

Why did youth culture generate such moral panic in the 1950s in Australia and the United States?

New media's Americanisation of Australia's youth created a moral panic through the introduction of American music and movies. It manifested itself in 1950s youth culture with the formation of gangs such as the Australian Bodgies and Widgies.¹ These gangs were the beginnings of 'consumerist youth cultures'.² Tony Bennet argued that the sense of 'oppositonality is more determinant than that of similarity, for it is shared antagonisms that produce the fluidity that is characteristic of the people in elaborated societies'.³

The American juvenile system was created in the 1800s, with Juvenile delinquency laws of the 1960s altered to encompass under eighteen popular cultural youth.⁴ Juvenile delinquency was thought to have resulted from bad parenting, or a psychological abnormality within the teen themselves, resulting in popular cultural fashion, music and movie choices.⁵

Established gender roles and social normatives were becoming blurred with the push by governments on postwar survivors, into pre-War life styles. For the most part, families consisted of a homemaker and breadwinner. It was expected that children would grow into either of these adult roles. However, the postwar 'demographic dominance of youth amplified a generation gap'.⁶ Popular culture cultivated a reinforced youth market, creating a moral panic in both Australian and American households.

¹ Jon Stratton. 1984. Bodgies and Widgies - Youth Cultures in the 1950s. *Journal of Australian Studies*. 8:15. Pp. 10-24

² Peter Cochrane. 1993. At war at home. Pp. 173

³ Tony Bennett. 1986. "The Politics of the 'Popular' and Popular Culture," in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, ed. Tony Bennett et al. Pp.24

⁴ Einstein Industries, Inc. 2015. "In re Gault" - 1967. in *History of America's Juvenile Justice System*. <http://www.lawyershop.com/practice-areas/criminal-law/juvenile-law/history>

⁵ Michelle Arrow. 2015. The Rise of the Teenagers. In *Lecture 6: 1950s Youth Cultures*. Macquarie University.

⁶ Michelle Arrow. 2009. Did the Sixties Swing in Australia: Youth Culture and Radical Protest. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 4. Pp. 105

How did the ethos of Black Power, as it was expressed in popular culture, challenge existing representations of African Americans in music and film?

The Black Power movement evolved as the modern civil rights movement was in its final stages.⁷ It was a movement for social, political, and economic change. African Americans had to redefine America's perception of their actuality, by deconstructing 300 years of the 'white man's attempts to control and define black reality'.⁸

African Americans had been blaxploited⁹ as 'sexy, violent and emotional children'.¹⁰ They were typecast as alcoholics and deviants in movies, and music maintained this perception. Popular culture moved from theatre shows such as the 1962 'Black and White Minstrels',¹¹ to television shows with black children integrated into white families, such as 'Diff'rent Strokes'.¹² Finally, cinema took blaxploitation to new levels and created movies such as the 1998 action horror, 'Blade'.¹³

Blaxploitation attempted to 'denigrate the image of African Americans'.¹⁴ The talent of African America finally broke the regulatory system that dictated acceptable popular culture. Comments such as 'wailing niggers' and their 'immoral and suggestive lyrics',¹⁵ were often used as excuses to shun movies and music. With the rise of Rap however, African American's were free to relate the truth of the atrocities enacted against them. Rap was

⁷ Ashley Sauers. 2012. "Can you dig it?: The politics of race, gender and class in Blaxploitation", *Film Matters*, Vol. 3, no. 1. Pp. 15

⁸ Lerone Bennett Jr, 1971. "The emancipation orgasm: sweetback in wonderland", *Ebony*, Vol. 26, no. 11. Pp. 106

⁹ Ashley Sauers. 2012. "Can you dig it?: The politics of race, gender and class in Blaxploitation", *Film Matters*, Vol. 3, no. 1. Pp. 14

¹⁰ Lerone Bennett Jr, 1971. "The emancipation orgasm: sweetback in wonderland", *Ebony*, Vol. 26, no. 11. Pp. 106

¹¹ BBC TV series. 1962. *The Black and White Minstrel Show*. Museum Victoria Collections. Tivoli Theatre. Melbourne.

¹² Jeff Harris, Bernie Kukoff. 1978-1986. *Diff'rent Strokes*. Prod. Embassy Pictures, Embassy Television, Norman Lear/Tandem Productions. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077003>

¹³ *Blade*. 1998. Dir. Stephen Norrington. Production Co's Amen Ra Films, Imaginary Forces, Marvel Enterprises.

