Are the kids all right?

CANADIAN FAMILIES AND TELEVISION IN THE DIGITAL AGE
We would like to acknowledge the Canada Media Fund for their support in facilitating the diffusion of our research reports.

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Are the Kids All Right?
Canadian Families and Television in the Digital Age

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Background

For more than three decades, the Youth Media Alliance (YMA) [previously the Alliance for Children and Television (ACT)] has been monitoring the quality of Canadian children’s television and all screen-based content, while keenly contributing to the vitality of the industry. The YMA also actively undertakes original research projects to advance understanding of children’s television and the impact of screen-based media on young people. Working with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) and other government agencies, the YMA continuously provides valuable insights into all matters concerning screen-based content for young Canadians.

The current research on children’s television, sponsored and supported by Bell Media, is a 3-year project led by a team of researchers from the Centre for Youth and Media Studies at the Université de Montréal’s Département de communication, under the supervision of Dr. André H. Caron, Ed.D. This groundbreaking project has two parts. In phase one, we took a quantitative approach and conducted a national content analysis to investigate the current state of children’s television programming in Canada. The findings, published in 2010, provided the industry with an overall portrait of where children’s programming stands, what its strengths are, and what new paths could be considered. Through an analysis of the relationship between types of television network, scheduling, and audience viewing behavior, the phase one report also looked into what children’s programs young Canadians are actually watching in terms of their age groups, and what are the most popular children’s shows.

Based on the findings of the phase one study, the second phase involves qualitative research that focuses on the ways children and parents appropriate media and media content. Our research team conducted in-depth family interviews and focus group discussions across the country. This study addressed questions like:

- How do children really watch television in 2012?
- Is television still a prevalent medium in children’s lives?
- Are kids watching children’s television programs on the Internet?
- How did television shape us as adults and how is it shaping our children today?

In their own words, parents, teenagers and children across Canada answered these questions and more as we attempted to explore the role of media content in young people’s lives in greater detail. The research was based not only on the habitual media use of Canadian families but on the ways in which they interpret, make sense of, and use media during their daily social interactions with family and friends.

In the following sections, we will detail the phase two research objectives and methodology, and then report our findings based on the five regions our researchers visited in their tour across Canada.
Introduction to Phase II Study

In collaboration with the Youth Media Alliance (YMA), the Centre for Youth and Media Studies at the University of Montreal has undertaken an extensive qualitative study that looks at children’s and parents’ appropriation of media and media content in Canada. Based on our knowledge of children’s television programming from the phase one report, the phase two study was designed to look at Canadian families in their home environment and to learn about what parents and children think about today’s children’s television programs.

The results from phase one (2010) showed, among other things, a serious gap in the availability and variety of Canadian television programs targeted expressly at children aged 9 to 12. The study found that all Canadian-made children’s programs represented a mere 2 out of 5 of the programs offered to this age group, and that more than half of all the programs made available for this age group were animations.

In English Canada, only three of the top ten favourite children’s programs for 9-12 year olds were Canadian-made, whereas with the younger 2 to 6 year olds, eight of the top ten children’s programs were either Canadian-made or Canadian co-productions. For French speaking children, the numbers were six of the top ten Canadian children’s productions for the 2 to 6 age range and five of the top ten for the older age group.

Generally speaking, 9 to 12, the beginning of the “tween” years, is a particularly vulnerable age. This is a stage where we see children strive for independence and privacy, develop a heightened interest in social media and overall peer interactions, and broaden their range of personal interests and intellectual capacity. At this stage of childhood, they are still building a sense of community and crave acceptance from many different circles, be it at a peer, family, or civic level. Moreover, navigating this age can be particularly tricky for children as they tend to mature and undergo these changes at different rates and over different lengths of time. It should also be noted that children today are increasingly exposed to numerous screen-based technologies that may impact on the amount of time they watch television. This is relevant to the findings.

In the past, children were loyal viewers of many quality Canadian-made children’s programs. However, they now have access to fewer Canadian children’s programs made especially for them, and they have begun shifting toward viewing non-Canadian programs. In addition, with limited variety and quality of Canadian programs targeting their age group in particular, many children have begun to watch content destined for older viewers, such as general-audience or adult programs, which are not always age appropriate.

