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# Positive Media: An Introductory Exploration

Meghan B. Keener  
mkeener@alumni.upenn.edu

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# Positive Media: An Introductory Exploration

## **Abstract**

Media has become an increasingly large part of our lives, and therefore plays a crucial role in our well-being. Positive psychology, the science of well-being, can be complemented through the new potentialities of media, which in many ways also seeks to improve the human experience. I create the context for a new dialogue about what "positive media" might be. By adopting a positive lens and discussing exemplars in different formats, this paper explores the ways media effectively incorporates elements of well-being. Through this positive approach, we gain an appreciation for what media does well. The paper also recommends ways that people can consume media in support of their well-being, and ways media creators can design content that optimizes human flourishing. Lastly, the paper encourages a dialogue between the important fields of positive psychology and media. With a partnership between these fields, it posits the opportunity for dramatically increasing global well-being.

## **Keywords**

positive psychology, media, positive media, television, film, well-being, creativity, eudaimonic turn, humanities, narrative

## **Disciplines**

American Film Studies | American Popular Culture | Broadcast and Video Studies | Cognition and Perception | Cognitive Psychology | Communication | Communication Technology and New Media | Film and Media Studies | Game Design | Instructional Media Design | Interdisciplinary Arts and Media | Journalism Studies | Mass Communication | Other Psychology | Recreation Business | Social Psychology | Television

## **Comments**

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Positive Media: An Introductory Exploration

M. B. Keener

University of Pennsylvania

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: M. E. P. Seligman, Ph.D.

August 1, 2012

## Positive Media: An Introductory Exploration

M. B. Keener

mkeener@alumni.upenn.edu

Capstone Project

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

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## Abstract

Media has become an increasingly large part of our lives, and therefore plays a crucial role in our well-being. Positive psychology, the science of well-being, can be complemented through the new potentialities of media, which in many ways also seeks to improve the human experience. I create the context for a new dialogue about what "positive media" might be. By adopting a positive lens and discussing exemplars in different formats, this paper explores the ways media effectively incorporates elements of well-being. Through this positive approach, we gain an appreciation for what media does well. The paper also recommends ways that people can consume media in support of their well-being, and ways media creators can design content that optimizes human flourishing. Lastly, the paper encourages a dialogue between the important fields of positive psychology and media. With a partnership between these fields, it posits the opportunity for dramatically increasing global well-being.

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*“Human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.”* –William James  
*“Whoever controls the media controls the mind.”* –Jim Morrison

Media has a power like nothing else in our lives, giving it a crucial role to play in the art and science of fulfillment. We spend a large majority of our discretionary time interacting with media, an integral part of our 21st century lives. The negative effects of media are under constant examination, and it is blamed for countless social ills. However, media also has a powerful positive impact on our lives. Indeed, why would we choose to engage with it to the extent we do if it were not fulfilling a portion of our needs and desires? As we will see, media provides pathways for us to enjoy many of the positive aspects of life.

In this paper I will first define *media*, and touch on the ways it impacts our lives. Next I will introduce the reader to the field of *positive psychology*, the science of well-being. I then propose the idea of *positive media* and offer a working definition. As a way to explore the positive elements of media, I will explore various media platforms and some of the elements of well-being they can exemplify. Afterwards, I will suggest ways people can both consume and create media to support well-being. Lastly, I will conclude with my hopes for a partnership between media and positive psychology. Hopefully, in so doing, I will help develop a *well-being lens for media* and create a context for talking about what *positive media* can be.

### **Media and Its Impact**

*“I like the idea of media as the 'oil on canvas'. What is left after you remove the oil and the canvas? There's nothing left. So, it's a vehicle for knowledge.”*  
– Cesar Hidalgo, MIT Media Lab (2011)

What do we mean by media? Media (2001) can be defined in several ways, the first and most common being “the main means of mass communication, *esp.* newspapers, radio, and television, regarded collectively”. With the remarkable rise of the Internet, what we mean by the

media in this sense has evolved to include websites, social media platforms, blogs, apps, podcasts, and more. In its second sense, media means “the reporters, journalists, etc., working for organizations engaged in such communication”. So when we talk about media in these typical ways, we mean both the *ways* in which we communicate with the public and *those who are doing* the communicating. Throughout this paper, I use the term media in both of these ways. In a third sense, media can refer to an “intermediate layer”, and we can apply this to the common uses; *the media* are the relational layer, the go-betweens or connectors between life and its stories, and *the mediums* are where we connect with the world around us. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan said, “All media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical” (Marshall McLuhan Speaks, 2012).

*"Nothing is important unless the difference that it makes is an important one."*  
-Harry Frankfurt (1982)

No one would argue that the difference media makes isn't an important one. Ever since its beginnings, media has had a history of profound impact on society. The printing press is credited with ushering in the scientific and industrial revolutions, laying the groundwork for future information technologies like the telephone and the Internet (Wright, 2000). Some feel that communication is so vital that it may even be responsible for why we evolved into the bodies we have. For example, psychologist Roy Baumeister (course lecture, September 11, 2011) believes it's likely that we walk upright so that we can communicate with our hands, and argues that we tackle survival and reproduction through the creation of culture. Psychologist Steven Pinker (2011) tells us that one of the reasons for a huge collective dip in violence was the widespread dissemination of the novel. Robert Wright (2000) calls culture the “transmission of information from one individual to another by non-genetic means”. Today, our culture is defined by and

depicted by, as well as a creator in the media we have come to think of as a natural extension of ourselves.

Media gets a bad rep, and with good reason. Extensive media research shows that it can have real negative effects. For example, we know that both fictional and news programming can cause lasting fear and anxiety in children, and that watching violent television programs and playing violent games can increase aggressive behavior (Wilson, 2008). In addition to increasing violence, consuming media has also been shown to have deleterious effects on body image, and is linked to excessive consumption, obesity, and more (Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008; Eisen & Möller, 2007; Felson, 1996; Hargreaves & Tiggemann 2003; Zimmerman & Bell, 2010).

However, this isn't the whole story. We also know that media can have a positive effect on people's lives. As an example, in one study examining over 2,200 American television programs, helping and sharing behaviors, or altruistic acts, were present in 73% of programs, more prevalent than violent acts (Smith et al., 2006). Children's programs had the highest incidence, depicting about 4 altruistic acts per hour. Viewing that type of prosocial television content increases altruistic behavior in children (Mares & Woodard, 2005).

There is debate about media's effects on well-being, in part because the research can be confusing. For example, television viewing decreases relational activities like time with friends and family, which is linked to lower life satisfaction (Bruni & Stanca, 2008), but those who watch television have higher satisfaction with life than those who don't (Kataria & Regner, 2010). Nevertheless, thirty-three percent of American adults feel they spend too much time watching television, and forty-eight percent of American adults aged 18-29 say they spend too much time on social media sites (Newport, 2012).



What we know for certain is that all media have the potential for communication, persuasion, and coordination (Wright, 2000). We can use media as a tool to engineer the social environment to bring out the best in our individual and collective lives. Media has the potential to impact individuals and society like few other institutions. Generally, people consume the products of media during their spare time for recreation purposes, though its applications are used for educational, workplace, and technical uses. When people are doing something for intrinsic reasons, as is the case with recreational activities, they are more motivated to participate (Brown & Ryan, 2004). Americans choose, on average, to watch about *five hours* of television per day (Gandossy, 2009). We spend many hours on social media platforms, as well, rounding out our total media consumption at *over eight hours* per day (Webster, 2011).

With usage as hefty as this, the potential capacity of media for changing individual lives and society is a sleeping giant. These intrinsically motivated activities we do for hours every day can be harnessed to help improve our quality of life. The cultural institution of media can be infused with what is best in human experience. With a partnership between positive psychology and media, the issue of what is best about the human experience could be entrusted into the hands of content platforms and creative professionals who could set about to showcase exactly that.

Media is an extremely powerful force and psychology can help us to understand why. Many psychologists now divide the activities of the mind into the rational and the intuitive. Our intuitive minds operate in an automatic, effortless, associative way, using shortcuts, opaque to our awareness (B. Schwartz, course lecture, September 9, 2011). Media taps into this power by using compelling images, exaggerated characters, narration, emotional cues through music and

sound effects, and by demanding our sensory focus (usually sight and sound). As such, media can speak to our judging, emotional and intuitive mind like nothing else.

Economist and psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) has isolated the two distinct cognitive systems he calls the "fast" system (or System 1) and the "slow" system (or System 2). Our fast system of thinking effortlessly and automatically gives us our impressions, intuitions, and feelings. It responds emotionally and impulsively. Our slow system is controlled, deliberate, and effortful; it uses reason and employs choice. The result is that our fast system (our intuitive, judging mind) is the source of the explicit beliefs we create that dictate our efforts and deliberate actions via our slow system (our rational mind) (Haidt, 2006; Kahneman, 2011). Our fast system is what is constantly running in the background, and it is to this intuitive judging mind that media speaks. Jonathan Haidt (2006) refers to this part of the mind as the "elephant", and the rational, "slow" part of the mind as its "rider". The elephant immediately reacts to stimuli, making judgments. The reasoning rider justifies its preferences with rationales.

Psychologist Paul Bloom (2010) says that we like what we like because of what we believe to be true about its essence or origin - the *meaning* we give to things. Certain structures in media especially stimulate our thinking about origins. Bloom uses paintings to illustrate his theory: we will happily pay more for an original painting than for an exact copy. The process of creation has value in itself. The narrative form can build empathy because we put ourselves in another's place. When we are taken through the backstory of a character, we relate to him. On Facebook, we make judgments about the friends of friends because, in seeing the schools they attended or the music they like, we make emotional judgments about whether or not we would like them. Ultimately, we are using "fast" thinking *as well as* the meaning-making mind when we consume media; as a result it is very powerful for creating beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

Consider another strong recent argument regarding the power of media. In his book about the decline of violence over the last few centuries, Steven Pinker (2011) writes that *literacy*, the *rise of cities*, and *thinking itself* are all partly responsible. One of these is media, and all three can be increased and perpetuated through the media of the modern world. More and more people are now reading than ever before, and *media literacy* is becoming increasingly important. Media literacy is defined as "a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms" that "builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy" (Center for Media Literacy, 2012). *The rise of cities* could be likened to the rise of online communities, which results in subsequent codes of conduct among and between groups. *Thinking itself* has, of course, dramatically benefited from the limitless access to information and perspectives that the Internet provides. Thus media can act as a tool for reducing violence through its cultivation of these factors.

So we have seen that media has power by virtue of its: massive rates of consumption; ability to speak to the intuitive and rational minds; platforms facilitating self-expression, connection, and education; potential to reduce violence; ability to entertain; impact on cultural, technological (and perhaps biological) evolution; and ability to change thoughts and behaviors. For all of these reasons, media is a powerful tool for captivating our emotions, our minds, and changing our culture and quality of life. Next we will explore a field that has as its explicit focus the enhancement of our lives.

### **Introduction to Positive Psychology**

Positive psychology, simply put, is the study of those things that make life worth living (Peterson, 2006). While traditional psychology is mitigative – helping us get less of what we

*don't* want and fix the things that are wrong with us – positive psychology functions constructively in helping us get more of what we *do* want, and making ourselves better, happier people. It is the "psychology of *building*" (J. Pawelski, course lecture, September 8, 2011).

Positive psychology came about through the evolution of psychology. Its co-founders are psychologists Dr. Martin Seligman and Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and it has roots in emotion research, moral psychology, humanism, cognitive behavioral therapy, and philosophy. Early in his career as a psychologist, Martin Seligman (1990) developed the theory of learned helplessness, which outlines the response that follows when we believe our actions don't matter. This later led him to explore the idea that if we could learn to be helpless, we could also learn to be optimistic. His pioneering work in learned optimism has shown that we are agents in our own well-being (Seligman, 1990). In conjunction with Dr. Aaron Beck's work in cognitive psychology, Seligman's work has highlighted the power that our cognitive processes play in our happiness.

Positive psychology began in 1998 when Seligman made it his mission as President of the American Psychological Association to turn the attention of psychology towards those elements of life that contribute to human flourishing. Through his mission to turn an empirical eye towards the good side of life, he was paramount in the creation of positive psychology as we know it. Co-founder Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi had spent years working on creativity and intrinsically motivated activity. He is most well-known for developing the construct of *flow*, which resulted from this work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined positive psychology as a "science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions".