¹⁴ Ashley Sauers. 2012. "Can you dig it?: The politics of race, gender and class in Blaxploitation", *Film Matters*, Vol. 3, no. 1. Pp. 14

¹⁵ Michelle Arrow. 2009. The Rise of Youth Cultures: The New Youth Culture. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 3. Pp. 56

culturally oppositional and provided an out from oppression for any African American child, even if that 'out' resulted in their deaths, as Rappers are frequently 'gunned down by other Rappers'.¹⁶

What does post feminism mean? How was it expressed in the popular culture of the 1990s and 2000s?

Postfeminism refers to forth wave feminism, and not third wave as it is sometimes confused with. Third wave lacks any formal structure and cannot be explained as one or even two concepts or ideas. It is fluidic and encompasses all women, from all walks of life.¹⁷

Postfeminism relies on 'competitive individualism and eschews collective action'.¹⁸ It is often used to explain contradictions in feminism. Popular culture made a pre-emptive move against the next generation of women, through mediums such as children's music, television, film and fashion.¹⁹

The Spice Girls were created to attract a young female audience, however it went one step further and sold 1990s girls, 'Girl Power'.²⁰ Girls learned that it was acceptable to be feminine and still be strong, to be who they willed, and to do what they wanted whilst maintaining the illusion of strength and comradeship through their individuality. But popular cultural formats did not use the term feminism, implying that feminism was not a requirement anymore.²¹

¹⁶ Zubair. 2012. Famous Rappers Killed. in *A Knowledge Archive. Informory*.

<http://infomory.com/famous/famous-rappers-killed>

¹⁷ Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra. 2005. In Focus: Postfeminism and Contemporary Media Studies. *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2. University of Texas Press Society for Cinema & Media Studies.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3661097> pp. 107-08

¹⁸ Alison Piepmeier. March, 2006. Postfeminism vs. the Third Wave. on *Electronic Book Review*.

<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/writingpostfeminism/reconfiguredrip2>

¹⁹ Flickchart. 2016. The Best Fairy Tales And Legends Movies of the 1990s on *Flickchart.com*

<http://www.flickchart.com/Charts.aspx?genre=Fairy+Tales+and+Legends&decade=1990>

²⁰ Maeve McDermott. 2014. The Girl Power Philosophy of the Spice Girls. in *Nat Geo TV Blogs*.

<http://tvblogs.nationalgeographic.com/2014/06/20/the-girl-power-philosophy-of-the-spice-girls>

²¹ Alison Piepmeier. March, 2006. Postfeminism vs. the Third Wave. on *Electronic Book Review*.

<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/writingpostfeminism/reconfiguredrip2>

Many girls were raised as strong, confident entities, but still required a prince. Forth wavers were modelled on television heroines such as Bridget Jones, the women in *Sex and the City*, and *Ally McBeal*.²² Presented with a wide range of alternative lifestyles, 1990s feminists could confidently operate as equal individuals, without pre-existing structures limiting their ability for distinctiveness. Popular culture helped to manipulate the new feminist into a consumerable product, without the need for feminism.

How can popular culture help us trace the impact of Consumerism since the end of WWII in America and/or Australia?

This paper examines consumerism, and how popular culture has been utilised to extend its reach into social and cultural changes, since post WWII, in both Australia and America.

Consumerism is insidious and encompasses almost every aspect of a person's life. It is sold through television and movies, music and theatre. It is sold through each and every person's choice, whether that choice is the clothes they wear, the food they eat or the car they drive.

America's consumerist influence on Australia was first disseminated through the WWII years.²³ The postwar years continued America's influence in Australia, through television and movies.

Lawrence Levine argues that 'popular culture is seen as the antithesis of folk culture: not as emanating from within the community, but created by people with pecuniary or ideological motives-for the community'.²⁴ Levine is saying that money, and specific ideologies by people in positions of power, use popular culture to create a consumerist society designed in their own image, or at least to their own desires.

