

**“TEACHERS AREN’T PEOPLE... THEY’RE TEACHERS”: A COMPARATIVE LOOK
AT THE EFFECTS OF AMERICAN TEEN TELEVISION ON CANADIAN NATIONAL
IDENTITY**

by

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Canada

A Comparative Look at Identity Formation in
The OC and Degrassi: the Next Generation

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Introduction

The Camera Eye: The Case of Television Studies and the Formation and Molding of Identity

“I feel the sense of possibilities,
I feel the wrench of hard realities”

(Lee, Lifeson and Peart)

Contemporary teen programming is recognized by hipster-TV audiences as being overtly self-referential. *The OC*, in particular, was admired and copied by programs like *One Tree Hill* and *Gossip Girl* for its ability to mirror itself and its program identity within the confines of the show itself. A way that the writers were able to do this was by creating a faux “mirror” show they called *The Valley*. Taken straight out of Shakespearean plays like *Hamlet*, the writers from *The OC* create a “reality show” that the characters watch throughout the years. The “play within the play” is a microcosm of the events taking place within *The OC*, and the primary characters comment on the “reality show” mockingly, completing a metaphor in that both audiences are being influenced by the programs they are watching in a cyclical loop. The writers thus used television as a mirror within the show as a reflection of character formation.

The OC, like many other teen dramas, exhibited that television works as a mirror; the audience is influenced by the actions they see reflected on it. The identity of North American Teen Audiences is very much molded by the television they choose to consume. “Television is still the dominant medium of choice for teenagers and they're watching more of it than ever before” (Nielson). While it might be commonly thought that teenagers are more consumed with the Internet and texting, a 2009 study by the Nielson group has shown that teenagers still spend

the majority of their free-time in front of a screen watching the television. As a teaching device, television can be problematic due to the arbitrary variances between what is possible and what is real. Both possibility and reality are negotiable terms whose meanings are both subjective and contextual; ideally, if the terms are paired, a possibility can often become a reality. Using both Television and Cultural Studies as a lens, this thesis will negotiate through television that is written for teen audiences and analyze the possibilities of the genre while addressing the impacts of the genre; who is watching, what they are gaining from it, and how their identity is modified as a response to and in relation to what they have seen.

I chose to link identity formation and the development of national identity by analyzing two popular teen programs, *Degrassi: the Next Generation (DTNG)* and *The OC*. I have been a fan of teen drama for as long as I can remember. During my teenage years, *Degrassi Junior High* was often playing on my TV, and I have fond memories of watching it in class during high school. Teachers would often use the show to help deal with “sensitive” material like sex and drug use. I imagine it would be easier for a teacher to talk to someone else’s child about these matters than it would be to talk to their own, but I still remember it being difficult for my teachers to talk to the class about personal issues like rape, bullying and drug use. When I began studying television, I found myself drawn to didactic television, and thus returned my gaze to the teen programming I remember being so important in shaping my identity when I was a teenager. At the time when I started my thesis work, *Degrassi: the Next Generation* and *The OC* were the most popular night-time teen television dramas available on cable. Both *DTNG* and *The OC* have also reached some sort of cult-status for teen programming because of their ability to not only

reflect teen culture, but also because they have the capacity to influence the complicated maturation process in which teens form identity. According to Sara Gwenllian-Jones:

Cult television's serial and segmented forms, its familiar formulae, its accumulated multiple storylines, its metatextuality, its ubiquitous intertextuality and intra-textuality, its extension across a variety of other media, its modes of self-reflexivity and constant play of interruption and excess, work together to overwhelm the processual order of cause and effect, enigma and resolution, extending story events and other narrative and textual elements across boundless networks of inter-connected possibilities. (84)

Both shows have devoted followings by adult audiences and often rely on culture relevant to young adults (for example, Kevin Smith and *Death Cab for Cutie*¹) to ensure their characters appear on the cutting edge of trends. Because of this, *DTNG* and *The OC* are strong, timely, and culturally relevant programs to analyze for the purpose of this thesis. Scholars like Thorburn, Gerbner and Fiske have been writing about the effects of television on national identity for more than twenty years. But what no one has yet treated is the impact teens have on their nation's identity and how the relationship between teen and country is portrayed on television. As the first scholar to approach *The OC* and *Degrassi: the Next Generation* I am creating a link between the discussion of television and national identity and the arguments that center around how television helps teens create identity. This link is vital to the discussion. In an age where television's reaches and influence have never been more pervasive, this discussion is necessary to understand the influence of television on identity moving forward.

Theoretically and empirically, two different approaches will be used to analyze these programs, Television Studies and Cultural Studies. These fields are significant in their own right and the connections that will be drawn between the two frameworks will further the discussion on the intrinsic link between television and culture in an era where media studies is making important strides towards legitimacy and magnitude in the field of Humanities. In his introduction to *The Television Studies Reader*, Robert Allen refers to Television Studies as being a “field of inquiry” (2). He continues to explain that Television Studies is becoming a legitimate field, but until further organization is done in the burgeoning field, Television Studies is more of an amalgam of studying television in different disciplines like Literature or Political Science. The introduction to this thesis includes a literature review that will touch on the major topics being discussed in both Cultural and TV Studies and present topics and arguments I will use as the theoretical basis for of my thesis.

The way that characters on a TV show are informally educated will have an effect on the audience, particularly in the way the audience sees informal education. Teen dramas are dominated by informal forms of education. Traditional education takes a secondary role to education by peers in teen based television shows like *Degrassi: the Next Generation* and *The OC*. This pedagogy is then relayed to the teen audience, who mirror what they see on TV. Television is the primary education medium on sexual and substance abuse issues for the Teen audience. This may be problematic if parents and educators attempt to teach teens using media. Examples of teaching with television already exist with classroom-based video/Media learning and made for Teen Viewers specials like ABC’s *Afterschool Special*. Being that “the typical

American spends more time watching television than doing anything else but sleeping” (Dail and Way 492) the way television teaches is pertinent to discussion.

Connections between viewers and experiences are laid out in George Comstock and Erica Scharrer's book, *Television: What's on, Who's Watching and What does it Mean?* In this book, the authors apply an empirical strategy to formulate data about the testable characteristics of television viewers. A theorist who approaches one subject from both textual and logical standpoints engages in interdisciplinary scholarship. Using this interdisciplinary approach, Comstock and Scharrer discuss hard facts about TV while backing them up with the results of their testing. Their results argue that Teen Audiences are influenced by what they see on television, particularly by anti-social behavior and issues that adults and parents are sometimes not comfortable discussing, like criminal activity, drug use, and open sexuality.

Anti-social behavior including, but not exclusive to drug use, alcohol use and under-aged sexuality is represented differently on television in individual countries, and this difference speaks to the national identity of the country in question. While investigating the depiction of the aforementioned issues in a comparative study of Canadian and American teen television drama, I expect that the way the subjects are handled individually in each country will speak volumes about their national identities in the contexts established in this thesis.

American television has a massive impact on Canadian audiences. In fact, “it is often easier to find Canadian content rerun on US stations than on Canadian ones” (Byers and VanderBurgh 105). A question arises, however. Would there have been many similarities between two shows from Canada and America even ten years ago? Are American television programs shaping Canadian ones? And if this is the case, is American television shaping

Canadian national identity? As a result of American television's social impact, coupled with Canadian television's has need to grow to compete with American television, programs like *DTNG* are getting more extreme, and struggle to maintain a Canadian identity.

In unpacking this comparison of national identities, I plan to examine a few specifics. First, I am interested in the way education is used in each program relating to the anti-social matters I have mentioned. Are the teens in the programs being formally or informally educated about these controversial topics? For the basis of this thesis, formal education will include teachers and professionals, while informal will include friends, parents and television itself. The handling of these issues in the narrative transcends the medium itself. That is, the viewers of this type of program that caters to young, impressionable audiences, are being influenced and educated in the same way as the characters in the program.

Television has a tendency to instruct subconsciously. Dail and Way refer to this as "observational learning" (492). They go further, adding that "If the viewer engages in the subprocesses of observational learning and perceives a certain degree of reality associated with what is being observed, and if there is likelihood of an opportunity to display the observed behaviour, modeled behaviour may occur" (492). This ties into notions of catharsis and didactic art, which will be discussed later.

From the field of Cultural Studies, I will use theories and arguments that focus on the rhetorical construct of identity and culture, not only for individuals, but for nations as well. We must assume that national identities are representative of individual identities. Theories about identity like those discussed in Chris Barker's book, *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities* will be discussed. In this text, Barker discusses the changing formation and definition

of the term "identity" in recent years. Barker argues that identity is not a fixed term; it is fluid. Barker goes farther to discuss television's role as a leading proponent of globalization, and whether or not it has a role to play in the unification of nations. With this study of the cultural effects of TV and its role as a component of national identity, Barker's argument will pertain to my argument about what role TV plays in the formation of Canada's culture and identity.

"Children spend more time watching television than they spend at school or in direct communication with their parents, siblings, or friends" (Fabes et al. 337). Television, although in most instances an informal form of education, plays a primary role in teaching teens about sex, drugs and alcohol, and is therefore instrumental in shaping teen culture. The characters in teen television dramas get the bulk of their "education" from friends and parents, thereby complementing the formal education system. Cultural Studies texts like Ron Lembo's *Thinking through Television* and Chris Barker's *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*, will serve as the basis for my methodology of studying culture through TV.

What function does American television have in molding the Canadian teen drama, and to what extent are elements of Canadian teen culture being shaped by the American ideals? In 1997, the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) televised a documentary titled, *What Border?* that investigated the Americanization of Canadian culture and what Canadians are doing to preserve their sense of distinctiveness. Additionally, in Richard Collins' text, *Culture, Communication and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television*, an argument is made for the case of Canadian national identity as it pertains to television. Collins goes on to argue that Canada's identity is not only shaped by its cultural influences, like television, film and other arts, but Canada defines itself culturally through a group of unifying symbols, like the maple leaf or

hockey. Thus, because of its ability to reach all Canadians and deliver symbols like hockey and even *Degrassi* television is a factor in any sort of over-arching Canadian identity.

Mel van Elteren, in his article, "Conceptualizing the Impact of US Popular Culture Globally," studies the impact that American pop culture has on other countries, mainly European in this instance, and what the affected countries are doing to maintain their identity. Van Elteren goes into great detail describing the legalities that come into play to protect cultural borders. Americanization is exactly what Canada may be facing; although scholars like Collins may think television is not a major influence on Canadian identity, I argue that as teens age into adults, their sense of national identity will be swayed by what they remember as predominant influences as they matured. Therefore, the Americanization of Canadian teens threatens Canada's already fragmented culture. According to Sean Phipps Canadian culture, "doesn't exist, it's regional, and it's multicultural or any combination of the three... It is a complex culture, shaped by all the cultures that form it" (theGlobeandMail.com). While describing the state of Canadian television culture, Byers and VanderBurgh state that "with no visible history upon which to draw, Canadian television must be constantly reinvented, coming to exist in a kind of television language of no language, television style of no style" (107). Obviously, Canadian identity is problematic, but this is also the case with American identity. For the purpose of this thesis, while Canadian and American identities are fragmented, I will examine them in contexts specific to how social issues are examined in each nation's teen television.

The abundance of American programming bombarding the mainstream viewing audience is a leading reason that Canadian culture is at risk. Beyond pure numbers of programs, American TV has better production values, contributing to "[t]his disinterest in watching Canadian-

produced television that despite the development of multiple platforms and the passing of years does not appear to have changed much” (Byers and VanderBurgh 114). The "Americanization" of Canada through programming and the spreading of pop culture by American broadcasters can be interpreted as a modern day form of imperialism, as Canadian sense of "self" is threatened.

Television is a medium that has educational value and can help instill values and identity in formative years. Although the amount of time spent by teens on their electronic devices increases yearly with the addition of smart phones and tablets, the time spent watching television in the traditional fashion has not suffered. A reason for this is that television is a legitimate social indicator. It reaches a diverse, influential audience. Although many consider television to be a large waste of time, they cannot deny its appeal. Television is both a mimetic and a didactic device; it echoes real life situations while teaching the viewers lessons. David Considine's article, "Media Literacy: National Developments and International Origins" discusses the concept of teaching with television and how specific countries, including Canada, are integrating this system into the public education sphere. Programs like *Degrassi* are being used to teach high school students about controversial issues like drug use, teen pregnancy and eating disorders. As traditional education is regionalized and differs slightly from region to region in a nation, television acts as an overarching signifier of national contexts. Television is an educator and it affects each country's national identity.

After thoroughly discussing the theoretical basis of each field, and how they individually apply to my central point, I will engage in arguing that in some circumstances, only through a union of the two disciplines can we really learn from television in a manner that is responsible. Notable scholars in the field, such as Lynn Spigel and Ron Lembo are approaching this subject in

an interdisciplinary manner. Lembo argues that TV viewing is a cultural form, implicitly tying together the disciplines of Cultural and TV Studies. Through argument, discourse and empirical studies of watching habits, Lembo attempts to learn how viewers give meaning to their television watching experience.

When studying TV, according to Horace Newcomb, three questions consistently arise, "[f]irst, how does television tell stories... [s]econd how do the stories found on television relate to... the societies and cultures in which they appear... [and t]hird, and finally, why television?" (107). It is the third question that I find most problematic, why study television? TV is an astute cultural reflection, and a driving force in shaping the identity of its audience. In terms of Television Studies, I will be following a reader response theory; I feel that the effects on the teen audience are what are truly important to my thesis. Of course, I will also discuss other matters involved with Television Studies, for example, television aesthetics and context.

One matter I am particularly concerned with is the ability of television to be didactic. For my argument, television must be proven to be a formative teaching implement for teens. Rick Nauert, Senior News Editor for Psychcentral.com recently published a paper speaking to television's ability to influence youths. In 2010, he started a study that "involved 353 undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25. All of them watched one of two programs that focused on the difficulties associated with unplanned teen pregnancies" (Psychcentral.com). One of the programs Nauert used was *The OC*. Nauert found that "those who watched *The OC* were more likely to report in two weeks that they planned on taking steps to prevent pregnancy" (Psychcentral.com). Lynn Spigel, one of the foremost experts on Television Studies, approaches the notion of "television" as more than just the narrative of the

shows themselves in her article, "TV's Next Season?" Spigel takes an interdisciplinary look at TV as a whole, arguing that the format of the shows (for example when commercials are on and what they are trying to sell) have just as much effect on the audience as what happens on the show itself. This concept is also known as "flow" (132). When referring to flow, Fink explains that "it is evident that what is now called 'an evening's viewing' is in some ways planned by providers and then by viewers as a whole; that it is in any event planned in discernible sequences which in this sense override particular program units" (132). Further discussing 'flow' in a national identity context, Byers and Vanderburgh conjecture that "Particular narratives through which ideas such as 'nation' have become meaningful might be seen to emerge quite literally in the jumbling together of disparate historical texts into one 'flow', in much the way that they do in the American and British contexts" (107). Specifically, Spigel's article discusses the integration of Cultural Studies into TV studies and how the scholarly research on television is changing and where she expects it to go in the next few years.

There is a discrepancy between Television Studies and Media Studies, the first being the act of studying television, the second studying with television. By studying with television, I refer to the act of using television in the classroom as a teaching implement. For example, an episode from a teen program discussing cyber bullying may be a valuable tool for a teacher to use inside the classroom. Studying television and studying with television are inevitably linked. A certain amount of TV study must be done before it can properly be used as an instructive device. Gary Edgerton discusses the relationship between the two theories in his article, "Media Literacy and Education: The Teacher- Scholar in Film and Television." This article deals with the

past, present and future of media studies as well as discussing the move away from reading and towards television.

