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Power to the Youth: Narratives of Age Ideology in *Degrassi: The Next Generation*

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a response to the inattention of age ideology in studies of *Degrassi: The Next Generation (TNG)* episode content. The main question is whether such a study can contribute insights not anticipated by the *Degrassi* and youth media and Marxist ideology literatures. Using John B. Thompson's conception of ideology, this study applies Porter, Larson, Harthcock, & Nellis' Scene Function Model to identify the function of kernel scenes in *TNG*'s season-three abortion storyline. The aim is to interpret the nature of ideological relations among youth and other age groups. The episodes reveal that *TNG* resists ideological age relations. However, it raises ideological issues, articulating age ideology, first, to gender and, second, to age. *TNG* also elucidates a homogeneous notion of youth, but stresses a common culture around sex. This study reduces the above issues to *TNG*'s narrative organization: its introduction of an episode's basic problem in the opening scene.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since CBC first aired *Degrassi* in the late 1970s, the television series about youth, in its myriad forms, has been a staple of Canadian television broadcasting. In its various incarnations, *Degrassi* has become one of the most successful television shows in Canadian history. The series includes *The Kids of Degrassi Street* (1979-85), *Degrassi Junior High* (1987-89), *Degrassi High* (1989-91), and *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001-Present). *Degrassi* has received critical acclaim and been successful not only in Canada but also internationally (Byers, 2005b, p. 31). *Degrassi*'s presence has been so pervasive, both in first-run and second-run syndication, that it has become almost impossible to imagine Canadian television without it. This ubiquity is evidence of the continuing desire of television audiences for *Degrassi*.

Degrassi has become embedded in, and is a significant artifact of, popular culture, at least in part, because it uniquely portrays youth – older children and teens – growing up. Miller (2005) attributed the series' distinctive depiction of young people to television producers' decision, for the first time, to specifically target older urban youth viewers as opposed to toddlers or primary school-aged children. A review of children's programming in the 1960s and 1970s, prior to when *The Kids of Degrassi* first aired, reveals that television producers in the United States did not make shows exclusively for teens until the 1990s. In effect, *Degrassi Classic (DC)* (the name scholars regularly use to refer to *Degrassi Junior High* and *Degrassi High*, the classic series) had a major impact on the development of the youth television genre (p. 15).

Although Canadian producers did not target youth as a demographic, these young people were featured in, and had a wide variety of, television programs to choose from.

This consisted of family-oriented programs, such as *Jake and the Kid* and *The Beachcombers* (Miller, 2005). These shows included young people, but they focused mainly on inter-generational conflicts and the family as a site of youth development and identity formation. They incorporated main characters from various age groups (Byers, 2005b, p. 36). These shows were aimed at broader audiences.

In the early 1970s, Canadian program heads began to recognize teens as a demographic. The 1970s and early 1980s gave rise to series such as *Adventures in Rainbow Country*, *Matt and Jenny on the Wilderness Trail*, and *The Campbells*. They focused more prominently on older children and teens than earlier programs did. However, they were set in the “wilderness” (Miller, 2005, p. 18). The issues they dealt with reflected small town living and wildlife as places of young people’s growth. This prevented them from covering topics that are indigenous to urban youth.

DC, however, shifted the multi-generational conflicts and broad focus to youth-centred storylines told from young people’s perspectives. It was also “urban drama” rather than set in the wilderness (Miller, 2005, p. 19). Even though *DC* may have *appealed* to a broad range of viewers, it was the first series to include an all-urban youth main cast *aimed* mainly at big city youth audiences. According to interviews with some of the original writers and producers, their goal was “to present television for youth that spoke to young people in a voice that was authentically their own” (Byers, 2005b, p. 33). Regardless of whether the action took place at home or school, *DC* moved youth television into the “autonomous space of peer culture” (Byers, 2005b, p. 36). By focusing the series primarily on youth and their interactions with peers, the producers wanted the characters to solve problems on their own or with the help of their peers rather than seek

the advice of parents or teachers. The production of storylines that dealt with one age group – youth – enabled *DC* to accomplish this.

One element that distinguished *DC* from other series was its method of storytelling. In order to keep the stories authentic, the producers drew on their own experiences and on those of their young cast. In this way, they did not feel limited in the issues that they presented in the episodes. They resisted the urge to protect young audiences from complex issues and “mature” subject matter, which was common in youth programming. Not only did *DC* present common youth problems like sibling rivalry and test taking, but it also dealt with serious issues, such as pregnancy, abortion, physical abuse, and suicide. In fact, *DC* was the first youth series to air stories on such controversial issues (Byers, 2005b, p. 35).

This leads to another one of *DC*’s defining features: Its core characters faced these problems directly. According to Linda Schuyler, *Degrassi*’s creator, she devoted the series to generating issues and their consequences for the main characters, characters that audiences were already invested in rather than averting to supporting characters or guest stars (as cited in Byers, 2005b, p. 33). This allowed the producers to serialize the storylines, many of which continued for several seasons. This story structure had the potential to make the narratives more believable and meaningful to audiences more than if they were created for a guest star in one episode. In other words, dealing with subjects, such as pregnancy and abortion, could have different effects when the young pregnant female was a regular cast member, as Erica was on *DC*. Audiences could experience not only Erica’s pregnancy and abortion, but also her character’s development up until that point and the consequences of those issues on further storylines. In contrast, the

producers of *Felicity* wrote out Ruby, a minor character in a few episodes, after she had an abortion (Byers, 2005c, p. 33).

Another defining characteristic of *DC* was its large cast: There were over 10 core characters. Unlike many youth series, which focused on the same small group of 4 or 5 young main characters each week, each episode of *DC* revolved around only a certain number of characters in the cast. A comparison of *DC* to the youth show, *The O.C.*, illuminates this difference. Some of the episodes in *DC*'s first season centred on Stephanie and Voula, whereas others revolved around Arthur and Yick, Kathleen and Melanie, Caitlin and Rick, Shane and Spike, or different combinations of these characters. This enabled *DC* to cover more topics in greater depth and span longer time periods. It also added authenticity to the characters. On the other hand, all of the episodes during the first season of *The O.C.* focused on stories about the same main characters – Ryan, Seth, Marissa, and Summer. This repetitiveness, as a result of the series' smaller main cast, strained the credibility of the issues that the show covered. In effect, it made the characters less believable than the *DC* characters.

DC characters spanned genders and had diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. These social categories helped to feed some of the shows' issues and storylines. There were female-centred storylines, such as Spike losing her virginity, getting pregnant, and raising a child, and episodes that focused on race, such as when Michelle and BLT had to deal with Michelle's racist parents as a result of her dating BLT, a black guy. Whether the shows dealt with gender or racial topics, they were, however, at their core, about age – the issues that young people must face as they grow up and form their identities.

The way that *DC* dealt with controversial topics helped to standardize the genre. However, as a result of “audience segmentation,” the ways in which subsequent shows incorporated these issues into storylines changed dramatically. The development of cable channels, dedicated entirely to youth programming, such as YTV in Canada and the N in the United States, required the need for diverse content (Byers, 2005b, p. 36). When *Degrassi* returned to the airwaves in 2001 with *Degrassi: The Next Generation (TNG)*, it had to contend with an expanded and a changed genre.

Although the *TNG* producers purport to appeal to the same age group and speak to young viewers in the same way as they did with *DC*, each *Degrassi* series was a product of its social-historical circumstances. In effect, there were some noticeable changes in *TNG*’s production context and in its content. New technologies enabled the producers to create *TNG* with higher production values than they did with *DC*. The production company films *TNG* mostly in a studio rather than on location, as was the case with the original series. Additionally, the growth of the youth television market has led to an increased number of professional young actors. Unlike *DC*, *TNG* uses trained performers. The newer series also had to compete with the success of *DC* (Byers, 2005b, pp. 36-38). In this regard, one visible difference is the inclusion of characters from *DC* in *TNG*. In other words, some of *TNG*’s main characters are adults. The newer series, however, still focuses primarily on youth, and how the issues that they face as they grow up help to shape their lives.

Degrassi’s popularity, importance to youth television, and construction of youth make it a significant cultural artifact to analyze within communication and media studies. Its depiction of youth, particularly, poses questions for researchers about issues of

“ideology” and “age.” In this study, I refer to “ideology,” generally, as the way in which various Marxist thinkers have adopted it in media studies: that is, a system of beliefs which, in some uses of the concept, is “abstract or impractical,” erroneous or illusory,” “expresses dominant interests,” and/or “sustains relations of domination” (Thompson, 1990, p. 54).

Even though the producers asserted that, in the episodes, they intended to authentically represent youth and give them their own voice – and they may have done so – they may also do something else: legitimate asymmetrical power relations among young and other age groups, which works to uphold the interests of a dominant group – for example, adults. In other words, the series’ preoccupation with age, as its media messages elucidate, *may* highlight unbalanced power relations because of the age groups to which people belong – youth, adults, infants, etc. I refer to this as “age ideology”: unequal power relationships among different age groups in which one group benefits in some way more than others; the strategy of narrativization (e.g., television narratives) may help to legitimate these power relations.

Lefebvre’s (2007) brief look at *TNG*’s broader social-historical context of production, for example, illuminates some of the ways in which the series raises issues about age ideology. This production context reveals possible contradictions in what the producers purport to do and the actual circumstances of age relations among youth and other age groups. The social structure of Epitome Pictures, *TNG*’s production company, highlights an asymmetrical power relationship. The people who produce the episodes are adults, whereas youth are merely receivers of this content. These young people may contribute story and character ideas, but they do not have the authority to make final

decisions. With regard to the series, then, age may limit a person's access to the political-economic and socio-cultural power necessary to make television content decisions. In this way, the intentions of adults – the producers – come first, and the interests of youth – the receivers of the adults' tales about them – come second. This is not to suggest that the production context *determines* the content. Rather, it points out a contradiction between them. This makes age relations in *TNG* episodes a valuable research endeavour for communication and media scholars.

Drawing on Lefebvre's (2007) study, I shall conduct a narrative analysis of a selection of *TNG* episodes. I shall employ Porter, Larson, Harthcock, and Nellis' (2002) Scene Function Model to identify themes around the notion of age and age ideology. This will enable me to determine if a study of age ideology in the series can contribute either new insights to, or build upon previous ideas in, the scholarly literature on ideology and *Degrassi* and, in turn, the broader work on youth media and Marxist ideology.

Research Questions

The general question at the centre of my research will be: Does a study of *Degrassi* provide perspectives about the ideological treatment of "age" not anticipated by the scholarly literature? In order to contextualize this problem, I shall pose three specific questions: Does the literature on *DC* and *TNG* articulate ideological relations among different age groups? Likewise, does the broader Marxist scholarly work – particularly, British cultural studies, Canadian political economy, and John B. Thompson's media sociology – examine ideology among distinctive subcategories of age? Does a narrative analysis of a sample of *TNG* episodes reveal ideological power relations among youth

and other age groups? I shall then determine if these findings support or alter the way in which scholars view the literature.

Significance of Study

Despite *Degrassi*'s major contribution to Canadian media culture, scholars have paid little attention to the ideological content of the series from a strictly "ageist" perspective. It is more common to find examinations of youth in connection to other primary categories of emphasis, such as nationality (Byers, 2004, 2005c; MacLennan, 2005; Simonetti, 1994), gender (Byers, 2005b), sexuality (Hart, 2005), and class (Tropp, 2005; Strangelove, 2005). These studies examined not only the series' texts but also their social-historical context of production or reception. None of them, however, focused on "age" and the power relations between youth and adults.

The broader work on youth media and ideology has also largely ignored "age" as a primary category of analysis. In this regard, I shall look at three relevant, important, and dominant fields of inquiry within the literature: British cultural studies;¹ Canadian political economy² and; John B. Thompson's media sociology.³ Using combinations of various methodological strategies – media production analysis, textual analysis, and reception analysis – these studies examined ideology with respect to different social categories, including social class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. My study of age ideology in a sample of *TNG* episodes is significant because both the *Degrassi* and the

¹ See Clarke, 2006a, 2006b; Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 2006; Fiske, 1989a, 1989b, 1992; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Hebdige, 1979, 2006a, 2006b; Jefferson, 2006; McRobbie, 1978; McRobbie & Garber, 2006; Osgerby, 2004; Willis, 1990; Women's Studies Group, 1978.

² See Clement, 1975; Hollands, 2003; Kurasawa, 2003; Magder, 1989; Mahon, 1993; Pendakur, 1990; Smythe, 1977, 1981; Whitson & Gruneau, 1996.

³ See Kelly, 2001; Nellis, 2003; Thompson, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995.

ideology literatures evidently focus on youth and highlight different social markers; in this thesis, then, an examination of one such category, “age,” may contribute to one or both of these literatures.

Methodology

I shall employ narrative analysis to explore seven episodes in *TNG*’s third season. These episodes all deal with abortion. In consecutive order, they are “U Got the Look,” “Should I Stay or Should I Go,” “Against All Odds,” “Holiday (Parts 1 and 2),” and “Accidents Will Happen (Parts 1 and 2).” I shall then interpret if they illuminate the legitimization of ideological age relations among youth and other age groups. My study will operationalize Thompson’s (1984, 1988, 1990) theory of ideology. This theory allows me to focus on age as a primary category of emphasis. At the same time, it does not consider other categories, such as class and gender, as contingent or necessary in an articulation of ideology.

I shall select the abortion story arc for one main reason: to respond to and build on Lefebvre’s (2007) social-historical analysis of age ideology in *TNG*’s production context. This is the only published examination of ideology in which age is the primary category of emphasis. However, Lefebvre considered age only at the production level. With regard to episode content, instead of exploring age, he looked at ideology from the perspectives of gender and sexuality. Therefore, there are no studies of ideological age relations that connect media production, messages, and reception. Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990) stressed that, in ideological criticisms, these interconnected relationships are necessary. As a result of time and space restrictions, I am unable to examine the sexuality storyline.

Unlike the abortion episodes, which are largely contained in season three, the sexuality storyline recurs throughout the series.

I shall adopt an interpretive methodology for at least two reasons. First, the objects that I shall examine are “symbolic” constructions, which necessitate “interpretation” in order to uncover their possible meanings (Thompson, 1988, p. 367). Second is the role that interpretation can play in revealing asymmetrical power relations among youth and other age groups. Rather than consult secondary texts on *Degrassi*, this method enables the primary researcher to conduct the majority of the analysis.

Thompson’s (1984, 1988, 1990) theory of ideology will inform my method rather than those of Canadian political economists or British cultural studies scholars for at least one reason. Thompson provides a toolbox from which researchers may choose one of a variety of methods, including narrative analysis, to analyze the internal structural features of media messages in and of themselves. On the other hand, political economy’s preoccupation with media production and reception limits their ability to develop methods for textual analysis. By contrast, British cultural studies stresses semiotic analysis. Semiotics is limiting to my research because it is a method of formal analysis as opposed to discursive analysis. A formal analysis focuses on the interrelatedness between the internal structural features of a television episode itself, for example, and its broader cultural context (Thompson, 1990, p. 285). By contrast, a discursive analysis is the exploration of the “structural aspects and connections of discourse” (Thompson, 1990, p. 286). By “discourse,” I mean “actually occurring instances of communication” (Thompson, 1990, p. 286). Although discourses are set within specific social-historical conditions, they also contain “structural features and relations” that researchers can

analyze formally, in conjunction with one of the various methods of discursive analysis (Thompson, 1990, p. 286). My interest will be to *discursively* examine *TNG* texts rather than to *formally* analyze them.

I shall conduct a narrative analysis because scholars commonly used this method to examine *Degrassi* texts.⁴ However, these studies did not employ methods necessary to identify television scenes, explain their significance, and their interrelatedness in order to ascertain if they display ideological power relations. I shall apply the Scene Function Model to identify specific *functions* of “kernel” scenes in the episodes (Chatman, 1978; Porter et al., 2002). Each kernel helps to advance a story in a linear way. The elimination of one of these scenes alters the story considerably (Chatman, 1978, p. 53).

The Scene Function Model is relevant for at least three reasons. First, it helps to uncover the specific “rules” and “strategies” that organize scenes in order to help give their narrative structure meaning. Additionally, it aids in highlighting patterns within the narrative. Finally, this model helps to explain how these “patterns” and “functions” of scenes may incite certain interpretations from researchers, such as the interpretation of ideology (Porter et al., 2002, p. 28).

Before proceeding, it is important to note two possible limitations to this approach. First, an interpretive narrative analysis will offer only one interpretation. My interpretation will provide only one of a number of possible meanings, which may conflict with others (Thompson, 1988, p. 373). This may restrict its ability to establish validity in order to illuminate the nature of ideological age relations in *TNG* episodes.

⁴ See Byers, 2005b, 2005c; Hart, 2005; Lefebvre, 2007; MacLennan, 2005; Simonetti, 1994; Tropp, 2005.

