

CONSUMING BEFORE THEY CAN WALK: AN ANALYSIS OF
MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION ON THE TOP PRESCHOOL
PROGRAMMING BLOCKS ON TELEVISION

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ABSTRACT

Preschool television is a growing segment of children's media, but there is limited research examining the structure of the top preschool content producers. The vast majority preschool programming is promoted as educational by the networks; however no show explicitly lists media literacy education as a primary learning goal even though children 2-6 spend, on average, more than two hours a day exposed to media. This thesis examines preschool programming through political economic theory to determine whether the business models of the top three preschool television networks influences their approaches to media literacy education in media themed episodes of their most popular series for preschoolers. The thesis first examines whether educational media works for preschoolers and how media literacy education can undermine attempts by media institutions to influence behavior. It also examines the history of the preschool series on PBS, Nickelodeon, and Disney Channel to determine how the development of preschool programming on each network has contributed to the content they produce for preschoolers. The thesis then moves onto a study comparing media themed episodes from the top series from each network and a media themed episode from a series that has presented media literacy episodes throughout its history to help compare and analyze the current state of media literacy in preschool television. This study helps build a foundation for future research so we can recognize the best strategies to introduce young children to media literacy education in this increasingly media saturated society.

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CHAPTER 1-MEDIA LITERACY AND EDUCATIONAL PRESCHOOL TELEVISION

Introduction

Over the past four decades, PBS, Nickelodeon, and Disney Channel have emerged as the most recognizable broadcasters of children's television in the United States. According to a Roper survey, non-profit PBS has been voted the most trusted institution in America, and one of the most trusted producers of children's media, for several consecutive years (Daddura, 2009). Nickelodeon and Disney Channel, both for-profit, are among the top 10 most valuable television networks. In 2009, it was estimated that Nickelodeon, a Viacom company, is worth \$17.2 billion and Disney Channel is worth an estimated \$9.3 billion. Both networks also earned revenues above \$1 billion in 2009 (Lauria, 2010). All three networks have daytime viewership above one million, when the majority of their programming is targeting preschoolers (Gorman, 2011).

Children's television occupies a unique place in the media landscape. Once an overlooked segment of the media, children's television has become a multi-billion dollar industry that includes some of the most popular and financially successful networks on television. However, unlike with television intended for adults, children's television producers must consider the "special cognitive, emotional, and developmental needs of its audience" (Bryant, 2007, p. ix). These special considerations include a susceptibility to attempts by advertisers and content producers to influence their young audience's opinions and desires. Although there is ample evidence that advertisers and producers have used this power to encourage product or brand loyalty, there is significantly less research examining each network's role in leading their young audience into becoming subjects of the larger cultural hegemony (Alexander & Owers, 2007; Tashjian & Naidoo, 2007). Most children's networks, including Disney Channel and Nickelodeon, are owned by larger conglomerates that also produce content and other commodities for adults. These conglomerates, like Disney and Viacom, have been accused in the past of supporting America's ruling class through their content, so it is important to examine their

children's content to examine whether they are using their influence to develop subordinate members of the hegemonic society (McChesney, 2004).

The three networks being studied in this thesis, PBS, Nickelodeon, and Disney Channel are not only the three leaders of preschool and children's television programming in America; they also represent three different television network business models, which impact the content produced by these networks. Nickelodeon, which is funded primarily through commercial advertising and subscription fees, must consider the interests of the companies that are advertising on the network along with ensuring support for the Nickelodeon brand through its content (Pecora, 2004). Disney Channel, which relies primarily on cable subscription fees and features promos for Disney products and programs during the interstitial times, must ensure the programs featured fit within, and support, the Disney brand and its characters (Kalagian, 2007).

PBS is a nonprofit network owned by its 354 member stations (Daddura, 2009). PBS and its member stations' mission is to provide quality programming, and PBS Kids, the children's programming block on PBS, is specifically concerned with providing educational programming for children (PBS Mission and Values, 2012). PBS and its member stations are able to focus on the quality and educational purpose of their programming because they do not rely on advertising or subscription fees. Instead, they fund their programming through corporate underwriting, individual donations and memberships, and programming fees from member stations, with a small portion of funding coming through federal programs (Kahn, 2011). Although PBS and its stations accept sponsorships, and often promote those sponsors through member stations and events, they ensure that their programs are produced independently without any interference from outside interests (Producing for PBS, 2008). This allows PBS and its content producers to develop and broadcast content that has a positive and educational influence on preschoolers' lives with less pressure from advertisers or sponsors to support their brand or the societal status quo. In the United States the status quo includes the capitalistic free market system that supports the growth of large, hegemonic corporations and encourages consumerism (Roland, 2002; Gitlin,

1979b).

Much of the early preschool programming on PBS created in the late 1960s and 1970s was produced to serve overlooked segments of the television audience, which included young children, minorities, and the poor. The network and its content producers continue to serve this segment of the population while broadcasting content that can benefit all young children's lives (Simensky, 2007). Both Disney and Nickelodeon began to develop and produce their own preschool programming in the late 1980s and 1990s when they realized the value of the demographic. Nickelodeon recognized the advantage of reaching the demographic directly preceding its main demographic, 6-11 year olds, and Disney understood the value in familiarizing very young viewers with Disney characters and properties (Pecora, 1998; Kalagian, 2007). Both networks also realized the amount that could be made from merchandising and licensing preschool programs and characters (Tashijan & Naidoo, 2007; Wickman, 2012). The lifetime profit potential of the preschool audience on both Disney Channel and Nickelodeon makes it critical to examine the content produced by these networks to ensure they are not taking advantage of the influence they have on young children's lives.

One way to explore whether children's networks are taking advantage of this influence is by examining the way they approach media literacy education in their programming. Media literacy education can help viewers better understand the media content they consume, however some children's networks may be hesitant to include media literacy education in their programming since it may undermine attempts to influence the thoughts and desires of young viewers (Hobbs, 1998; Oates, Blades, Gunter, 2002). This thesis attempts to determine whether the business models and missions of these networks influence the amount of media literacy education included in episodes with specific media themes on each network's most popular programs. The thesis first explores political economic theory and how it can help explain the motivations of these networks, while also examining evidence that shows that media literacy education can be used to mitigate the negative influence of media content on children. The thesis

then looks at the history of the networks to provide evidence that their business models have influenced the content they broadcast. The thesis then moves on to a textual analysis of episodes from highly rated programs on each network to compare their approaches to media literacy education in media-specific episodes. This will provide further evidence that funding models are connected to each network's approach to media literacy education, and that the preschool programming on for-profit children's networks is just a vehicle to familiarize children with a network's brand, franchises, and ethos.

Examining the current state of media literacy education in preschool television through political economic theory offers an appropriate framework to study this issue, since the theory helps explain the influence of politics, economics, and society as a whole on media content (McChesney, 2000). Political economics is also the appropriate theoretical framework to examine ownership in media, particularly attempts by those controlling media content to influence actions, thoughts, and desires (Chomsky, 1989). Money and power are consistent concerns for each of these networks, and political economic theory allows for the examination of these issues in preschool television along with society as a whole. This is because political economic theory examines how different strategies of financing and organizing commodities, in this case each network's productions, can influence how the content is presented to the public and how it is consumed and understood by those in a society. In the case of preschool program producers and broadcasters this includes how each network's business model influences the content that is broadcast and the way it is presented to their young viewers.

The Political Economics of Media Literacy Education on Preschool Television

Theoretical Background

As children's networks continue to target younger viewers, introduction to television and mass media is taking place much earlier in children's lives than in previous decades

(Wannamaker & Andrews, 2010). This is why it is important to examine preschool television and the way networks approach different areas of education and how they use their influence, since it can affect a child's perspective on society and mass media for the rest of their lives (Fisch, S. M., Truglio, R. T., & Cole, C. F. (1999). This is also why political economic theory is the best framework to examine the business of preschool television, since it examines the implications of media phenomena for not only consumers and producers, but for society as a whole.

According to Meehan, Mosco, and Wasko (2006), "Starting with the classical political economists, this approach has been concerned with a holistic analysis, with comprehending the social totality. In concrete terms, this meant understanding the relationship among commodities, institutions, social relations, and hegemony" (p. 107). Understanding these relationships is necessary when examining the different forces that have influenced the development of preschool television in the United States and the top three preschool networks' approach to education, specifically media literacy education in their programming.

Political economic theory goes beyond merely looking at media and its relationship to the larger communication system to examine the media's position in the "broader social structure of society" (McChesney, 2000). Children growing up in this media saturated society will become influential adults in society. It is important to understand how their exposure to the media influences their behaviors and perceptions, and how to reduce the negative effects of the media and increase the positive ones, especially since people are being exposed to media at a younger age. Understanding the media and how information is disseminated helps citizens decipher what is truth and recognize when the media are trying to influence their actions. This way they can become critical, well informed members of a society (Domine, 2011).

According to Chomsky (1989)"those in power" in a capitalist society practice "thought control" through the media to serve the interests of the ruling class (p. vii). This attempt by those in power to support their interests through institutions, like the media, fit with Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, where the ruling class attempts to keep its power by maintaining the status

quo in a capitalist society (Bates, 1975). Media literacy education, which teaches citizens the ability to analyze or “read” the media and better understand the producers of and motivations for this content, can undermine these attempts to control through the media. A citizen’s ability to be media literate can negatively affect attempts by the ruling class to ensure citizens behave a certain way and are controlled by the ruling class through the media in a hegemonic society (Hobbs, 1998; Oates, Blades, Gunter, 2002). This includes attempts by children’s media networks to encourage brand loyalty in young viewers for both the network and its advertisers (Berger, 2003; Gunter & McAleer, 1997; Pecora, 1998). This is especially important for Nickelodeon, which must ensure the advertising on its network influences children so advertisers will buy commercial time, and Disney, which uses Disney Channel to promote the larger Disney brand (McChesney, 2004; Pecora, 1998).

Children’s television and media literacy education also fall within the “moral philosophical dimension” of political economic theory (Mosco, 1996, p. 133). According to Murdock and Golding (1991), when speaking about political economy, “perhaps most importantly of all, it goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity, and the public good” (pp. 18-19). All three networks promote their preschool programming as being educational and beneficial to the well-being of the viewers (PBS Mission and Values, 2012; About Our Shows: Disney Junior, 2012; Nickelodeon, 2011). Children, especially very young children, are extremely impressionable, and are unable to differentiate between programs and advertising content, so the hope is that children’s media producers will produce positive content that will benefit young members of a society, but when money is involved, that is not always the case (Gunter & McAleer, 1997).

The ability to be media literate in a society saturated with media is becoming as important as being traditionally literate (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1997). A literate media consumer understands media producers may be trying to influence their thoughts, actions, and opinions so the ruling class in the hegemonic society can control them (Gitlin, 1979b). In

children's programming, this typically occurs by introducing children to the status quo, and negative consequences of opposing it (Banet-Weiser, 2007). This is accomplished by promoting certain behavior and opinions both in advertising and in the actual content (p. 22). For-profit networks, like Nickelodeon and Disney, who are owned by large media conglomerates and create media for all ages, would benefit by ensuring children behave a certain way. By establishing their child viewers as a subject of the cultural hegemony, they can create a consumer for the conglomerate's content and advertising for life (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 1997).

Political economic theory also offers the proper framework to examine how economics influences the content produced by these networks. Money is a consistent issue in the production of content for all three networks. Both Nickelodeon and Disney must consider how the content they present both through programming and advertising can provide revenue and support their brand (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 2006). By reaching children at a very young age both of these for-profit networks can promote brand loyalty to very young children before they can even walk, ensuring that both networks continue to have a consumer for their content and products in the future (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 1997; Pecora, 2004). For PBS, finding funding for its network and programs determines not only the quality of its programming, but whether the network and its member stations can operate at all (Pecora, 1998). PBS must ensure their children's programming is high quality and educational or the network may be further criticized, which could cost it corporate funding along with state and federal education grants (Simensky, 2007).

There is very little research available that examines children's media through the theoretical framework of political economy. Most of the past research examining the political economy of television has concentrated on television content aimed at adults, like the news (Keshishian, 1997; Morris, 2007). The few attempts to look at children's media through political economic theory have done so by focusing on mainly the advertising and merchandising through children's media, the relationships between content distributors and advertisers, and the effect this has on a child's desires or actions (Pecora, 1998; Kline, 1995; Seiter, 1995). This thesis goes

beyond examining just advertising to look at all content: the attempts to influence children and the history and motivations behind the production of children's content by the top children's television networks.

The research conducted by Pecora (1998), Kline (1995), and Seiter (1995) concentrate mainly on children from ages 7-12. Even though this thesis will touch upon this age group, it focuses mainly on the political economy of preschool television. The amount of preschool content has increased exponentially since the 1990s with all three networks launching digital tier networks dedicated solely to children's programming. The preschool programming across PBS, Nickelodeon, and Disney Channel, and their digital offshoots, exceeds, on average, six million viewers a day (Gorman, 2011; Catering to Children: Cable Networks Divide, 2011; PBS Kids reports growth across all platforms, 2012). However, there is very limited research examining this segment of children's programming. According to Murdock and Golding (1997), "The obvious starting point for a political economy of mass communications is the recognition that the mass media are first and foremost industrial and commercial organizations which produce and distribute commodities" (p.205). Since there is so little research examining preschool television programming through political economic theory, this thesis examines the conditions which have influenced the development and broadcasting of the main commodity of these networks, their shows, and how their approach to media literacy education in their programming can be correlated with their histories and business models.

In a capitalist society, such as the United States a dominant ideology is consumerism, which is perpetuated by children's television. Since the 1960s, when children's programming emerged as its own segment of television programming, broadcasters and advertisers began to see children as potential consumers (Kapur & Kinder, 1999). They recognized the fact that children not only have their own money to spend, and influence their parents' purchases, but they are also potential lifelong consumers in the capitalist society (Strasburger, 2001). Advertisers and networks want to encourage brand loyalty amongst their viewers for life, and ensure advertising

and media messages affect members of a society until they die (p. 186). The children's networks also contribute to this dominant ideology by not only continually promoting their brands, and the products and brands of their sponsors, but also by promoting adult brands, like car companies, with very few attempts at explaining the purpose or structure of the media to foster a greater understanding of these attempts and mitigate the negative effects (Kapur & Kinder, 1998).

Nickelodeon and Disney have clear motivations to limit the media literacy education presented in their programming, since it undermines attempts by both networks to promote brand and advertiser loyalty (Harris & Bargh, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006, Siddika, 2002). Since PBS relies on sponsors, who have little to no influence on the production of content, there should be little resistance from the non-profit network to present media literacy messages in its programming. However, this willingness to go against the status quo has historically cost PBS and its member stations funding from the government and other sources (McChesney, 2004)

Each business model presents different issues related to political economic theory that could be reflected in the way they approach media literacy education in their programming. Nickelodeon and Disney Channel, which have developed into two of the most valuable cable television networks in the United States, have a clear motivation in keeping the current status quo and maintaining their success. The nonprofit business model of PBS, on the other hand, is oppositional to free market capitalism since its main concern is providing the public with news and information rather than profits it could make from advertising or promoting its brand (McChesney, 2004).

The first portion of this thesis examines the current state of media literacy education in America to determine where educational media, specifically children's television, can provide support for this area of education. It reviews past research to provide evidence that media literacy education can mitigate the negative effects of the media while increasing the positive effects. It also uses past research to determine whether education through the media can work for preschool aged children. Lastly, the first portion of the paper examines the histories of the three networks

being studied to determine each network's motivation for producing preschool television.

