

**News for Action: A CRITICAL CASE STUDY OF YES! MAGAZINE**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Journalism and Media Studies

of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

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January 2015



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## **ABSTRACT**

Coming out of more than a century of concern over the commercialization and monopolization of media ownership, this study highlights some areas of opportunity for alternative media in the United States. Holding an ideal of participatory democracy, driven by an educated electorate, the research considers an example of US media action, *Yes!* magazine, from the perspective of alternative media and social movement theories. As alternative media are most generally a response to the mainstream model which acts in the interests of profit rather than public participation in politics, this thesis will cover not only democratic responsibility, but also mainstream media ownership and organization when considering the current manifestation of *Yes!* magazine.

Inspired by a frustration with the concentration of mainstream media ownership, and consequently journalistic homogenization, this research explores opportunities for democratic media divergence and contestation. After 18 years of publication, *Yes!* was chosen as an ideal candidate for research due to its sustainability and longevity as one such critical media organization. Through in-depth interviews with *Yes!* personnel, and ideological analysis of *Yes!* articles, the following case study research explores the complexities that construct *Yes!* magazine, a corporately independent publication from Bainbridge Island, Washington.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to two of my former teachers: my third grade teacher, Ronald Langston and my undergraduate photojournalism professor, Beбето Matthews who taught me the value of hard work, the balance in a well-adjusted life, and the constant necessity for critical creativity. Thank you for academically encouraging me with strong convictions, open ears, and honest hearts.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my Mom and Dad who chose the difficult road of conscious parenting throughout my upbringing. Thank you for your continued belief and support in me through this extended and tiring thesis endeavor. I am so grateful to have two highly motivated and persistent parents to look to for continual inspiration.

To my two Grandmothers, Carol Hosford and Joan Israel, who could not be more different in life, history, or character, but similar in unconditional love. Thank you both for your patience with my youth and for the wealth of wisdom you continue to impart to my life.

To my Aunt, Susun Hosford and Godfather, Richard Mattei, many thanks for your educational encouragement over the years and for your confidence in my continued curiosity in our world.

To my Grahamstown classmates and peers, Nqobile Buthelezi-Sibisi, Pauline Atim, Khanyile Mlotshwa, Ayanfeoluwa Oyewo, Lauren Hutcheson, Mathew Nyaungwa, Niamh Walsh-Vorster, Michelle Avenant, Travis Carlyle, Martha Soteriades and Paul Daniels II for your understanding that I could exist apart from my home country's politicians and that my intentions could serve a different purpose than stereotypical US individualism and arrogance. For your ability to take lightly the weight of our world, for a continued stream of laughter in the face of excruciating frustrations, and for an abundance of love that could only come from an intimate acknowledgement of the gifts of life.

To Dawn Long, one of life's most committed students, my continued journalism department liaison, and friend. Thank you so much for your willingness to dive into such stimulating conversation at a moment's notice, both in the journalism department and around town. I so appreciate and miss our seamless ability to skip right over small talk into the depths of our thoughts and days.

Lastly, to Lynette Steenveld, my thesis supervisor, but most importantly a remarkably humble and all-questioning role model. Thank you so much for your trust, patience, and high expectations. As I tie together these last remaining thesis strings I can still remember the warm welcome I received from you on my first tour of the journalism department. I am so grateful your warmth never dissipated.

## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

By showing the challenges that others have faced, the responses that others have considered, and the choices that others have made, history can help media ethics to evaluate possible actions and policies. (Ferre, 2009: 15)

In 1920 Upton Sinclair, a socialist muckraker, self-published *The Brass Check, A Study of American Journalism*. Dividing his history into three parts, The Evidence, The Explanation and The Remedy, he details his problematic experiences with mainstream media in the United States, outlines causes of these experiences, and hypothesizes solutions. Evident in Sinclair's ideals for US media are an allegiance to social rebirth and a strong need for economic independence in an age of social reform (Sinclair, 1928: 23-43).

It is not accident nor the special depravity of publishers but the cold logic of commercial necessity which brings into being the fact that in most of the great battles against special privilege the big newspapers are found openly or stealthily lined up on the side of privilege. (Richard, 1912: 15)

These same claims of conflict between business and social justice have been echoed by media theorists from Sinclair to the present day (Bagdikian, 2004: 85). Nearly a century later, this research will undertake a study of *Yes!* magazine, an online and print publication with social, political, and economic concerns strikingly similar to Sinclair's goal of equality over privilege.

I came to study the media, and more specifically *Yes!* in 2013, interested in continuous self-motivated pathways of education. In an introductory lecture to our media studies course our lecturer remarked that there were at least three main systems through which members of society can collect organized and widely distributed information: educational institutions, the church and the media. As one of three mass information distribution centers, it is difficult to ignore media's importance and influence in our daily lives. Whether we seek it out, or often times it seeks us out, media messages are incessantly around us (Thompson, 1995: 30).

At 12 years old, saturated in media content, I found myself trying to make sense of media's significance through the live reportage of September 11. I vividly remember cutting my first newsprint clippings from *The Seattle Times*: photos of people from around the globe protesting

the budding potential of a US counter terrorism invasion of Iraq. Less than two months later I was reading headlines stating the US was deploying our troops. Regardless of the power media held to connect us to one another, through an educated awareness of the actions we had taken, I learned quickly that media representations of dissent would not translate to public influence on US foreign policy. At 12 years old, I took this chain of events to exemplify media's irrelevance in our democracy alongside our governmental failure. This MA degree and *Yes!* research stemmed from the festering frustration of my 12-year-old self. It became a process of denaturalizing the media world that I have been steeped in since early childhood, a process of unmasking media structure, function, and potential. Mainstream media's existence through repetitiously profitable patterns of production is where my research curiosity began, and from there I was led to undertake study on those who critically break normative media monotony, alternative media.

I came to read *Yes!* magazine through its positive review by my mother. While I was in high school she was alerted to two 'optimistically' based US news publications by a close friend: the then *Ode Magazine*, currently *The Optimist*, and *Yes!*. For Christmas that year she bought everyone in my extended family a subscription to *Ode* and thereafter our home was saturated with 'optimism'-based news publications. What intrigued me in high school was their focus on human dignity and potential. *Yes!* taught me that:

...the importance of state institutions should not blind us to the fact that overt political power is only one rather specialized form of power, and that individuals commonly exercise power in many contexts which have little or nothing to do with the state. (Thompson, 1995: 13)

When flipping through the pages of either magazine, I was flooded with stories of struggle, coupled with practical action. *Yes!* and *Ode* highlighted possibilities for change to a jaded and unsatisfied teenager. They made social activism more possible through representations of social justice as 'reachable'.

*Yes!*

Like many circulating news magazines, the *Yes!* cover page gives little away about its content other than perceived ‘positivity’, in its short title. I began my research with the limited knowledge that *Yes!* is a quarterly publication that covers stories ranging from mass incarceration to consumerism, while maintaining the exclaimed ‘optimism’ alluded to in its name. Reading through *Yes!* gives one a sense of the many problems facing our societies, but not without due diligence to enacted solutions. When reporting on incarceration, for example, *Yes!* introduces organizations that work to implement therapeutic and restorative treatment programs for inmates (*Yes!*, 2013). In a recent article on electronic waste, *Yes!* highlights the sustainable work of a new Dutch mobile phone company which is building responsibly-sourced smart phones (*Yes!*, 2013). Within all the topics covered, it is the above mentioned ‘struggle in the face of adversity’ frame that sets *Yes!* apart from its mainstream counterparts. Readers are continually addressed as activists and change-agents through *Yes!*’s alternative news values.

Founded in 1996, *Yes!* was brought into being by a contributing editor and a board member of a previous publication that had decided to move all of its content online. Not wanting to lose the physicality of the printed page, the colleagues established *Yes!*, only producing two issues in their first year, out of a home on Bainbridge Island, Washington. From their modest beginnings *Yes!* co-founders, Sarah Van Gelder and David Korten elaborate on the magazine’s cover page objective of “powerful ideas [and] practical actions” (*Yes!*, 2014). They expressed their vision in the following way:

We would increase the visibility of an emerging life-sustaining culture, facilitate the sharing of ideas and experience relating to the possibilities for change, explore the relationships between the inner spiritual growth and outer political action, and contribute to expanding the circle of alliances in support of deep change. (Korten and van Gelder, 2002)

Maintaining similar objectives today, *Yes!* prints on 100% post-consumer waste and chlorine-free paper to a readership of 150,000 with another 140,000 website views per month; publishes all content under a creative commons license; runs a High Impact Campaign to provide activists with relevant issues of *Yes!* quarterly; has published books on the Occupy Wall Street Movement and Sustainable Happiness; structured readers groups to facilitate connections between *Yes!*

subscribers; initiated a series of annual workshops titled ‘State of the Possible’ to bring together prominent social leaders; and facilitates an Education Connection Program that gifts a one-year subscription of *Yes!* to teachers, and continues to collect and collate academic curricula to complement each gifted issue.

Understanding *Yes!* as a change-motivated alternative news publication broadly suggests its divergence from hegemonic journalism practices of acting within and in accordance to existing systems of power and authority (Sandoval and Fuchs, 2009: 147). While much research has attempted to mark universal news values and professional practice<sup>1</sup> (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O’Neill, 2001), this study will interrogate the news values of *Yes!* as an ‘alternative’ publication. Increasingly, ‘alternative’ media in the United States, such as *The Optimist*, *Upworthy*, and *TED Talks* are operating under shared goals of social progress, not only through education, but through community empowerment and community-based activism (Hamilton, 2000: 362). These publications all seem to be challenging the conventional journalistic practice of “if it bleeds it leads”: objectively sensationalized and normally negative news (Harcup and O’Neill, 2001: 263-264).

While mainstream media may not be one solid block of heterogenous news publication it can generally be seen as one solid block motivated by similar capitalistic drive for profit leading to a commercial focus. It is in this dichotomy that mainstream media functions predictively out of sync with radically alternative publications, because the limits of profitability are vastly different than the limits of social organization. Sure, oppressors always meet resistance and sure they will offer certain concessions when facing social pressure; but what history has yet to record is the altering of organizational mind from capitalistic to community orientated. While most prior research on alternative media focuses on single issue focused magazines and newspapers, such as the abolitionist, suffragette, or environmental press (discussed further in Chapter 2) my interest in the following *Yes!* research stems from the organization’s interests in contributing to and

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<sup>1</sup> Frequency, Threshold, Unambiguity, Meaningfulness, Consonance, Unexpectedness, Continuity, Composition, Reference to Elite Nations, Reference to Elite People, Reference to Persons, Reference to Something Negative.

covering many movements, in building strong and multifaceted communities. The wide reach of *Yes!* article topics connects it to more general theory on social movements and organization for social action. Holding an ideal of participatory democracy, driven by an educated electorate, the research considers an example of US media action, *Yes!* magazine, from the perspective of alternative media and social movement theories. After 18 years of publication, *Yes!* was chosen as an ideal candidate for research due to its sustainability and longevity as one such critical media organization.

Ultimately, the purpose of this thesis is to understand the marriage between alternative media and social movement theory through an exploration of *Yes!*. Three themes are common to both, and connect their social purpose: acknowledgement of oppression, contestation of centralized power, and visions for more equitable and sustainable futures. In their social critique and contestation of inequity, both radical social movements and alternative media signify that they are part of vital democracies. For the purpose of this research, *Yes!* will serve as an intrinsic case study to contextualize the linkages between social movement theory and alternative media practice. The research will illuminate areas of overlap between progressive social movements and alternative media organization, with the intention of sparking further questioning on how the two marginalized areas of grassroots organization can mutually grow.

### *Chapter Outline*

Chapter *two* provides the theoretical underpinnings guiding the *Yes!* magazine case study. Functioning as a theoretical framework the theories presented will be used to ground the following *Yes!* research in current understandings of the structure, function, and purpose of mainstream and alternative media. Critical political economy is used to illustrate the significant impact of economics on media production. Cultural studies, and Johnson's (1987) circuit of culture, extends media theory from a singular influence of economics on media production, to a cyclical movement of multiple layers of power in media production and reception. The chapter will then delve past the more abstract concepts of power circulation to concrete methods of media production: those adopted by US mainstream and alternative media. Throughout, the

chapter will look to connect theories of alternative media, from Atton (2002, 2003), Ostertag (2006) and Downing (1984, 2008), to those of organized social movements, specifically looking to Paulo Freire's (1993) Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Saul Alinsky's (1969, 1972) Reveille for Radicals and Rules for Radicals.

Chapter *three* outlines the qualitative case study undertaken to answer the two key questions posed by this research, namely: (1) What are the news values and frameworks driving *Yes!* magazine? (2) Where do the methods and goals of social movements and alternative media converge? Stake (1994) and Yin (1999) will be used to expand on the relevance and specificity of case study research and findings. The chapter will then detail the strengths and weaknesses of both research collection methods: in-depth interviews and ideological article analysis. A brief discussion will outline the sample populations selected and the ethical considerations surrounding human participant based research practices.

Chapter *four* summarizes the findings of the thematic interview analysis in connection to the theoretical foundation built in chapter two. It will explore the areas in which *Yes!* fulfills, expands, and diverges from theories on media ownership, professionalism, news values and democratic obligation.

Chapter *five* details the findings of the thematic and ideological article analysis. It will draw out connections between the prior interview findings as well as from the theoretical framework of chapter two. Ultimately, it exposes the values behind the presentation of *Yes!* news.

Chapter *six* concludes the study with a brief synopsis of the findings and poses questions within the areas of alternative and social movement media that remain unanswered, noting opportunities for further research.



## **CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework**

The point of departure of the movement lies in the people themselves. But since people do not exist apart from the world, apart from reality, the movement must begin with the human world relationship. Accordingly, the point of departure must always be with men and women in the “here and now”, which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting from this situation - which determines their perception of it - can they begin to move. To do this authentically they must perceive their state not as fated and unattainable, but merely as limiting - and therefore challenging. (Freire, 1993: 66)

### *Introduction*

Alternative media and social movements act in the interest of social betterment through continued democratic investigation and action (Freire, 1993: 88; Sandoval and Fuchs, 2009: 147). They move with a conviction of continuous education interested in informing and activating a democratic electorate (Haas, 2004: 115). The media provide communicative platforms from which this democratic electorate necessarily educates themselves into what Keane (1991: 16) calls an ‘effective [democratic] engagement’. US democracy, as a system of government enacted for, and in part by the people of the nation, is reliant on this engaged politics. This chapter situates mainstream and alternative media practices within a theoretical framework that traces the negotiation of US democratic power through the communication industry. The question I would like to address to the reader during the following theoretical framing and research analysis is this: If US citizens understand the media to be a tool of education, and democracy a necessarily uncompleted and contested project, how can US citizens encourage and promote media that prioritize continual civic education and engagement in political process over one rooted in profit-making?

### *Critical Political Economy*

To explore specific models of media organization, and make sense of them in detail, it is useful first to sketch some general theory of media production. Critical Political Economy situates media action in a model of economic dependence where news values and professional practices are ultimately linked to financial imperatives and constraints (Curran, 1987: 64, Golding and

Murdock, 2000: 70). Content and structure that are economically viable will appear with frequency in media products as their producers are directly linked to the profitability of production (Sinclair, 1928: 285). Critical political economy will be used to understand economic impact on *Yes!* news production. As Golding and Murdock note:

In the case of the cultural industries we are particularly concerned to trace the impact of economic dynamics on the range and diversity of public cultural expression and its availability to different social groups. (2000: 73)

Critical political economy marks economics as a preliminary influencing factor in the structure of media industry, but ultimately codetermining in a series of organizational structures that will influence content production (Hall, 1996: 37, Golding and Murdock, 2000: 74). Concerning *Yes!* production and consumption, it is necessary to interrogate the economics of the growth potential, sustainability and readership accessibility of a nonprofit and ad-free model.

