

THANK CANADA: LOCATING THE CANADIAN PRESENCE IN U.S. YOUTH  
TELEVISION

By

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION: MAPLE IN MY SYRUP, CHEESE IN MY POUTINE

And right in the middle of the pile of straw was the First Little Pig—dead as a doornail. He had been home the whole time. (Scieszka)

A favorite storybook for many children of the 1990s is Jon Scieszka's *The Real Story of the Three Little Pigs*, a kid-friendly predecessor to the growing canon of other-side-of-the-story novels like Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* and *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*. Told from the Big Bad Wolf's perspective, Scieszka's picture book details A. Wolf's testimony in a double-murder trial, in which he paints the pigs as unjustified victims and himself as a misunderstood scapegoat. According to Al Wolf, when the alleged murders occurred, he was only trying to borrow a cup of sugar from his porcine neighbors in order to make a cake for his grandmother, but one pig ignored him and the other mocked him. The wolf then had two uncontrollable sneezing fits, and they, combined with the poor construction of the pigs' houses, caused the pigs' deaths. Once their straw and stick houses, respectively, caved in on the two pigs, the wolf decided he should not waste two perfectly good ham dinners, so he ate them. The pigs, if we believe the wolf's story, emerge as unkind and foolish, the wolf practical and pitiable.

In some ways this dissertation project involves the same kind of retelling, although it neither makes arguments about the "real bad guys," nor seeks to absolve a figurative wolf of all accusations. Like the aforementioned retellings, however, it works to complicate the traditional view of the perceived victim and aggressor, the weak and the strong, and thereby to muddle any

binaristic understanding of either figure. This project's characters are Canada and the United States, and the story is that of the longstanding connections between their televisual histories from a U.S. perspective. While the latter country has often been characterized as a big, bad wolf of sorts, the former has based a good deal of its self-definition and self-preservation on viewing itself as a pig in peril, "the surviving Third Little Pig" with a crumbling brick house. Among the most notable metaphors for Canada's place in relation to the United States are those of WH Pope, who describes Canada as the mouse to the United States' elephant, and Margaret Atwood, who characterizes her home and native land as the weaker sex lying in submission to U.S. penetration.<sup>1</sup> Homegrown Canadian television is often described in similar terms: ever flailing, weak, "a perennial bridesmaid," one blink away from U.S. domination, and moments away from caving in on itself.<sup>2</sup> Much of this perception has depended on facts, such as the size, power, and capitalistic and imperialistic tendencies of the United States and the real threats they have posed to Canadian cultural expression, economy, and national identity. But in some cases, the effects of the United States on the Canadian television industry have been overstated at the expense of analytical work that considers how other factors, such as the construction of the house, may have led to the Canadian industry's shortcomings—and at the expense of analysis of the Canadian industry's strengths.

The international reception of an episode of *Degrassi: The Next Generation (DTNG)* provides a strong example of how thoroughly entrenched popular and critical discourses are in representing Canada as subordinate to U.S. televisual power. In 2004, U.S. film producer Kevin Smith realized two of three lifelong dreams when he appeared in a three-part story arc of

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<sup>1</sup> Manning 4.

<sup>2</sup> Beaty and Sullivan use the term "perennial bridesmaid" to describe the status of Canadian televisual drama in Canada (71).

*Degrassi: The Next Generation* (420-422) and shared an on-screen kiss with Caitlin Ryan (played by Stacie Mistysyn).<sup>3</sup> Smith has often spoken of his adolescent infatuation with Mistysyn and the *Degrassi* television series—the former a popular stage and screen actress and the latter an international Canadian icon—and he approached creator Linda Schuyler several times about directing an episode.<sup>4</sup> Although Schuyler expressed an interest in working with Smith, Telefilm Canada, the agency that funds the series, vetoed Smith’s plans. As they put it, in order to receive Canadian funding, the show must remain a “100 per cent Canadian production.” This self-funding system remains in place in part to protect Canada’s public-private broadcasting structure from too much external influence, and it gestures to the major structural differences between U.S. and Canadian television that this project will take up in more detail later.<sup>5</sup> Smith settled for merely appearing in the episodes, although he has made it clear that he (unofficially) influenced their direction.<sup>6</sup>

The *DTNG* story arc centers on Kevin Smith (playing “a fictionalized version of” himself and his fictional Silent Bob character) coming to *Degrassi* Community School to shoot a new film (Djuric par. 5). The entire school responds enthusiastically, and campy hi-jinks ensue as students and teachers fight for screen time. Meanwhile, Caitlin, the host of a local Canadian news show, tries to create a tasteful story about Smith’s visit—one that encompasses the political

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<sup>3</sup> Where numbers in parentheses do not clearly correspond to page numbers for a book or article, they refer to the season and episode numbers for a television series (i.e., 420 describes the twentieth episode of the fourth season of *Degrassi: The Next Generation*).

<sup>4</sup> *Degrassi* began in the late 1970s and has extended in various incarnations into 2009, with an eighth season currently airing. In 2005, it was the highest-rated digital-cable series in the United States (“DTNG”), and it remains “[p]erhaps the single most successful Canadian television series [...] an internationally recognized franchise [...]” (Beaty and Sullivan 25). The *Degrassi* canon includes *The Kids of Degrassi Street* (1979-1985), a series of short films and specials that features many of the actors from the latter *Degrassi* series but in different roles; *Degrassi Junior High* (1987-1989); *Degrassi High* (1989-1991), which continues the plots from *Degrassi Junior High*; and *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001-present), which revisits the adult cast at their ten-year high-school reunion and follows some of their children.

<sup>5</sup> Djuric par. 10.

<sup>6</sup> “DTNG” Tutorgig.

and national contexts for his infatuation with Canada—only to find that her boss wants to edit the story down to banal Hollywood gossip. The episodes provide a strong metaphor for the problems facing Canadian television networks and filmmakers and a parody of U.S. and Canadian views of each of other. But fans did not receive Smith well; many even called the story arc the worst episodes of *Degrassi* “ever.”<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1: Kevin Smith and Caitlin Ryan (Stacie Mistysyn) in the *DTNG* episode “Going Down the Road,” Part Two (422). Photo courtesy of and reprinted with permission from Epitome Pictures.**

Kevin Smith’s work on *Degrassi* demonstrates a paradox in the Canadian television industry that informs the focus of this dissertation. Because criticism in all disciplines tends to focus on Canada’s vulnerability to U.S. influences, the literature is skewed in favor of arguments that cite U.S. complications to Canadian production as the primary sources for the nation’s media

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<sup>7</sup> On the TV.com *Degrassi* message boards, for example, countless viewers have cited Kevin Smith’s episodes as one of the “worst mistakes *Degrassi* has made.”



problems.<sup>8</sup> Yet, despite its difficulties in grappling with U.S. economic and media authority, Canada has produced and exported some of the most successful youth-television programs that have ever aired in the United States; *Degrassi*'s international and specifically U.S. popularity provide clear evidence of this. In the case of *Degrassi*, however, rather than recognizing Smith's attempts to pay homage to his favorite series and his character's attempts to sympathize (as an independent filmmaker) with the struggles of homegrown Canadian television, fans essentially accused Smith of inappropriate interference in the Canadian series. They claimed that Smith ruined the end of the fourth season of *DTNG* and destroyed a twenty-plus-year relationship between two beloved *Degrassi* characters (Smith kisses Caitlin, prompting her to break up with Joey Jeremiah and to pursue a journalism job outside of Canada). Smith, in other words, inadvertently created more "evidence" for the common argument about the problematic U.S. presence in Canadian television.

The irony here operates on multiple levels: First, Smith did not officially direct the episodes, but the secondary readings of the show (those enacted by the viewers) imply that he did. By linking Smith's independent-filmmaker status to the Canadian television industry, the Canadian writers of *Degrassi* use him to articulate genuine Canadian sentiments about the general facility of mainstream U.S. production versus the difficulty of Canadian production. Fans, however—from both the United States and Canada as far as I can tell—interpret the storyline as Smith, the *American* director interfering with the Canadian *Degrassi*.<sup>9</sup> The secondary readings of the show epitomize the metanarrative in Canadian film and television

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<sup>8</sup> Work like Mary Jane Miller's, Michele Byers', and Eugene Tate's intervenes in this pattern by demonstrating many of Canadian television's strengths.

<sup>9</sup> *Degrassi*'s writers and producers, however, seem to have no such problems with Smith's involvement in the series: Kevin Smith later reappeared on the series to showcase the premiere of his fictional film in season five (511-512). And in early 2009, *Degrassi* executive producer Stephen Stohn announced that Kevin Smith and Jason Mewes would return for the eighth-season "*Degrassi* Goes Hollywood" movie special (Myspace).

criticism—that U.S. production and influences trump Canadian fare, that Americanization is always imminent, and that even *Degrassi* is not exempt from U.S. domination.

Yet, in the complex supplementary narrative that I am spinning, there is another way of approaching the Canadian television story from a more positive perspective, one that sets up two strong players who have fed from and off of one another. Just as U.S. cultural products have inundated the Canadian industries, for decades and particularly since the 1980s U.S. television has borrowed from, imitated, and thrived on Canadian television through imported, co-produced, and made-for-the-United-States series and films. In fact, English-speaking Canadian and U.S. audiences likely share more televisual texts with each other than they do with any other country. The critical and popular tendency to view Canada and the United States in the binaristic terms I have mentioned tends to efface the breadth of Canadian influence on U.S. television, as has a general lack of realization about which “U.S.” series are actually Canadian. Marsha Ann Tate’s *Made for the United States*, a history of Canadian involvement in U.S. television and an index of the films and series made for and with the United States between 1926 and 2004, is in fact the only work to my knowledge that details the widespread U.S. use of Canadian productions. When internationally circulated Canadian series receive other critical attention, furthermore, the narratives tend to focus on controversial moments, like *Degrassi*’s Kevin Smith episodes and the U.S. censorship of two abortion story arcs that I will discuss later in this dissertation. By historicizing Canadian youth television’s larger presence in and effects on U.S. television, my work adds to Tate’s an examination of specific programs and the television networks that air them and the complexities of U.S. networks’ appropriation and marketing of these Canadian series.

Above all, this dissertation attempts to reposition Canada—through English-language Canadian youth television—as a major contributor to U.S. media production and as an increasingly powerful international exporter of television, not just a recipient of unwelcome external influences.<sup>10</sup> Using texts produced between 1979 and 2009 and that aired in both Canada and the United States, I argue that Canadian television has been central to the development of U.S. youth television in all genres—though I generally focus on live-action series more than animation—and that U.S. youth television owes many of its most acclaimed series to Canadian involvement. Canadian television adds, to borrow a phrase from Kevin Smith’s *DTNG* appearance, some metaphorical maple to U.S. televisual syrup, some cheese to our poutine. (Kevin Smith’s character Jay (Jason Mewes) uses this phrase in an ineffective attempt to hit on an underage Canadian girl: “You’re the maple in my syrup, the cheese in poutine,” he declares, to which an onlooker adds, “the ‘ick’ in pathetic”). Canadian television has long held a marginalized or even “pathetic” position. As I will demonstrate, however, from PBS to Disney and Discovery Kids to Nickelodeon, much of the variety in U.S. youth programming and many of its educational, ethnically diverse, and realism-driven texts come from Canada—or have been directly influenced by Canadian series—and while the United States poses serious complications to Canadian television’s production, U.S. television also depends heavily on Canadian television. Globally, moreover, Canadian television rivals U.S. television in its international reach. Canada is the second-largest exporter of televisual texts worldwide,

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<sup>10</sup> I have chosen English-language Canadian television because it is most commonly exported to the United States and because French-language television, and Quebec more generally, have not traditionally suffered from the same identity issues and power struggles with the United States as has English Canada (Juneau et al 76; Attallah 344; Tracey and Redal par. 43).

and popular Canadian youth series air in upwards of 100 nations/territories, including Australia, the UK, Japan, Hungary, and Latin America.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 2: “Jay”/Jason Mewes, Alanis Morissette (playing a school principal), and “Silent Bob”/ Kevin Smith outside of the *DTNG* set. Photo courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from Epitome Pictures.**

In positioning Canada as a strong televisual force that has gone relatively underappreciated, this work joins Ralph Nader’s *Canada Firsts*, a collaborative encyclopedia in which he assures Canadians that they have too long reveled in self-deprecation and now need to recognize their manifold contributions to world culture. I try, however, to do the same kind of

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<sup>11</sup> *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, for instance, airs in 150 countries; *Life with Derek* has been sold to 138 territories and translated in nine languages; *Instant Star* to 110 countries; *Naturally, Sadie* to 90 countries; and *The Best Years* to 40 countries (MacDonald R.13).

work in a way that avoids the unintentional paternalism of Nader's well-meaning project. To that end, this project, like Nader's, recognizes the actual ways that U.S. media and economic power inhibit Canadian production, and it highlights the strengths of Canadian television, but it does so without a) overlooking the ways that Canadian practices and overarching structures might contribute to the Canadian television industry's vulnerability, and without b) romanticizing the excellence of Canadian television in such a way that the project fails to problematize Canadian television's shortcomings.

This dissertation also adds to a tradition of U.S. approaches, like Nader's, to Canadian history. As Robert H. Babcock explains,

A paradox is embedded in the soul of Canadian historiography. Over the years many Canadian scholars have set out to preserve their nation by showing how it was different from the United States in geography, economic development, social values, political institutions, and historical experience. If there was a single common thread woven into their interpretations, it concerned the perennial struggle of a people living north of the United States to resist expansionist forces emanating from the American republic [...]. The paradox is that so much of the history of the "true North strong and free" has been conceived and written in the bosom of the enemy. Between the 1870s and 1980 nearly a third of all the doctorates in Canadian history were earned at American universities. (115, 116)

Robin Winks' work, similarly, falls into this tradition, and he notes that the U.S. study of Canadian issues need not pose a limitation to the analysis; a U.S. approach to Canadian history simply involves different questions, motives, and interpretations of the same material:

Americans study Canada in their own, not in a Canadian way and for their own reasons; as a result, they are likely to ask different questions and produce different scholarship [...]. The fact that the nature of American scholarship on Canada is somewhat skewed by America's natural interests means that the body of literature is different—not better, not worse, simply different—from the Canadian mainstream. (4)

Because my work focuses on the symbiotic relationship between U.S. and Canadian televisual productions (and often co-productions at that), I see it as a co-production of sorts as well: This project's particular angle can provide a view of television history that Canadian authors either

cannot access in Canada or have overlooked. My work joins theirs in conversation to create a richer overall picture, “for both stories are a necessary part of both our viewing cultures” (Byers “Revisiting” 48).

### Speaking Of Canada<sup>12</sup>

Canada and the United States, as should be becoming clear, share a multifaceted relationship. Both nations have in common “a genuine North American community” and trade more—in terms of commerce and people—with each other than with any other nation (Brady 191). According to one website, trade between the border regions of Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan alone exceeds trade between all of the United States and Japan.<sup>13</sup> Part of the complexity of the relationship between Canada and the United States stems from the fact that their interactions are generally peaceful and reciprocal yet experienced very differently.<sup>14</sup> For many theorists, proximity to the United States is one of Canada’s biggest disadvantages, the reason for what has been called Canada’s identity crisis (or lack of central mythology), an economic strain, and a relationship based more on pressure and practicality than voluntary cooperation. The United States, as critics often note, is generally oblivious to this dynamic of the relationship, adding to the problem. This tension—and the long-predicted underlying fear that Canada may one day become another U.S. state—has contributed to the Canadian tendency towards rhetorics of cultural defense, self-distancing, and self-differentiation from the United States in political, social, and literary practices. These differences are obvious in Canada’s more socialist approaches to welfare and health care, in its democratic monarchy, in some of its

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<sup>12</sup> This title comes from a collection of speeches made by Canadian Governor General Vincent Massey (1952-1959) with the same name.

<sup>13</sup> “Binational Effort.”

<sup>14</sup> See Roger Sauvé’s work, for example.

environmental policies, and in its television production. Yet, the similarities between the two countries are unmistakable and generally easier to locate than are the differences, and this is part of what makes Canadian television a useful object of study and an immediately complicated one.

Canada's physical and cultural proximity to the United States, its ethnic multiculturalism, and its shared British colonial past have made for an exceptional televisual environment, unparalleled perhaps by any region, including Australia, because of its combination of U.S. and European influences.<sup>15</sup> Canadian television falls in a strange position among that of other Western Countries in relation to the United States. While the United States has since its founding attempted to self-distance from British traditions (and the United Kingdom has done the same in relation to the United States), Canada has fallen somewhere in between both countries and has applied aspects of both televisual traditions. Like the UK and many European, Latin, and Asian regions, Canada has set up self-protective strategies against U.S. cultural penetration to avoid or thwart potential U.S. imperialism, but unlike most of these countries, many Canadian regions can easily access U.S. television with antennae, grey-market cable boxes, and even directly through signals that transcend national borders. Like the British national public broadcasting system, Canadian television began in the public sphere as a sort of state monopoly. And just as the British regulatory system OFCOM (Office of Communications) governs "the UK communications industries," the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) regulates what can and cannot air in Canada based on elaborate points and quota systems ("OFCOM").<sup>16</sup> The CRTC, however, is much more explicitly aimed at keeping national

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<sup>15</sup> Comparative works often juxtapose Australia with Canada because of its similar relationships to Indigenous people and the British crown, because of its multicultural policy, and because of its susceptibility to British national identity instead of a self-made identity (in the same ways that Canada is susceptible to U.S. influence).

<sup>16</sup> OFCOM was instituted in 2002 and includes the formerly separate Broadcasting Standards Commission, Independent Television Commission, Office of Telecommunications, Radio Authority, and Radiocommunications

identity in tact and at protecting Canada from external (and particularly U.S.) influences than is OFCOM. Unlike the British system, moreover, Canadian national public television has always included commercial support rather than pure state funding/ license fees (the BBC is still commercial free; the CBC has never been). This has led to a hybrid system that is in some ways half-American (commercial and private) and half-British (state-funded and public with separate independent commercial broadcasting), but from all accounts always much more susceptible to U.S.-ification than is the televisual production of any other English-speaking nation—and perhaps any nation for that matter.<sup>17</sup> The overarching structural differences between U.S. and Canadian television only compound the issues that stem from Canadian television’s visual and textual similarities to U.S. television.

Canadian television also holds a unique position in U.S. televisual culture. Most foreign programs that air on U.S. television are limited to specialty channels aimed at “high culture” (IFC or Sundance), “ethnic” stations aimed at specific demographics (Universàl or AZN Television), or “lowbrow” niche audiences (such as male-branded Spike TV and G4). As other writers have demonstrated, U.S. television generally excludes foreign texts from the mainstream market even while U.S. producers of film and television frequently appropriate international series and films by remaking them.<sup>18</sup> For decades, for example, U.S. producers have “borrowed” British sitcoms and simply remade them to fit a U.S. context. Norman Lear’s hit 1970s series and their spin-offs, such as *All in the Family*, *Maude*, and even *Sanford and Son*, are all U.S. versions of British sitcoms. The most current manifestation of this long-established tradition is evident in the mainstream popularity of the U.S. versions of British series *The Office* and

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Agency (“OFCOM”; “About OFCOM”). The CRTC was instituted in 1968 as the Canadian Radio-Television Commission as a replacement for the Board of Broadcast Governors (“CRTC”).

<sup>17</sup> Tracey and Redal par. 44.

<sup>18</sup> See Paul Swann’s work.



Australian series *Kath and Kim*. With Japanese television, we tend to see U.S. dubbing, and often re-editing, over the original television series, such as in *Dragon Ball Z*, *Power Rangers*, *Pokemon*, *Ninja Warrior*, *Iron Chef*, etc. Canadian television, however, proves the exception to these patterns because its foreignness is less recognizable than is the foreignness of a subtitled Bollywood flick, a French independent film, or a Japanese game show. And unlike even British television, which is relatively assimilated into U.S. television culture through remakes, PBS, and BBC America, there are no “Canadian” television channels in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Canadian television circulates under the radar because it can actually “pass” for U.S. television—without remaking, rewriting, or dubbing. Canadian television in this way is *most* present among the English-language international television in the United States, but because of its visual and cultural similarity, it is the *least* recognized, least cited, and perhaps the most under-examined. This lack of examination—or the reality of Canada’s invisibility to the United States—has led to the perpetuation of many of the myths about Canada-U.S. media relations that I have discussed.<sup>20</sup> By upturning and rewriting many of these myths, this dissertation seeks to provide another way of approaching this shared televisual story.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. networks such as ABC, FOX, and NBC broadcast directly into Canada through antennae or through cable and satellite packages. In border states, however, these channels are also accessible via antennae. CTV, Global, and the CBC are unavailable legally to U.S. viewers even though they are available in some international settings (like parts of the Caribbean) through cable.

<sup>20</sup> Canadian invisibility is as common a trope as Canadian weakness or vulnerability. See Kroetsch qtd. in Berland 144; Berland, who studies this in some detail; and Hardin, who writes, “Canada exists, but is invisible. There must be something wrong, then, with the way we look at ourselves” (9).

<sup>21</sup> In the same vein as this project, Beaty and Sullivan stress the theoretical need for moving away from attention to the United States’ complications to Canadian production and “toward a more global outlook in which we open up television to increased foreign language and cultural content” (21). Unlike Beaty and Sullivan’s work, this project first rereads the U.S. role in this story and then examines Canada’s global position in relation to that of the United States.

## “Electric Youth”

If Canadian television is as prevalent in the United States as I have argued, why does this project focus specifically on youth television? All television can potentially serve as a medium for addressing controversial subjects, teaching powerful lessons, or even subverting colonial barriers, because “[...] any version of the television text functions as a forum in which important cultural topics may be considered.”<sup>22</sup> Television can mask hard-hitting themes in the guise of likeable characters, exciting action, satire, and parody, or explicitly tackle certain issues through a popular and generally entertaining form. Effective TV shows often “play with up-to-date mores and new social realities [and then...] incorporate them into an abiding context that is solid and humane” (Fass 49). Youth or family media can have greater ease in incorporating cultural/political realities because they seem rooted in uncontroversial subject matter, but are often steeped in adult projects and in this way are symptomatic of what is going on in the larger adult world. Marsha Kinder, among others, argues that adults tend to project their own political or social agendas onto children’s TV and culture (20). Lynn Spiegel, similarly, recognizes that texts marketed to youth serve as adult “vehicles for international cold warfare” (33), and Heather Hendershot warns that “children’s television production needs to be understood as an imperialistic export product” (159). Youth television, in other words, operates as much more than television for youth; it is always potentially political, it reaches more than youth audiences, and it demonstrates more than youth trends. With its often explicitly pedagogical function and with increasing watchdog attention to the media messages children receive, youth television is also immediately wrought in issues of protectionism, censorship, and national identity. The television series this project explores serve as visual manifestations of cultural and international

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<sup>22</sup> Caughie 53; Newcomb and Hirsh 460.

relations, sorts of tangible “contact zones,” or ““social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power [...]” (Pratt qtd. in Rowe 10).

The term “youth” refers to “both a market, and a complex and highly differentiated range of cultural practices. It turns profits and it constructs urgencies and identities” (Laba 76). Youth television as a genre describes the in-between space of neither child- nor adult-centered television. In practical terms, it can include any television programs with a U.S. TV Y7, G, PG, or 14 rating (or a Canadian C8, G, PG or 14+ rating). All of the series I discuss in this project fall somewhere on this ratings continuum and are explicitly aimed at teens, tweens, or both (viewers ages 7 to 21). All feature casts composed primarily of young actors (or people pretending to be young actors), and all take up issues of interest to middle-, high-school, and early college students. Most of the Canadian series, such as the *Degrassi* series and *Strange Days at Blake Holsey High*, also incorporate pedagogical elements, while most of the U.S. series are more explicitly concerned with entertainment. Although the series aim to connect primarily with “tweens” and teens, youth television’s audience often extends beyond either of those categories to include adults, such as parents and grandparents, and children, who tend to “watch up” or view programs that are intended for older audiences. In this way, “youth” television encompasses a wide variety of television series viewed by people of all ages, and it can overlap with children’s and adult TV. Youth consumption, furthermore, often sets the trends for adults and for younger children and mediates between two markets and audience demographics.

Yet, as a newer genre, youth television is much more marginalized or outside of what I call the mainstream than is children’s, family, or adult television. Before the widespread reach of cable television that began in the late 1980s, for example, series that attracted U.S. youth

audiences were generally limited to Saturday mornings, the weekday hours right after school, and family-friendly programming blocks airing on primetime TV. With cable, youth television is available twenty-four hours a day across a variety of channels that specialize in targeting specific demographics. This shift from network predominance to cable dominance has essentially destroyed the production of family, teen, and youth series for primetime network television (aside from the new CW network), meaning that currently youth series on U.S. mainstream network television air once again during the hours after school, the early hours before school, on Saturday mornings, and most youth series air exclusively on cable specialty channels. For these reasons, this project's analysis of networks primarily focuses on cable channels like Disney and Nickelodeon, digital channels like Discovery Kids and The N, and to a lesser extent PBS, all channels that broadcast the bulk of youth television in the United States and which cull a variety of series from Canadian sources in order to reach youth viewers.

Just as youth television is simultaneously marginal and far reaching, *Canadian* youth television represents a particularly strong suit in the larger industry and a doubly marginalized genre. Canada's particular attention to youth television has produced a large body of texts, an overproduction that, as Michele Byers explains, is partially possible because of Canada's marginalization in television production more generally and because of the stronger public-television tradition there ("Empty Archive"). Canadian television has served as a forerunner for tackling controversial subjects, for utilizing documentarian realism, and for creating programs aimed at youth audiences. Miller, in fact, argues that Canadian television essentially instituted the teen-television genre with the introduction of *Degrassi Junior High*, which aired in both

Canada and the United States in the mid-late 1980s.<sup>23</sup> While I would argue that forms of U.S. teen television—variety series, dance shows, and programs available on cable—have existed since well before the 1980s, I agree with Miller that narrative programs specifically targeting the tween and teen demographics are recent phenomena and that their proliferation both because of and since *Degrassi* has changed the face of television.<sup>24</sup> Internationally acclaimed, early to focus on youth, generally less violent than that of the United States, relatively didactic, and routinely exported, Canadian youth television plays a major global role and arguably a larger one than does U.S. youth television (which many countries are less willing to import, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Two).

Because this project focuses a good deal of attention on the *Degrassi* series, and because they collectively represent one of Canada’s most successful international franchises, I have chosen to organize this project’s historical focus around *Degrassi*’s contemporaneous series: those produced between 1979, when *The Kids of Degrassi Street* premiered, and 2009, when *Degrassi: The Next Generation* was rumored to end (though like the Energizer Bunny, it always beats on beyond its expected expiration date).<sup>25</sup> As Miller notes, the original *Degrassi*’s production coincided with major world movements and reforms in Canada, including the “height

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<sup>23</sup> Speaking of the larger argument for the book *Growing Up Degrassi*, Miller writes, “[...] in the United States, television specifically made for teens was not made until the 1990s, and therefore, the airing of *Degrassi Junior High* starting in 1987 and then *Degrassi High* was quite revolutionary” (15).

<sup>24</sup> The original *Mickey Mouse Club* (1955-1959) and its related serials—*The Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew*, and *Spin and Marty*—were early U.S. attempts at teen/youth series, though they were also admittedly used as vehicles for Walt Disney’s theme parks. Ironically, Canadian company Nelvana co-produced updated versions of *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew* in the mid-1990s. *Gidget* (1965-1966) also targeted youth and teens with its use of slang, surf culture, and a laid-back father who tended to allow Gidget to learn her own lessons, and because it featured no central family, *The Facts of Life* (1979-1988) falls more into the youth/teen genre than into that of the family sitcom. Finally, nationally broadcast teen dance series like *American Bandstand* (1952-1989) and *Soul Train* (1971-2006) and their local predecessors also served as early non-narrative teen programming, as did Nickelodeon’s teen talk show *Livewire* (1980?-1985).

<sup>25</sup> Viewers have speculated since at least 2006 that each *DTNG* season would be the final season. In keeping with *Degrassi*’s pattern of resiliency, *DTNG* will not end in 2009 as I originally believed: Stephen Stohn announced in early 2009 that *DTNG*’s production company had begun filming a tenth season (Twitter).

of the Cold War, the fall of the USSR, the first Quebec referendum, the repatriation of the British North America Act [... and] the first Gulf War [...]" (13). The series produced since then and alongside *Degrassi: The Next Generation* have also been affected by the transformation of television, the exponential growth of youth series and Canadian televisual exports, the formation of youth television as a niche and valued genre, and the increased corporate recognition of youth as major consumers. This project's rich thirty-year span includes texts produced just a few years after the institution of Canadian multiculturalism, during the debates about and solidification of NAFTA, around the time that cable television and VCRs proliferated, and since the Internet has changed television production, distribution, and the viewer's role in its dissemination and review.<sup>26</sup> The series, then, and the contexts of their production reflect a variety of political, international, and technological revolutions.

Like *Degrassi*, many of the series I have chosen were among the most successful series ever produced in Canada for youth and family audiences, and many of them were at some point the highest-rated series on the U.S. networks that broadcast them. This includes Kevin Sullivan's adaptation of Lucy Maude Montgomery's novels in the form of *Road to Avonlea* (1989-1996); *Ready or Not* (1993-1997), which aired in the United States on both Showtime and Disney; *Instant Star* (2004-2008), produced by *Degrassi* creator Linda Schuyler and executive producer Stephen Stohn; and *Life with Derek* (2005-present), a popular series that airs on Disney. Generically most of these series fall under the category of youth/family drama, though I also pull examples from comedies (like *Life With Derek* and *You Can't Do That on Television*) and

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<sup>26</sup> Canada signed the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Mexico in 1992. Formerly, the United States and Canada shared the Free Trade Agreement of 1988 ("NAFTA"). Although it has made trade between the two countries easier—and contributed to a body of oppositional literature about Canada's perilous future (see Mel Hurtig's work, for example)—NAFTA does not seem to have affected the televisual trade between the two nations in any discernible ways, though it has certainly seasoned much of the discourse about Canada-U.S. relations more broadly. Television is, arguably, both a "good" and a "service," but neither agreement specifies its position in relation to free trade, and I have found little research suggesting any link between the two.

science fiction (such as *Strange Days at Blake Holsey High* and *The Zack Files*). Each of these series varies in the degree to which it makes Canadian references, people, and places central to its representation, and the series' production environments range from Ontario to British Columbia. All of them, however, arguably share specific Canadian inflections and reveal the kinds of negotiations at work in simultaneously cultivating self-identity and internationally marketable exports. Because this project involves comparative analysis at every turn, U.S. youth television is just as central to my argument as is Canadian television. In some ways, this argument also implicitly involves evaluative analysis; to demonstrate the strengths of Canadian televisual traditions, I must at times demonstrate the weaknesses of U.S. television as well. But what emerges more than another good-bad binary, I hope, is a symbiotic media relationship in which both television cultures have thrived on using each other as sounding boards, partners, and Others.

#### An "Empty Archive" Of Televisual Treasures

Writing about Canadian television—and Canadian youth television at that—poses several problems for any researcher and particularly for one outside of Canada. Because of distribution and production complications that I will discuss in Chapter Three, many Canadian series do not make it to DVD as most relatively popular U.S. series do. As Byers has demonstrated, furthermore, many Canadian series are essentially lost to researchers because they either have not been archived properly or have not been archived at all ("Empty Archive"). The *Degrassi* series, for example, *are* all available on DVD (and before this, they were available as classroom VHS sets). *Road to Avonlea* is available in two different DVD/VHS forms, an edited Disney version, parts of which I owned as a child, and an official Canadian version that Sullivan

Entertainment released later. *Ready or Not*, however, is not, and most likely never will be, available for purchase, and the few surviving VHS “library copies” of the series are incomplete and scattered across Canada and the United States. The same story applies to highly popular series like *You Can’t Do That on Television* (1979-1989), which is unavailable on DVD and only viewable in fragments online and through a “best of” VHS that is nearly impossible to find; the distributors of recent *Instant Star* stopped making DVDs after the second season of the series, postponing its last two—and arguably most important seasons—indefinitely; the Canadian drama *Hillside* (1991-1993), which Nickelodeon eventually purchased, re-titled *Fifteen*, and moved to Florida, is not available for viewing in any purchasable form to my knowledge (even though it provides a strong counterpart to *Degrassi* and represents Nick’s only attempt at drama); and the series *Radio Free Roscoe* (2003-2005) was only released as a “Best of Season One” DVD. The underlying sentiment that Canadian television is either not worth the investment or the critical attention and historical preservation has made things difficult for any researchers who wish to draw attention to these valuable series.<sup>27</sup>

Although I use brief episodic examples from several series, I have chosen to write in detail only about series that I have seen in their entirety, or of which I have seen a large number of episodes (in the case, for example of *You Can’t Do that on Television*, where many episodes are online but still limited to specific seasons). To access many of the texts I discuss, I have had to become a good archival researcher, scouring the catalogs of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto Public Libraries, the UCLA Film and Television Archive, and National Archives

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<sup>27</sup> And in my own experience, I have found that many series/episodes have been mislabeled as “banned” or unavailable to the public simply because no one has ever requested their use. Library and Archives Canada, for example, holds some *Degrassi* documentaries and specials that were mislabeled as threats to the Canadian Patriot Act, and it was not until I requested to see them that the archivists realized that these specials were not likely problematic. But the process of pulling old films out the *fonds* and re-labeling them to make them available to researchers takes weeks and sometimes months, meaning that someone on a brief research trip would need to return later to view the library copy.



Canada, among others. (And even in many of these libraries, the archivists remark, “Why would you want to study Canadian television?”). I have in many ways, moreover, become a sort of emergency archivist. On top of watching whatever I could find in Canadian archives, I recorded four six-hour VHS tapes of television (both U.S. and Canadian) in Canada over two research trips. I have also depended on old personal copies of Canadian series that I happened to tape as child or teenager, created my own copies of many series by taping them daily from television, purchased DVD sets whenever possible (or asked Vanderbilt librarians to do so), and watched series on the Internet.<sup>28</sup> The latter type of viewing is the least ideal, for unlike official DVDs, which may contain important behind-the-scenes information, or library copies, which are sometimes taped with the original broadcasts’ commercials, these Internet “viewing copies” are often reruns of each series and recorded without commercials. Websites like Youtube and Daily Motion, furthermore, provide only an inconsistent “grey market” broadcast of series that are sometimes available and sometimes removed due to violations of copyright law. And because of strict policies governing what may flow into and out of both the United States and Canada, many series are available legally online (through, for example, the CBC and CTV websites) but are unavailable to international viewers who reside outside of the “viewing range” or proxy server’s reach. On the other hand, the amount of Internet research it has taken in order to access these series has also heavily influenced this project’s attention to Web cultures and their role in television series’ distribution, production, and longevity.

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<sup>28</sup> From television I have recorded, for instance, parts or all of the series *Strange Days at Blake Holsey High*, *Degrassi: TNG* (seasons five through present), *Degrassi High*, *Instant Star*, *Edgemont*, *Darcy’s Wild Life*, *Dinosapien*, *Jett Jackson*, *Life with Derek*, and *Radio Free Roscoe*. The benefits of this “self-archiving” so to speak are that in rare cases when a U.S. network has edited the series *and* it is available on DVD, I can compare my version of the official Canadian DVD release with the original U.S. broadcast. I can also use the commercials that air with the programs as contextual clues for the network’s marketing of the series and ensure that even if a series does not make it to DVD, I will have an “archived” copy available for reference. This makes, as should be obvious, for a good number of hours spent taping, watching, and re-watching television series, a good deal of money spent on blank DVDs and VHS tapes, and I, believe, a good number of examples from series that might otherwise pass unnoticed in most critical circles.

## Methodology and Thematic Concerns

Most studies of youth television take an empirical approach and examine the effects of the messages and images youth audiences receive. An entire field of research, for instance, focuses on the effects of violent imagery and its potential correlation to aggression and social disorders, and another examines the ways that racial representations affect self-esteem and self-image. The body of work on youth television from cultural studies/communication studies, which is more “literary” but also sociological and sometimes empirical, tends to examine youth television through a variety of different yet interconnected theoretical frameworks: through Marxism or the Frankfurt School, examining the effects of capitalism on teen consumption, for example; through criticism of the Birmingham School, tracing the cultural effects of image production; and from varying feminist discourses that examine gender representation, identity formation, and power relations. Generically, this project is literary and cultural in nature, though it often builds from empirical findings from other studies.<sup>29</sup> As both a “literary” dissertation, one that primarily depends on formal analysis, and a necessarily multidisciplinary one—because its “texts” are televisual—the theoretical bend of this project leans in many ways towards a combination of the cultural-studies models (in its historical work and social implications), a televisual application of postcolonial theory (in its international focus and concerns about power relations), and fits somewhere within the fields of newer American Studies as outlined by William Carlos Rowe (through its comparative and multidisciplinary approach and its move beyond U.S.-centric study) and Canadian Studies.

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<sup>29</sup> The only “empirical” components I have directly performed for this project—and they are more closely “oral history” components—are the interviews I conducted with members of the Canadian television industry, which included two directors/producers/writers and one actor. I have chosen not to identify any of these participants, in spite of the written permission each has granted me to do so.

Because I am most interested in the ways that these youth series from Canada and the United States represent, problematize, and interact with each other, the questions this project asks and the kinds of analyses it performs make the role of the Other a central concern. The degree to which the United States operates as a hegemonic or imperialistic force in Canadian televisual production is a pertinent question, as is Canada's role in perpetuating this relationship, if it exists. And, in many ways, the project examines "[...] how [...] cultural phenomena we think of as domestic or particularly national [or Canadian or "American"] are forged in a crucible of foreign relations" (Kaplan 1). Theoretically, the project borrows from Raymond Williams, Raymond Miller, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Homi Bhabha, who all demonstrate that any hegemonic relationship involves a two-way transaction, not mere passive acceptance, and that all such relationships are more complicated than meets the eye. It also questions how Canada's traditional subject position as "weak" or "imperialized" in relation to the United States may obscure careful examination of Canada's position as "strong" or "imperializing" in relation to its own people and in its international projects. This dynamic emerges in particular in Chapter Five, which examines Canadian self-differentiation from the United States and internal Others via multiculturalism.

Self-definition, self-distancing, and self-differentiation through the use of a sort of Orientalist Other also readily describe the ways that Canada and the United States posture vis-à-vis each other. Speaking specifically of black Canadians and their relation to black Americans, George Elliott Clarke, for example, argues that Canadians enact "a version of Edward Said's Orientalism" in which the United States is Canada's "exotic *Other*," the culture against which Canadians structure their own ("Contesting" 39, original emphasis). Canadians often theorize themselves and their distinctiveness through a process that Clarke terms "resistive appropriation"

(“Must All Blackness” 83). That is, they appropriate models from the United States and then muddle, revamp, and Canadianize them. Similarly, Frank Manning describes Canada-U.S. relations as “both symbiotic and dialectic”: “Symbiotically, Canadian popular culture needs its American partner as an ambiguous and reversible opposite. Dialectically, Canadian popular culture imposes a particular construction on the United States and then defines and redefines itself in terms of ambivalently held differences” (9). Manning articulates something like Clarke’s concept of resistive appropriation in his description of the process through which Canadians “consume American cultural products but reconstitute and recontextualize them in ways representative of what consciously, albeit ambivalently, distinguishes Canada from its powerful neighbor” (8). These processes of resistance and appropriation are evident in some of the intentional ways that Canadian televisual texts communicate a sense of distinction from yet similarity to those of the United States. Canadian television’s rhetoric of cultural defense from U.S. influence is more stringently built into the overarching structures that govern television’s production and financing. But U.S. television, to be sure, is equally invested in the management of international influences. The United States also uses the same kind of resistive appropriation and self-differentiation, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, in distinguishing its televisual environment from Canada’s, and it enacts its own versions of cultural defense, protection, and identity building through television in ways that will emerge in Chapters Three, Five, and Six in particular.

Textually, I draw from several discursive registers in making arguments about the cultural, economic, and international importance of Canadian television: critical, historical, and theoretical analyses of specific series, policies, and cultural practices in Canada, the United States, and other countries; analysis of televisual “texts,” which include individual series,

patterns, story arcs, episodes, and moments; network analysis, which examines the corporate, economic, and often political interests of specific channels and their parent companies; the purchasable materials sometimes attached to series and their franchises (such as *Degrassi* novels, Mangas, webisodes, soundtracks, etc); and the secondary Internet discourses in which viewers and fans engage, including message boards, blogs, and official and unofficial websites for individual series. This latter register adds richly to a project of this nature, for in many cases fans of the series not only circulate any and all press related to them, but also contribute to a good deal of that press. Fans tend to know what is going to happen to a series, where to locate missing episodes, when episodes have been edited, censored, or misrepresented, and because of their high levels of engagement and investment, fans are heavily critical and often reproduce or anticipate “official” critical readings of the series. Many of the materials used in this project involve transcripts of lengthy viewer discussions that I have archived over several years.<sup>30</sup> Even the executive producers of many of these series contribute to this web discourse; some post updates about these and upcoming series to their Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter accounts, and some answer questions about the series and distribute them to reputable websites as forms of official press. While a number of Canadian youth series are difficult to locate or historicize, in other words, the large accumulating body of discourse about them always aids in reading their significance at the individual and cultural levels.

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<sup>30</sup> For ethical reasons, I have chosen not to participate in this discourse for the past several years, to ensure that I am not coaxing responses from viewers. I treat viewer discourse as additional information, as content that needs to be analyzed, not as official information (though it is often highly accurate and in agreement with “official” press). Because television accumulates faster than most critics can write about it, sometimes websites like Wikipedia, IMDB, and TV.com serve as major sources for the airdates, controversies, and other points of reference in this project. Though none of these is a traditional scholarly source, each has become almost necessary in this sort of televisual and web-attentive analysis.

## Chapters

Each chapter in the dissertation takes up a specific concern related to the larger project of locating Canadian youth television's role in and influences on U.S. television. Chapter Two, "Bridesmaid Revisited: Recasting the Standard Narrative of Canada-U.S. Media Relations," is largely historical, situating this project's narrative of Canada's strong televisual production within the critical approaches that have thus far defined Canadian-television criticism. The chapter examines what Paul Attallah calls the "standard" narrative of Canadian television production and builds from his call for researchers to problematize and replace it with other stories that move us beyond viewing Canadian television solely in terms of cultural defense. To create one of these new narratives, the chapter begins with the traceable effects of the "standard" one, demonstrating how a rhetorical and political tradition of cultural defense in Canada has become self-perpetuating at the expense of other narratives. It also juxtaposes Canadian television's structure and practices against those of the United States, analyzes youth television's unique position, and sets up the symbiotic relationship that complicates the story of cultural defense. In arguing that Canadian television works as an arbiter of U.S. television culture and a mediator between U.S. and international television sectors, the chapter begins to build up the global relevance of Canadian television as well as the specific ways that it has affected U.S. youth television over the past three decades. Essentially, the chapter's attention to policy, history, and critical concerns lays the foundation for the textual analyses that follow.

Chapter Three, "As Canadian as Possible ... Under the Circumstances," turns to the effects of the symbiotic U.S.-Canada media relationship in order to analyze how a history of shared texts—and an increasingly shared televisual environment—have affected the formal qualities of these television series. The analysis takes up a common issue: whether U.S.

influence and continued televisual exchange with the United States have compromised the “Canadianness” of Canadian series. Many critics argue, for example, that Canadian television succeeds in the United States because it can “pass” for U.S. productions and that its creators often intentionally mask its Canadianness or create universal products in order to enter the international market. Others in the same vein argue that few if any distinctively Canadian traits remain in Canadian television, particularly televisual exports. Through a comparative analysis, this chapter illustrates the long-established formal, representational, and functional differences between Canadian and U.S. approaches to youth television, attributes those differences to structural and cultural traditions, and demonstrates the low success rate of Canadian series that explicitly attempt to “pass” for U.S. series. It argues that the most internationally successful Canadian series, like those highlighted in this project, remain as Canadian (or as inflected with Canadian tropes, traditions, and representational practices) as possible. Through its extended attention to specific series, its introduction of U.S. and Canadian differences in racial diversity and representation, and its outline of the state of youth television in 2009, this chapter emphasizes Canadian youth television’s U.S. value and sets up how Canadian TV’s continued differences contribute to an overall richer youth-television environment.

While Chapter Three traces specific Canadian inflections and their roots in policy, Chapter Four demonstrates how U.S. networks intentionally try to manipulate, highlight, or downplay these differences once Canadian texts cross the border. This chapter, “*Degrassi*’s Always Greener on the Other Side: Canadian Television, U.S. Handling,” comes closest to an economic analysis than any other, though its concerns are still primarily cultural. It looks at the way that U.S. networks fluctuate between constructing Canadian texts, and often Canada, as either Other (by marking aspects of Canadian television as too controversial, too different, or too

risqué for U.S. television) or as simply the “same” (by appropriating Canadian representations, texts, and people as “U.S.” or “just like us”). Using examples from Nickelodeon, Disney, PBS, and The N, I argue that U.S. corporate goals determine Canadian texts’ ability to “be Canadian” in their U.S. broadcast, and that the Canadianness of individual series varies from network to network. In every case, as the first half of the chapter demonstrates, U.S. networks have built their particularly U.S. brands—and often rescued their flailing companies—through their use of Canadian series (whether they marketed these series as explicitly Canadian or not); yet in every case, the U.S. network’s economic fulfillment compromises or fundamentally changes the Canadian text, rendering it incomplete or a completely different product. Another section of this analysis turns to an extended example of network self-branding via the branding of Canadian series by examining The N’s recurrent censorship of *Degrassi: The Next Generation* and the ways that the network’s self-definition and proliferation have depended on re-representing and sometimes misrepresenting the Canadian series. And throughout this chapter, the analysis considers how these economically rooted processes reflect on popular interpretations of the cultural differences between Canada and the United States.

Chapter Five picks up on Chapter Four’s popularly perceived differences between the two countries and Chapter Three’s comparative analysis of their televisual patterns by examining one specific characteristic of Canadian youth television produced within the last 30 years: multiculturalism. If the first four chapters of this project set up the valuable and positive characteristics that Canadian youth television adds to U.S. television, this chapter considers how multiculturalism—at least as it manifests in internationally circulated Canadian youth series—might compound under-problematized issues in both Canadian and U.S. TV. As an increasingly fundamental aspect of Canadian national identity and an official policy that distinguishes



Canadian practices from those of any other nation, the discourse of multiculturalism often promotes pride and serves as an effective tool for incorporating *visual* diversity into Canadian television. The form of popular multiculturalism that appears *at the narrative level* in youth television, however, is problematic because of its unconscious racism. Called, “Tolerated But Not Preferred,” this chapter locates the subtle racism that is often beneath seemingly positive multicultural representations, compares such representations to U.S. trends, and problematizes their implications for Canadian and international audiences. In most of these examples, representations of multiculturalism (via tolerance, diversity, and specifically interracial relationships) are ultimately shallow and reproduce the racism present in U.S. TV but in subtler ways that may promote self-congratulation rather than continual examination. Above all, this analysis emphasizes that both televisual cultures can benefit from more attention to antiracist representation (and argues that the Canadian industry seems more able to accommodate the improved representations for which this analysis calls).

Finally, the Conclusion takes up how Canadian influence on U.S. television heretofore might continue to Canadianize U.S. televisual trends of the future, and it specifically examines how several recent youth series—including *South of Nowhere*, the *90210* sequel/spin-off, and *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*—have clearly benefited from the success of Canadian television. The kinds of controversial storylines that have emerged in the early seasons of these U.S. series arguably would not have fared as mildly as they did without the foundation that series like *Degrassi* have laid. Yet each of these new series and many of the others I discuss have created particularly U.S. versions of Canadian tropes, making them serve simultaneously as examples of the continued differences between U.S. and Canadian television.

The Conclusion also emphasizes the critical moment in which this project has taken shape. While U.S. series experiment with new forms of representation, Canadian live-action youth series dwindle from some niche networks. They increase, however, in newer, more mainstream outlets. The economic recession, Writers Guild America Strike, and the U.S. success of many Canadian series in the past few years have reproduced in the many ways the late-'80s early-'90s mainstream turn to Canada for well- and inexpensively produced series. Like CBS's 1980s-90s experimentation with CTV series, the recent increase in U.S. network circulation of Canadian television series represents the completion of a cycle, a continual return to Canadian series and sources for U.S. television. As of late 2008, for example, press releases confirmed that *Life with Derek*'s Michael Seater (Derek) and *Degrassi*'s Stacey Farber (Ellie) would star in a new ABC-CBC co-venture called *18 to Life*, an unprecedented sitcom deal that will change the way that mainstream U.S. networks view Canadian series (whether the series succeeds beyond a pilot or not) and particularly the public CBC.<sup>31</sup> CTV's original police drama *Flashpoint* (2007-present) has found a well-publicized home on the U.S. CBS network. Short-lived Canadian series *MVP* (2008) and newer *Being Erica* (2009-present) are among SoapNet's first attempts at "original programming." As CBC series, these programs' U.S. broadcasts are also immediately exceptional, and their marketing as U.S. "original" programs speaks to many of the issues with which this dissertation deals. FOX, furthermore, has recently bought the format rights to Canadian sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, another CBC show and a purchase that may spawn other remakes of Canadian (as opposed to the tradition of British) series.<sup>32</sup> Although this project historicizes the U.S. use of Canadian televisual talent over the past thirty years and

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<sup>31</sup> The series is the first ever Canadian-U.S. co-produced half-hour sitcom made for network television ("A Life" L.8) and a definitive move for the CBC. Posner; Kelly D.1. The first CBC sell to U.S. network television was the miniseries *Love and Hate* (1990) (Knelman A.25), and other CBC series, like *Edgemont* (2000-2005), have aired for U.S. youth audiences on various cable channels.

<sup>32</sup> Vlessing; "Little Mosque;" TV Stevie.

specifically in youth television, then, its implications signify on Canada-U.S. media relations across genres and audience demographics and into the future of international television.

## CHAPTER II.

### BRIDESMAID REVISITED: RECASTING THE NARRATIVE OF CANADA-U.S. TELEVISION RELATIONS

For Canada, “globalization” is really another word for Americanization. And it is no more inevitable today [1993] than in 1812 or any other time in our history. (Orchard 291)

The facts speak for themselves. [...]n English Canada most of the stories available to us are American. [...]nly about 14% of all the fiction [...] is Canadian [...]. The bottom line is that the vast majority of all the entertainment offered on Canadian television [...] is American and this is unlikely to change. (Juneau et al 22)

If there is one non-American nationality that is ubiquitous in Hollywood, it is Canadians. In fact, so many actors are culled from Canada’s population of 28 million that you sometimes wonder if the US produces ANY home-grown stars [...]. Don’t like Hollywood actors? As the song suggests, “Blame Canada.” (“Canadian Connection,” original emphasis)

Like any tradition, Canadian-television scholarship has generally focused on specific issues that form a canon of important yet worn favorites while dusty corners remain unchecked. For criticism and historical work on Canada-U.S. televisual relations, the canon is comprised of a large body of cultural-defense scholarship that problematizes the U.S. presence in Canadian television and its effects on Canadian production, identity, culture, and the structural differences between each televisual environment. Practically speaking, it is much cheaper to import a U.S. series than to produce a Canadian one.<sup>33</sup> U.S. television is so popular and financially lucrative in Canada that many imported series receive the best time slots on Canadian networks, attract the most advertising revenue, draw the largest audiences, and hinder homegrown Canadian

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<sup>33</sup> Dunton 64; Attallah 165.

television series from finding the same success. Paul Attallah calls the critical focus on this reality and its effects the “standard story” of Canadian television (338 “Usable”). The standard narrative generally characterizes the U.S. presence in Canada as the main force that impedes the ideal of a nationalist Canadian television institution, and it often characterizes Canadian private broadcasters and Canadian audiences as the henchmen for the United States’ work of diminishing Canadian televisual (and by extension cultural) distinctiveness. From this view, homegrown Canadian television remains at the status of “perennial bridesmaid,” because U.S. television’s economic and cultural allure, private Canadian broadcasters that profit from it, and a Canadian public who “won’t watch what’s good for them” all undermine the success of the television environment for which cultural nationalists and the central government routinely fight (Beaty and Sullivan 71, 17).<sup>34</sup> Attallah suggests that criticism should move beyond rehashing the cultural-defense story, the focus on policy, and efforts to change Canadian viewer preferences.<sup>35</sup> He instead extends an open call for scholarship that rewrites these “standard stories” by considering, for example, why Canadians watch U.S. television, not just the problems that U.S. television causes for Canadian cultural production (343 “Usable”).

My goal in this chapter is not to revise the standard narrative in the specific ways that Attallah suggests, but to show how it has limited the telling of another story—or a dusty corner unchecked—that of the Canadian presence in U.S. television. My revisionist project of shifting the critical gaze towards a larger picture of Canada-U.S. televisual relations depends in part on the standard narrative, for that has affected virtually every area of Canada-U.S. television studies

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<sup>34</sup> I have slightly changed the context for the phrase “perennial bridesmaid,” which Beaty and Sullivan use specifically to describe Canadian television drama’s status in Canada. Similarly, there is ironic distance in their description of viewers who “won’t watch what’s good for them.”

<sup>35</sup> In his terms, “In linking television to cultural defence, it [the standard narrative] imagines audiences as imperiled—the garrison mentality—and audience preferences as errors in need of correction. Its unspoken presupposition is its narrow definition of culture” (343).

and the television produced within Canada and with and for the United States; yet, the story I want to tell also complicates and intervenes in the standard narrative. The first part of this chapter 1) presents a sort of critical and historical genealogy that walks through the standard narrative of cultural defense, 2) locates some of its tangible repercussions and demonstrates its shortsightedness, and 3) explains the traditional focus on the standard narrative as a byproduct of competing forces within the Canadian television industry and external pressures from the United States. Rather than replacing the standard narrative, the story I tell in the second half of this chapter adds to the standard narrative an emphasis on the Canada-U.S. symbiotic media relationship that began long before television and asks us to reconsider U.S. television's central mythology and Canada's role in producing it. While I advance an argument that involves repositioning the United States from the conventional role of "dominator" of Canadian television to a smaller player in the complications to it, I attempt to do so with sensitivity to the ways that U.S. involvement in Canadian industries has created real problems with continual and often cyclical effects. In place of the perennial bridesmaid, I position Canada as an arbiter of U.S. culture, a mediator between the United States and other international audiences, a major producer of quality youth television, and a major global televisual force, not so much in need of cultural defense but international and self- recognition.

