Prompt: How do stereotypes in the media affect society?

Jack Shakley is former chair of the Los Angeles City/County Native American Commission as well as president emeritus of the California Community Foundation (CCL), a local nonprofit philanthropic organization that supports “transformative change” in the region and the larger world. Shakley served as president of the CCL from 1980 until 2004. (Emeritus is a title of honor granted in the business world upon retirement to someone who has made important contributions to a company, corporation, or foundation over a long period of time. This rank is also conferred on some professors at the time of their retirement.) Shakley is currently a member of the Board of Advisors of the Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy at the University of Southern California. This article appeared in August 2011 on the op-ed page of the LA Times. (Traditionally, in U.S. newspapers, readers found pieces expressing opinions on various timely subjects and written by syndicated columnists or by writers who did not work for the newspaper on the page opposite the editorial page, hence, the name “op-ed.”) As you read, note the kinds of evidence Shakley uses to support his position as well as important concessions he makes to those who would argue that teams should not bother to get rid of Native American mascots.

\[\text{Shakley begins his argument with a personal anecdote. How does the use of personal experience help focus his argument? For more on using personal experience as evidence, see Chapter 17.}\]

\[\text{LINK TO P. 405}\]

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Indian Mascots—You’re Out!


cap with the famous Chief Wahoo

When we got back to Oklahoma, my mother took one look at the cap with its leering, big-nosed, buck-toothed redskin caricature just above the brim, jerked it off my head and threw it in the trash. She had been fighting against Indian stereotypes all her life, and I had just worn one home. I was only 10 years old, but the look of betrayal in my Creek mother’s eyes is seared in my memory forever.

So maybe I shouldn’t have been surprised when half a century later, a Los Angeles Times editorial about legislators in North Dakota struggling over whether the University of North Dakota should be forced to change its team name and mascot from the Fighting Sioux provoked such a strong reaction. It was an irritant, like a long-forgotten piece of shrapnel working its way to the surface.

Most stories about sports teams and their ethnic mascots are treated like tempests in a teacup. The Times’ editorial writer, however, while noting that the solons probably had better things to do, understood the sensitivity and pain that can accompany such a seemingly trivial subject. It is a small matter, perhaps, but far from trivial.

Many of the fights over team names and mascots cover familiar territory.
Esikmos or Florida State Seminoles represent other than sports franchises. But that doesn’t necessarily make the brands benign. And the irony that the football team in our nation’s capital is called the Redskins is not lost on a single Native American.

The controversy over changing ethnocentric mascot names is not a simple matter of stodgy white alums holding onto college memories. Indians, too, are conflicted. In a 2002 study on the subject, Sports Illustrated reported that 84% of Native Americans polled had no problem with Indian team names or mascots. Although the methods used by the magazine to reach these figures were later criticized, that misses the point. If 60% of a population finds something offensive, that should be enough to signal deep concern. There are many things in this country that are subject to majority rule dignity and respect are not among them.

And it is dignity and respect we are talking about. Since the creation of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media in 1991, that group of Native American organizations has been protesting negative portrayals of Indians, hammering away at what’s behind our discomfort with Indian

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**Muscogee/Creek:** a Native American tribe originally from the Southern part of the United States.

**Strapnel:** here, fragments from an exploding shell or grenade that penetrate a soldier’s or civilian’s skin and flesh during wartime. Strapnel wounds are often fatal or severely debilitating. In cases where the wounded individual survives, the fragments sometimes cannot be surgically removed and remain inside the body.

**Solon:** legislator; as used in the United States today, the word often carries at least some negative connotations. Historically, Solon was an ancient Athenian statesman and reformer whose work helped create the conditions that gave rise to democracy in Athens.

**Ethnocentric:** assuming the superiority of a single ethnic group, generally one’s own, and seeing the world from that perspective.
sports mascots. Many of these mascots—maybe most of them—act like fools or savage cutthroats.

When I went to an Atlanta Braves game in the 1970s, the Braves name wasn’t the biggest problem. It was that cringe-worthy Chief Noc-A-Homa who came stomping and war-dancing his way out of a tepee in center field every time the Braves hit a home run that got to me. He was dressed in a Plains Indian chief’s eagle bonnet and acted like a village idiot. To their credit, the Braves retired Chief Noc-A-Homa and his girlfriend Princess Win-A-Lot in 1983, amid assertions by the Braves’ home office that the protesters were over-dramatizing the issue.

Few people complain about Florida State University calling itself the Seminoles. But its war-painted and lance-threatening mascot, Chief Osceola, is intended to be menacing, and that’s the take-away many children will have. Such casual stereotyping can breed callousness. In the “only good Indian” category, in 1999 the New York Post entitled an editorial about the pending New York-Cleveland baseball playoffs, “Take the Tribe and Scalp ‘Em.”

It isn’t easy or inexpensive to remove ethnic and racial stereotypes from college and professional sports. When Stanford University changed from the Indians to the Cardinal in 1972, recriminations were bitter. Richard Lyman, a friend of mine, was president of Stanford at the time. He said the university lost millions of alumni dollars in the short run, but it was the right thing to do.

In 21st century America, to name a sports team after an African American, Asian or any other ethnic group is unthinkable. So why are Native Americans still fair game? As benign as monikers like Fighting Sioux and Redskins or mascots like Chief Osceola may seem, they should take their place with the Pekin, Ill., Chinks$ and the Atlanta Black Crackers$ in the dust bin of history. It is the right thing to do.

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**Pekin Chinks**: name of the high school sports teams in Pekin, Ill., from 1930 until 1980, when the teams became the Dragons. The school mascots were a male and female student dressed in traditional Chinese attire; the origin of the mascot was the similarity between the town’s name and the name Peking, the earlier English spelling of Beijing, the capital of China. Chinese Americans had sought a name change as early as 1975, but the change occurred only in 1980 despite protests.

**Atlanta Black Crackers**: a professional African American baseball team that existed from 1919 until 1952, five years after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball.
Uncle Ben, Board Chairman

By STUART ELLIOTT MARCH 30, 2007

A racially charged advertising character, who for decades has been relegated to a minor role in the marketing of the products that still carry his name, is taking center stage in a campaign that gives him a makeover — Madison Avenue style — by promoting him to chairman of the company.

The character is Uncle Ben, the symbol for more than 60 years of the Uncle Ben’s line of rices and side dishes now sold by the food giant Mars. The challenges confronting Mars in reviving a character as racially fraught as Uncle Ben were evidenced in the reactions of experts to a redesigned Web site (unclebens.com), which went live this week.

“This is an interesting idea, but for me it still has a very high cringe factor,” said Luke Visconti, partner at Diversity Inc. Media in Newark, which publishes a magazine and Web site devoted to diversity in the workplace.

“There’s a lot of baggage associated with the image,” Mr. Visconti said, which the makeover “is glossing over.”

Uncle Ben, who first appeared in ads in 1946, is being reborn as Ben, an accomplished businessman with an opulent office, a busy schedule, an extensive travel itinerary and a penchant for sharing what the company calls his “grains of wisdom” about rice and life. A crucial aspect of his biography remains the same, though: He has no last name.

Vincent Howell, president for the food division of the Masterfoods USA unit of Mars, said that because consumers described Uncle Ben as having “a timeless element to him, we didn’t want to significantly change him.”