Second, by focusing mainly on the structural features of the media messages (and their production context), this work will not consider the ways in which individuals receive these episodes. In effect, I will be unable to offer any final statements about ideological power conditions with regard to this story arc, and how they may exist in the social world. This thesis is by no means an attempt to make conclusive assertions. Rather, my aim will be to generate discussion around the notion of age, ideological power relations among youth and different age groups, and most important, determine if the series' *texts* offer an interpretation that may contribute to the scholarly literatures. Further research may build on my textual analyses and the production context, and consider the social-historical context of reception in greater depth.

Outline of Chapters

In the next chapter, I shall examine the scholarly literature on *Degrassi* and ideology. I shall also review some of the main theoretical and methodological conceptions of Marxist ideology within the broader literature, focusing on three dominant approaches to studying ideology in the analysis of youth media. This examination will consist of three parts: first, British cultural studies; second, Canadian political economy and; third, Thompson's sociology of the media. My aim will be to identify gaps and deficiencies with regard to age, particularly youth.

In chapter three, using the Scene Function Model (Porter et al., 2002), I shall conduct a narrative analysis of the abortion storyline as *TNG*'s third season articulates it. I shall first attempt to identify patterns in the episodes' story structures. Second, I shall attempt to determine if these episodes illuminate ideological power relations among

youth and different age groups based on Thompson's (1984, 1988, 1990) critical conception of ideology.

In the concluding chapter, I shall summarize my findings and discuss the implications of them in the context of the above literatures. This will enable me to conclude whether or not age relations, as *TNG* depicts them, can inform this scholarship. Additionally, my focus will be on the implications of my examination and recommendations for further work. In this final chapter, I shall also highlight some of the limitations of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the previous chapter, I briefly introduced the concept of ideology. The term has occupied a prominent place in the development of media studies. This has reflected its broader position, for two centuries, within social and political thought. French philosopher Destutt de Tracy coined the term in 1796 to refer to a “science of ideas” (Thompson, 1990, p. 28). Soon after, Napoleon Bonaparte attacked this neutral perspective. In his view, ideology referred not only to a science of ideas but also to the ideas themselves. It conveyed a pejorative sense, erroneous, divorced from the practical realities of everyday life (Thompson, 1990, pp. 31-32). Karl Marx, indebted to Napoleon’s critical and negative sense of ideology, altered the concept, placing it in a politically motivated theoretical framework. Marx’s work has filled an important space in the history of ideology (Thompson, 1990, p. 33).

In the current study, I refer to “ideology” generally as a system of beliefs which, in some uses of the concept, is “abstract or impractical,” erroneous or illusory,” “expresses dominant interests,” and/or “sustains relations of domination” (Thompson, 1990, p. 54). Pertinent to the present work is the conceptualization of “age ideology.” By this, I refer to unbalanced power relationships among different age groups in which one group benefits in some way more than others. Television narratives may help to legitimate these power relations. For example, a particular age group, such as adults, may dominate another age group, youth. The use of social institutions, such as a television production company, may help to maintain this domination. In this way, the company makes the perspectives and interests of adults appear to be legitimate through narratives that its executives embed in their corporate histories, brochures, websites, etc. Adults

further occupy most of the positions of authority. The television content they produce may highlight the legitimization of accomplishments and concerns of adults, portraying youth as deviant, victims, subordinate individuals, etc. The privileging of adult interests, in effect, makes it difficult for youth to receive fair treatment. This is not to downplay the significance of another social marker, such as gender, in this ideological articulation (Wood, 2004, pp. 276-277).

Ideology is central in the scarce scholarly literature on *Degrassi*. Within this literature, scholars conceptualized ideology from the perspectives of British cultural studies (Byers, 2005c; Lefebvre, 2007; MacLennan, 2005; Simonetti, 1994), U.S. political economy (Tropp, 2005), and U.S. political economy and cultural studies (Strangelove, 2005). Researchers also adopted alternative conceptualizations: from the perspectives of race and ethnicity theory (Byers, 2004), feminist thought (Byers, 2005b), and a combination of gender and queer theories (Hart, 2005). They explored the program using three broad areas of investigation: media production, texts, and reception. However, they did little to consider ideology, in each of these areas, simultaneously, from a strictly “ageist” perspective. In other words, they did not reduce ideological power relations to a particular age group based on an articulation of production, content, and reception. This is not to suggest that an exploration of ideology should be age determinist. It can look at individuals as members of a particular age group, which may be “other” to adults, and consider if class, gender, nationality, etc. perspectives contribute to ideological age relations.

In view of this gap, there remains a need for a theoretical approach to the study of age ideology. This chapter is one step in such a project; in this chapter, I wish to offer a

critical survey of the *Degrassi* literature and some of the relevant, important, and dominant fields of inquiry, in English, within the broader work on media and Marxist ideology. My aim is to offer not only an intellectual overview of the various literatures but also to prepare the way for a more useful approach to studying ideological age relations. This chapter falls into four parts. In the first section, I shall examine the studies on *Degrassi* and ideology. In the second, third, and fourth parts of the chapter, my concern will be with British cultural studies, Canadian political economy, and John B. Thompson's media sociology, respectively. I shall provide a short intellectual history of these domains and then turn to their focus on youth.

Before proceeding, it is important to make some preliminary remarks with respect to the selection of material. In examining the work on *Degrassi*, I shall not provide a review of this literature in its entirety. I shall focus instead only on the ways in which scholars used ideology to explore the series. With regard to studies of media and ideology, I shall refrain from offering a detailed history of the concept of ideology or an introduction to classical Marxist theoretical positions. I shall concentrate on the debates within the British cultural studies, Canadian political economy, and Thompson's media sociology literatures, highlighting the ways in which scholars applied ideology in studies of youth and popular media. While I am aware of other cultural studies, political economy, and media sociology traditions, I chose the ones outlined above for particular reasons.

My choice of British cultural studies rather than its English Canadian incarnation may seem surprising in light of *Degrassi* being a product, first and foremost, of Canadian culture, and my attempt to study it in a Canadian context. As many surveys of the

historical development of English Canadian cultural studies have attested, although its theoretical legacies are at least partially indebted to British Marxist models, a distinct cultural studies has developed in Canada.⁵ However, the limited examinations of Canadian youth, media, and culture share many theoretical features of classic British studies; they have applied, directly or indirectly, British analytic frameworks without taking into consideration criticisms or the rich development of cultural studies of youth and media in Britain or elsewhere (Baron, 1989; Brake, 1985; Tanner, 1981, 1996, 2002). Therefore I consider it reasonable to put aside the Canadian work.

As regards Canadian political economy, my selection appears logical because my object of analysis – *Degrassi* – is a television series situated within the Canadian political-economic landscape. The Canadian literature contains unique features that may help to explain the show's context. I shall also narrow my focus within this literature to a Marxist model of explanation. Although several reviews highlighted non-Marxist alternatives, such as the Innisian tradition,⁶ Marxism is the only approach pertinent to the theoretical claims that I wish to examine in this thesis. Finally, I shall examine Thompson's work because it is one of the few major and recent Marxist revisionist attempts of ideology, especially with regard to the analysis of media objects (Corner, 2001).

Within these three streams, I shall choose material that is representative of their distinctive and developed stances on Marxist ideology, youth media, and age. My work,

⁵ See Berland, 1995; Cavell & Szeman, 2007; Fortier, 1995; Harp, 1991; Kinahan, 2002; Morrow, 1991; Straw, 1993.

⁶ See Babe, 2000b; Cavell & Szeman, 2007; Clement, 1996; Clement & Williams, 1989; Harp, 1991; Kurasawa, 2003; Magder, 1989; Mahon, 1993.

of course, will overlook many studies that would warrant discussion in a more thorough survey. I shall highlight the main lines of development and the key theoretical debates.

Degrassi and Ideology

Within the *Degrassi* literature, scholars reduced ideological power relations to five social categories: nationality (Byers, 2004, 2005c; MacLennan, 2005; Simonetti, 1994), gender (Byers, 2005b), sexuality (Hart, 2005), class (Strangelove, 2005; Tropp, 2005), and age (Lefebvre, 2007). Their work, then, attributed the key to the structure of domination – or the negotiation or resistance of it – to the social categories listed above. Additional markers may help to establish and sustain ideological relations, but power relations between other groups are a consequence of these primary relationships.

According to the nationalist argument, *Degrassi*, as a Canadian cultural product, rejects American cultural domination. Byers (2005c) and MacLennan (2005) linked the subversion of a dominant ideology solely to nationality. In this way, nationality is the only marker of difference that these scholars attach ideological relations to. Byers situated her argument in a critique of Simonetti's (1994) essentialist claims regarding whether *Degrassi Classic (DC)* and *Beverly Hills, 90210* “impart” and “shape” distinctly Canadian and American values, respectively. She argued that *Degrassi* and *90210* “reflect the contexts of media production in which they were produced; their narrative strategies – if not specific topics – are different, reflecting these contexts but also the generic strategies through which they each tell their stories” rather than in differences in national identity (p. 39). Byers supported Simonetti's argument that *90210* is hegemonic and *DC* defies hegemony; however, she believed that this is rooted in national differences in television production in each country as opposed to national identity. On the other

hand, MacLennan situated *DC* in the context of Canada's realist documentary tradition and the "grassroots authenticity common to many of the culture's other expressions of identity" in order to help define *DC* as uniquely Canadian (p. 150). She concluded that this sense of authenticity set it apart from American television at the time, thus helping to resist American cultural domination.

Simonetti (1994), on the other hand, highlighted the interrelated nature of class, race, and gender in helping to build national ideology in *DC* and *Beverly Hills, 90210*. She argued that the shows mirror the cultural backgrounds from which they emerged. This led her to argue that *90210* reflects hegemonic values, whereas *DC* "defies hegemony." Similarly, Byers (2004) proposed a three-level hierarchical approach whereby two subordinate levels help to determine the dominant one. At the highest level is nationality, race and ethnicity follow it, and at the lowest level is class and age. Byers argued that "[*DC* does] not reduce issues of race and ethnicity to moments of racism and prejudice"; however, the series neglects to address issues of privilege (p. 314). All of this work situated nationalist ideology in the series' mode of production, highlighting factors such as the influence of genre (teen television; Canada's realist documentary tradition), the series' broadcasters (CBC; CTV), the producers' objectives, the technological context (e.g., production values), and the broader cultural context (Canada; U.S.).

A second category of ideological analysis is gender. This work focused on gender empowerment and *Degrassi's* "emancipatory potential." Byers (2005b) distinguished between *DC's* collective femininity and individualistic femininity on *Degrassi: The Next Generation (TNG)*. Similar to Byers' (2004) earlier study and MacLennan's (2005)

examinations of nationalist perspectives, Byers' (2005b) second study focused on the construction of gender without linking it to other social categories. She concluded that although both series contained feminist narratives, explicitly feminist language is more apparent in *DC* than in *TNG*. In effect, *TNG* conceives of the "emancipatory potential of girlhood as an individual, rather than as a collective, feminist struggle or political project" (Byers, 2005b, p. 206). This study attributed feminist representations to the series' social-historical contexts of production, emphasizing the socio-cultural context of feminisms and the producers' aims.

A third social category that emerges in the *Degrassi* literature is sexuality. This work centred on the ways in which *Degrassi* transcended traditional heterosexual roles. Hart (2005) argued that *DC* subverts stigmatizations of homosexuality. Even though the series resists a dominant sexuality, it still reinforces white patriarchal gender roles. He placed sexuality in its socio-cultural context, using statistical information about AIDS to highlight that it is more than only a homosexual disease.

Scholars also explored ideology from a traditional Marxist sense, focusing on class and/or economic relations. Employing political-economic and cultural studies perspectives, these studies highlighted the degree to which *Degrassi* accepted or rejected dominant class positions. Tropp (2005) used the literature on U.S. political economy, drawing on the series' institutional and technological contexts, to compare the use of technology in *DC* and *TNG*. To emphasize this, she drew on asymmetrical power relations between adults and youth. She argued that *TNG* was more commercial than *DC* because it promoted consumption. She concluded that technology is a double-edged sword. It provides a way for youth to resist adult control, but it also enables adults to

exert power over young people. Strangelove (2005) examined *Degrassi* solely with regard to class; however, he argued that audiences are subversive because *Degrassi*'s production company had no control over how fans used the series' narratives. In effect, audiences' use of episode content leads not only to resistance but also to co-optation.

Finally, most pertinent to my study, Lefebvre (2007) examined ideology from an ageist perspective. He argued that, even though *TNG*'s producers took into account the input of *TNG*'s young cast, adult writers and producers ultimately had the final say in shaping the series' messages about youth. He concluded that, as a result of the show's narrative organization, there are multiple meanings – preferred and negotiated – with respect to sexuality and gender. Lefebvre placed the series in its production context. He placed *TNG* in the soap opera and the young adult problem novel genres. He then highlighted some producers' aims, the choice of broadcaster (CTV), and the technological context. However, at the textual level, he explored ideological power relations between youth and adults from the perspectives of sexuality and gender. In effect, there are no studies in this literature that centre primarily on age as a central but *interconnected* category at all levels of analysis – production, text, and reception.

British Cultural Studies

Cultural studies in Britain emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Richard Hoggart established the CCCS, the first important school of cultural studies, in the early 1960s, as a response to the perceived “narrowness” for studying English literature (or “high culture”) in Great Britain (Baran & Davis, 2000; Schulman, 1993). Aside from Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson were prominent contributors to the early cultural studies project. Stuart Hall took over the Centre in the late 1960s and

largely helped to define what is today known as “cultural studies” (Lorimer & Gasher, 2004, p. 122).

There are many intellectual accounts of British cultural studies from its beginning to the present.⁷ I shall highlight three fundamental and interrelated concerns drawn from this work: the first points out the importance of “ideology,” the second centres on the examination of different social categories, and the third focuses on mass media, such as popular films, television, and music. By the end of the 1960s, when Hall assumed leadership of the Centre, it aligned itself with Marxist theories of ideology, first as Althusser, then as Gramsci, reformulated them in the early 1960s. An emphasis on class relations was well suited for the CCCS’s concentration on popular culture as a site for “the working class’ struggle for self-expression” (Schulman, 1993). Responding to criticism, the Centre extended its focus to gender (Women’s Studies Group, 1978), race and ethnic relations (Hall, 1996b, 1996d, 1996e, Hall, 1997a, 1997b; Hall, et al., 1978). At least in the School’s early history, mass media content provided a source of popular culture or, what Williams labelled, “common culture” (Hall, 1994; Schulman, 1993). Some early CCCS studies recognized the importance of youth within patterns of post-World War II social, economic, and political change, and explored the relations between youth cultures and media industries (Hall, 1996d; Osgerby, 2004). The interrelatedness of Marxist ideology, social categories, such as class, gender, and race and ethnicity, and mass media become central to the analysis of youth culture.

⁷ See Baran & Davis, 2000; Green, 1996; Hall, 1996a; Johnson, 1996; Lorimer & Gasher, 2004; Schulman, 1993; Sparks, 1996; Turner, 1990.

The examination of young people in the early 1960s foreshadowed British cultural studies' interest in Gramsci. Some scholars reacted to the Frankfurt School's "mass culture" thesis, which saw popular media as a standardized product, working to sustain the relations of domination between a dominant class and a monolithic subordinate class (Osgerby, 2004, pp. 111-114). At this time, cultural studies scholars' main concern was popular audiences' active and critical consumption of media products. Hall and Whannel argued, "[T]he use intended by the provider and the use actually made by the audience never wholly coincide, and frequently conflict" (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 114). Williams influenced Hall and Whannel with his notion that culture is ordinary and his breakdown of the distinction between "high" and "low" culture. They stressed that popular culture had the potential to be "an area of self-expression for the young" (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 114). In this way, media producers wielded power but audiences still crafted their own meaningful cultures.

In the 1970s, British cultural studies turned to "subcultural theory." Theoretically, this work appropriated Gramsci's conception of ideology or "hegemony." According to Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts (2006), Gramsci used hegemony to refer to a dominant class' ability to get a subordinate class to conform to their interests not through force or coercion but through consent. In this way, the legitimacy of the dominant class appears "spontaneous," "natural," and "normal." The working class, then, comes to view this hegemonic consensus as common sense. However, the ruling class secures hegemony through "struggle" and victory is only temporary because it can never completely "absorb" the subordinate class into the social order. For Gramsci, the hegemonic struggle

takes place within institutions, such as the mass media, thus becoming sites of class struggle (pp. 28-31).