### The Standard Narrative and Its Discontents

Canadian television (as an institution and a cultural medium) developed in the context of larger issues related to identity that are inseparable from any narrative of Canadian cultural production. A history of British and French colonialism, hegemonic settler-Indigenous relations, a slow move towards confederation, an enormous and geographically fragmented land mass, and

a deep-seated sense of “weakness” in relation to the United States all made identity-building a difficult undertaking for Canada.<sup>36</sup> Long before television, different proponents of cultural nationalism had been attempting to “Canadianize” Canada by articulating Canadian identity against and in spite of a perceived homogenizing U.S. presence that threatened the cultivation of Canadian cultural distinctiveness and fully Canadian print, film, and radio industries.<sup>37</sup>

Since even the earliest forms of Canadianization and before television, the United States has worked as an impetus for organizing a good deal of internal conflict in Canada. As both a catalyst for the development of a distinctively Canadian national sense of self and a possible impediment to the burgeoning sense of a Canadian nation-state, the United States has served as Canada’s most frequently used Other, the culture against which Canadians have structured their own and through which they often structure national identity or the lack thereof.<sup>38</sup> Ryan Edwardson’s work, for instance, historicizes the processes by which often “ideologically opposed” (5) Canadian nation-builders have mobilized mediated texts as symbols of cultural distinctiveness and tools for managing national identity. While each of these moments of nation-building through culture (or each moment or “reimagining” the nation (16)) involved looking internally towards creating media industries that would meet the disparate ideals of elite cultural

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<sup>36</sup> The traditional adage about Canadian identity, distinctiveness, and culture holds that few people can define them, but everyone can pinpoint what they are not: American. See Massey 29; Winks 2; Kymlicka 363-5. Berton, in the same vein, explains to a fictional U.S. listener, “[...] our identity has also been shaped by our negative reaction to your overpowering presence. We know who we are *not* even if we aren’t quite sure who we are” (58, original emphasis).

<sup>37</sup> The term “Canadianization” describes a continual “paradigm by which nation-builders [have] tried to use culture to imprint a sense of nationhood” in Canada (Edwardson 6). Though there have been various forms of Canadianization since at least the late nineteenth century, the term was popularized in the Canadianization Movement of the 1960s, in which cultural nationalists strove to increase Canadian media content and jobs in Canada—particularly at the university level, where brain drain and willingness to hire Americans was common. In Cormier’s summation, “Canadianization was a movement to resist the growing strength of foreign, often American influences on Canadian culture and at the same time a movement to encourage, nurture, support, and foster, an indigenous Canadian culture [...]. To Canadianize something meant to transform it by making it more Canadian” (8).

<sup>38</sup> Clarke “Contesting” 39; Manning 8-9; see also Berland 141.

nationalists, bureaucracies, specific government administrations, and the masses, each moment also necessarily involved attention to and often defense against the U.S. media industries and their effects on Canadianization. As with other mediated texts, the longstanding perception of the United States' potential to hinder nationalism and the close proximity of Canada to the United States, both geographically and in some ways culturally, affect virtually every area of Canadian television and its history such that "[...] the debate over television in Canada has tended to be shaped by the perceived threat of the United States and its globalizing homogenization [...]" (Beaty and Sullivan 17; Tracey and Redal).

The historical prevalence of the U.S. presence in Canada and in the Canadian media industry has legitimately justified concerns about the need for cultural defense. U.S. interference in Canadian magazines, radio, films, and book publishing preceded its manifestation in Canadian television and led to cultural industries that were Canadian owned but U.S. dominated.<sup>39</sup> Despite this clear U.S. economic domination, in the early twentieth century, the Canadian federal government initially hesitated to stringently regulate U.S. imports to Canada. Early state intervention in Canadian media (from which television took its cues) emerged under pressure from cultural elite/ists, or "learned and enlightened citizens" who pressured the government to restrict imported "pulp periodicals" and "escapist Hollywood films" from the United States and to aid in a nationalist vision of a cultured Canadian identity (Edwardson 11). Mobilized under Vincent Massey's leadership and eventual commission (the Massey Commission), one of the first major efforts to Canadianize Canadian media resulted in stronger government regulation that began to limit what could and could not enter Canada from the southern neighbor. It was

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<sup>39</sup> Dunton; Vipond cited in Edwardson 8.



within this context that state intervention and the ideal of cultured Canadian content that would educate the masses grew.

As a concept of national identity (forged through the cultural industries) formed under Massey and the “cultural intelligentsia” throughout the 1940s, policies and institutions began to shape Canadian media in terms of protection from outside, and namely U.S., influence. Precedents for this kind of protectionism were the *Aird Report* of 1929, which “institute[d] the concept of national unity *as a counterforce to American culture* in Canadian telecommunications policy” (Tinic 6, emphasis added), and the radio regulatory systems that formed in the 1930s. The United States prevailed, however, in “dominat[ing] the Canadian leisure agenda” through inundation with cultural products, heavily exporting magazines and films, and even traveling artists and professors to Canada from the late 19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Berlin 6). The United States, in other words, justified the growing tendency towards cultural defense and what led to the standard narrative through economically imperialistic practices (and from many accounts, culturally imperialistic practices) that only encouraged more self-defense in Canada. To make matters more complicated, although the cultural nationalists working through the Canadian government painted many U.S. products as problematic, the public or the “masses” often readily consumed U.S. imports.<sup>40</sup> Before television ever hit the airwaves, then, a structure in which the central government “protected” Canadians (and a national identity perceived as fragmentary and in need of defense) from the wiles of the United States clashed with the large percentage of the Canadian public that consumed U.S. imports.

The same sort of tension between Canadian consumers, the Canadian government, and U.S. influence is evident in the way that television was instituted in Canada. Partly in efforts to

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<sup>40</sup> Marshall 13-14.

continue the defensive policies instituted in radio, film, and print, and partly in order to fuel nationalism via television, early Canadian television took a different path from that of the United States in almost every conceivable way and was structured much more explicitly as a cultural medium to be utilized for nationalist purposes. These central and original structural differences between U.S. and Canadian television heavily affect the way that U.S. television, private Canadian broadcasters, and Canadian viewers have been historicized as complications to a cultural Canadian television industry. Where U.S. television became a private “network-centered” and “profits-obsessed” (Brown 259) industry dominated by “unbridled” commercialism (Boddy 52), Canadian television has become increasingly privatized and commercial only in the past few decades. Canadian television officially premiered with the state-monopolistic, publicly funded CBC (Canadian Broadcast Corporation) in 1952—six years after the widespread broadcast of television in the United States. Canadian television’s delay stemmed from the government’s attempt to make sure that the Canadian version would operate from a distinctive system that would benefit national identity (“CBC Television Networks”).<sup>41</sup> In George Quester’s terms, however, “Well before acid rain from the United States began having any discernible impact on Canada, American television signals were having such an impact” (532). Canadian viewers preempted their official introduction to television as early as 1946, watching it with “relative ease” through access to U.S. signals or with antennae in distant regions.<sup>42</sup> By 1951, at least 146,000 Canadian households were already watching U.S.

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<sup>41</sup> The government also recognized that Canadian television would prove a more culturally complex system (with pressure from the United States and the internal fragmentation of the French, British, and Indigenous populations) and a more expensive one (because the large geographical distances between communities would require more broadcasting equipment and a dual-language system at that) (Peer 10, 52).

<sup>42</sup> “CBC Television Networks.” The criticism disagrees about the extent to which Canadian viewers in various regions could access U.S. television, but Attallah’s numbers, the CBC’s summary, and Berlin’s assertion that 70 percent of the Canadian population “live within one hundred miles of the [U.S.] border” (7) suggest that even in the furthest regions, access to U.S. television was possible.

television.<sup>43</sup> Within this context, we can see how and why the desire for self-defense has become so prevalent in Canadian-television scholarship. The ease with which many Canadian viewers could/can access U.S. content and potentially undermine the success of Canadian television has only justified concerns about the ever-hovering threat of U.S.-ification or U.S. penetration. Although several forces (U.S. producers/broadcasters/signals and Canadian viewers) work together, the criticism has tended to focus on the perceived negative or imperialistic intentions of the United States and the seeming uncooperativeness of Canadian viewers.

The presence of the United States in Canadian television, both real and perceived, is so prominent that most of the policies governing Canadian television have formed in efforts to anticipate, accommodate, or avoid U.S. economic and cultural penetration. What I want to emphasize in this chapter, however, is that while the U.S. presence in Canadian television has in many ways caused and in more ways compounded internal tensions—between a heterogeneous Canadian state, individual Canadian viewers, and disparate visions of a nationalist television environment and its appropriate management—the traditional focus on this part of the story obscures other ways of reading U.S.-Canada televisual relations and actually breeds more attention to the need for cultural defense. The standard narrative *overstates* the effects of U.S. cultural penetration in Canada generally at the expense of thoroughly interrogating these internal dynamics, because the internal dynamics are often intertwined with the effects of the U.S. presence in Canadian production and culture.

While Canadian access to U.S. television clearly interfered with the early institution of a national Canadian broadcasting system, some of the United States' impediments to Canadian

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<sup>43</sup> Attallah 162.

television are perceptual and utilized as rhetorical strategies for nation-building or as convenient forces that mask other issues. The over-attention to the U.S. presence in Canadian television has, for example, fed and fed upon arguments that the United States is a media- or culturally imperialistic force in Canada, seeming to justify increased requirements for Canadian content and defensive practices.<sup>44</sup> Many of the protectionist strategies of the latter half of the twentieth century, such as Canadian content guidelines and quota systems, emerged in response to heavy U.S. cultural penetration, but many also emerged in efforts to strengthen state control in forming a more unified national imaginary (in the wake of threats about Quebecois separation, for instance).<sup>45</sup> Much of the criticism citing the United States as an imperialistic force proliferated during the 1960s and 1970s, and its effects have been far reaching at both the critical and policy level. Although, for example, criticism of the past twenty years does not generally seek to *prove* whether or not U.S. influence in Canada signals cultural or media imperialism, some of this criticism implicitly or explicitly assumes it by referring to the U.S. presence in these terms.<sup>46</sup> Empirical research and a good deal of newer criticism generally refute the idea that the United States is culturally imperialistic in Canada, while conceding that the perception of cultural imperialism permeates present policy. (And as I will demonstrate shortly, Canadian cultural penetration in the United States is almost equally as widespread in film and television, but critics tend to read the Canadian presence in different terms). As Berlin's 1990 study describes, "[...] the Canadian perception [is] that the vast media spillover [from the United States]—a modern Trojan horse—is causing a decline in Canadian culture and identity. Whether

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<sup>44</sup> Serra Tinic notes that "The origins of nation-building in Canadian broadcasting did develop within the context of fears of imperialism from the American cultural behemoth" (viii).

<sup>45</sup> Edwardson 17-19.

<sup>46</sup> Although, for instance, it is highly attentive to the internal factors that complicate Canadian media and the variegated issues of building nation through them, even Edwardson's work refers to U.S. influence in Canada as cultural imperialism.

or not this view is supported, the Canadian perception of a dramatic effect is real and has encouraged passage of protective legislation” (8).<sup>47</sup> Berlin also seems to imply that the very idea of U.S. cultural imperialism over Canada works more like an enduring “rationale of political rhetoric used to stir nationalistic feelings”—a perception unchecked and manipulated—than a willful intent on the part of the United States (107-8).

Other work on the application of cultural-imperialism theory, even that which is not specific to Canada-U.S. relations, demonstrates that its use in television studies fails to account for the kind of self-distancing at work in cultural or media exchanges. Richard Collins argues that although Canadians undoubtedly consume copious amounts of U.S. television, there is clear evidence to support their self-differentiation or symbolic distancing from the United States (a point that I will discuss in the next chapter). Through what he calls the “decoupling of polity and culture,” Canadians may consume U.S. television while still feeling assured of their difference from its representations (137). Michael Elsamer illustrates, furthermore, the problems with applying cultural imperialism to Canada’s relationship with the United States: The cultural-imperialism model works from the assumption that “Western powers (mainly the United States) export mass media to developing countries with the deliberate intention of corroding [...] traditional cultures [...] and convincing the people [...] to adopt Western cultural values which will lead to their purchase of Western products [...]” (12). In a Canada-U.S. context, this binary crumbles, given Canada’s position as an increasingly sizeable (and Western) power and its cultural and political landscape that is more similar to than different from that of the United States (Brady 90). Canada is also a powerful exporter of media texts to nations all over the

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<sup>47</sup> In Berlin’s summation of cultural-imperialism studies, “Analytical, impressionistic, and other critical perspectives generally find—and decry—homogenization and acculturation of Canadian culture by the U.S. media. A review of the empirical research, although relatively sparse, suggests to this writer limited effects—both negative and positive—in identity, tastes, values, attitudes, and beliefs” (107).

world, “the second-largest exporter” of television after the United States, making it less plausible that it is simply subject to U.S. televisual hegemony (Knelman qtd. in Attallah 161-162). Despite evidence against cultural or media imperialism, the combination of actual U.S. influence and the already-established Canadian discursive strategy of cultural defense has created tangible effects on the Canadian televisual environment and its overarching structures.

The same early opposition to the United States and efforts to wrangle a public who will consume U.S. products still define the state’s approach to creating and regulating television content in Canada and the internal tensions that complicate the Canadian television industry. The desire for cultural defense against an imperialistic or at least dominating U.S. force, for instance, guided/s what can and cannot air in Canada from the United States and the degree to which Canadian television is supposed to serve the cultural needs of its Canadian consumers. The cultural-defense model also allowed the early but now-dwindling television dominance of the CBC (from the 1950s until the early 1980s) and the particular concept of television that elite cultural nationalists realized through the national public broadcaster. Because it was already rooted in protective strategies against a perceived U.S. threat, Canadian TV “was born into a paternalistic environment, its role to provide not what the masses wanted—indeed, their love of American culture disqualified them from knowing what they wanted—but what was good for them” (Attallah 162-163). What was good for them, as the Massey Commission argued in 1952, was “television [that...] inform[ed] Canadians about various aspects of their lives. Much more, it should contribute to a general upgrading of critical analytical skills on the part of average Canadians. [...] Canadian television in its founding charter thus dedicated itself to the production of difficult programs for disciplined audiences” (Hogarth 38, 39). Ideally, Canadian

television would become distinctive through its superiority, through its less-commercial and more refined model, and through its adherence to a primarily public-broadcasting structure.<sup>48</sup>

The initial Canadian *Broadcasting Act* of 1968 and its revisions instituted protective measures to ensure that this sort of television and television environment succeeded. Enforced by the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC), the *Act* stipulates that Canadian television should “encourage the development of Canadian expression” by “displaying Canadian talent” and reflecting Canadian views, geography, and diversity “from a Canadian perspective” (qtd. in CRTC “Mandate”). In efforts to counterbalance the presumed U.S.-ification of Canadian television, the CRTC (instituted in 1968 to take over the CBC’s regulatory role) requires that various amounts of Canadian television air per day. The Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office (CAVCO) certifies the “Canadianness” of films and programs based on a quota or points system (points for Canadian producer, lead actor, setting, etc), and the CRTC determines whether individual networks meet their Canadian-content (CanCon) requirements.<sup>49</sup> Implicit in this system was the notion that the CBC was already doing its job in broadcasting sufficient(ly) Canadian content and that private networks did not and would not do so without regulation. Yet, for various reasons, these regulatory practices have not necessarily made Canadian television more “Canadian,” at least from the standpoint of the CBC and cultural nationalists. The same policies, in fact, that were intended to thwart U.S. economic and cultural domination have arguably undermined the broadcast of nationalist or Canadian-inflected content

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<sup>48</sup> In a different context, Wilmott describes this ideal of superiority as Canadian *ressentiment*, a discursive strategy that still holds the United States as the dominant force and Canada as its visibly weaker counterpart but adds to it Canadian ethic and intellectual supremacy. Through the “high road,” from this light, Canada, like Canadian television, distinguishes and protects itself from U.S. pressure and emerges as the true power.

<sup>49</sup> In the 1980s, CRTC guidelines stipulated that “private television stations, networks, and ethnic television stations [...] devote sixty percent overall of their daily (i.e., between 6 p.m. and midnight) and fifty percent of their evening broadcast time (i.e., 6 a.m. to midnight) airtime to certified Canadian programming” (Tate 14). As of 1997, the amount of domestic programming required for private networks has dropped to fifty percent (Tinic 84).

by setting up an internal competition between the public/national CBC and the private Canadian networks that formed a market niche by selling U.S. programs.

#### Public-Private/ “Television Was CBC”<sup>50</sup>

These and other unreconciled issues arising from the combination of public and private broadcasting may have as much to do with the perpetuation of cultural defense and cultural-defense scholarship as does any direct practice of the United States. While in all of the stories of cultural defense the U.S. presence serves as the organizing factor working against a fully Canadian broadcasting system, other narratives consider the role of the CBC and the private networks in either harming or helping the television situation. One branch of scholarship implicitly problematizes cultural defense—and brings us closer to my goal in the first half of this chapter—by demonstrating how internal dissensions work against an ideal Canadian television system. Here, critics still read Canadian television production as an ongoing struggle for defining, representing, and retaining a distinctive national identity, but they examine how the United States might not be its only impediment. In these cases, the prevalence of U.S. influence serves as a mere microcosm of other competing economic and political factors in television. Herschel Hardin’s *Closed Circuits: The Sellout of Canadian Television*, for example, argues that Canadian complicity with the promotion of U.S. imports on Canadian television is thoroughly entrenched in the structure of Canadian television policy and its enforcement. He demonstrates that while private Canadian networks compromise the production and efficacy of “Canadian content” by catering to U.S. television, the CRTC has been continually and willfully involved in that process. Behind closed doors, the very people who have publicly called for and instituted

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<sup>50</sup> This title modifies the 1966 CBC slogan, “Television is CBC.”



Canadian public broadcasting as a counterforce to U.S. commercial television have allowed for a Canadian version of the U.S. television model. Hardin argues that the CRTC's inability or refusal to strongly regulate Canadian commercial networks—because of friendships with network bigwigs, deals, and other murky politics—and the decision to grant them broadcasting licenses in the first place undermined the very public-broadcasting structure that the Commission was supposed to protect. Because of the CRTC's decision to allow private broadcasters to compete with the public-broadcasting model, internal opposition between Canadian networks regularly pit(s) the CBC against the private Canadian networks, creating cyclical instability. In the same vein, Michael Nolan's and Peter Desbarats' work, respectively, examines Canadian television from the perspective of the private networks, demonstrating that they have "been a convenient whipping boy periodically for some of the challenges and problems faced by the Canadian broadcasting system as a whole, especially the preponderance of United States programming available to audiences" (Nolan xi-xii).

Even without the CRTC's complicity in allowing access to U.S. television, the private-public debate remains a prominent issue in Canadian television's broadcast, funding, production, and U.S. television's ability to flow into Canada. Because television emerged in Canada as a primarily pedagogical public institution offering an alternative to the wiles of U.S. fare, all Canadian television is made with at least some public funding. This structure allowed for the early domination of the CBC and its stations. In fact, until the 1980s, most *Canadian* television was completely limited to the CBC. Although there were private CBC stations in some regions, these had to broadcast CBC series, and private network competitor CTV did not get CRTC permission to broadcast until 1961. While the CBC has at various times depended on U.S. imports for commercial revenue (Rainsberry 25), it has generally worked from the assumption

that U.S. programs offer “cheap succor” in the form of lowbrow entertainment (Beaty and Sullivan 17). As a medium for the work of identity building, the CBC’s programming primarily relied on documentary and drama—which even from the network’s early days could not always compete with the U.S. series that Canadian viewers could and often did access. Despite its more “sophisticated” programming, the CBC’s early production values also paled in comparison to U.S. television, and the “[...] comparison with American television was damaging even in the eyes of Canadians” (Attallah 167; Miller 11), feeding a desire for the U.S. programs that some regions could access via antennae and that private Canadian stations were willing to offer.

From the view of narratives that problematize the CBC and CRTC’s role in creating an internally divisive Canadian television environment, private networks have simply capitalized on what has long operated as a truism: “Canadians have shown that they will watch and enjoy quality, home grown [sic] programming, but they are not prepared to be denied access to American fare” (Nolan xxiii). Private Canadian networks have been quicker to recognize this and operate from a commercial-television model more akin to U.S. television’s structure. In the 1980s, when Telefilm expanded to include television, it also defunded the CBC to provide funding for independent production of Canadian series, creating more Canadian programs from a variety of genres and spawning the growth of private networks.<sup>51</sup> While the funding allowed for the creation of non-CBC Canadian series, the private networks and their connection to the CRTC still interfered with the CBC’s identity-building creed and undermined it by selling space to U.S. television.

Formerly the only Canadian network Canadians could access, the CBC now reaches only ten percent of its audience “during the most popular viewing hours,” while private networks

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<sup>51</sup> Attallah 176-7.

CTV and Canwest/Global are the two largest and most-watched networks in English-speaking Canada (Demers 656, 657). While they air a variety of Canadian series, both of the latter networks have been complicit in promoting U.S. television over Canadian content, and both networks have chosen to fulfill their content requirements by manipulating the looser aspects of the CRTC. For instance, Global and CTV may simply air and re-air the news to fulfill primetime content laws without conflicting with their manifold U.S. imports, and, without penalty from the CRTC, they often broadcast Canadian series at pre-primetime timeslots or air them twice a week to ensure that imported series get the best broadcasting times.<sup>52</sup> The Canadian television industry also includes a built-in system for using import profits to create original Canadian programs: “The low-cost [imported] American programme can [...] be used to attract large audiences and generate a consistent profit on the Canadian market” (Attallah 165). By simulcasting U.S. imports, furthermore, private Canadian networks can ensure that although many Canadians watch U.S. series, some will watch them on the Canadian networks, bringing advertising funds for high-rated series to Canada.<sup>53</sup> This does not count as Canadian content but theoretically should fund the production of it.<sup>54</sup> From the perspective of building cultural nationalism through television and apart from U.S. influence, the Canadian series that private networks broadcast suffer not only because of the lure of U.S. imports, but also because internal policy assists in the privileging of commercial programming. In this light, the issue of the U.S. presence in Canadian television lies not *just* in Canadian accommodation to U.S. television or the CRTC and private networks’ roles in fostering that accommodation. Rather, the issue lies in the attempt to

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<sup>52</sup> “Simultaneous Substitution.”

<sup>53</sup> In this context, simulcasting refers to the process by which Canadian networks broadcast U.S. imports at the same time that they air in the United States, often on two different networks. *American Idol*, for example, airs in Canada on both CTV and on FOX, which some Canadians can access via satellite. The simulcast on CTV means that Canadian viewers can choose to watch the series on either channel, but it ensures that they will receive Canadian commercials and announcements if they choose to watch it on CTV.

<sup>54</sup> Beaty and Sullivan 72.

reconcile two competing visions of Canadian television's ideal structure (one that is public, "cultured," and nationally motivated and one that is commercial, heavily inundated with U.S. television, and seemingly in contrast to national identity) that operate alongside each other *and* U.S. television.<sup>55</sup>

Another branch within this discourse of the public-private, Canadian-U.S. debate turns to why Canadian viewers might prefer U.S. television and the government's inadvertent encouragement of these viewer behaviors. Because, to use Attallah's terms again, Canadian television "was born into a paternalistic environment," structured as both an alternative to U.S. television and as an example of what other critics have called "green vegetable" programming, it may have pushed audiences toward U.S. television, which served/s as a "guilty" pleasure. Collins argues that part of the reason Canadians prefer U.S. television is because Canadian drama lacks the "fun" and excitement that audiences want (344). A 1993 Ryerson University study of Canadian teen and child viewing preferences seems to confirm this, arguing that even children can recognize the difference between U.S. and Canadian series and that they find U.S. series more exciting because they look more expensive, tend to be less educational, and treat them to the pleasures of violence and other thrills. While many Canadian viewers complain of the lack of Canadian content on the air, then, the popular perception that U.S. television is somehow better still feeds the justification of importation (despite improved Canadian production values).

The prevalence of Canadians watching U.S. TV, furthermore, might not stem so much from their preference for it, but from the lack of positive options in its place. Copycat versions of U.S. series, for example, have historically failed to capture Canadian audiences because the

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<sup>55</sup> Tinic 66.

actual U.S. program is so readily available.<sup>56</sup> And private Canadian networks, as I have noted, often keep U.S. programs at the forefront by promoting them more than homegrown (and often innovative, important) series. An extended example of this Canadian accommodation to U.S. television at the expense of Canadian series comes from the 2007-2008 Writers Guild of America strike and the context that preceded it. During the strike, which postponed the broadcast of many popular U.S. series from major networks and cable channels, Canadian press excitedly buzzed with news that the strike might provide extra job opportunities for Canadian writers and might increase sales of Canadian television exports to the United States.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, however, Canadian networks like CTV slowed down their release of episodes of *Canadian* series, saving them for desperate times in case the strike prevented the broadcast of U.S. fare.

In recent years CTV has jeopardized the success of several Canadian series and angered viewers by conceding to imported U.S. series. Since 2006, for example, CTV executives have sacrificed *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001-present), the highest-rated half-hour Canadian drama to date, to the imported *American Idol*, which the network simulcasts three days a week during the fall/winter season. This shift in priorities means that in 2006 and 2007, *Degrassi* moved back and forth between time slots (some even pre-primetime) in efforts to accommodate *American Idol*<sup>58</sup> and in ways that made clear CTV's priority investment in the latter series. In 2007, under increased pressure because of the writers' strike and in efforts to ensure continued high ratings for *American Idol*, CTV even reordered, delayed, and skipped episodes of *DTNG*. The Canadian viewer responses to CTV's treatment of *Degrassi* highlight Beaty and Sullivan's

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<sup>56</sup> Miller "Canadian TV"; Tinic 19; "Canadian Programming."

<sup>57</sup> MacDonald R.13; Andreeva and Vlessing E.8; "Canada Dry."

<sup>58</sup> Bailey; "New Day;" "Channel Canada."

point that Canadians will watch good Canadian series if given the opportunity to do so. One viewer from TV.com under the screenname Small Wonder wrote, for instance,

It's ridiculous, but CTV has so many big [U.S.] shows in primetime, of course *Degrassi* wouldn't get a slot. I mean, they've got so many big American shows from Fox, CW, ABC, NBC, etc. that they have to stick some of them on at 7 and 8 PM, *Degrassi* has no shot of getting a good slot with it like this, because the American programming comes first. [...] I still think it's foolish that they've put it off this long, last year I tried to wait it out for the episodes but this year I gave in and watched them [online] as the US got them lol [laughing out loud...]. It's really what's wrong with Canadian TV, no wonder Canadians choose to watch American programming instead. ("Season 7 in Canada")<sup>59</sup>

The irony of this comment is that the viewer wants to watch Canadian television, but turns to U.S. television's broadcast of it in order to see it in a timely manner. Others on the same website expressed similar sentiments. Lostintherain wrote, "As far as I'm concerned, Canadian programming should be CTV's main priority, and then the American shows. No wonder everyone always says how dead our television industry is." Wallman2001, another viewer, concurred: "CTV has become so Americanized that [... it] shouldn't even be a Canadian network. I thought the CRTC wanted to make sure that Canadian networks aired so much Canadian content.... I guess CTV is exempt from that" ("Season 7 in Canada"). This small selection of viewer responses is not unlike the many protests on several websites that discussed CTV's recent treatment of *DTNG*. Most agreed that the central problem with Canadian TV is Canadian networks' over-accommodation (here CTV's in particular) to U.S. programs, not simply the presence of U.S. programs in Canada.

*Instant Star*, produced by *Degrassi*'s Linda Schuyler and Stephen Stohn, has endured similar treatment from CTV, pushing it into near obscurity in Canada, despite an active and large Canadian fan base. One director/producer who has worked on *Instant Star*, *Degrassi*, and most of the series I include in this dissertation, explains,

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<sup>59</sup> All viewer responses here and throughout this dissertation are presented with the original punctuation, spelling, grammar, and emphasis (unless otherwise noted) in order to preserve the general tone of online culture.

CTV's business plan positions the network as a programmer of US television. The cynical among us feel that they only involve themselves with Canadian shows in order to keep their broadcast license. It's basic economics. It costs a lot less to acquire a hit US show than to make even a cheap Canadian show. I feel they treat Canadian series as stepchildren for this reason [...] and that has nothing to do with the writer's strike. (Interviewee One)

He also notes that "*Instant Star* is a bigger hit in the US because its broadcaster (The N) is behind it 100% and promotes it heavily. Conversely, CTV doesn't market the show very much, they keep changing the timeslots, and sometimes keep it on the shelf for months, so the Canadian public doesn't have very much chance to like or dislike the show."

Although I have referred to the network frequently, my goal here is not to highlight CTV as *the* problem, but to demonstrate how its profit- (rather than nationalism-) driven programming model is a microcosm of the opposing forces that complicate Canadian television. Private Canadian networks air Canadian television, but they also struggle to profit in a television culture that did not begin in the private realm and among a public that seems to crave both U.S. and better (or at least better-advertised, better-treated) Canadian television.<sup>60</sup> The dual dependence on and privileging of imported U.S. texts, combined with the historical underappreciation of successful Canadian ones and the state's sometimes heavy-handed, sometimes ineffective protective strategies, characterize the complexity of Canada's media situation.

These examples make it clear that the critical problems with and far-reaching practical application of the cultural-defense model have contributed to the oversimplified argument that Canadian television needs continual protection from a menacing U.S. presence. As I am demonstrating, however, it is the combination of U.S. cultural penetration, the state's paternalism, and increased Canadian accommodation to commercialism via privatization and

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<sup>60</sup> And as many theorists point out, whether viewer behavior is any indication of viewer preferences is another matter entirely; it often has everything to do with the lack of alternative options and the market forces that dictate and limit those options. In other words, just because Canadian viewers will watch U.S. television does not mean that U.S. television is what they want to watch.

U.S. imports that justifies and perpetuates the critical attention to the U.S. presence in Canada. Canadian state policy requires nationalist television, but that ideal of a nationalist televisual environment has always worked in opposition to practical and economic concerns and internal divisions. Individuals and networks often act on behalf of personal, corporate, and commercial interests rather than on behalf of the nation-state as it has been conceived, making internal dynamics just as problematic, or possibly more problematic, than direct external interference from the United States.<sup>61</sup> The perception that the United States is somehow damaging to Canadian television, then, persists because it is true, but also because other factors make U.S. “domination” in Canadian television a viable option not only for U.S. networks and companies, but also for some of the Canadians—at the viewer, state, regulatory, and corporate levels—involved in the process.

#### Another Side of the Story

Yet Canadian complicity in growing commercial interests at the expense of a flawed prescription for building national culture is not a new phenomenon. Through rereading how thoroughly Canadian complicity (or in the rhetorical terms I prefer, Canadian involvement) is entrenched in *U.S.* television and film history, we can begin to rethink Canada’s—and individual Canadians’—role in producing this media relationship. What emerges in this recasting is a highly symbiotic relationship between the two countries and their cultural products. Though this association is still subject to inequality and the reality of a larger and more powerful U.S. television industry, it also illustrates Canadian participation and success in the same cultural industries that have been characterized as ailing, weak, and in need of protection.

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<sup>61</sup> Ohnstad “Interview.”



A popular website is not far off in its assertion (and title) that “Canadians invented Hollywood,” and many of the U.S. industries would not be the same—or even nearly as successful—without Canadian involvement in them. On the other hand of the heavy cultural penetration the United States enacts through media exports to Canada are the widespread Canadian integration and involvement in U.S. television and the history of Canadian “brain drain” and talent drain since the early twentieth century.<sup>62</sup> Since the proliferation of film and television, “Migration from Canada to the United States has on average [...] been three times as great as the corresponding northbound migration” (Helliwell 112), and most of this is concentrated in Los Angeles, a major site of U.S. television and film production:

People forget that Canadians have had a huge impact on world television [...]. [O]ne fifth of the American television production community in Los Angeles is Canadian, and Canadians are behind those American shows “imported” into Canada [...]. Canadians have played integral roles in the U.S. film and television industries since the medium’s earliest days. Beginning with the silent film era, Canadian actors, directors, writers, and others came to Hollywood to ply their talents. [And...] many [...] Canadians ultimately reached the pinnacle of Hollywood power and prestige. (Tate 3)

Indeed, Jack Warner of Warner Brothers; Louis Mayer of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer; “America’s sweetheart,” Mary Pickford; Florence Lawrence, the Biograph Girl; Charlie Chaplin; and Yvonne DeCarlo were all born or spent their formative years in Canada.<sup>63</sup>

Early U.S. film and the aforementioned individual Canadians clearly benefited from this immigration, while Canadian film did not: Many of these figures openly expressed their ambivalence towards Canada and claimed the United States as the land of opportunity. Mayer,

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<sup>62</sup> “Movement of talented Canadians to the US has at least a century-long history. Luminaries of the stature of Alexander Graham Bell led the way, followed by a cadre of talented but less glamorous émigrés. By the late 1950s, Canada was in the midst of its first legitimate ‘brain drain’ to the United States. A net total of approximately 10,000 highly-skilled [sic] Canadians left for the United States each year between 1950 and 1963” (DeVoretz 19). Furthermore, “recent Canadian immigrants in the United States are the best and the brightest in terms of occupational choice and earnings performance relative to both resident Americans and previous Canadian immigrants in the United States” (DeVoretz 21).

<sup>63</sup> See Foster and Spaner, respectively.

for instance, always paid “lip service” to Canada (Eyman 27), citing Saint John, New Brunswick as his childhood home, and he made sure to employ his Canadian actor friends with lifelong contracts at MGM, thereby increasing the number of Canadians in Hollywood and ensuring their longevity there.<sup>64</sup> Yet, he clearly saw the United States as the site of realizing the dreams he may have birthed in Canada. ““Canada,”” he said, ““taught me that if you worked hard, you can do anything. And America took me in hand and showed me I was right”” (qtd. in Eyman 310). Pickford, similarly, remarked that

she couldn’t understand why [Charlie] Chaplin never became an American citizen. “This country made him famous and gave him his fortune,” she said. “He owed it to us to become an American.” Two years later, Pickford, who had also made her millions in America, reversed her attitude. Born in Canada, she had taken out American citizenship in the 1920s, but in 1964 she sought, and regained, her Canadian citizenship and passport. “One should never abandon the country of one’s birth,” she said. (Foster 268)

But abandonment—in deed if not in attitude—partially accounts for why Hollywood and U.S. television are as “Canadian” as I am beginning to argue they are. Following on the heels of these early success stories, actors like Michael J. Fox, Tom Green, Alan Thicke, Alex Trebek, Howie Mandel, and William Shatner have become household names in the United States. And countless Canadian comedians have grossed millions of dollars in film and television revenue for the U.S. industries, including Martin Short, Dan Akroyd, John Candy, Eugene Levy, Rick Moranis, Mike Meyers, Jim Carrey, and Tommy Chung. Fox, Levy, and Mandel echo Mayer’s sentiments, noting that while they love Canada, they could never make money as actors there.<sup>65</sup> This recurring theme suggests not only U.S. domination (though that certainly accounts for some of the Canadian industries’ limitations and the lack of opportunities that encourage brain drain), but also Canadian involvement in growing the U.S. industries at the expense of Canada’s.

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<sup>64</sup> Foster 9-10, 146.

<sup>65</sup> Lauria A.4.

Just as we can clearly see a Canadian presence in U.S. television through the actors and producers who have moved to Los Angeles, we can also see heavy Canadian involvement in U.S. television through the producers and actors who have remained in Canada. Although from a common Canadian perspective Canadian television struggles because of its connections to the United States, U.S. television has thrived because of its connection to Canada. The Canadian television industry depends now as much on broadcasting U.S. imports as it does on creating series that will sell to the United States and other international audiences. I have mentioned that imported U.S. fare draws high revenue for the advertisers it brings to Canada and in a best-case scenario then funds Canadian content. In a similar way, as Tinic's work demonstrates, Canadian series made for or with the United States also fuel the Canadian and U.S. economies, such that many series are now (and have been since the 1980s) made with international audiences in mind. According to Beaty and Sullivan, "[...] the backbone of Canadian television is cheaply produced syndication shows designed for the international [generally U.S.] market" (79). Canadian television also arguably plays a mutually supportive role in U.S. television. But as evidence of how the symbiosis at work here is unequal, Canada's role in U.S. television has, as the next chapter will demonstrate, caused more problems for the definition and production of distinctive Canadian content. The dependence on selling series to the United States means that when U.S. networks pull the plug on their participation in Canadian productions or even stop broadcasting them, those productions often end in Canada as well (this has occurred, for instance, with youth series *Falcon Beach*, *Radio Free Roscoe*, *Instant Star*, and *The Best Years*). Generally the Canadian network (even with the funding it receives from Telefilm or the Canadian Television Fund) simply cannot carry the production costs on its own, intensifying Canadian dependence on

U.S. television and the pressure to create Canadian content that will appeal to U.S. and Canadian audiences concurrently.

On the other hand, Canadian success in the U.S. television and the larger international export market has also rendered Canada a major global-television force and allowed a formerly “weak” television culture to become the second-largest exporter of television after the United States. From a U.S. perspective, Canadian actors, labor, and even texts have been and are increasingly central to U.S. film and television. While this detail does little to change the real complications the United States poses to official Canadian cultural production, it suggests a different way of reading that cultural production. Canada and individual Canadian actors, producers, and texts work simultaneously as arbiters of U.S. televisual culture *and* Canadian culture through the established tradition of Canadian involvement in the U.S. industries. The following section historicizes the increased Canadian involvement in U.S. television since the 1980s, characterizes the kinds of Canadian productions that are most common here, and attends to why.

### We Built This City/ Under Rug Swept

Since the late 1970s, U.S. television has adapted from a “big-five” network structure with some local stations to include hundreds of cable, digital-cable, local, and international channels. The sheer increase in the number and variety of television choices, as well as the attention to ethnic audiences, has increased imports from several regions, including Japan, Mexico, Argentina, the United Kingdom, and continental Australia. We have also seen an increase in exports from Canada because of the aforementioned changes that have taken place in the

Canadian industry<sup>66</sup> and because of the specific roles Canadian television is able to play in U.S. television. English-Canadian series provide the most common imports because their shared language, their actors' similar and sometimes undetectable accent, and their cultural and geographical landscapes may allow them "pass" as U.S. productions or at least as representations of North American community in ways that imports from other countries cannot. Canadian series often work as "in-between" foreign texts, providing for U.S. audiences some of the "positive" features associated with European television (education, public service, "sophistication") without some of the "negative" features associated with it (explicit language and sex, for example). At the same time, Canadian series can provide for other international audiences some of the "positive" features associated with U.S. television (English language, North American settings, good production values) without some of the "negative" features associated with it (violence and commercialism, for example). As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, however, Canadian television's ability to seem both very different from and highly similar to U.S. television works not only as a benefit but also as a potential liability. In the United States, the expectation that Canadian TV look similar to U.S. content has made Canadian television susceptible to re-editing, censorship, and post-production assimilative practices that differ immensely from the way U.S. networks treat other foreign imports. In this way, Canadian television serves in the United States (and in other countries), as a mediator and a flexible product, often imported for the purpose of passing for other things.

Canadian television also fills U.S. programming needs for economic reasons and for the sake of convenience:

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<sup>66</sup> "The shifts of the 1980s can be best understood by examining five interlinked trends: (a) changes in the regulation of television; (b) the creation of a specialty and pay TV market; (c) the creation of Telefilm Canada and changes at the CBC; (d) the rise of co-productions; and (e) transformations in US broadcasting" (Attallah 173).

Although the Canadian television production sector has historically faced a number of disadvantages vis-à-vis the corresponding U.S. sector, it also counts a fair number of factors in its favor, including: (a) lower labor and production costs owed to the historically lower valuation of the Canadian dollars (at times up to forty percent less), (b) close geographic proximity to the United States, (c) linguistic and cultural similarities (at least in English Canada), (d) scenery that easily passes for the “United States,” (e) skilled professional actors and crews “intimately acquainted with the nuances of American television,” and finally (f) availability of state-of-the-art post-production facilities. (Tate 20)

Canadian labor, scenery, and actors lend themselves to three specific areas of U.S. television, each of which I will briefly elaborate in order to distinguish it from other genres and in order to operationalize the terms I use throughout this dissertation.

The first category includes what Tate characterizes as Canadian television and films made *for* the United States, which means that the majority of the actors, writers, and locations in the texts are Canadian, but U.S. networks have commissioned them for U.S. audiences in order to save money on labor. This includes most of the made-for-television movies that air on cable networks such as Lifetime, USA, TNT, Sci-Fi Network, etc and some of their television series (Tate 110). Disney series *Flash Forward* (1996) and Discovery Kids series *Darcy’s Wild Life* (2004-2006), for example, were filmed in Canada, and many of their actors, writers, and producers are Canadian. To my knowledge, however, both shows only aired in the United States and other non-Canadian countries, because they were commissioned and intended specifically for a U.S. audience. Sometimes texts made for the United States may air in Canada, and because they are Canadian in nature (but financed by the United States), they *may* fit Canadian content guidelines. In other words, they potentially may serve both nations because they are vague enough to pass for “American” and Canadian enough on screen and behind the scenes to “count” as Canadian by CRTC and CAVO standards, but they also may not count as Canadian or find a home on Canadian networks.

Next are “on location” or “runaway” U.S. series and films that utilize Canada’s cheaper filming industry. Filmed in Canada (generally Toronto and Vancouver), these texts may include Canadian actors and labor, but their storylines, target audience, and general production concerns are U.S. in nature. The 2007 NBC remake of *Bionic Woman* utilized Vancouver filming locations and stars a Canadian actress, but its writers are American, and its storylines are set in the United States. The long-running CW series *Smallville* (2001-present), similarly, stars Kristin Kreuk, Laura Vandervoort, and Erica Durance, all popular Canadian actresses who have appeared in other series, but the characters they play are American. Ironically, U.S. series filmed on location frequently air in Canada but generally do not fit content guidelines because they are not considered distinctively Canadian enough—though I would argue that even extended Canadian involvement of this sort often can bring a subtle Canadian inflection or aesthetic to these texts. More ironic in *Smallville*’s case is the prevalence of Canadian actors and scenery in a show that focuses on a young Superman. Here a seemingly quintessentially U.S. character, like the actresses in the show, has Canadian roots: As a *Degrassi Extra Credit* novel points out, even one of the co-creators of the *Superman* comics was Canadian (Torres).

Finally, international joint ventures are the hybrid form of the other two program types, sharing funds between Canadian and international production companies in order to cut down on costs and meet specific requirements for the countries involved. International joint ventures include co-productions and co-ventures. Co-productions are texts made between Canada and another country with which it has an international production treaty.<sup>67</sup> They divide production costs between two or more partners and ensure that the resulting texts meet national content requirements for each country involved. As I have mentioned, because many other countries,

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<sup>67</sup> Tate 63; Attallah 336 “Usable”; “Content Rules” par. 23-26.

like France, and parts of Australia and the UK also require nationalist content in protection against U.S. exports, Canada makes a useful co-production partner. These texts provide another example of how Canada acts not only as an arbiter of U.S. culture, but also as a mediator between the United States and other international contexts: Because Canada's co-production partners often prefer some aspects of U.S. television but not others, Canadian television can act as a substitute for U.S. television or provide for other countries texts that are similar enough to those of the United States without the complications (such as limited artistic control) and cultural concerns associated with them.<sup>68</sup> Because of widespread co-production between Canada and other more recognizably "foreign" countries, U.S. viewers consume much more Canadian television than is obvious. Seemingly "British" series like *Dr. Who*, "American-Australian" series like *The Saddle Club*, or "French-American" series like *Jane and the Dragon*, are actually co-produced or produced in association with Canada, not the United States. In other words, just as Canadian series often "pass" for U.S. series, French, Australian, and British series often pass for other things—including U.S. series—through their involvement with Canadian producers.

Most of the series made *with*, rather than *for*, the United States fall under the category of co-ventures. The term co-venture refers to any text produced between Canada and another country with which it has no co-production treaty.<sup>69</sup> Although they do not automatically "count" as Canadian content under CAVO guidelines, some co-ventures can potentially serve double duty in order to meet Canadian-content laws while still accommodating a U.S. audience.<sup>70</sup> To do this, their producers may choose to shoot a series two ways, one for U.S. audiences—with U.S. locations, license plates, monetary currency, and other details—and one with Canadian versions

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<sup>68</sup> Haskins and McFadyen par. 26, 30.

<sup>69</sup> In everyday, laymen's terms, co-ventures are often covered under the misnomer "co-productions," because while the texts themselves are "co-ventures," they are still "co-produced."

<sup>70</sup> Co-ventures generally do not count as Canadian content under the CAVO points systems, but they do under CRTC guidelines ("Content Rules" par. 31).



of the same. The ABC Family/ Insight series *Falcon Beach*, for instance, is set in a New England beach town for U.S. audiences and in a Saskatchewan beach town for Canadian ones. The directors shot any scenes with markers of nationality two ways in order to make the series fit either national context. All of the actors in the series, however, are Canadian, and the aesthetic features of the show are more similar to Canadian television than U.S. television (See Chapter Three). Co-venture *Road to Avonlea*, on the other hand, did not apply a dual setting for its U.S. and Canadian audiences, but relied on one kind of marketing for the CBC and another for the U.S. Disney Channel (Chapter Four). Each of these types of series is somehow Canadian in nature and in most cases pliable enough for dual national (and often many other international) audiences.

Canadians are involved, then, to repeat Tate's point, in many of the so-called U.S. productions that interfere with "Canadian" productions. High-rated U.S. series like *Smallville* and *24* (which features a Canadian producer and several Canadian actors) are perhaps more Canadian than U.S. ("Canadian Connection" par. 8), again complicating the idea that Canadian media are unsuccessful or that Canadian television is plagued by U.S. domination. The common perception of this kind of Canadian involvement, however, reinforces the idea that Canada is subservient to or less successful than the United States, not an active contributor to or partner in U.S. and global media production. From the cultural-defense perspective, this history of Canadian participation in U.S. television is noteworthy only for negative reasons: Canadians become partners because they have not succeeded at competition; they work with the United

States instead of for their own traditions; they have not “beaten” them, so they have joined them.<sup>71</sup>

Parallel to what I have characterized as Canadian involvement or partnership *with* U.S. television and film production are imported series, which make up a smaller percentage of Canadian texts in the United States, but which are often highly successful. CTV-produced Canadian drama *Night Heat* (1985-1991) and comedy-drama *Due South* (1994-1999) were the first ever to air on a major U.S. network (CBS) in primetime, but before and since then imports for mature audiences such as *DaVinci’s Inquest* (1998-2005), *Corner Gas* (2004-present), *Kenny vs. Spenny* (2002-present), and *Slings and Arrows* (2003-2006) have proven consistently popular on U.S. cable and local syndicated networks. On digital cable, Canadian series proliferate through broader market opportunities and in specialty niches. And they are increasing all the while as major networks like ABC, FOX, and CBS experiment with Canadian co-ventures, imports, and rights purchases. Among channels that cater to women or education, Canadian programs or programs filmed in Canada supply a large percentage of what airs, particularly on WE, GREEN (formerly Discovery Life and Home), Fine Living, and Lifetime Movie Network (see Conclusion). As of 1996, in fact, Canadian imports have comprised 30% of the “original programming” on U.S. cable television, making Canada the ‘largest foreign supplier of original programming on U.S. cable’” (Murray qtd. in Attallah 182). The strong suit for Canadian television, however, is undoubtedly its contribution to youth and family genres, which are among the most successful homegrown series in Canada and in the international export market. Some of these imports are completely Canadian while others are co-ventures with varying U.S.

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<sup>71</sup> See Tonic’s work for an extensive account of how cooperation with (or submission) to U.S. productions, and particularly runaway filming, affects the Canadian media economy and the producers working within it and complicates the creation of Canadian content.

involvement; all, however, demonstrate Canadian centrality to U.S. television, and as I argue in the next chapter, all arguably bring a Canadian inflection to U.S. television.

### Growing Up Canadian

In youth television, the prevalence of Canadian series is higher because Canadian youth programs are generally high in quality and effectively combine pedagogy with entertainment. Because the early Canadian model of television that would simultaneously educate and entertain is thoroughly evident in youth productions, youth series are more likely to receive public and public-private funding (especially since the demand for their exportation justifies their production). The United States, on the other hand, came late to funding educational and public television. Our television culture has developed each decade with increased attention to prosocial and skill-increasing series, and with that children's programming—on public and network television— has increased in new/revised genres. Although as early as the 1950s, the major television networks had already devoted a total of twenty-seven hours per week to children's television (Alexander par. 2), children's programming at this time was also rooted in the broader commercialism of U.S. television, not education—in its current-day prosocial or skill-based definition—meaning that inexpensive programs that drew in high ratings dominated.<sup>72</sup> By the 1960s, *most* of the series available specifically for young U.S. viewers were animated and concentrated on Saturday mornings, and with their violent content and double entendres, they would not meet the educational-programming criteria by which networks abide today. Most of the overtly educational series that resemble contemporary pedagogical series

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<sup>72</sup> “*Science Circus* mark[ed] the first juvenile-oriented educational series on commercial networks over ABC from WENR, Chicago” (Woolery 583). Some earlier series such as *Mr. I. Magination* (1949) and *Watch Mr. Wizard* (1951) were educational, and as Lynn Spigel notes, U.S. television was always concerned with television's pedagogical effects on the child and the family.

were produced in the 1960s and after by the Children's Television Workshop, public broadcasters, and "state departments of education" (Alexander par. 25-26).

In the 1970s, Action for Children's Television (started by Peggy Charren in 1968) heavily lobbied the FCC for stronger children's television guidelines, including "a limit of nine and a half advertising minutes per hour [...] and the directive that children's programming not be confined to one day [...(Saturday)]" (Alexander par. 35). The "television revolution" of the 1980s saw major changes, "as the growth of cable and VCR penetration began to erode the network audience," and specialty networks like Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, and blended stations increased the amount of available programming for young audiences (Alexander par. 5). Finally, the 1990s added major legislative reform to children's television with the Children's Television Act, which "imposed an obligation on broadcasters to serve the educational and informational needs of children" and to "keep a log of that programming and make the log available in a public inspection file" (Alexander par. 38). In 1996, the Clinton Administration instituted a policy requiring all channels to broadcast at least three hours of educational/informational (E/I) programming per week.<sup>73</sup> Since then, the requirements have increased to include digital channels as well. These changes account for the increase in the amount of children's and quality educational television available daily on both cable and major networks and for the increased ways that Canadian imports have recently served U.S. youth television.

As I mention in the previous chapter, Canada has overproduced in the realm of children's television and in many ways instituted youth television (that for viewers roughly ages 7-21) as a genre. As separate children's, youth, and teen television genres have developed in U.S.

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<sup>73</sup> Kinder 178.

television, Canadian programs have found a particularly strong market among U.S. television channels that cater to young audiences. Because of the early mandate for cultured programming that would instruct audiences, furthermore, many Canadian youth series—and particularly live-action series and cartoons for young audiences—are and have been somewhat educational, allowing them to fulfill U.S. E/I requirements. Even among series that are not overtly educational—although many live-action Canadian youth series “count” as educational by U.S. standards—Canadian series fulfill large generic gaps in U.S. youth programming. Canadian drama and animation are most common in the United States because although they are more expensive to produce, they are the easiest to export and have a long “shelf life” (Pecora 21). Youth drama in particular (and especially that for child and tween audiences) is an area in which U.S. producers have been less likely to create programs and where Canadian producers have traditionally formulated well-written and effective series.

Although my focus in this project is specifically on youth TV, it is worth noting how much U.S. children’s television has also relied on Canadian series, particularly since the two overlap. Since their beginnings, for example, Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, and even PBS have depended heavily on Canada for live-action youth series, particularly dramas, and children’s animation. In the early days of The Disney Channel (1983-1989), Canadian imports were crucial to individual programming blocks divided by age groups. Canadian dramatic imports/co-ventures like *The Edison Twins* (1982-1986) and *Danger Bay* (1984-1990) and “gentle” and “thoughtful” cartoons like *The Racoons* (1985-1992) contributed to the family and child lineups of the mid-1980s.<sup>74</sup> By the late ‘80s, the network’s major series were the U.S. variety series *Kids*

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<sup>74</sup> Atherton F1. *Danger Bay* began as a CBC series but apparently became co-venture when Disney picked it up (this remains ambiguous in the press I have found). The parenthetical airdates refer not to the U.S. airdates, but to the production dates for each series; in most cases, the U.S. broadcaster of these series aired them far beyond their production dates.

*Incorporated* and the *New Mickey Mouse Club*, both of which targeted the preteen demographic. During the daytime lineup for children, however, Canadian cartoons and puppet shows were among Disney's most popular and most advertised series. *Fraggle Rock* (1983-1987), *Under the Umbrella Tree* (1986-1993), and *The Care Bears* (1985-1988) all filled space in what eventually became known as Disney's TKO (Totally Kids Only) lineup and served in the free previews used to attract subscribers.