The field of positive psychology operates from the premise that we ought to acknowledge

both the light and the dark sides of life. It focuses on positive elements of life such as character strengths, positive emotion, resilience, purpose, positive relationships, and accomplishment. It strives to create healthy institutions, happy and engaged individuals, and flourishing communities. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) has said that positive psychology requires a "metaphysical orientation toward the positive" by which he means that the positive is just as real as the negative. While traditional psychology has been highly successful at making life better for those of us suffering from negative conditions in our lives, positive psychology maintains that now is the time to turn our attention to matters that exist "metaphorically above zero", or on the positive side of neutral, in the realm of what is best about life. It urges us to adopt a "balanced meliorism" (J. Pawelski, course lecture, September 8, 2011), or *bettering through effort*, and to turn our attention to the optimization of the human experience. It does not deny the existence of the negative parts of life but argues for a deep exploration of the "upper reaches" of human experience.

Of note is Seligman's (2011) latest theory of well-being, which goes by the acronym PERMA. Its letters represent its constituent elements: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Each element not only contributes to well-being, but is pursued for its own sake, and can be measured independently from the others.

Major theoretical developments like that of PERMA are reflective of the relatively young state of positive psychology and part of its rapid evolution. Its research and application spans the domains of human life: family, school, work, spirituality, health, economics, government, medicine, military life, etc. My hope is to strengthen the bond between positive psychology and the realms of art, culture, communication and technology that intersect at what we call media.

### **What is Positive Media?**

The existence of a positive psychology makes me ask: can there be *a positive media*? I ask the question as any student of applied positive psychology might. I also ask it as a creator of media and participant in its evolution. For five years I worked on big budget feature films in various capacities such as art department, casting, assistant to directors and producers, costumes, set decoration, product placement, legal clearance, and even acting. I spent a year working at a talent agency and an advertising agency, and a year on a CBS scripted series. For the last seven years I have been producing programs for cable networks such as TLC, I.D., Discovery Health Channel, Travel Channel, and Animal Planet. I currently work at Discovery Channel, making reality shows, news documentaries, and specials.

Throughout my twelve years of experience, I've had the opportunity to see the entertainment business from many angles, and to observe it at its best and its worst. I've seen many lives improved by the media I've helped create (like prisoners whose pleas have reached caring ears, or viewers who have discovered their calling), and seen others whose lives were permanently impacted in negative ways (like a woman who was fired from her job of 30 years for participating in a show, and crew members who died while filming). So the pursuit of media for well-being is extremely close to my heart, and I have hope for its potential to create positive outcomes for both consumers and creators.

This leaves me to wonder, what would "positive media" be like? What does positive media mean? (And should it even be called that?) I choose for jumping-off points some ideas of Dr. James Pawelski, philosopher and Executive Director of the International Positive Psychology Association.

In his forthcoming book, Pawelski discusses a concept called the *eudaimonic turn*.

Simply defined, eudaimonia consists of "those aspects of life that are directly constitutive of well-being", so the eudaimonic turn is an *emphasis* on those aspects (Pawelski & Moores, in press). Pawelski and co-author Moores (in press) write that part of this new emphasis is encouraging "robust discussion of cultural processes for creating the best possible constructs of well-being." My hope is that the eudaimonic turn can happen for media, that a *lens of well-being* or a *eudaimonic lens* can be applied to help us determine what constitutes media that supports well-being, and what does not. Thus, we are in need of criteria to help us determine the variable factors.

James Pawelski (course lecture, February 3, 2012) makes a distinction between positive *processes* and positive *outcomes*. (Psychologist Issaac Prilleltensky, 2011, says that a good process *is* a good outcome because it builds respect, and encourages control and empowerment.) If an intervention causes either a positive process to occur in the participant or a positive outcome to occur (or both), that intervention could be seen as positive. In media this translates as, if I engage with media (e.g., watch a film, spend an hour on Facebook, read a newspaper), and I either experience a positive outcome or I engage with a positive process in so doing, the media with which I engaged could then be called "positive media". At least, *for me*, that would be positive media. For someone else, the result might be different.

For example, if I watch *Saving Private Ryan*, the violence might make me feel frightened during the film and cause me to ruminate after it ends. On the other hand, my friend who is a Marine might also experience discomfort during the film, but feel afterwards a renewed sense of meaning, or connection with his larger life's purpose. For one of us only, that film would be positive media.

Another approach to teasing out whether or not media is "positive" is by measuring it against the constituent elements of well-being. If the content generates outcomes or processes that enhance the components of PERMA (Seligman, 2011), it can be said to be media that supports well-being. Well-being can be defined as "that which benefits a person; is in a person's interest" (J. Pawelski, course lecture, February 3, 2012).

Employing the first definition of media – *a means of mass communication* – and borrowing from theoretical constructs by Seligman (2008, 2011) and philosophical teachings of Pawelski (course lecture, February 3, 2012), I propose a working definition of positive media that can advance dialogue between the fields of media and positive psychology. For the purposes of this paper, I define *positive media* as:

Media that measurably promotes, depicts, or facilitates elements of well-being, either by creating a positive outcome or a positive process in the viewer or participant.

For this definition, I include the following elements as constituents of well-being: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, accomplishment, and positive health. By "measurable" I mean via subjective, objective, or functional methods.

To get a better sense of how exactly media does this, I employ the vantage point of Marshall McLuhan who famously said, "The medium is the message" (1964), by looking at what each form does best. (While McLuhan overemphasized the power of the medium to the detriment of the content it delivered, his theory has become more relevant since the advent of digital technology, and provides a useful framework in this context.) I also borrow from the strengths perspective (Seligman, 1999) foundational to positive psychology by asking the appreciative question, "With regards to well-being, what's *working* in media?"



## Well-Being in Media

In this section, I will explore various mediums. Because there are too many media forms to include every one, I have selected the following: film, documentaries, television, news, music and visual art, social media, games, apps, and other digital media forms. For each media platform, I will highlight elements of well-being that it naturally showcases and include exemplars to illustrate what I see as positive media that supports human flourishing.

It can and should be argued that any medium has the potential to increase numerous facets of well-being, but for the purposes of this appreciative inquiry, I have limited my topic choice. I begin with the most beloved form of media, film.

### Film

*"It was the greatest preview I've ever had, the E.T. preview. It was insane. Nobody wanted to leave, the audience wanted to stay and see it over, they were demanding that we show the movie again. Ushers had to get people out of the theater."*

-Stephen Spielberg (DGA, 2011)

Films take our breath away and transport us to unknown worlds. Every one of us has favorite quotes, favorite characters – possibly even favorite directors and cinematographers. When we watch a film, we can experience a wide range of human emotion, and see the vastness of possibilities for human existence through the magic of the screen. Film can exemplify at least three elements of positive psychology: character strengths, positive emotion, and envisioning the future, or prospecting.

Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman (2004) painstakingly created a classification of 24 universally valued character strengths. Not a taxonomy but an evolving curated work of research, it is often referred to as the "manual of the sanities" in its direct polarity to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders (DSM) for use in identification of psychopathology. One of the

criteria for designation as a character strength is the existence of paragons (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Film and television characters are paragons that give us clear examples of character strengths on display. In their book "Positive Psychology at the Movies", Niemiec and Wedding (2008) make the point that it is easy for film to depict behaviors and actions, but not necessarily intentions or motivations. We as the audience get to see what the behavior looks like of someone who has the character strength of kindness, like E.T., or bravery, like Indiana Jones. Film allows for great exaggeration of character strengths. Niemiec and Wedding's (2008) research shows that the character strengths most often depicted in films are: creativity, bravery, persistence, hope, love, kindness, and spirituality. Those least likely to be portrayed are humility, love of learning, and prudence.

*"Every epic needs a hero. The mind will do."* -E. O. Wilson (1978)

We can use upward comparisons and emulate the virtues of characters we come to know through films. Doing so can help us find not only role models, but also teachers (Cohn, 2004, p. 226). "Positive psychology's goals of fostering optimism, resilience, and adaptive ways of relating to the world can be served by individuals who outperform us in some way" (p. 221). Cohn (2004) lists elements that contribute to positive upward comparison, which include a "detailed and nuanced understanding of the comparison target" (or role model), and an "appropriate choice of comparisons" (p. 222). While the first can not truly be attained through film due to its short duration and may be easier to do through recurring programs on television, we do get to see characters in various scenarios, overcoming challenges, and generally making a transformation of some kind. Watching a film's DVD special features can be a great way to learn more about a character's development. To the second point, it's up to us to choose on screen role

models with whom we share commonalities, but who also embody a quality we would like to have.

Ryan Niemiec (2007) has expanded his character strengths work into creating criteria for what makes a "positive psychology film". He outlines four:

1. balanced portrayal of a character displaying at least one of the 24 character strengths characterized by Peterson and Seligman (2004);
2. depiction of obstacles and/or the struggle or conflict the character faces in reaching or maximizing the strength;
3. a character portrayal that illustrates how to overcome obstacles and/or build and maintain the strength; and
4. a tone or mood in the film that is inspiring and uplifting.

He states that these criteria may apply to the film's character(s), to the film itself, or to the viewer. Niemiec and Wedding (2008) state that the viewer "plays the most important role, co-participating in the act of creating meaning when watching a film". In my role as producer, I find this to be true. I receive viewer emails after my shows air, and a single program can generate widely varying reactions informed by different meanings viewers attach, even to non-fiction content. In discussing character, I think the inclusion of the film itself and the film's characters is important to make. For my purposes of outlining what is positive media as a whole, I am focused on processes and outcomes for the viewer or participant alone.

Some characters can generate powerful meaning in the culture at large. The American Film Institute (2003) places importance on those who create a cultural impact, "who have a made a mark on American society in matters of style and substance", and those who leave a legacy, "who elicit strong reactions across time, enriching [America's] film heritage while continuing to inspire contemporary artists and audiences". *Superman* (originally a comic book) is a great example of a film that accomplished this task. In addition to sequel films, it has spawned

television series (such as *Smallville*, *Lois & Clark*, and *Superman: The Animated Series*), video games (like *Superman: The Man of Steel*, *Justice League Heroes*, and the new *Injustice: Gods Among Us*), and its main character is a cultural icon.

Film is also a powerful generator of positive emotion. In her "broaden and build" theory of positive emotion, researcher Barbara Frederickson (2001, 2009) explains the many benefits of positive emotion, including: increasing creative thought, reducing boundaries between self and other, acting as a "buffering strength" against future adversity, and generally increasing social, psychological, and intellectual resources.

*"Anything was possible. Your films were a physical, tangible manifestation of potential, of possibility."* - Director J.J. Abrams to Stephen Spielberg (DGA, 2011)

In their ability to make the impossible appear possible, films can evoke the emotional state of awe as nothing else can. Because our attention is focused and our senses are confined to two (sight and sound), it is possible that we can experience more concentrated awe when watching a film than in real life. Angela Duckworth (course lecture, October 30, 2011) believes the evolutionary reason for awe (and disgust) could be that it urges us to think to ourselves, "there is new information here", so films may make us wiser.

Psychologists who research awe list its defining features: (a) a feeling of vastness (or connection to the sublime); (b) a need for accommodation; (c) an experience of beauty, ability, or virtue; and (d) a connection to the supernatural (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Awe embraces both fear and amazement, creating a feeling of insignificance and simultaneous optimism, and combining confusion with wonder (Pearsall, 2007). A great example of awe evocation in film can be found in the BBC's nature films, *Planet Earth*, *Blue Planet*, and *Frozen Planet*. While watching a polar bear trying to swim to safety on melting glaciers, the intricate mating dances of South American birds, or the massive migration of water buffalo, one can't help but transcend

everyday reality and feel slightly smaller and more vulnerable, but also a part of something massive and eternal. Using visual splendor, these films also get us to care about our collective future. (One of the ways to do this is to create a new point of view for the audience - for example by using wire-mounted or remote-controlled flying cameras, forcing a new view of a landscape or scenario. At Discovery we have employed this for mountain and canopy shots and overhead shots of animal herds in nature films, and in shows like *Life on a Wire*, featuring tightrope walking.)

Psychologists are now considering the possibility that an elemental part of consciousness involves creating mental simulations of the future (M. E. P. Seligman, course lecture, October 30, 2011). Imagination may very well be built into our biology. New findings show that the process of daydreaming employs our *neutral* neural circuit (Seligman et al., in press) so when we watch films that vividly simulate future potential realities (think *Independence Day*), it likely feels very natural to our brains.