The second portion of this thesis will feature a study of the actual programming featured on PBS, Nickelodeon, and Disney Channel to examine the current state of media literacy education in the episodes from the most popular preschool series on each network. The study explores the current state of media literacy education by examining the few episodes with a media focus from these series through a detailed textual analysis and analyzing whether these programs attempt to teach preschoolers to access, analyze, evaluate, or produce media and how the network's business models, and their interest in maintaining the status quo, correlate with these attempts. Using a textual analysis allows the study to both recognize media specific themes in each episode and determine how they fit within the larger episode, the series, and each network's business model.

Media Literacy Education in America

According to Aufderheide (1993) media literacy is described as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms” (cited in Hobbs, 1998, p. 16). The United States is one of the top producers of media in the world; it is also behind many other industrialized English-speaking countries in its commitment to media literacy education (Hobbs, 1996). Children in America spend, on average, at least one-half of their waking life exposed to, or using, media, and that number is increasing (Kubey, 2004b). Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1997) urge schools and the public to adopt a broader definition of literacy to include new communication technologies along with the traditional ones related to writing and print. Even though in the last decade all but three states have adopted some type of media literacy education in their overall curriculum, these requirements are typically included in the English, History, Social Studies, and Civics curriculum rather than being taught as a separate subject or concentration (Kubey, 2004a). The biggest issue with this strategy is that most English and Social Studies teachers are not trained in instructing media literacy education, which often results in

analyzing texts or media productions in relation to the subject area, rather than thinking critically about how and why certain media is produced (p. 76). It can take up to two years to train teachers without a background in the media how to understand and teach media literacy in the classroom, which is often too much of a time and financial burden for teachers and schools (Hobbs, 1996). Also, recent budget cuts due to the 2008 recession have resulted in schools scaling back available course and extra-curricular options making it more difficult to include media literacy courses or lessons beyond what has been traditionally taught in public school for over a century (Stansbury, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind Act has also become an obstacle for school districts or departments of education wanting to include courses or lessons that are outside the traditional curriculum. The Act requires states to assess their student's skills through standardized testing of mainly reading and math skills, which forces schools to spend more time on these subject areas while ignoring others, like media literacy (Beach & Baker, 2011). The Common Core State Standards, an initiative that has been adopted by 46 of the 50 states by 2012 that identifies national standards for education, does include media and technology as a core focus, however, those standards only touch upon the use and production of the media, and require very little work exploring how the media work or how to develop media-specific critical thinking skills (Common Core, 2012). Some state curricula even include works from such pre-digital media authors as Ovid and Shakespeare as a part of their media and technology Core Standards (Walsh, 2010).

This lack of focus on media literacy education and competency is even more alarming when compared to other industrialized English-speaking countries. Canada requires that 25% of the Language Arts curriculum focus on media education and literacy. In other English-speaking countries, like Australia and Great Britain, media literacy education is a part of the language arts curriculum for all students in grades 7-12 (Hobbs, 1996).

Who is Educating the Public about the Media in America?

Schools are finding it difficult to include media literacy education in their curricula, so many nonprofit and advocacy groups are producing research and working to make media literacy education available to both children and adults. National organizations, like the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), and community based media organizations associated with public media stations and universities help improve media literacy by promoting programs that educate citizens about the media (Hamilton Media Commons, 2012). They also advocate for an increased focus on media literacy in formal educational settings like schools, and increased awareness by society as a whole (NAMLE.net, 2012; Media Education Lab, 2012).

Programs run by organizations like these cannot reach the masses, even when teachers are educated about incorporating media in their classrooms. Often the media literacy lessons taught to educators are used to improve comprehension in their subject area, like English, rather than teaching media literacy as a separate course or lesson topic (Hobbs, 2007; Kubey, 2004b).

As advocates continue to struggle to have media literacy lessons included in national and statewide curricula due to budgetary concerns and an unwillingness to update what is considered the traditional curriculum, they are looking for other avenues to teach children and even adults about the media and how the media works (Rubinstein, 2012). One way that media literacy education could be brought to the masses is by using media themselves as an educational tool. Almost every home in the United States has some sort of media, including the 99% of homes with children that have at least one television (Roberts & Foehr, 2008).

Individuals in today's society are constantly exposed to the media in their everyday lives. With the proliferation of laptops, smart phones, and tablets, the media now follow people everywhere they go. This ever-expanding role of the media in our lives makes it important for individuals to be able to think critically and analyze the influence of the media in society and in their lives. It is also important to recognize the motivations behind the media content different companies produce for public consumption and how it influences the actions and affects the

thoughts and attitudes of both individuals and groups. To mitigate the negative effects and to promote the possible positive influences of the media, individuals must have the ability to understand how the media operate and understand the motivations behind media content.

Mitigating Negative Effects Associated with Television Advertising and Content

One area most often studied by media effects researchers is the influence of advertising, especially on children (Carter, Patterson, Donovan, Ewing, & Roberts, 2011). Although licensing and merchandising have become big revenue sources for television networks, advertising revenue continues to be the foundation of the children's television business (Alexander & Owers, 2007). The purpose of advertising is to persuade the viewer of the advertisement to buy the product being promoted or advertised (Oates, Blades, & Gunter, 2002). Many worry about advertising directed to children, since most children under the age of 12 struggle to understand the persuasive intent of advertising (p. 240). This inability to recognize these intentions also makes it especially difficult for children under 7 to recognize the difference between regular programming and advertising (p. 242; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). This is why the FCC requires "intervening or unrelated material" to appear between the actual program and the commercials in content intended for children under 12, to help them distinguish between commercials and the actual program (FCC, 2012). Advertisers still try to target certain age groups of children by altering advertisements depending on the age of the children the product is targeting (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). Advertisers understand that younger children, under the age of 7, are more likely to be persuaded to want a product if the advertisement features a cartoon, celebrity, or jingle since younger children are drawn more to commercials that are visually and aurally appealing (p. 572). Older children and teenagers are drawn more to advertisements that use argumentation to persuade viewers to buy or desire a product (p. 573; Carter, et al., 2011).

The advertising of unhealthy foods to children is considered one of the biggest issues concerning advertising, obesity, children, and the media (Morrison, 2011). According to the

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2011), over one third of children under the age of 18 are obese or overweight in the United States. Total expenditures by unhealthy food advertisers like fast food and snack companies topped \$1.6 billion in the same year, most of which was spent on media advertising (Marr, 2008). This figure does not include other activities that draw children to unhealthy foods, like kid-friendly packaging, contests, mascots, and prizes, making advertising unhealthy foods to children a multi-billion dollar industry (Story & French, 2004).

Children's exposure to advertisements for foods with low nutritional value has been linked to unhealthy eating habits in children (Kunkel, 2010; Morrison, 2010; Schultz, 2010). A large portion of this research places blame on three types of food advertisements: fast foods, sugary beverages, and unhealthy snacks. Commercials for these products make up the majority of advertising on children's television (Morrison, 2011; Dhar & Baylis, 2011; Thompson, 2005; Zmuda, 2011; Strasburger, 2001). This, combined with television being a sedentary activity, is a major reason why the media, advertisers, and television are consistently blamed for the growth of obesity in both children and adults (Story & French, 2004). A child's food choices can influence their diet for the rest of their lives, so exposure to these ads during childhood may result in unhealthy eating habits and obesity in adulthood (Birch, 1999; Harris & Bargh, 2009).

The impact of the commodification of childhood and consumerism are also significant issues related to children, advertising, and the media. In 2008, it was estimated that companies spent more than \$17 billion on advertising and marketing directed at children in the United States alone (Lagorio, 2009). The two top toy companies in the United States, Mattel and Hasbro, spent a combined \$378 million in 2007 marketing their products to children. This figure does not include the operational costs of both companies' expansion into the media through television networks, production companies, feature films, and video games, each of which increases the visibility for their products and brands (Bulik, 2009). Companies advertising products to children, like Mattel and Hasbro, spend this much because they understand the buying power children and adolescents possess. They want to start influencing children's buying and brand preferences early

so, as they get older, gain more influence in their family's buying decisions, and earn of their own money, they will stay loyal to the brands and products they were exposed to as a child, and even buy the product or brand for their own children (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 2006). It was estimated in 2004 that teenagers in the United States spent over \$140 billion a year of their own money (Story & French, 2004). Children under 12 have less money of their own to spend, about \$25 billion, but it is estimated that children under 18 influence another \$200 billion of their family's spending. With children and adolescents controlling over \$350 billion a year, advertisers want to ensure children not only want their products, but also develop a loyalty to their brands (p. 1). Advertisers want to instill the need for individuals to buy goods to feel fulfilled at a young age so they have loyal consumers for life (Strasburger, 2001).

How Media Literacy Education can Mitigate Negative Effects of Media Exposure

The introduction of media and advertising literacy lessons in a classroom setting have been shown to decrease the effectiveness of advertising on children and adolescents (Harris & Bargh, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006, Siddika, 2002). In An and Stern's (2011) research of advergaming, interactive games that advertise a product or brand, it was found that a short explanation of the marketing nature of the game reduced the likelihood that a child under 12 would prefer, or be able to recall, the product or brand advertised. Furthermore, voice interventions before the advergaming were more effective than visual interventions in reducing the influence of the advergaming on a child's brand or product preference. A parent or teacher co-viewing a media advertisement with a child, or the media itself, could provide voice explanations of television advertisements to help children understand the persuasive nature of advertising.

Media literacy education has also been shown to reduce the negative effects from content. Research has shown media literacy lessons related to representations of violence, sex, and substance abuse can lower the negative effects of this content on children (Kupersmidt, Scull, & Austin, 2010). According to Scharrer (2005), media literacy lessons explaining violent media

content was shown to decrease aggressive behavior related to violent media exposure. This strategy has proven most effective when the media literacy lesson is conducted directly after exposure (Byrne, 2009). Encouraging children and adolescents to discuss their feelings about content they have seen featuring sex, violence, or substance abuse, through media literacy education, has also been effective in decreasing the negative influence of the content (Cheng, et al., 2004; Demico & Fuller, 2007; Lemish, 2011). Lastly, heavy exposure to media literacy lessons through the media, specifically in the form of Public Service Announcements (PSAs), has been effective in increasing anti-drug attitudes and perceptions in adolescents (Terry-McElrath, Emery, Szczypka, & Johnston, 2011).

This research shows that media literacy education can mitigate the negative effects of both television advertising and content, undermining attempts by television networks to support the current hegemonic structure of society that includes media institutions as a part of the ruling class. Networks like Nickelodeon and Disney are a part of media conglomerates that have been accused in the past of supporting the American status quo of consumerism to maintain their profitability (McChesney, 2004). These conglomerates produce content for all age groups, from preschool to adults, so it would be to their benefit to not undermine the hegemonic influence of their children's content so they can continue to influence media consumers' actions and desires throughout their lives (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 2006). Media conglomerates also make billions of dollars from advertising, merchandising, and licensing their products, and a consumer's understanding of these practices could undermine the ability for the conglomerates and other advertisers to sell their brand and characters to consumers (Sandler, 2004). It is reasonable to expect that they could also support the status quo by promoting consumerism, the current organization of the media, and the current structure of society (Gitlin, 1979a). Examining the history of educational television and the rise of the top producers of preschool programming provides insight about how the development of these entities has been influenced by the hegemonic and capitalist society.

History and Current State of Educational Television

Much of the media use by children is seen as superfluous, if not detrimental, to a child's development (Perlmutter, 2010). Even media activities normally recognized as having a positive influence, like reading, are considered detrimental when particular books are read, like *Twilight*, due to the presence of content some see as inappropriate, like sex and violence (Gray, 2011). This negative perception of the media, one that is particularly linked to television, along with the perceived limited commercial and financial viability of educational television has made many children's media producers hesitant to produce educational media, especially for children over the age of 6 (Hundt, 1996; Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007; Simensky, 2007). Many of those that do produce educational children's media create this content for altruistic reasons, and as a result, must rely on public funding and corporate underwriting to produce their content; since many feel traditional advertising may undermine the positive influence of the program (Cuhn, Kalagian, & Lyon, 2011; Simensky, 2007). However, unlike formal teaching in school or in the home, the media can reach thousands, if not millions, at the same time for a relatively low cost. An episode of the popular preschool educational series *Sesame Street* costs just under \$700,000 to produce, but is seen by millions through PBS member stations, video on-demand services, and the internet (Wickman, 2012). This ability to reach millions at less than a dollar per child could make the media an even more powerful educational tool. But do educational media work, or is educational media content merely produced to appease advocacy groups and present an alternative to the massive amounts of children's entertainment programming produced by content creators?

Early Educational Television, PBS, and the Success of Sesame Street

Attempts to make television more educational have occurred throughout the history of television. During the early years of development and expansion of television in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, there were several attempts to reserve broadcast spectrum space for educational television (Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007). This eventually resulted in the

establishment of the Educational Television and Radio Center (later National Educational Television) in 1952 and over 200 channels being reserved for educational television by the FCC in 1953 (p. 10). The development of many of the educational stations was slow and media corporations lobbied until the FCC permitted the sale of these channels to media companies to develop commercial networks throughout the 1950s. Most of the owners of the reserved educational stations were colleges and other non-profits, and many of them took advantage of the opportunity to profit from the channels they owned and eliminate the need to raise capital to build a television station (Museum of Broadcast Communication, 2012a)

Educational television advocates continued to fight throughout the 1960s, making gains through the Educational Facilities Act in 1962, which provided funding for educational television stations. However, even with this funding, finding programming for these stations continued to be difficult (Museum of Broadcast Communications, 2012a). Three years later, the Carnegie Commission would spend two years analyzing the state of educational television, developing several proposals to improve public media in the process. This included creating a better system to exchange programming between stations and educational media producers through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which was launched in 1967 (Simensky, 2007). The CPB would establish the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in 1969 and National Public Radio (NPR) in 1970. PBS absorbed National Educational Television in 1970, expanding beyond formal instruction to include enrichment programs like the arts and public affairs. PBS and the CPB would also begin to provide programming for underserved audiences like young children and minorities through educational programs, such as *The Electric Company* and *Sesame Street* (p. 132).

Sesame Street is one of the great success stories in the history of educational children's media. *Sesame Street* is produced by the non-profit Sesame Workshop (formerly Children's Television Workshop) and broadcast by PBS and its member stations. The show was originally produced for underserved segments of the child audience, specifically minorities, inner-city

youth, and children aged 3-6. Its mission is to prepare preschoolers for formal schooling by teaching them basic lessons focusing on letters, numbers, and developing reading and mathematics skills (Simensky, 2007). *Sesame Street* has been both a critical and commercial success winning 8 Grammys and 118 Emmy awards since 1969 and earning over \$45 million in merchandising revenue in 2010. *Sesame Street* is also seen in over 120 countries, including 20 separate international versions that have been produced in countries such as Japan and Germany (Wickman, 2012).

Sesame Street has not only been a huge success, but has also influenced how programs are produced on PBS and other children's networks. *Sesame Street* proved to PBS they could find success through the production of positive, educational children's programming leading to over 40 years of children's media, including several other critically and commercially successful shows on the network, like *Barney and Friends* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (Davis, 2008; Simensky, 2007). PBS was one of the few broadcasters of children's programming outside of Saturday Morning before the rise of cable, and continues to be a leader in children's media by providing an educational alternative to the entertainment programming seen on most children's cable networks (Pecora, 1998). *Sesame Street* has also provided a development and production model for children's television that places precedence on research from psychological, content, and educational experts to ensure shows are developmentally appropriate for the viewers. Without the commercial success of *Sesame Street*, for-profit media companies might be even more hesitant to produce educational programming for children or include research in the development of their shows (Simensky, 2007).