### *Cultural Studies*

Expanding on the economic imperatives guiding media production one can understand the organization and actions of media through Cultural Studies theory which poses the questions: ‘where are we?’ and ‘how do we make sense?’ It prompts the researcher to look past the singularity of phenomena and instead towards discursive relationships structured by power. The circuit of culture introduced by Richard Johnson (1987: 47) became an influential model to unmask the filtration of power throughout cycles of media production and reception. In Johnson’s circuit, media is produced, internalized, and reproduced in four main processes: production, texts, readings and social relations, respectively. Each stage of the process is distinct and articulated in precise conjunction with the ones preceding and following it. Yet, in their isolation the four processes are disjointed by interpretation and the contestation of partial and incomplete realities.

The values of this approach is that while each of the moments, in articulation, is necessary to the circuit as a whole, no one moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated. (Hall, 1980: 128-29)

Drawing on this, Johnson elaborates a model of media production and reception which suggests the inter-relationships between two seemingly different social actions, namely, media production, and media consumption. The circuit thus represents the intricacies of relations of power, expanding on a closed and predictable economic reductionism by contextualizing the making of meaning.

### *Ideology*

Woven into this circuit of culture and implicated in social action are socially shared beliefs and ideologies that allow for equally shared communication. Ideology, most broadly, is the formalized and often naturalized fixtures of socially held truths, continuously used in the process of sense making (Hall, 1996: 26). The malleable and constructed nature of languages, as systems through which sense is made and communicated, are the subjects of ideological study (Hall, 1982: 66-67). Understanding ideology through language systems of polysemic signifiers wielded by language users with varying degrees of autonomy, consciousness, creativity, and initiative in the process of making things mean, makes for a tumultuous scholarly terrain. One can differentiate a theoretical split in ideological study by thinking ideology through the lens of power and the question of 'in whose interests?' In thinking ideology through the lens of power Thompson's (1990) response to the latter question differentiates his critical theory of ideology from Hall's more neutral conception (1982). While Thompson qualifies ideologies as acting in the singular interest of domination (1990, 56), Hall defines a broader view of ideology as :

...the processes by which new forms of consciousness, new conceptions of the world, arise, which move the masses of people into historical action against the prevailing system. (Hall, 1996: 27)

While Hall (1982) and Thompson (1990) differ on the purpose of ideological formation, they both account for power in the process of meaning making. Regardless of ideological purpose, Purvis and Hunt illustrate the tangible significance of both conceptions of ideologies through action and inaction:

...perhaps most important of all, it makes a difference; that is, the way in which people comprehend and make sense of the social world has consequences for the direction and character of their action and inaction. (Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 474)

Ideology, as the process of meaning making has an active capability for reorganizing the ways in which we come to understand our world and the ways we organize our world for understanding.

### *Hegemony*

Hegemony, or rule by the stasis of ideological consensus (Good, 1989: 61), is a temporary but marked end to democratic social movement, as social movement depends on critical contestation (Freire, 1993: 64). As the marked end of a process of communal social decision, “[H]egemony describes the attempt to produce uniformity and coherence, but it also implies that such attempts must always, eventually and necessarily, fail” (Turner, 1990: 215) to account for social difference (Mouffe, 1999: 753). While mainstream news values in the United States demonstrate hegemonic professional practices that produce ideologically similar content (Bagdikian, 2004; Tuchman, 1972; Christians, et al., 2009), alternative media are examples of contestation: hegemonic failure. To further understand the temporality of hegemony and consensus, Hall poses the question, “In what interest did the consensus ‘work’? What particular type of special order did it sustain and underpin?” (1982: 63). Viewing consensus making as an active process engaged in by various social actors Hall answers his own question:

Thus, in order for one meaning to be regularly produced, it had to win a kind of credibility, legitimacy or taken-for-grantedness for itself. That involved marginalizing, down-grading or de-legitimizing alternative constructions. (Hall, 1982: 67)

Hegemonic consensus is temporary due to the asymmetrical distribution of social, cultural and economic power, and thus inevitably is driven by varying degrees of exclusion and oppression.

### *Public Sphere*

News values then do not exist in isolation from circulating social power, but are rather formulated through existing structures of societies (Manning, 2001: 138). These structures -- political, economic and cultural -- are important to take note of when considering the rise, relevance and opposition in various media models. Habermas’s (2004: 359-361) theoretical construction of the public sphere addresses the democratic potential and progression in these

communicative spaces fueled by the socially educative mission of journalism (Dahlberg, 2005: 160). He details a transparent and accountable society in which educated citizens make reasoned decisions founded on a free flow of information. Ideals of the public good, equality, rationality, fairness, accuracy, evidence, pluralism, and consensus are not only marked as attainable, but championed as necessary (Habermas, 2004: 359-361). Habermas's public sphere has since been problematized from multiple angles (Fraser, 1990): it is founded on a historical fallacy of prior existence (Kapoor, 2002: 470-471), it fails to account for unequal distribution of power in society, to define rational discourse, and recognize the limits of consensus and reason (Kapoor, 2002: 463-464). Nevertheless, Habermas's conception of the public sphere presents possibilities for evolving democratic engagement and education through communication, goals to which the media and social movements are committed and can be evaluated (Garnham, 2004: 357).

### *Agonistic Pluralism*

Challenging the above noted flaws in the public sphere model, Chantal Mouffe (1999: 752) presents continuous struggle as necessary for democracy in her theory of agonistic pluralism. Replacing idealized consensus with contestation, Mouffe champions the legitimacy of marginalized views and voices. From her perspective, notes Carpentier, "Antagonisms, as materialized in a variety of social struggles, thus provide identification points that not only rupture the social but also structure (and, in a particular way, stabilize) it" (2005: 200). Alternative media propose a similar and consistent reassignment and reassessment of the values and purpose of journalism, coupled with a reassignment and reassessment of the organization and purposes of participation in daily life (Atton, 2002: 7). It is along the particular lines of struggle rhetoric that one can differentiate between the ethics, practices, and functions of various alternative media sources.

### *Radical Social Movement and Dialogic Democracy*

This contestation, fueled by an unequal distribution of power, is explored further by Paulo Freire in his Pedagogy of The Oppressed (1993). Freire's Pedagogy details participatory methods of progressive social organization, pathways to empowerment and away from oppression. He

defines oppression as “Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person...” (Freire, 1993: 37). In opposition to this situation of oppression, Saul Alinsky characterizes the radical: “The radical believes intensely in the possibilities of man and hopes fervently for the future” (1969: 16). In its goals for a social and cultural turning towards a more just and sustainable world for all, *Yes!* can be understood as a response to the culturally oppressive monopolization, homogenization, and commercialization of mainstream media.

Freire’s (1993) *A Pedagogy of the Oppressed* further explores the possibilities in dialogue for building empowered responses to oppression. He writes:

Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education. (1993: 74)

If education is proposed as necessary for conscious engagement in democratic politics, then without dialogue there can be no engaged democracy. Social movements disrupt hegemonic structures of stasis and silence.

Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality. (Freire, 1993: 62)

The following research will evaluate alternative media through Freire’s pedagogical model under the assumption that dialogue should be held as a democratic media goal.

Democracy’s reliance on civic participation assumes that the personal is political as well as the reverse (Karppinen, 2006: 503). Individuals and media institutions filter information constantly, digesting, justifying, and constructing meaning which re-enters society mediated, mitigated, antagonized, and ready again for consumption.

...it is in the discursive form that the circulation of the product takes place, as well as its distribution to different audiences. Once accomplished, the discourse must then be translated-transformed, again-into social practices if the circuit is to be

both completed and effective. If no 'meaning' is taken, there can be no effect.  
(Hall, 1980: 129)

The process of internalisation and representation of *significant* events by media professionals and media readers is unquestionably uncertain due to the inconsistent relations of symbolic power and social autonomy (Mouffe, 1999: 752; Deuze, 2005: 444). Power is foundational to identity formation and must be continuously evaluated rather than removed: "...power should not be conceived as an external relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves" (Mouffe, 1999: 14). News organizations and media professionals are constituted through interwoven power relations.

The following research on *Yes!* exposes how power is deployed in news selection and representation in an attempt to make room for democratic dialogue in the United States.

The degrees of symmetry – that is, the degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange – depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the 'personification' encoder-producer and decoder-receiver. (Hall, 1980: 131)

Unlike the planned and professional business model mindset of mainstream media, alternative media often originate in response to some sort of social inequality, privileging social struggle over sales (Ostertag, 2006: 10). This initial response to inequitable distributions of power links alternative media and social movement theory. Both stem from observations of oppression and unequal opportunities to political personhood (Freire, 1993: 31; Ostertag, 2006: 77). This concentration on ill-distributed social, political, and economic power dominates the domain of alternative media studies through questions of self-actualization and influence. If "Power is the ability to act in pursuit of one's aims and interests, the ability to intervene in the course of events and affect their outcome" (Thompson, 1995: 13), then the study of alternative media, from its roots of responsiveness to structural oppressions, requires the study of power as it permeates processes of representation.

### *Mainstream Media*

To investigate what sets *Yes!* apart as alternative news, it is important to form a theoretical understanding of mainstream and alternative media regarding power, ownership, professionalism, and news values that have been attributed to industry practice. Mainstream media models remain a point of departure for most manifestations of US alternative journalism to date (Ostertag, 2006: 151). This responsiveness to observed inadequacies in dominant social structures binds alternative media and progressive social movement theories. Alternative media of various kinds challenge the ideologies and practices of mainstream news (Haas, 2004: 115). As Ostertag remarks, “The experience of repression continued to define the environment and provide the impetus for much of the gay press for years to come” (2006: 77). Alternative media spring forth from a conception of an oppressive mainstream media model that, in the selection and presentation of news fit for publication, marginalizes or silences what alternative media deem significant stories. In alternative media’s origins of educative opposition it is fundamental to outline the contemporary methodology and methods of mainstream media practice.

Mainstream media in democratic nation states have been noted to hold eight main goals: surveillance of the sociopolitical environment, meaningful agenda setting, providing a platform for advocacy, cultivating diverse dialogue, holding external actors of power accountable, promoting incentives for citizens to learn and engage through their citizenship, resisting external censorship and dependence, and respecting their audience (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1994: 25-26). With only five major mainstream media corporations in the United States today (Bagdikian, 2004: 27), mainstream media are highly consolidated in goals and methods. The singularity of processes and product from this monopolized and homogenized industry demonstrates a clear contradiction to the diversity welcomed in the above stated goals (Murdock, 1990: 1). Mainstream media decisions driven by profit often conflict with critically educative goals of democratic citizenship. Gurevitch and Blumler (1994: 25) elaborate on the triumph of profitable news coverage predictability in United States mainstream media methods:

Their inner workings are rarely opened to voluntary outside scrutiny. And they seem committed to the presentation, not of a broad spectrum of ideas, but of mainstream opinion currents, whose flows are bounded politically by the two-

party system, economically by the imperatives of private enterprise capitalism, and culturally by the values of a consumer society.

News reporting that is inclusive and encouraging of consumerism, instead of the financially risky potential of provoking political debate, is promoted by United States mainstream media models.

Responsible for guiding this profit-oriented ideology and practice of mainstream media is its ever-shrinking pool of owners (Bagdikian, 2004: 3). While not directly involved in the daily production of news, owners are able to construct a news environment through selective employment and layoffs that produces an economically and ideologically agreeable media production ecology (Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott, 1982). According to Bagdikian, “Control of public information by a handful of powerful global firms weakens democracy by omissions of news that might interfere with media’s maximizing their own profits” (2004:102).

Mainstream media is caught in a juggling act between two sets of ‘customers’:

The large media conglomerates do not want greater political and social diversity because it would dilute their audiences and thereby reduce the fees they can demand for the commercials that produce their unprecedented profit levels. (Bagdikian, 2004: 260)

With greater profit power on their side to sustain mainstream media organizations financially, business funds a mainstream media model that appeals to a capitalistic and consumption-driven news consumer, instead of a socially critical one.

The naturalization of predictable and business favored coverage constrains the potential diversity of news selection and representation (Atton, 2002: 492). Today the mass media are seen as participants in one larger profit game: “...they all sell the same fundamental idea: the route to happiness and a better life is through buying stuff, and not through any kind of community or collective action” (Ostertag, 2006: 17). By linking success and media recognition to high levels of economic wealth and consumerism, news has increasingly become a representation of the views of the authoritative economic elite. “Seldom, if ever, do daily sections deal with continuing needs of ordinary American families, needs that differ from those of the people with

whom publishers have lunch” (Bagdikian, 2004: 120). The concentration on economically centered news leads to a profitable but topical imbalance in mass media reporting (Ostertag, 2006: 17-18).

Professionalism, observed in news selecting and presenting practices, is the daily journalistic enactment of this economically prioritized power (Tuchman, 2002, Soloski, 2007: 139, Deuze, 2005: 444). As a standard by which media workers are evaluated through practice and production, professionalism is an area from which one can begin to understand the processes and predict the limits of mainstream news coverage. It constructs a baseline from which the media owners and the media consuming public can hold journalists and editors to account (Carpentier, 2005: 207). Authoritative sourcing is one such practice of professionalism used by mainstream media journalists in the US. Authoritative sourcing guarantees that events and people with existing authority make news, not only through their own design of press releases and public statements, but also the media’s general and unspoken acceptance of the recordable authority of those with existing political, social and economic power (Soloski, 1997: 144). As an implicit guideline for how to collect and produce media, authoritative sourcing becomes a method through which the mass media are able to reproduce and support existing power structures in society.

As the physically discernible practices of professionalism, news values guide the formation of media content. While there is no exhaustive list of what constitutes these through continuous and historically contextual fluctuations (Carey, 1993: 3), there are discernible patterns in choices made by like-minded and structured media (Galtung and Ruge, 1965: 65-70). The methodical practice for deciding what is newsworthy is influenced by multiple circulating forms of power in society: ideological, temporal, and financial. In the United States, mainstream news values include accurate and authoritative sourcing, objectivity, fairness and accuracy (Hanitzsch, 2007: 367). Objectivity is often measured by the distance between a journalist’s individual opinion and media representation, fairness is calculable by the equal positioning and space granted to

multiple sides of understanding an event, and accuracy is seen through authoritative sourcing and the general verifiability of presented facts (Hackett, 1984: 231-256).

Objectivity is perhaps the most definitive news value of mainstream media in the United States (Schudson, 1978: 9). Debates surrounding the usefulness of objectivity specifically target the idea of whole truth as distinguishable and detachable from subjective account (Lichtenberg, 1996: 225; Rosen, 1994). While it is advocated by mainstream media as fair and truthful, one must turn back to Johnson's circuit of culture (1987: 47) and question the certainty of facts amongst the partiality of interpretation.

