or his use of Seneca language and culture for the purposes of entertainment. Such criticism was probably deflected due to several factors. Halftown

\textsuperscript{92} For an example see “Race Hustle: The Crying Indian” by Andrew Hamilton (http://www.counter-currents.com/2011/10/race-hustle-the-crying-indian/) and “A Scandalous Activist” by Brown Safe (http://www.brownsafe.com/preservingtomorrow/a-scandalous-activist/).
had a lower profile since he was primarily a local celebrity and was not on the national stage and subject to national scrutiny like De Corti. Williams was situated in Northern California which in the late 1960s and early 1970s had an Indian activist community at the forefront of the Red Power movement as evidenced by the occupation of Alcatraz (1969 - 1971). The American Indian population in Pennsylvania was extremely small during this era and while it is impossible to claim Indian activism was non-existent in the Philadelphia region any such activism failed to receive much if any local news coverage.93

Halftown was embraced by the Philadelphia viewing audience. He was respected in the region for both his promotion of Indian culture and his dedication to giving back to the community. In his stagecraft—his storytelling, his sincere and gentle manner, which was enhanced by his soft voice and the slow pacing of delivery—Halftown forged a persona of host closely tied to his own past and his own values. His ethnicity and authenticity added to his aura of acceptability as a “television friend.” While the run of The Chief Halftown Show straddled the decades that brought changes regarding socially progressive attitudes regarding race and ethnicity the contents of the shows, the shorts and cartoons were rooted firmly in the unexamined racist attitudes in the popular culture of the early twentieth century. The next section will look more closely at the content of the hosted children’s shows which were bracketed by the performance of the hosts like Halftown.

The Content of the Shows

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93 According to the 1960 US Census the percentage of Native Americans living in California was approximately .25% contrasted with the .02% living in Pennsylvania.
The difficulties intrinsic to any wished-for escape from the shame of America's racial past are evident in the shifting fortunes of the film and television phenomenon *Our Gang*, also known as the *Little Rascals*.

Tavia Nyong’o (380)

The 1950s marked a decade of change for the film industry. Movie moguls initially dismissed television as a novelty. Darryl F. Zanuck (of Twentieth Century-Fox) quipped: “Television won’t be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night” (Becker 17). Zanuck was wrong. By the late 1950s television sets had saturated the home consumer market; movie theater attendance and studio profits “plunged” to half of what they had been in 1946; and federal court rulings had ended the big studios anti-trust business practices of distribution and bookings (17, 21). Television had become America’s preeminent mass medium. The film studios looked for ways of capitalizing on the television’s popularity and the distribution and syndication of their cartoons, short features, and parts of their film catalogs presented one such strategy. With the exception of the Disney studios and MGM’s *Tom and Jerry* by the late 1950s “all the major theatrical cartoon series had been syndicated” (Hollis 7).

Associated Artists Productions, founded in 1948, served as a major clearinghouse in the distribution of films and cartoons for television syndication. Their catalogs included Warner’s Brothers *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies* as well as the Fleischer and Famous Studios’ *Popeye* and *Betty Boop* series. Live-action shorts were also
syndicated including Hal Roach’s *Our Gang* comedies which were produced from 1922 to 1948. Because of copyright and licensing constraints the films were re-titled and distributed as *The Little Rascals* starting in 1955. Screen Gems, a subsidiary of Paramount studios, syndicated *The Three Stooges*, a series of slapstick, “knuckleheaded,” live-action shorts (Hollis 8). In the late 1950s *The Three Stooges* and *Popeye* were the first and second most syndicated shorts on children’s shows (8). Hollis notes that television gave new life to the cartoons and shorts and resurrected the then faded careers of The Stooges, Moe Howard, Jerome “Curly” Howard, and Philadelphia native, Larry Fine (9). According to Hollis, children’s shows throughout the United States purchased and broadcast these syndicated features (7-8). Thus, while each of the shows had its own local star (such as Sally Starr in Philadelphia or “Officer Joe” Bolton from New York) they shared a common “canon” material.

In addition to the syndicated materials, the local children’s shows also featured on several cartoon series produced specifically for television. The first of these was *Crusader Rabbit* from the creative team of Alex Anderson and Jay Ward which debuted in 1949. By the late 1950s animation studios like Hanna-Barbera, Cambria Productions, and Jay Ward Productions were producing cartoons for television. Some (like *Rocky and Bullwinkle*) were network shows and some (like Cambria’s *Clutch Cargo*94) were produced specifically for the hosted kid shows.

During this era the program managers were fairly uncritical of these features with regard to educational value or levels of violence. Price was the major determinant. In

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94 *Clutch Cargo* (1959) is a cult favorite among animation fans. The series was famous (infamous) for its use of extremely limited animation. Using a technique dubbed “Synco-Vox” the animators superimposed filmed human mouths over the un-moving cartoon faces to voice the lines.
these cartoons and shorts ethnic minorities were absent or relegated to stereotypes as were most female characters. Children, of course, did not watch television in a vacuum. They had potential access to the gamut of programming during this era which included the local and national news shows, locally produced shows, sports events, network shows (sitcoms, dramas, documentaries, variety shows, game shows), and syndicated movies. As such, they could have potentially seen a wide variety of portrayals of race, gender, and ethnicity over the two decades under discussion. Case in point, starting with the mid-1960s, in response in at least part to a changing social consciousness, more than two dozen network, prime-time shows featured African Americans with regularity as leads or on-going character (MacDonald 2013).95

In the section which follows I will explore how the content of the children’s shows reflected or troubled prevailing constructions of race, ethnicity, and gender during the twenty-year span in which they flourished. I will argue that the images of diversity presented on children’s cartoon shows fell out of sync with the steadily progressing images available on network TV.

**Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Cartoon**

With regard to depictions of gender, of the theatrically released cartoons shown on the hosted children’s shows *Betty Boop*, *Little Lulu*, and *Little Audrey* had female lead characters. There were of course a large number of sweethearts and female side-kicks in

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95 There were two programs that starred African Americans in the 1950s: *Beulah* (1950-1952) and *Amos ’n’ Andy* (1951-1953) both of which originated as radio shows (“Beulah” was a character on several inter-twined radio sitcoms) with white male actors originating the roles. In 1946 character of Beulah was given her own radio show. In 1947 Academy Award winning actress Hattie McDaniel assumed the title role for the series.
the cartoons of the era (such as Lois Lane in the animated version of *Superman*, Olive Oyl in *Popeye*, and Petunia Pig in *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies*). In these cartoons African Americans, American Indians, and other ethnicities were generally portrayed in racially stereotyped supporting roles. There were a number of female characters in the made-for television cartoons of the 1950s and 1960s such as Natasha in *Rocky and Bullwinkle*, Nell Fenwick in *Dudley Do-Right*, Judy and Jane Jetson of *The Jetsons*. These characters, for the most part, fall into readily recognizable female stereotypes (femme fatale, damsel in distress, daughter, and wife, respectively). Female leads of animated shows during this era were few and far between.\(^96\)