The more we are transported into a story, the more likely we are to experience affective empathy, and more likely to engage in prosocial behavior (Johnson, 2012). This type of *transportation* is also associated with perceptions of meaningfulness, and even fun (Hall & Zwarun, 2012). The more coherent and closer to external reality the story, the more engagement the viewer experiences, and the more persuasive power that story wields (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008).

In addition to depicting character strengths, invoking emotion, and transporting us to other realities, films also allow us to explore very real social issues. Jeff Skoll, the first employee of eBay, now runs Participant Media. He created the company in order to delve into important issues we have faced as a nation. Participant Media is responsible for films such as *Syriana*,

which tackled the politics of oil, *The Help*, a touching narrative that explores race issues in the American south, and *Good Night & Good Luck*, a drama about Senator McCarthy's attacks on news journalism.

Lastly, films model positive relationships and accomplishment. Film producer Lindsay Doran (2012) has looked at film as it relates to Seligman's (2011) well-being theory of PERMA. She believes that while movies marketed for men seem to be about the "A" (accomplishment), female movies are typically about the "R" (relationships). However, she notes that movies made for males generally culminate in scenes in which the main character's accomplishment is shared with another character, allowing relationship to ultimately trump achievement as the driving force in great cinema. Perhaps the combination of the two factors is what creates the optimal experience for viewers. It would be interesting to measure which elements of PERMA, either alone or in combination, elicit the most positive effect(s).

### **Documentary**

*"The camera is mightier than the sword."* – Director Jeremy Gilley (2011)

Documentary film is a form that uses the power of long-form narrative (like a feature film) to tell amazing yet true stories of all kinds. Its ability to inspire and ignite action are second to none because it depicts real-life characters and, in so doing, suggests to the audience what is possible in real life. Documentary film highlights many kinds of struggles, such as political, environmental, creative, and personal. It celebrates grand-scale human and animal achievements. It brings tiny unexplored corners of the world to the big screen and the living room. It also allows the viewer to stand aside a real-life person with a passion. In most cases, that person is someone in the film, doing something extraordinary. In other cases, we as the audience feel empathy with the filmmaker herself, as we spend years looking through her lens, trying to

capture the full picture of a tiny corner of the world. Documentary filmmakers often do their work as a labor of love, sometimes without any funding, on small crews (or alone), for months or years on end.

It is for these reasons that documentary film so exemplifies meaning and purpose, two crucial aspects of the life well-lived. The stories depicted are meaningful, such as the plight of the planet, an artist's struggle with addiction, the loneliness of prison. The storytellers are purposeful, trying to expose a secret, compel us to action, bring beauty to our lives. The media - the *films* - enhance our experience of life. The media - the *filmmakers* - compel us to engage with life in a new way. Documentary also highlights achievement and excellence as it tells the stories of real people doing extraordinary things.

*Undefeated* (Lindsay & Martin, 2011) tells the true story of troubled city kids on a Memphis football team and a coach who helps them succeed for the first time. The film is meaningful in two ways. The narrative itself is about giving the students a purpose and developing their characters. Secondly, director T.J. Martin's multi-year struggle to make the film was validated when he won the 2011 Academy Award, making him the first African-American to win an Oscar for a feature-length film, which brought meaning to others' lives as well. *Human Family Tree* (Cohen, 2009) by National Geographic features the work of Dr. Spencer Wells' Genographic Project. Its basic premise is that we are all part of one race of humankind. The documentary highlights the fact that we're all descendants of the same group of people who came out of Africa long ago, and its mission is to encourage us to see one another as kin. I've worked on several quick turnaround documentaries, or "instumentaries", about topics like the murders on the island of Utøya, and the unprecedented tornado outbreak last year in the Midwest. These

films allow people a deeper window into the human impact of news events than is facilitated by news broadcasts.

Bunking the convention of long-form, Ben Henretig co-founded Micro-Documentaries a few years ago to harness the power of the documentary narrative form to work on behalf of social causes worldwide. His short cost-efficient documentaries create leverage for organizations whose stories might otherwise be obscured by a lack of creative voice or resources. He explains why he began the company (personal communication, July 29, 2012):

We see incredible stories happening every moment, and we exist to develop the capacity to tell those stories. Documentaries explore notions of addressing challenges, and finding ways to move through them and find solutions. Those doing the most important work in the world – building resilience and promoting well-being – those are the stories that need to be told, because they warrant more attention and resources, but also because we can connect to them the most as humans. There's an opportunity to tell stories that appeal to positive emotion, that cultivate the positive character of the audience, rather than appeal to more base impulses. For us at Micro-Documentaries, it means organizing ourselves in a way to do that – focusing on solution-oriented storytelling, making production affordable, helping organizations leverage their resources, etc. Designing around principle is also a powerful behavior to model for audiences.

## **Television**

*"Television! Teacher, mother, secret lover." - Homer Simpson*

When the population of the world's richest nation spends 5 hours a day doing something (Gandossy, 2009), it makes sense to conclude that this activity, whatever it is, provides things people desperately crave. (I choose to believe that it is not simply because TV is now more available. Reading, after all, is still available, and some might argue more so, because of e-



books.) American children watch four and a half hours of television a day on average (Powers & Comstock, 2012). This does not count movies, print media, audio media, games, or Internet use, which brings their grand total to just under *eleven hours* of media per day. But why do we watch television - alternately known as the modern-day campfire and the idiot box - so much? Mass communication researchers say that we use television mainly for three things: diversion, social comparison, and to gather current information (Powers & Comstock, 2012).

If you watch any long-running television series, you will note that its themes are universal. Clark Bunting (personal communication, July 26, 2012), the former President of Discovery Channel, said of one of the network's most popular shows:

*American Chopper is King Lear. It's great stories played out with great characters and great drama – principles that go all the way back to Shakespeare. Struggles between fathers and sons go back to the Bible. Stories resonate because of key components like these. American Chopper was going to be a show about building motorcycles, but became a story-driven show where we occasionally build a bike. Ultimately the story overtook the bike.*

This is reminiscent of Lindsay Doran's hypothesis: relationships trump accomplishments. Executive Producer Paul Gasek echoed this sentiment when he said of his hit series *Deadliest Catch*, "It's a Greek tragedy" (personal communication, July 16, 2012).

But while its themes may be universal and sometimes tragic, television is also an exemplary medium for cultivating positive emotion (to the "diversion" point above), especially humor. *Saturday Night Live* is a wonderful example of this, accomplishing humor without forsaking intelligent social commentary and novelty. Television also gives us a chance to experience alternate personal and collective realities we might prefer. For example, actress

Elizabeth McGovern (NPR, 2012) says Americans like the scripted historical drama *Downton Abbey* because it is set in a stricter and simpler time. On the other end of the content spectrum is the new phenomenon of reality television, which has a lot of mixed reviews. Stephen Reverand, the former SVP of Production and Development for Discovery Channel, SVP of Specials for National Geographic, and NBC Bureau Chief, explains:

When individual producers of media tell the truth, their contributions to the human condition can be immeasurable. This can happen in both fiction and non-fiction. Soon after television became our national pastime, *All in the Family*'s Archie Bunker exposed the shallowness of bigotry and narrow-mindedness through an accurate portrayal of pervasive but ugly popular thinking at the time. A decade later, *The Cosby Show*'s Dr. Huxtable demonstrated the ultimate truth that all people are essentially the same. Both iconic roles, though set in sitcoms, served to expand our thinking.

The good news here is that through the early history of modern media, the truthful media has been the most successful and therefore the most impactful. One look at the astonishing run of *60 Minutes* confirms this. But this trend has been frighteningly altered with the advent of "reality" television - perhaps the most twisted and inadvertently dishonest use of a word since Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. Much of reality television is both completely contrived and successful. This is a worrisome trend. It blurs the line between what's real and artificial and that is never healthy. Still, I remain firm in the belief that sunlight is the best disinfectant and that truth in media will prevail. And we will all be better for it (personal communication, July 25, 2012).

So reality television might not be quite as "real" or quite as benign as we'd like to think – but on a good day, it can provide elements that propel us forward. Studio executive Lauren

Zalaznick hypothesizes that we love reality TV in part because it feels like "Me plus": we might see a better version of ourselves in the characters onscreen (Benzine, 2012). We find surrogates who risk it all (*Deadliest Catch* crab fishermen on the Bering Sea), while we sit at home believing we could surely do the same. Reality TV, by containing both upward and downward comparison, using a narrative structure, instigating us to ponder its origins, and in being a fantasy, becomes "the ultimate in pleasure" (P. Bloom, course lecture, November 19, 2011). Zalaznick highlights other elements that attract viewers to reality television: emotional connections between evolving characters and viewers, rooting for underdogs, and fish-out-of-water scenarios (Benzine, 2012).

Episodic dramas, because they allow viewers to develop bonds with characters over time, have been used to depict and encourage new positive perceptions, behavior and policy change in social issue areas like literacy, family planning, women's rights, AIDS prevention, female education, and more (Ryerson, 2011). Producers of this type of content rely on extensive preparatory research to make sure storylines are culture and context-sensitive. Moreover, because issues are repeatedly depicted (due to the nature of serial dramas), audience members have a chance to relate to characters in deep ways.

Al Bandura (2004, 2011) has applied social cognitive theory to positive media work through telenovelas, which are similar to soap operas, but more focused on positive narratives. He outlines the elements at work. The format uses modeling of others to instruct, motivate, and act as a "social prompt" by depicting the actions of others. It also serves a social constructionist role by creating new norms. Role models in media create "prestigious" models, while other characters are designed to be similar to everyday viewers, who go through transitions in positive and negative directions. Lastly, contrasting models are used to show multiple sides of an issue.

Viewers of programs such as these may adopt new lifestyles as a result of: a heightened belief that they can affect change (or increased self-efficacy), through social persuasion, because of positive outcome expectations (anticipated good results from good behaviors), or due to new aspirations. Bandura (2004, 2011) also outlines ways to build resilience through media modeling by preparing people for future problems, modeling healthy recovery after setbacks, and depicting examples of social support. Importantly, many media efforts in serial dramas for social change also provide the benefit of linking individuals to real-life supportive organizations and communities.

Research shows that written narratives are powerful tools for *experience-taking* (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). In experience-taking, the reader (viewer) feels as though he or she is going through what the character is going through, and experiences a loss of self. This differs from perspective-taking, which *enforces* self-concept and functions through comparison between self and the character in the narrative. This may be important understanding for those periods in life at which people are likely to look to the outside for examples in developing their selves, such as in adolescence. If one spends extensive time with the narratives, for example, of ongoing television reality series produced with the intention of adding drama and creating conflict, and edited in such a way as to bring out the characters' most radical attributes, he or she may "experience-take" to an unhealthy point leading to the thwarting of healthy development of self-concept.

Television certainly serves a moral function in our lives, as well. Lauren Zalaznick (2010) believes that television "directly reflects the moral, political, social and emotional need states of our nation" and is perhaps even acting as our collective conscience, by both "tempting us and rewarding us at the same time". A recent example of a television program that aims north

in terms of a moral compass is *Oprah's LifeClass*, featuring positive outliers in different specialties such as poetry, religion, and music, who teach their "life lessons" to viewers. The show is about meaningfully creating a best future self and perpetuating a "virtuous cycle" (Frederickson, 2009) in the viewer community. It is also a boundary-breaking exemplar, because it creates the new model of a virtual classroom on cable television and online. *Lifeclass* is seen by an average of 130,000 households on cable alone (Nielsen, 2011).

Changing formats are part and parcel of the state of media technology. As technology becomes cheaper, "narrowcasting" is also becoming our fate. Unlike in broadcasting where a general swath of content is offered to the masses, content is increasingly marketed through specialized channels (Wright, 2000). An example of this is Discovery Communications. Once just Discovery Channel, the media corporation is now a global giant, with networks such as the Military Channel, Science Channel, and Investigation Discovery ("true crime" content only). While this could act to connect small like-minded audiences and urge them to pool their resources, it could also create tunnel vision and possible exclusionary views when people nurture isolating viewing habits.

One of my favorite television programs is *Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking*, because it gives voice (figurative and literal) to Hawking's resilience. The scientist, who is afflicted with a motor neuron disease (Lou Gehrig's disease), speaks in an electronic voice through his computer, and also through the voice of a narrator, to explain some of the greatest mysteries of science, like whether or not extra-terrestrial life exists (his answer: yes). Television's ability to depict resilience is stellar in that it shows characters over time. *Gold Rush* is one of our current hit reality series at Discovery Channel. It follows a group of friends through a painstaking process of trying to find gold on a rented Alaskan claim, having mortgaged their

homes and used up their savings. One of the characters, a mechanic, told me that his favorite moments being involved with the show were receiving letters from fans about how they gained courage (for their own financial challenges) from watching the struggling miners.