Sesame Street's long-term success is linked to the positive results seen by parents and researchers during its four decades on the air. *Sesame Street* is one of the most researched series in the history of television, and the vast majority of the research has shown that *Sesame Street* has a positive impact on a young child's ability to recognize letters and numbers, and their success and interest in school both early on and as late as high school (Fisch & Bernstein, 2001). *Sesame*

Street's success preparing young children for school and increasing children's interest in math and reading over the last 43 years is proof that the media, particularly television, can be used to educate through a well-researched and well-produced program (Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 1999).

Educational television has continued to struggle to find a place on commercial television in the United States except for one audience, children under six (Kalagian, 2007). Television for young children used to be more localized; however, concern over the impact of television on young children, the past commercial and critical success of educational series targeting preschoolers, particularly on PBS, and the ability to engage children under six through educational television, which is much harder to do with older children, has led the two top commercial children's cable networks, Nickelodeon and Disney Channel, to develop programming blocks and entire networks focusing on preschool television with what they promote as positive, educational content (Andreeva, 2010; Hogan, 2012). Nickelodeon and Disney also recognize that the vast majority of older children are in school during the late morning and early afternoon, and by featuring preschool programming, they are able to reach the only child audience home during these times (Pecora, 2004). Similar to the PBS Kids website, both the Nick Jr. and Disney Junior websites list the educational objectives of each show that appears during the block or on the network, although neither network includes this information on the show's main page as of July 2012 (PBS Kids: About *Dora the Explorer*, 2012; For Grownups: *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, 2012). Instead, Nickelodeon and Disney bury the educational objectives on a separate parents page forcing those who are interested to navigate several pages to find the objectives of each series. The educational nature of preschool television makes it a perfect place to introduce new or underserved areas of education and knowledge, including media literacy. It is unclear, however, to what extent for-profit children's networks, like Disney and Nickelodeon, are producing preschool television to educate young children or to make parents more comfortable with exposing their children to each network's content at an earlier age.

Policy, Educational Television, and the Exodus from the Networks

Before cable and satellite services became commonplace in most American homes, most television programs intended for children on the broadcast networks were purely for entertainment. Occasionally a show like *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* would promote positive messages to children, and PBS offered an educational alternative in most markets, however most of the programming seen on commercial television was purely profit driven and often low quality (Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007). The content of children's programming on television came under the heaviest scrutiny during the 1980s after the FCC eliminated limits on commercial time for networks and many of the shows left were low-budget or product-driven, such as *Transformers* (Pecora, 1998).

Advocacy groups continued to fight against these shows with little educational value when the Children's Television Act was passed in 1990. Due to little oversight from the government, broadcasters did not follow many of the requirements of the Act (Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007). However, the Children's Television Act did ban commercials featuring characters from a program from appearing during the same program, since children under 12 have difficulties distinguishing commercials from the actual program (Story & French, 2004). Many of the regulations from the Children's Television Act, including the Three Hour Rule, which required networks to air at least three hours of educational or informational (E/I) programming each week directed at children, and limited commercials during children's programming, were strengthened by the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The Telecommunications Act also required V-chips to be in all televisions manufactured after 1996, which aided in the adoption of the television rating system in 1997 (Montgomery 2007; Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007).

The regulations by the FCC did not have the intended outcome many advocacy groups had hoped. Rather than making the children's programming on networks more educational, it led most of the broadcast networks to become less involved in their children's programming (Mitroff

& Stephenson, 2007). Most of the broadcast networks either started to lease out time on Saturday or Sunday morning to outside production companies to produce the shows that fulfill their E/I requirements, or abandoned children's programming completely, leaving it up to their affiliates to fulfill the requirements (Fox ends Saturday Morning Cartoons, 2008). In the end, the broadcast networks felt that it was not worth investing large amounts of money to develop high quality educational children's programming, like PBS, when it is more difficult to find commercial success and compete with children's cable networks through education television (Albiniak, 2011).

The fact that most children's television content has shifted from the broadcast networks to cable networks has made it more difficult for advocacy groups to oversee and influence content. That is because the FCC does not have the same power to regulate the content on cable. Many of the restrictions that govern children's television on the broadcast networks, like commercial limits and educational and information requirements do not apply to children's content on cable or satellite (Kalagian, 2007). Although watchdog groups like the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) provide some oversight, there are far fewer provisions governing the children's content on cable (Montgomery, 2007).

Media Literacy, Education, and the Preschool Television

One of the greatest motivations for the development of PBS's preschool programming was to bring educational programs to households that cannot afford to send their children to daycare or preschool (Simensky, 2007). Children between the ages of 2 and 6 spend, on average, two hours a day exposed to visual media like television, so it would be greatly beneficial to use that time to engage and educate children. Several programs, most notably *Sesame Street*, have shown that young children can learn basic skills from television programs in school subjects like math and reading to prepare them for formal schooling (Fisch, Trugalio, & Cole, 1999; Fisch, 2004; Liddell & Masilela, 1990; Roberts & Foehr, 2008). There is also evidence that repetition of

a message through videos that include both aural and visual instruction helps children under 6 retain new information (Linebarger & Piotrowski, 2008). Children as young as 3 have also shown improved linguistic and communication skills after exposure to the media, particularly media with both audio and visual components, like television (Hisrich & Blanchard, 2009). So there is significant evidence that children can be educated through the media, but can young children be taught to be more media literate through the media, specifically television?

There are very few studies that directly examine the possible benefits of media literacy education in preschool television on a young child's understanding of the media. There are several studies that analyze reading literacy education in the media that could provide some evidence that media literacy education can work to help teach young children the basics about understanding and using the media. In two separate studies it was found that exposure to educational television like *Sesame Street* often leads to increased interest and understanding of the subject matter presented by the program, and education through the media helps connect traditional literacy and current media (Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 1999; Jennings, Hooker, & Linebarger, 2009). In another study it was determined that children are able to imitate simple actions and follow information between scenes and cuts at as young as 24 months (Anderson & Hanson, 2010).

Although research examining the effects of media literacy education on preschoolers is limited these studies do offer some evidence that exposure to media literacy education through educational television may not only increase interest in the media but may also increase knowledge of the media, especially as it relates to the production of media. As discussed previously, media literacy is defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages through the media. Children under 6 are still in Piaget's preoperational stage of cognitive development, so they cannot manipulate information or understand concrete logic, making it difficult for very young children in this stage to truly evaluate or analyze the media (Oates, Blades, Gunter, 2002). They can be shown how to access and use media since children as

young as 2 can imitate simple actions seen on television, and this knowledge of how to access media often creates an interest in better understanding the media later in life (Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 1999). Children in this stage love to perform, so teaching children how to use media and communicate through the media may be developed as an extension of this interest (Eagle, 2007). Instilling interest in the media early in children's lives, and offering media literacy lessons through content aimed at young children, may undermine attempts by large media companies to ensure they follow the status quo, as they grow up, by mitigating the effects of advertising and brand promotion through children's content.

An important component related to educating children, particularly preschoolers, through television is the presence of parents or instructors during the child's viewing. The studies above show that young children can be educated through the media without any intervention from adults; however, other studies also provide evidence that learning from television is improved when parents and teachers co-view educational media with children (Chakroff, 2008; Panuel, et al, 2012; Comer, et al., 2008; Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 1999; Liddell & Masilela, 1990). A parent's presence can also mitigate attempts by media institutions that are part of the hegemony to convince children to follow the status quo. By being present parents have the opportunity to explain the differences between following the status quo and thinking independently, and even encourage children to think and act independent of the hegemony (Signorielli, 1990). This is why it is important to not only recognize what strategies help children learn through the media, but where the opportunities are for adults to possibly explain or expand on the information presented in the episode. This is also why many shows like *Sesame Street* ensure there are elements to entertain older children and adults to encourage them to watch with their children, siblings, or students (Simensky, 2007).

Even with limited research directly examining the effectiveness of media literacy education in preschool television, previous research does support that preschoolers can learn the basics about certain subjects like reading, mathematics, and behavior through consistent, age-

appropriate lessons on television. The limited research of the effect of media literacy lessons on television aimed at preschoolers provides some evidence that even very young children may be able to learn certain media literacy lessons through television, like simple media production and the basics about how the media work. It is important to look at how the top children's networks have approached preschool and educational television throughout their histories before examining the media literacy education contained in episodes of series they broadcast. Each network's history, and the way they have approached educating children in their programming, may provide insight about how media literacy lessons are incorporated in media themed episodes of their most popular shows.

The Current State of the top Preschool Programmers on Television

Nickelodeon

Nickelodeon officially launched in 1979 on Warner Cable Systems as a part of Warner-Amex Satellite Entertainment (Pecora, 2004). Throughout the early 1980s Nickelodeon struggled to turn a profit, losing \$10 million by 1984 (p. 23). In 1983, Nickelodeon was merged with MTV to form MTV Networks, and the executives who had overseen the rebranding of MTV began to overhaul Nickelodeon (p. 26). This included a switch from financing through corporate underwriting, like PBS, to a more traditional commercial model and rebranding the Nickelodeon as the "kids first" network (p. 29). Warner then bought American Express' stake in Nickelodeon and sold MTV Networks to Viacom in 1986 (p. 26). At the same time, increased scrutiny from advocacy groups and the Children's Television Act of 1990 led many broadcast networks to cut back their commitment to children's programming throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s (Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007). During the exodus of children's television programming from the broadcast networks, the children's cable networks, particularly Disney Channel and Nickelodeon, continued to grow (Kalagian, 2007; Pecora, 2004). PBS also continued to establish itself as the

leader in educational children's television, particularly for children under 8 and, in many markets, as the only over-the-air network broadcasting children's programs during the week (De Moraes, 2010). Nickelodeon began its attempt to capture some of PBS's preschool audience by launching the Nick Jr. in 1989 (Pecora, 2004). Nickelodeon had broadcasted preschool programming before, specifically *Pinwheel*, but the development of the programming block showed a long-term commitment by Nickelodeon to the preschool audience. By the fall of 1989 Nickelodeon had its first commissioned preschool program to feature completely original content, *Eureeka's Castle*. *Pinwheel* featured animated shorts and segments from outside and international production companies (p. 29). In fact, international animation continued to be a staple of Nickelodeon and Nick Jr. until the early 1990s when Nickelodeon and MTV Networks invested over \$40 million into producing original programming, which resulted in the creation of the original "Nicktoons": *Rugrats*, *Doug*, and *Ren and Stimpy*. The success of the Nicktoons, and the capital it infused into the network, allowed Nickelodeon to invest another \$30 million into remaking Nick Jr. to produce better, more educationally based programs. Nickelodeon did this to boost Nick Jr.'s ratings and attract the preschool audience so the young viewers could develop a loyalty to the Nickelodeon brand at an early age (p. 30).

This commitment to preschool programming on Nickelodeon led to the creation of one of the most successful shows in children's television history, *Blue's Clues*, which debuted in 1997 (Jenkins, 2004). The show frequently broke down the fourth wall by featuring a host and other characters that often interacted with the viewer, and revolutionized the way children, particularly preschoolers, interacted with television. *Blue's Clues* offered Nickelodeon a chance to connect preschool viewers with the network's brand. *Blue's Clues* was the first show for the network to be widely recognized as having educational benefits for the young viewers (Pecora, 2004). Nickelodeon took advantage of the popularity of the show by licensing *Blue's Clues* to dozens of companies to produce products based on the program and its characters (Sandler, 2004). The commercial and critical success of *Blue's Clues* firmly established Nickelodeon in the field of

preschool and educational television and gave PBS its first real competitor in preschool programming since it launched *Sesame Street* in 1969 (Pecora, 2004; Simensky, 2007).

Since the success of *Blue's Clues*, Nickelodeon has continued to produce highly successful shows with educational curricula targeting preschoolers and Nickelodeon is now the broadcaster of the top rated show for children under 6 (Nickelodeon closes 2Q11 as Top Cable Net, 2011). In 2009, after Nick Jr. launched as its own network, Nick Jr. the programming block was rebranded Nick Play Date until January 2012 when the preschool programming block was placed under the "Nick" brand. This eliminated any on-screen graphics during programs that would distinguish Nickelodeon's preschool programming from the rest of its shows. The actual shows, the interstitial programming, and the decreased commercial time are the only characteristics separating Nickelodeon's preschool block with the rest of the network's programming (Karvunidis, 2012).

Nickelodeon targets children between four and six years old with its preschool programming and children between six and eleven years old with its afternoon animated programming (Pecora, 2004). There is crossover between the demographics, so Nickelodeon may be trying to keep the preschool viewers tuned into the network by removing some of the characteristics that distinguish the two blocks so the younger viewers continue watching Nickelodeon and become a consumer of shows aimed at older children, like *Spongebob Squarepants*, as they grow out of preschool programming (Sandler, 2004). This is supported by the fact that Nickelodeon markets merchandise for many of its shows meant for older children to preschoolers (Golin, 2011).

Nickelodeon follows a traditional cable network funding model for its programming, relying on a mixture of subscription fees from cable providers and revenue from commercial advertising (Kalagian, 2007). Although Nick Jr. and the Nickelodeon preschool block are broadcasted with limited commercials and sponsorships that typically target the parents, there is always the threat that the commercial interests of the network will influence the content. This is

particularly concerning for programming targeting young children since parents want to feel as though the content their impressionable preschoolers are exposed to will not negatively influence their lives. Parents also hope that the content producers have their children's best interest in mind, and not merely the interests of the advertisers (Bean, 2010).

Disney Channel and Disney Junior

Disney Channel was launched in 1983 as a premium cable channel only available through subscription. The premium network featured promotional material for other Disney and Disney Channel products and programs during interstitials, a practice that continues today (Pecora, 1998). By 1997, Disney Channel would begin transitioning to a basic cable station in most markets to increase its availability in American households (Kalagian, 2007). At the same time, Disney Channel would split their programming into three blocks targeting preschoolers, adolescents and teenagers, and families at different times of the day. The network would also begin to produce more original programming that was connected with the Disney brand (Pecora, 1998).

Similar to Nickelodeon, when Disney Channel launched Playhouse Disney, their preschool programming block, it relied mainly on series from outside or international production companies. But Disney would soon produce several original series including *Handy Manny* and multiple series featuring its most famous character, Mickey Mouse (Kalagian, 2007; Pecora, 1998). Disney Channel created a few successful series for Playhouse Disney throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, including *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, but it would continue to struggle to find a series that achieved the commercial or critical success of Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues* or PBS's *Sesame Street* (Andreeva, 2010). In 2010, Disney announced it would rebrand Playhouse Disney in 2011, launch a new digital tier network dedicated to preschool programming in 2012, and both would be named Disney Junior (Barnes, 2010b). Since the rebranding, Disney has launched several new preschool programs and has seen a huge boost in ratings, although this is partly due

to the increased publicity in preparation of the launch of the new network in March 2012 (Palmeri, 2012). These new shows include the top rated show among boys under 5, *Jake and the Neverland Pirates* (Seidman, 2011).

Aside from the multiple series on the Disney Junior block based on past Disney characters and franchises, Disney Junior really separates itself from its main competitors, PBS and Nickelodeon, by focusing its content more heavily on lessons promoting correct social values and behavior rather than lessons originating from school or educational curriculum (Barnes, 2010a). Since the block is so new and the network has just launched in most markets, there is no research examining how this pro-social approach may be beneficial or detrimental to young children preparing to enter formal schools, but this focus seems to be beneficial to Disney Channel and Disney Junior's ratings (Seidman, 2011).

