



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Adam C. Hughes for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Ethics presented on July 15, 2013  
Title: Abandoning the Girl's Show Ghetto: Introducing and Incorporating Care Ethics to Girls' Animation

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In regards to animation created and aimed at them, girls are largely underserved and underrepresented. This underrepresentation leads to decreased socio-cultural capital in adulthood and a feeling of sacrificed childhood. Although there is a common consensus in entertainment toward girls as a potentially deficient audience, philosophy and applied ethics open up routes for an alternative explanation of why cartoons directed at young girls might not succeed. These alternative explanations are fueled by an ethical contract wherein producers and content creators respect and understand their audience in return for the privilege of entertaining.

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Abandoning the Girl Show Ghetto:  
Introducing and Incorporating Care Ethics to Girls' Animation

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes the release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Adam C. Hughes, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This author expresses sincere respect for all animators and entertainers who strive to create a better profession for themselves and their audiences. Their personal struggles and frustrations begin to bear fruit in this academic document, but nothing can do proper justice to the service that they selflessly give as they attempt to reform a sphere of every day life that has long been in disarray.

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## Chapter 1: A History and Outline

“Girls don't watch cartoons.” “Cartoons for girls don't sell.” These are consistent replies to persons bold enough to pitch plot driven cartoons aimed at young girls. It's no surprise that within the animation fan community, a phenomenon colloquially called the “Girl Show Ghetto” has been closely watched for several years now. The phenomenon is characterized by a gender gap in what is created, viewed, and consumed by men and women, especially young girls. Largely, producers and network executives seem to believe that cartoons for girls historically do not succeed. These beliefs have lead to a large scale gap in what is created for girls, and are defended with a mixture of pessimism and cynicism toward girls as an audience. What can be done for girls in the field of animation? In this project, I begin by outlining the existence of this problem, and report the sociological and personal accounts of its affects on women in order to give context to later ethical analyses surrounding the moral regulation of creator driven entertainment. It is my hope that the combined gravity of these personal accounts alongside the logical underpinnings of an ethical analysis of what I refer to throughout this work as the “Entertainer's Privilege” give weight to philosophical and meta-ethical claims surrounding girls' animation. My thesis then builds on a historical account of animation, and culminates with a newly formed hypothesis between key epistemological concepts, the role of ethics in story telling, and the responsibilities of entertainers toward their audiences.

### 1.1 A Gendered Divide in Expectations and Content

I will begin with an outline of the problem that this thesis seeks to underline. While there is a great deal of research surrounding the ratio of female characters to male in animation, the portrayal of



these characters as stereotypes, and the effects these stereotypes have; there is significantly less focus on the actual programming stratification itself. It is an observable phenomenon that in the industry of animation, there is far less content intended for girls than there is for boys. The audiences are smaller, and the target demographic of gender is almost always male. In a recent profile of networks, Disney's "Toon Disney" channel reported a viewership of 61% boys aged 2-11, and 39% girls aged 2-11 ("Cable Network Profiles," n.d.). Turner Broadcasting's Cartoon Network held an even lower female viewership, with 73% of their animated viewership being male. Following a 2011 first time ratings drop, childhood entertainment giant Nickelodeon's solution was to create more content for young males, citing future animation lineups, all of which were aimed at boys (Zahed, 2011).

The root of this discrepancy lies in an industry-wide perception that cartoons geared toward girls are largely off-limits because they do not traditionally succeed. In an interview by Amy Chozick (2011) with Viacom's Head of Research Ron Geraci, Geraci was quoted as saying "Girls migrate out of animation more quickly than boys. That's a fairly new phenomenon" (Chozick, 2011). Likewise Stuart Snyder, President and CEO of Cartoon Network was quoted as saying that animation was better than live action when it comes to boy-friendly story-lines, because "You can't always do the most adventurous things in real life" (Chozick, 2011). Executives like Snyder and Geraci seem to believe that there is an experiential focus on "boy" things that make them suited to cartoons, and seem to believe that the migration is a fairly new phenomenon on the one hand, but claim that traditionally girls do not watch cartoons, preferring less adventurous pursuits.

As an example, In 2010 when pitching ideas for the successor to the cartoon series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, Nickelodeon writer and storyteller Bryan Konietzko also noted that Nickelodeon executives were concerned about the potential success of an action-oriented female protagonist. Particularly, executives voiced concerns over traditional industry logic that girls and boys would watch boy's cartoons, but that boys would not watch girls' cartoons. The stereotype is at least in part carried

out because so much of cultural importance of “boyhood” is placed on avoiding the feminine, and all cultural importance for “girlhood” is placed on being an adult woman (Kimmel, 2000). We can observe this phenomenon in the shifting focus of girls and boys as they reach early adolescence, a period wherein boys tend to focus on their traditional childhood pursuits, and girls begin to show interest in more adult pursuits including make-up, fashion, and reality television.

In a business media study carried out in 2006, Isabelle D. Cherney studied the marketing and consumption habits of boys and girls as they age, based on what they consume, how often they consume it, and when they shift in consumption interests. In the study, Cherney (2006) first finds that “Girls’ television shows became more feminine with age, but their toys, computer games, and sports became more masculine with age.” (p. 4). Here Cherney is examining factors like color, the gender of a protagonist, and the producer stated audience of that subset of media. Cherney (2006) also notes that while both girls and boys reported watching cartoons at a young age,

“Girls reported watching cartoons, entertainment shows, and teenage drama shows. Television viewing changed with age from cartoons to sports shows (boys) and from entertainment shows to sitcoms (girls). Boys tended to list more action-oriented programs, whereas girls tended to list more people-oriented programs. In general, television shows became increasingly gender-stereotyped with age.” (p. 6)

Cherney concludes that as the stereotypical roles are increased in upper aged media they are “likely to influence stereotypic conceptions about gender roles” (Cherney, 2006 p. 6).

Cherney notes that cartoon programming seems to fall off in exchange for dramas, sports, and other more life-oriented programming as children mature. The statistics are backed up by the Nielson instituted, which stated that in 2004 the top television shows for 12-17 year old girls were *American Idol*, *the O.C.*, *Will and Grace*, and *One Tree Hill*, while the top shows for 12-17 year old boys were *The Simpsons*, *Malcolm in the Middle*, and *the O.C.* (Facts and TV Statistics, 2011).

The first of several problems flows into the others. The expectations that creators of content driven animation have for their female audiences seem to reflect either a genuine misunderstanding or legitimate neglect of their young female audience. While the ethical implications of these reactions are explored in detail later, the sociological and personal ties that women's childhoods have to their persons form the basis of why those ethical narratives matter. As both a sociologist and an ethicist, there is a tie worth examining in the claims of adult women who have already lived to see the implications of a stratified medium. Childhood flows into adulthood, and most reasonable persons will at least admit that if it is possible, all opportunities afforded to one gender should be afforded another (and many will argue that if it is not possible, it must be made so). However all persons should be ready to acknowledge the greater implications of my hypothesis as it ties into the socio-moral sphere- that ownership of one's childhood comes with great cultural capital, and that denial of such prominent cultural capital as the ownership of one's childhood could easily set one back in both the social and professional world.

### 1.2 Gendered Divides that Carry Into Adulthood

The statistics that Cherney and many other researchers have provided seem to show that girls can enjoy boy's cartoon programming, but seem to shy away from their own around the time that they come into tween and teen years, and most seem to stay clear of such programming in adulthood. As an example, a young woman caught watching cartoons like *The Powerpuff Girls* or *Totally Spies* in the early 2000s cannot claim to be doing so ironically, she cannot easily claim to be an adult who is simply enjoying childhood nostalgia, and she is almost certainly not going to admit to being entranced by the plot or the characterization. Yet we can observe that men almost certainly create a degree of cultural capital around this idea. Cartoons for men like *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy* and *American Dad* reach into

adulthood, while there are no real likenesses for women. Most adult men can gather and speak about the previous night's episode of a cartoon show, but the same cannot be said for female pursuits. The ability for one sex to generate cultural capital around an idea or a concept but to keep it off limits to another is very certainly a problem.

It has been documented by social researcher Susan J. Douglas that the gap in quality program creates in women both a collective loss of social identity and an unwillingness to own their childhoods. In her writing, Douglas outlines the shared childhood of the baby boomer generation and the feeling of lost childhood as she reflects on her life as a young woman. In her book, *Where the Girls Are*, Douglas speaks to the lack of perceived history of women in media. Douglas (1994) says that “Looking back produces for women an overwhelming urge to disown past images... because women have had little memorable contributions to society” (p. 5). In media also, the experience of women has been devalued and lost in a way that this thesis seeks to reconcile. Douglas notes throughout her book that while men can look back on childhood fondly and see characters like The Beatles, James Bond, and cartoon superheroes, women look back with embarrassment at groupies, Bond girls, and damsels in distress. She chronicles the growth and rise of role models for women over generations, and concludes that there is a feeling of split identity as women feel split between intelligence and dependence, sexuality and prudishness, and perhaps most importantly to this body of work, childhood and adulthood.

Feminist animator and producer Lauren Faust also speaks to this childhood void and the impact it is having on the animation industry in her reply to a *Ms. Magazine* article defending her then project, *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. In the article, Faust (2010) notes that

“Shows based on girls’ toys always left a bad taste in my mouth, even when I was a child. They did not reflect the way I played with my toys... ..Even to my 7-year-old self, these shows made no sense and couldn’t keep my interest. No wonder the boys at school laughed at my Rainbow Unicorn Trapper Keeper.” (My Little NON-Homophobic, NON-Racist, NON-Smart-Shaming

Pony: A Rebuttal, para. 3).

Faust's childhood experience matches closely with Douglas' own account of childhood media consumption. It's a childhood that seems to shame "trivial" pursuits, but it's also apparent that very little effort has been made in the past to raise those pursuits beyond triviality. In fact, the opposite seems true. It seems as though the industry has largely begun these same pitches under the assumption that if what is created for boys is given a female face, cartoons should succeed just as openly as those for boys do.

Closely tied with Douglas' experience is the second half of Faust's assertion. Not only did the shows fail to connect, they were a source of shame and ridicule among children. The deeper meaning of this socio-personal problem is tied up very closely in this sense of childhood acceptance and identity. Through personal stories of a female childhood, both Faust and Douglas speak to a more global adult phenomenon; the unacceptability of this particular identity among both men and women. Faust speaks to the ridicule of male-to-female identity policing, while Douglas speaks to a collective female shame regarding childhood.

Equally importantly, in the first few lines of her dialogue on the issue, Faust notices an experiential gulf between how she practiced play and childhood, and how the shows that were meant to reflect her values did not. This experiential gulf, the root of the problem outlined above, is an epistemological concept called *imaginative resistance*. In imaginative resistance, an individual working with a certain ethical framework finds it far harder to suspend disbelief or discount his or her assumptions toward certain methods of problem solving when confronted with alternative methods. As an example, when asked to suspend one's disbelief about a fictitious story or scenario, one might have an easy time pretending that time travel was plausible, or that super heroes exist, but one has a very difficult time imagining that what is wrong might be right, or that a method for bringing a person to justice might be different from what is "normal." The suspension of disbelief of morality and moral

problem solving is categorized as one of the most difficult illusions to generate in fiction.

Faust's assertion underlines a more global female encounter with imaginative resistance that outlines why cartoons show such difficulty in succeeding with an intended female audience. Producers' and writers' need to transpose a recycled justice based ethic tends to make them unrelatable, and feed into Douglas' own experience. As a result, women observing such cartoons may be embarrassed by the seemingly simple black and white framing that typically accompanies justice based solutions, or legitimately confused as to how a justice based approach to ethics might solve a problem.