Is television the primary educational medium on anti-social issues for teen viewers? This theory was empirically tested in George Comstock and Erica Scharrer's book, *Television: What's on, Who's Watching and What does it Mean?*, but what the study does not evaluate is what techniques programs in different nations are using to affect their respective audiences. The logical question, then, is: do teen nighttime dramas use the same didactic devices and rhetorical techniques to educate the audiences in Canada and the United States? I propose that this is not the case, and that the differences in pedagogical styles between the programs I am looking at speak clearly of national identity in each country. Critics such as Jeannette Sloniowski and Marie-Claire Simonetti have both attempted to survey the differences between this genre in Canada and the United States, but the link between didactic television and national identity has escaped the discourse so far.

The Canadian program I will analyze is *Degrassi: the Next Generation* (2001). Analysis and interpretation of this program will make a point about the didactic properties of TV, as well as how the Canadian writers and producers of television attempt to negotiate the formation of Canadian national identity into their programming.

The OC (2003) is the American show that I will address as it deals with many of the same issues as *Degrassi* but in a distinctively *American* way. As this thesis is comparative, the two shows will be analyzed together regarding the specific issues they share, and how these shared issues are handled differently.

Degrassi: the Next Generation, created by Yan Moore in 2001, is the most recent incarnation of a show that originated almost thirty years ago in Canada with *The Kids of Degrassi Street* that originally aired in 1982. This program aired on Canadian Television (CTV), until 2010 when broadcasting was taken over by sister station MuchMusic. CTV is Canada's largest privately owned television network. In this most current version, the narrative follows an ever changing cast through their high school years. A few of the actors from *Degrassi Junior High* and *Degrassi High* rejoin the cast. This time around, they are the parents and teachers. The teenaged characters in *DTNG* are actually played by teenagers. This is unlike many teen dramas that use actors in their twenties. I believe this adds to the believability of the on-screen relationships and dilemmas.

The OC was created by Josh Schwartz in 2003 and aired on the Fox network in the USA. *The OC* follows a group of four teenagers and their parents as they go through their high school years in the very upscale neighborhood of Newport Beach in Orange County, California. Unlike *DTNG*, *The OC* uses actors in their early twenties to portray the teenagers. Chang claims that “[a]t its height, *The OC* drew nearly 10 million viewers and had a dedicated following in the lucrative youth demographic” (Chang). Although *The OC*'s target market is teenagers, the adults play primary roles in the story arcs that occur in each season. In *DTNG*, the adults do play a part in the narrative, but only to further plot lines.

My thesis will have six sections in total: an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. In chapter one, I will investigate the counter culture elements including the use of drugs, alcohol and sexuality in the American television program, *The OC*. My findings will not only show how in this instance, Americans look at these issues, but also how American teens are educated about

these issues through this program. Chapter two will be similar in style and structure to chapter one, but instead focus on the Canadian program, *DTNG*. Again, my findings will point to the *Canadian* way of dealing with counter culture as well as the struggle of Canadian television to interpose concepts of nation into television. Chapter three will be a comparative look at the periphery of counter cultures. Chapter four will take a look at class issues in the two programs and compare contemporary TV to traditional genre definitions of comedy and tragedy. My conclusion will tie up my argument and comparison and point towards further work to be done in this subject.

¹ Kevin Smith is a film writer and director who gained fame in the late 1990s with his independent films that had a style of quick dialogue with intelligent verbiage that has become common on shows geared towards a youth demographic. Death Cab for Cutie is an independent band that received a large push in listenership after the band was featured on *The OC*.

Chapter One

Beneath, Between & Behind: Sex, Substance and

Violence in The OC

“The guns replace the plow, facades are tarnished now.

The principles have been betrayed”

(Lee, Lifeson and Peart)

Southern California acts as the setting for the program I will be analyzing in this chapter. California still produces the majority of America’s television and movies. Fame and affluence are a few of the notions associated with the largest state on America’s west coast. Television images of Southern California are rife with deceitful characters, extra-marital activity and substance abuse.

The OC follows a group of four teenagers and their parents as they go through their high school years in the very upscale neighborhood of Newport Beach in Orange County, California. The setting of the program is of utmost importance. A teen drama could take place anywhere as normally the major concern of the program is the interpersonal issues that are inherent in the plot. When considering teen drama, I agree with Silverblatt that teen dramas focus on “the theme of the adolescent’s assertion of independence, which is characteristic of the adolescent stage of development” (219). I will extend this definition to include aspects of education and rebellion, both of which are identity forming, and together, are fundamental to the teen experience.

In this program, the setting for the drama, Newport Beach in Orange County, California, becomes a character. As if the title of the show, *The OC*, gives it signification as an object, each

individual episode follows this pattern; the title always starts with “the.” The setting is not simply a backdrop, but there are further implications as well. For example, the issue of nationality is important. *The OC* aired during the presidency of George W. Bush, during the second war in Iraq and on a network that is owned by the ultra-Conservative Rupert Murdoch. With all its affluence and exclusion, *The OC*’s Newport Beach is what I will refer to as a “gated community.” Based on the following theoretical bases and analysis of the program I will argue that the gated community of Newport Beach is but a microcosm of American society during this time context, and thus, the beliefs and behaviours of the characters in the show can and should be applied to the general notion of American national identity.

During the four seasons of the program, interpersonal relationships maintained the majority of the weekly serial plot-lines. The characters are always making and breaking up while trying to find their place in modern nuclear families, if there is such a thing. The majority of the watchers of *The OC* are of the fifteen to twenty five year old demographic, both north and south of the 49th parallel, and during these highly susceptible years, a person’s identity is being formed. Of course, that demographic matches with the ages of the four main characters on the show and this creates familiarity and identification between audience and actors. Television is often didactic and is capable of influencing the audience. To be more specific, when I speak of “the audience” in this thesis, I am referring only to the teen audience because that is my focus. Teen viewers, who are easily influenced, have identities that are being inculcated by the characters on this program at some level. Although most positive and formal lessons, such as attention to mathematics and respecting one’s elders, can commonly be reinforced at school and in the home, I believe that the more controversial, or what I will refer to as “anti-social,”

elements including substance use, criminal activity and sexuality, are not reinforced by parents and teachers, either because teens cannot associate or identify with these older adults as experts on these subjects, or the parents/teachers are not comfortable addressing these matters. Teenagers are being instructed by the aforementioned issues. They are also discovering the link between these issues, for example sex and drugs, criminal activity and drinking and so on. If these teens are being instructed or influenced by the attitudes and beliefs propagated by this program, then I believe that *The OC* is both reflective of American identity while at the same time shaping it. The depiction and interplay of anti-social issues including irresponsible sexuality, substance abuse, and criminal activity on *The OC* speaks to American identity in the context of the program as well as shaping future generations of viewers.

First and foremost, I am going to discuss the didactic nature of television. Then, the definition and implications of the gated community will be considered. Next, I will address the definition and conventions of the traditional teen drama and how they are insufficient to capture the actual niche or genre of this program. Finally I will discuss the link between television and identity formation that is formed in this unconventionally didactic teen drama.

To really understand the impact television can have on a person, I want to quickly discuss the theories of fandom and connectedness. In short, fandom “is characterized by the persistent influence of a television program(s) in the fan’s life and experiences. (Russell and Puto 395). Fandom itself may not cause harm to individuals or really influence their identity, but because of the persistent influence of a program in one’s life, it will be a long term influencer. When I speak of persistent influence, I refer to participating in the show beyond just watching it. This includes online forums, blogging, or tweeting. In fact, Russell and Puto found that

The teen soap opera *Beverly Hills, 90210* generated many Internet chat room comments such as 'I feel as if I have grown up right along with the cast' or "I like (90210) so much because they face everyday problems that teens have to deal with such as racism, death, alcohol and drug abuse and so on.' These comments show that the viewers enjoy their shows because they can relate positively to the situations portrayed in them. (397)

Once the viewer has this persistent influence in their life that is acting as a influencing factor, they then enter a state of 'connectedness.' According to Russell and Puto, "Audience 'connectedness' is defined as an *intense* relationship between audience and television program that extends *beyond* the television watching experience into individuals' personal and social lives" (397). Connectedness creates an almost dependent relationship between viewer and program, as the identification has reached cathartic levels. Russell and Puto indicate that "connectedness with a television show testifies to the pertinence of the show and its characters to an individual's identity" (398). So, when we take fandom and connectedness in context with influence and teen programming, we are shown a blue print that displays exactly how teens are being influenced by television.

The links between drama and its ability to be didactic may be found in the Greek philosophy of Aristotle and the Roman philosophy of Horace. Aristotle believed that art was mimetic, in that it reflected the real world through its actors and scenarios. According to Aristotle, if the audience was able to identify with the actors and scenes, then they are able to healthfully purge negative emotions through a process known as catharsis. (Aristotle 53). While Aristotle established that drama was helpful and that identification with it was healthy, Horace

goes further, establishing that art should both delight and instruct. In *The Art of Poetry*, Horace states that “[h]e who combines the useful and the pleasing wins out by both instructing and delighting the reader. This is the sort of book that will make money for the publisher, cross the seas, and extend the fame of the author” (72). For what I am contending, it is what Horace refers to as “the useful” that is the most important.

Television, as the most pervasive and available form of art in modern times, is capable of complying with the precepts set out by Aristotle and Horace. Gerbner argues that “television has become the primary storyteller for children in the late twentieth century, a common source of information and socialization in an otherwise diverse population” (17). Programs that are examples of tragic drama evoke empathy and are cathartic for the viewer (Aristotle 53). Programs that are intentionally didactic, like *Sesame Street*, instruct and delight the younger viewers. I believe that there is the potential for a program to do all of these things, and this is when television is at its most important, and most dangerous. I contend that when people are undergoing catharsis, they are vulnerable, because it is an emotionally purgative state. When an audience becomes attached to a character on a program, this type of catharsis is more common. This is especially true if the audience recognizes a moment of peripeteia, which is the reversal of the situation, or a deep identification with a character. Although if art is didactic, it must be influential. If a teen is taught by something they see or hear are they not being influenced to think or feel a certain way? Therefore, when audiences undergo a process of catharsis that makes them vulnerable, they are more open to be influenced by the message of the program’s writers.

The teen drama, as defined earlier, is a highly cathartic type of programming that is influential. These influences shape thought patterns, belief systems and, thus, identity in its

audience. This theory is referred to as “social cognition” (299) by Comstock and Scharrer. They go on to explain that this type of learning, “emphasizes the meaning individuals ascribe to the observed behaviors of others. Observation is fundamental, but interpretation is decisive” (299). These interpretations are formed through experience. While children are at a young age, parents will often watch television with them to ascertain the value of what they are watching, but, this is unlikely to continue when those children have reached their teenage years. The teenagers do not have the benefit of parental supervision and are watching television only with what they have learned as a lens of interpretation. Therefore, when the teenagers are viewing scenes containing sex or drug use, what basis do they have to interpret the action on screen as anything but realistic? Thus, television can be important in the identity shaping process for malleable teens because of its ability to be didactic and cathartic.

In the introduction to this chapter, I referred to Newport Beach as a “gated community”. Tragedies like Columbine and 9/11 have caused America to retreat into a strategy of isolationism and I believe this is represented on a microcosmic scale in *The OC*’s gated community. In the traditional sense, a gated community is a usually affluent neighbourhood, made up by a series of houses and roads that are literally protected by a surrounding wall and guarded gate. At its heart, the community is protective of its borders and citizens, and practices exclusion rather than inclusion. In the pilot episode of *The OC* we are introduced to the character Ryan Atwood (Ben McKenzie) who grew up in Chino, a rougher part of California, famous for its prison and violent neighbourhood. Ryan is considered other by the community for the entire run of the program because he is not originally from Newport and has a violent past. In “The Pilot” after Ryan is attacked by some of the Newport elite, one of Ryan’s attacker delivers the infamous line,

“Welcome to the OC, bitch” (“The Pilot”). Immediately, the outsider, Ryan, is presented as unwanted by the established. I believe that since 9/11, the United States has returned to a policy of cultural isolationism. This is not the same type of isolationism the country practiced before World War Two (White and Murphy) when it would not participate in world politics, but an isolationism that it is protective of its borders, particularly against the other. With programming like Fox’s *24* and even the parodic *American Dad* consistently using Muslims and Middle-Easterners as “the enemy,” the American television viewing public is being influenced to immediately disassociate from those who are unfamiliar, and to protect their communities from those who are deemed dangerous. Although *The OC* does not deal with these terrorism or race issues explicitly, the program is riddled with themes of exclusion and protecting the community of Newport. Therefore, the gated community allegory, in my belief, ties the social constructs of *The OC* to a larger sense of identity existing in America today.

Genre has a vital role in television programming. As the youth today have been brought up watching TV, in general, they expect certain conventions in their programming; the guy in the leather jacket is dangerous, the skinny fellow with glasses is a nerd and the girl in the short skirt and no bra is probably promiscuous. Steve Neale argues,

it has long been recognized that output in each of these fields [genres] can be grouped into categories, and that each category or class is marked by a particular set of conventions, features and norms... that generic norms and conventions are recognized and shared not only by theorists themselves, but also by audiences, readers and viewers. The classification of texts is not just the

province of academic specialists, it is a fundamental aspect of the way texts of all kinds are understood. (1)

So, when an audience member is about to watch *The OC* for the first time, certain expectations should already be in place. These expectations would have been created dually, by the commercials and introduction (opening credits) of the program and also by what conventions the audience would expect because of genre expectations. But, these suppositions fall short in this program. *The OC* does not use the archetypal characters that were established from programs like *Beverly Hills, 90210* or even *Saved by the Bell*. Of the four main characters, Seth (Adam Brody) is the character that would most closely represent a “nerd” type figure. But, he has popular friends, dates the most beautiful girl at school, Summer (Rachel Bilson), experiments with drinking and drugs, and his humour is not sight or gag based. We do not laugh at Seth; we laugh because of Seth. Rachel Mosely writes about the teen drama:

At the imaginative centre of the teen drama, as in soap, are place, character and relationships, and emotional drama is often heightened through the use of close-up and (generally romantic pop) scoring... further pointing to the melodramatic nature of the genre... Teenageness is a significant ‘in-between’ period, and teen drama deals with the stuff of adolescent anxiety: friendship, love, sex and impending adulthood. (42)

Mosely’s description does justice to the format of the teen genre, but is not entirely accurate when dealing with this program. *The OC* deals with difference and otherness, but not in an obvious sense. The show does not present one model, in other words it does not promote the idea that, one teen is gay and all of his peers are straight. Instead, it suggests that othering is an active

notion, an individual must be “othered.” Often, this is done in one of two ways; either a character is seen as an outsider or different by the other characters in the narrative, or this difference is recognized by the audience. In *The OC*, the characters who do show major differences in sexuality or race are not othered by their on-screen peers at all, but are positioned to be recognized as being others by the audience. I believe this is an intentional act the writers commit to warn the audience that being different will lead to ruin. The principal othering in this program, or where differences are brought to the forefront, deals largely with class and birthplace. To put it simply, class can be defined as “a relative social ranking based on income, wealth, status and/or power” (Collins et al 233). Again, this ties into the notion of the gated community. While *The OC* does deal with standard teen issues, much of the plot-line also involves the adult characters. Thus, the writers have the opportunity to address issues that could not realistically be discussed in a solely teen forum. A teen may associate with alcohol, but it is a rare occurrence before 2007², for an American program would have a teenage character be an admitted alcoholic and go through treatment. Although this may be the reality, it is too real for a teen audience in the network’s opinion, otherwise this example would have been addressed by this time. Also, the need for distance from reality is a dependent clause of catharsis according to Aristotle (57). *The OC* uses self-reflective plots with layers of intertextual references to establish a type of program that transcends the typical teen drama. With its inherent social conscience and less than subtle messages, this program applies elements of the teen drama and of the soap opera to create a format that gives the writers, directors and actors a forum for delivering social commentary without preaching.