Another great example of resilience on television is, of course, the Olympic Games – which is being broadcast from London right now. The Olympics showcase peak achievement through *grit*, or perseverance and passion towards long-term goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Remember Kerri Strug, the gymnast who vaulted onto a sprained ankle in 1996 to secure a gold for the USA women’s gymnastics team? That grit was echoed yesterday, when we were awarded a second team gold in this sport because of the focused persistence of young athletes.

## News

*"Everything we hate about the media today was present at its creation: its corrupt practitioners, its easy manipulation by the powerful, its capacity for propagating lies, its penchant for amplifying rage. Also present was everything we admire and require from the media: factual information, penetrating analysis, probing investigation, truth speaking to power. Same as it ever was." - Journalist Brooke Gladstone (2011)*

While today’s news broadcast is filled with tales of gold medals, this is not the norm, as crime, corruption, celebrity news, and environmental disasters typically play center stage. More so than any other medium, we are perhaps most disillusioned with news journalism’s role in our well-being. Watching the news has been shown to desensitize us to violence (Scharrer, 2008), increase anxiety, sadness, and the “catastrophizing” of personal concerns (Johnston & Davey, 1997), make us focus more on crime, and possibly even perpetuate racial stereotyping (Entman, 1994; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). Considered by many to be a necessarily evil, journalism importantly functions to make sure we are aware of what is taking place in the world around us. The Journalists' Code of Ethics (Society of Professional Journalists, 2011) states:

Seek truth and report it.

Minimize harm.

Act independently.

Be accountable.

The part many of us question is "minimize harm", since news journalism depicts disturbing stories of violence, crime, and environmental devastation.

Although our confidence has recently grown, still only 27% of Americans have a great deal of confidence in television news, and 28% for newspapers (Morales, 2011). Fortunately for us, "There is now a growing disenchantment with disenchantment" (Pawelski & Moores, in press). News has the potential to increase meaning in our lives, make us more engaged citizens, and could possibly even increase positive emotion if done correctly.

Danish journalist Cathrine Gyldensted argues that much of the news media contributes to negative affect in society, and also contributes to negative well-being within the journalism profession. Gyldensted (2011) designed a research questionnaire to test the limits of how journalism can apply principles of positive psychology to reporting while still honoring the Journalist's Code. Her objective was to discern how much "positive" reporting would be too much: would readers find "positive" journalism trustworthy? Participants read two variations of news stories, each reporting on the same facts, but presented within a spectrum of several positive-to-negative ratio written styles. Her findings indicate that the most positive affect was experienced using two strategies. The first was the 3-to-1 "positivity ratio" of Frederickson and Losada (Frederickson, 2009), an optimal ratio of positive events to negative ones. The second strategy was employing the "peak-end" rule, telling the stories using a positive peak and a positive end in the narrative structure. We know that an experience's *peak* and its *end* are what

determine how we tend to remember it (Kahneman, et al., 1993). Knowing that readers still find stories incorporating these two methods to be *believable* is key takeaway for the future of reporting, and can contribute to the well-being of both readers and journalists themselves.

Another storytelling method Gyldensted effectively tested (for believability and affect-related outcomes) was telling a news story using what Professor Betty Sue Flowers calls a "hero narrative" (as cited in Gyldensted, 2011). Inspired by the hero's journey narrative pattern identified by Joseph Campbell (Vogler, 1992), hero narratives center around a character within the event who has overcome an obstacle and grows through that adversity. The American Film Institute (2003) defines a hero as "a character who prevails in extreme circumstances and dramatizes a sense of morality, courage and purpose; though they may be ambiguous or flawed, they often sacrifice themselves to show humanity at its best".

Gyldensted and I are now discussing ways that debate-style reporting on political issues can be done with an appreciative view, and through technological advances, from a more democratic (lowercase "d") - stance. We are also experimenting with a Facebook page called "Science of Good News". Arianna Huffington's digital news site *The Huffington Post* is an example of more democratic reporting in that it employs bloggers and asks for feedback that gets posted on its topical verticals such as "Mindfulness", "Parenting", and now, "Good News" and "Impact", sections focusing on positive news stories. Another website that focuses specifically on uplifting content is *Daily Good* (see Resources for all).

The model of journalism seems to be slowly shifting, but one key to this change will be the future education of journalists. Recently, five Danish journalism students wrote a thesis (Hylleberg et al., 2012) outlining the need for education on positive reporting, and Gyldensted and others are working on textbooks and curriculum changes for the next generation of



journalists. For example, when interviewing subjects, asking positive questions will help in crafting storylines like the hero narrative. Without the relevant information-gathering processes, there can be no positive reporting. Humans also have a tendency to give greater weight to the negative in life, which is called our *negativity bias* (Rozin & Royzman, 2001) – which might be a good thing as it relates to news. (We have yet to answer the question: should people helping people be "news"?) Regardless, we can't report the good without knowing what it is - and not knowing has its own consequences.

Kahneman (2011) explains that the *availability cascade* (Kuran & Sunstein, 1999) is what allows biases to become policy via the over- or under-exposure of major issues. For example, people think that murder, shark attacks, and terrorism are more prevalent than they are, due to their coverage in the media. If we media makers feed into the availability cascade, and don't make an effort for fair and balanced reporting, we are partially responsible for the resulting panic, debilitation, and frequency fallacy that ensues.

No one wants the news “sugarcoated”, especially not bad news. It would be easy to say that we should hide the bad news – that its negative effects outweigh the good it does. But positive psychology maintains the stance that the good is *just as real as* the negative, not *more important than* the negative. We can only appropriately respond to the world around us when we have access to accurate information, for which we rely on journalists. By following their code (Society of Professional Journalists, 2011) and "seeking truth", we must necessarily find some good, and by "minimizing harm", we media-makers must take responsibility for our impact on well-being. Next we turn to classic mediums that, unlike news, are known for their ability to impact our lives in a positive way.

## **Music & Visual Art**

*“Keep a sharp lookout on changing styles in the arts. The artist is always a jump ahead of technology.” - Marshall McLuhan, 1968 (Marshall McLuhan Speaks, 2012)*

*“All art is performance art. You're responding to your best guess about the process leading up to it.” - Paul Bloom (course lecture, November 19, 2011)*

The power of art and music to evoke positive emotion is undeniable. Music is especially good at creating the emotional states of excitement, tranquility, and joy. We even listen to sad music to lighten our hearts at times. Live concerts can help us access our “groupish” nature (Haidt, 2012). The first concert I attended was Paul Simon’s *Rhythm of the Saints* tour. I remember being transported into a state where I was one with the music. I felt the same way years later while dancing at raves, a venue Haidt (2012) describes as successful at allowing us to tap into our “hive psychology”, allowing us to experience transcendence of the self and connection to something larger.

Through their multimedia live performances incorporating nature animations, and their intergenerational impromptu road shows in the Icelandic countryside, singer Jónsi and band Sigur Rós have successfully made music about the experience of connecting with others and with things more meaningful than self. Jónsi recently won the Nordic Music Prize, whereupon the jury declared of his album *Go* (2010), “It sounds and almost smells like Iceland. It’s brave and life-affirming pop music that grabs you by the heart in flamboyant technicolour” (Nordic Music Prize, 2010).

In New York City, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is taking advantage of classic mediums by integrating music, visual art, and poetry into their Arts for Transit program. The MTA’s founders believed that the subway should enhance the experience of travel and be “an inviting and pleasant environment, geared to the user, with the highest levels of design and materials” (Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 2012). To that end, they employ

durable mediums such as ceramic tile, mosaic, bronze, terra cotta, and glass in both rehabilitating and constructing elements of the subway system. MTA Arts for Transit commissions artists to create transit-related posters for display in unused advertising space on their 468 subway stations platforms. The artwork is complemented by their Poetry in Motion program's subway car poem cards. The MTA also brings thousands of music performances to commuters each year through their Music Under New York (MUNY) program, which showcases performers across music genres. Collectively, this effort is a great example of a public humanities project aimed at greater well-being.

Two other examples of artwork worth mentioning are Shepherd Fairey's "Hope" poster, and Stefan Sagmeister's "Happy" exhibit. Fairey's collage-medium face of U.S. presidential hopeful Barack Obama was made famous when it became the iconic symbol of the 2008 election. Street artist Fairey donated the image for use in the public domain to aid the campaign, and some credit it with having set the tone of the election and bringing many young voters to the polls. After his inauguration, President Obama wrote to thank Fairey (2008):

The political messages involved in your work have encouraged Americans to believe they can change the status-quo. Your images have a profound effect on people, whether seen in a gallery or on a stop sign. I am privileged to be a part of your artwork and proud to have your support. I wish you continued success and creativity.

– Barack Obama, February 22, 2008

Graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister (2012) used his own happiness quest as a jumping-off point for an art gallery exhibit at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. He created an experiential show that included visual art (especially typographic motifs), video, graphic depictions of happiness-related data, and user experience prompts to engage attendees.

The exhibit was effective at increasing engagement for two reasons. First, it employed the attendee as a participant. For example, Sagmeister asked attendees to contribute a drawing about what makes them happy, which were later posted on his website. (Here is mine, on the [right](#).) The exhibit may also have increased positive emotion - visitors were tasked with choosing a gumball numbered between one and ten to describe their happiness as they left the exhibit. No "pre-test" measures were taken.

Secondly, we were invited intimately into the artist's personal journey. To use Haidt's (2006) metaphor, we were allowed into the elephant. We rode into the artist's mind on a Trojan elephant, and so could experience his life through his eyes – literally, through his art, and also through video of his journeys to find happiness through meditation, acts of kindness, and interactions with nature. As in television and film, the personal narrative invites a deeper experience of the media. As Atticus Finch said in Harper Lee's classic novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960), "You never know someone, until you step inside their skin and walk around a little."

We have now explored some of the many ways that traditional mediums like feature films, documentaries, television, news journalism, music, and visual art can exemplify elements of well-being. Next we turn our eye to how the newer mediums of the computer age - social media, video games, apps, and other digital media like blogs and podcasts - can aid in our pursuit of the good life.

## **Social Media**

*“Nineteenth century culture was defined by the novel, 20th century culture by cinema. The culture of the 21st century will be defined by the interface.”*

-Lev Manovich, new media theorist

One of the newest forms of media is social media. Robert Wright (2000) calls information technology the nervous system for social organisms, and "the better the nervous system, the more agile the organism". The information technology of social media is now incredibly agile. Not only can we connect with what our family overseas is reading, listening to, and "Like"s, we can even chat with them live through our social networking sites. More than any other element of media, social media has the power to nurture positive relationships by keeping us connected. It also naturally fosters engagement.

While its users do tend to skew young, affluent, and educated, no social media platform in the world brings more people together than Facebook (eBizMBA, 2012; Morales, 2011). We often hear negative findings about Facebook: the more "friends" you have, the more narcissistic you are (Schwartz, 2010); it has created a new form of bullying (Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012). But while negative social forces may be at play in social media, the upside of this is that we now have a public space of accountability. McLuhan said, "Nobody can really imagine what private guilt can be anymore" (Marshall McLuhan Speaks, 2012). Social media creates accountability structures via our networks. These networks may even spread well-being through a "contagion" effect, up to several degrees of separation (Fowler & Christakis, 2009). Social media may even contribute to a "moral Flynn effect" (Pinker, 2011) through which we come to care about one another more as time progresses.

Social media also functions as an engagement device for us. Consider Twitter, in which short tweets of up to 140 characters can be used to say just about anything, to anyone else online. It's an efficient way to be up-to-the-minute current about trends, and especially breaking news. I first learned of the Japanese quake and tsunami because of Twitter, and immediately got to work on a 1-hour "instamentary" (quick turnaround documentary) covering the events. Twitter also

allows people to search for topics of interest using the hashtag function to get the very latest posts on their topic (e.g., #mindfulness). By using hashtags in one's own posts, one can become a part of a community of like-minded individuals, many times rallied around a social cause.

Teilhard de Chardin (1969) spoke of the *noosphere*, the "electronically mediated web of thought", or shared mind to which we all contribute (Wright, 2000). The collective mind of politics has been ignited through social media. In March of 2011, about 9 in 10 Egyptian and Tunisian Facebook users surveyed said they were using the platform to organize or spread awareness about protests. During Egypt's civil protest movement, 94% of citizens there said they got their news from social media, as opposed to 40% from state-sponsored TV, news, and radio (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Tweets from the Tahrir Square rebellion graphically described to the world the brutality that was happening live on the ground. Social media has become a people's journalism fueled with meaning for activist causes, and possible through civic engagement in a participatory and inclusive medium.