The subculture scholars, then, initially used class as a distinct social category to analyze young audiences' active engagement with popular media in Britain (Osgerby, 2004, p. 108). First published in 1975, Hall and Jefferson (2006) edited a compilation of articles, *Resistance Through Rituals* – mostly contributions from members of the CCCS – that helped to shape this literature. Building on Stanley Cohen's examination of stylistic working-class youth subcultures, this literature emphasized consumers' capacity to create their own cultures from commercial products (Osgerby, 2004; Sparks, 1996; Turner, 1990). This work commonly employed a neo-Marxist analysis of "style" – which consisted of "dress, music, language and postures" – as a driving force of class-based resistance against a dominant culture (Osgerby, 2004, p. 10). According to the CCCS scholars, subcultural groups, such as Teddy Boys (Jefferson, 2006), mods (Hebdige, 2006b), punks (Hebdige, 1979), and skinheads (Clarke, 2006b), were embodiments of rebellious and "disempowered" working-class youth who created "oppositional subculture identities" in order to resist dominant power relations (Osgerby, 2004, p. 10). They interpreted this resistance as "symbolic" or "ritualistic" (Osgerby, 2004, p. 118). In this way, their research fused together aspects of young people's class or "parent" culture with elements from other cultural sources, particularly products of commercial media industries (Green, 1996; Osgerby, 2004).

The implication of this approach was that it conceived subcultural styles as "texts" (Osgerby, 2004, p. 119). They used semiological analysis to decode transgressive meanings encoded in subcultural fashion and music, such as the skinhead's boots or the

punk's spiky hairstyle. Here, two concepts derived from French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, became important: bricolage and homology (Hebdige, 1979; Osgerby, 2004). Bricolage refers to subcultural groups' acts of "re-ordering and re-contextualization of objects to communicate fresh meanings, within a total system of significances, which already includes prior and sedimented meanings attached to the objects used" (Clarke, 2006a, p. 149). Hebdige (2006a), for example, argued that the 1960s mods used the scooter, "a formerly ultra-respectable means of transport ... and converted [it] into a weapon and a symbol of solidarity" (p. 76).

On the other hand, homology is "the way disparate stylistic elements – music, clothes and leisure activities – coalesced to form a coherent symbolic expression of a subcultural group's identity" (Osgerby, 2004, p. 119). In the late 1970s, Paul Willis applied "homology" in his study of motorcycle boys, identifying the link between the physical traits of the motorcycle and the subcultural philosophy of the biker gang (Hebdige, 1979; Osgerby, 2004).

Clarke et al. (2006) linked bricolage and homology to systematically explain the appeal of particular subcultural styles to particular groups of people. They argued that subcultural groups reassemble different objects and appropriate them as a means of reflection and expression of group life. These artifacts are homologous with the defining features of the group. In short, they argued that these objects hold and reflect subcultural members' central beliefs.

Scholars used the notion of "articulation" to theorize the relationship between "symbolic practice and social process, formation or experience" (Hesmondhalgh, 2005, p. 33). Hall (1996c) explained that articulation is "the form of the connection that can make

a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time,” and needs to be located in its social-historical circumstances (p. 141). Clarke et al. (2006) used “double articulation” to explain the link between youth style and social formation, first, to the “parent culture,” and second, to the “dominant culture” of post-World War II British youth (p. 41).

Critics attacked the CCCS’ canonical work, however, for its supposed preoccupation with boys’ subcultures. Some of this criticism came from within British cultural studies (McRobbie, 1978; McRobbie & Garber, 2006). McRobbie and Garber (2006) argued that there are patriarchal assumptions inherent in most of this work. For them, the pressing question was not “the absence or presence of girls in the male subcultures, but the complementary ways in which girls interact among themselves and with each other to form a distinctive culture of their own” (p. 186). This led the Centre to extend the study of young people’s subcultures from class to gender relations. As a result, between the 1970s and 1990s, some theorists highlighted the centrality of young women’s active media consumption and uses in helping to shape and express identity (Osgerby, 2004).

Similarly, other research considered race and ethnicity (Hall et al., 1978; Hebdige, 1979, 2006a) and the interrelatedness between this and other factors, such as age, class, and gender structures in identity formation. Willis (1977) further gave prominence to generational difference. He demonstrated how “counter-school culture” – rugged masculine values, adult tastes, wearing particular clothes – prepares male youth for dealing with working-class jobs. The very mechanisms that help young people actively resist, oppose, and, ultimately, cope with school are the same ones that ensure their

entrapment in manual labour and in the reproduction of the social order. Although these studies generated new thoughts, they concluded that gender, racial, and generational inequalities are a consequence of class – capitalism itself (Schulman, 1993). In other words, this work neglected to examine asymmetrical gender, race, and ethnicity in isolation from class. This reflected broader class-reductionist Marxist assumptions inherent in cultural studies work at the time. According to Hall (1996a), the engagement with Marxism “begins, and develops through the critique of a certain reductionism and economism, which ... is not extrinsic but intrinsic to Marxism” (p. 265). Although multiple categories may be important, Hall (1996e) asserted that it is unclear how much relative weight to give to each of them.

Researchers also criticized youth subcultural studies for their particular use of ideology. According to Sparks (1996), the use of Gramsci in *Resistance Through Rituals* “remains substantially underdeveloped and schematic and constitutes the weakest link in the general theoretical statement while, at the same time, having only a very shadowy presence in the ethnographic work” (p. 23).

Other criticism highlighted a lack of attention to youth audience intent and use of media and cultural products (Osgerby, 2004). Although *Resistance Through Rituals* (2006) contained a section devoted to ethnography, the scholars only partially attempted to determine from the young people *themselves* the meanings they gave to their lifestyles and patterns of media appropriation.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, then, rather than concentrating on subcultural styles, some scholars shifted their focus to the forces of agency in youths’ everyday practices around media appropriation and use. Theoretically, though, this work was

similar to some of the subcultural studies. It focused on audience resistance to dominant ideologies and how this helped to maintain the status quo.

In *Common Culture* (1990), Paul Willis brought together ethnographic work on a variety of young people's cultural activities. He focused on the ways in which young people use cultural products to help form and express their identities. Willis concluded that youth actively appropriate media texts, altering their meanings in ways that challenge dominant power relations among different social groups (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 137). His focus on the "symbolic creativity" of everyday culture echoed Williams' notion that "culture is a whole way of life." It also challenged Hebdige's distinction between "a meaningful 'subculture' and an incorporated 'mainstream'" culture (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 137). Mirroring Hall and Whannel's conception of popular media as "an area of self-expression for the young," Willis claimed that the pleasures that ordinary youth take in the formation of identity through the "grounded aesthetics" of everyday life rather than in the "semiotic guerrilla warfare" of subcultural products form the "meaning of style" (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 137). This reflected a broader turn in media and cultural studies to ethnography, active audience engagement with media texts, and different social categories' influences on their responses (Osgerby, 2004).

This focus on active and creative media audiences also became central in the examination of fans and their cultural practices. Fiske (1989a, 1989b, 1992) argued that all popular media audiences are creative in their consumption and interpretations of media texts, but *fans* particularly take part in producing their own texts, such as fanzines and fictional stories, based on the original material. Like Willis, Fiske contended that commercial media objects are resources that audiences actively appropriate and make use

of. This led him to argue that commercial products serve the interests of dominant social groups and contain “hegemonic” codes within them; however, even though commodities generate profit for their producers, they can only survive in the marketplace if they possess resources from which subordinate groups can create their own meanings (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 139). Fiske pointed out how subordinate groups use these media products as semiotic resistance to challenge dominant power structures (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, pp. 139-140).

Political economists attacked the active audience literature. McGuigan was critical of Willis and Fiske for paying inadequate attention to social-historical contexts, “institutional power” and “socio-economic relations” (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 140). Similarly, Garnham argued that the focus on active media audiences had sometimes “exaggerated” the possibilities of “consumption in daily life” (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 141). In effect, Murdock claimed that this work had downplayed “the ways that these grounded processes are structured by wider economic and ideological formations” (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, pp. 140-141).

In response to political economy, more recent research in British cultural studies linked cultural theorists’ focus on issues of reception and use, and political economists’ emphasis on aspects of production and dissemination. This reflected another broader shift in cultural studies work. In this way, it is possible to conceive of the mainstream youth market and young people’s identity formation as mutually dependent sites within an inter-linked “cultural capital” (Osgerby, 2004, p. 221). Miles considered the connection between youth culture and the commercial market “mutually exploitative” (as cited in Osgerby, 2004, p. 141). In this way, the cultural industries set the boundaries in which

young people can appropriate, transform, and re-contextualize the meanings of media texts.

Likewise, proposing a multi-dimensional approach, Osgerby (2004) applied the ideas of Du Gay (1997), Jackson, Lowe, Miller, and Mort (2000), and McRobbie (1997) to youth media studies. In an attempt to transcend the divide, Osgerby emphasized Du Gay's (1997) "circuit of culture," a refinement of Johnson's (1996) conception of "circuits of culture." It examines the "biography" of a media text through the "articulation" of five distinct processes: production, identity, representation, consumption, and regulation (Du Gay, 1997, p. 3). Like Johnson, Du Gay emphasized that this model follows a non-linear path, as each part of the circuit overlaps and intertwines with the other parts. Although this notion of articulation leads to a methodological reworking, Osgerby refrained from modifying the theory of ideology.

Drawing on the above work, then, Osgerby (2004) argued that, in order to understand youth cultures and their relation to popular media, researchers must give sufficient attention to each dimension of the "cultural circuit" from both cultural and political-economic perspectives. Although British cultural studies highlighted the significance of youth cultures and ideology, as articulated in media production, texts, and reception, it still treats age as a consequence of other social categories, such as class, gender, and race.

Canadian Political Economy

Some scholars (e.g., Clement, 1996; Clement & Williams, 1989) consider the 1920s through the 1950s the "classic period" of Canadian political economy. This signifies when researchers pioneered approaches indigenous to Canada. From the 1950s

to the 1970s, C. B. Macpherson and H. Clare Pentland rejected the normative liberal frameworks of social analysis and initially adopted and influenced a strong Marxist perspective within Canadian political economy. Clement and Williams (1989) explained that, during this same period, a post-1960s resurgence of Marxist thinking in Western Europe also helps to explain its emergence in Canadian thought.

I shall illuminate three central and interrelated themes in this literature: Marxist conceptions of ideology; its focus on nationality and class relations and; third, its emphasis on media institutions. Dallas W. Smythe (1977) believed that the “blindspot of western Marxism” was its neglect of the political and economic significance of mass media systems (p. 1). Although this “blindspot” is questionable in the context of Clement’s (1975) Marxist analysis of Canadian media, according to Mosco (2006), Smythe became a major influence in Canadian political economy’s use of Marxism in media research and analysis. As a result of drawing on Marxism, many scholars highlighted that political economists focused on media imperialism – the communication of a dominant nation’s ideology via the media – and social class (e.g., Babe, 2000a; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Kurasawa, 2003; Mosco, 2006). These categories provided them with a useful way of examining the political-economic nature of media. The interconnected nature of Marxist thought, class relations and U.S. media imperialism, and mass media institutions became fundamental in examinations of popular media (Clement, 1975; Pendakur, 1990; Smythe, 1977, 1981).

However, political economists limited their Marxist engagement with Canadian popular culture, first, to studies of “cultural dependence” and “underdevelopment,” and second, examining the ways in which media disseminate and legitimate dominant class

ideologies (Whitson & Gruneau, 1996, p. 360). This distinctive combination led Canadian political economy to adopt an economic-, class- and nationality-reductionist, and an instrumentalist perspective on popular culture (Kurasawa, 2003; Magder, 1989; Whitson & Gruneau, 1996).

For example, Clement (1975) examined the relationship between the media elite and the economic elite in Canada, and the structure and concentration of media ownership. He coupled a classic Marxist conception of ideology with one that Karl Mannheim proposed. In effect, for Clement, ideologies are representative of “an interdependent set of ideas which become embodied in various social groups arising out of their ‘locations’ and serve to defend, orient and direct the interests and actions of these groups” (p. 272). The function of a dominant ideology, then, is to “preserve and maintain existing social institutions and social stability” (p. 272). The “relations of production” provide the foundation of, and establish, ideologies. The “ruling class” controls the means of production. Clement concluded that there was a high level of concentration of media ownership. Additionally, the media and socioeconomic elite in Canada intersected. Adopting an implicit base/superstructure framework, this study portrayed the mass media simply as an ideological tool of the Canadian elite.

There is also evidence of economic reductionism and of instrumentalism in examinations of different Canadian cultural sectors. In Smythe’s (1981) work, he presented two definitions of ideology. First, he appropriated a Marxist-Leninist one: “the system of values with which people support or attack a particular class-dominated social system” (p. 16). Second, he conceived of the term as “the system of beliefs, attitudes, and ideas which support or tend to transform a larger social enterprise – a political-economic

system, be it capitalist or socialist” (p. 271). The main mode in which ideology operates is via the legitimation of the social system (p. 2). Employing a historical-materialist analysis, Smythe (1981) conceived of popular culture as a “Consciousness Industry” (p. xii). This refers to a group of *ideological institutions*, led by the mass media industries, which influence or divert mass society in order to support American imperialism and capitalism. In order to understand their economic function in producing and reproducing ideology, Smythe (1977, 1981) regarded media audiences as commodities. In this way, the mass media “produce audiences and sell them to advertisers. These audiences work on, and are consumed in, the marketing of mass-produced consumer goods and services to themselves” (Smythe, 1981, p. xii). The dominant class alone or through symbiotic relations with other classes controls and operates the media industries. Here, Smythe considered contradictions between dominant and subordinate races and ethnic groups, genders, age groups, and religious faiths, but reduced them mainly to struggles among different classes and nation-states. There are also contradictions *within* these groups.

Pendakur (1990), indebted in part to Smythe’s radical political economy, analyzed Canada’s dependency, from a historical perspective, on imported feature films, from the United States. In this way, he was concerned with power in class societies and American media imperialism. These studies demonstrate how U.S. foreign domination and the practical necessities of profit-generation, together, help popular culture in Canada to propagate the reproduction of unequal class and nationalist structures of power (Pendakur, 1990; Smythe, 1981).

As a result of their reductionist and instrumentalist tendencies, this work denies Canadian popular media *content* a role in shaping external social processes. In effect, it

also disables them from reproducing dominant ideologies (Kurasawa, 2003; Magder, 1989). Further, Magder (1989) argued, with regard to Smythe's analyses, particularly, that the audience is not merely the central commodity that the mass media produces. As they are unable to produce what they do not own (like the way that "capital owns labour"), the mass media produce *content* (p. 286).

Although there were political-economic analyses of popular media, this literature largely failed to recognize youth as an important dimension (Hollands, 2003; Kurasawa, 2003).⁸ Some scholars attributed the absence of youth to the larger problem that Canadian political economy had with respect to conceptualizing culture. Brym argued that political economy developed, in part, in opposition to a socio-cultural viewpoint (the reverse criticism political economists made of British cultural studies). Instead, it focused on "how structural features of Canadian society, such as the distribution of power, affect economic, political and ethnic behaviour largely independently of the influence of culture" (as cited in Hollands, 2003, p. 449). In other words, according to Hansen and Muszynski, it centred on structure at the expense of "agency": the ways in which subjects "intervene in these structures" to produce meaning in their everyday lives (as cited in Harp, 1991, p. 210).

This criticism initiated proposals and attempts to bridge Canadian political economy with cultural studies.⁹ An indigenous Canadian political economy could combine political elements of British cultural studies with Canadian idiosyncrasies

⁸ In this respect, Saunders' (2002) political-economic study of North American young people may seemingly serve to counter this claim; however, she failed to distinguish clearly between "Canadian" and "American" youth and, more importantly, between "children" and "youth."

⁹ See Hollands, 2003; Kurasawa, 2003; Mahon, 1993; Whitson & Gruneau, 1996.

(Hollands, 2003). A political economy of media, then, could locate young people's political, economic, and cultural place within a historical-materialist and cultural framework. It could seek to analyze the relationship between a specific socially constructed age group, an economic mode of media production and reproduction, and a mixture of class, ethnic, gender, regional relations, etc. This perspective, in effect, involves uncovering young people's place in capitalism without neglecting the impact that other social divisions have for different youth. A crucial aspect of this approach involves critically analyzing a variety of ideological interpretations of power relations among different generations. Finally, this renewed political economy could explore the ways in which "modern forms of capital reorganization and regulation" started to change conventional youth "transitions, cultures, and identities" (Hollands, 2003, p. 444). It is also important to evaluate the relevance of these alterations with regard to political subversion and compliance. Ultimately, in order to avoid an economic-, class-, and nationality-reductionist perspective, a renewed political economy could consist of a "dialectical process of horizontal interpenetration and articulation between the economic and cultural spheres of social life" (Kurasawa, 2003, p. 468). Additionally, this approach could give equal priority to multiple social relations (Mahon, 1993). However, this "horizontal" equality prevents scholars from exploring age as the main category for analysis. The renewed political economy further stresses the importance of media production and reception at the expense of media content.