²² Joke Hermes. 2008. 'Ally McBeal', 'Sex and the City' and the Tragic Success of Feminism. in *Feminism in Popular Culture*. Ed. Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley. Pub. Berg. Oxford, New York. Ch. 5. Pp. 71

²³ Michelle Arrow. 2009. Popular Culture and Family Life in the Postwar Years. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 2. Pp. 14-18

²⁴ Lawrence W. Levine. 1992 . The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences, in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 5. (Dec., 1992). Pp.1370

1920s Australian television broadcasts were used to inform the public, to educate. This was served through the use of a Radiovision system created by Gilbert Miles and Donald McDonald.²⁵ By the 1950s, television was deemed to be an assuage to their desires. There was an already efficient communications system, Radio, to transmit ideologies. There were the traditional institutions such as churches and schools to reach the mass population, but those in power needed a new format to reach the entirety of the masses.²⁶ Television was rationalised as being a ‘mass communications’ outlet in the post War years.²⁷

There was a concern in America about the consumerist society they had created, ‘what will happen once the consumer has bought everything they think they needed?’²⁸ The response to such concerns came in the guise of ‘market segmentation’.²⁹ Michelle Arrow qualifies this term, noting that it refers to dividing up the market into ‘subsets of consumers’.³⁰ With the need by the market to expand their profit margins, international markets became the focus, and Australia was closely aligned with the United States.³¹ Australia became an obvious market partner.³²

Television reached Australian shores and began as benignly as other popular cultural mediums, such as magazines and music of the 1950s.³³ Wholesome family sitcoms were favoured by producers and therefore by the viewers. However, only white family life was

²⁵ Peter Beilby. 1981. Australian Broadcasting from the beginning in *Australian TV: The First 25 Years* Pp. 173

²⁶ Raymond Williams. 1990. C. The Social history of the uses of Television Technology: The Technology and the Society. in *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*. Ed. Ederyn Williams. Ch. 1. Pp. 21

²⁷ Raymond Williams. C. The Social history of the uses of Television Technology: The Technology and the Society, in *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*. Ed. Ederyn Williams. Ch. 1. Pp. 23

²⁸ Michelle Arrow. 2009. The Rise of Youth Cultures: Consumerism. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 3. Pp. 63

²⁹ Michelle Arrow. 2009. The Rise of Youth Cultures: Consumerism. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 3. Pp. 63

³⁰ Michelle Arrow. 2009. The Rise of Youth Cultures: Consumerism. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 3. Pp. 63

³¹ Bureau of Public Affairs. 2015. Bureau of East Asian and Public Affairs: U.S. Australian Relations. U.S. Relations With Australia. from *the U.S. State Department*. <http://www.state.gov/t/pa/ei/bgn/2698.htm>

³² Michelle Arrow. 2009. The Rise of Youth Cultures: Consumerism. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 3. Pp. 63

³³ The People History. 2004-2016. Money And Inflation 1950's. in *1950s News, Events, Popular Culture and Prices*. <http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/1950s.html>

sold as normal.³⁴ The perfect white family home, with the doting wife and mother, was a construct of consumerism in 1952 television shows, such as ‘The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet’.³⁵ The illusion of female power was sold to female viewers, with the antics of Lucille Ball in ‘I Love Lucy’.³⁶

Music was sedate and not very sexy until the arrival of Elvis Presley.³⁷ Presley adopted a ‘black man’s’ voice and gyrated his pelvis on stage.³⁸ A rather take it or leave it entertainer, Presley’s career was on a downward slide by the late 1960s, until his 1968 ‘Come Back Special’.³⁹ Presley worked the rooms, the concerts and the outdoor ‘hippy’ fests,⁴⁰ as a narcotics agent dressed up as an entertainer.⁴¹ The question must be asked if Presley’s comeback was due to popular cultural demand, or as a patriotic desire by presidents to regain the services of an on the ground narcotics agent?⁴²

Patriotically, baby boomers repopulated the western world, and by the 1960s they knew what they wanted and desired. It differed greatly from their parent’s hopes for their futures. Baby boomers were actively seeking more consumerables and quickly became slaves to consumerism.⁴³ However, teenagers earning a fraction of their adult counterparts were being

³⁴ Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines. 2003. Past as Prologue: The 1950s as an Introduction to the 1960s. in *Takin' it to the streets: A Sixties Reader*. Ed. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines. New York, Oxford. Oxford University Press. Pp. 5

³⁵ The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet in the *TV Series (1952–2014)*. Stage Five Productions, Volcano Productions. 1952.

³⁶ I Love Lucy. in the *TV Series*. Desilu Productions. Dir. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. 1951.