“What’s powerful to me is to show an African-American icon in a position of prominence and authority,” Mr. Howell said. “As an African-American, he makes me feel so proud.”

The previous reluctance to feature Uncle Ben prominently in ads stood in stark contrast to the way other human characters like Orville Redenbacher and Colonel Sanders personify their products. That reticence can be traced to the contentious history of Uncle Ben as the black face of a white company, wearing a bow tie evocative of servants and Pullman porters and bearing a title reflecting how white Southerners once used “uncle” and “aunt” as honorifics for older blacks because they refused to say “Mr.” and “Mrs.”

Before the civil rights movement took hold, marketers of food and household products often used racial and ethnic stereotypes in creating brand characters and mascots.

In addition to Uncle Ben, there was Aunt Jemima, who sold pancake mix in ads that sometimes had her exclaiming, “Tempt yo’ appetite;” a grinning black chef named Rastus, who represented Cream of Wheat hot cereal; the Gold Dust Twins, a pair of black urchins who peddled a soap powder for Lever Brothers; the Frito Bandito, who spoke in an exaggerated Mexican accent; and characters selling powdered drink mixes for Pillsbury under names like Injun Orange and Chinese Cherry — the latter baring buck teeth.

“The only time blacks were put into ads was when they were athletic, subservient or entertainers,” said Marilyn Kern Foxworth, the author of “Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.”
After the start of the civil rights movement, such characters became “lightning rods” in a period when consumers started to want “images our children could look up to and emulate,” Ms. Kern Foxworth said.

A Web site for Uncle Ben’s, unclebens.com, offers a look at his executive office. 
Credit: Newspaper ad and image of Uncle Ben in his office, Masterfoods USA

As a result, most of those polarizing ad characters were banished when marketers — becoming more sensitive to the changing attitudes of consumers — realized they were no longer appropriate. A handful like Uncle Ben, Aunt Jemima and the Cream of Wheat chef were redesigned and kept on, but in the unusual status of silent spokescharacters, removed from ads and reduced to staring mutely from packages.

Times, however, change, as evidenced by real-life figures as disparate as Wally Amos, the founder of Famous Amos cookies; Oprah Winfrey; and Senator Barack Obama, the Illinois Democrat who is running for president. In advertising, there are now black authority figures serving as spokesmen in multimillion-dollar campaigns, like Dennis Haysbert, for Allstate, and James Earl Jones, for Verizon.

That helped executives at Masterfoods and its advertising agency, TBWA/Chiat/Day, consider the risky step of reviving the character.
“There’s no doubt we realized we had a very powerful asset we were not using strongly enough,” Mr. Howell said.

So about 18 months ago, the company and agency decided “to reach out to our consumers” and gauge attitudes toward Uncle Ben, Mr. Howell said. There were no negative responses or references to the stereotyped aspects of the character, he said. Rather, the consumers “focused on positive images, quality, warmth, timelessness,” he added, and “the legend of Uncle Ben.”

That encouraged the idea that “we could bring him to life,” Mr. Howell said, sensitive to “the sorts of concerns that are important to me as an African-American.”

Joe Shands, a creative director at the Playa del Rey, Calif., office of TBWA/Chiat/Day, said the freedom to use the character to sell the Uncle Ben’s brand was a welcome change from the years when “all we’ve had to work with is a portrait.” “We wanted to know if there was something there we could utilize to talk about new products, existing products, the values of the company,” Mr. Shands said, adding that both black and white consumers described the character as someone “they know and love.”

“Through the magic of marketing, we’ve made him the chairman,” Mr. Shands said. Uncle Ben’s office, he said, is “reflective of a man with great wisdom who has done great things.”

Magazine ads in the campaign, which carries the theme “Ben knows best,” present a painting of the character in a gold frame with the chairman’s title affixed on a plaque.

The painting is also on display on the home page of the redesigned Web site, which offers a virtual tour of Ben’s office. Visitors can browse through his e-mail messages, examine his datebook and read his executive memorandums.

“It’s important consumers begin to hear from Uncle Ben,” said Mr. Howell of Masterfoods, who is based in Los Angeles.

Despite the character’s impressive new credentials, some advertising executives expressed skepticism that the campaign could avoid negative overtones.

The ads are “asking us to make the leap from Uncle Ben being someone who looks like a butler to overnight being a chairman of the board,” Ms. Kern Foxworth said. “It does not work for me.”
“I applaud them for the effort and trying to move forward,” she added, but the decision to keep the same portrait of Uncle Ben, bow tie and all, also dismayed her because “they’re trying so hard to hold onto something I’m trying so hard to get rid of.”

Howard Buford, chief executive at Prime Access in New York, an agency specializing in multicultural campaigns, said he gave the campaign’s creators some credit. “It’s potentially a very creative way to handle the baggage of old racial stereotypes as advertising icons,” he said, but “it’s going to take a lot of work to get it right and make it ring true.”

For instance, Mr. Buford said, noting all the “Ben” references in the ads, “Rarely do you have someone of that stature addressed by his first name” — and minus any signs of a surname.

Mr. Buford, who is a real-life black leader of a company, likened the promotion of Uncle Ben to the abrupt plot twists on TV series like “Benson” and “Designing Women,” when black characters in subservient roles one season became professionals the next.

“It’s nice that now, for the 21st century, they’re saying this icon can ‘own’ a company,” Mr. Buford said, “but they’re going to have to make him a whole person.”

Mr. Visconti of Diversity Inc. Media struck a similar chord. He said he would have turned Ben’s office into “a learning experience,” furnishing it with, for example, books by Frederick Douglass and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
“I’ve never been in the office of African-Americans of this era who didn’t have something in their office showing what it took to get them there,” Mr. Visconti said.

The actual biography of Uncle Ben is at variance with his fanciful new identity. According to Ms. Kern Foxworth’s book and other reference materials, there was a Ben — no surname survives — who was a Houston rice farmer renowned for the quality of his crops. During World War II, Gordon L. Harwell, a Texas food broker, supplied to the armed forces a special kind of white rice, cooked to preserve the nutrients, under the brand name Converted Rice.

In 1946, Mr. Harwell had dinner with a friend (or business partner) in Chicago (or Houston) and decided that a portrait of the maitre d’hôtel of the restaurant, Frank Brown, could represent the brand, which was renamed Uncle Ben’s Converted Rice as it was being introduced to the consumer market.

In coming months, visitors to the Uncle Ben’s Web site will be able to discover new elements of the character, Mr. Howell said, like full-body digital versions of Uncle Ben and voice mail messages. The Web site was designed by an agency, Tequila, that is a sibling of TBWA/Chiat/Day, and the budget for the campaign, print and online, is estimated at $20 million. TBWA/Chiat/Day is part of the TBWA Worldwide unit of the Omnicom Group.

If the makeover for Uncle Ben is deemed successful, could there be similar changes in store for other racially charged characters?

Last month, the Cream of Wheat chef got a new owner when B&G Foods completed a $200 million deal to buy his brand, and its companion, Cream of Rice, from Kraft Foods.

“We’re doing consumer focus work right now to understand how important the character is,” said David L. Wenner, chief executive at B&G in Parsippany, N.J.