There is a trend towards this democratization. In the real life version of social media, a phenomenon began during Occupy Wall Street that is known as the "people's mic". One person says a phrase, and the crowd repeats it back, amplifying it. Because Occupy is a grassroots movement and generally there are no microphones or amplification systems, this creates an effective way to spread a message. It is also a democratic process: anyone can be the caller, and all are the responders. The people's mic is like the live version of the retweet. On Twitter, anyone can tweet his message, and anyone else can blast it to his followers in an instant, multiplying the effect of the message.

It seems that social media was built as an environment of positive defaults to nurture positive relationships. We can designate "friends" but not "enemies" on Facebook, and can

"follow" whom we choose on Twitter, without a need for reciprocity, or any outright rejection mechanisms. The words "share", "like", "favorite" and other positively-coded words are embedded into new media technologies to the extent that we barely realize that their opposites are nowhere to be found. Facebook's design principles (Facebook Design, 2009) include being *universal* ("making the world more open") and *human* ("the people you care about all in one place"). It is because of this intention and because of the dramatic ways it has brought strangers, friends, and families together, that I believe social media is the best example of positive media platform we currently have.

Another type of social media is that of resource-sharing. A good example of this is Craigslist, a "local" bulletin board online that has now spread to cities the world over. Elsewhere, social sites are used for linking travelers with beds, volunteers with organizations they can help, and of course, future husbands and wives through online dating sites.

## **Games**

*"A good game is a unique way of structuring experience and provoking positive emotion. It is an extremely powerful tool for inspiring participation and motivating hard work. And when this tool is deployed on top of a network, it can inspire and motivate tens, hundreds, or millions of people at a time." - Game designer Jane McGonigal (2011)*

Games provide us with highly structured, self-driven work that provides us with instant feedback and clear goals. It is for this reason that games exemplify accomplishment, and more than any other medium, flow, or intrinsically motivated skillful activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Experience sampling methods have also shown that gaming is an activity that produces high levels of interest and positive emotion (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow is characterized by complete immersion in an activity, so that time seems to stand still. An individual might retrospectively experience positive emotion from flow, but in the moment may lose her sense of self entirely, being wrapped up in using her skills at an equally matched level. Flow is also

characterized by immediate feedback and a clear goal (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Games provide constant feedback through scoring mechanisms, and goals are dictated by the levels, worlds, or reward incentives of the specific gaming environment. As one advances through a game, one has to increase his or her skill level to feel the same degree of engagement in the activity. (By comparison, television is often accused of producing "junk flow" or "faux flow" because it provokes absorption but does not generally invite the use of skill (Peterson, 2006); an exception may be the game show genre.)

In her book *Reality is Broken*, Jane McGonigal (2011) makes a case for why games pull us out of real life and into another reality so effectively, by:

1. challenging us with voluntary obstacles and allowing us to use our strengths;
2. focusing our energy, with relentless optimism, on something we are good at and enjoy;
3. giving us clear missions and satisfying hands-on work;
4. eliminating our fear of failure and improving our chances for success;
5. building stronger social bonds, leading to more active social networks; and
6. making us a part of something bigger and giving epic meaning to our actions.

McGonigal makes a compelling case for using our obsession with games as a way to learn about how we can restructure life to make it more compelling. "Obsession" is not too strong a word. Games are such a rich source of gratifying activity that in South Korea, some children are now so addicted to gaming that their parents enroll them in addiction rehab clinics (Dretzin, 2010).

McGonigal (2011) describes some of the unique elements of gaming, such as its high levels of accomplishment, which she calls "epic wins" (p. 247), and its "epic environments" (p.



98). It fosters problem-solving, and can allow one to be surrounded by creative collaborators. It builds positive feedback and reward into its structure.

Some researchers have described a magic number of practice hours one needs to become an expert in a given field (Ericsson et al., 1993; Gladwell, 2008). That number is ten thousand hours, and by the age of 21, the average American has racked up that many gaming hours (McGonigal, 2011, p.266). Gaming has become a sort of parallel track of education, in which three billion *weekly* collective hours of effort are expended (McGonigal, 2011, p. 51). Economist Edward Castronova (as cited in McGonigal, 2011, p.1) said, “We’re witnessing what amounts to no less than a mass exodus to virtual worlds and online game environments.”

We know from many studies that playing violent video games reduces prosocial behavior and increases aggression (Anderson et al., 2010). However, playing a violent game cooperatively in a team (in multiple-player mode, as opposed to single-player mode) actually increases cooperative behavior (Greitemeyer, Traut-Mattausch, & Osswald, 2012). McGonigal (2011) says that gamers are increasingly using games as a way to connect and build relationships. She explains that gamers are virtuosos at four things: having a sense of *urgent optimism*, weaving a tight social fabric (positive relationships), being blissfully productive (experiencing flow), and construing epic meaning (through their awe-inspiring missions and planetary-scale epic stories) (McGonigal, 2011).

McGonigal (2011) makes the case that serious gamers believe they are capable of changing the world - or at least the virtual world. Like film, games encourage prospection, our ability to create mental simulations of the future (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007). McGonigal has harnessed the power of games to create new realities in her work at the Institute for the Future with social issue games like *World Without Oil*, *Superstruct*, and *Evoke*. These are examples of

"non-zero-sum" games.

Game theory, founded by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, distinguishes between zero-sum games in which players outcomes are inversely correlated, and non-zero-sum games in which one's gain does not necessarily entail another's loss. Most likely in non-zero-sum games, players' interests actually overlap. Wright (2000) explains that as technology evolves in complexity and social structures follow this lead, the result is a growing social complexity and increased interdependence. Hence, "non-zero-sumness" shows up as a potential for (and momentum towards) either collective loss or collective gain (Wright, 2000). Games are one way we can work towards non-zero-sumness.

### **Apps**

Sixteen percent of people in the U.S. now own tablet devices like the iPad (Ipsos Mediact, 2012). Coupled with dramatic growth in the use of smartphones in recent years, the prevalence and use of *apps* – applications that can be run on computers, smartphones, and tablet devices – is on the rise. Today at least 40% of American kids ages 5 to 12 spend up to an hour or more using smartphones, where apps dominate (Pan, 2012). Apps are an agile, modern medium, each one unique and customized, bringing the best elements of other mediums together to work for us at our fingertips.

Apps can be a great mechanism for boosting willpower and facilitating goal achievement. By creating exercises for changing behaviors in small ways, we can build our willpower (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011). Apps can help us to take control of our second order desires (our "shoulds" and "ought tos") by creating accountability structures or commitment devices for us that also provide feedback. Importantly, apps may be the best medium we have for promoting positive health. Seligman (2008) has described positive health as encompassing three factors:

subjective assessments, biological factors, and functional factors. Apps can tackle all three. For example, the *WeightWatchers* app allows people to track personal (subjective) weight goals. The *Stress Check* app by Azumio measures heart rate variability using the built-in camera on smartphones, a biological health marker. *Nike+* lets you know how many miles you've run, your functional capacity.

Apps also naturally foster engagement because they are typically interactive. A great example of this is *Instagram*, a photography app that allows users to edit photos and upload them to social networks and share with friends. The app became so popular that it was acquired by Facebook in advance of their I.P.O. to boost the value of the social media giant and in fear of competition from the photo startup (CNBC, 2012).

Some excellent examples of apps that can increase different elements of well-being are: *Mint*, which tracks financial well-being; *Words with Friends*, which allows participants to play Scrabble with their friends; *Nike+*, a tracking mechanism for physical health goals employing the voice of exemplar models like Lance Armstrong and interactive technology for use with friends; *Moodtraining*, a forthcoming app for emotional state management via exercise; *Adopt-A-Hydrant*, which encourages civic engagement; *LiveHappy*, a positive psychology research-based app fostering gratitude and savoring; and *Pain Squad*, a pain management game for children with cancer.

## **Digital Media**

*"Each new technology is a reprogramming of sensory life."* - Marshall McLuhan  
(McLuhan & Carson, 2003)

Digital media is a broad term that includes many forms such as some we've already explored (social media, apps), and others, such as podcasts, transmedia, blogs, webisodes, and more. I suspect that we might find the best ways to marry the findings of positive psychology in

a seamless way into the life of the consumer/user in a new media realm. Digital media uses video and audio together in a multi-sensory experience. We have long since transcended past text on a page, and returned to moving images and sound, our oldest and most natural way of seeing the world. Because each breakthrough in technology lubricates the transmission of information (video, sound, etc.), each also makes subsequent breakthroughs more likely (Wright, 2000). Innovations are springing forth from the personal freedom inherent in the new ideas economy; insofar as they do, new technologies also perpetuate "non-zero-sumness" (Wright, 2000). *Cognitive surplus* is the term given to describe how "new media and technology are transforming us from consumers to collaborators, harnessing the vast amounts of free-floating human potential to build on humanity's treasure trove of knowledge and bring about social change" (Shirky, 2010).

One example of digital media innovation is the new area called *transmedia*. Transmedia is a content distribution method that employs multiple media platforms and environments to express a single fictional world, and involves both narrative and game worlds (Dena, 2009). It can also be thought of as one story told over multiple media, in which each makes a unique contribution. One of its hallmarks is *layers of meaning* (A. Phillips, personal communication, May 30, 2012), hearkening back to Aristotle's dramatic unities and the German aesthetic notion of "Gesamtkunstwerk" which uses layers of different arts to create a universal or comprehensive work.

For example, an online web series can have character pages on Facebook, and (fictional) characters chat (in real life) back and forth with their audience. Through its "worldbuilding" element, actual objects might be sent to the consumer, like a treasure map. Worldbuilding incorporates both digital and real world artifacts. More platforms ensures more ways to create

backstory and future possibilities out of a narrative – more temporal realms. In one transmedia game, an online character posted that she was going out into the city to track down the bad guys, and later when she never reappeared on Facebook (she was virtually "dead" - had been murdered in the storyline), participants felt guilty for not warning her not to do it, though they knew the game was a fake. Players brought roses and mementos to the office building of the game developer in her honor. Transmedia may be the best way to exemplify an individual element of well-being, by telling its complete story across platforms in ways dictated by each medium's ecology. (For example, a positive relationship could be expressed across mediums such as via texts, tweets, social media profiles, and a web series, making its narrative more robust and lifelike, and providing accessibility to people on various platforms.)

More well-known examples of digital media that support well-being are Chris Anderson's TED Talks, and Oprah Winfrey's Book Club. TED gathers the world's leading thinkers together once a year to distill their life's work in 18 minutes or less. Its format makes it a powerful device for education. What is impressive media-wise is that it is able to successfully: mix content across subject domains (something that is difficult for say, a television network), use a simple format (a lone speaker referring to a PowerPoint presentation), and create a powerful brand globally and cross platforms seamlessly (iPad, now TEDradio, and airing on Science Channel). Its brand is so beloved and it generates so much groundswell support that it has now branched off into TEDx independently organized TED events the world over. I was an organizer for Washington D.C.'s first TEDx talks, and it created a powerful sense of community engagement for hundreds of people, and a win-win for local businesses and our university sponsor.

Oprah's Book Club has been a phenomenal success. She introduced the original club on her television show, which immediately resulted in skyrocketing book sales for its featured

works, and a deeply engaged participant fanbase both online in forums and offline at privately-organized events, some of whom were treated to a dinner party with the author and Oprah, which was recorded and broadcast. Oprah recently launched her Book Club 2.0, with webisodes, reading group guides, an app for creating a virtual book club, the ability to ask the authors' questions, post videos, tweet, etc.; each added different layers of meaning for readers.

The digital medium is also excellent at cultivating the positive emotion of *interest* (Frederickson, 2009) through websites like YouTube, StumbleUpon (which generates recommendations for other online spaces to the participant) and Pinterest (an inspiration and creativity portfolio / social network).

Decades before social media and the blogosphere, McLuhan (1967) said, "*Electric circuitry has overthrown the regime of time and space and pours down upon us instantly and continuously the concerns of all other men.*" While blogs can admittedly be criticized for sometimes being narcissistic in nature, they are a digital medium that engages the participant in creating content, and they allow readers a window into another life.