Hence, the second phase was designed to interview Canadian families in their everyday settings, in order to learn more about what parents and children aged 9 to 12 think about today’s television programs made specifically for the 9-to-12 age group. Parents, teenagers and children across Canada opened their homes and engaged our researchers in this discussion, as we attempted to explore in greater detail the role of media content in these young people’s lives. In addition to the role of television and its content, children’s use of new technologies, such as the computer, iPad, video game consoles, and cellular phones were also investigated. Therefore, the study looked at each family as a whole, in terms of how its members use media in everyday interactions, how they perceive the impact of television programming on Canadian children, how they evaluate the past and current quality of children’s television, and how they see themselves navigating through the ever-changing media landscape.
Thus, our objectives for this research were to:

- Understand the role television plays in the lives of Canadian youth with a focus on their perception of children's programming;

- Explore young people's perceptions of media content based on their interpretation and use of these images in everyday family and social interactions;

- Better understand the influence of television programming on Canadian children in terms of their values and identity.

Methodology

With these objectives in mind, the Centre for Youth and Media Studies research team, (comprised of four senior researchers and four graduate-level research assistants), developed a series of data collection instruments: 1) in-depth family interviews in participants' own homes; 2) focus groups with, respectively, children, fathers and mothers, which enabled participants to share their ideas among peers; 3) focus groups with teenagers who, having recently stepped out of childhood themselves, had fresh insights into the things that interest kids.

For each instrument, we developed specific interview questions to examine major themes, such as children's television viewing habits (where, when, what, why, with whom?), parental involvement (program selection and regulation), perceptions of children’s programming in Canada, emerging uses of new media. In the focus group interviews, we included a memory elicitation exercise in which participants were asked to reflect on their childhood memories of television programs. By going back in time to elicit childhood memories, this method allowed us to collect valuable information about memorable program characteristics that signify Canadian values and identities. It allowed us to investigate in greater detail how Canadian youth reconstruct these values during their everyday social interactions. Looking at parents' nostalgic memories about childhood programs provided us with vivid images of their lives with television when they were young. It also illustrated the types of programs they desire their children to watch. Further information about the methods and interview questions we used for our phase two research will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Our data collection journey started in Montreal, Quebec, in the fall of 2010. Over the next 18 months, the team travelled all over Canada to meet families in Toronto, Ontario; St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador; Calgary, Alberta; and Vancouver, British Columbia. In each city/region, we conducted five in-house family interviews and four focus group interviews, which meant that we engaged in in-depth discussions with more than 80 different families (over 200 people) about their media use and opinions of children's television. It must be noted that when qualitative in-home interviews are done, we encounter all different types of families, quirks included. It is safe to say that in this particular study, our researchers saw it all. The families we met came from all backgrounds and walks of life, from those on welfare to those who lived in mansions with 3-car garages. Some families greeted us with freshly baked cookies, while others had to move 12 boxes filled with junk to even open the front door. There were some families with as many as six television sets and some with only one. One family in particular kept theirs in the parent's office under lock and key. We met children on the honour role and children with learning disabilities, children who played four instruments and children who built live-size pirate ships in their backyard. In some houses, researchers were greeted by all sorts of furry friends, from your typical dogs and cats to one house with pet rats, and one that even had a miniature pony. We met parents working in all sorts of different industries. There was a teacher, arborist, accountant, mechanic, kayak builder, professional video gamer, homemaker, and government employee, among many others. We met families from diverse family backgrounds, some of whom spoke a second language in the home.
We met all different types of family structures, including some restructured families. The families provided an overall reading of media consumption practices in each region, but each individual family also showed us great diversity in terms of media usage and family culture.

The phase two study thus focused on creating in-depth insights into media content and usage as seen through the eyes of Canadian families themselves and told in their own words. Each instrument was developed to understand specific questions from the perspectives of different groups of participants in each city/region. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Montreal, and the confidentiality of the research participants was ensured.

The basic criterion for selecting families was the children's age. Since we were especially interested in those who were 9 to 12 years old, we worked with a recruiting company in each region to select families based on their children's age and to ensure gender-balance. Each participating family had at least one child in this age group, though there were normally two. Other criteria included that each participating child had to view 10 or more hours of television per week. The participating families also had to have some new technologies in the home.