Over time, Canadian series have continued to fill specific niches for Disney Channel, primarily with animated series for young children and live-action dramas (or hybrid dramas and comedies) for preteens. In 1997, when the network became a basic-cable channel, it was able to reach a larger audience and began the process of rebranding into the children's and pre-teen network that it is today.<sup>75</sup> It also introduced Playhouse Disney, a block of educational programs for preschool children that airs each morning. Canadian imports and co-productions comprised a good deal of this programming, including *Rolie Polie Olie* (1998-2004) and *Katie and Orbie* (1994-1996; 2001-2002). During the preteen and teen hours, Disney also aired the aforementioned series *Flash Forward* and *Ready or Not* (1993-1997), a Canadian live-action dramedy that eventually became a co-venture with Disney Channel. When the network rebranded again between 1997 and 2002, it catered primarily to a preteen audience and privileged live-action series of all kinds ("Disney Channel" par. 8). Of the seven "Disney original series" that the channel introduced, three were Canadian in some way, and each came from a genre that is less common for Disney series: *The Famous Jett Jackson* (1998-2001), an action-based dramedy; *So Weird* (1999-2001), a sci-fi series with some dark and realistic storylines; and *In a Heartbeat*, a dramatic series about young EMTs. Each of these co-ventures

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<sup>75</sup> In 1997, the network also dropped the word "The" from its name and became "Disney Channel" ("Disney Channel" par. 6).

features on-location filming in Canada and casts that are primarily, if not entirely, Canadian. The high number of newly introduced Canadian series at this time, combined with the number of imported and made-for-the-U.S. series that were already airing meant that Canadian live-action series nearly equaled the number of original U.S. live-action youth series broadcast by Disney. Since then, the network has shifted again to include more comedy, and in 2002 it cancelled all of its realistic live-action and dramatic series in favor of Disney-produced sitcoms.<sup>76</sup> Recent Canadian imports, however, have filled gaps during Playhouse Disney hours (like *This is Emily Yeung* (2006) and *This is Daniel Cook* (2004-2005)) and among the afternoon and evening lineups (*Life with Derek* (2005-2009) and *Naturally, Sadie* (2005-2007)), by adding more realistic settings and strong storylines to the otherwise fantastical programming available on the network (See Chapter Three).

Although the network's history is different, Nickelodeon has depended on Canadian series in many of the same ways, to fill specific niches. Nickelodeon began broadcasting in Ohio in 1979 under the name Pinwheel, which it owes to the Canadian series of the same name. *Pinwheel* (1977-1989) combined various animated shorts with live-action segments, famous U.S. actors, and puppets and served as the network's first and primary series, airing for three to five hours a day in Nick's early years.<sup>77</sup> In 1981, the network changed its name to Nickelodeon and became available nationally, but the Canadian presence on the channel only increased. *Today's Special* (1982-1987), a Canadian series similar to *Pinwheel* that combined live action and

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<sup>76</sup> "Disney Channel" par. 10.

<sup>77</sup> "Pinwheel"; Pecora 29. Information about *Pinwheel*'s production is sparse. IMDB cites the series exclusively as Canadian, but provides no elaboration of what this means (whether it was simply filmed there, or actually produced there; IMDB generally marks the latter as "Canadian and U.S."); Wikipedia, on the other hand, cites *Pinwheel* as Canadian *and* U.S., implying that it was a co-venture or filmed in Canada. Because the show featured popular U.S. actors like Bill Cosby in some of its live-action segments and utilized puppetry and international cartoon shorts, I lean towards categorizing it as a series made in Canada for the United States or as a co-venture between the two. Either way, the Canadian involvement in it is indisputable.

puppetry, aired on Nickelodeon from 1982-1987. In 1985, seven and a half of the twelve hours of children's programming that Nick broadcast daily were supplied by Canadian series. Six of these hours aired a *continuous* block of Canadian series.<sup>78</sup>

Off-network syndicated series from Canada, Canadian cartoons, and live-action variety series comprised a large percentage of the programming that followed on Nickelodeon in the late-80s, including *Fred Penner's Place* (1985-1997), *What Will They Think of Next?* (1976-1979), and *Turkey Television* (1985-1996). Like Playhouse Disney, Nickelodeon also divides its programming into age-specific blocks that crystallized during the 90s. Nick Jr., the preschool block, relied steadily on educational Canadian series such as *Sharon, Lois, and Bram's The Elephant Show* and animated series *Rupert* (1991-1997). And in 1989, when Nick finally removed *Pinwheel*, Canadian series *Fred Penner* and *The Elephant Show* (1984-1988), along with Nick's *Eureka's Castle*, became its "backbone" (Pecora 28). By 1995, many of these series no longer aired on the network, but Canadian programs continued to supply Nick Jr. with animation and Nick with series for older viewers.

Canadian imports and co-productions also provided many of the live-action series available on Nickelodeon during the 1990s. Nick's original comedy series for preteens and teenagers generally were and are U.S. productions. Most of the dramatic and action/adventure series for preteens and teens, however, were Canadian imports, co-ventures, and series filmed on location. Successful series such as the teen soap *Fifteen* (also called *Hillside* in Canada, 1991-1993), drama *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo* (1996-1998), sci-fi series *Animorphs* (1998-2000), and the thriller *Are You Afraid of the Dark* (1990-2000) were among the definitive programs of Nick's '90s youth lineups. In recent years, Nickelodeon has shifted like Disney to

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<sup>78</sup> I have calculated the number of hours of Canadian programming Nickelodeon aired at this time by using old television-guide grids that are printed in *Nickelodeon Nation* and by studying lists of every series Nick broadcast and then determining which series were Canadian.



appeal primarily to preteens, and with that change, most of the variety, dramatic, and sketch series have given way to U.S. live-action comedies. Parallel to the preteen changes are the network's continued movement into international markets and creating programs that will sell toys and showcase the Nick brand. With this "global expansion" has come a shift in making "its American series serve as the focal point" (Sandler 62). Because of this change, between 2000 and 2009, Canadian series have mostly filled gaps in Nick's morning preschool programming (in the form of educational cartoons like *Little Bear* and *Franklin*), in afternoon animated series for tween audiences, (*Wayside*, *6Teen*, *Pelswick*, *Martin Mystery*, *My Dad the Rock Star*), and very rarely in live-action dramas like *Caitlin's Way* (2000-2002). With the increasing specialization of cable television, some of the older Canadian series have also moved to Nick's family networks, the digital channels Noggin and The N. Although most of the Canadian live-action series have disappeared from the parent network, then, their influence continues in Nickelodeon's animated series and on other channels under the general Nickelodeon brand (See Chapter Four).

Nickelodeon's teen channel The N, in particular, (formerly divided into two channels, Noggin for kids, and The N for teens) has relied heavily on Canadian and other imported series since its initial broadcast in 2001. In addition to *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, which is not only the network's flagship series, but also its highest-rated, most talked-about series, the Canadian series *Whistler* (2006-2008), *Instant Star* (2004-2008), *Radio Free Roscoe* (2003-2005), *The Best Years* (2007-2008; 2009-present), and *About a Girl* (2007) have filled entire programming blocks. At various transitional periods in The N's seven-year history, furthermore, Canadian series have provided the *only* original (non-off-network syndicated) programs on the teen channel. Interestingly, even *Nickelodeon Nation*, the most extensive scholarly resource on

the network to date and from which I have pieced together much of this history, avoids examination of how much of Nick's (and its family channels') early programming was Canadian and fails to cite many of these Canadian series as such. Though several contributors to the book mention that some of Nick's early series were Canadian, the book's premise and subtitle, that Nick is "America's only network for kids," is rooted in the U.S. context of the channel and not in the ways that its concept of "American" youth television is only possible through Canadian texts. (See Chapter Four for an extensive analysis of how Nick and other channels have, in fact, built their particularly U.S. brands on their use and manipulation of Canadian series).

Similarly, Canadian content has provided many of the definitive series for U.S. public television. PBS and its individual stations have relied since the 1980s on almost the same amount of Canadian series as Nickelodeon and Disney, at times airing equal numbers of Canadian series for young audiences as U.S. series. It can also thank Canada for some of its highly acclaimed children's programs, particularly *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*. A native Pennsylvanian, Fred Rogers created his first series, *The Children's Corner*, in 1953, airing it locally in Pittsburg on "the nation's first community-supported public TV station" (Stewart 98). But although it drew influence from its predecessor, Rogers' namesake series *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* (initially called *Misterogers*) was conceived, born, and reared in Canada. In 1962-3, "under the supervision of Fred Rainsberry, the inventive and durable head of CBC's children's programs," Rogers created the show at a CBC studio in Toronto. It first aired in Canada as a fifteen-minute "hit" series and then in the United States in 1964 as a half-hour series with its current title (Stewart 100; Rainsberry 170-3). At that time, Rogers brought the show back to the Pittsburg station, and it has aired nationally since 1968—for over forty years—serving as PBS's longest-running and one its most successful series (Stewart 95). Educational

Canadian cartoons *Cailou* (1997-present), *Arthur* (1996-present), *The Bearenstain Bears* (2003-present), and *The Magic School Bus* (1994-1997) also aired for years on PBS, and most now serve its 24-hour digital network Sprout.

Other networks have followed suit in their use of Canadian series, though to a lesser degree. HBO and Showtime have sporadically filled youth-television blocks with Canadian series, most notably *Babar* (1989-1991) and *Ready or Not*, respectively. Discovery Channel and its family network Discovery Kids often source Canadian series, which they share with NBC. And in its various forms, the Family Channel has included large numbers of Canadian imports, some of which it acquired from Disney and Nickelodeon.<sup>79</sup> Because, furthermore, Disney owns ABC and ABC Family, Nickelodeon is affiliated with CBS, and Discovery with NBC, many of the aforementioned series have aired on the major networks on Saturday mornings and daily during the afternoon programming that is required for young audiences. CBS also struck a deal with Canadian animation company Nelvana in the mid-1990s, making it a source for most of its Saturday-morning series.<sup>80</sup> In other words, many of the network-television options for youth that do not come from affiliated cable channels come directly from Canada through co-ventures or as imports. In children's and youth television alone in the past twenty years, U.S. viewers with and without basic and digital cable have been exposed to large amounts of Canadian series in several genres, at times so much so that Canadian programs actually outnumbered or perhaps "dominated" U.S. youth television. Add to these youth programs the series made with, by, and in Canada and starring Canadians, and it is often difficult to tell where their television ends and ours begins.

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<sup>79</sup> The Family Channel began as a CBN (Christian Broadcast Network) channel and then became Fox Family before ABC bought it. It is now called ABC Family.

<sup>80</sup> Pecora 35.

Youth audiences in both countries share so many of the same texts that just as Canadian youth channels are heavily “U.S.,” many U.S. youth channels are heavily “Canadian.” Although, for instance, neither the Disney Channel nor Nickelodeon is allowed in Canada under content restrictions, Canadian channels like YTV and Family air manifold Disney and Nick series. In fact, during research trips, I have been sorely disappointed to find that I could not escape from U.S. series like *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, *Hannah Montana*, or *That’s So Raven* even in Canada, where I wanted to watch as much Canadian television as possible. With so many popular Canadian series airing on U.S. youth channels, the youth options in both countries often have looked more similar than different. In Beaty and Sullivan’s terms, the two countries’ television cultures are so intertwined that we can think of Canadian television as “AmeriPlus” (U.S. television with some extra Canadian series/channels that are unavailable in the United States) or “AmeriMinus” (U.S. television that is missing some of its series/channels and has replaced them with Canadian ones) (69).

Just, then, as U.S. televisual products figure largely in Canada, the Canadian presence is traceable in virtually every area of U.S. television. This chapter’s narrative of this presence and of the Canadian television industry’s strengths complicates the narrative of cultural defense. As I have demonstrated, internal divisions in Canadian television’s structure (through network and CRTC practices), mass Canadian involvement in U.S. television, and the policies that have undermined cultural defense are perhaps as much inherent to Canadian media issues as is the United States, making it much less palpable that hegemony is the only cause for the U.S. presence in Canadian television. U.S. consumption of Canadiana (and Canadians) bears witness to the talent that originates there and its potential for success, and U.S. television’s heavy

dependence on Canadian labor and imports also works against any simple binary explanation of the shared media situation.

Yet, the kind of symbiosis at work between the two nations' television cultures is not without problematic power dynamics: The historical attempt to grapple with the reality of U.S. cultural penetration in Canada has resulted in structural differences that sometimes inadvertently limit the Canadian content they were meant to protect. Canadian dependence on U.S. imports, advertising revenue, and an increasingly commercialized/ privatized industry causes economic structures that hinder nationalist content, that interfere with the broadcast of good Canadian series, and that disrupt the central government's identity-building agenda, and some Canadian series lack opportunities for success and longevity because U.S. broadcasters and partners can pull their involvement at a moment's notice and cause the series to get canceled in Canada. Canada and the United States are so connected that "both stories," to quote Byers again, "are part of our viewing cultures" ("Revisiting" 48). If, as one of this chapter's epigraphs claims, globalization signals U.S.-ification for Canada, then it also signals Canadianization for the United States—and both processes preceded television. Most importantly, while I do not mean to minimize Canadian television's struggles, I do want to suggest that given all of this history and its complication of the standard narrative, it is difficult to imagine Canada as a weak force; if she is a bridesmaid, she upstages the bride with a quieter entrance in an equal dress.

Yet, how "Canadian" can of these internationally circulated series remain if for decades U.S. viewers have consumed them unknowingly? Is Canadian television's selling point its ability to pass unnoticed as such? The following chapter builds from this history, addressing how the imbricated market forces between the two countries have affected the aesthetics of the texts produced within them. Globalization may have U.S-ified Canada's television market, but it

has not U.S.-ified its texts. The same structural differences, self-differentiation, and discursive strategies that have made Canadian television difficult to manage in Canada have in many ways allowed it to retain a sense of distinction from U.S. television and account for its appeal there.

### CHAPTER III.

#### AS CANADIAN AS ... POSSIBLE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, OR WHY U.S. TELEVISION NEEDS CANADIAN TELEVISION<sup>81</sup>

Whereas Canadians were once referred to as “the pod people of American entertainment,” we’ve now both drunk enough from the same pitcher of Kool-Aid to render our differences virtually indiscernible. (Deachman B.4)

In several season-seven episodes of *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, establishing shots of the CN Tower figure prominently between scenes.<sup>82</sup> Formerly the world’s tallest building and an image still associated with Canadian National (CN) pride, the Tower serves as a functional radio and television communications site.<sup>83</sup> In its manifestations on *Degrassi*, the Tower, seen only in long shots, represents an unadulterated Canadian image in a series that remains unlike anything else on U.S. television and that thrives in Canada (and over 100 other nations) because of its difference. The shots of the Tower remind viewers in Canada and abroad that *Degrassi* is set in Toronto (where the Tower stands downtown), and its symbolism parallels *Degrassi*’s status as a definitive Canadian series. Like many Canadian television series, however, the CN Tower looks more Canadian from afar than it does up close. While the Tower is one of Canada’s most recognizable national icons, it has also operated as a symbol of Canadian accommodation to U.S. commercialism. According to the 1997 CBC documentary *What Border*, advertisements for

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<sup>81</sup> The expression “as Canadian as ... possible under the circumstances” originated as the winning response to a contest that solicited the Canadian version of “as American as apple pie,” and it is a common title for scholarship on Canadian identity (Resnick 38).

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, “Broken Wings” (719) and “Everything She Wants” (721).

<sup>83</sup> A dualistic title, “Canadian National” refers to the company that built the Canadian National Railway and the CN Tower (“CN Tower” par. 1-2).

Disney, quintessentially U.S. iconography, cover the Tower. Like another Canadian symbol, the Mountie—the licensing trademark for which the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) sold to Disney in 1995—and the larger arguments about Canadian television’s susceptibility to U.S.-ification, we could read the real CN Tower as more evidence of Canadian capitulation to U.S. economic and cultural domination.<sup>84</sup> But the televisual version of the CN Tower signifies something else.

The effects of increased globalization, Canadian dependence on trade of all kinds with the United States, and the prevalence of U.S. interference in Canadian politics, economy, and culture support the common perception that internationally circulated Canadian television series manage to, like other Canadian symbols, only vaguely represent Canada, if it all, and instead submit to the market forces that demand adaptability. To the contrary, *Degrassi*’s pronounced inclusion of Canadian symbols in an internationally distributed text—as well as the series’ visual and narrative distinctiveness—suggest that intentional vagueness is not the only means by which Canadian series succeed with global audiences. *Degrassi* and its use of the un-Disneyfied CN Tower gesture to Canadian markers that withstand U.S. influence and typify some of the ways that Canadian television series retain or represent a sense of Canadianness in the export market.

With that said, the task of reflecting any sense of “Canadian” identity, conventions, or characteristics is much more complex than the placement of national symbols within a television series and more complicated than a mere pronouncement of the text’s nationality. When combined with the traditional difficulty of pinpointing a fittingly Canadian identity or form of cultural expression, the attempt to represent Canada in televisual texts becomes even more difficult, because the Canadian television industry *has* thrived since the 1980s on creating series

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<sup>84</sup> Disney owned the license for the RCMP until 2000, when the Mounted Police Foundation gained the rights to it (“RCMP” par. 51-52).



that will attract international audiences. In her extensive work on the Vancouver film and television industries and their relation to the United States, Tinic demonstrates that although a good deal of television comes from Canada, it does not always tell Canadian stories or deal sufficiently with the variegated regional identities that comprise the nation. While most of it utilizes Canadian “spaces,” Canadian television—as is clear from the previous chapter—varies immensely in the degree to which Canadians are involved in it and in which Canada as a “place” is represented (x, 37). From this perspective, Canadian television—particularly that produced with, for, or with the United States in mind—features Canadian locales and people but does not necessarily attend to Canadian history, storytelling, aesthetics, and cultural concerns.

Implicit in this dynamic is the notion that there is a gap between authentic Canadian television and series that simply originate in Canada.<sup>85</sup> Within this binary, exported series (whether intended for U.S. audiences or not), co-productions, and co-ventures are the most susceptible to claims of vagueness or U.S.-ification. Although she focuses primarily on Canadian producers’ struggles to represent Canadianness and somewhat less on analysis of the texts themselves, Tinic argues that participation with other countries, and particularly the United States, “fundamentally changes” the nature of a series (113), generally compromising Canadian specificity in favor of “universal” values or settings explicitly masked as the United States. Departing from Tinic, some critics assert that Canadian television succeeds internationally *because* it is not authentically Canadian or because its producers have become experts at creating universal series that can “pass” for U.S. television (and thereby sell internationally) and that such series often privilege “economic over cultural concerns” (Yacowar 15; Matheson 119).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Sarah Matheson’s work demonstrates that critics have particularly maligned ““industrial”” or exportable Canadian series, setting up a binary between them and ““real or ‘authentic’” series (119, 117-118).

<sup>86</sup> Yacowar likens televisual passing and “operations in self-denial” to the “traditional bobbing of the nose or the name” (15).

Because of a tendency to create series that will sell internationally, as Tate and Allen argue, “there are very few dramas explicitly showcasing Canada and/or Canadian characters” (par. 2).

In addition to critical work arguing that international exports and even domestic Canadian series somehow lack a sense of Canadianness is criticism that questions whether any distinctive televisual sense of Canadianness exists in the first place. Attallah, for instance, further complicates the gap between “authentically” Canadian series and those that simply originate in Canada by suggesting that such comparisons “presuppos[e] the existence of an antecedent Canadian style or theme against which new productions can be judged [... when...] the only antecedent style—slow, awkward, and earnest—has been rejected. There is no reason that the new style should not be equally ‘Canadian’” (187). The inability to locate a positive or antecedent Canadian aesthetic and the aforementioned ways of theorizing the supposed lack of Canadianness in internationally (and sometimes domestically) circulated texts feed arguments that Canadian television, already susceptible to U.S. influence, is ever in danger of losing any distinctive qualities it may have once had, and that whether it ever had any is questionable as well.<sup>87</sup>

While claims of vagueness certainly apply to some Canadian exports, and while Attallah is right to warn against upholding an originary or mythic Canadian televisual aesthetic, none of these arguments takes into account the manifold successful Canadian exports that are intentional about expressing their Canadian origins or that are structured as alternatives to U.S. television series. Nor do these arguments accommodate Matheson’s well-demonstrated point that even in

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<sup>87</sup> A 1996 report to the CBC argues the need for distinctive Canadian television as if it does not exist: “We have developed a feature film and television industry, but a good deal of this product is created specifically for the American market, without reflecting a Canadian reality [...]. We need Canadian programs and films to enable our citizens to understand one another, to develop a national and community consciousness, to help us shape our own solutions to social and political problems, and to inspire the imagination of our children and express their hopes” (Juneau et al 22-23).”

universalized series that “confor[m] to [...] aesthetics of placelessness, local meanings may surface in covert and often overlooked ways [...]” (130). As Governor General Vincent Massey once said, “There are Canadian customs, if we choose to find them; Canadian things which are very much our own, suggesting this country and no other” (31), differences that are not rooted in anything essential or inherent, but in representational conventions, historical traditions, and the processes of self-definition. Tate and Allen, for instance, find that *Due South* provides an exceptional example of a Canadian export that retains distinctive elements, and many critics read *Degrassi* as a similar distinctively inflected exception.<sup>88</sup> I want to take these arguments further and suggest that despite the difficulty of locating Canadian culture or identity more generally, despite the U.S.-ification of Canadian television’s structure, and despite increased Canadian dependence on selling series internationally, “Canadian things” are existent and evident in *most* of the Canadian televisual texts that flow in to the United States, not just in a few examples.

Building from Chapter Two’s discussion of the specific policies through which cultural elites and the central government established Canadian television as an alternative to U.S. mores, this chapter examines how youth-television series with various degrees of Canadian involvement construct and signify Canadian differences in the U.S. market, and even work to critique U.S. television through those differences. Like the CN Tower or *Degrassi*’s use of it, Canadian television looks more Canadian from afar—when placed in the context of U.S. television—than it may look up close in Canada. To demonstrate Canadian youth television’s difference from afar, this chapter counters what I would call the myth of converging televisual styles, or the idea that Canadian television has become less distinctive under globalization and increased

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<sup>88</sup> See many of the articles in Byers’ edited collection *Growing Up Degrassi*.

exportation.<sup>89</sup> The chapter also argues against the oversimplified notion that Canadian television succeeds in the United States because of its similarities to U.S. television.<sup>90</sup> It contends a) that Canadian television remains distinct from its U.S. counterpart, b) that in the current state of youth television, Canadian television's differences today seem more pronounced than they may have twenty years ago, and c) that these differences—some of which include early documentary traditions, realism, and pedagogical entertainment—account for Canadian TV's popularity in U.S. youth television. Theoretically, the chapter approaches this discussion from what might roughly fit “a paradigm of historical poetics that situates formal developments within specific historical contexts of production, circulation, and reception” (Mittell 30).<sup>91</sup> It explores the formal qualities of several series and locates the differences between the two countries' modes of production in established policies, in literary traditions, in opposite approaches to encouraging viewer self-identification with and agency in extracting meaning from the text, and in transformations in youth television that magnify these differences. Where Canadian youth television's conventions often depend on nuance, complexity, open-endedness, and encourage viewer self-interpretation, U.S. youth television's generally depend on hyperbole, straightforwardness, and emphasize singular interpretations.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> This argument and its work of countering convergence theories build upon Michael Adams' *Fire and Ice*, which argues against the possibility of Canadian and U.S. convergence more broadly and concludes that “[...] Canada and the United States are socio-culturally distinct and will remain so for many years to come—perhaps indefinitely” (76).

<sup>90</sup> Here I am also arguing against Marie-Claire Simonetti's assertion that Canadian television's differences might “diminish cross-cultural fidelity” with U.S. audiences (“Teenage Truths” par. 30).

<sup>91</sup> Mittell's discussion of historical poetics borrows from David Bordwell's cinematic theory of historical poetics (which builds from André Bazin's work), but it applies such principles to televisual texts: “Following a historical poetic approach, innovations in media form are not viewed as creative breakthroughs of visionary artists but at the nexus of a number of historical forces that work to transform the norms established with any creative practice. Such an analysis examines the formal elements of any medium alongside the historical contexts that helped shape innovations and perpetuate particular norms” (Mittell 30).

<sup>92</sup> In its dismissal of essential differences and attention to production environments and qualities that have become conventions through repetition, the chapter also extends Byers' response to Simonetti's comparison of *Degrassi* and *90210*.

## Where It Gets Canadian

As I note in the previous chapter, the global popularity of the U.S. television industry makes it the paragon for television production in many countries but not necessarily a welcome partner in international co-production; Canada, on the other hand, makes an attractive partner for both U.S. and international joint ventures because as a mediating force, its similarity to the United States offers external producers access to the U.S. market, and its co-production treaties with several nations offer U.S. producers access to other international markets as well. Undoubtedly, Canadian television's similarity to U.S. television—culturally, linguistically, and visually—and its economic viability account for some of its popularity internationally and in the United States. And there is no question that some products pass for “American,” either intentionally (as in the case of, for example, Lifetime movies) or inadvertently because U.S. viewers assume Canadian series are U.S. productions. In Canadian producer Arnie Gelbart's terms, Canadian texts often succeed in the international market because they are less expensive “but still have that American feel about them” (qtd. in MacDonald R.13). Yet, while they do provide U.S. and international audiences with a level of familiarity in their ability to emulate U.S. series, Canadian series' position as “men for all seasons” is overrated. The following comparative section of this chapter highlights particular Canadian inflections in and approaches to youth series produced in the last thirty years, focusing specifically on popular series and the ways that their conventions differ from those of U.S. series.

Several issues complicate this comparison. Canadian and U.S. youth television have developed in many ways similarly, but also differently, making particular genres more or less predominant in each country. Many of the generic distinctions between Canadian and U.S. television date back to early Canadian nationalist projects of self-differentiation. As Miller

explains, the CBC “basically distrusted popular genres, and particularly those originating in America, such as the sitcom, copshow and soap” (27). The CBC, similarly, intentionally avoided developing the kinds of children’s Westerns that the United States mass produced in the mid-twentieth century, deciding “that stylized adventure was not a sufficient basis for [... their] audience” and that Westerns “provided a disastrously narrow range of information and emotional experience. Priority should be given, it was thought, to a variety of emotional and informational experiences, in the performing arts and in the sciences, as basic human and democratic values” (Rainsberry 69). When Canadian youth television did have to depend on imported U.S. series, the CBC often chose to Canadianize them, replacing *Howdy Doody*’s Buffalo Bob, for example, with Timber Tim or adding Canadian characters to segments of *Sesame Street*.<sup>93</sup> These early decisions to distinguish Canadian television from popular U.S. television—by privileging information, human values, and psychology, Canadianizing U.S. series where possible, and avoiding particular genres—still affect the distinctions between Canadian and U.S. youth television.

As U.S. network television has decreased its youth options in all forms, cable and specialty channels have thrived on creating entire markets for youth (Discovery Kids, Disney, Nickelodeon, HBO Family, Family, and The N to name a few). Yet, in spite of the increased number of cable options for youth audiences, recent U.S. live-action programming is generally limited to comedy (building from an early U.S. tradition of family sitcoms), and most of the available youth dramas that fall outside of the *Gossip Girl* (2007-present) model come to the United States from Canada.<sup>94</sup> The latter problem stems from three interrelated issues: First,

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<sup>93</sup> Rainsberry 26-27, 38-39, 43.

<sup>94</sup> By the *Gossip Girl* model, I mean hour-long teen soap operas that focus on circumstances and settings that are unavailable to most viewers, series that move us away from the recognizable middle and working classes to privilege either the economic elite or small, protected, homogeneous towns. This includes fish-out-of-water series

Canada has generally overproduced youth drama (or hybrid dramatic series that include comedic elements), while the United States has not, making Canadian dramas among the most common exports to the United States. This means that there are abundant Canadian dramatic references from which to draw examples and fewer U.S. series within this genre. Second, while the United States has focused on versions of live-action youth sitcoms for decades, Canada has underproduced in this area, making Canadian comedic series the least likely to be exported to the United States.

In positive terms, because of their opposite strengths, each country fills in generic gaps for the other, with the United States providing youth comedies for Canadian channels like YTV and Family and Canada providing youth dramas/ sci-fi series for Disney, Nickelodeon, and Discovery Kids. In negative terms, any comparative analysis of the two traditions must at some point compare dissimilar products, for there are too few analogous examples from either country. Because of this, the analysis that follows may seem to pair apples with oranges by juxtaposing imperfect generic matches, and in a sense it does. To get around these roadblocks, I have paired Canadian and U.S. series with their closest contemporary counterparts, though this sometimes involves cross-genre analysis. These details alone, however, begin to set up one of the primary contentions in this chapter, that Canadian television's differences are not only visible, but also necessary to U.S. television and crucial to Canadian success in the U.S. market.

It is also worth noting at the outset that as a marginalized genre, youth television tends to cull its talent from a small pool, as does Canadian television more generally. If six degrees separate the average person from any given other person, in youth television it generally takes

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about the wealthy, or what Chuck Barney calls the many “prime-time shows awash in affluence” (par. 4) (*90210*, old and new, *Privileged*, *Young Americans*, etc), and series like *Dawson Creek* that do not necessarily focus on wealth, but that extend a highly constructed, glamorized, and often pretentious view of youth and teen cultures—series in which realism is not the point.

only one degree to find a connection between series. The actors, producers, and creators of U.S. and Canadian youth series often work on several series simultaneously (executive producers Linda Schuyler, Peter Engel, Thomas Lynch, and Stan Rogow, or the production companies Shaftesbury Kids, Brookwell-McNamara, and Epitome Pictures, for instance), making each series overlap with and resemble others within its production family. Writers and producers from each country, furthermore, often move back and forth between Canada and the United States in order to get their series made by the highest bidder. U.S. series *The Adventures of Pete and Pete* and *The Naked Brothers Band*, for example, share producers Will and Douglas McRobb with Canadian series *Radio Free Roscoe*, complicating the “Americanness” or “Canadianness” of any of these series. Yet, *Radio Free Roscoe* is quite different from the McRobbs’ two very similar U.S. productions (*Naked Brothers* basically remakes *Pete and Pete*), and since we know that the CRTC explicitly calls for specific attention to national identity in Canadian television, we can read *Radio Free Roscoe* as an example of how a Canadian production atmosphere affects the values and concerns of a series despite its U.S. producers. Just as a small group of writers, politicians, or other figures can imagine a national identity by the repetition of symbols and tropes, what comes to stand for a “Canadian” or “U.S.” inflection in a television series often began as the aesthetic of a particular production team and through continued repetition, and a low success rate for series in general, became representative of the differences between one televisual culture and the other. As Tinic aptly notes, “It is a truism that television does *not* provide a mirror of any society [...]. Rather, the televisual world is one of partial representations of the social, political, and economic realms we inhabit. It is necessarily selective [...].” (152, original emphasis). In many cases, then, what I refer to as a Canadian or U.S. tradition describes those repeated (but not all-encompassing) practices easily situated within



policy and literary history just as much as it describes the practices of similar thinkers and creative ensembles.

\* \* \* \*

Like Canadian identity, Canadian television is generally described in negative terms, or for what it is not. This focus, like the focus on Canadian television's similarity to U.S. television, eschews many of the strengths that this dissertation seeks to emphasize. According to Canadian writer Sue Karp, for example, "*real* Canadian shows have certain qualities that distinguish them from their American counterparts," few of which are positive: Canadian series supposedly suffer from colorless sets, a "cheap, slightly off quality," and "the same group of about 20 [actors who] seem to get the lead roles in almost everything" (par. 5, emphasis added). While many U.S. series are mere "carbon cop[ies] of these Canadian series, in the U.S. version "everyone will be dressed better, the actors will be younger and hotter, colour will be rampant, and the sun will shine down on them all" (par. 5). Although Telefilm's 1980s increased funding for Canadian television dramatically improved the poor production values that Karp mentions, and Karp's piece is intentionally ironic, the argument here contains several kernels of truth, including: the binary I have noted that pits "real" Canadian television against its less distinctive counterpart, what I would call the more nuanced visual and narrative aesthetics of Canadian television, the tendency for U.S. series to borrow heavily from them,<sup>95</sup> and visual differences in casting, sets, and wardrobe (as well as the small group of actors who appear in virtually every series) that have traditionally marked Canadian series as less than or unequal to U.S. television. As Byers observes, "Today, viewers are less likely to notice the Canadian mark on

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<sup>95</sup> See Chapter Four and Conclusion of this dissertation.

internationally-circulated televisual products because of their production values or unfashionable, chubby, acne-riddled actors” (“Youth, Representation” par. 6). But while they are less likely to notice a negative Canadian stamp, they are likely to notice stylistic differences that mark Canadian products in other ways.

Two earlier studies have attempted to locate these Canadian markers and to intervene in the tendency to focus on Canadian television’s shortcomings. Like this chapter, Eugene Tate’s 1978 comparative study of Canadian and U.S. action/cop series characterizes both television cultures as reflections of their respective national mythologies and literary traditions. Canadian series, he notes, tend to focus on everyday people solving problems by relying on education, cooperation with others, and with respect for authority. These differences also seem rooted in the early Canadian educational/documentary tradition in which television itself was pedagogical. Though, as Tate finds, Canadian series often feature elaborate plots, most problems confront people who are engaged in the mundane, and the resolution occurs through realistic action. With little physical violence, these series explore traumatic situations through “psychological violence,” dealing generally with internal struggles relating to moral, ethical, and identity concerns (4). U.S. series, on the other hand, are heavily influenced by their commercial tradition and history of national revolution. They feature individual heroes who use superhuman strengths or technological advancements to solve their problems; protagonists generally shirk authority figures in favor of rebellion or individualistic goals, and the series tend to feature more sensational violence.

Miller finds similar patterns in her 1985 study of CBC (publicly funded, necessarily Canadian-inflected) television programs from the 1950s through the 1980s:

We will discover that good, usually successful Canadian versions of formula television [...] are distinctively inflected. Irony replaces moral certitude. Open narratives or

unresolved emotional conflicts replace happy or poetically just endings. Surprising levels of subtext appear on action shows in scenes which are allowed time to develop. Literate dialogue, allusions to the actual society we are living in, music which counterpoints instead of hyping the emotional temperature or telling us when to laugh or cry, even satire on popular culture, appear regularly in Canadian series [...]. (24)

Thirty years after Tate's and over twenty years after Miller's work, Canadian *youth* television with wide international circulation remains distinct in many of the same ways as its domestically circulated adult counterparts, including its approaches to commercialization, visual aesthetics, narrative strategies, and representation.

### Commodity and Culture

Just as Canadian television's introduction as a public institution and later shift towards privatization affect its content, U.S. television's commercial structure deeply influences its series. The attempt at selling series that will sell products governs U.S. youth television much more than does storytelling or pedagogical concerns, though the latter have increased since the Clinton Administration and under pressure from Action for Children's Television. In Tunic's terms, the U.S. "television industry [... is] a risk-averse environment in which the commodity form of production and audience marketing dictat[e] adherence to genre and style expectations" (115). The youth series produced in this environment and under its network-centered structure reflect this commercial imperative. Nickelodeon's explicit goal is to sell an international lifestyle brand for children and series that will promote toys.<sup>96</sup> Disney's, similarly, involves creating "stars" who will promote the brand and its international holdings in various corporations. In this way, synergistic productions are most common for U.S. youth markets: Viacom, for example, houses Nickelodeon, MTV, VH1, The N, Rhapsody Music, Burger King,

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<sup>96</sup> Sandler 62.

etc, making any of Nickelodeon's products immediately related to other brands. Disney owns ABC, ABC Family, ESPN, SoapNet, Lifetime, Lifetime Movie Network, and shares in McDonald's and other corporations, making its television series simultaneously promotional for and promoted by other brands. Canadian youth television—even that made privately with the U.S. market in mind—still adheres more formally to a history of public broadcasting, meaning that it is rarely produced with the intention of selling mass-marketed products, and it always uses at least some public funds.

Because Disney and Nickelodeon's series and the individual stars within them ultimately serve as commodities meant to attract consumers to several markets simultaneously, the series cater towards premises that will create opportunities for product development. *Hannah Montana's* (2006-present) Miley Cyrus, for instance, plays both a fictionalized version of herself in the series—girl-next-door Miley by day and pop-star Hannah Montana (Miley wearing a blonde wig) by night. Disney releases products ranging from board games to underwear, capitalizing on both Hannah Montana and Miley Cyrus, and Cyrus releases Disney-produced music under both names. Miley the character is as much a commodity as Miley the person, who plays the quadruple role of television actress, film actress, and two different singers.<sup>97</sup> The very premise of *Hannah Montana*—and countless other Disney and Nickelodeon productions—is to create a feedback loop of series that promote the purchase of products, concerts, and theme-park tickets and theme parks, concerts, and products that will in turn promote the series.

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<sup>97</sup> This marketing of Miley Cyrus/Hannah Montana and other Nick and Disney stars follows the model of the star system instituted in early cinema, in which studios attempted to “blur the boundaries between the real actor's personality and fictional screen persona” (Singer 267).

Most Canadian series, conversely, generally rely neither on stars nor big budgets, nor do they find mass-franchising opportunities.<sup>98</sup> Unless they attract a large U.S. or other international fanbase, Canadian youth series rarely even get released to DVD, because the sales do not recoup the investments in marketing and distribution. *Life with Derek* (2005–present), for example, is rare in its DVD release and for the book series that supplements the show. *Instant Star*'s (2004–2008) DVD release and successful accompanying soundtracks are also less common. The *Degrassi* series prove the exception to this, though their franchise is still very different from the Disney/Nickelodeon model. The television series have spawned novels, comic books, and mall tours with cast members, but most of the products associated with the series target educators and students as their consumer market—and many of these products are marketed, ironically, to U.S. audiences, not Canadian ones.<sup>99</sup> The series' production company also launched a small-scale distribution of *Degrassi* products, such as bookbags, coffee mugs, and sweatshirts through its official website around 2006. This cross-marketing effort, however, pales in comparison to that associated with figures like Cyrus, whose products are available and visible in a variety of stores. And a percentage of the proceeds from the *Degrassi* products goes to Free the Children, a non-profit organization that builds schools in developing countries.<sup>100</sup> These manifest differences between commercially produced television and the Canadian public-private tradition also carry over into the visual and narrative differences between the series.

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<sup>98</sup> Because of its structure, funding, and traditional differences from U.S. film and television, furthermore, Canadian television has not historically adhered to a star system like that of the United States, nor do Canadian actors in Canada generally receive the same voyeuristic level of fame or media attention that U.S. actors do (Edwardson 243–244; Lauria A.4; Miller “Canadian TV” par. 16, 43).

<sup>99</sup> In the 1980s, *Degrassi*'s creator Linda Schuyler exclusively marketed the series as pedagogical to U.S. educational circles, promoting worksheets, discussion materials, and video sets for teachers (Panarese 55).

<sup>100</sup> In 2007, members of the *DTNG* cast also built a school in Kenya in a special called “*Degrassi*: Doing What Matters,” another one in Ecuador in 2008, and the series later featured an episode about Free the Children (721). When *Degrassi* actress Shenae Grimes left the series (ironically to star in the CW's resurrection of *90210*), her character, Darcy, moved to Kenya to participate in a missions' trip with Free the Children (803).

## Visual Aesthetics

Disney and Nickelodeon's visual aesthetics parallel their series' overtly commercial goals and use of hyper-visible marketing as opposed to the subtler, quieter approach that we find in many Canadian youth series. The actors in the U.S. youth series wear elaborate hair and makeup and layered clothing that either reflects or creates the latest trends for youth. Hannah Montana and Miley's hairstyles, for example, relate to much more than either character's appearance in the series. Each must appeal commercially as well as visually because viewers can purchase replicas of Hannah Montana's wig and "Miley" wigs through a variety of products: starter guitar kits, karaoke sets, and Halloween costumes that many fans wear to her concerts. Even in series that do not openly promote character-driven products, the styling of the characters feeds consumption of the goods associated with them. Carly and Sam from *iCarly* (2007-present), for example, wear expensive tennis shoes, two to several shirts at once, and Sam's everyday hairstyle is a series of long ringlet curls that are not natural to the actress (Jeanette McCurdy). Their trendy clothing looks expensive and because it is layered, some individual outfits could dress two children at once. Viewers can purchase *iCarly* shirts, bookbags, and technology like that used in the show (*iCarly* keyboards, digital cameras, etc) and imagine that they perform the actions of the characters. What the series sells, then, is a lifestyle associated with "cool" media-savvy adolescents, their gadgets, and their overall appearances.

Characters in the Canadian series, conversely, may follow fashion trends—as do Manny and Emma on *DTNG* and Amanda from *Ready or Not*—but for the most part, the series do not center on style, fashion, or products except to distinguish character traits or social status. Their clothing looks like everyday attire for many teens, is not elaborately styled, and characters—especially on *Degrassi*—often repeat outfits or parts of them throughout one or several seasons.

This, too, results in part from the different budgetary constraints on Canadian and U.S. series. As Pat Mastroianni, who played Joey on *Degrassi*, jokes, ““Our budget [in the early series] was, like, a buck ninety-nine [...]” Most of the wardrobe for the early series, “often purchased from Goodwill or Zellers, sat along a schoolroom wall in plastic milkcrates. The children did their own make-up, and often wore their own clothing” (Freydberg par. 16). But the visual differences also reflect the U.S. and Canadian series’ respective aims: The explicit goal of *Degrassi* and *Ready or Not* (1993-1997) is to realistically represent teens as they already are, and thus it makes sense that the wardrobe and styling would look more natural. The series do not focus on consumerism, making consumption of commercial products within them mild and more related to an aesthetics of realism that I will elaborate shortly.<sup>101</sup> Disney and Nick’s model is, again, rooted in selling products, and thus *creating* a fashion trend is much more financially lucrative than merely representing what already exists.

### Humo(u)r

The same central thematic pattern of naturalistic understatement versus heavily constructed hyperbole is evident in Canadian and U.S. youth TV’s respective versions of humor, though here the differences have tended to overlap more. Just as Canadian approaches to public broadcasting and educational television have fallen in between those of the UK and the United States (Chapter One), writers have generally situated Canadian and U.S. comedic styles on a sort of continuum, placing British humor on one end, Canadian humor in the middle, and U.S. humor

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<sup>101</sup> Despite many complaints that the new series’ move to CTV has changed its visual aesthetic (see Ravindra Mohabeer, for example), *DTNG* still looks more like a Canadian production than a U.S. one. Although *Degrassi: The Next Generation* has over the years gained large endorsements from U.S. advertisers as it has grown in popularity, the funding has not changed its visual aesthetic much—other than the odd placement of Pantene hair products and Old Navy sweatshirts in some scenes. In the earlier *Degrassi* series, endorsements from Skippy admittedly led to frequent scenes in which characters ate peanut butter directly from the jar.

on the opposite side of the British. Though there are obvious exceptions to it, in one version of this model, conventional U.S. comedy tends to fall into a tradition of “lower” or broad comedy, characterized by a combination of visual and situational irony, slapstick, and farce, while Canadian humor depends more on elements of “high” comedy, privileging verbal and situational irony, banter, puns, repartee, and recovery.<sup>102</sup> Where U.S. humor sometimes tends towards what Mittell in another context calls the “exceedingly obvious,” Canadian humor in this view tends more towards nuance (37). Gerald Noonan, for instance, describes Canadian humor as less exaggerated, perhaps less slapstick, than that of the United States and less literal than that of the UK, making it “go over” the heads of both audiences (68). In Andrew Clark’s terms, Canadian humor “is maybe sometimes a bit more obtuse and seemingly benign than the other, more in-your-face comedy that you might get in America” (qtd. in Deachman B.4). Like Canadian literary humor, it comprises what Miller calls “the more difficult ironic, allusive forms of comedy” (110) or what Karp refers to as a “self-deprecating sense of humour that permeates everything [...] all tongue in cheek, knowledgeable of its shortcomings, but trying valiantly nonetheless [...]” (par. 7).<sup>103</sup>

Of the manifold Canadian series in this project, *You Can’t Do That on Television* best epitomizes the tendency towards this ironic, self-deprecating humor. Virtually every episode features an opening scene of self-denunciation: “Welcome to today’s episode of *You Can’t Do That on Television*, the show that should probably be caged up right way” (607); or “[...] This network is ashamed to present the show that holds the record for the least number of laughs in a

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<sup>102</sup> Though I do not mean to impose a hierarchical value judgment on either type of comedy, I have defined low and high comedy based on descriptions used by Simpson, Trumbull, Charney, and DeLuca and Natov, respectively. Highly successful comedies like *Friends* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*, the growing body of deadpan sitcoms like the remakes of *The Office* and *Kath and Kim*, and original series like *Ten Items or Less* and *Malcolm in the Middle* provide clear U.S. exceptions to “low” comedy and privilege irony of all kinds.

<sup>103</sup> Many writers have also described irony, particularly ironic distance or ambivalence, as a distinctively Canadian literary/cultural tradition (Miller 24, 61; Hutcheon “Preface”).



half-hour program. Ha-ha. That's one" (609). And after the closing credits, Les Lye generally returns for brief coda called the "production credits" in which he makes fun of the series: "*You Can't Do That on Television* has been a rotten-egg production, laid by a bunch of chicken producers." Even the credits themselves often feature ironic written comments, such as "This is like watching *Paint Dry*" (216).

Because, however, Canadian comics and comedy have for decades been well assimilated into U.S. culture (see Chapter Two) and vice versa (and for that matter, so have British comedies and comics), I am not sure whether it is possible to completely separate distinctively "Canadian" humor from its U.S. equivalent.<sup>104</sup> Instead, what we can see are clear trends during which particular comedic strategies have proliferated and then given way to something else. U.S. youth comedies of the '90s experimented with a variety of styles ranging from high to low comedy. NBC's primetime family/youth sitcom *Blossom* (1991-1995) struck a balance between youth-targeted farce (such as frequent dream sequences featuring special guest stars) and ironic wisecracks geared towards older viewers. NBC also produced several similar Saturday-morning and after-school youth comedies like *Saved by the Bell* (1988-2000), *California Dreams* (1992-1997), *Hang Time* (1995-2000), *USA High* (1997-1999), and *City Guys* (1997-2001), all which shared executive producer Peter Engel and combined mid-level comedy with concerns that would interest middle- and high-school students.<sup>105</sup> Canadian-filmed *Breaker High* (1997-1998) and Canadian-produced *Student Bodies* (1997-1999) featured a parallel format and comedic approach. Many of Nick's comedies during this time, similarly, found a niche in ironic humor,

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<sup>104</sup> Short-lived U.S. comedies *Freaks and Geeks* and *Popular* combined what might be called Canadian irony and parody with biting wit and self-deprecation, and adult-targeted sitcoms like *Arrested Development* and *Seinfeld* have muddled conventional U.S. comedy, creating what Mittell calls a growing genre of U.S. narrative complexity.

<sup>105</sup> NBC has, in fact, led U.S. network television in the broadcast of live-action youth series, though they have mostly been limited to Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons on affiliated cable networks. The *Saved By the Bell* canon includes *Good Morning, Miss Bliss* (1988-1989), *Saved by the Bell*, *Saved by the Bell: The College Years* (1993-1994), and *Saved by the Bell: The New Class* (1993-2000).

wisecracks, and youth angst (*Clarissa Explains it All* (1991-1994), *The Adventures of Pete and Pete* (1993-1996), etc), blurring any strong line of demarcation between Canadian and U.S. humor. During the mid-90s, while Disney focused on action and sci-fi series that combined fantasy with real life (*So Weird*, *The Jersey*, *Jett Jackson*), Nickelodeon began to produce mild family comedies with very few slapstick elements (*My Brother and Me*, *The Brothers Garcia*) and other “low” comedies with outright farcical and slapstick premises, like *Kenan and Kel* (1996-2000) and *Cousin Skeeter* (1998-2003). When Disney rebranded, however, and shifted its focus from family to youth series (Chapter Two), it became a more stringent competitor with Nickelodeon, making both channels more similar now than they were when either channel began. This change has increased Disney’s attention to low comedies of the Nickelodeon slapstick variety. It has also more solidified a canon of what might now be called contemporary “U.S.” youth comedy than was arguable when both channels and network television featured more variety.<sup>106</sup> In other words, the differences between recent U.S. and Canadian youth series’ approaches to humor were not as apparent at the formal level in the 1980s and ‘90s, when there was more variety in youth TV, as they are now.

Unlike adult series, U.S. sitcoms for youth have become fairly homogeneous in style; one would be hard-pressed, for example, to find major stylistic differences between U.S. comedies *That’s So Raven*, *iCarly*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, *Hannah Montana*, and *True Jackson, VP*. Aimed at short attention spans, these live-action series rely on a modified sitcom format, either filmed with live studio audiences or with laugh tracks, and their comedic pacing caters to extravagant behavior and quick punch lines that highlight the central characters or stars, rather than wit or irony. In many ways, these new series simply intensify the humor of ‘80s and ‘90s

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<sup>106</sup> Although there are major differences between these U.S. youth channels, their series are still more similar to each other than to some of the Canadian series I would like to highlight.

series like *Punky Brewster* (1984-1988), *Saved by the Bell*, *City Guys*, and *California Dreams*, but they do so in ways that often compromise the storytelling present in the older shows.

CBS's only live-action youth series *Cake* (2006), the Disney series *That's So Raven* (2003-2007) and *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (2005-present), and the Nickelodeon series *Just Jordan* (2007-2008) and *iCarly* (2007-present), for instance, all time their comedic beats similarly so that the humor centers more on the actor's vocalization than the line itself.<sup>107</sup> Raven squeals, grunts, or mumbles most of her punch lines, frequently using the phrase "Oh snaaaap" or some other expression of her implication in a mishap. Hannah Montana rolls her neck—feigning (offensive and outdated) black vernacular—and yells, "Oh, no you didn't, girlfriend!" In Nickelodeon sitcoms with similar pacing, the punch lines rely on crescendo. Characters from *Cake*, *iCarly*, *Drake and Josh* (2004-2007), and *Just Jordan* yell or scream their lines to get the desired audience reaction: "Because I said SO."<sup>108</sup> Parallel to the star and commercial systems built into these U.S. series, then, the stylized, character-driven, and exaggerated delivery of the humor makes for a comedic genre in which loud or jarring sounds (like ostentatious wardrobes) figure more prominently than dialogue.<sup>109</sup>

Some recent Canadian series such as *Life with Derek* (*LWD*) also utilize a sitcom format, but in general it is a less common Canadian form and relies on a different comedic structure.<sup>110</sup>

While Nick and Disney's series have exaggerated the forms of their predecessors, *Life with Derek's* style offers a more nuanced version of youth comedies of the 1990s and adds to them an

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<sup>107</sup> *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* officially ended in 2008, but Disney re-launched it as a spin-off series, *The Suite Life on Deck*, shortly thereafter.

<sup>108</sup> This crescendo humor has long characterized Nick's aesthetic in self-produced sketch-comedy (*All That*) and sitcoms (*Kenan and Kel*).

<sup>109</sup> Nick's *Naked Brothers Band* is currently the only live-action comedy on the network that does not utilize a studio audience or laugh track and instead attempts something more akin to the deadpan humor in the U.S. version of *The Office*.

<sup>110</sup> As Miller demonstrates, Canadian sitcoms have varied in their success, due to a late start (1968, when the CBC first attempted one) and trouble finding a form that was both distinctive enough from U.S. fare and interesting enough to compete with it (130-133). Also see Tinic 131.

explicitly Canadian setting and frequent references to Canadian geographic and cultural markers. Instead of studio audiences or laugh tracks, *LWD* uses cutaways—extraneous moments that highlight absurdity, humor, or stress—and non-diegetic sounds such as records scratching, guitar riffs, etc—to create punch lines. Although the banter between Derek and his stepsister Casey provides much of the humor and frames the series’ plots, it does not rely as much on quick beats and punch lines as it does on irony and deadpan delivery. The result is a series in which viewers can expect to do more analytical work to “get” the jokes, but in which the nuanced humor is more satisfying because of it. This does not imply that *LWD*’s comedic form is exclusively or characteristically Canadian—older U.S.-made Disney series *Lizzie McGuire* (2001-2004) and *Even Stevens* (2000-2003) utilize a similar form in a different way—but that *LWD*’s juxtaposition with other contemporaneous series immediately underscores its difference and marks it as a testament to Canadian irony.<sup>111</sup> It is also currently the only show on the network to utilize deadpan humor or cutaways, while everything else relies on the crescendo format I have just described. Given that *Derek* has outrated the highly visible *Hannah Montana*, something in this difference, or perhaps in the more subtle form of comedy that used to characterize each U.S. network’s series, appeals to U.S. viewers.<sup>112</sup> As the amount of variety in youth comedy has decreased, then, the seeming distinctions between Canadian and U.S. comedic

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<sup>111</sup> Nickelodeon’s *Clarissa Explains it All* also used cutaways. In *Lizzie McGuire*, the cutaways are all animated, featuring Lizzie’s cartoon alter ego reacting to situations along with the accompanying non-diegetic sounds. *Even Stevens*, *Phil of the Future*, and *Lizzie McGuire* also relied on the kind of ironic humor that I have described as Canadian inflected, and they served as comedic staples for the network before Disney began to feature more sitcoms. Similarly, before its transition to lower sitcoms, Nickelodeon featured a number of U.S. comedies that used neither laugh tracks nor slapstick, including *Zoey 101* (2005-2008) and *Ned’s Declassified* (2004-2008). I do not imply that Canadian youth series never use exaggeration or slapstick, but that these comedic strategies are less common, particularly among live-action series. Canadian puppet show *Mr. Meaty*, which airs on Nickelodeon, for example, combines over-the-top gross-out humor with ironic distance, and many Canadian gross-out series have influenced U.S. youth series.

<sup>112</sup> MacDonald R.13.

styles have intensified, marking the Canadian series as unique and increasing their ability to stand out in the U.S. market.