A great example of a personal blog is that of nine-year old Martha Payne, who writes a [blog](#) called "Never Seconds" all about school lunches. Starting as a hobby, Martha's site has now had over 7 million page views. Martha publishes photos and blogposts from parents and kids worldwide, talking about what they eat. The blog has now raised money to build a kitchen to feed children in Malawi, and has attracted attention to the important issue of nutrition in schools worldwide.

Some researchers are now focusing on ways to cultivate well-being through digital mediums. For example, narratives delivered through cell phones and MP3 players have been used to increase well-being in commuters. In a study done in Milan (Grassi, Gaggioli, & Riva,

2009), participants listened to (or listened to and watched) the media on their mobile devices on their commutes to and from work on two consecutive days. At the start and end of the days, their emotional state, trait, and sense of presence were measured. The mobile narrative interventions increased both positive emotion and sense of presence, and in some cases reduced stress and anxiety. While this is a relatively new area of inquiry, digital media's built-in portability and data-tracking capacities make it ideal for future research.

Podcasts, topical audio series delivered to mobile devices, are an ideal mechanism for learning (like audiobooks), generating interest in new topics, and for creating positive emotion through humor. One of my favorite podcasts is *This American Life* by Ira Glass and National Public Radio. Another is *99% Invisible* by Roman Mars, which explores the invisible architecture of the world around us.

### **Summary of What is Working**

As I've shown, both traditional media forms and modern digital media can all increase our well-being in countless ways. The content might naturally incorporate an element of well-being, like those of PERMA (Seligman, 2011), or another element that fosters it (e.g., it might increase learning, which can increase accomplishment). It might engage its participant in a positive process, such as experience-taking, or towards a positive outcome, for example through goal-setting. It might even foster a new lens of well-being, by showing a different worldview or presenting information from a positive vantage point, such as through the hero narrative.

We've explored the following (partial) list of mediums: **film, documentary, television, music and visual art, news, social media, games, apps**, and other **digital media**. We've seen each has unique capacities to foster and/or model elements that contribute to human flourishing, such as the following:

Character strengths  
Positive emotion (P)  
Engagement or flow (E)  
Positive relationships (R)  
Meaning and purpose (M)  
Accomplishment or achievement (A)  
Resilience and optimism  
Prospection  
Positive health

### **Positive Media Consumption and Creation for Individuals**

Towards enjoying the ends of well-being, we can choose to make better choices in our relationship to media. Jonathan Haidt (2006) says that happiness comes not from within or without but from *between*. I believe the key is to create a healthy relationship *between* our selves and media. How can we use media to be a better version of ourselves? Here I offer some ways in which we as the consumers and creators of media can engage with it in a way that supports flourishing.

Consumers of media have a lot of power, because consumer choices drive the creation of content. For example, when ratings soar on a television show, that television network can charge more advertising dollars, and orders more episodes of that show or a similar show. So if we want to affect what media gets created, it's our job as viewers to choose wisely about the media we consume.

What kinds of content do we enjoy and reject? Those likes and dislikes determine our beliefs about the world. Psychologist Paul Slovic (as cited in Kahneman, 2001) calls this our *affect heuristic*, our mental shortcut for liking. Because our emotional attitude about things is many times determined by how we come to know them, and that is often through media sources, those sources are directly driving our beliefs, whether we realize it or not. Cultivating *mindfulness*, the non-judgmental awareness of experiences in the present moment (Hölzel et al.,



2011), can allow us to be more aware of our emotional reactions to the media we consume and tap into the slower and more rational side of our thinking.

One way to do this is to write down your media intake. How much time did you spend playing games this week? When's the last time you went to a concert? Knowing your patterns will help you to make better decisions. Another way is to start a mindfulness meditation practice. This form of meditation can be done for as little as a few minutes a day, and it has been shown to increase attentive focus, awareness of the body, emotional regulation, immune function, and to decrease stress, among other benefits (Hölzel et al., 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

When you become mindful of your media patterns, you will be able to understand your motivations for engaging with media, such as: what is your desired outcome when you turn on the TV? Are you hoping to relax? When you spend two hours on Facebook, is it because you're feeling disconnected? Sometimes just knowing why we're doing something will give us an idea about a better way to reach our goal. Knowing what is especially meaningful to us can also help inform our decisions. For example, if I realize that I am turning on the TV because I feel alone in my apartment at night, it might make more sense for me to see if I can video chat with my brother and nurture our relationship.

Media critic William Powers (2010) says that the most important theme to keep in mind is the balance we need to strike "between connected and disconnected, crowd and self, the outward life and the inward one" (p. 210). Mindfulness allows us to gain perspective on that balance, as does something else Powers (2010) suggests: *screen fasts*, or getting some *digital distance*.

We already know that more screen time is not necessarily better for us. Researchers in one study found that increased television watching by the elderly correlated with more negative

associations of aging and that tracking viewing impressions in a diary increased awareness of this phenomenon (Donlon, Ashman, & Levy, 2005). Afterwards many participants expressed intentions to reduce their television consumption. Given that the elderly watch more television than any other age group (Donlon, Ashman, & Levy, 2005) – they are its biggest market – and they are also the ones being negatively portrayed, these findings speak to the importance of mindful television consumption. Especially because the baby boomer generation is moving towards old age, these findings also urge researchers and developers to find ways of producing healthy content for our aging population. The silver lining is that this research shows the effectiveness of tracking one's own media habits for making new decisions about what to consume. Cultivating our *emotional intelligence* can also help us make more mindful decisions (see Resources).

Another thing we can do is learn to cope with negative media by understanding that the news and other media plays into our collective negativity bias. That is, try not to let the negative incidents you hear about make you feel scared or powerless. If you must watch the news, give yourself a time limit. Also, seek out news sources that are more balanced in their reporting of negative and positive news (see Resources). Aim to limit your exposure to negative messages. A good shortcut to keep in mind is the positivity ratio of 3:1 (Frederickson, 2009); when choosing what to watch, try not only to increase the amount of positive media that you consume, but to decrease the negative messages, as well.

A third way to enrich our media exposure is through savoring. Savoring is the ability to attend to and deeply enjoy the pleasures and other positive experiences we have (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). People who savor are generally happier with life, more optimistic, and less

depressed than those who don't (Peterson, 2006). Some examples of savoring strategies

(Peterson, 2006) as applied to media are:

1. Share your media time with others: invite a friend to the movies and discuss the film afterwards; ask your family members to play online games (e.g., Words With Friends).
2. Build memories: create an online video diary of your vacations; build a ritual around your favorite television show's airings. (This will help you to savor in retrospect later through reminiscing.)
3. Congratulate yourself: Stop to celebrate when you've mastered a new level in a game; use social media to involve others in your accomplishments (and celebrate theirs).
4. Sharpen your perceptions: Try to focus only on the drums at a concert event; look carefully at the set decoration in a period movie.
5. Absorption: Set aside time for reading your friends' status updates and responding; stay for the credits of movies; finish all other work before sitting down to watch television, and giving yourself permission to enjoy a set period of time.
6. Cultivate anticipatory pleasure (J. Saltzberg, course lecture, April 28, 2012): plan events in advance, such as a summer concert with friends, or an Oscar's premiere party. If you're going to see a play, read it in advance.

When selecting between an activity that engages one part of you (for example, the brain, in a standard video game), or an activity with a second level of challenge (for example, a sport-related game that uses the brain and whole body), choose the latter, since it's more likely to create flow. One characteristic of flow is working at one's full capacity (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), and it's been called the "coming together of a person and an environment" (Peterson, 2006). If that game is environment-specific (chess on the Santa Monica promenade or *Dance Dance Revolution* at a boardwalk arcade), all the better.

One powerful way to impact media is to set a good example for the next generation of media consumers and creators, our children. The four prominent methods of learning in human evolution are: imitation, teaching, tool use, and language (Wright, 2000). We can use these four methods as guides for how to educate the next generation on healthy media consumption and

creation by: using media that supports our own well-being (imitation), explaining the choices we are making (teaching), showing kids how to use social media in a positive way (tool use), and creating a dialogue with them about media in their lives (language).

Social media is increasingly important; 45% of children ages 9-12 have a Facebook page (Common Sense Media, 2012). Role models for using social media in ways that foster positive relationships are crucial for today's youth. Parents, relatives, and teachers can get involved in what the kids around us are consuming and creating media-wise, and engage them in dialogue. Ask to see their Facebook page, and show them yours. Start a family Twitter feed. Embrace the media world kids live in every day, and create projects together, like videos, slideshows of trips, and family websites.

If you're using media to foster well-being, employ what psychologists and economists already know about what makes people happy. For example, comforts don't provide joys. Psychologist Paul Rozin (course lecture, October 9, 2011) says, "If I ask you how your year was, you're not gonna say, 'It was such a great mattress'." Invest in media consumption that is likely to create a joyful experience, as opposed to a quick pleasure. (An obvious example here is pornography, which provides basic pleasure, but not joy.)

We now know that people rely on their memories, not their actual experiences, when deciding whether or not to repeat an experience. We give undue weight to our experiences' peaks and ends (Kahneman, et al., 1993), and due to a concept called *duration neglect*, how long a movie is (or how many episodes in a row we watch on Netflix) makes little difference to how we remember our viewing experience (Redelmeier & Kahneman, 1996). The key is trying to *end* that experience on a good note. Also, your experiencing self is less powerful overall to your well-being than your remembering self that creates "representative moments" from your

experience (Kahneman, 2011). We can take advantage of those findings by trying to end your media experiences on a good note. (If you're "falling asleep to the TV", at least do yourself the favor of turning it off directly after a good joke or a sweet scene, not during an annoying commercial. Turn games off after completing a level, not being killed by enemy fire.)

Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2012) teaches that to understand people more deeply, we ought to "follow the sacredness" in their life. When you engage with media, try to understand what it might be "sacralizing" or valuing, and whether or not that is in line with your own values. For example, many television productions place value on self-reliance and bravery (think *Man vs. Wild*). Others sacralize material beauty (*Next Top Model*) or creativity (*Top Chef*). Pawelski and Moores (in press) make a valuable distinction we can use: "What distinguishes prudential value from aesthetic or moral value is that it is good for the subject." What is good for you personally about the shows you watch or the games you play?

*"We all care intensely for the narrative of our own life, and very much want it to be a good story, with a decent hero."* - Daniel Kahneman (2011, p. 387)

A good way to find media that is in line with your values is to heed the recommendations of friends. Four or five friends recently recommended the film *Buck* to me. I watched and loved it, and it felt in line with who I am, because my friends know what I value. Likewise, stay on the lookout for websites, films, music, and games that are in line with your friends' values. When you enjoy something, think of others who will appreciate it; share with family, friends, and colleagues those things that have boosted your mood, improved your relationships, or given you a feeling of meaningful accomplishment. Start a film club or book club that is aligned around core values or character strengths. Take advantage of media that can increase what psychologists call your *social capital* and *moral capital*. This includes media that aids in your spiritual or religious growth, emphasizes similarity among people, builds on shared traditions, or helps

create norms that support hard work and contribution (Haidt, 2012). Finding and maintaining a sense of meaning is important because not only is it highly correlated with life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2012), but there is growing evidence that it is protective against psychopathology (Damon, 2008).

Mix up your media diet. Psychologists have learned that when not enough information is available, our minds will always complete the picture to make a coherent story. We trick ourselves into thinking what we see is all there is (Kahneman, 2011), but in reality we don't know what we don't know. Thus we must try to keep our information pathways as diverse as possible given this limited way our minds work. We can learn to attack our confirmation biases (our tendency to remember and interpret information in ways that confirms our existing beliefs and biases), for example, by not watching the same news channel every night. To cultivate openness, make an effort to create variety in the media you consume. Likewise, consider new mediums for obtaining information and entertainment. I have a feeling my Mom would love podcasts if she would only give them a try!

*“Now what we’re seeing is people have more free time, more access to resources, and infinite knowledge at their fingertips – which means they can tap into any form of creation. That trumps the Renaissance by orders of magnitude.”*

- Digital artist Aaron Koblin (KS12 & Emergence Collective, 2011)

Today, *we are all the media*. Each of us is capable of creating media that can be seen all over the world, e.g., blogs, YouTube videos, etc. When we do so, a good question to ask is, "How might the media I'm creating be impacting people's lives?" For example, how are you presenting yourself to others on social media platforms? Are you aware of your impact on others? Since life satisfaction may likely be contagious through social networks (Fowler & Christakis, 2009), when you post a violent video, write a scathing blog post, or complain about your day on Twitter, be aware that you are creating ripple effects of negativity, or "downward

spirals". Be careful of the words that you use: what messages are you putting out there? What is your ratio of positive to negative (Frederickson, 2009)? Decide to cultivate only upward spirals in the digital sphere – or at least try to engage others in a positive process.