In-House Family Interviews

To conduct the family interviews, we travelled to five cities and suburbs in different geographic regions: St. John’s in Newfoundland and Labrador, Montreal in Quebec, Toronto in Ontario, Calgary in Alberta and Vancouver in British Columbia. In each city/region, we visited five families by meeting with parents and children in their homes. This allowed us to familiarize ourselves with their everyday media environment and get a feel for their home life. Our researchers also took notes of the technology spatial arrangement within the home: a detail we felt was important as it indicates how the family appropriates their technology. Each interview typically lasted about 60 minutes, and conversations were all video recorded.

The interview started with some simple inventory questions concerning the different forms of media or technologies in the home and where they were located. Specificities regarding cable or channel subscription and Internet connection were also discussed. Next, children were asked about their general media use habits. For example: How do you watch television on a typical day, from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed? Which TV do you use the most? Do you watch TV with your parents? What are your favourite TV programs and why? How do you feel (emotionally) when watching those programs?

In terms of perception of children’s television, parents were asked to name the three best children's television programs for their children that were out there at the time, as well as elaborate on the reasons behind their choice. Hence, they mentioned the title of the program and discussed their preferences in more detail. They were also asked to voice their opinions about the current state of children's programming, such as the availability of programs for 9-12 year olds, programs produced in Canada, the impact of television on their children's lives, and how they mediate/regulate their children's media consumption.

Lastly, children's computer use was examined in terms of the online activities in which they engaged at the time, whether or not they were media multi-taskers, and the various websites they visited on a regular basis. In addition, other uses of new technologies, such as video game consoles, iPods, cellphones and iPads, were explored. At the end, the whole family was also asked to talk about any changes they had noticed in their media use over the past years. This question allowed them to reflect on the ways they incorporated different technologies into their home and changes in the ways they used to communicate, learn or be entertained.
Focus Group Interviews with Fathers and Mothers

In each city/region, we also recruited five additional families to participate in focus group interviews, where fathers, mothers and their children were divided into their own peer groups respectively. Thus, each fathers’ and mothers’ focus group was comprised of 5 people, and there were approximately 6-10 children in the children’s focus group. The focus group interview lasted 1 1/2 hours, and the whole interaction was video-recorded.

The purpose of the focus group was to let participants express themselves freely to their own peers and to comment together on the current state of children’s television. In the focus groups with the fathers and the mothers, the interview started with a memory elicitation exercise to evoke feelings of nostalgia, where participants watched a Chrome Experiments online video to revisit their childhood home/neighbourhood. For this activity, one parent was asked to share his/her childhood address so that, when entered into the website, a music video of the Arcade Fire song “We Used to Wait” would play alongside flashing Google Earth images of the participant’s childhood neighbourhood, street, and finally, home. Participating parents were astonished to see the streets upon which they grew up, which elicited nostalgic childhood memories. Then the moderator read, “Now I’d like you to close your eyes and to imagine yourself going back to your childhood. I want you to think especially hard about the programs you were watching at the age of 9 or 10. Bring those experiences to your mind. Think about those experiences as you are reliving those moments. Imagine how you are feeling, and what you see and hear.”

Parents took time to first reflect then record their memories and the emotions that accompanied them on a piece of paper. In turn, each parent shared his or her own childhood television viewing experiences by responding to questions like: What were your favourite shows? Who were your favourite characters? Can you remember the theme song? When did they air and with whom would you watch these programs? Where would you watch them? What is the most memorable one for you? What emotions did you feel when you watched these programs? After the memory session, participants took a 5-minute break.

The second half of the discussion focused on the present day, and participants were asked to put on their parental hats and reflect on questions similar to the ones used in the family interviews (mainly about their opinions on today’s children’s television, online content, and the best programs for their children). Interestingly, parents spontaneously commented on the values they learned through their childhood programs in comparison with the values to which their own children were being exposed. Finally, a role-playing question asked them to put themselves in the shoes of television producers, and say what children’s programs they would make in that capacity.
Focus Group Interviews with Children

As to the children’s focus group, instead of having a memory elicitation exercise, the children played a drawing game to talk about their favourite television programs. Each child had a turn to draw a picture of his or her favourite program, and the whole group of children then guessed the program and commented on it. This sparked much excitement. The children’s focus group also asked kids to evaluate current popular children’s programs by watching several short clips (e.g., Suite Life of Zack and Cody, SpongeBob SquarePants, Une grenade avec ça?, Kaboum). Sometimes children who liked the shows would spontaneously sing along and many of them were surprisingly opinionated about these programs, eager to share both positive and negative comments. They also responded to the TV-producer role-playing game where they were asked to work together to create a children’s program for their own age group. In this exercise, children were able to choose the style (cartoon or live action), the setting, the types of characters and the plot synopsis. This gave us insights into the preferences of creative young Canadian minds.