Both writers outline an important part of this body of work. They make the all-important assertion that a part of adult identity is at stake when discussing a childhood identity. Douglas' quote regarding looking back speaks most powerfully to this problem, it speaks very obviously to a social void inherent in childhood stemming from the imaginative resistance bound up in the issues that cartoons seem to take seriously.

The problem then outlines both a shamed childhood and an adult loss of self and identity, fostered by an abysmal showing for cartoons created with girls in mind. This in turn results in a stratification of entertainment priorities between adult men and women. If women cannot own their childhood cartoons, perhaps the next question in line is to ask why. Many answers might appear. As Lauren Faust (2010) herself notes

“From what I’ve seen since I’ve grown up, little has changed. To look at the quality of most girls’ cartoons, it would seem that not one artist really cared about them. Not one designer, not one background painter, not one animator. Some of the more well-meaning, more expensive animated productions for girl audiences may look better, but the female characters have been so homogenized with old-fashioned “niceness” that they have no flaws and are unrelatable.” (My Little NON-Homophobic, NON-Racist, NON-Smart-Shaming Pony: A Rebuttal, para. 4).

This level of unrelatability might well be founded in a realistic, down to life level of suspension

of disbelief, but it is the imaginative resistance rooted in the shows' ethical lessons and methods of problem solving that I theorize makes them so difficult to relate to. In her article, Faust had previously noted that

“I assigned my ponies and my Strawberry Shortcake dolls distinctive personalities and sent them on epic adventures to save the world. On TV, though, I couldn’t tell one girl character from another and they just had endless tea parties, giggled over nothing and defeated villains by either sharing with them or crying—which miraculously inspired the villain to turn nice.”

Imaginative resistance explores the idea that while suspension of disbelief for setting or characterization is a relatively simple one, it is difficult to visualize or suspend one's disbelief with regards to ethics, ethical issues, or methods of ethical problem solving. As is explained in greater detail through literature surrounding it, the degree of ethical imaginative resistance is typically larger, and the potential to be caught up in the intricacies of problem solving is higher. If this literature holds true, then an epistemological problem highlighting differences in ethical approaches would couple powerfully with the feminist ethical narrative that women's ways of knowing and practicing ethics are different from men's.

I hypothesize throughout the body of this work that a great deal of the lack of interest results from a lack of properly applied and relevant creative and content based ethics, namely a feminist ethic of care. Care ethics is a field of divergent philosophy centered around women's experiences and way's of knowing. An ethic of care is driven by alternatives to the justice approach in moral problem solving that center around community building, interpersonal relationships, compassion, and care giving. Justice based ethics is described on page 26. At the age of 5-7, moral maturation is accompanying physical maturation, and both boys and girls are beginning a documented deeper analysis of their own morals and boundaries. Care ethics is rooted in these studies, stemming from a complete contrast between the psychological and ethical studies of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan that displayed

various differing stages of ethical maturation. The studies by Kohlberg outlined a tradition of justice based ethics that focus on individual problem solving. In these studies, Kohlberg tended to criticize the moral development of female participants as lacking, and lumps them in as outliers stemming from stunted moral development and reasoning. Because girls tended to solve Kohlberg's moral quandaries via methods outside the boundaries of the expected or accepted, their answers seemed morally irrelevant or too uncertain to be of use to the study.

Gilligan attributed the uncertainty and nervousness in female participation to a more likely factor. She was the first to hypothesize that the traditional cultural roles women are asked to perform resulted in different methods of problem solving and ethical analysis that operate on a community based standard unfamiliar to traditional ethicists. The care ethic tends to accept the community based, care centric methods of problem solving as legitimate methods that have been traditionally practiced and undervalued for long periods.

Gilligan (1985) outlines care ethics by saying that:

“Norma Haan's (1975) research on college students and Constance Holstein's (1976) three-year study of adolescents and their parents indicate that the moral judgments of women differ from those of men in the greater extent to which women's judgments are tied to feelings of empathy and compassion and are concerned with the resolution of real as opposed to hypothetical dilemmas. However, as long as the categories by which development is assessed are derived from research on men, divergence from the masculine standard can be seen only as a failure of development. As a result, the thinking of women is often classified with that of children.” (p.9).

In her outline of care ethics, Gilligan notes several points of sincere interest to this particular line of research. The ethic itself covers all of the facets of this problem in a way that no other solution appears to do, as will be explored in greater detail in later chapters. It exemplifies the different means of problem solving and frameworks that men and women commonly work in commonly go unnoticed.



From a practical standpoint, it explains exactly why an industry that rarely concerns itself with the meta-ethical might overlook this explanation for the lack of interest in girls' cartoons. It implores artists, producers, and writers to rise beyond their entertainer's privilege and see to the needs of a silent, underrepresented, and vulnerable group whose vulnerability can last a lifetime in the form of a compromised identity.

It is this undervalued ethical practice that this thesis hypothesizes has gone sometimes unnoticed, sometimes miscarried in the world of animation and cartooning. In modern media, entertainment has taken on an educational role, and the premises of most entertaining animated cartoons and movies involves an ethical quandary faced by the protagonist(s) as they seek to resolve a conflict or dispute. While cartoons have a varied history of protagonist archetypes, I would argue that methods of conflict resolution seem unanimously concerned with justice based individualistic ethics rather than a communal ethic that employs care to resolve conflict.

Gilligan's work is included in my own not because of its timely relevance but because it outlines the historical narrative surrounding women. As will be explained further in my examination of her literature, Gilligan is the first to explain that women's ways of knowing and practicing ethics are typically undervalued and underrepresented in the history of philosophy. While Gilligan's primary assertions on what "care ethics" is have largely seen revision in recent years, her historical narrative is selected because it underlines alarmingly the same knee jerk reactions by media content creators for young girls. The consideration that girls may be growing interested in adult women's ways of solving problems and that they may crave such interaction in their media is the missed point much of the body of this work seeks to highlight. I will argue in this thesis that few writers have brought care ethics to a place where it can mesh seamlessly with the entertainer's privilege in the way that Gilligan has. In the Literature Review subchapter entitled "Care Ethics", I will describe further some of these writers, and the virtues of care ethics that they employ, as well as several responses to the emergence of care ethics

and Gilligan's initial framework.

### 1.3 Care Ethics and the Entertainer's Privilege

The first step in the solution is to identify the entertainer's privilege and to question the extent of it. Entertainer's privilege is the social contract between an entertainer and his or her audience that allows an acceptable extension of typical moral conventions. In a classic example, a comedian is allowed to speak about topics considered taboo, or use hostile language in a way that is normally considered to be insensitive at best. Through this contract, an author or actor can invite an audience member to believe that the fictitious world he or she portrays is truly real so long as he or she adheres to the expectations of their audience member.

The care ethic I propose is mixed with Leo Bogart's inspection of the entertainer's privilege. It is a privilege extended to entertainers, but it is contingent on the connection of an art as reflecting on the artist's audience. The social contract made throughout entertainment is a contract of expectations and realities. A person expecting to receive an entertaining movie displaying “Black Pride” during an African American holiday would likely be mortified to discover that the DVD endorses a “white man knows best” attitude and is little more than propaganda. In this rather extremely framed case, the contract is broken because the expectation of entertainment was met with a false reality- what followed was a tasteless approach to “pride” that did not capture the average audience member's interests. The same rule when applied to a more moderate case like care ethics reveals a similar conclusion- audience members entering into the contract expecting to be entertained by their own ways of knowing are instead presented with a dominant male narrative- as if to be told that their ways of knowing are false, or not good enough for television air time. When the contract is broken, the entertainer's privilege is revoked, and the cartoon fails. The strong history surrounding girls' cartoons tells exactly this story-

attempts to insert the same recycled justice based formulas into girls' entertainment are met with commercial and social failure.

The care ethic involved here calls writers, producers, and animators to rise above a simple formulaic approach to everything that they write and examine the vulnerable populations within their audiences. It is tailored further to a realistic industry application through a number of media ethicists including Sarah Banet-Weiser and Matthew Kieran (1997). Specifically, it outlines an ethic of care that sees to the needs of these vulnerable populations and sets them as the center target for future content.

This content should also be influenced in its execution by the same care ethic that calls creative minds to work for it. The idea follows that if the content of justice based girls' cartoons seems irrelevant to the target audience, creating a cartoon whose basis is care ethics is the first step to remedying this problem. A clear employment of care based problem solving should be present both in storytelling and in character design to connect with the intended audience. The limitations are not specific to writing and story either; characters who practice a justice based ethic, or whose design or world is built around justice based ethics are theoretically less relatable to a female audience than those whose ethic seems relevant.

I hypothesize that a care ethic in cartoons would be better received than a recycled justice based ethic, and its relevance might allow cartoons to succeed among a female audience where previously cartoons have apparently failed to generate interest. It is my hypothesis that a number of cartoons have already successfully done just this, and have gained an incredible bi-gendered following that denies and defies the expectations and assumptions of previous media creators within their genres. The importance of this dual shared audience cannot be understated; the acceptability of these cartoons among women by women and men and among men by other men will free them to be a part of future women's shared history and childhood in a way that they were previously not.

Animation and characters focusing on care should specifically employ alternative problem

solving strategies that focus on community, and an even distribution of care. Of special note is the use of an ensemble cast to promote both variety in character design and the heavy presence of a supportive community of care takers and strong problem solvers.

The use of ensemble cast carries a large number of these strengths specifically, adding weight to the encouragement of varied individuals. Particularly, Lauren Faust notes this in the above article when she states that there are

“lots of different ways to be a girl. You can be sweet and shy, or bold and physical. You can be silly and friendly, or reserved and studious. You can be strong and hard working, or artistic and beautiful...This show is wonderfully free of “token girl” syndrome, so there is no pressure to shove all the ideals of what we want our daughters to be into one package. There is a diversity of personalities, ambitions, talents, strengths and even flaws in our characters—it’s not an army of cookie-cutter nice-girls or cookie-cutter beauty queens like you see in most shows for girls.” (My Little NON-Homophobic, NON-Racist, NON-Smart-Shaming Pony: A Rebuttal, para. 11).

Faust's enterprise is noted for being highly successful in a surprising bi-gendered uprising, and also focuses on friendship, community, and shared problem solving as its core thematic elements.

#### 1.4 Final Argumentative Assumptions

It is worth noting that the usefulness of a care ethic is one of the core assumptions of this project. It assumes foremost that at the least the gendered roles that care ethics operate on are social constructs rather than biological realities, but they are constructs that must be approached practically. There is no normative claim that women “ought to” think differently than men, simply the observed reality that social construct has left both genders with apparently divided methods of problem solving that are outlined in psychological and sociological work extensively. Through the hypotheses

mentioned throughout this work there is a glimpse of potential repair work that can be done between the genders, until both forms of ethics are presented as equally appealing.

I also assume that feminist ethics are relevant to both girls and adult women, especially as they mature in a social and cultural atmosphere that conditions them to find certain ethics relevant. I assume that persons gravitate toward ethics, practices, and stories that they find socially and culturally appealing in media. In short, successful media content is content that works within already existing frameworks, and not content that creates and perpetuates certain frameworks over others. To change these frameworks would be a larger project than this one, and would involve a larger scale overhaul of cultural values to create a more appealing and receptive gender inclusive tone.