If any changes were to be made, “you would need to be very careful,” he added, “and you would want to do it with dignity.”
Porochista Khakpour (1979–) is an Iranian-born American reared in California. Her 2007 novel Sons and Other Flammable Objects about fathers and sons of Iranian origin in the United States following the events of 9/11 received critical acclaim, winning several awards. Prior to becoming a novelist, Khakpour was a journalist writing about arts and entertainment for a number of newspapers and magazines. She has taught creative writing and literature at institutions in the United States and in Europe, and she is currently a member of the creative writing faculty in the MFA program at Fairfield University, Connecticut. This selection, “Reality TV Goes Where Football Meets the Hijab,” first appeared in the New York Times in November 2011. As you read, pay careful attention to the ways that Khakpour simultaneously invokes an audience with intimate knowledge of American popular culture, especially reality TV, while mocking using her status as an outsider—a freak—to critique media stereotypes in the United States in nonthreatening ways.

**Reality TV Goes Where Football Meets the Hijab**

**Porochista Khakpour**

If anything made me an American, it was television. I learned English from soap operas—after kindergarten, curled up Mommy-side—and then beyond, the many hours she abandoned the sofa for the kitchen when I alternated between after-school cartoons and adult crime dramas. English came to me, and with it so many questions about what was happening on TV. But one that never hit home was why the people on the screen did not resemble my family. I suppose when your daily life involves acute consciousness of being a foreigner, you lack that sense of entitlement; self-identification with a popular representation of America was a luxury this newly transplanted Iranian immigrant didn’t even know to lust for.

At school in suburban Los Angeles we took TV show residue and dumped it on the playground, recreating sitcoms and cartoon plots during recess. I was always typecast by the director, myself. I played only villains, Caira of She-Ra, the Misfits of Jem, Nellie of Little House on the Prairie. When the fifth grade put on a production of The Wizard of Oz, I tried out for the Wicked Witch, knowing I’d settle on Flying Monkey (the other brown girl, the class’s sole South Asian, was immediately cast as Toto) and was

**hijab:** the head covering worn by some Muslim women, generally as a sign of their piety. Most often the hijab covers all the hair as well as the neck, leaving only the face visible.

**Toto:** Dorothy’s dog in the novel and the movie The Wizard of Oz.
crushed when I became a Kansan extra. I knew by then that heroines and ingénues were “fair,” as fairy tale convention dictated. Darkness—dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin—always equaled trouble, as if it actually implied a dark side. This expanded as I evolved into a teenage thespian of school drama festival circuits, where, if not Medea or Antigone, I could be the comic relief: the zany psycho at worst and the wisecracking best friend at best.

In other words, part of assimilation was a crash course in sober self-awareness. I gravitated toward the freak, the outsider, the protagonist, the one who did not belong in the protagonist’s vision, not because I had low self-esteem but because conditions couldn’t have allowed for normal self-esteem. A bottle of water bobbing in an ocean doesn’t contemplate its wetness, after all. I knew my place. I was a freak, and I consoled myself with one thought: Of all places, America was a pretty O.K. place for freakdom.

And that’s one message sent by our culture of reality TV. Well-intentioned efforts like the new All-American Muslim aside, it’s the realm of the freak—think of Puck from The Real World, the Osbournes at the dinner table, Kris Jenner accompanying her daughter on a Playboy shoot, Somethin’ of Flavor of Love defecating on the floor during a no-pun-intended elimination ceremony. The reality show theorem is a simple one: Propose a basic niche, and then go about a set of proofs that, with simple variations on a theme, repetitively reinforce it. The show
masterminds might even pledge to prop up a people—designers! cooks! the Amish! dwarf groomsmen!—by raising awareness, perhaps pursuing the idea that exposure in itself is a type of service, but the world of toddlers and their tiaras, and sister-wives and bridalplasty is the all-for-profit evil twin of Documentary Land. Its value lies in sensation and so, more often than not, we are watching the shows the same way we rubberneck a car crash. Or we file its so-bad-it's-goodness under "guilty pleasure," along with Hostess products and bummed smokes and other things that will eventually kill us.

And this becomes more culturally problematic when you throw ethnocentric reality shows in the mix. The most famous one set a false precedent by getting away with it. While Snooki and the Situation even managed to irk some Italian-Americans in the end, Jersey Shore escaped citation from the political-correctness police, since we don't live in a time of mass marginalization of Italian-Americans.

Cable channels have been trying their hand at the ethnocentric reality lottery ever since, from Russians (Russian Dolls) to Chinese (Family Restaurant) to even Iranians. Over the summer Bravo announced The Shahs of Sunset, and one can imagine that that Iranian-American venture, produced by Ryan Seacrest, will be a manic mash-up of much Jersey Shoring in the kingdom of Kardashia.

Mr. Seacrest's announcement seemed mired in flash and trash: "Armed with chromed-out cars, logoridden purses and designer outfits, they've got it, and they're not afraid to flaunt it. But while these young socialites know how to spend money—they also know the value of family and tradition. It's a part of Los Angeles culture and lifestyle that definitely has to be seen to be believed." That implied adherence to Reality TV spectacle has got my inner-child-freak losing it over what might happen to my native Tehrangelenos.

Compare that reality take on a Middle Eastern people with a news release about All-American Muslim, the latest from TLC (the channel behind Sarah Palin's Alaska), starting Sunday night: "Through these families and their diverse experiences, we will explore how they blend their values and traditions with everyday life in America." The author Reza Aslan, whose media entertainment company, BoomGen Studios, has been helping TLC with publicity, calls it "a groundbreaking, intimate look inside the lives of a group of Muslim families in Dearborn, Mich., who are struggling with the everyday issues that all families deal with." He adds, "Except they are doing it at a time of unprecedented anti-Muslim hysteria in America."

Everyday. There is a reason that word keeps coming up. There is absolutely nothing extraordinary about All-American Muslim, and that's the point.

Enter the Midwest's Little Mideast: 10 Dearborn, "America's Muslim Capital," is over 30 percent Arab. It's also home to the Islamic Center of America, the largest mosque in the country. The show focuses on five families in this enclave. You have the newlyweds Nawal and Nader, on the verge of having a baby; Mike, the deputy police chief; Foad, the head coach of the high school football team; Nina, the platinum-blonde businesswoman; and the heavily tattooed and pierced Shadia, who marries an Irish-Catholic.

The most maxi-Muslim predicaments in the first few episodes? Foad switching the nearly all-Muslim football team's practice to nocturnal hours.

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**antagonist**: briefly, the "bad guy" in a story, play, or film.

**protagonist**: briefly, the "good guy" in a story, play, or film.

**Hostess products**: baked goods produced by Hostess Brands, most famously Hostess Twinkies, CupCakes, Ding Dongs, and other snacks.

**ethnocentric**: assuming the superiority of a single ethnic group, generally one's own, and seeing the world from that perspective.