Ethnic and minority groups fared even less well in the theatrically released cartoons from the 1930s and 1940s many of which were highly racially charged or steeped in ethnic stereotypes (e.g., the African American housekeeper in *Little Lulu* and Speedy Gonzales from *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies*). Film scholar, Irene Kotlarz, notes that the cartoons that came of major studios (Disney, Fleischer, and MGM) during the 1930s and the 1940s represented: “the clearest expressions of national and corporate racism produced by mass media” (21). During the 1950s and 1960s the entire catalog of Warner Brother cartoons was available for television broadcast. This catalog included cartoons that aroused the ire of civil rights groups such as the NAACP because of their inflammatory depictions of blacks. In 1968 United Artists pulled eleven cartoons which were deemed too racist for continued presentation (Cohen 55).\(^97\) In the cartoons created

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\(^96\) It is beyond the scope of this work to document the rise of the female animated lead but briefly in the 1960s there were a few animated series with female leads: *The Wizard of Oz* (1961), *Winsome Witch* (1965), and *Sally the Witch* (1966-1968). It wasn’t until the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly with Hanna-Barbera productions such as *Scooby-Do*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* and *Josie and the Pussycats* were women/girls featured as “stars.” Indeed, *Josie* had an African American member (Valerie) of the all-girl rock band.

\(^97\) These have become known as “The Censored Eleven” and include: titles such as “Goldilocks and the
for television during the “Golden Age” persons of color and/or specific ethnicity were still either caricatures or absent.98

*Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Live-Action*

As with the cartoons, the girls and women shown in the live-action shorts were side-kicks or love-interests, mothers or teachers. In the two most popular series, *Little Rascals* and *The Three Stooges*, males are the protagonists that drive the action and have the adventures. Portraits of race also mirror those found in the animated shorts. In *The Three Stooges*, for example, African Americans are minor character in service-oriented roles such as servants, housekeepers, and train porters. The *Our Gang* comedies, however, present an interesting subject for a critical analysis based in childhood studies since they featured child actors. Indeed, in the world of the *Little Rascals*, as in the *Peanuts* comic strip universe a couple of decades later, adults are largely auxiliary and interchangeable in the film narratives.

Film critics are divided on how to read *Little Rascals* from a post-Civil Rights perspective. In the introduction his book on *The Little Rascals* series, Leonard Matlin writes that the films “stand for the best of the collective American boyhood … as timeless as childhood itself” (4). Matlin notes that in the early 1970s that King World Productions, which had the syndication rights for the series, re-editing many of the films “removing racial and other gags thought to be in bad taste” and some of the titles “were

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98 Affirmative action seems to come into play for animated character of color as well with the late 1960s and early 1970s with this time period seeing the introduction of *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids, The Harlem Globetrotters*, the character of Franklin as an addition to the Peanuts specials, and Jonathan (an African American) and Cisco (a Hispanic) as best friends of Davey on *Davey and Goliath*. Jivin Bears,” “Uncle Tom’s Bungalow,” and “Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs” (IMDB “Censored 11 Titles” http://www.imdb.com/keyword/censored-11/).
eliminated from the TV package altogether” (230). In discussing the racially charged imagery and stereotyping that are found throughout the films, particularly the ones from the silent era, he acknowledges that many of the episodes “provide uncomfortable moments today” (23). Lodge Night (1923), for example features a preacher who encapsulates many of the era’s racist stereotypes of black men; the character is a dishonest, gambling, confidence artist. Matlin characterizes this as an “unfortunate lapse into stereotype humor” but one which reflects an “innocent 1923” now viewed “from a modern perspective” (23).

Critic Tavia Nyong’o reads the films differently. According to Nyong’s Our Gang (both in theaters and on television):

… played no specific ideological role within white supremacist politics. The cultural work it seems to do is less a bolstering of claims to white supremacy, and more a production of the appropriate ambience for the insinuation of racially-unmarked innocence, and innocence predicated upon a forgetfulness of the past that is one of the greatest privileges of whiteness (381).

Nyong’o disagrees with Matlin’s assertions that the children were equals as portrayed in the series. He cites a litany of slapstick indignities inflicted on the black but not the white children: near drowning; ingestion of nails and needles and chewing on a razor; drugging; and electric shocks (381). Additionally, with the exception of Alfalfa, the African American children are named for food (Buckwheat, Farina, Mango). Farina’s gender was kept a mystery and used as a publicity gimmick by the Hal Roach studios (381). Nyong’s
labels this treatment of the black children in the series as “racial kitsch” (383). Thus, it can be argued that the legacy of the stereotype of the consumable, expendable “pickaninny” leaves its trace even in the (what Matlin purports to be) “innocent” text of the Our Gang comedies (383)

Philadelphia Tribune\textsuperscript{99} columnist, Alonzo Kittrels, wrote a piece in 2012 praising the Our Gang comedies calling them “ahead of their” time and noting that the boys and girls were treated as equals; they ate and played together and attended the same schools. Kittrels includes a link to a Web site that has streaming video of some of the films.\textsuperscript{100} I would caution that this site reflects a heavily redacted sampling of the Our Gang comedies (i.e., the racially “sanitized” versions) and that, as with many aspects of the hosted children’s shows, nostalgia for a remembered childhood can obscure a more critical appraisal of these cartoons and shorts.

Upon examination, it becomes apparent that the cartoons and the shorts that were the substance of the locally produced children’s shows were at very much odds with the inclusiveness and respect for the child viewer that was part and parcel of the performance of the host. This is particularly true for Mr. Halftown. The racially charged images in the shorts featured on his cartoon-centered show were jarringly at odds with the intelligent person of color hosting the material. In large part, the material introduced by the hosts frequently visualized the racist/sexist/homophobic attitudes that were prevalent and unexamined by the white mainstream film-going audience for whom they were produced a generation before. I argue that the hosted children’s show sat at the center of this cross-

\textsuperscript{99} The Philadelphia Tribune founded in 1884 is the oldest continuously published African American newspaper in the United States.

\textsuperscript{100} See http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Our+Gang&.
roads of mid-century movements—white hegemony and dominance versus the intent of inclusion. The hosts that populated children’s television could navigate this terrain due to the protective status afforded them as fantasy figures and through the parasocial relationships that they created with the viewers.

**Conclusion**

Another one of the legends [Chief Halftown] of our childhood that we no longer can enjoy in person. The Chief along with Sally, Gene, Jane Norman, Al Alberts, Lorenzo The Clown, Wee Willie Webber, Dickory Doc and Adam Android became our extended family. Too bad the kids of today will never have this great influence that’s probably why they are like they are. Sad.

Comment on “Chief Halftown” Video

Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=by0MK_pktXQ&t=5s

Scott Denny (2013)

The hosts saw themselves as role models for their child viewers. The common themes run through the interviews with Sally Starr, Gene London, Jane Norman, Bill Webber, and Carter Merbrier (WFIL’s Captain Noah on the show of the same name) when discussing their relationship with their child viewers include: respect for those viewers, e.g. “never speaking down to them;” the importance of the teaching of civic/ethical values and manners, e.g. being kind to others and always listening to their parents; the hosts’ joy at making public appearances and meeting the viewers in person; and an acknowledgement
of the importance of the civic and charity work that they did. These men and women made it an integral part of their performance on the shows to be engaging and kind in their dialogues with the at-home child viewer. Those who had “peanut galleries” on their shows were also unfailingly respectful of the children physically present in the audience. There was no demarcation by any societal marker—all children were welcome as television friends, was the sentiment echoed all the hosts.