The Balinese say, "We have no art. We do everything as well as we can." Zen teacher Cheri Huber (1988) echoes that sentiment: "How you do anything is how you do everything." When creating media, it makes good sense to stay sensitive to media's global reach and the now eternal nature of digital reality. In the last year, I've made a personal commitment to only post positive messages or thought-provoking ideas on my Facebook page, and I use a Twitter feed @PosPsychology to boost my sense of meaning, by contributing to a larger community who share my common values and interests. William James (1890) once wrote, "A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him." If you have several different digital personalities, consider cultivating the character strength of honesty and authenticity by being consistent in tone across your networks.

Knowing your signature character strengths will help you develop an appreciation of your unique perspective, which might aid you in finding media that feels authentic. (See the Resources section for a link to the VIA Survey of Character Strengths.) Likewise, you may be more able to find good characters onscreen whom you can emulate in order to build other strengths. For example, if you notice you are low on the character strength of integrity, you can find film characters to model and with whom to generate upward comparisons. By creating models, you can develop mental shortcuts. For example, to emulate integrity, we can ask ourselves, "What would Atticus Finch do?" Pick personal heroes from our rich media heritage.

Set positive defaults for yourself. Use tools like your DVR to make sure you watch only the content that feeds you, not depletes you. Modify your cable subscription to include channels

that educate and inspire you, like the Sundance Channel, or allow you to reminisce, like classic movie channels. Set up a Netflix queue filled with the recommendations of friends (or those in books like Niemiec and Wedding's *Positive Psychology at the Movies*) far enough in advance that you always have a go-to list at the ready. Choose companions for your media activities who are also engaged and mindful, as opposed to couch potatoes.

In summary, here are some of the ways we can consume and create media in order to cultivate our own well-being:

- Practice mindfulness
- Take “screen fasts”
- Know your motivation and desired outcome
- Embrace the positivity ratio
- Learn to savor
- Choose flow
- Set a good example
- Know your character strengths & look for heroes
- Set positive defaults
- Follow the sacred & increase your "capital"
- Listen to friends & share resources
- Mix it up and consider new mediums
- Contribute meaning

### **Positive Media Creation for Professionals**

*"We can stop shark finning, we can stop elephant slaughter. We are talking to the world... What we really try to do is get the facts right, and give the audience respect by saying, 'You draw your own conclusions. We respect you. Here are the facts as we know them.' That resonates with people. Media can be a great tool to empower people if done correctly."* - W. Clark Bunting, Discovery Channel

Just before his recent retirement from serving as president of the world's largest non-fiction television network, my boss Clark Bunting (personal communications, March 27, 2012 & July 26, 2012) expressed to me how for those in positions of power in the media, social responsibility can be both an honor and a yoke. Many times I've found myself working on a film or a show that I know will probably have a negative emotional effect on viewers. Sometimes I'm



in a position to change the content, but most of the time I'm not. The long process through which films and television shows are "greenlit" (given the go-ahead) and sent into production entails many people. It's rare that one person can dramatically change the momentum of a project set in motion. But I'm not the only one who knows these shows or films might elicit negative feelings or views, so why is the project moving forward?

I think the answer is that the question of well-being is not an integral part of the decision-making process in creative production. We have the visual lens: *What camera is best for filming outside? What costumes work best with the set design?* We have the advertising and branding lens: *Will Procter & Gamble be upset if we show a different brand of detergent in the shot? Will this subject matter anger our sponsors? What will this project do for our network's brand trajectory?* We have the lens of talent: *Is our actress getting too fat? Can we score someone from one of those vampire shows for our lead?* Last and perhaps most important of all, we always have the lens of cost: *Can we get the footage we need in five shoot days instead of seven? How dare that director think he can charge that rate? How much can we charge for a 30-second commercial spot?*

In short, there is no well-being lens being widely applied to media production. Of course a well-being lens will likely never be the *predominant* lens of media – and I'm not sure that I would urge that it should be – but it can and should be *one* lens. We need to cultivate a dialogue that acknowledges the powerful impact that media can have on people's well-being, and we need better tools to measure the positive impact of the media we have.

There are other things media makers can do. We can democratize content creation through methods like crowdsourcing via social media, and incentivize those who propose positive media pathways. We can also build appreciative questioning into program development

("How *could* we do a film about resilience that's visually compelling?") and interviewing ("After surviving the hurricane, what social resources did you rely on?"). We won't get much of a positive answer without a positive set of questions.

To illustrate character strengths in action, writers can explore "situational themes" for their storylines, the "specific habits that lead people to manifest given character strengths in given situations" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 14). We can challenge ourselves to consider the ways less popular character strengths (like prudence) can be portrayed in a visually exciting or compelling way. We can incorporate conceptual priming into thematic elements, by introducing positive ideas and topics that may influence viewer outcomes down the road.

We can also acknowledge the powerful benefits of positivity (Frederickson, 2009) by including positive dialogue in scripts, and uplifting music cues when editing. Positive emotion becomes increasingly important as media takes on a crucial role in the classroom. Discovery Education's video content is now used in over 50% of U.S. schools (Discovery Education, 2012). One thing producers and curriculum advisors can do is build positive emotion into educational content to harness its power to facilitate learning, foster creativity, and minimize racial boundaries (Frederickson, 2009).

When media giants choose to give back, everyone benefits. Discovery Communications' founder John Hendricks, in addition to starting Discovery Education for domestic schools, started a non-profit organization called the Discovery Channel Global Education Partnership to educate children in third-world countries using the power of television. By setting up learning centers with satellite feeds, the children (many for the first time) get to experience the wonders of volcanoes, buffalo, outer space, and blue whales. Jeff Skoll of Participant Media created the Skoll Foundation, the world's largest foundation for social entrepreneurship.

We can also design media *technology* that gives back. Sepandar Kamvar, professor at the MIT Media Lab (2012) says: “Every tool should nourish the things upon which it depends. I call [them] cyclical tools.” For example, Kamvar cites the iPhone, a tool used by the same developers who drive its adoption, and open-source software that builds the knowledge base of future contributors. *Craigslist*, the community bulletin board, provides a platform for the gift economy, and *Kickstarter* crowdsources funding for recipients who are also contributors.

*“What we need is seriously engaged art that can teach again that we’re smart. And that’s the stuff that TV and movies, although they’re great at certain things, cannot give us. They have to create the motivations for us to want to do the extra work, to get those other kinds of art... A good book teaches the reader how to read it.”*

- David Foster Wallace (as cited in Lipsky, 2010)

In addition to creating technologies that nurture their users, we can make better efforts to find and tell nurturing stories. Kahneman (2011) explains that “people tend to assess the relative importance of issues by the ease with which they are retrieved from memory, and this is largely determined by the extent of coverage in media” (p. 8). Topics and events that are covered extensively give viewers the impression that those topics are more important, and that those events are more likely to occur. In light of that, we can make a choice to cover the good things that are happening. As James Pawelski (course lecture, April 29, 2011) has said, “People don’t look at their worlds. They look at their models.”

Regardless of the subject matter, writers and producers can choose to employ the “peak-end rule” (Kahneman et al., 1993) in our reporting and storytelling (a believable, real life version of “happily ever after”). We can tell stories of real people doing extraordinary things in hero narratives (Gyldensted, 2011) and through the lens of character strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). One example of this is the *CNN Heroes* program, which distinguishes “everyday people changing the world”.

Many organizations have already identified ways to introduce more positive elements into media content. One example is the Girl Scouts of America, who provide healthy media suggestions on their website (see Resources). When taking on a new project, we media creators can look for partners who share our goal of supporting well-being. Choose vendors, seek funders, cast talent, and promote through communities who share your objectives and values. Develop reciprocal relationships with these partners. (Perhaps moving forward, we can even find new ways to transform advertising, which funds most media, into a "non-zero-sum-game" (Wright, 2000).)

Governments who care about the well-being of their citizens ought to care about cultivating free, independent media, a hallmark of democracy. Today, people worldwide mostly agree that their countries have a free media, but this varies from 95% agreement in Scandinavian countries to as low as 27% in Chad, with the U.S. weighing in at 89% agreement (English & Vlad, 2011). Because we know that perceptions of community and cultural justice are correlated with life satisfaction (Prilleltensky, 2011), any ultimate goal of well-being must include worldwide adoption of a free, independent media culture. Ideally it goes one step farther:

When a culture succeeds in evolving a set of rules so compelling and so well matched to the skills of its population that its members are able to experience flow with unusual frequency and intensity... we can say that the whole culture becomes a great game (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 81).

As far as experiencing freedom *itself*, Seligman and colleagues (in press) believe that guidance through prospection can play an important role: "Acting freely or willingly is a matter of generating and evaluating multiple possible future courses of action and so enhancing freedom is thus a matter of enhancing powers of generating and evaluating options." Games, television,

and films can generate realities into which viewers can momentarily step. We know that in order to give viewers or participants a window into a new way of life, certain techniques such as using a first-person narrative, and delaying the revelation of character's "outgroup" (such as their sexual orientation or race) can allow for greater experience-taking (Kaufman & Libby, 2012).

In their work on *prospection*, or the imaginative simulation of possible futures, Seligman and colleagues (in press) state that the way that we turn our experiences into more intelligent behaviors is by acquiring and modifying our expectations. Our passive experiences can become active experiments. Our media experiences, many times passive, are already helping to create our implicit expectations, so they might as well be a tool for imagining positive outcomes and experimenting with future possibilities.

*“The game is for everybody to change. It's not because the audience is demanding us to come out of a different rabbit hole each time, it's because we can't stop ourselves from trying to figure out what is the next way of reducing the aesthetic distance between the audience and the experience.” - Stephen Spielberg (DGA, 2011)*

Media technologies are already being used to design alternate realities, and "as more of our real lives migrate to virtual spaces, there's a growing market for research on how we behave inside those spaces, as well as how our virtual experiences change us" (Dretzin, 2011). The line between the real world and the virtual world is getting fuzzy, especially for those who work in virtual spaces. Importantly, the relationship is multi-directional. For example, a study at Stanford (Dretzin, 2011) showed that giving avatars, our virtual body-doubles, an extra ten centimeters of height and having them negotiate in virtual spaces, helped people to negotiate better later on in the real world, regardless of actual height. The U.S. Army is ahead of the digital curve, using virtual reality as therapy for troops with PTSD, employing predator drone pilots who wage warfare through computers, and by testing recruiting strategies using gaming stations, like at the

former \$12 million Philadelphia "Army Experience Center" property - which was closed after two years and opposed by many (Colimore & Lockley, 2010; Dretzin 2011).

Whether designing digital spaces, composing a song, or developing an app, a question to ask yourself and your content creators is, "What is likely to be the net effect on the well-being of the people that will engage with this project?" A shortcut way to think about this larger question is to remember PERMA and positive health (Seligman, 2008, 2011), and ask:

- P** Will it increase positive emotion? Is it likely to make people more joyful, happier, or more peaceful? Does it have a positive tone?
- E** Does it promote engagement, build skill, or focus attention? Is flow likely to result?
- R** Will it build connection between people? Does it facilitate dialogue? Is it interactive and/or democratic?
- M** Is its message meaningful? Does it have a hero narrative? Does it contain a call to positive action? Does it tell a story that the world needs to hear?
- A** Does it promote hard work? Is it a teaching tool? Can it aid in goal attainment?
- H** Can it contribute to positive outcomes of physical health? Does it promote a healthy lifestyle?

To summarize, here are some things professionals can remember when aiming to create media that fosters well-being:

- Take an appreciative stance
- Utilize the 3:1 positivity ratio
- Support a free independent media
- Fund and adopt new measurements
- Cover the good stuff
- Find supporters and like minds
- Build in a positive peak & end
- Find and employ a hero narrative
- Design to give back & incentivize talent
- Tell a strengths story
- Adopt a well-being lens

### **Future Directions for Positive Media**

*"This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it."*  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1837)

*"We're headed for big brains and big-time culture."* - Robert Wright (2000)

Humans are co-evolving alongside media technology. As we evolve biologically, it feeds our cultural evolution, and as new cultural memes become more prevalent, there's value in us getting smarter; to Wright's point, collectively we're on an upward spiral. As *media* evolved, its newest life forms were typically accessible by only the elite, but today because video and computer technology are evolving together, they are increasingly available to the masses. Our task is to evolve to accommodate this cultural evolution that has likely surpassed (and may come to control) our genetic evolution. Wright (2000) calls this adaptation for advanced culture "the last adaptation". Psychologist Roy Baumeister (course lecture, September 11, 2011) says that our brains "evolved to tap into the consciousness of the group", and advances in technology can be attributed to "a collective social brain" (Wright, 2000). Thus over time, biology and technology are colliding and evolving.