### 1.5 Onward to Literature

The assumptions above and the introductions to basic concepts will continued to be raised throughout examination of literature surrounding those ideas. There is obviously a slight divide in priorities here, as the body of this thesis seeks to handle the concept of applied ethics in two distinct ways. Firstly, through the entertainer's privilege and a historical sociological account, it seeks to explain the personal and global ethical imperatives surrounding animation and creative media. In this way, ethics is applied to a job sphere. Literature surrounding the entertainer's privilege support those is chosen arguments. In another way, this thesis seeks to examine the current applications of ethics as a narrative storytelling method. The crux of the entertainer's privilege is in acknowledging the limitations of storytelling methods. Ethical scenarios have a long and rich history of being woven into storytelling and in many cases moral lessons are the entire backbone of the entertainment enterprise. As the literature and arguments formed out of it will continue to expand upon, there is an ethical need to be both familiar with and accepting of the limitations of ethics in the roles of storytelling, and a

willingness to own the audience's form of ethics over the author's own preferred methods if the story is to be truly entertaining.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Animation as a commercial enterprise has tended to avoid pitching television cartoons to young girls and adult women alike. The rationale for this has not only been engrained in the minds of aspiring storytellers and animators of girls' cartoons, it has actively constrained cartoons from dealing with this audience on the grounds that the audience historically shows no interest in this form of media. Few historians and scholars of animation have touched upon the dearth of content for female viewers, and I will sample Rebecca C. Hains as one such author and question potential gaps in her implied conclusions, which I feel are premature. In this way, I hope to prove that not only has the problem existed, but that it continues to exist. I then outline an alternative philosophical reason for why girls may show less interest in previously created animation.

I feel that these reasons are deeply embedded in how we as a culture value ethical solutions, and acknowledge in a brief overview of feminist care ethics that men and women practice different ethical methods and solutions. With these different practices in mind, I examine why diverging ethics and problem solving methods might result in less enjoyment and a smaller viewership of fictional cartoons due to the philosophical concept of imaginative resistance. Lastly, I examine why this gap might be a problem for animators, and why they should consider it a breach of their responsibility as entertainers not to be fully aware and conscious of their audience.

The literature I have selected in this chapter best examines the line of questioning above, which I outline in greater detail in the Thesis chapter. In the first section dealing with the history of animation,

I highlight gaps in both reasoning and numbers in Rebecca C. Hains' *Growing up with Girl Power*. Following this, I define the “problem of imaginative resistance” as a philosophical concept examined by numerous modern thinkers. Penultimately, I continue with the definition and highlights of Carol Gilligan's views of care ethics, and I conclude my review with the works of entertainment and media ethicists Leo Bogart and Matthew Keiran, as well as several other ethicists of media whose related views have influenced my understanding and definition of the concept of what I refer to as “Entertainer's privilege.”

## 2.1 The History of Girls' Animation

Written examinations of the history of girls' cartoons have been, in my studies, a rare finding. Many texts have been written on women's media as a whole, and these texts have been examined thoroughly for their value and insight. Few tend to focus on young girls' media however, and even fewer concern themselves with the statistical gap in television programming outlined in the introductory chapter of this thesis. Of the many sources I consulted, only one stood out as a direct narrative of the growth and creation of girls' cartoons in recent years. *Growing Up With Girl Power*, a study by Rebecca C. Hains, begins by telling the story of empowering girls' media from the Spice Girls to modern cartoon shows like *The Powerpuff Girls* and *Totally Spies*. Based on my life's experience and my learned experience, I do not share Hains' conclusion that the current growth of and security of girls' cartoons has reached an acceptable threshold. In this section, I hope to outline a history of “Girl Power” as opposed to “Feminism” in cartoons, and voice the concerns that I feel feminist animators express with the idea that girls' cartoons are numerous enough to be called successful.

In her writing, Hains examines a wealth of sources that critique the growth of girls' animation following the rise of the cartoon show *The Powerpuff Girls*, a cartoon that Hains claims to be the first

real girl superpower hit, which she claims is responsible for breaking down a generation's worth of entertainment images that portrayed women as weak and frail. In the first three chapters of her book, Hains (2012) begins by accurately speaking to a previous cultural phenomenon she calls “The Girl Power Crisis.” In it, she first shows that feminism has in the past been lowered to the status of a “dirty word.” In the time of the Spice Girls, feminism was given a reboot in the form of girl power, a concept that Hains fairly portrays as potentially motivated by both a sense of empowerment and a dubious sense of branding. This branding is more closely examined in the essayed excerpt *Girls Rule! Gender, Feminism, and Nickelodeon* by Sarah Banet-Weiser from her book *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship*. Banet-Weiser (2004) examines this dichotomous relationship between empowerment and branding throughout her essay and her larger work. Of the concept of Girl Power, she says that

Certainly, it can be argued... that alternative cultural productions along the margins of mainstream popular culture—’zines, for example, or Riot Grrrl websites—illustrate how girls can produce girl power culture (Kearney, 1998). But Nickelodeon programs are hardly “alternative,” and are squarely a part of mainstream, commercial culture (p. 121).

Banet-Weiser and Hains both outline an important point regarding this historical rebranding of girlpower and feminism--that in order to subvert a long history of media mudslinging around the word feminist, the concept of Girl Power needed reinventing. Hains is clearly conscious of this, as she cites Heather Havrilesky's Salon.com article *Powerpuff Girls Meet World* in her own section on this phenomenon. In her article, Havrilesky (2002) states that

Given a recent Gallup poll that found that only 25 percent of women today consider themselves feminists, *The Powerpuff Girls* may reflect a shift from embracing political and social labels to choosing between carefully packaged products that have ideologies encoded deep within their shiny exteriors. (Powerpuff Girls Meet World, para. 20).



These three articles seem to speak well to the historical shift from “feminism” as a brand to Girl Power as a brand in children's cartoons. Much of Hains' book deals with the relative success of Girl Power as a feminist substitute brand, and the examination of children's acceptance and incorporation of feminist ideals from those cartoons. As such, I feel it fair to mention that Hains' primary premise is not a historical narrative, but that her historical narrative gives context to her larger study.

It is the historical narrative however that seems a bit too optimistic. With the rise of Girl Power and *The Powerpuff Girls*, Hains rattles off a number of subsequent shows like *W.I.T.C.H.*, *Totally Spies*, *Atomic Betty*, and more that follow in the footsteps of *The Powerpuff Girls*, and pave the way for girls' cartoons. It is the historical lack of, as well as the current lack of, cartoons for girls that makes this thesis so important, and it is that historical lack that I feel needs exploring.

Hains sets the stage well in her history of girls' cartoons. She narrates a humble beginning in which there are no cartoons airing in 1992 for girls. By 1998, the success of *The Powerpuff Girls* breaks down long standing expectations that boys would not watch cartoons for or about girls. Over the next few years *The Powerpuff Girls* is joined by a number of other highly rated and highly viewed cartoons about and for girls- but there is no arguing that to this day animation is still a world targeted at boys. Rick DeMott (2000) noted the same history in his *Animation World Magazine* article “The Powerpuff Girls' Phenomenal Merchandising Mantra.” According to him;

Long thought that little boys determined what a household of kids watched, shows based on girl topics were never made. However, that's all changed. Since *The Powerpuff Girls* has become a hit, every channel is scrounging around for their own “girl show.” (p. 2)

And the list of optimistic praise is far from short for *The Powerpuff Girls*, but there is a key point to the problem as a whole, a hole in this narrative that I feel simply must be filled. It is possible to *overstate* this success, and we are dangerously close to doing just this. The line is philosophically quite thin between noting a pleasing rise in girls' media from “none” to “some” and “some” to “enough.” As a

result, the numbers are still massively skewed. At the time of my writing, a typical weekday schedule for Cartoon Network, the same network that launched *The Powerpuff Girls*, runs a fourteen hour scheduling block for children, beginning at six in the morning on the East Coast and ending at eight at night. During that block, there are five timeslots that could be classified as “gender ambiguous” (*Tom and Jerry*, *Scooby Doo*, and *Loony Tunes*); twenty three timeslots that are regularly classified as “boy's programming” and two timeslots that are regularly classified as “girls' programming” (*Total Drama Island*) (Locate TV Cartoon Network Schedule for July 8, 2013). Of shows like the *The Powerpuff Girls* flaunting super powered girls, there are now none. The closest thing that the network runs in this regard is *Adventure Time*, a boy's action cartoon that has seen great commercial success among boys and girls, for it's mixed cast and is now run six slots a day. I rather generously classify *Adventure Time* as “boys' and girls” programming, and the closest thing to *The Powerpuff Girls* that this generation has seen ownership of. Where is the lauded success spoken of in Hains' and DeMott's writing? It is my opinion that success too quickly and often praised can become normative, but not expansive. A network like Cartoon Network runs a whopping twenty three to two scheduling block of boy's to girls' cartoons, and feels secure in doing so because of the praise it has gained for shows like *Adventure Time* in the present and *The Power Puff Girls* in the past.

It is important to note that this is in no way a criticism of Hains' and other authors' larger work on the topic; it is a criticism of our ability to quickly praise too easily and too often the very admirable success of a cartoon. *The Powerpuff Girls* has the power and statistics to prove what feminist animators have spent so much time thinking--that boys will watch girls' cartoons, since they accounted for a substantial portion of the show's audience. Unfortunately those statistics aren't persuading the industry overnight, and it's important not to sell them as if they are. Each major network may indeed have picked up a girls' television show--maybe two. Few networks animate those shows, most aim for live-action comedy/dramas, lessening feminist animation's success rate in the field of animation

significantly. The remainder fill hundreds of timeslots a week with boys' cartoons, and only dozens with girls'. The industry perception still exists, and it's important that our analysis of success not oversell it. In her section *Representing Girls: Strong in Numbers, Weak in Diversity* Hains (2012) comes dangerously close to this mistake when she states "No longer a victim of symbolic annihilation, girls could be seen on screen in great numbers, in leading roles and engaging in a range of unstereotypical behaviors. They were active and agentic, rather than passive, weak objects." (p. 98) The basis of this quote is part of a larger idea; that girls' numbers have grown on screen, but their diversity tends to be limited to a few archetype races and personalities. This is certainly a valid and forward thinking criticism, but never is criticism leveled against the current number of girls on screen. The simple virtue that their numbers are "higher" than they used to be is not enough to form the basis of calling them "strong in numbers" when compared to their male counterparts, especially when a huge number of female characters are "lead roles" in that they are male characters' mothers, sisters, or girlfriends. So while a focus and criticism on diversity might well be important, it is a careful line to tread that we not make it sound as though the current number of girls in animation is an acceptable amount, or that the number of cartoons marketed toward girls is close to the number marketed toward boys, or that the number of cartoons following a female lead is close to equal to the number of cartoons following a male one.

It is here that I feel much of the industry's focus is slipping. It seems to be the unexpressed opinion of many that the problem of numbers is slowly solving itself, but as I examined in the introduction to this matter, already we are seeing rollback. There is already a refocus on boys, already an industry perception that their incredible branding power is becoming "underrepresented" when the figures hardly account for an underrepresentation, and more accurately this language indicates that executives are shifting back toward a world of easy marketing toward boys. Girls' cartoons still air and fail after a season or two, and executives struggle to explain this phenomenon beyond the idea that girls

just don't make an adequate market. Why they might not make an adequate market, and why it might be their job not just to entertain but to create more specifically for this underrepresented population has not yet become a mainstream issue, but it is an issue that I am firmly interested in, and an issue that will be more adequately explained and explored in the subsequent appraisal of the idea of imaginative resistance.

## 2.2 Imaginative Resistance

My proposed explanation for girls' distaste with mass marketed cartoon animation is imaginative resistance. Imaginative resistance is an emerging philosophical concept that can be traced back to the empirical philosopher David Hume. In my own words, the concept involves a subject's relative inability to accept contrary to evaluative facts presented in their fiction, namely but not limited to contrary to evaluative moral facts. I include this lack of limitation because I believe that it speaks through my work to a larger goal of accessibility in fictional content creation, despite the fact that my own work deals primarily with the constraints of imaginative morality. For the purpose of my study, I will begin with Hume's initial observation, and speak on the subject of writers who have most formed my opinion of the phenomenon, concluding with a brief connection between it and the other ideas present in this chapter. This should inform prepare the reader for a more robust examination in my thesis chapter. Though I may touch on my reasons for excluding certain lines of thought from my definitions, the main focus of this section is not to critique imaginative resistance, a concept I believe all persons on examination will find to be self-evident. Instead, I will focus on my ability to define the phenomenon within the scope of my work, given the influence of writers whose works I considered and consulted.