When analyzing these shows critically it becomes quickly apparent that nostalgia was part of the appeal of the shows both when they were produced as well as with regard to the recollection of the shows in the present by the former child viewers. The shorts and cartoons, although now viewed as racially-tinged and sexist, represented a nostalgia for a perceived “untroubled” time of the status quo of white hegemony in both population numbers and in cultural content. The persona of the hosts were typically anachronistic stereotypes from children’s literature or American history such as Traynor Ora Halftown in his performance of “The Chief.”

A YouTube clip from 1992 shows a seventy-five-year-old Halftown introducing his show.101 By that time the show had changed format from a cartoon show to a local children’s talent showcase; however, the video gives the viewer an insight to his on-air demeanor. Comments from the Philly TV Kid Party (a nostalgia Web site for local children’s shows) discuss Halftown’s personal qualities of kindness and gentleness. The comments include remembrances of his personal appearances in the area, particularly his storytelling appearances at Dutch Wonderland in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. One former viewer wrote:

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101 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBy9SwfgebY)
Thanks for a bit of fun from the past. I too grew up in Philadelphia near Wynwood and was delighted to discover your site by accident. Now I live in Australia on the Mornington Peninsula so it made me quite nostalgic. I took my son to Dutch Wonderland some 10 years ago and saw Chief Halftown there. He was the consummate gentleman and a credit to the image I have always had of him. Thanks again, Owen P. (*Philly TV Party*, “Legendary Chief Halftown”)

Traynor Ora Halftown’s status as an Amerindian was an important factor in both his presentation and his ability to be embraced by the Philadelphia area viewing audience. This status lies in the long-standing complexity with regard to white cultural understandings and appropriations of Indianness. For centuries, white America has fetishized the Indian as the embodiment of a genuine and authentic American identity; one separate and unique from white America’s Old-World ancestors. The Indian that appeared in Cold War era film and television was, for the most part, a mythologized figure—the noble savage, the wise companion, or the vanquished warrior—a caricature that little to do with contemporary American Indians, i.e., fellow citizens in postwar America.

Although there were other Indian characters and hosts on children’s television those characters were portrayed, almost exclusively, by white actors in “red face.” Mr. Halftown’s performance was paradoxical in that it both conformed to and troubled popular culture understandings of Native Americans. Although a member of the Seneca Nation, on-air, in public appearances, and in publicity stills he wore the costume of a
Plains Indian. Through this costuming he presented a visual convention of “Indianness” that Cold War American audiences were both accustomed to and comfortable with and was able to utilize popular culture stereotypes while simultaneously challenging them and providing nuance. He extended his viewer’s knowledge while staying within mid-century boundaries of a familiar racial “other.” Mr. Halftown was one of the most beloved and successful children’s television personalities in Philadelphia’s history. This was all the more remarkable given the pervasive cultural, social, and business discrimination that non-whites encountered in Cold War America. He was an entertainer proud of his ethnicity and heritage; a heritage and pride that he shared with his viewers.

The bond that existed, both then and now, between the child viewers and the hosts like Mr. Halftown had, and continues to have, a deep resonance and that bond was based in the personality of the hosts. While the parasocial relationship between the host and the viewer was indeed a device to ensure the success of the show by engaging loyal viewers it transcended the medium. The shows were an important part of children’s culture of Cold War America that daily demonstrated in the performance of the host a subtle, between-the-lines manner, attitudes of tolerance, inclusion, and boundary-tweaking models of femininity and masculinity, and, as in the case of Traynor Ora Halftown, race.
THE END OF THE HOSTED SHOWS

Television has often been characterized by its “transience,” ephemeralicity,” and “forgetability.” Even more seriously, it is seen as “amnesiac,” responsible for the “undermining of memory.” Television is not only the bad critical object in the academy, but it is a bad memory object as well.

Holdsworth 137

Children’s Shows as Cold War Texts

In the chapters that have preceded this one I have read the locally produced children’s shows as texts from the popular culture of the Cold War era. These texts represented unique sites of mediation for American public discourse. At that time television was a new mass medium and, while it drew upon familiar tropes, characters, and conventions from radio, the combination of the visual in addition to the aural contrived to make it an even more intimate parasocial audience experience. The intent of the shows was to entertain children and encourage those child viewers to have their parents support the sponsor’s products. The creation of a parasocial relationship between the child and the host was a performance technique that the hosts used to establish a loyal viewing audience. However, those performances, as I have argued, transcended this practical business purpose. The hosts utilized and explored identity constructs prevalent in the era as part of their personas and their engagement with their child viewers.

The hosts of the local shows in the Delaware Valley were representative of the
mediations and performances televised for children throughout the United States. Sally Starr was a cowgirl—a character out of the American myth of the Golden West. She took the latitude afforded that persona to push the boundaries of the “domestic containment” parameters assigned to adult women as typically shown on television of the era. Gene London similarly pushed up against the hyper-masculinity prevalent on televised Westerns, police shows, and war-themed shows. He accomplished this by adopting the stance of a gentle, child-like, adult friend harkening to comic greats like Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel. Jane Norman, who was a kindergarten teacher before she became a local host, was synthesizing elements of children’s popular culture to not only entertain and build an audience but also to impart school readiness and middle-class values nearly a decade before the debut of Sesame Street. Traynor Ora Halftown became the site of explorations of non-white race identity through his gentle, dignified presentation of the wise Indian companion, another character from the myth of the American West—one cloaked in nostalgia for authenticity and unthreatening masculinity.

The format of the local hosted children’s show ended when industry regulations changed and the performance of commercials by the hosts was prohibited. Additionally, there were increasing societal pressures for relevancy and cultural sensitivity. The Civil Rights and feminist movements rendered the content, the cartoons and shorts, increasingly problematic. At the end of the 1960s Sesame Street launched. It was markedly different from earlier shows, with an educational and political agenda advocating inclusion and diversity. Sesame Street immediately struck a chord with critics and audiences. However, for all its innovation, Sesame Street built upon the work done in the “Golden Age,” refining the earlier models with its progressive approach. Within four
years after its debut the majority of the local hosted shows were off air.

The End of the Tale

In Hi There Boys and Girls! Tim Hollis discusses factors that contributed to the end of the hosted children’s show. Citing a multiplicity of reasons, he compares the demise of the format to “the sudden extinction of the dinosaurs, and like that longtime scientific puzzler, probably no single answer would be the absolutely correct one” (19). Hollis cites 1973 as the watershed year for the demise of the hosted show. On January 1 of that year, due to pressure by the FCC and driven by the grassroots activist group, Action for Children’s Television, the National Association of Broadcasters put into effect the following rule: “Children’s programs hosts or primary cartoon characters shall not be utilized to deliver commercial messages within or of adjacent to the programs which feature such hosts or cartoon characters” (20-21). This loss of the close personal connection between the sponsor’s product, the host, and the viewer was significant. The parasocial relationship with the child viewer was disrupted since the host could no longer narrate the entire show, seamlessly flowing through commercials, chats, and cartoon introductions. Since the hosts could no longer serve as product spokespersons, sponsored public appearances were no longer possible. As a result, the hosted shows became less appealing to the sponsors and the sponsors pulled their advertising dollars from the shows. As the shows began to lose these ad revenues the local program managers cancelled them and replaced them with adult fare such as talk shows.