The prevailing opinion on any matter is rarely the whole truth. This means that it is only by confronting it with the other, contrary opinions that the full truth can be attained. In public affairs, truth necessitates combining and reconciling opposites. (Keane, 1991: 18-19)

If truth can be found in wholeness, it is indeed reliant on diversity and contestation. Other critics of objectivity attribute its infeasibility to the more physical limit situation of the 24 hour news cycle (McDonald, 1975: 78). According to McDonald, objectivity "...could only be discerned by relating the particular action to previous, possibly contradictory, actions; to the web of current and contemporary history in which the actions took place..." (1975: 81). From this perspective objectivity is reliant on context, and fact or truth cannot be achieved under the time constraints of minute to minute news production. In the blinding certainty of ideology and the temporally limited possibilities for a contextualized depth in news construction, objectivity, as practised and promoted by mainstream US media, seems more a farce than fair to a constant news consuming public.

The significance of mainstream media homogenization cannot be divorced from its professional purpose or situational consequence. The US mass media represents the capitalist economic model as a functional necessity of democracy, thereby deemphasizing its flaws or alternatives. Oppression of alternatives is a fundamental element in any oligopoly: "When some of the most pressing domestic problems and a fair spectrum of ideas and commentary have disappeared from

the main media, the American public has lost its real choices” (Bagdikian, 2004: 132). Silencing some people’s reality through the over promotion of another’s is a form of violence (Freire, 1993: 66). By presenting news through the ideological authority of the often exclusionary capitalist economy, mainstream media promote private growth through public oppression. “Consequently, any apparent dialogue or communication between the elites and the masses is really the depositing of “communiques” whose contents are intended to exercise a domesticating influence” (Freire, 1993: 112). Critical question-based communication is devalued and replaced by a naturalization of economic certainties. Alternative media, driven by those who have been silently robbed of liberty and justice, have developed in response to this violence.

### *Alternative Media*

As alternatives cannot exist without a mainstream, the above is a necessary foundation from which the following alternative media theory can be seen as an historical response. Many manifestations of alternative media continuously grow out of a seemingly stagnant mainstream model. For the purposes of this study alternative media will generally be understood as proactively responsive: “...employ[ing] methods of production and distribution, allied to an activist philosophy of creating ‘information for action ‘timeously and rapidly” (Atton, 2002: 12). While the research analysis of *Yes!* in Chapters Four and Five provide a detailed look into the more intimate structure and function of one alternative media organization, a few other historic versions of alternative media in the US will be referenced below to demonstrate a diversity of methods within the industry-wide persistence to promote social change:

Tim O’Sullivan (1994: 10) introduces the notion of ‘radical’ social change as a primary aim of ‘alternative’ media, in that they ‘avowedly reject or challenge established and institutionalised politics, in the sense that they all advocate change in society, or at least a critical reassessment of traditional values’. (Atton, 2002: 15)

Alternative media’s critique of the mainstream, and attempts to change both media and social structures, has been constant in the US media landscape (Ostertag, 2006: 2).

Mainstream media are concentrated and centralized around a limited core of owners, methods, and purpose (Bagdikian, 2004) and as such leave the range of possibilities for alternative media organization wide-reaching. This expansive organizational freedom for media categorized as alternative or not 'not-mainstream' has elicited multiple other media titles: independent, underground, radical, or oppositional. Most generally, all of these titles and types of alternative media are understood as those which are "...closely wedded to the notion of social responsibility, replacing an ideology of 'objectivity' with overt advocacy and oppositional practices" (Atton, 2003: 267). While the multiplicity of these titles represent a theoretical quest to distinguish among variations of alternative media on the basis of structure and function, it is necessary to remember that:

...the history of social movement journalism can be understood only in the context of the particular movements of which each journal was a part: its internal dynamics and strategies, its relation with its immediate adversary, its relation with the state and its location in the broader culture. Each of these four components is highly dynamic; together, they create a context of continuous change. (Ostertag, 2006: 1-2)

As a form of response to certain historical moments, alternative mediums have held various names, values, and purpose. Alternative media, most fundamentally, address key informational lacunae perceived in mainstream reporting or journalistic style.

These gaps in mainstream media as perceived by their alternative counterparts are recognizable through a re-appropriation of professionalism and news values. From the origins of journalism as a profession, values and practices were 'imposed' on media practitioners in the name of management and accountability (Soloski, 1997: 139). These regulations, guidelines, and professional ethics drive professional practice and influence general content production. News is consistently created (Vasterman, 1995: 509). Professionalism becomes a system to regulate this creation, embodied by media professionals and integrated into their identities (Carpentier, 2005: 214). For alternative media, professionalism is often radicalized (Atton, 2002: 113). In these radical permutations professionalism is based on a process of 'native reporting':

...native reporters are at the centre of things as participants, and their work is precisely to feed discussion and debate from the perspective of the colonized and crucially to provide 'information for action'(ibid).

In this reconstructed professionalism, alternative media makers involve themselves in the activity that they will be reporting, and thus report from a space of engaged, and description-rich, empathy.

While the defining properties of alternative media are hardly as all-encompassing as those of the mainstream model, scholars continue to contribute to a discussion on what has and can constitute an alternative publication (Downing, 1984; O'Sullivan, 1994; Rodriguez, 2001; Atton, 2002; Atton, 2003; Sandoval and Fuchs, 2009; Hamilton 2000; Haas, 2004; Dahlberg, 2005; Carpentier, 2005; Ostertag, 2006; Downing, 2008). Some frequently proposed characteristics depict alternative media as hostile towards the mainstream (Haas, 2004: 115); reporting on issues neglected by the mass media (Downing, 2008: 7); encouraging a diversity of contributors (Rodriguez, 2001: 267); privileging social movements before institutions (Haas, 2004: 116); advocating social responsibility (Sandoval and Fuchs, 2009: 147); innovative, stylistically and organizationally experimental (Haas, 2004: 7-10); prefiguratively political, democratic, and collectivist (Downing, 1984: 17, O'Sullivan 1994: 10). Chris Atton recently expanded these criteria, creating the following typology (2002: 27):

1. Content (politically radical, socially/culturally radical); news values
2. Form - graphics, visual language; varieties of presentation and binding; aesthetics
3. Reprographic innovations/adaptations - use of mimeographs, IBM typesetting, offset litho, photocopiers
4. 'Distributive use' (Atton, 1999) - alternative sites for distribution, clandestine/invisible distribution networks, anti-copyright
5. Transformed social relations, roles and responsibilities -reader-writers, collective organization, de-professionalization of e.g., journalism, printing, publishing
6. Transformed communication processes -horizontal linkages, networks

Alternative media have changed over time responding to their social contexts. For this reason it is important to analyze examples of alternative media within their socio-historic context.

Useful in Atton's typology is the separation between content, form, distribution, and transformation. By separating out the variety of entry points for alternative media to challenge the mainstream model, one can get a sense of democratic multidimensionality,

. . . instead of thinking of democracy as an ultimate goal, a final state-of-things to reach, we should look at how democratic and non-democratic forces are being renegotiated constantly, and how citizens' media can strengthen the former, thus contributing to the – although sometimes ephemeral – swelling of the democratic. (Rodriguez, 2001: 372)

The constant negotiation of democratic forces is the basis for alternative media's replacement of objectivity and singular truth with exposure of the continually contested nature of democratic power (Mouffe, 1999). It thus critiques the democratic end of rational consensus detailed in Habermas's (2004) idealized notion of the public sphere. In the active diversity of alternative media's consistent renegotiation of cultural, political, economic, and social life, it is easiest to learn from examples of organizations who have paved new paths. Historic examples in alternative media movements will be used to highlight the manifestations of Atton's typology outlined above.

Six main movements in the US alternative media sphere will be outlined for the purpose of illustrating the enacted ideals of alternative media movements. In these movements one can come to an understanding of the diversity of forms alternative media have taken in response to the mainstream. To understand the similarities and differences in these alternative media models, the historic details in ownership, professionalism, and news values, of some media will be discussed. The abolitionist and suffragette press demonstrates the use of alternative journalism to influence government policy. The socialist movement papers will be discussed as an example of continuous critical questioning of social, political and governmental norms. The LGBTQI press illustrates the ability of alternative media to promote a media practice of empowerment by creating a safe space for dialogue otherwise deemed morally or socially threatening. The environmentalist press movement signifies the capacity of alternative media to persist for over a

century, often times with little more than hope. Finally the GI press demonstrates alternative media's capacity for subversive mobilization. While the strengths and weakness of these alternative media models overlap, the intention here is to use illustrative examples from each to characterize the complexity and longevity of the US alternative media movement.

Beginning in the nineteenth century the abolitionist, suffragette and socialist press were bound together in active critique of the political system and the mainstream media, through which it was uncritically represented. Ostertag illustrates one basic three stage formation of alternative media organization and action through the example of the abolitionists: "They have a clearly defined target (slavery), opponent (slave owners), and goal (abolition)" (2006: 58-59). They worked to realize their goals through pathways of communication under the assumption that "To become a social movement, these common experiences had to become shared experiences..." (Ostertag, 2006: 71). The abolitionist and suffragette press, were legislatively focused while the latter, the socialist press, was much more interested in entire governmental, cultural, and economic reform. Notable among these three examples of alternative media action is the comparatively quick successes and subsequent demise of the first two movements and the current continuation of the third. Through the social mission driven model of alternative media, the above movements demonstrate that with smaller goals come quicker solutions and shorter media life-spans. This phenomenon could exemplify Freire's position that "Knowledge of the alienated culture leads to transforming action resulting in a culture which is being freed from alienation" (Freire, 1993: 162). While the abolitionist and suffragette press advocated for the recognition and empowerment of specific groups, the socialist press worked towards all-encompassing reform requiring the continued involvement of the entire population. Regardless of their life-spans, success shared among these three alternative media in the nineteenth century, is based on their unwavering critical commitment to social reform through a practice of democratic dialogue.

Following after the above three nineteenth century examples of the US alternative media movement is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQI) press originating in the

beginning of the twentieth century (Ostertag, 2006: 72). The LGBTQI press provides a useful example of news publishing with a concentration on community empowerment. In the LGBTQI alternative media sphere the separation between the realms of media production and consumption collapsed into one, as the press was fully apart of the community from which it reported (Ostertag, 2006: 78). This process of radical reporting (Atton, 2002: 113) is equally one of empowerment:

Finding the words to express oneself, building enough of an organization to manage the production of a journal, finding the nerve to approach others with the copies – these are experiences that can turn a “nobody” into an agent of social change. (Ostertag, 2006:20)

In an act of redefining authority, the members of the LGBTQI alternative press ‘... set out to show you that we could speak perfectly well for ourselves, thank you very much,’ (Ostertag, 2006: 84-85). Empowered solidarity in the self-published voices of the marginalized, and their hard fought political gains such as social respect of same-sex life-partners and eventually same-sex marriage (Ostertag, 2006: 93), demonstrates not only that “Solutions must be found for the present intolerable minority status of millions of American men and women who refuse any longer to tolerate suppression, subjection and abuse from every side” (Ostertag, 2006: 81), but further that they can be found and actualized by oppressed communities themselves.

What is most unusual regarding the LGBTQI alternative press movement is its current position as one of the most profitable areas of news production, touted by advertisers as a “dream market” (Ostertag, 2006: 73). Alternative media are often shakily driven by the economic independence of being social, political, and media industry minority markets (Atton, 2002: 34). As mainstream media’s economic model is one concerned with, and driven by, advertising profit, achieving similar profit gains could arguably compromise the alternative independence of LGBTQI press content. Freire warns: “Revolutionary praxis must stand opposed to the praxis of dominant elites, for they are by nature antithetical” (Freire, 1993: 107). The LGBTQI press achieved their intentions of mass solidarity and in some cases legal recognition and marriage rights. They grew a broader base of audience support and advertising money necessarily changed their model of

organization. They are now left to evaluate the impact of these structural changes on their overall function (Ostertag, 2006: 109).

The longest standing alternative press movement in the US media landscape is that of the environmental press. Like the socialist press mentioned previously, the environmental press organizes around goals of sustainability and longevity. What is usefully exemplified through the environmental press's lengthy timeline of more than a century of consistent publication is the large degree of faith and hope exercised by its participant journalists and committed readership (Ostertag, 2006: 173, 189). Faith and hope are noted by Freire as a prerequisite for dialogue and social action: "Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it" (Freire, 1993: 72). Instead of buckling under the weight of continuous environmental degradation, the environmental press continues to illuminate pathways of possibility (Ostertag, 2006: 189). "What is required is simply a vision of what people can do to make their lives more meaningful" (Ostertag, 2006: 190). With a consistent and creative hope in alternatives the environmental press continues to collate information about our precarious place in the natural environment (Ostertag, 2006: 161).

The more temporary GI press of the 1960s and 70s exemplified a commitment within alternative media to combat the government's commitment, regardless of indirect government threats and attacks to GI media organizers (Ostertag, 2006: 118). Organized largely by women and men fighting in the war, the GI press consisted of a series of underground newspapers that present a platform for discursive dissent among colleagues (Ostertag, 2006: 117-160). Instead of trying to reach out to those of a differing occupational and potentially social, political and cultural position, the GI press was interested in collecting the ideas of military personnel inhabiting the shared space of war (Ostertag, 2006: 139). Discussions center on the realities of war and ways to end it (Ostertag, 2006: 139). Participation was voluntary and came with high risk: "Many charges on which GIs were framed carried a penalty of substantial time at Fort Leavenworth doing hard labor" (Ostertag, 2006: 136). Forced into a labor camp, or dishonorably discharged, activity in the underground GI press, as with much alternative media participation, was

undertaken with a certain reliance on the mercy of the oppressor and the perceived strength of the first amendment.

From this description of the abolitionist, suffragette, socialist, LGBTQI, environmental, and GI press one can begin to see strands of similarity and difference in the different alternative media movements. What is certain, in all examples, is a continuous allegiance to problem posing citizenship. Freire saw this as a potential way of involving people in social change:

Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response - not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action. (Freire, 1993: 76-77)

The alternative press continues to be a contested terrain of voices challenging social, political and economic norms. It is a critical space where a consistently unequal distribution of social, political and economic power in society is discussed, deconstructed, and hypothetically reconstructed through enacted and imagined solutions. In this way, according to Freire,

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves, they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (Freire, 1993: 64)

This work of active transformation is what ultimately unites the various manifestations of the alternative press in opposition to the mainstream media.

In directly challenging mainstream media's constructs of authority, alternative media produces content with socially, culturally and politically radical dimensions: "To participate in such a radical (anti-)economic world is to construct oneself radically, defiantly" (Atton, 2002: 130). Changing the modes of production changes the product. By acknowledging the limits within mainstream media production, alternative media interrogate professionalism through a re-evaluation of news values and daily practice:

By recognizing the political dimensions of objectivity, practitioners of alternative journalism challenge central assumptions: that it is possible in the first place to

separate facts from values, and secondly that it is morally and politically preferable to do so. (Downing, 1984: 10)

In democracies such as the United States, the recognition and exercise of personal power complemented by the greater formulation of social power is the goal of most alternative media and social movements in the move towards more accessible freedom for all.