John B. Thompson's Media Sociology

Between 1979 and 1995, University of Cambridge Sociologist, John B. Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995), offered critical analyses of some of the

major contributions to Marxist theories of ideology. Thompson's (1990) book, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, in particular, was a major revisionist attempt to understand ideology (Corner, 2001). In this work, Thompson proposed a new theoretical account, replying to the supposed inattention to the "mediation of modern culture" – "the general process by which the transmission of symbolic forms becomes increasingly mediated by the technical and institutional apparatuses of the media industries" (pp. 4-5). As was the case with my review of British cultural studies, I shall illuminate three crucial and interconnected points taken from Thompson's work: first, the concept of ideology and the role that different social groups attached to it play; second, cultural and media objects; and third, analyzing ideological social groups as articulated in different cultural and media objects.

Thompson (1990) forged a "critical conception" of ideology, drawing on some ideas implicit in earlier Marxist formulations, such as cultural studies and political economy, while discarding others. He explained, "Unlike neutral conceptions, critical conceptions imply that the phenomena characterized as ideology or ideological are misleading, illusory or one-sided; and the very characterization of phenomena as ideology carries with it an implicit criticism or condemnation of them" (p. 54). In this regard, the analysis of ideology mainly focuses on the ways in which meaning, generated from symbolic forms, such as films and television shows, intersect with power relations; in other words, the ways in which persons assemble meaning in the service of those groups and individuals in positions of power. Thompson (1990) defined his specific focus as follows: "*to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination*" (p. 56, italics in original).

In his formulation of ideology, Thompson (1990) drew on what he called, “Marx’s latent conception.” Ideology, according to this conception, is a “system of representations which serves to sustain existing relations of class domination by orienting individuals towards the past rather than the future, or towards images and ideals which conceal class relations and detract from the collective pursuit of social change” (Thompson, 1990, p. 41). However, Thompson (1990) only retained one negative criterion: sustaining relations of domination (p. 56).

There are two further respects in which Thompson’s theorization is different from Marx’s. First, and most pertinent to this thesis, he explained that Marx’s concern with class relations is only one form of domination but not the only form. The link between ideology and class is contingent but not compulsory; it is possible to also consider ethnicity, gender, nation-states, age, etc. (Thompson, 1984, 1988, 1990). In many reviews of Thompson’s publications, scholars highlighted this crucial break from other Marxist work and their class-reductionist tendencies.¹⁰ In other words, Thompson extended both British cultural studies’ focus on race and gender and political economy’s concerns with class and nationality.

Second, Thompson (1990) argued that symbolic forms do not simply represent articulated or obscured social relations that are basically constructed at a pre-symbolic stage. Rather, they play a continuous role in the formation of these social relations. Hence meaning itself may vigorously produce and initialize relations of domination.

¹⁰ See Barker, 1991; Kellner, 1992; Larrain, 1985, 1991; Mitchell & Slopek, 1992; Rosen, 1987; Schudson, 1992; Visagie, 1998; Weinstein, 1992.

In order to further develop Thompson's (1990) conception of ideology, it is important to elaborate three important aspects: "the notion of meaning," "the concept of domination," and "ways in which meaning may serve to establish and sustain relations of domination" (p. 58). The meaning with which Thompson is interested is the meaning of "symbolic forms." This meaning is situated in social contexts and circulates in the social world. Symbolic forms may consist of images and texts that agents or groups of agents produce and which they and others recognize as "meaningful constructs" (Thompson, 1990, p. 59).

When discussing domination, Thompson (1990) referred to established power relations that are "systematically asymmetrical." In this way, particular individuals or particular groups possess power in a way that "excludes," and in some ways remains unobtainable to, other individuals or groups of individuals, regardless of the basis upon which they carry out such an "exclusion" (p. 59).

These explications of meaning and domination provide the background against which Thompson (1990) undertook the third concern: the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination. Symbolic forms become ideological only when agents in particular practices mobilize them using particular modes. These modes include "dissimulation," "unification," "fragmentation," "reification," and "legitimation." Each of these modes is linked to various "strategies of symbolic construction" (Thompson, 1990, p. 60).

Turning to the concept of culture, Thompson (1988, 1990), in a critique of Clifford Geertz, conceived of a "structural conception of culture" (but not "structuralist"). This formulation highlights both the symbolic nature of cultural objects and that such

objects are always situated in “structured social contexts.” In this way, cultural analysis is the study of symbolic forms in relation to their specific social-historical contexts.

Symbolic forms, then, possess “internal structural features,” but are also embedded in contexts. There are five different aspects of social contexts that condition them as such: “spatio-temporal settings,” “fields of interaction,” “social institutions,” “social structure,” and the “technical media of transmission” (Thompson, 1990, pp. 282-283).

Thompson (1988, 1990) highlighted the relation between culture and mass communication. In considering symbolic forms meaningful objects, the implication is that individuals situated in particular contexts both produce and transmit, and receive and appropriate, them directly. There are a number of features of this process: “the use of a technical medium” to produce and transmit the symbolic form, “the institutional apparatus within which a technical medium is deployed,” and “the space-time distancing involved in cultural transmission” (Thompson, 1990, p. 13). Additionally, a theory of ideology must consider the ways in which mass communication transformed modern culture. It must take account of various factors: “the instituted break between production and reception,” “the extension and availability of symbolic forms in time and space,” and “the new forms of public circulation of symbolic forms” (Mitchell & Slopek, 1992, p. 85).

This theory lays the groundwork for Thompson’s methodological approach to analyzing ideology and culture as articulated in contextualized media products. In order to approach the analysis of symbolic forms, Thompson (1988, 1990) distinguished between three aspects – what he described as the “tripartite approach.” By implementing this depth hermeneutics methodology, it is possible to uncover an “interpretation” of

ideology. It gives a “critical” tone to each of the phases within it. It provides them with the ability to uncover the ways in which meaning may establish and sustain power.

The first aspect of the tripartite approach is the “production and transmission or diffusion” of symbolic forms. Thompson (1988, 1990) explained that this is the process of producing media products and distributing them via selective windows of dissemination. At this level, researchers conduct a social-historical analysis, that is, the study of the social-historical context within which, and by means of which, individuals produce and transmit media forms. Researchers can examine this aspect with a combination of “social-historical analysis” and “ethnographic research” – what Thompson (1990) called the “interpretation of everyday understanding” of persons involved in the production process (pp. 304-305). Ideology directs this form of analysis toward “the study of the relations of domination” (Thompson, 1990, p. 292). In this way, the researcher can determine “the characteristics of the institutions within which media messages are produced and through which they are transmitted or diffused to potential recipients” (Thompson, 1990, p. 304). As mentioned previously, there are five different aspects of social contexts that define a unique level of analysis: spatio-temporal settings, fields of interaction, social institutions, social structure, and the technical media of transmission (Thompson, 1990, p. 281).

The second aspect of this methodology is “the construction of the media message.” Thompson (1990) explained that mass-mediated messages “are products which are structured in various ways: they are complex symbolic constructions which display an articulated structure” (p. 304). At this level, then, the concern is with “the internal organization of symbolic forms” (Thompson, 1990, p. 284). The researcher gives priority

to a “formal” or “discursive analysis.” Ideology here focuses upon the “structural features of symbolic forms which facilitate the mobilization of meaning” (Thompson, 1990, p. 292). Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990) explained that there are many ways in which researchers can carry out this type of analysis, like social-historical analysis, depending on the type of study. These include semiotic analysis, conversation analysis, syntactic analysis, narrative analysis, and argumentative analysis. Formal analysis is typically concerned with analyzing symbolic forms that consist of images or words and images. One of the most common methods of formal analysis is semiotic analysis. On the other hand, the objects of discursive analysis – the focus of the remaining methods – are instances of “everyday communication” (Thompson, 1990, p. 286).

The third aspect of the tripartite approach is the “reception and appropriation” of messages. Thompson (1990) asserted that individuals, and groups of individuals, who are situated within particular social-historical circumstances receive these messages. They use the resources available to them in order to interpret the messages they receive and incorporate them into their everyday lives (p. 304). As was the case with the analysis of production, at this level, the researcher conducts a social-historical analysis and ethnographic research. This entails the examination of the particular conditions and the socially diverse settings within which individuals receive media messages (Thompson, 1990, p. 305). It is important to consider the other aspects of the tripartite approach in order to avoid reductionist conclusions.

Following the social-historical analyses of the production and reception, and the discursive analysis of the symbolic objects, the researcher interprets/re-interprets the data to uncover the role of ideology. This process builds upon the results of each of the three

analyses. As Thompson (1990) explained, “[I]t proceeds by *synthesis*, by the creative construction of possible meaning” (p. 289, italics in original). This enables the analyst to illuminate the relationship between meaning and power (Thompson, 1990, p. 293). It is important to note, however, that this process of interpretation is simultaneously a re-interpretation. Symbolic forms, which are objects of interpretation, are fragments of a “pre-interpreted domain,” in that subjects within the social-historical world already interpret them (Thompson, 1990, p. 290). In other words, the production and reception of media content, as well as a researcher’s interpretation of this information, helps determine the nature of ideological messages.

Media studies scholars have applied Thompson’s theoretical and methodological approach to analyzing ideology (e.g., Li, 2006). Li reduced ideological power relations to nationality. In other words, the key to the structure of domination, as reflected in this study, lies in the above marker of difference. This is not to suggest that other, secondary categories are not factors in helping to establish and sustain ideological relations; rather, power associations among secondary groups are merely the result of the primary group – nationality.

One area in the Thompson literature that was largely ignored is media and age. In studies of media and youth, scholars operationalized Thompson only at the level of *methodology* (Kelly, 2001; Nellis, 2003). In effect, they reduced ideological age relations to other social markers of difference. Kelly (2001) used Thompson’s depth-hermeneutical framework to explore the connections between “globalized popular culture,” locality, and identity formation among African Canadian students in Alberta. She situated her analysis, first, in the social-historical context of the “critical cultural studies” work. Second, her

study focused on the students' discursive constructions. This level highlighted the ways in which African Canadian students identify with representations of blackness within different popular media forms. It also placed the students within their local context – Alberta. Kelly concluded that “style” (e.g. hip-hoppers' baggy clothing) and “culture as the everyday” are important criteria for measuring black identity. However, in addition to race, class, sexuality, and religion help to form these identities.

On the other hand, Nellis (2003) employed not only Thompson's depth hermeneutics methodology but also his tripartite approach to examine the ideological character of Hollywood teen films. First, using Thompson's five fields of mediated social-historical contexts – spatio-temporal settings, fields of interaction, social institutions, social structure, and the technical media of transmission – Nellis situated the films in their production context. He then used Thompson's five methods (semiotic, conversation, syntactic, narrative, and argumentative) to analyze the formal and discursive constructions of the films' messages. Third, he performed a reception analysis, from the perspective of the researcher, using the five domains of social-historical contexts. This led him to interpret the ideological nature of the media messages. He concluded that ideological character of the films is “liberal.” Unlike British cultural studies and Canadian political economy, Thompson's approach overcomes the deficiency of regarding a specific social group as contingent rather than necessary in analyzing ideological power relations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a critical review of Marxist theories of ideology, as articulated in studies of *Degrassi* and the broader discourse on youth and popular media,

within three dominant traditions: British cultural studies, Canadian political economy, and John B. Thompson's media sociology. My aim was fourfold: first, to identify some of the main conceptions of ideology formed within the *Degrassi* studies with regard to its coverage of the category of age; second, to highlight gaps in this work; third, to illuminate the ways in which cultural studies scholars, political economists, and Thompson's media sociology researchers conceptualized ideology, and helped to define their unique treatment of age; and fourth, to propose an appropriate conception, from the three above, for dealing with age.

Two of the main strengths of the *Degrassi* literature, in its focus on youth identity, are that it highlighted the importance of ideology and power relations among different social groups. These scholars adopted conceptualizations of ideology from dominant schools of thought – British and U.S. cultural studies and U.S. political economy – and from the perspectives of race and ethnicity theory, feminist thought, and queer and gender theories. In this work, scholars placed power relations in the social-historical context of media production and they linked power relations to social categories, such as nationality, gender, sexuality, class, and age. This work demonstrated how *Degrassi* either upholds or subverts dominant ideologies. However, there is one crucial hole in this literature, in the context of age ideology, which necessitates further research. Although Lefebvre's (2007) study stressed the significance of age – and is the sole work to consider ideological age relations a central category for examination – it is seriously flawed because it examined age only at the level of media production. Thus there are no studies that focus on age as a primary marker at the other levels of analysis – text and reception.

Turning to the broader discourse on youth media and ideology, the writings of the British cultural studies scholars offered a distinctive and innovative account of the nature and role of ideology, youth media cultures, and the significance of different social groups. Recent developments emphasized that ideological power relations form through a “circuit of culture.” In this way, five unique processes articulate the “biography” of a media text: production, identity, representation, consumption, and regulation (Osgerby, 2004). British cultural studies stressed the significance of power relations between different youth classes, genders, and races, illuminating how youth reject dominant ideologies. Nevertheless, there is one main aspect of British cultural studies that severely limits its relevance to the analysis of ideological age relations: it reduces age to the above markers of differences. In this way, when examining ideology, age is a secondary rather than a primary category.

On the other hand, Canadian political economists demonstrated the importance of ideology and media institutions. As was the case with cultural studies though, they gave priority to traditional social categories. Recent scholarship linked political economy with cultural studies.¹¹ In this way, researchers can uncover the role of ideology from the social-historical contexts of production and reception. This work found social class and nationality to be important and stressed specific groups’ domination over others. However, there are two main features of Canadian political economy that strongly restrict its applicability to an examination of age ideology. First, although they attempt to give equal priority to different social groups in order to overcome class- and nationality-

¹¹ See Hollands, 2003; Kurasawa, 2003; Mahon, 1993; Whitson & Gruneau, 1996.

reductionism, they do not treat age as a primary category for analysis. Second, this literature downplays the significance of media content. In this way, it assumes that an analyst can read the ideological message from the production and reception of media objects alone, without considering in detail the messages themselves. Neither the *Degrassi* scholars nor the cultural studies and political economy analysts, then, made a sustained attempt to consider reducing social categories, such as class, race, gender, etc., to age – the main marker of difference. In effect, their reductionism rests merely on an unsubstantiated claim about age.

Thompson, on the other hand, argued that class (or any marker for that matter) is conditional rather than compulsory; in effect, it addresses the main theoretical fault I made of the other two traditions. (This is not to imply that Thompson's sociology is the only way of overcoming this deficiency. It is possible that it is merely one of a number of potential solutions.) This alternative approach fuses together both theoretical and methodological concerns. According to this conception, to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning is assembled and is subsequently articulated in symbolic forms in order to establish and sustain asymmetrical social relations. A depth hermeneutics framework provides analysts with a means of undertaking an inquiry into the nature of ideological power relations in mass communication. This methodology, aimed at social critique, is comprised of social-historical analyses of production and reception and a formal or discursive analysis of texts. Finally, linking these analyses, the researcher interprets the role of ideology in the object of study. Thompson's work was operationalized only at the methodological level, so integrating it into my study serves a dual purpose: to uncover if a study of *Degrassi* can provide perspectives about the

ideological treatment of age not anticipated by either the *Degrassi* or the broader ideology literatures.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD AND RESULTS

In the previous chapter, I described narrative analysis as it applies to ideological criticisms. Thompson (1990) highlighted this method as one way in which researchers can analyze the construction of media messages. Television narrative analysis attempts to uncover “the internal organization of symbolic forms” (Thompson, 1990, p. 284).

Scholars can use narrative analysis to discover how the structure of stories and the function of scenes in an episode are “used to explain and naturalize a sequence of events” (White, 1987, p. 147). This method helps to identify the specific “rules” and “strategies” that organize narratives and give their structures meaning (Porter, Larson, Harthcock, & Nellis, 2002). White (1987) explained, “This analysis may reveal values or meanings that are not immediately apparent in, but are crucial to, the general coherence and logic of the storyline” (p. 147).

Television episodes are structured in unique and complicated ways. According to Thompson (1990), they are “symbolic constructions which display an articulated structure” (p. 304). In comparison with other media, such as films and novels, television’s narratives contain a distinctive structure (Porter, et al., 2002, p. 23). Most notable, two characteristics of television narration are character growth and serialized storylines (Porter et al., 2002, p. 23). First, in some television series, such as *Degrassi: The Next Generation (TNG)*, many characters reappear in multiple episodes. This enables characters to develop complex relationships and confront and deal with a variety of issues. Second, in a number of television programs, specific storylines span multiple episodes. This continuity is referred to as a “story arc” (Porter et al., 2002, p. 23). The

story arc not only resists absolute closure and helps to create a notion of “realism” but also emphasizes “character” over “plot” (Porter et al., 2002, p. 24).

Using narrative analysis, this chapter will examine the episodes in the *TNG* abortion story arc. It will use these episodes to determine if the content within them displays evidence of ideological age relations among youth and other age groups as Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990) articulated the concept of ideology. I shall divide this chapter into two sections. In the first section, I shall describe my method, first, highlighting the specific means that this study employs to operationalize the central concepts, and justifying their inclusion. Second, I shall describe the source and composition of the sample on which I based my study. Finally, I will describe the method that this examination uses to collect the information – the Scene Function Model (Porter et al., 2002). In the second section, I will present the results of the study using the six variables Porter et al., (2002) identified in the Scene Function Model: disturbance, obstacle, complication, confrontation, crisis, and resolution. I will, first, conduct a narrative analysis of each variable, and second, subject them to an ideological criticism. I shall employ an age-based analysis of the above scenes without downplaying the significance of another social marker – gender.