Disney Channel is unique since it does not feature traditional commercials, instead filling its interstitials with promotions for other Disney Channel programs and Disney products (Kalagian, 2007; Pecora, 1998). Similar to other preschool networks and programming blocks, Disney has promised to allow very limited advertising during its Disney Junior block on Disney Channel and on the Disney Junior network. However, since many of the programs and movies featured thus far on the Disney Junior block have featured characters from Disney franchises, promotion of Disney and its products may just be taking place within the shows or during the limited interstitial time (Palmeri, 2012).

PBS

As discussed previously, over the last 43 years the mission of PBS has been to make cultural and educational programming available in all Americans' homes. PBS has paid special attention to its younger audience, providing educational media for children since its inception. The network focuses primarily on its preschool audience and targets all of its children's programs to children under 8 (Simensky, 2007). PBS considers itself "America's largest classroom" and is

the top provider of educational media for preschool teachers (PBS Mission and Values, 2012). This proven track record of providing educational programs for young children to help prepare them for success in school has made PBS one of the top providers of children's media in the country (Fisch & Bernstein, 2001; Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 1999; Shore, 2009). PBS also strives to make its content widely available through its website and video-on-demand services (Shore, 2009). Many people trust PBS to provide their children with quality, educational programming, which has helped the PBS Kids programming block grow into one of the top providers of children's television programming (Pecora, 1998). Since PBS started its subscription to Nielsen's audience measurement reports in 2009 the network has consistently placed several shows, including *Curious George* and *Super Why!*, in the top ten for children 2-11 (PBS Kids reports growth across all platforms, 2012).

The integrity and reputation associated with the PBS name is not the only advantage the network has over children's content providers who are more closely associated with entertainment programming, like Nickelodeon and Disney. PBS is also one of the few children's television programming providers to be broadcasted over-the-air through local member stations (The Transition to DTV FAQ, 2009). Although about 90% of households pay for television content through cable or satellite, that number is dropping as more and more content is made available digitally through the internet. As people eliminate cable or satellite, they will be looking for more content online and possibly begin to get linear television again for free through an antenna, and PBS is one of the few networks that can provide both (Goldman, 2010).

Even with its success, particularly in children's programming, public media corporations like PBS and the CPB continue to struggle financially as they face consistent calls for funding cuts from the government. Many in Congress feel that the government should not have to support public media, and that PBS could easily find alternative funding through advertising and other traditional media revenue sources, especially since some members in Congress see public media as being too liberal and not serving all Americans (Kahn, 2011). Some even feel the content and

even the funding structure of PBS goes against the American capitalist status quo and undermines values and systems seen as important in American society (McChesney, 2004). Further funding or grant cuts would threaten the quality of programming on PBS and its stations and moving to a traditional commercial format would undermine the mission of PBS and the CPB, who already face criticism due to the amount of corporate sponsorships they feature on the network to fund their programming (De Moraes, 2011).

Why Study Nickelodeon, Disney, and PBS?

As discussed above, these three networks are not only the most successful broadcasters of preschool and children's programming; they also represent three different business models. It is difficult to fully determine the role of each network's business model in their content without being deeply involved with program development at each network; however, it is important to recognize these differences while examining each network's content so possible differences in each network's programming or, in this case, differences in their approaches to providing quality content to preschoolers, can be determined in future research. For example, the fact that Disney Junior features several shows based on previous characters or franchises, like *Jake and the Neverland Pirates*, which features several characters from *Peter Pan*, and *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, provides evidence that Disney is interested in attracting children to the Disney brand, and its characters, at a young age (Palmeri, 2012).

These three networks are the three highest rated children's networks and broadcast the vast majority of the top shows for children between the ages of 2 and 6 (Seidman, 2010; Seidman, 2011; PBS Kids reports growth across all platforms, 2012; Nickelodeon closes 2Q11 as Top Cable Net, 2011). Also, they are among the longest and most trusted brands in children's television and media. PBS has been producing children's programming for 43 years and Nickelodeon for 33 years (Simensky, 2007; Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007; Kalagian, 2007). Disney has been producing family and children's content for 83 years, children's television

content for 58 years, and has operated its children's cable network for 29 years (Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007; Kalagian, 2007). This experience and success has made these networks three of the most recognizable brands in children's media.

CHAPTER 2-MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION IN CURRENT PRESCHOOL PROGRAMMING

This study focuses on the preschool programming blocks for each network even though each network at least partially owns a children's network that targets preschoolers on the digital tier: Nickelodeon owns Nick Jr., Disney owns Disney Junior, and PBS owns 15% of PBS Kids Sprout. The main networks are available in more households and receive significantly higher daytime ratings than their specialized digital tier stations. PBS, Nickelodeon, and Disney Channel each reach more than 100 million households while Nick Jr., Disney Junior, and PBS Kids Spout reach between 50 and 75 million households (Catering to Children TV Networks Divide, 2010). Also, the main networks represent the business model for Nickelodeon, PBS, and Disney more closely than their digital tier networks (Kalagian, 2007). Even though Nickelodeon's preschool block and the Disney Junior block limit commercials and promotions, Nickelodeon still allows limited advertising from a variety of companies between programs during its preschool programming while the Disney Junior block still focuses most of its interstitial time promoting Disney programs and products. PBS Kids Sprout also allows for limited commercials, similar to Nickelodeon's preschool block and Nick Jr., but unlike the PBS Kids block on the PBS network and its member stations (Catering to Children TV Networks Divide, 2010).

This study examines episodes of preschool programming on the top children's television networks. The research will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are media literacy lessons presented in media themed episodes of the preschool television programs?

RQ2: How have the histories, missions, and business models of Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, and PBS and their programs influenced the content they produce for children, particularly preschoolers?

RQ3: Do these networks broadcast educational preschool television to provide a positive

influence in children's lives or to appease parents and advocacy groups as they draw in new consumers?

The purpose of this study is to examine the current state of media literacy education on preschool television through a political economic viewpoint. Programming blocks and shows aimed at preschoolers were chosen since these programs are meant to be educational (PBS Mission and Values, 2012; About Our Shows: Disney Junior, 2012; Nickelodeon, 2011). As a result, media literacy lessons are more likely to fit and appear naturally in preschool programming. Preschool programming is meant to set a foundation for future education in the same way formal preschool should. It is important to examine how well the preschool programming on these networks is providing a foundation for future media literacy education since, for the most part, formal schooling is not building this foundation in its students (Shore, 2009). Also, it is important to examine the way these networks approach their young viewers, and in the cases of Nickelodeon and Disney, if they use the preschool programming to create brand loyalty at an early age.

The program representing PBS is expected to present more useful media literacy messages due to the network's commitment to educational television over the past four decades, and historically, PBS has been willing to go against the status quo to provide beneficial content to children and adults, even it results in loss of funding (Simensky, 2007; McChesney, 2004). The non-profit business model of PBS also allows the network to present educational media with less pressure from advertisers to produce certain ratings or programming to support its products (Producing for PBS, 2008). Nickelodeon is expected to present more media literacy messages than Disney since it has been committed to producing curriculum-based educational preschool media for a longer time, however, Nickelodeon's commitment to media literacy education should be limited compared to PBS due to their long term financial success and threat of media literacy education undermining the effects of advertising and influence on content (Pecora, 2004; Kupersmidt, Scull, & Austin, 2010; Harris & Bargh, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006, Siddika,

2002). Disney Junior's focus on pro-social content in its preschool programming, rather than curriculum based content, and its success within the hegemonic society, will limit the media literacy messages presented in the episode representing the network (Barnes, 2010a).

It is unreasonable to expect preschoolers to grasp the same media literacy concepts as older children and adults, but there are still many basic lessons that can be taught to young children to help build a foundation for later media literacy education. These lessons include; basic terms and institutions that pertain to the media, simple explanations about how media technologies work, identifying what advertisers are selling, and basic explanations about why certain aspects are used within a program, like music and sets. Children are much more likely to understand these lessons if there is a parent in the room to reinforce what the program is attempting to teach, so the ideal media literacy episode would encourage parents to watch with their children (Rogow, 2002).

Method

This study features a textual analysis of an episode from four different preschool programs. One episode that has clear media literacy lessons from a program with a history of media literacy education was used as an example, or baseline, to compare against the other three programs. Media literacy messages in this study are defined as any content that aims to increase understanding of the media and its systems and improve the ability to analyze or create media messages (Aufderheide, 1993). A qualitative textual analysis was chosen over a quantitative content analysis to allow the study to go beyond the mere presence of media and media literacy education in these programs and examine how the media and media literacy is represented in these shows (Henrikson, Irby, & Frels, 2011). According to Fiske and Hartley (2003):

“...content analysis does not help us to respond to the individual programme, nor, more importantly, the viewing session; it does not help us with matters of interpretation nor with how we respond to the complex significance and subtleties of the television text. That sort of reading of television requires that we move beyond this strictly objective and quantitative method of content analysis...” (p. 21)

A textual analysis is a better tool to examine the content that is presented to preschoolers in a single viewing session from an individual program. It also allows for the media literacy lessons to be studied individually so the study can examine how they fit within the episode and within other portions or educational goals of the program. None of the shows actually state through their websites that media literacy education is one of the overall goals of the programs, so it is important to analyze the few episodes with specific media themes and examine how they include media literacy lessons with their stated learning goals like reading and problem solving (PBS Kids, 2012; About *Dora the Explorer*, 2012; For Grownups: *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, 2012). Lastly, a textual analysis will allow this study to more deeply examine the whole show and its dialogue to analyze what type of media literacy messages they present and whether these lessons may help undermine the status quo by creating a greater understanding of the American media system.

The three episodes representing each network came from a program on each network's preschool programming block: PBS Kids on PBS, Nickelodeon's preschool block, and Disney Junior on the Disney Channel. All the series chosen are among the top ten highest rated shows for viewers under 6, and among the top 3 preschool shows on each network (Nickelodeon closes 2Q11 as Top Cable Net, 2011; PBS Kids reports growth across all platforms, 2012; Seidman, 2011). The three series chosen were *Curious George* from PBS, *Dora the Explorer* from Nickelodeon, and *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* from the Disney Channel. Summaries for each episode were obtained either from the network's website, show's website, or from a television news site (About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012; About *Dora the Explorer*, 2012; Episode details: "Mickey's Art Show;" *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*: Episode Guide, 2012). An episode from each series that explicitly described the presence and use of media or includes lessons that are transferable to media literacy were chosen. There were no time restrictions from when the shows could be chosen from, since episodes from these programs typically appear at least 5 days a week

on each network and past episodes are often replayed to fill the schedule (Pecora, 2004). The synopses of the episodes were transcribed and examined to determine the possible media literacy messages. Each episode was also compared with the baseline episode in this study to determine how media and media literacy is being presented in media focused episodes of these series.

The baseline episode of the three programs representing each network was chosen from a series that has a history of presenting media literacy lessons in its programs, *Sesame Street*. Throughout its over 40 years on the air, *Sesame Street* has consistently presented media literacy lessons within episodes of the series (Shore, 2009). Similar to the other episodes in this study, the *Sesame Street* episode was purposefully chosen due to the presence of media in the episode based on episode synopses from *Sesame Street*'s website (Show Guide, 2012). By examining the *Sesame Street* episode against the other episodes in the study, it is possible to compare the use of media and the presence of media literacy education in a series that has a history of featuring these representations with series that do not. This will help determine the approach these networks take in including media literacy education in popular programs and whether these lessons can coexist with the business models and missions of each network.

These episodes represent only a very small portion of the total episodes from each series. As of the writing of this thesis *Dora the Explorer* has broadcasted 118 episodes, *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* has broadcasted 100 episodes, and *Curious George* has broadcasted 87 episodes. However, of these shows, only *Curious George* has more than one episode that explicitly includes media or a media literacy lesson in the synopsis (About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012; About *Dora the Explorer*, 2012; *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*: Episode Guide, 2012). *Sesame Street* has consistently presented media literacy lessons in their program since its debut in 1969, and several of the over 4300 episodes focus lessons on educating children about the media (Shore, 2009; Show Guide, 2012).

The episodes of *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* and *Curious George* included in this study were recorded to a digital recording device from Disney Channel and PBS, respectively

(Malkasian, 2011; Ward, 2008). The *Dora the Explorer* and *Sesame Street* episodes were viewed through Amazon's video player (Chialtas, 2002; *Grouch News Network*, 2007). Only the episode content was viewed so interstitial material from the networks was not included in the analysis. Each episode was viewed three times, once to transcribe the episode and twice to ensure accuracy. The transcriptions were examined and each episode's approach to media literacy lessons were analyzed along with the rest of the episode content.

Results

None of the episodes studied, including the baseline episode, had an ideal approach to media literacy education, however the baseline episode did present the most media literacy lessons. The most common media literacy lesson contained in the episodes studied focused on teaching young children the basics about media production, specifically digital photography. According to the National Endowment for the Arts (2004) photography is one of the simplest ways to introduce children to art and media production. Even though each episode contained some type of media literacy lesson, there were limited lessons, outside of the baseline episode, focused on teaching children about media institutions, why certain aspects are present in the content like the sets or music, or how to identify what advertisements are attempting to sell.

Sesame Street Synopsis

The episode from *Sesame Street* that was chosen is titled "The Grouch News Network", and it originally aired on October 16, 2007. According to *Sesame Street*'s official site episode guide, the educational goal of the episode is emotional development and the letter and number of the day are G and 9, respectively. The summary from the official site (Show Guide, 2012):

"Oscar the Grouch is the host of the Grouch News Network- all grouchy, all disgusting, all yucky news, all the time. The stories are starting off grouchy enough, but they're ending up really nice.

First, Cookie Monster is upset when his cookie breaks in half, but thanks to Oscar, he realizes that he now has 2 half cookies. Prince Charming and Sleeping Beauty are playing checkers when Sleeping Beauty falls asleep right in the middle of their game. Prince Charming is feeling frustrated, but Oscar unknowingly gives him a great idea, a kiss could wake her up. Sleeping Beauty thanks Oscar with a big kiss of his own. Now Oscar's really losing his grouchy viewers.

There has been an elephant stuck in Maria's bathtub all day, which could just be the kind of grouchy news him and his viewers need. Bob happened to be watching the Grouch News Network, and came to the rescue with a bag of peanuts to get the elephant out! Oscar's show is ruined. Lucky for him, it's so nice, happy and sweet that it's aggravating! The grouches love it and Oscar wins a Phlemmy Award.”

As stated in the summary, the episode revolves around The Grouch News Network (GNN), a parody of the Cable News Network or CNN, directed toward the Grouches on *Sesame Street*. The episode opens with a GNN bumper with slime oozing around it, since Grouches on the show like dirt, grime, and trash. Teletype music similar to older news shows, like the CBS Evening News, begins to play (Edwards, 2004). Oscar is wearing a dirty, wrinkled suit with a sardine in his tie and he is holding a microphone with a microphone flag featuring the GNN logo, which looks very similar to the CNN logo. He is sitting at a “desk” covered in trash and surrounded by trash cans. Oscar opens the “telecast” by yelling at the audience “it’s about time you tuned in,” and says that the Grouch News Network is “all grouchy, all disgusting, all yucky news, all the time,” before trash falls on him and a news story comes in, which is given to Oscar by an elephant trunk emerging from a trash can. He says “something very grouchy and very exciting is going on in Maria’s bathroom,” before turning to a television screen while satellite reception noise plays, to simulate receiving a remote feed, and the scene switches to Maria’s bathroom.