Children’s shows were relegated to weekend mornings where, during this era, air time
was less valuable. With a few notable exceptions the local shows did not survive beyond 1973 (Hollis 23). Of the hosted shows that did survive the ruling, Hollis states, they “were often so sanitized and regulated that they resembled their longtime formats in name only”(23). Other circumstances that contributed to the demise of the format included evolving sensibilities regarding what children’s programming could aspire to and increased adult scrutiny of the content of the shows, the cartoons and the shorts. Hollis states that the violence of the 1960s, the assassinations and the horrific images of the Vietnam War, were discordant with as “simplistic” local children’s shows. Hollis characterizes the shows as typically being “Uncle Dopey … wishing kids a happy birthday and screening ancient cartoons” (19). As the 1960s progressed, and the struggle for racial dignity appeared nightly on the news, the locally produced shows seemed increasingly out-of-step with changing sensibilities. The embedded shorts contained insensitive and offensive material, which the host could not mediate anymore.

Sesame Street: Cultural Diversity and Children’s Television

Although Hollis marks the end of the era at 1973, I choose to end my analysis with the debut of Sesame Street in 1969. Sesame Street was the harbinger of an expanded and more inclusive notion of American childhood. Its debut marked the beginning of the end for the hosted show, but it framed the cultural significance of early television for children. Historically, the hosts and shows analyzed in this study provide a window of paradox as the hosts tested boundaries and the cartoons stood for status quo. As noted

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102 Case in point is Philadelphia’s Chief Haltown which became a children’s talent showcase.
above, the performances of the hosts of the locally produced children’s show can be read as explorations of the mythologies of the Cold War era. In 1969, at the cusp of the rise of Black Power, Red Power, and Women’s Liberation, Sesame Street began broadcasting on PBS. In very many ways the show was radically different from the children’s entertainment produced by the white, male dominated content creators for children (at both the local and network levels) with regard to structure, content, and creative talent.

Sesame Street was aired on a public, non-commercial network and helmed by a woman, Joan Ganz Cooney. One of the foundations of the show was its multiculturalism and diversity in the casting choices for not only the live action sequences but also the cartoons and shorts. Even the Muppets were deliberately multi-hued. In the neighborhood of Sesame Street the child viewers saw men and women who had a variety of jobs and professions and boys and girls who lived and worked together in an urban setting. From its opening segment all the children shown on Sesame Street, unlike the children of color in the Little Rascals, were portrayed as living an equally protected and culturally valued childhood.

As previously stated, many factors, including economic viability and regulatory responses to parental activism, contributed to the downfall of the locally produced children’s show. Sesame Street debuted at the end of a decade that included not only advances in technology and social justice (e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the moon landing in 1969) but also great national tragedies such as the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, Malcom X, and Martin Luther King. From the very first episode, Sesame Street’s intent to include all child viewers was clear. Multiculturalism and urban children were promoted in the presentation and
performance of the human and puppet actors as well as the educational shorts.

Paul Jackson, in his examination of the intersection of Johnson’s Great Society, Project Head Start, and Sesame Street, writes that part of the rationale put forth by the creative team for developing Sesame Street was to encourage federal investment in educational television programming in lieu of bricks-and-mortar Head Start Centers. Joan Ganz Cooney argued that since Head Start had a limited reach, the federal Office of Child Development would do better to shift its funding educational programming initiatives, which would reach a national audience of preschoolers (200). In the report, The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education (1966), Cooney stated that educational programming, in order to compensate for the “environmental deprivation” of the “disadvantaged child,” would have to take into consideration the “din and confusion characteristics of most impoverished homes” wherein “the television set is on from early morning until later at night” (200). Henson’s Muppets, the multicultural cast, and the segments modeled after television commercials were all intended by the show’s creators to keep the target audience of impoverished children’s “eyes on the screen” as they watched in their loud, crowded “ghetto” homes (201).

Jackson notes that when Children’s Television Workshop (CTW) began its viewer response research with the target child audience, i.e., black urban and poor, they started in North Philadelphia and discovered that these children did not live in homes with television sets. CTW contracted the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to organize

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103 Jackson notes that the term “disadvantaged” was used in the literature of the 1960s and “makes sense only in direct relation to ‘advantaged.’” Jackson defines “advantaged” as “white, rich, suburban, English-speaking, and with an IQ score above 84. In the USA ‘disadvantaged’ was the urban black child; however the ‘dis’ modifier could incorporate geography, language, poverty, attitude, and test scores” (192).
“collective viewing in poor neighborhoods” in order to gather viewer response data. Head Start and other day care centers around the country in both rural and urban settings participated in the data collection (201-202). CTW met with resistance from early childhood educators, who feared that the results of this research would be misused to stigmatize further children in poor communities by IQ comparisons with middle-class children. As a result, the research that was gathered focused on the show and its “watchability” (202). Jackson writes:

After the testing ETS repeated Cooney’s rationale and support for educational television, instead of Head Start school. *Sesame Street* was part of the larger trend away from testing children to auditing educational programs. The aim transitioned away from researching the ‘disadvantaged child’ learned how to [sic] retain a viewing audience. Due to early fears that *Sesame Street* would be unpopular, the audience was expanded to all American children. The target of the program, the “disadvantaged child,” was subsumed. (202)

While *Sesame Street* met with general critical praise and positive audience response, it did receive adverse criticism. Feminists took issue with the fact that the main female character “Susan” was a stay at home housewife.104 Political conservatives took issue with its message of integration. However, overall *Sesame Street* struck a positive chord with its viewing audience. The show’s success was due to various elements of its production and design; the freshness of its approach; the multiculturalism of the cast; the

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104 In Episode 96 Susan returned to working outside the home as a nurse (Muppet Wiki https://muppet.fandom.com/wiki/Susan).
fluidity of the Muppets in that they were not bound to normative markers of gender, class and race; the quality of the writing, music, and visuals; and its uniqueness of situating the show in an urban rather than suburban or rural setting. Its success, however, indicates that by the end of the 1960s, a decade of much social upheaval, American television audiences were more receptive to a visual representation of American childhood that was more diverse and inclusive. Morrow argues that Johnson’s Great Society programs and initiatives, from which the Children’s Television Workshop first received a large part of its funding, were responses to a country in a crisis and in search of a new national identity. After World War II the United States had to reexamine its narrative of universalism and equality for its citizens. The Civil Rights movement in particular had brought to light the fact that people of color had been left out of the American Dream. Johnson’s proposed civil rights and anti-poverty legislation represented a call to positive action (Morrow 31-32). *Sesame Street* was one expression of a larger cultural conversation regarding an expanded definition of American identity.

