



University of Pittsburgh

SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

November 25, 1992

Dr. George Gerbner
Annenberg School of Communication
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Dr. Gerbner,

It was good to talk with you on Monday. I am sending you the unedited copy of your speech, and in the meantime, we will work on editing it. I am also including here the brief outline of material that we have sent others who are working on this book.

It's easy, of course, to imagine a book filled with testimonials about Fred Rogers. What we're looking for, however, is something quite different. To date, no one has written a book on the style and strategies involved in *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Rather than gathering testimonials from famous people ("Why I Love Mister Rogers," by Barbara Bush), we are interested in soliciting experts in child psychology, social history, education, music, ethics, communications specialists and others to examine the show and provide analytical essays on specific topics. These topics fall under the following sections:

Overview: In the last 25 years, new approaches and new ways of thinking have challenged our fundamental beliefs about families, children and education. We would like to construct an overview of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* which puts the show--and Fred Rogers himself--against this changing background.

Use of Language: One of the key elements that separate Mister Rogers from other children's programming--especially *Sesame Street* and *Electric Company*--is his distinctive use of language. In most children's shows, the viewer is a witness to dialogue among several characters; Mister Rogers (and Bob Keeshan's *Captain Kangaroo*) use direct address, actually talking to the viewer. But, unlike Captain Kangaroo, Mister Rogers seems to wait for a response, as if there is some unheard dialogue between the child and the television set. We'd like to explore the specific mechanics of Mister Rogers' unique "one-way interaction."

Ethics: Few shows are as famous for "prosocial" formation as *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. In spite of this reputation, very little has been written about the moral components that are presented to this impressionable audience. We'd like to examine the ethical vision that's inherent in *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

Music: Thanks to the collaboration of Fred Rogers and Music Director John Costa, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* has exposed children to a wide range of musical forms and expressions, including songs, opera, jazz, folk and dance music. Sometimes the music has a message; sometimes the music **is** the message--the sheer joy of sound. We'd like to examine the hows and whys of Mister Rogers' music.

Autonomy and Self-Respect: Perhaps the best-known feature of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is the tagline at the end of every show: "You know you make every day special. How? By just your being you. There's only one you." But developing this sense of self-knowledge and self-respect requires more than a slogan. We would like to explore how *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* fosters autonomy.

Aggression and Non-aggression: In some senses, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* has become a rallying point for supporters of quality children's television. Like *Captain Kangaroo*, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was one of the first national shows to step away from the traditional shoot-'em-up Saturday cartoons; more importantly, the series has also dealt head-on with difficult issues like anger, fighting, and conflict resolution. Instead of highlighting the **lack** of aggression, we would like to concentrate on how Mister Rogers **promotes** peaceful solutions.

Family Issues: *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* has been on the air for 25 years--a quarter-century of fundamental change for the American family. We would like to analyze how Fred Rogers has dealt with these changes--and how the show has changed to reflect the new realities.

Health Issues: As tempted as we are to lump four-year-olds with eight-year-olds under the general title of "children," in reality these two groups share very little in common: their bodies (as well as their intellects) are absolutely and fundamentally different. How is it possible for a children's show to address this question of growth so that its diverse audience understands the message?

Gender Issues: When *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* first went on the air in 1965, adjectives like "non-sexist" and "gender-neutral" were virtually unheard of. The changes in vocabulary over the last 25 years not only reflect a more universal language, but also efforts to create a more inclusive, more encompassing society. To that end, how does the show encourage or discourage sexual equity?

Children's Response to Mister Rogers: *Mister Rogers Neighborhood* is watched by more than 7 million households each week across 300 PBS affiliates, not to mention several foreign countries. As succeeding generations of video children have "grown up watching Mister Rogers," he has moved--quietly, almost silently--from television figure to cultural icon. We'd like to explore the nature of the Mister Rogers' phenomenon.