Focus Group Interviews with Teenagers

In addition to the participating families, we also recruited five or six teenagers, aged from 13 to 17 years old in each city/region. The teenage focus group was designed to gain more insight into their viewing preferences as they looked back on the programs they used to watch when they were just 9-12 years old. The same evaluation of the current children’s programs (by watching the clips) and the TV-producer role-playing question (since they had lived through it and understood the preferences of younger audiences) were also included. This data allowed us to investigate distinct (memorable) program/character elements as well as important symbolic meanings based on teenage participants’ recommendations for developing future children’s programs.

Data Analysis

Our travel across Canada produced hours of recorded materials, which were meticulously transcribed in either English or French. In total, over 60 hours of data were explored. We analyzed these transcripts by looking for emerging themes, which enabled us to gain in-depth insight into parents’ and children’s media use and opinions. More specifically, we analyzed the thematic aspects of participants’ accounts, while focusing on the aspects that showed how parents, children, and teenagers justified their viewing preferences by frequently referring to their own personal or nostalgic experiences. Hence, we repeatedly read our transcripts and field notes (taken while on the road) to identify and label recurring points of reference in the data. Looking at the regularity with which these points of reference emerged then enabled us to define central themes, thereby capturing families’ and participants’ specific ways of appropriating media use and content in each city/region. From all the data collected and interviews conducted, several important themes have emerged, some of which are uniquely specific to certain regions while others are universally identified trends that span households across the country.

It is also worth noting that no families or focus group participants picked up on or mentioned any gender specific preferences in terms of children’s favourite television shows. Though the question was never directly asked, neither children nor adults spontaneously spoke of any ‘boy shows’ or ‘girl shows,’ or of any children gravitating towards specific programs because of their gender.

The only mention of gender-specific television programs was made by the teenagers...
participating in the focus group interviews, many of whom did so. They remembered there being very specific gender lines drawn between the programs watched at that age. That said, they were the only ones who touched upon this element. Moreover, it was never presented as a negative aspect, more as a matter-of-fact reality of some of the 9 to 12-year-old targeted television shows.

This report is organized as follows: we will present our data, based on each region, and specific themes that emerged from our analysis. This provides an in-depth look at each city, complete with direct quotations and personal examples from the interviewees. We will present our findings from east to west, beginning with St. John’s and concluding with Vancouver.
To conclude, we will summarize our findings and discuss the implications of the phase two research.
Regional Analysis of St. John's, NL
Introduction

The Eastern Canadian data for this study was collected in St. John’s, the capital city of Newfoundland, with a population just shy of 200,000 people. The information presented in this particular chapter was collected over a four day period in June 2011. Overall, the families interviewed in Newfoundland are lower to upper middle-class families with parents aged late 30’s and early 40’s. Each family has at least one child between the ages of 9 and 12 years old, all of whom were born in Canada. The family household annual income ranges from $34-120K. All parents have grown up in Canada, the majority of whom have spent most of their lives in Newfoundland and typically work full or part time blue collar positions. Some have university or college degrees, and vocations vary from construction worker to teacher, healthcare technician to retail manager.

The following chapter will present a portrait of an archetypal Newfoundland family that best embodies all those interviewed and then proceed to outline the typical media habits and trends that emerged from the east coast portion of our data analysis. The themes will be divided into categories which shed light on three different angles to consider when exploring the question at hand: a family’s perspective, a child’s perspective and an adolescent’s perspective. As will be the custom in this report, the names of the families presented in this chapter have been altered to protect participant confidentiality and provide anonymity.

The Carlson’s

Welcome to the Carlson’s, an upper-middle class family living in the suburbs of St. John’s. The mother, Lisa, is a local middle school teacher while the father, John, works as a full time retail manager. Both parents are in their early forties. Together, their annual family income counts somewhere between $100,000 and $120,000. Joining them in the interview is their 11 year old son, Kyle; an intelligent and well-spoken young interviewee who is also an avid musician and plays three instruments. The couple has an elder daughter of 14 who is not present during the interview, though from the information provided by the parents, we can deduce that she is academically successful.