**Tehrangelenos**: Iranians living in Los Angeles (from Tehran, the capital of Iran, and Angelenos, residents of Los Angeles).
because of Ramadan fasting; Shadia’s
groom-to-be’s conversion to Islam (it
involves the uttering of a single holy
phrase before Shadia’s relaxed, wise-
 cracking family); and Shadia’s sister
Samira’s covering of the hijab in order
to enhance her fertility by appearing
pious in God’s eyes. And that’s about it.
The ground is breaking, as Mr.
Aslan implies, but ever so demurely. In a
January article in the Chicago Tribune in
which I was quoted, the columnist
Clarence Page examined Katie Couric’s
answer to Islamophobia: “The Cosby
Show” did so much to change attitudes
about African-Americans in this coun-
try, and I think sometimes people are
afraid of things they don’t understand,”
he quoted her as saying. Mr. Page, in
calling Muslims the “new Negroes,”
also felt the Cosby characters served a
great purpose in showing “the American
Dream is not for whites only.” But if
patiently viewed by the gladiatorial-
combat-hungry masses, All-American
Muslim might achieve much more at
first by taking on less: showing people
that Arab Muslims are Americans.
Then maybe we can move on to
American Dreaming.
I admit, as I watched preview episo-
des, the lessons seemed not for me at
first; I drifted a bit, mildly entertained
by superficial peripherals like Mid-
western accents on Middle Eastern
people. The show’s affable education-
ality reminded me of high school cultural
exchange videos in language class. I
can’t help longing for a drunken
brawl, someone in the bed of someone
they shouldn’t be with, some pretty
girl’s big stink on a spiral staircase.
But then I realized the freak was
there. For many Americans just a
woman in a hijab is a red alert on the
freak meter. Voyeurism is the draw
here, but it’s voyeurism with a silver lin-
ing. Between the Islamophile and
Islamist there are the simply curious
who may catch on that assumptions
about a certain other’s freakdom are
sordidly misplaced. “Muslims: They’re just
like you and me” seems like an embarras-
ning message for us to be grappling
with in 2011, but our ever-fearing
“never-forgetting” has created a forever-
post-Sept. 11 era whose only antedote
might be a normacly verging on mundan-
ity.
It would be nice to pretend that the
straightness of All-American Muslim
is part of reality TV’s sobering up, a sort
of noble resurrection after death
by trashiness, but more likely the matin-
egning of the glossy-exotic here is entirely
measured. Some of us might miss the
spectacle of the freak—I can even see
the confused child in me scouring the
women of the cast for my hot mess of
choice and coming up empty-handed—
but even the most jaded of us Middle
Eastern Americans might come out
with a valuable lesson.
Seasons ago, before I knew of any
potential reality hits on anything close
to my ethnicity, I decided to embark on
a novel about two of my worst night-
mares: the first Iranian-American real-
ity television family and war with Iran.
Insanity ensues, of course, but once I
walked away from All-American
Muslim and back to my desk, I found
my instincts challenged a bit. Maybe
that stranger-than-fiction dream my
kiddie self and my adult writer self
would never have indulged could hap-
pen: for once, maybe the freaks took
off their masks, and people liked what
they saw.

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**Ramadan fasting:** During
the lunar month of
Ramadan, devout Muslims
avoid food, beverage,
tobacco, and sexual activity
from before dawn (the
time one can tell a black
thread from a white
thread) until sundown.

*Clarence Page (1947-):*
Pulitzer Prize-winning
syndicated columnist who
writes for the Chicago
Tribune, broadcast journal-
st, and author. An African
American, Page often
examines issues related to
race.

*Islamophobia:* fear of
Islam or Muslims.

**The Cosby Show:** award-
winning prime-time NBC
sitcom focusing on the
Huxtable family, starring
Bill Cosby as Cliff Huxtable,
an obstetrician, and Phylic
Rashad as his wife, Clair.

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**mundanity:** the condition
of being boring or
everyday.

**matte:** to finish with a flat
(in contrast to shiny or
glossy) surface.
Making a Visual Argument: Cartoons and Stereotypes

A well-known anthropologist claims that if he were dropped into a strange culture and had only an afternoon to figure out the nature of social organization there, he’d ask local people to tell him jokes because jokes ultimately reveal the fault lines in a society; that is, they indirectly indicate where the social divisions are. Jokes frequently treat topics that are taboo or nearly so; thus, they likewise reveal perspectives on controversial issues as understood within a given society. Of course, jokes are a genre of the spoken language while cartoons are their multimodal print equivalent. By combining image and text in some way, cartoons present arguments that critique some aspect of the social order, whether a controversy that has simmered for quite a while or some recent event that was the talk of yesterday’s talk shows and Twitter feeds. The arguments cartoons present, often mocking in nature, are profoundly local. A major reason humor, including jokes and cartoons, doesn’t translate well is that the things each society (and subgroups within any given society) considers funny and the topics it considers appropriate to make light of vary widely. As you study the cartoons in this selection, examine each from these perspectives. Is the cartoon concerned with a long-standing controversy or some specific event or situation? What social divisions in American society does the cartoon acknowledge, and what is the basis for those divisions—political affiliation, age, ethnicity, sex or gender, sexual identity, region of birth, or some combination of these? As noted in the introductory note to the chapter, you will also want to consider which common stereotypes you don’t see represented in these
cartoons and whether it is because they are too potentially incendiary or explosive to find their way into print in mainstream publications or in textbooks like this one. In other words, what social taboos can't be violated, at least not in these contexts, when the medium is cartoons? Finally, think about the cultural knowledge required to understand each of these cartoons; as you'll see, in some cases, that knowledge is quite complex.

Matthew Diffee, Whack-a-Yankee
Matthew Diffee, a graduate of Bob Jones University, grew up in Texas and North Carolina. In addition to being a cartoonist, he's the creator of several volumes in the "Rejection Collection" series, in which he gathers cartoons that were rejected by the New Yorker along with interviews with the cartoonists. The most recent volume in this series is The Best of the Rejection Collection: 293 Cartoons That Were Too Dumb, Too Dark, or Too Naughty for the New Yorker (2011). In this cartoon, which, in fact, appeared in the New Yorker, Diffee gives new life to a long-standing regional rivalry in the United States. If you're not familiar with the game "Whack-a-Mole," check out the Wikipedia entry on it, paying attention to colloquial usage of the phrase; you'll need that information to understand this cartoon.

Eric Allie, Get a Job
Eric Allie is a cartoonist for the St. Paul Pioneer Press, and his work is syndicated by Cagle Cartoons. This cartoon came in response to a remark made during the 2012 presidential primaries by Democratic strategist Hilary Rosen, who stated that Anne Romney, wife of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, "hasn't worked a day in her life." Republicans were quick to capitalize on these remarks by appealing to stereotypes of liberals as disrespectful of the values of conservative women who stay home to raise families. (Romney had stayed home to rear her five sons, and as she responded, "Believe me, it was hard work."))
Charles A. Riley II is a professor of journalism at Baruch College, part of the City University of New York. He also served as editor in chief of WE, a now-defunct national bimonthly magazine that focused on disability issues. During his career, he has received several awards for his writing on issues relating to disability. (Riley is able-bodied, a fact that he believes has important consequences for his writing on these issues.) Among his books are Aristocracy and the Modern Imagination (1980); Disability and Business: Best Practices and Strategies for Inclusion (1980); Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music, and Psychology (1995); Small Business, Big Politics: What Entrepreneurs Need to Know to Use Their Growing Political Power (1996); and The Jazz Age in France (2004). The selections featured here come from Disability and the Media: Prescriptions for Change (2005). These selections include the opening pages of Riley's “Preface” as well as an appendix created by the National Center on Disability and Journalism in 2002 that offers guidelines for portraying people with disabilities in the media. As you read, note ways in which Riley marshals evidence to demonstrate a need for change and the appendix constitutes a set of proposals to create that change.