Physically/Mentally Challenged Children: When Fred Rogers speaks

to professional groups or to graduation classes, he often concentrates on a different aspect of the show: his recent involvement with children who live with handicaps. In these speeches, Fred Rogers talks about the same uncomfortable difficulties many of us have in confronting those who are somehow "different" from us. We would like to explore this theme.

Non-Traditional Viewers: Shows like *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* may be intended for children, but children aren't the only audience. There's also parents, who either watch the show with their children or hear the show as they work in another room. How do parents react to the show? Would they just as soon turn it off if their kids weren't watching, or are they genuinely entertained or informed by what they see? Likewise, we'd like to ask the same questions of the other non-traditional viewers -- pre-adolescent (10-13 years old) and elderly and/or "shut-ins."

Racism: Despite the ambitions of such catchphrases as "multiculturalism" and "diversity," we are a long way off from realizing the promise of plurality. *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* came of age during a period of rising consciousness regarding race and culture. Does the show reflect these changes in attitude? How are races presented to the viewing audience?

In light of your speech, we thought you would be interested in the issue of communication. By default, Mr. Rogers serves as "interpreter" for children. Whether good or bad, adored or ridiculed, he is still seen by children as a liaison between their world and the adult world. In this role, Mister Rogers becomes a model of communication.

Considering his broad agenda and the expanse of his international audience, we'd like to examine exactly how this communications model works or doesn't work. Although the context of his message and his language (both verbal and nonverbal) are very important, we're just as interested in analyzing the milieu. How does the world of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* establish its rapport with the audience? What kind of communication does this environment encourage? What concessions (if any) does this model make to its younger audience? Is there a prescription (or, more importantly, a paradigm) that Mister Rogers follows?

In other words, we're asking that you expand the last part of your speech. You've already established the legacy of storytelling, the importance of publication in our cultural heritage and the consequences of the newest frontier, television. We're interested now in how Mister Rogers operates within that context. How does he invent and maintain his unique identity?

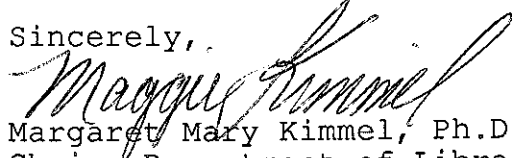
Of course, there may be other issues you would like to discuss as well; please don't feel limited (or restricted) to the questions we raise here. We also understand that modifying your speech requires a significant commitment of time. But we've asked you to

participate *not* based on money but on what we wanted: the first-ever analysis of a one-of-a-kind program (now seen by more than 10 million children each week) which will serve as an extraordinary historical document as well as an invaluable resource for parents, educators, scholars, child advocates--virtually anyone interested in understanding children's shows and television history.

If you have questions about the book, feel free to contact Dr. Margaret Kimmel at the address or phone numbers below. We hope to hear from you soon regarding your participation in this project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Margaret Mary Kimmel, Ph.D.
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University of Pittsburgh

SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
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7 May 1993

Dr. George Gerbner
Annenberg School of Communication
3260 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Dr. Gerbner,

As the seasons change, our thoughts have turned once again to the Mister Rogers' project. This is just a short note to see how your essay is coming, and to let you know that we're available if you'd like to talk about your specific chapter. Could you let us know when you might be able to send a draft?

Feel free to call either of us at the numbers below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Margaret Mary Kimmel".

Margaret Mary Kimmel, Ph.D.
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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Collins".

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University of Pittsburgh

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15 June 1993

Dr. George Gerbner
Annenberg School of Communication
3260 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Dr. Gerbner,

Enclosed please find the edited version of the speech you gave several years ago in Pittsburgh in honor of Fred Rogers. As we discussed, this speech can serve as the basis for your chapter in our book on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

In reviewing the speech, we were once again impressed by both the depth and accessibility of your observations and scholarship. Throughout this project (perhaps out of deference to the subject matter), we have attempted to balance solid research with the author's personal vision; your words here have done exactly that.