### *Conclusion*

Democracy, as a political form for and of the people, is reliant on educated and engaged citizenship – people who not only acknowledge but consciously enact their political power (Mouffe, 1999: 753). This conscious and daily engagement with democratic power is the foundation of various democratic rights and freedoms. Freedom, as an agenda of democracy, then necessitates responsibility (Gilmore and Root, 1982: 27). Democracy without engaged citizens ceases to be democratic, just as freedom not earned through participation is gifted, reliant on an othered entity, and thus never free. Mainstream media threatens US democracy through hegemonic news organization and the underrepresentation of dissenting alternatives. It is a threat that goes beyond a pattern of bias into one of deception, founded on its false-promotion of public interest. In Freire's words: "To glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce, to discourse on humanism and to negate the people is a lie" (1993: 72). Living with this lie are diverse groups of citizens who have always managed in various ways to contest their subjugation to injustice. *Yes!*, alternatively, moves with this motive to break hegemonic silences and work through inevitable difference for social sustainability. Therefore, from Freire's perspective, "The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice" (1993: 73).

### **CHAPTER THREE: Methodology and Research Methods**

At its best, research offers us powerful tools for questioning received wisdoms, challenging the rhetorics of power, illuminating the blind spots on our social and cultural maps, helping us to puzzle out why things are as they are and how they might be changed, and finding ways to communicate our own gains in knowledge as widely as possible. (Deacon, 1999: 13)

Research by nature is a process where one takes an elaborated interest in a fragment of society, chooses an appropriate method from which to come to understand this fragment, and embarks on a journey of questioning and exploration. Research is reliant on degrees of knowing, unknowing, curiosity and methodological practice. Sharing similar journalistic methods to those in Deacon's outline of powerful research, namely critically challenging power, lighting up darkness, and sparking agency by presenting possibility, *Yes!* was recognized as an ideal candidate for the following critical research. By looking at not only the publication and the ideals behind it, but also considering its physical manifestation, this case study explores the correlations between alternative media and social movement objectives. This chapter maps out the methodology and methods used and assumed while researching *Yes!* magazine using a critical case study approach.

While it is simple to set off with research processes and individual plans and procedures, it is useful to interrogate the ideological assumptions and expectations that both led one to, and will guide one through the research. Questions of qualitative or quantitative measurement implicitly drive most initial phases of research planning. While a research process can include mixed methods that are both qualitative and quantitative in nature, qualitative and quantitative methodologies mark different research assumptions on how one can come to know and research a subject. These assumptions on paths to knowing are observable through the assumptions driving the research questions as well as methods. Guided by a quantitative methodology a researcher will assert a positivist research question and research trajectory holding that there are universal and natural relationships in the world that one can hope to uncover and explain through structured experiments. Research founded on qualitative methodology is more likely to ask questions suggestive of specifically constructed and contextual language, identity formation and

social relationships (Lindlof, 1995: 5). Qualitative research rejects a positivist permanence, highlighting instead constructivist notions of continual change. Quantitative findings are often used to make generalizable claims, based on degrees of statistical certainty, defined as objective through research carried out with little to no interference from the subjectivities of the researcher. On the other hand, qualitative research assumes the subjectivity of the researcher as the main research instrument, and thus begins with a dissection of researcher bias and intent, much like the one found in Chapter One.

With the researcher as the main research instrument, a great deal of self-reflexivity is necessary in qualitative research. Acknowledging myself as the main research tool I recognize that I chose *Yes!* out of great personal interest and respect for the organization which could cloud out critical interrogation. Case study research should address, as wholly as possible, organizational potential and limitations. Being the researcher it is my prerogative to determine, study, and analyze what those assets and liabilities look like. My bias as someone who appreciates the publication could limit my ability to be forthcoming about the the publications faults, if I thought acknowledging them would somehow discredit my admiration for the magazine. In reality I understand myself to more fully appreciate bits of life that are transparent about the inevitability of flaws, imperfect, and humble. Indeed *Yes!* magazine might be underfunded, guided by donor dollars, reach a mostly female, highly educated and middle to upper class readership but I was not in fact carrying out this thesis research to identify a publication that seeks to resolve all media organization and social ills. Instead I intended to research a magazine proclaiming practicality through community building. I carried out this work to uncover the ties that bind one form of alternative media to social movements and through: acknowledging imperfection, addressing it, and working towards resolving oppressions. While positivism leaves quantitative researchers with generalizable findings, used in argument for all-encompassing social resolutions, qualitative analysis more often takes the form of thorough and thick description based in a transparent research processes.

With regards to this case study, the assumed usefulness in the specificity of findings is rooted in a qualitative critical theory of action-based research. If social action is “...human only when it is not merely an occupation but also a preoccupation, that is, when it is not dichotomized from reflection” (Freire 1994: 35), then research as a form of preoccupation and reflection is the foundation from which action must be built. Rejecting the often ahistorical positivist position that there are certain facts to be uncovered, critical research proposes “...that unlike the structures that organise the natural world, social and cultural structures have traceable historical careers” (Deacon, 1999: 10). In communication studies these particulars are unearthed from the sediment of naturalized media production, consumption, and reception, within which one finds pathways for continued research and action. As Kincheloe and McLaren note, “...critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself” (1994: 140). The above stasis I observed in the naturalized patterning of mass media production was comparable to one often described in non-critical research pursuits. This detachment of investigation and reflection from action leads to a pacification of knowing.

Case Studies are one of many qualitative research methods which prioritize specificity in observation and critical analysis, acknowledging a depth and diversity to knowledge. Unique to qualitative research and the case study method from this conceptualization of knowledge, is its ability to connect traditionally segregated academic disciplines.

With broader purview than that of crafters of experiments and testers of hypotheses, qualitative case researchers orient to complexities connecting ordinary practice in natural habitats to the abstractions and concerns of diverse academic disciplines. (Stake, 1994: 239)

Connecting diverse academic disciplines in the detail of contextualized cases requires deep knowledge of the research subject, the case, and at minimum, a surface level understanding of areas influenced by and influencing the case. The process of unmasking what connects the research subject to other areas of social, political, cultural, and economic organization grows fertile findings for post analysis action.

An acknowledgement of the peripheral connections between *Yes!* and other means of social organization does not attempt to presume that *Yes!* is representative of all alternative media forms. In contrast, the research and findings are purposefully grounded in specific time and instance. Stake elaborates, “With its own unique history, the case is a complex entity operating within a number of contexts, including the physical, economic, ethical, and aesthetic” (1994: 239). It is from an understanding of these particularities and connections that progressive action can be taken (Alinsky, 1969: 34). The unique details of *Yes!* news organization, explored in chapters four and five, replace the quest for positivist answers with multidimensional questions on the interrelated actions of one case of alternative media in the US and its connections to progressive social movement.

Due to the diversity of media ownership, production, professionalism, and media makers’ individual intentions, coming to know *Yes!*, or any such media organization, requires not only a preliminary consideration of how one comes to know, but further a multi-method research process. In the following critical and qualitative research specific organizational details of *Yes!* and its employees were studied to understand contextualized examples of alternative media ideals in thought and practice. In its ability to collect multilayered information on a diversity of real-life events (Durrheim, 1999: 43) with great depth, the case study method is ideal for studying journalism institutions.

... the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries. (Yin, 1989: 14)

Much like the process of news writing itself, the case study explores the specificity of a certain segment of organized life. Wilbur Schramm (quoted in Yin, 2003: 12) maintains that the case study “tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result”. From this understanding, interview data on its own would provide a perspective on the identities of *Yes!* professionalism, but an incomplete observation of

their respective practices. Analyzing *Yes!* daily and editorial decision-making through in-depth interviews and ideological analysis of *Yes!* articles facilitates the construction of a more complete framework of organizationally held and enacted alternative media values.

The interviews provide a platform for the emic perspective, which is a “...study [of] human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 270). They look to the research participants, submerged in the subject under research, as repositories of experimental knowledge. This emic perspective begins to detail the professional assumptions and ideological foundation from which research subjects act. In conducting the following research, in-depth interviews were used to question *Yes!* journalists, editors and management on their news values and processes of news content creation. In order to explore and understand the internal goals and objectives of the organization, this phase of the research takes the position

...that journalists and other newswriters do not merely select and combine information; rather they can be seen to literally ‘produce’ the news in the context of organization and other social frameworks. (Tuchman, 2002: 78)

The above questioning will solicit an understanding of the individual and organizational power behind the construction of *Yes!* news. Ideological analysis is concerned with language not only as symbolically representative of items in the physical world, but also as representation of social relations of power (Thompson, 1990: 58). This research method will be used to understand *Yes!* action as described by *Yes!* actors.

While the interviews will be used to examine the journalistic intentions of *Yes!* employees, an ideological analysis of *Yes!* articles will unearth their textual manifestations. Ideology, noted in Chapter Two as the meanings and assumptions through which social groups consciously or subconsciously justify their conditions of existence, “... [also] organize[s] its identity, actions, aims, norms, and values, and resources as well as its relations to other social groups” (van Dijk, 2006: 115). Ideological analysis of news articles is thus broadly concerned with the unmasking of power expressed through language. It assumes that “...language users are defined as members of communities, groups or organizations, and are supposed to speak, write or understand from a

specific social position” (van Dijk, 2006: 136). From this position, meaning is constantly constructed through language along the ideological lines of these defined groups. By interrogating the use of language in the construction of news one assumes that “...language and discourse have a broad range of structural possibilities to emphasize and de-emphasize information...” (van Dijk, 2006: 145). Ideological analysis is specifically interested in not only language as symbolically representative of items in the physical world, but equally representative of social relations of power. Through an ideological analysis of *Yes!* news stories and thematic analysis of letters from the editor, the research exposes the core values *Yes!* staff hold to be true and reproduce consistently.

Since this study will be carried out in two main phases of research, two main sampling populations needed to be defined. A wide, diverse sample population of *Yes!* employees at different levels of decision-making power and process was identified for the initial in-depth interviews. The staff page of the *Yes!* website was used to get an understanding of the internal and hierarchical office structure and interviewees were directly selected based on job title. Ten employees out of 20 staff from the online list were selected to be interviewed. Research was conducted while I was home on holiday in January 2014, which was during the final stages of the *Yes!* Spring issue publication. Due to a heightened workload during this time only seven out of the selected 10 employees elected to participate in the research. The aim of this purposive selection was to gather a representative sample of employees from all positions listed as involved with the production of news content and management (see appendix).

The sampling of articles for ideological analysis was equally purposive. In this phase of the research, all *Yes!* publications were charted by date and issue theme. From a total of 70 published quarterly magazines, 10 main themes were identified (see appendix). As this thesis is primarily concerned with alternative media as a means of building and sustaining progressive social movements and engaged democracy, ten issues relating to the theme of democracy in the United States were selected for a sample population. Out of these ten issues, only four were available for back order, three more were only available with the order of a complete 18-year back issue order,

and three were out of print (see appendix). From the selection of this theme and due to cost, the following four issues available for individual order were selected for the ideological analysis: 'Democracy: Latin America Leaps Ahead', 'A Just Foreign Policy', 'Purple America', and 'America: The Remix'. Each issue's letter from the editor and one news story divided equally amongst each of the four category sections of *Yes!* news stories: New Visions, World and Community, The Power of One, and Breaking Open, were selected for analysis. This selection the exploration and comparison of the *Yes!* editor's conception for news writing and those from *Yes!* contributing writers, who are often freelance journalists unattached to the daily procedures of the *Yes!* office.

The use of multiple methods guiding this research will enhance the validity and reliability of the qualitative data. Validity can be understood as the *fit* of the collected data to the posed research question (Babbie, 2007: 146). Conclusions and analysis drawn from the qualitative data can only be valid if they specifically address the previously outlined research questions, or as Alan Bryman expands: "...the question of techniques of investigation is no longer whether A is 'better' than B, but is A the appropriate technique in terms of a particular set of epistemological premises X" (1984: 80). Therefore validity is concerned with the transparency and connection between research assumptions, questions, and methods. Reliability is later concerned with the data itself and raises the question: "if the same research was conducted again, perhaps by another researcher, would the findings remain similar?" Babbie and Mouton (2001: 278) reference Guba and Lincoln stating "...there can be no validity without reliability... the former is sufficient to establish the existence of the latter". Under a qualitative methodology, a multiple-method approach, such as the triangulated one detailed above, approaches the research topic from many angles to gain a deeper and reliably valid understanding and description of the phenomena studied.

The whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focuses on more complex interdependencies, not meaningfully reduced to a few discreet variables and linear cause-effect relationships. (Durrheim, 1999: 43)

This research is thus guided by triangulated methods, as specific cases are never isolated from larger societal contexts. To research the potentially counter-hegemonic values of *Yes!* Magazine and answer the above-mentioned research question it is necessary to study not only the publication itself, but also its publishers.

Finally, it is of utmost importance to consider ethics when conducting social research. Upholding ethical research requires both an anticipation of potential and perceived ethical problems. The field of social research ethics is concerned with possible harm caused to those researched from both the research and publishing process. Standards in research ethics thus concern voluntary participation, no harm to participants, anonymity and confidentiality, deception, and analysis and reporting (Babbie, 2007: 63-69). Ethics can become a major concern when dealing with sensitive social issues or vulnerable populations. While this study of *Yes!* deals with neither of these two groups, the researcher should nevertheless pay attention to mainstream research procedures that ensure that research relationships are founded on transparency and integrity. Informed consent on the part of the research participants is important. “The aim is to ensure that research participants are able to decide for themselves what is in their best interest and what risks they are prepared to take” (Ali and Kelly, 2004: 121). All participants in this study were given a consent form detailing the intentions and scope of the research. The form also explicitly states that those participating could remove themselves from the study at any time. Two copies of each consent form were made, one kept by the researcher and one by the participant. Ethical dilemmas, like social relationships, are not predictable. While the researcher can and should take all preemptive steps possible to prevent unethical methods and analysis, self-regulation and reflection are necessary to avoid careless choices when the research is well underway.

*Yes!* news processes in many ways mimic Deacon’s (1999: 13) goals for research, with both emphasizing a critical questioning and considering of perceived knowledge and its influence on social action. The following critically minded research is guided by a transparent dedication to academics for action. Coming from a history steeped in marxism and materialism, with its

development by the Frankfurt School, “Critical realism insists that unlike the structures that organise the natural world, social and cultural structures have traceable historical careers” (Deacon, 1999: 10). This position assumes that historical patterns are products of constructed political, social, and economic conditions that in their human conception can be challenged and reformulated. According to Kincheloe and McLaren:

Critical research can best be understood in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name *critical* must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within the society. (1994: 140)

With a critical research framework this thesis will work to outline the possibilities of *Yes!* as an alternative medium for progressive social change, and in so doing promote not only new ways of understanding the world but further uncover new pathways for participation in its reconstruction.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Interview Analysis

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves, they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (Freire, 1993: 64)

### *Introduction*

The following two chapters are the product and culmination of time spent reading and rereading through interviews with *Yes!* employees, *Yes!*, letters from the editor and *Yes!*, news stories. This two-part research analysis will analyze employees' journalistic missions and how those missions are or are not translated ideologically through *Yes!* articles. This chapter will outline the observations and experiences of the journalists that I was fortunate to speak with at *Yes!*. Chapter five will then, through thematic and ideological analysis, critique the manifestation or absence of those professional values and expectations in the printed pages of *Yes!*. Ultimately, chapters four and five present an holistic account of *Yes!* professionalism and discusses *Yes!* news values.

Through the interview process with *Yes!* employees, founders, and board members seven main themes emerged that depict *Yes!* as:

1. a corporately independent community;
2. responsive to a transformative social, cultural, and economic shift;
3. focused on exploring the 'radical roots of society';
4. posing sustainable, creative, diverse, and alternative solutions;
5. valuing the contextualization of power, wealth, change and accountability;
6. encouraging engaged living;
7. having room for growth.