My consultation begins with David Hume, arguably the first writer to remark on the

phenomenon. In a larger treatise on art and sentiment, Hume (1757) notes that

Whatever speculative errors may be found in the polite writings of any age or country, they detract but little from the value of those compositions. There needs but a certain turn of thought or imagination to make us enter into all the opinions, which then prevailed, and relish the sentiments or conclusions derived from them. But a very violent effort is requisite to change our judgment of manners, and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind from long custom has been familiarized. (Of The Standard of Taste, para. 33).

Simply put, Hume recognizes that when it comes to fictional worlds, a line can be drawn between what we are capable of suspending our disbelief toward and what we cannot. Hume is arguably the first philosopher to recognize that this pertains to moral claims. Of all the claims which we struggle to believe in fiction, we “violently resist” imagining a world where what we commonly believe to be a wrong course of action is said to be a right one.

Imaginative resistance as Hume proposes it is just a sliver of the philosophical argument it later becomes. Kendall Walton (2008) sums up Hume's proposal with a great deal of interest in his essay *On the (So-called) Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance*. He asserts that

When it comes to moral matters (moral principles anyway)...I am more inclined to stick to my guns, and it seems to me that most interpreters are also. I judge characters by the moral standards I myself use in real life. I condemn characters who abandon their children or engage in genocide, and I don't change my mind if I learn that the author (and the society he was writing for) considered genocide or abandoning one's children morally acceptable, and expected readers to think this is so in the world of his story. (p. 35)

Walton's explanation is here quoted to help the reader grasp the scope of this particular argument. We have little trouble in being asked to imagine a world of fiction where star cruisers larger than planets

exist and travel masslessly at beyond the speed of light. Most readers know these things to be impossible works of fiction, but they are works of fiction that we do not struggle to imagine. When called upon to imagine a world where, as Walton proposes, genocide or abandoning one's children are simple, morally right acts, we are repulsed.

We “stick to our guns” in a very unique way. We begin by assuming that the world in which the story is set is a morally corrupt one. We aren't capable of imagining a world where these things are truly correct, and our immersion in such stories is quickly broken. As we explore further, we expect some form of resolution to return the setting to one we are comfortable with, but our discomfort remains if the resolution does not come. If the parent who abandons his or her child is not proved wrong for doing so, and is instead praised, we assume the moral insanity of the praiser. As viewers of such content we are incapable of imagining a world where such an act would be truly praiseworthy.

Our reasons for struggling to imagine these scenarios are variable. Philosophers of both mind and art are fascinated by the question because the potential reasons surrounding it are abundant. Why do our senses latch onto certain concepts as if they were immutable facts and others as if they were trifling details? It seems obvious on further inspection that the phenomenon is not limited to moral facts, an example I find striking in Neil Levy's article “Imaginative Resistance and the Moral / Conventional Distinction.”

Levy's work deals with a larger question of moral construction, and he uses the concept of imaginative resistance to argue against the idea of an objective and engrained moral reality. He is quick to point out in his work that a core facet of imaginative resistance is its flexibility from person to person. What one person or child might struggle to imagine is not the same as any others'. He draws clever lines from literature that engage his reader in the practiced struggle of imaginative resistance. With them, he implores his reader to explore their concepts of mathematical, geometrical, and spacial truths, and investigate whether they too are not immutable- not because they have any objective truth to

them, but because they are deviant aesthetic claims- that a monster truck in a blood red sky is as beautiful as a painting, that a maple tree's leaves are oval shaped, or that a fork and knife are indistinguishable from a chair and a sofa. In each example, a reader practices a similar level of aesthetic disbelief- any person who makes such distinctions clearly lacks in either visual capacity or sanity. It is impossible for us to imagine any world where these aesthetic creations are truths.

Levy's eloquent portrayal of the problem of imaginative resistance is picked up once more by Dustin Stokes in his work "The Evaluative Character of Imaginative Resistance." Stokes also agrees that the problem of imaginative resistance is aesthetic. He states that "Cases like this suggest that the puzzle of imaginative resistance be reframed in terms of the following asymmetry: Imagining contrary-to-descriptive facts versus imagining contrary-to-evaluative facts." The concept Stokes outlines makes a great deal of sense to me, and has been heavily adopted into my working definition of the term. Descriptive facts are typically very sensory in nature- we have no problem extending the idea that descriptions of sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch might run counter to our own. Facts that we must evaluate the truth of however require some degree of active acceptance on our part. We struggle to think that a maple tree's leaves are oval shaped, or that a fork and knife resemble a chair and sofa to the point of being indistinguishable from another. We can describe them as odd in shape, but our evaluation of those things will invariably lead to the assumption that there is something technically deficient in the world we are being asked to imagine. Furthermore, there are some facts that seem to repulse us more than others- we cannot even begin to fathom a world where five plus seven does and does not equal twelve, the evaluation of such a statement seems impossible to imagine.

Thus, it might be said that imaginative resistance extends to all things which have a contrary-to-evaluative quality, but that it extends to certain things with a greater "violence"- to quote Hume- than it does with others. Morality seems to be at the very least the most unflinching of these resistances, while we can certainly envision a world where people practice heinous crimes, the idea that such crimes are

“right” in that world is as impossible to summon as the idea that five and seven does not equal twelve.

So it can be said that in the portrayal of moral problem solving that is very wrong, it is incredibly improbable that an animator might convince their audience that such a problem has been solved eloquently. A story following the mechanics of a serial arsonist hero would never catch the eye of viewers, because no viewer could understand the world of the arsonist where his or her ability to burn down innocent people's homes is considered a societal asset. Unless the same problems are intentionally framed in such a way as to explore a side of moral problem solving that persons might connect with, the cartoon would quickly fail for lack of interest no matter how well drawn or budgeted it is.

This has significant merit for exploration if- as we examine in the next section with Carol Gilligan's care ethics, female persons tend to practice a different brand of ethics from male persons. That there might be a connection between the lack of female viewership of cartoons, and the justice oriented nature of cartoons is an idea that hinges not only on the above understanding of imaginative resistance, but on a practiced understanding of care ethics and feminist ethics as well.

### 2.3 Care Ethics

If the idea that cartoons and media targeted specifically at girls don't succeed holds the statistical water that executives and producers seem to believe it does, the next appropriate question is “why”? In previous sections of this literature review, I've outlined just such a reported history, and I've outlined the concept of imaginative resistance specifically as a potential cause for the lack of interest in girls' cartoons. If imaginative resistance in fiction is to have a hold on girls as a whole, it must mean that women practice different approaches to ethical problem solving than men do. In this section of my literature review I examine pieces from Carol Gilligan's work *In a Different Voice* to support my



hypothesis that socially many girls are separated from many boys by a different set of ethical problem solving strategies that deal with an ethic of care rather than a justice based ethic. I then supplement my summary of Gilligan's observations with more recent critiques and interpretations of the values that care ethics embraces.

Categorically, a large majority of what most philosophers would call traditional ethics falls under the heading of “justice based ethics.” Justice based ethics tend to deal in problem solving from the perspectives of rules and guidelines built on universal principles concerning individual interactions, good and evil, a sense of fairness, or other broad criteria. Typically, decision making in justice based ethics is enacted by an individual, with emphasis on the individual's separation from influence. “Free will” is a common tenet of individualistic justice based problem solving, and a focus on the individual's rights and freedoms through a sense of fairness tend to be the end result of any ethical practice that is “justice based.”

Care ethics tends to handle ethics in a more complex sense, that is to say it deals less in rules and more in relationships. The care ethicist focuses on need and social vulnerability as routes of moral concern, and rather than inequality or injustice, tends to focus on detachment and isolation as the subjects of large scale moral consideration. Care ethicists have outlined the virtues that they believe women tend to value, including but not limited to; the of building communities, the strengthening of interpersonal ties between friends or family, the peaceful resolution of conflict, and caring for the vulnerable. Vulnerable populations are not only the subjects of oppression as the justice based ethicist approaches them, but the subjects of marginalization and social obfuscation when examined through a care ethics lens. Because of their societal roles as frequent caregivers, care ethicists argue that many if not most women practice care ethics, while men's roles tend to thrust them into justice based problem solving until they are equally familiar with those concepts.

Carol Gilligan's work is arguably the first work to express these differences in practice and

gender. Gilligan's work on the subject begins built on the studies of Lawrence Kohlberg, whose own writings concluded that women's moral practices and reasoning were not in line with moral practices he considered to be conventional or well developed. Gilligan's insight into Kohlberg's study surrounded the idea that women were not morally deficient, but rather were not being appropriately polled and studied. Their methods of problem solving tended to be more focused in the relationships and finer details, and they tended to shy away from matters that required a black and white response. Of particular interest to my work is a quote wherein she examines this distinction and rationalized reasons for its social denial. Gilligan (1986) first states that,

Norma Haan's research on college students and Constance Holstein's three-year study of adolescents and their parents indicate that the moral judgments of women differ from those of men in the greater extent to which women's judgments are tied to feelings of empathy and compassion and are concerned with the resolution of real as opposed to hypothetical dilemmas. (p. 69)

Gilligan's historical study of moral and development psychology paves out a crucial flaw in most psychological studies at the time. Complex moral problems were examined only through one lens, and that lens had a long history of being the only one given any considerable social weight. Most classical philosophy and ethics were practiced by men, and moral problem solving on both an academic and social level had and continues to mean the ability to solve or examine problems through a justice based perspective. As a result, studies like Kohlberg's are cast into doubt, as their ability to capture the intricacies of moral problem solving becomes more and more one dimensional in approach.

Gilligan (1986) goes into greater detail on this fact as she continues

...As long as the categories by which development is assessed are derived from research on men, divergence from the masculine standard can be seen only as a failure of development. As a result, the thinking of women is often classified with that of children. The absence of alternative

criteria that might better encompass the development of women, however, points not only to the limitations of theories framed by men and validated by research samples disproportionately male and adolescent, but also to the diffidence prevalent among women, their reluctance to speak publicly in their own voice, given the constraints imposed on them by their lack of power and the politics of relations between the sexes. (p. 69)

Gilligan's thoughts encompass a wide ranging critique of moral problem solving and development as one dimensional. The problem is not only a psychological one, but a historical one. Women's experiences tend to be cast as important only when questions concern their rights directly--and often not even then. The justice based nature of problem solving is a societal norm, and one that I would argue is at fault for women feeling marginalized not only in open ethical spheres, but in private ones such as entertainment as well.

Gilligan has been criticized, however. Her psychological methods are sometimes considered dated, and her observations as a psychologist who detailed alternative stages of moral development have difficulty surviving modern scrutiny, and are contentiously lamented as undocumented (Sommers 2000). More importantly in this context, Gilligan's own examination of the care phenomenon focuses on the biological sex rather than social painting of gendered expectations; that is to say, the context of her care ethics is what many philosophers call "essentialist". In her journal entry , political philosopher Naomi Weisstein (1997) elaborates on the concept, observing that

"Feminist psychologists are averting their eyes from the larger barbarism of the social context in which we operate. They choose instead to put forth a notion of female difference which, while no longer biologically based, is nevertheless essentialist, or at least highly decontextualized, for example, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (1982); Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (1990). That is, they assume that female difference is fixed, rather than contingent on social context. (para. 3)".