Television, especially programming that is aware of and acting on its social conscience, can hold an important role in the formation of identity for its viewers. Lichter et al. conjecture that, "television has transcended its role as mere entertainment to become a potent force shaping everyday life" (12) and that "the most innocuous sitcom carries messages about how our society works and how its citizens should behave" (12). Now, although it may not be a positive aspect, in some circumstances, Gerbner argues that television is shaping identity because the viewers are having a hard time disassociating what they are watching from real life. This goes beyond mimesis, into something that Gerbner calls the "cultivation effect" (5). He goes on to explain this as, "contending that the more time people spend watching television, the more they misperceive the real world as being identical to the stylized version of things as presented on TV" (5). This is most true when dealing with viewers who are the most malleable, for instance, children and teenagers. Fabes et al. support this, conjecturing that "... a 'cultivation effect' whereby people who watch large amounts of television tend to believe that the real world is more like the way it is presented on television than it actually is and, for example, are more fearful and distrustful." (338). Although teens will have a better chance than young children of understanding the difference between television and reality, they are still easily influenced by what they are watching. Edgerton conjectures that, "television and other mass media are presently undermining the socially constructed stages of childhood by systematically disclosing and dispensing the adult world to youngsters at the simple touch of a button" (6). This can be conflated with the concept that parents are more comfortable letting their children learn about certain matters on television. So, not only are the young able to learn about adult issues at the

push of a button, but by some neglect on the part of the authority figure in a child's identity formation, ie. teachers and parents, the child is almost encouraged to learn in this way.

Lyn Spigel has a different approach to using the media as a tool in identity formation that is slightly more positive than the way I am looking at it, and it should be noted. She argues:

... there are, of course, important reasons to study new media... Scholars have shown how Internet culture re-articulates (and at times replicates) gender, sexual, class, and racial struggles; how it provides alternative modes of "gathering" as communities and political bodies; and how it reconstructs the politics of national borders and our sense of place. Insofar as television studies has been centrally concerned with similar issues, and insofar as television now converges with digital platforms, it seems only right that people who study television would also study the Internet and other digital devices. (84)

In this passage, Spigel is clearly linking the study of digital media along with television and national identity, and I believe that there are important themes that should be drawn from this link as well. For example, the re-articulation of understood concepts of sexuality and an alternative gathering point for building community are crucial to the discussion of TV's impact. Television offers these things in abundance and to a substantial audience. TV programs create communities of fans that have something in common, whether it is just enjoyment of the program or an aspect of the program that they might not be as comfortable in the real world. For example, the bisexual character Alex (Olivia Wilde) on *The OC* is not demeaned in any way by her peers or the central characters despite the restrictions of their heteronormative framework. I will refer to her bisexuality as assumed because in a heteronormative lens, a more fluid

explanation of sexuality does not exist. Bisexual viewers might find this comforting if they are not accepted by their actual community and seek out viewers with similar problems on blogs or fan-sites. From here, these likeminded individuals can create a safe online community where they can discuss their sexualities and come to terms with them. In this way, television and its contemporary mediums can have a positive effect on the formation of identity in its viewers.

This argument, thus far, has postulated that television is influential as a device that can shape the identity of its viewers. To take this argument farther, and to make it more specific, I will apply the terms and theories I have posed thus far to a specific American teen program. With a direct read of Josh Schwartz's *The OC*, I will formulate an argument around how the program, in the context of when it was developed and aired, has a role in the development of the identity of its audience. I will look specifically at three characters from the program, Seth Cohen, Marissa Cooper (Mischa Barton) and Ryan Atwood. These characters each come from a different class. Class is central to issues in *The OC*. Langston argues that

[A]s a result of the class you are born into and raised in, class is your understanding of the world and where you fit in; it's composed of ideas, behavior, attitudes, values, and language; class is how you think, feel, act, look, dress, talk, move, walk; class is what stores you shop at, restaurants you eat in class is the schools you attend, the education you attain; class is the very jobs you will work at through your adult life. (100)

Seth's parents are members of Newport's elite. Marissa's mother comes from a trailer park but she marries often and usually above her current class. As a result, Marissa has a complex identity. She is not really a member of the elite, but she does have some social status. Ryan is the

classic boy from the wrong side of the tracks who consistently struggles to gain comfort in the social situations he is placed in. Although these characters will be the major focus, other characters will be used as foils or as comparative points for specific instances where similarities of experience but difference of consequence cannot be ignored. From the scenes that I select, the importance of class in *The OC* will be obvious. Also, as mentioned previously, if the program is a microcosmic representation of America, the effects the characters suffer from the consequences of experiences with drugs, sex and violence will speak of American national identity.

When the audience is first introduced to Seth Cohen, a few basic things about him are evident; he is an outsider in his school, he is in love with Summer Roberts, and his parents are extremely wealthy. Through his friendship with Ryan, Seth develops into a young man who is more able to fit in at school, get the girl of his dreams, and undergo many major life events that influence the formation of his adult identity. Although Ryan is adopted by Seth's parents, he comes from humble roots and he cannot shake that stigma. In many instances, because they act as if they were brothers, Ryan and Seth experience similar challenges.

In season two of *The OC*, Seth's mother, Kirsten (Kelly Rowan) develops a drinking problem. Throughout the series to this point, Kirsten is well known for enjoying a glass of Chardonnay, but after marital difficulties and the death of her father, Kirsten's drinking ends up crossing the line and becomes an addiction. In the episode "The Dearly Beloved," (Season Two) Kirsten creates an embarrassing scene at the wake of her father's funeral involving her family and her alcoholism. After falling and spilling a tray of drinks, Kirsten is obviously embarrassed and angry. Her actions are not only causing her grief, but her family as well. But, since Kirsten is of the upper class, she gets help. During a scene from the aforementioned episode, Kirsten's

husband Sandy (Peter Gallagher) and a doctor at the Suriak Alcohol treatment facility demonstrate that this sort of issue is properly taken care of for the higher class citizens of Newport Beach by involving their family and making sure the correct and necessary treatment is available.

According to Langston, when discussing class in America, “as a result of the class you are born into and raised in, class is your understanding of the world and where you fit in” (101). Although class may not be discussed at great length in the United States, according to Holtzman, there are great discrepancies between the rich and the poor. The differences are overly apparent in this program. Kirsten Cohen gets to go to a treatment center and gets real help to deal with her drinking, resulting in a full recovery and return to both her family and the social status that she held during the years before her alcoholism. On the other end of the spectrum, Ryan’s mother, Dawn Atwood (Daphne Ashbrook), does not have the same advantages. In an episode from season one, “The Gamble,” there is an incident including alcoholism and embarrassment, highly reminiscent of the scene involving Kirsten. Ryan’s mother, Dawn, becomes drunk, loses her balance and causes a scene in front of the Newport Elite, just as Kirsten does at her father’s funeral. Dawn requires the boys’ help to walk out of the event and is heard muttering “You hate me, don’t you?” to her son (“The Gamble”).

At the end of the scene, Kirsten associates Dawn with the Cohens, so no more trouble is caused between Dawn and the other guests and the police are not called. Being from the lower class, Dawn is unable to help herself and feels bitter and pitiful. The Cohens adopt her son and raise him while Dawn ends up in jail. Not until season three, before her son’s graduation, does Dawn sober up. The difference in the treatment of class in the gated community of Newport

Beach is obvious, and disconcerting. According to Holtzman, since “factors of income and wealth are devastating simply on the face of the information, there are further consequences for lower income people in the United States” (115). The factors that Holtzman refers to are a lack of health coverage or insurance and a larger susceptibility to violence or violent behaviour. For example, the audience sees two women in *The OC*, separated only by money in identical situations. For the woman of the privileged class, help is provided and recovery happens; for the poor woman, exclusion from the gated community and later, incarceration are the eventual precursors to her possible recovery. What is this telling teenagers? How is it shaping their identity? It is understood that television is mimetic, and Gerbner’s cultivation effect theory is accurate. This program is reinforcing ideals of affluence equating to better lives and that the poor can only achieve more than stereotypically expected if they are helped by the rich. According to Hochschild, the American dream is defined as having four characteristics:

1. The belief that everyone can participate equally and can always start over.
2. The belief that it is reasonable to anticipate success.
3. The belief that success is a result of individual characteristics and that actions are under one’s control.
4. The belief that success is associated with virtue and merit.

(Hochschild 72)

The accepted notion of the American Dream is that everybody has the opportunity to be successful. But, *The OC*’s narrative tells the teen audience that success is completely contingent on receiving help, whether an individual was born into luxury or is dependent on members of the community at large for help. In this instance of *The OC*, identities of difference and class are

reinforced, presumably affecting the identity of the viewers to continue to think and act in this way.

In the scenes that I have discussed, the use of alcohol in *The OC* has had consequences. The character in question is represented as an alcoholic and the narrative focuses on the problems of her drinking. This does not follow the norm for television, in which the use of a tertiary or transitory character as one with a drinking problem is more common, and the main characters may just use alcohol situationally or as a social enhancer. This is contrary to what Brown and Witherspoon argue as the standard. They argue that alcohol is associated with

a variety of benefits that appeal to adolescents... and few consequences... often depict[ing] slices of life that focus on the drinkers and the drinking occasions rather than on the qualities of the product itself, which may be particularly appealing to teens who are using the media for ideas about how to be in the world.

(88)

Although the melodrama of *The OC* creates unrealistic and inappropriate ways of looking at life, functional lessons are important. These lessons speak to the social conscience of the show, and its attempts to shape at least one element of identity in a positive way as opposed to solely reinforcing the conventions laid out by Brown and Witherspoon. As mentioned earlier, during the pilot episode of *The OC*, the Cohen family rescues Ryan from a youth incarceration facility. It does not take long for his friendship with the Cohen's son, Seth, to become brotherly in nature. Ryan protects Seth at school and acts as a positive influence in his life, truly caring for him. Ryan and Seth go to school together, date best friends and manage to find themselves in similar socially unacceptable situations. For instance, during the tenure of the program, both youths steal

vehicles. As established in scenes that have been analyzed, in *The OC* class will play a large role in how the boys are punished for their crimes.

In season two, Seth starts dating a girl, Alex, who is positioned as an outsider. Physically, Alex is a beautiful girl, but with her dyed hair and visible tattoos, she is different from the Newport Beach bred crowd. Seth is somewhat intimidated by her “bad girl” persona and attempts to act like a “bad boy” to compensate for this, drinking and stealing his grandfather Caleb Nichol’s (Alan Dale) Bentley. The car is reported as missing and Seth is brought home by the police in the following scene:

The front door - Sandy opens the door and sees Seth standing there with 2 police officers

Seth: (waves) ‘Hey dad’ (Sandy looks disappointed) ‘How was the party?’ (points to the 2 police officers, whispers) ‘I think somebody called the cops.’

(Sandy stares at Seth, not impressed)

(“The Family Ties”)

Seth ends up being grounded for his auto theft. To a teenager, this is almost no consequence at all. True, it was his grandfather’s car that Seth stole, but again, the rich in Newport Beach are nominally punished for their actions, reinforcing the class differences I have mentioned to this point. To further discuss these class issues, I will focus on the car theft that led to Ryan’s entry to the Cohen family.

In the pilot episode, the underprivileged Ryan Atwood is involved in auto theft. The car is by no means a Bentley, and it is Ryan’s brother, Trey (Logan Marshall-Green) who actually steals the car against Ryan’s wishes and better judgment. As a result of this, Ryan ends up in

juvenile hall and his confinement results in violence against him from fellow inmates and his ultimate adoption by the Cohen family. Ryan was obviously against the car theft, and nothing but an unwilling participant. He does not overtly steal a car like Seth does but his punishment is far greater. Again, the reinforcement of class differences in this series speaks to the same innate differences in American culture; the lower income families are more likely to suffer from unfair treatment from the establishment, and these attitudes are being reinforced on television. Identities are being shaped by stereotypes and although there are repercussions for these illegal activities, the only punishment that fits the crime is handed down on the characters from lower social classes. In the gated community of Newport Beach, if one is not of the proper class, one will suffer the consequences.

A final scene that I would like to discuss in this chapter involves two individuals who are roughly of the same class. During season three, Ryan has been accepted by most members of Newport Beach as the Cohen's son, not as a criminal. The other character involved is Marissa. After Julie's (Marissa's mom) husband dies at the end of season two, mother and daughter are destitute and must move into a trailer park. Marissa has dropped in social standing, and Ryan has risen, but because of their roots, I would situate them in the same general class. But, this scenario has less to do with class and more with American attitudes about sex, violence and substance abuse and, again, with how this type of programming can negatively shape youth identity. In episode three of season three, "The End of Innocence," Ryan and Marissa have sex together for the first time. Now, besides the complete lack of discussion on safe sex it is the way that this scene is shot that is crucial to my argument that there is no privileging between sex, violence and substance abuse; they are shown for equal times and at random. The scene is a montage, spliced

together with images of Marissa's father, Jimmy (Tate Donovan) getting assaulted by men under a pier, as well as scenes of Kirsten contemplating having a drink after reading a letter from her dead father. These scenes cut from one to the other with no privileging. The teen audience is shown a scene with Ryan and Marissa in a coital embrace, which then quickly cuts to Jimmy getting punched in the face, and then followed immediately with a cut to Kirsten looking lovingly at a bottle of vodka in a sequence of repetition. This scene proposes a complicated, negative message. Is teenage sex the equivalent of an assault or falling off of the wagon? Although quick cross-cuts back and forth between scenes exhibiting both sexuality and violence are a subtle way to delivering this message, the subconscious mind latches onto the negativity immediately. If the intention was to make teens fear sex, the results may not be so. Edward Donnerstein argues that

Individuals exposed to certain types of materials respond with blunted sensitivity to violence against women, calloused attitudes about rape, and sexual arousal to rape depictions and laboratory simulations of aggression against women. (5)

It is possible that this scene would have the same effect when watched by a teen audience. Interspersing violence, substance abuse and sex may just deaden the audience to the harmful effects because of this correlation between brutality, alcoholism and sexuality and not cause fear in spite of this conflation. Reuman writes, "it is now primarily children and teens, rather than adults, who are considered to be at moral and physical risk from inappropriate sex" (216). As illustrated in *The OC* the conflation of sex with violence could lead to similar negative behaviours in a teen audience.

As Holtzman argues, “*Entertainment media* (prime time television, popular film, and music) are a primary fact of life in most US homes” (5). Media Literacy is a common catch phrase these days. Digital mediums, including TV, are becoming more pervasive and ever present and youths should be taught to be media literate; they should be critical while they are watching television. But, where should this critical thinking process come from? It is the responsibility of the parents and the education system to prepare youths to watch TV critically and not become conditioned by it. In the episodes from *The OC* that I have looked at for this chapter, there are many other scenes and characters that exhibit attitudes and behaviours that can be considered counter-culture or anti-social. Roszak defines counter-culture as a “group whose behaviour deviates from the societal norm” (419). Like the situations I have mentioned, most of the behaviours result in some sort of consequence, whether it is appropriate or not. Television is representative of the belief systems under which it is created, and national identity affects these systems. Whether or not Newport Beach truly is a microcosmic representation of the entire United States is not as important as realizing that these attitudes exist in some parts of the United States. In order for television to help shape the identity of the youth that is already being influenced by its programming, we should not look to the networks to change what is on TV, but to the parents and establishment to educate the youth on how to be critical of what they see on TV.