These themes will be elaborated on below and prove useful in understanding the actions of *Yes!* staff, the organization's positioning, and the final ideological analysis of *Yes!* letters from the editor and feature stories.

### 1. *Yes!* as a corporately independent community

While the series of *Yes!* interviews were semi-structured, I often began with questions relating to the alternative journalistic form of *Yes!* magazine. My initial media definition based questions sparked discussion on words associated with alternative media and its many varieties: ‘independent’, ‘solutions’, ‘optimistic’, ‘radical’, and ‘social movement’ journalism. These words are significant in understanding the selection and representation process behind what constitutes *Yes!* news. But interviewees were always reluctant to categorize the goals and functions of *Yes!* so narrowly. There was a continuity of understanding among *Yes!* staff that the foundation of financially independent journalism largely allowed *Yes!* the freedom to meld and mix a variety of other journalistic types and processes.

In my first interview with Publisher Fran Korten (2014), she highlighted the usefulness of ‘progressive’ as a *Yes!* media qualifier:

So I would call us a progressive media outlet, but we have a particular slant on that progressive stance and that is this more solution oriented, more oriented toward helping people see the world through a different lens, a more hopeful lens.

Korten specifies progressiveness, through this *Yes!* lens, as founded on positivity through practicality that fully acknowledges the leaps of faith required in social action and change (Ostertag, 2006: 97). In a subsequent interview with *Yes!* cofounder Sarah van Gelder (2014), van Gelder directly challenged the confines of corporately funded models of solutions journalism practice:

I do think we’re different than a lot of the others. We have kind of struggled with how much to identify with being part of that [solutions journalism model] because I think a lot of the stuff that has been labeled solutions is all about fixing the little quirks within the status quo, not with really re-visioning what the status quo should be.

While its goals may align with aspects of certain versions of alternative media organization, its radically independent financial model enables a more critical mission and methods. As cofounded and board member David Korten (2014) explains,

The way I phrase a frame, characteristically with the terminology, has been magazines like *Yes!* are an alternative media. What I think is a better frame is we are the independent media. This has to do with the question about advertising. That most of all what is considered mainstream media is absolutely dominated by the interests of advertisers and corporations and that is exactly the frame that we are trying to change.

David Korten highlights a financial divergence from the mainstream journalism model that allows *Yes!* to advocate for readers' interests, first, rather than that of corporate advertisers. This model enables *Yes!* to focus on radical solutions for society that often challenge a corporate organizational model.

From an understanding that the status quo of mainstream media reporting as largely and silently corporately determined through advertising (Sinclair, 1928: 285), it would prove difficult for alternative media to respond to or critique mainstream media with a similarly influencing corporate funding model. Instead, fully funded through the Positive Futures Network, *Yes!* is based on a nonprofit model that collects and distributes subscription fees, donations, and grants made directly to the magazine. This funding model allows for a news selection process that is reader-focused, but nonetheless economically independent. Cofounder Sarah van Gelder (2014) explains a balance of cultural concern and economically sustainable news practices that go into the decision of what is fit for *Yes!* publication:

We try to judge news value by what is really significant to this transformation and less on what's popular. But, what's popular also plays into it. What's popular is what sells, and we need to draw people into the conversation, finding that right balance.

Van Gelder highlights a multilayered and concerned news production process that ultimately aims for a balance of building readership and maintaining fiscal feasibility, while providing sustenance for readers already deeply involved in social transformation. Online editor James Trimarco (2014) also underlined a similar process of striving for a balance between highly specified and generalizable content:

And so if you know that that's a problem, then that solution is going to be very interesting. But if you're like the average person, and the idea of a produce

auction in rural eastern Ohio is not that compelling... then we have a lot of stuff that is designed to appeal to almost everybody. (Trimarco, 2014)

*Yes!* print and online editors recognize the growth potential in generalizability and popularity while remaining authentic to their more specialized mission of social, cultural, political, and economic transformation.

Cofounder David Korten (2014) revealed his ideal independent *Yes!* growth strategy for building unity amongst writers and readers:

And again in my own work, people often say “well you’re just preaching to the choir”, and I say, “damn right”. We get the choir singing together at the same tempo and the same key then we pull in all sorts of people. As long as we’re a bunch of screeching cats there is no coherence.

Mirroring the homogenization of mainstream media content, Korten emphasizes the strength and magnetism in independent, but consistent and concise news messaging. Through a balance of determining public popularity and the social movement significance of news, while maintaining a coherent *Yes!* message, *Yes!* writes for readers first, and depends on those same readers for a business model detached from corporate dependence.

In almost direct opposition to David Korten’s growth strategy, Creative Director Tracy Dunn (2014) explains her growth-concerned method of news construction as one that targets a population of, as she calls them, “toe-dippers”. “I target people like me. I believe that I’m what we call the toe-dipper, outside the ring of who is receptive to us, who is interested but not there yet”. In addition to the choir who David Korten works to get singing together, or the community of committed activists that Van Gelder focuses on nourishing, Dunn recognizes potential in reaching out to the not fully radicalized. From the position of a Creative Director this most often looks like choosing imagery that is general enough not to alienate particular groups of readers: “You know people want to see themselves and so they will always choose a woman” (Dunn, 2014). Through the combination of these corporately independent, reader and growth-focused approach to news values, *Yes!* has experienced a continued and sustaining readership from its

modest beginnings in 1996: “So far, here we are. 18 years later. You know most magazines would never make it to their 10th birthday” (Fran Korten, 2014).

## 2. *Social transformation*

Sarah van Gelder and David Korten created *Yes!* based on the ideas and objectives of a previous publication, *InContext*, as it transitioned to an online platform. In discussing *Yes!*'s transitional beginning, David Korten (2014) noted that *Yes!* was founded on a clear sense of purpose:

...we created *Yes!* because of a sense of a need, and so it is to my mind a mission-driven organization which is very different than a group of people getting together; in a sense forming a collective and saying, you know, ‘let’s do something together’.

In response to the contrast I drew between *Yes!* longevity and the impermanence of alternative media in the 1960s (McMillian, 2011), David Korten highlighted the sustainability in a hierarchically- organized and solid goal-driven news organization like *Yes!* whose aim was to see a new society into fruition. *Yes!* founders and staff all articulated the need for transformational change in society that motivates their work. As van Gelder (2014) sums up:

The old way of doing things that is built on corporate capitalism, that’s built on wealth, that’s built on huge inequality, a war machine that makes it all plausible, that that way of life is hitting some limits for a lot of people in all sorts of ways. Our premise is that there is another world coming into being that people are creating, a new society around the edges of the old world. As journalists what we’re interested in doing is looking at what that is, what that’s comprised of...

This view is echoed by Fran Korten (2014):

So there are forces that are hitting walls: that’s one way to put it, and the question that the founders asked, you know 18 years ago, was: ‘can we help? Can we help our society find a path, away from the current trajectory, onto something that will really work, that will be better than what we’ve got – more just, more compassionate, more sustainable, more joyful, healthier’.

*Yes!* sees societies that are reaching their sustainable limits and works to publish the process of uncovering these social, cultural, economic, and political limits while encouraging reflection, recourse, alternatives, and action.

David Korten (2014) cemented his belief in a more positive attitude to social change on the abundance of human and biological potential. He proposed a reframing of our thoughts and processes to focus on this human and biological potential:

Just starting to recognize the extraordinary capacity of living systems that can only be explained as intelligent self-organization, which is basically totally outside the frame of conventional science... although we are in a moment of seeing shifts to where more and more scientists are beginning to acknowledge that.

All three of these lengthy remarks from leaders within the organization mark a consensus on the perceived need for, and plausibility of, social transformation which are responsible for the heartbeat of *Yes!* media action. As a self-reflexive response mechanism to perceived social, political, cultural, and economic problems, *Yes!* acknowledges the innate human ability to organize alternatives that will alleviate a mutually destructive future.

### *3. A focus on exploring the ‘radical roots of society’*

As the focus of *Yes!* in both its online and print platforms is on the solutions that ordinary people have come up with in their efforts to construct a more progressive society I asked *Yes!* editors and staff about their processes for finding these grassroots organizers and social change activists. These questions on how *Yes!* sources news led me to uncover a meticulous office research process, predating any publication, of digging to the deepest roots of problems:

The print magazine does something different because they will take like one particular thing, like water or food, and do a really deep dive, like almost write a book about it and that is kind of unusual. (Trimarco, 2014)

Through a combination of deep diving into quarterly *Yes!* topics and consistently following up with series of story threads online. Trimarco’s view is that “it is not very professional to just do one story on something and then leave it” (Trimarco, 2014). *Yes!* undertakes a multilayered investigation of news topics and themes over an extended duration of time.

Through its emphasis on stretched timelines of news contextualization *Yes!* attracts activists and possible future content contributors for practical organizing purposes. Susan Gleason (2014), *Yes!* Media and Outreach manager, noted, “they will come to us: ‘this seems like a *Yes!* story, can you cover it?’ They might come to us first and say ‘we came to you first, can you cover it?’”. With an emphasis on following news as it moves, and detailing it as a political process tied to history and invested in the future, Gleason (2014) further distinguishes the *Yes!* take on solutions: “It’s not just any solutions, like what’s a solution that embodies social justice and sustainability values”. *Yes!* staff were in agreement that the material for sustainable solutions lies in a deeper systematic reworking than is normally portrayed in mainstream or solutions media.

Tracing the roots of everyday conflict, Sarah van Gelder (2014) expanded on the *Yes!* process of searching for the primary causes of highly visible symptomatic issues of social concern:

I think a lot of progressives were working around the edges: you know, ‘if we can sort of increase the minimum wage, or do this a little bit we can sort of make it all work, or maybe we can get corporations to be more responsible citizens’ all of those kinds of things. And we are basically saying ‘well, corporations are designed for something different, that’s where it’s going to go. So let’s look at the things that are designed to actually build environmental responsibility and social responsibility instead of things that might potentially do that.

Van Gelder talked at length about the difference between surface and sustainable solutions, noting homelessness and male dominance in the corporate work place as symptoms of larger economic problems requiring structural reconfiguring, not detached problems requiring separate solutions:

One of the things that we don’t do is changing the distribution of the pie, but leaving intact the system that creates inequality. So women get positions in corporations, but some other group needs to be excluded because that’s how the system was designed. We just don’t see that as a solution. (van Gelder, 2014)

*Yes!* bases the process of exploring new ways of “constructing the pie” on notions of social justice, sustainability, and equality.

Solutions are seen as system-shifting: sustainable in ways that encourage a redistribution of power, are equally accessible, and can be seen to reach far into the future.

Change in institutions and structures and reward systems: instead of rewarding exclusion, reward inclusion...We are always looking for ‘what does this mean for you, the reader, and how can you get involved in this?... Rewarding the people, and featuring reward systems that preserve people...Ordinary people actually have the power to change things. We are trying to be very grounded and real about that. (van Gelder, 2014)

Trimarco, Gleason, and van Gelder emphasize the significance of discerning a sustainable solution from temporary ones. Gleason (2014) distilled the *Yes!* news-making process as one ultimately “...interested in, I mean you could also say root or radical, you know like the original meaning of radical – that what we are looking at are changes at the structural level”. *Yes!* magazine, from its quarterly model of thematically specific issues, traces the origins of problems to propose shifts that may solve many smaller symptomatic issues along the way.

#### *4. An approach that poses practical, sustainable creative, diverse, and alternative solutions*

Publishing these pathways of action in ways that are both approachable and radical, presents itself as another consistent and deliberate *Yes!* decision-making value. Susan Gleason (2014) gave an overview of the *Yes!* multi-lens frame which gives readers news on a single theme from many different vantage points and angles,

...it looks at the possibilities of that shift through a few different lenses: it looks at it from big picture view – what is the state of the problem and what seem to be the most promising directions to go in in addressing the problem; and then this other lens of what does it look like on the ground in a bunch of different case studies and what are some practical tools for people to use.

This commitment to elaborating on the many specificities of foundational problems is in part due to *Yes!* audience research of their well-educated readers. Van Gelder (2014) notes: “our readers are really well educated and do have graduate degrees... so we feel like we have to nourish them by giving them things that will nourish and delight them”. Understanding that the majority of *Yes!* readers are middle-aged, middle to higher income women with graduate degrees, *Yes!* purposefully produces a diversity of detail-orientated and highly researched news.

While *Yes!* quarterly retains a highly educated readership of middle aged females, *Yes!* editors and staff maintain a desire to produce news content that speaks to a great range of socially and politically active communities. James Trimarco (2014) commented on his desire to organize news as information for action:

I think that I mess around with the idea of wanting to inform the social movement or create a fertile flowerbed in which many things are possible because people who are interested in activism, mobilization, agitation, various kinds of organizing could get information about how other people are doing it.

Trimarco grounds the purpose of *Yes!* 'solutioning' in the presentation of practical pathways to action which is exemplified by Gleason (2014) when mentioning *Yes!*'s alternative approach to coverage of Hurricane Katrina:

*Yes!* was able to pull out some of that grassroots community creativity that was happening around clinics and kitchens and things like that that were being established outside of FEMA and its failed response and even beating Red Cross and others like that to the punch.

By publishing alternative news stories around the tenets of practicality, diversity and creativity, *Yes!* makes news which tries to inspire a wide array of people and communities to involve themselves in work that affects the sustainability of their lives.

As Media and Outreach Manager, Gleason is closely connected to the critical process of determining the user applicability, or the 'use value' of *Yes!*. In our interview she expanded on the personally descriptive and physical reality behind *Yes!* news that makes it practical:

...you can see that something like a shared toolshed for a neighborhood feels within reach, 'oh, I see how that could happen, I could start this conversation with some of my neighbors that I know, and then we just start to do it, we just find this space and now we've got a tool library.'

Whether discussing the feasibility of a neighborhood tool library or the disabilities and social reintegration of US veterans, *Yes!* editors and staff evaluate news on its ability to engage, educate and activate their readership. Van Gelder emphasizes that "We don't want to just tell people that 'oh, everything will just be good if everybody just claps their hands and thinks happy

thoughts” (van Gelder, 2014). Instead, *Yes!* uses each quarterly issue to personalize a general topic of concern, and expose multiple methods of problem solving.

Resisting abstract optimism through practical, sustainable, creative, diverse, and alternative solutions, *Yes!* continues to appeal to readers by providing new perspectives that are intellectually stimulating and non-alienating. In the interest of social transformation, *Yes!* prioritizes publishing news on practical implementation and direct pathways to action. Gleason (2014) crystalizes these processes of production, and distinguishes *Yes!*'s role as

...making these alternatives, these other possibilities visible in a real practical way: not in a pie-in-the-sky or a Pollyanna-ish sort of way, but in a very grounded ‘this can work, it has worked, this is how it happened’ ...those kind of practical steps.

By knowing and considering the interests of their general audience, targeting new areas of growth, and keeping a consistent mission of ‘practical action’, *Yes!* works against traps of inaction and exclusivity.

##### *5. An approach that values the significance of contextualization of power to prompt accountability and change*

Solutions at *Yes!* contextualize power, wealth, change and accountability and encourage consistent reader engagement. Or as stated in the *Yes!* document on *Yes!*-worthy news compiled by the editorial team in 2008: “‘Change the story’, deconstructing dominant stories and illuminating emerging alternative narratives. Offer accessible tools that can make engagement more effective”. By taking a singular thematic but multi-layered approach to their physical publication, *Yes!* works towards a conceptualization of news events as contextually interwoven and socially accessible.