Method

Operational Concepts

There are a number of key concepts that I will operationalize in this study: ideology, legitimization, narrativization, age, and scene. The basic term that I will employ is “ideology.” In the previous chapter, I explained that, according to Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990), to study ideology is to examine the ways in which individuals construct

meaning and successively articulate it in symbolic forms in order to create and maintain unequal social relations. Thompson outlined several modes in which ideology may operate. Particularly relevant to my study is “legitimation” because it is linked, in specific circumstances, with “narrativization,” a typical strategy of symbolic construction. The producers assemble *TNG* episodes as narratives that depict social relations and display the outcomes of actions in ways that establish and sustain power relations as legitimate.

Narrativization consists of claims, which producers embed in stories, that recall the past and consider the present “as part of a timeless and cherished tradition” (Thompson, 1990, p. 61). These traditions may be “invented” in order to construct an impression of “belonging to a community and to a history which transcends the experience of conflict, difference, and division” (Thompson, 1990, p. 61). The narratives of the official storytellers validate the power that they possess and exert, and remind others of the fact that they cannot do so.

The next operational concept is “age.” Age is the crucial variable in this study. As mentioned previously, age ideology consists of unbalanced power relationships among different age groups in which one group benefits in some way more than others. In order to operationalize age, my study will take a character’s occupation as an indicator. Although there are some limitations to this approach – for example, it neglects aspects of age associated with home life and leisure time – “occupation” is an effective shorthand classification for an assortment of features – “leisure lifestyles,” “unemployment rates” – usually associated with different age groups (Hollands, 2003, p. 446). I shall obtain this background information from details *TNG* reveals over the course of its run. On the basis

of these results, I shall consider characters either youth (e.g., students) or adults (e.g., teachers, homemakers).

The remaining concept that I shall operationalize is “scene.” This concept will help break up the narrative into recognizable fractions. According to Porter et al. (2002), a scene is “the duration of time that contains two or more camera shots and shows action that is spatially and temporally continuous” (p. 25).

Materials

I shall use the abortion storyline in season three of *TNG*. This storyline is one of two plots within seven episodes: in order of sequence, “U Got the Look,” “Should I Stay or Should I Go,” “Against All Odds,” “Holiday (Parts 1 and 2),” and “Accidents Will Happen (Parts 1 and 2).” In other words, I am not interested in the episodes in their entirety but, rather, the plot that is relevant to my inquiry. I selected this storyline in order to respond to the one main criticism I raised in the previous chapter against Lefebvre’s (2007) work. I argued that, within the *Degrassi* and ideology literature, it is the only study that examined ideology from an ageist perspective. However, Lefebvre analyzed ideological power relations between youth and adults only at the production level. At the textual level, rather than looking at age ideology, he explored the concept from the perspectives of gender and sexuality. This leaves the literature bare of any studies that link media production, content, and reception in order to examine ideological relations among different age groups. As Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990) emphasized, in analyses of ideology, these interrelated relationships are critical. I shall put aside Lefebvre’s examination of the sexuality storyline because time and space limitations will prevent me from conducting this extended analysis.

Procedure

My study is the second phase of what I conceive as a three-phase project. In chapter two, I reviewed the first phase, Lefebvre's (2007) articulation of the social-historical context of *TNG*'s production. Lefebvre argued that, in constructing *TNG* episodes, the series' adult writers and producers took into consideration the thoughts and opinions of its youth cast in order to construct authenticity. However, it is ultimately the adults who made the final decisions. This has implications for ideology. In effect, it will enable me to focus on the second phase, the textual level. To conduct this investigation, Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990) will inform my method. I shall employ a qualitative procedure that provides a narrative analysis of the internal structure of the stories (Chatman, 1978; Kozloff, 1992; Porter et al., 2002). In previous studies, variations of narrative analysis were standard for analyzing the content of *Degrassi* episodes.¹² However, they neglected to adopt a version that is designed to explore the "function of television scenes" and offer the analyst a means of understanding the unique features of a television narrative in order to assess the ideological nature of its messages in a comprehensive manner.

Aspects of the "Scene Function Model" provide one such way of overcoming this deficiency (Porter et al., 2002). While viewing the *TNG* episodes, taking notes, and coding the plots, I shall look for patterns in the ways in which the writers present them. My concern is not only with what they included in the episodes and how frequently they included it, but where it appeared in the episode. As mentioned previously, in applying

¹² See Byers, 2005b, 2005c; Hart, 2005; Lefebvre, 2007; MacLennan, 2005; Simonetti, 1994; Tropp, 2005.

this analytical tool, my aim is to identify particular functions of “kernel” scenes in the episodes (Porter et al., 2002). Kernels are major turning-point scenes in a story (Chatman, 1978). Chatman presented two aspects of the “story”: first, “the events (actions, happenings)” and “the existents (characters, setting)” (Chatman, 1978, p. 19). In this way, “the story is the *what* in the narrative that is depicted” (Chatman, 1978, p. 19, italics in original). The analyst can place events into two groups, one of which is kernels (Chatman, 1978, p. 32).

The Scene Function Model contains six kernel scene functions: disturbance, obstacle, complication, confrontation, crisis, and resolution (Porter et al., 2002, p. 26). Each kernel helps to advance a story in a linear way. The elimination of one of these scenes changes the story dramatically (Chatman, 1978, p. 53). The function of “disturbance” is to expose the event that initially disrupts order in the main character’s life, leading to the main conflict of the story (Porter et al., 2002, p. 26). The second kernel scene, “obstacle,” introduces an antagonizing force. It reveals who or what will prevent the protagonist from attaining his or goal (Porter et al., 2002, p. 26). “Complication,” the next kernel, initiates “a new course of action,” intensifying the character’s situation (Porter et al., 2002, p. 26). With “confrontation,” the protagonist encounters an “obstacle” (Porter et al., 2002, p. 26). The function of “crisis,” also known as the “climax,” is the “decisive confrontation,” when the hero and the antagonist conflict (Porter et al., 2002, p. 26). Finally, the “resolution” reveals the outcome of the crisis and restores balance. This may follow the crisis or may occur within the same scene (Porter et al., 2002, p. 26).

After performing the narrative analysis, I shall interpret/re-interpret the ideological nature of age as articulated in this storyline. Synthesizing the narrative analysis with the results of Lefebvre's (2007) examination of the social-historical analysis of production, I shall attempt to elucidate a possible relationship between meaning and power. In effect, this will enable me to determine if the episodes tell a certain story about youth, adults, and the nature of their relationship. Although I shall focus my study on age, I shall try to refrain from downplaying the significance of another social relation – gender – in helping to articulate age ideology. As Thompson (1990) highlighted, I am aware that my interpretation will simultaneously be a “re-interpretation.” The creation of symbolic forms constitutes one interpretation, whereas my interpretation as a researcher constitutes a second interpretation (Thompson, 1990, p. 290). As this is only the second of three phases, my interpretation/re-interpretation will only be partial and tentative. Although I shall be unable to draw any definitive conclusions without conducting a reception analysis, the production context and textual elements of the storyline can help me demonstrate, to a certain extent, some interesting trends.

Results

Disturbance

A typical *TNG* abortion episode begins with a teaser (the scene before the opening credits) that reveals the disturbance in the story. In the disturbance, a youth protagonist becomes detached from a complacent, recognizable realm typically connected with his or her past or present romantic interest(s). This interest is always another *youth* who belongs to the *opposite gender* group from the hero or heroine.

An examination of these scenes illuminates these details. In the episode, “U Got the Look,” for example, Paige suggests that Manny change her “adorable” image in order to be more suitable for Sully (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003). In “Should I Stay or Should I Go,” Craig damages his opportunity to have sex with his girlfriend, Ashley, because he is unable to express in words his love for her (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003). The disturbance in “Against All Odds” includes Manny inviting Craig to a rave for “no strings” fun after he wishes Ashley well on her weekend away (Hurst & Scaini, 2003). In “Holiday (Part 1),” Manny disrupts Craig’s celebration with Ashley, calling to say that she misses him. This leads Craig to pretend that it is Spinner on the phone (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a). In “Holiday (Part 2),” Craig defends himself to Spinner for purchasing an expensive Christmas present for Ashley, culminating in Spinner pointing out that Craig still needs to buy a gift for Manny – his other girlfriend (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b). The next episode, “Accidents Will Happen (Part 1),” contains the following disturbance scene: Manny calmly practices for gymnastics. She is trying to ignore Craig, who is taking photos for the yearbook. When Craig attempts to take Manny’s picture, she refuses to smile. She says, “Looking at you doesn’t exactly make me want to smile” (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). Finally, in “Accidents Will Happen (Part 2),” Manny beams after discussing the baby with Craig. When Paige reminds her of cheerleading practice after school, though, Manny’s demeanour changes; she is unable to attend practice because of her pregnancy (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b).

These disturbance scenes reveal a few points about the protagonists’ basic conflicts, which lead to the ensuing action in the stories, in connection to the social marker of age. First, while the initiating event within these scenes does not set up a basic

conflict *between* age groups (e.g., youth versus adults) it incites conflict *within* an age group – youth – using different combinations of the series' students: Manny, Paige, Craig, and Spinner. Regardless of the issue, it is youth-centric rather than inter-generational: Manny tries to attract the attention of a boy from her school (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003); Craig is unable to take his relationship with classmate, Ashley, to the next level (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003); Manny invites Craig, a colleague from school, to party with her while his girlfriend is away for the weekend (Hurst & Scaini, 2003); Manny interrupts Craig's holiday celebration with Ashley (Martin & Earnshaw, 2004a); Craig defends his two girlfriends to Spinner, his schoolmate (Martin & Earnshaw, 2004b); Craig's attempt to take Manny's photo for the yearbook as she is practicing gymnastics upsets her (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a) and; Paige affects Manny's jolly disposition, reminding Manny of cheer practice because her pregnancy prevents her from attending (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b).

Second, in these scenes, it is the protagonists' peers that help to resolve these tensions. In other words, it is other youth in a given story rather than adults who help set the hero or heroine on the right path. Even when adults appear in these scenes, they are absent from the main conflict. In effect, the disturbances emphasize that the peer cultural group is the primary site of interaction rather than the family. Unlike the former, the latter is typically composed of members from different age groups. In this way, the scenes refrain from showing youth as being under the power of older people, such as parents or teachers. They do not, then, portray ideological power relations among different age groups.

Obstacle

There is one obstacle scene in each episode and in most instances it occurs after a complication scene. The obstacle reveals an initial threat to the hero or heroine's goal of, and plan for, attaining his or her current romantic or sexual interest. Although this interest is someone of the same age and the opposite gender – and it is possible to reduce the obstacle to this person – the protagonist plays out this tension either between one of these characters or indirectly through a close friend or peer, or someone from another age group.

This becomes evident through a detailed exploration of the scenes. “U Got the Look” contains the following obstacle: Liberty warns Manny – to Manny’s annoyance – of the ramifications of her revealing thong. She exclaims that it is “against code of conduct. And if someone were to point that out to Mr. Raditch, I’m sure he’d think it was his business” (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003). In “Should I Stay or Should I Go,” Ashley tells Craig that she thinks they need to “take a bit of a break” because he was unable to express his feelings for her in the card attached to the roses (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003). The obstacle in “Against All Odds” consists of Manny and Craig close to kissing. When Craig reminds Manny that he has a girlfriend, she says that she “can keep a secret” (Hurst & Scaini, 2003). In “Holiday (Part 1),” Manny asks Craig to “dump Ashley” so they can be together, but Craig is unable to make that choice (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a). “Holiday (Part 2)” includes the following obstacle: Craig gives Manny two of the Christmas presents that Ashley had found and thought were for her. Manny exclaims, “You really do care about me after all” (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b). In “Accidents Will Happen (Part 1),” Manny’s obstacle occurs when she reveals that she has not had her

period in a long while. Emma suggests that her “sickness” may be more serious than she thinks (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). In the final episode, “Accidents Will Happen (Part 2),” Manny and Craig attempt to care for baby Jack when Emma leaves to answer the door, Craig asserting that tending to a baby must be simple. However, they fail to stop Jack’s crying and are unable to change his diaper successfully (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b).

From the above obstacle scenes, I can draw a variety of conclusions with regard to age. Obstacles are conflicts between people of different age groups – youth and adults, and youth and infants – and, again, among the youth in the series. In the first instance, the protagonist’s obstacle is the result of an adult, although being of another gender is also a contributing factor. In “U Got the Look,” when Liberty warns Manny of the consequences of wearing visible underwear at school, she speaks for Mr. Raditch, the vice-principal. Although this is seemingly an issue between two youth and two women – Manny and Liberty – it is possible to reduce the conflict to one between Manny and Raditch – a youth and an adult. Liberty utters the words, but she takes the role of Raditch’s spokesperson because she has no official power to stop Manny from changing her image at school; however, as vice-principal, Raditch has this authority. I link his power to the privilege with which his seniority over *Degrassi* students endows him with, hence his age. Liberty focuses on Raditch’s gender inadvertently, referring to “Mr.” Raditch rather than “Raditch” or “the vice-principal”; therefore this social marker further enables him to enforce the school dress code from a man’s perspective. Liberty’s reference to Raditch, in effect, helps to legitimize unequal power relations between youth and adults (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003).

Second, in “Accidents Will Happen (Part 2),” a distinctive relationship emerges between youths – Manny and Craig – and an infant – Jack. Manny and Craig cannot properly care for Jack, in stark contrast to Emma, who is also a youth, but is able to effectively attend to the child. It is not Manny and Craig’s *age*, then, but their inexperience and lack of education that prevents them from parenting Jack. On the other hand, Emma’s regular exposure to an infant, because her parents are raising one, implies that it may have been necessary for her to learn how to tend to a young child. Rather than conceiving of this as an ideological power relationship between two age groups, it is youth-centric. Suggestive here is that there are different subcategories of youth, Emma composing the first and Manny and Craig comprising the second. The social group, youth, then, is not homogenous but heterogenous.

Likewise, the other obstacle scenes evidently display youth-focused tensions wherein various episodes pit some *Degrassi* students against one another. These consist of the following: Ashley breaks up with Craig (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003), Manny tries to coerce Craig into kissing her – even though he has a girlfriend (Hurst & Scaini, 2003), Manny asks Craig to break up with his girlfriend (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a), and Emma expresses her concern to Manny because of her “illness” (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). Although the obstacle scene with Manny and Liberty demonstrates ideological age issues, the remaining scenes empower youth as a group. It is impossible to put them under the power of other age groups, such as adults or infants.

Complication

The number of complications ranges from two to four per episode. The first complication always takes place in the kernel following the disturbance scene. Here, the

protagonist, either explicitly or implicitly, lays out an initial plan for attaining his or her goal as a result of the disturbance. The second complication usually follows the obstacle. It either presents a completely new plan or intensifies the initial one as a consequence of the obstacle. The third complication, which follows the second complication, portrays the protagonist as seemingly achieving or unable to achieve his or her goal. In two instances, the inclusion of a fourth complication serves to intensify further the hero or heroine's pursuit of his or her goal. These kernels are always connected to the protagonist's current or proposed intimate relationship with another youth of the opposite gender. However, in some instances, an adult may be involved, in some way, with this plan.

These ideas become clear through an examination of the different episodes. "U Got the Look" contains four complications. First, after Emma describes her mission for the year, starting an environmental club, Manny contrasts that with her year's mission: "I want to be hot. Not cute, not adorable. Hot." As Manny utters these words, she removes her jacket to show Emma her new, more revealing clothing. Continuing, Manny says, "There's no way I'm getting dumped this year for being too young." Second, at the mall, Manny tells Emma that she still thinks that her attire is "too tame" and J.T. is not the type of guy she had aimed to attract. When Manny sees a thong, she grabs it, thinking that it is "perfect." Third, J.T. flirts with Manny – until Sully interrupts. Ignoring J.T., Manny nervously converses with Sully. Sully informs Manny that he will attend the environmental club because she will be present. Finally, when Manny reveals her outfit to Emma, Emma exclaims that Mr. Raditch will suspend her after his prior warning because her clothing is similar to yesterday's wear (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003).

“Should I Stay or Should I Go” also includes four complications. First, Craig tells Marco that it is difficult for him to express his love to Ashley. Marco suggests that Craig send Ashley a rose-a-gram. Liberty further advises Craig to attach a card, exclaiming, “If it’s for a girl, you need one.” Second, Craig informs Marco that he is unable to tell Ashley that he loves her. Marco exclaims that if Craig cannot tell Ashley, he has already lost her. Third, Craig is ecstatic when Ashley surprisingly asks him to spend the night after Paige’s party. Fourth, in Craig’s garage, Manny expresses her feelings for him, leading them to kiss, culminating in Craig undoing Manny’s shirt (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003).