When Maria walks in she reacts to Horatio the elephant using her bathroom before trying to cover the camera recording this for GNN. Although the Muppets and the human characters on *Sesame Street* often talk to the audience they do not typically react to the camera. This alerts the audience that the GNN camera is in the bathroom for Oscar’s newscast. Maria continually looks at the camera while trying to get Horatio out of the bathroom, which reinforces the presence of

the camera in the bathroom. While Maria is trying to pull Horatio out of the bathtub she again tries to cover the camera before the scene pans out away from the television screen back to Oscar at his news desk. Oscar tells the audience to “stay tuned Grouches, we’ll keep you updated on this sticky situation,” before glass breaks and Oscar announces there is “another breaking news story,” while the teletype music plays again.

The scene switches to Cookie Monster admiring a cookie. Oscar comes into the scene to cover the “breaking news” for the Grouch News Network. Cookie Monster says there is no news, he just has a cookie, at which time the cookie breaks in two. Oscar then remarks that Cookie Monster’s broken cookie is the breaking news. Oscar starts interviewing Cookie Monster asking him how the “ruined” cookie makes him feel. Cookie Monster says he is “sad” and Oscar tries to end the story/scene. However, to Oscar’s dismay, Cookie Monster takes the microphone and continues talking, using several synonyms for sad to describe how he feels. Eventually Cookie Monster realizes his cookie is not ruined, and he now has two cookies. He eats the cookies, describes how he feels with several words for happy, and hugs Oscar, ruining the negative, or grouchy, feel to the story.

A trashcan wipe rolls by changing the scene to Oscar at his news desk. He is on the phone, and “off air” talking to Grundgetta, his girlfriend and another Grouch. She is angry that there was hugging on air, which is against Grouch CC regulations, a parody of the FCC. Grundgetta threatens to change the channel and Oscar pleads with her not to, worrying her changing the channel will lower the ratings of GNN. At the same time, the elephant trunk comes out of the trashcan again, alerting Oscar that there is an update on Horatio in Maria’s bathroom. The satellite noise plays again as the feed becomes unscrambled on the television screen next to Oscar showing Maria pulling on Horatio’s trunk. Gordon runs in the bathroom to help after telling Maria he saw her and Horatio on the Grouch News Network. Maria is shocked that he watches GNN and Gordon responds that he watches it because he “likes getting both sides of the story.” As Maria asks Gordon to help, she again tries to block the camera before she and Gordon

grab Horatio's trunk and pull. Maria is then pulled into the bathtub head first as the camera pans out and switches back to Oscar at the news desk as the satellite noise plays again.

Grundgetta calls back, telling Oscar there is way too much niceness on GNN and threatens to change the channel again. Oscar responds that his "star reporter is digging up dirt," and the camera moves over to show Slimey the worm literally digging through dirt. Oscar asks if Slimey has found any news and Slimey starts saying "look" repeatedly as the camera pans back and to show Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming playing checkers. Oscar says that there is a "celebrity sighting" outside Hooper's and GNN will be first on the scene as the trashcan wipe rolls by again changing the scene. Oscar is now standing watching the checkers game between the fairy tale characters. Oscar says that "their story does not have a happy ending" and tries to interview Prince Charming. Prince Charming is annoyed, asking why reporters cannot "leave them be" so they can play checkers in peace like "ordinary, boring people." Sleeping Beauty then passes out, frustrating Prince Charming, who is annoyed with her continually falling asleep during their games. Oscar then says "it's a shame that you cannot kiss her to wake her up," like in the story. Prince Charming then kisses Sleeping Beauty, waking her. Sleeping Beauty is thankful to Oscar saying she "loves the paparazzi" as she starts kissing Oscar before Prince Charming comes in and starts hugging the Grouch.

The scene cuts to Oscar on the phone with Grundgetta being yelled at again for allowing hugging and kissing on the show. She tells Oscar she is changing to Pox News, a parody of Fox News, because it is "a trashy news show." Then Lester the Goat comes by with a piece of paper. Oscar responds, "here is my roving reporter with news from the dump," but Lester continues to chew the paper and runs off with it before Oscar can grab it. Oscar comments that "a good reporter never reveals his sources." The elephant trunk then rises from the trashcan again alerting Oscar there is "another elephant update." The camera pans over to the television screen as the satellite feed sound plays again and the picture unscrambles to reveal the bathroom again.

Maria and Gordon are still trying to pull Horatio out of the bathtub. The camera then switches to a different angle to show Oscar in the bathroom reporting on the situation. As he reports, he reveals that “the only way to get an elephant out of the bathtub is with peanuts.” Bob then runs into the bathroom with a giant bag of peanuts because he “heard about the elephant on Grouch News Network.” Bob says he “heard Oscar on television” talking about the peanuts, at which point the elephant jumps out of the bathtub to get the peanuts, ruining the story and disappointing Oscar. Gordon, Maria, and Bob begin to celebrate as Maria continues to try to block the camera. Bob tells them he could not have done it without Oscar and Grouch News Network, and they turn around and hug Oscar.

The scene then cuts to Oscar at his news desk saying that “the network is ruined,” before Grungetta runs in with an award that looks like a Grouch holding a trashcan. She tells him he won the “Phlemmy Award,” a Grouch’s version of an Emmy, for the “grouchest” news show. The show was so “nice, kind, and sweet” it was aggravating, which Grouches love. Oscar starts making a speech saying he’d like to thank his “crack news team,” but says he is not going to because he is a Grouch and “Grouches never thank anyone.”

The next three segments feature Baby Bear singing in the bathtub, television personality Tyra Banks acting out the word of the day, and an animated short produced with pipe cleaners. After this, another segment, the “Letter of the Day Game Show” begins with Cookie Monster as the contestant. Like most game shows he competes for a prize; in this case he must find three words that begin with the letter of the day to win cookies.

After a short song about words that start with G, the GNN logo appears and “interrupts the program, because we feel like it.” The announcer says “Anderson Cooper of CNN is filling in for Oscar the Grouch of GNN.” Anderson Cooper emerges from a trashcan at Oscar’s desk. Anderson Cooper says he’s filling in for Oscar “who’s on assignment at the dump.” With Cooper to discuss, “the letter in the news, the letter G,” is “legendary newscasters,” and Grouches, Dan Rathernot and Walter Cranky, parodies of Dan Rather and Walter Cronkite. Cooper asks

Rathernot and Cranky to say hello, but they respond with “I’d rather not” and a growl, respectively, which they continue to do every time they are asked a question. He then turns to a “GNN News Poll,” which is a simple bar graph with a Grouch holding a G on one side and a girl holding one on the other. The poll measures how many Grouches think G is a grouchy letter and how many think it is not a grouchy letter before Cooper lists three examples of each. He tries again to ask Rathernot and Cranky what they think before getting the same answer as earlier. Cooper then responds, “I’ve been in some tough spots before,” most likely referencing his reporting in often dangerous places, “but nothing like this.” He thinks aloud to himself “what would Oscar do?” As he does Oscar walks up and tells Cooper that he would “answer the question himself” and that Cooper “has a lot to learn about Grouch journalism.” Oscar then responds, “of course G is grouchy it is the first letter in the word grouch.” Cooper tries to ask Rathernot and Cranky again, but they still have the same answer. Cooper remarks that “these guys never answer the question,” to which Oscar responds, “yeah, that’s what made them great.” Oscar then announces that tomorrow’s guests will be “Meredith Bewarea and Diane Spoiler,” parodies of Meredith Viera and Diane Sawyer. Oscar invites Cooper to come back tomorrow and he responds “I’d rather not.” Oscar then comments that Cooper “may have a future in Grouch journalism” and invites Cooper to work at GNN. Cooper responds, “never” before climbing back inside the trashcan. Oscar then returns the audience “to their irregularly scheduled program.”

The next seven minutes features a variety of old and new animated and live-action segments including a parody of Bob Dylan’s blowing in the wind and the “Rubber Ducky Song.” This is followed by the extended segment Elmo’s World hosted by Elmo and featuring Super Grover and Elmo’s fish, Dorothy. Elmo’s house and everything in it looks like it was drawn by a young child, and throughout, Elmo talks to the audience and children’s voices are heard answering when he asks a question. Elmo says the theme of the day is helping, which is followed by several examples of helping. A computer then jumps on-screen with Elmo repeatedly saying “you have mail,” similar to America Online, displaying a mail icon with wings on screen. Elmo

clicks on the mail icon while saying that he has email from Papa Bear and Baby Bear. The “email” features a video of Papa Bear helping Baby Bear and a chicken across the street. Later, Elmo says he wants to learn more about helping when a television dances on screen and Elmo replies, “Elmo knows, we can watch ‘The Helping Channel’” where “helping is just a click away.” The channel features a musical cartoon about a family helping each other with the chores. After it ends the network announcer says the song was “brought to you by Hand-Sandwich Helper,” a parody of Hamburger Helper. Elmo then asks Super Grover to help find him people with “helping jobs,” when the doorbell rings. When Elmo opens the door a nurse, a crossing guard, and a life guard introduce themselves. Elmo then notices Dorothy imagining Elmo as a lifeguard, which turns into a parody of *Baywatch*. To end the segment, Elmo and Super Grover sing “The Helping Song,” which is just them singing “helping” over and over to the tune of “Jingle Bells.”

The scene switches to Oscar the Grouch still dressed as a reporter with the GNN microphone reporting on the “grouchest news of the day.” He reiterates that the episode has been “brought to you” by the letter G and the number 9. He ends the segment, and the episode, by saying, “and that’s the grouchy way it is,” modeled after Walter Crokite’s famous signoff, “and that’s the way it is.”

Sesame Street Analysis

Sesame Street is unique in that both its producer and broadcaster are non-profit media organizations. Although PBS and Sesame Workshop accept corporate underwriting they do not allow input from their financial contributors (PBS Mission and Values, 2012). As a result, the producers of *Sesame Street* can include media literacy lessons without needing to consider their advertisers. The “Grouch News Network” segments of the episode help children understand how the news, particularly cable television news, is produced. Even though the episode could have explained and expanded several pieces of the segment, including, for example the basics about

how satellites or ratings work, how video and television cameras work, and certain attributes of the program, the “Grouch News Network” episode shows children the basics of journalism and reporting. By using parodies of various people and organizations in the news media, like GNN and Walter Cranky, and including Anderson Cooper as a guest, *Sesame Street* is not only engaging adults but also introducing these entities that form the news media, both in the past and present, to children, and providing opportunities for co-viewing parents to explain their roles to the young child viewer.

The “Grouch News Network” episode of *Sesame Street* also presents several messages about the American news system. This includes messages about the invasiveness of the news media, like when cameras continued to follow Maria in the bathroom, and the news media’s coverage of celebrities and the presence of the paparazzi when Oscar visits Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming. The episode also addresses sensationalism as Oscar seems to overreact to every story including Cookie Monster’s broken cookie. Lastly, the episode contains messages about bias and negativity in the news media as Oscar searches for “grouchy” angles to each story.

This willingness to present an opinion or subjective point of view in their programming, like the producers do in this episode with the news media, has led to some accusations that *Sesame Street* is too politically liberal (Donovan, 2011). The “Pox News” parody of Fox News, which they refer to as “a trashy news show” angered conservative politicians, which led them to call for further funding cuts for public media in Congress (Itzkoff, 2009). Many feel that, as a children’s program, *Sesame Street* should not be offering their point of view in the program, however, producers feel they should present various viewpoints and biases so children learn how to respect different perspectives (Getler, 2009b).

The quick segmented magazine format that has come to represent *Sesame Street* allows the producers to use past segments, and offers them the opportunity to present different forms of visual media and visual communication to children, including a wide range of animation and film styles (Davis, 2008). The creators of the program also ensure that all the segments fit within the

educational themes and goals of the show while staying true to all the characters and their personalities. The producers can also present lessons in various educational areas. Although the “Grouch News Network” segments were the most prevalent in the episode, it accounted for less than half (48%) of the 58 minutes episode, which left time for segments in more traditional educational areas like reading.

The producers approach the episode’s educational goal of emotional development several times throughout “Grouch News Network” by having the subjects of each news story express how they feel before and after Oscar inadvertently helps them. When Oscar is covering the Cookie Monster’s broken cookie, the Cookie Monster hugs and thanks Oscar after he is reminded that, by breaking the cookie, he now has two cookies. The Cookie Monster also says several words for sad while he is depressed about breaking the cookie and for happy when he figures out he has two cookies, which also stays true to the program’s mission to introduce reading literacy and vocabulary to young children (*Sesame Street* Webpage, 2012). None of the media literacy lessons feel forced throughout the episode, and they are also presented in a way simple enough for children to imitate and learn through repetition.

The “Elmo’s World” segment, which *Sesame Street* introduced in 1998, was a response to the rising viewership by toddlers and new research that said that children respond to both the quick segmented magazine format and a more consistent narrative format (Goodman, 2002). The segment also encouraged participation from the young viewers when Elmo talks directly to the audience, but it still featured content that would keep older children and parents engaged. The presence of the more linear “Elmo’s World” proves that the producers of *Sesame Street* are willing to change the format of their show if it increases the educational benefits of the program (Fisch & Bernstein, 2001).

Media production is the easiest way to introduce young children to media and media literacy education, and the episode offers easily imitable ways for preschoolers to produce their own news story (Eagle, 2007). Having the understanding about how to produce media makes it

easier for children to learn how to analyze media, and understand how it influences our society, later on in their lives (Hobbs, 2011). The episode also introduces media entities to young children and even introduces the concept of television ratings and sponsorships, so they have basic knowledge of these portions of the television business to provide a foundation for later media literacy education. This episode limits the amount of media literacy education that focuses on advertising. The “Hand-Sandwich Helper” parody was the only opportunity to teach children how to identify what specific advertisements are selling.

Even with limited advertising literacy lessons, merely introducing these media entities to children, and showing young children how television content, particularly television news, is produced helps them recognize the differences between the real world and television, which ultimately reduces the effects of media content on children’s lives (National Endowment for the Arts, 2011). The sooner children can recognize that most media content has a purpose, and that purpose is not always positive, the sooner they can either avoid or overlook the negative content. This includes the effects of advertising, which can be mitigated when children understand the purpose of advertising and when a parent or instructor is there to help explain the persuasive nature of advertising (An & Stern, 2011).

Throughout its history, *Sesame Street* has never had to be concerned with input from any for-profit media organizations, so with the help of their developmental experts, they are able to produce educational media content they know will have a positive influence on their intended viewers’ lives (Davis, 2008). This includes media literacy lessons that can build a foundation for later media literacy education, which provides citizens with the tools to think critically about the media and advertising they consume, potentially undermining the negative influence of the content (Shore, 2009; Harris & Bargh, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006, Siddika, 2002). One of the major concerns of political economic theory is whether an institution is contributing positively to the well-being of the public, and the producers of *Sesame Street* feel they are doing that by providing educational opportunities to preschoolers through the media and recognizing the

importance of providing positive influences on children's lives (Mudock & Golding, 1991; Davis, 2008; Gunter & McAleer, 1997).

Dora the Explorer Synopsis

Dora the Explorer has consistently been one of the top preschool shows on television since it debuted on Nickelodeon in 2000 (Nickelodeon closes 2Q11 as Top Cable Net, 2011; Arrieta, 2008). The animated show features an eight-year-old girl, who is fluent in both English and Spanish, embarking on different travels in each episode with her monkey Boots and anthropomorphic backpack and map. Dora often asks the audience for help, pausing to allow the viewers at home to answer and participate with Dora. This format was popularized by another big preschool hit for Nickelodeon, *Blue's Clues* (Pecora, 2004). In each episode Dora has something to do or someplace to go and she must visit three locations to accomplish her goal (Arrieta, 2008).