### Fantasy and Everyday Life

The differences in narrative conventions between each televisual culture also flow from their different emphases. While every television series adheres to a formula of sorts and to particular narrative beats that characterize its style, in most recent Disney and Nick series, viewers know that spectacle stemming from the central selling point of the show defines virtually all of the narratives within it and that fantasy can supersede real life. Sci-fi comedy *Phil of the Future* (2004-2008) features a futuristic family who must hide their identities while living in the present and who incorporate gadgets befitting the Jetsons into their everyday lives; *That's So Raven* focuses on a teen with psychic abilities that regularly get her into trouble and force her to wear elaborate disguises, including prosthetics and wigs; *Raven's* spin-off series *Cory in the House* (2007-present), centered on Raven's brother Cory, takes place in the White House, where their father works as a personal chef to the President. *The Suite Life* focuses on twin boys who live in an expensive hotel full of wild guests and incompetent workers; and in *The Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007-present), two siblings discover their magical powers, which the series showcases through frequent and expensive special effects. Nickelodeon's series come closer to realism by incorporating urban settings and issues, but they still operate outside of the range of everyday life: *iCarly* centers on Carly, a teen who lives in a huge loft with her older brother (while her father notably is stationed in the Navy), but the show's real focus is on Carly's difficulty in producing a live Internet show, not the complications of the war on her family; and in the most realistic of these comedies, *Just Jordan* (2007-present), working-class teen Jordan

can temporarily “freeze” himself out of uncomfortable situations—as Zack sometimes did in the earlier comedy *Saved by the Bell*. While these series may deal with the same sorts of life events as their Canadian counterparts, they generally do not resolve basic narratives through options to which most viewers can relate. Instead they tend to solve problems through disguises, super powers, impossible situations, and fast-paced humor, through fantasy and escape (as Tate’s study finds of mainstream U.S. action series). Even simple problems depend on extravagant premises for their solutions. When Carly wants to exact revenge on a mean teacher, she and Freddie hide a camera in a fake pie, sneak into the teacher’s house, and get locked in the closet, which serves as a shrine to *American Idol*’s Randy Jackson. When the teacher catches them, Carly’s punishment is to let the teacher play her bagpipe on Carly’s Internet show (106). Like its U.S. contemporaries, *iCarly* offers fun and exciting plot twists without the realistic nonchalance or pedagogical model that influenced many of its predecessors and that continues to drive most Canadian live-action youth television.

Because their focus is on storytelling and character development, most imported and co-produced live-action Canadian series fall under the category of drama and include comedic and pedagogical elements that teach a variety of practical, problem-solving, and social skills. This generic distinction alone allows them to fill an important niche in U.S. television, where as I have noted lasting youth drama of the educational sort comes almost exclusively from Canada. *Instant Star*, the *Degrassi* series, and *Ready or Not* are all half-hour “dramas” that hybridize sitcom and hour-long dramatic styles. This format, which owes heavily to the early documentary and dramatic traditions and the CBC’s model of educational entertainment, generally makes for rounder characterizations and plots with premises that viewers might encounter. Canadian series *Naturally, Sadie*’s (2005-2007) premise, for example, centers on the way that Sadie’s high-

school life parallels the animal wildlife she studies, but its plots mostly deal with the mundane: school projects, annoying siblings, dances, etc. In *Radio Free Roscoe*, four friends run an edgy, underground radio station, but this somewhat extraordinary circumstance essentially just gives vent to their everyday home and school woes. Even Canadian shows that feature more extravagant premises—such as the medical drama *In a Heartbeat* (2000) or the sci-fi series *Strange Days at Blake Holsey High* (2002-2006), *Mentors* (1998-2002), and *The Zack Files* (2000-2001)—concentrate on the intricacies of everyday life and relationships while teaching viewers public-health, scientific, historical, or paranormal principles. The latter series may use time travel, for example, in order to show the similarities between a present plot issue and its historical counterpart, not simply to showcase the possibility of time travel; the gadgets aid in the narrative’s practical didacticism.



**Figure 3: The cast of *Radio Free Roscoe*, season two. From left to right: Parker (Victoria Nestorowicz), Ray (Ali Mukaddam), Lily, (Kate Todd), Travis (Nathan Carter), River (Steve Belford), Kim (Genelle Williams), and Robbie (Nathan Stephenson). Photo courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from DECODE. Photo Credit: David Leyes.**



**Figure 4:** From *The Zack Files*. (L-R): Michael Seater (*Life with Derek*'s Derek) as Spencer Sharpe, Jake Epstein (*DTNG*'s Craig) as Cam Dunleavy, and Robert Clark (*Strange Days at Blake Holsey High*'s Vaughn) as Zack. Photo Credit: Steve Wilkie. Reprinted with written permission from DECODE.



**Figure 5:** Promotional photo from season three of *Naturally, Sadie*. From left to right: Ben (Jacob Kraemer), Sadie (Charlotte Arnold, who also plays Holly J on *DTNG*), Margaret (Jasmine Richards) and Rain (Michael D'Ascenzo). Photo Credit: Sophie Giraud. Reprinted with written permission from DECODE.



Even co-produced series arguably bring this subtler life-focused Canadian aesthetic to common U.S. premises. Half-Canadian, half-U.S. series *Jett Jackson* (1998-2001) strikes a balance between what would otherwise work as another *Hannah Montana*-like series. Set in North Carolina, but featuring mostly Canadian actors, *Jett Jackson*'s main characters are superstar Jett and the fictional superhero Silverstone, whom he plays on TV, but the series settles comfortably into plots about everyday life. The show within the show adds brief excitement through Silverstone's narratives, while the major plots deal with Jett's ordinary experiences away from Hollywood, "trying to live [...] as a regular kid" in North Carolina, and the way that Silverstone's fictional technology and resolutions are of little use to Jett. Although I do not want to give too much credit to the series' many Canadian writers, directors, and even executive producers (Shawn Levy, Stacey Stewart Curtis, and Suzanne Bolch, for example, who have worked on many of the series in this chapter) or take away from the U.S. crew's influence on the series, there is a clear difference between *Jett Jackson* and Disney's self-produced U.S. fare, and *Jett Jackson* is more similar to the other Canadian series in this discussion. In this co-venture, the Canadian influence on the series seems to temper the U.S. influence, creating a more balanced text. Whereas in the aforementioned U.S. series gadgets, shocks, and antics mitigate or substantiate life events, in these Canadian series—and many of the series made in and with Canada—real people and circumstances generally provide the basis for exploring all other issues.

### Class and Context

We see the same patterns in the differences between Canadian and U.S. youth series' settings and emphases and the ways they choose to represent them. The flip side of exaggerated comedies featuring magical powers are the U.S. teen series that offer another form of escapism

in their attention to socioeconomic elites and in their focus on other kinds of extraordinary circumstances. Exemplifying what Tom Panarese calls “America’s taste for fantasy over reality” (70), U.S. series *Gossip Girl*, *90210*, *Privileged* (2008-present), short-lived *Young Americans* (2000), and even the more realistic *Veronica Mars* (2004-2007) to some extent, attend to the realms of New England prep schools, Manhattan boarding schools, and upscale Los Angeles neighborhoods. Although each of these series’ protagonists are foreign to these wealthy environments, each show still sells itself in part as a voyeuristic peek at the lavish lives of the “rich and famous,” or generally, the rich and tawdry (where teen drug use, sex, alcoholism, and other issues work as a montage of shocks or spectacles). Particularly during the war and recession of the new millennium, these series fit well with the tendency towards televisual and filmic excess during difficult times. They provide “escapism [...and] a fantasy lifestyle contrary to what most people are experiencing,” reproducing the prevalence of luxury films during the Great Depression and the popularity of 1980s recession-produced series like *Dynasty* and *Dallas* (Kim qtd. in Barney par. 11; Barney par. 3, 25).<sup>113</sup> Like their comedic counterparts aimed at younger audiences, these U.S. teen dramas provide a protected, and arguably useful, space of retreat from “the real world” because they do not ultimately aim to focus on the real world.

While the U.S. series often deal with superheroes, wizards, psychics, wealthy elites, and people who can literally escape uncomfortable situations by “freezing” reality, the Canadian series primarily focus on everyday people (like everyday life), and blend a variety of socioeconomic experiences into their narratives, pushing us towards the kind of politics of realism that I am beginning to demonstrate. Although *Strange Days at Blake Holsey High*, for

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<sup>113</sup> In Kim’s terms, “[...] the concept of schadenfreude is operating in the pleasure people have of watching representations of the wealthy. [...] There is a sense of satisfaction in seeing those ‘who have everything’ also have dysfunction and problems in their lives—that money doesn’t guarantee happiness—and that the viewer’s own life is good, even if she or he doesn’t have as much money. There is a moral superiority that non-wealthy people can have over those who are wealthy and lead ‘messed-up’ lives” (qtd. in Barney par. 22).

example, takes place at a boarding school, the presumed wealth of the characters hardly figures into the series if at all, but the boarding school's setting allows the series to explore the adolescent characters' growth beyond the classroom. Although *Degrassi*, similarly, features some wealthy characters (like Jimmy and Lucy), the series primarily focuses on the middle and working classes, and all characters are equally susceptible to the same evils at the "cursed" public school they attend. The focus on "regular" people also allows these series to incorporate current events into their narratives rather than creating narratives that provide an escape from current events. On *Degrassi*, the real-life context of post 9/11 security threats and the "war on terror," for example, figures into Hazel's and Fareeza's experiences with anti-Muslim discrimination and heavily influences Ellie's turn to self-mutilation when her father serves in the war and her mother retreats in alcoholism. If we compare this to *iCarly*'s use of her father's deployment to allow Carly to live alone with her inept older brother (in other words its use of the war to allow for comedic possibilities), the Canadian series' focus on realism and historical context takes on greater significance: They use life events to explain character psychology and to explore "issues" that could potentially plague anyone; they depend more on relatable characters than exceptional characters and in doing so emphasize the ways that viewers can solve problems. This is not to suggest that we need the Canadian youth model more than the U.S. one; rather, the differences between the two highlight the need for distinct functions of television and the role that Canadian series often perform in U.S. youth television.

### Topical Concerns and Narrative Resolution

While realism permeates even fantastical Canadian series, a seeming discomfort with or avoidance of representing life as it is also shrouds the degree to which many of these U.S. series

tackle serious issues, making protective, authoritarian storytelling limit not only their characters and premises, but also their narrative strategies. When representation of a serious issue becomes necessary, U.S. series tend to utilize what many writers have discussed as “the very special episode.”<sup>114</sup> Generally described as a particularly ‘80s and ‘90’s phenomenon—though present in sitcoms of the ‘70s as well—the very special episode limits the educational components of a series to individual episodes, allowing them to teach singular lessons that do not fit readily with the aims of the show. Adult series like *The Golden Girls* (1985-1992) and *Designing Women* (1986-1993) regularly used this form. NBC’s *Blossom* gained popular notoriety for its frequent use of special episodes and commercials advertising “this week’s very special *Blossom*” (“Very Special Episode” par. 2).<sup>115</sup> Many of these series also include post-narrative, “real” moments in which the actors from the show warn viewers not to make the same mistakes as the characters did, encourage viewers to discuss the issue with their parents, and guide viewers towards a variety of resources on the issue. This method provides a televisual version of “traditional” education, which stresses the declarative role of the teacher, the more passive role of the student, and “encourag[es] learning by reception-repetition” (Serrano et al 5). The special episode’s obviousness ensures that it drives the lesson home and makes sure that viewers “get it,” but it also stresses one particular predetermined lesson from the text.<sup>116</sup> *Saved By the Bell* provides the classic and perhaps infamous example of the special episode, as Tom Panarese among others notes: In its central focus on a “serious” issue, “Jessie’s Song” (6343)

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<sup>114</sup> This difference stems in part from a U.S. tradition of separating education from entertainment (*After-School Specials*, for example, are marked by their difference from “regular” after-school television) and a Canadian one of fusing the two together.

<sup>115</sup> According to Joey Lawrence, who played Joey Russo in the series, NBC and the producers of the show wanted to “warn people, without putting a ‘parental warning’ on it [... so they...] just call[ed] it a very special episode, so people understand something’s going on that hasn’t gone on before in TV” (“A Very Special Show”). The phrase “a very special *Blossom*” is so popular that it even serves as the title of a *Powerpuff Girls* episode about stealing.

<sup>116</sup> Viewers may, of course, still choose to question, contradict, or downright reject this lesson.

differs from most of the frivolous fare in the series (though there are many special episodes in the series). In it, Jessie turns to caffeine pills in order to manage her academic and social commitments, and she becomes a drug addict, admits she has a problem, seeks help, and recovers from her addiction in twenty-three minutes.<sup>117</sup> The same plot occurs in *California Dreams* when Tiffani takes steroids (317). The issue's immediate resolution allows the writers to avoid compromising the lightheartedness of the entire series, but it often also creates an unrealistic representation of that same issue (which generally never resurfaces). The special episode, then, inherently marks the educational or serious content as extraneous or incompatible excesses in these series, concerns that fall outside of their main goals.<sup>118</sup>

Several writers have characterized the very special episode as a dying form, no longer relevant or effective—if it ever was—in the '90s and post-'90s era of ironic, biting U.S. sitcoms of the *Seinfeld*, *Simpsons*, and *Friends* breed.<sup>119</sup> With the increased focus on producing youth comedy and teen romance dramas of the *Gossip Girl* sort, moreover, the number of U.S. youth series that attend to “issues” at all has decreased. With the exception of *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, which includes a public service announcement at the end of every episode and a warning before each one, most series for older teens no longer treat the special episode as overtly “special,” and instead rely on a form of continual shocks and very few educational plots.

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<sup>117</sup> Jessie's drug use does, however, come up in another very special episode on drug use, “No Hope with Dope” (6362). Though the idea of containing “issues” through special episodes proves true for most of U.S. youth television, during the 1980s and 1990s Nickelodeon often incorporated serious concerns in other forms, like commercials. Commercial shorts that discussed AIDS/HIV, how one contracts them, and how one does not contract them, and issues about environmentalism were common and part of the overall feel of the brand. Nick's newsmagazine series *Nick News with Linda Ellerbee* (formerly *Nick News W5* (1993-present)) also treats concerns about drugs, mental, physical, and emotional health, and current events. As a formerly once-weekly series, it provided a lot of the realism that some of the scripted series might have lacked. Although *Nick News* remains a high-rated series, in its current rendition as a periodic (irregularly programmed) show, it is now akin to a “special.”

<sup>118</sup> For other discussions of the special episode and its difference from Canadian television and specifically *Degrassi*, see also Hart 220, Mitchell 226-227, and Spencer 236-238.

<sup>119</sup> Nussbaum; Silverman. Tyler Perry's new comedic form, however, has resurrected this pattern in the adult/family sitcom. Many episodes of his series *House of Payne* (2006-present) and *Meet the Browns* (2009-present) are “special” in their blatant attention to topical, pedagogical issues that receive brief treatment, but his version more effectively makes “issues” one of the overall concerns of the series.

And recent U.S. youth sitcoms that do incorporate serious topics often offset them with outrageous comedy intended to temper their tone, basically undermining any realism that special episodes may include. In, for example, one of the only three “serious” episodes of the series, which consequently deals with racial discrimination, Raven disguises herself as an elderly man (who sounds like Jesse Jackson) in order to catch a racist store clerk on video (303).<sup>120</sup> One of *The Suite Life*’s few “serious” episodes also deals with race and finds Mr. Moseby dressed as his buxom grandmother and teaching the boys about black history (236).<sup>121</sup> In both cases, the issues seems not only incompatible with the series itself, but also with the individual plot in which the issue appears, again marking the educational components as atypical or special.

There are, of course, notable U.S. exceptions to these patterns, many of which emerged during the 1990s. PBS and Discovery Kids series (*Ghostwriter* (1992-1995), for example) have always incorporated education into entertaining narratives, but the channels have generally produced very few scripted live-action options, especially for youth (as opposed to children). Nickelodeon produced several educational youth dramas that avoided special episodes while still remaining educational (*Caitlin’s Way* (2000-2002) and *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo* (1996-1999), for instance). And, as I have mentioned, Disney aired educational action series *The Famous Jett Jackson* (which it has replaced with a newer series with same the premise called *Aaron Stone* (2009-present)) and *In a Heartbeat*. All of these cable series, however, were either co-produced with or filmed in Canada, featuring primarily Canadian actors and often Canadian writers and producers.

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<sup>120</sup> The other serious episodes feature lessons on the dangers of smoking (419) and stealing (305), respectively.

<sup>121</sup> Even special episodes in these series tend to center on holidays and historical events. Both *That’s So Raven* and *The Suite Life*, for instance, briefly recognize Black History Month with these episodes, and the latter series’ use of a black character disguised as a female and stereotypical historical figure overshadows what little positive work the episode may perform. The following chapter deals more specifically with the U.S. utilization of special episodes and the problems of trying to adapt Canadian television into this structure.

Recent exceptions also include the brief NBC series *Just Deal* (2000-2003) and *SK8* (2001-2002), both of which were similar to Canadian live-action youth dramas and both of which included didactic elements and realism. Similarly uncharacteristic for U.S. television were NBC's *Scout's Safari* and Discovery Kids series *Darcy's Wild Life* and *Flight 29 Down*. *Flight 29 Down* (2005-2007) is a half-hour dramatic youth version of ABC's *Lost*, in which a group of teen and child castaways cope with living on a deserted Pacific island. The show's premise and storytelling fit much more with the formal qualities that I have described as "Canadian," and the series combines action and mystery with practical concerns about leadership, democracy, and survival skills without rendering the show "green vegetable" programming or a series of special episodes. Like *Life with Derek*, comedy *Darcy's Wild Life* (2004-2006) utilizes ironic comedic timing and non-diegetic sounds to signal punch lines and absurdity. Its premise essentially remakes *Green Acres*, placing ex-socialite Darcy Fields on a farm, but its emphasis is always on the ethical, character, and veterinary lessons that Darcy learns in adjusting to her new surroundings. *Darcy's Wild Life*, *Just Deal*, and *Sk8*, however, were all filmed in Canada; the former two series seem to have been co-ventures between Canada and the United States and were produced by Thomas Lynch, who tends to create most of the rare U.S. dramatic youth series (like *South of Nowhere* and *Caitlin's Way*); *Darcy*, in the same vein, features mostly Canadian actors, and its producer is *Lizzie McGuire* and *Flight 29 Down* creator, Stan Rogow, whose works also prove exceptional for U.S. youth television. *Scout's Safari* (2002-2004), a co-production between the United States and South Africa, is very similar to *Darcy's Wild Life* and features a white U.S. teen living on South African plains and working with animals. Its lessons also center on ethics and animal care. And the CW's brief primetime series *Life is Wild* (2007-2008) featured the same premise but with older teens. Each of these

latter series lasted only one or two seasons, and although they collectively provide alternatives to U.S. very-special moralizing and avoidance of educational narratives, they have not left as large a televisual footprint as will more heavily publicized/franchised series like *Gossip Girl*, *Raven*, and *Suite Life*. And the overwhelming Canadian involvement in many of these counterexamples demonstrates not only that educational drama is simply a less developed, less lucrative, or less comfortable form for U.S. youth television, but also emphasize again that even U.S. series filmed in Canada or co-produced there often feature distinctive elements.

On the other hand of U.S. youth comedies and teen dramas that specialize or avoid education is the prevalence of Canadian realism and harder-hitting narratives that borrow from the national documentary tradition and the historical Canadian resistance to U.S. television.<sup>122</sup> Many Canadian producers even intentionally structure their series as “alternatives” to U.S. programs. Like the larger educational context from which Canadian television originated, *Degrassi*’s educational model began literally in the classroom, when schoolteacher Linda Schuyler realized that television series did not accurately depict adolescent experiences or provide narratives to which they could relate. In a “letter from the producers” that precedes the in-classroom materials Schuyler marketed to U.S. educators, she along with Kit Hood and Kate Taylor, describes the series as “an alternative to [...] a Hollywood reality [...]. If it can entertain, provoke meaningful discussion, and take a small step toward helping young viewers make more informed choices during their adolescent years, we will have done our job.” Jennifer MacLennan refers to this alternative style as an “‘anti-language’ of resistance and difference,” a Canadian “strategy that defines and presents its sense of cultural distinctiveness” (155). The alternative structure of these series also includes explicit refusal of the very special episode

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<sup>122</sup> MacLennan 154, 155, 160.



because of its tendency for minimizing issues and stressing a singular, predetermined lesson: “[W]hat helps us keep the truthfulness,” Schuyler says, “is that the story is told in increments and not crammed into one very special episode with a guest star who’s going to be the one who gets pregnant or gay-bashed” (qtd. in “Very Special Episode” par. 13 and Allemang par. 18). The incremental and slow build of the issues in these series allows them to privilege truthfulness and open-ended narration (rather than neat, tidy singular lessons) and immediately offsets them from U.S. series. In their different emphasis, these series also adopt an alternative Freinet-like pedagogy in opposition to the traditional top-down, authoritarian one. Here, a cooperative/democratic teaching model shifts attention away from the role of the teacher and encourages “an alternative power within the education system countervailing that of officialdom” (Legrand 8; Serrano et al 5).<sup>123</sup> As in the Freinet educational model, in this alternative televisual version of teaching, cooperative learning, problem solving, and individualized lessons ensure that “power is transferred as far as possible to the pupils themselves” (Legrand 8), and there is no need for cast members to explicitly direct viewers on what to do.

Canadian youth series in this tradition have tended not only to encourage cooperative self-learning, but also to represent serious topics that most youth-television series avoid or specialize. *Degrassi*, for instance, is somewhat exceptional in its longstanding inclusion of topical concerns ranging from sexuality, rape, teen pregnancy, abortion, and self-mutilation to child abuse, sexism, racism, alcoholism, cancer, AIDS/HIV, and drug abuse. Although it targets a slightly older audience than the Disney and Nick crowds, *Degrassi* resembles early CBC attempts to blend entertainment, education, comedy, and drama, juxtaposing fun and silly plots

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<sup>123</sup> Freinet pedagogy is named for French educator Célestin Freinet, who revolutionized education in the early twentieth century.

with tougher storylines—consistently. In each episode of *Degrassi*, the A plot handles the heavier issues, while the B plot provides a lighthearted story to balance it out, making every episode “special” in its attention to real life and yet relatively gentle enough to remain entertaining and humorous. Often, the episodes contain little or no narrative resolution. When Paige is raped, she must wait two seasons (years) for her case to go to trial, only to find her rapist acquitted. Each episode ends, sometimes in *medias res*, with a freeze frame of the character who has learned a lesson, but it does not overtly state what that lesson is, guiding viewers towards learning from the manifold consequences and choices each episode represents, but not explicitly telling them what to learn.<sup>124</sup> Even lighter-hearted Canadian youth series that take a less issue-driven approach to their narratives (like *Edgemont* (2001-2005) and *Ready or Not*) have dealt with many of these aforementioned concerns without specializing them or pushing for a single interpretation. *Ready or Not*’s creator Alyse Rosenberg also says her goal in the show was “to offer *alternative* ways to navigate the rocky road of adolescence, without being cutesy” (qtd. in Chisholm 40, emphasis mine). Each episode of *Ready or Not* ends like *Degrassi* in progress, in that Amanda and Busy have not always worked out their problems, and their attempt to work them out extends beyond the credits in imaginary action that viewers cannot see.<sup>125</sup> In this way, these shows can empower viewers to analyze, interpret, and apply the fictional narratives without trivializing or dictating a single view of the issues the series represent.

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<sup>124</sup> We see the same cooperative model in the government-sponsored documentary series *Degrassi Talks* (1992), whose theme song assures viewers, “*Degrassi* talks/ *Degrassi* listens.”

<sup>125</sup> In Miller’s terms, “Our better series television, like the rest of our better television drama, is influenced by anthology. CBC series drama at its most distinctive takes ambivalent moral stances when required; it challenges its audience with open or downbeat endings instead of our tired old friend ‘poetic justice,’ [and] has tackled topical subject matter quite regularly [...]” (386).



**Figure 6:** *Degrassi Junior High's* grade-eight students Shane (Bill Parrott) and Spike (Amanda Stepto) find themselves expecting a child. Photograph courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from Epitome Pictures Inc. Photo Credit: Stephen Scott.



**Figure 7:** Some of the cast of *Edgemont*. Clockwise (starting from back row): Gil (Richard Kahan), Anika (Vanessa King), Shannon (Grace Park), Craig (Micah Gardener), Jen (Sarah Lind), Laurel (Kristin Kreuk), and Mark (Dominic Zamprogna). Photo courtesy of OMNI.

Once again, this is not, however, to say that this Canadian approach to narrative development and incorporation of issues is inherently better than the U.S. one, but that its goals and the ways that it realizes them are strikingly different. The only contemporary U.S. dramatic series to come close to the Canadian aesthetic of educational entertainment or the alternative model are the short-lived ABC series *My So-Called Life* (1994)<sup>126</sup> and *Life as We Know It* (2004), both of which the network pulled in spite of large and active fanbases. These series' quick cancellation had a lot to do with the U.S. network's unease in marketing them, perhaps because their narratives were a bit too open for U.S. youth television. ABC Family's latest series, *The Secret Life of an American Teenager* (2008-present), has fared better so far arguably because it combines its attempt at realism and sort of alternative style (crowded hallways, muted styling, and issue-driven storylines) with the special episode's overt didacticism. As in the case of the aforementioned exaggerated U.S. comedies, *The Secret Life of an American Teenager* tends to emphasize a singular lesson—in this case that teens are engaged in various degrees of sexual activity unbeknownst to their parents—and most of the dialogue focuses exclusively on teen sex and its complications. Each episode ends with the star of the series (Shailene Woodley) warning teens and parents to discuss sex. While this series, then, is exceptional in the way it looks and in the subject matter it attempts to tackle, it is akin to an extended very special episode and far from “gritty” in the representation of its lessons. Within the context of U.S. television's approaches to serious youth content, *Secret Life* appeals to many viewers because it takes a very clear position against premarital and teen sex—a position that many parents would find comforting and reassuring—and because it clearly teaches the dangers of sexual activity. And in terms of responsible or ethical narration, it moves far beyond *Gossip Girl*'s glorification of teen

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<sup>126</sup> Panarese 66.

sex and other issues for the sake of titillation. *DTNG* and *Ready or Not*, conversely, have proven controversial in the United States because of the openness that distinguishes them. *Degrassi*, for example, demonstrates many of the complications and consequences of teen sex, but it leaves its propriety up to the viewer and his/her parents to discuss/decide, creating a narrative openness that some viewers may find refreshing but that may cause uneasiness for others. The Canadian series, then, stand out because they let their plots speak for themselves and encourage cooperative learning, but they also stand out as problematic for the same characteristics in a U.S. television culture that prefers literal lessons (see Chapter Four).

### Characterization

Canadian and U.S. youth series tend to differ immensely in characterization as well, and the difference again is centrally rooted in steady subtlety versus singular or shock-based payoffs. *Secret Life*'s characters provide another example of the difference between an exaggerated, closed, and quick narrative structure and a subtle, open, and incremental one. Unlike *Degrassi*, in which most characters have depth and useful back-stories, in *Secret Life*, every character is a type (often racially coded) and a type related solely to the premise. The ensemble cast includes the abstinent blonde Christian and her boyfriend, the sexually irresponsible playboy whose father molested him, the loose Latina temptress who wants her boyfriend to see her as more than a sex object, and the unlikely good girl who has become pregnant at fifteen. Unlike the slow development and revelation of these back stories that would take place in *Degrassi* or similar Canadian series, each of *Secret Life*'s types is evident from the first episode, and viewers immediately learn why each is sexually active or not because of it: The Christian, Grace, has parents who are too strict; the pregnant Amy's parents are feuding, and her father is engaged in

an affair; aggressively sexual Ricky lives in a foster home and needs love; and nice-guy Ben has lost his mother and seeks a replacement mother/family in Amy. Like the pronouncement of *Secret Life*'s lessons and its limited encouragement of viewer self-interpretation, the characters are "exceedingly obvious" enough (to borrow again from Mittell) to ensure that viewers readily understand them.

While some defining characteristics could reduce *Life with Derek*, *Ready or Not*, and *Degrassi*'s characters to types (athletes, nerds, snobs, etc), each core character is dynamic, and it often takes years for viewers to find out the motivation for characters' actions, making it difficult to stamp any single label on them. Derek is for all intents and purposes a "bad" teen, rebellious, sexist, and insensitive, but he cares deeply about his biological siblings, and in private moments he reveals that he has grown to care for his stepfamily as well. From seasons one to seven, *Degrassi*'s Paige transforms from a materialistic snob to a sensitive woman who has faced her rapist and taken him to trial, helped other girls through their struggles, come to terms with her bisexuality, and dropped out of college; in spite of her confrontation with issues that have changed her personality, her core characteristics remain the same, and she evinces a level of maturity reflecting growth over time. Even characters that change relatively little over time, like Toby, who remains a self-conscious nerd, reveal variety in their life goals, concerns, and problems, making for steady documentarian development that better imitates real life than the overtly represented and heavily constructed types in *Secret Life*.

Another Canadian angle for character development stems from a Canadian literary tradition in which a sort of unprepared, insecure anti-hero is more likely to emerge than is the rugged, rebellious, or anti-authority U.S. protagonist. As Jody Berland muses, Canada's "most prominent literary hero [Anne Shirley of *Green Gables*] is an orphan girl with a temper," (162)

an underdog and a girl at that, and in contrast to the gun-slinging U.S. cowboy, Canadian mythology upholds the peace-protecting Mountie. The effects of this canon carry over into television, where, as in Tate's study, the Canadian hero generally "wins" through intelligence, communal support, and a particular kind of individualism (one that privileges culture, not solipsism). Here, the protagonists appear "in several shades of irony and deprecation instead of the brilliant colours of crusaders, omniscient wise men, and flamboyant villains" (Miller 387). Karp's example elaborates this effectively: "Americans have FBI dramas like *Without a Trace* where we see experts in action tracking down missing citizens, and Canadians have *Sue Thomas: F.B. Eye*, based on the true story of a deaf woman who joins the FBI and all the wacky situations she gets into having a guide dog" (par. 6). In similar televisual representations, the "alternative" structure of Canadian series becomes clearer as the series often implicitly or explicitly structure the hero as oppositional to an ideology or character coded as "American."

*Instant Star*, for example, builds from this anti-heroic structure and deals with Jude Harrison's attempt to find herself after winning an *American-Idol*-esque contest. The series adds a Canadian context for music production in which the star system is milder, Paparazzi are scarce, and commercial success is not as satisfying as independence. To that end, the show's view of pop-stardom focuses much more on the psychological than the salacious and frequently mocks U.S. popular culture, particularly in its latter seasons.<sup>127</sup> A blonde wig does not transform Jude or her problems as it conveniently does for Hannah Montana, and at the end of the day, her musical success only complicates her chaotic life. Jude's continued struggle for self-definition, self-differentiation, and independent production in the series could easily symbolically represent the historical struggle for producing Canadian cultural products and identity. To that end, the

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<sup>127</sup> Miller describes "self-conscious, yet off-hand references to elements of American popular culture" as another example of Canadian inflection (60).

show's focus on Jude's inability to become a traditional star and on her marginalization within a mainstream record company reflects a Canadian politics of identity, and it demonstrates a more nuanced Canadian approach to dealing with the extraordinary circumstances of fame in a way that ultimately focuses on the same ordinary circumstances of life that I have emphasized in other Canadian series. Given the series' high U.S. ratings and mourned cancellation after four seasons, *Instant Star* further exemplifies U.S. acceptance of Canadian texts with distinctive cultural characteristics.

### Race And Representation

Equally related to representation and characterization, and my final point of references in this comparative section, are the different ways that U.S. and Canadian youth series tend to treat race and ethnicity. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the major distinctions between Canadian and U.S. youth television often have to do with subtlety versus exaggeration and consistency versus individualized incorporation. We can see the same two dynamics at work in the differences between each television culture's approach to representing diversity. Canadian series and U.S. series *attempt* to utilize race and ethnicity in different ways. And I have emphasized the word "attempt" in order to note that they differ in method but not necessarily in results. Canadian youth television often incorporates diversity more thoroughly into more series (just as it does with education or realism), while U.S. youth television often separates "ethnic" or diverse series from others (just as it does with special episodes). While U.S. youth television represents more diversity of a particular sort (through racially homogeneous series with minority casts and some minorities in primarily white series), Canadian youth television tends to naturalize diversity into the framework for a series, such that even series with large numbers of



white characters feature minorities in prominent roles. Chapter Five will demonstrate that neither the Canadian nor U.S. model has found a fully effective or fully antiracist way of dealing with ethnic diversity (and specifically interracial relationships) televisually, but here I want to highlight the differences in each televisual culture's use of homo- and heterogeneity, ethnicity, and stereotypes.

We can generally find three versions of diversity in U.S. youth television: series that naturalize diversity into their frameworks without racializing any group, series that primarily play race for laughs, and series that mobilize ethnicity to teach particular and often singular lessons. In the '90s, for example, Nickelodeon and Disney Channel featured a variety of series that simply embraced diversity and did so without the use of stereotypes: *All That* (1994-2005) featured a heavily diverse ensemble cast, many of whose players earned spin-off series. And Disney aired *The New Mickey Mouse Club*, or *MMC* (1989-1994), which included several black, Latino, and Asian cast member in prominent roles. In the past fifteen years, Nick has also produced a large body of youth comedies about black and Latino families: *My Brother and Me* (1994-1995), *The Brothers Garcia* (2000-2004), *Taina* (2001-2002), *Cousin Skeeter*, and *Romeo!* (2003-2006), while Disney has aired off-network syndicated black series *Sister Sister* (1994-1999), *Smart Guy* (1997-1999), and semi-Canadian series *Jett Jackson*. Before the shift to sitcoms, Disney's *Even Stevens* and *Lizzie McGuire* also featured a good deal of ethnic diversity, through minority teachers, school principals, and friends of the white core characters. Among recent series, Discovery Kids' few original shows, such as *Flight 29 Down*, tend treat diversity in the same integrated ways. These effectively "multicultural" series do not segregate "ethnic" narratives from "white" ones, and they look much more like Canadian youth series in their consistent and thorough incorporation of visual differences.

Other series simply play race for laughs, differentiating minority characters from white ones through exaggeration and obvious stereotypes that—because they are supposedly funny—get to pass as part of a program’s comedic approach. In 1990s series *California Dreams*, for example, the cast is completely multiracial/ethnic, and everyone plays a type, but minority characters tend to speak in racialized dialects or slang and dress in markedly different styles, while white characters serve as the normative types. Black character Tony is known for his fast-paced way of hyphenating long phrases into “so-quick-we-didn’t-see-them-coming” insults, while Latina Lorena turns to fast-paced Spanish whenever she gets angry, which is often. As with *Secret Life*’s types, we can ultimately attribute any personality trait to physical or racial characteristics in most of the series’ characters. With the increase in sitcoms, Disney and Nickelodeon have begun to produce ethnic series of this variety, series that often explicitly or implicitly racialize characters in negative ways and that treat diversity with a formulaic tokenism or in special cases. The shift towards this kind of comedy seems to have increased many of the former problems with representation that were evident but not as intense in *California Dreams* and other series. We see race and ethnicity played for laughs in most of the new series that Disney Channel produces. By featuring a black family as its central focus, *That’s So Raven*, for example, makes strides in promoting diversity on the Disney Channel. Because of its antics-based premise and nonsensical comedic approach, however, the series walks a thin line between representing a form of “black comedy” and treating its characters as stereotypes who use stylized slang and dress in ostentatious clothing.

*The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* also fits this pattern of playing race for laughs, but intensifies it by reversing stereotypes; here racial difference still fuels the series’ punch lines, but through the seeming absurdity of mismatched signifiers. Hip-hop and slang, for example,

operate in a variety of problematic ways throughout the series. When Zack feigns a “pimp walk,” gyrates, or krumps, he does so for laughs, not because he has a genuine interest or investment in these cultural expressions.<sup>128</sup> When Asian character London makes a new black friend, she adopts an offensive vernacular accent, calling the friend “girlfriend” and other outdated slang coded as “black.” All of these stereotypes only serve the comedy, and the show does little to explore them as offensive or utilize them as teachable moments. Instead, it uses them to demonstrate Zack and Cody’s mastery over cultural symbols of all kinds and their mastery of virtually everything. Black hotel manager Mr. Moseby, similarly, speaks with a pretentious British accent—a trait that automatically seems absurd or out of synch with his ethnicity—and he fails to successfully manage anything; the children continually run over him and undermine his authority. At other times, instead of reversing stereotypes for comedy’s sake the series simply amplifies them. For example, in addition to his very long name, the bellhop, Esteban Julio Ricardo Montoya de la Rosa Ramirez, has a very heavy accent, very few skills, and a pet chicken. *Suite Life* and other U.S. youth television series’ comedic use of race, then, tends to ignore the ways that stereotypes breed stereotypes and instead plays with stereotypes as though there were nothing wrong with them. Like wild costumes and other gags, race serves outrageous comedy.

Finally, just as U.S. youth television series often segregate “ethnic” series or isolate diversity while creating types, we often see race and racism explored in special episodes that are meant to serve specific and brief purposes in the series, or through token characters who serve the same sorts of explicit ends. Often, the specific function is to increase diversity in otherwise

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<sup>128</sup> Krumping (or K.R.U.M.P) describes an urban branch of break dancing that involves aggressive and often sharp popping and locking moves of the arms and chest. It originated in South Central, Los Angeles and has become popularized in various hip-hop and mainstream music videos as well as sitcoms such as *Just Jordan* (“Krumping”). In *The Suite Life*, white Disney star and popular hip-hop dancer Alyson Stoner teaches Zack how to do this as well as other break-dancing moves.

racially homogeneous series. In *Beverly Hills 90210*, there are no minorities in central roles, but they appear throughout the series in order to justify their absence (for they do not *really* fit in) and to solidify the identity of the core white characters. Recurrent black character D'Shawn Hardell serves two brief functions: As a cheater, the recipient of an athletic scholarship, a blackmailer, and a lazy student, his juxtaposition against Brandon's established "honest" and "smart" character only highlights Brandon's goodness, making both characters' behavior seem somehow related to their racial differences. When Brandon takes up D'Shawn's cause after he has been falsely accused of cheating on an exam, this, too, serves to highlight Brandon's attention to social injustice, not D'Shawn's unfair trial. Both D'Shawn's negative and positive characteristics, then, only exist in order service Brandon's character. The same applies to Brandon's brief interracial relationships with Latina Carla (114) and black Sherice (209); they demonstrate that although Brandon will never date a minority girl for longer than a single episode, viewers can rest assured that he is antiracist enough to do so. Through Brandon's frequent interaction with and rescue of these minority characters, he essentially demonstrates that if there *were* minorities in the central cast, the good white characters *would* treat them well. Similarly, the marketers of the new *90210* remake (2008-present) have, as if in response to old complaints about the original's racial homogeneity, released a good deal of self-congratulatory press about the series' inclusion of a single black character, Dixon (*The Wire*'s Tristan Wilds), who essentially plays the new Brandon. Dixon, however, is adopted, not a member of a solid or positive black family, and all of his friends and girlfriends are white (or Jewish, but represented as white). Thus, his placement in the series has not ultimately increased its diversity very much, as the series still represents Beverly Hills—and the wealth for which it stands—as exclusive to

white families and minorities as somehow foreign to this environment.<sup>129</sup> Both *90210* series at least do better than other U.S. teen series such as *Gossip Girl*, *One Tree Hill*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *Popular* and youth series *iCarly*, which contain very little ethnic diversity. But in their specialization of race-related issues and their brief or minimal inclusion of diversity, both *90210*s ultimately either paint diversity as another excess incompatible with the whole of the series or make it the entire focus of brief story arcs. As with fantastical or escapist storytelling and exaggerated comedy, race often can become another apparatus for promoting hyperbolic or false images in U.S. youth television.

We see a different utilization of race or ethnicity in most Canadian youth series with international circulation to the United States. In Canada, state-driven multiculturalism of the early 1970s *requires* that Canadian television represent a certain level of diversity on screen and that minorities are employed behind the scenes in various capacities.<sup>130</sup> This sustained or thoroughly integrated form of diversity generally results in what seems like a more positive approach to racial representation. For the most part, contemporary Canadian youth television does not distinguish its minority characters from white ones in the same ways that U.S. series like *Suite Life* and *90210* do, although some series highlight hip-hop or immigration as cultural differences. *Degrassi*, for instance, has always used musical interests as a way of dividing character groups. Many of the black characters in the series listen to hip-hop or have an interest in it, but they are not the only black characters in the series, nor do they all share a monolithic or

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<sup>129</sup> The N's original series *South of Nowhere* uses the same model, bringing diversity into the series through an adopted black character, but it moves beyond *90210* by giving him a variety of black friends and adding other minority characters. The series, however, kills the black core character off in a school shooting, leaving his pregnant girlfriend to date his white brother.

<sup>130</sup> Byers "Revisiting" 43. Although Canadian television generally reflects multicultural policy, in television for older audiences whiteness serves more prominently as the dominant identity ("Media Stereotyping") in spite of government policies requiring diversity.

collective taste; and the series never makes fun of ethnic difference for the mere the sake of making fun of ethnic difference.

I have, in fact, found few examples in Canadian youth television that involve playing race for laughs. Instead, it seems more common for these youth series—those that mention race at all—to turn stereotypes on their heads. But unlike in *Suite Life*'s use of reversed stereotypes, the Canadian youth series add an ironic twist to them. For example, when white character Spinner accuses Jimmy of racism for saying that Spinner cannot dance, the pun is that Spinner reads too much into Jimmy's insinuation that Spinner dances like a polar bear: "Polar bears are white, I'm white, and you're a racist," he remarks. The other characters who witness this conversation laugh, agreeing that Spinner "can't dance because [he] suck[s]" (203). Unlike in *Suite Life*, the joke is never contingent upon Spinner's whiteness, Jimmy's blackness, or either's mastery of seemingly ethnicity-specific behaviors, but on Spinner's characterization as a dimwitted teen who has once again failed to surmise the situation correctly. Conversations from *You Can't Do That on Television* also use ethnic jokes with pronounced ironic distance in order to comment on the status of minorities in Canada or to empower them, not in order to justify their marginalization (though that often occurs in other subtler ways). In an episode from the 1981 season, black cast member Angie muses:

Randy, which would you rather be, black, white or Indian?

Randy: I don't know, Angie. I never really thought about it. Being Indian's pretty good. I guess I like being Indian.

Angie: Yeah. I like being black. Being black or being Indian are both good.

Randy: Yeah, must be a real bummer to be white.

Angie [shaking her head incredulously]: Yeah, poor guys. (208)

The positive statement on being black or Indigenous Canadian works to give Angie and Randy a sense of pride in spite of their ethnic disadvantages. As in Spinner and Jimmy's exchange, the

humor comes from the obvious absurdity of the situation and its pronouncement from two children, not from any stereotyping of the black and Indigenous cast members.

While it is common to see a multiracial cast in Canadian youth series, it is less common to see one that is racially homogeneous (either all white, all black or Latino—though there are some dramas with Indigenous casts that rely on a multiracial model) in exported series.<sup>131</sup>

Canadian youth-ensemble casts generally feature at least one—and often several—characters of color who are peripheral if not central to the series. Although they are sometimes problematic in less obvious ways (see Chapter Five), these characters’ ethnic or racial differences overtly inform the plot only insofar as they *teach* about culture. Greek characters on *Degrassi* and *Naturally, Sadie* may take Greek lessons, for example, not in order to demonstrate fundamental or inherent differences between groups, but to emphasize their investment in particular cultural practices.

Even when series center on white characters, those characters often have black or immigrant best friends, and their love interests come from a variety of backgrounds. Casey’s best friend Emily, on *LWD*, for example, primarily dates white teens; Emily does not speak or dress differently from Casey, and all of her quirks stem from her personality, not her supposed racial difference. Similarly, in *Naturally, Sadie*, Sadie’s best friend Margaret is black, her other best friend Rain is Greek, and neither speaks or behaves in overtly racialized ways. In other words, in these series multicultural casting is more the norm than a recent trend, and “difference [... generally seems] naturalized rather than pathologized” or satirized, as it is in some of the

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<sup>131</sup> Canadian teen/ young-adult series *Moccasin Flats*, *Renegade Press*, and *The Rez* all feature primarily Indigenous casts, but they, like the U.S. segregated ones, incorporate core characters of other ethnicities to appeal to a wider audience. A short-lived CBC series called *Drop the Beat* featured an-all black cast. These types of shows are least likely to make it in the export market, because the kinds of ethnicity they represent are so culturally specific to Canada (Byers “Youth Representation” par. 4), though *The Rez* did air in the United States in limited circulation on a cable channel called VTV. *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, which as I mentioned, will appear on U.S. TV via a FOX remake, provides an exception to these less-circulated “ethnic” series.

examples from U.S. television (Byers and Haines 179). And parallel to the Canadian series' diversity is their general inclusion of characters with mental, physical, and emotional disabilities that would be "special" in or absent from most U.S. narrative television. Like Brandon with black and Latino characters, in series like *Saved by the Bell*, characters with disabilities or undesirable physical characteristics (such as obesity) can only date Zack in special episodes, while *Degrassi* features recurring paraplegic and mentally disabled characters and characters of all body types throughout the run of the series.<sup>132</sup>



**Figure 8: Unit photography from episode 306 of *Naturally, Sadie*. Pictured: Sadie (Charlotte Arnold) and Margaret (Jasmine Richards). Photo Credit: Steve Wilkie. Courtesy of and reprinted with permission from DECODE Entertainment Inc.**

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<sup>132</sup> *Life Goes On* (1989-1993, and another ABC series with "life" in its title) serves as an exception to this pattern and featured a character with Down Syndrome as one of its protagonists (Corky, played by Chris Burke). *The Facts of Life*'s Cousin Geri (Geri Jewell) also dealt with cerebral palsy. But in another example of how U.S. television's traditions tend to contain difference through special episodes: according to Wikipedia, after serving as a recurring character for years, Jewell planned to join the series as a full cast member in the sixth season. The producers, however, "offered her only one episode for the season because viewers would immediately assume that any episode with Cousin Geri would be a very special episode. Jewell stated that she stopped appearing on the show for this reason" ("Facts of Life" par. 22).



Canadian youth television's more sustained incorporation of diversity illustrates another gap that Canadian series can fill in U.S. television, particularly for U.S. networks that choose not to produce ethnically diverse series. In *Nickelodeon Nation*, for example, Sandler praises Nickelodeon's early-'90s diversity, citing *Hey Dude* (1989-1981), *Are You Afraid of the Dark*, and *Fifteen* as series that provided generic variety, "mature handling of teenage issues," and multiculturalism: "African-Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans," he writes, "played significant roles in these series" (49). However, with the exception of *Hey Dude*, which was a U.S. series, the diversity in these shows came from Canada, and these minority "Americans" were in fact African and Asian Canadians. Similarly, a recent article in *Entertainment Weekly* that details the lack of diversity on mainstream U.S. television notes that "color-blind casting is something [U.S.] teen-focused networks seem to have down pat: Nary a show has passed through ABC Family or The N without an interracial coupling or a naturally integrated cast" (Armstrong and Watson par. 14). Yet these "naturally integrated" casts and many of the interracial couples—not all, but many—often appear in the Canadian series that air on these U.S. networks, or in the series that are filmed in Canada. As the Conclusion of this project will explain, even the U.S. original series on ABC Family and The N owe much of their influence to similar Canadian series. Combined with the narrative, aesthetic, and topical differences between Canadian and U.S. youth television, Canadian television's more consistent, more official, and subtler form of multiculturalism marks it as indeed differently inflected and serves as another selling point for U.S. distribution.

### Resist the U.S. and It Shall Flee

Up to this point, most of the Canadian series I have discussed (with the exception of *Ready or Not*, *Naturally*, *Sadie*, and *Jett Jackson*) have been 100% Canadian, with little or no U.S. involvement. But part of my aim is to demonstrate that distinctively Canadian conventions or traits remain, not only in texts that make it to the export market, but also in texts that range in their degree of Canadian involvement. As a Canadian series frequently cited as Americanized, *Road to Avonlea* (*RTA*) provides a strong example of the ways that Canadian texts and their characterizations not only construct a sense of Canadianness, but also use it in order to critique U.S. representations. Here I offer *RTA* as an extended case study that solidifies the patterns within the other series I have discussed and that demonstrates how even Canadian series with heavy U.S. involvement retain and emphasize Canadian difference.

Co-produced between Kevin Sullivan's (Canadian) Sullivan Entertainment, the CBC, and the Disney Channel, *RTA* loosely adapted several of Lucy Maude Montgomery's popular novels and became one of the most successful series for each of the two networks involved. It remains the highest-rated English-language hour-long drama in Canadian history, it was once the highest-rated series on the Disney Channel (where it aired as *Avonlea*), and it found large audiences in several other countries, including Iran.<sup>133</sup> Most criticism about it concedes that the series "both embraces and resists" the U.S. "paradigm" that Disney epitomizes (Lefebvre 182). But even these critiques tend to paint *RTA* as an un-Canadian or generic series, another example of Canadian texts' accommodation to vague or U.S. aesthetics. In his analysis of Disney's involvement in the series, for example, Benjamin Lefebvre concludes that *RTA* represents "the paradox of Canadian television: whereas most series financed and produced solely in Canada

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<sup>133</sup> Lefebvre 182.

receive only lukewarm responses from Canadian viewers, the one ‘Canadian’ popular culture phenomenon is the series that Mike Boone aptly called ‘family viewing in the finest tradition of Disney’” (184).

People involved in *RTA*’s production express similar sentiments. Kevin Sullivan has admitted that without Disney’s involvement, *RTA* ““would have been a very different show”” (qtd. in Lefebvre 183). And in what Sullivan has called “hyperbolic” statements, the show’s initial star Sarah Polley has vehemently disdained it for its so-called U.S. ideals. Calling it ““that sugary sweet kids’ show”” and ““the most sugar-coated, unrealistic depiction of Canadian history ever,”” Polley has also said that the series became less political with Disney’s increased involvement: ““In the first couple of seasons we did things like an episode on a strike [...]. Then as soon as the Disney Channel got really involved, all that went away and it became, literally, a show about family values”” (qtd. in “Deconstructing Sarah”; qtd. in “Sarah Polley Interviews”). One actor from the series whom I interviewed suggests that Disney heavily influenced the series from its beginning, while another interviewee stresses that most everything in the series reflects neither Disney nor Canada, but “a Sullivan aesthetic.”<sup>134</sup> The self-fashioning (and distancing) involved in the aforementioned statements about the series’ nationalism or lack thereof makes it clear that its Canadianness is disconnected from any consensus about what that term means, but that authentic Canadianness is inherently and most certainly different from whatever Disney is. Though aesthetically, *RTA* more resembles U.S. (and specifically Disney) fare and is far from *Degrassi*’s grit, at the narrative level the series is unmistakably Canadian.

In most every season, *RTA*’s plots deal with the threat of U.S.-ification in some way or another, usually through storylines that juxtapose U.S. ideas about advancement with Canadian

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<sup>134</sup> Interviewee Two; Interviewee Three.

ones. Through these episodes, a pattern of symbolism emerges in which a Canadian figure asserts his or her difference from the United States through the creation of internally funded technology or art. Jasper Dale, a recurrently struggling inventor serves as the town's laughingstock, and like Jude from *Instant Star*, he epitomizes the antihero; passersby scoff at his inventions, arguing that if they have little local relevance, then they will never amount to anything of national or global importance (a fairly plausible allusion to the status of Canadian television in Canada). But the "Awkward Man" becomes Avonlea's strong man, and his characterization becomes symbolic, when in several episodes his inventions, made possible only with Hetty or Sara's money, save Avonlea from the destruction of U.S. interference. In the episodes "Home Movie" and "Modern Times," for instance, U.S. businessman Mr. Dunne threatens to Americanize Avonlea by instituting new technology that initially appeals to the townspeople. Completely driven by his pursuit of capital, Dunne represents U.S. commercialism, while Jasper and Avonlea stand as their antitheses. In "Home Movie" (412), Dunne plans to buy Avonlea or parts of it and turn the town into Dunnsville (a pun on the town's future if Dunne has his way and a verbal analog to "Dunce-ville"). In "Modern Times" (505), Dunne tries to debauch the temperate town by adding a distillery and tearing down the old cannery that employs a good percentage of its citizens—and at which a protest for women's suffrage has recently occurred. With his assumption that he can easily transform Avonlea and its components into extensions of his U.S. investments, Dunne, like the traditional reading of the United States, interferes with Canadian culture because he neither understands nor values it. Jasper saves the town in both cases by creating technology (a film in one episode and a conveyor belt in another) that scares Dunne away or botches his plans. The townspeople then praise Jasper and appreciate their independence.

Because these episodes stress the importance of homegrown technological advancement and local, internal support for the arts, they gesture towards present-day off-screen struggles to create and retain Canadian cultural expression; because they work through the characters' use of technology, they represent Canada's historical media problems and resilience. This symbolism within the series also signifies on the United States while clearly defining Avonlea—and by extension Canada—as its alternative: Avonlea is not Dunnsville; like the early cultural nationalists who swayed television's institution in Canada, Avonlea can compete technologically with the United States, but will use its production for the cultivation of its community and culture, not for the pursuit of money; Jasper takes a slower, steadier high road, and it pays, while Dunne favors quick, easy, and selfish acquisitions. The boldness of this recurring narrative structure within the series hardly suggests a fear of alienating U.S. viewers with storylines that are too "Canadian" or too specific to Canada; instead it illustrates a savvy way of representing Canadian difference through a text that is cushioned by its Disneyesque appeal. Ironically, Disney may have influenced this construction of Canadian difference just as much as any of the Canadians involved in the show. That does not, however, change its mildly subversive potential, for it still represents this sense of a culturally and traditionally distinctive Canada to Canadian and other international viewers, creating an aesthetics of Canadianness in a text with unprecedented global success.

### To Pass or Not to Pass

Some of the aforementioned distinctive qualities remain in Canadian series that attempt to pass as U.S. products, but their combination of noticeably different storytelling with fake U.S. locations and characters makes for precarious texts that generally fail to impact any market.