Everyone gathers around the kitchen table where the family readily shares the details of their routine media habits during the interview. For the record, this family owns four television sets: there is one in the main living room and another in the basement rec room while both the parents and the 14 year old girl each have a set in their respective bedrooms. Kyle tends to use the first two televisions the most to watch his three favourite programs: Mythbusters, Phineas and Ferb and Star Wars the Clone Wars.

A typical weekday in the Carlson household begins with Kyle and his father eating breakfast together in the living room while watching the Family Channel (a ritual that will be further explored later on in the chapter). After school, Kyle returns home and tends to spend most afternoons playing outdoors with friends in the neighbourhood but will sometimes come indoors and watch television or do homework before dinner. While the parents prepare supper, he and his sister enjoy watching Family Channel programs in the main room. Evening meals at the Carlson household are always spent either in the main room or in the basement watching television together as a family. They will typically watch prerecorded adult sitcoms such as The Big Bang Theory and America’s Funniest Home Videos as well as adult dramas such as Castle. After supper,
The family will sometimes continue watching television together, usually shows such as Myth Busters and other Discovery Channel programs which are family favourites. For the most part, however, the children have extra-curricular activities starting at 6:30 pm four nights during the week, leaving little time for evening viewing. Weekends are a different routine, when Kyle admits to watching less television, aside from the Family Channel Saturday morning programs, since he prefers to spend the weekends playing outside.

In terms of parental participation, both Lisa and John are actively involved in regulating their children’s media use and have set in place certain rules to control this intake. For example, they limit their son’s video game play time to weekends only, the exception being if he practices his musical instruments for an hour daily. They have also installed a password-protected parental control feature on the HD television in the basement since they are not always around to monitor what their children are watching. That being said, John makes a point to explain why at times it is important to bend the rules when it comes to keeping their children equal among their peers. When discussing his son’s affinity for video games, the father admits that although Halo may not be age appropriate, he allows his son to play so as not to be left out amongst his friends at school who are all avid gamers.

At times, the Carlson parents worry that certain shows made specifically for children of Kyle’s age are too dramatic and do not contain enough knowledge-based content. To remedy the situation, they like to watch as much television with their children as possible, usually programs broadcasted on the Discovery Channel, in order to monitor what they are watching as well as spend quality time together.

### Media Habits in St. John’s

With respect to television consumption, the St. John’s children report watching 10 or more hours of television per week. That being said, the children also spend a good portion of their leisure time outdoors, playing with friends in the neighbourhood. Children typically report watching some television before school and habitually during dinner with family as well as in the evenings. There are much less instances of television consumption after school and on weekends when they tend to spend more time outdoors, although this is contingent on the weather.

Though there is an average of 3.8 televisions per household reported amongst the families interviewed in St. John’s (4 out of 5 of whom subscribe to satellite or digital cable), there appears to be quite a bit of co-viewing, or family members watching television together, taking place on a regular basis. This generally occurs during evening mealtimes when families attest to watching more adult-centered programs together while eating supper. The 2 out of 5 families who own Personal Video Recorders (more commonly known as the PVR) choose to pre-record their favourite programs to watch during mealtimes. It is during the evenings and mornings before school that parents and children normally enjoy watching their child’s favourite programs shown on Family Channel, YTV or the Discovery network. There are also, however, instances of children watching television alone, since one third of the children interviewed have a television set in their own bedroom.

While each family’s television consumption pattern is relatively similar, computer and internet use vary from home to home. The families interviewed in St. John’s have an average of 2.2 computers per household, meaning there is quite a lot of sharing done amongst family members. Each family typically has one main computer located in a central area that is available for all
to use, though some children report having their own laptops and therefore have more freedom and mobility to use the computer and internet wherever they please.

In terms of computer habits and online activities, children frequent a wide variety of websites, the most common of which is Facebook. In fact, 4 out of 5 of the Newfoundland children aged 9-12 interviewed for the study have Facebook, some of whom claim to access their accounts multiple times a day. As we will see in other regions, the St. John's children who use Facebook and other social media websites vary in age, but most are older, in the 11 and 12 year old age bracket. The younger children have yet to sign up for an account or, if they have, do not access it as frequently as the older children. Other popular sites include MSN, online game sites and YouTube. Few children report watching television programs online.