As with the children’s programming that preceded it, *Sesame Street* was also an endeavor rife with paradoxes; it was in many ways rooted to the conventions created by television but pushed the boundaries of those conventions. *Sesame Street* drew upon the tropes and formats of the local, pioneering children’s show while tapping into political and societal concerns of the era. The attention to education, particularly early education, was also partly in response to the Cold War and America’s race with the Soviet Union with regard to technological innovation in atomic weaponry and space exploration. Project Head Start was part and parcel of the American Cold War narrative of the child as the hope for the future. Better educated children meant a better educated workforce, and a
better educated workforce would spur American scientific achievement and innovation (Hendershot 148). Indeed, Loretta Moore Long, one of the show’s original cast members (Susan) wrote her doctoral dissertation on that topic: “Sesame Street: A Space Age Approach to Education for Space Age Children” (University of Massachusetts, 1971). Long also wrote that the show had a clear objective to teach progressive social values of tolerance, self-respect, and the “eradication of racism” (Hendershot 151).

Hendershot discusses the paradoxes at the heart of Sesame Street from its inception. In her original prospectus for the show, Cooney stated that the show would specifically target “disadvantaged” children and that through its educational objective of enhancing cognitive abilities, Sesame Street would serve as a democratic equalizer between suburban and urban children (165). As mentioned above, that goal was dropped before the show went into production as being unrealistic and unquantifiable. Instead the new mission was to provide quality children’s entertainment for all preschool viewers but with the idea that the disadvantaged child would especially benefit from the program (141-142). Morrow notes that this “concentric circle” of intent has been a source of both strength and trouble for the show (61).

In my analysis I have found many intersections between Sesame Street and the local shows which came before it. In each instance values and constructs of what it meant to be a good American were part of the message and intent of the show. There was a use of direct address with the intent to talk directly with the child at home with the intent of building a parasocial relationship an on-going viewership. Both Sesame Street and the local shows used short segments to entertain the viewers. Puppets, music, and humor were utilized by both as well. Indeed, Children’s Television Workshop analyzed
“quality” children’s show such as *Captain Kangaroo* (Morrow 66-68) as part of their research process with an eye toward incorporating the best elements of those shows. However, *Sesame Street* parted ways with its predecessors through its diversity of casting and its urban setting. When *Sesame Street* debuted children of color had, for the first time, television friends who looked like them. The show’s educational and entertainment segments were either without social, class, or gender markers, such as the segments featuring Henson’s “Anything Muppets,” or specifically presenting children of various races and ethnicities. Although, as Jackson, Hendershot, and Morrow note, *Sesame Street* came from a nostalgic liberal ideology of universalism that did not acknowledge or examine the deep societal roots of white privilege and institutionalized racism. Rather, it marked the beginning of a quest for diversity in the casting, along with a more mindful presentation of material in programming for children.

**Television and Nostalgia**

Thus, the locally produced hosted shows became a bookended period in time. Amy Holdsworth describes television as a “deeply nostalgic technology.” She writes that “nostalgia,” etymologically, is derived from the Greek words for “homecoming” and “pain;” i.e., literally an ache for home. Television and home are intertwined since the viewing experience is “embedded in the domestic space.” Television memories are tied to viewers’ personal histories and those personal histories are conversely reflected in many of the television shows watched (15). This interconnection between personal history and

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105 While *Captain Kangaroo* was nationally broadcast Bob Keeshan’s earlier local show, *Tinker Tom*, which served as a template for *Captain Kangaroo*.
television viewing permeates all adult-produced children’s media. However, the parasocial nature of the relationship between child and host, which did not carry over to the newer shows, became the center for nostalgic memories voiced by Boomers on the internet and in letters. Children’s shows from the Golden Age of Television are particularly prone to nostalgia, evidenced in commentaries about the shows in interviews and social media by former child viewers and former industry participants.

The nostalgia surrounding the Golden Age of Television presents a challenge for critical analysis and method. Due to the lack of scripts and filmed shows, i.e., original texts both visual and written, objective evidence is scarce. Principally what remains of the era are: the few remaining kinescopes of the original shows; YouTube clips of the shows that lasted into the 1980s and 1990s, the decades when home video recording technology became widely available; and photographic stills. Interviews of the show’s participants are likewise available. These narratives need to be utilized cautiously since they are memory-based recollections of events from fifty or sixty decades ago. The same holds true for the interviews with former child viewers, the Baby Boomers, whose television memories are reconstructions of their Cold War childhoods. Scholars, scientists, and philosophers have long explored the meaning and functionality of “memory.” Memory, as it relates television viewing and reception, is an important area of inquiry for television scholars. The “pervasiveness” of television in day-to-day life is a “major obstacle to the study of relation with the formation of memory” (Bourdon 5).

Children’s shows nostalgia sites abound on the Web. One example is TV Party, which comprises messages to the fans from the former hosts, photographs, articles, video clips, and postings of fan memories. Facebook hosts a number of Philadelphia-based
nostalgia sites, such as the official Gene London page as well as the fan-based site for Sally Starr. In addition, YouTube provides an online space for shared television memories, where clips of shows can be found. The clips and the accompanying comment sections represent a venue for reminiscing and sharing personal memories. Some representative examples include:

Sally Starr, along with Gene London, were the royalty of Philadelphia kid television ... All of these performers were great in their time and made an impact on our generation, but Gene and Sally more than any of them were probably our second parents, providing morals and guidance you didn't always get at home and school. (Will Hill, TV Party)

“Our Gal Sal” was really “My Gal Sal”... I loved her! I had a crush on the pretty blonde cowgirl ... My mom still refers to Sally Starr as her “babysitter,” since I would be glued to WPVI-TV Channel 6 in Philly from 4:30 until the end of the show. This gave my mom the uninterrupted opportunity to fix dinner for dad. (Frank T., TV Party)

Gene is my only happy childhood memory. (Scott Davidson, “Gene London Philly”)

I would love to tell the great Gene London how much of an impact he made on me and my siblings when we were growing up. We were products of a family
where our Dad was left to raise alone [sic] and that Mr. London's show entertained us and at the same time helped teach to appreciate and broaden our horizons. (Richer Enouff, “Gene London Philly”)

Gene, do you remember me? I was on your show in the sixties ... God Bless!
(Diane Morgan, “Gene London Philly”)

These examples indicate how the comments range from the specific, personal (and sometime painful) memories to expressions of joy and gratitude. Conversely, some of the “whisper campaign” material about the sexual orientation of the hosts, which circulated when the hosts were on air, reappears on these sites:

I heard Sally Starr had been a Burlesque dancer in her prime (not true), and then moved into the Kiddee [sic] show TV market. (Ed Justice, TV Party)

Gene London's departure from Philly TV was, according to stories I have heard, not a pleasant one. He was apparently forced out after it was discovered that he (you'll have to guess). (Ari G., TV Party)

While it is unproductive to attempt to recreate an imagined viewer of the era, these posted comments provide some circumstantial evidence of and insight into the parasocial relationship between hosts and audience members. The lingering interest in gossip about the hosts points to the esteem in which the hosts are held and suggest the paradoxical
nature of suspicion and acceptance continues to attract commentary. These comments are also indicative of the nostalgia surrounding that viewing experience for those former viewers. The fact that the local shows have ceased production fuels this nostalgia since the shows are now encapsulated in time. An additional aspect of this nostalgia is the use of popular culture to reconstruct remembered childhoods. This personal reconstruction of a lost era represents a form of identity mediation that has long been a part of children’s culture—both television and literature.