According to the *Dora the Explorer* page on the Nick Jr. website (2012), the show is meant to help kids to learn about nature, Spanish, and to develop problem solving skills. It also aims to encourage movement, confidence, and participation from children watching the program. It is also important to note that Dora is one of the few Hispanic characters and female leads in preschool television both when it started and today (Arrieta, 2008).

The episode chosen from *Dora the Explorer* is titled "Click!" and it first aired on Nickelodeon on November 5, 2002. Nickelodeon does not provide summaries or synopses for past episodes, but the description from the second season DVDs of the program states, "Dora the Photographer and her assistant, Boots, set off with a new camera to take pictures of wild animals for a photo contest" (Chialtas, 2002). The episode was 25 minutes long, leaving time for other interstitial content from Nickelodeon, and the whole episode focused on the same plot about photography.

This episode, like every episode of the series, opens in a playroom with toys and several drawings of Dora's face. The camera pans around the room before zooming in on a computer

screen where Dora, Boots, and other characters from the show are walking around what looks to be a computer game. At the same time, Dora and some children's voices start to sing the theme song to the program as they negotiate different obstacles in the computer game.

The first scene of the show features Dora in front of a photo shop. She tells the audience where she is before asking the audience "Do you know what this is?" as she holds up a camera and pauses to allow viewers to answer. She tells the audience that it is her new camera and asks viewers "Do you like taking pictures?" She answers "me too," assuming the audience enjoys photography, and turns her camera around pointing to a 10 on the back of the camera while saying, "I have ten pictures." She then moves over to a poster featuring pictures of wild animals. Dora says there is a photo contest to see who can take pictures of three wild animals: "a sleepy sloth, a mountain goat, and a fox." As she says this she points to a picture of each animal on the poster, and then asks the audience if they will help her take the pictures.

A monkey sound is heard in the distance and Boots swings down, hanging from a tree near Dora. She decides to take a picture of Boots in the tree and explains how to use a camera by telling the audience to "put your hands out in front of you, hold the camera, now push the button and say click, 'click'." She then turns her camera, which is digital, to show the audience the picture she has just taken of Boots on the camera's screen.

Boots agrees to help Dora with her contest and Dora calls on Map to help direct them to where to find the necessary animals. Map tells Boots and Dora that they can find the sloth in the rain forest, the mountain goat on Tallest Mountain, and Swiper the fox on Blueberry Hill. As they are walking towards the rain forest Dora asks the audience whether they know where the rain forest is as it appears in the background. After a short pause a computer cursor comes in and rolls over the rain forest highlighting it the background. The cursor then clicks on the rain forest producing a sound similar to a computer, alerting Dora to the location of the rain forest.

While walking to the rain forest Dora asks the audience to help her to take pictures of animals on the way, and tells the viewers to hold their cameras as she sings the lyrics to her song,

“finding the animals that’s a good trick, when you find an animal aim and say click.” She takes pictures of three more animals, identifying each animal before displaying each picture to the audience on the screen of her camera.

When she arrives in the rain forest she has the audience help her pick the right path several times, as she follows the snores of the sloth. Every time she asks for help picking the path there is a pause and the computer cursor comes in highlighting and clicking on the correct path. The computer cursor also clicks on the sloth after Dora reaches the snoring and asks the audience if they see the animal in the tree. She greets the sloth by saying “hola,” one of several Spanish words and phrases Dora introduces to the audience in the episode. Boots helps Dora by climbing the tree to take the picture of the sloth. He requests permission from the sloth before asking the audience for help, telling the viewers “hold your camera and say click.” He then shows the audience the picture he just took of the sloth.

Boots and Dora then leave the rain forest after thanking the sloth and ask the audience where they should go next, pausing before the cursor comes in and clicks on a picture of Tallest Mountain that has appeared on the bottom of the screen. She then walks for a few seconds before seeing three mountains in the distance. She pauses, and Boots asks the audience which mountain they should go to, “the tall mountain, the taller mountain, or the tallest mountain,” and the cursor comes in again to click on Tallest Mountain. On the way to the mountain she sings her song again, “finding the animals that’s a good trick, when you find an animal aim and say click,” and asks the audience to help her take pictures of more animals, telling the viewers to hold their camera out and say click when they see an animal. She takes three more pictures of animals, again identifying each animal and showing each photograph to the audience on the screen of her camera.

When they arrive at Tallest Mountain, it has a face and Dora says “Hi” to the mountain and the mountain greets Dora back. They see the mountain goat run up the mountain and Dora runs after him. The next scene shows Dora near the summit of the mountain. The animation has

changed slightly, and Dora is less fluid, similar to the computer game seen during the opening song. Dora follows the path and reaches the mountain goat. After it agrees to let Dora take its picture Dora tells the audience to hold their cameras and say “click” as she takes the mountain goat’s picture. She shows the viewers the picture she has just taken before going back down the mountain.

Pictures of each location again appear on screen and Dora asks where they should go next. The cursor comes in and clicks on the picture of Blueberry Hill after the pause. The clouds then clear, revealing Blueberry Hill behind Dora. She asks if the audience sees Blueberry Hill before the cursor clicks on Blueberry Hill again. When Dora reaches Blueberry Hill, Boots asks whether they have any pictures left. Dora turns her camera revealing all the pictures she has taken today. The cursor comes into view and clicks on each picture as Dora and Boots count. After they count nine pictures Dora asks “how many pictures do we have left?” An empty box then appears on screen and the cursor clicks on it as Boots and Dora figure out they have one picture left. The camera then beeps and flashes a light revealing that the battery has run out on the camera. Dora asks the audience to wake her backpack by saying “backpack.” The backpack releases several different kinds of batteries as it sings the “Backpack Song.” The backpack tells the audience that the camera needs a rectangle battery before the cursor comes in and clicks on the only rectangle battery, after the customary pause.

Dora and Boots climb up the hill and Dora asks Boots if he sees Swiper’s foxhole. The cursor comes in again and clicks on a hole in front of a tree. Swiper jumps out and runs in and out of trees before Dora finds him and tells the audience to take the picture quickly by holding the camera and saying “click.” She then shows the audience the picture before they stop Swiper from stealing the camera by saying “Swiper no swiping,” three times.

The scene changes to the photo shop where Dora’s family and friends are coming to see all her pictures. All ten pictures she has taken throughout the episode appear on an easel and Dora asks the audience to help her find the three pictures of the animals for the contest. The cursor

clicks on the pictures of the sloth, mountain goat, and the fox, moving each picture over to another board to be displayed at the photo shop. Her parents tell her how proud they are of her as a toucan comes in and places a blue ribbon on Dora's pictures. All Dora's family and friends do the "We Did It" dance. The cursor then clicks on the screen ending the scene.

The next scene features Dora and Boots asking the audience what their favorite part of the trip was. She also tells the audience that they "couldn't have done it without you." Dora then decides to take "your" picture, pointing to the audience. She aims the camera and says click before waving and saying "bye" to the viewers. The scene then changes to reveal what looks like a simple computer screen featuring Dora, Boots, and a few other characters on the show as the computer icons. The cursor first clicks on the right corner opening the credits that scroll on the right of the screen. The cursor then clicks on Swiper the Fox and a forest appears. For the remainder of the credits the screen looks like a video game as the cursor chases Swiper throughout the forest trying to click on him before finally catching Swiper at the end of the credits.

Dora the Explorer Analysis

This episode of *Dora the Explorer* incorporates several media literacy lessons within the typical framework of the show. Like most other episodes of the series, Dora still needs to go to several locations to find or accomplish something with the help of her monkey friend Boots. She introduces several Spanish words throughout the episode keeping with the bilingual mission of the show. Also, the fact that every episode begins with every character singing in what looks to be a computer game, several scenes in this episode featured the same computer game style of animation, and every episode features a computer cursor helping Dora, may also help young children still developing their motor-sensory skills recognize certain objects on a computer screen, and better understand how a computer works. For Nickelodeon, it also might help familiarize the viewer with what games look like on the Nick Jr. website, making it possible for

the children to play the computer game with minimal parental or adult assistance, potentially exposing them to advertising and other influences without the intervening presence of a parent (An & Stern, 2011).

The most prevalent media literacy lesson in this episode revolves around the production of media, specifically photographs. In the episode, Dora shows the audience the very basics of taking a picture with a digital camera. Dora also demonstrates a lesson about how cameras, and other electronics, work by showing the viewers what to do when the camera stops working and the batteries run out of power. She constantly repeats the simple instructions about how to work the camera throughout the episode before she takes each of her ten pictures, and shows the viewer each picture she has taken to ensure that the audience knows what the photograph should look like. Repetition aids in the education of preschoolers since they use repetition to investigate the world around them, and they enjoy recognizing characters and remembering correct answers (Why Do Toddlers Love Repetition, 2008). All the lessons presented in the show are transferable to real life (aside from the talking animals and anthropomorphic objects) which makes it easier for young viewers to imitate Dora's actions with the camera.

Considering the amount of repetition and the simplicity of the instructions and lessons presented in the program, the creators of *Dora the Explorer* may be tailoring the show to preschoolers watching alone. This is different from the "Grouch News Network" episode, which features jokes and gags directed at adults, since *Sesame Street* is produced with co-viewing parents in mind (Simensky, 2007). This is done to either allow the opportunity for parents and adults to teach or explain, or to keep adults entertained while watching the program with children. *Dora the Explorer* would be much harder to watch for adults since the constant repetition and overly simplistic songs can become annoying for parents and even older children (Barron, 2009). This forces the producers of *Dora the Explorer* to keep the lessons simple enough to not require any adult aide to help children understand the program. The producers of *Dora the Explorer* are unable to present more advanced lessons if they are creating each episode with the assumption

that the child is alone. They are missing the opportunity for parents to expand on the lessons by not making the program tolerable for adults.

The slow pace discourages parents from watching with their children, which not only reduces opportunities for parents to expand on media literacy lessons, but also eliminates the ability for parents or other adults to intervene against possible attempts by Nickelodeon to influence children (An & Stern, 2011). This influence includes encouraging children to develop a connection with a show like *Dora the Explorer* and its characters, which is reinforced by *Dora the Explorer* merchandise licensed to companies by Nickelodeon (Pecora, 2004). Also, since there is no longer a distinct on-screen logo separating Nickelodeon's preschool programming from its programming for older children, the lack of a co-viewing parent would allow children to continue watching after the programming meant for older children begins, which features several minutes of advertising an hour. This exposes young children, who struggle with recognizing the differences between the programs and advertising, to commercials. Preschool children have difficulties understanding the persuasive intent of advertising so they are especially susceptible to the negative influences of advertising, making this lack of distinction between the preschool and regular programming especially concerning (Oates, Blades, Gunter, 2002; Karvunidis, 2012).

Even through these limitations, the *Dora the Explorer* episode "Click!" still introduces children to a medium and its equipment, and encourages them to become producers of their own media, photographs. Through the constant repetition and the catchy, albeit extremely simplistic songs, preschoolers, particularly those nearing the age for formal schooling, can learn how a camera works and, if presented with a simple camera, should understand the basics about how to take their own pictures. Dora even asks a few of her subjects, including the sloth, for permission to take their photograph teaching children proper etiquette. The episode may also make some young children interested in photography and other visual media as they get older.

The episode does teach the basics of digital photography, however, there are several portions of photography and the media that the episode could address, but does not. Every picture

Dora takes comes out perfectly, which is hard for even the most experienced photographer to accomplish. By allowing Dora to always take a perfect picture the producers overlook an opportunity to explain what constitutes a good photograph or even present a lesson about perspective. Dora also enters a photography contest which motivates her to take pictures instead of just taking photographs for fun or just to produce art.

“Click!” introduces photography and media production to young children, however, there is very little in this episode that would help children understand the media system and how the media they consume is produced and presented. Unlike *Sesame Street*, this episode of *Dora the Explorer* does not introduce any media entities to their viewers nor does it attempt to show children how or why most media content is produced. This makes it harder for children to begin to understand how the media fit within our society (McChesney, 2000). The approach the producers take to teach about photography also eliminates the opportunity to teach children the basics about advertising and help children understand what advertisers are selling. The producers miss the limited opportunities to explain how certain aspects of the content and photographs are influenced by different attributes, like the setting.

If Nickelodeon was truly concerned with the well-being of their viewers and contributing to the public good they would provide more opportunities for parents to protect their children from the content that may not be developmentally appropriate for preschoolers that appears directly after its preschool programming (Murdock & Golding, 1991). This includes exposure to advertising before a child is developmentally ready, and attempts by the network to introduce very young children to the certain behaviors before they have the mental capability to decide whether they want to follow it (Banet-Weiser, 2007). However, parents may not get that opportunity even if Nickelodeon did distinguish between the preschool and regular programming since the pace of the show suggests Nickelodeon and the producers expect children to watch the program alone.

Curious George Synopsis

Curious George debuted on PBS in September of 2006, only seven months after the film based on the book series by H.A. Rey and Margaret Rey premiered. The television series is produced by the same studios that produced the film, Imagine Entertainment and Universal, in conjunction with PBS affiliate WGBH in Boston (About the Program : *Curious George*, 2012). According to the *Curious George* section of the PBS Parents site, the show focuses on teaching preschoolers about math, engineering, and exploring the world around them. It also supports the “try and fail” model of inquiry where George tries several options to try to solve a problem, and after a few mistakes, finally settles on the correct solution (About the Program : *Curious George*, 2012). George also never talks, which may help his character relate to younger children still learning to communicate with words. Since its premiere, *Curious George* has been one of the highest rated shows in preschool television and a huge hit for PBS (PBS Reports Growth Across all Platforms, 2012).

Unlike the other programs in this study, each episode of *Curious George* is split into two unrelated segments. Each segment of the 28 minute episodes contains a twelve minute portion along with a short live action portion featuring young children exploring the same topics as the episode that directly preceded it. Typically the two segments have very little serial connection aside from the presence of George and the other characters. Also, episodes of *Curious George* take place in both a city and in a rural setting. The episode being examined for this study was chosen due to the fact that one of the segments revolves around a lesson connected to media literacy education while the other segment still touches upon some lessons that can be transferred to media literacy education. The two segments in this episode are titled “George and the Giant Thumb” and “Shutter Monkey.” The episode first aired on September 7, 2011 as a part of the sixth season of the series.

The first segment of this episode, “George and the Giant Thumb,” takes place in the country. The summary, from the *Curious George* section of the PBS Parents website (About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012):

“A bored George and Allie decide to make a ginormous sculpture of Bill's sprained thumb. The duo quickly run out of clay and turn to less conventional art supplies. Peanut butter proves too sticky and shaving cream too drippy, so George and Allie use mud to finish their masterpiece. But will Bill give their art a thumbs up?”

Every segment in each episode lists one or two specific lessons it focuses on from the series' learning goals on the website (About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012). This segment focuses on structures, particularly how they are built and what materials are used. The episode opens as the rain slows up outside of the Renkins' farm, a family that lives near the country house of George and The Man in the Yellow Hat. George and Allie, the Renkins' granddaughter, look for something to do as Bill, one of George's neighbors, attempts to throw a newspaper with his sprained thumb. The newspaper ends up on the Renkins' roof, and after George retrieves it, Allie sees a giant dog sculpture in the newspaper. She suggests they make a “ginormous” sculpture like the one in the newspaper, and they decide to model it after Bill's injured thumb, since he is unable to help much.