As for other electronics, each household averages 2.4 gaming consoles (i.e. Nintendo Wii, PlayStation, DSI, etc.). Amongst the children in the households, 4 out of 5 own a cell phone and have an iPod. Only one child to speak of owns a Smartphone, which she uses from time to time to access Facebook and the internet, in addition to all of the regular phone functions.

**From a Family’s Perspective**

From all the data collected, several important themes have emerged and resonate among the participating families in St. John's. The following is a detailed account of these themes, highlighted with examples from the five family interviews and four focus groups that were conducted.

**“We tend to watch a lot of those shows together”**

As previously mentioned, not only is there a high instance of family co-viewing amongst the St. John's interviewees but also active viewing on the part of the parents. The distinction between having a viewing awareness about a program and actively viewing a program is evident in the way in which parents are able to explain and discuss the shows their children are watching. This demonstrates the level at which they are actively paying attention to the programs and the content being shown. Co-viewing is the physical act of joining your children while they are watching television, or watching together as a family.

Evidence of parents actively co-viewing children’s television programs in St. John’s with their kids is seen throughout all of the interviews, especially since most parents in St. John’s have no trouble listing their children’s favourite program names, characters, scheduling and even recounting the plotlines of past episodes. Moreover, many parents admit to enjoying the same programs as their children, which no doubt makes co-viewing a pleasurable pastime for the whole family. Take the Doherty family as an example, where the mother, father and 12-year-old daughter explain why they enjoy watching Hannah Montana all together:

**INT** Do you watch it with her?

**G12** Sometimes.
Dad Sometimes.

((Everyone laughs))

Mom A lot of the times. He loves Hannah Montana. Hehe.

INT Hehe.

Dad Well she was born on my birthday, the 23rd of November, so that gives me reason to want to watch it.

Mom But it’s a good family show.

Dad It is

Mom I like watching Hannah Montana too, it’s good, you know?

The same father elaborates further on this point, stating how much he enjoys spending this ‘family time’ together as it is reminiscent of his childhood when his family practiced a similar tradition:

I enjoy watching that too, and it’s just those programs, you know, like, I mean like Hannah Montana, like those programs. I enjoy sitting back, you know. I like comedy and that and they bring out the – it’s Family, whereby we can all sit around and watch it, which is great cause I grew up, my family was close, so it’s nice to be able to sit around like that and enjoy. I laugh. So does the family.

As the above quote confirms, the researchers feel that the act of watching television together as a family is a tradition parents have carried over from their youth. In fact, many of the parents interviewed in St. John’s mention feelings of nostalgia for their childhood spent gathered around the one television set watching programs with their entire family. These emotions seem to have transferred over into their adult life, where today many parents make a conscious effort to continue this ritual and spend time co-viewing television with their children. One excellent example of this is seen in the mothers focus group when a mother recounts how she has carried on this tradition not just with family co-viewing in general, but even with specific programs from her past that she now takes pleasure in sharing with her daughter:

Highway to Heaven, I’d watch with my mom all the time, just me and my mom cause my sister was in bed by the time it came on. And we’d sit there with a box of tissues between us and we’d be snotting and bawling and crying our eyes out. But now I’ve got the seasons and I watch it with my daughter, so that’s something that’s stayed.

While co-viewing is an excellent way for parents to spend time with their children, it is also beneficial and much appreciated by the children themselves. Many of the children in St. John’s mentioned how much they enjoy watching television programs with their parents as it way to connect and bond over a shared enthusiasm for certain programs. The mother and 11 year old daughter from the Forrester family enjoy watching Oprah and Dr. Phil together after school – a time that is shared between just the two of them. The girl explains how “we cry during Oprah”, giving the interviewers an intimate glimpse into this special mother-daughter pastime. Further along, the same mother and daughter discuss other shows they watch together and why, according to the girl, this time spent together is so important:

Mom Hannah Montana we watch together.

G11 Yeah.

Mom Like a lot of her shows, we enjoy.

INT Ok.

Mom Especially the twins on the boat.

G11 Suite Life on Deck.

Mom Yes.

INT Oh yeah. Yeah. That’s a popular one. And do you enjoy it when your parents watch your shows with you?

G11 Yeah.