Weisstein's critique of care ethics highlights a distinction that is becoming more common in a modern feminist movement. That there is a natural or fixed difference between the genders plays into much of the sexism that feminist ethics and philosophy seeks to break down. Perceived biological and natural differences between sex and race tend to become justifications for sexism and racism. So Weisstein is right to be worried about the larger implications of Gilligan's work. I do not believe that these oversights disqualify Gilligan's points regarding there being a difference, or that she necessarily believes that an ethic of care is inherently a part of each woman, and has no social context. Gilligan's observation that the practice of ethics is gendered is of value, even if she has attributed the cause to something natural, rather than the differences persons are asked to act out already in their lives.

It's important to note as this definition is established that to a person practicing care ethics, it is not wrong to practice justice based ethics. Gilligan herself admits that most persons practice both sorts of ethics, and that care is not female specific, nor justice male specific. These are simply societal shadows cast on the blank canvas of most persons' ethical expression and reasoning. While one problem might exist there are two approaches. She does state it somewhat ambiguously later in her work:

“Like the drawing that can be seen as a young or old woman, or the image of the vase and the faces, one initially sees it in only one way. Yet even after seeing it in both ways, one way often seems more compelling. This phenomenon reflects the laws of perceptual organization that favor certain modes of visual grouping. But it also suggests a tendency to view reality as unequivocal and thus to argue that there is one right or better way of seeing.” (p. 69)

According to Gilligan, “it” (ethics) is practiced in a variety of ways, but social expectations tend to play greatly into how a person acts and reacts to moral situations--both in the public sector of laws and legality, and in the private sector of entertainment. She goes on to note that persons tend to defend a viewpoint that they are partial to as a “right” or “better” means of seeing. Gilligan's work did not stop

with her, however. A variety of other ethicists followed her work on care ethics, and each of them has added to the definition in some way.

The first of these ethicists is Eva Feder Kittay. In her collection *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*. Kittay works to develop the concept of care ethics. Kittay brings a focus on social connectivity, expanding care ethics beyond the realms of personal and interpersonal ethics and into the public sector. The ethics women are asked to practice, Kittay argues, are developed around ideas of community and interdependence, and can be used to improve lives not just on a private level, but on the level of public policy and interpersonal care. This is the beginning of a greater expansion of scope, Kittay argues largely that care ethics shows us how to care for our vulnerable populations, our elderly, and our children, and how we legislate these matters is equal parts about doing justice to those populations and caring for them.

Public policy is also raised by ethicist Sarah Ruddick in her book *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. Ruddick focuses on the relationship between mother and child, and how it comes to play a role in public policy, especially in a global sense. Her focus on dependency, interconnectedness, and the need of a parent to be supported by a community are all valuable in a care ethics framework. Both Ruddick and Kittay outline similar values of compassion, interconnectedness, community building, and the value of both expansive social networks and private social networks that care ethicists also place great emphasis on. Later in my thesis I will discuss the emphasis on harmony, cooperation, and personal relationships between friends, family, and social structures that is a part of many successful girl's cartoons, and are what is sadly lacking from many unsuccessful girl's cartoons. In other words, I will argue that the same values these otherwise differing care ethicists share can address a marginalized girl audience.

## 2.4 Cynical Producers and The Entertainer's Privilege

In previous sections of my literature review I've felt it imperative to examine a phenomenon that outlines the moral psychology of care ethics, and the effect it may have on the entertainment industry. The relationships built between the ideas of imaginative resistance and care ethics when those concepts interact with a history of neglect in the animation field mean little however if they cannot be tied to firm problems. In this final section of my literature review, I examine previous entertainers' answers to that all binding question: Why is there an expectation for an entertainer to act morally towards this underrepresented audience in the first place? In other words, if it is likely that an applied examination of the way society uses, practices, and frames different ethical approaches can account for the discrepancy in numbers between boy's and girls' animation, does the task of rectifying this problem not fall ethically on the shoulders of those who create such content? To this end, several philosophers, scholars, and media ethicists have given a collaborative voice to a concept that I call "The Entertainer's Privilege."

The Entertainer's Privilege revolves around a core idea that considers creators' awareness of their audience. Specifically, I choose to define it as: *The responsibility owed by all entertainers in exchange for the privilege of entertaining and the suspension of conventional moral premises that privilege entails*. Throughout this section I will provide sources which I believe substantiate this definition and concept by providing an examination of the roles producers, entertainers, writers and artists tend to play in the lives of the entertained, their own self-awareness of what they create, and their obligation to those they create for.

Firstly, my definition might require some elaboration. I begin by inviting my reader to imagine conventional moral strictures against lying or deception. In some spheres of media such as journalism, being invited to imagine a false scenario as though it were the truth would result in a profound sense of

distrust from its audience. Broadly speaking, consumers of media do not like to be misled, taunted, or made the subject of unfair inspection; yet all of these are key insights in a comedian's act or a work of fiction. Fiction as a premise is the invitation to be briefly misled, and it is a privilege that audiences grant so long as it is used responsibly. Comedy as a practice often involves cutting insights into groups of people's habits that, when brought to light, seem so implausible as to be humorous. Though normally we as a society decry being misled in any form, or being the subject of telling public insights, we extend this privilege to entertainers with a list of often unspoken caveats.

These responsibilities underlie the privilege of deception and social commentary. When abused, deception can create a profound sense of mistrust for all media outlets, even reputable ones. Social commentary and observation taken too far can often construe racist, sexist, or otherwise harmful ideas. Though we frequently extend the privilege of flouting these and other rules to entertainers, it is evident upon inspection that these rules have limitations. Lewd humor and crass language are allowed so long as they are not employed in the tormenting of individuals in humor. It would be an abuse of the privilege granted to them if a comedian's act consisted of an hour long cursory berating of their audience. An author in an interview could not insist truly that their fictional world exists in any capacity beyond the imaginary, or that their audience are unfit audience members for not believing in the fictional image he or she painted.

In his book *Commercial Culture: The Media System and the Public Interest*, Leo Bogart examines this very claim. Bogart's examination of media culture cuts deeply into it, as the media veteran recognizes that often content creators blame their audience's supposed incapacity for ideological content rather than their own inability to portray or construe a complex idea in an inviting way. Instead, he argues that many modern media producers have found an easy solution in the mass marketing of basic urges rather than higher ideals. There is no excuse in the idea that the purpose of entertainment is simply to entertain without regard to rules, and entertainment is not simply governed

by censoring authorities. In his chapter “The Pursuit of Sensation,” Bogart (1995) says that

Media Standards are set not so much by censors as by those who produce content and have their own sense of the limits that cannot be transgressed. Newspapers and most magazines have resisted the temptation to intrude four-letter words or explicit sex into their columns (though they have become increasingly willing to be tolerant in straight news reporting). When they self-consciously refer to their responsibilities as “family” publications, they are expressing not only the conservative proclivities of their managements, but also a perception of their civic mission. (p. 152)

In this section, Bogart outlines the groundwork of entertainer's privilege. Media creators know and follow very specific personal codes of creation, with or without the standards of external reviewers. As he is quick to point out shortly after “Networks are quite capable of making courageous decisions when the issue at stake is not entertainment but public information, where different rules and conventions apply.” (p. 152) It seems obvious that moral distinctions can be and are made while creating entertaining content. Producers actively make these decisions and, as Bogart accounts for, admit to making those very same distinctions frequently as they plan various sorts of media. They are active decisions to create and paint a picture of a social world quite different from our own.

Bogart's work criticizes this facet of current generation American television broadcasting as well. The interests of audiences are rarely accounted for, because they are rarely portrayed. Bogart is quick to point out that “The figures of the stage, of novels, films, and television dramas, have never depicted a true cross-section of society” (p. 159) and goes on to quote statistics that “Nearly three-fourths of television prime-time characters are male (typically in their late 30s to early 40s), and men account for nearly nine out of ten of the college graduates and professionals. Television's elderly often tend to be senile or sinister, its blacks are comics; its working men, buffoons. Its women still often tend to pretelevision stereotypes; nearly three-fifths of them are shown simply in terms of their private



lives.” (p. 159) The gross misrepresentations Bogart points out are part of a larger insight into the workings of current generation television. Rarely are the persons in charge of content creation living up to the expectations drawn out for them by their privilege as entertainers, and often they cite their work as entertainers as their reasons for why they choose to shirk those duties.

There is a great movement among the modern entertainer to distance themselves from the connection to the audience that Bogart is quick to latch onto in his chapter “The Manufacture of Taste.” Regarding the creation and generation of what is considered to be marketable, he says that “In commercial culture as in the arts, there are high moral expectations of talented people, but an uncomfortably high proportion of media content is created with a detached disdain for its public and rationalized as a response to that public's low taste.” (p. 221) Here Bogart speaks to the very phenomenon I have observed and recorded in the first section regarding the history of girls’ animation, and the chapter on care ethics. The rationalization exists that cartoons for girls do not succeed not because they are not created with a proper ethic in mind, but because girls are not interested in the world of animation, or that they are not capable of puzzling out complex moral dilemmas. Often it is the audience who suffers from the cynicism that Bogart chronicles, yet it is the audience who grants the very privilege of entertainment to those entertainers who they expect to care for them.

In his book *Tele-ology: Studies in Television*, John Hartley (1992) points out that “Both the industry and its regulatory bodies are obliged not only to speak about the audience but--crucially for them--to talk to one as well: they need not only to represent audiences but enter into relations with them.... The way in which corporate executives and professional producers imagine audiences is particularly important, since it determines to some extent what goes on air, and it may help to explain why the industry acts as it does.” (p. 107-108)

Hartley makes a critical point in line with the entertainer's privilege here that ties in well with Bogart's claims about executive perception of an audience. Audiences trust their creators and producers

to give them content that builds upon their own lives. For this reason, pitching a poorly masked boys' cartoon to girls and being surprised when it fails is a personal failure of a creator's ability to communicate with and understand his or her audience. The trust given to entertainers is not simply that they will not be offensive, but that they will in return for their privileges be legitimately "entertaining." Such a subjective heading needs distinction; a joke falling flat is not the failure of an audience member but of a producer or entertainer who did not adequately research their audience members. Persons who attend a comedy club in Harlem where the majority of jokes in that act revolve around contemporary issues in Detroit are done a disservice. As Hartley observes, persons creating content for their audience need to know that group in order to properly create functional content for them.

The history of cynicism noted above and its relationship to the entertainer's moral code is explored in greater detail in the formal Thesis chapter of this work, but it ties very closely into the idea of the entertainer's privilege. Bound up in the cynical outlook of executives and producers is the failure of the entertainer's privilege and the failure that haunts girls' cartoons. In reality, the genre is a single proper appropriation of responsibility and moral obligation away from being plausible.

### Chapter 3: Girls In Action

In previous chapters, I've outlined what I believe to be a problem in animation, and examined the resources that I believe can lead us to conclusions about that problem, the hidden factors that contribute to it, and the balancing factors that I believe can solve it. In this chapter, I will explicitly examine the claims of that solution and the reasons for it, as well as why it imagines a line of reasoning overlooked in previous literature. I will conclude by examining and rebutting three potential flaws in the hypothesis I am seeking to prove, and give examples of contemporary cartoons that I believe have employed my proposed methods (either unwittingly or intentionally) to draw conclusions from their success, as well as what I believe has made them successful.

#### 3.1 The Problem and the Solution

In the introduction to my work, I bring light to a problem that I feel is provably an ethical dilemma for entertainers and producers of content. The premises I outline in this examination of my problem are as follows:

2. There is a noticeable and observable insufficiency of cartoons for all young girls in America.
3. This discrepancy is typically justified as a deficiency on the part of girls who “do not watch cartoons.”
4. The lack of female viewership is rarely examined beyond this claim, and is typically justified as a flaw inherent to their sex or social standing.