Bill shows Allie and George a box of pictures featuring his injured thumb since they cannot see his actual thumb due to the splint. Bill does not want to model the sculpture after his left thumb since he feels his right thumb looks better. George and Allie try several materials to sculpt the thumb, including modeling clay, shaving cream, and peanut butter, before settling on mud. They also try different consistencies of mud and foundations to support the mud. They use a tower meant to support growing crops and screen mesh as the support. George, Allie, and Bill get the mud from under Mr. Renkins' tractor, which had been stuck in the mud since the morning, before the children inadvertently freed it.

They finally complete the sculpture, showing their masterpiece to Allie's grandparents before a tour bus headed for the dog sculpture pulls up to the Renkins' farm. The tourists are so

impressed by the thumb sculpture they forget about the dog and stay on the farm to take pictures of the thumb and admire the piece of art before eating lunch at the Renkins’.

The live action portion of this segment features young children using mud to build their own sculptures. They use sticks, bark, and other objects found in their backyard as the foundation for their sculptures, and like George, they have to figure out the right consistency of mud to sculpt with so their sculptures stay upright.

The second segment of this *Curious George* episode is titled “Shutter Monkey” and it takes place in the city. The summary, from the *Curious George* page of PBS Parents (About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012):

“Betsy's "Out of Sight Shapes" entry for the photo contest is sure to win first prize--that is until George and Steve accidentally ruin her pictures. With some help from Steve, George runs around town trying to re-shoot the photographs. But finding the hidden shapes in things is hard for a little monkey! Can George snap 4 pictures of 4 shapes by 4:00...or are Betsy's prize-winning photos out of sight for good?”

The segment opens as George and The Man in the Yellow Hat are getting their pictures taken inside a photo booth. They are waiting in line to get The Man in the Yellow Hat a new passport photo. As George and The Man look over the pictures from the photo booth, their friend Betsy takes a picture of George for her photography contest. Betsy teaches George how to use the camera by showing him how to hold the camera, where to look in the viewfinder, and how to check the picture that was just taken on the screen of the digital camera.

Betsy invites George back to her house to see all the pictures she has taken for the contest. Through a very simplistic computer interface, Betsy shows George how to find the folder on the computer with the pictures after hooking the camera up to the computer, how to choose which pictures to print, how to delete the pictures from the camera by clicking on the trashcan icon to free up memory, and how to actually print the photographs. Betsy tells George that the theme of her photos is “Out of Sight Shapes” featuring shapes hiding in everyday objects and activities, which fits with the educational goal of the episode, shapes.

After showing George the pictures, Betsy's Aunt Margaret tells Betsy they need to leave to buy a dress for the photography show that evening. As Betsy is leaving, her brother, Steve, comes in to see what they are doing and to play with George's "bouncy-yo," George's toy which is a hybrid of a bouncy ball and a yo-yo. Steve and George accidently delete the pictures from the computer with the bouncy-yo, and knock the printed pictures out the window and into a puddle. George suggests that they retake the pictures, since he remembers what Betsy taught him, and Steve agrees. As they set out to replace Betsy's destroyed photographs they see Betsy out with their aunt. Steve offers to take Betsy shopping to distract her as George goes to the necessary locations to replace Betsy's pictures.

George goes to a firehouse to take a picture of firemen holding a hose in a triangle shape. He also goes to the park to take a picture of a path in the shape of a circle and four garbage can lids shaped like a square. To capture the last picture, George poses as a curve in a mirror. After taking each picture he looks at it on the screen of the camera and outlines the necessary shape. George then goes back to Betsy's house, hooks up the camera to the computer, like Betsy showed him, and prints out the new pictures as Betsy and Steve get back from shopping. Betsy notices that the pictures George has taken are not hers, and finds the destroyed pictures on the desk. She tells George and Steve that they did not really "mess them up" and goes to the computer to click on another file folder which brings up her pictures. She then clicks on a print icon at the bottom of the page, reprinting her pictures. She tells George and Steve that "a photographer always saves her work" and if her pictures are destroyed "she can always print new ones."

As they look at the pictures George has taken, Steve notices that George's reflection or shadow is in every picture and Betsy suggests he enter the photography contest as well. They title George's pictures "Photos of a Monkey, Taking Photos of a Monkey" and both he and Betsy win awards for their photographs. The episode ends with George getting his picture taken with The Man as the narrator comments, "George really loves taking pictures, but not as much as he liked having his picture taken with his friends."

The live action section of the segment features a class of young children forming shapes with their bodies and taking pictures of the shapes like George and Betsy did in the episode. The teacher shows the students how to plan the design of the photograph by drawing it on a piece of paper before actually attempting to form the shape with their bodies. A graphic outlines the intended shape they are forming with their bodies as another student photographs the posing students.

Curious George Analysis

The format of *Curious George* enables the producers of the program to cover multiple educational topics due to each episode being split into two separate segments. Also, the live action section of each segment helps to provide real world ways for children to explore the lessons taught in each episode. Each segment in this episode touches upon a mathematical or engineering lesson while still offering media literacy lessons. Similar to the *Sesame Street* episode, and unlike the *Dora the Explorer* one, this episode of *Curious George* does not leave long pauses or over-simplify the information on the show. Instead the producers expect the show to be co-viewed with parents so they can explain or expand the lessons presented on the program (About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012). *Curious George* is one of the top viewed shows among mothers of children between the ages of 3 and 5, so this expectation to have an adult co-view the program with the child is being met (PBS Reports Growth Across all Platforms, 2012).

The first segment, “George and the Giant Thumb,” promotes the creation of art and teaches the viewer to not give up on a project, even when it is difficult. Both of these lessons can be easily transferred to media, specifically the production of media, one of the tenets of media literacy. The live-action segment reinforces these lessons by showing children creating their own mud sculptures. The presence of the newspaper early in this segment of the episode, and Allie’s ability to recognize the news story featuring the dog sculpture, also opens up the opportunity for parents to explain to their children the role of news, newspapers, and the basics about how to

read, or even produce, their own news story. The media literacy lessons presented in this segment fit seamlessly with the math and engineering focus of the series and the lessons in this segment about structures and sculpting with different materials (About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012).

“Shutter Monkey,” the second segment of this episode, touches more directly on media and media literacy lessons. The segment prominently features the basics of photography, including those exclusively related to digital photography, such as the ability to upload photographs to a computer and delete photographs from the camera. This is pertinent since digital photography has far surpassed film photography as digital cameras have become more popular through increased affordability and their presence on most cell phones (Hamm & Symonds, 2006). Betsy shows George the basics of how to use her camera and the viewers see both George and Betsy take several pictures, after which the audience is shown each photograph. Each photograph also contains a shape, which reinforces the geometric focus of the episode and series (About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012). The photo contest, and the slight dissimilarities between George and Betsy’s entries, also gives the co-viewing parents the opportunity to explain how perspective can change the message presented in media content. Unlike the *Dora the Explorer* episode, this episode approaches photography more like an art form that welcomes different perspectives and viewpoints; however both Betsy and George need to be motivated to take the photographs. Betsy takes the pictures for the contest while George takes them to cover up his mistake. The segment also presents a pro-social message when George learns it would have been easier to tell the truth than go through all the effort to try to replace Betsy’s pictures, although his attempt to try to hide his mistake did allow George to enter the photography contest.

Many of the shortcomings of the media literacy lessons presented in this episode are the same shortcomings in the “Click!” episode of *Dora the Explorer*. Even though they present the basics of producing media, specifically photographs, the producers do not touch upon the basics of the media industry, who produces media content, and how media fit within society, like the

producers of *Sesame Street* do in their “Grouch News Network” episode (McChesney, 2000). There were opportunities, in both segments, to acquaint children with the media industry. For example, the producers had the opportunity to provide information about the photography or visual media industries throughout the second segment. The producers also do not present any lessons about identifying what is being sold by advertisers, however they do present some opportunity for parents to explain how attributes, like setting, influence content when George travels throughout the city to replicate Betsy’s pictures.

Even though *Curious George* is broadcasted on PBS and co-produced by member station WGBH, Universal Animation Studios and Imagine Entertainment still produce much of the show. The influence of these for-profit production companies may limit the media literacy lessons presented in this program. NBCUniversal, parent company of Universal Animation Studios, is now owned by media conglomerate Comcast, which also owns several commercial networks that target older children and adults and rely on advertising revenue and promote consumerism through their programming and commercials (Universal Studios, 2012). Although the producers of *Curious George* may not be trying to influence that desire of their viewers or subject them to certain behaviors, there is very little evidence in this episode to suggest the show’s media literacy lessons are preparing children to become critical media consumers and decide for themselves whether they want to follow the status quo presented in media (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Gitlin, 1979b) NBCUniversal and Imagine Entertainment may not want children, who they hope to be consumers of their media products for life, to understand how the media works since it may undermine their ability to sell content, and their advertisers’ ability to sell products, as the child viewer grows up (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 1997).

There is no evidence that the for-profit media companies are producing *Curious George* for the public good (Murdock & Golding, 1991; Mosco, 1996). The lack of media literacy lessons that introduce larger media systems and media institutions to young children suggests that the for-profit media companies are producing the program to ensure they have an educational franchise

in their portfolio. This way they can profit from the popular franchise while appeasing the parents that allow their children to watch the *Curious George* program and movies without undermining the influence of content they produce for older children and adults (McChesney, 2004).

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse Synopsis

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse premiered on Playhouse Disney on May 5, 2006. *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* was one of the few preschool shows on Disney Channel that had consistently high ratings before the rebranding to Disney Junior in 2011, and it continues to be one of the top rated preschool shows on television (Bibel, 2012). The show features many of the popular classic characters that helped make Disney one of the most successful media companies in the world including Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy.

The show is computer animated rather than being hand drawn, like many of the main characters' original films, so everything appears on the show as three dimensional. According to the parents page on the Disney Junior website, the show focuses on teaching preschoolers math and problem solving skills (For Grownups: *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, 2012). It also promotes pro-social behavior in children, like many of the other Disney Junior programs (Barnes, 2010a). There are no episodes in this series, or Disney's other popular series, *Jake and the Neverland Pirates*, that have clear media related themes or promote media literacy. The episode that is being studied was chosen due to its focus on the creation of art and the transferability of these lessons to the creation of media. The episode is titled "Mickey's Art Show," and it first aired on June 27, 2008 (Ward, 2008). The official television synopsis, according to TV Guide's episode details (2008): "Goofy learns to sculpt, paint and draw so he can compete in an arts-and-crafts show sponsored by Mickey."

Like every episode, "Mickey's Art Show" opens with Mickey inviting the viewer into his clubhouse. He tells the viewer they need to say the magic words "meeska, mooksa, Mickey Mouse" to get the clubhouse to appear, at which time the opening theme begins to play. The

clubhouse magically appears and Mickey welcomes the audience to his clubhouse. He reveals that he is having an “Artsy Art Show.” The camera then turns to show Pluto, Mickey’s dog, painting with his paw before Mickey comes over to admire Pluto’s work. Goofy walks in to see what they are doing, and when Mickey tells him there is an art show that day, Goofy becomes depressed since he does not know how to make something for the show. Mickey says that all his friends will be happy to help Goofy figure out what to make for the show. Mickey then reveals that they will need their “Mouseketools” which are used to help solve the problem presented in each episode. He sings the “Mousekadoer” song to invite the Mousekadoer to help. The Mousekadoer is a machine that distributes each day’s Mouseketools to Mickey and his friends. The tools are first given to Toodles, a floating object shaped like Mickey Mouse’s head that distributes the necessary Mouseketools from the Mousekadoer to the characters on the show. The Mouseketools in this episode are a pogo stick, a record player, a cup and saucer, and a mystery Mouseketool that will be revealed when the show’s characters need it later in the episode.

Goofy and Mickey then walk out of the clubhouse as Pluto finishes his painting. Goofy and Mickey first see Daisy painting a picture of flowers in a vase outside of the clubhouse. She says that she needs more green paint, and she asks the audience what Grownups: *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, 2012). It also promotes pro-social behavior in children, like many of the other Disney Junior programs (Barnes, 2010a). There are very few episodes in this series, or Disney’s other popular series *Jake and the Neverland Pirates*, that promote a clear colors they need to mix together to make green before revealing that she will use yellow and blue paint. Daisy, Goofy, and Mickey realize they need something to help mix the paint and they decide to use one of the Mouseketools. Mickey asks the audience which tool they should use before Goofy decides to use the pogo stick to mix the paint. He places the paint under his hat and jumps high on the pogo stick which mixes the paint. Daisy finishes her painting and Goofy decides to paint flowers like Daisy. After he paints his picture he is disappointed that the painting does not turn out as well as Daisy’s. Mickey comforts Goofy by explaining there is no right or wrong in art and he sings a

song as they walk to visit Minnie making pottery; “There is no right or wrong/when it comes to making art/making sure that you have fun/is the most important part. Splash a little paint/draw a little line/just make sure that you have fun/each and every time.”

Mickey and Goofy walk around the outside of the clubhouse to Minnie, who is putting clay on her pottery wheel. She shows Goofy how to shape the clay as the pottery wheel spins, making a small, round pot in the process. Donald then comes along and places his own clay on the wheel as Minnie asks him what shape pot he will make. Mickey suggests a cylinder pot and a thought bubble forms above Donald as he imagines what a cylinder looks like. The wheel spins and he accidentally creates the wrong shaped pot. Goofy asks the audience if that is a cylinder before telling the viewers that it is actually a pyramid. Donald tries again, but he still molds the wrong shape for the pot. Goofy asks the audience again what shape it is before revealing that Donald had made a cube this time. Finally Donald tries a third time and creates a cylinder shaped pot. Goofy then attempts to make his own pot, but he gets caught on the wheel, which spins him, before throwing him off, and the pottery wheel rolls away. Mickey then calls for a Mouseketool to replace the pottery wheel. Mickey asks the audience which one to use before deciding on the record player. They turn on the record player and place the clay on it, which plays music even with the clay on the record. Goofy molds a banana shaped pot, which again disappoints him since his pot does not look like Minnie or Donald’s. Mickey comforts Goofy again, telling Goofy that his pot is one of a kind. Goofy decides to try something else for the art show and Mickey offers to show Goofy what he is making. Mickey then sings the same song he did earlier in the show when Goofy was disappointed about how his painting turned out.

Mickey takes Goofy in the clubhouse and he tells Goofy he is drawing a simple picture of himself. He looks at himself in the mirror and asks the audience what shape is his head and ears before Goofy tells him they are all circles. Mickey tries to draw a circle, but he is unable to do so. He asks Goofy to call for Toodles so he can use a Mouseketool to trace the circles. Mickey asks the audience which tool he should use before Goofy helps him decide to use the cup and saucer to

trace the circles. He uses the saucer for his head and the smaller cup for the ears. He then draws his face quickly to finish his self-portrait. Goofy tries to draw a self-portrait, but his oddly shaped head makes it harder for him to draw his picture. When he finishes, Goofy's picture looks surreal, which again disappoints him since his picture does not look as polished as Mickey's. Mickey comforts Goofy a third time, again singing his song about how there's not right and wrong in art. Goofy says he is having a great time, but everything he draws still turns out "goofy."