What's needed next, we believe, is more about *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* itself. We do not believe that an in-depth analysis of certain episodes or groups of programs is necessary. Instead, your speech has set up the context of television in the story telling tradition; we would like your general impressions of how the program fits (or fails to fit) into this tradition. Your comments about the state of television--violence, stereotypes, etc.--sketch out the present standards of story-telling; in what specific ways does Fred Rogers "counter point" and "provoke" the status quo? Is such an approach an anachronism these days? Has his presence made a difference in children's lives, or merely served to soothe parents' worries about watching television (well, at least sooth their worries for 30 minutes a day)?

We did only minor editing and rearranging of your speech; with the exception of the final three paragraphs, it seems close to a solid draft. The last three paragraphs begin to introduce more about the program itself--exactly what we're looking for in your revision.

Thank you for your cooperation in this project. If there's anything you need from us, please feel free to give us a call.

Sincerely,


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IMPORTANT MESSAGE

FOR George Herbert

DATE 10/9/93 TIME 1058 AM
P.M.

M Margaret Kimmel

OF Univ of Pittsburgh

PHONE 412-624-9436
AREA CODE NUMBER EXTENSION

☐ FAX

☐ MOBILE
AREA CODE NUMBER TIME TO CALL

TELEPHONED	X	PLEASE CALL	X
CAME TO SEE YOU		WILL CALL AGAIN	
WANTS TO SEE YOU		RUSH	
RETURNED YOUR CALL		WILL FAX TO YOU	

MESSAGE re: the manuscript

SIGNED Julie



October 11, 1993

Dr. Margaret M. Kimmel
Chair, Library Science
640 LIS, University of Pittsburgh
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Fax: 412 648 7001

Dear Dr. Kimmel:

Here is my replacement ending for the last 5 lines. You are welcome to edit or to flesh it out with examples. I had to write this between trips in a few minutes, and will be out of the country until the end of October. This is all I can do so please edit, augment, as you see fit, and just send me final copy or the proof. Incidentally, what is the title of this piece, of the book, and the publisher and publication date?

...reflect on it.

Just how does Fred do that? First, he always has something to tell, rather than something to sell. He has a purpose, a message that respects the viewer and what the viewer may need rather than what the viewer may be induced to buy.

His perspective on life's needs, problems, and conflicts does more than help the child. It confers a measure of immunity from other programs that may be damaging. Knowing that there is another way of looking at things counteracts the unwitting absorption of what is seen elsewhere.

Warm instead of cool, understated instead of bombastic, low-keyed instead of frantic -- these are some of the ways Fred Rogers counterpoints the high-pressure world of television. In this world of assembly-line daydreams that too often hurt, Fred Rogers is crafting the stories that heal.

Sincerely yours,



George Gerbner
Professor and Dean Emeritus

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TO: Contributors to Mister Rogers' Neighborhood
FROM: Catherine Marshall, Editor-in-Chief *CM*
DATE: 6 June 1995
RE: Revised manuscripts

At long last we are ready to put this book into production--we have scheduled it for our Spring 1996 list. It is certain to attract a lot of attention, and we are committed to making a book of the highest quality, both visually and intellectually.

The book's editors, Margaret Kimmel and Mark Collins, have worked hard on the manuscript, editing and revising the essays so that they fit together coherently. This has involved some cutting, to eliminate repetition and overlap, and rewriting in order to achieve a certain level of consistency and uniformity throughout the book. We would like you to look over your essay now, before it goes to a copyeditor, to make sure you approve of its present shape and focus. The Press's copyeditor will watch for details of grammar and style, and you will have a chance to review her work as well; at the moment we are more concerned with the broader picture.

In order to meet our commitment of publication next spring, we must all adhere to a rather strict schedule. I will need your responses to this memo no later than 1 July; if I do not hear from you by then, we will go ahead with the copyediting. You may reply with a phone call or by marking up the manuscript and returning it to me.

Later this summer or early fall, we will send you the copyedited version of your essay, and there will be a similarly tight deadline for reviewing it.

I do want to convey to you my enthusiasm for this manuscript. I very much look forward to its publication.