INT Why? Why do you like that?

G11 Well we just get to like spend time together.
The Carlson’s offer an excellent example of how each parent can co-view a specific show with their child. For the children, these shows translate to important time shared with each parent. For example, the father and 11 year old boy like to sit down together and watch Mythbusters on the Discovery Channel because they both enjoy the scientific aspect of the program. On the other hand, the mother and same boy enjoy watching America’s Funniest Home Videos and Phineas and Ferb since they both enjoy the humour. Though they may not always watch television together as an entire family, the act of viewing different programs with different parents symbolizes a special bond each parent shares with their son.

Another benefit of co and active viewing for both parents and children alike is the opportunity that arises to initiate a dialogue about certain issues presented in television content. Typically seen with older children, the parents find that watching specific shows together acts as a gateway to broach uncomfortable adolescent topics that are otherwise difficult to discuss. The father from the Hannigan family explains why he feels it is important to watch Degrassi with his two 12 year old twin daughters:

**INT** And you were saying how Degrassi sometimes, it makes you a little squirmish

**Dad** Cause of the adolescent subject matter that it touches on. Getting into about like sexuality and stuff like that. But that’s it.

**INT** So it doesn’t bother you if they’re exposed to it?

**Dad** Uh I didn’t like the part where I was sitting down there watching one day and there were two boys kissing, that kind of made me squeamish and uncomfortable but they got a big laugh out of it and I got uncomfortable about it but.

**G12-1** [Mmm]
**G12-2** [Mmm]

Though there is a significant amount of co-viewing that occurs, it is important to reiterate that the same families own on average 3.8 televisions per household, creating an opportunity for individual viewing as well. One very interesting excerpt worth noting is a comment made by the McLeary’s. The mother and daughter explain how their entire family enjoys watching American Idol, even though they normally will not watch it all together in the same room. Though the 11 year old girl will watch with her mother, the rest of the family will watch while spread out in different rooms around the house.

**Mom** Hehe.

**Dad** That’s the way it goes, I suppose, you know, but I don’t – we don’t talk to them much about that stuff so it’s nice for them to get a bit of exposure. And sometimes when it’s on and gets on the subject matter, I try to um explain or narrate it and that gets on their nerves a bit sometimes right, I don’t think they want to hear it, but anyways, it makes us talk and think about things.

**Mom** We’re more into reality shows, TV shows like that? American Idol, we’re all into that.

**G11** Yes. Everyone. Like my sister, my other sister, me and my mom and dad, we all watch that.

**Mom** We all watch it.

**INT** And you like that, when everyone watches the same show?

**G11** Yeah well sometimes we don’t all watch it in the same place. Like,

**Mom** It’s on, but we’ll all watch it in different rooms.

**INT** Oh really?

**G11** My sister and my dad would watch it right here, we’d go up in my mom’s room, me and my mom. That being said, while they may not all sit together in the same room to watch,
it is made clear to the interviewers that this specific program is an important part of ‘family time’ and a common interest they all share.

To offer a possible explanation for this heightened level of co and active viewing among the parents in St. John’s, our research team feels this may be directly linked to the types of occupations typically held by the adults interviewed. The parents in St. John’s appear to have more free time in the evenings to engage directly with their children without distractions from work. Moreover, the average parent in St. John’s does not have the same time-commitment to daily work commutes as in Toronto, which also may cut into this family time. Nevertheless, the heightened level of co-viewing seen in St. John’s may very simply be attributed to a different family culture and lifestyle that is distinct to this region.

“He’s usually out there till supper”

Though the families interviewed in St. John’s tend to use media on a large scale, the children appear to maintain an even balance between media use and outdoor play. While children of the same age in other regions of Canada rarely mention time spent outdoors playing with peers, all of the Newfoundland children interviewed mention their outdoor play habits on more than one occasion. When questioned about their daily television watching habits, the children routinely answer with roughly the same response as this boy of 11 from the Carlson family:

INT Ok. And just describe a little bit your average day. weekday. Like, you arrive here at 3:30 or whatever and you’ll eat a little bit of a snack?

B11 Sometimes. And if it’s a nice day out, when my mom gets home, she uh – I go over to the subdivision across the road and play with my friends. Sometimes I come back and watch some TV and just rest.

INT Till supper?

B11 Yep.

Mom Well, and usually he’s out there till supper.