Clarabelle Cow then walks in, starting the art show. She is wearing a triangle cheese hat fashioned from a giant piece of Swiss cheese. All the other characters run in with their art and they display their works in the clubhouse. Goofy is unsure whether he has any art good enough for the art show. He shows Clarabelle, who is impressed by his "fun and colorful" art. When Clarabelle tries to display Goofy's pot she realizes there is no place left and Mickey calls for the last Mousketool, which is still a mystery. Toodles reveals the last tool to be building blocks, which they stack and use as a pedestal for Goofy's pottery. Everyone is impressed with Goofy's art, convincing Goofy that he is an artist. The episode ends with all the characters doing the "Hot Dog Dance" out of the clubhouse. Mickey asks the audience how many circles he used for his portrait as clips from the episode play above the credits.

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse Analysis

Unlike the *Sesame Street*, *Dora the Explorer*, or *Curious George* episodes, there are very few direct media literacy lessons presented in the "Mickey's Art Show" episode of *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*. In fact, none of the 100 episodes of *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* have any type of media related theme (*Mickey Mouse Clubhouse: Episode Guide*, 2012). This can be partially linked to the mission of Disney Channel and Disney Junior to focus on pro-social messages in their programs (Barnes, 2010a, Kalagian, 2007). While *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* does list mathematics and problem solving as a focus on the parents section of the show's website, the attention paid on promoting certain social values is obvious since the characters frequently share,

comfort and support each other throughout the episode. The biggest problem with promoting pro-social programming rather than programming based on educational curriculum is the fact that the definition for pro-social programming is extremely broad. According to Lowery & DeFleur (1995) pro-social is defined as “socially desirable and which in some way benefits other persons or society at large” (p. 354). How this is achieved is subjective, so preschool television producers can produce content that is purely for entertainment, and as long as it does not promote anti-social behavior, they can label it as pro-social. The vast majority of children’s programming on television is pro-social, since no network or producer wants to be associated with content that promotes anti-social behavior in their audience, so by labeling their preschool programming “pro-social” Disney could produce more content that is purely for entertainment and not worry about adhering to any educational standards (Wilson, 2008). Although this attention to pro-social content is seen in all the episodes in this study, it is much more prevalent in “Mickey’s Art Show.”

Even without clear media literacy lessons there are still several portions of the episode that can easily be transferred to the production of the media. Goofy’s willingness to continue to try different artistic mediums of expression, even though he feels as though his productions do not fit within the parameters of what he considers good art, teaches children that, when producing art or media content, to keep trying. Like the first segment of *Curious George*, “Mickey’s Art Show” also offers the opportunity for a parent or adult co-viewing to explain different perspectives when it comes to producing content. It also promotes producing art for art’s sake, since all the characters produce their art just to be displayed at the show. The episode also promotes non-conformity, since Goofy learns to appreciate his art even though it does look the same as everyone else’s pieces of art.

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse is one of the top rated preschool shows on television, however, it is not among the top co-viewed shows on preschool television (Bibel, 2012). Like *Dora the Explorer*, the program frequently breaks the fourth wall by featuring characters that talk directly

to the audience to ask for advice and answer questions. Although the program and its pauses are not nearly as excruciatingly slow as *Dora the Explorer*, they are still used to promote active participation with the program from the preschool viewer even if an adult is not present with the child. This supports children watching the program alone, which eliminates the possibility of a parent intervening when Disney attempts to sell its characters and brands to the young audience.

The “Mickey’s Art Show” episode of *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* clearly does not have the same media literacy focus as the *Sesame Street* episode, “Grouch News Network”, or even the episodes of *Dora the Explorer* or *Curious George* from this study. The presence of the magical clubhouse and its “Mouseketools” and “Mousekedoer,” can open up the opportunity to approach a variety of educational lessons and subjects, including media literacy, without having to explain where the equipment or objects necessary for the media literacy lessons originated. There are also no opportunities to present children with basic media terms or media institutions, lessons that help them identify what advertisers are selling, or explanations about how attributes like music and setting influence the content. Also, without the presence of any media, beyond the outdated record player, there are very few opportunities for the parents or adults that do co-view *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* with children to expand on or explain lessons pertaining to how media technologies work.

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse is the only show in this study that is also produced by the same company that owns the network (Mickey Mouse Clubhouse Overview, 2012). This allows Disney to tailor the content and messages to support the network and company’s brand. This may be the reason that there are so few media lessons and representations of the media presented in episodes of programs on the network. Disney wants to introduce the brand and its characters to children at a young age so they continue to be fans and they support and consume the brand throughout their lives. In this case, they are introducing Mickey and other characters that are synonymous with the Disney brand to children as young as two so they will develop a connection with these characters and continue to consume products featuring these characters throughout childhood (McChesney,

2004). Even as these consumers enter adulthood, Disney will continue to sell to them through content until they have kids, who will become early adopters of the Disney brand due to their parents' lifelong support of the brand, starting the cycle again (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 2006). Disney undoubtedly wants to support this cycle that has made the company so successful over the last 83 years, and limiting media literacy education in their preschool programming helps do this by limiting opportunities to undermine the influence of the network's content (Harris & Bargh, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). Lastly, Disney Junior's focus on pro-social lessons rather than educational lessons through traditional curricula gives Disney more flexibility in how they produce their shows (Barnes, 2010a). This allows Disney to present content that supports its brand and the development of its characters and focus more on entertaining rather than educating its preschool viewers (Pecora, 1998). Disney will continue to "carpet bomb" children with their commercial interests and introduce children to the status quo as long as they can avoid public criticism (McChesney, 2004 p. 204). The success of Disney Junior so far is proof that more children are being exposed to this content at a young age (Palmeri, 2012). Instead of using their status as one of the top children's media producers to contribute to the public good and support the well-being of children, they are using their past success in children's media to introduce them to the Disney brand and characters while they are still in preschool (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Murdock & Golding, 1991).

CONCLUSION

It was correct to assume that PBS would present the most media literacy lessons in its programming. Although *Dora the Explorer* did present very similar messages as the second segment of *Curious George*, the PBS series was able to present more media literacy messages since it did not utilize long pauses, allowing for more time for actual content. The format of *Curious George* also enables the producers to introduce a wider range of educational messages by splitting each episode into two unrelated segments that address different educational goals (About

the Program: *Curious George*, 2012). However, the *Curious George* episode did not present as many media literacy messages as the episode of *Sesame Street*, possibly due to the presence of for-profit companies in the production of the show. The *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* episode presented the least media literacy messages due to Disney Junior's focus on pro-social content and the overall lack of episodes from popular Disney Junior series that include representations of the media and media literacy education (Barnes, 2010a).

The *Sesame Street* episode may have presented the most media literacy lessons, but none of the episodes were perfect examples of the way preschool programs should approach media literacy education. None of the episodes provided lessons about identifying what advertisers are selling or about how visual and aural attributes influence the content. Each program also missed several opportunities to present basic media terms to young children, however the *Sesame Street* episode does introduce many more terms than the other episodes in this study. The *Dora the Explorer* and *Curious George* episodes both present more basic lessons about how media technologies work than the *Sesame Street* and *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* episodes since they provided basic instructions about how digital photography works. The *Curious George* episode goes deeper than the *Dora the Explorer* episode by showing children how a digital photograph on a camera becomes a tangible picture and both shows offer opportunities for parents to explain how computers work.

The advertising on both Nickelodeon and Disney Channel discourages the two networks from producing programs that promote co-viewing between adults and children. There is very little advertising or promotional time to sell products and services to adults, and both networks would receive complaints if they directed too much advertising during their preschool programming to children. Instead, they focus their programs only on their intended audience, the preschooler, making many of the episodes and programs difficult or boring for adults to watch. Whether this strategy has proven educationally beneficial, or both networks are merely trying to force parents away from the television so they can sell the characters, other content, or network

brand to children, is up for debate. Both networks may also be hiding the fact that their preschool programming is more entertainment focused than other educational preschool programming, like on PBS. This is supported by the fact that Disney and Nickelodeon bury the educational goals of their programs on the parents site connected to their networks rather than on the shows' main page, like PBS, and Disney has publically stated Disney Junior focuses its content to promote pro-social, rather than curriculum-based, lessons (Barnes, 2010a; About *Dora the Explorer*, 2012; About Our Shows: Disney Junior, 2012). In the end, if these networks were more concerned about their programs being educationally beneficial, they both would find ways to either draw parents in to watch the programs with their children or more clearly separate their preschool programming from the programming aimed at older children that does contain advertising.

It is difficult to prove that Disney and Nickelodeon are limiting media literacy lessons in their programming just so the preschool audience is more susceptible to the influence of their brand and advertising as they grow older. However, there is ample evidence in this study that both Disney and Nickelodeon use their preschool programming to influence preschoolers into supporting the network's brand and its characters as they get older. The media literacy lessons presented in the episodes *Dora the Explorer*, *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, and *Curious George*, which has for-profit producers, only present production related lessons when they do include media literacy lessons. Although this does help increase interest in the media, it does not provide enough of a foundation so young viewers can become critical media consumers later in their lives (Eagle, 2007). *Sesame Street* is one of the only preschool programs in America promoting media literacy in their content, and there is no evidence that there are other preschool programs taking any steps to include media literacy in their content (Shore, 2007). This helps answer the first research question: "To what extent are media literacy lessons presented in media themed episodes of the preschool television programs?" All the programs that had the presence of a for-profit media organization in the production of the show had far fewer media literacy lessons than *Sesame Street*, which is produced and broadcasted by non-profit media organizations.

Examining these shows and the way these networks have produced programs in the past and present brings clarity to the last two research questions: “How have the histories, missions, and business models of Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, and PBS influenced the content they produce for children, particularly preschoolers? Do these networks broadcast educational preschool television to provide a positive influence in children’s lives or to appease parents and advocacy groups as they draw in new consumers?” Nickelodeon has always produced preschool programming to support its overall brand. The network understands that the preschool market is a financially valuable one. Along with the profits it makes from merchandising their preschool programming, Nickelodeon recognizes the preschool audience directly precedes its main 6-11 demographic and its preschool shows could help bring in new consumers (Pecora, 2004). This is supported by the fact that Nickelodeon has removed any in-program branding that would distinguish its preschool programming from its regular programming, potentially exposing children and familiarizing them with the regular Nickelodeon programming so they begin to consume it as they grow too old for the shows aimed at preschoolers (Karvunidis, 2012).

Disney’s history of promoting consumerism in its content suggests that Disney Channel may be using its Disney Junior programming to introduce children to its products and franchises at an earlier age (McChesney, 2004). This is supported by the fact that Disney Junior has several shows based on Disney franchises and characters they market to older children and families (Palmeri, 2012). Although Disney Channel and Disney Junior do not feature traditional advertising they still use interstitial time to promote its products and programs, so the network may want to ensure the advertising it features for its own content is not undermined by media literacy education (Kupersmidt, Scull, & Austin, 2010). The network also takes a pro-social approach to its educational children’s programming, so it does not have to present as many curriculum-based educational lessons in their programming (Barnes, 2010a). This gives the network more flexibility to present content focused on entertaining their audience, and further reduces the likelihood that it will present media literacy lessons in its shows.

Since PBS relies on donations and uses its stellar reputation in educational media to attract corporate sponsors it is not as concerned with ratings or selling any specific products, enabling the network to concentrate on providing quality and entertaining educational content for children (PBS Mission and Values, 2012). Ironically, this focus on quality educational media assures parents that they can trust the content on the network, so parents allow or even encourage their young children to watch the programming on the network. This provides PBS with ratings high enough to compete with the other children's television producers (Catering to Children TV Networks Divide, 2010). Also, since it does not have to worry about advertisers, the network has the flexibility to broadcast shows that have co-viewing adults in mind, ensuring the shows are at least viewable, if not entertaining, for adults. *Sesame Street* has a socially conscious non-profit producing the program which is willing to include media literacy messages because its main concern is educating children and ensuring they are as ready as possible to continue maturing in this media saturated environment as they enter formal school (Simensky, 2007). PBS has shown a willingness to lose financing to produce the content it believes will make a positive difference in people's lives, and this includes content that educates young children about the media (McChesney, 2004; Kahn, 2011; Getler, 2009a). However, the fact that many PBS shows, like *Curious George*, are produced by for-profit production companies may limit media literacy lessons seen in other PBS programs (Pecora, 1998; About the Program: *Curious George*, 2012).

The content and histories of Nickelodeon and Disney Channel suggest they are promoting their preschool programming as educational to appease parents and convince them to allow their children to be exposed to the content on the for-profit networks. The pacing of the shows from those networks in this study may be discouraging parents from watching with their children, which makes it easier for both networks to sell to children since there is no adult in the room to intervene. Both networks, to some extent, are using their preschool programming to not only profit from the preschool audience, but expose them to the network brand early in their lives, and possibly, influence their behavior as they develop (Gitlin, 1979b). PBS and Sesame Workshop

seem to be producing their educational programming to provide a positive influence in children's lives and, unlike Disney or Nickelodeon, contribute to the overall public good (PBS Mission and Values, 2012; Murdock & Golding, 1991)

Nickelodeon markets merchandise to preschoolers for shows targeting its older audience, and has eliminated the Nick Jr. branding from its preschool block, making it harder for children and parents to recognize the daily change from preschool to children's programming (Karvunidis, 2012). Disney markets the same characters to children from preschool to adolescence, and there is continual presence of the Disney brand on Disney Channel due to the fact that all the interstitials promote Disney products (Pecora, 1998; Blumenthal & Goodenough, 2006). Also, the majority of shows on the Disney Junior block are either produced by or, exclusively for, Disney. In fact, almost half of the block (3.5 hours out of 8 total hours) is occupied by just *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* and *Jake and the Neverland Pirates*, two shows that are produced by Disney that feature characters from Disney franchises. On Fridays, the block features one of Disney's animated feature films, all of which have produced their own characters and franchises that are merchandised and licensed (Disney Junior Schedule, 2012).

The episodes in this study show that it is possible to include media literacy lessons even when the educational goals of each program are in more traditional school subjects like mathematics, science, and reading. It would greatly benefit children growing up in this media saturated environment to better understand the media and develop the skills to critically analyze media content and produce their own media. Whether it is an increased presence through shows already on the air, or producing programs in the future with educational goals more directly linked to media literacy, preschool programming can help young children develop a basic understanding of the media in the same way shows like *Sesame Street* have aided in the development of basic skills in traditional learning areas, like reading. The for-profit networks and production companies may be hesitant to produce more programs with media literacy lessons, since it may increase awareness by children about how these networks sell their brands and

various products through advertising, which would upset the networks' power by revealing how media institutions operate and their motivation for producing content (Alexander & Owers, 2007; Bazalgette & Buckingham, 1997). It may also raise awareness among both children and parents of how these networks commodify children and childhood, reducing the effectiveness of the networks' advertising and merchandising to children, especially as children get older, develop stronger reasoning skills, and become aware of persuasive intent (Tashijan & Naidoo, 2007).

The study in this thesis only examined four media themed episodes from popular preschool series on television, which is a very small portion of preschool content produced and broadcast in America. To fully comprehend preschool content producers' commitment to media literacy education and educational content, future researchers need to look at more content and networks. Also, future studies must focus more on the production process and talk to those responsible for developing and producing preschool content to understand how they approach media literacy education. Even though this study included a detailed textual analysis, a content analysis would provide another perspective by quantifying the amount of media literacy lessons contained in the episodes.

As the amount of preschool content available continues to grow, it is important to continue to increase knowledge about the motivations behind the production of this content. Since the vast majority of preschool content is promoted as being educational, future research must also examine whether the producers are actually educating children in the areas they promise, or whether they are merely promoting their content as educational to convince parents to allow their young children to be exposed to their content. It is nearly impossible to shield young children from all media content in this media saturated society, so we must ensure the content they do consume is supporting their well-being and development now and later in their lives.

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