Yet an examination of these premises leads a scholar of care ethics to a different conclusion. The historical lack of cartoons made for girls is justified on this singular premise, and that premise is rarely if ever justified by any logical reason other than some abstract claim as to the intrinsic nature of

girls' taste.

I take issue with these claims for a variety of reasons as outlined briefly in the literature review. Firstly, Carol Gilligan's studies into the nature of women's ways of knowing and solving ethical problems gives examiners a starting point toward an alternative explanation for girls' disinterest in animated mass media. Gilligan is the first to point out that women's ways of knowing and solving problems, or their epistemological methods, are typically marginalized in favor of explanations that portray them as deficient in some mental capacity. This theory lines up with the explanations offered by media producers and creators whose explanations for their relative dearth of content revolve around girls' disinterest in what they offer as content creators.

This appeal to nonexistent taste continues to grow suspicious in the light of Leo Bogart's writing on the subject of taste, as he exposes taste as heavily manufactured by producers and creators of content who feel limited to only creating mass-produced appeals to sensationalism rather than higher art. These creators all too often cite their struggles with disinterested and uncultured audience members. Given Bogart's insights into the manufacture of taste, it seems unlikely that taste is anything other than what media giants dictate it should be. It seems odd then that taste which is so easily manufactured in the minds of any person cannot be captured in the realm of women's and girls' content. Under these premises the female sex would need to be deficient indeed in some way to both be uninterested in animation and untargetable by it. Yet women do not seem to be invulnerable to advertising and marketing in any other sectors of entertainment, and so we know that content creation can succeed where they are concerned.

Furthermore, there appears to be no malicious motivation on the parts of content creators, who already willingly split their audiences by gender, to simply ignore half their target population out of spite. One can conclude that the problem is very real and hardly imagined. If media giants regularly practice the splitting of potential audiences by gender to double their potential sales and advertising

markets, a documented and commonly known practice; why would they willingly destroy this one? I can only conclude given these lines of motivation and the numbers and statistics as outlined in previous chapters that market-analysts are still sincerely exploring and wondering why this particular medium struggles.

As outlined in the introduction, previous attempts at explanations for this phenomenon revolve around gender-specific rationales for a problem that eventually is explained via biological reasoning rather than social, in other words a marked and inherent deficiency in the sex of a person. These explanations are shallow, and typically confuse concepts of gender and biological sex. Were the conclusion so simple, a re-imagining of the media image of “girl” would hold a key to the problem, which would be a small task for media moguls. Today however, the image of “girl” portrayed by the media has not changed greatly over the last decade. There has been little to no pursuit of something that would be rather simple for social and media analysts to repair, and one must conclude that it is because media experts believe that what is “deficient” in girls is not something that can be altered via branding or marketing, but something beyond their control.

It seems then that the idea of examining one's content to tailor it to one's audience seems to rarely occur to persons steeped in the opposite line of reasoning. The reinvention and branding of girls and Girl Power appears to many to be a much simpler solution than to examine why traditionally cartoons and animation have not taken a hold in girls' marketing. It is here that an unconventional application of ethics might well hold the key to a complex problem.

I hypothesize here that the age range where the shift for girls from animation to television dramas seems to occur, and the targeted audience of Carol Gilligan's studies are no coincidence. The “Aesop, or moral storytelling format” is a traditional method of generating cartoon plotlines for persons of all ages. At the range of around 8 years old, children become interested in increasingly complex situations involving morality and ethics. Gilligan's theory holds that girls begin to practice varying sorts

of ethics from boys, in that their moral reasoning becomes more about real as opposed to hypothetical dilemmas, and focuses more on the dynamics of relationships and communities than justice for singular individuals.

My hypothesis takes these observations and offers the question they pose in a succinct fashion. In the case of girls' lack of interest in cartoons, might they not simply be disinterested in the common and recycled male formulas of justice based moral lessons? The philosophical concept of imaginative resistance gives us a framework in which to examine and legitimize this claim; audiences who are subjected to a moral framework that they hold no regard for are unimmersed and unmoved by those fictions that contain them. I find it reasonable and even demonstrable that given the opportunity, many girls are attracted to content that deals with moral issues in a care ethics framework rather than a justice based framework. I find it likely that those same girls would encounter imaginative resistance in the case of justice based cartoons, thus leading to the inevitable failure of those cartoons that encapsulate such lessons.

The result of imaginative resistance would be a marked disconnect from content created, and would explain why cartoons employing recycled justice based ethical stories would struggle to succeed where girls are concerned. These cartoons likely seem “immature” because of their imaginative disconnect with their audience, and bring little to the way of identity to girls watching them, who likely feel that they risk ridicule in the face of such “immature” content. As Lauren Faust and Susan J. Douglas point out, looking back on childhood tends to provoke a sense of shame in women with regards to their entertainment, as they seem to identify more as passive recipients of spill over content than direct owners of unique content marketed at them. This identification of those entertainment sources as immature aligns with Gilligan's observation that girls tend to struggle to identify with hypothetical moral scenarios that revolve around justice based methods of problem solving, often feeling uncomfortable for the simplicity or relative black-and-white nature that ethics is portrayed in

throughout these types of exercises. The hypothesis seems likely to me then that justice based cartoon premises should appear irrelevant to young girls who are beginning to concern themselves with a different sort of ethical practice within their social roles, at a time when ethical problem solving is beginning to manifest as cultural capital among all persons in those age groups.

My thesis seeks to add to scholarship on a variety of these issues. Primarily, it seeks to create a connection between the narratives of care ethics and of media production that have until now gone previously unlinked. To my knowledge and research, there is no work detailing a connection between ethics of care and ethics of entertainment, and there is very little work in regards to the ethics of entertainment as a whole. My literature review chronicles the search for information on all of these topics, and it seems most research exists in a lateral sense. There is little written directly on the topic of applied care ethics, or of ethics of entertainment, while much is written on the topics of abstract care ethics and of ethics of journalism or media. Thus, finding these concepts can be difficult, and linking them even more so.

It is this relative dearth of content that makes my own work important and relevant. The application of ethics to entertainment is still not a largely noticed issue in animation, despite the subject of children's cartoons dealing with moral reasoning for several decades now. That entertainers have a responsibility to those they entertain is becoming a talking point in ventures that range from stand-up-comedy, to sit-com actors and actresses, to writers of cartoons and movies. At what I feel to be a fairly modern turning point, it is important to not lose sight of the many facets of morality and ethics. One cannot only judge one's entertainers and entertainment from a central and localized masculine viewpoint. Bringing care ethics into the spotlight creates relevant interests in animation and entertainment for women as well as men, and raises up a form of ethics that is fairly frequently marginalized.

The problem of ethics when applied to animation and entertainment in a girls' sector has existed

for quite some time. The history that Rebecca Hains and Susan Douglas outline shows many decades of collective bewilderment by the entertainment industry as to why childhood cartoons do not seem to mix well with girls. Yet successful outliers have begun to surface, and there is a growing need to identify what qualities set them apart from their less successful predecessors. This new generation of girls' cartoons are the beginning of a movement that needs only an identity and a list of qualities to continue to generate success. Several explanations have been offered, and attempts to recreate the formula of these standout cartoons have been largely unsuccessful. These cartoons have been made readily available through the internet, have followed a similar ensemble cast formula, and have even in some cases been tailored to the exact color schemes of previous works, to no avail. Where then is the secret for success hidden?

My hypothesis and the greater body of my work offers an alternative explanation for the success of several recent girls' cartoons, and seeks to resolve an old problem through logical ethical investigation and application. It is a unique and until now largely ignored facet of cartoons that they tend to deal with ethical and moral issues, and that the interests of children ages 8-13 are typically governed by their emerging interest in the adult ethical sphere. For this reason, entertainers have had great success in the past in tailoring childhood as a road to adulthood, and of framing the importance of being a child on appearing older, more mature, and able to run with teenagers and adults alike. As a result, it is curious that no one has yet tried to point to an application of ethics and imaginative resistance as a potential explanation for the success or failure of cartoons as a whole.

My work seeks to combine several such overlooked and underrepresented theories as a basis for explaining why certain cartoons succeed or fail. The philosophical concept of imaginative resistance is a fairly obscure one in the larger framework of what philosophy is or isn't; it is a niche branch of study within epistemology and aesthetics, and it seeks to bridge the gap between the two. It is for this exact reason that it fits so well in an account involving art, attention, and entertainment. The creation of and



entertainment of a sector of underrepresented audience members combines the spheres of both epistemological and aesthetic examination to create an account of why certain audience members might find concepts to be interesting or boring, relevant or irrelevant. By itself however, it can only hypothesize at an abstract concept of taste; there is very little to join taste and gender without the equal weight of care ethics within the theory.

The third circle of this body of work centers on care ethics because it is an ethical application of both ethics and feminist epistemology. Women's ways of knowing join with ethics to speak volumes about women's ways of practicing ethics. These same ways of knowing cross into the epistemological sector of imaginative resistance and offer an explanation for what might be resisted in girls' cartoons. It is a unique perspective offered by the joining and application of ethics and epistemology to moral psychology, sociology, and aesthetics that gives way to a hypothetical resolution for the problem outlined above.

The resolution of this problem is not as simple a matter as creating more cartoons, or creating them with good intentions and compelling stories, although all of these factors are positive developments in girls' cartoons. It is specifically acting out those methods with the overarching goal of introducing women's issues and ways of knowing that will make a lasting impact in entertainment and animation specifically.

I use the words "lasting impact" because although I do not believe it is possible to truly entertain and capture an audience without knowing and creating for them specifically, I also have faith that even if one were able to entertain in such a way, the success would be short lived. What is "popular" changes in entertainment frequently, and any impact made that does not take into consideration something as lasting as the moral practices of a social group will not last for long. Thus, I cannot see a greater merit to seeking out solutions in other venues than in the ethical lessons of one's entertainment. Any discovered solution that could exist would only fade in the face of time and

changing cultural values.

So it is that I believe that my thesis outlines a persisting problem rather than a passing fad in women's entertainment. The resolution of the problem is not only more impactful, it is also deeper, having a profound impact on the population of women whom such cartoons are pitched for, and on all practitioners of care ethics. Incorporating a care ethics based lesson into cartoons has the effect of both entertaining an audience and raising up public perceptions of care ethics, which are frequently marginalized in favor of a more common justice based representation in entertainment. As a result, there is a twofold importance placed upon incorporating care ethics into cartoons, both to create content for girls, and to create potential care ethics based content that men who favor a care based approach to problem solving might also be entertained by.

Opponents of the concept might argue it to be vague in execution, with little promise or evidence toward the hypothesis. If the hypothesis holds true, men who incorporate care ethics--not only women--would enjoy these cartoons. Just as there are arguably fewer women who practice justice based ethics than care, there are arguably fewer men who practice care. These outliers should appear in cartoon audiences as fans of well-made girls' cartoons, or as fans of cartoons which employ care ethics in their execution.

### 3.2 Solution Application and History

In this section of my Thesis, I want to discuss in depth two modern cartoon series which I believe illustrate the very points I speak to previously, cartoons which hold all the properties of a care based animated television show that succeed in rising above producer generated stereotypes and create a window of opportunity that girls' cartoons have previously only rarely had given to them. The cartoons I outline are Hasbro's breakout television series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, as

produced and creatively generated by artist and animator Lauren Faust; and Nickelodeon's *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. Throughout this section I will seek to outline why I feel that these two cartoons are model examples of care ethics in action, and propose care ethics as a part of my hypothesis that unravels some of the mystery behind the success of these cartoons.