Though she describes Canadian television in Canada, Miller’s summation holds for exports as well: “Canadian series that depend on borrowed stereotypes [...] fail miserably because they are imitative, and the ‘real thing’ is just the flick of the switch away” (385). Many of the series that are *explicitly made* to pass for “American” or to play different roles for different national contexts are co-produced for dual audiences, with Canadian settings for Canadian viewers and vague or “New England” settings for U.S. viewers.<sup>135</sup> *Falcon Beach* (2006-2007), for instance, which aired on ABC Family, was set in a New England beach town for U.S. viewers and Winnipeg for Canadians, and scenes with national markers were shot differently for each respective audience. The setting itself, however, is not as problematic as the attempt to modify Canadian series for U.S. audiences (an issue that the following chapter will take up in more detail). *Falcon Beach*’s less-traditional multiracial casting and its initial storytelling marked it as different from U.S. series. The laid-back pacing of the pilot, the show’s focus on people from a variety of socioeconomic statuses, and its slow build towards an exciting climax are very different from, for example, the pilot of the newest incarnation of *90210*: in which explicit sexual content, language, and material culture frame the plot, the angles from which the series is shot, and the episode’s premise. *Falcon Beach*’s early storylines included some of these elements but approached them with narrative lessons—such as the dangers of drug use and dealing—without much melodrama, making the series look more “Canadian” in its attempt at realism. But the series eventually relied on selling similarity to *The O.C.*—with increased violence, illicit affairs, quick shocks, etc—making it a mere Northern copy of the same California tale. It lasted only two seasons. Part of its cancellation certainly lies in the U.S. network’s decision to stop airing

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<sup>135</sup> Co-production need not imply this structure, however, as other co-productions, including *Road to Avonlea*, include overtly Canadian characters and settings. I emphasize “explicitly made” to pass for “American” because U.S. post-production practices often attach additional attempts at making Canadian series pass once they cross the border. See Chapter Four.

the series. Official press holds that ABC Family wanted to reach a larger demographic and would not renew the series, and when the U.S. network cancelled it, Canadian network Global (unable to carry the funding for the series alone) was also forced to cancel *Falcon Beach*.<sup>136</sup> Although *Falcon Beach* proved popular with teenage girls, I want to suggest that these sorts of intentionally vague or universal series inherently pose problems for marketing because they must constantly fluctuate between two distinctive televisual traditions. The combination of Canadian storytelling, actors, and settings with U.S. tropes but without any ironic distance from the latter results in a series that is internally unstable because it tries to “be everything to everyone”: In trying to look “American” for U.S. viewers, it must attempt to look like other U.S. series (like *The O.C.*), but in simultaneously trying to look Canadian for Canadian viewers, it cannot depend on the modes of self-differentiation that I have described as prevalent in Canadian television. If distinctive Canadian television often depends on its self-reflexive difference from U.S. television, then a series that tries to look Canadian in one context and “American” in another must necessarily fail at one or both of these aims.

In a similar vein, *The Best Years* (2007; 2008-present) includes a Boston setting for both Canadian and U.S. viewers, but it is the brainchild of *Degrassi* writer and *Being Erica* producer Aaron Martin and counts as a Canadian series (most of its actors but only one of its *characters* is Canadian). Centered around Samantha Best, who grew up in multiple foster homes in Boston’s Southie region, the show follows Samantha’s financial and social struggles during her first year of college. Its ensemble narration, gritty aesthetic, *Degrassi*-esque topics, and casting are fittingly Canadian. There are several minority core or peripheral characters, and all of the cast members have less-common forms of beauty (such as representative body types, untraditional

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<sup>136</sup> ABC Family apparently wanted to reach beyond an audience of 12-17-year-old girls to a broader 18-49-year-old demographic (“No Season Three” par. 2-3).

features, etc). In spite of visual aesthetics that situate it more readily within Canadian patterns, however, the series relies on episode-by-episode shocks that resemble U.S. drama—temporary characters that die or leave quickly, bizarre love triangles, catfights—and immediately undermine its believability.

In the first few episodes alone, one of Samantha’s friends falls from the roof of a campus building and dies, another tries to jump from her dorm window in a botched suicide attempt that culminates in the revelation that her father has molested her, and another begins a love affair with his professor. The original *90210* covered most of these storylines—and ironically in a less melodramatic and more educational way. Add to the narrative hyperbole Canadian accents that neither sound like U.S. natives, nor Bostonians, and the series is less than realistic. Some viewers recognize this, arguing that *The Best Years* and its actors fail to pass muster, let alone pass as “American.” One writes, “I know the actors are Canuck’s, and this is shot in Canada but you mean to tell me they could’t hire a few Boston natives to make it more authentic? [...] Even the producers of ‘Friday Night Lights’ knew their show would not work unless it was shot in Texas, and not some LA, or Vancouver backlot.”<sup>137</sup> After one season, *The Best Years* was officially cancelled in both countries. Its Canadian network, Global, resurrected it in late 2008, while The N remained elusive about whether or not it would broadcast a second season of the series.<sup>138</sup> The N did bring it back in April of 2009, but whether the series will earn a third season is unclear.<sup>139</sup>

As with *Falcon Beach*, I read *The Best Years*’ initial cancellation and the U.S. network’s indecision about its return as another example of the difficulty in marketing and maintaining a

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<sup>137</sup> “Really Lame.”

<sup>138</sup> In 2007, several websites announced the official cancellation of *The Best Years* (“Best Years Cancelled”; “N Network Cancels”).

<sup>139</sup> The N broadcast all of the season-two episodes of *The Best Years* in less than two months, at irregular, obscure times, making clear the its lack of commitment to the series.



series that tries to combine so many different emphases. *About a Girl* (2007-2008), a comedy broadcast by The N, utilized similar techniques and met a similar fate. While the series' comedic timing is more in keeping with Canadian humor and effectively funny, the show neither looks nor sounds like the kind of U.S. production for which it attempts to pose, nor does its California setting effectively mask its Vancouver shooting location. With *About a Girl*, what is really a novel and decently written series, then, suffers because its authenticity is immediately ruptured in its failure to "pass." The issue resides in the insincerity of passing the series off for something it is not and in the complications of trying to do so to audiences that have received cross-cultural imports for decades.

I am not suggesting that series made in Canada for the United States or filmed in Canada by U.S. producers are destined to early cancellation. *Battlestar Gallactica*, *Smallville*, and *Jett Jackson* clearly demonstrate that U.S. series (those made by U.S. producers to air primarily on U.S. networks) made in or with Canada often find longevity. And in many cases (as with *Jett Jackson* and *Darcy's Wild Life*), the extended Canadian involvement in the U.S. series can, once again, temper the U.S. involvement to create a more balanced, still "American" but Canadian-inflected series. What I am arguing with *The Best Years*, *About a Girl*, and *Falcon Beach*, however, is that when series are made with the explicit intention of looking Canadian for one audience and "American" for another, with vague North American settings, or in efforts to make an "American" show fit Canadian content guidelines, the inconsistencies seem to create internal instability, as in traditional literary passing narratives (such as Nella Larsen's *Passing*). In a Canada-U.S. television context in particular, intentional self-enacted passing works against the very tradition of establishing Canadian televisual distinctiveness, for passing necessarily involves being indistinctive, not standing out, remaining under the radar. If the Canadian

inflection of these series is, as I am arguing, what makes them unique and worth importation in the first place, the attempt to downplay those elements in order to fit U.S. patterns can only detract from the series' ability to impact (or even create) a market successfully.

As is clear from the viewer comments about the insincerity of series that attempt to pass for U.S. products, many U.S. viewers recognize the differences between Canadian and U.S. television, and although they do not always attribute them to national differences, they often cite Canadian series, (*Life with Derek* and *Degrassi*, for instance) as unlike anything else they encounter on television—for better or for worse. Chapter Four deals with how U.S. networks sometimes interpret Canadian series as too risqué or too problematic in this difference, while many viewers see those features as exciting and indicative of a superior Canada. Here, however, I want to highlight the positive viewer responses to some of these series, most of which cite *Degrassi*, *Ready or Not*, *Life with Derek*, and other Canadian shows as more realistic and overall more interesting than other contemporary series they watch. On the TV.com message boards, for instance, a debate about the show's propriety finds viewers noting that *LWD* takes a less superficial approach to television that makes some viewers uncomfortable and attracts others. Getedfan7 asserts, "LWD had much better writers than other Disney channel shows, and is more mature." Sinamon58 concurs, "It is one of the slightly mature shows on Disney n [(and)] is a refreshing change." The confrontation with these series, however, does not seem to keep viewers from watching series that they find less interesting or more exaggerated. FOP\_fan17 admits that although he finds this series better, he has not given up on *Suite Life*:

[...] LWD is, however, WAAAAAY different than other Disney shows. All you see on pretty much every other Disney live action is tween crap with overrated stars and cheesy jokes....that don't teach too much of anything. Other than this, I really only watch this station b/c of the *Suite Life*, and I watch that because Maddie and Barbara are the only down-to-earth girls out of the many that have appeared on the show. LWD, however, isn't overrated, has humor and useful lessons, and doesn't have the stupid and cheesy

factor that Disney seems to like. In the two other Disney forums I visit, the older kids are sick of the tween pop crap. (“Really a Kid’s Show”)

Ironically, furthermore, many of these Canadian series are *more* popular in the United States than in Canada. If, as I mention in Chapter Two, Collins and the Ryerson University study are correct in arguing that Canadians prefer U.S. television because it offers them a level of excitement unparalleled in Canadian series, then U.S. viewers likely enjoy Canadian series for their differences as well. The same features that make them seem too pedagogical, too middlebrow, or too boring in Canada may make them welcome sights in the United States, where youth television is increasingly homogeneous. *Instant Star*, for example, fared much better on The N than it did on CTV (partly because of CTV’s privileging of U.S. series). Even when they do poorly in Canada, then, some Canadian series out-rate U.S. series in the United States simply because they stand out as authentic, complex, and interesting among series that tend to glorify fantasy, farce, hyperbole, and commercial concerns. Conversely, in Canada, they probably do not stand out because they are part of the tradition of this kind of programming (and there, viewers may appreciate series like *Suite Life* and *Hannah Montana* more for their novelty). A history of opposition to U.S. television, in this light, may not have served Canadian television well in Canada; it may have contributed to its position as the “perennial bridesmaid” there. But it serves U.S. television well in its demonstration that a combination of public service, realism, education, and entertainment need not result in boring or pretentious series that fail internationally and in its demonstration that distinctive series are more lucrative than vague ones in an international market that needs variety.

The divergent focuses of Canadian and U.S. television also suggest more leeway for Canadian producers to explore certain forms of television. As I have mentioned, when U.S. networks have attempted to produce shows that feature a more “Canadian” aesthetic—or

conventions more easily located in longstanding Canadian patterns—they generally have succumbed to quick cancellation despite positive feedback from viewers (as did *My So Called Life*, *Life As We Know It*, *Scout's Safari* and other series I have not explored such as *Just for Kicks* and *Beyond the Break*). The commercial imperative that drives U.S. TV, its traditional privileging of particular televisual forms, and the “risk-averse” nature of it mean that although the United States has produced many noteworthy subtle or gritty youth series, these series have tended to become marginalized as “cult favorites” rather than recognized as innovative televisual approaches that might expand U.S. television’s canon. In other words, U.S. television’s structure limits the success of U.S. series that are more like Canadian series and simultaneously provides access for like Canadian series to enter the U.S. market. Similarly, Canada’s traditional complications with producing sitcoms and other forms associated with U.S. television have provided an inlet for the manifold U.S. series that “dominate” Canadian television. The two country’s structural differences, opposite focuses, and different strengths create a self-fulfilling, self-perpetuating line of distinction between Canadian and U.S. television such that both countries will necessarily depend on each other for particular kinds of series.

While intentionally vague or universal series like *About a Girl* fail, *Life with Derek*, *Degrassi*, *Road to Avonlea*, and *Instant Star* overtly make Canadian elements part of their narrative and representational strategies—or at least they do not mask them—and they have met unprecedented success in the United States. The best Canadian television series, those that do not assimilate their origins, remain as Canadian as possible under the circumstances—of globalization, commercialization, and U.S. influence. Or, in Yacowar’s terms about Canadian films, they “have their most interests to others, especially perhaps to American audiences, when

they dare to be themselves” (19).<sup>140</sup> Like the addition of the unadulterated CN Tower to latter seasons of *DTNG*, or *RTA*’s insinuation that increased U.S. involvement would lead to Dunnesville, successful Canadian television remains Canadian outside of the United States. Difference is what allows Canadian television to fill important gaps in U.S. youth programming, particularly in its current manifestation, just as U.S. television’s differences add some excitement to Canadian television.

Admittedly, however, not all of Canadian youth television’s differences inspire appreciation in the export market. As I have begun to introduce with *Degrassi*’s potential for controversy, and as the next chapter will make clear, the realism with which Canadian youth series handle issues often causes anxiety for the U.S. networks that import them, making Canadian television susceptible to censorship, editing, and U.S.-ification once it crosses the border. *Ready or Not* and *Naturally, Sadie*, both Canadian series that aired on Disney Channel, became less distinctive and differently motivated as Disney became more involved in their production. And the *Degrassi* series have endured infamous U.S. censorship. The more “Canadian” Canadian series are before they get to the United States, then, the better chance they have of retaining their characteristics after U.S. modification.

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<sup>140</sup> Attallah predicts, similarly, “Indeed, as viewer choice expands and as all channels tend to an inexorable sameness, the specificity of Canadian, or any other, production, may well emerge as a market advantage, as an element of sufficient distinction to attract and hold audiences” (187). And Tate and Allen’s earlier study of *Due South* concludes, “distinctive elements should not necessarily be viewed as detriments to a show’s success at home or abroad. Instead, the elements should be regarded as potential assets that can be tapped to help a program distinguish itself from the competition.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### *DEGRASSI'S ALWAYS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE: CANADIAN TELEVISION, U.S. HANDLING*

Only the unique is irreducible and absolutely other! (Levinas 138)

Any discourse reproduces its own borderlines and thus defines its own specificity with respect to other discourses. (Robyns 405)

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes describes several approaches to dealing with alterity. In one response, the spectator is “unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. [... A]ll the experiences of confrontation are reverberating, any otherness is reduced to sameness” (151).<sup>141</sup> The Other becomes a reflection or a mirror image of its spectator, always mediated by or operating as an extension of the spectator’s self. In alternative situations or “emergencies” in which difference cannot be reduced to sameness, the Other can become an exotic, “a pure object, a spectacle, or a clown” (152). Here, the spectator enacts a form of self-distancing from the Other to such a degree that the spectator essentializes and then fetishizes the Other’s differences. In both cases, the Other is incomplete to the spectator. The Other is never allowed to just “be” or to carry value on its own terms, because its value and very existence as other are contingent upon its difference from or similarity to the one viewing it. As in Barthes’ analysis, the common U.S.

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<sup>141</sup> I have replaced Barthes’ original “petit-bourgeois” with the term “spectator” to allow for exploration of myth in a televisual context.

spectator and marketing approaches to imported Canadian television involve the disavowal, transformation, and sometimes fetishization of differences.

As similar as Canada and the United States are, Canadian television's differences—the differences that I have outlined in the previous chapter—often produce anxieties and complications for their U.S. broadcasters that manifest in problematic manipulations of Canadian texts' "Canadianness," or the very features that distinguish their conventions and production atmosphere from those of U.S. television. Once televisual texts cross the border, they all predictably become altered products with additional, lost, or modified symbols and implications, but Canadian television's relation to U.S. television is unique in several ways. When Japanese television, for example, crosses the border, it undergoes specific changes to make it palatable and/or marketable to U.S. audiences, most of which transform Japanese texts either into specific kinds of "international" products or into pure spectacle. The Japanese series *Iron Chef* features a legitimate competition between acclaimed culinary artists, and though it includes humorous moments, these are not as central to the series as is the excitement of the competition between professionals in a national forum. As Mark Gallagher has demonstrated, the U.S. rendition of the series changes *Iron Chef*'s emphasis—including English-language voiceovers that parody and even condescend the participants in the series—and implicitly makes *Iron Chef* seem much more comedic than it is or than it would seem in Japan.<sup>142</sup> The very origin of the series, its actual differences from U.S. fare, and the intentional U.S. changes that highlight or exploit those differences render the series spectacle for spectacle's sake, rather than spectacle with its original professional focus. The exaggerated "Japaneseness of *Iron Chef*" becomes its selling point and "accounts for its humor and cult appeal among U.S. viewers" (Gallagher 181). The parodic

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<sup>142</sup> On an ironic side note, Canadian actors perform these American-sounding voiceovers in *Iron Chef*.

voiceovers and other post-production modifications involved in selling *Iron Chef* to U.S. audiences make it clear that U.S. networks anticipate that viewers will enjoy and consume the perceived “Japaneseness” of the series as much as they will enjoy consuming the series itself. This would not be possible, however, if the televisual import came from a country with obvious cultural similarity to the United States: “If the program’s cultural proximity to the United States was greater, it would closely mirror existing U.S. programming, and the lack of differentiation would limit its distinctive appeal” (Gallagher 180).<sup>143</sup>

Because of its particular and peculiar relationship with U.S. television, English-language Canadian television complicates any such modifications in its transnational exchange, for dubbing, voiceover translation, and this kind of parody are unnecessary. The perceived similarity of Canadian television to that of the United States and the shared language between the two countries make differentiation of the *Iron Chef* sort unmarketable and ultimately pointless. And unlike televisual texts from other English-speaking regions (like the UK or Australia), which are “different” from U.S. television in some of the same ways as Japanese exports, Canadian televisual texts are virtually expected to be like those of the United States. British imports are, for example, routinely censored before their U.S. broadcast. These edits are not generally aimed at translating, parodying, exploiting, or removing the “Britishness” of the series, but at keeping difference in tact while protecting U.S. viewers from “explicit” content. Canadian television’s differences, conversely, are routinely edited, censored, disavowed, *and* exploited in ways that are meant to downplay the differences between U.S. and Canadian television. This

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<sup>143</sup> The same is true of Japanese game shows, like *Ninja Warrior* and *MXC*, which are increasingly the subject of U.S. parodies with ridiculous voiceovers that do not merely “translate” the dialogue, but often change it entirely to make it more comedic. Spike TV, in fact, has built an entire lineup of dubbed Japanese programs, including infomercials, called “Duty Free TV.” This process is lucrative because the majority of the viewing population cannot understand the original Japanese dialogue and has grown accustomed to viewing Japanese products as humorous or spectacular.



means that Canadian series may require more modification in the export market than do series from the UK or Australia and even from Japan, because they are “supposed” to be similar, while the others are necessarily and expectedly dissimilar.

While I have argued in Chapter Three that Canadian texts retain Canadian inflections after export to the United States, here I explore how the processes at work in adapting Canadian television for U.S. audiences can have as much to do with the perceived Canadianness, or difference, of Canadian series as do their Canadian producers. While the previous chapter counters the notion that Canadian exports primarily represent vague or universal cultural markers so that they will sell internationally, in this chapter I analyze how U.S. networks enact post-production, post-export modification of Canadian series, why they do so, and how they change the “Canadianness” of the texts. Passing, for example, does not just involve the “self-denial” at work in series like *Falcon Beach* and *The Best Years*. Many U.S. networks choose to market distinctively inflected Canadian products as U.S. products, making them pass *after* production. Others may choose to exploit differences in ways that parallel the changes to Japanese television but that are invested in different motives, historical interactions, and emphases and that produce contradictory readings of Canadian culture’s value.

This chapter’s analysis largely situates Canadian television series within specific U.S. networks’ practices in order to analyze how the results of commercial manipulation come to represent supposedly national ideologies. I argue that U.S. corporate goals mediate or even dictate Canadian texts’ ability to “be Canadian” in the United States and the ways that viewers in turn interpret Canadian televisual and often cultural difference. Through three processes—reduction to sameness (which I will call assimilative appropriation), defensive translation, and fetishization—U.S. televisual practices structure Canada, via Canadian texts, as what Manning

calls an ever-flexible “reversible” Other” (9). The “Canadianness” of a text, in this way, becomes not the set of conventions and aesthetic practices rooted in different structural concerns that I have outlined in the previous chapter, but a set of inconsistent commercially driven values that rely on individual networks’ decisions—generally decisions to either highlight or downplay similarity or alterity—and which ultimately render Canadian texts incomplete in their U.S. incarnations.

The first section analyzes U.S. networks’ 1980s and ‘90s appropriation of the Canadian texts that helped to define their individual brands. By reducing Canadian characteristics to universal “youth,” “kid,” or “family” values, these channels built their “American” brands through emphasizing Canadian series’ similarity to those of the United States. The second section historicizes Canadian youth television’s U.S. censorship and how network practices have inadvertently structured Canadianness as inappropriate, expendable content through their defensive translation of Canadian series. And the final section turns to The N’s editing and fetishization of *Degrassi* as examples of how “Canadian” impropriety gets remarketed as commodity to suit the network’s goals. Each of these practices (appropriation, censorship, and fetishization) represents a form of U.S.-ification, some of which is rooted in fear, not all of which is negative, and some of which can actually contribute to the series’ success. But more importantly, in tandem these practices demonstrate a) the discomfort with which U.S. culture treats Canadian texts and foreign texts more generally; b) the fundamentally different nature of Canadian televisual products, for were they vague, universal, or just like those of the United States, they would not require such modifications; c) the degree to which U.S. television’s commercial imperative governs its management of Canadian series; d) the fractional nature of Canadian products in the United States; and e) how decisions made by and on behalf of a brand,

and how each brand manages Canadian televisual differences, represent the practices through which U.S. networks maintain their senses of self.

### One-World Marketing: The Cultivation and Commodification Of Sameness

In Chapter Two, I noted the sheer volume of Canadian texts, actors, producers, and filming locations on screen and behind the scenes of adult-centered U.S. television and on U.S. children's and specialty networks like Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, and The N. In quantity alone, Canadian series have filled major programming gaps for these channels, but they have also helped to define brands, increase franchising opportunities, and sell products for U.S. networks in specific ways that I have yet to mention. But how do series that openly critique the United States (as does *Road to Avonlea*) or those featuring overtly Canadian settings and casts (like *Degrassi*, *Life with Derek*, and *Instant Star*) become part of U.S. franchises? Unlike Japaneseness, which cannot effectively pass for "American" (except perhaps in animation), Canadianness is often susceptible to reduction to sameness.

The U.S. assimilation of Canadian texts relies on familiar patterns for managing difference, the best explanations of which often come from postcolonial theory and its offshoots. If we recall from Chapter One, in the dialectical-symbiotic play that Manning describes as central to Canadian self-differentiation, Canadians "consume American cultural products but reconstitute and recontextualize them in ways representative of what consciously, albeit ambivalently, distinguishes Canada from its powerful neighbor" (8). The United States works in this way as an Other through and against which Canadian difference gets articulated. George Elliott Clarke describes a similar process called "resistive appropriation," wherein Canadians appropriate texts, traditions, patterns, and models from the United States and then muddle,

revamp, and Canadianize them (“Must All Blackness” 83). Building from Clarke’s and Manning’s works, we might describe the U.S. attempt to mask and utilize Canadian texts as “assimilative appropriation,” a U.S. version of the same consumption, recontextualization, and reconceptualization that Manning and Clarke describe, where Canadianness works as the Other against which U.S. networks structure their brands.<sup>144</sup> In the context I am framing, however, assimilative appropriation is the opposite of resistive appropriation, for it involves emphasizing the *sameness* of a thing in order to make it an extension of one’s self, not consumption of the thing in order to demonstrate one’s difference from it. It describes the process by which U.S. networks resist Canadian differences by attempting to erase or mask them and thereby represent Canadian series as “just like” other products within the U.S. brands or as testaments to the strength of the brands themselves.

While the process of transforming Canadian television’s differences into sameness enacts U.S.-ification of the series, I have chosen to think of this in terms of appropriation, because while U.S. post-production practices indeed etch U.S. expressions into Canadian texts, the texts remain Canadian, remain different. The term “U.S.-ification,” conversely, implies a sort of complete transformation, the process through which the text becomes “American.” But I want to emphasize how these Canadian series do not become U.S. series; they become flexible tools, “reversible Others,” that networks work and rework to suit specific purposes, allowing them to take credit for and benefit from the differences that made the series attractive in the first place while reducing, appropriating, and claiming those differences as parts of the brand and by extension parts of an often unmentioned national ideology. More often than not, furthermore,

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<sup>144</sup> And although I am dealing specifically with brands and networks here, we will see later how these processes also apply to national identity. The only other mention of “assimilative appropriation” I can find comes from a translation of the Sanskrit term “atmasatkarana,” a yoga concept that means “making a thing settle into oneself and turn[ing it] into [a] characteristic form of our self-being” (Integral Yoga).

and as I will demonstrate in the second section of this discussion, the attempt to represent Canadian texts as “U.S.” texts only ends up highlighting their differences from U.S. fare. I have organized this section of my discussion around the individual networks and their treatment of specific series in order to distinguish between several forms of assimilative appropriation: the Disney version, which is overt and heavily commercial, the Nickelodeon version, which seems less intentional but equally commercial, and the PBS version, which is the least commercial but involves the same kind of homogenization of specific aspects of the series. Despite their variations in assimilating Canadian texts and their different motives for doing so, all of the networks achieve the same end result of appropriating Canadian series as their own.

Disney Channel’s assimilative appropriation of Canadian series has involved universalizing them through appeals to shared values and culture. In its most negative form, “universalism sacrifices the specificity of others to a global equality that denies the historical context of its own emergence and interests” (Beck 431). In this practice, “the dominant erases the contingencies of time and space, history and location, and with the same gesture elides its operations of domination, projecting instead the appearance of being democratic” (Palumbo-Liu qtd. in Lee 507-508). Claims to universality through dominance have long epitomized the Disney model. Disney is both all inclusive and exceptional, universal yet particular.<sup>145</sup> Its individual theme parks represent “the happiest place on earth” and yet encompass that entire earth through Disney World, Epcot Center, Tokyo Disney Resort, Disneyland Resort Paris (formerly Euro Disney), Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, Disneyland, and a forthcoming Disney

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<sup>145</sup> In Zukin’s terms, “The Disney Company is an innovator of global dimensions in the symbolic economy of technology and entertainment; it also exerts enormous influence on the symbolic economy of place [...]. The world of Disney is inescapable. It is the alter ego and the collective fantasy of American society, the source of many of our myths and our self-esteem” (49).

Hawaii. Although it began in the United States and under one man's vision, Disney has developed into a global brand with a mishmash of cosmopolitan ethos. The company's filmic and televisual images promote a sort of ethics-based cosmopolitanism through themes of tolerance, worldwide cooperation, and "a small world" in which differences are less important than the common denominator of humanity. But the brand and its practices perpetuate a heavily economic cosmopolitanism, a one-world neocolonialism or imperialism that operates through capitalistic globalization.<sup>146</sup> As Clem Robyns explains, "[a]n imperialist attitude toward the other is characterized by a paradoxical claim of, on the one hand, the irreducible specificity of one's own identity and, on the other hand, the universality of its values" (409). We see this and other paradoxes in Disney's recent promotions and in its treatment of Canadian series.

Disney's made-for-television movies and recent "Pass the Plate" campaign encapsulate how the imperialist tendencies of the brand are intertwined with its vision of ethical universalism perhaps more than do its television series. The central message and musical numbers in *High School Musical* (2006), for example, emphasize the sameness of social groups within the United States (uniting jocks, nerds, and thespians), while also promoting an ethos of a shared world. "We're all in this together," the students sing in the final number and most popular song from the films. *High School Musical* and its sequels, which have succeeded in dozens of countries and even been translated with Hindi subtitles, demonstrate how storylines and circumstances that are often highly particular to the United States (prom, school dances, basketball, etc) can simultaneously promote so-called universal values and allow the Disney brand to literally reach across the world through hundreds of commercial products. *The Cheetah Girls: One World* (2008), the third film installment to the franchise, promotes the same capitalism-based

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<sup>146</sup> My understanding of ethics cosmopolitanism comes primarily from Appiah, economic cosmopolitanism primarily from Marx, and the general genealogy of cosmopolitanism from *Stanford's Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

cosmopolitanism that stresses universal goals and values, but that ultimately desires economic access. The film's central message culminates in its final musical number, where the American Cheetah Girls dance through India wearing elaborate saris, performing a combination of hip-hop and traditional Indian dances, and singing of "one world" in which difference does not matter because "we're a circle together/ now and forever." The film's incorporation of Bollywood themes, images, and dances ensures that the franchise will serve Disney Channel India, which was introduced in 2004. "Pass the Plate" is a series of shorts that endorses a similar sentiment. In it, Disney star Brenda Song gives viewers "some global inspiration" for "eating healthy." Song teaches about the value of a food item (shrimp or bananas, for instance), and then cuts to stars from Disney Channel Australia, China, South Africa, Italy, and several other countries, respectively, who create representative dishes with the same food. Most of the shorts end with, "Remember: no matter how big the world might seem, we all come together when we pass the plate," a message that on the surface promotes healthy food and world tolerance but which, like *High School Musical* and *The Cheetah Girls*, clearly highlights Disney's global holdings and the shared language of the Disney brand.

Critical work on Disney and its various products has demonstrated its particularly U.S. and capitalistic world purview in which racist, sexist, and hegemonic representations have been frequent and in which capital interests often reduce culture, storytelling, and virtually all aspects of everyday life into products intended for mass consumption.<sup>147</sup> From the latter perspective, the promotion of a shared, small, small world or universality simply masks exploitative commercial practices. This cynical view of Disney recognizes that underneath its utopian vision of one world in which difference is acceptable exists a world in which difference is not actually allowed

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<sup>147</sup> This is almost the definition of the pejorative terms "Dinseyization" or "Disneyfictaion." See Bryman's work, for instance.

to be different, because difference is valuable only inasmuch as it is assimilable into or profitable for the brand.

If Disney stands roughly for this “magical world,” the Disney Channel represents these implied values as well as the network’s specified trademarks. Where Disney Channel struggled in its early years to reach beyond an audience of seven- and eight-year-old kids and adults nostalgic for programs from the 1950s and ‘60s, its audience grew exponentially around the time that the network introduced *Road to Avonlea* (1989-1996 and simply called *Avonlea* in Disney’s hands) and other Canadian programs.<sup>148</sup> Although the series seems unmistakably Canadian in spite of its co-production with Disney, *Road to Avonlea* became central to Disney Channel’s self-branding as a family channel through a process of assimilating the series’ differences and then appropriating the series as a Disney production. Like ‘80s Canadian import/co-production *Danger Bay*, Disney’s formerly highest-rated series, *Avonlea*’s storylines brought together adult and child audiences because of their dual focus.<sup>149</sup> Catapulted by the success of Kevin Sullivan’s earlier CBC miniseries *Anne of Green Gables* (1985, which aired in the United States on PBS in 1986) and its sequel (which was produced by the CBC, PBS and the Disney Channel and broadcast in 1987), *Avonlea* began airing on Disney Channel with an established fanbase of L.M. Montgomery readers and U.S. viewers who had seen the *Anne* films on PBS and Disney.

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<sup>148</sup> “From 1984 through 1992, the number of Disney Channel subscribers grew from 1.7 million to 7.1 million,” and between 1988 and 1993, “[...] Disney Channel subscriptions averaged 13 percent annual growth [...]. In 1992 alone, the Disney Channel picked up 832,000 subscribers—more than twice as many as were added by all other pay-cable networks combined” (Duffy E.4). I do not imply that *Road to Avonlea* was the only reason for Disney’s growth at this time, but that the series (like earlier Canadian series *Edison Twins* and *Danger Bay*) served Disney in the branding that led to the channel’s growth.

<sup>149</sup> *Danger Bay* (1984-1990), a CBC family-adventure series that I have not seen, was the highest-rated Disney Channel series in 1986 (Boone F.8). As I mention in Chapter Two, it is unclear when Disney became involved in *Danger Bay*’s production. The series began airing on the Canadian CBC in 1984 and Disney in 1985 (“*Danger Bay*”), and at least since 1986 Disney paid a third of the series’ production costs (Boone F.8). Unlike *Avonlea*, however, it seems that many Canadian viewers always perceived this series as an “American” show, and Miller implies that it reflects Disney’s aesthetic, not a Canadian one (91-93), calling the series “derivative and improbable” (339).



Although the visual aesthetics and values that made *Avonlea* a hit were already present in Sullivan's first *Anne* film (which he produced without Disney), *Avonlea* is generally viewed as a series that epitomizes Disney's model (Chapter Three). The series' picturesque landscapes, period costumes and setting combine Disneyesque beauty and fantasy with nostalgia for a seemingly simpler time, and Disney frequently advertised the series during the free previews it used to attract subscribers.<sup>150</sup> *Avonlea* became one of the Disney Channel's pillars and "The Disney Channel's most popular series, [... an] acclaimed, original production, [...and an] Emmy-winning" series ("Disney Promo Three"). What is most interesting is a how a show clearly set in Prince Edward Island and utilizing the kind of Canadian storytelling I have mentioned elsewhere could not only function so well on the U.S-centered Disney Channel, but come to represent it.

Highlighting in the series the same values that define Disney, Disney Channel's marketing of *RTA* structured it as an extension of the Disney brand, even while the series was central to securing Disney's Channel's proliferation. In the channel's early stages (1983 to 1989) and during the time that *Road to Avonlea* aired, Disney Channel adhered to a more pronounced slogan: "Quality family programming," "magic," "adventure," and "the best in family viewing," and the channel was formerly self-billed as "America's Family Network." Within this framework, *Avonlea*'s positive characteristics and those of other Canadian series broadcast by Disney worked through Disney's marketing as symbols of the network, with little or no mention of their Canadian origins. As Benjamin Lefebvre has noted, Disney stressed its ownership of the series—"Disney's *Avonlea*"—in selling it to U.S. audiences, an act that automatically removed it in part from its Canadian context by emphasizing its similarity to other

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<sup>150</sup> Many U.S. viewers of the series admit, in blogs and message-board posts, that they wanted to subscribe to the Disney Channel in order to watch *Avonlea*.

Disney-produced fare (178). Without even calling *Avonlea* an “American” show, then, in the context of Disney Channel, *Avonlea*’s “magic,” familial interactions, and picturesque settings became extensions of what Disney had already claimed as integral to its brand. Within this one-world schema, even story arcs that overtly mentioned Canadian spaces, places, and activities became part of “Disney’s *Avonlea*,” and even the PEI setting could be included in Disney’s “world.”

Kevin Sullivan has said that *RTA* would be a very different show without Disney’s involvement, presumably because while the series was primarily produced in Canada by Canadians, Disney’s high economic investment in it meant that the U.S. channel held a lot of artistic control.<sup>151</sup> Disney’s funding was crucial to *Avonlea*’s success, and the network added enough “recognizable [British and U.S.] guest stars to sink the entire island” (Kenter and Martin 152). A Disney commercial for the series even boasts, *Avonlea* “has captured the hearts of Disney Channel viewers everywhere, a fact that can probably be attributed to the wonderful guest stars that have appeared” (“Disney Promo Three”). Disney’s hand in the series, in fact, is most traceable in similar U.S. promotional materials for it. In addition to claiming *Avonlea* as a “Disney Channel original series,” Disney Channel’s free previews and commercials underscored the aforementioned magical familial values and the beauty of the *Avonlea*’s landscape. They also emphasized characters that aligned *RTA* with the existing Disney model. For example, in a 1992 advertisement for “Misfits and Miracles” (213), an episode in which Alec King forms a hockey team out of the town’s oddballs, Disney Channel’s commercial primarily includes scenes of poor hockey playing and Sara clumsily slipping and sliding across the ice. A cartoon short,

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<sup>151</sup> According to Lefebvre, “As several sources have indicated, however, Disney Channel executives outlined a substantial number of creative requirements in the series to protect Disney’s investment of 60 per cent of the total budget of \$110 million. In addition to pushing for the frequent inclusion of prominent American guest stars, Disney encouraged what Knowlton Nash calls ‘an old-fashioned, sentimental, almost syrupy, innocence of the series’ [...]” (176).

“Hockey Homicide,” featuring Disney character Goofy, immediately follows the *Avonlea* commercial.<sup>152</sup> In the short, Goofy plays hockey just as badly as *Avonlea*’s Sara, sliding across the ice in the same way. The juxtaposition of the two clips draws attention to the relation between Sara’s clumsiness and Goofy’s goofiness, making them both “a couple of misfits” in the same familiar family. As a quintessentially U.S. character already associated with Disney’s brand, Goofy and his seeming similarity to Sara evoke feelings of nostalgia at the same time that Goofy draws younger viewers to *Avonlea*, for both the cartoon short and the upcoming *RTA* episode seem to tell the same story. Other Disney ads for *Avonlea* create the same kind of parity between the Canadian series and Disney’s U.S. fare, connecting, for example, an episode about *Avonlea*’s “witch” Peg Bowen with Halloween programming from the Disney vault.<sup>153</sup> Though Peg is not really a witch, just a practitioner of homeopathic medicine, the link between her and Disney’s well-known witches (like the link between Sara and Goofy) stresses again the supposed Disney-ness of *Road to Avonlea*. This sort of cross-branding helped to make *Avonlea* a hit on the Disney Channel and to make Disney Channel a hit with subscribers because of *Avonlea*. This method also seems to have worked to create the appearance of *Avonlea*’s “Americanness.” Despite the show’s Canadian setting and co-production with the CBC, according to Lefebvre, U.S. viewers were relatively unaware of its Canadian origins, and Canadian viewers were equally unaware of Disney’s involvement in the series (176).<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> “Disney Promo One.”

<sup>153</sup> “Disney Promo Two.”

<sup>154</sup> Lefebvre also notes that “in different ways, and to different ends, both the CBC and the Disney Channel take advantage of their mutually exclusive broadcasting territories to minimize viewers’ awareness of the others’ participation in the series [...]. In turn, this confusion complicates *Road to Avonlea*’s status as the epitome of Canadian popular television” (178).



**Figure 9:** Captured image from “Misfits and Miracles.” Photo courtesy of Sullivan Entertainment (roadtoavonlea.com).

But when Disney released an incomplete and edited version of the series on VHS in 1995 and then on DVD beginning in 2004, the series’ ownership and origins became points of concern. Called *Tales from Avonlea*, a title that implicitly admits to the incomplete nature of Disney’s release, the backs of the DVDs emphasize the universal appeal of the series: “Experience all the charm of a homespun saga as TALES FROM AVONLEA takes you on enchanting journeys of unforgettable trials and triumphs [...]. Full of love, laughs, and lessons, and cherished characters of all ages, TALES FROM AVONLEA imparts time-honored values and ventures that never go out of style.” Disney’s “complete first season” release, however, contained Disney-edited episodes of “homespun saga,” upsetting viewers who were expecting the full thirteen episodes in their director’s cuts (Disney’s version leaves out between two and seven minutes of each episode).<sup>155</sup> Sullivan Entertainment soon after released the “real”

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<sup>155</sup> Joy.

complete first season and all subsequent seasons of the series with packaging that stresses Sullivan's ownership, without even mentioning Disney. The brief and mild mix-up essentially revealed to U.S. viewers that the *Avonlea* they got—on DVD and in Disney's television broadcast—was a different product in its U.S. incarnation and drew attention to the Canadian origins of the series for those viewers who were unaware.<sup>156</sup> Although it never amounted to more than complaints and low ratings on the Amazon pages for the Disney DVDs, this viewer dissatisfaction reveals the incomplete nature of Canadian products in the United States, an issue that will become central to the latter sections of this chapter. Without the DVD releases, many U.S. viewers may have continued to perceive *Avonlea* as the sole property and brainchild of the Disney Channel and an "American" series that happened to take place in Canada. The series' placement on the Disney Channel, Disney's intentional assimilative appropriation through commercial parity, and Disney's actual involvement all worked to create this perception and worked to minimize the Canadianness of the series for U.S. viewers. As in the case of the examples from *The Cheetah Girls* and "Pass the Plate," both the difference and the universality of the series only matter as much as they serve the brand—in *RTA*'s case assisting in Disney Channel's exponential growth and marketing opportunities.

Nickelodeon's marketing of Canadian series has relied on different versions of the same processes, in this case through highlighting generic similarities and encouraging product consumption. Although Nickelodeon's billing is "America's only network for kids," the channel has avoided marketing "values" like those of Disney and instead attempted to speak directly to youth audiences while appealing to parents as well. Without any expressed claims to U.S.

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<sup>156</sup> Ironically, Disney's original (and equally incomplete) VHS release of *Tales from Avonlea* stressed the Canadian setting, if not origins, of the series. These covers sell it as a sequel to *Anne of Green Gables*, a quality choice for parents, and summarize it as the tale of Sara's move from "the big city of Montreal to Canada's beautiful Prince Edward Island." And even while they stress Disney's involvement in the series, both the DVD and the VHS covers say, "Disney **presents** *Tales from Avonlea*," not "Disney's *Tales from Avonlea*."

particularity (though it calls itself a U.S. brand), Nick’s constructions of the wallet-in hand child consumer and of the mildly rebellious and masterful child viewer (in opposition to ignorant, unsuspecting adults) place its series within U.S. literary traditions and business models for youth. Like Disney, Nickelodeon reaches a global audience through exported series, international versions of Nickelodeon in 162 territories (Nick Australia, Nick UK, Nick Southeast Asia, etc), and licensed merchandise ranging from toys to films. The animated series *Rugrats*—which focuses on the secret world of precocious babies and toddlers—has been central to Nick’s international expansion, becoming a “global franchise generating over a billion dollars via licensed merchandise including interactive home video and software, as well as live tours” (“Nick International” pars. 22-23). The network’s motto, “Nick is Kids,” links youth viewers from across the world through an appeal to the universal interests of childhood and youth-specific programming. Unlike Disney, however, at the core of Nick’s international expansion and desire to “connect kids with kids” is a goal of meeting specific needs for specific regions, not merely creating one Nickelodeon “world” (qtd. in Goldman par. 2). Lisa Judson, Nick International’s former senior vice president and creative director, says that to reach international audiences, Nickelodeon executives “tailor the programming to meet the needs of that marketplace. It’s not about simply taking a successful formula which has worked in the US and then repeating it in exactly the same way” (qtd. in Goldman par. 15). Nick, then, is both specific to the United States and adaptable for other countries, while its central aim is to provide children’s products that will reflect a universal kid-centered brand.

Canadian import *You Can’t Do That on Television* (YCDTOTV) helped to define this kid-focused, kid-driven aspect of Nick’s brand as well as its trademark gross-out humor during the ‘80s and ‘90s. Nick relied on the same kind of assimilative appropriation of the series that

Disney used with *Road to Avonlea* by emphasizing *YCDTOTV*'s generic similarity to the developing Nick brand but also by downplaying its Canadianness through subtle changes to the series. *YCDTOTV* originated at local Ottawa station CJOH in 1979, where its ratings were steady but unimpressive, and then the series moved to a national broadcast on CTV.<sup>157</sup> Featuring a cast of everyday unknown teen and preteen actors (including an as-yet undiscovered Alanis Morissette in the 1986 season), the series involves comedic vignettes and sketches, often centered on thematic elements (outer space, body parts, or smells, for example) that poke fun at adults, politics, popular culture, and life in general.<sup>158</sup> Whenever a cast member utters the phrase "I don't know," a bucket of green slime oozes over his or her head; the word "water," similarly, triggers a downpour of water, and in the early seasons of the series, cast members are also hit randomly with pies. In Nick's marketing, the Canadian series represented a universal category of kid humor focused on elements that adults seemingly would not understand and the growing concept of "N-I-C-K IS K-I-D-S." This tied *YCDTOTV* well to Nick's other 1980s series, such as *Live Wire*, which stressed, "We're not here for your parents; we're not here for your teachers. We're here for YOU" ("Nick Promo"). In 1981, when Nickelodeon began broadcasting *YCDTOTV* in the United States, the show excelled in popularity, becoming Nick's highest-rated series by 1984, through 1986, and remaining in the top five through 1990.<sup>159</sup>

The U.S. broadcast of the show moved it from relative popularity with Canadian audiences to international success, simultaneously boosting Nickelodeon's appeal with viewers, but it also changed the nature of *You Can't Do That on Television*. When Nickelodeon

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<sup>157</sup> Although the series' creator Roger Price is British, all of the actors and the other producers on the series (before Nickelodeon's involvement) were Canadian. In its 1981 move in Canada from the local CJOH to the national CTV, the series changed from an hour-long part-comedy, part-dance live series to the half-hour comedy that it became before moving to Nickelodeon ("YCDTOTV").

<sup>158</sup> The theme of the episode also served as its title ("Smells," "Body Parts," etc).

<sup>159</sup> "Show History;" "YCDTOV."

executives became partners in its production in 1982, they intentionally attempted to mask the series' Canadianness in order to make it look like a U.S. production. Writers for the show admit that they tried to avoid using any words—like “out”—that might reveal the cast members' Ontario accents, coached the kids to eliminate the word “eh,” and changed certain colloquialisms that U.S. viewers might not recognize.<sup>160</sup> This points at very least to an attempt at making the show look and seem “American,” but also to Nickelodeon's role in making the formerly local and later (inter)national series look and feel like the kind of export-ready, vague Canadian production that critics routinely accuse Canada of generating.

Other changes related to making the series look like a U.S. production may have actually harmed its Canadian reception. Nick's involvement, for instance, did not effectively reduce the noticeable accents of most cast members, nor did it change some Canadian references. But it definitely changed the context and perceived setting of the series. Like many of the texts I analyze in the previous chapter, the attempt to “pass” *YCDTOTV* off as a U.S. series in the United States involved a precarious blend of U.S. and Canadian features. These efforts to make the series look “American,” however, occurred after the series was already established as a Canadian series in Canada and after the producers had filmed several seasons. Unlike *The Best Years* or *Falcon Beach*, the show was not originally shot two ways for dual audiences, but modified after its sale to the United States. With *YCDTOTV*, we can trace the moment at which the show began to be produced for both audiences (and when it later became produced almost exclusively for Nickelodeon): After filming a Canadian 1981 season, the cast and crew re-shot scenes to “filter out Ottawa-centric or Canada-centric content” for Nickelodeon's upcoming 1982 broadcast (“YCDTOTV” par. 10). From this point on, the series features an unspecified

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<sup>160</sup> Agren A.9.



“North American” setting, with characters actually using phrases like, “In North America [...]”<sup>161</sup> Once the series entered the Nickelodeon market, then, it began to fluctuate between catering to a U.S. audience and applying a vague setting that would not alienate the original Canadian viewers.<sup>162</sup>

Though the series’ Canadian inflection remains in place at the narrative and aesthetic level (rampant self-deprecation, irony, etc), with the shift towards a vague North American setting, it lost most explicit references to Canada. An episode on politics (518) focuses almost exclusively on U.S. election processes and politicians—aside from brief mentions of Pierre Trudeau and Indira Gandhi—and cast members mention that this is what it means to live in a “democracy.” Similarly, Ross, the on-set crew leader, carries U.S. currency in the breast pocket of his shirt (“TV Commercials” (706)), and Valerie Prevert uses U.S. currency in her savings-account jars (“Saving Money” (711)). There are so many post-1981 episodes that feature U.S. currency, in fact, that I cannot keep track of them and would venture to say that all episodes involving money use U.S. bills. Other episodes include loaded U.S. symbols. In the house of recurrent alcoholic father Senator Lance Prevert (played by Les Lye, who plays all of the adult-male roles in every episode of the series), many episodes display a pair of Confederate flags in an upstairs bedroom (505, 506, 515, 711, and 908, for example).<sup>163</sup> A family that is supposed to stand for any and every dysfunctional family—with a deadbeat, lazy, grotesque father and an inept, mousy mother who never removes her dishwashing gloves, and both of whom who play

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<sup>161</sup> In “Clubs” (513), for example, Barth tells the kids that he has applied to the “great chefs of North America Club.” In “Country” (607), Matthew remarks, “North American farmers aren’t doing well.” Yet in the same episode, which is about country living, hicks, farms, and family feuds, there are no mentions of “the South” as we might find if the show were trying to look exclusively “American” or U.S.

<sup>162</sup> Nick made some of the same kinds of changes to the U.S. broadcast of Canadian series *Are You Afraid of the Dark*, in this case calling for more U.S. references in the series (Kenter and Martin 8).

<sup>163</sup> Over time, the flag moves from a visible within-the-frame position above the bed to behind the bedroom door, where it is only visible on occasion.

the parents to every kid in the cast when parents are featured—suddenly becomes with this prop addition a family of U.S.-coded rednecks and racists. Who is responsible for this characterization and prop placement remains ambiguous, but each time the flags are featured, they add clear symbolism to the Prevert family. In one scene, the perfect symmetrical placement of the Confederate flags above Valerie Prevert’s head seems like nothing less than a comment on the family’s redneck status (711). Though these moments are brief, they add either a Canadian perspective on what it means to be “American” to the show, or Nickelodeon’s U.S. perspective on the kind of “Americans” the Preverts are supposed to represent.

Product placement for Nickelodeon and MTV, both housed under the Viacom family, is also recurrent throughout the latter episodes in the series; cast members wear ostentatious (even by ‘80s’ standards) Nickelodeon hats and MTV sweatshirts. Because Canadian viewers have no legal access to Nickelodeon under CRTC restrictions, these visual cues signify more than Nick’s involvement in the series; they work to claim it as a Nickelodeon and thereby U.S. production.<sup>164</sup> As Nick became increasingly involved in *YCDTOTV*’s production, the series’ Canadian ratings dropped dramatically, while its U.S. ratings grew exponentially. The changes and the lowered ratings in Canada point again to the problematic nature of creating universalized Canadian exports and to the need for examining the post-production assimilation of Canadian series rather than merely focusing on Canadian attempts at selling them as universal (Chapter Three). My point here, however, is that Nickelodeon’s global brand became dependent on selling the Canadian series as a universal or U.S. trademark of youth culture. In this form of assimilative appropriation, Nick both “denied ... [the] innovative function” of the series, or its Canadianness,

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<sup>164</sup> Nickelodeon, ironically, however, only gets one brief mention in the series’ regular credits, starting in 1984. The single line simply lists the “producer for Nickelodeon” (either Paula Levine, Brown Johnson, or Debby Beece), while the major credit goes to the Canadian company (Carleton Productions, Ottawa). It is not until 1989 that the production information for the series changes to “Produced for Nickelodeon by Carleton Productions.”

such that “[i]mported elements [were] not allowed to dominate” and rarely to even manifest themselves, while the network used the series’ imported innovation as a catalyst for building the universality of the U.S. Nickelodeon (Robyns 413).

Although *YCDTOTV* aired simultaneously in Canada, the United States, and several other countries, Nick’s incarnation of the series influenced virtually every aspect of what became fundamental to Nickelodeon and the products that launched its international merchandising franchise. The series’ infatuation with pleasantly unpleasant humors—pus, flatulence, slime, and mild gore—for example, swayed other generically similar Nick series: *Ren and Stimpy* (also made by a Canadian), *Rocko’s Modern Life*, *Aah, Real Monsters!*, *CatDog*, and *Angry Beavers*. And it certainly influenced the creation of one of Nick’s most successful series to date, *All That*, a sketch comedy that even borrowed *YCDTOTV*’s adult stage manager Ross and replaced him with stage manager Kevin. *All That*, which ran for ten seasons, begat Nick’s other popular comedies *Amanda Show*, *Nick Canon Show*, *Kenan and Kel*, *Action League Now*, the big-screen film *Good Burger*, and served as an early vehicle for Nick’s later stars Jamie Lynne Spears and Lil’ JJ, who earned respective spinoff series (*Zoey 101* and *Just Jordan*) on the network (“All That”). Nick also aired *Turkey Television* (1985-1996), a direct spinoff of *YCDTOTV* featuring several cast members, and co-produced *The Tomorrow People* with a UK network (created by *YCDTOTV* and *Turkey Television*’s Roger Price). *YCDTOTV*’s green slime became central to Nick’s other popular series *Double Dare* and *What Would You Do?*, it continues to serve in the annual *Kids Choice Awards*, and Nick marketed it as a toy called Gak. According to the *YCDTOTV* official website, “Nickelodeon knew it had a hit on its hands and quickly began assimilating the show into everything the network did. Nick also [...] released [products...] including green slime shampoo and soap, a green blob substance called Green Slime and also a

short-lived comic strip featured in *The Cable Guide* appropriately titled, *You Can't Do That In Comics* ("Show History"). General Mills briefly released a special-edition Nickelodeon Green Slime Cereal in 2003 ("FAQs"), and arguably, even Nick's major international hit *Rugrats* may owe some of its child rebellion to *YCDTOTV*'s "the joke's on the adults" style. Nickelodeon "rode to its early success on the back" of *YCDTOTV*, essentially building elements of its brand and later international expansion around it by transforming the small Canadian series into a national (U.S.) and eventually global symbol of youth culture (Atherton AL.5; Conway 53).

While as a niche cable channel, Nick could take certain liberties in defining adolescence through its series, PBS met mild controversy when it attempted a similar marketing scheme. As a noncommercial public broadcaster with an educational and international bent, PBS seems as far from Nickelodeon in aim, programming choices, and reach as is possible. The two networks have more in common, however, than meets the eye. At one point, though only briefly, they shared a taste for Canadian gross-out humor. In 1982 (the same year that *YCDTOTV* began airing on Nickelodeon), PBS requested that Roger Price produce a Boston-based U.S. version of *YCDTOTV* called *Don't Look Now!*, which used "yellow yuck" instead of green slime and replaced other *YCDTOTV* gags with their closest relatives. According to the *YCDTOTV* official website, the series proved an immediate hit for PBS and also brought it its second-highest ratings to date. Yet, it also proved immediately problematic: "Unfortunately, since it was PBS, parents were expecting an educational show, rather than this rebellious, anti-educational comedy show. One critic hated it so much, that she actually said [,] 'PBS shouldn't be giving kids what they want!'" ("Don't Look Now!"). Newspaper press confirms these concerns. In 1983, *The Boston Globe*'s Jack Thomas produced a tentative review for the upcoming series premiere of *Don't Look Now!* in which he essentially warns parents that "television is entering a new generation of

children’s programming” (1). The same public broadcaster that brought their children educational hits like *Sesame Street* and *Howdy Doody*, he writes, will now bring them a spinoff of *YCDTOTV*. Implicit in the article and its title, “Is This PBS’s Gross National Product?,” is a concern about the ideology that the series promotes and its incompatibility with that for which PBS supposedly stands. Throughout the review Thomas emphasizes that the PBS series, which he notes has Canadian producers,

is like no other children’s show ever seen on network, local or public television. Because it’s live and shockingly satirical, “Don’t Look Now” resembles a pre-adolescent version of “Saturday Night Live” with a dash of “Monty Python” thrown in. And just as some people said in the ‘70s that television had gone too far with “Saturday Night Live,” so, too, in the ‘80s there will be some who’ll say it’s gone too far with “Don’t Look Now.” (1)

Apparently, the series did go too far for U.S. public television and the educational boundaries of PBS, revealing in part the differences between cable (where *YCDTOTV* flourished) and public broadcasting standards (where its copycat version also flourished but network executives faltered) in the United States. Though PBS likely could have made the series into the kind of franchise that Nick made with *YCDTOTV* and where it could have even caused *Don’t Look Now!* to surpass Nick’s show in ratings (because the series’ placement on public television made it accessible to more U.S. viewers), PBS cancelled the series after six episodes. Reportedly, the network “realized that it wasn’t the kind of show they wanted associated with them” (“Don’t Look Now!”). Most important to my discussion is the way that the same kind of content—from the same Canadian source—fared so differently on two different U.S. networks, making it clear that the content, style, and origins of the series had much less to do with its reception than the boundaries of the network. Where Nickelodeon could take risks with *YCDTOTV*, the difference between commercial (and in this case specifically cable) and public television (with public funding, viewer support, and the expectation that it would educate

viewers in specific ways) also limits what can air within the same country to the same youth audience and emphasizes one of the larger points in this discussion: that what is read as a national or cultural boundary can often be traced back to the protection of the brand.<sup>165</sup>

In efforts to keep its core values intact, PBS has generally used Canadian series in ways that involve less commoditization and more appeals to the generic similarities between its imported and in-house productions. Canadian cartoons *Arthur* and *The Magic School Bus*, for example, have spawned toys and products that feed back into the popularity and stability of the broadcasting company, just as *YCDTOTV* and *Avonlea* did for Nick and Disney, respectively. But in these PBS cases, because the successful series originated as books, the franchising opportunities that followed them may have more to do with the original publication of the printed texts than their U.S. televisual treatment (just as *Avonlea*'s status as an adaptation allowed it to build on the earlier success of Montgomery's novels). Live-action Canadian series have worked differently. PBS's use of *Degrassi Junior High* and *Degrassi High*, for instance, stressed the educational value or service potential of the series rather than their marketability as products, though PBS may have also used the series in telethons soliciting viewer support. As I have emphasized in Chapter Three, because U.S. television tends to separate educational television from entertainment television while Canadian traditions more thoroughly intertwine the two, *Degrassi*'s placement on PBS immediately made the series' educational components serve as their selling points.