**Children’s Culture and Identity Mediation**

America has a long history of searching for a unique identity with regard to American children’s tales. This quest has included authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, L. Frank Baum, and Carl Sandburg. In his Introduction to *The Annotated Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the annotator, Hearn states that Baum explicitly intended the work as a “modernized fairy tale” for the “children of today;” one which does not moralize but entertains and sparks the imagination. Baum stated that his tale “dispenses” with the “disagreeable ... horrible and blood-curdling” incidences found in the Old-World fairy tales. He wanted to “keep out” nightmares and heartaches for his child readers to which James Thurber, himself the author of several volumes of fairy tales, quipped: “I am glad that despite his determination Mr. Baum failed to keep them out” (85-85). Sandburg’s *Rootabaga Stories*, like *The Wizard of Oz*, spring from the landscape of the midwest but unlike Baum, Sandburg celebrates the simplicity and unique characteristics of America’s Heartland. “In the *Rootabaga Stories* Sandburg could use all the powers of his adult poetry to celebrate the physical reality of his own Midwest,
to rejoice in the energy of American technological society, to ache for the mutability of youth and beauty” (Lynn 129). The hosted shows followed in this tradition by utilizing characters familiar to children in their day-to-day experiences (e.g., shopkeepers, school teachers, policemen) or figures that populated the Cold War cultural landscape such as astronauts and cowboys.

Just as Jacqueline Rose posited the “impossibility” of children’s literature, so too I would posit the impossibility of children’s television. Arguably both children’s television and children’s literature are permeated with nostalgic impulses. In each instance adults are telling a tale to imagined child listeners from the vantage point of a remembered childhood. Nostalgia is intrinsically involved in any discussion of the “Golden Age” of children’s programming. The television industry of the Cold War era was centralized and predominantly populated with white, adult males. While administrators and behind the scenes talent in the television and film industries are still overwhelmingly white and male, the push for diversity has become a cause célèbre and is gaining traction. The production of children’s entertainment, and more specifically children’s television, experienced a radical change as adult gatekeepers have increasingly controlled content and dissemination.

Media function alters with new media. While children and youths have always engaged in authoring stories and personal narratives, new technologies and new platforms for the dissemination of content have now empowered them as creators of visual culture in unprecedented ways. With the rise of cable networks and providers, streaming and on-demand services, social media, and file sharing there is now more diversity in the kinds of programs being produced along as well as the way they are available. Viewers have
control not only of the choice of content but also the method and timing of that viewership. In contrast, the television industry of the Cold War era was centralized and its content reflective of a society in which white privilege was accepted in mass media and was largely unexamined by those in power.

In the Age of the Internet, broadcast television has been dethroned as the exclusive electronic hearth. However, according to recent research by the streaming service Hulu, most Americans (77%) still prefer to watch television at home in the living room and the majority of those viewers watch with family or friends (Feldman “Hulu”). What has changed dramatically is how the Internet has given the average person, including children and teens, the ability to create content for public consumption without the intervention of gatekeepers. Youths in particular are using the Internet for social, political, and artistic expression. In 2014 a survey by the educational resources site, Stage of Life, reported that 49% of the teenagers they surveyed had responded that they had uploaded a video to YouTube (“Statistics”). A Pew Center research report states that the proliferation of smartphones has made Web access easier for teens and that as of 2015 92% of 13 to 17-year olds in American report going online daily. African-American teens represent the largest percentage of young smartphone users, 85%, as opposed to 75% of both white Hispanic teens (Lenhart 2015). While the children’s entertainment industry is still immensely profitable across all the various media platforms, access to the Internet by young people, I would argue, has created new opportunities for children and youths to give expression to their own tales in their own, diverse voices and present a challenge and a counterpoint to the tales framed in nostalgia by adult content creators.
Conclusion

Throughout this work I have made the assertion that a critical examination of Cold War television can provide insight into the popular consciousness in a time of societal change with regard to constructions of gender, class, and race. Further, I have asserted that these shows both conformed to and pushed conventional boundaries. I have based this approach on cultural studies scholarship such as Engelhardt's work on post-World War II search for a new national identity, Sammonds and his discussion of Disney productions and the nuclear family, and Spigel’s work regarding the incorporation of this media into the post-War suburban lifestyle. While social upheavals and a re-examination of societal constructions are frequently the surface in the aftermath of traumatic historical events or radical technological advances, the social upheavals of the Cold War were the first such ones to be televised. While radio, as television’s mass medium forerunner, brought events into American living rooms, television made that experience even more visceral and personal by adding sight to sound. Hosts were basically adults installed in a child’s home.

The local children’s show is an important artifact in children’s television history. This format persisted for over twenty years and was responsible, in large part, for providing the advertising revenue that helped to launch a fledgling industry. These local shows were also the incubators of innovation and creativity. Former hosts point to their early use of green-screen technology and remote site broadcasts. The Philadelphia-based show Tottle pioneered the first puppet stage built specifically for television (Marshall Izen interview). The format of the local hosted show has been deeply influential in the children’s television industry. The television and movie career of Pee-wee Herman (Paul
Reubens) was built on the foundation of the children’s host. Nickelodeon used the format in the Stick Stickly segments and as a framing device for Spongebob Squarepants. The fact that host figures have received little scholarly scrutiny is understandable, given the ephemeral nature of the format. I was privileged to interview the remaining local stars and production members in the Philadelphia area over the course of this project. I feel doubly privileged since many of the participants have passed away and my taped interviews have preserved their oral histories.

In addition to their cultural and historical importance, these locally produced children’s shows represent a site for understanding the evolution and construction of what it means to host and therefore construct a mediated American Childhood. My critical reading of the shows illustrates how the hosts understood, performed, and pushed the boundaries of the normative mores of Cold War America for the child viewer, even while paradoxically tapping into problematic cultural mythologies. Future scholarship can use the adult-child parasocial bond to understand the intersection of nostalgia, media, narrative, and performance studies. Hosting both the children born into this era as well as the introduction of television into the home, the parasocial bond between an adult persona and a child provides a point of entry into the study of media for children. The host role may have shifted with the advent of different formats for children, but the period dominated by celebrity hosts, interpreted here as the face of new media, provides a complex area of inquiry that may illuminate the dynamic impact of media on children even as media continues to evolve.
## TABLES

### Table 1.
Television ads in the Ad*Access database by category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1949</th>
<th>1949%</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1950%</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1951%</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1952%</th>
<th>1953-1957</th>
<th>1953+ %</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV Alone</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>51.25%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>37.69%</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>35.00%</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>61.25%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxury</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>20.18%</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>16.61%</td>
<td>17.75%</td>
<td>10.09%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>35.47%</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.73%</td>
<td>112.73%</td>
<td>15.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>32.64%</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>10.61%</td>
<td>17.35%</td>
<td>8.64%</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5.08%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>61.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramper/Dad</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.53%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.69%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.04%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.53%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.69%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.04%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.62%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.47%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.38%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Teaching&quot;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.88%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>749</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Some advertisements fell into more than one grouping. I scored these by giving partial credit to each appropriate category. Thus, if an ad showed images of ballerinas and baseball players it was scored “.5” in both “Luxury” and “Sports.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme of Show</th>
<th>Total Hosts</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total % of Women</th>
<th>Ethnic Minorities</th>
<th>Total % of Minorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misc. (no specific or verifiable theme)</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auction Shows</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clowns/Circus</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jungle/Zoo</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nautical</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeman/Fireman</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railroad/Trolley</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space/Science Fiction</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1040</strong></td>
<td><strong>120</strong></td>
<td><strong>12%</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Hosts and Shows by theme, gender, and ethnicity
These tallies are based on a survey of the shows listed in Tim Hollis’s *Hi There Boys and Girls.*


Berry, Gordon L. “Television, Social Roles, and Marginality: Portrayals of the Past and Images for the Future.” Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research, edited by


DeCocco, Ralph. Personal interview. 2010.