Disability and the Media:
Prescriptions for Change

CHARLES A. RILEY II

Every time Aimee Mullins sees her name in the papers she braces herself for some predictable version of the same headline followed by the same old story. Paralympian, actress, and fashion model, Mullins is a bilateral, below-the-knee amputee, who sprints a hundred meters in less than sixteen seconds on a set of running prostheses called Cheetahs because they were fashioned after the leg form of the world’s fastest animal. First, there are the headlines: “Overcoming All Hurdles” (she is not a hurdler, although she is a long jumper) or “Running Her Own Race,” “Nothing Stops Her,” or the dreaded overused “Profile in Courage.” Then come the clichés and stock scenes, from the prosthetist’s office to the winner’s podium. Many of the articles dwell on her success as the triumph of biomechanics, a “miracle of modern medicine,”
Coppélia: a nineteenth-century French comic and sentimental opera in which Dr. Coppélius creates a dancing doll that is so lifelike that a young man falls in love with her.

Six Million Dollar Woman: an allusion to Six Million Dollar Man, a late 1970s ABC television program about an astronaut who was “rebuilt” after a crash to become a cyborg, part human and part machine.

ur-narrative: the prefix ur- refers to the earliest, original, or most primitive or basic. Hence, the ur-narrative is the source narrative on which all others are based.

Warholian: a reference to Andy Warhol (1928–1987), American avant-garde artist who commented in 1968, “In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes,” a critique of how modern media create instant celebrities.

Before he offers his proposal, Riley first explains how stereotyping causes problems for the disabled. For more on causal arguments, see Chapter 11.

Poster child: a perfect representative. The source of the phrase is the image of a disabled child or one with a visible medical condition whose photo is used on posters to elicit sympathy and donations.

Allegorical: the adjectival form of allegory, a moral story in which the characters, always one-dimensional in nature, suggest a meaning beyond the story. Thus, in Aesop’s fable about the ant and the grasshopper, listeners are to understand that the wise person prepares for future needs, as the ant did, rather than wasting time, as did the grasshopper.
media considered here, from print to television, radio and the movies (including advertisements) to multimedia and the Internet, are guilty of the same distillation of stories to meet their own, usually fiscal, ends. For example, even though her autobiography is remarkably ahead of its time in its anticipation of disability culture, by the time Helen Keller had been sweetened for movie audiences in Patty Duke’s version of her life, little was left out of the fiery trailblazer. In much the same way, Christopher Reeve and Michael J. Fox have been pigeonholed by print and television hagiographers as lab experiments and tragic heroes. Packaged to raise philanthropic or advertising dollars, they perform roles no less constrained than the pretty-boy parts they played on screen earlier in their lives.

What is wrong with this picture? By jamming Mullins and the others into prefabricated stories—the supercrip, the medical miracle, the object of pity—writers and producers have outfitted them with the narrative equivalent of an ill-fitting set of prostheses. Each of these archetypal narratives has its way of reaching mass audiences, selling products (including magazines and movie tickets), and financially rewarding both the media outlet and the featured subject. In some ways, as optimists point out, this represents an improvement. We have had millennia of fiction and nonfiction depicting

Helen Keller (1880–1968): the first American who was both deaf and blind to graduate from college, Keller was an author and activist for progressive causes.

Patty Duke (1946–): an American actress who played Helen Keller in the 1959 play The Miracle Worker and in the 1962 film version of the story.

Christopher Reeve (1952–2004): an American actor who is best known for his four Superman films. In 1995, he was paralyzed in a riding accident and used a wheelchair for the rest of his life. After his accident, he became an activist for public issues related to spinal-cord injuries and stem-cell research.


hagiographer: technically, one who studies saints. Here, hagiography is used to refer to the ways in which able-bodied individuals often portray people with disabilities as saints, thereby refusing to let them be fully human.
angry people with disabilities as villains, from Oedipus to Ahab to Dr. Strangelove. The vestigial traces of that syndrome still occasionally recur, although with far less frequency, in current movies or television series and in journalists’ fixation on the mental instability of violent criminals. However, today’s storytellers, including those in the disability media, are more likely to make people with disabilities into “heroes of assimilation,” to borrow a phrase from Erving Goffman’s seminal work on disability, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.*

As Goffman knew too well, just as the stigmatization of the villain had its dilatory effects on societal attitudes, so too does relentless hagiography, particularly by transforming individuals into symbols and by playing on an audience’s sympathy and sense of superiority. Those who labor in the field of disability studies point out that disability culture and its unique strengths are absent from this story of normalization. Others would simply note that the individual is lost in the fable, an all-American morality tale that strikes one of the most resonant chords in the repertoire: redemption. Like the deathless Horatio Alger tale, the story of the hero of assimilation emphasizes many of the deepest values and beliefs of the Puritan tradition, especially the notion that suffering makes us stronger and better. An able-bodied person falls from grace (often literally falling or crashing, as in the case of many spinal cord injuries), progresses through the shadows of rehabilitation and

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**Dr. Strangelove:** the title character in the 1964 film comedy *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.* Strangelove, played by Peter Sellers, uses a wheelchair and suffers from alien hand syndrome. He is often used to represent the stereotype of a “mad scientist.”

**vestigial:** adjectival form of *vestige,* a more basic or rudimentary structure that no longer has any useful function; therefore, a useless leftover.

**Erving Goffman (1922–1982):** a highly influential Canadian-born sociologist who taught in the United States. His work was much concerned with the nature of the social organization of everyday life.

**dilatory effects:** effects that delay or cause delay, here of positive changes in societal attitudes.

**Horatio Alger Jr. (1832–1899):** the prolific author of popular “rags to riches” tales in which hardworking, virtuous poor boys rise to stable and productive lives at the lower edges of the middle class.
depression, and by force of willpower along with religious belief pulls through to attain a quality of life that is less disabled, more normal, basking in the glow of recognition for beating the odds.

This pervasive narrative can be found in print, on television, in movies, in advertisements, and on the Web. Its corrosive effect on understanding and attitudes is as yet unnoticed. It is impossible to know the full degree of damage wreaked by the demeaning and wildly inaccurate portrayal of people with disabilities, nor is it altogether clear whether much current progress is being made. Painful as it is for me as an advocate to report the bad news, I cannot help but point out that the “movement” has slowed to a crawl in terms of political and economic advancement for 54 million Americans. The stasis that threatens is at least partly to be blamed on a reassuring, recurring image projected by the media that numbs nondisabled readers and viewers into thinking that all is well.