²Josh Schwartz’ current project, *Gossip Girl* debuted in 2007. The characters on *Gossip Girl* are the same age and socio-economic status as the characters on *The OC* but there is a great deal more drinking and provocative sexual activity. Previous to ’07 programs like *Beverly Hills, 90210*, had drinking in them, but nothing like *Gossip Girl*

Chapter Two

Closer to the Heart: The Responsible Education of

Degrassi: the Next Generation's Teenagers

“And the men who hold high places

Must be the ones to start

To mould a new reality

Closer to the heart”

(Lee, Lifeson and Peart)

While the greater region of Toronto may not have the significance in the entertainment industry that Orange County does, it is Canada's artistic and multicultural mecca. Toronto, to many, is the pinnacle of Canadian society; the business sectors, excellent schools, media centers and proximity to Canada's political nucleus make this city as significant to Canada as California is to the United States, though for different reasons. And like the state that hosts the television program I discussed in the last chapter, the teens of Toronto seem to find themselves involved in the same types of affairs, both physical and emotional, as their Californian peers. Toronto is the home of the fictional Degrassi Street, and although the programs based upon its inhabitants may not follow the same melodramatic formula of programs like *The OC*, it is comparable in several ways.

In 1982, *The Kids of Degrassi Street* was the first incarnation of the *Degrassi* phenomenon. The *Degrassi* franchise carried on from there in a fashion not often, if ever, seen in North American television. It next evolved into *Degrassi Junior High* in 1987 and penultimately into *Degrassi High* in 1992. These three incarnations of the series followed the same general

group of children as they grew up, graduated and moved on with their lives. The most recent manifestation of the series is *Degrassi: the Next Generation (DTNG)* that first aired in 2001 in Canada on Canadian Television (CTV) and continues to air on MuchMusic, a CTV GlobeMedia property. The series now follows the children of the original cast and their group of friends. The teenagers in *DTNG* reside in a generally nondescript neighbourhood in a middle-class region of Toronto, though, occasionally, the scene shifts to areas inhabited by the wealthy or the poor. This environment is typical of urban Canada: multicultural and multi-class. Obviously, if the program was filmed for viewers in the prairies or Atlantic Canada, the audience would be shown a much different Canada, as in *Corner Gas* or *Trailer Park Boys*, but as this program is intended to be educational and the majority of the Canadian population lives along the US/Canada border, that is the section of Canada that is represented. Also, the educational purpose of the show demands the use of urban Canadian characters in order to reach the largest possible segment of the school age demographic. The periphery may be portrayed during episodes as well. To further the impact that the notion of the periphery has on Canada in general, Tinic argues,

As the centre replicates itself on Canadian television screens, it is perhaps not surprising that a regionally fragmented community has become an avid audience for American television programming. Positioned as outsiders in both televisual landscapes, Canadians on the periphery have opted for the one that will, at minimum, provide the epitome of production quality and investment. (Tinic 156)

Tinic's argument acts as a harbinger for future Canadian generations; American television has invaded Canadian borders and is supplementing Canadian identity. This is the link that I find both fascinating and important. Everything about Canadian television, from the policy that

regulates it to the shows that end up sporadically on Canadians' televisions, seems to make American television a more feasible and attractive option for Canadian teen viewers. Furthermore, as more Canadian teenagers are watching American television on a regular basis, Canada edges closer to losing its national identity.

Of course, there are others who think that Canadian identity is not at risk. As Vipond argues, "Clear proof that American culture is not damaging to the Canadian identity is the fact that Canada still exists, although it has been flooded by Americanized mass media for at least the past one hundred years" (126). Be that as it may, the fact that something still exists is not evidence that it has not been changed. When Vipond uses the word "damaging," I would argue that this is a subjective term and what seems damaging to one reader or viewer may not be to another. In the same work, Vipond goes on to argue that "[m]any Canadians feel comfortable enough about their own identities to believe exposure to American culture will not undermine their own sense of Canadian identity" (127). This seems to be a more reasonable statement concerning the battle that Canadians are facing on a daily basis regarding the Americanization of their identity. Perhaps the reason that Canadians are not afraid of American culture's effect on their national identity is the recognition of the sheer melodramatic nature of American television.

According to Thorburn, "[t]he term *melodrama* is said to have originated as a neutral designation for a spoken dramatic text with a musical accompaniment or background, an offshoot or spin-off to opera" (438). He goes further to contextualize it for a modern audience:

...*melodrama* is a resolutely pejorative term, also originating early in the last century, denoting a sentimental, artificially plotted drama that sacrifices characterization to extravagant incident, makes sensational appeals to the

emotions of its audience, and ends on a happy or at least a morally reassuring note” (439)

The OC exemplifies this definition; the program is rife with extravagance and artificiality. The plots of the drama are sensational, and commonly through a party or gathering, a strict moral code is exhibited and reinforced. By this definition, *The OC* is much more melodramatic than *DTNG*. Although in *DTNG* the audience is still looking into and getting involved in the day-to-day lives of these teenagers and their families via Twitter and engaging with the program, but the sense of abundant affluence is missing in the Canadian program. The Canadian teenagers are not from very rich families, so the element of exoticism is taken away from the program. This exotic element is commonly seen in American teen programming, as in the current Schwartz project, *Gossip Girl*, or MTV’s *The Hills*. The utter wealth and untouchability of the American characters make the audience members into what I will refer to as voyeurs, teen viewers who are peering into something they want but, more than likely, can never have. This has an impact on the audience as well as their interaction with the program. The unique way each show is watched is relevant to their individual identities, as well as their respective national identities.

Canadian teen television is the focus of this chapter. Throughout this chapter in the lives of the urban Toronto based families, the program follows the children and friends of the characters from *Degrassi Junior High*. *Degrassi* has reached cult status with its Canadian audience. Byers and VanderBurgh explain that “our students have encyclopedic knowledge of *Degrassi* episodes made before they were born. Since the series is readily available, inexpensive, and legal to screen in classrooms, *Degrassi* will be taught in schools, discussed, and remembered as part of a specific cultural lexicon” (108). The characters on *DTNG*, I will argue, are

representative of Canadian teens at large. Furthermore, this program is targeted towards a demographic that resembles its cast. As I have argued, this helps with the formation of a belief system for the viewers of this program by creating a believable mirror. Teen years are a major stepping stone in the formation of identity, both of the self and how an individual sees him or herself as a citizen of their nation. Rosengren et al argue that “[t]o a large extent, youth culture is a differentiated product of the cultural industry, providing the young with what they may need for the creation, maintenance, and expression of their identity” (119). Therefore, this program will affect the national identity of a teen, and furthermore, as teens grow into the leaders of tomorrow, Canada³ as a whole.

Degrassi: the Next Generation is representative of Canadian national identity, insofar that it privileges community support and knowledge as forms of education. I will argue that each situation that the teenager characters face ends in a manner that is reasonable and attempts to educate the audience responsibly. These situations will include non-traditional sex, drug and alcohol usage and violence, specifically sexual violence. Furthermore, I will discuss how the realism in *Degrassi* helps Canadian teens build a positive identity, both in regards to nation and self. The existence or non-existence of nation and nationalism in the program will further be applied to how it relates to the formation of identity. Before the concepts of nationalism and identity formation can be juxtaposed, the concepts of nation and nationalism must be discussed.

The identification of self and national identity are by no means synonymous, and although there may not be an obvious link between the two concepts, when considered in the context of identity formation, these links should be made, especially when watching television through the lens of Canadian Cultural Studies.

One thing that we must consider is that in modern society, the definitions of terms like nation and nationalism are changing continuously. According to Anthony Smith, “the nation, that nation-state and all its works may be modern, contested and fluid” (218). If the concepts of nation and nationalism are fluid in nature, the “nation” represented as “home” in this program is tied to the formulation of identity. Not having overt influences of “home” is as much of a statement as privileging it.

Anderson writes that “the end of nationalism, so long prophesied is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (3). Although written in 1983, I believe the sentiments in Anderson’s book are still viable. The world’s political climate has changed, but since 9/11, I believe that nationalism remains strong and is by no means on a downswing. For Canadians, this needs to be true. In a country cloven by divisions: linguistic, geographical and ethnic, there must be something that ties the nation together, some unifying concept that brings Canadians to the table as one, not divided into “multis.” Anderson furthermore defines the nation as “an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). For the scope of this paper, I will only define two of those characteristics, as I believe only the fact that the nation is both “imagined” and a “community” is inherently applicable to Television Studies.

To further quote Anderson, “[the nation] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). For Canadians, this is very true. The majority of Canadian citizens will not travel the expansive space of this nation, nor will they meet even a minute portion of the population, but Canadians are aware of each other.

Canadians are linked under a flag, an anthem, a government, and it is because of our beliefs in these systems that a nation can exist. Secondly, Anderson states that:

...[the nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. (7)

This definition of “nation” applies directly to the state of Canadian Studies today and, perhaps, where it must go in the future. The authenticity exists in a confluence, where the representation of the nation is representative of its people. “People” includes both indigenous citizens and settler. When I refer to settler, I am talking about those who landed on Canadian soil. Canada has entrenched multiculturalism in its constitution. According to Bill C-93:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to:

(a) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage; (“MISA”)

Because Canada is multicultural by nature, I will refer to the sense of belonging to Canada as Canadian nationalism. Although Canada has several regions, there is one commonality: television.

Television can be something that binds Canadians together, a “large cultural system.” But, is it prudent to be proud of a cultural source that creates no connection with Canada? In part, Canadians could be proud of a television program because it is Canadian itself, part of the imagined community. But, it is my argument that the system works both ways; in order for a

Canadian to be proud of another Canadian citizen, or art forms, then the citizen or art form, too, must exhibit Canadian nationalism. How can this pride come out of television? Overt attempts to create this relationship may be pointless, and by no means should the writer of a program be forced to display something that does not fit in his or her vision, so the question remains, can a television program, or a character, have an identity that includes nationalism in its formation while still being true to the screenwriter's vision? Perhaps if the screenwriter's vision is nationalistic pride, then overt nationalism could have merit, but in the upcoming examples, these attempts are unsuccessful. Before looking more deeply at nationalism in Canadian television, some differences between American and Canadian television broadcasting must be discussed.

An important distinction between Canadian and American broadcasting that must be noted is in the policies that involve the act of broadcasting itself. American television is predominantly privately broadcast; the major networks, NBC, ABC, CBS and FOX are privately owned or publicly shared companies that are broadcast over local networks that are in turn owned privately in each viewing area. Canada also has three "major" networks, CTV, GlobeMedia (a division of Bell Media), CBC and Global, but the way broadcasting works in Canada is disparate in comparison to the United States. The most obviously non-conventional network, when comparing Canadian and American networks and broadcasting, is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, or the CBC.

The CBC is a governmentally funded network that is mandated to air in every area of Canada. Whether viewers live in Toronto or Stoney Creek, they are able to turn on their televisions and tune into the CBC. The CBC does air private commercials that in turn help fund the programming, but a portion of the channel's income comes from the Canadian government,

and hence, its taxpayers. Since the network is intrinsically in debt to its viewers, the programming must both reflect the nation's contextual attitude, and also represent its people. In fact, the CBC has a mandate to "contribute to shared national consciousness and identity" (*International Directory of Company Histories*, Vol. 37. St. James Press, 2001). The CBC is the only Canadian network that receives this type of funding and has this expectation; both Global and CTV are completely privately funded. The CBC does more original programming than either of the other networks, but I argue that even though the shows that air on CTV are not funded by Canadian tax payers, to compete with the original programming on the CBC, the networks executives at CTV must both be wary and respectful of what the CBC is doing. The CTV is not only competing with the CBC; the largest market share of Canadian viewers is held by American programs. Unfortunately, unlike the CBC, CTV does not have the luxury of being defended by legislation. Tinic argues, "National public broadcasting in Canada was, from its inception, designed to defend against the perception of cultural domination by the United States" (Tinic 154). Although CTV, and more specifically relevant to the television show, *DTNG*, do not share that mandate against American broadcasting, it is the burden or duty of every original Canadian program to fight against the appropriation of Canadian culture by American television.

Furthermore, American television is so pervasive that it threatens the very identity of Canada. This is especially true for Canadian teen audiences, who, as I have argued, are at a malleable and persuadable stage. Canadian teens are exposed daily to television that, as I argued in the previous chapter, represents conservative, fear-mongering, protective American ideology and identity. So, how does *DTNG* depict Canadian identity, and furthermore, is there an attempt

made to rationalize this depiction to the audience? Is *DTNG* about being a Canadian, or is it about being a teenager? Is there a disconnection between the two concepts, or from the point of view of the viewers who are Canadian citizens, are they inexplicably linked? *Degrassi: the Next Generation* does engage with both the concepts of Canadianism and maturation. By examining two of the more popular characters from *DTNG* as well as various scenes, I will point out a distinction between how American and Canadian programs display and shape national identity. Also, I will address Canadian television's flaws and the forthcoming loss of Canadian televisual national identity.

Unlike *The OC*, which has only subtle nuances and microcosms of national identity, *DTNG* actually makes one specific, textual attempt at displaying Canadian national identity. Canada's identity is commonly seen as "not-land"; this refers to Canada identifying itself as "not something else," for example, "not American." So, by self-identifying in this nature, Canada is opening itself up to further comparisons to external identifiers. If the "not-land" theory has credence, then what other countries think of Canada is of equal importance and validity as how Canada views itself. Collins argues that

[t]wo opposed forces are at work in the Canadian broadcasting system the political pressure to 'Canadianize' the system in order (it is believed) to maintain the integrity of the Canadian state and Canadian audiences' contradictory and obdurate consumption of large quantities of non-Canadian programming. (Collins 43)

The Canadian program is constantly fighting an uphill, losing battle. The pressure should exist to not only be successful, but to be Canadian as well. The act of being Canadian is fraught with

language divisions, peripheral geographic isolation and politically forced multi-culturalism. How is a single program supposed to accomplish these things while still being topical, valid and attractive to its demographic, which is, in this case, teenagers? *Degrassi* attempts to do just that by asking Kevin Smith to direct, fictionally, *Jay and Silent Bob Go Canadian, eh?* Kevin Smith, a writer/director known for his soliloquies and distinct camera work, plays himself in a *Degrassi* story arc concerning Canadiana.

During season four, Jason Mewes and Kevin Smith, who are commonly known by their alter egos, Jay and Silent Bob, come to the hallowed halls of *Degrassi* Community School to film the next feature in the Jay and Silent Bob line, *Jay and Silent Bob Go Canadian, eh?* using the local kids as cast members and *Degrassi* as the set. The story arc, which takes place over two episodes in season four and two episodes of season five, offers a truly parodic view of Canadian culture and features guest appearances by some of Canada's most well known celebrities, including musical artist Alanis Morissette, who also played God in the Kevin Smith film *Dogma*. Kevin Smith, an avid fan of the *Degrassi* series, has also mentioned the program in some of his other movies, including *Chasing Amy*. By undertaking this project, the writers of *DTNG* are walking along what Simon Gikandi would refer to as the "double edged sword" of nationalism. Gikandi goes on to describe the double edged sword as "two competing narratives, one of celebration, the other of crisis" (672). While one wants to celebrate their nation, at the same time, nationalism causes conflict because of the strife felt by groups who do not feel like the nation they live in represents them. While attempting to add this overt injection of satirical Canadian Content into the program, the writers risk alienating parts of the Canadian audience for the possible gain of an American audience.