“Against All Odds” contains three complication scenes. First, Joey asks Craig why he is home on a Friday night, leading Craig to go out. Second, at the rave, Craig runs into Manny, who suggests that they dance. In the last complication scene, Manny and Craig kiss (Hurst & Scaini, 2003).

Likewise, in “Holiday (Part 1),” there are three complications. First, Manny and Craig playfully embrace, but Spinner catches them and uncovers their secret, breaking their mood. Second, Craig asks Caitlin for advice, exclaiming that if he is with someone like Ashley, he should feel fortunate and not second-guess the relationship. Caitlin asserts, “Love isn’t about luck. It’s about being with the right person.” Craig’s face lights up and he dashes out. Third, Craig finds Manny at the arena and tells her that he made a mistake. Ashley is not the girl for him and he is going to tell her that; he would rather be with Manny. After a moment Manny’s face lights up and they embrace (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a).

On the other hand, “Holiday (Part 2)” has two complication scenes. First, in the garage, Ashley complains that she is cold. When Craig leaves to grab her a hot drink, Ashley notices a bunch of presents and smiles. Second, Ashley sees Manny wearing the bracelet and in possession of the scarf, both of which she had noticed in Craig’s garage. Ashley asks Manny if Craig got her the items, forcing Manny to apologize: Craig had wanted her to remain silent because he knew that Ashley would be upset about him moving on so quickly. This surprises Ashley because she and Craig are still together (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b).

An examination of “Accidents Will Happen (Part 1)” reveals three complications. First, Manny asks Ms. Kwan to excuse her from class because she feels ill. Kwan suggests that Manny stay home if she is sick. She is annoyed because many students have been ill lately. Manny dashes out of the room, about to throw up, Emma looking concerned. Second, Manny asks Paige how to tell if Craig had worn a condom when they had sex. Although Paige asserts that Craig seems responsible, Manny should ask him. However, for next time, she suggests, “Ask questions first. Get naked later.” Third, Manny confronts Craig and discovers that he had refrained from using a condom, thinking that she was using birth control (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a).

Finally, “Accidents Will Happen (Part 2)” also has three complication scenes. First, Manny is in a bathroom stall crying, Terry remarking that she is lucky to be pregnant, Paige describing all of the downfalls to being a young mother. When they leave, Emma finds Manny and suggests that she and Craig come over after school to help her babysit Jack. Second, Manny tells Spike that the pregnancy is destroying her dream of studying fashion. Spike informs Manny that she has other options besides keeping the

baby. Finally, Manny hesitatingly tells her mom that she is pregnant. Manny's mother is shocked and cries, but then they hug (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b).

The complication scenes raise several important issues with regard to age, and have implications for age ideology and how gender contributes to this articulation. These scenes illuminate relations between youth and adults, and relations between youth and other youth. With regard to the former, the scenes attach the protagonist's plans, in some way, to adults. Two of Manny's discussions with Emma illustrate this indirectly. First, Manny links her new image to looking older because she believes that her former appearance makes her seem too young. Second, Emma warns Manny of the consequences of disobeying Mr. Raditch. With regard to the first scene, the series raises the idea that looking older and more mature will endow a young woman with the power to attract one of her peers – a man. Although this comment does not explicitly refer to a specific age group, the implication is that it is adults. In effect, the scene legitimates an unbalanced power relationship between youth and adults. In the second scene, Emma's reference to Raditch legitimizes him as a figure of authority and thus a threat to Manny. The scene links this threat to Raditch holding more power than Manny because he is vice-principal, whereas she is a student, hence their age difference. Gender also helps to explain this relationship. As a man, he holds the power to enforce the dress code, including that of a young woman, to her disadvantage. This helps to develop the legitimization of his domination over youth (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003).

The remaining five scenes overtly demonstrate youth-adult relations. First, when Joey questions Craig about staying home on a Friday night, Craig decides to go out (Hurst & Scaini, 2003). Second, Craig asks Caitlin for relationship advice, igniting a

glow in his face, forcing him to rush out (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a). Third, Manny asks Ms. Kwan to go to the washroom because she feels ill (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). Fourth, Spike informs Manny that she has the freedom to choose whether or not she should keep her baby, and fifth, Manny reveals to her mother that she is pregnant (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b).

The first scene endows Joey with the power to influence Craig's plans for the night; in effect, Joey – an adult – dominates Craig – a youth. Joey masks this domination in a narrative that seemingly degrades adults, using a tactic of two men bonding: Why would Craig want to spend the night watching television with a boring old couple like him and Sydney when he can be out having fun with his peers? Craig takes Joey's advice, thus helping to legitimize the asymmetrical power relationship between a youth and an adult.

Second, Caitlin possesses the knowledge and experience as an adult to offer Craig relationship support. Caitlin's position is strengthened because she is able to help Craig from a woman's perspective, a position that he is unable to directly experience. In this way, Caitlin holds more power than Craig and, in effect, dominates him. Caitlin's advice is contained within a short poetic verse, highlighting her past wisdom and, in effect, legitimating her power over Craig.

Third, as Manny's teacher, Ms. Kwan's age provides her with the power and privilege of excusing her from class. This is one such way that Kwan dominates Manny. She voices her aggravation because student illness has been a recurring predicament. It is possible that the inter-gender relationship between Kwan and Manny helps to mask this power. Although she is frustrated, as a woman, she appears understanding and

compassionate enough to permit a sick student to leave (but still interrupt her class). In any case, it serves to legitimize Kwan's power relationship over Manny.

Fourth, similar to Joey's influence over Craig, this scene endows Spike with the power, as a result of experience – and, in effect, age – to provide Manny with alternatives to keeping her baby. When Manny shares her narrative about wanting to pursue a career in fashion, Spike assures her that it is possible. Although Spike wraps her advice in a message of youth independence and free choice, Manny is unaware of multiple options until Spike informs her of them. Their inter-gender relationship further helps to articulate this ideological age relationship. Spike's power is hidden within the tactic of two women bonding. Even though this does empower youth, the scene reduces it to a youth-adult relationship, thus serving to legitimate Spike's domination over Manny.

Finally, Manny's fear of revealing her pregnancy to her mother is a consequence of age. Manny's mother possesses more power than Manny because she is an elder and has the authority and resources to decide Manny's fate (e.g., punishment, financial support). However, her mother's position as a woman helps to hide this power and make her appear less threatening than Manny's father. Her mother's emotional and all-embracing nature is embedded in the narrative, thus legitimizing her domination over Manny.

The second set of interactions that some of these scenes display are inter-youth relations. They link the hero or heroine's goal to a youth-centric plan. They include exchanges between or among the following characters: Manny and Emma – e.g., at the mall with Emma, Manny selects a thong as part of her new image (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003); Manny, J.T., and Sully – e.g., J.T. flirtatiously chats with Manny, but Sully

disrupts them with a call to attend Emma's club meeting if Manny goes (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003); Craig, Marco, and Liberty – e.g., Marco suggests that Craig purchase a “rose-a-gram” for Ashley to express his feelings for her, Liberty advising that he add a card (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003); Craig and Marco – e.g., Marco informs Craig that if he is unable to convey his emotions to her, the relationship is already over (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003); Ashley and Craig – e.g., to Craig's surprise, Ashley asks him to sleep over after Paige's party (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003); Craig and Manny – e.g., at the rave, Craig and Manny kiss (Hurst & Scaini, 2003); Manny, Craig, and Spinner – e.g., at the arena, Spinner interrupts Craig and Manny's intimate moment (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a); Ashley and Manny – e.g., Ashley asks Manny where she had obtained her bracelet, leading Manny to reveal that she and Craig are in a relationship, to Ashley's surprise (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b); Manny and Paige – e.g., Manny asks Paige how to detect if a guy had used protection during sex or not (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a) and; Manny, Paige, and Terri – e.g., Manny cries in the bathroom stall, as Terri outlines the benefits and Paige highlights the drawbacks of mothering a child (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b). These youth-youth(-youth) scenes demonstrate a unique power relationship. Although they are evidently free of ideological power relations between youth and adults, they imply that these young people possess different levels of power from one another. In this way, it is impossible to conceive of youth as an equal, homogenous group.

Confrontation

There is a range of zero to two confrontation scenes per episode. Although there is no consensus, in most instances, a confrontation occurs directly prior to the crisis scene. In the confrontation(s), the hero or heroine suffers a major setback, which links the

protagonist to one of his or her intimate partners. This implies that he or she will have to increase the intensity of effort with which he or she works toward meeting the goal.

Although I can reduce most confrontations to a youth-centred aim, sometimes an adult is a major player in this obstacle.

A thorough investigation of the episodes illuminates the above points. First, the episode, “U Got the Look,” contains one confrontation scene. At Sully’s suggestion, Manny dreamily contemplates the name “Manuela” over “Manny,” oblivious to Emma’s questions about her relationship with J.T. However, Mr. Raditch catches Manny’s attention, provoking her to defend herself when he announces, “I expect you to show up tomorrow in an outfit that does not reveal your undergarments . . . I’ve had complaints” (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003). In the next episode, “Should I Stay or Should I Go,” Ashley confronts Craig for telling Spinner about their plan to have sex. She accuses Craig of attempting to con her into an intimate encounter with “that stupid lie of a song” (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003). On the other hand, “Against All Odds” does not contain a confrontation scene. Imbedded in “Holiday (Part 1)” are two confrontation scenes. First, Craig is lost for words because Manny professes her love for him, a love greater than Ashley’s. Second, Craig nervously informs Ashley that he wants to discuss something with her. However, before Craig does, Ashley unveils his Christmas present, a new guitar. When Ashley asks Craig what he had wanted to talk about, Craig nervously says that he loves her (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a). In “Holiday (Part 2),” on stage at the holiday show, when Ashley neglects to sing with Craig, he nudges her, forcing Ashley to slap him (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b). The confrontation in “Accidents Will Happen (Part 1)” consists of Spike using a personal anecdote to ease Manny’s fear of her mom if she is, in

fact, pregnant. She says, “My mom surprised me. She was incredibly supportive.”

However, this does little to convince Manny, who replies, “My mom would kill me, or send me to live in some convent in the Philippines. . . . ‘Cause that’s what they did to my cousin.” After a pregnancy test reveals that Manny is pregnant, she cries (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). Finally, in “Accidents Will Happen (Part 2),” Manny informs Emma that her mom is not upset and is willing to take her to an abortion clinic. Emma insists that Manny consider other options, but Manny cannot endure the pain of labour or cope with attending school when her pregnancy begins to show (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b).

The confrontation scenes emphasize both youth and adult relations and inter-youth relations. In the first instance, there are two confrontations that contain youth-adult interactions. In effect, they have implications for age ideology and the relationship among gender groups, which help in this articulation. The major setback, then, is a result of adult interventions. The story draws this out in issues between Manny and Mr. Raditch, and Manny and Spike: Raditch warns Manny that she must change her revealing attire because he has had complaints (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003), and Spike attempts to ease Manny’s dread over her mother discovering that she is pregnant (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). In the former instance, an adult poses a threat to a youth because he has more power and authority in comparison to her as a result of his position. As previously mentioned, Raditch’s age, at least in part, enables him to occupy the position of vice-principal and, consequently, enforce the dress code. Although Manny has the power to change her image, the school’s code of conduct, which Raditch enforces, binds her. Gender also plays a role in this articulation. Raditch’s power and authority in being able to decide on women’s attire places a man in a position of privilege, consequently to a

woman's disadvantage. Both age and gender, then, serve to legitimize Raditch's power over Manny.

With regard to the second scene, Spike, an adult, threatens Manny, a youth, because her age embodies her with a significant amount of knowledge and experience, which the younger individual does not possess. In this way, Spike is like a counsellor, and Manny is her client. This provides an adult with more power than a youth. However, this power relationship is seemingly equal, masked in a friendly conversation wherein an adult supports a youth. In effect, it serves to legitimate an asymmetrical power relationship between a youth and an adult.

In this scene, inter-gender relations also help in the articulation of ideology. Spike's ability to share her past womanly experience with Manny places her in a position of privilege to Manny's (dis)advantage. Spike legitimizes this privilege because she, too, was pregnant when she was a youth. This implies that youth pregnancy is common, but it is only adults who can help these young people deal with the effects of their actions. This bond between women of different age groups, then, also helps to formulate an unequal age relationship.

Second, the confrontations that centre on youth without reference to other age groups present a protagonist with a major hindrance as a result of another youth. These include scenes with Craig and Ashley, Craig and Manny, and Manny and Emma: Ashley confronts Craig about revealing to Spinner their intent to have sex (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003), Ashley gives Craig a new guitar before he can break up with her (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a), and Ashley slaps Craig and walks off stage during their performance (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b); Manny confesses to Craig her love for him (Martin &

Earnshaw, 2003a) and; Manny ignores Emma's inquisition about her and J.T. (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003), and Manny rejects Emma's alternative suggestions about abortion (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b). Although these scenes do not link youth to adults, by pitting young people against each other, they work to fragment youth as a group. Hence, from these scenes, youth is not a homogenous category. In effect, these confrontations avoid ideological power relations between youth and adults.

Crisis

The crisis is usually the second last scene or the final scene in an episode. The protagonist comes to a realization about his or her romantic relationships. He or she must defend and demonstrate a commitment to this relationship or to the actions that result from it (e.g., Manny changing her image). In some instances, this decisive confrontation is between the protagonist and one of his or her love interests, whereas in others it is between the protagonist and a peer.

An exhaustive study of the episodes highlights the above points. "U Got the Look," pits Manny and Emma against each other. When Emma conveys her concern about Manny's new style and attitude, Manny gives her an ultimatum: "This is who I am now, Em. If you can't accept that, then don't talk to me" (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003). The crisis in "Should I Stay or Should I Go" is comprised of the following: Ashley surprises Craig when she reveals that she understands how difficult it was for him to express his feelings for her. This leads Ashley to ask Craig for a second chance (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003). The climactic scene in "Against All Odds" consists of Emma walking in on Manny and Craig kissing on her bed, forcing Craig to leave (Hurst & Scaini, 2003). "Holiday (Part 1)," reaches a climax when Manny threatens to tell Ashley about her and

Craig's relationship. This leads Craig to exclaim that he had broken up with Ashley, but prefers to keep it secret until after they perform at the holiday show (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a). "Holiday (Part 2)" reaches a climax when Ashley decisively confronts Craig about his affair with Manny and, likewise, when Manny confronts Craig about lying to Ashley about their relationship (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b). In "Accidents Will Happen (Part 1)," Manny meets Craig to reveal that she is pregnant with his child (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). Lastly, in "Accidents Will Happen (Part 2)," Craig attempts to talk Manny out of having an abortion, leading Emma to defend Manny's right to choose (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b).

The seven crisis scenes reveal significant trends about the main characters' climactic moments, particularly with regard to age relations. They highlight the importance of conflict within an age group – youth – rather than between youth and adults. This is clear in the scenes involving Manny, Emma, Ashley, and Craig. They all share one common feature in that they focus on the interactions of youth: Manny gives Emma an ultimatum with respect to their friendship (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003); Ashley reveals to Craig that she understands his difficulty in expressing his emotions (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003); Emma interrupts Manny and Craig kissing in her room (Hurst & Scaini, 2003); Manny threatens to expose her and Craig's relationship to Ashley (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a); Ashley and Manny confront Craig about his infidelities (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b); Manny reveals to Craig that she is pregnant (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a) and; Emma defends Manny's freedom to abort her pregnancy (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b). These decisive confrontations empower youth. They place young people in a position to determine their own fate rather than a fate that adults help resolve. However,

the crisis scenes, like many of the other kernels, position youth against each other, implying that it is a conflicted group. In this way, youth is far from a monolithic social marker but, rather, is composed of multiple variations of young people. From these scenes, then, it is impossible to conceive of asymmetrical power relations between youth and another age group.

Resolution

The resolution is always the final scene of an episode. Sometimes it follows the crisis scene, but in other episodes it occurs within the crisis scene. The resolution links the hero to a new, comfortable, familiar sense of self, sometimes connecting him or her to a complacency that transcends the confines of a single episode. Related to the disturbance scene, this comfort is typically a result of the hero's previous or current romantic interest(s). Similar to the other kernels, these love interests always take place among youth. However, the conclusions also suggest that the initial conflict between youth only appears to restore balance to the protagonist's life; he or she will have to deal with the consequences of the supposed resolution in subsequent episodes. Sometimes adults seemingly help to resolve a plot.