Although Linda Schuyler participated in marketing the *Degrassi* series as primarily pedagogical texts in U.S. circles (see Chapter Three), their broadcast on PBS changed their U.S.

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<sup>165</sup> Kevin Conway demonstrates, in fact, that *You Can't Do That on Television* could *only* become the kind of hit it became on a network like Nickelodeon, where a specialty or niche-market status allowed for the exploration of nontraditional forms and created a new kind of audience for the series.

reception, as others have demonstrated.<sup>166</sup> In Canada, *Degrassi* has primarily aired as primetime entertainment television with educational components, whereas during the 1980s and '90s U.S. schools often incorporated *Degrassi* into their curriculum or their treatment of specific issues.<sup>167</sup> This difference automatically helped to align *Degrassi* with other educational shows on PBS and by extension may have made it less appealing to viewers who wanted to watch something “mature” or “cool.” One U.S. article about *Degrassi Junior High*, for example, even went as far to assert that PBS would use *Degrassi* to “do for adolescents what *Sesame Street* did for children” (Hechinger 9), a thoroughly “uncool” use for the teen-centered series that harkens back to the discomfort with *Don't Look Now!* and the broadcaster's concern with promoting education, not “fun.” As in the case of Disney's release of *Tales from Avonlea*, though to a lesser extent, the assimilative appropriation of *Degrassi* into PBS's model and its marketing as an educational series (rather than as a combination of pedagogy and entertainment) limited the series at the thematic level and rendered it incomplete in its U.S. incarnation.

### You Can't Do That on (U.S.) Television

A more literal, more extreme form of incompleteness often results from the U.S. post-production editing and censorship of Canadian imports. U.S. censorship of Canadian texts is ironic, given the history of Canada's protective strategies against U.S. influence and the early twentieth-century Canadian censorship of U.S. films and magazines (Chapter Two). U.S. television has paradoxically been associated with both irresponsible representation (such as

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<sup>166</sup> See Panarese 56, for example.

<sup>167</sup> During its first season on CBC, *Degrassi* aired on Sunday afternoons at 4:30, but by its second season, it had secured a place at 8:30 on the Monday-night lineup (Polger “Little Known” 1). A few individual PBS stations decided to move the show to primetime after the censorship of a story arc that I will discuss shortly, but in most parts of the United States, the show aired in the late afternoon or on Saturday evenings. Until recently, *DTNG* has also aired at 8:00 Monday nights in Canada, now on CTV.

heavy commercialism, frequent violent content, etc) and Puritanical values (protectionism against sexual content and nudity, for instance), two characteristics that seem to work against each other and yet which have made other countries less willing to import U.S. texts. While the violence and commercialism in U.S. television pose problems for many of the countries receiving the exports (including Canada), sexual and political representations pose the most problems for foreign texts flowing into the United States. Canadian series have proven especially susceptible to U.S. editing along these lines in the past two decades, and they generally undergo one or several types of censorship, often through the re-editing, reordering, cutting out of entire scenes, or literal banning of individual episodes from U.S. broadcasts. These practices, which are generally inconsistent, can occur at several points in a Canadian series' U.S. broadcast: after the original run of an episode or an entire series (because of negative reviews, bad press, viewer complaints, or the shift from network television to syndication), before the U.S. broadcast of the series/episode but after the Canadian one, or before any broadcast in either country. Each of these forms of censorship falls under the category of defensive translation, and each reveals a discomfort with allowing Canadian texts to remain different from those of the United States, but each act of censorship also clearly demonstrates how individual network practices and boundaries influence what comes to stand for national content boundaries.

As in Barthes' description of the spectator's encounter with alterity, defensive translation relates to the transformation of difference. But where Barthes' spectator either ignores and denies difference *or* transforms it, in Robyns' description, defensive translation involves a clear recognition of difference *and* a purposeful decision to transform it (408). Robyns' subtle revision allows for the exploration of intentionality or motivation in this transformation process



and more explicitly links the process to fear. Exploring the fear at the heart of U.S. censorship of Canadian series opens up new avenues for analyzing Canada-U.S. media relations from a U.S. perspective. While as I have demonstrated elsewhere, the fear of U.S. contamination, dominance, and imperialism in Canada are common in scholarship, there is very little work on the fear of Canadian television's spread to or contamination of U.S. television, partly because of the changes to which Canadian television is subject in its U.S. broadcast. The scholarship about Canadian series that have endured U.S. censorship generally cites their U.S. restructuring as evidence of the differences between Canadian and U.S. production atmospheres, histories, and ideologies, all of which are important. But I wish to think more about how censorship works as another form of disavowing and transforming Canadian series' differences, one that exposes concerns about Canadian television's place in U.S. television culture even while it remains rooted in commercial interests. Censorship and re-editing provide U.S. networks with tools for transforming the differences in Canadian television into U.S. sameness, but they are inherently flawed responses. Although they enact a form of assimilative appropriation (because they stem from efforts at making Canadian series look like U.S. series), they fail to fully make "American" texts out of Canadian series and instead actually highlight their difference from U.S. television.

Not all defensive translation is bad, and not all of it negatively affects Canadian series, but in every case, it changes the series' nature and renders them incomplete. The N, for instance, has responsibly edited scenes from *Degrassi: The Next Generation* in order to avoid promoting copycat behavior. After "Whisper to a Scream" (308, an episode that explores Ellie's self-mutilation) aired in Canada, several middle-school students imitated Ellie's cutting. In order to avoid the same sort of scandal and potential harm to viewers, The N edited part of the graphic cutting scene after its Canadian broadcast in recognition of the episode's "imitatable" behavior.

The N made similar edits in “When Doves Cry” (201-202) where Craig “plays chicken” with a train in an impulsive suicide attempt, again to prevent the potential encouragement of dangerous behavior.<sup>168</sup> In other cases, the edits have had less to do with fear of imitation and more to do with protecting viewers from graphic imagery. “When Doves Cry” explores child abuse, and The N’s executives decided to cut an extended scene (one which seems to go on forever) in which Craig’s father beats and kicks him in his back and chest. After seeing both The N’s edit and the original Canadian edit, many viewers (including myself) remarked that we really did not need to see so much of Craig’s abuse in order to get the intended effect of the episode. Since The N’s initial intended audience was much younger than its current audience, and the channel originally shared airspace with the preschool network Noggin, many of these choices made sense even while they instituted the network’s practice of editing the series.<sup>169</sup> These examples represent a sensible concern for viewers, but defensive translation becomes problematic when it overtly attempts to translate Canadian series into U.S. conventions and when so-called protective practices—protective of both the viewer and the brand—supersede the context of the series.

In the channel’s earliest days, executives at The N routinely expressed discomfort about *Degrassi: The Next Generation* and its ability to fit within the growing brand, though as I have mentioned elsewhere the series has served as The N’s major selling point, its highest-rated series, and its cornerstone. The N originally self-branded as an international channel with a common appeal to teens, and the network began as a noncommercial self-contained Viacom channel. The N’s early programs came primarily from the United States, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and

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<sup>168</sup> “The N Iteration 2.2.”

<sup>169</sup> The N originally operated as the nighttime version of Noggin, airing from 3pm (or 6pm, depending on the time zone) to 4am (or 7am).

Canada, and most of its “original” series were foreign.<sup>170</sup> As *Degrassi* increased in popularity, the N’s programming transitioned from including series from several English-speaking regions to focusing on a mixture of Canadian and U.S. series, likely in effort to make the brand seem exclusively “American.” But even before *Degrassi* became the highest-rated series and before The N began to depend on advertising revenue, the network censored the Canadian show. Some of the discomfort seems to have stemmed from the fact that very few U.S. series for youth (none to my knowledge, in fact) address the issues that *DTNG* did from its first seasons. Rather than find ways to work with problematic episodes, The N originally excluded them or watered them down to avoid controversy and to keep a generally “lighthearted” tone at the forefront of the brand. For instance, executives at The N feared that the pilot episode of *DTNG*, “Mother and Child Reunion,” would not bode well because its plot includes a brief and rather mild scene of sexual violation. In the episode, a man posing as a boy named Jordan solicits seventh-grader Emma online. After Emma arrives at the hotel room where they have agreed to meet, the pedophile poses as Jordan’s teacher and pretends that Jordan will show up at any minute. But when Emma figures out that he has lied, the pedophile threatens her and begins what would likely constitute a rape if her mother and friends did not intervene. Even though the episode features a clear lesson on Emma’s behavior and a warning to parents to monitor their children’s Internet usage, The N subtly reordered the first season of the series, airing the third episode of *DTNG*, “Family Politics,” as its premiere in order to avoid Emma’s plot entirely.

In other cases, many of the edits to and much of The N’s censorship of *DTNG*, have stemmed from efforts to assimilate the series’ educational elements into a television culture that has traditionally separated education from entertainment or to turn the series’

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<sup>170</sup> The N aired, for instance, British series *24Seven* (2001-2002), Australian series *Out There* (2003-2004), which features a Canadian protagonist, and *Being Eve* (2001-2002), a series from New Zealand.

democratic/cooperative pedagogy into traditional pedagogy. Some of The N's other changes to *DTNG*, for example, have attempted to force potentially controversial plots into a "very special episode" model and thereby reflect an inability or unwillingness to think outside of U.S. narrative boundaries. The N turned three episodes from season three (207, 208, and 220)—in which Paige gets date raped and struggles with confronting her attacker—into a single hour-and-a-half story arc. In the arc's first run, the N included parental-advisory notices during commercial breaks. These editing decisions essentially condensed what would have realistically been a long recovery and educational process, and one that took place over the course of an entire season, into a singular episode with an overt "lesson" on the trauma of rape. Similarly, the network combined the end of season one, in which Ashley experiments with the drug Ecstasy, with episodes from season two, in which she experiences some of the consequences of her drug use—all in order to foreground Ashley's lesson. The N's executives explained that their version caused viewers to "automatically see the consequences of her [Ashley's] decision" in an hour-long episode instead of in a storyline that develops over several months (Lindman qtd. in "The N Iteration 2.2"). The N also included commercial-break discussions with the cast of the show, in which cast members make direct appeals to the camera, asking the audience what Ashley *should* have done.<sup>171</sup> Rather than letting viewers draw their own lessons from "Jagged Little Pill" or Paige's rape story arc, both of which already demonstrate the negative effects of each issue quite thoroughly, The N's edits ensure that the negative presentation is not only visible, but explicitly spelled out. In other words, where open-ended realism represents one of the defining characteristics of Canadian dramatic traditions that I discuss in Chapter Three, The N's edits

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<sup>171</sup> And The N's website contained printable materials for parents and educators with lists of questions that they should ask young viewers to make sure they understood the episodes. This harkens back to Schuyler's original U.S. marketing of the series as educational, but surpasses it by taking the series out of the limitations of the classroom or even PBS and highlighting the educational components during primetime entertainment television.

work to close off the narrative and create a single unambiguous “special” lesson, like those in *Secret Life* and other conventional U.S. series.<sup>172</sup>

As in defensive translation, the network clearly recognized *Degrassi*’s difference and then tried to rewrite it into a more recognizable U.S. tradition. By continually translating *Degrassi* into the special-episode form, The N places the emphasis on fun and entertainment, marking the educational aspects of the series (which are again foundational to its style) as “different” or extraneous. At the same time, by highlighting these components as unusual or out of keeping with other programs on The N or other episodes in the series, the network inadvertently marks them as foreign/Canadian, revealing both a fear of difference and a fear of U.S. viewers’ ability to draw their own lessons from this style of (Canadian-coded) narration. The network attempts to change *Degrassi*’s differences through these translations and yet emphasizes them by the very process of translating the series. Because *Degrassi* features narrative lessons about a variety of issues in *each* episode, The N had to repeatedly restructure the series in order to make it fit this special model. Over time, The N has abandoned this practice, perhaps out of recognition that every episode of *DTNG* would have to become “special”—and that many episodes would require parental advisories and cast-viewer discussions—in order for the network to make the series fit into a U.S. youth-television mold. The N’s censorship and translation of the series, then, have not transformed it into U.S. television, but merely highlighted *Degrassi*’s dissimilarity to U.S. series and contributed to the association of these differences with Canadian conventions.

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<sup>172</sup> In Canada, furthermore, few episodes in the series have posed problems or caused controversy, and most air with a TV-PG rating. On The N, many have aired with a TV-14 rating, and many more have been re-rated TV-14 for reruns and syndicated broadcasts.

The extreme version of this translation has taken place through more overt editing of Canadian series, including the removal of entire episodes or specific parts of them from a season's broadcast. Again, the perceived seriousness of the episode (as opposed to the fantasy, antics, and lightheartedness most prevalent in U.S. youth series) influences the decision to broadcast it or not, and generally episodes dealing with sex, sexuality, and their related effects have been most susceptible. Because it was already thoroughly invested in an educational model, PBS, for example, did not have to structure any episodes of *Degrassi Junior High* or *Degrassi High* as "special" in order to sell the series to its audience. But the network still found aspects of it problematic and in 1989 censored *Degrassi High*'s "A New Start, Part Two," an episode in which ninth-grader Erica gets an abortion. PBS executive Kate Taylor changed the episode's ending after its U.S. importation so that Erica stopped just short of the abortion clinic and the pro-life protesters who surrounded its entrance, cutting roughly 40 seconds of the episode without permission from the Canadian production team.

It is worth considering how much networks shaped the ensuing debate about "A New Start" and in fact how small a role they played in the ways that press interpreted the episode's U.S. treatment. The mission of the CBC, the public broadcaster on which *Degrassi High* aired unedited in Canada, is to "inform, enlighten, and entertain" while explicitly acting as "an essential cultural force" that promotes and defines Canadian-specific traditions (Saucier). PBS is the United States' closest correlate, and its explicit mission is to "[...] present high-quality, involving content [...]" while "fortifying [...] global community" and remaining dedicated to "spreading awareness, unlocking mysteries, and exposing truths" ("PBS Mission"). Under this mission, international programs and topical subject matter that deals with a variety of social, political, and global issues have been central to the PBS brand, and the network is perhaps one of

the few places where a series like *Degrassi* could air. While only a few U.S. newspapers mentioned PBS's edits to *Degrassi*, the Canadian press at the time frequently mentioned "A New Start's" U.S. censorship. Taylor's individual decision on behalf of the PBS brand prompted vague insinuations about national ideology and the differences between Canadian and U.S. television.

Taylor's decision, one rooted in network/corporate concerns and the need to keep public and viewer sponsorship intact, became representative of U.S. televisual politics—not business concerns or structural (rather than ideological) differences; at the same time, "A New Start's" original content somehow became representative of Canadian politics. *Degrassi* producer Kit Hood was so angry at what he called Taylor's "American ending, happy, safe, but incomplete," that he asked that his name be removed from the episode's credits (qtd. in Cuff C.11). Taylor argued that her modifications to the episode amounted to mere "esthetic" changes that made it end with a "more powerful, more poignant," more ambiguous ending (qtd. in Cuff C.11); essentially, she argued that her version looked more like *Degrassi*'s typical style, "the way the series normally is," or by extension more Canadian (qtd. in Cuff C.11).<sup>173</sup> While she never admitted that the episode's subject matter had anything to do with her modifications, it was clear from the surrounding press and the suddenness of the changes to the show that Taylor's decision stemmed from fears about the episodes' U.S. reception and its general difference from other youth fare. Most importantly, in Hood and Taylor's discourse about the re-editing, the Canadianness of "A New Start" became its willingness to tackle the controversial subject matter in the first place without necessarily promoting one view or another of the abortion.

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<sup>173</sup> Taylor also claimed that her ending looked more pro-life and that the original edit painted the pro-life protesters as "fanatical" ("Abortion Scene" E.6). Kit Hood accused her of making the episode look more pro-choice. Tom Panarese writes that the Canadian network (CBC) showed more trust in its audience's ability to handle the episode without a heavy-handed lesson. See his work for a thorough exploration of this episode's censorship (69).

“Americanness,” conversely, became the desire to shield or protect audiences from an issue of reality and to add a polarizing ending. In Hood’s summation of Taylor’s editing, the Canadian episode became in its U.S. rendition another example of the U.S.-ification of Canadian texts, while for Taylor it merely represented a single, artistic change to the episode. I will return to the issue of abortion and its implications shortly, but I want to emphasize again here the way that the U.S. defensive translation of Canadian television signals a sense of loss or reduction—renders the text “safe” yet “incomplete”—the general discomfort in U.S. youth television with the subjects of sex, sexuality, and real-life issues more broadly, and the way that the treatment of a single issue (40 seconds of film) came to epitomize national concerns even while they were related to brand concerns. The differences between Canadian and U.S. TV clearly exist, but the network handling of those differences can compound them or exaggerate them, contributing to essentialized understandings of national ideology rather than consideration of the practices of specific companies.

Disney Channel, similarly and predictably, did not air most of the episodes from *Ready or Not* that dealt with sex, puberty, and anatomy, including at least “He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not” (108), “Origins of Man” (111), “Beyond the Birds and the Bees,” (201) and “Am I Perverted or What” (213). The network also cut scenes in which characters used certain anatomy-related colloquialisms: “Nice tits,” “So they get a boner” (101), etc. Like The N’s early censorship of *DTNG*, this censorship makes sense for Disney’s brand and its self-created TV-Y through TV-PG limitations. But it also points again to a U.S. discomfort with teen and youth sexuality in youth programming, for in Canada, reruns of *Ready or Not* air/ed unedited on YTV



with either a Canadian-8 or TV-PG rating, depending on the episode.<sup>174</sup> Disney's edits to Canadian series, however, are different from those of The N, PBS, or Nickelodeon, in that as a self-contained corporation that owns countless other media ventures, the Disney company does not depend on selling commercial space in order to broadcast series. In this way, there was no threat that *Ready or Not* might compromise commercial sponsorship or viewer support as *Degrassi High*'s content could have with PBS. With no potential for losing the commercial or donor support that feeds other networks, Disney's decisions (like The N's up until 2004) had everything to do with protecting the self-created sanctity of the brand.

Since Disney also did not air an episode in which a character died, "Saint Carla" (508), we can readily see how a protectionist standpoint guides its approach to televisual subject matter for youth audiences. "St. Carla" did not include any violence, and the death (via car accident) occurred off screen, yet the network's programmers did not seem to think that the episode's serious tone fit with the general representation of childhood that Disney Channel promotes (which, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Three, relies on fantasy, comedy, and very few plots about everyday life, let alone anything remotely depressing).<sup>175</sup> Because the network also reportedly cut scenes that featured Canadian currency, however, even these edits related to subject matter seem to reflect a broader interest in making the series pass for a U.S. production and in keeping its narratives within the expected boundaries of U.S. youth television.<sup>176</sup> Viewers

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<sup>174</sup> Canadian-8 is the equivalent of the U.S. TV-Y7 rating, meaning that the program is recommended for viewers ages 8 and up in Canada and for viewers ages 7 and up in the United States.

<sup>175</sup> Disney movies, ironically, are filled with death and violence, so the difference between Disney Channel's view of childhood and the Disney film industry's view of it suggests a larger concern for what airs on television versus what airs on the big screen. Canadian-filmed Disney series *So Weird* has been called its darker or perhaps darkest series, for its exploration of some real-life issues. Disney, however, did not allow the production of proposed episodes that dealt with death (in a non-fantasy way), addiction, and other serious issues ("So Weird").

<sup>176</sup> The story of Disney's changes to the monetary currency in *Ready or Not* has circulated in popular forums, as has the degree to which the network cut particular episodes; hence, I emphasize that Disney "reportedly" cut these

who found out about the edits and censorship through the Internet consistently referred to this as U.S.-ification of the series, and many saw it as representative of the differences between U.S. and Canadian television. On IMDB, for instance, MachineGunFunk writes, “And ofcourse it [*Ready or Not*] was un-censored [in Canada] its CANADIAN TELEVISION WHERE WE DO WHATEVER THE F CK WE WANT(LOL)!” (“Ready Or Not”). Again, the U.S. network’s failed attempt to deny or erase the Canadian series’ difference through defensive translation results in underscoring that difference while rendering the U.S. version of the Canadian series incomplete. Disney’s version of *Ready or Not*, like its *Tales from Avonlea* and PBS’s “A New Start,” is literally a sample or a collection of safe episodes that do not represent the entire tone of the series but that do work within Disney’s parameters.

The most infamous examples, however, of U.S. censorship and editing to Canadian series and their ensuing viewer protests, debates, and popular discourse come from *Degrassi: TNG*. In addition to reordering episodes, The N has in the eight years of its broadcast edited episodes from virtually every seasons of *DTNG* in small ways, such as blurring out school posters and products or restructuring narratives into special episodes, and in more noticeable ways, such as refusing to broadcast entire episodes. In 2002, The N refused to air (in their terms “postponed”) “Accidents Will Happen” (314 and 315), a story arc in which Manny finds out she is pregnant and has an abortion. There were no FCC guidelines marking the episode as inappropriate for U.S. viewers, and representatives for The N noted that there is no “list of taboo subjects” for

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scenes. Producers from the Canadian company behind the series (Insight) would neither confirm nor deny the edits in my correspondence with them, and one even said that the agreement between Disney and Insight is completely confidential and will not become publicly available. Although the Canadian edits of the series are available in their entirety online, the Disney edits seem to have disappeared. Therefore, in the case of *Ready or Not*, I can only piece together the extent of Disney’s modifications through archived articles, my own memories of the show’s broadcast on the Disney Channel (which I watched regularly from 1998-2000), and viewer discourse about the show (which I have interpreted with a grain of salt). It also seems that Showtime aired *Ready or Not* in its entirety, including the more controversial episodes. This is evident from a U.S. newspaper review that complains about the “explicit” language in the episodes (and only the aforementioned episodes that Disney cut contain explicit language) (Mangan 3).

the network; it can air anything as long as it does so ““through this authentic, responsible filter”” (Lindman qtd. in Arthur 2.21). The N initially downplayed the decision not to air the story arc, arguing that it did not match the network’s other ““lighthearted programming”” (Cunniff qtd. in Drumming 19), but as in the case of Kate Taylor’s edits to *Degrassi High*, viewers and press alike realized that it had everything to do with the abortion.<sup>177</sup> This time, the story attracted press attention in Canada and the United States, including a large body of printed and Web-based viewer protests, some of which made it into the *New York Times*, various Canadian newspapers, the CBC News, the London press, and *Entertainment Weekly Magazine*. Once again, the decision to cut the episodes reflected arbitrary boundaries supposedly distinguishing acceptable content for Canadian television from that which is acceptable in the United States, and this is where the network’s role in creating these boundaries becomes most relevant. By extension, everything that does not fit within the individual network’s self-defined limits becomes coded as the Canadian elements of the series, or the only things that cannot be assimilated and appropriated as U.S. components.

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<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, when The N aired *Degrassi Junior High* and *High* (as *Degrassi Old School*) in 2005, the network skipped “A New Start,” parts one and two, and even “Breaking Up Is Hard to Do” (103) (an episode that references the abortion), surpassing Taylor’s original edits to the story arc and PBS’s milder discomfort with the topic of abortion (“Degrassi High”).



**Figure 10: From “Accidents Will Happen”: Spike (Amanda Stepto) and Manny (Cassie Steele) discuss Manny's options. Photo courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from Epitome Pictures Inc. Photo Credit: Christos Kalohoridis.**

Because each brand is rooted in its own vision of what “Americanness” means for television broadcasting, what the network represents as within the boundaries of U.S. youth television (or acceptable enough as not to compromise revenue or the brand itself) comes to signify the actual boundaries between U.S. and Canadian television just as much as do the repeated conventions that distinguish each television culture. Although The N eventually aired “Accidents Will Happen”—a promise that took over three years to fulfill—viewers decided to take action against the network’s censorship through the manifold protests that they circulated and by distributing the episodes illegally online. In print and online petitions, they wrote, for instance, “This petition is about the-n not showing accidents will happen in the united states but they showed [it] in canada [to] other kids and i think that’s not fair because we are no diffrent than them we all watch the same show so why not show it, it’s apart of life so thats why im

making this petition” (“Show It”). Others argued specifically against The N’s practices of protecting viewers from touchy subjects: “We feel that the teens of the US should have the same right to view the episodes as they are seen in Canada. The-N tries to shelter us and hide us from reality” (“Show It”). And many found The N’s attempts at sheltering viewers condescending. As one protestor wrote, “Cutting these two episodes from airing belittles the program and we feel that the issues at hand are real, and important for today’s youth to be exposed to, despite their controversiality ” (“Show It”).

U.S. viewers also recognized that *Degrassi’s* formula involves a balanced treatment of controversial issues and that the removal of the episodes seemed inconsistent with the network’s treatment of the rest of the series. This excerpt from another petition captures what many described as the arbitrariness of The N’s decision to keep the summer “lighthearted” by excluding the abortion but including other difficult subjects: “Although it [abortion] is a touchy subject, it is also a very real subject for today’s youth. The show has dealt with sexuality, rape, cutting, child abuse, death and drug abuse, among other topics. Pregnancy, abortion and the side effects of both, only seem like the next step for the show” (“Show It”). Viewers, furthermore, perceptively argued that the censorship of “AWH” would have a negative effect on the rest of season three. As protesters put it in one print petition to The N, the story arc ““does not contain any forceful opinions regarding [abortion...]. By taking these actions [to censor the episode] we feel as a whole that you are dismissing a substantial part of this season’s plot”” (qtd. in McKay C.1), incompleteness again.

Many other viewers, however, made comments implying that The N’s treatment of the series reflects why Canada is better than the United States. Some even complained that they wanted to move to Canada because of The N’s practices and that Canada is more progressive and

less sheltered than the United States. One among many Internet posters wrote, for instance: “what happens that is soooo controversial that americans cant see? JEEZ AMERICA LIGHTEN UP” (Facepunch). Another viewer captured this sentiment in his message-board signature. Playing with The N’s slogan for *Degrassi*, “*Degrassi: It Goes There*,” the viewer writes: “Degrassi.... It Goes There.... Only on CTV and The-N. Though The-N really sucks and they often edit things, so yeah it only really goes there on CTV [in Canada]. The-N just wishes they would” (“What Kind”). These Internet posters, like many others, illustrate one way that U.S. treatment of Canadian series teaches viewers to imagine Canada and Canadians: *Canadians can see the original cuts of Degrassi or Ready or Not. Canadians can handle sexual solicitations, abortions, and topical issues without special episodes, and thus, Canadians must be more liberal, more progressive, less sheltered.* To quote Tinic again, television is already a necessarily incomplete picture of any nation, a “world of [...] partial representations of the social, political, and economic realms we inhabit” (152). Even while Canadian conventions are evident in the series, *DTNG* can only offer an incomplete representation of Canadians or “Canadianness,” and The N’s version is even less complete. These viewers essentially defined (and essentialized) “Canadianness” through their experiences with Canadian television in its *U.S.* (and specifically The N’s) incarnation, just as Taylor’s individual changes to *Degrassi High* on behalf of PBS and Disney’s censorship of *Ready or Not* came to epitomize a national approach to television rather than adherence to non-essential but regularly repeated conventions. The N inadvertently encourages fetishization of Canadianness through practices that invite viewers to imagine national ideologies in terms of highly fragmented, unrepresentative televisual parts—parts that Canadian viewers can see and parts that U.S. viewers cannot. In popular discourses, the network treatment of the parts, rather than the aesthetic differences that encompass the whole comes to

stand for the Canadianness or U.S.-ness of each series. The N represents U.S. youth television's content boundaries or limitations.

“*Degrassi: The N Iteration*,” A Case Study in Fetishization<sup>178</sup>

In the processes that I have outlined, the spectator, in this case the network, can take several approaches to difference: One denies difference, and defensive translation recognizes and then willfully transforms difference into sameness. The final option is Barthes' description of the emergency situations in which the spectator transforms the Other into an exotic, “a pure object, a spectacle, or a clown” (152), or as in the case of the U.S. broadcast of *Iron Chef*, fetishizes its differences. Like defensive translation, “Fetishism is always a ‘play’ or vacillation between the affirmation of wholeness [...] and anxiety associated with lack or difference [...]” (Bhabha 74). The aforementioned practices of modifying Canadian television to suit various U.S. purposes—and the ways that such practices end up highlighting rather than effectively assimilating or transforming difference—take on further implications when we consider The N's other uses of *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. While Disney, Nickelodeon, and PBS's use of Canadian series has inadvertently contributed to particular views of Canadian television (either that it is just like U.S. television because it has been made to pass for it, or that it is so different that it reflects an exceptional Canada), The N's practices, sometimes overtly, sometimes implicitly, highlight *Degrassi*'s so-called Canadianness in order to sell an increasingly inconsistent, commercial, and exploitative teen brand. The marketing encourages both fetishization of the series' parts and the national contexts that allow for their production and broadcast.

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<sup>178</sup> I borrow the first half of this title from a *New York Times* article with the same name. My use of the fetish here encompasses elements from Freud's sexual fetish, Homi Bhabha's cultural one, and Karl Marx's commodity fetishism.

Although the network has clearly attempted to pass *Degrassi* off as either a U.S. or universal product, it has also fluctuated between assimilative appropriation of the series and highlighting it as different, and in some cases explicitly “Canadian.” In 2002, the network’s first slogan for the series paralleled The N’s self-branding as “the authentic voice of teens” with, “*Degrassi*: If your life were a TV show, this would be it.” Later, The N’s ads boasted, “*Degrassi*: It Goes There,” marketing *DTNG* as more authentic and salacious than other teen programs. Commercials abstracted shocks and reaction shots, all of which supposedly testified to *Degrassi*’s willingness to “go” where other television does not. When in 2004 The N attempted to introduce U.S. series *South of Nowhere*, the channel marketed *South* as the “American” counterpart to “Canadian-made” *Degrassi*. Commercials placed images from each show on a map of North America with *South* over the United States, *Degrassi* over Canada, and a voice asking, “Hey, Mexico, what you got?” The features that made *Degrassi* salacious and controversial or willing to “go there” became through this marketing overt symbols of its Canadianness and also marked this “Canadianness” in problematic ways.

The fluctuation between highlighting the supposed Canadian or salacious elements of the series and editing its content out of fear of its difference culminated in The N’s decision to re-air the first four seasons of *Degrassi* in their Canadian edits. Longtime viewers know that “Accidents Will Happen” marked neither the first nor the last time that The N censored *DTNG*: Since 2002, The N has removed “inappropriate” scenes—an extended shot of Manny’s visible thong underwear, Spinner’s (clothed) erection, and the aforementioned scenes of Emma’s attempted molestation and Craig playing “chicken” with a train: parts. When asked about the frequent censorship of the series, one executive at The N implicitly framed the decisions in terms of national boundaries. “Erect penises,” she said, “are things you do not see on [U.S.] basic



cable or broadcast television” (qtd. in Arthur 2.21). Yet as The N has attempted to raise its viewers’ median age from 15 to 17 or 18,<sup>179</sup> it has not only shown the erection, but encouraged appropriation of it as a “Snaggable” *Degrassi* moment. The decision to bring back this part and “Accidents Will Happen” coincided with continued viewer dissatisfaction and the channel’s transition from commercial free to commercially motivated. With these changes, *Degrassi*’s formerly “dirty” parts returned in dirtier ways that bespeak how commercial interests dictate “national” guidelines for television content.

In a 2006 campaign called “*Degrassi: Director’s Cut*” and a corresponding online feature called “*Degrassi Snaggables*,” commercials promised parts of *Degrassi* that U.S. viewers had “never seen before”: Emma’s violation, Spinner’s erection, extended scenes of Ellie cutting herself, Craig’s violent beating from his father, the scenes with the train, and “Accidents Will Happen.” The network renamed several episodes—“The Boner” and “Manny’s Butt Floss,” for example—revealing the edited parts and abstracting them from their contexts as sensational, rather than realistic, moments. Episodes that were once inappropriate in their TV-PG forms now became soft-porn mockeries of the series, where context mattered less than titillating viewers with tawdry parts.<sup>180</sup> Enacting a sort of fetishism that privileges parts at the expense of the whole, The N emphasized the Director’s Cuts as enhanced viewing experiences rather than as complete originals and encouraged their appropriation as commodities. And playing with *Degrassi*’s slogan, commercials promised, “*Degrassi: Now It Really Goes There.*”

And go there it did, but in an entirely different way from the intended purposes of each episode. When The N brought back some of the edited episodes, the commercials focused on the elements that made the episodes controversial in the first place, working to ascribe special value

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<sup>179</sup> Arthur 2.21.

<sup>180</sup> And the commercials for these episodes featured disco music associated with ‘70s pornography, subtly connecting the already-sexualized rebroadcast of the episodes to literal sex.

to “the boner,” for example, where it once decided that the erection was too graphic. The campaign’s emphasis on the now “dirty” little pieces of *Degrassi* rather than the episodes as a whole made the censored parts come to stand again for the Canadian parts, the same parts that made *Degrassi* “go” where most television would not. The restored parts equal the parts that *Canadians could* see in the original broadcast; the “Director’s Cut” amounts to the *Canadian* edit. Because, furthermore, the campaign concentrates on images of an underage girl’s rear end and an underage guy’s erection, rather than on the narrative contexts that called for such images in the first place, the restored parts seem more offensive than the original cuts of the episodes. This marketing essentially teaches U.S. viewers to look for the controversial parts of *Degrassi*, to eagerly anticipate *parts* rather than a fully restored whole, and by extension to associate such parts with Canadianness.

The “Snaggable” component of the Director’s Cut campaign added distributable goods, a commodity fetish, to this sexual and cultural fetishization of the series. The campaign encourages fans to save and then upload scenes from *Degrassi* to their personal Webpages, thus creating more buzz for the show and the network on other Websites at no charge to The N. The Snaggables are short, streaming video clips of not only the erection and thong shots but also other small bits of the series that look “dirty” or risqué when they appear individually. The caption for the campaign reads, “You’ve shown us your *Degrassi*, and we’ve shown you ours. Now share it by pasting the code from these snaggable *Degrassi* moments into your blog or website. *Degrassi* love from every season. Take them! Snag them! Spew our communal *Degrassi* all over the world!” The blatant sexual tone of the campaign’s description—imagery like “spewing” “communal *Degrassi*,” showing “yours,” showing “ours”—only foreshadows the content of and problems with the individual clips. The clips, like the Director’s-Cut episodes,

highlight sex, violence, or drama rather than the point of each scene, making The N's representation of *Degrassi* its only representation to potentially new viewers. This includes JT's stabbing death, Toby buying condoms, and Manny getting dumped, and in each case, the clips have been given new intentionally sexual or "cool" names. Spinner's erection, for instance, is called "Spinner's Vertical Smile," and the caption for the former reads, "Insert boner joke here." Similarly, Toby's condom purchase, which in the series is both an embarrassing and educational moment, is renamed "For Her Pleasure." The campaign, then, not only encourages the abstraction of many of the same parts that the network previously labeled dirty, but it also encourages their appropriation and distribution. The N's editing and censorship create a cyclical process that fuels viewers' desire to see the series unedited or censored, provides a market for the uncensored through the censorship of the series, and then provides the network with opportunities for selling the uncensored bits back to the same audience. In the meantime, The N builds its own budding reputation, as the purveyor of such shocks, on *Degrassi's* modification, misuse, and exploitation.<sup>181</sup>

Like Disney with *Road to Avonlea* and Nickelodeon with *YCDTOTV*, but much more problematically and severely, The N has ridden to commercial success on *Degrassi's* coattails through its manipulation of the series, its nationality, and its component parts. Worse still, The N's marketing of the Director's Cuts may extend beyond *Degrassi's* expected final season in 2010. Since 2006, the channel has continued to edit the series: Spinner smoking medical marijuana in efforts to deal with his chemotherapy for testicular cancer ("Pass the Dutchie," 710); a shot of Emma's semi-naked buttocks during a moment of feminist protesting ("Hungry Eyes," 709); and a kiss between Mia and a female model ("Uptown Girl," 801-802)—all parts

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<sup>181</sup> The new and re-branded The N also had no problem with Jimmy's on-screen (clothed) erection in an episode that explores his impotence, which resulted from injuries he incurred in a school shooting (604).

that the network may bring back in efforts to cultivate desire for its only hot commodity, which really is better (or at least cleaner and certainly more complete) on the other side of the border and which no amount of censoring will fully assimilate into a U.S. televisual model. *Degrassi* perhaps best represents a recurrent point throughout this discussion—that U.S. assimilative and transformative practices still fail to reduce Canadian texts completely to sameness; the series remains, in Levinas’ terms, “absolutely other,” for The N’s attempts to pin it down only implicate The N’s inconsistent practices and emphasize *Degrassi*’s difference.

Some Canadian television series, however, like *Road to Avonlea* or *YCDTOTV*, somehow may manage to pass for U.S. productions for a time, but they do so not solely because Canadian producers attempt to pass them off this way, but because U.S. networks find ways of masking Canadian elements to suit their own purposes. As both a good and a service, television must be malleable and profitable, and to prove internationally successful, it must to some extent exhibit universal or shared values. “Successful” post-production assimilative practices—those that temporarily mask Canadian series’ Canadianness—also account for how Canadian television has been so central yet invisible to U.S. television.

Yet, there would be no need for any of these U.S. practices if there were no fears about Canadian television’s U.S. reception and if Canadian television were indeed the same as U.S. television. Canadian television is able to fulfill particular roles as too controversial, too different, or just like U.S. television only because of the expectation that it seem similar in the first place, and in this way it often works as a scapegoat or more visible example of other issues in youth television. While *Degrassi* and *Ready or Not*, for example, incited some controversy, British youth and teen series often tend to treat issues in more graphic ways than does either U.S. or Canadian television. British youth series *Grange Hill* (1978-2008), one of *Degrassi*’s long-

running contemporaries, deals with the same topics as *Degrassi*, but would likely never air in the United States because of its highly specific British and working-class setting and the controversies that have ensued during its UK run. As I mentioned, The N also aired Australian and other imports in the channel's early days, but given their brief U.S. broadcast solely on The N, it is difficult to tell whether some of these series were censored and edited in the United States as well. In the same vein and as I have noted, because popular foreign English-language series of the *Grange Hill* sort tend to appear in the United States in the form of remakes (like that rumored to take place of the series *Inbetweeners* (2008-present)), it is mostly Canadian series that are forced into passing.<sup>182</sup> Canadian series have proven more problematic in the United States, just as *Degrassi* became The N's most notorious series, because they are much more present and subject to assimilation. But if Australian and British youth series were more common here, Canadian series would likely meet less editing, censorship, and controversy, and rather than fetishized Canadian texts, we might see fetishized imports from other countries.

Canadian texts' inability to fully become "American," and the expectation that they are similar to U.S. television, result in the discomfort with which each network treats them. Each brand's approach to the alterity of the imported or co-produced text has everything to do with the self-definition of the brand and the brand's management of difference. Given the use and success of so many Canadian series on U.S. networks, Nickelodeon, Disney, The N, and even PBS to an extent might not have proliferated to the major media conglomerates that they are today without Canadian television. Canadian television series' differences and their Canadianness—taken to mean whatever the network wants them to mean—become inconsistent, incomplete, and reversible Others, restructured, expended, and exploited to serve U.S.

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<sup>182</sup> "Inbetweeners."

commercial and brand-building purposes. If we extend these networks' practices into national ideology, U.S. networks manage and mobilize Canadian television's differences—whether highlighted intentionally or unintentionally or masked by practices that attempt to pass series off as U.S. productions—in the creation of the self: the self as promoted through the brand and the national self for which the brand comes to stand. The U.S. brand's intentions, practices, and decisions towards these texts, in other words, come to represent larger ideological concerns and examples of national boundaries because they are inherently rooted in concerns about national boundaries that play out through corporate decisions. Canadian television's perceived impropriety, sameness, and ultimate difference can have as much to do with these attempts to build self through and against an Other as they do with the aesthetic and structural traditions I have already discussed. The next chapter explores the management of difference and the construction of self from a different angle, analyzing Canadian television's representations of race and ethnicity.

## CHAPTER V.

### TOLERATED, BUT NOT PREFERRED: TROUBLING THE UNCONCIOUS OF TELEVISUAL MULTICULTURALISM

TAI: What's a Monet?

CHER: Its like a painting, see? From far away, it's OK, but up close, it's a big old mess.  
(*Clueless*)

In Canada, the party line goes, there are no racists save those who watch too much American television. (Clarke "White" 101)

Like other key words such as democracy or liberty [...], multiculturalism's symbolic effectiveness derives from its ambiguity. Vague notions of ethnic, cultural or communal pluralism conflate with references to constitutional and civil rights, social justice, electoral strategies, and government policy to yield a symbolic bundle that is politically charged as it is indeterminate. (Amit-Talai 90)

A subplot in *Exit Stage Left*, the first *Degrassi Junior High* novel, finds Stephanie Kaye feeling insecure about her appearance, her acting skills, and her ability to attract male attention in comparison to her biracial friend Lucy. When Lucy approaches, "her pink ski jacket seem[s] to glow with a light of its own [...] and set off her fine, dark features. Looking at her, Stephanie felt herself no longer blonde, but pale and colorless" (Pasnak 3). Lucy's exoticized portrayal in these and other passages in the novel relates to more than her supposed racial difference from Stephanie's; careful viewers of *Degrassi Junior High* read the accompanying books with the knowledge that Lucy is also a wealthy New Yorker living in Canada, one of the most stylish or

“cool” students at school, and a reformed shoplifter.<sup>183</sup> Stephanie muses that someone like Lucy, “whose parents let her throw parties when they weren’t even there [...] would make a number one, high-status girlfriend” for white character Wheels, on whom Stephanie has a crush (Pasnak 6). Later, Stephanie realizes that the theater offers her a space for redefining herself and competing with Lucy:

If she wanted to change, what better way to do it than to become an actress? Already she saw herself with a new identity: shy and elusive by day [...] but at night, on stage, holding a packed house breathless with her performance. As she lifted one *white* arm toward the floodlights, a gasp of appreciation swept through the audience. Slowly, she lifted her head back, a gesture of submission to the tragedy of life. (Pasnak 15, emphasis mine)

Important here is that Stephanie sees herself as white and plain when she compares herself to Lucy, but feels reassured that a new identity and a performance involving the revelation of her whiteness (or “her white arm”) will entitle her to appreciation on stage and perhaps appreciation from Wheels. It is unclear whether the “gesture of submission” that Stephanie makes by tilting her head describes the role she will play on the stage or if it describes submission to her place in relation to Lucy’s. Equally ambiguous is the tragedy of life, which could refer to something self-reflexively theatrical, or something Stephanie perceives as the result of her submission to Lucy.

While the novel never fully resolves these strange but loaded passages, Stephanie’s plans for self-transformation and the insecurity that Lucy evokes provide two of several written examples in which characters make jarring remarks about their ethnic or racial difference from others and in which foreign Canadians are juxtaposed with non-racialized white ones.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> By the end of the earlier *Degrassi* television series, Lucy’s Americanness arguably goes unnoticed by a casual viewer of the show.

<sup>184</sup> In Yick Yu’s first appearance in the novel, the narrator describes him as “slight, wiry and Chinese” and his friend Arthur as “taller, curly-blond and still a bit baby-fat” (Pasnak 7). Later, Yick wonders if he should even audition for the school play, because “‘There won’t be any Chinese parts’” in *Macbeth*. “‘MacYick MacYu,’” he scoffs (16). In Voula’s first appearance in the novel, she mentions that theater “‘was sacred to the ancient Greeks. In fact, my



Arguably, these narrative moments function as written reminders of *Degrassi*'s diversity in a book lacking the visible markers of ethnicity that are available in televisual texts. More than that, they continually make diversity part of the text as if to reassure readers that diversity is present and that diversity is good. Even these brief passages, however, demonstrate a thematic tension that links Stephanie's whiteness to accommodation and that paints her social suffering as tragic and somehow related to Lucy's presence. *Exit Stage Left*'s inclusion of an odd and overly present racial discourse and a subtler nationalist one in a book that is not about race and void of racial discrimination, prejudice, or problems parallels one strategy of representing Canada in television series. As in the case of Stephanie Kaye's private, internal musings about Lucy, race-related insecurity and anxieties in Canadian youth television often emerge only as sub- or unconscious dynamics revealed beneath the surface of apparent racial harmony.

A more explicit version of the same insecurity occurs in an episode of *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, when Emma, gazing at Afro-Caribbean-Canadian Chris Sharpe, remarks that she could never stand a chance with Chris: he's so worldly, and she comes "from Planet White Dork" (309). This narrative structure of representing minority characters in seemingly positive ways—as cool, attractive, stylish, even wealthy—by offsetting them against white characters who suddenly feel plain recurs in the *Degrassi* canon and in many Canadian representations of interracial interactions between youth. Beneath their positivism, these representations continually reveal—through dialogue like Stephanie's and Emma's—hierarchical constructions

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great-great-great grandparents may have played to the gods!" (Pasnak 17). Stephanie's whiteness, furthermore, is somewhat ambiguous, as she has changed her name from Kobalewski to Kaye (taking her mother's maiden name after her parents' divorce). Whether she has taken this name to create a new start at school or to distance herself from her father's Polish and possibly Jewish side is unclear in the television series.

that expose apprehension about diversity's place in society, distinguish authentic Canadian identity from "diversity," and link minorities to white accommodation and sometimes tragedy.

In this chapter, I situate Canadian representations of diversity within multicultural discourses and read their implications for internationally circulated texts. Using examples of interracial friendship, dating, and sex from a variety of popular Canadian series, I argue that what emerges more often than not is a surface-level positivism about multiculturalism, diversity, tolerance, and cultural integration, evident in the avoidance of blatant stereotypes or negative characterizations. Yet, underneath lurk strong and recurrent unconscious messages about the negative (and often threatening) status of minority groups in Canada (particularly black people) and fears about the possibility of a racially heterogeneous or mixed-race future. Ethnic diversity and interracial interactions work in these series as tools for representing tolerance, but in most every case, diversity causes problems with which none of the series deals tolerantly. At the level of individual episodes or story arcs, the series seem to promote effective official multiculturalism in action; it is only in the context of the entire series and the patterns that run across Canadian youth series that they look problematic. In this way, they weave a complex televisual system of race and racism that is buried beneath a veneer of antiracism. Building from the works of Minelle Mahtani and others, I consider how *official* multicultural policy in Canada may contribute to the prevalence of these issues, which continually emerge from what seem like unconscious spaces of image production and unresolved insecurities related to national identity more broadly. Because, furthermore, many of these representations are implicitly steeped in the notion of Canada as more progressive or more tolerant than the United States (as is multiculturalism as a whole) and Canada as a paragon for other nations, the problems with the Canadian series bear upon international televisual environments as well.

I have chosen to think about these patterns as “unconscious” for several reasons. In Freudian terms, the unconscious holds those thoughts or mental processes that are “*inadmissible to consciousness*” (653, original emphasis). But even unconscious decisions involve a level of agency, for

[...] in becoming conscious [...] psychic elements pass through two phases. Between the two phases is a deciding process, the censor, which determines whether a psychic element is fitted for admission to the consciousness. Having passed this censor the element remains in the foreconscious until circumstances secure its entrance into consciousness proper. (“Unconscious” 292)

The idea of repressed elements that can enter into consciousness if given the opportunity to do so speaks well to any task of excavating buried or inadmissible racial hierarchy, as does the idea of a censor that determines whether such elements will become conscious. In some ways, both multiculturalism and the surface-level positivism of the racial representations I will discuss work as censors suppressing the real issues within Canadian representation and practice—and their relation and/or similarity to other North American representations and practices. What is inadmissible to consciousness within these series is the ultimately negative way in which they conceive of diversity and multiculturalism through interracial interactions. Like the death drive, these series represent an inherently flawed tendency to repeat the same kinds of representation as if to correct what remains unchallenged in each narrative: the centrality of racism in Canadian representation and in the country as a whole.

Though I borrow briefly from Freud’s notion of the unconscious, my goal is *not* to conduct a psychoanalytic reading of these series, nor is it to prove that Canadian representations are the *only* ones that suffer from these flaws (U.S. youth television enacts its own version of racial coding by separating ethnic series from others and regularly relying on obvious stereotypes, as should be clear from Chapter Three). Rather, by bringing these issues to

consciousness, I want to demonstrate how official multiculturalism may hinder Canadian television (and thereby the television traditions that are influenced by it) just as much as, if not more than, it helps. Because a central premise in my dissertation as whole is that Canadian television provides necessary televisual content and a useful and positive model for U.S and other international television productions, it is equally important for me to demonstrate how its subtler, unconscious racism also makes it a potential liability for international circulation.

Before I get into the patterns most common to these series, I want clarify the way I am using the term “multiculturalism” and briefly outline the common critical approaches to dealing with it in Canada. As Will Kymlicka emphasizes, multiculturalism refers to both symbolic and tangible practices, and because it works as “an umbrella term for a wide range of policies [...] we need to be clear about which policy we are criticizing or defending” (122). Multiculturalism “describes [...]the Canadian] polyethnic and racial mosaic; it articulates a vision of cultural pluralism which many feel is suitable for the Canadian reality; and it denotes a policy of the federal government first introduced in 1971” (Wilson 651). Self-reflexively constructed as different from the practices of the United States (the “mosaic rather than melting pot” model), it also “provides a vision for [...] manag[ing] Canada’s racial and ethnic diversity—a purposeful attempt to address the historical and contemporary exclusion of ethnocultural and racial minorities” (Wilson 654).<sup>185</sup> While the term “multiculturalism” now acts as “a synonym for ‘ethnic’ or ‘immigrant’” (Roy 200) or “diversity,” the policy originated as a strategy for managing white-Canadian identity and as such began “not so much as an answer to necessary social accommodation as a response to pressing political concerns” (Bissoondath 371).

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<sup>185</sup> The “mosaic rather than melting pot” model refers to the popular perception that while the United States’ melting pot requires assimilation and the loss of distinctive ethnic characteristics, Canada’s mosaic allows individual cultural elements to shine in their distinction (creating a more colorful montage). See Kruger et al 75; Wilson 651; Mackey 2; Thomas par. 32; and Roy 200, respectively.

Official multiculturalism, which Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced in a 1971 speech to the House of Commons, responded to two forces: a) the continued fragmentation of Canada because of the opposing ideals of the British and the French and b) the increasing European-immigrant and specifically Ukrainian communities that threatened to further polarize the French and British populations.<sup>186</sup> In Neil Bissoondath's terms, "If the emphasis on federal bilingualism had seemed to favour francophone Quebec at the expense of the rest of the country, enhanced multiculturalism could be served up as a way of equalizing the political balance sheet" (371). It is only as the policy has developed that it has become more "colorful," expanding to include "visible minorities" and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects citizens from "discrimination along racial or ethnic lines" and discourages forced assimilation (Resnick 39).<sup>187</sup>

Critical work on multiculturalism generally falls somewhere on a continuum composed of two binaristic approaches, those critics who oppose the policy for various reasons and those who praise it for various and often overlapping reasons. Much of the work in the latter canon has been self-congratulatory, upholding multiculturalism as evidence of Canada's commitment to antiracism and progressive politics. Some of these writers manage to combine the self-praise with careful attention to multiculturalism's shortcomings and challenges, but they also explicitly link the policy to Canada's superiority over other Western countries. Kymlicka boasts, for

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<sup>186</sup> Roy 200; Resnick 39. As Jean Burnet clarifies, "Until the 1960s governmental policy concerning immigration was based upon the principle that those who were admitted into Canadian society should be assimilable into the dominant British and French ethnic group" (44).