“Gene London Philly Kids Show Host WCAU.” *YouTube*, uploaded by SV In Like Flynn, 6 January 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhKbRCA2kZw&t=1s.


Hanson, Bruce. *Peter Pan on Stage and Screen*. McFarland, 2011.


Lauzen, Dr Martha M. *Boxed in 2016-2017: Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television*. San Diego State University, 2017.


Stark, Steven D. *Glued to the Set: The 60 Television shows and Events that made Us Who we are Today*. Free Press, 1997.


---. Personal interview, 2010.


Webber, William. Personal interview. 2009.


WORKS REFERENCED


**Experience**

*July 2010 to September 2018*

**Head of Access and Collection Services**  
**Paul Robeson Library**  
*Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey 08102*

Serve as the librarian in charge of the circulation desk and technical services department of the Paul Robeson Library. Manage the library supervisors and staff responsible for public services, materials delivery, as well as collection management and maintenance. Continuing responsibilities as part of the library reference department include: providing reference service for students, faculty, and staff; conducting library instruction sessions; and authoring web-based and print instructional materials for bibliographic instruction. Areas of bibliographic responsibility include: Art and Art History; Children and Childhood Studies; Education; Psychology; Religion and Philosophy; the Rutgers Camden Honors Program; and the Rutgers Camden Teacher Preparation Program.

Awarded Librarian Emeritus status upon retirement in 2018.

*July 2011 to January 2012 (Interim appointment)*

**Acting Director**  
**Paul Robeson Library**  
*Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey 08102*

Responsible for supervising the daily operations of the Camden campus library of the Rutgers University Library system. Duties include: budgeting; human resources; administration; and oversight of facilities and security. Responsible for the planning and implementation of a multi-million dollar library renovation project in conjunction with campus administrators.

*July 2000 to July 2010*

**Reference Librarian**  
**Paul Robeson Library**  
*Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey 08102*

Responsible for serving as web administrator for the Paul Robeson Library home page; providing reference service for students, faculty, and staff; conducting library instruction sessions; and authoring web-based and print instructional materials for bibliographic instruction. Areas of bibliographic responsibility included: Art and Art History; Children and Childhood Studies; Education; Psychology; Religion and Philosophy; the Rutgers Camden Honors Program; and the Rutgers Camden Teacher Preparation Program.
July 1998 to July 2000  
**Reference Librarian/Library Liaison**  
*Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey*

Served as the library liaison for the Rutgers University/Rowan University/Camden County College Urban Campus Library Project. Conducted bibliographic instruction sessions and reference services for the students, faculty, and staff affiliated with the project. Produced web-based and print instructional material for the project.

July 1993 to July 1998  
**Reference Librarian (part-time)**  
*Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey*

Conducted bibliographic instruction sessions and reference services for the students, faculty, and staff of Rutgers, Camden Campus.

March 1981 to March 1983  
**Manager Information Services**  
*TeleSciences Data Systems, Warminster, Pennsylvania*

Organized and directed all aspects of a corporate information center. Established and maintained procedures for bibliographic control of user documents. Generated project planning schedules. Compiled special reports and research papers.

June 1980 to March 1981  
**Associate Systems Analyst**  
*PRC/Information Sciences Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Edited publications for an on-line information retrieval project under the auspices of the department of the Navy. Designed and produced a series of training manuals. Created public relations brochures.

October 1979 to June 1980  
**LEXIS Representative**  
*Mead Data Central, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Instructed lawyers, accountants, and librarians in the use of LEXIS, an on-line information retrieval system.

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**Education**

Ph.D. candidate (Expected date of graduation 2019)  
Graduate School of Children and Childhood Studies  
*Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey*
Master of Arts, 2005
Graduate School of Liberal Studies
Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey

Master of Library and Information Science, 1981
School of Library and Information Science
Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Bachelor of Arts, 1978
Elementary Education
LaSalle College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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**Publications**

**Edited Books**


**Book Chapters**


“Feminine Mystique: Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane in the ‘Silver Age’ of Comics.” In *Examining Lois Lane: The Scoop on Superman’s Sweetheart*, edited by Nadine Farghaly, 39-60. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013. Print. (Note: This chapter was peer-reviewed).


**Refereed Journal Articles**


**Periodical Publications**


**Reviews**


**Encyclopedia Articles**


**Exhibit Catalogs**


**Editorial/Review Positions**


EconKids: A Rutgers University Project on Economics and Children (http://econkids.rutgers.edu/) Co-project manager with Theo Haynes for this online resource which promotes using literature to teach economic principles to children (2012 – present).


**Presentations**

**Juried Presentations**


“Feminine Mystique: Superman as Lois Lane’s Alter-Ego in the ‘Silver Age’ of Comics” (juried selection). Batgirl to Buffy: Women and Gender in Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Comics (Women’s Studies academic conference). May 2, 2014 (presenter and panel chair).


“YouTube and YouTube-iness: You Tube as a Research and Instruction Tool.” An ACRL Webinar June 7, 2011 (presenter with Katie Elson Anderson).

“‘There's No Place Like Home’: Mothers, Daughters, and Domestic Spaces in 20th Century American Film.” National Popular/American Culture Association Conference, St. Louis, Missouri, March 31, 2010 (presenter).


“From Scribbler to Scribe to Scholarly Communicator: Transition Points in Publication.” VALE Users Conference, January 6, 2005 (co-presenter with Patricia Libutti, Rutgers University Libraries; Eileen Stec, Rutgers University Libraries; Mallika Henry, York College CUNY).


“Based on a True Story: Lifetime Movies as the New Domestic Gothic.” Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association, November 5-7, 2004 (member of panel discussion).


“Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage Affected by Wars: An International Perspective.” ARLIS Annual Conference, New York, New York, April 18, 2004 (co-presenter and moderator with Nensi Brailo, California College of Arts; Andras Riedlmayer, Harvard University; and Marilyn Russell, Institute of American Indian Arts).

“Strategic Marketing for Academic and Research Libraries.” VALE Users Conference, January 7, 2004 (co-presenter with Luis Rodriguez, Montclair University; Mary Martin, County College of Morris).


“Metadata 101: A Primer for Librarians.” VALE Users Conference, January 8, 2003 (co-presenter with Aurora Ioanid, Monmouth University).