This study aims to expose the extent of the problem while pinpointing how writers, editors, photographers, filmmakers, advertisers, and the executives who give them their marching orders go wrong, or occasionally get it right. Through a close analysis of the technical means of representation, in conjunction with the commentary of leading voices in the disability community, I hope to guide future coverage to a more fair and accurate way of putting the disability story on screen or paper. Far from another stab at the political correctness target, the aim of this content analysis of journalism, film, advertising, and Web publishing is to cut through the accumulated clichés and condescension to find an adequate vocabulary that will finally represent the disability community in all its vibrant and fascinating diversity. Nothing like that will ever happen if the press and advertisers continue to think, write, and design as they have in the past.
Skip Hollandsworth (1957–) is the pen name of Walter Ned Hollandsworth, an award-winning journalist who is currently one of the executive editors of the Texas Monthly. Born in North Carolina, Hollandsworth graduated from Texas Christian University, where he was a sportswriter for the school paper. Several of Hollandsworth’s articles for the Texas Monthly have become the basis for television programs or movies. In this article, which first appeared in Good Housekeeping, in August 2011, he reports on child beauty pageants, which were originally especially popular in the South as well as California, but are apparently now as American as apple pie. As you read this article, consider how its subject relates to the previous selection by Stephanie Hanes, “Little Girls or Little Women? The Disney Princess Effect.”

Toddlers in Tiaras

SKIP HOLLANDSWORTH

It’s 6:30 on a Saturday morning at the Southfork Hotel in Plano, TX, just north of Dallas, and in Room 326, 6-year-old Eden Wood is perched on a stool, quietly staring at herself in a lighted mirror, waiting for the transformation to begin. First, a stylist applies layers of foundation, blush, eye shadow, mascara, lipliner, and hot-pink lipstick. Then she turns to Eden’s hair—except it’s not Eden’s hair. A long blond fall, full of curly ringlets, is attached to the back of the little girl’s head, and using a brush and curling iron, the stylist teases all the hair, real and synthetic, until it looks as if it’s going to float away. Finally, she runs a cloth over Eden’s already manicured fingernails and adds a touch of bronzer to her spray-tanned arms and legs.

“OK, sweet girl, let’s get after it,” declares Eden’s mother, Mickie, a congenial, determined-looking 46-year-old who’s wearing glasses with hot-pink frames and a matching pink coat over a black pantsuit. Eden jumps off the stool and steps into a $3,000 hand-sewn bubble gum–pink dress covered with sequins and edged with lace that billows out, tutu-like, just below her waist.

Mickie helps her put on white ankle socks and unblemished white patent leather Mary Janes. Finally, she snaps faux diamond earrings onto Eden’s ears and fastens a glittery rhinestone necklace around her neck. After an hour and 30 minutes, her daughter has become part Barbie, part Madame Alexander’s doll, and part Las Vegas showgirl.

Eden, who’s from Taylor, AR, is about to participate with 90 or more other girls in a beauty pageant put on by Texas-based Universal Royalty Beauty Pageant, one of the country’s best-known children’s beauty pageant organizers. All around the conference room and adjoining hallways that serve as the pre-contest prep area, little girls do the pageant version of suiting up. Some are having fake eyelashes applied; others sit quietly as their parents insert dental prosthetics called “flippers” into their mouths to cover the gaps where baby teeth have fallen out. A few are already on the
stage, doing one final run-through of the formal “beauty walks” that they will later perform, acts that require the girls to cross one foot over the other and slowly pivot in a semicircle while keeping their shoulders back and their eyes locked on the judges.

“Remember, honey, step, then turn, then give those judges a big wink,” one mother says encouragingly, holding a brush in one hand and a mirror in the other. “Your job is to make them love you.”

JonBenét Ramsey, who would have turned 21 this month had she not been brutally murdered, remains the most famous pageant girl in the world. All one has to do is say her name and the images come flooding back—not those from photos of her home in Boulder, CO, where she was found in the basement on December 26, 1996, but those of the 6-year-old pixie strutting across pageant stages, looking like a baby Marilyn Monroe with makeup more suited to a woman several times her age.

Rayanna DeMatteo, a 22-year-old student at Samford University in Birmingham, AL, regularly competed at events with JonBenet. “I remember playing hide-and-seek with her,” she says. “We used to jump into the hotel pools together after competition.” DeMatteo remembers that increasingly, as she grew older, being part of the pageant world was something she wanted to hide. “I don’t tell people my secret about what I did back in the day,” she says. “I don’t want people to know that I was a pageant girl.”

Before JonBenet, most Americans didn’t know such beauty pageants existed, and they were shocked at what they saw. Karen Steinhauser, Denver’s chief deputy district attorney at the time, bluntly told reporters, “It’s impossible to look at these photos and not see a terribly exploited little girl.” 

CBS Evening News anchor Dan Rather compared the video footage of JonBenet at pageants to “kiddie porn.” Given the force of what, at the time, felt like national outrage, one would think that child pageants would have faded away. But, in fact, the opposite is true. Though beauty pageants for adult women seem to be disappearing from the landscape (even the Miss America pageant no longer draws respectable television ratings), kiddie pageants are flourishing. Fueled by a reality TV show, an estimated 250,000 American girls participate in more than 5,000 beauty pageants every year.

The promise of a tiara has always been a fast, easy sell to young girls who pine to be princesses—just ask 

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**Madame Alexander:** a brand of collectible doll dating from the 1920s. Madame Alexander dolls have often been based on licensed characters from movies or novels or famous women, living or dead.

**JonBenét Ramsey (1990–1996):** a six-year-old girl murdered on Christmas Day in her home under suspicious circumstances. The much-publicized case has never been solved. Part of its notoriety came from the fact that Ramsey was a frequent contestant in child beauty pageants.

**Dan Rather (1931–):** anchor for the CBS Evening News from 1981 to 2005. Rather also contributed to 60 Minutes, and he now serves as anchor of Dan Rather Reports on HDNet. In an earlier era, when the evening news was a trusted source of information, Rather’s comments carried great weight with many viewers.
Disney, which reportedly makes approximately $4 billion annually from its more than 26,000公主-related retail items. The connection between princesses and pageants exploded in 1954 with the first televised broadcast of the Miss America pageant; 27 million viewers tuned in. Six years later, Miami played host to Little Miss Universe, the first official beauty pageant for children. Soon, kidde pageants emerged all over the U.S., particularly in the South and in California. "It was the thing to do if you had a halfway cute kid," says Nicole Eggert, 39, who was crowned Miss Universe, Petite Division, in 1976, when she was 4. That pageant led to a lucrative shampoo commercial and the launch of a decades-long acting career. Eggert went on to starring roles in popular 1980s and 1990s television shows such as Baywatch and Charles in Charge. She remembers the child pageant world as decidedly low-key. "None of the kids had their hair done, no one had makeup on; no one had custom-made gowns—it was a party dress from a store," says Eggert. "I remember it being sort of a joke [that I won] because my mom had a hard time getting me to brush my hair."

Although some of today's contests are now promoted as "natural pageants," in which girls compete in off-the-rack togs and little or no makeup, it's the glitz pageants that remain the most popular. While prizes are relatively small, the investment can be enormous. Parents, many of whom have only modest incomes, pay for high-glitz coaches ($50 to $100 an hour), high-glitz photographers ($300 per session, with $150 for retouching), high-glitz wig makers ($150 to $175 a pop), and high-glitz spray tanners ($25 per pageant). One company goes so far as to offer parents a "breakthrough Pageant Preparation System" with this promise: "No more drives home with tears! No more disappointing pageants, missed opportunities, and humiliating moments."

"When we talk high-glitz, we mean the glitzier the better, and we make no apologies for it," says Universal Royalty Beauty Pageant owner Annette Hill, who puts on about 12 to 15 high-glitz pageants a year, culminating in a national pageant that pays out $75,000 in cash and prizes, including $10,000 to the winner. "We love the beautiful dresses and the big hairstyles. We love the bling and makeup. We love our girls showing lots and lots of style, and we love seeing them sparkle."