<sup>187</sup> The term "visible minority" originated in the *Employment Equity Act* of 1986 and has since served as the state-recognized descriptor for non-white and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Mensah 22). In 2007, the United Nations found the term racist for its inherent suggestion that non-whites are somehow less Canadian than the white majority (Edwards). Goldie and Meer argue, "The term *visible minority* seems typically Canadian. It says *race* without saying race. It of course depends on all kinds of assumptions that go well beyond the bland claims of multiculturalism" (223, original emphasis).

example,

We [in Canada] take in our stride a level of immigration that in most countries would provoke xenophobic nationalism [...]. As a result, Canada is now seen as a model by many other countries. Western Europeans want to know how we've managed to accept so many immigrants without provoking a neo-fascist backlash; Scandinavians want to know about our approach to indigenous rights; Eastern Europeans want to know about the accommodation of national minorities. In all of these areas Canada has relevant experience and expertise to offer the world. (3)

Later, he argues,

On every indicator of integration, then, Canada, with its multiculturalism policy, fares better than the United States, with its repudiation of multiculturalism. We would find the same story if we compared Canada with other immigrant countries that have rejected multiculturalism in favour of an exclusive emphasis on common identities—such as France. Canada does better in these countries not only in actual rates of integration, but also in the day-to-day experiences of ethnic relations. (21)

For Kymlicka and other writers of similar sentiment, it is the “official-ness” of multiculturalism in Canada that distinguishes it from other integrated nations. The symbolic value of the official practice somehow represents, from this view, a stronger commitment to human rights and equality than do, for example, the unofficial multicultural practices and mass social movements of the United States (which in this light have failed to produce institutionalized multiculturalism at the national level).<sup>188</sup>

In the same self-congratulatory tone, work in this area often cites comparative empirical studies that find Canada less racist as evidence of multiculturalism's efficacy. A common example, and the one which relates most to my analysis, is that Canadians show higher tolerance for interracial interactions (both romantic and friendly) than do Americans.<sup>189</sup> Another argues that U.S. viewers “who watched Canadian TV were slightly more favorable towards blacks than

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<sup>188</sup> A recurrent fear in the criticism, in fact, is that without multiculturalism and its careful management and reform, Canada may experience uprisings like those of the Civil Rights Movement.

<sup>189</sup> Kymlicka 21; Bibby 1-2.

those who watched American TV [...]” (cited in Payne 21). Reitz, who problematizes some of this work as self-serving and often de-contextualized, notes that according to an Environics poll, “72 per cent of Canadians believe Canadians show more racial tolerance than do Americans” (425). The tendency towards this kind of comparative work—which often tries to demonstrate Canada’s benefits through the United States’ shortcomings (and which admittedly characterizes some aspects of my project)—makes careful examination of Canada’s own problematic issues all the more important.

The other side of the critical fence includes work like Bissondath’s, Lorna Roth’s, and Eva Mackey’s, work that problematizes multiculturalism’s myths and practical flaws, including its impediments to national unity and identity.<sup>190</sup> Many of these critics argue that multicultural policy is itself a veneer for unmended issues and that it promotes an imaginary anti-racist Canada while silencing the real voices of oppressed people—and their oppressors, as I will demonstrate shortly.<sup>191</sup> Roth describes this silencing process as semantic play in which “Canadian policymakers have [...] relabeled inequality as ‘diversity,’ [making] it easier to mask cultural and racial hierarchy and marginalization within mainstream and specialized organizations of Canadian society” (par. 46). From this view, multiculturalism can simultaneously accommodate the images of Canada as “a nation of immigrants” (or a mosaic) and the common originary myth of Canada as a white settler colony, because the management of diversity or multiculturalism is rooted in an understanding of official or authentic Canadianness as white.<sup>192</sup> As Beaty and Sullivan explain, “It is this conceit of multiculturalism [its tendency towards self-congratulation and its inherent hierarchy] that allows Canada to present a nationalist myth of tolerance and

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<sup>190</sup> See also Roy, Burnet, Kernerman, and Bannerji, respectively.

<sup>191</sup> Bannerji; Keohane.

<sup>192</sup> See Roy 208; Bannerji.

acceptance of clearly identified ‘others’ even as its cultural policies whitewash the very significant differences between those cultures and between them and a predominantly Anglo-European definition of Canadianness” (11-12). Similarly, Resnick admits, “Canadians are not saints, and multiculturalism, more often than not, can become a matter of grand official pronouncements trotted in public occasions to convince Canadians of just how wonderful they are” (60).

The other major critique of multiculturalism is that it cannot and “has not dealt with systemic racism, nor has it adequately addressed the normalized qualities of uneven geographies that are integral to racist representations and practices” (Peake and Ray 182), and from some critical accounts multiculturalism can actually encourage subtler, more complex forms of racism while inhibiting their recognition (Mahtani par. 4). Caroline Knowles and Gerald Kernerman, respectively, demonstrate multiculturalism’s tendency towards eliding the existence of racism. Because multiculturalism promotes antiracism as a “majoritarian discourse” in Canada, the fear of political incorrectness means that

the Canadian conversation must attempt to constitute the political community in inclusive terms [...]. Even while it constructs minorities as threatening to the political community, the embrace of diversity entails the exclusion of explicitly racist, xenophobic, or otherwise antidiversity discourses from Canadian conversation. Canadians may not yet know what it means to be Canadian, but, as far as the Canadian conversation goes, to be antidiversity is to be un-Canadian. (Kernerman 17)

Knowles’ critique also cites multiculturalism’s inability to reveal racism:

It is a limited strategy which fails to admit a limitedness [...]. Multiculturalism lacks a conception of power and because of this treats all symbols of difference as equally valid. It lacks a means of discussing which symbols and practices dominate crucial areas of social policy decision-making. Thus multiculturalism is also a limited strategy for dealing with racism. Although it stigmatizes the overt verbalization of racial bigotry and provides a limited means for its redress, the climate of political correctness it supports conceals, rather than confronts popular feelings and beliefs about race. The fettered



voice of racial bigotry is not long silenced by posturing on human rights; it breaks out verbally, physically, and administratively. (49-50)

This fettered voice of racism also breaks out televisually, unconsciously.

Multiculturalism's official bearing on Canadian televisual representation is somewhat ambiguous. Unlike in the United States, where television's diversity is relatively optional and generally pushed by interest groups and network diversity specialists (rather than officially required under broadcasting guidelines), in Canada the Broadcasting Act's recognition of multiculturalism is largely responsible for the diversity that appears on camera and behind the scenes. But the Act offers only vague prescriptions for diversity in Canadian television. It stipulates that "the Canadian broadcasting system should: '(iii) through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspirations of Canadian men, women and children, including equal rights, the linguistic duality and multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society [...]" (qtd. in Roth par. 3). The Act does not attend, however, to how this multiculturalism or multiraciality should be represented, and this is where most of the problems in Canadian representations become apparent, not so much in the *amount* of representation (though as Mahtani notes, this is a recurrent issue), but in the *kind* of representation. Interracial relationships are generally the most subject to negative representation, revealing the dynamics at work between groups perceived as Canadian and those perceived as "ethnic" or "cultural."<sup>193</sup> In examining interracial interactions, I do not mean to conflate interracial relationships with multiculturalism, but to explore them as popular manifestations of

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<sup>193</sup> Mahtani suggests that Canadian television has never represented a single romantic interracial relationship in a positive way, "despite the reality that there are more interracial relationships in Canada than ever before" (par. 9). Though I cannot speak to the former half of that claim, youth television's representations ultimately support this general idea.

the symbolic and official policies, or as a form of “‘popular multiculturalism’ that ‘articulate[s] itself through a politicized understanding of cultural representation’” (Bannerji qtd. in Byers “Canadianizing” 4).

### Saying Race

The common Canadian treatment of diversity through interracial interactions becomes most meaningful when viewed with and against some of the traditional patterns in contemporaneous U.S. television series. Because I have outlined many of these general patterns (which often involve exaggeration or specialization of race-related issues) in Chapter Three, here I find it useful to discuss U.S. patterns as they relate specifically to racism and interracialism while situating Canadian representations within them. The portrayal of interracial relationships, both casual and romantic/sexual has undergone several changes in mainstream adult television over the past four decades, and these changes impact both youth television and the contexts for the international circulation of televisual texts. U.S. television series of the 1970s through the present have generally taken three approaches to representing racism through interracial relationships—that of attempting to challenge racism through sustained parody or drama, that of avoiding such narratives while using interracial relationships to incorporate ethnic diversity into the framework of the series, and that of adding subtle barriers to these naturalized representations.

## 1. Overt Exploration

There are several ways that series overtly explore racism: The first takes the predictable path of representing racism as an individualized, primarily white practice or mentality of which racial minorities and ethnicized people are the recipients. Plots about interracial or interethnic interactions generally serve as the vehicles for representing this racism. In sustained comedic characterizations, *All in the Family*'s (1971-1979) Archie Bunker best represents this pattern, though it is also popular in special episodes of many U.S. sitcoms: Because the series self-reflexively represents him as volatile, unreasonable, and flawed, Archie's prejudice and frequent use of stereotypes (particularly towards Italian and black people) fit his overall characterization while marking his racism as exceptional and individualized. Although Archie in some ways may stand for white prejudice more generally, his characterization allows the series to explore and often parody the reality of racism through a single character, and the series ultimately avoids problematizing institutions. In Lentz's terms, "the representation of race and racial politics" in this series and many of the Norman Lear comedies of the 1970s "tended to efface [...] the conditions and contexts for image production of these conditions" (62-3). In its focus on a specific racist, the series allows many viewers to self-distance from Archie and from the more important ways that racism affects people at higher, organized levels. And in the worst-case scenario, the series may allow viewers to affirm Archie's suspicions as justified. *All in the Family* represents race and racism as the volatile subjects that they are and provides an outlet for exploring them through entertaining and "in-your-face" dialogue. Yet, because of the series' encouragement of contextual effacement and potential self-distancing from and/or self-identification with Archie, it is unclear whether it ultimately challenges viewers' prejudice at all.

As Ozersky argues, the show “was essentially conservative” and once its “novelty [...] wore off,” it “trivialize[d] serious issues” (77-78).

In an international context, furthermore, the subversive or progressive potential of the show invites another mode of self-distancing. In his comparative work on Canadian and U.S. viewer responses to the same content, Eugene Tate argues that *All in the Family* (one of the highest-rated U.S. series of all time) failed to impact Canadian audiences because they could neither identify with the show’s culturally embedded context nor presumably relate to its racial humor.<sup>194</sup> If in the United States, then, Archie *could* function as a subversive character, in Canada, he merely serves as evidence of U.S. racism and Canada’s perceived avoidance of those practices.

The second ‘70s-‘80s approach to overtly representing racism is less predictable, though common, and replaces the white Archie Bunker type with his minority counterpart. Black characters Fred Sanford and George Jefferson (both characters introduced in spin-off Lear comedies as Archie’s foils) share Archie’s temperament, prejudice, and stereotypes, but add to these traits the seeming comedic shock of “reverse racism.” Like Archie, George and Sanford’s characterizations invite viewers to recognize the men’s flaws and then self-distance, thereby again individualizing racism. But George and Sanford’s prejudice arguably challenges viewers even less than does Archie’s, for it implicitly (though likely unintentionally) universalizes racism as a practice confined to ignorant *individuals* of all colors and in this way stifles even the possibility of linking individual racism to institutional practices. As exceptional examples of racism, like Archie, George and Sanford almost absolve viewers of the need to challenge their own prejudices, and they do Archie one better by demonstrating that minorities are racist,

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<sup>194</sup> “Canada and US” (7); Tate and Surlin (par. 6).

“too.”<sup>195</sup> Like *All in the Family*, these series bring racism to the surface, but their shock value is their intended value, and according to Ozersky, the shock had worn off by the time *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985) and *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977) aired (80). As we shall see, an altogether different version of this reverse-racism narrative is prevalent in the (U.S.-circulated) Canadian youth series that make pronounced statements about racism.

## 2. Naturalization

In recent U.S. television ('90s to the present), storylines about race and racism are almost always confined to special episodes, if they appear at all. In more contemporary mainstream U.S. series that deal with interracial interactions, the overt challenging of prejudice through narrative pronouncements has generally fallen out of favor, and instead, series make symbolic statements about racism by not making any statements about it at all.<sup>196</sup> The plot, in other words, no longer depends on making the racism or the dynamics of interracial relationships the focus and instead subtly challenges racism by representing interracial interactions as successful and acceptable. During the tenth season of *Friends*, for example, both Joey and Ross date black paleontologist Charlie without any mention of her blackness, racial dynamics, opposition, or even recognition of race from their friends (1006-1014). The seeming smoothness of each man's interracial relationship serves, supposedly, as the statement of how far we have come in race

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<sup>195</sup> Sitcoms such as *The Golden Girls* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (1990-1996) have relied on this structure in brief storylines, and *Beverly Hills, 90210* has used it frequently to demonstrate Brandon's antiracism through problematic minorities.

<sup>196</sup> In some ways, this '90s trend may have grown from late-'70s-'80s series like *The Facts of Life* (1978-1988) and *Diff'rent Strokes* (1978-1985)—which visually challenged prejudice through matching dissimilar ethnic groups and demonstrating how they could “all get along”—but which ultimately relied on special episodes to deal with prejudice, and from the *Cosby Show* (1984-1992) and *A Different World* (1987-1993), which challenged it through consistently positive representation.

relations.<sup>197</sup> In U.S. youth television, we see this kind of plot frequently in *That's So Raven*, in which Raven has dated several white teens without comment; in newer series *True Jackson, VP*, in which black protagonist True's love interest is white; and in *One on One* (2001-2006), in which one of black protagonist Brianna's long-term boyfriends is white. These series, then, present a tolerant and progressive space where people have moved beyond the overt prejudice of the Bunker/Sanford/Jefferson types, but where they do not really talk about race anymore. Among Canadian series for young audiences, this pattern is also common in *Naturally, Sadie* (before Disney's involvement), *Strange Days at Blake Holesy High*, *The Zack Files*, and *Life with Derek*, where interracial relations are thoroughly naturalized into the series but never noted as such.<sup>198</sup>

### 3. Subtle Separation

The alternatives to this kind of unproblematic, integrated plot are those that represent a good deal of diversity but squash any possibility of particular kinds of mingling between the races. In U.S. youth series *Clueless* (1996-1999), for example, three of the five core characters are black (Cher's best friends Dionne, Murray, and Sean), and Cher is Jewish (though blonde and generally perceived as "white"). Within the series, interracial interactions are overwhelmingly positive. Yet none of these friendships progresses into an interracial romantic relationship; everyone, for the most part, stays "within the race" represented by his or her character when romance is involved. A notable episode, "Prom Misses, Prom Misses" (320), clearly draws the

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<sup>197</sup> I say supposedly because this storyline worked as a response to frequent criticism about *Friends*' lack of diversity. It also appeared in the final season of the series, which sets up Ross and Rachel's reunification, making the relationship between Ross and Charlie doomed for failure and the one between Joey and Charlie a comedic farce.

<sup>198</sup> Sadie's original love interest on *Naturally, Sadie* was black character Owen. Disney's increased involvement in the series coincided with the series' attention to Sadie's crush on white character Ben.

line between interracial friendships and romances when Dionne and Cher host auditions for their prom dates. Their four male suitors assemble in one line, with two white teens presumably for Cher and two black teens presumably for Dionne. Cher chooses not to pick from the line at all (because she decides not to attend the prom), while Dionne picks a black suitor. Although the line of potential dates is visually integrated, implicit in Dionne's plot decision and the scene's composition is that the natural or expected, acceptable order is for each girl to pick a same-race suitor, as Dionne does. Even in other episodes when Dionne finds one of Cher's white suitors attractive and a potential battle for him ensues, each girl generally ends up with a boyfriend or date who matches her perceived race. In this way, this series and others like it represent "diversity" and interracial friendships, but they avoid most romantic interactions between the races.

### Different Versions of the Same

In Canadian youth series that do not rely on these unproblematized, integrated representations of diversity, the common pattern is to represent interracial interactions of all kinds—friendly and romantic, non-sexual and sexual—as acceptable to "good" Canadians and to use them as vehicles for exploring the prejudice of "bad" Canadians. (As I will demonstrate shortly, however, these series also tend to utilize *Clueless*'s invisible barrier between the races, but in subtler and very different ways—and after the interracial relationships already exist.) *Ready or Not* and the *Degrassi* series, for example, use interracial/interethnic relationships as a means of portraying and correcting false perceptions about the absence of racial conflict in Canada, and they do it relatively consistently, without special episodes and without parody or explicit dialogue (like *Bunker*'s or *Sanford*'s) for the sake of shock. In the *Degrassi* episodes

“Black and White” (*DJH* 314), “Don’t Believe the Hype” (*DTNG* 211), and “Got My Mind Set on You” (*DTNG* 715), characters experience a variety of discriminatory practices from other Canadians in interracial settings. Some of this is black-white conflict, while in “Don’t Believe the Hype,” it results from post-9/11 paranoia about a Muslim character. Similarly, in *Ready or Not*, Amanda becomes a target of anti-Semitic taunts and graffiti just as she begins to explore her ethnicity (309), and Busy finds in continuing storylines that her own father discriminates against her black boyfriend Troy.<sup>199</sup> In this way, interracial interactions in these series work as representational tools that challenge racism and promote positive values.

*Degrassi’s* explorations of discrimination through interracial interactions, for example, are noteworthy in their recognition of the different ways that less-visible minorities and highly marked racialized bodies experience race. In “Black and White” (*DJH* 314) the narrative extends beyond the racism that BLT experiences from Michelle’s father and the kid in the hallway who calls him a “dumb nigger” by including Lucy’s biracial experience of being called an “oreo” or “halfbreed.” Because Lucy comes from New York, her discussion of the racism she has experienced also complicates traditional myths that Canada is a safe haven for minorities who have left other countries and particularly the United States. And in the same episode, Spike, who is white, learns that her punk-rock style evokes prejudice and discrimination on the job market. “Don’t Believe the Hype” (*DTNG* 211) presents another view of racism by focusing on hate crimes against Islamic peoples of different nationalities. In it, Somalian Muslim Hazel feigns Jamaican heritage in order to avoid the harassment that Fareeza, a Middle-Eastern

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<sup>199</sup> Mr. Ramone initially refuses to hire Troy at his butcher shop because he is black, and after money turns up missing, he wrongfully accuses Troy of stealing (110). As it turns out, Busy has miscounted the cash drawer, but the damage is done, and Troy refuses to return to the shop. Despite his clearly unjustified misgivings about Troy, Mr. Ramone never recants, and as they pursue a romantic relationship in other episodes, Busy and Troy must sneak around to avoid her father’s anger (202).



Muslim, experiences at school. While Hazel never deals with racism on the show for her perceived Jamaican blackness, she recognizes that wearing a hijab in public, as Fareeza does, is a “personal” choice, and the episode demonstrates that some visible versions of ethnicity are more accepted than others in the post-9/11 climate. Most importantly, in implying that discrimination is itself a form of terrorism, the storyline corrects “the presumption that terrorism emanates from outside Canada’s borders” (Kruger et al 78).

Finally, and most recently, in “Got My Mind Set on You,” Danny experiences racism from an ignorant store clerk who accuses him of stealing and involvement in gang activity, while his friends shop freely. Although the dialogue in the episode lacks nuance, the storyline demonstrates skin-color privilege through Danny’s white best friend Derek, who remains oblivious to Danny’s experience, and through Danny’s fair-skinned/ racially ambiguous girlfriend Rachel, who escapes discriminatory treatment completely. These *Degrassi* episodes and *Ready or Not*’s recurrent explorations of race and racism move beyond a self-congratulatory use of multiculturalism to dismiss racism in Canada by continually bringing ethnic identity and its complications into the forefront, and in doing so, they deliberately and stringently structure racists as bad or misguided (not as potentially ambiguous as in Bunker’s or Sanford’s case), and they avoid superficial representations of multicultural national identity or the overt racial coding used in U.S. series like *Suite Life* and *90210* (Chapter Three). But like *Clueless*, most of these representations establish a partition between the races, this time through a) negative characterizations of minorities, b) failed interracial relationships, and c) long-term narrative choices that ultimately mark white characters as the bearers or victims of “diversity.” Each series also includes direct or indirect consequences for multiculturalism that intensify to suit the

degree of romantic or sexual involvement in the interracial relationship. The following sections explore these kinds of representation and their larger implications for popular multiculturalism.

### Saying Race Without Saying Race: Reversed Racists

With closer examination, for example, many of these *Degrassi* and *Ready or Not* storylines reveal deep-seated tensions, through their recurring depiction of non-whites and immigrant characters as less progressive and often more racist than white Canadians, and in their inherent construction of white-Canadian identity as superior and in need of protection. Like *Sanford and Son*, or *The Jeffersons*' utilization of reverse racism, but more so, these narratives demonstrate that minorities are not only racist "too," but perhaps the most racist or among the only racists in Canada. The reverse racism of the particular sort that we see here completely individualizes racism and avoids institutions altogether while also marking racism as a foreign trait. The racist store clerk in Danny's storyline, for instance, seems to be a British immigrant (not a naturalized or founding British Canadian) with a heavy accent delineating her as a foreigner or new arrival; her racism towards Danny, in other words, comes from somewhere else, not directly from Canada. Greek, Italian, and Asian characters are particularly susceptible to this kind of characterization. *Degrassi*'s Filipina Manny and all of its Greek characters (Voula, Alexa, Alex, and Diana) struggle to break from their immigrant parents' old-world and often unreasonable or racist values. In *Ready or Not*, it is Busy's first-generation Italian father who objects to her relationship with Troy, while her mother accepts it. This characterization seems coincidental at first glance, but it demonstrates a common pattern in which televisual immigrants become more "progressive" as they assimilate into the Canadian mainstream. Busy's father is more "visually" Italian than her mother (a second-generation Canadian), he speaks with a heavy

accent, and he expresses his “backward” views openly, while her mother looks white, has only a faint accent, and generally concedes to more “modern” values. This juxtaposition of the old-world father with the newer-world mother inherently relies on a structure that renders authentic Canadian identity as progressive and antiracist and immigrant identity as its antithesis. Even Hazel’s plot fits this pattern; although it explores prejudice through two Muslim characters of different ethnicities, it ultimately marks racism as an internal, Muslim dynamic, not something that white Canadians also enact (Byers “Canadianizing” 9). In Byers’ terms, these episodes “locat[e] the roots of racism in ethnic otherness constituted in cultural difference [...]” ultimately “equat[ing] racism with ethnicity” (“Canadianizing” 5, 6). In a different version of the George Jefferson/Fred Sanford pattern, each episode’s “anti-racist message is directed into the community against which the racism is also directed [...]. In this way, racism is presented as something that comes from within, and which is not explicitly tied to histories of marginalization and oppression [...]” (9, 12).”

This equation of Canadian racism with ethnicity or foreignness occurs yet again in a story arc during *DTNG*’s eighth season, where Indian Muslim Sav continually hurts his white girlfriend Anya with his hesitance about introducing her to his family. Anya is willing to convert from Christianity to Islam if it means she will have a future with Sav, but she repeatedly finds Sav’s religion, family, arranged marriage, and the expectation that he “carry on the family” too restricting and too painful. Sav also upholds a sexual and ethnic double standard when he will not allow his younger sister Ali to even spend time alone with a member of the opposite sex (because people will think Ali is “an impure girl”), while he simultaneously tries to sleep with Anya. Later, his parents humiliate Anya by inviting her for dinner and then telling her she has no future with Sav. Though Sav eventually rejects their beliefs and pursues the relationship (and

his sister Ali pursues one with a white male character), the episodes still emphasize the rigidity of foreign-born Canadians and their generational struggle for freedom from what are coded as older-world, external prejudices (804, 806, 810-811). Anya, like the white members of many of the examples I will discuss later, must bear the sacrifices of her inter-ethnic relationship and almost seems to suffer more than Sav and more than she would if she had chosen a white partner.

Hazel, Sav's parents, and all of these prejudiced immigrants exemplify what Robin Winks calls a "back then and over there" mentality, where racism is something that minorities bring with them to Canada, but which is not understood as having been prevalent in the white parts of the nation (327). Multiculturalism itself, if we recall one of its criticisms—in its popular and official forms—already distinguishes authentic Canadians from "diversity" or "race" by relying on

a model of "normal" Canadianness as white and unmarked [...]. This model is defined not by any particular characteristics, but by its difference from (and often its ability to tolerate) other marked Canadian identities such as multicultural-Canadian, Native-Canadian or French-Canadian. The state of being unmarked (and therefore "normal" or "ordinary") is both constitutive of, and an effect of, structural advantage and power and the cultural authority that power brings. (Mackey 21)

In the same vein, these examples begin to communicate that a Canadian is an anti-racist *white* person, a non-hyphenated citizen, or a "Canadian-Canadian" (Mackey 156-157) who tolerates diversity, but is not necessarily part of that diversity. Like *All in the Family*, *Sanford and Son*, and *The Jeffersons*, these Canadian series individualize racism, attributing it to individuals who are not representative of real Canadians and allowing the same self-distancing from the narratives. Because racism is already positioned as inadmissible or politically incorrect for authentic Canadians, however, instead of Bunkers, here the racists are Greeks, Italians, and

Indians. The same groups whom multiculturalism seemingly accommodates are the groups whom it represents as un-Canadian and unaccommodating.

“Black and White” ultimately takes a similar stance, promoting diversity and ethnicity as vaguely good, but somehow different from authentic Canadianness. Although the episode primarily demonstrates the racism of Michelle’s parents, it also paints Alexa’s Greek-immigrant family as more racist or more ethnocentric than non-ethnicized white Canadians. When Michelle shares that her parents dislike BLT “because he is black,” Alexa comments that he must be a good dancer because “he *is* black,” to which LD, Lucy, and Michelle all react with surprise and the conclusion that Alexa’s comment is a stereotype. Alexa responds, “It was just a comment,” and her parents would “die” if she dated a black guy; they would not even let her date her white boyfriend Simon, because “he’s not Greek.” “They can’t help it,” she explains. “They still think they live in a village back in Greece.” Alexa’s excuses pass, and the conversation returns to Michelle. In the episode’s logic, the racism of Alexa’s parents affects her ability to see the problems with her acceptance of stereotypes, and just as the parents “can’t help it,” the episode practically dismisses their behavior as a given, a byproduct of Greek identity. Michelle, conversely, rejects her parents’ beliefs, saying, “I think they’re wrong [about BLT].” Alexa’s parents seem normal or simply realistic in their racism, while Michelle’s parents become an exception. As the normative identity, non-ethnicized white-Canadianness becomes more flexible or able to accommodate change, variety, and rebellion like Michelle’s, while Greek identity (like Italian) remains static and monolithic.

## Restoring Order

This pattern of racist minority Canadians who are distinguished from authentic, progressive Canadians often overlaps with characterizations that mark interracial interactions as unstable or fleeting, and that then restore narrative order by pairing characters with others of the same race. This latter pattern only becomes noticeable when we look at the long-term consequences of specific plots, while the individual episode may look positive. In the BLT-Michelle story arc, for example, the writers created problems when they attempted to revise BLT's character through a storyline on infidelity. The writers apparently chose this plot in response to "critical feedback" from black female viewers who called BLT stereotypical in his pursuit of a white woman (Byers and Haines 175). In the corrective episodes, BLT cheats on Michelle and leaves her for a black girl named Cindy (*DH* 201-203), reducing his otherwise positive character to another stereotype and working to justify (though inadvertently) Michelle's parents' racism. As Dyer explains, "Stereotypes are a function of the desire to control through knowledge; the stereotyp[e], its fixed contours and endless repetition, constantly reassures 'us' that such-and-such a group is known—[...] 'they' are still the same as 'we' always knew they were'" (qtd. in Braziel 870). True to stereotypes about interracial relationships and blackness, all of the work that Michelle does in trying to prove BLT's worthiness falls apart when he proves himself a cheating cad. In the revised storylines, BLT becomes "the same" as we always knew he would be, the same as he would be in a less tolerant televisual representation. Without the racial discourse already attached to their relationship, BLT's disloyalty would work as a mere plot issue—nothing meaningful—but because BLT disrupts a relationship for which Michelle has sacrificed, the episode implies that interracial dating is not worth the struggle, that it ends in disaster, and in this case, hurts white women. BLT's decision to date a black girl, moreover,

subtly implies that parents need not worry about interracial relationships because they will end with everyone in his or her “proper place,” the races unmingled, order restored.

In other words, the end of the story arc unconsciously undoes the single episode’s positive work (Michelle and BLT’s challenge to racism) even while it consciously attempts to do positive work (“fixing” BLT’s construction for black viewers). As Rebecca Haines, who played Kathleen on *Degrassi Junior High* and *Degrassi High*, notes, “[...] it begs the question whether or not this plot resolution leaves viewers with the impression that young people are better off making the choice not to date cross-racially [... although] I am sure this was not the conscious intent behind this narrative choice” (175). The same thing happens in *Ready or Not* when Busy concludes that she is too young for a serious boyfriend—after months (and many episodes) of sneaking around with Troy, trying to change her father’s opinions, and arguing with racist black girls who hate her for dating interracial (206). The episodes do the positive work of creating these storylines only to deemphasize the importance of Busy’s struggle, and the interracial issues soon disappear from the series without leaving the impact they were supposed to leave. These plots still move beyond *Clueless*’s invisible barrier, but they make interracial relationships problematic not because they are “unacceptable,” but because they are fleeting and in Michelle’s case subject to untrustworthy characters. As these examples are beginning to demonstrate, the attempt at a progressive multicultural representation of diversity through interracial relationships repeatedly results in tensions that emerge in other ways; issues that are inadmissible to consciousness appear in problematic narrative choices. The invisible barrier returns but under the guise of initially positive representation, and many of these series add to the barrier representations of interracial interactions as hurtful or dangerous.

## It's "Under My Skin"

*Instant Star* also writes this unconscious narrative tension about interracial relationships into continuing stories throughout its first three seasons. The tension is more clearly unconscious in this case because the show includes narrative choices that simultaneously work against and towards racialized representations, and the negotiations that went into their creation are almost visible in the symbols, images, and resolution of each episode. *Instant Star*'s number of interracial relationships is immediately exceptional, and the series provides a variety of relationships at all levels of engagement and between different kinds of interracial pairs (black female/white male, black male/white female, and Asian female/white male). Because of this, I have chosen it as a case study of the narrative negotiation between a positive and negative representation of multiculturalism and in order to set up the final section of this chapter in which I explore sexual interracial relationships. Though their representation seems to vary by gender dynamics, virtually all interracial interactions (romantic and unromantic) are ultimately problematic in *Instant Star* even though each episode attempts to represent them in a positive light. Interracial relationships in this series are also more complicated than the other examples I have cited, because nonromantic interactions between white and minority characters are almost always tied to romantic triangles of some sort. Because they are the most complex and interrelated, I will focus on the black-white storylines and discuss them in the series' chronological order.

Of the four central black characters in the series (Kwest, Kat, Portia, and Darius), only one is overtly negative (Darius, a hard-hearted music executive, one of Jude's primary antagonists, and the eventual owner of her record label), and all seem fully integrated into the cast; Shay, a character only featured in seasons one and two, also plays an important role in the



series' racial representation. The series represents all of these characters as either potentially problematic or suddenly problematic, and even the most positive characters (except for Kwest) can degrade without warning into threatening or unstable figures. Each black character engages at some point in an interracial relationship with another character from the series (except for Darius, whose biracial child is the only evidence of his white partner). For the most part, the dynamics of these relationships never pose problems in explicit racial terms; no one, that is, ever brings up race as an issue. In each case, however, the black character interferes in one of the many love triangles that the series sets up, and every interracial relationship, aside from Darius', ultimately serves as an imperfect substitution for one of the perfect pairs in the series.<sup>200</sup> Each interracial relationship is tolerated—and tolerated quite well on the surface—but never preferred, acceptable but not ideal.

We see interracial relationships used as substitutes or second choices in parallel plots within a four-part story arc (105-108) from season one. Jude begins dating Shay because she cannot date her over-age producer Tommy, just as Jamie dates Kat because Jude is unavailable. Within this extended plot, interracial tensions and dissatisfaction with multiculturalism emerge only in symbolic moments, never directly. When Darius's cousin and up-and-coming protégé Shay enters the series, the entire staff at G Major buzzes with excitement and efforts to accommodate Shay's every whim, and the episode situates him as a foreigner or immigrant of sorts in this way. Shay's presence and "boy-diva" antics push Jude out of her studio, and out of her studio time with Tommy, relegating her to Studio C—a dark corner of the label's headquarters complete with outdated equipment. In the voiceover that begins the episode, Jude

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<sup>200</sup> This pattern applies to virtually all relationships in the series that disrupt the triangle between Jude, Tommy, and Jamie (these interactions are almost always temporary), but interracial relationships feature additional dynamics.

frames this as an interruption to the fairy tale she dreams of sharing with Tommy: “The princess wanted back what was rightfully hers, the palace, the pro tools, and the prince. But this wasn’t fantasy; this was reality, and the princess realized it bites.” Though race never comes up in the episode, the clear language of Jude’s entitlement to what is “rightfully” hers, offset by the studio’s overwhelming accommodation to newcomer Shay, mirrors the view of multiculturalism in which ethnic minorities upset the seemingly “natural” order of things by forcing tolerant societies to adjust to them (and the language harkens back to Stephanie Kaye’s tragic submission to Lucy). Shay, on the other hand, makes no such adjustments and within the first five minutes of the episode irritates Jude in multiple ways.



**Figure 11: Screen shot of Jude (Alexz Johnson) and Shay (Matthew Brown) at her birthday party, from “Unsweet Sixteen” (108). Photo courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from Epitome Pictures.**

The early visual and aural cues in this episode immediately encourage parallelism between the two musicians and foreshadow their plot. As Jude works on her song in one studio

booth and Shay works on his in another, cameras cut back and forth between Shay's rap recording session and Jude's rock one and juxtapose Shay's blackness, musical tastes, and cocky worldliness with Jude's whiteness, musical tastes, and frustrated naiveté. This tension culminates when with Shay in Jude's former studio space and Jude in Studio C, they begin a cross-studio musical "throwdown." Jude plays a loud electric-guitar riff while Shay tries to outdo her by rapping over her song, creating in the process a surprisingly good duet. While the language that describes it seems symbolic, throughout the episodes all of the tension between Jude and Shay (and Tommy and Darius) emerges in musical and practical terms rather than racial ones. Impressed by Jude and Shay's duet, for example, Tommy and Kwest remark that the new song "kills," but the harmony infuriates Darius, who claims that "mash-ups don't sell a million records" and literally pulls the plug on their session. Tommy argues, "You've gotta be open to new sounds, D. Let's break out, experiment." The word choices of breaking out and experimentation could easily allude to Jude and Shay's impending romantic experimentation and their decision to break out of old racial barriers. But Tommy later draws the line between musical experimentation and other kinds; as the plot progresses, he clarifies that he is fine with Jude and Shay's musical mingling, but not their romantic entanglement, while Darius initially opposes both (not because of race, but because of the pressures the relationship might place on their careers and profitability). Jude is also apprehensive about Shay because of what she perceives as his character flaws, though as she gets to know him, she is impressed by his kindness and the news that he has skipped two grades. In this way, the narrative fluctuates between representing Shay in stereotypical terms and representing him as a positive character, building suspense about what viewers can expect from him and setting up his character's instability or untrustworthiness.

Meanwhile, the B plot focuses on the growing relationship between Jude's black best friend Kat (Barbara Mamabolo) and her white one, Jamie (Kristopher Turner). Again, without ever mentioning race, the thematic parallels between the two plots and their visual parity invite such readings. Jamie agrees to tutor Kat, who shows early signs of a crush on him. But when Jude asks Jamie to accompany her to a meeting with Shay, Jamie chooses Jude over Kat (who has shown up to the tutoring session with DVDs and plans for a date). Through its dual focus, the first episode sets up two interracial relationships probably destined for failure. Jamie and Jude share apprehension, stress, and ambivalence about their cross-racial treks (though again not in racial terms), while Kat and Shay remain confident and persistent (Shay even cocky and elusive). Jamie even remarks that Kat, who has kissed him, "vex[es]" him and "freak[s] him out," while Jude feels like she is "being pulled in three different directions at the same time." As the first part of the story arc concludes, Jamie remains uncomfortable with Kat, while Jude and Shay begin dating—singing their duet happily together before the credits roll. The words of the chorus, however, reemphasize Jude's insecurity about the relationship. She repeats, "Waste my time/ Waste my time/ Not so sure that I'll be yours/ And baby you can be mine." Even as the series tries to avoid dealing with the obvious visual dissimilarity of the characters, then, misgivings about mixing continually manifest in other ways, through song lyrics, musical numbers, visual cues, and juxtapositions that foreshadow instability and unreciprocated feelings on the part of the white characters.



**Figure 12: From “I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend” (107). Kat (Barbara Mamabalo) and Jamie (Kristopher Turner) attend a school dance. Jude and Shay dance nearby; hence the stares of the on-looking students. Photo courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from Epitome Pictures.**



**Figure 13: Jude and Shay at the same school dance. Photo courtesy of reprinted with written permission from Epitome Pictures.**

Like BLT, Shay becomes what we always knew he would become, and in the climax of the story arc he returns from a world tour with a new girlfriend, humiliating Jude (though

somewhat unintentionally) at her sixteenth-birthday party. Yet, the story arc ensures that Jude and Shay's relationship is not associated with race (for Kat and Jamie's seems to be working), even though it is embedded in the symbolism I have previously described. Unlike the similar *Degrassi* story arc with BLT and Michelle, however, here the writers do not restore racial order by pairing Shay with a black girl, nor do they allow Shay to become the only problematic character. Shay reveals that his new girlfriend is Jude's white enemy, Eden, the second-place winner of the *Instant Star* competition. To keep Shay's negative behavior from playing into stereotypes, the narrative universalizes relational and particularly male instability. Moments after Jude's breakup with Shay, Tommy also hurts Jude by kissing her and then rejecting a relationship with her. Immediately following in the next episodes, Jude finds out that her father is cheating on her mother. The narrative draws attention to the parallel between Jude's father and Shay when Jude writes a song about an unnamed man who is "under [her] skin" and which could refer to Tommy, her father, or Shay. And as Shay and Jude break up, furthermore, Kat and Jamie make out in a parallel scene. Through these narrative choices, Shay and Jude's breakup becomes a simple matter of life: as one relationship dies, another flourishes, and all the men in Jude's life have the potential to "return her heart [to her] in pieces." Yet, as I have noted, in the run of the series the story arc gains different significance, and when paired with the battle that results from Kat and Jamie's relationship and Jude's relationship with Tommy, Jude's interactions with Shay solidify the series' general discomfort with interracial interactions.

We see both this discomfort and the tendency to paint interracial pairs as tolerable but not preferred in Kat and Jamie's plot, which pushes for Jude and Jamie's union. Jamie clearly dates Kat because she is available when Jude is not, but he attempts to work against his desire for Jude and begins to feel a romantic connection to Kat. In two exchanges that reveal the hidden

dimensions of the relationship, Jamie turns to Tommy and Spiederman for advice. Spiederman tells Jamie, “You’re in a precarious situation [...]. You’re dating Kat, the best friend of the girl you’ve always wanted.” Later, alone with Tommy, Jamie expresses the same frustration:

Jamie: This [Jude showing possible interest in me] can’t be happening, not now.  
Not when I’m supposed to be with Kat.  
Tommy: Supposed to? You gotta wanna be!  
Jamie: I do. I adore Kat.

The gap between what Jamie feels he’s supposed to do (stay in the relationship with Kat) and what he wants (Jude) brims with symbolism. Kat and Jamie make a progressive, multicultural, tolerance-friendly pair. Jamie and Jude create the expected order, the comfortable old mode of homogeneous culture, the safe space of unblurred racial lines. Jamie makes his decision unintentionally when he leaves Kat’s fashion show to confront Jude’s father about his affair and once again chooses Jude over Kat. Kat, spurned by an openly jealous Jude and left by an indecisive Jamie, emerges as the victim in the relationship, and visibly hurt, she breaks up with Jamie. The end of the episode, however, establishes a hierarchy that encourages viewer identification with (and preference for) Jamie and Jude: As Jamie tells Jude of his breakup with Kat and admits that Jude is to blame, she encourages him to cheer up, and they both reveal the matching “J” tattoos they got earlier that week and promise to remain best friends forever. In this way, the narrative promotes the view that Jude is somehow entitled to both Tommy and Jamie at the same time, while Kat and Shay are implicitly wrong in their pursuit of emotionally and thematically unavailable mates. Like “J” with “J,” white ultimately belongs with white. And even as the series tries to resist this structure by creating multiple interracial pairs, it emphasizes Jude and Jamie’s seemingly more natural pairing.

The series reinforces the same message through its portrayal of Kat's instability. Jude's decision to date Jamie hurts Kat, but she accepts the relationship and remains friends with Jude only to find that Jude and Jamie break up almost as soon as they get together. The story arc and Kat's role in the series end in "Viciousness" (205) when Kat decides that she cannot handle a friendship with Jude. While Jude and Jamie have used Shay and Kat as substitutes for their ideal mates, Kat ends up using Jude's father to hurt Jude (Kat grabs Jude's father and kisses him as Jude walks by). The next day, she admits that she is too jealous to remain friends with Jude: "I can't compete [...] and I can't win. I get a boyfriend, and he's in love with you. I make a dress; you get designer freebies. I get a car, and you get the coolest old car in the world, and then you get flowers from Tommy frickin' Q!" Although they have been best friends since grade school, Kat never reappears in the series. Like Shay's fluctuation between good and bad, Kat's sudden (and uncharacteristic) jealousy emerges as a character flaw that has seemingly remained dormant and that justifies Jude's selfishness. Through Kat's sudden brief bad behavior, the series once again implicitly stresses identification with Jude and positions Kat as a necessary backup to Jude's success. Although Kat is the real victim, the blowup gives Jude yet another claim to sympathy and reinforces her subtle entitlement to anything she desires.

Like the other story arcs, the plot includes no obvious racial dimensions, but the song choice for the episode (every episode features a song from one of Jude's albums) would make it seem so. Called "Fade to Black," the song plays during a dream sequence in which Kat and Jude's family members become vampires who prey upon each other. In cuts back and forth between Jude and Kat, the chorus plays, "Everything you are/ Fades to black." The timing of matching up Kat's face with Jude's pronouncement of the word "black" involves an intentional re-editing of the song (though perhaps for time rather than symbolism), whose full chorus reads:



“Everything you are/ Everything reminds me of/ Everything you are/ Fades to black.” And as the vampire Kat dies with a stake in her heart, the sequence ends with, “We fade to black.” As in the previous examples, the show’s attempt to represent interracial friendships and romances as positive and integrated into everyday life works against its own symbolic choices, which relate seemingly deracinated issues to race and multiculturalism. Everything fades, or returns to, black, to stereotype, to disorder and then to order. On top of this storyline, as seasons two and three progress, Jude’s sister Sadie uses her interracial relationship with Kwest as a substitute and in efforts to make Tommy jealous. Then, Tommy reveals that he cheated on his black ex-wife Portia and stayed with her not because he loved her, but for his career (and her connection to Darius) (312). In Kat’s, Shay’s, and every case in the series, the interracial relationship and the minority member of it work as stand-ins when the perfect relationship is impossible, and the minority character can only cause pain or receive it. While this pattern could also work as a commentary on the white characters’ selfishness in playing with other people’s feelings, it also more certainly paints interracial relationships as means to ends, tools for building white unity and stability, just as multiculturalism works to unify white, non-multicultural Canadians.



**Figure 14: Press picture of Jude's sister Sadie (Laura Vandervoort) and music producer Kwest (Mark Taylor). Courtesy of and printed with written permission from Epitome Pictures.**

Another story arc, and my final example from this series, positions these minorities not only as substitutes for and impediments to the perfect pairs in the series, but also intensifies the pattern of minority instability with a murder plot that links interracial relationships to death. In episodes 307-312, a revelation completely remedies Tommy's character up to this point in the series and ruins Portia's. Portia (Miku Graham), Jude's stylist, has until season three served as one of the few people in the music industry whom Jude can trust and the positive foil to her brother Darius, and as Tommy's ex-wife, she offers Jude and Sadie frequent warnings about him. Five years ago the woman with whom Tommy was having an affair (while he was married to Portia) died in a fluke car accident. Since then, Tommy has harbored the guilt and shame of Angie's death, believing it was his fault, a detail that explains his aloofness with Jude and Sadie

and his brooding, melancholy temperament. By telling Jude about his past, Tommy makes major strides in beginning a stable romantic relationship with her, just as her eighteenth birthday approaches and the relationship would become “legal.”

With the fifth anniversary of Angie’s death, Angie’s mournful brother Hunter comes to town to hurt Tommy and anyone he loves, making Jude, who has just publicly announced their relationship, a target. Hunter eventually finds access to Jude and holds her hostage with a knife before Tommy and the police intervene and send him back to jail. The true resolution to the story and its interracial love triangles comes, however, when Tommy finds the un-filed police report for Angie’s death in Darius’ office, revealing that Portia cut the brakes on Tommy’s car and is responsible for Angie’s death. She was trying to hurt Tommy, she admits, not Angie, and although she did not mean for anyone to die, Angie did. In this example and in others, interracial relationships are not only fleeting substitutions, but they also create long-term irreversible effects. Tommy’s association with Portia literally causes Angie’s death, and the residual effects of this relationship prevent him from stable relationships with either Jude or Sadie. And it is Tommy’s association with Portia that ultimately leads to Jude’s endangerment by Hunter. Portia’s admission of guilt creates a fresh start for Tommy and Jude. As the episode ends, Portia surrenders herself to the police, and Jude enters her home, happy that now both Jamie and Tommy pursue her. Portia, like Kat, never reappears in the series and has no entitlement to the security, happiness, or the white man who was once her husband. Like Kat’s, Portia’s behavior is completely out of character (though in this case it does develop over several episodes), and the series dismisses it as a necessary narrative evil, a mere catalyst for Jude’s unification with

Tommy (and/or Jamie).<sup>201</sup> Repeatedly, then, despite its overwhelmingly multicultural cast and the positive ways in which it attempts to portray minorities, *Instant Star* promotes the pairing of white characters with white characters, in friendships and in romance, and minorities generally pose complications to the implicitly preferred order of the series or serve as scapegoats in the construction of the preferred pairings.<sup>202</sup> Given the series' obvious attempt at representing diversity positively and its sheer number of black characters, it seems unlikely that these patterns could be anything but unintentional, unconscious. Yet the repetition of these patterns suggests that they relate more to embedded issues—in the ways that series mobilize and manage minorities under multicultural policy—than to coincidence.

“You Bend; I Break, Like in Every Song”<sup>203</sup>

The prevalence of squelching interracial relationships through writing characters out of the series and restoring order through non-mixed pairs is not exclusive to *Instant Star* and is among the most recurrent narrative choices in the popular Canadian youth series that air in the United States. This pattern, however, takes on stronger implications when it relates to pregnancy and child rearing. Interracial sex in popular Canadian youth series, as I will demonstrate, is recurrently dangerous even when racial conflict of any kind is absent from a relationship. Worse still, when interracial relationships result in pregnancy, the biracial child almost always dies or suffers because of the instability of her parents' relationship. In several cases, the interracial

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<sup>201</sup> And after its inherent positioning of Jude as entitled to whomever she chooses and minorities as impediments to or substitutes for Jude's desired relationships, the series ends its final season with Jude rejecting both Tommy and Jamie in favor of finding herself in London.

<sup>202</sup> Asian character Karma (Corey Lee) and Jude's sister Sadie prove the only partial exceptions to this pattern. Though she also frequently hurts Spiderman as she promotes her career over his feelings, Karma eventually decides she actually loves him, and their marriage seems to work by the end of the series. Sadie, as I have mentioned, uses Kwest to make Tommy jealous, but her relationship with him works out. She admits, however, that with “those lips, those eyes, Tommy will always be a contender” (313).

<sup>203</sup> I borrow these lyrics from Jude's song, “Fade to Black.”

pregnancies are the only ones to occur in the entire run of a series, immediately making them exceptional or rare in relation to the sexual activity of other—namely non-mixed—couples. There are also systems of blame, punishment, and racial hierarchy built into each relationship such that white bodies and psyches generally suffer more than their minority counterparts, while non-mixed relationships generally encounter fewer complications. These patterns continually perform surface-level tolerance and social accommodation while reflecting an unconscious anxiety about what diversity costs white Canadians, who are structured by extension as needing protection from minority influences and intermarriage. As with Jude and G Major's accommodation to Shay, and Anya's futile willingness to convert to Islam and learn Indian culture for Sav, the minority character is represented as merely bending, while the white character almost always breaks. And I emphasize "represented as" because although the minorities in each story arc are equally hurt and sometimes rejected or spurned more than the white characters, many plots encourage identification with the white member of the relationship (as does *Instant Star* with Jude).

Like early U.S. discourses about interracial sex and the attempt to protect the sanctity of the white races, recurrent negative portrayals of intermarriage and interracial sex bear witness to concerns about white racial purity. Canada's distinctive historical approach to intermarriage is worth noting because the history works against the televisual patterns I will discuss. A simple comparison of Canadian literary and televisual tropes to U.S. tropes, such as the tragic mulatto/a or anti-miscegenation law, does not do justice to the complex nature of Canadian racial politics, because the history of intermarriage in Canada has taken a very different path from its U.S. counterpart—different in its documentation, creative exploration, and popular understanding. Unlike in the United States, where at least forty of the fifty states have upheld anti-miscegenation

laws for some ethnic/racial group or another,<sup>204</sup> anti-miscegenation law in Canada did not exist as such. Most of the documented discriminatory policies related to sex and intermarriage in Canada focused on exclusionary acts against Chinese immigrants and Indigenous people, and these only implicitly discouraged intermarriage. Laws such as the White Women's Labour Law, for instance, prohibited white women from working in Chinese laundries, ostensibly in order to protect white women (and thereby white patriarchy) from potential mingling and procreation with Chinese men.<sup>205</sup> Even with exclusionary policy in place, intermarriage between Chinese and white people occurred without legal penalty, though it did often spark or frame legal cases that were not related to marriage. Sexual relations and intermarriage between Indigenous peoples and whites was also common. And unlike in the United States, where white men often married Native women in order to dispossess them of land, Indigenous women who intermarried in Canada often gave up their tribal rights, participating in a system ensuring that white men did not gain access to Native lands through marriage.<sup>206</sup> No documented laws banning intermarriage between blacks and whites, furthermore, existed, and intermarriage occurred even in some of the smallest provinces during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>207</sup> According to this history and current research, intermarriage in Canada has been and is now increasingly acceptable. Although there are many historical accounts about intermarriage in Canada, the lack of a state-driven ban against it means that at the popular level interracial marriage and sex (particularly between blacks and whites) in Canada remain somewhat under-problematized subjects, cited perfunctorily like popular and official multiculturalism as examples of Canada's "better" politics. The televisual analysis I

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<sup>204</sup> Weinberger cited in Foeman and Nance 542.

<sup>205</sup> Backhouse 141, 145.

<sup>206</sup> Mawani 48-9.

<sup>207</sup> See Hornby's work, for instance.

conduct in the final section of this chapter seeks not only to further interrogate present-day anxieties about interracial relationships (and specifically interracial sex and procreation) in Canada, but also to demonstrate how these tensions are repeatedly avoided, denied, and buried in these narratives only to resurface. The denial of the anxiety results in its repeated manifestations and in ultimately harsher ways of dealing with ethnic diversity than we see even among archetypal racists like Bunker or Sanford.

In many Canadian youth television series, sexual interracial interactions suffer from the same representations of inherent character flaws that we saw in the previous non-sexual examples. *Falcon Beach* and *Edgemont*, for instance, use *Instant Star*'s subtly negative portrayal of minority teens to mark them as poor choices for their white counterparts. *Falcon Beach*'s Erin is the only recognizable minority in the teen cast, and the show fluctuates between representing her as a nice girl and a hard-partying promiscuous one.<sup>208</sup> When Erin begins dating Danny, he becomes Hosea to her Gomer.<sup>209</sup> He repeatedly overlooks her faults—including her initial desire to be nothing more than “friends with benefits,” her participation in a wild video, and her attempt to make their relationship too sexual too soon—and patiently supports her through one problem after another, while she descends into self-centered and self-destructive behaviors. Similarly, *Edgemont*'s black character Chris Laidlaw enters the series as one of the high school's resident male jerks. He has already hurt two other white-female characters by

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<sup>208</sup>Although Erin is the only minority among the young adults in the show, there is also a black police officer with a recurring role in the series and an Asian woman who has an affair with Mr. Bradshaw. Early episodes of the show feature black extras in beach scenes, mostly with Erin and during her hip-hop aerobics class.

<sup>209</sup>Hosea is the Old-Testament prophet who obediently married the prostitute Gomer, despite her repeated infidelity; the story serves as a metaphor for God's faithfulness in redeeming a continually unfaithful Israel. To be fair, Jason exhibits the same patience with Tanya, and other characters certainly have problems: Tanya suffers from debt, drug addiction, and illicit activity; Paige is an antisocial brat; and her older brother is one of Tanya's drug dealers. But Danny's relationship with Erin is the only one in the series that is racially marked or that suffers repeatedly because of promiscuity. Tanya's overtly sexual behavior, for instance, only occurs when she is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, while the show paints Erin's as inherent. It is Erin's positioning as the only “naturally” sexually promiscuous character that follows common racial stereotypes.

rejecting them and caused manifold problems for others, but he seems sincere, even sweet, in his pursuit of Jen.<sup>210</sup> By dating him in season three, Jen does not risk racial discrimination, for it is absent from the series' exploration of their relationship, but risks instead her established reputation as a good girl and the possibility that Chris will hurt her as well. Jen's friends frequently warn her about Chris, marking her as naïve in believing that he may have changed. In both series, as in *Instant Star*, although the narratives avoid exploration of the racial politics in each interracial relationship, the characterizations are subtly racially charged.



**Figure 15: Press picture of Jen (Sarah Lind) and Chris (PJ Prinsloo). Photo courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from OMNI.**

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<sup>210</sup> Between seasons one and two, Chris scorns Anika, another evil character who functions as his white-female counterpart, and her friend Erin, both of whom aggressively pursue him, and he spreads rumors that damage Anika's reputation. He also instigates a fight that gets Jen's brother sent back to jail and threatens to out Shannon, who is a lesbian.