“I Sing the Library Electric: Designing the Virtual Library.” NJLA/NJACRL Spring Conference, April 11 2002 (presenter).


Invited and Other Professional Presentations


“Teaching with the Millennial Generation.” Workshop for the faculty of Zane North Elementary Collingswood, New Jersey. October 19, 2015 (presenter with Katie Elson Anderson).


“Katniss in Oz.” Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association, Pittsburgh, Pa., November 3, 2012 (presenter).

The Big Read: The Call of the Wild. I served as a member of the opening panel on October 6, 2012 at Urban Promise Academy, Camden, New Jersey and presented “Call of the Wild in Film” at the Paul Robeson Library, Rutgers Camden on October 10, 2012.


“Children, Comedy, and Television Cartoons from Crusader Rabbit to Phineas and Ferb.” Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association, Alexandria, Virginia, October 29, 2010 (presenter).

“'There's No Place Like Home': Mothers, Daughters, and Domestic Spaces in 20th Century American Film.” Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association, Boston, Massachusetts, November 7, 2009 (presenter).


“I Know Why the Caged Book Sings: Reading and Identity.” Rutgers University Libraries. Banned Book Week Faculty Panel Presentation. New Brunswick, New Jersey. September


“Big-Eyed Art and the Age of Nuclear Anxiety.” Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, October 31, 2008 (presenter).


“Quarantining the Plagiarism Plague.” NJLA CUS/NJ ACRL User Education Committee Workshop, October 21, 2005 (keynote speaker).


“Camtasia.” Rutgers University, Camden Campus Faculty Symposium, April 30, 2004 (co-presenter with John Gibson, Rutgers University Libraries).


“Strategic Library Marketing.” PALINET, Philadelphia, PA, December 5, 2003 (workshop presenter with Luis Rodriguez, Montclair University; Susan Rosenberg, Brookdale College; Cynthia Gibbon, Gettysburg College; Irene Percelli, PALINET).


Media Appearances


Professional Activities

American Association of University Professors (1998-present)

- Vice President, Rutgers University, Camden Campus Chapter (2006-2007)

American Library Association (2000-2009)
• ALA Drewes, Hornback, and Leisner Scholarship Committee, Member (2005-2009)
• ALA Library Instruction Roundtable (2001-2009)
  • Past-President (2008-2009)
  • President (2006-2008)
  • Vice President/President Elect (2005-2006)
  • Organization and Planning Chair (2008-2009)
  • Teaching, Learning, and Technology Committee Chair (2003-2005)

• LAMA – member since 2014 and selected as mentor for the LAMA membership program.
• ACRL Membership Advisory Committee (2005-2007)
• ACRL Chapters Council Past Chair (2005-2006)
• ACRL Chapters Council Chair (2004-2005)
• ACRL Chapters Council Vice-Chair/Chair Elect (2003-2004)
• ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award (Nominations)(2004-2005)
• ACRL Immersion Program Selection Committee (2008-2009)
• ACRL Instructional Section Web Administrator (2000 to 2001)

Beta Phi Mu International Library and Information Studies Honor Society (since 1981)
Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia (since 2009)
Center for Children and Childhood Studies, Rutgers University
• Center Associate (since 2002)
Informing Science and Information Technology Education Joint Conference, Australia (2004)
  • Member of international review board
Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association (since 2004)
• Children and Childhood Studies Section, Founding Chair (2005-2013)
• Member of a working group which updated standards for licensure of institutions of higher education within the state of New Jersey. This working group was specifically charged with updating the standards regarding libraries and information literacy.
New Jersey Libraries Association College and University Section/ACRL NJ (since 2001)
• Academic Statement Task Force, Member (2003-2004)
• Co-Chair VALE/NJLA CUS/NJ ACRL Users Conference Planning Committee (2003–2005)
• Past President (2003 – 2004)
• President (2002 – 2003)
• Vice President/President Elect (2001 – 2002)
Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (since 2010)
Rutgers – The State University, Camden, New Jersey
• Enterprise Risk Management Ethics and Compliance Subcommittee on Plagiarism (since 2015)
• Title IX Adjudication Team, Student Advisor (since 2015)
• Accessibility Committee (since 2013)
  Rutgers University Libraries
  • Access Services Working Group (2011-present)
  • Advisory Committee on Appointments and Promotions (2006-2008)
  • Deputy Faculty Coordinator (2008-2009)
  • Digital Repository Review Committee (2004-2006)
  • Faculty Coordinator (2009-2010)
  • Instruction Services Group (2000-2002)
  • IRIS Public Access Committee (2004-2008)
  • Marketing/PR Group (2006-2008)
  • Planning and Coordinating Committee (2012-2013)
  • READ Scale Implementation Committee (since 2013)
  • Training and Learning Committee (2004-2006, Chair 2012-2014)
    o Committee Chair, 2012-2016
  • University Librarian Search Committee (2015)
  • User Services Council, Social Science Representative (2011-2012)
  • Virtual Reference Task Force (2007)
  • Web Advisory Committee (2000-2006)

Virtual Academic Library Environment, New Jersey
• Interface Committee (2000 to 2001)
• Shared Resources Committee (2002-2008)
  o Convener for Best Practices Sub-group (2007)

Arguments and Grants
  • Web Development Fundamentals Certification, Rutgers University Internet Institute, 2002.

Professional Development

• OASIS Leadership, Collaboration, and Networking Training, Rutgers University, Camden Campus, September – December 2010.
• LIRT Strategic Planning Retreat, ALA Annual Conference, Washington, DC, June 24, 2010.
• Rutgers University Human Subjects Compliance Program Certification, Rutgers University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, May 6, 2004.
• LIRT Leadership Retreat, ALA Mid-winter Conference, San Diego, California, January 9, 2004.

Awards and Grants
Recipient of the Marsh-Gillette Fellowship for Childhood Studies, Department of Childhood Studies, Rutgers-The State University. This is a monetary award to facilitate the completion of a PhD candidate’s dissertation research.

The Big Read 2012: The Call of the Wild. Paul Robeson Library served as a community partner with Urban Promise Academy and the Camden County Public Libraries in a community read initiative. Urban Promise received $10,800 from the NEA for this project. I served as the Paul Robeson Library liaison for this initiative.

Selected as a Chancellor’s Civic Engagement Faculty Fellow for Rutgers Camden in 2012.

Selected by Library Journal (March 15, 2005) as one of the “Library Movers and Shakers for 2005,” an annual list that profiles “emerging leaders in the library world who are innovative, creative, and making a difference.”

Awarded the Rutgers University Camden Campus Provost Grant (2005-2006) for improving undergraduate education (with Dr. Gary Golden, Rutgers University Libraries; and John Gibson, Rutgers University Libraries).

Community Service

Camden Rescue Mission Christmas Toy Drive, Coordinator for Paul Robeson Library (1999-2009)

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church Food Bank, Volunteer (2001-2009)


Rutgers University, Rutgers Camden English Graduate Student Association
  o Served as Conference Planning Chair for 2006 Conference

Rutgers University, Childhood Studies Graduate Student Organization
  o Web Administrator (2009-2010)