After JonBenet's death, a few journalists and commentators went so far as to suggest that her tricked-up pageant look could have been the reason for her murder. Perhaps, they said, she had become the target of a pedophile who lurked around pageants. "The way people were talking, you would have thought we were all going to be murdered by child molesters," says Brooke Breedwell, who was 7 at the time. A recent graduate of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Breedwell was one of the country's most famous child contestants during the JonBenet era. For Breedwell, JonBenet's murder was more than a tragedy—it was a little girl's worst nightmare. "I remember thinking when she got killed, I was going to get killed. I was convinced it was a serial killer going after pageant girls. I would hide under my covers, terrified, at night."

Stacy Dittrich, a former detective in Ashland, OH, who specialized in sex crimes and who is now a true-crime author and media analyst, says, "I found, in the course of my work, pedophiles who had gone to great lengths to obtain videos of little girls walking around provocatively, pulling their shirts down off their shoulders and smiling at the camera." Even though Dittrich never worked on a case in which a pedophile stalked a child from a pageant, she did have experience with pedophiles who lurked at football games to snap pictures of young kids. "I arrested one guy who sat at his window and took photographs of the neighborhood girls playing in a sprinkler," she remembers. "When I see pageants on TV, I think, These are the types of videos those pedophiles would watch." While Dittrich isn't totally against pageants, she thinks air-
ing them on television is irresponsible: “On TV, they are not only giving out the names of these children, but they also tell you what towns these little girls live in,” she says. “It would not be difficult whatsoever for an obsessive pedophile to track these children down.”

There is scant documented evidence to suggest that pageants put little girls in danger, yet many psychologists believe that developmental and emotional problems can stem from the pressure and value system that pageants embody. A 2007 report issued by the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls claims that parents who put their daughters in pageants can contribute “in very direct and concrete ways” to “the precocious sexualization” of their daughters. “These pageant girls are taught from a very early age that what is most critically important in life is their physical appearance along with a superficial and eroticized charm. They are presented in a hypersexualized manner that is completely inappropriate to their ages,” says Mary E. Doheny, Ph.D., of the Family Institute at Northwestern University. Doheny says, “Also, for the mothers, their whole focus is imparting the critical importance of physical beauty, and along with that is the mothers’ implicit criticism of their girls’ own unembellished beauty. They are always applying makeup to their girls’ faces, dressing them up, and dyeing their hair. They are hypervigilant about diet and posture. And so the message these little girls take away is that natural beauty isn’t enough—that their self-esteem and sense of self-worth only comes from being the most attractive girl in the room, not from being smart or resourceful or tough or creative.”

“These little girls are being trained to look and act like sexual bait,” says Nancy Irwin, Psy.D., a Los Angeles–based psychotherapist who specializes in working with sexually abused clients, particularly teenage girls. “And what’s really disturbing is that so many of these girls seem to be tools of their mothers, who think this is the way for the girls to get fame and attention.” Raised in Atlanta, Irwin herself competed in pageants when she was a teenager and a young adult. “I did them in hopes of getting college scholarship money, I worry that these girls are just doing it because they are being ordered to do it—and if they don’t win, many times their mothers let them have it,” she says.

A small 2005 study, published in *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention*, that involved 22 women, half of whom had participated in child beauty pageants, concluded that there were “no significant differences” between the two groups on measures of bulimia, body perception, depression, and self-esteem. But it did find that the former pageant girls scored significantly higher on “body dissatisfaction, interpersonal distrust, and impulse dysregulation [an inability to resist performing actions that would be harmful to themselves or others].”

It is difficult to ignore the link between the flirtatious behavior exhibited by pint-size contestants in heavy makeup (it’s not uncommon for toddlers to be encouraged to wink or blow kisses at the judges) and the naïve sexuality that is becoming increasingly blatant among elementary school girls. Author and journalist Peggy Orenstein, who wrote about child beauty pageants in her latest book, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture*, believes that pageant girls are being taught to see themselves as objects of others’ pleasure. “I’m not saying that when they wiggle their hips and wink at judges at the age of 4 or 5, they have any idea that what they’re doing is a highly eroticized,
seductive gesture,” she says. “But pageant girls are definitely learning that if they act in a very sexualized way, they will get attention. The risk is that as they become adult women, they will continue to see their sexuality as a performance and not something connected to their own true feelings.”

Whether it’s a 5-year-old strutting down the pageant runway in lipstick and false eyelashes or the 7-year-olds who became a YouTube sensation for a sexy Beyoncé “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)” dance routine, the fact that these young girls don’t mean to be sexual is actually part of the problem. When very young girls learn to disconnect sexy motions from the thoughts and feelings behind them, it’s hard for them to integrate all of those elements as they get older.

Deborah Tolan, Ed.D., a professor at Hunter College and author of Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk about Sexuality, says, “From Toddlers & Tiaras to America’s Next Top Model, reality TV takes away a lot of what we know is good for girls. Focusing so much on how you look is problematic. Instead of focusing on how she feels—which is an important skill growing up—a girl learns to sexualize herself. Your body is a compass, and premature sexuality takes the arrow out of the compass.”

“Even in 1996, when JonBenet was murdered, it was shocking for us to see a 6-year-old wearing lipstick and eye shadow,” says Orenstein. “Now, market research studies have found nearly half of today’s 6- to 9-year-olds are already using lipstick or lip gloss. Walmart launched a makeup line just for girls 8 to 12. Abercrombie & Fitch marketed a padded push-up bikini top for 8-year-olds. It’s easy to slam pageants, but maybe that’s because no one wants to deal with the bigger picture, which is the day-to-day sexualization of all our daughters.”

Perhaps it’s precisely because sexy dress-up has gone mainstream that Toddlers & Tiaras, the TLC network’s hit reality show about child pageants, draws 1.4 million viewers per week. Toddlers & Tiaras made Eden Wood a star. The chubby-cheeked 6-year-old has more than 15,000 fans on her Facebook page, and there are nearly 700 YouTube videos of her posing, prancing, or performing one of her talent routines: a song-and-dance act in which she struts and swaggers, swings her hips, flips her hair, cooly sticks her fingers in her dimpled cheeks, and belts out lyrics in her untrained but very enthusiastic voice.

The demands of pageant life can be relentless. Many of the girls start competing as babies; some, like Eden, are homeschooled and spend Fridays making all-day trips to pageants. The time devoted to pageants is a developmental concern, says Northwestern’s Doheny: “On the most benign level, the girls who participate in pageants truly limit the time they get to engage in playtime and other creative endeavors, or to learn and practice other competencies, like sports or personal relationships with peers.” The top girls on the pageant circuit not only have hair and makeup stylists; they also have “beauty walk” consultants and “talent” coaches.