One of the characteristics of oppressive cultural action which is almost never perceived by the dedicated but naive professionals who are involved is the emphasis on a focalized view of problems rather than on seeing them as dimensions of a totality. (Freire, 1993: 122)

In working towards empowering cultural action, *Yes!*'s mission and organization is aligned with McDonald's argument that: "the press owes society "a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning" (1975: 69). By connecting seemingly singular news events through coexisting social structures *Yes!* highlights the multidimensionality of current events and illustrates entrance points for reader action.

Coming out with a quarterly publication that is dedicated to delving deep into a particular topic, such as the environment or education, allows *Yes!* editors and contributors the space to connect many smaller news events to the larger systematic workings of power.

To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity. (Freire, 1993: 29)

This *Yes!* approach, of added time, news contextualization, and emphasis through quarterly thematic focus, builds multifaceted narratives around often isolated and over-simplified news issues.

Thematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character. (Freire, 1993: 88)

With a multiplicity of entry points into each *Yes!* quarterly theme, *Yes!* encourages a diversity of readers to engage with *Yes!* news writing and topics.

The model attempts to expose social and systemic connections in current events in order to reinforce notions of individual initiative and community agency directed at building a fuller humanity. The *Yes!* ideals of accountability and change are directly promoted by these articles that expose structures of power:

That what we are looking for are changes at the structural level, so it's not just "isn't that a really cool thing that people are building bamboo bikes for people who can't afford bikes in Africa?", I mean we have done a bamboo bike story. But on the whole I think we are looking at shifts away from consumer culture as we know it. I always say we are also looking at shifts away from capitalism as we've

known it and from fixed notions of what family means or... what are some others? We do a lot of countering the ‘there is no alternative’ messaging that comes through the mainstream media, the ‘there is no alternative’ (TINA), the there is no better alternative to capitalism say, to the stock market, to war and violence those are just inevitabilities that have been around for a long time and have got the weight and emphasis now of being inevitable and we are saying no, that’s not human nature, to necessarily compete or to go to war or those things... (Gleason, 2014)

Gleason most significantly touches on the stagnating influence of a perceived inevitability. In contestation of this stasis, *Yes!* uses their quarterly model to connect readers to a web of information on power that works to unlock their own potential.

With an in-depth contextualization of power as it weaves its way through *Yes!* articles every quarter, comes clarity:

The things that stun me, the things I have come to over the years, they are so obvious and so simple that once you grasp them you are going “why did it take me so damn long to figure this out?”. And when you share them with other people, basically any one of them can get it instantly, but when you put them all together all at once and it’s all contrary to all they have been taught. (D. Korten, 2014)

When the connected foundations of power between news events are revealed, readers can visualize origins of issues from which one can take action. As *Yes!* details the complexities and connections through a model of quarterly thematic focus, it appeals to readers by connecting familiarity to accountability. In this style of contextualized and detailed news change is multidimensional, like *Yes!* readers themselves.

#### *6. It encourages engaged living*

Seeing their readers as multidimensional adds a crucial assumption behind the *Yes!* interviewees’ understandings of news-making: everyday people have the capacity to fully engage with their communities, country, and democracy. Every *Yes!* contributor interviewed mentioned the ability of people to recognize and act on their power. *Yes!* is a direct response to their concern about the disempowerment of ordinary people through the underrepresentation of issues that directly affect

their lives. *Yes!* takes to heart Ostertag's views that "Their absence from the historical stage made room for a stunning rewriting of history" (Ostertag, 2006: 158). In reaction to the erasure of everyday people in mainstream media representation, *Yes!* editors work to redefine mainstream media methods of authoritative sourcing by hiring freelance journalists and contributors who exemplify atypical notions of success in their lives outside of journalism. Shannon Hayes, the Radical Homemaker<sup>2</sup> and *Yes!* blogger, is an example of one such voice. While she lives on a farm in one of the poorest counties of New York, homeschooling her two daughters, "...she is showing a path to a very sustainable rich wonderful life that we think is worth lifting up" (Fran Korten, 2014). Hayes is a radical homemaker first and a writer and *Yes!* journalist second, if not even further down her list of life priorities. She speaks to her reader as a mom, farmer, author, citizen, but most importantly as detached from the professionally protective, objective, impersonal, and impenetrable structure of mainstream media.

The *Yes!* commitment to encourage everyday engagement is necessarily a multi-method approach through a diverse congregation of photographers, editors, writers, and readers. *Yes!* Creative Director, Tracy Dunn, noted the importance of photographically representing readers so they could not only read their way into engagement but further visualize it. When explaining her process of selecting images to accompany *Yes!* stories, Dunn (2014) highlighted her search to represent: "individuals especially, I try to show regular people, real human beings and it's been a driving thing to make sure that people can see themselves in the magazine". Visually emphasizing the closeness between reader and news subject potentially constructs more compelling narratives that readers can relate to. Dunn came to *Yes!* after completing a redesign process for the *Seattle Times*. She was enlisted to do the same for *Yes!*, and while the redesign process for both publications followed similar trajectories, Dunn (2014) highlighted a stark difference in the responses from *Yes!* reader focus groups:

When I came to work for *Yes!* the pay was half but it was really shocking how everybody here loves you, they really like you, they choose to read you. I was in

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<sup>2</sup> <http://theradicalhomemaker.net>

newspaper focus groups over and over where we would get together and talk to readers about design and how they feel about the paper, and they hated us.

*Yes!* advocates for its readers' issues, making them feel continually validated through the journalistic representations of like-minded individuals with a common objective of progressive political and social action.

In redefining mainstream media practice, where activists and change agents can both make and write the news, *Yes!* practices a journalism of everyday encouragement and radical trust. James Trimarco (2014) emphasizes the journalistic rewards of this mutually supportive *Yes!* community:

I reported inside a food movement in Hawaii that is facing a lot of penetration and frustration from the GMO seed industry there, that people will be like 'Oh I wouldn't talk to any other news organization except you guys. If you were from the New York Times or even like Alter-net I would just be like, fuck off, but we actually do respect *Yes!* magazine so I'll talk to you.

This respect does not stem from a practice of giving a voice to the voiceless, but from providing a platform that recognizes and amplifies the strength in the voices of the underreported. *Yes!* produces content from a model of recognition, over reliance or repression, that the politically adversarial among us persist regardless of a mainstream under-representation.

As *Yes!* stories come from a wide-reaching community of activists as writers, (Dunn, 2014), the *Yes!* take of progress, through acknowledgement of potential, is easy to maintain. Progressive social movements and individual and community empowerment are reliant on dialogues of hope: "Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope... hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it" (Freire, 1993: 72). Sarah van Gelder (2014) outlined the motivating significance of encouragement through *Yes!*'s opposition to dwelling on oppressions:

...if you are addressing people who have a history of being oppressed, when you simply point out to them over and over again how oppressed they are you are actually engaging in another form of oppression. It used to be pointed out so people didn't blame themselves for all of the hardships, but after a point it's just another form of oppression.

Instead of dwelling on areas of oppression, van Gelder (2014) emphasizes her core belief that

In every case, when you take an area of society you find this extraordinary uprising of people who are creating something different. Ordinary people actually have the power to change things.

Representing and refocusing on those stories of change, often through the words of the change agents themselves, potentially encourages and fuels a community of action and engagement.

*Yes!* exists in part to acknowledge the momentum of movements, however small, in an effort to propel them forward as well as pull more support into them. This *Yes!* goal marks the publication with a tinge of advocacy journalism, as it looks to highlight and encourage information for action. James Trimarco describes a feeling Fran Korten and he hope to impart to *Yes!* readers, that will draw them into social and political engagement:

From Fran's point of view even hitting people at a more gut level in the sense of 'oh this world can be changed' – we are going to hit you every day about how people like you do change this world so there is never any possibility of operating under the illusion that this world simply can't be changed and I agree with that.

*Yes!* staff work to create a feeling of possibility and change by illustrating examples of it already taking place. The reminder to the everyday reader of their everyday potential is a continual process of empowerment where there is no room for

...the notion that you come as a complete objective observer with no skin in the game. We think we all have skin in the game; we think this is our future, so we bring a certain passion that may also cloud (sic)... There are reasons for that objective stance that a journalist is supposed to take. That is really not our stance (F. Korten, 2014)

Trimarco and Fran Korten highlight the *Yes!* form as one that privileges a deep feeling of personal responsibility in political engagement. *Yes!* was born out of a this sense of social responsibility and looks to nurture that same quality in its readers.

## *7. Room for Growth*

At the conclusion of my interviews with *Yes!* staff, publisher Fran Korten asked me to come in over a lunch hour and give an overview of my findings and recommendations. I was honored and humbled by this proposition: honored to be given the opportunity to voice my inexperienced student journalist opinions to a round table of professionals; and humbled as I had barely finished the interviews, much less analyzed them. This request from Fran Korten, in honor and humility, is a clear example of the *Yes!* news selection and representation process. *Yes!* works from an understanding that opportunities for learning are all around us; that each individual knows something every other one doesn't, that authorities are everywhere; *Yes!* also works from a foundation of humility. *Yes!* staff accept the certainty of unknowing, coupled with a constant process of conscious self-reflection. As I re-listened to the interviews on the ride over to Bainbridge Island, I knew then, and know now, that honor and humility through self-awareness and reflection is what continues to keep *Yes!* relevant.

After 18 years of *Yes!* publication, *Yes!* staff were ready and willing to discuss areas for organizational improvement and growth. Following a framework, much like the one used to articulate *Yes!* news, employees always explained the potential within, and noted flaws to expand the reach and significance of the organization.

Out of seven interviewees I only talked with one staff member from *Yes!* online, and came to find out that James Trimarco was two thirds of the *Yes!* online staff. Hired in 2012, after *Yes!* received a grant to increase their online presence, Trimarco is one of the newest staff members at the organization. Responsible for navigating the ever-quickening online news world, Trimarco (2014) noted the challenge of running an online news publication in an office used to a print news pace:

I think it's been kind of difficult, because they are not under the same pressures and they haven't always been sympathetic to like 'oh, these people had to finish this in one day, and like now they are working on the next thing to finish in one day'.

He proposed reaching an office-wide understanding of both processes so that expectations from either didn't overwhelm the growth of the other. This suggestion was noted at a staff retreat and followed up through the implementation of a monthly lunchtime session titled 'Action Lab', where staff have the opportunity to voice present concerns. Regardless of whether Trimarco is satisfied with the level of shared office knowledge on the differences in expectations for print and online publishing, the *Yes!* responsiveness to his concern shows a lived model of democratic consideration and decision making. "I think any system, anything that tries to be democratic has to have that kind of diversity," reflects van Gelder (2014). *Yes!* employees note room for growth in conjunction with an acceptance of difference.

Most other problems noted by *Yes!* staff related to financial restrictions. Publisher Fran Korten (2014) enunciated the strain of the *Yes!* financial juggle: "Every single year it's kind of like 'Oh, God how are we going to balance our books this year'?" This financial strain does not resonate solely with *Yes!* publisher Fran Korten, but trickles down through the budget to editors and content contributors. James Trimarco (2014) commented on his experience with *Yes!* financial insecurity:

I guess what I am saying, is I actually perceive this job largely as scarcity management. Scarcity is for real: it's like 'can you create something with that?' You have to tell people 'no' like most of the time. Like when I first started I did not realize that and there were a lot of things where I wasted time trying to do things that were beyond the scope of the current amount of resources we have. I think a lot of people probably look at the site and think we have six or seven people – they don't realize we have one and a half people.

Gleason continued:

Well, resources are probably the biggest issue. For instance, in the world of magazines, how you usually come across magazines are on newsstand shelves and it costs a lot of money to get on these shelves and it costs a lot of money to be the front facing magazine: the one that you really see. (Gleason, 2014)

Financial insecurity was a noted *Yes!* short-coming and creator of stress brought up in each interview. It was seen as affecting staff morale, potential *Yes!* content, and ideal *Yes!* distribution.

While interviewees mentioned the stresses of not quite having enough, they continually followed up such statements with suggestions of what could be done with more financial resources, acknowledging a trust in *Yes!* sustainability and future growth.

Greater future financial stability was attributed with the possibility of both deepening and widening the range of *Yes!* stories. Editor Sarah van Gelder (2014) voiced a desire to report in depth on the sustainability of solutions:

[*Yes!*] would like to dip more into what you could call solutions investigative journalism, which is to say, “let’s really look at these solutions and what they have to offer in greater depth”. If we had more resources, we could do more in-depth reporting.

With more financial resources, van Gelder sees potential for richer investigation into the feasibility of presented solutions. In addition to delving more deeply into the sustainability of solutions, Susan Gleason (2014) noted an expanded *Yes!* potential through a multiple bureau model:

I think it would benefit *Yes!* to be of a size where we could support a bureau or two – like have the northwest bureau, because this is a terrific area for journalism and if we could commit to it and be known for how do you find out about the cool solutions coming out of the northwest... but then also having say a bureau in DC like *Mother Jones* does because it is so essential for the lawmaking the policy making and I think that’s another important part of the practicality of these things, because at some point policy is going to be needed to support the larger cultural shift.

Both van Gelder and Gleason exemplify a thought process of confidence that looks past limitations as temporary, but not limiting in the interest of long term growth.

The challenge of balancing *Yes!* finances was detailed and expanded on by both Gleason and van Gelder as a broader issue of sharing limited resources amongst a robust group of like-minded organizations.

The challenge with that model is that we end up to a great degree being pinned against each other, trying to get the same major donors who have any interest in

media. It's not a big pool: we are pinned against each other for the same foundation money and even when it comes down to the individuals, 'I love independent media. Where do I even start with the different media I am going to support'? (Gleason, 2014)

The independent media sphere is infinitely more organizationally diverse than the mainstream, and competes for much more broadly disseminated resources in the hands of small foundations and individual subscribers. In this terrain of many alternative news sources and no consolidated finance, van Gelder (2014) highlights the struggle to maintain and market *Yes!* individuality.

The greatest difficulty has been maintaining our distinctiveness when there are so many forces that would tend to make us want to be like everybody else. Because if everybody, including people within the organization, thought the standard of success was to be like who we all admire and we are going on a different track that can be very stressful. Finding ways to keep focused on our distinctive contribution.

Throughout discussions of difficulty, *Yes!* staff continued to bring dialogue back to the difficulty and discipline of difference. Whether noting the unavoidable tensions in office politics or the struggle to persist under economic strain, difference both motivates and moves *Yes!* into continued newness unseen in mainstream media's financially stable and stagnant model.