**Figure 16: Another photo of Chris and Jen, this one referencing her pregnancy. Photo courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from OMNI.**

When pregnancies result from these relationships, the instability of the minority character—and of the relationship as a whole—resurfaces and then intensifies. *Edgemont* encourages identification with Jen as a dual victim of pregnancy and Chris’ antics much more than does *Falcon Beach* with Danny. Although Chris is justified in his fears about Jen’s pregnancy, and Jen tells him about it after she has told all of her friends and her ex-boyfriend Mark, the story arc continually sets Chris up as the problem. In “A Simple Plan,” for example, Jen still has not told Chris about her pregnancy and gives him the cold shoulder, so Chris tries to pay her back by flirting with other girls. As Jen remarks, “He is such a jerk. I mean I guess I always knew that but lately I’m getting more and more reminders” (407); again, the stereotype we always knew Chris was returns. Jen’s friends Mark, Laurel, and Maggie repeatedly ask her what is wrong and fuel her anger with Chris. Mark confronts Chris about the pregnancy before

Jen has revealed it to him, and although he later admits that if he were Chris, he'd "be terrified," Mark clearly identifies more with Jen. Similarly, Maggie asks Jen what's going on with her and Chris and then notes that "It doesn't look like Chris is all that interested" (408). In this case, as in the previous, the white parties involved in the relationships subtly bear the burden of their decisions to cross racial lines, through their higher sacrifices and the reputation-based risks inherent to their involvement with non-white characters, even without any explicit representation of racial problems. The characters' fundamental ethical differences serve as the driving symbolic forces behind the relationships' failures, and their friends' concerns seem to paint the relationships' failures as inevitable.<sup>211</sup>

This unconscious discomfort with interracial sex becomes more apparent as the pregnancy plots develop. None of the interracial pregnancies produces children whom the characters raise. Danny and Erin and Jen and Chris lose their babies: Jen's miscarriage occurs midway into her pregnancy, while Erin's baby is stillborn. This seems innocently coincidental or rooted in creating dramatic educational narratives that demonstrate the potential consequences of teen pregnancy, not interracial sex. After the mourning, however, the white characters form romantic relationships with other white characters, again restoring order, while the ethnic characters fall out of the plot, suggesting that these deaths signify on more than the dangers of teen pregnancy.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Scott's interracial relationship with Bekka works as *Edgemont's* exception to this pattern, but as far as the narrative allows, this relationship never progresses to sex or anything serious. Half-Asian character Laurel's relationship with Mark could also work as an exception, but it also does not result in pregnancy, and the visual similarity of the characters minimizes the perceived interraciality of the relationship. And, looking away from racial issues to gender, most relationships in *Edgemont* make the male party the guilty one and encourage identification with the female characters, who tend to be vindictive and slow to forgive yet represented as victims of male insensitivity.

<sup>212</sup> After her miscarriage, Erin returns home to her parents to cope, while Danny pursues a relationship with another girl. Erin returns in the series finale, but Danny concludes that they have too little in common to rekindle their relationship and goes away to college. Jen and Chris's relationship ends similarly, with Jen revamping herself,

As Sharon Patricia Holland and many others have demonstrated, the narrative use of death reveals concerns about national identity and racial embodiment. Dead subjects, and particularly dead minorities, often represent people who have never earned, in the national imaginary, or “in the eyes of others, the status of the ‘living’” (15). We can read these unborn/stillborn biracial babies in the same terms, as subjects who never earned the status of the living. The dead or unborn children in these televisual examples work as subjects who “threaten the stability of the working nation” (23). Children, in particular, have historically served as symbols of the nation’s future and “operated as important ideological site[s] for representing the shifting conceptual place of race” in the construction of nation and national identity (Levander 223). Because in these aforementioned youth narratives the biracial child’s death coincides with or leads to the demise of the interracial relationship, death in these series becomes a narrative strategy (like minority instability in Kat’s, Portia’s, Shay’s, and these cases) for shaping the preferred white-with-white pairs, and by logical extension tools for shaping a white nation. In contrast to multicultural discourse, these series position the biracial children resulting from interracial relationships as unwanted, unnecessary, or somehow implicitly threatening to the nation’s future and their deaths as part of either the expected or desired order.

Complementary patterns emerge in *Degrassi*’s various series, which as of 2009 have included seven pregnancies, almost half involving minority girls. In *Degrassi Junior High* and *Degrassi High*, white characters Spike, Erica, and Tessa each become pregnant by white teens, and Spike is the only one to carry her child to full term and successfully raise her. In *DTNG*, although other characters experience pregnancy scares (Emma and Sean, for instance, both white), every definite teen pregnancy occurs in an interracial couple or in a non-mixed

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breaking up with Chris, and pursuing a relationship with a white rocker named Eddie while Chris is left alone (though he will likely also go to a top university) (405-513).

relationship between minorities.<sup>213</sup> Manny becomes pregnant after sleeping only once or twice with Craig; Liberty becomes pregnant shortly after she begins her black-white relationship with JT; and Mia (an ambiguous minority) first enters the series with a two-year-old daughter whose father appears to be a second- or third-generation Italian. The *Degrassi* series avoid *Falcon Beach* and *Edgemont*'s representation of character flaws or ethical differences as synonyms for racial difference, but they continue the pattern of the biracial child's death or removal from his/her parents, and they construct a system in which white people suffer psychological and physical harm either because of or shortly after their participation in interracial relationships.



**Figure 17: Soon after Manny (Cassie Steele) realizes she is pregnant, she and Craig (Jake Epstein) attempt (ineffectively) to care for Emma's baby brother. From "Accidents Will Happen" (314-315). Photo credit: Christos Kalohoridi. Photo courtesy of and reprinted with written permission from Epitome Pictures.**

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<sup>213</sup> Spike's second pregnancy in "White Wedding" (*DTNG* 212-13) is the seventh and only adult pregnancy in the *Degrassi* canon.

Although the storylines differ in their specific details and intensity, in JT and Craig's situations on *DTNG* neither interracial pregnancy produces a nuclear family. In each case, the white male has no control over the minority girl's decision not to raise the baby, and this along with the strain of a pregnancy coincides with the male character's physical harm. Upon finding out that Liberty is pregnant, for example, JT attempts to do the right thing, but Liberty pushes him away. Under the strain of mounting financial and career-centered pressures, JT agrees to steal and sell prescription drugs from the pharmacy at which he works, before overdosing on them in a failed suicide attempt. JT and Liberty seem to suffer equally when she decides to give the baby up for adoption. But soon after JT has moved on by beginning a relationship with Mia, some of Mia's ex-classmates stab and murder JT; Liberty, conversely, eventually emerges as resilient. While the biracial child lives in this case (though not with his parents), JT's relationship with Liberty directly influences his suicide attempt, and his relationship with another minority, Mia, indirectly results in his actual death, creating a pattern of punishment or injury for (sexual) association with the minority girls.

Craig's relationship with Manny is much more complicated, and the physical and psychological harm that he suffers after Manny's pregnancy do not immediately result from the interracial relationship. Rather, like the bipolar disorder that leads to Craig's cyclical instability, these effects remain latent and develop over several seasons of the series. During season three of *DTNG*, Manny aggressively pursues Craig (who is involved with Ashley) and becomes pregnant. Craig lacks a traditional family structure, wants the child, and believes he can raise it with Manny. But Manny proceeds with an abortion and loses Craig in the process. Craig and Ashley then reconcile, and it is only when they begin a relationship that Craig's residual issues—from his childhood abuse, his unstable family life, and arguably Manny's abortion—emerge. By the

beginning of the next season, Craig begins to show signs of mental illness, and by the end of the same season, he turns to violence, self-destructive behavior, and even temporary homelessness before finding out that he suffers from bipolar disorder and learning to maintain it with prescriptions. The combination of Craig's erratic behavior and his history with Manny and Ashley ends up destroying his relationship with the latter girl. Later in season six, while Craig is again involved with Manny, he descends into cocaine addiction before going to rehab.<sup>214</sup> Unlike in JT's case, the series never represents Craig's issues as directly related to his relationship with Manny, but Craig seems to suffer much more over time than Manny for his involvement in the relationship. Even without a direct link between Craig's instability and Manny or her pregnancy, the pattern in his story arcs shares enough parallels with JT's more literal demise to make clear that these episodes inextricably link white suffering to efforts at coping with pregnancy. And they link extended and severe consequences to pregnancies resulting from interracial sex. Coupled with the plots in the other two series and the loss of all four biracial children, Craig and JT buttress a common narrative structure in which interracial sex seems socially acceptable but seriously harmful, dangerous, or potentially deadly and in which biracial children pay (like the white participants in the relationships) for their parents' mistakes.

The solidity of the pattern becomes clearer in analysis of the pregnancies that do result in successful child bearing and rearing. I have already noted that Erin's is the only one to occur in *Falcon Beach* and the prevalence of pregnancy plots in *Degrassi*. *Edgemont*'s Jen, however, becomes pregnant at the very same time that white student Paige returns to school with her baby, a narrative choice that immediately paints the two as foils. While Jen cannot carry her baby to full term, Paige's baby is happy, healthy, and works as a "chick magnet" for the guys who baby-

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<sup>214</sup> Craig picks up this addiction while touring with a band.

sit him, but Paige's pregnancy also does not result from interracial sex. Though she experiences some problems with male students who are afraid to date her, she learns to balance motherhood with dating, working, and finishing her degree. Similarly, on *Degrassi*, Spike is the only one to raise her child in a balanced and healthy way, despite some complications, while by the eighth season of the *DTNG*, Mia still has not learned to balance her personal life with responsible care for Isabella, and Children's Aid threatens to take Isabella away (716). Spike and Paige are already exceptional in their success at child rearing, and from a critical point of view, their motherhood is non-threatening because it is not a product of racial mingling (or in Mia's case a minority pregnancy); rather, their unmixed motherhood provides examples of relative order within the chaos of teen pregnancy.

The potential for interracial relationships to cause harm not only to the white person who participates in them but also to harm those who later attempt a relationship with the white character also continually resurfaces throughout these series. Spinner's previous sexual interracial relationship with Manny during season four of *DTNG* results in the temporary destruction of his later relationship with Darcy at the end season of season five (518). Although Darcy breaks up with Spinner because he is not a virgin like she is and because of his dishonesty about it, she clearly looks down on Manny (without any insinuation of ethnicity) and disapproves of Spinner's previous sexual relationship with her in particular. The effects of the interracial relationship, in other words, do not stop with its dissolution, just as Portia's instability destroyed a life and thwarted Tommy's success in a relationship with Jude. And in one of *Degrassi's* most striking plots to date, Paige begins a sexual relationship with her black roommate Griffin only to find out the next morning that he was born HIV-positive (717). The as-yet unresolved plot leaves Paige having to wait six months before she can find out if she has contracted the virus.

Although she chooses to stay with Griffin, if Paige has contracted HIV, she will carry this permanent and deadly consequence of her encounter with Griffin into any future relationship as well. When situated within the patterns I have already noted, even this well-written episode paints interracial relationships as somehow *more* dangerous than their racially homogeneous counterparts. While the relationships themselves are generally fleeting, their consequences are potentially irreversible, and white Canadians emerge as the scapegoats for a multiracial or tolerant Canada in which racial mixing is inevitable but not preferable. In Kieran Keohane's terms, these popular manifestations of "[...] official multiculturalism [...] comman[d] us to 'mix enjoyably,' [but] somehow maybe promot[e] the opposite: preserve particularity, don't mix, don't lose your particularity" (124).<sup>215</sup>

Like the representations of interracial relationships as more dangerous, minorities and foreigners as more racist, and minorities as catalysts for the creation of white couples, the televisual tendency towards white victimization gestures to an under-problematized yet deeply entrenched trope in Canadian self-expression. These patterns borrow from a tradition of identity building that has relied on constructing Canadians as ever in need of protection from outside influences. As Mackey demonstrates, many of Canada's most acclaimed literary figures have for decades constructed Canada as a weak, feminized figure by misappropriating the voices of actual marginalized Others, including Indigenous people, ethnic minorities, and Quebecois nationalists

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<sup>215</sup> To my knowledge, the only exception to this portrayal of interracial sex is *Degrassi's* black character Jimmy (Aubrey Graham). Jimmy's on-again-off-again interracial relationship with Ashley features no racial dimensions or invisible barrier as far as I can tell. Interestingly, however, their decision to become sexually active is complicated by Jimmy's impotence (which is a side effect of his paralysis after a school shooting). Jimmy's inability to consummate his relationship with Ashley (604) would fit the general representation of interracial sex as problematic and the narrative pattern of punishing or disrupting such interactions, but Jimmy later successfully dates (and presumably sleeps with) his white girlfriend Trina. Trina, notably, is also paralyzed but has used stem cells and intensive physical therapy to strengthen her legs. If her impending marriage to Jimmy at the end of season eight actually occurs without narrative interruption, Jimmy and Trina's relationship will provide a counterexample to these negative patterns related to interracial sex and marriage.



(“Death” 128). In her terms, “Of course we all want an identity, but whom are we using, abusing, and erasing in the process of creating one?” (“Death” 129). Robin Wiegman suggests, furthermore, in a different context, that the replacement of minority victimization with the focus on white victimization “offers [...] white subject[s] who becom[e] ‘particular’ through a claim to social injury, thereby affirming not only that all historical racial debts have been paid (and hence that the historical is itself irrelevant) but that there is finally no privileged linkage between the protocols of universality and white racial embodiment” (134). These televisual examples speak a similar sentiment. Through them it becomes clear that popular multiculturalism, if not official multiculturalism as well, encourages the use of ethnic minorities in representing and stabilizing the identities of the white population and in painting them as the new marginalized figures in the face of increasing diversity. The balance sheet of racial suffering represents these white characters as paying a high or the highest price for multicultural tolerance, but it depends on negatively structuring minorities in order to do so.

All of this is not to say that these repeated representations are intentional. *Degrassi* generally represents sexual activity as marginally if not completely dangerous, in that each sex-related episode teaches a lesson about the consequences of choosing to engage in or abstain from sex. Paige’s non-interracial rape by a white teen results in predictable and justified psychological issues that manifest in brief destructive behavior, though this behavior pales in comparison to Craig’s. Griffin, furthermore, is one of two characters (and the only minority one) over the run of the series to experience HIV. Notably, his does not result from sexual carelessness, as it does when white character Dwayne contracts the virus in *Degrassi High* (201-202). Most pregnant teens in the series also give up their babies in some way or another, and even without race as a factor, the male body frequently suffers harm. For example, while high

on acid, white character Shane falls/jumps off of a bridge soon after finding out that Spike is pregnant (*DJH* 312). But while Shane's story slightly complicates the pattern of white suffering for participation in interracial sex or pregnancy, it does not change it, for Spike is still one of only two girls who effectively raises a (non-mixed) child. Nor does this information change the recurrent representation of interracial sex as *more* dangerous.

Because these series' representations run counter to public and academic discourses that stress the higher tolerance and acceptance of intermarriage and interracial exchanges in Canada, they suggest a discrepancy between self-representation and national sentiment, an unconscious attitude to which even seemingly positive representations are not immune. Because these series clearly try very hard to get it "right" through positive representations, they reveal not so much racism or prejudice on the part of their writers or producers, but work as microcosms of larger unproblematized issues in Canada—and in representations of diversity via multiculturalism in general. The producers and writers, in other words, grapple with dealing with diversity and its issues when the overarching discourse of multiculturalism has not dealt with them. In the same vein, the series' persistent representation of immigrant characters' difference seems like a legitimate attempt at painting them into a multicultural framework, but this also gestures towards the shortcomings of building identity through multicultural policy, because that policy inherently constructs diversity as somehow separate from Canadianness, even while it seeks to build Canadianness on diversity. If multiculturalism, then, works as a bandage—but not a salve—for unhealed issues, it merely covers them, just as does surface-level televisual positivism about diversity. These unconscious representations illustrate in many ways what will keep seeping out until those issues that are inadmissible to consciousness are resolved. In this way a continued self-representation of antiracism—where racism always comes from external, non-Canadian

sources and where “race” is somehow different from Canadianness—will keep old issues buried alive.

Because, finally, these exports look altogether different from and from some angles better (more diverse, more consistently integrated) than U.S. youth television, they are perhaps more problematic internationally. They may promote the vaguely deceptive view of an antiracist Canada, serving comparative work that does not account for subtler forms of racism, and in turn promote self- as well as external congratulation for these images. As Reitz notes in a comparative study between Canada and Britain, “The view of Canada as comparatively tolerant of racial minorities [...] is unfortunately not supported by available evidence. The comparative evidence suggests instead a rather different view—that what may be most distinctive about Canada, in the field of minority relations, is a low potential for racial conflict and tension, not a lesser underlying degree of discrimination” (424). This finding is also consistent with Catherine Murray’s large-scale empirical study of Canadian television’s representation, which essentially demonstrates that although Canadian television is less overtly racist than that of some countries, it still has not found the balance between representing multiculturalism as difference and representing multiculturalism as equal and positive. In other words, and as these examples should make clear, official multiculturalism has made major strides in creating a televisual environment in which racism is perceived as wrong and in which overt racism and discrimination are less likely to occur—and that is something that makes Canadian youth television a partially positive model for international audiences. But many of these youth series have not alleviated racial tensions; they, like multiculturalism, may only have given them a different package, and in this way, some elements of Canadian televisual exports may be just as “dangerous” for U.S. television as U.S. television has historically been for Canada. This dissertation as a whole has

traced some of the longstanding Canadian presence in U.S. television and argued that continued Canadian involvement in particular genres serves U.S. youth television well. Until Canadian youth representations bring buried issues to light, however, a Canadianization of U.S. television's ethnic or racial representations via the adoption of official multiculturalism may only add subtler forms of negative representation to U.S. youth television's already-problematic tropes.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CONCLUSION

#### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?: THE CANADIANIZATION OF U.S. TELEVISION

The preceding chapters of this analysis recast the traditional view of the United States' role in dominating Canadian television by shifting our emphasis to Canada's important but also complex role in U.S. television. In this revisionist narrative, U.S. television's power in complicating and often compromising Canadian televisual production remains an important dynamic, but the focus on the United States emerges as overplayed as other images of Canada and Canadian production take a more prominent role in the frame. As an arbiter of U.S. culture, a mediator between the United States and other international audiences, and an innovator in youth production, the Canadian television industry emerges as globally reputable and fundamental to the U.S. television industry, yet still distinctive from it. As a whole, this dissertation demonstrates a highly symbiotic relationship between Canadian and U.S. television in which Canadian centrality to U.S. youth and other television markets immediately complicates any binaristic reading of either Canadian or U.S. television or the forces that connect them. It is in reading their histories and the texts produced within them side by side that we best see the necessary overlaps between Canadian and U.S. TV, and it is also through this juxtaposition that we can best see the ultimate differences between them.

Both countries have had to find ways to manage the televisual presence of the other. For Canada, the deep-seated rhetoric of cultural defense positions U.S. influence as potentially

damaging to national culture and identity and emphasizes television's role as a cultural medium. Canadian television's original national public-broadcasting structure and longstanding context of difficulty in nation-building through culture have made the management of U.S. imports both convoluted and seemingly urgent and encouraged the institution of policies that offset U.S. influence. Canadian television's transition over time to a more privatized broadcasting system has only made the vision of cultural nationalism through television more difficult to maintain, as private Canadian networks have often promoted U.S. television series at the expense of homegrown fare and as U.S. series continue to inundate Canadian airwaves through private-network, satellite, antennae, and cable access. In addition to the prevalence of U.S. television in Canada, the Canadian industry has since the 1980s depended heavily on selling televisual exports and on the revenue that comes from them and U.S. runaway filming in Canada. Both of these changes further complicate the already-difficult undertaking of maintaining a culturally distinctive domestic Canadian television industry.

The United States has not had to deal so intensely with the Canadian presence in our television culture, it is not as explicitly burdened by the need to narrate national identity through mediated texts, nor has it positioned Canadian texts as potentially diminishing to identity or culture. U.S. television has, however, had to adjust to Canadian television, and U.S. television is as deeply rooted, if not more rooted, in national and cultural concerns as is Canadian television. These concerns just manifest differently, not so much through institutions or regulatory agencies (though those may come into play as well), but through the strict adherence to particular televisual conventions and through a more protective approach to youth television more generally (Chapters Three and Four). U.S. networks manage Canadian imports in order to protect a highly capitalistic, risk-averse, and fairly homogeneous U.S. televisual structure from

series that could potentially compromise advertising revenue and brand sanctity. To make imported and co-produced Canadian series seem to fit a U.S. television model, U.S. networks have frequently censored and reedited them, attempted to downplay their Canadian origins through assimilative practices, and often blatantly marketed Canadian series as “American” in order to build brands. These processes collectively demonstrate a U.S. counterpart to Canadian cultural defense, a defense of the commercial infrastructures that inform a U.S. sense of nation, and a defense of the conventions that continue to distinguish Canadian television from U.S. television.

One of this project’s central arguments counters the notion of converging televisual styles by demonstrating how structural privatization in Canada has not necessarily led to more U.S.-ified texts, as is generally feared. Instead, we see that even commercially broadcast and internationally circulated Canadian series still adhere more to Canadian televisual conventions than to U.S. ones. Canadian exports to the United States often contain inflections that not only mark them as different, but that also account in part for their sale to the U.S. market. If this were not the case—and if Canadian television were just like U.S. television—we would not find U.S. networks so frequently trying to de-Canadianize the imported series, nor would we find the same networks so frequently failing to do so. It is because of these continued differences that both countries fulfill specific generic gaps in each other’s television markets and counterbalance each other’s tendencies towards particular traditions.

While U.S. televisual exports to Canada have often been read as unwanted or harmful evidence of U.S. cultural penetration (and often imperialism), those exports also provide television content in genres that Canada has had difficulty sustaining (like sitcoms). In the same way, Canadian televisual exports to the United States provide series from under-produced genres

in U.S. youth television (like drama). Where Canadian television has excelled at youth realism, drama, and pedagogical entertainment, U.S. youth television has built a foundation of comedy and fantasy that utilizes traditional educational models and tends to privilege entertainment. Where U.S. television has focused on and indeed epitomized a commercial structure, Canadian television's resilience in spite of marginalization has proven that public and public-private series without franchises or mass-marketing opportunities can still become international successes. Where U.S. television has tended to specialize and often shield viewers from "issues," a good deal of Canadian youth television has taken bold steps in incorporating them thoroughly into the premises of series. And where U.S. youth television tends to give us racially homogeneous series, or series that paint diversity as tokenism, Canadian multiculturalism integrates ethnic and cultural diversity more thoroughly into more series. Yet, neither country's youth television has provided a fully anti-racist model for managing diversity. U.S. youth television's more explicit use of stereotypes and Canadian youth television's subtle incorporation of them both result in problematic images of minorities, images that need further and sustained improvement. While reading Canadian and U.S. youth television series together demonstrates each country's respective and distinctive strengths, then, this project's comparative analysis also demonstrates both countries' shared weaknesses and the differences in the ways that they manifest.

As in Toni Morrison's description of the Africanist presence that lurks in U.S. literature's mythology, all of the televisual examples in this project demonstrate how a Canadian inflection, presence, or influence may lurk in any area of U.S. television, in "idiom [...] in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation" (47). Whether it appears in ironic play or references to Canada and whether it remains invisible or is made by U.S. networks or Canadian producers to pass, the Canadian presence in U.S. youth television has grown steadily since the 1980s and will continue



to do so. This dissertation's analysis of Canadian youth television in the United States from 1979 to 2009 should cause us not only to recognize the Canadian presence in U.S. television up to this point, but also encourage the continued probing of U.S. television's central mythology, its "Americanness," and Canada's role in producing these myths. Just as Canadian-television scholarship has often read U.S. influence as an "Americanization" of Canadian television, we can read the embedded Canadian presence that this project has historicized as a quiet Canadianization of U.S. television and this project as a call for making U.S. viewers more attuned to this process.

Where will Canada-U.S. televisual relations go from here? As awareness of the Canadian presence expands, the mainstream U.S. realization of Canadianization can prompt several responses: The most extreme reaction to sustained Canadianization can lead to U.S. defensive practices like those we saw in Chapter Four (censorship, etc) or to a more stringent form of U.S. cultural defense that seeks to protect U.S. commercial interests from Canadian influence. In the most ideal reaction to Canadianization, U.S. television adapts to Canadian television exports in newer, more positive ways that benefit both industries. Or an increased awareness of the Canadian presence can produce another fetishization of Canadian television that manifests in the misrecognition of difference. In these final pages, I analyze each of these three ways that Canadianization can play out, predict the implications or potential benefits for each country, demonstrate how versions of these processes are already occurring, and suggest how we might make the most of the inseparable relationship between U.S. and Canadian television.

## 1. Structural Canadianization as Role Reversal: “Buying American”

At the outset, it is worth reemphasizing that the term “Canadianization” signals different things for different contexts, and I use it in this chapter to describe several processes that are not mutually exclusive. As we saw in Chapter Two, in the early twentieth century, Canadianization movements led by cultural elites, the Massey Commission, and other government administrations sought to imprint a sense of Canadian cultural distinctiveness on media industries that were inundated with U.S. products. These efforts to Canadianize (or to make more Canadian) media led to a television institution in Canada that styled itself as an alternative to U.S. television, that privileged public broadcasting over private commercialism, and that has continually had to adjust to privatization, commercialization, and U.S. penetration through protective regulatory agencies like the CRTC. In the 1960s, a mass Canadianization Movement of another sort, led by Robin Mathews and James Steele, sought to do the same work of nation-building through culture in Canadian universities, print industries, and other careers.<sup>216</sup> In each of these movements and in Canada, Canadianization has referred to a need for the cultivation of homegrown institutions and cultural expressions, a turn inward towards making Canada “more Canadian,” and a turn outward towards making sure that U.S. influence in particular could not interfere with these efforts.

Outside of Canada, however, Canadianization takes on different, sometimes negative, connotations. In the UK, where a more stringently “public” public-broadcasting structure governs television, a Canadianized television industry refers to one in which satellite technology and international imports undermine national public broadcasting and cause audience

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<sup>216</sup> See Cormier’s work.

fragmentation.<sup>217</sup> A Canadianized industry, from this perspective, is one whose structure succumbs to external influence, one that fails to manage the influx of exports from other countries or to retain a national broadcasting system. In the United States, this UK vision of a Canadianized television structure does not apply, because our system has since its inception already been primarily private, commercial, and fragmented (if fragmentation refers to manifold options not dominated by any one network or institution such as the CBC or BBC). In a U.S. context, structural Canadianization would instead imply a system in which cultural protectionism limits the international flow of television and hinders free-market capitalism by stressing public broadcasting over privatization, and cultural concerns over commercial ones. Canadianization at the structural level would mean that U.S. television, like Canadian television, would institutionalize defense against dependence on imports from other countries (in this case Canada) and that an emphasis on homegrown products or “buying American” would become the ideal for television broadcasting. In its most extreme form, a Canadianization of U.S. television would work as an Americanization of U.S. television—an effort to make it more structurally and symbolically “American” and more internally supported—an effort to purge international influence from it and to thereby increase domestic production as Canada historically has.

It is unlikely that this sort of Canadianization of U.S. television would ever fully manifest or that the United States would suddenly decide that promoting a distinctively “American” televisual culture is more important than a market-driven television environment. It is also highly unlikely that the United States would stop trade with Canada of all countries (if we recall, the two trade more with each other than with any other country). Yet, the general shift in 2009 towards domestically grown U.S. industries under the Stimulus Package, and its stipulations that

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<sup>217</sup> Miller “Canadian TV” par. 1.

U.S. public projects must utilize domestic materials in order to receive tax credits, in many ways parallel Canada's traditional approach to television.<sup>218</sup> If we broaden the increasingly popular "buy American" clause to apply to television and imagine a completely domestically operated U.S. television industry, the United States and Canada's traditional roles could momentarily reverse. The Canadian presence in U.S. television could become so recognized that it produces fears about the diminishing "Americanness" of U.S. television. Canadian television could emerge as the dominant force, the perceived aggressor, or the complication to "buying American," and U.S. television would have to question what distinctive traits define it while fighting further cultural penetration from Canada. Canadianization in this context would work as an equalizing force, meaning that U.S. television might suffer in the same ways and from the same insecurities that Canadian television traditionally has.

A historical parallel to this hypothetical situation did occur in the mid-1990s, in fact, when U.S. actors and producers lobbied against the prevalence of U.S. runaway filming in Canada. Led by Richard Riordan and Charleton Heston, the movement argued that cheap filming in Canada took needed funds away from U.S. film and television. The movement resulted in the founding of the Los Angeles Film Office and a campaign to "bring the movies back home" (Tinic 35). Imagine if a similar movement to bring *television* back home occurred, if U.S. television required content quotas, instituted a U.S. counterpart to the CRTC, and then intensified these regulations by trying to buy and air exclusively U.S. series in defense against a dominant Canadian presence. In the processes of increasing domestic content and weaning U.S. television from a dependence on Canadian television, networks like The N, Discovery Kids,

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<sup>218</sup> This is not to imply that "buy American" is a new phenomenon; as others have suggested, this rhetorical strategy is most valuable during economic recessions and dates back at least to the Great Depression (See Sanger, for example).

PBS, and Sprout would lose most of their original children's and youth series, educational content for youth would virtually disappear from U.S. television, and along with them so would non-comedic live-action youth series. Digital-cable and specialty channels for adults (like, Discovery, WE, Fine Living, and Fit TV) would feature very little serial content. U.S. television producers would have to learn to build programming in sectors that they have generally avoided, like youth drama, and "cheap" made-for-TV movies would have to become even cheaper. If inexpensive runaway filming in Canada were frowned upon, we would find the U.S. film industry—at both the big-screen and television level—stalled by the expensive realities of trying to make movies in Los Angeles and New York. Because a fully homegrown television and film environment would likely become too expensive to manage, U.S. television might find its production values suffering as companies cut costs by making cheaper series, and networks would depend even more on syndicated reruns and exports (which they probably could not sell to Canada). If U.S. television became like Canadian television—if it underwent Canadianization in this sense of the term—the decision to domesticize U.S. television would not only damage the U.S. industry, but likely also cause the Canadian one to fold.

Given the Canadian dependence on broadcasting U.S. imports and selling Canadian exports to the United States, it seems fairly obvious that if the United States suddenly decided to break ties with the Canadian television industry, the private sector of the Canadian industry would die, and the public sector would follow soon after. But U.S. television is also so dependent on trade with Canada that the U.S. industry would suffer immensely (it would not likely die, but certainly suffer) if it stopped trade with Canadian television in favor of a "buy American" televisual policy. This extreme form of the Canadianization of U.S. television—in which structural changes privilege a fully domestic televisual culture—is highly unlikely to

occur, both because “government interference with free trade” is often viewed as diametrically opposed to “Americanism” (Binswanger par. 16) and because Canada’s geographical location and cultural similarities make trade between the two countries most practical. But I have humored this hypothetical in order to reemphasize this project’s overarching argument about the symbiotic relationship between U.S. and Canadian television, their ultimate dependence on yet difference from one another, and the unbalanced reciprocity at work in their television industries. Just as every import is someone else’s export,<sup>219</sup> a full-scale structural Canadianization of U.S. television will necessarily involve a parallel and likely further-reaching effect on Canadian television. In contrast to U.S. defense against or purging of the Canadian presence in our television industry, I offer an alternative response to the Canadianization in progress in which symbiosis can work best for everyone involved in it.

## 2. Buying Canadian: Mainstream Exportation and Cooperation

This first scenario of structural Canadianization is unlikely, as I have mentioned, but a second more-realistic form of Canadianization is already occurring as U.S. networks not only continue to “buy Canadian,” but also continue to buy more and different Canadian products. Here, “Canadianization” refers to an increased and recognized Canadian presence in U.S. television that results in more care for both industries’ needs. While Canadian series are virtually absent from Nickelodeon and only scarcely present on Disney in 2009, they proliferate on U.S. network channels, on mainstream cable, in adult-centered markets, and in newer narrative forms for U.S. youth television. As Tinic notes in a recent article in *FLOW*, “Together CBS and NBC will directly import five new Canadian series for 2009-10 as they continue to cut

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<sup>219</sup> Cordova par. 6.

production costs in a softening advertising market.”<sup>220</sup> These U.S. (re)turns to Canada for network-television content complete the cycle that began in the 1980s. If we recall from Chapter Two, *Night Heat* and *Due South* of the 1980s and ‘90s proved well-rated co-ventures between CTV and CBS that demonstrated how co-ventures with Canada could work for U.S. network television. Recent CTV co-ventures such as *Flashpoint* (2008-present) have continued to succeed in the U.S. network market. Arguably, as series made with CTV (a private Canadian network that is generally considered more “U.S.” in its commercial approach and program preferences), *Flashpoint* and its ‘80s predecessors seem like easier sells to the United States than would CBC (necessarily Canadian-inflected) series. Upcoming CBC-ABC co-venture *18 to Life*, however, ushers in a new moment for Canada-U.S. co-ventures. Exceptional as both a CBC series and a Canadian sitcom sell to U.S. network television, the series could well predict how the Canadianization of U.S. television will pan out.

If *18 to Life* proves a ratings hit in both countries, the sitcom will encourage more such cooperative network-television series for U.S. and Canadian producers and potentially bolster mainstream exports by the CBC. If the series is explicitly set in Canada and avoids representing vague nationalities, characters, and settings, it can reach both audiences equally. If the series fully combines Canadian conventions—like irony, visual diversity, and an innovative approach to comedy—with U.S. conventions, it can provide a comedic parallel and parallel success story to Disney and CBC’s *Road to Avonlea*. As Chapters Three and Four explain, family drama

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<sup>220</sup> We also see U.S. cable channels depending more on Canadian series, with Discovery Channel and its family networks’ use of Canadian series *Survivorman* (2004-2008), *Man Tracker* (2006-present), *X-Weighted* (2006-present), and *How It’s Made* (2001-present); Style Network’s broadcast of Canadian reality/help series *Maxed Out* (2007-present), *Outlaw In-Laws* (2007-present), and *‘Til Debt Do us Part* (2008-present); HGTV’s use of Canadian home and living series *The Stagers* (2008-present); much of what airs on Fine Living Network, including *Newlywed, Nearly Dead?* (2007-present), *Big City Broker* (2007?-present), *Plastic Makes Perfect* (2007?-present); and much of what airs on WE TV, including *Bulging Brides* (2008-present), *Very Bad Men* (2006), and *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* (2006-present).

*Avonlea* worked because while it utilizes a picturesque and fantastical visual aesthetic that seems more fitting with Disney's model, its narrative approach gives the series a clear Canadian inflection, creating a balanced co-venture that can fit the conventions of both Canadian and U.S. television without necessarily downplaying either one. The same balance made youth series *Jett Jackson* an effective combination of Disneyesque fantasy and action and Canadian-inflected pedagogical realism. If ABC and the CBC can find the same balance in *18 to Life*, the sitcom will not only fare well, but the resulting increase in co-ventures between Canadian and U.S. television can bring needed funds to Canada's industry and move Canadian television exports out of the margins of youth and specialty television and further into the mainstream.

If the producers of *18 to Life*, on the other hand, attempt to make the series pass for one thing in the United States and another in Canada or to utilize a vague, universal setting, the series will end up with the same internal instability that made *Falcon Beach* and *About a Girl* seem awkward and unfocused (Chapter Three). Just as the best Canadian television exports are "as Canadian as possible," the best Canadian-U.S. co-ventures do not minimize or exclude the conventions that mark Canadian television as unique, but join them with U.S. conventions that can attract both audiences. Furthermore, if the producers on the CBC side of *18 to Life* choose to de-Canadianize the series or shoot it two ways, this process would work against the CBC's traditional identity-building creed and the call for distinctively Canadian television series. A U.S.-ified CBC would lead to other de-Canadianized CBC exports, undermine Canadian television's most stringently nationalist institution, and encourage more U.S. use of Canada for the production of series that can be easily assimilated rather than naturally integrated into our television programming.



It seems much more plausible (and pertinent) that the CBC will stress a Canadian inflection in *18 to Life* and that ABC will have to adjust its U.S. marketing of the series accordingly. This can provide the most ideal version of Canadianization of U.S. television, where Canadian series continue to fill programming gaps on U.S. television and continue to do so with intentional distinction. This kind of co-venture will demand proof to U.S. networks that admittedly Canadian series can work for mainstream U.S. television and adherence on the CBC's part to the differences that make Canadian television worth importation. The underlying belief, for example, that U.S. viewers need their series to be set in the United States—the belief that leads to universal or double settings—ignores the countless examples of Canadian-set series that have proven ratings successes on U.S. youth television. As long as the series remains a dual project and does not become another “made for the United States” Canadian series, *18 to Life* can find international success while still meeting Canadian content guidelines, working within the CBC's parameters, and without masking Canadian origins or characters. In other words, if *18 to Life* is “allowed to be” a Canadian co-venture—rather than masked or made to pass in a U.S. context—and succeeds, it can encourage more mainstream U.S. acceptance of overtly Canadian series and discourage the traditional assimilative post-production practices that U.S. networks have used to market Canadian imports (Chapter Four).

We see another precedent for this kind of U.S. acceptance of Canadian exports (and a way in which Canadianization is already working without interference) with the CBC series *Being Erica*. Though it is somewhat marginalized in its broadcast on specialty channel SOAPnet, *Being Erica* (2009-present) provides a model for how U.S. networks can continue to utilize Canadian series in ways that encourage the production of distinctively Canadian texts instead of in ways that encourage or require the production of the de-Canadianized texts that tend

to fail. Produced by *Degrassi: The Next Generation*'s head writer Aaron Martin, *Being Erica* garners high ratings on its U.S. broadcaster and positive reviews across the board. Set explicitly in Toronto, focused on a Jewish family, and combining a highly ironic sense of humor with relevance, life lessons, and a complex and incremental narrative build, the series looks “Canadian” in many of the ways that I have described in Chapter Three. As the U.S. broadcast of *Being Erica*'s first season comes to a close, I am struck by the extent to which SOAPnet has left the series intact. The U.S. channel claims its Canadian import as “SOAPnet original” programming (as most importers do), but it has not edited the Canadian series as severely as did The N with *DTNG* or called for changes akin to those Nickelodeon required of *You Can't Do That on Television*. SOAPnet has removed some profanity from *Being Erica*, but it has not changed the feel of the series in any discernable ways. The setting and characters remain Canadian, the marketing for the series does not highlight one aspect of it over another or misrepresent the series' goals, and many U.S. viewers not only like the series, but do not care that it is Canadian.<sup>221</sup> I would argue that given *Degrassi*, *Edgemont*, and many other shows' success as openly Canadian series, U.S. viewers might have accepted Canadian series “as is” all along and that network hesitance about these series is the only thing that has justified their traditional assimilation on U.S. television. *Being Erica*, like *18 to Life*, should set a standard for the U.S. handling of future Canadian imports and co-ventures, which clearly can and do sell to the United States in spite—or because—of distinctive qualities.

This version of Canadianization, in which Canadian series are allowed to be Canadian, can work for the optimal good of both U.S. importers and Canadian exporters. If, for example,

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<sup>221</sup> See, for example, the Facebook groups dedicated to the series and the number of U.S. fans who have joined the CBC-specific group.

these more relaxed practices continue in U.S. television, distinctively inflected Canadian television series can continue to function on U.S. television in their traditional ways without revivifying the overstated fears that Canadian series must hide Canadian origins in order to attract U.S. audiences. In other words, Canadian producers can be encouraged that selling to the United States does not necessitate selling one's soul or "selling out" by promoting vague texts over culturally distinctive ones. If U.S. television networks simply continue to import Canadian series without modifying or censoring them, without trying to downplay their origins (and without claiming them as "original [U.S.] programming"), then Canadian series will likely begin to get the recognition they have long deserved. Canadianization of this sort could also open up a dialogue about the U.S. dependence on Canadian television that in turn promotes greater appreciation of Canada's role in our television industry. This dialogue could perhaps (though this is a long shot) promote greater U.S. respect for the different implications of international exchange between the two countries and thereby greater respect for the boundaries that the CRTC has set in place. This would mean that as U.S. networks recognize the symbolic value and literal profitability in allowing Canadian exports to "be Canadian" in the United States, they might also recognize that the Canadian television industry's sustainability requires U.S. trade, but not U.S. economic and cultural pressure (via mass U.S. exports and assimilation of Canadian series), that Canadian television's industry requires enough distance or leeway from U.S. television to also "be Canadian" in Canada, and that both television industries could benefit more if the U.S. one embraces a policy of mutual respect.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Moreover, the way that U.S. networks choose to handle Canadian series will likely affect the way that other international series enter the U.S. market. The increase in Canadian imports that are allowed to retain distinctive inflections and clear Canadian settings may "extend to other countries [...]. Canadians with their indistinguishable accents may be able to pass as Americans but that did not initially overcome the 'cultural discount' that was seen to

### 3. Not Buying the Cow or the Milk, But Selling Formula

Though we can hope to see more Canadian imports in the U.S. market that are made with distinctive traits and then allowed to keep them after exportation, the final version of Canadianization I want to discuss is less ideal, but potentially salvageable. Parallel to the increase in Canadian exports on mainstream U.S. television is the proliferation of U.S. youth series that borrow from Canadian conventions. Canadian approaches to television are appearing in U.S. television programs and on U.S. networks that have traditionally relied on other forms. Disney XD, the new boy-branded channel that replaced Toon Disney, for example, has made relevance one of its explicit goals in reaching its boy demographic. Shifting away from Disney's and other U.S. networks' general focus on "purposeless fun," the channel's new market research finds that what youth viewers want is "fun with a purpose" (Ross qtd. in Barnes par. 25) and series that feature "mediocre" everyday characters to whom viewers can relate (Barnes par. 6). Disney's move towards representing and creating youth television with a purpose has, predictably, depended on Canadian input. As yet, one of the only two original live-action programs the channel has run—in efforts to create this "newer" relevant niche—is the Canadian co-venture *Aaron Stone*. Although *Aaron Stone* does not offer something completely new to television, it features many of the Canadian inflections that I have listed throughout this project and combines prosocial values and a subtler aesthetic with Disney's action and fantasy. The series is by far the cornerstone program on Disney XD, and its success will influence other similar series, many of which will likely come from Canada or utilize Canadian filming locations. In the same vein, Cartoon Network's 2009 lineup will add to the animation-focused network its first four live-action, semi-educational series, one of which is Canadian (*Survive*

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define programs explicitly set in Toronto, Vancouver, or rural Saskatchewan. If this discount no longer applies, can imports of television series set in Slough or Manchester, UK be far behind?" (Tinic "Life on Mars").

*This*, a youth counterpart to the already-popular Canadian series *Survivorman*). Disney's newfound attention to relevance and Cartoon Network's experimentation with live-action series illustrate the continued prevalence of U.S. networks looking to Canada for innovative (and inexpensive) or "different" series and also signal other ways by which U.S. channels may rebrand themselves via Canadian series.

We can also see more Canadian influence on U.S. youth television at the textual level. While U.S. youth TV for younger audiences has increasingly focused on slapstick comedy, the few non-soap youth dramas are attempting new forms of representation and narration. *Degrassi* and other Canadian series arguably paved the way for many of the recent U.S. youth and teen series that have earned critical acclaim for taking up what might be called "relevant issues" and "going" where U.S. youth television has generally chosen not to go.<sup>223</sup> The N's *South of Nowhere* (2005-2008), for instance, which deals with a family's move from Ohio to Los Angeles, addresses many of the same issues as the *Degrassi* series. Its principal focus on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues, as well as its attention to teen pregnancy and school shootings, have allowed it to attract many of *Degrassi*'s fans and earned it praise from organizations like GLAAD. The N, as I mention in Chapter Four, explicitly sold *South of Nowhere* as a U.S. counterpart to *Degrassi*, marketing its openness and issues as evidence of the same kind of

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<sup>223</sup> In using the term "relevant" here, I am both gesturing to television theory and revising it for a new context. The shift in some U.S. youth and teen television towards more seemingly "relevant" or issue-driven programming parallels the 1970s shift in adult-centered series that created a divide between "relevant" and "quality" programs. While both emerged in light of increased independent production and a variety of economic changes in U.S. television, "quality" television of the '70s was associated with intellectual stimulation, artistic expression, and feminist discourses, and "relevance" was associated with a "realist epistemology—an attempt to 'ground' the image in the referential" and improve racial representation (Lentz 47). "'Quality' [did] not strive to shock [...but] to appeal[] to the intellect [, relying] upon its associations with whiteness, class location, and sexual modesty. 'Relevance,' on the other hand, is a discourse about the 'real,' not the moral or polite. And reality is allowed to be shocking" (Lentz 68). Where quality and relevance have arguably served in much Canadian youth television implicitly, in these new U.S. youth series, we see explicit revivals of both quality and relevant politics—in their attempts at presenting realism via discourses of feminism, sexuality, and race simultaneously and at offering seemingly new modes of representing youth in terms of narrative innovation and dependence upon narrative shocks.

narrative aesthetic that I have characterized as Canadian inflected. Though expectedly controversial for its subject matter and the sometimes graphic ways through which it approaches it, the series has proven quite *uncontroversial*. *South* has arguably been able to get away with its content because of the precedent that the Canadian *Degrassi* already set for teen television on The N and in the United States.

Similarly, ABC Family's *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* could have caused much more controversy with its focus on teen sex and pregnancy, but it was hardly revolutionary when it aired, for *Degrassi* had already "gone there" many times before and since the 1980s. *Secret Life*'s ethnically diverse cast, attention to various types of students, and incorporation of a character with a disability also seem to offer a "new" U.S. aesthetic of youth realism, but as I have mentioned in Chapter Three, these traits really build from patterns of diversity and storytelling that have been prevalent in Canadian youth television for decades. Similarly, though it has met with some criticism that I will describe momentarily, the new incarnation of *90210* boasts of its more relevant, less "cheese fest" approach to teen issues and its use of a single minority character.<sup>224</sup> *Secret Life*, *South of Nowhere*, and *90210*'s incorporation of forms of realism and issue-driven storytelling into U.S. youth television suggests that U.S. producers are learning and building from traits that have long marked Canadian youth television as unique (and *90210* has even imported *Degrassi*'s Shenae Grimes, who now stars in the U.S. series). Many recent series have passed unscathed and unproblematized because of the battles that Canadian series have already fought in the United States, and *Degrassi* served as a scapegoat for its content before these other series were conceived. Common tropes in Canadian series, in other words, are becoming more central to notions of U.S. youth television's goals and selling points.

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<sup>224</sup> Executive producer of the *90210* remake/sequel Gabe Sachs states, "We know people are probably expecting a cheese fest and that's just not what we do" (qtd. in Martineau par. 6).

Successful Canadian series work in many ways as paragons for the growing concept of relevant U.S. youth TV.

This last version of Canadianization, however, also demonstrates the ultimate line of demarcation between Canadian and U.S. television that I have stressed throughout this project. What these latter U.S. series do—and the reason this kind of Canadianization is less ideal—is essentially bastardize their Canadian predecessors or models by borrowing some elements but not others and creating series that epitomize the differences between U.S. and Canadian youth television’s emphases. As I have noted, *Secret Life* works as an extended very special episode, making explicit and repeating its goals, lessons, and standpoints on particular issues. Its diversity often reduces characters to types rather than providing them with depth. And as I have mentioned elsewhere, *90210*’s inclusion of a single black character does very little to create an effective multicultural picture either of Beverly Hills or for teen viewers. *South*’s characters, similarly, are types, and the early promotions for the series encouraged this reduction of their characteristics. With labels for each character, the commercials stated, “He’s trying to figure out the race thing” (about Clay, the adopted black brother). “She’s trying to figure out the sex thing” (about Spencer’s struggle with coming out as lesbian/bisexual). And “he’s trying to figure out the jock thing” (about other brother Glen). All of these “things” that plague the characters suddenly appear as problems only when the Carlin family moves to Los Angeles, as though sex, race, and professional questions did not and could not exist in Ohio. While, furthermore, it naturalizes homosexuality and preaches against homophobia with its manifold gay teen characters, *South* still encourages heteroerotic identification with its lesbian characters, sexualizing the teen actresses in low camera angles and body shots clearly aimed more at titillation than realism.

Titillation rather than realism, in fact, guides many of these new U.S. series' incorporation of formerly taboo subjects. In Laura Fries' terms, the new *90210* (and I would add *South of Nowhere* as well) "does not cover issues so much as exploit them" (par. 6), and Beverly Beckham calls the former series "too raunchy not just for preteens, but for all teens [...] adult sex disguised as entertainment" (6).<sup>225</sup> A good example of this comes from a comparison of *Degrassi's* "Secret" (414, 415) and *90210's* premiere episode, "We're Not in Kansas Anymore," both of which use teens talking about sex and having oral sex to very different ends. "Secret" mentions oral sex, even using graphic colloquialisms for it, but the episode does not focus on gratuitous actions or language. With very little suggestive imagery, we know that Emma and other students engage in "bracelet parties" before they start a gonorrhea outbreak at their school.<sup>226</sup> Without too much heavy-handedness, the story arc teaches the consequences of Emma and other characters' behavior and how to avoid its potential dangers. *90210*, conversely, includes very different scenes of oral sex and teen dialogue in the first ten minutes of the episode, where Annie passes by her former boyfriend engaged in the act in a car with another student. The scene is more than suggestive as we see the disheveled girl rising from Ethan's lap, Ethan zipping his pants or pushing her away, and Annie's disgust in the reaction shot. Soon after, another character, Naomi, sardonically retorts to a teasing male classmate that her gynecologist told "me to remind you to keep your vagina clean." While the sex scene alerts

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<sup>225</sup> Jennie Garth of the original *90210* even concedes that though she participates in the remake, the original series was more family centered, and the new one is not something she will let her children watch (Beckham 6).

<sup>226</sup> At the parties, a girl receives a different-colored cheap bracelet each time she performs oral sex for one of the guys.



Annie to Ethan's infidelity, Naomi's dialogue is gratuitous and only makes narrative sense inasmuch as it reveals how far the Beverly Hills kids presumably are from those in Kansas.<sup>227</sup>

These U.S. series treat the same youth content as Canadian series but for completely different reasons, as these examples and Chapter Three demonstrate. Like *South*, *90210* detracts from the issues it explores by exploiting them for shock value and localizing them as particular to California and not to adolescence. The decadence of the series and their issues is contained in the decadence associated with the place of their setting. In this way, these U.S. series metonymically fetishize the places in which teens encounter such issues just as much as they fetishize the issues themselves, making clear that both the supposed realism and the settings are rooted in a premise of providing shocks. Without the balanced democratic pedagogical model we see in *Degrassi*, *90210* and *South* ultimately work towards representing teen spectacle, not realism or relevance. And with an over-attention to traditional pedagogy without stressing viewer self-learning and self-interpretation, *Secret Life* serves as the other extreme, utilizing top-down traditional pedagogy. Each of these series borrows specific elements and contemporary "issues" that have made Canadian television series like *Degrassi* and *Edgemont* successful, but none fully removes itself from common U.S. tropes like the special episode and overt moralizing or the downright avoidance of responsible narration in favor of salacious or commercially shocking content. These series are partially Canadianized but ultimately very different.

As in resistive appropriation, these U.S. series utilize elements from Canadian series only to U.S.-ify them in particular ways. Unlike resistive appropriation, however—which depends on *recognizing* and then muddling or revamping an image, trope or pattern—it is unclear whether

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<sup>227</sup> This scene received a good deal of popular press, some of which directly berated the series, and complaints from parents' organizations. See TV Shark's "90210 Oral Sex Scene," Susman's *Entertainment Weekly* article, and Chan, respectively.

the makers of these U.S. series really recognize the “point” of the Canadian series that have influenced them. *90210*'s attempt to add relevance via shocks is very different from *Degrassi*'s attempt to represent relevance that sometimes happens to be shocking. The difference in emphasis is akin to The N's initial decision to censor erections, suicide attempts, and thongs, for instance, only to bring them back and exploit them in marketing schemes. If we recall from Chapter Four's analysis, The N essentially misread the point (educational realism) of these *DTNG* episodes and censored them accordingly (marking them as too dangerous, too graphic). Then the network executives misread, or ignored, the viewers' desire for the episodes' completion and sold the same viewers parts (fetishized moments) at the expense of the whole. In the same way, by selling shocks as relevance or graphic sexuality as realism, these new U.S. teen series misread the narrative focuses of their Canadian predecessors. *90210*, *South*, and *Secret Life* essentially reenact the same fetishization, by relying on individual parts of the story (like graphic language or sex), sexuality, and hyperbole of location to attract viewers; but they miss the well-roundedness of the whole, the emphasis on realism, education, and helping viewers to make choices.

Collectively, these U.S. examples demonstrate both the positive and negative possibilities of the Canadianization that is at work in U.S. television: On the one hand, Canadianization could possibly result in more attention to the issues that youth viewers need and want to see represented in new ways; this might mean that series like *Secret Life* continue in their attempt to emphasize real life but recognize that very-special moralizing is not the only way to approach didactic entertainment. On the other hand, we may find that Canadianization can never fully transform U.S. television, but might only continue to highlight the ultimate differences between it and Canadian television; in this case, we may find that new U.S. representations can or will

only create ineffective copies of series like *Degrassi* and *Edgemont* and result in the proliferation of series like *90210* and *South*.

In its least effective form, then, Canadianization could simply mean that U.S. television continues to misinterpret the value of Canadian series and their differently focused conventions and that fetishization of Canadian series proliferates. Conversely and preferably, if the second kind of Canadianization—that in which we increase imports that are allowed to retain distinctive characteristics and that are in fact valued for those characteristics—continues, authentic Canadian series will continue to offset their ineffective U.S. counterparts, and fully Canadian content can serve both cultural nationalism in Canada and the U.S. television industry that sources so many of its series from Canada.

Whichever form of Canadianization ends up dominating, the Canadian presence in U.S. television is deeply ingrained, necessary, and often positive. This dissertation's recognition and analysis of both the current and historical Canadianization of U.S. television should not promote draining Canada of its televisual resources, but it should promote further recognition of U.S. dependence on Canada for televisual texts—and for products from many other industries at that—and it should encourage more scholarship about how we can improve and sustain televisual relations with Canada in ways that respect the Canadian needs for 1) protection from too much U.S. penetration, 2) for continued self-differentiation from U.S. television, and 3) for a separate television culture in spite of so many overlaps. In tandem, the implications of this project should encourage other such re-readings and rewritings of the “standard narrative” of Canada-U.S. television relations, not in terms of defense, but symbiosis. And this examination of youth television should work as a heuristic for scholarship on other genres, for as I have said, youth television mirrors, predicts, and often sets the trends for other markets. The project also,

finally, demonstrates how much Canadian television has quietly served U.S. television for decades. Winston Churchill once called Canada the “linchpin of the English-speaking world,” and Canada may well become or already serve as the linchpin of English-language television.

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