Centuries ago, Socrates (370 B.C.) predicted that the alphabet would "create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves." Today, we rely on online calculators, calendars, encyclopedias, translation devices, libraries, and all kinds of information sources. Positive psychology is amassing important research about what contributes to a "life worth living" (Fowler, Seligman, & Koocher, 1999), and even what is worth knowing, "what to care about" (Frankfurt, 1982). That information should be in places everyone can access it. One of my hopes for positive psychology is that its various communities of coaches, scholars, researchers, and practitioners can work to create resource banks accessible all over the world to

people in all domains.

Positive psychology's exciting findings can and should be presented in engaging ways through media. For example, Ebbe Lavendt, a positive psychology practitioner getting his Ph.D. at the University of Copenhagen, is creating a video library of coaching techniques to help educate other coaches about positive psychology. Renee Jain, another positive psychology practitioner, has created animated online video classes to teach children and parents about positive psychology topics like goal-setting, optimistic thinking, and character strengths (See Resources). On the information *gathering* end, the World Well-Being Project at the University of Pennsylvania, spearheaded by Johannes Eichstaedt, seeks to create methods for tracking global well-being through words posted on social media platforms and utilizing search engine technology. These are just three examples out of many where the findings of positive psychology and new media technology are intersecting. This is just the beginning of both the digital media age and of positive psychology.

One future direction I recommend for the area I'm calling "positive media" is the development of a simple media consumer tool such as a questionnaire to measure elements of well-being such as those of PERMA (Seligman, 2011) (positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning/purpose, and achievement) using media-related prompts. Taking inspiration from "Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life" in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005), here is an example of how a simple questionnaire like this could work.

Each rated 1 (Very True) to 5 (Not True at All):

1. When I watch [my favorite show], I typically feel happier in the hour or so after I turn off the TV than I did when I turned it on.  
(This gives a "P" score to rate positive emotion.)



2. Posting my photos and status updates on Facebook usually leads to an interaction with someone I care about.  
(This gives an "R" score to rate positive relationships.)

Alternately, a questionnaire could list media choices, with P, E, R, M, and A scores that could be used to create a new way of rating media through the lens of well-being. For example:

Media Use	P	E	R	M	A	Well-Being score
1. Watching <i>American Idol</i>	5	2	1	1	1	10
2. Playing Wii dance game	5	5	4	1	5	20

Of course these are just initial prompts to spur dialogue about possibilities for future research. As media technology evolves, the methods we use to track well-being will become easier, cheaper, and even more engaging themselves. Each day I find out about new technologies being used to increase well-being: wearable brain scanners that tell your computer when you're overwhelmed (Waltz, 2012), sleep masks that promise access to lucid dreams (Acelar de Leon, 2012), and games for empathy training (Sakai, 2012). Perhaps McLuhan was right when he said, "The most human thing about us is our technology" (McLuhan & Carson, 2003).

### Conclusion

Over the last twelve years, I have seen the best and the worst media can do for well-being, especially my own. Many long days and nights I've spent on sets and in edit suites wondering, "What's the point?" But then I find out about exciting new projects like those above, or see a movie that changes my perspective, laugh uncontrollably during a podcast, or find a long-lost friend on Facebook, and I feel incredibly grateful for media technology.

The trajectory or narrative of media has in some ways paralleled the narrative of psychology. In both domains, we looked around and saw a need for expression, explanation and conversation about important pieces of our nature. We started that conversation and filled in the

details over time, aided by technological advances and driven by culture. We marveled at our achievements and determined that we had made life a little bit better – fixed some of life's problems or allowed ourselves to escape a negative reality. But that was just the beginning of the story. Now is the time in media and in psychology where a holistic picture of human life is emerging, where science is blending with art and spirituality, and where layer upon layer of cultural evolution, human knowledge, and technological innovation will allow us to design a new reality that promotes human flourishing. To McLuhan's point above, when we own technology as a part of our humanity, we affirm a metaphysical stance akin to that of positive psychology. Media technology is natural and real, just as the good life is deeply human and profoundly real. As a student of positive psychology, I work at being an optimist, and as a media producer, I must do the same. I have great hope for a mutually beneficial relationship between positive psychology and media, and believe that both need one another desperately.

I believe that **media needs positive psychology in order to**: create new metrics for what's working (what is an "engaged" audience?); contribute nuanced research about what people like and what they need; lend a new perspective to an ever-evolving craft; provide research support for bold creative decisions that challenge the status quo; help institutions like newsrooms become workplaces that support well-being; help turn the tide of unhealthy and passive overconsumption; create accountability for content designed to enhance well-being; contribute to a rich dialogue about the "positive" and the "negative"; understand creativity and excellence more deeply and teach their principles to future media-makers; and justify the existence of arts programs to government funders.

On the other side, **positive psychology needs media to**: spread its exciting findings across the world to practitioners, researchers, students, and the general public; engage wide

audiences in dialogues about what is worth measuring; invent new tales of heroes and compellingly tell those of the real-life positive outliers who exemplify character strengths in action; turn an investigative eye to the good in life; enhance positive psychology conferences, research labs, and classrooms with positive emotion; crowdsource innovation for new interventions; execute research objectives; lend subtlety to topics such as character, narrative, point-of-view, beauty, and creativity; expand beyond traditional research paradigms; track the progress and record the stories of new findings; develop new content platforms that will serve research science; and galvanize communities with shared objectives.

I will go so far as to say that I believe positive media is the only way we can dramatically increase the quality of people's lives expediently. Not even government has the power to get into people's hands the way smartphone apps do, into their living rooms several times a week the way cable television does, or into their family vacations the way Facebook does. If we want to increase well-being on a global scale, we must continue this important conversation about positive media.

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## Appendix A: Resources

Article:

"Positive Psychology Oscars of 2011: Character Strengths & Best Picture" by Ryan Niemiec – <http://positivepsychologynews.com/news/ryan-niemiec/2012022421165>

Books:

*Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* by Clay Shirky, 2010 – how new media and technology allow us to collaborate  
*Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* by Martin Seligman, 2011 – current well-being theory and an overview of positive psychology  
*The Influencing Machine* by Brooke Gladstone, 2011 – graphic novel about media's history  
*Nudge* by Richard Thaler & Cass Sunstein, 2008 – an introduction to the idea of paternalism, engineering good choices by building in positive defaults  
*The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less* by Barry Schwartz, 2004  
*Positive Psychology at the Movies* by Ryan Niemiec & Danny Wedding, 2008  
*Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals how to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive* by Barbara Frederickson, 2009

Documentaries related to Positive Psychology:

*Free the Mind* directed by Phie Ambo - PTSD & Dr. Richard Davidson's work – <http://danishdocumentary.com/site/freethemind/>  
*Happy* (2011) directed by Roko Belic - [www.thehappymovie.com](http://www.thehappymovie.com)  
*How Happy Can You Be* (2005) directed by Line Hatland – <http://icarusfilms.com/new2006/hhap.html>  
*Why Bhutan?* (forthcoming) directed by Ben Henretig: <http://signup.whybhutan.com/>

Education:

Applied Positive Psychology graduate program – <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/lps/graduate/mapp>  
 GoStrengths - Animated videos for children about character strengths and virtues – [www.GoStrengths.com](http://www.GoStrengths.com), Twitter: @AskNeutrino  
 Media Literacy information – [www.medialiteracy.com](http://www.medialiteracy.com), [www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)  
 Media Psychology graduate program – <http://www.mspp.edu/academics/degree-programs/media-psychology-ma/default.asp>  
 MIT Center for Civic Media – <http://civic.mit.edu/home>

News:

Daily Good – [www.dailygood.com](http://www.dailygood.com)  
 Dowser – social innovation & entrepreneurship – [www.dowser.org](http://www.dowser.org)  
 Huffington Post – [www.huffingtonpost.com/good-news](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/good-news), [www.huffingtonpost.com/impact/](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/impact/)  
 Positive News (U.K.) - <http://positivenews.org.uk/>  
 Science of Good News Facebook page – <http://www.facebook.com/ScienceofGoodNews>  
 Weekend Leader (Chennai, India) – <http://www.theweekendleader.com/about-us>

Talks:

Gilley, Jeremy – (documentaries) – [One Day of Peace](#)  
 Haidt, Jonathan – (hive psychology) – [Humanity’s Stairway to Self-Transcendence](#)  
 Koblin, Aaron – (digital media) [Artfully Visualizing Our Humanity](#)  
 McGonigal, Jane – [Gaming Can Make A Better World](#)  
     [The Game That Can Give You 10 Extra Years Of Life](#)  
 Pinker, Steven – [The Surprising Decline of Violence](#)  
 Schneider, Cynthia – [The Spread of “Idol” TV](#)  
 Shirky, Clay – [How Cognitive Surplus Will Change The World](#)  
 Zalaznick Lauren – [The Conscience of Television](#)  
 Lewis, Paul – [Crowdsourcing the News](#)  
 Online film – (the “aesthetics of art in the networked era”) – [The Future of Art](#)

Web resources:

Blog publishing – [www.blogger.com](#), [www.wordpress.com](#), [www.squarespace.com](#)  
 Common Sense Media – helping kids and families learn to navigate the world of media and technology – [www.common sense media.org](#)  
 Conflict resolution resources for journalists (Australia) – [http://www.crnhq.org/pages.php?pID=32](#)  
 Documentary film festival sponsored by the American Film Institute and Discovery Channel – [www.silverdocs.com](#)  
 Emotional Intelligence resources – [www.eiconsortium.org](#)  
 Family tree software – [www.familytreemaker.com](#) (with sharing capability), [www.leisterpro.com](#) (Reunion), [www.syniumsoftware.com](#) (Mac Family Tree)  
 Games Learning Society (University of WI, Madison) – [www.gameslearningsociety.org](#)  
 Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media – [http://www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org](#)  
 Harry Potter Alliance – Fighting for social justice in partnership with NGOs through the character strength of Love – [thehpalliance.org](#)  
 Healthy Media Commission, Girl Scouts of America – [www.girlscouts.org/who\\_we\\_are/advocacy/watchwhatyouwatch/healthymedia.asp](#)  
 Hero's Journey model – [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Heroesjourney.svg](#)  
 Knight Foundation – Innovating journalism and media, engaging communities, and fostering the arts – [http://www.knightfoundation.org/about/](#)  
 Media literacy kit – [www.medialit.org/cml-medialit-kit](#)  
 Media Psychology Research Center – [http://mprcenter.org/](#)  
 Media Psychology Division, APA – resources for psychological issues in media – [www.apa.org/divisions/div46/resources.html](#)  
 Micro-Documentaries – [www.micro-documentaries.com](#)  
 Moodtraining – blog and forthcoming app using the body to change the emotional state – [www.moodtraining.com](#)  
 Never Seconds – 9 year-old Martha Payne’s food blog – [http://neverseconds.blogspot.co.uk/](#)  
 Oprah’s Book Club 2.0 – [http://www.oprah.com/packages/oprahs-book-club-2.html](#)  
 Parental ratings information – [www.kids-in-mind.com](#), [www.tvguidelines.org](#), [www.mpaa.org/ratings/what-each-rating-means](#)  
 Personal history documentaries – [www.reeltributes.com](#)  
[Pixar "story rules"](#)

Positive games – <http://janemcgonigal.com/play-me/>

Positive psychology resources and link to the VIA Survey of Character Strengths –  
[www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org)

React to Film – A non-profit leveraging documentaries to promote social responsibility and spark civic engagement. [www.reacttofilm.com](http://www.reacttofilm.com)

Scribe Video Center (Philadelphia) – Goal: to explore, develop and advance the use of electronic media, including video and audio, as artistic media and as tools for progressive social change – <http://scribe.org/>

SkillShare – teaching and learning media tools in person – [www.skillshare.com](http://www.skillshare.com)

Spiritual Cinema Circle – subscription service for uplifting shorts, documentaries, and features:  
[www.spiritualcinemacircle.com](http://www.spiritualcinemacircle.com)

Stanford Calming Technology Lab – <http://calmingtechnology.org/pages/lab>