### *Conclusion*

From these interview findings it is clear that *Yes!* is run by what Alinsky would call 'radicals': critical and pragmatic in their search for, and sorting out of, foundational social struggles while maintaining a belief in the human spirit to face challenges and persist (Alinsky, 1969: 15-16). By focusing *Yes!* news on the marriage of hope and social struggle *Yes!* functions in opposition to mainstream media reportage:

Therefore, if your function is to attack apathy and get people to participate it is necessary to attack the prevailing patterns of organized living in the community. *The first step in community organization is community disorganization.* The disruption of the present organization is the first step toward community organization. Present arrangements must be disorganized if they are to be displaced by new patterns that provide the opportunities and means for citizen participation. (Alinsky, 1972: 116)

Responding critically to and reacting defiantly towards systems of oppression, both within mainstream media and society, highlights *Yes!*'s prioritization of heightened democratic freedoms and links *Yes!* news values with alternative media's contribution to emancipation highlighted by Sandoval and Fuchs (2012: 147). Through its reorganization of news values, ownership and professionalism outlined above *Yes!* runs on a strict and widely understood mission for social sustainability in the face of failing social systems, equally emphasized by Bagdikian, "The social body to which we belong is at this moment passing through one of the greatest crises of its history, a colossal process which may be likened to a birth" (2004: 9). Employees are reflectively certain that *Yes!* will maintain relevance and vitality, in contrast to many of Ostertag's (2006) examples of past US alternative media organizations. However, how they are able to fund their continued mission is a constant point of struggle, in much the same way described by Ostertag when recounting past examples of alternative media in the US.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Article Analysis

While more traditional approaches to communication presume a kind of apolitical objectivity or autonomy from the social practices they examine, critical studies presume a “moral” imperative of demystification as creating “possibility” – that is, as creating a climate of questioning all that is otherwise taken for granted about social action. (Good, 1989: 54)

### *Introduction*

As noted in chapter three, *Yes!* magazine is themed every quarter into one of roughly 10 categories (see appendix). This thematic element is one of the main distinguishing features of the publication. It is a tactical decision made to go deeper into news, contextualize issues, and use the quarterly timeframe to seek out sustainable solutions. This chapter details an ideological article analysis of four *Yes!* issues (2007–2010) relating specifically to US democracy. I will begin the chapter by describing the structure of *Yes!* issues, then thematically analyze the four editorials, followed by an analysis of the four selected articles. This ideological analysis of four feature articles, and the thematic analysis of the editors’ note at the beginning of each issue, will unmask the magazine’s ideological position, and the ways in which this is constructed through the structure of the magazine, its choice of articles (demonstrating its news values), and its focus not only on unveiling the various structures of oppression, but also possible solutions. As discourse is understood to illustrate power relations within processes of news selection, representation, production, and reception, the combination of the interview and article analysis will unmask *Yes!* values and beliefs behind organizational decision making.

### *Structure of Yes! magazine*

When one opens up *Yes!* one is met immediately with a thematically consistent image on the inside cover headlined by a quote and neighbored by the editor’s note. On pages two and three the *Yes!* mission statement leads the reader through a delineation of articles into four categories: New Visions, World and Community, The Power of One, and Breaking Open. I have selected one article from each section for detailed analysis as each one exemplifies the conceptual category in which it is located. The detailed description of each broad category will be used throughout this chapter to analyze the *Yes!* methods of news construction.

The titles of the editor's notes of the selected issues are: 'An Invitation from the South', 'How to Join the Family of Nations', 'Politics That Break Through' and 'Becoming a Whole Nation'. Each one of these 'editorials' will be analyzed. In addition to this, the following four *Yes!* feature articles will also be analyzed: 'Health Care for All: Love, Cuba', 'Heal the Warrior, Heal the Country', 'We Are Hard-Wired to Care and Connect', 'My Life in Black and White'. My aim in analyzing these four editorials and four feature articles is to probe *Yes!* priorities and the ways in which they suggest pathways to action, and help to build confidence in readers as political actors.

### *Thematic Editorial Analysis*

Each issue is introduced by a note from the editor, who during the process of this research was Sarah van Gelder. Her short notes are only a page in length, similar in style and structure to a newspaper editorial. They are thematically explored below through van Gelder's concentration on inspiration for the issue at hand, overviews of the subject matter to come, and notes on hope and its ability to contribute to lasting change. In each editor's note the reader gets to know a bit more about van Gelder and the process of news selection that determines *Yes!* content.

Van Gelder's typically begins her editors notes with some sense of conflict, perhaps to peak readers interest: '***An Invitation from the South***' opens issue number 47 (2008: 1) with a quest to fill an information gap: "But I wanted to know what the people of Latin America are creating to take its [neoliberalism's] place". From this introduction the reader is educated on what groups and individuals are seen as authoritative *Yes!* sources, dissenting voices. Fran Korten (2014) emphasized the integrity behind this *Yes!* redistribution of social authority recounting a conversation James Trimarco had on assignment with an organic farmer in Hawaii:

...they told him they knew *Yes!* and they said 'you know we're not willing to talk with some of these journalists, but we will talk to you, and the reason is that you people believe in social movements and we know that you're not here to trash us, you're here to lift up our voices and so we are happy to talk to you'.

By practicing news production with an emphasis on seeking information for change *Yes!* articles often feature grassroots voices. In *'Politics That Break Through'* van Gelder remarks, "This issue of *Yes!* spotlights Americans who are reaching beyond their usual comfort zones to find that common ground". *Yes!* editors and writers give authority and acknowledgement to those seen as change makers at all levels of society. This representation of the everyday activist potentially resonates with readers who are much the same: active in their own communities across the states. As Fran Korten (2014) remarks,

I find, that whenever I talk to, whenever I discover, you know I mean in the NY subway I discover somebody who is a *Yes!* reader and I ask them what they are involved in and they are always involved in something, always. It's never 'oh, I don't know, I'm just you know at the gym'. No they are teaching Buddhism in the prisons or they are in charge of their farmers market or they are, they are doing something.

*Yes!* works to determine authority on the basis of action and represents these voices and perspectives in response to the hegemony of corporate media.

After introducing some form of conflict, van Gelder often alludes to a necessary process of social transformation in response to prevailing unsustainable systems. In the first paragraph from the same note above van Gelder continues, "I already knew that many people in the Americas are rejecting "neoliberalism" (2007: 1). Van Gelder highlights what isn't working to provide a stable foundation from which to search for solutions. In *'Politics the Break Through'*, which leads issue number 42, van Gelder states, when referencing conversations on US politics: "There seems to be no way to have a meaningful dialogue, much less find common ground" (2008: 1). This noted disappearance of dialogue is democratically problematic (Keane, 1991: 18-19). In *'How to Join the Family of Nations'*, van Gelder rattles off a list of shortcomings in the United States: loss of US moral standing due to the Iraq invasion, 'wasteful ways', a 'federal budget...deep in the red', 'trade deficit', 'consumer debt', 'skyrocketing food and energy prices', 'stagnant wages', the 'cutting [of] vital services'. She notes: "The question now at hand is how—not whether—our reign as the world's sole superpower will end". *Yes!* maintains its independence by pointing out flaws in the same economic systems that largely support mainstream media. The story of mounting

problems facing US society is echoed in the final note under analysis: *'Becoming a Whole Nation'*. Van Gelder opens issue 53 with a reminder to the reader: "A year ago, Americans were full of pride at having elected an African American president. For a moment, people across the political spectrum were celebrating the breakthrough" (2010; 1). That fateful 'for a moment' serves to signify the instability of short term solutions and necessitates a deeper investigation into sustainable change.

The great potential within social transformation consistently noted during *Yes!* interviews is never far off in van Gelder's notes. Common in all four notes is a language of hope responding to that of despair. When David Korten (2014) was asked how he maintains momentum in such a problem riddled world, he cited historic examples and concluded "...shifts can come very quickly. My own frame is that underlying any of these big shifts is a change in the underlying story. We have to see a new possibility before we can make it happen". Words such as: 'common ground', 'agreement', 'collaborate', 'fairness', 'ambition', 'forming', 'powerful', 'self-aware', 'democracy', 'potentials', 'strengthened', 'enhanced', 'enrichment', 'wisdom', 'prosperity', 'visionary', and 'support' populate the editor's notes. They respond to words of failures and flaws also covered: 'fall', 'tumbling', 'wasteful', 'deficit', 'stagnant', 'rejected', 'ill-informed', 'devastated', 'meltdown', 'marginalized', 'losing', 'victims', 'abuses', 'hopelessness', 'violence', 'racism', 'divide', 'block', 'indentured', 'draconian', 'killed'. In her interview van Gelder (2014) distinguished *Yes!* from other alternative publications solely focused on reporting the positive. She highlighted the *Yes!* belief that change can only come from advancing hope in the face of despair.

### *Ideological Article Analysis*

As noted above, *Yes!* articles are divided into four sections: New Visions, World and Community, Power of One, and Breaking Open. The organization of the magazine into these sections is an indication of its ideological perspective: challenging the structural basis of the status quo; locating people within both their local and the global community; an emphasis on the possibility of individual action to promote change; and finally, offering perspectives on new ways of being

and living. Within the theme of US democracy, I have selected a story from each section to probe the ways in which the magazine's ideology is manifested in individual articles, thus contributing to the overall 'coherence' of *Yes!* ideology.

### *New Visions*

*Yes!* begins with articles in the New Visions category stating: "New Visions: Solving today's big problems will take more than a quick fix. These authors offer clarity about the roots of our problems and visions of a better way". In *Yes!* issue number 47 from fall 2008, *Yes!* cofounder David Korten wrote a New Visions piece titled, '***We are Hard-Wired to Care and Connect***'. What becomes apparent immediately when paging through this article is the tremendous number of times the personal pronouns 'we', 'our', and 'us' are used: 87 times in just 26 paragraphs. The emphasis on the collective drives the narrative that individualism masks a necessary realization that we can and must rely on each other to solve shared problems. "Although we may differ in our idea of the 'how', we want health, happy children, loving families, and a caring community with a beautiful, healthy natural environment" (2008: 48). Listing these common desires potentially reminds readers that there are basics in social structures that remain unmet and are worth advocating for with the understanding of 'everyone'. This evoked oneness is often alluded to in the terms that are coupled with the prior mentioned pronouns: humans, human-nature, humanity, species, head, brain, heart-rate, health, daily experience, basest fears and desires, capacity, potential, interactions, and lives. Korten consistently reminds readers that they share common human bonds through the basic realities of living, and through these bonds, common needs, desires and potential.

Many *Yes!* employees noted an aversion to a Pollyanna-ish tone in news values, which this article is at risk of slipping into through its abundant use of widely ascribed values attributed to every human being. However, Korten introduces authoritative, specifically scientific, brain research on page two grounding his wide-reaching and personal claims.

Perhaps the most impressive evidence of this comes from studies conducted by the University of Illinois professor Ed Diener, and others, comparing the life-

satisfaction scores of groups of people of radically different financial means.  
(2008: 49)

This argument initially presents as peripheral to the original proposition that we humans share similar life fulfillment goals as it measures life satisfaction scores in general and not goals in particularity. However, Korten goes on to note that the studies show people living in small and dependent communities to have similar happiness ratings to those individuals on the Forbes list of the world's most financially successful. This finding supports the notion that not only are we neurologically predisposed to connect, as the article will later claim, but we are happiest when connecting within, and caring for, close community.

The article ultimately attempts to convince the reader that we have the tools of caring and connecting to one another at our mental disposal, and encourages us to utilize and normalize these neurological tools in our everyday living. Korten writes, "...the act of helping another triggers the brain's pleasure center and benefits our health by boosting our immune system, reducing our heart rate, and preparing us to approach and soothe" (2008: 49). Brain capacity allows for us to help ourselves when reaching out to help others, which Korten argues goes against what we have been taught to believe about human nature in what he calls "our Empire story" (2008: 49). Instead, when approaching the isolation and alienation of today he proposes that the readers engage in the necessarily communal "...Power of Conversation" (2008: 51) the final subheading in his article. Practically speaking, Korten leaves the reader with an historical example of story sharing that was able to shift the beliefs and actions of women in the United States. He notes "We can create a cultural story that says competition and polarization, whether the red-blue political divide or the rich-poor economic one, is not the inevitable result of being human" (2008: 51). Through an incessant use of collective pronouns, along with scientific and historical rhetoric David Korten proposes that the *Yes!* reader is inherently attached to a larger and well resourced human community, capable of meeting individual and group needs.

*World and Community*

The World and Community section of articles follows New Visions and outlines “New models that foster justice, real prosperity and sustain the earth’s living systems.” It further poses the question: “How can we bring these models to life and put them to work”. In the summer 2007 *Yes!* issue, number 42, the article *‘Health Care for All: Love Cuba’*, written by former editor and *Yes!* co-founder Sarah van Gelder, details the Cuban health care system as one such international model. Presenting Cuban health care as a commendable model van Gelder writes: “Far fewer babies die. Almost everyone has been vaccinated, and such scourges of the poor as parasites, TB, malaria, even HIV/AIDS are rare or non-existent”. Van Gelder (2007: 28) looks quickly past the ‘what’ to the ‘how’ and in paragraph five writes:

Everyone has access to doctors, nurses, specialists, and medications. There is a doctor and nurse team in every neighborhood... House calls are routine, in part because it’s the responsibility of the doctor and nurse team to understand you and your health issues in the context of your family, home and neighborhood. (2007: 28)

What could be an article on how Cuba is doing health right is extended into an article on how lessons from Cuba can and do extend beyond its limited borders.

The disaster assistance is part of Cuba’s medical aid mission that has extended from Peru to Indonesia, and even included caring for 17,000 children sickened by the 1986 accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in the Ukraine. (2007: 30)

Van Gelder highlights Cuba’s ability to look past itself and its insular needs and extend its knowledge and physical assistance to others, thereby reinforcing its national sustainability and international replicability. “Those investments in health care missions ‘are resources that prevent confrontation with other nations’,” writes van Gelder (2007: 31). Ultimately she leaves the reader with the message that helping others is directly linked to helping oneself, much like Korten’s previously discussed conclusion in ‘We are Hard-Wired to Care and Connect’.

Van Gelder details the expressions of Cuban health care, its processes, projects and implementation. She elaborates on its missions in other parts of the world, and cements the beneficial aspects of these diplomatic extensions both for the residents of Cuba and those they medically serve abroad. Additionally, in an effort to connect directly to her US audience, she

weaves US-Cuban relations into her story through an account of US public misinformation and two different foreign policy incidents (2007: 28). This continued attention directed towards the US government's tumultuous relationship with Cuba serves as a direct critique of US policy, especially when it is compared to the Cuban government's efficiency through long-term thinking. Van Gelder finally appeals specifically to United States readers' stating: "Imagine, then, that this idea took hold" (2007: 31). While this appeal is only for an imagining, an internal action on the part of her reader, by addressing the reader directly in the final paragraph van Gelder presents a call to action: a reframing of the US-Cuban historical narrative and a questioning of the potential to transplant internationally implemented and beneficial programs back at home in the United States.

#### *Power of One*

**'Heal the Warrior, Heal the Country'** written by Edward Tick, a senior psychotherapist at Soldier's Heart<sup>3</sup>, is categorized in the Summer 2008 issue, number 46, of *Yes!* as a 'Power of One' article. Power of One articles are "Stories of people who find their courage, open their hearts and discover what it means to be human in today's world". 'Power of One' represents individual potential. Tick's article compares both the roles ascribed to, and healing processes accessible to soldiers and warriors, in the US today, with those in contemporary and past traditional societies. A conflict between the sustainability of warrior status and that of soldier is immediately established. Throughout the article warriors are accompanied by language depicting the loving necessity of community protection: 'whole', 'strong', 'unity'. Soldiers are described as want-to-be warriors: 'destroyers', 'dislocated', 'distorted', and 'disabled' under the weight of isolating false pretense. Tick introduces the reader to four US and one Vietnam veteran, using these characters as living examples of suffering and healing which readers could identify with. Nick, a US army officer introduced in paragraph 6 describes his warrior intentions at the time he enlisted in the US military: "to be like Hector defending the gates of Troy" (2008: 47). But post-enlistment his view was different, as noted in paragraph 13: "all they gave me was this dirty

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.soldiersheart.net>

stinking little Iraq war” (2008: 47). In this pre and post war reflection Tick is able to underscore Nick’s transition from a perceived ‘we’ into an ‘us and them’ situation. Nick as Hector first felt at one with Troy, and then uses ‘they’ to separate himself from those distributing polluted missions out to a detached and disenchanted military.