This becomes clear by looking at the individual episodes. "U Got the Look" ends with Manny and Sully drinking coffee together at the Dot, Manny sullen because Emma and J.T. walk by without stopping (Sinyor & Scaini, 2003). In "Should I Stay or Should I Go," the resolution occurs within the crisis scene: Manny's face is marked with hurt and defeat, watching as Craig and Ashley embrace and communicate their love for each other (Scarrow & Scaini, 2003). In "Against All Odds," Manny and Emma end their friendship: Manny considers Emma a "stuck-up, prude princess," whereas Emma labels Manny "the

school slut” (Hurst & Scaini, 2003). The resolution of “Holiday (Part 1),” is also contained within the crisis scene. Manny beams after Craig convinces her that, by next term, they will be together openly because he and Ashley will have broken up (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a). “Holiday (Part 2)” concludes with Joey trying to comfort Craig in his misery after losing both Ashley and Manny (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b). The resolution of “Accidents Will Happen (Part 1)” is also in the crisis scene. Manny is confused and speechless after Craig proposes that they raise the baby and start a family together (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). Finally, the finale of “Accidents Will Happen (Part 2)” is also the conclusion of this story arc. At an abortion clinic with her mother, a doctor informs Manny of the side effects of an abortion and exclaims that she should only proceed if she is ready. Manny looks off into the distance, suggesting that she will go through the procedure (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b).

As with the other kernel scenes, the resolutions illuminate the significance of age. They first raise the issue of youth-adult relations. Second, they highlight the importance of youth relations within the category of age. In other words, although the main crisis in each episode is youth-centric, in some instances the series uses adults to help resolve the protagonist’s specific conflict, whereas in others it utilizes youth.

In the case of the former, there are two resolutions that include interactions between youth and adults. They have implications for a *rejection* of age ideology and draw attention to gender as it contributes to this formulation. A number of scenes, including Ashley and Manny dumping Craig (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003b), and Manny aborting her and Craig’s child (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004b), articulate the ramifications of the protagonists’ actions through interactions with adults. In the first instance, Craig

converses with Joey. As the adult, Joey's age endows him with the wisdom and knowledge to share with Craig – the youth – about similar calamities with women – Caitlin and Tessa – when he had been a youth. This scene links gender to its distinctive counter-articulation of age ideology. As men, Joey and Craig are able to bond with each other, speak freely about women, and share experiences that are only common to other men. This seemingly serves to bequeath Joey with more power than Craig, implying that relationships are a recurring issue for young men, which only an adult man can help the younger individual resolve. However, Craig's skepticism during Joey's attempt to comfort him serves to counter this asymmetry. Craig points out that Joey's current relationships with Sydney and Caitlin mirror his own situation. This issue, then, is common not only to youth but also to adults. It further serves to negate their unequal power dynamic. It insinuates that Craig will have to overcome his losses alone. Additionally, this conflict within the category, "adult," highlights its fragmented nature, suggesting that it is heterogeneous.

The second of these adult-youth scenes contains Manny's relationships with two women: Manny's mother accompanies her to the abortion clinic wherein a chat with a doctor helps Manny affirm her decision to terminate the pregnancy. This scene connects gender to its unique counter-formulation of age ideology. It provides the characters, three women, with a way of sharing the unique and intimate experience of pregnancy. Embedded in these relations, then, is a sense of understanding and compassion indigenous to women. First, although Manny's mother appears in the scene, she acts merely as Manny's moral support, upholding her daughter's decision about the pregnancy rather than helping to form it. The second youth-adult relationship is the one that Manny

forges with the doctor. The doctor educates Manny about the physical and mental side effects of abortion. This appears to endow her with professional knowledge and experience and, in effect, more power than Manny to make decisions with regard to abortions. However, at this point it is clear that Manny has made her decision. In effect, the doctor's function is similar to that of Manny's mother: to complement and reinforce Manny's choice. When the doctor informs Manny that women (without referring to a particular age group) react differently to the procedure, this suggests it is impossible to use age to predict reactions to the procedure. In other words, she cannot reduce women to the age group to which they belong or compare them with other women. However, unlike Manny's mother, the doctor reiterates Manny's choice from a professional perspective rather than a familial one. This implies, again, that "adult" is heterogeneous.

Although both of the above scenes raise ideological issues between youth and adults, they defy a complete articulation. While it is true that the adults seemingly help to resolve the specific episode (and with the final episode, the abortion storyline), it is ultimately youth who draw a close to the particular conflicts in relation to other youth. With regard to age, then, the episodes do not reveal a definition of youth via an articulation to adults but, rather, one that conceives of them in and of themselves. In effect, these resolutions work to give power to these young people, emphasizing autonomy from adults. Additionally, Manny's scene, the conclusion to the storyline, highlights the empowerment of women and hence the rejection of age ideology.

The remaining resolution scenes – the ones that refrain from making reference to adults – draw on the significance of youth-youth relations. The following scenes demonstrate the actions of the youth protagonists: Manny choosing Sully over J.T.

(Sinyor & Scaini, 2003), Craig picking Ashley rather than Manny (Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a; Scarrow & Scaini, 2003), Manny and Emma ending their friendship (Hurst & Scaini, 2003), and Manny revealing her pregnancy to Craig (Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a). The ways in which the various episodes end create disparities between different young people, indicating that youth is not a monolithic category. The freeze frame on the protagonist at the end of each episode further helps to emphasize and solidify youth as an individualistic and privileged, rather than a collective, social group, defining itself in relation to adults. As was the case with the youth-adult resolutions above, these scenes work to empower the adolescents, stressing independence from adults. Ideological age relations between youth and adults, then, are nonexistent in these scenes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined *TNG*'s abortion story arc, the stories of which are contained in seven season-three episodes. My aim was threefold: first, to use a method of narrative analysis – the Scene Function Model (Porter et. al., 2002) – to identify the six kernel scenes in each episode and their story function; second, using Thompson's (1984, 1988, 1990) theory of ideology, to uncover if the narrativization of *TNG* episodes legitimate ideological power relations among youth and other age groups, and the ways in which gender, a secondary social category, helps to articulate that relationship.

The narrative analysis illuminated the following results. The typical episode begins with a disturbance that raises a basic conflict either directly or indirectly between the protagonist, a youth, and another youth of the opposite gender. The protagonist is either Craig or Manny. As a result, the stories revolve around Craig's pursuit or avoidance of a current or new woman or Manny's chase after or rejection of a man. In all

cases, a complication follows this scene, interfering with Craig's or Manny's initial plan for attaining his or her goals. Although the plan is to win over a youth, sometimes an adult helps the protagonist with his or her strategy.

With respect to the next series of kernels, there is no consensus, but the majority of episodes follow a typical structure: an obstacle, a second and third complication, and a confrontation. In some instances, there are two confrontations, whereas in others, there is none. Additionally, in two other instances, there is a fourth complication. The obstacle is a minor threat to Craig's or Manny's plan. The second complication is the introduction of a new plan or the intensification of the first one as a result of the obstacle. In the third complication, Craig or Manny appears to attain or be unable to attain his or her aim. Similar to an obstacle, a confrontation presents a threat to Craig's or Manny's strategy. He or she experiences a major hindrance to attaining the goal. A fourth complication strengthens Craig's or Manny's most current plan. Sometimes, adults become part of the obstacle and the confrontation or help initiate the complications, but it is mostly Craig's or Manny's peers.

Following, the crisis, the last or second-last scene, contains a final confrontation that will determine Craig's or Manny's fate with regard to his or her intimate relationships. As Craig or Manny secures and proves his or her dedication to the relationship (or to their final plan of action as a result of it), this scene helps to answer the following question: Which girl or guy does Craig or Manny end up with? Finally, the resolution, which may occur within the same scene as the crisis, illuminates the results of the crisis. It attaches Craig or Manny to a new comfortable sense of self. However, this

scene implies that Craig's or Manny's resolution is only temporary and the cycle will repeat itself in another episode (even in the final episode of the story arc).

My interpretation of the narrative analysis reveals a number of distinctive results with respect to the legitimation of age ideology. Although there is no consensus among the kernels in every episode, in places, *TNG* raises power issues between youth and adults. In these instances, adults appear to hold more power than youth and, in effect, dominate these young people. In other words, particular scenes in and of themselves articulate ideological age relations using gender. Most important, however, this power (im)balance is never related to the basic conflict, the opening disturbance. Rather, kernels such as the obstacle, the complications, the confrontations, and the resolution, which I reduce to the disturbance, raise these matters. In effect, this prevents them from fully articulating ideological age relations among youth and other age groups. The disturbance, which leads to the protagonists' goals, the subsequent action, and consequently, the conclusion, is always youth-centred, and other youth help initiate the protagonist's attempt to achieve his or her goal. By the end of these episodes, then, the resolutions negate the possibility of unbalanced youth-adult power interactions and emphasize youth empowerment. This story arc also demonstrates that it is impossible to conceive of "youth" or "adult" as monolithic categories. It displays the emancipatory potential of youth as an individual, rather than a collective, ageist struggle in comparison to a fragmented notion of adults. In this way, it reveals multiple "age-isms." By this, I mean that the episode content does not reveal age as a homogenous category. Rather, it is heterogeneous and can have different implications depending on the particular character.

In most cases, however, *TNG* completely rejects ideological power relations between youth and adults. In these scenes, the series presents youth-centric relations, wherein the young characters conflict with each other. Evident here is the distribution of unequal amounts of power only to various youth rather than to other age groups. This creates a disparity among youth, further highlighting the heterogeneous nature of the category. As is the case with the youth-adult scenes, they empower the younger age group, illuminating youth privilege and autonomy from other fragmented age categories.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I shall, first, summarize my findings. Second, I shall provide an answer to the main research question of the study. In order to elucidate and validate my conclusions, I shall highlight similarities and differences between my findings, the studies on *Degrassi* and ideology, and those within the literatures on British cultural studies, Canadian political economy, and Thompson's media sociology. In other words, this chapter will synthesize the conclusions of the various aspects of my research, thus answering the three sub-research questions. Third, I shall elucidate some of the limitations of my study. Fourth, I shall include some remarks on the implications that my results may have for future scholarship. In this context, I shall address the importance of my problem: the ideological or non-ideological nature of the social category of "age." Finally, I shall suggest avenues for further study. My focus will be on highlighting significant topics of concentration on which scholars may conduct additional research not only with regard to *Degrassi* but also more generally in relation to youth media and Marxist ideology.

Summary of Findings

The main objective of this study was to determine whether a study of *Degrassi* could offer perspectives about ideology and age that the scholarly literature had not foreseen. In my attempt to resolve this issue, I examined the literature on *Degrassi Classic (DC)* and *Degrassi: The Next Generation (TNG)* to discover if there were studies

of ideological age relations.¹³ Although Lefebvre's (2007) study was the only such work to draw on the significance of age as a primary social marker of difference, I found one serious deficiency with his theoretical and methodological approach: He analyzed age only in *TNG*'s production context. In effect, he failed to explore age as a central category in the series' episodes and reception context.

Next, to answer my second research question, in order to overcome the gap in the *Degrassi* literature, I critically surveyed three of the appropriate, significant, and major fields of inquiry, in English, within the broader scholarship on media and Marxist ideology regarding "age," particularly "youth": British cultural studies;¹⁴ Canadian political economy¹⁵ and; John B. Thompson's media sociology.¹⁶

British cultural studies emphasized the importance of power relations between youth of different classes, genders, and races, describing how young people within these groups resisted dominant ideologies. However, these scholars' perspectives were of limited relevance in my examination of age ideology because they treated age as an epiphenomenal rather than a primary group, reducing it to the above markers of difference. Similarly, Canadian political economists drew on the significance of class and nation, underscoring the ways in which particular groups dominate others. Nevertheless, they emphasized age and other social categories equally rather than attributing priority to

¹³ See Byers, 2004, 2005b, 2005c; Hart, 2005; Lefebvre, 2007; MacLennan, 2005; Simonetti, 1994; Strangelove, 2005; Tropp, 2005.

¹⁴ See Clarke, 2006a, 2006b; Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 2006; Fiske, 1989a, 1989b, 1992; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Hebdige, 1979, 2006a, 2006b; Jefferson, 2006; McRobbie, 1978; McRobbie & Garber, 2006; Osgerby, 2004; Willis, 1977, 1990; Women's Studies Group, 1978.

¹⁵ See Clement, 1975; Hollands, 2003; Kurasawa, 2003; Magder, 1989; Mahon, 1993; Pendakur, 1990; Smythe, 1977, 1981; Whitson & Gruneau, 1996.

¹⁶ See Kelly, 2001; Nellis, 2003; Thompson, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995.

age, and downplayed the importance of media texts. In effect, these deficiencies restrict political economy's applicability to a study of ideological age relations. On the other hand, Thompson's "revisionist" tradition (Corner, 2001) theorized age without reducing it to class or any other marker of difference or equally prioritizing age along with other categories. Thompson's methodological approach consists of social-historical analyses of production and reception, and formal or discursive analyses of media content. Linking these studies, the analyst interprets the ideological nature of the media object of focus. However, scholars appropriated only Thompson's methodological approach, leaving the literature bare of any applications of his theory of ideology (Kelly, 2001; Nellis, 2003).

I took a third step in attempting to answer my main research question: Situating my study in Lefebvre's (2007) exploration of *TNG*'s mode of production, I conducted a narrative analysis of seven episodes in the third season that dealt with abortion.¹⁷ I conceived of this as the second phase in a three-phase project. Thompson (1984, 1990, 1988) informed my method. To begin, I adopted, in part, Chatman's (1978) conception of "kernel scenes" – disturbance, obstacle, complication, confrontation, crisis, and resolution – and Porter, Larson, Harthcock, and Nellis' (2002) "Scene Function Model" to identify and illuminate the function of the kernels in this story arc. I then applied Thompson's critical conception of ideology to determine if these scenes portrayed a legitimization of ideological power relations among youth and other age groups I refrained from downplaying the significance of gender in an articulation or a rejection of age ideology.

The narrative analysis revealed that the typical episode begins with a disturbance. This scene initiates a basic conflict overtly or covertly between a youth protagonist, Craig or Manny, and another youth of the opposite gender – Ashley or Manny, and Sully or Craig, respectively. The conflicts concern Craig's chase for, or away from, a current or possible future partner, or Manny's hunt for, or neglect of, a particular man. The typical episode consists of an obstacle, two complications, a confrontation (although this ranges from zero to two), and in some episodes there is a fourth complication. All episodes end with a crisis and a resolution. The complications set up or intensify Craig's or Manny's plan for attaining his or her goal. On the other hand, the obstacles and the confrontations present the hero or heroine with a major setback, as regards his or her plan, forcing him or her to rethink it. Although the main conflict revolves around two youth, sometimes adults appear to propel Craig's or Manny's actions with respect to the plan and consequent goal. However, I reduced all of these scenes to the disturbance and, in effect, to the problem between two youth.

Generally, the abortion storyline refrains from formulating ideological power relations among youth and different age groups. In certain kernel scenes, however, *TNG* raises unequal power relations between youth and adults. Sometimes gender contributes to this formulation. These scenes seemingly legitimate particular adults' domination of youth because adults possess more power than these youngsters. The episodes reject asymmetrical power relations between youth and adults, though, because the basic

¹⁷ See Hurst & Scaini, 2003; Martin & Earnshaw, 2003a, 2003b; Scarrow & Lindo, 2004a, 2004b; Scarrow & Scaini, 2003; Sinyor & Scaini, 2003.

problem, which the disturbance scenes articulate, is the consequence of two youth characters. In other words, they are youth-centric. As a result of reducing youth issues to other youth, the storyline illustrates that this subcategory of age is heterogeneous. It presents the emancipatory possibility of youth in individual rather than collective terms. In effect, it reveals the multifaceted nature of these young people.

Age, Marxist Ideology, and TNG's Abortion Storyline

My findings demonstrate a contribution to both the *Degrassi* and ideology literature and the broader youth media and Marxist ideology literatures. In order to support this claim, I shall highlight some of the patterns, in three general areas, which emerge from the narrative analysis: the notion of age, the articulation of Marxist (age) ideology, and the construction of television narratives.

The Notion of Age

The results of this study offer ways of thinking about youth and adults, which, in turn, provides insights about the social category of age. They indicate that it is misleading to use the terms “youth” or “adult” as though there are common definitions to describe all of these people. On the basis of my findings, then, I add two main components to the literatures on *Degrassi*, and youth media and ideology, which comprise what I understand to be “age.”

First, age groups are comprised of “individuals,” and are heterogeneous, autonomous, and privileged rather than collective and homogenous. This mirrors Byers’ (2005b) conception of gender and her distinction between multiple and singular feminisms and “the emancipatory potential of girlhood as an individual, rather than a collective, feminist struggle or political project” (p. 206). Lefebvre (2007) invoked a

comparable argument with respect to gender and sexuality: *TNG*'s abortion and sexuality storylines produce polysemic youth characters. Similarly, as a result of the British cultural theorists distinguishing different working-class youth subcultures from each other, they produced a plural notion of youth (e.g., Hall & Jefferson, 2006; Hebdige, 1979; McRobbie, 1978). In effect, I argue that there are multiple "age-isms." My focus on conflicts *within* a particular age group and the multiple roles of different group members stress these points.