In 1992, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) released a report on the stabilization of Canadian identity in television. As far as they were concerned, it was legitimate to create an assimilated identity in the attempt to create national unity. I believe this textual parody of Canadian culture by an American director on a Canadian program abides by this agenda. As mentioned previously, Canada is a country split by regional and linguistic cleavages, and presenting Canadian identity as a whole is an impossibility. As the CRTC states in their findings,

... it is not always realized that unity and identity are quite different things to be promoting and that in Canada they are perhaps more different than they are anywhere else. Identity is local and regional, rooted in imagination and in works of culture; unity is national in reference, international in perspective and rooted in political thinking... Assimilating identity to unity produces the empty gestures of cultural nationalism; assimilating unity to identity produces the kind of provincial isolation that is now called separatism. (CRTC qtd in Frye 24)

Perhaps attempting to overtly create or exhibit a “Canadian” national identity is a fruitless effort. Raboy refers to this as the “Canadian crisis” (257). Thus, by attempting to add a humorous look at Canadian culture, the writers of *DTNG* are not only alienating their Canadian audience and risking destabilization of national unity, they are also contributing to Raboy’s “Canadian crisis.” In a scene from the episode “Goin’ Down the Road⁴,” Kevin Smith, Jason Mewes and Alanis Morissette lampoon Canadian culture by wearing flannel, speaking in stereotyped Canadian colloquialisms and swinging hockey sticks in the air. Obviously, the writers, directors and producers involved in the scripting of this program are aware of the absolute absurdity of this

episode. I can make the assumption that the Canadian portion of the audience is also aware of this preposterousness. This story arc does provide several sub-plots that will be discussed in full in chapter three, but does this interplay of Canadian identity and culture help or hinder the attempt to add to the mosaic of Canadian national identity? According to Tinic's reading of Fiske and Hebdige, any attempt to produce an institutionalized broadcast with the goal of instilling or reaffirming Canadian national identity will be met with failure:

These institutions not only tend to marginalize groups and regions, they also often encourage high-culture programming at the expense of popular culture. As a result, audiences frequently turn to internationally produced (mainly American), commercial alternatives as an act of resistance against official culture. (128)

Therefore, the problem is cyclical; if the producers of *DTNG* want to seriously attempt to educate their audience, both national and international, they run the risk of marginalizing the Canadian audience. On the other hand, if the writers of *DTNG* attempt to educate the audience comedically, it is often done as a parody, and only a stereotyped version of Canadian national identity is shown. But is this inability to exhibit Canadian identity on television just a rejection of the notion of a singular Canadian identity? According to Collins, "...Canadian television audiences' viewing of non-Canadian television ... is a deeply destabilizing political force" (43). As mentioned previously, the audience ends up turning to American television. If the Canadian teen is not getting a reasonable cross section of national identity from the overt attempts to display it within the program, then the program must attempt to discover and develop this identity in more subtle ways.

Although the cast of *DTNG* does not share the class issues of *The OC*, characters do seem to go through the same types of drama. Teenagers are teenagers, regardless of place, and most anti-social behaviors are ubiquitous. Most teenagers will at some point have to deal with sexual subjects like pregnancy and rape; most teenagers will have to deal with the pressures of drinking and drug use, and most teenagers will have to deal with violence. Even though rape can be positioned as a violent act, its nature is sexual. So, as I have addressed these issues in the previous chapter on *The OC*, I will now address them with *DTNG*. The Canadian program deals with each of these issues differently from the American show, and this is truly how Canadian teens can hope to get a sense of national identity from watching *DTNG*.

James Tiberius York (Ryan Cooley), also known as JT, is one of the first characters introduced in the *DTNG* pilot. He is perhaps the most dynamic character from the program. He undergoes massive changes throughout the series, from his pre-pubescent beginnings to his untimely death. The examination of JT's maturation process (including but not exclusive to sexual education), his drug use and his violent death will exhibit the way these issues are dealt with on the Canadian program and will be compared to similar occurrences on the American program.

Although JT does not share the same issues of class and drinking experienced by the cast of *The OC*, he does share the melodramatic problems that are commonly experienced by teenagers. In the final episode of season one, "Jagged Little Pill," JT has his first experience with drugs. At a party thrown by his best friend's older sister, JT brings drugs, specifically Ecstasy, to the party.

Ultimately, the older teenagers end up taking the drugs away from the younger teens. This is an example of the community interaction in Canadian television that I mentioned earlier. The older teens, who are deemed responsible at this point in the plot line, take it upon themselves to act as the appropriate authority in this situation. In this situation, phoning the police would be a more drastic response and who would attack the perpetrators violently? In this case, a less extreme response is to remove the drugs. This is an honest consequence to an action. Sera Tinic argues, “There is a perception among Canadian producers that ‘As a country we are a lot more open or we can talk more honestly to our audience’” (181). Canadian producers are being more straightforward with their teen audiences. *DTNG* is a non-melodramatic, but still dramatic, didactic teen drama that echoes Canadian ideals of responsibility, education and community.

DTNG continues to produce new episodes while *The OC* only lasted for four seasons. Therefore, the audience of the former has grown up with the characters. When the teen audience is first introduced to JT, he is in grade eight, so he is roughly thirteen years old. His character is on the show for five years until his death, so the character matures from childhood to adulthood. The dynamic process of his aging has a major impact on the audience’s connection with JT because they feel they truly get to know his character. In fact, according to the blog “iLove - All Things Degrassi”, “... JT was someone who we grew up with and saw as a friend. What is your reactions when you recall JT, or watch Rock This Town - the crucial episode in which JT died? Most posts on YouTube.com... talk of tears and sadness” (ilove-allthingsdegrassi.blogspot.ca). On the other hand, the teenagers from *The OC* start at roughly sixteen years old, and by the time the show was cancelled, they were twenty. According to the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, “[a]dolescence is an extremely important period in terms of emotional development

partly due to a surge of hormones in the brain” (*Understanding the Brain*). Earlier teen years are more formative than the latter years. Therefore, the audience will be more affected by the issues dealt with by the younger characters than those of the older characters, especially because the situations are comparable, even though the consequences are not. To avoid being considered melodrama, *DTNG* uses both adult and teenaged characters that suffer from a wide scope of issues. This brings *DTNG* into a realm of reality that *The OC* avoids with its specific, hyperbolic drama. For *DTNG* to uphold the responsible community, the way the situation is dealt with must be realistic and probable. If the situation being discussed is realistic and probable, and it represents Canadian culture, is it therefore a better tool for Canadian youths to use to help shape their identities? Analyzing one of the more sober *DTNG* story-lines from season two will provide some information on this topic.

During Season Two of *DTNG*, which originally aired in 2002, JT has his second, and far more serious, encounter with drugs. Strangely, in this case, the drugs that JT interacts with are legitimate, prescription narcotics, specifically OxyContin, but they are used in a way that takes the situation into the anti-social side of culture. At this point in the *Degrassi* narrative, JT is involved in a situation he does not have the facilities to negotiate. Like so many teens, including the character Spike, (Amanda Stepto) from the earlier *Degrassi* incarnations, JT and his girlfriend, Liberty, (Sarah Barrable-Tishauer) have had unprotected sex and Liberty becomes pregnant. JT attempts to do what he thinks is the *mature* thing and finds himself a job at the local pharmacy, but it is what he learns at school, from the miscreant, Jay, played by Mike Lobel, that truly *educates* JT and ultimately influences his actions. Instead of just working at the pharmacy, JT starts stealing prescription medication and selling it to Jay’s drug dealing

acquaintance. This incident has obvious implications for the viewers. First, the audience is shown, matter of factly, that young teenagers cannot hope to come out of adult situations without consequences. A child of fifteen should not have to worry about having a baby and finding a job to support a family; he should be concentrating on school. JT has become a criminal to attempt to do these things, and this action has realistic, rather than melodramatic, consequences.

When JT finds that he is in over his head, his life spinning out of control, he does what seems to be reasonable, to his immature mind, and takes a handful of the powerful narcotic to not only attempt to belong, but to try and forget his troubles. It is never broached in the show whether or not this was an attempt at suicide, or just a horrible decision, but the response is very unlike what happens to characters in *The OC* who take drugs. Yes, he does have an overdose and ends up in the hospital, similar to Marissa Cooper's Vicodin overdose in Tijuana in Season One of *The OC*, but it is what happens in the hospital that I argue speaks to the Canadian sentimentality in the program. Instead of having his friends break him out of the hospital to avoid being replanted in a mental health institution like Marissa, JT is met by his friends, family and the police. In the episode "Turned Out, pt 2," JT has to deal with the community-wide ramifications of his actions, as well as the personal difficulties. This honest telling of consequence refers back to Tinic's argument that "...As a country we are a lot more open or we can talk more honestly to our audience'" (Tinic 181). The Canadian producers provide what I interpret as an honest, realistic, community-driven response to this tragic occurrence⁵.

Television aside, Canadians have a more collective relationship with their country, from the standpoint of citizenship, than do Americans who have a more individual connection with their country. As early as 1922, scholars like Herbert Hoover were writing about *American*

Individualism. More recently, Fox News contributor Margaret Hoover explains “[b]y invoking the principles of American individualism, we have a template for addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century in a way that can make modern conservatism relevant for the rising generation” (xv). While television does have its part in forming the identity and morality of its viewing culture in Canada, a lot of this duty is held by the community, and that is reflective in *DTNG*. Americans, on the other hand, were destined to let television guide and shape their country. John Hartley speaks of Thomas Paine and his notions of the republic and relates them to television:

Paine united the three elements of a republican approach by bringing together: textuality (republic of letters); nation (“respublica,” the common weal); and citizenship (representative government). Paine actually modeled his favored system of government on publication -- on the republic of letters itself. (389)

The American republic was based on documents first and foremost, and since Paine was one of its founders, this diatribe should be looked at from the standpoint of the publication aspect of it. In the modern age, a country is kept together via its television; thus, the relationship each citizen has with his or her TV is a relationship that keeps them attached to the happenings of their country. Hartley describes this as a “two-way flow of information [that] was needed to link the imagined community together, with public affairs and decisions heading one way and public opinion and feedback heading the other” (390). Therefore, the lack of community involvement in *The OC* gives credence to this argument. In the United States, the television has taken the place of a true community, and only Anderson’s “imagined community” still remains. Luckily, JT had

his community, and his life was not only saved, but carried on quite successfully for a number of years.

As I have shown through the narrative surrounding the JT character, *DTNG* has a very different way of dealing with counter cultural issues than *The OC*. In this situation, of course, I am referring to the relationship between drug (ab)use, the characters and the community. On *DTNG*, no characters are shot; nobody has to perform a daring escape from a hospital, and nobody is excommunicated from Toronto. Instead, the issues are dealt with aptly and responsibly from the lens of today's educators as seen in several studies. The teenagers are reprimanded for their activities by the proper authorities, like parents or school administrators and rehabilitation takes place in and with the help of the community. As Hall states, "identities" are "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past" (Hall qtd in Castiglia and Reed 249). Future watchers of *DTNG* can properly situate themselves against or with this narrative in the construction of both their self and national identity. Furthermore, as Tinic argues:

the perceived need to create a homogeneous definition of national identity, through broadcasting, preceded the analysis and subsequent representation of the various interpretations of national self-consciousness as expressed by the distinct populations within Canada. (16)

Thus, *Degrassi: the Next Generation* is doing what I argue Canadian television must set out to do. It is using a responsible form of education to represent Canadians, while also creating a form of national identity. *DTNG* has now been on the air for eleven seasons. Although Canadian teens may be able to learn from this program, many of them were not watching it during the timeframe

of this thesis. In 2007, *DTNG* averaged 522,000 viewers, about a quarter of the viewers as compared to *Hockey Night in Canada* (Strauss), so the Canadian teenagers that are viewing examples of Canadian youth are influenced by the program's message of responsibility.

Raboy argues that Canadian television needs to use "...Canadian culture as a bulwark against American domination" (153). Out of the channels shown on the average Canadian television, only three channels are nationally broadcast Canadian channels: CTV, CBC and Global. Out of the three, only "the CBC, as the national broadcaster, must ensure that at least 60 percent of its program schedule between six AM and midnight consists of Canadian productions" (Canadian Content Rules). So, the average Canadian television set is completely dominated by American programming. Raboy goes further in his argument, stating that "...the majority of Canadians were using other [international] broadcasting sources most of the time" (161). Therefore, Canadians find themselves in a crisis. As I have argued to this point, television is not only a national unifier, but a major device in the creation of identity, particularly in malleable teens seeking acceptance. If the Canadian teen is not watching Canadian television, the inundation of American programming will have an effect on future Canadian national identity. Canadian teen audiences are arguably consuming primarily American programming because Canadian TV screens are a reflection of the "regionally fragmented community of Canadian TV. A" s mentioned previously, Tinic argues that:

As the centre replicates itself on Canadian television screens, it is perhaps not surprising that a regionally fragmented community has become an avid audience for American television programming. Positioned as outsiders in both televisual

landscapes, Canadians on the periphery have opted for the one that will, at minimum, provide the epitome of production quality and investment. (156)

Tinic refers to a “centre” that represents the urban, more often focused on economic, social and cultural centres of Canadian society, such as Toronto or Vancouver. The shows that represent this “centre” often alienate the periphery, and although demographically, the majority of Canadians are representative of these “centres,” at least geographically speaking, most of Canada is on the periphery.

DTNG maintains this centre-view by continuing to underrepresent the periphery. The characters live in Toronto and are fairly middle class. *DTNG* might be on the mark regarding responsible, educational programming that encourages the formation of Canadian national identity in the nation’s youth, but by denying involvement of the periphery, the show fails to completely curb or negate the onslaught of American culture.

⁴ All episodes of *DTNG* are titled after songs. This one is based on Bruce Cockburn’s song from the 1970 Donald Shebib movie *Goin’ Down the Road*. Shebib’s film is widely acknowledged as one of the best in Canadian history that really grasped the mood of the nation in the period that it was released.

⁵ Canada has a rich history of social programs and a welfare state. This has lead to Canadians’ sense of community involvement and responsibility for each other.

Chapter Three

Lessons: The Tragedy of the 'New Woman,' Alex Kelly

and

Different Strings: The Deconstruction and (Re)Creation of Paige Michalchuk

You know we've told you before!

But you didn't hear us then

So you still question why

You didn't listen again

(Lee, Lifeson and Peart)

Different eyes see different things

Different hearts

Beat on different strings

But there are times

For you and me

When all such things agree

(Lee, Lifeson and Peart)

As North American teen television evolves with the teens that it is representing, there is a need to represent those who have been underrepresented on television thus far. This includes LGBT teens or teens that have suffered from sexual abuse. To set the parameters for this chapter, I will focus on season two of *The OC*, which aired during the 2004/05 TV season, and particularly on the character Alex and her relationships with the rest of the cast, and seasons two

through five of *DTNG*, which aired between 2002 and 2006, and particularly on the character Paige Michalchuk. But first, to have a true understanding of sexuality and othering in *The OC* and *DTNG*, several things must be put into perspective including the types and intensity of sexuality on the programs as well as an explanation of othering and how it fits into television.

When discussing othering, I am going to extend definitions set out in Edward Said's *Orientalism* to include the area of sexual orientation as I examine homosexual characters as "other". Said defines Orientalism as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (1). Said takes his theory farther, but for what I am discussing, this definition will suffice. Said poses the question, "Can one divide human reality into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races and survive the consequences humanly?" (110). This concept of division is at the heart of the inevitable "'us' and 'them'" (110). That division, in accordance with this chapter, will be heterosexual versus homosexual. Larry Gross seems to believe there is a connection between sexuality and othering on television. He argues that, "This emerging trope [homosexuality] is significant in many ways. The absence of overt television portrayals has reproduced youth homosexuality as deviant and other, achieving what some term, symbolic annihilation" (148). A character that causes as much destruction around her as Alex cannot help but seem dangerous.