Eden has her own agent, Heather Ryan, a Des Moines, IA, mom who, after entering her oldest daughter in pageants, realized there was money to be made representing the country’s top glitz contestants. Ryan is the agent for 34 girls, and while she won’t discuss dollar figures, she says none come close to making the money that Eden does. So far, with Eden’s parents’ approval, Ryan has produced an Eden look-alike doll, a book about Eden’s life entitled From Cradle to Crown, Eden’s first single (“Cutie Patootie,” which Ryan wrote), and T-shirts that feature a photo of Eden in a showgirl-style pink costume and matching headdress along with a slogan that reads “I’m Tanned and Ready for the Stage!” All of Eden’s merchandise is sold on her website, littleedenwood.com. But it is her TV appearances that have given Eden such a massive profile. Fans turn out in droves at her mall appearances to see her sing and to have her autograph a CD or poster. Only days before the Plano pag
eant, the agent announced that later this summer, Eden and a couple of other pageant contestants would do an eight-city tour of the Midwest, billed as "The Glamour Girls Starring Eden Wood." Eden is even taking her show abroad as a special celebrity guest at Universal Royalty's first-ever pageant in Australia this summer, signing autographs, posing for photos, and singing songs such as "Cutie Patootie." Even as Eden walks into the Southfork Hotel ballroom, she's got her pageant smile on: teeth clenched, lips unmoving. Many contestants gape at her, awestruck. One holds out a sheet of paper for Eden to autograph. "Thank you!" Eden says, signing her name in big block letters. Another tells Eden that she owns two blond-haired dolls, both of which are named—that's right—Eden. "Yay!" says Eden cheerfully.

"It's simply amazing," says Mickie, who's renowned in pageant circles for her level of prep, even bringing along a portable spray-tan machine to pageants. "Eden's now got fan clubs in Europe and Australia. Strangers come up to her and ask for her autograph. They call her America's sweetheart. I'm telling you, for a family from a poor little town in Arkansas, this is like a fairy tale come true."

Not all child pageant participants come from modest means, but it's hard not to see the material aspirations reflected in the paste-jewelry crowns that sparkle atop the heads of little girls like Eden. Melissa Harris-Perry, Ph.D., a professor of political science at Tulane University, says, "We tend to think that we're very class-mobile in America, that anybody can do anything. But the fact is, we're not. Most working-class girls born into working-class families are going to die working-class. These pageants are a time for them and their moms to have the Kate Middleton moment. These moms want to live the princess story and, more, to feel like they've captured it for their daughters—this instant of extreme specialness. If you think about the royal wedding, it really was like a pageant in that way. Kate Middleton was praised during the ceremony for the same things these girls are praised for: 'Look how she can stand so still and self-possessed and smiling while people take photographs of her.'"

When Mickie Wood compares Eden's pageant career to a fairy tale, the question is, for whom? For Brooke Breedwell, pageants were a potent symbol of her mother's ambition. When she was 3 months old, her mother began entering her in pageants; Breedwell left the circuit, at her own insistence, when she was 8. "I had to quit soccer, and I couldn't go to certain school events or friends' birthday parties, all because my mom wanted to spend thousands and thousands of dollars so I could win $500 and a trophy," she says. "I ended up having a very tense relationship with her because she was always nitpicking at me, pushing me to be perfect. One day I got so mad I threw a curling iron at her, and I finally quit because of the stress. And you know what I hate? All these years later, I've still got this anxiety about feeling like I have to be perfect."

Breedwell says if she ever has a daughter, she'll never let her do pageants. But in the next breath, she says, "I did love performing, I will say that. I miss the feeling of being onstage."

If you were to come across Eden in Taylor, a town of 566 people that is a few miles north of the Arkansas-Louisiana line, you would think she was just another

<table>
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<th>Kate Middleton (1982–)</th>
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<td>Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, since her April 2011 marriage to Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, who is second in line to the throne of the British Commonwealth. She is the first person who was not a member of a royal family or of the aristocracy to marry an heir to the throne in over three and a half centuries. Thus, the British press has characterized her as a &quot;commoner&quot; who has married a prince.</td>
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country girl, cute but not particularly beautiful, with her hair in pigtails and the knees of her blue jeans scuffed and dirty. She lives in a small brown brick house with her father, Louis, a welder and full-time farmer, and Mickie, a music and drama teacher at the local public school. One day, when a visitor arrives, Eden is outside, riding her bicycle with training wheels past a truck in the driveway that’s on blocks with the transmission pulled out, then past the backyard chicken coop, whose roof is held down by two tires.

When she heads inside the house, Eden walks down a dimly lit hallway filled with mounted deer heads, her father’s hunting trophies. She opens the door to her bedroom—and the contrast is breathtaking. The walls are lavender, and painted on the closet doors, like a coat of arms, are the initials “E” and “W.” Her bed is set inside an oversize pink dollhouse that reaches to the ceiling. At least 300 trophies line the floor, many taller than Eden herself, and custom-made shelves hold a seemingly endless array of glitter crowns and sashes.

Throughout the room are photos of Eden in pageant costumes. While spray tans rule the pageant stage, in photos the look is pure porcelain doll. Many of them have been retouched to make her hair blonder, her face creamy white, her eyes bigger and rounder, and her lips larger than life. It is nearly impossible to recognize that the child in the pictures is the same girl who is standing in the room.

Mickie was raised on a farm not far from Taylor, and as a young teenager and college student, she entered a couple of local beauty pageants and sang with country music bands. She quit the pageant world a few years before she married Louis. After years of trying to get pregnant, she gave birth to Eden at age 40. When Eden was 14 months old, Mickie entered her in the infant division of the Miss Lumberjack pageant in a nearby town—“People told me my baby was too pretty to keep hidden at home,” she recalls—where Eden won for best hair. Mickie then entered Eden in a pageant in Shreveport, LA, “and a judge told me I had a star on my hands.” As Eden got older, Mickie began driving her to pageants around the South in her red pickup truck, keeping a curling iron plugged into the cigarette lighter. By the age of 3, Eden was winning trophies in some of the bigger high-glitz pageant circuits—Darling Dolls of America, Tiny Miss America, Ultimate Dream Queen, and International Fresh Faces, among others.

Toddlers & Tiaras began featuring Eden in 2009, when she was 4. In one commercial promoting the show, there’s a shot of Eden sweeping across the stage as the announcer says, “A toddler’s greatest fear. Two little words: Eden Wood.” Soon, she was being interviewed on such shows as Good Morning America and Entertainment Tonight. Reporters couldn’t get enough of this chubby-cheeked, hip-wiggling girl whose original song “Cutie Patootie” included the refrain “I’m a cutie, cutie patootie. Rockin’ out the pageant stage and shakin’ my booty.”

Predictably, there was plenty of criticism. After Eden performed “Cutie Patootie” on The Talk, CBS’s afternoon talk show, cohost Sharon Osbourne, clearly dismayed, said that Mickie needed to let Eden be a normal little girl. “Seriously, do people believe I’d be so cruel as to force my only child to do all this if she didn’t like doing it?” Mickie says at their home. making Eden a peanut butter sandwich. “When Eden gets to a pageant, it’s like someone has flipped a switch in her. She shines with this bubbly joy. And my husband and I have always made it clear to her that the minute she wants to quit, then we’ll quit, no questions asked.”

“But I don’t want to quit,” Eden chimes in as she happily munches on her sandwich. “I want to be a star!” Nevertheless, in an episode of Toddlers & Tiaras, as Mickie walks Eden to the stage, she is caught on tape telling the little girl, “It’s on you, the whole thing. All the work, all the money—it’s all on you.”

Eden is one of the rare money-makers in the child beauty pageant world: She’s earned about $40,000 ...