The implication of this is that it is objectionable to use only "age" to define youth or adults. As Canadian political economists found, such a definition necessitates the linking of additional social markers, including class, ethnic, gender, regional relations, etc. (Hollands, 2003; Kurasawa, 2003; Mahon, 1993; Whitson & Gruneau, 1996). I distinguish my conception of age from studies in which the primary focus is on other social groups (e.g., gender and class). As well, I differentiate my ideas from work that attributes an implied homogeneity to age, specifically with regard to *Degrassi* youth and adults (Byers, 2005c; Simonetti, 1994; Tropp, 2005).

Second, with respect to youth, particularly, although they are distinctive individuals, the abortion episodes illuminate one common characteristic that helps to define them. Youths' greatest conflict stems mainly from their desire to seek out or hide from the romantic and intimate attention, in some way, of a youth of the opposite gender. I situate this distinguishing feature in the various literatures' elucidations of the solidarity of youth cultures: the early British cultural studies ideas about youth subcultures (e.g., Clarke, 2006b; Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 2006; Hebdige, 1979), a political-economic conception of youth leisure lifestyles (Hollands, 2003), a Thompson notion of

style (Kelly, 2001), and the *Degrassi* literature's elucidation of fandom and fan fiction surrounding the series (Strangelove, 2005). Whereas British cultural analysts and the scholar who appropriated Thompson's methodological framework, particularly, account for youth cultures in terms of subcultures and styles, such as punks' spiky hairstyle (Hebdige, 1979), skinheads' boots (Clarke, 2006b), and hip-hoppers' baggy clothing (Kelly, 2001), my study reveals a more general culture among youth, which is similar to fans uniting in their production of fiction as a result of their similar attraction to *Degrassi*. I conceive of this culture in terms of an interest in common activities: acts leading up to, engagement in, and the ramifications of sexual intercourse.

This also marks a departure from the *Degrassi* literature's illumination of *DC*'s heroes or heroines engaging in predominately serious issues: abortion (Byers, 2005c; Lefebvre, 2007), contracting AIDS (Hart, 2005), strictly feminist political projects (Byers, 2005c; Lefebvre, 2007), coming to terms with one's sexual identity (Hart, 2005, Lefebvre, 2007), and the impact of technology on society (Tropp, 2005). This is not to suggest that the storyline neglects particular issues as a result of an abortion or is free of gender-focused political motivation. Rather, to add to this scholarship, the story arc, of course, deals with abortion and raises feminist politics, but reduces them to a more basic matter: the pursuit of sexual affection from an individual of the other gender.

The Articulation of Marxist (Age) Ideology

My ideological criticism of *TNG*'s abortion storyline provides perspectives on the concept and theory of ideology. As I attempted to demonstrate above, comparing the results of my examination with those of the broader scholarly literatures, I conceive of "Marxist age ideology" as consisting of two central aspects. First, the concept of "double

articulation” helps to explain a formulation of youth ideology (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 2006, p. 41). With regard to social class and youth subcultures, the early British cultural studies scholars used the concept to reduce young people, first, to their “parent culture” and, second, to the “dominant culture.” In this way, ideology works at two interrelated levels, wherein a lower level is the consequence of, and a contribution to, a higher level. Lefebvre’s (2007) exploration of age also produced a sense of double articulation: He reduced gender or sexuality to age. Similarly, Byers’ (2004) study of race and ethnicity in *DC* reflects this hierarchal reductionism, though she inadvertently formulated “triple articulation”: She reduces youth, first, to age and class, second, to race and ethnicity, and third, to nationality.

On the other hand, I reduce age, initially, to an epiphenomena category – gender – and then to age. Unlike the cultural studies scholars, who made distinctions within their category of focus – social class – I have yet to make similar theoretical divisions within age groups. My understanding of “articulation” also differs from Lefebvre’s (2007) and Byers’ (2004) because they attributed the articulation of ideology with regard to different social groups to different aspects of media analysis (e.g., Lefebvre bequeathed the production with age and endowed the texts with gender or sexuality) whereas I contend that the articulation must remain the same at each level of investigation.

The early British cultural studies scholars (Hall & Jefferson, 2006), the Thompson youth media scholars (Kelly, 2001; Nellis, 2003), and some of the *Degrassi* analysts (Byers, 2005c; Simonetti, 1994) applied the concept of hegemony to explain the way in which ideology and, in effect, articulation operate. Rather than hegemony, however, I appropriate Thompson’s (1990) Weberian notion of legitimation, as one way in which

ideology operates, using the strategy of narrativization of television episodes. My adoption of Thompson's reformulation of ideology helps to overcome hegemony's inherent class-reductionism.

The second aspect of age ideology lies in its emphasis, for example, on youths' resistance of adult dominance and authority, thus leading to self-empowerment. I reject the thesis that *TNG*'s season-three abortion storyline fully articulates ideological age relations among youth and other age groups. This mirrors the results of numerous *Degrassi* studies: *DC*'s rejection of the U.S.'s dominant national ideology (Byers 2005c; MacLennan, 2005; Simonetti, 1994); the emancipatory potential of *DC* and *TNG* (Byers, 2005b); *DC*'s subversion of a dominant heterosexual ideology (Hart, 2005) and; *TNG*'s rejection of dominant class ideologies (Strangelove, 2005). This further parallels British cultural studies' illumination of resistant youth cultures or subcultures as a result of dominant parent cultures (Hall & Jefferson, 2006; Hebdige, 1979) and the particular use and appropriation of cultural products (Fiske, 1989a, 1989b, 1992; Willis, 1990). My argument is that, although the series raises age issues between youth and adults, and youth and infants, the episodes' resolutions illuminate the primacy of youth.

However, unlike most of the above *Degrassi* work, particularly, I refrain from presenting a simplistic and homogeneous notion of acceptance and rejection. In other words, although I declare that *TNG*'s abortion storyline "rejects" ideological age relations, I account for how it may also raise the idea of unequal power relations between youth and adults. This broadly reflects Fiske's contention, at least in part, that media objects initially contain hegemonic codes but also include counter-hegemonic codes that enable users to reject the dominant ideology. My findings suggest that the formulation of

the abortion story arc's acceptance or rejection of a dominant ideology is more complex than the literature elucidates. As mentioned earlier, although these episodes help to empower youth, I do not mean to suggest that the emphasis on empowerment necessarily comes at adults' expense.

The Construction of Television Narratives

The narrative analysis of the abortion story arc offers insights into the structure of television texts. Situating it in the discourse on *Degrassi* illuminates one important but neglected aspect of television narratives. Applying Porter et al.'s (2002) Scene Function Model, as the first in-depth linear narrative analysis of the kernel scenes that make up *Degrassi* episodes and their story function, my results highlight that the concept of age and subsequently, ideology, are reducible to an episode's opening scene – the disturbance. In order to briefly elaborate this idea, the concept of articulation, again, is useful: I reduce the main conflict in these episodes, first, to five kernel scenes – obstacle, complication, confrontation, crisis, and resolution – and second, to the disturbance scene. On the contrary, other narrative analyses of *Degrassi* highlight only the analyst's discursive interpretation of the story structure without identifying particular scenes and their function.¹⁸ Many of these studies also undertake a broad sweeping analysis of the various *Degrassi* series. In effect, this scope limits their ability to conduct a micro narrative analysis of episode scenes within story arcs or stand-alone shows. Additionally, it disables them from addressing each other's findings to offer a comprehensive ideological analysis of *Degrassi* texts.

¹⁸ See Byers, 2005b, 2005c; Hart, 2005; Lefebvre, 2007; MacLennan, 2005; Simonetti, 1994; Tropp, 2005.

Limitations of the Research

Due to space and time restrictions, using only a narrative analysis and Lefebvre's (2007) examination of the social-historical context of *TNG*'s production to undertake an ideological criticism created a number of limitations. The first limitation is that my study neglects the reception context of these particular episodes. As mentioned previously, in order to complete an ideological analysis based on Thompson's (1984, 1988, 1990) comprehensive methodology, it is necessary to consider media production, content, and reception. The second limitation is that I was unable to conduct a thorough investigation of the production context. Such an examination could consider, with regard to age relations, the institutional contexts of *TNG*'s production company, Epitome Pictures, its broadcaster, CTV, and connect these to the broader political-economic structures of Canadian society. Finally, I was able to undertake an analysis of only one storyline. At the textual level, this disables me from building a body of storylines from which I could compare results in order to establish stronger validity. Although these limitations prevent me from offering final and definitive conclusions, I can still identify patterns and provide implications and suggestions for further research.

Implications for Future Study

The findings of this thesis raise major issues in three broad areas: problem choice, levels of analysis, and application. First, this study addresses an important problem. With regard to media about, and aimed at, youth, age is a noteworthy category for analysis because it offers insights into a perspective from which identities may be socially created; it further insists on the significance of considering the ways in which television objects help to construct age. Additionally, this study argues that, in a series about youth in

which adults have the final say about the production of episode content about them, it may contain ideological power relations among different age groups.

The study of ideological age relations in one *TNG* storyline, further, has implications for some larger issues in communication studies, with regard to cultural identity, which transcend the subfield of youth media. As illuminated in chapter two, one of the tasks of Canadian communication scholars, regardless if they adopt a cultural studies, political economy, or media sociology approach, is to theorize different social markers, such as class, gender, and race, in an articulation of cultural identities. They then link the notion of identity to the concept of ideology. They use ideology to examine the ways in which some symbolic objects, either explicitly or implicitly, display evidence of asymmetrical power relations. To a large extent, however, they neglected age as either a central or epiphenomenon category in the formulation of these ideologies. Although the third-season abortion storyline is evidently free of unequal power relations among youth and other age groups, the extrapolation of my results to the literature demonstrates the importance of age.

Second, with regard to levels of analysis, as mentioned earlier, this thorough investigation of the kernel scenes within *TNG*'s abortion storyline is one step in an ideological analysis of age relations. Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990) emphasized several methods for analyzing media content, including narrative analysis. My application of The Scene Function Model attempts to build an ideological criticism of television series at the textual level. As a result of conducting this research, further work can connect the textual analysis to phenomena at more complex levels of examination. One of the main achievements of Thompson's media sociology was to develop an effective

methodological approach for the interpretation of ideology in media objects. This consists of analyses of media production, texts, and reception. This enables me to link the analysis of episode content to an examination of the series' production context. Similarly, as a consequence of undertaking this study, researchers can proceed with the next phase of ideological criticism – a reception analysis.

The third issue that I want to raise is the application of this thesis' findings. In this work, the results that stem from my operationalization of age may help to explain the real-life phenomenon surrounding this social marker. My use of the concept, double articulation, represents a means of thinking about age that focuses on a possible way of considering youth identity formation. It is possible that, in the social world, youth perceive themselves, and alternately, other age groups consider youth, in this way. In this attempt to reflect carefully on some of the formative criteria people bring to the notion of youth, it is possible to overcome the sweeping generalizations and broad conceptualizations that are all too evident in dealing with these larger categories. In other words, to emphasize the formula that I appropriated from Thompson (1984, 1988, 1990) early in this thesis, it is necessary to recognize the multifaceted nature and complexity of defining and theorizing age or, for that matter, other social groups. (British cultural studies theorists and Canadian political economists, to some extent, also consider this principle.) However, I should caution that, until scholars conduct further research in this area, I abstain from suggesting a direct application of the conceptualization of “television age,” based on one story arc in one season of one television series, to “real-life age.”

Directions for Further Research

In brief, I would like to outline five major recommendations for further research. The first suggestion emanates from one of the limitations of this study. I propose that researchers revisit *TNG*'s production context and conduct a more thorough examination of it as it relates to "age." Lefebvre (2007) offered tentative grounds about the series' production on which I based my analysis of the abortion storyline. He explained that *TNG*'s producers allowed its youth cast to participate in the construction of the series' messages about youth in order to authenticate them; however, the adult production team made the final decision about episode content. His conclusions were based on soap opera and young adult problem novel generic conventions, a selection of producers' goals, the show's broadcaster, and the technological context.

Despite this, scholars can make a more sustained attempt to engage with the multifaceted aspects of media production not only as Thompson's media sociologists elucidated it but also as British cultural studies scholars and Canadian political economists treated this important dimension. With respect to the Thompson tradition, further work can focus on *TNG*'s production company – Epitome Pictures. Although Lefebvre inadvertently drew on the "social structure," additional research can analyze Epitome Pictures, a "social institution," illuminating the ways in which it gives particular shape to particular "fields of interaction." This work, then, may elucidate the company's specific "social structure," thus helping to explain the relationship among age groups within the production company without downplaying the significance of other factors, including gender. Further studies can then link the analysis of Epitome Pictures, the specific institution, to its broadcaster – CTV. An examination of the same aspects of

social-historical contexts mentioned above – social institution, fields of interaction, and social structure – may help to elucidate power relations at this level and connect it to those of Epitome Pictures.

Next, drawing on the approaches of political economists, scholars can conduct economic analyses of media production and link them, along with the examinations of *TNG*'s production company and broadcaster, to the broader economic, political, and social landscape and uncover its place in a capitalist society. This study may also consider the impact of “capital reorganization and regulation” on youth “transitions, cultures, and identities” (Hollands, 2003, p. 444). This can aid in our understanding of the ways in which power circulates in the social world with regard to age and how gender contributes to this relationship.

Finally, British cultural studies, particularly Osgerby's (2004) appropriation of Du Gay's (1997) circuit of culture, can complement the analysis of *TNG*'s production in the following ways. It can highlight how the production of *TNG* episodes *represents* the work of particular individuals, of particular age groups, as a consequence of the distinctive organizational cultures of Epitome Pictures and CTV. This work can then explore the ways in which Epitome and CTV, as companies, continually inject their corporate *identities* into these various representations. This study may also examine the ways in which particular individuals encode the show's content with certain meanings during the production process and how they aim at establishing *identification* between the symbolic objects and specific groups of *consumers*.

The second suggestion that I propose is for further research to consider additional *Degrassi* texts (another limitation in my project) before proceeding with the next phase in

this project – a reception analysis. Although I focused on the abortion episodes in this study, the literature may benefit from a more thorough investigation of age in *TNG* content if further work looks at additional storylines. In this regard, a narrative analysis of Marco's season-three sexuality story arc, the other storyline that Lefebvre (2007) examined, may satisfy this recommendation.

The third recommendation that I offer also stems from a limitation of this study. As mentioned earlier, additional work in this area must consider the reception context of ideology and age. In effect, I suggest that analysts conduct a reception analysis of *TNG* episodes in the season three abortion and sexuality story arcs. Drawing on Thompson's (1984, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995) discussions of media reception, as outlined in chapter two, such an analysis of *TNG* can elucidate the ways in which particular youth use the means available to them in order to make sense of the abortion and sexuality episode content they receive and integrate these meanings into their daily lives (Thompson, 1990, p. 304). This necessitates an investigation of the specific conditions and the socially distinctive locations within which these youth receive the programs (Thompson, 1990, p. 305).

Using a combination of Thompson's (1990) five aspects of social-historical contexts and ethnographic research, researchers can conduct a social-historical analysis. Examples of relevant and valuable ethnographic work may consist of interviews and focus groups with regular young viewers. This can enable analysts to build a body of information on particular individuals' viewing practices, their attitudes toward, and their comprehension of, these programs. This work can draw attention to the significance or insignificance of power relationships among viewers' age groups and the gender groups

that help make up these age groups. This research is crucial not only to determine ideological age relations in two *TNG* story arcs but also because the *Degrassi* literature is bare of any reception analyses.

Fourth, I suggest scholars conduct a cross study of ideological age relations in *Degrassi*. This work can examine the evolution of the series. It can compare and contrast the ways in which *The Kids of Degrassi*, *Degrassi Classic*, and *TNG* demonstrate power relationships among different age groups. Considering not only episode content, this study can situate each program in its social-historical context of production and reception. This can enable researchers to discover if different iterations illuminate diverse power relationships, reflecting unique and distinctive production conditions and audiences.

The final suggestion I make is that researchers consider age ideology in other Canadian urban youth-centred series. This work may trace the fragmented and segmented development of the youth television genre in Canada. In this way, it can look at programs in which Aboriginal teens appear regularly, such as *renegade press.com* and *Moccasin Flats*, youth programs focused primarily on women protagonists, including *Ready or Not* and *Our Hero*, and youth shows as being products of a particular locality – for example, *Northwood* and *Edgemont* as being products of Vancouver. These studies can situate the programs in an integrated Marxist approach that borrows from British cultural studies, Canadian political economy, and Thompson's media sociology. In chapter two, I commented on the neglect, to a large extent, of youth in Marxist studies of Canadian media, particularly from the perspective of political economy. On a larger scale, analysts can mirror the suggested approaches I proposed earlier with regard to *TNG*. The present

study was unable to develop such an exhaustive framework for analysis and broaden its scope, but I hope the considerable attention I devoted to each of the above areas can help to expand Marxist research on Canadian youth media.

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