In the second season of Josh Schwartz's *The OC*, the character Alex Kelly (Olivia Wilde) is portrayed as an outsider. While she is no more or less beautiful than any of the other major female characters or extremely loose in her sexual morals, she is presented as dangerous in her bisexuality, a person that the teen viewer should not idealize. Although Alex is an example of a strong female character, it is ultimately her lack of classic femininity and embodiment of "bad"

sexuality that differentiates her from the rest of the female characters and establishes Alex as other. I believe that the Alex character is used as a warning to teens that open sexuality will lead to danger. According to Regnerus, "Whether punishing or peeping, Americans are a gawking nation when it comes to sex... We remain fixated on punishing the sexually deviant, even as "deviant" sexuality remains a moving target" (4). Alex is not explicitly othered by the characters on the show; most of them accept her into their group quite willingly. The othering in this case is dependent on the American teen audience. In this instance, the issue of othering transcends the media itself. Although Alex is accepted by the characters on the show as a friend, she is presented as other by the writers to the audience because of her sexuality and unwillingness to become a "cookie cutter" resident of Newport Beach.

During seasons two and three of *DTNG*, the character Paige (Lauren Collins) is not portrayed as an outsider to the teen audience; in fact, she is the exact opposite. Paige is the most popular girl at school, leader of the spirit squad and an excellent student on her way to Banting University. She fits in well with the rest of the characters and is never seen as dangerous, but in some situations, she is a victim. She is a strong female character who experiences the normal challenges of a pretty teen girl, like dealing with popularity and deciding whom to date. But Paige, like Alex, does not have a traditional femininity in that her sexual dalliances exceed the predetermined standard and could subscribe to what I will define as "revealing" sexuality. As mentioned earlier, class issues are not highlighted for the most part in *DTNG*, and the character is definitely not othered by either her classmates or by the audience. Paige suffers from the real consequences of her actions, and while she goes through dramatic situations, they are less sensationalistic than the melodrama of the American program.

The sexuality that is displayed in *The OC*, is completely heteronormative.

Thomas Peele argues that

...in the realm of popular culture, discourses that are perceived as positive far out-weigh those that are perceived as negative. Negative discourses concerning lesbian and gay people are either relegated to the level of connotation, where the reader can't be sure if a particular character is lesbian or gay, or, more commonly, the lesbian or gay character is irredeemably evil, strictly laughable, or asexual. And even while these representations are heteronormative, they are not considered to be necessarily negative or destructive by people who enjoy, for example, representations of the homosexual-as-sissy. (Peele 2)

There has been an utter lack of explicit sexuality throughout the duration of this program. Obviously, there are examples of kissing and occasionally the sexual contact becomes slightly more intense, but visually, it never becomes lewd or inappropriate. Characters' clothes are rarely removed, perhaps with the exception of a man's shirt. Other than the instances I will mention in this paper, physical contact is always male/female, and although there are instances of lust, most contact is done within the confines of a monogamous relationship. Although these facts may not seem entirely important, they have an intriguing effect; it sets a precedent as to what I will refer to as "restrained" sexuality.

Yet, *Degrassi* takes a stance on sexuality that is not prudish. During the nine seasons of the program, while sexuality has not been explicit, it has been discussed at length. Characters have been pregnant, and in the three instances portrayed on the show, one had a child, one had an abortion, and the third gave her child up for adoption. Sue Johanson, a famous Canadian sex

therapist, makes numerous guest starring roles on the program, preaching her mantra of safe and responsible sex. The character that I will speak of at length, Paige, has been raped and later is involved in a lesbian relationship. So, although the sexuality is not graphic, the Canadian audience is receiving a responsible and educational view of teen sexuality.

Another context that must be kept in mind before delving deeper into this argument is the role of the female in each of the programs. There are four female lead characters throughout the entirety of *The OC* that I will be discussing. First, the adult women, Julie Cooper, Kirsten Cohen, and the teenage girls, Marissa Cooper and Summer Roberts. These women are strong, well-rounded female characters. During season two, Kirsten is the Vice President of a real estate development firm, the Newport Group, and Julie is the acting Corporate Executive Officer of said group. The teenaged girls are both in high school, and are by no means wallflowers. Marissa is the head of social direction, and although Summer may not be as involved in school events, she is clearly dominant in both of the relationships she juggles throughout the season. As sexual beings, all of these women, except for Marissa, ascribe to my theory of restrained sexuality. All four women have boyfriends or husbands, and although there are occurrences of unfaithfulness in each case, the sex is non-violent and consensual. Marissa, on the other hand, does not exhibit restrained sexuality because her relationship with Alex is homosexual in nature. As characters, the women of *The OC* are representative of Lynn Stevens' fin de siecle, or end of the century, theory of The new woman. This theory "anticipate[d] this key modernist movement. The figure of the 'new woman' appeared when feminists were arguing that marriage and motherhood were detrimental to women" (Stevens 4). In a more contemporary context that fits with the adult female characters of television, we can look at Sally Ledger's *The New Woman Fiction and*

Feminism at the Fin-de-Siècle from 1997. In Ledger's text, she refers to the "new woman" as the "crème de la crème of human evolution" (10). This historical definition of an ideal or perfect woman is impossible to maintain today. According to Jong

such supposedly benign expectations victimize women far more than men have ever done. Attachment parenting, especially when combined with environmental correctness, has encouraged female victimization. Women feel not only that they must be ever-present for their children but also that they must breast-feed, make their own baby food and eschew disposable diapers. It's a prison for mothers, and it represents as much of a backlash against women's freedom as the right-to-life movement. (Jong)

Jong is referring to attachment parenting, the newest addition to societal expectations for women. Women are held to an unacceptable level of accomplishment due to antiquated ideas like the "new woman" and in this chapter, the impossibility for the characters in these programs to meet this mold will be explored. By discussing the "new woman" concept in the context of the aforementioned notion of "restrained sexuality" a clear definition of what I will call *restrained femininity* will be evident. Thus, restrained femininity will include the characteristics of beauty, strength of mind and will, and sexual liberation that may include infidelity but is always heterosexual and non-violent. Some youth may find that restrained femininity is impossible to uphold.

Degrassi boasts a massive cast, so I will not go into each character in as much detail, but I will describe enough of the female characters in the program to give an appropriate cross section of their roles as the female characters in the program. There are two adult female

characters, Spike and Miss Hatzilakos, (Melissa DiMarco). Spike is a young mother; she had her daughter Emma in the first season of *Degrassi Junior High* and is a small business owner. Miss Hatzilakos is a teacher who is later promoted to principal of Degrassi Community School. Similar to the women in *The OC*, these women are obviously strong characters and responsible role models, ascribing to the earlier mentioned theory of the “new woman.” The two teenage girls I will compare to the teenagers from *The OC* are Ashley Kerwin, whose role in the *Degrassi* narrative will be discussed at length in the next chapter, and the aforementioned Paige. Ashley represents restrained femininity with her responsible nature and heterosexuality, but she also walks along the darker side of life, visible in her use of drugs in Season One and her identity as a “goth” from seasons two to four. Paige, on the other hand, does not fit my definition. Paige is raped in season two and has a bisexual affair with *Degrassi*’s Alex, (Deanna Cassaluce) in seasons three and four. Paige is very similar to *The OC*’s Marissa, but the results of her experimentation and sexual deviance are not her death, but the true formation of her character. This evolution and dynamic nature of Paige fits what I have argued is the Canadian producers’ responsibility of honesty to their television audience.

The OC has its share of strong women. Alex is introduced to the audience in the third episode of season two, “The New Kids on the Block.” In the scene, she roughs up the effeminate Seth, while positioning herself as both physically and sexually dominant and as the manager of the restaurant. My interpretation of this scene is that Alex is a strong, domineering, beautiful young woman who is so capable that she runs a club with little to no interference from the owner. From this evidence, it is clear that Alex has elements of the *new woman*. But, there is a difference between the woman Alex is and that historical definition; whereas Alex may embody

certain elements, including being a strong willed career woman, she does not succeed in her career while balancing a family life. The notions of marriage and family are as oppressive to today's woman as they were to the women of the nineteenth century. Alex is a guest character on *The OC*; she is only present for half of season two and is then never heard from again. But, during her tenure on the program, she is involved in two relationships, one with Seth and the other with Marissa. It is my belief that Alex is the terrifying other in this program because of the latter relationship. Alex may be set up as other before the homosexual relationship occurs through visual and class differences, but it is her bisexuality that may cause the audience to other her completely.

As I have mentioned visual differences in television, diegesis should be discussed. According to Bordwell and Thompson, diegesis consists of a "spatio-temporal world" (8) where everything that is not explicitly displayed on screen, exists. Diegetic othering, or the process of characters on screen treating someone as other, is a method the writers of the program can use to convey to the audience that someone is different, or that the viewers should be afraid of them. The last statement made regarding Alex is an example of diegetic othering, but only to a point. Since the cast does not other her, what needs to happen for the character to be othered by the audience requires that the audience's attitude toward a certain group must be known or expected. As Queers have been pre-determinately exposed on American TV as other, the audience recognizes that even though Alex is friends with the characters, her sexual preferences are counter-culture and will thus lead to difficulties.

Alex may be a shining example of the new woman but her non-conformist sexuality results in her downfall. I believe occurrences of "revealing" sexuality in *The OC* always lead to a

character's downfall, because, at some level, the writers are intending to use the character's fate to convey a warning to the teen audience. Although accepted by the characters around her, Alex is othered to the audience because of her revealing femininity. Alex may be capable and beautiful, but her immoderate sexual tendencies keep her out of the Newport Beach elite. Alex leaves Newport Beach because of problems relating from her relationship with Marissa. After being with Alex, Marissa goes through several stages of transformation, although not sexual, that result in her ultimate death. Through examples of Alex's sexual tendencies and a comparison of her pseudo-doppelgänger, Ryan, I will argue that characters on *The OC* who don't fit the "restrained" sexuality mould are othered and then omitted as a warning to the audience.

Alex is a complex character and this creates a paradox. Alex is gorgeous, and she is also tattooed. Tattoos do not detract from a woman's beauty, but they are a counter culture scar that act as a mark of resistance. As Karin Beeler argues in her book, *Tattoos, Desire and Violence*, "Tattoo culture has traditionally been a very male-centered culture... when women are tattooed they are often restricted to the object of male, heterosexual desire" (41).

The tattoo is a form of visual othering. During Season two of *The OC*, Alex is the only character on the program that is marked in such a way, and it makes her less safe than a girl like Summer. The purple stripe in Alex's hair furthers this paradigm, creating difference between her and the other characters. This is an example of diegetic indicators that act on the audiences pre-conceived expectations and furthermore indirectly influence the audience's attitude towards a character. Later, when Seth is attempting to arrange a double date, he comments to Ryan, "Her with the tattoo, you with the wristband? That's like the ultimate wrong side of the tracks love story" ("The New Kids on the Block"). Seth others both Ryan and Alex by loosely referring to

them as subversive members of society. Seth maintains a friendship with Ryan and dates Alex, and the audience is led to believe that even though Seth is a part of the establishment with his lawyer father and executive mother, Alex and Ryan are similar, as opposed to other or different, and therefore able to exist in his social circle. Thus, although Alex is accepted by Seth, her difference is still inferred negatively by the audience. Seth's comment not only points out Alex's differences, it also creates a link with Ryan that I believe helps establish her as other.

Alex's tattoo is that of a butterfly, a marking that is traditionally female. Yet, she is not a traditional woman. When Marissa asks her what the butterfly means, Alex responds, "It means... I was drunk... (laughs) No, I just got emancipated from my parents, and Mom and Dad with a huge X through them was way too expensive" ("The Accomplice"). The butterfly tattoo establishes Alex as a character who has gone through a metamorphosis. Alex has lost the shackles of her oppressive parents and has embraced bisexuality where she finds true happiness. In episode ten, after Marissa helps Alex reclaim her heart-shaped necklace from her ex-girlfriend in "The Accomplice," Marissa also becomes tattooed. Marissa's tattoo is never quite visible, but in this instance, it is the act more than the symbol that is important. This moment marks the beginning of Marissa's fall; first the tattoo, then the homosexual relationship, then the trailer park, and ultimately, death. Although Marissa was a mildly troubled youth before Alex came along, her life only seems to get more complicated and destructive afterwards.

Alex is not the "object of male heterosexual desire" (Beeler 41). Alex is a sexual being herself, and although not predatory, she does not shy away from physical contact. In this scene, Alex's morals concerning casual intimate contact are exhibited:

‘Obviously you got the wrong idea Saturday night, cos you and me, it's not happening.’

‘Ok... Ok, but you did kinda kiss me.’

‘Uh huh. It was fun.’

‘It was fun? It was fun? It didn't mean anything to you?’

‘Dude it was just a kiss.’

‘Why don't you just shake hands?’

(Alex kisses delivery guy) ‘Thanks Homer, see you Thursday.’

‘You just kissed the beer guy.’

‘So it's just a kiss, right Mandy?’ (kisses girl).

("The SnO C")

Alex resists Seth's attempts of drawing a connection between kissing and relationships. While exemplifying her carefree, dangerous attitude, this also shows Alex's resistance to all things formal, in this case, the SnO C dance held at the local high school. Although attending the school dance is a given in most teens' lives; a right of passage that Alex resists. Although in this scene she does not appear to be mocking the dance or regretting her decision, she acts as though the dance just is not necessary. As Alex has already had a metamorphosis, the flowering of her sexuality, she does not need the traditional teenage rituals to feel as if she belongs. After the dance, a recently assaulted Seth returns to Alex where she kisses him to improve his mood, effectively starting their short relationship. At this point in the story arc, Alex is seen as a visual other that resists the classic interpretation of being a teenager. Alex is accepted by Seth, but is definitely deemed as an outsider by the teen audience.

The scene I have mentioned earlier, with Alex kissing her co-worker, was also the first instance of teenaged homosexuality on *The OC*. Although the kiss was trite, it expands on the representation of Alex as other. The kiss is shocking to Seth, and is an understated introduction to Alex as a bisexual figure. In the next instance, in the episode entitled, "The Ex Factor," the audience is introduced to Alex's ex-girlfriend, which is of little importance except to establish Alex's history of homosexual experience, further adding to her otherness. Marissa and Alex's relationship commences from issues with Alex's former lover. As mentioned previously, Alex and Marissa journey to the residence Alex shared with her prior girlfriend to retrieve some of Alex's things, including the heart necklace that her ex-girlfriend had stolen from her. In this episode, Marissa becomes truant, spending the majority of her time drinking and partying with her new lover. Alex has a lifestyle that Marissa finds appealing in an idealistic sense. At this point in the series, Season two, Episode fourteen, Marissa has only dated three people: Luke, a preppy water polo player at the beginning of the series; Ryan; and DJ who was Marissa's family's yard boy. Luke aside, Marissa has a history of dating men who are rejected by the establishment in some form or another. For someone of her breeding and environment, there are class issues when she dates a maintenance man or the teenaged male who just got out of jail. Although Marissa still maintains the image of the new woman, she dates the subversive side of Newport Beach. While Marissa may idealistically covet the sensual, exciting, carefree life that Alex possesses, the audience is led to believe that Alex is just another anti-establishment figure that Marissa is dating to resist her mother's tyranny. In the episode "The Rainy Day Woman," Alex and Marissa's mother, Julie, discuss the ironies of Marissa's character. Julie takes the opportunity to ridicule the relationship between the two, and not only does Julie undermine any

sort of partnership Marissa and Alex may have, she discounts Alex's importance in Marissa's life when she comments on Marissa's past loves. Julie insinuates that Alex has the same social standing as the yard boy, thus othering Alex further. This is where the audience can distinguish the difference between Alex and Ryan as well. Although Ryan is anti-establishment, like Alex, and shares the same working class affiliation, because he is straight he is deemed acceptable according to Julie at this juncture. According to Julie, Ryan is only the right choice when the other option is a homosexual relationship between Marissa and "this week's yard guy" ("The Rainy Day Woman"). This further adds to my argument that *The OC* promotes and privileges a heteronormative viewpoint.