I have selected these cartoons for a variety of reasons, and the first and foremost is that they vary drastically in setting, displaying how flexibly care ethics can be represented. *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* is a capital example of so many traditional girls' cartoons. Its setting, which is riddled with pastel colors, princesses, and an enormous female population; illustrates a very long standing tradition in girls' cartoons. Although the cartoonish design of the characters differs heavily from previous historical iterations of the series, many of the visual design choices are strikingly similar to so many other failed girls' cartoons, leaving characterization and the portrayal of relationships as a potential explanation for the cartoon's success.

It is in this sort of content that the series arguably excels, sporting a vast array of characters who each present a different definition of what girl might mean. The ensemble cast includes the studious unicorn Twilight Sparkle, the shy pegasus Fluttershy, and ranges to the headstrong traditional pony Applejack. Also included are a fashionista named Rarity, an athlete named Rainbow Dash, and a free spirited party animal named Pinkie Pie, whose random cartoonish antics hark back to the days of Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd.

A variable and well written ensemble cast can bring a great deal of strength to any series, and this series holds little exception. Yet despite the outward appearance and fan proclivities to praise characterization as the show's singular greatest strength, a wide variety of recent shows have been generated by Hasbro's animation team "The HUB" to try to imitate the success of *MLP: FiM*, to only mixed success. A prime example is Hasbro's reinvention of its *Littlest Pet Shop* franchise, with a

mixture of six characters whose personalities, designs, and even colors mirror the ponies to an almost alarming degree.

Where one series sees commercial and critical success however, the other does not. It might be arguable that the writing is weaker in *Littlest Pet Shop*, and yet with several of the writers from *Pony* on the same team as *Pet Shop*, it is hard to imagine why this would be the case. The strength of *MLP:FiM* would arguably dwell elsewhere. Characterization and well-marketed girly appearances cannot singularly capture the show's ability to find niche appeal among grown men and women alongside the show's target 5-8 year old girl audience--a task this thesis outlines as seemingly impossible in the ideas of media designers and entertainment gurus. The series' unexpected success defies everything that entertainers believed they knew about girls' cartoons, jumping up in popularity among grown men and teenage boys on the internet alongside the target audience.

With Hasbro seemingly at a loss to explain and recreate the strength and success of its sensation, fingers eventually pointed to the internet. The show had generated no small amount of popular discussion among animation lovers frequenting internet forums and image boards, and its success might well be attributed to the exposure it was given by those audiences. With this in mind, Hasbro wrote a series of letters to major animation websites asking them to talk up new series, including one new CGI series *Care Bears: Welcome to Care-A-Lot*. When the moment came, almost no interest was generated in Care-A-Lot, and audience attendance beyond the initial episode was limited.

One can hardly blame Hasbro for attempting to recreate the firestorm of interest that the internet brought one of its least likely candidates for success, and a company that owns rights to other giant names like *Transformers* and *Batman: The Animated Series* was left scratching its chin at what brought the series the degree of success that it had. Wired.co.uk reporter Daniel Nye Griffiths (2011) attempted to get to the bottom of the show's success. In the interview regarding the show's remarkable success,

Linder Steiner, Hasbro Studios Senior Vice President was quoted as saying ““You develop the best show you can, and hope the humour will translate to a broader audience... .But I've been in the business for 25 years and I've never seen anything like this.” (Colt Success: My Little Pony's Reboot, *Friendship is Magic*, para. 4). As shown in a report by Sara Bibel (2012), arguably one of the most powerful branding and marketing machines in the world could not generate the same success for *Care-a-Lot* that *My Little Pony* had achieved overnight in the minds of cartoon viewers both male and female.

I would like to end my historical narrative here with an alternative explanation for the success of this series that I feel has been left unconsidered that brings care ethics to the forefront. Perhaps it has remained unconsidered because, as I have outlined in the history of care ethics, women's ways of knowing are commonly overlooked or undervalued in the considerations of both taste and intelligence. Perhaps it is also true that a focus on the ethical stories that are told and the ways that they are represented are commonly overlooked for more popular accounts of taste, such as appearance and timeliness. Whatever the reason for this oversight, it is an oversight I hope to correct.

*My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* is a stellar example of care ethics in action. The series focuses on the Aesop method of storytelling, which outlines a consistent problem throughout the show and focuses on the characters' attempts to resolve that problem through a variety of means. At the end of the episode, an account is usually made wherein a moral lesson is learned and the characters express the lesson to one another for the audience's benefit. *Pony* does exactly this, but its title is hardly for show. The series doesn't focus on a wide variety of lessons concerning justice or power or politics, it focuses on the lessons of studious unicorn Twilight Sparkle and her friends in the power and intricacy of friendship.

The building of relationships is a cornerstone of care ethics. The theory centralizes on the power

that relationships of all kinds hold, and the importance that they have to the people in them. Most conflict resolution in care ethics seeks to focus not on creating justice for an individual, but on synthesis of communities of people as they struggle to resolve conflicts in a realistic way that does not discount any single person. The lessons in this show mirror care ethics directly, and the show's foci on relationship building and friendship are precisely in line with what, according to writers such as Hains and Douglas, many girls are discovering at the young ages of 5-8 are the cornerstones of their expected social lives.

The lessons regarding relationships in the series seem realistic and mature enough to be owned and carried by a niche audience of adult men and women. They are a far cry from the problems, for instance, a conflict between public weakness and private responsibility, that Susan J. Douglas outlines in her account of a more “shameful” childhood as represented in entertainment. If the series can break through the imaginative resistance of its target audience and still hold to its otherwise formulaic approach to girls’ animation, there is a substantial implication that the series might be succeeding because of its ethical and moral content.

My theory might well be applied in a broader and more adult sense in Nickelodeon's *Avatar: the Last Airbender*, which features a much less traditional art style. Initially marketed at boys aged 5-8, the eastern style visuals and Buddhist and Hindu themes served to attract a more mature audience than expected. What was entirely unexpected was the enormous female following that the series generated. Both of its creators reveled in the opportunity to create a narrative that included both strong men and strong women, and openly challenged sexist stereotypes in a number of their episodes. The show openly generated an action series following of women both in the target age group and in the adult age group, a following that rarely turned out for boys’ action cartoons. Following the series' success, its creators were tasked with a sequel, which they accepted on the grounds that it follow a female protagonist. Serious story based action series with female protagonists are incredibly rare and even

more rarely successful--yet in a report by New York Times journalist Adam Kepler (2012) *Avatar: the Legend of Korra* saw the highest network launch of the year (New Animated Series Make Inroads in Ratings, para. 5).

I have selected *A:tLA* because I believe it is as striking an opposite creation as one can get from *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. It is a series that is obviously directed at boys from the start, in a genre that has rarely attracted girls historically, much less teenage to adult women. The show has an entirely different aesthetic from anything *Pony* can claim, and arguably a different aesthetic from anything ever aired in North America. It seems to mix Japanese anime styled art with Buddhist and Hindu themes, martial arts that are truly rooted in actual forms and styles, and characters who openly express non-Christian religious values. With all these differences, the series still attracted an enormous female following, an untold and popularly claimed nearly 50/50 split in the gender of those watching the television series (Lasswell, 2005). Its differences from *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* highlight the few similarities that follow what is arguably one of the only other surprising gender-specific commercial successes of the past several decades.

The entire series follows the development of Aang, a young 13 year old boy who lives in a world controlled by the four traditional elements. Persons who can harness those elements “bend” them, and are gifted with varying degrees of control over them. Aang is the Avatar, a spiritual embodiment of the cosmos whose continued rebirth over countless lives serves to keep the balance of the spiritual, physical, and elemental worlds intact. Aang lives in an age of strife, where members of the Fire Nation seek dominance over all other nations. Aang's task as the Avatar is to master the four elements in time to stop the fire nation and its lord, prince, and princess from taking over the world.

The story arc stretches for three incredible seasons, and runs much deeper in places than I have need to outline, but the central theme in the final season comes down to Aang's training as a pacifist and intermediary, and how it conflicts with his role as an agent of cosmic justice. Aang clearly sees the

humanity in his foes, and he expresses a number of times in the series' finale that although justice might be brought by felling the singular individual of the Fire Lord, harmony and peace will not be found through such violence.

Aang's solution is a clever interaction with the spirit world that teaches him to permanently disable the powers of his foes, which he uses to strip the Fire Lord's ability to harm anyone. The solution is less important to the body of this Thesis than the struggle that Aang and his friends encounter throughout the series however. The strong willed character of Katara, Aang's closest female friend and teacher, is often offset by her love and caring for her friends. The initially conflicted character of Prince Zuko, Aang's friend and eventual Fire-bending teacher is one of honor bound duty and justice, and the care and friendship that his mother taught him. Zuko is a prime example of the harmony between Care and Justice that are ever present throughout the series, which makes it clear that both philosophies are equally important in the balance of the world. The show never gives explicit names to either of these philosophies, but it is hard to argue that the central theme is not the perceived conflict between them. Aang's eventual greatest lesson is to harness both mentalities, and find comfort and peace for even his enemies to bring an overall sense of wholeness to the world.

Both *Avatar* and *Pony* are on a short list of series that have shocked animation planners in recent years, and both are shocking not simply because of their commercial and viewer success, but because of who those viewers are. I do not count these examples as perfect and unflinching evidence, but as part of a trend that points toward an overall hypothesis surrounding care ethics in girls' animation. Their differences underlie the wide variety of situations in which a care ethic might be employed, both in episodic and serial contexts. The setting might be as conventional as *Pony* or as unconventional as *Avatar*, but an underlying thread highlights both of these series as instant hits among girls in ways that consumership giants had scarcely dreamed. Through them, the outline of my theory's applicability is perhaps more obvious. How the cartoons are generated and what they look like stylistically can be



quite versatile, but there is at least merit to further investigation of the idea that care ethics seems to break through a long standing imaginative resistance between boys' and girls' cartoons.

Equally important in this examination of applicability is that media creators need not take on any long supposed financial burden to do what is right in creating cartoons for girls. If the cartoons are created in an appropriate fashion, I believe my hypothesis outlines a way in which they can be incredibly successful financially. Both series managed to reach the public syndication requirement of 52 episodes and beyond, a coveted goal that few cartoons with a female audience can boast. Few female cartoons make it out of one or two seasons, while these have made it numerous, and continue to evolve at the time of this writing. With what currently numbers at three seasons each, and planned additions beyond these numbers, both series cannot be said to have struggled in either consumership or viewership.

#### Chapter 4: Conclusion:

My conclusion is that overcoming imaginative resistance is the task of entertainers everywhere. As established in my examination of media ethics literature, content creators have an obligation to their audience members in exchange for the privilege of entertaining them. If the split in the market is to be maintained, it must be maintained fairly and responsibly by creators who are tasked with making content for those underrepresented groups. To know one's audience is to respect it, to create with the audience in mind is to show responsibility for the privilege an entertainer is given. This is the very heart of Matthew Kieran and Leo Bogart's message, and it is a teaching I have embraced here: success will not come to girls' cartoons unless the respect that women as an audience deserve is afforded to them. Content creators cannot claim that they create artistically lacking content out of difference to a lesser audience, there is no imperative to simplify content for audiences who constantly ask to be challenged the way that feminist and female writers have asked to be.

##### 4.1 Is A Care Ethics Split Beneficial?

A natural question is whether my proposal for girls' cartoons has all desirable consequences. Will creating such content not further a split between men's content and women's content in a way that feminists might seek to eliminate? Is dividing moral reasoning into “men's thinking” and “women's thinking” not also furthering an undesirable shift away from a more homogenous social fabric, and does this project not embrace that concept?