³⁷ Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc. 1935-1977. Elvis Presley: Biography. on *Graceland the home of Elvis Presley Website*. <http://www.graceland.com/elvis/biography.aspx>

³⁸ Michelle Arrow. 2009. The Rise of Youth Cultures: Creating the Youth Audience of Television. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 3. Pp. 69

³⁹ Elvis Presley. That’s alright mama. in *Elvis 1968 Come back Special*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJd-av4HgRw>

⁴⁰ Michelle Arrow. 2015. The Sixties and Radical Cultures: Counterculture Chronology. In *HST370 Lecture 8: Slide 4*. Macquarie University.

⁴¹ Margaretha Emma. Elvis Presley -TCE - TCB 4EP. on *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGIa4Qo7WbI>

⁴² Peter Carlson. Dec. 2010. When Elvis Met Nixon. in *Smithsonian Magazine*. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-elvis-met-nixon-69892425>

⁴³ Michelle Arrow. 2009. The Rise of Youth Cultures: Consumerism. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 3. Pp. 65-66

charged the same amount for popular consumables such as cinema access.⁴⁴ A shift in home dynamics altered from those early days of family sitcoms, to one that an alpha masculine Playboy man might appreciate.⁴⁵ 1950s woman was now a rarity rather than the norm, as consumerism had engulfed 1960s America and Australia, and everyone wanted more, especially President Nixon and Prime Minister Menzies.⁴⁶ This ideology dominated our children, Generation X.⁴⁷

For Generation X there was a strong 'Me Generation'⁴⁸ work ethic, with new young workers knowing that if they wanted something, they themselves had to work to obtain it. Generation X turned their backs on the conformity that adults were promoting, and America was fast becoming the dominant cultural influence in Australia.⁴⁹ Parents were working two jobs, and their children, Millennial's,⁵⁰ were more often placed in front of television screens, than involvement in outdoor activities. Suggestions of bad parenting are unfair for many families, in a climate where both parents were obliged to work in consumerist, high debt societies.⁵¹

With the advancement of technologies, Millennial's were more connected to their parents, yet had less face time with them. They became absorbed in popular cultural wants. Everything

⁴⁴ Michelle Arrow. 2009. The Rise of Youth Cultures: Consumerism. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 3. Pp. 65-66

⁴⁵ Mark Jancovich. 2006. The Politics of Playboy: Lifestyle, Sexuality and Non-conformity in American Cold War Culture. in *Historicizing Lifestyle : Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s*. Ed. David Bell. Ashgate Publishing Limited. Ch. 5. Pp. 70

⁴⁶ Michelle Arrow. 2015. Suburbia and Postwar Family Life: Kitchen Debate. in *HST 370 Lecture 3*. Macquarie University.

⁴⁷ Michelle Arrow. 2009. Imagining the National: Music in the 1980s and 1990s. in *Friday on Our Minds*. Ch. 6. Pp. 169

⁴⁸ Tom Wolfe. 1976. The "Me" Decade and the Third Great Awakening. in *New York Magazine*. <http://nymag.com/news/features/45938>

⁴⁹ Andrew Guild. Jul, 2004. The Americanisation of Australian Culture: Discussing the cultural influence of the USA upon our nation's way of life. on *Ironbark Resources*. <http://ironbarkresources.com/articles/guild2004americanisation.htm>

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center. Mar, 2014. Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends. on *Pew Research Center: Social & Demographic Trends*. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood>

⁵¹ Mercyman53. Jan, 2008. The cost of housing: 1050% higher than 1970 and climbing. on *Mercyman53's Weblog*. <http://mercyman53.com/2008/01/11/the-cost-of-housing-1050-higher-than-1970-and-climbing>

had to be name brand.⁵² Many parents worked harder and longer to provide for Millennial's the 'things' that would keep them happy, and secure their placement in peer groups. For Millennial's brand names were extremely important for their self esteem.

Having no control over the 1960s women's movement, popular cultural outlets took control of Millennial's before they were able to think for themselves. A revolution was coming and popular culture was going to control its beginnings, its direction and its outcome. So intertwined in the lives of American and Australian Millennial's is popular culture, that who a Millennial is, was taken out of the hands of their parents, and are still controlled by consumerisms today.

⁵² Pauline Weston Thomas. 2014. 1990s Fashion History: Global Fashion Attitudes - Part 1&2: Fashion in the 1990s and Early C21st. in *Fashion-Era.com*. http://www.fashion-era.com/the_1990s.htm

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