Alex and Marissa's relationship ends predictably. Since, Marissa is unable to handle the realities of living outside of her economic and social spheres; she returns back to the centre of Newport Beach. Marissa is not capable of being with Alex and being completely happy because she is not ready for life on the social periphery. In episode sixteen, the audience is shown the ultimate break-up between the two:

Marissa: This is my life! So what do you think?

Alex: I think, this is your life, and I don't fit in. Pep rallies, cheerleaders, boys.

Marissa: Nothing happened with Ryan.

Alex: Not yet, but what do you give it, a week, a month?

Marissa: I really wanted this to work between us. Look, I'm sorry if I hurt you.

Alex: I'm sorry that I brought two skeezy ex-cons to your bonfire.

Marissa: What happens now?

Alex: Who knows? I think I might go back home, make some money, go back to school. It actually looks kinda fun.

Marissa: Yeah, from really far away. C'mon, you're gonna miss the human pyramid.

("The Blaze of Glory").

Alex points to her own differences in this passage. She recognizes that she does not fit in and that Marissa would be better off with Ryan. The passage ends with Alex's expected exit from *The OC* and her half-hearted statement regarding returning home and attempting a normal lifestyle. This speech completely undermines her resistant, anti-authoritarian ways by showing a longing for a banal existence that she struggled against the entire time she lived in Newport Beach. Apparently, this is the writers' attempt to bring closure to the portrayal of Marissa as being other. She has already been visually othered and portrayed as a sexual other and her lower class upbringing is emphasized, and this led to her returning to a home that she originally left because she was not accepted. I believe the writers of *The OC*, were broadcasting the message that the only way to belong anywhere is to be one of "us," not one of "them."

Perhaps the creator of the program was not attempting to other Alex but to use her as a tool to assist Marissa's character development, at least in his mind. *The OC's* creator and writer, Josh Schwartz comments on the relationship:

'That was a double-edged sword for us,' Schwartz admits, 'because we were asked to pull back [on the duration of the kiss] while at the same time it was very heavily hyped. It was like some sort of game. But while everybody thought the kiss would be the start and end of it for them, for it was really about doing a real

relationship and showing how, after it ended, Marissa would be at a place of greater maturity. (Mitovich)

Marissa never reaches this "place of greater maturity". In fact, the end of the relationship initiates the end of her character on the program. Alex unknowingly wreaked havoc on the two characters she dated during her time at Newport Beach. With Seth's out-of-character drinking and stealing of his parents' car and Marissa's lesbian relationship that could be seen as the beginning of her downfall, it is hard to argue that Alex is not depicted as a negative influence. Although Alex and Ryan share a multitude of similarities, including upbringing and resistance to authority, Alex is the character who causes people to hurt or suffer. The only conclusion I can draw from this is that Alex is seen as a negative other because of her sexuality. Alex is a warning to the audience that if they mirror her sexual behavior, it will result in harmful situations both for the persons involved and their associates. "Revealing" sexuality is what ultimately establishes Alex as a true other. This type of othering is a repeating theme in the program. It resurfaces when Ryan's brother is added to the cast in the second half of season two.

Much like Alex, Paige endures her own share of issues during *DTNG*, though her problems occur during a much longer period of time. Paige is introduced in the third episode of the series and remains a regular on the program through the sixth season. Paige is beautiful and has power over her friends - this much is evident even from her earliest on-screen appearance. Her attire during her introduction is similar to that of a young starlet, and her demeanor sends a message of confidence and overt sexuality. Paige is fifteen in the first season, so her journey into womanhood has just started. But, she is still similar to the historical concept of the "new woman" in that she is straight, a figurehead, social, and successful. Paige has a relatively safe sex life

during the first season, as she has no relations whether sexual or romantic with men or women, but early in the second season, Paige starts dating and finds that she has a predilection for older, more experienced men. Paige has three relationships that are integral to her identity formation. By relationships, I refer to dating rather than sexual relations. Throughout the series, she dates two men, Spinner; (Shane Kippel) and Matt Oleander(Christopher Jacot) her teacher; she also dates one woman, Alex Nunez (Deanna Casaluce). Paige has a destructive introduction to her sexuality.

In season two, Paige decides that she wants to have her first boyfriend and sexual experience. Although it is not apparent during their first meeting, the attractive basketball player from another school, Dean, played by Dean Blundell, is about to become a rapist. Paige is lured upstairs during a party and then forced into sexual intercourse. This moment Paige regrets is her first sexual interaction. Rape does not fit my definition of restrained sexuality. After this moment and the subsequent story arc that continues through seasons two and three, Paige is scarred sexually. This is a probable response that a teen girl would have to such a traumatic event. One must assume the rest of Paige's life will be different because of her rape. Can or will Paige still fit the definition of the "new woman" after her rape? As I previously defined the term, as soon as revealing sexuality is introduced into the equation, the "new woman" formula is complicated, and often, the character's existence is marred by misfortune rather than positivity. Or, is the "new woman" an impossibility, an ideal set up that cannot be reached? As I mentioned earlier, today's women are now expected to be successful in both the workplace and home. Fabes et al. comment on how class may lead to different definitions of parent: (m)iddle-class television parents and their children are more likely to be portrayed as intelligent, mature 'superpeople' ...

whereas working class parents and children are likely to be portrayed as inept” (339). It is more reasonable that a woman, whatever her circumstance might be, should just be a strong, feminine person rather than to attempt to be compared to an ideal formula of what a woman in the twenty first century should be. Although Paige does not fit the restrained sexuality formula that I have established, she is not othered by the audience or the rest of the characters. Instead, she remains as part of the cast until the show’s seventh season. I believe this is because the Canadian program is rejecting the standard, Americanized melodramatic teen drama formula and is instead attempting to bring responsible levels of reality and consequence to the genre.

In season five of *DTNG*, Paige starts a relationship with the school’s “bad girl,” Alex. This relationship does not start off sexually, however; it begins as a work association. After the closure of her rape trial, where the defendant was found not guilty due to lack of physical evidence, another burden that Paige is forced to live with, Paige takes retribution into her own hands. She destroys her rapist’s car with her boyfriend’s, and as a result of this, Paige does the responsible thing: she turns herself into the police and starts a part time job at the local theatre, with Alex, to pay for the repairs to her boyfriend’s car. In the episode “Death of a Disco Dancer,” Paige and Alex share their first casual social experience, which happens to be deviant in nature. The two girls skip their college interviews to smoke marijuana outside the school. Their conversation includes discussion about college and Paige’s failed heterosexual relationships, perhaps a precursor to their eventual affair. I interpret this scene as Paige and Alex setting themselves on the periphery by accepting drug culture into their lives. As part of the counter culture, the formation of their identities does not abide by the same standards as what would be referred to as traditional culture. Castiglia and Reed argue that, “People invested in normative

identities (whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality) that are continually reinforced by the mainstream media as the makings of unique individuality can afford to ignore the collective aspect of those [counter culture] memories” (256). This program gives the counter culture an opportunity to build identity in a positive way. Although Paige is not successful during the interview, which is a reasonable expectation of the audience, she does end up getting into the school and goes on to have a decent, normal life. She is by no means othered by the characters because of her experimenting with counter culture; instead, the teen audience learns that there are consequences to every action.

Now that the counter cultural nature of Paige and Alex’s relationship has been established, I want to discuss the homosexual relationship that they share. In the end of season five, series episodes ninety-two and ninety-three, Kevin Smith and Jason Mewes return to Toronto for the premiere of their movie, *Jay and Silent Bob Go Canadian, Eh?*. Alex and Paige attend the movie premiere together, and after several intense moments, they have their first same-sex kiss. The way this scene was shot shows it to be anything but harmless. The camera zooms in closely on the kiss, and the passion is evident, as well as Paige’s immediate discomfort and regret. In the next few episodes, she negotiates with the the terms of the relationship, its impact on her and how those around her feel about it. As Castiglia and Reed argue, “For those outside mainstream culture, however, memories on which to ground alternative social identities must be more self-consciously recognized, cultivated and shared” (256). Again, Paige is not othered because of her sexuality or decision to live in the counter culture. It is well-established by this point that her brother and the character Marco, played by Adamo Ruggiero, are both homosexual. *DTNG* is offering the counter culture part of its audience the opportunity to build

positive memories related to their own life experiences. Paige does not suffer because of her choices; she deals with them in a socially responsible fashion, and the audience is shown positive experiences as a result. This stance towards sexuality is fluid in nature, especially as compared to the heteronormative lens that *The OC* uses.

Ultimately, the relationship between Alex and Paige does not work out. Paige has aspirations of attending college, but Alex is not willing to join her. The relationship has a non-melodramatic ending, which is common to many teenage couples who face the decisions that life presents after high school. Both characters go on to lead regular lives, and neither of them is written off the show or stereotyped as a lesbian in the narrative. They continue to be dynamic and representative of teenage counter culture.

In this chapter, I have compared characters who are representative of the counter culture in both Canada and the United States. Although the two countries might have very different cultures, counter cultural elements are almost universal in the Western World. Drug culture and alternate sexuality are depicted with common themes on television from Canada's *DTNG* and America's *The OC* to the United Kingdom's *Skins*.⁶ Street drugs are illegal, and no matter how liberal each individual country might claim to be, the centre, or mainstream culture, still believes there is something deviant about homosexuality. The differences become apparent when I look at how each country deals with the issues in their television programming. In *The OC*, the counter culture character Alex is othered and leaves town hastily after her tumultuous relationship with Marissa. Marissa suffers from an attempted rape, which results in an abusive drug infused relationship and ultimately death at the hands of her violent boyfriend⁷. In *DTNG*, the character Paige goes to university and lands a job in her chosen field, while Alex goes to college and rises

above her expected position in life. More disparateness in sexuality in television, though, is necessary. According to Peele

[w]hile much progress has been made toward representation of glbtq people in composition and in popular culture, we still need to encourage our students to look beyond the traditional categories of straight and gay, male and female. A queer response would be to focus on the incoherence, constructed nature, and fluidity of gender identity itself.

(Peele)

The differences in the strategies that the Canadian *DTNG* and the American *The OC* employ that influence their audiences are representative of each country's national identity. In the next chapter, I will take a final look at how national identity is tied to each program.

⁵ Although not discussed at length in this thesis, the program *The Skins* which aired originally in the United Kingdom on BBC4 and now a North American version on MTV in Canada and the United States is the epitome of the realistic teen television program. The dark, gritty style of the show has drawn negative press since some critics have argued that it romanticizes counter culture, but in my opinion, the non-sensationalist style of the program offers an honest look at teenaged culture

⁶ At the time of Marissa's death, she was not dating the young man who was driving the vehicle that crashed into hers. She had broken up with him and was attempting to get her life back on track. I see her death as a further warning to the audience that if you do deviate from the norm, you are doomed regardless of whether or not you attempt to alter your life's course.

Chapter Four

Subdivisions: A Comparative Look at Class and Identity

“Subdivisions ---

In the high school halls

In the shopping malls

Conform or be cast out”

(Lee, Lifeson and Peart).

The Roman poet Horace elucidates that, “[h]e who combines the useful and the pleasing wins out by both instructing and delighting the reader. This is the sort of book that will make money for the publisher, cross the seas, and extend the fame of the author” (72). Television, especially that which is written for a primarily teen demographic, is both mimetic and didactic, echoing the lives of the audience members and drawing upon traditional rhetorical devices like catharsis to influence the viewers in subconscious ways as to how they may react in situations that resonate with the on screen action.

From the urban neighborhood of Degrassi to the gated community of Newport Beach, the audiences of *Degrassi: the Next Generation* and *The OC* in Canada and the USA are presented with microcosms of their specific countries. If American programs that are rife with melodrama are didactically more of a cautionary tale to the audience rather than a more comprehensive educational tool, then appealing to a large demographic is still an effective methodological way to influence and teach the audience. At the same time, the Canadian teen drama is attempting to engage primarily with the youth demographic. Whilst engaging, *DTNG* hopes to provide teens with the knowledge needed to deal with troubling situations whether or not they actually arise.

The strategies these programs employ are influencing their respective target audiences in ways that speak to the national identity of the country in question.

Considering how substance abuse is addressed in both texts, the differing values of each culture are increasingly apparent. For example, in *DTNG*, when a character uses ecstasy and embarrasses herself at a party, she is not punished by her parents or the police, but is shunned at school, not for the drug use, but for humiliating her friends. In this case the specific community that is involved are her colleagues at her educational institution. In a comparable scene from *The OC*, a lower-class teen character uses cocaine with his love interest, and the two of them attempt to buy and sell ecstasy. The cocaine use is situated as the mitigating factor in an attempted sexual assault and ultimately in the violence leading to a tragic shooting. Unlike the example of the substance use in *DTNG*, the example of substance abuse in *The OC* is followed up with more dangerous and serious implications. In *DTNG*, the substance use and its implications are dealt with by the violator's community (friends at school), but in *The OC*, the substance use is conflated with class differences, and the implications are apparently violent and tragic. On *DTNG* the social violation results in a less-serious consequence for the perpetrator, but on *The OC*, the temperament of the pedantic, or teaching, moments are presented as dangerous in attempts to coerce the audience to fear the outward and inevitable consequences of this anti-social behavior rather than to be educated about these activities and their effects on both self and community. I will argue that the way that both of these programs address the issue of substance abuse reflects the individual identity of the parent nations; the Canadian program channels education and community, the American program channels fear and violence. To establish theoretical basis for this argument, I will address Aristototele and notions of tragedy.

In *The Poetics*, Aristotle describes tragedy as,

an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of emotion. (53)

Aristotle argues that tragedy is cathartic. For the purposes of this thesis and from evidence I have presented, I will refer to contemporary television dramas as modern day tragedies. As I have argued, catharsis creates a symbiotic relationship between viewer and character which influences the creation of identity. As far as I am concerned, because of this, television is didactic as well. Other than the fact that Aristotle argues serials should not be allowed (53), many of his descriptions, especially dealing with catharsis and plot can be cohesively correlated to elements of both *The OC* and *DTNG*. To understand this, Aristotelian notions of mimesis must be acknowledged. Mimesis refers to the imitation of life in art. To paraphrase Aristotle from *The Poetics*, it is through this imitation, that must not be too close to reality that the members of the audience may undergo a process of catharsis, or a purging of emotions. Aristotle goes on to describe the distance that is necessary between the mimesis and reality.

When referring to the historical, Aristotle is speaking of that which is true and has happened. But as he states, these historical events must refer to the realm of “probable and possible.” Therein lays the distinction between mimesis and reality. The plots of good drama should be about something that has happened, but it should not be an absolute truth. Without the ability to disassociate slightly from what they are viewing, the audience cannot be removed enough from the action to truly be affected by it, because in Aristotle’s estimation, only when

you can separate yourself from something can you be affected by it. The programs that I am examining for this paper are both of this mould. *The OC* and *DTNG* tackle legitimate issues that most teens have to deal with, but the pace and severity of these programs remain entirely divorced from what is realistic, which is an ingredient for catharsis (Aristotle 56). *The OC* and *DTNG* are both cathartic and didactic due to the distance between the audience and the realities of the program and how the audience engages with television in terms of mimesis.

A Television Studies reading of the aforementioned literature is appropriate when building upon the teachings of Aristotle and Horace as a basis for further scholarly discourse. Television both teaches and delights. Horace's exact description of literature is that is successful for both the writer, the publisher, and the audience. Not only do television programs delight, but more importantly, in my opinion, they instruct important lessons and can be useful in the formation of young identities.