These answers depend upon a careful examination of the effect applying care ethics might have on social roles and perceptions. These answers require asking basic questions about the value of

equality and weighing it against the value of homogenization. I believe that in conversations with other philosophers of ethics there is a perceived notion that the goal of feminism is homogenization, which is not necessarily true. Furthermore, there is an underlying supposition that perhaps homogenization is equality, a concept I find contentious.

As a result, I approach these questions carefully, but let me make my stance clear from the beginning: the split in content is neither the choice nor the desire of any care ethicist. Yet perfect homogenization (sameness) is not the immediate goal of my care ethics in this framework; equality is. Homogenization is not the same thing as equality, nor does equality require it. Men and women do not lead indistinguishable lives in our society, and while we strive for equality between them, we should be readily willing to admit that their situations are not always identical.

To the first question on page 51, I must sadly confess that as of the time of this writing, men's and women's content seems largely and inseparably divided. As Leo Bogart and so many other media analysts have been quick to point out, a divided marketing tactic is simply strong economics (Bogart, 1995). Marketing separate products for men and women simply sells more units. In a house of mixed genders, it will always be more prudent to inexplicably sell a family two kinds of shampoo instead of one, two kinds of razor instead of one, and two kinds of toy, backpack, or pencil set instead of one. And given the influence of marketing in our nation's (if not the world's) economy, it is unlikely that genders and identities will always share a common product.

So does my proposed solution involve “selling out” to a philosophical mode of thought that feminism should inherently battle? I think not. However pragmatic it may seem to work within a framework while striving for equality, it might well be said “The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.” (Lorde, para. 9). To work within the framework of a gendered audience rather than simply press for its immediate removal seems more realistic.

To scholars of women's philosophy and social ethics, homogenization emerges naturally as

differences between persons are made socially neutral (that is, having no social consequences).. Thus, equality is a prudent first step in any such goals, whether admirable or not. In this case, Gilligan's observation that women's ways of knowing and practicing ethics are marginalized gives us good context for where the inequality in these situations lie. The idea that marginalizing women's ethics might be at the root of problems with women's entertainment is one that needs vocalization and visibility if later goals for eventually contracting all entertainment into a homogenized setting are to be realized. Thus, even if the goal of feminism is to bring a singular structure to entertainment, this cannot be done without first equalizing society's perception of care ethics in entertainment.

Here is an example of why homogenization seems a poor goal from the framework of my applied ethical project. Homogenization means selecting a mode of ethics that is relevant to both genders, and promoting it as a dominant story not just for one gender, but for both. The idea that equality comes from being able to tell a single story for both genders is compelling, but it means selecting one story and interjoining another's story into it. Inevitably, one would need to admit that “justice based ethics was the right ethic” or that “care ethics was the right ethic,” and neither of these is the goals of care ethicists.

Because it comes from a framework many consider to be oppressive, care ethics might be thought in this context to be doing the work of the oppressors by teaching young girls lessons of care and persuading them to practice only that sort of ethic. I argue that this is simply not the case. The practice of caring is one the world cannot do without. This project's goal is not to teach women to exclusively practice care, but to allow those who practice care ethics to share equal cultural acceptance with those who practice justice based ethics. Nor is it a goal for “all girls” or “all boys” to think a certain way. It is a goal to bring to girls who practice care ethics an appropriate space in which to enjoy and celebrate and be entertained by their own practices. The same care based cartoons might be enjoyed by boys who feel inclined to care in the same sense--which is a valuable job in itself.

Thus, it is prudent to work within a framework of division and separation. Even were the lines between women's and men's entertainment entirely closed, I believe there would still be an important place for telling both the stories of those who care and those who practice justice, and at this moment women and men are still divided into these two categories. There is nothing inherent in the striving for cartoons for women that says that care ethics based cartoons must continue to force a split if ever there is a call to lose one. The task of caring will always fall to some and the task of justice and individualism to others.

I propose that once equality exists between girls' and boys' cartoons, a more fundamental split between those whose practice is in caring and those whose habits tend toward justice will be more visible than any gendered split. The care based practitioner should not be shamed out of entertainment. However, even in a homogenized world where men and women have equal opportunities to decide between those who care and those who practice justice the need to speak to both schools of thought will always exist. A world without persons who think and rationalize in terms of care would quickly lose sight of entire bodies of minorities, and a world without persons who practice justice would lose sight of the individual's plights. Although at the moment the battle for a care ethics based cartoon and the battle for a girls' cartoon are synonymous, the day may come when the battle for only a care ethics based cartoon might become a relevant concern. It would be important to remember that the imagining of a world where entertainment was directed at women's care ethics based practices was not done to force women forever into the roles of caring, but to lift them into a position where their care-based stories were made valuable. Likewise, the important task of making caring a valuable mode of thought to men will also be served, and thus the greater goal of equality served with it.

#### 4.2 Framing Care Ethics As Women's Ethics

There is a secondary mode of thought in feminist philosophy beyond homogenization that questions the usefulness of a “women's ethic” over an ethic of care. In the case of animation and cartooning, my question is not only whether or not the definition of women's ethics as separate from men's runs counter to the idea of homogenization, but whether or not it restricts women to a certain range of ethics. The question might be read as such: If the splitting of cartoons between men and women is inevitable, is it wise to identify certain philosophies as female and others as male?

The crux of this question is that defining ethics in cartoons as male and female might only provide the grounds for a “separate but equal” treatment of them. The goal of homogenization in cartoons in addition to raising women's ethics to equal status with men's is arguably to avoid this classic moral failure. That which is kept separate can never be truly equal. Yet this failure need not occur even if cartoon programming is split along gender lines. This is because men's issues and women's issues are currently divergent. What moral issues and social criticism a cartoon might offer differs depending entirely on the audience, as scholars of media have been quick to point out, cited in previous chapters of this work. Thus, there is an overwhelming need to be relevant and current in all entertainment spheres. It is the moral imperative of the artist under the burden of the entertainer's privilege to do exactly this- to stay current and relevant. Thus, cartoons for girls should speak to women's issues, and create and foster a social dialogue on their own struggles for equality in social spheres.

The eventual goal of this project is to create a code of ethics wherein entertainment serves its audience directly and indirectly- they create content for underrepresented groups, and when this issue of representation is accounted for sufficiently they begin to speak to the larger social concerns of their audience. Once equality is achieved among the sexes, then talks of homogenization may occur, but

until those times arrive it is important that media and entertainment be both morally accountable and morally active.

To put it another way, the goal of this project is indeed to create a sphere for “women's ethics”, because currently I believe social responsibility calls for such a sphere to exist. There is a need to tell this story is also a need to raise care ethics up to equal social weight with justice based ethics. This is a culture-wide goal, the shaming of care and praising of justice appears to me to happen in almost all spheres of life. Entertainment is one part of a holistic approach to bringing care ethics into the social spotlight and telling both men and women that it is acceptable and praiseworthy to practice this type of ethics, and feel the sorts of feelings that are associated with it.

The keen observer might assert that this move defines care ethics as a women's ethic. I am going to state boldly that, right now, care ethics is a women's ethic, but that it does not have to be. At the time of this writing, care is largely a female sphere, and it is largely because it is a female sphere that it is so blatantly ignored.

The goal of this project is to bring care ethics out of obscurity so that women feel comfortable owning an identity and are free to explore a moral identity and not be ashamed of their own moral leanings. It is true that the role of caregiving that may result in a leaning toward care ethics is a social calling, so that women who are socially called to care now may later, when forced into caring roles less often, tend toward other types of ethical problem solving. A day may come when half of women practice justice and half care; and that half of men practice justice and half practice care. It may even come to pass that justice and care become unfavorably imbalanced in the other direction, with more persons who dedicate themselves to care than to justice. In that day, a call will likely rise up to bring justice based ethics back into equal standing. In my thesis, no ethic is a women's ethic or a men's ethic in any sense other than it pertains to a gender in this day and time. These ethics should never be painted as men's or women's in an essentialist way, and they should never be used to define what man

and woman are. Entertainment employing ethics should be used to tell the stories and struggles of their dominant user base.

There is no doubt in my mind that for a media practitioner, there is a fine line to walk. At the moment the media system determines what stories are told and what are not, and it gives power to certain narratives consciously while hiding others in. In their writing, both Leo Bogart and Matthew Kieran are skeptical of media's right to influence minds in this manner. The standard of taste, Bogart is quick to offer, should be set not by entertainers, but by the entertained. They are the persons who afford the privilege of entertainment, and without this acknowledgment this project will surely fail. It is common practice currently to construct a narrative of gender and sexual identity that is favorable to selling products, but there is a neglect for the facets of gendered life this practice sustains. Care ethics is the untold story that spins off from the current dominant cultural narrative of women as caregivers and men as determined bringers of justice. The need to tell the story of care ethics stems from a twofold need to always tell the story of caregivers and to stop avoiding the true stories of women's lives as they are at this point in time.

Here I want to conclude by saying that I think speaking to one's audience and knowing one's audience is not just an ethical imperative. Throughout the course of this project I have tried to point out that the monetary profession of being an entertainer is just as relevant as the moral profession. As equality is achieved and more women shift to become ethically mindful of justice over care, and more men become more mindful of care over justice, the lines will blur, and the content of cartoons and other entertainment will change. Stories that previously were reserved for women will eventually be picked up with perhaps silent fondness by men, and eventually open enjoyment. I will gladly argue that this shift is already happening, and we can see it happening in cartoons that are growing unexpectedly popular in the last decade. Thus, success and ethics are tied up together in this way--it is not an unsuccessful and thankless venture to learn the inner workings of an audience as Bogart and Kieran



implore entertainers to do. It is not simply an inconvenient ethical imperative, it is a way to profit as well.

Yet if one is a clever entertainer but holds no respect for his or her audience, success is generally short lived. Entertainment is now receiving a sizable backlash from a public who feels mistreated and misrepresented. Leo Bogart's work outlines this. Engaging entertainment builds on an understanding of an audience, and a respect for them that considers them as strong, intelligent moral agents who are capable of understanding complex humor, stories, and contemporary issues. Care ethics is the first of many steps in a larger project to reconsider animation as an entertainer's industry that respects its audiences and tackles complex ideas through creative means.

#### 4.3 Forward and Future Considerations

This project has sought to generate a hypothesis surrounding the historical and ethical narrative of cartoons made for girls. Future studies should be conducted to explore the further implications of the reasoning that I have outlined. In this final section, I will list some of the remaining questions, and some forward moving research projects that I feel might bring the Care Theory of girls' cartoons some added credibility.

I believe a great deal of forward progress could be made by audience response studies as they are carried out in Rebecca C. Hains' Girl Power studies. I have been somewhat critical of Hains' hasty historical narrative throughout my work, but I have nothing but praise for Hains' method of studying her audiences directly. Hains' ability to present questions directly to young children as they watch some of the most successful girls' television series from the turn of the century holds a great deal of potential in future tests of my own hypothesis. I strongly recommend persons moving forward in this project to seek out potential audience members in a way that I have only imagined and measure how much they do (or don't) appreciate a care based ethics in their franchises. By referring to some of the cartoons that

I have mentioned and others like them, and interviewing their intended audiences with questions relating to their imaginative resistance to justice based methods of problem solving and their potential connections to care based ones, one might unearth empirical evidence for some of the speculative claims made in this thesis.

If a more firm connection between care and imaginative resistance is established, the onus will be placed on cartoonists and animators to generate suitable content. Yet whatever the outcome of empirical studies, the implications bound up in the privilege of entertaining will signal a need for animators who wish to create for girls specifically to study and learn from their audiences. Were the hypothesis of this thesis proven to be refuted empirically someday, the creative lack of existing girls' cartoons would still exist, and the concept of the entertainer's privilege would still compel creators to seek out the source of their failure.

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