To heal the wounds of the US veteran, and the country, as set out by Tick in the article’s title and goal, he exposes the reader first to a disequilibrium in the United States and then to the healing potential of traditional alternatives. Gunter, a US World War II veteran, whom Tick opens his piece with, carries “Guilt, shame, slaughter without purpose, alienation from homeland and life itself” (2008: 46). By paragraph two Gunter has passed on a tarnished legacy to his son Walt, who joins the US military in his father’s footsteps, innocently yearning to “...be one of the good guys”, while unaware “he would return with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder...” (2008: 46). The use of this legacy of pain passing through generations of US soldiers underscores a need for a shift within a continuously unsustainable US military system. Avoiding placing a disempowering weight of an elaborated recounting of pain on his readers, by paragraph three Tick has outlined a more stable role for national protection: that of traditional warriors. Warriors are “...to protect the country they love, its ideals, and especially their families, communities, and each other” (2008: 46). He uses both character archetypes to personify the instability of war making, preparation and restoration models in the United States and the possibility of a more fruitful alternative.

The solutions exposed to the reader through Tick’s elaboration on the path of the warrior again reinforce the notion that pain to one in a society is a harmful legacy to the many, and thus an individual’s problems require full social acknowledgement and responsibility. Tick emphasizes: “To the veteran, our leaders and people must say, ‘You did this in our name, because you were subject to our orders... We are responsible for you, for what you did, and for the consequences’” (2008: 49). His solutions thus acknowledge a two stage approach: an implementation of warrior protection tactics involving the careful determining of just wars, and warrior healing processes through conscious and caring communities. Concluding with a potentially Pollyanna-ish ideal of “war no more” (2008: 49), Tick focuses on contemporary

solutions that currently utilize warrior healing methods of community-sharing and support as a response to the continued presence of war throughout history.

### *Breaking Open*

*Yes!* articles are lastly organized into a category titled Breaking Open: “Humor, story-telling and the arts – taking you into the unexpected spaces where business as usual breaks open into new possibilities”. In *Yes!* issue number 53 from spring 2010, Assistant Professor of English, Faith Adiele writes, *‘My Life in Black and White’*, which discusses the changing meaning of diversity in the United States and the role of memoir within this transformation. As an educator, she recounts her processes of teaching self-reflection as a cornerstone of communal emancipation. She begins, in paragraph two by defining memoir as: “...the intersection of story and reflection” (2010: 32). Speaking directly to her reader as one of her students, she states: “Your presentations will be graded on honesty and risk-taking”. The remainder of the article articulates examples from Adiele’s classrooms that demonstrate honest, risk taking, and reflective sharing.

This raw and uncomfortable risk taking is highlighted in the initial vignette she tells about one of her first student’s reactions to her class and her blackness: “He recalls a roller skating party where, during the “Sadie Hawkins” girl-ask-boy round, he was picked by the only African American girl”. Adiele’s details her and her student’s response to this specific student’s racially centered recounting as ‘concerned’ and accompanied by uncomfortable and excited rapid blinking (2010: 33). These raw details of the room through a real-time recounting, aim to draw the reader into the class’s sense of uncertainty. Adiele then relieves this tension ‘suddenly’ by speaking directly to the sharing student: “...if this is any indication of your honesty and risk-taking, it looks like we’re in for quite a ride” (2010: 34). This classroom example highlights Adiele’s unwavering belief in the possibility of teaching vulnerable honesty as ‘things break open’ and allow for growth.

Immediately following the disruption and re-equilibrium from above, Adiele introduces the reader to another situation of uncertainty: “I am asked to design a literature course, my first”.

Throwing herself into uncharted teaching terrain, Adiele demonstrates her willingness to actively take the risks she encourages in her students. Adding to the precariousness of her new teaching position she notes: “The students at Framingham State College are primarily working class, first generation-college whites” (2010: 34). By now the reader knows that Adiele is an African American woman who grew up “the sole black girl” (2010: 32) in her home town and is acutely aware of race. In the recognition of both her students’ whiteness and her own blackness it is established that she sees great potential in confronting difference. In this classroom example Adiele details an assignment she gave to the group of white students ‘(un)enthusiastic about multiculturalism’: ‘work in groups to deconstruct an American cultural myth’ (2012: 34). Mirroring the *Yes!* model, Adiele acknowledges the transformative act of challenging naturalized narratives. She concludes this classroom example through a description of their collective success: ‘The class abandons old cliques, and new configurations of students sit together in the cafeteria’. Again, by investigating areas of unknown and avoidable discomfort Adiele and her class broke down social walls and built a supportive community.

The practical tools presented by Adiele in the cultivation of diverse and strengthened communities are underscored as attainable as the final vignette in her article touches on an experience of sharing in an elementary school classroom. In this short section Adiele travels to her goddaughter’s elementary school to speak on travel writing at a ‘show-and-tell’ session. Adiele recounts opening the lecture with a request for questions and describes one child’s response: ‘his quivering arm so high it looks like it could pop off’. She unpacks six of the student’s questions immediately and then recounts the detailed student driven mini-narratives that followed. For 44 lines following her description of the little boy’s raised arm Adiele quotes the stories of the young students, their multiplicity of message, characters and points of emphasis. Halfway through the students’ sagas she notes: ‘They speak in short-essay form, complete with the dramatic hooks and concrete details I beg my college writers to provide’. In her presentation of children’s abilities to reach the unabashed memoir heights she solicits from her college students, Adiele demonstrates the naturally occurring and indiscriminating character of human potential. In a final comparison with the prior two college classroom examples of

discomfort in difference, the children's diverse stories flow from a self-assured ease (Adiele, 2010: 35). Adiele concludes '...their narratives are part of the collective memoir we are writing' (2010: 35). Her view confirms those of other authors cited in previous articles that humans necessarily function together – whether or not we are comfortable with the whole.

### *Conclusion*

Apparent in all of the editor's notes and articles under analysis is the commitment of *Yes!* employees to publish critical and subversive news, based on the necessity for deep social, political, economic, and cultural change. *Yes!* news is subversive in the sense that it evaluates the social status quo, including the mainstream media itself; exposes its inadequacies; and reports and proposes solutions, which is its own journalistic act of contributing to social change. The *Yes!* material chosen for analysis underscores human connection from which everyone can harness the collective power to amplify individual ingenuity and potential. *Yes!* writing is well researched and has a clarity of style that makes it able to reach a diverse audience who are interested in the world and who are seeking to find ways to make the world a more hospitable, egalitarian, and sustainable place. *Yes!* continues to publish single-themed issues each with a diversity of solutions. These detailed stories offering a multitude of possibilities allow entrance points for a wide diversity of readers to engage with the ideas and experiences represented by *Yes!*.

## CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

We do not see nature or intelligence or human motivation or ideology as “it” is but only as our languages are. And our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture. (Postman, 1985:15)

This thesis set out to explore various details of *Yes!* magazine as a contemporary form of alternative magazine news production in the contemporary US mediascape. The study explored the similarities in alternative media organization and the views about dialogical political education and radical social change espoused by Paulo Freire (1993) and Saul Alinsky (1969, 1972). The research process theoretically mapped out a range of alternative news values which found cohesion in their origins of response to perceived oppressions; acknowledgement of democracy as a necessarily contested terrain; and mobilization around idealized conceptions of more equitable futures. *Yes!* employees were interviewed and *Yes!* articles analyzed with an understanding of the ideologies guiding alternative media action and progressive social action.

The findings from the interview and article analysis detailed a magazine and online alternative media publication with communicative intentions aligned with radical social action. *Yes!* sees their place in the media industry as marked by authenticity, transparency, and independence, but ultimately acknowledges the need to collaborate in a larger and necessarily diverse media ecosystem, confirming Mouffe’s (1999) argument of agonistic pluralism and democracy in difference. Like Ostertag’s (2006) examples of US alternative media that came before it, *Yes!* hopes to use its growing media platform as a springboard for progressive social action, beginning with a redistribution of power for a more equitable and sustainable future. Echoing Bagdikian (2004: 9), one interviewee after the next remarked on the deep need for social and cultural transformation, ignited by the unsustainable social, political, and economic structures of our time. To work towards this future *Yes!* connects grassroots communities of activists to a highly educated core of magazine readers, and through the formation of these transformative human connections follows directions, given by Alinsky (1972), for radical social change through community building. *Yes!* articles highlight the potential within these human connections through

the educative engagement of democratic dialogue put forward by Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1993). As one can observe routinized and naturalized processes of mainstream professionalism, so too I came to know the patterned methods and assumptions organizing *Yes!* magazine. Sustaining *Yes!* as an independent ‘alternative’ publication for years to come hinges on it being a solidly structured media organization that continually seeks new ways to maintain its practical and powerful relevance to contemporary progressive social movements.

In 1920, Upton Sinclair detailed the missteps of a profit driven media model. In 1984 Ben Bagdikian outlined the dangers of a monopolizing mainstream media system. The concerns voiced by both Sinclair and Bagdikian were in response to a democracy they saw slipping away with corporate control of communication. Since these calls of concern, multiple methods of alternative media organization have been tried and tested, always resisting but never replacing the mainstream. As Sarah Van Gelder (2014) clarified, this notion of mainstream media replacement by alternative media models is not even on *Yes!*’s list of organizational goals. What sets *Yes!* apart from many of its historical and contemporary alternative media peers, and is consistent with Freire’s (1993) Pedagogy, and Mouffe’s (1999) conception of Agonistic Pluralism, is its continued acknowledgement of the democratic significance of difference. Through patterned repetition of production mainstream media represent the contemporary political hegemony that threatens active democracy (Mouffe, 1999: 752). If ‘liberty and justice for all’<sup>4</sup> are to become active tenets of US democracy, information should provoke citizens, rather than pacify them; it should leave readers with questions instead of answers. In essence it should be unpredictably diverse.

This research confirms some decades old observable patterns in the ways in which mainstream journalism supports the ideology of economic profitability, political complacency, and social inaction (Sinclair, 1928; Bagdikian, 2004). Critics of mainstream media argue that the hegemony of mainstream media works against a vibrant democratic process. *Yes!* values of continuous self-

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.usconstitution.net/pledge.html>

reflection, and unabashed critique work towards what Freire (1993: 60) calls a praxis of liberation: "...the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it". Liberation is enacted democracy, and social movements and alternative media continue to hold this democratic process at their respective cores. The fringes of our societies, those that both prop up, and get left behind by the exclusionary nature of capitalism, will continue to ferment in the fissures of difference. It is of great social benefit to seek them out and listen as they operate from 'progressive' political places concerned with creating a better life for all.

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## APPENDIX

YEAR	FALL	SUMMER	SPRING	WINTER
2014	The End of Poverty	Story Power	Education Uprising	Healing Food
2013	Human Cost of Stuff	Love and the Apocalypse	Cooperative Economy	What Would Nature Do?
2012	Your Body	Making it Home	We Can End Corporate Rule	Break Through
2011	New Livelihoods	Beyond Prisons	Can Animals Save Us?	What Happy Families Know
2010	A Resilient Community	The Water Solutions Issue	America: The Remix	Climate Action
2009	Learn as You Go	The New Economy	Food for Everyone	Sustainable Happiness
2008	Purple America	A Just Foreign Policy	How to Stop Global Warming Cold	Liberate Your Space
2007	Go Local!	Is the U.S. Ready for Human Rights? (back issue only)	Democracy: Latin America Leaps Ahead	Stand Up to Corporate Power
2006	Health Care for All	5,000 Years of Empire (back issue only)	10 Most Helpful Trends of the Last 10 Years	Spiritual Uprising
2005	Respecting Elders, Becoming Elders	What Makes a Great Place?	Media That Sets Us Free (out of print)	Healing and Resistance
2004	Can We Live Without Oil?	What is the Good Life?	Conspiracy of Hope	Whose Water?
2003	Government of the People Shall Not Perish (out of print)	Finding Courage	Our Planet Our Selves	What Would Democracy Look Like (out of print)

YEAR	FALL	SUMMER	SPRING	WINTER
2002	Living Economies	Art and CommUnity	What Does It Mean to Be an American Now? (back issue set only)	Can Love Save the World?
2001	Technology: Who Chooses?	Reclaiming the Commons	Working for Life	A New Culture Emerges
2000	Is it Time to Close the Prisons?	Food for Life	New Stories	Changing the Climate
1999	The Power of One	Cities of Exuberance	Economics as if Life Matters	Education for Life
1998	Making Peace	Rx for the Earth	Millennium Survival Guide	Sustainable Sex
1997	Sustaining Watersheds	Money: Print Your Own!	Future Watch	

## **Interview Questions for Yes! Employees**

### **Individual**

What three words would you use to describe yourself?

What personal values inform your work?

Do you differentiate between personal morals and professional obligation?

What do you see as the role of journalism today, does this role shift?

### **Yes! Ideals and Structure**

How would you categorize the publication, its goals, objectives and target audience?

How does it strategically attempt to achieve its objectives?

Does *Yes!* strive to build community outside the publication?

Does *Yes!* host events or hold meetings for activists?

Was the above outlined vision clear from the publications beginnings?

How have *Yes!* ideals and structures evolved?

What does professionalism in a solutions journalism atmosphere look like?

What is considered newsworthy? What won't readers find?

*-Help tell new cultural stories, based on understanding of our deep interconnectedness, that change how we think about ourselves, our sources of 'true happiness' and our relationships with all people and all other life*

*-Demonstrate new and very old ways to live and institutions that support 'healthy' and inclusive communities*

*-Reveal rules changes that reward cooperation rather than exploitation and partnership rather than domination*

Why a magazine format?

Why does *Yes!* tend to produce singular issue quarterlies, example: food or stuff?

How do you find stories, what are general *Yes!* news gathering practices? Can you walk me through the structures of production?

Are there guidelines for what *Yes!* endorses and discredits?

### **Office Routines and Economics**

Can you talk to me about the Positive Futures Network, the decision to go ad free and how *Yes!* maintains financial stability?

Is there//How is the hierarchy of roles devised and upheld?

How are wages determined?

How are employees educated, trained, chosen? How do you select contributing writers?

Why does *Yes!* use freelance writers?

Does *Yes!* maintain particular office rituals that are exemplary of it's core beliefs and mission?

Do technological advances influence content production and audience size?

### **Audience**

What assumptions are made regarding audience?

Who do you target v. who do you appeal to v. who is writing?

Does your audience fluctuate and how do you respond or cater to these fluctuations?  
How do you maintain relevance?

### **Solutions Journalism v. The Mainstream**

What do you see as the benefits and repercussions of solutions journalism?

How does *Yes!* stand out or with other publications of a similar structure and in the general US media landscape?

Who is working against *Yes!* values in the field of journalism and is *Yes!* a marginalized voice?

How does 'mainstream' news infiltrate or influence *Yes!*?

Would *Yes!* lead a similar existence if it became the new "mainstream"?

Can mass thinking accommodate individuals being true to themselves?

### **Other**

Why is *Yes!* important?

What gives *Yes!* the authority to offer critique?

What has brought you the greatest satisfaction and equally the greatest discomfort while working for *Yes!*?