Television, at least in these cases, is a didactic device. But this begs a second question, in the context of a Cultural Study, how does TV build identity in teenagers? Van de Berg and Wenner believe that television, "...confirms the power of the image to raise the passions of viewers simply by creating and confirming, through non-discursive means, beliefs about their reality and ideals" (478). As Jackson believes, "an identity is fashioned in response to others. It is a dialogue with others in the context of patterned ideas, concepts, linguistic and social categories... which predate the individual" (81). In such a malleable state as adolescence, influences from external sources shape how teens see themselves, both in relation to their parents, their nation, and their associates. Using rhetorical devices, such as mimesis, the imagery on TV is reflective. These last two points are indicative of television's aptitude for shaping

teenage identity, especially when united with the didactic nature of TV as discussed earlier. Later, I will take this further and show how place has a role in identity construction. To start this analysis, I will discuss how action and consequence, as a didactic technique, and how character are comparatively different when discussing drug use in *The OC* and *DTNG*.

In the second season of Josh Schwartz's *The OC* the audience is reintroduced to the character Trey Atwood (Logan Marshall-Green). Trey is different from the majority of the citizens of Newport Beach; he is of a lower class. According to Gerbner, "addictive substances are linked to bad character rather than to negative health consequences or the danger of addiction" (71). Bad character and lower class are often linked on television. When the teen audience is reintroduced to Trey, he has just been released from jail for grand theft auto the same crime he and Ryan were convicted for during the series' first story arc. The Cohens take responsibility for Trey, and as presented in a scene from the episode "The Brothers Grim" the class differences between Trey and the rest of the community are immediately emphasized. Trey, with Ryan and Marissa, enter a high end clothing store where Trey is quickly confronted by the store's security guard. The altercation turns violent, with Trey noting that he is being singled out because of how he looks. Although the teen audience has not seen Trey as a drug user yet, the way his character is being constructed is consistent with the American stereotype of the criminal, ex-con addict. Therefore, in matters of character, in the American program, the character that ends up being the drug user is shown as a criminal who cannot be trusted.

As explained earlier, this type of thinking is ubiquitous. An audience who sees this type of character as a drug user has an expected reaction when taken in the didactic sense. This reaction is fear and repulsion. The audience is not typically expected to be afraid of the character,

but they are expected to fear becoming like this character, to pity him or look down upon him. Using a stereotypical drug user as a character achieves the desired result. Making an audience fear a character in terms of his or her class and legal standing is a didactic technique that is quite common. Although Trey's attitude may be a mitigating factor in the didactic attempts of the program's writers to influence viewers to fear drug use, what really exemplifies this matter is the consequence of Trey's actions. In *Media Matter: TV Use in Childhood and Adolescence*, Rosengren argues that "To a large extent, youth culture is a differentiated product of the cultural industry, providing the young with what they may need for the creation, maintenance, and expression of their identity" (119). The television industry has built these stereotypes that are undeniably shaping the beliefs and knowledge of youth culture. Although there are instances of Trey using, buying and selling drugs earlier in the season, the instance I am focusing on for the first half of the action and consequence formula is in episode twenty-one, entitled "The Return of the Nana," that was written by series creator, Josh Schwartz. In the following scene, it becomes clear that when a character in *The OC* who is recognized as being lower class takes drugs, the results are very extreme. In the episode just mentioned, Trey and Marissa become inebriated together and Trey snorts cocaine. After sitting on the beach for a short time conversing, Trey attempts to rape Marissa. During the struggle, he keeps mentioning his social class as an issue or reason why Marissa will not have sex with him. In this scene, things quickly become inappropriate when drugs are involved. The mood goes from jocular and peaceful to resentful and violent, even with the inclusion of alcohol. As the teen audience has been shown thus far, drug use may lead to violence, even with someone that means as much to one as Marissa does to Trey. Again, as Rosengren argues, this type of vision is identity building.

Although Trey's drug use and his attempted rape of Marissa situate substance abuse as a negative didactic approach, it is the consequence of these actions, and thus his drug use that really makes the audience fearful. In the season finale, titled "The Dearly Beloved," Trey is shot as a result of his drug using ways. Although the teen viewers find out in season three that Trey does not die from the shooting, the picture that is painted for the young audience is grim; if you use drugs, you may become violent and ultimately suffer from violence yourself. Gerbner states that in television, "addicts are more likely than others to fail and to fall victim to violence. They are portrayed as "losers" (74). Trey is the ultimate degenerate, a stereotypical ex-con that ends up getting shot as a result of his drug use. In a didactic sense, again, fear is the motivating factor for the audience not to do drugs. In *The OC*, the youth cultural identity is being shaped negatively with fear as the primary factor against drug use.

The drug user that the teenaged audience is introduced to in *DTNG*, is a very different type of young adult than Trey. Ashley Kerwin is the Junior High class president, dates the best player on the basketball team and is generally the most popular girl in school. Obviously, she is nothing like Gerbner's "loser." In an aforementioned passage from Serra Tinic's *On Location*, she gives a plausible explanation for this, "There is a perception among Canadian producers that 'As a country we are a lot more open or we can talk more honestly to our audience'" (181). This could have something to do with Canada's history with documentary film and television. The multi-award winning National Film Board of Canada (NFB) has been focussing on documentaries and short films since the 1970s. The Canadian audience is more likely to see a television documentary and this may lead to, as Tinic mentioned, the perception among Canadian producers that they can be honest with their viewers. Although Aristotle's separation from reality

is still necessary for catharsis, in Canada the realities of the teen genre are a little closer to what an audience would perceive as reality. Ashley's character is not of the archetype that would be an expected drug user, but when taken in the context of realism before extremism as I have explained it, the audience should believe that it is as likely that any character on *DTNG* is capable of making a mistake that will lead to complications. Compared to *The OC*, this is a didactic technique that speaks more to education through knowledge and truth than through fear.

In the season finale of season one, titled "Jagged Little Pill," Ashley feels pressure from her friends who consider her boring and predictable. After some Ecstasy is confiscated from some of the younger kids, it is given to the dependable Ashley to dispose of. Ashley's friend, Paige, confronts Ashley about her dullness. Feeling pressure from the group to "be cool", Ashley keeps the drugs and invites her boyfriend over, in spite of her parent's wishes. Like a normal teen feeling these pressures, Ashley capitulates and takes the drugs. Later, Ashley embarrasses herself and offends her friends. The actions that lead up to Ashley taking the drugs and her actions while high are quite tame compared to the attempted rape of Marissa by Trey. Ashley also faces consequences for her actions, but Ashley's punishment is not a gunshot wound, but being shunned by her former best friends and boyfriend. These effects stay with Ashley up to midway through the second season, and predicate Ashley's transformation from high school princess to Goth queen. Again, these reactions seem more realistic, echoing the sentiments from Tinic's argument. The Canadian audience is being educated with community based responses instead of terror. Teen programs are building the identity of the youths viewing them, but *DTNG* is a more beneficial type of didactic television than *The OC*.

According to Gerbner, “Scenes with alcohol, tobacco, and/or illicit drugs are present in seven of ten prime-time network dramatic programs. Scenes of drinking alcoholic beverages are seen an average of every twenty minutes, smoking every fifty five minutes, and illicit drugs every seventy eight minutes” (69). Youths today are bombarded with this type of imagery. What must be taken into context is the variety of imagery they are seeing and the message that is being delivered because this is what is shaping identity. From a Canadian standpoint, even more concern is necessary, because more Canadian teens are watching American programming than are watching *DTNG*. In fact, the season finale of 2007’s *DTNG* gathered under 600 thousand viewers in Canada while the episode of Fox’s *24* had 1.2 million Canadian viewers (Strauss). This fearful type of didactic television is being absorbed by our youth culture, and they are in danger of losing their sense of Canadianism. As a nation, Canada has to protect its own identity, and programs like *The OC* that use a negative form of teaching are subjecting Canadian youth with identity building techniques that are American in nature. If television is the prime identity builder of youth, perhaps parents must have better control of what type of content is being viewed by using parental locks and filters if the content is inappropriate.

Conclusion

In the End: What can Canada do?

“I can see, what you mean, it just takes me longer.

And I can feel, what you feel, it just makes me stronger”

(Lee, Lifeson and Peart)

Obviously, the Canadian programs do not have the budget to truly compete with the major networks of the USA, but as argued in the context of this thesis, the Canadian product is a rounder, more responsible product. Even the actors in Canada are reaching the same heights in their careers as their American counterparts. In fact, it seems that the USA is now stealing *Degrassi's* stars. Shenae Grimes, formerly Darcy Edwards of *DTNG*, is now starring in the current incarnation of *Beverly Hills: 90210*; Nina Dobrev, Mia Jones of *DTNG* is now on CW's hit, *Vampire Diaries* and rapper Drake (Aubrey Graham), also known as Jimmy Brooks on *DTNG*, signed a major record label with Little Wayne's label, Cash Money Records, after being the most sought after free agent in the market in 2009. But this thesis is not about whether or not Canadian television can reach the level of success that the American programs have reached - it addresses whether Canadian television can help Canadian teens build or keep their national identities, and if so, how and when?

In chapter two, I addressed *The OC* and how the handling of counter cultural issues spoke to the national identity of the United States of America. I have argued that the American show utilizes fear and negative consequences as a device to educate youths at their most malleable state. I believe and have argued that this is representative of the conservatism and isolationism which are generally assumed to make up large parts of the American identity (Lora 269).

In chapter three, I addressed the Canadian program, *Degrassi: the Next Generation*. I discussed how *DTNG* handles counter cultural issues that were similar to those portrayed in *The OC*, as well as the struggle of Canadian television at large. I have argued that Canadian programmers are thus far incapable of producing teen television that addresses national identity in a fashion that can be representative of Canada as a whole and non-parodical. I went on to argue that *DTNG* uses a much more realistic style of education and more plausible consequences when addressing counter cultural issues, while similar problems on *The OC* caused death and destruction. This is representative of Canadian ideals of community and education through knowledge, rather than through fear. This can also be seen as an example of Canadians' willingness to look for solutions through means other than violence or oppression.

In chapter four, I made a comparative analysis of the two programs, and, more specifically, of two female characters of roughly the same age and class. This chapter gave a more specific look at the two countries' national identities by comparing the counter cultural experiences shared by these two young women. In this side by side comparison, the differences in national identities is evident, and it is clear that the two programs have very different ways of dealing with the same issues; the American program uses fearful consequences while the Canadian program uses consequences that are community based and reasonable.

Finally, in chapter five, I examined class differences and whether or not they were portrayed by the programs. Specifically, I addressed how place influences the repercussions that follow problems arising from class differences in *DTNG* and *The OC*. So, conclusions must be made. During my introduction I noted that Canadian teens are watching more American than Canadian programming. Although I have argued that *DTNG* has a more realistic and responsible

way of dealing with teen issues, it is to no avail if fewer Canadian teens are watching the program than American programs.

In the summer of 2010, *Degrassi* moved networks from CTV to MuchMusic (MM), which is a CTV GlobeMedia subsidiary but has a very different mandate. MM aims at the teen audience, which is a younger audience than its sister station, and it has employed techniques much closer to current American programs aimed at the same target, like *Gossip Girl* or *90210*. *DTNG* has become a more sensationalist, or melodramatic, narrative, with anti-social issues like violence and sexuality appearing much more frequently than before the network change. *DTNG* now soundtracks the episodes, with licensed music taking the place of the instrumental score that used to permeate the soundscape when the program aired on CTV.

As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, I believe that Canadian national identity is at risk, and, as I predicted, the more time the *Degrassi* program stays on the air, the closer it will become to its American counterpart, *The OC*. As I have interpreted, the program has taken a decidedly American slant in the recent years. The higher quality of production, a significant change in scoring, marketing and the advertising shown during *DTNG*'s airings are not just a sign of evolution in television in and of itself but a deliberate change to attempt to draw more viewers than the program did during its tenure on CTV.

This is problematic for two reasons. First, an Americanized Canadian program does little for building a Canadian identity because it privileges American over Canadian ideals. Second, Canadian nationalism and, as I have explained in Chapter Two, the promotion of responsible repercussions has taken a back seat to sensationalism currently on *DTNG*. The show now attempts to draw an audience by appearing as a standard teen melodrama that is identified by the

audience as familiar, or, to be extreme, American. Now, to be fair, the program was not dealing with much substance of import before, but it did emphasize a Canadian lifestyle where problems were dealt with by the community in a responsible manner. In the most recent season of *DTNG*, police guards, metal detectors and uniforms were installed in the community high school after a student brought a knife to school. This seems like a sensationalized idea that would not have been seen on this program in 2006.

It is not just Canadian television narratives and production values that are more closely resembling those found on American programming; marketing and advertisements are affected as well. In 1979, during an address to the nation, Jimmy Carter warned Americans of worshipping a system of “self indulgence and corruption” (Carter). In a very lucid and prophetic way, Carter was right. Michael Moore addressed Carter in his documentary *Capitalism: A Love Story*. During an interview taken for Moore’s documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), shock rocker Marilyn Manson (Brian Warner) declared that American television, and American society in general, is built around a symbiotic relationship between “fear and consumption” (*Bowling for Columbine*). This is intriguing but understandable based on the way television is delivered to the audience. While people are still paying for and receiving cable by traditional means, the audience is subject to commercials as a form of advertising. Products are purchased because of a perceived *need* or *want* and making the audience afraid is a sound way to sell. If a young man does not smell properly, he will not win the heart of the woman he wants. If women do not choose the correct yogurt, they will gain weight. If young women gain weight, they must go to this gym or use that product. Fear, not just of violence and anti-social behaviours, but also of loneliness and lack of self worth, is the largest motivator in television advertising.

Based on the research I have done, I have found this type of advertising is ubiquitous in American programming. If Canadian teen television programs are being assimilated into the great landscape of North American teenage melodrama, then perhaps the advertising, which is already almost exclusively for American products, will shift towards an American style as well. If this is the case, then Canadian national identity is truly at risk. As I have argued, the best way for Canadian identity to be built or maintained through teen television is by educating the audience that anti-social behaviours should be dealt with through responsible, community-based repercussions that I believe are significant to the Canadian experience or identity.

Teaching youths to be media literate will facilitate their own abilities to watch television critically. In Canada, this may not as be as easy as one might think. Although Media Literacy is mandated in all Canadian school districts, acceptance of the program is very low (“Learn Quebec”). In fact, the adoption rate is so low that the British Columbia Association for Media Education refers to their cause as a “special interest” (Blake). Should it be a special cause to educate towards media literacy, or is it an integral part of pedagogy moving forward? I believe the latter is true. Parenting blog “Family Matters” explains that “(a)t some stage, you will need to make sure your kids have enough understanding and awareness to regulate their own TV consumption” (Baras). If Canadian media literacy is a special interest, the onus must be on the parents to instruct on media literacy. The easiest way for this to happen, outside of a complete pragmatic shift is for parents to talk to their kids about TV and media. It may be that simple. Parents can start while their children are young, explain advertising, editing, production and how people can’t fly (Baras). If media literacy starts at home, parents have more influence in how their children are both watching and understanding television.

In closing, I want to bring to light a few final thoughts from Dail and Way. According to them, "Viewers who are parents as well as those who may become parents are receiving information about the parental role from television which may contribute to their expectations about what the role is or should be, as well as how others solve the common problems of every day parental life" (491). If this is to be believed then the cyclical relationship between viewer and program becomes completely symbiotic; as the audience is influenced by television, it is also influencing the production of the programming. Finally, when discussing the breadth of parenting on television, they noted that "20 parenting behaviours were observed per program... These interactions took up a total of... 3.7 minutes per program" (495). This is a very small amount of time on screen for parenting. If we consider the amount of time a parent actually spends with a child, the ratio between time spent parenting on television and length of program must be changed. The onus is on parents to make these changes, though. Prensky believes that parents and educators need to go beyond just preaching media literacy; they need to change the pragmatic language and method to keep up with what he refers to as "Digital Natives" (1) or, the generation brought up with computers. Parents and educators must adopt methods that youths are already using in order to teach media literacy. Take this into account with the fact that children are learning from TV, even observationally, and the impact television has on building identity in teens is evident.

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