It is worth noting that most of the children interviewed would usually mention outside play before watching TV as an after school or weekend activity. What’s more, all answers were given without prompting from their parents — an indication to the interviewers that this is a routine of normalcy and one that the children generally enjoy.

A possible explanation for this difference correlates directly with the province in which these children live. The parents in Newfoundland continually mention the level of trust they feel towards their neighbourhood, stating that it is an ideal environment for raising children. They feel ‘safe’ when their children play outdoors because of this strong sense of community they share with their neighbours. Many parents have also grown up practicing the tradition of ‘outdoor family time’ and feel it is important to continue this ritual with their children today. The Doherty mother, who has lived in Edmonton (AB) and Dartmouth (NS) in the past, explains the difference in comfort level she feels about letting her children play outside now that she lives in St. John’s:

And when I lived in Edmonton, my oldest daughter was 5. And I can tell you for 100% sure, (girl12) wouldn’t have had the freedom to be outside. I wouldn’t let her have the freedom to be outside as much as she is, living in Edmonton as I do here. Just because of. I think, the crime and you know, there’s much more to be afraid of there, I think, hehe. From a parent’s point of view. With the kids. Last year we lived in Dartmouth. Or the year before last. And even there, it’s quite similar to Newfoundland but even there I was a little more hesitant because you hear a lot more about, you know, drive by shootings and you know? You don’t hear about that here. So I’m much
more comfortable with letting her – she doesn’t roam free, I always know where she is and that kind of thing but – and we live on a very busy road here, but still, I’m not as concerned with her being outside here in Newfoundland as I would be in Nova Scotia and definitely in Alberta.

It is clear from the above testimonial and those of other parents that the tightly knit sense of community and safety in St. John’s is an important and cherished part of life in this Eastern Province.

“Your kid can watch it 24 hours a day – you know they’re not seeing something that is inappropriate for their age”

Of all the networks broadcasted in Newfoundland, the Family Channel is by far the most watched by children and most trusted by parents as reported by the families in our study. When discussing which networks parents prefer their children to watch, they unanimously felt that the Family Channel and the programs they air are the safest and most entertaining for their children. Below is an excerpt from the focus group conducted with Newfoundland mothers as they discuss the reasoning behind their network preference:

Mom5 But I say, like, now for the age range, for (girl 9’s) age range, the best ones are definitely Zoey 101, ICarly, That’s So Raven, stuff like that.

INT So I guess you can say that -

Mom5 Family Channel
INT The Family Channel basically...
Mom2 Yeah. And Teletoon
Mom5 Definitely over YTV, yeah.
INT Now why over YTV?
Mom4 I mean, Spongebob’s the only one I let them watch. That and Fairly Odd Parents. Usually though I’m flicking it off.
INT Ok. Any reason why?
Mom4 Just the shows sometimes, there’s one I caught (my daughter) watching one time, cause it came on after Spongebob, and I came out and it was something about teens. I don’t even know what it was, but it was something about actual teenagers in cartoons.
INT Oh, 6teen? They’re in a mall?
Mom4 Yeah. So I said “no”. I didn’t like that at all. I don’t want her to watch that.
INT Ok. Do you have the same sort of feelings about – is the Family Channel one of those channels that –

Mom2 Definitely
Mom4 You know, you don’t mind. You can sit down and your kid can watch it 24 hours a day. It wouldn’t make a difference, you know they’re not seeing something that’s inappropriate for their age.
INT So would you say almost a level of trust with Family Channel that –

((everyone nods))
Mom1 Yeah
Mom2 [Yeah
Mom4 [Yeah
Mom5 For sure.

These parents not only feel that the Family Channel broadcasts responsible programming, but that these television shows are the most age appropriate for their children. They mention shows
such as Hannah Montana, Corey in the House, Suite Life on Deck and Wizards of Waverly Place as being “trustworthy” shows that parents feel safe letting their children watch unsupervised.

They feel that this network is sensible because of its age-appropriate programs and entertainment value and it seems that much more appealing when compared to other children’s networks. The parents and boy in the Carlson family unanimously agree that other networks are less appropriate for his age group, even if they are cartoon networks that typically target children and young adults:

INT What do you think overall about children’s programs. The state of children’s programs?
Mom I think there’s some weird cartoons out there.
Dad Yeah.
Mom Like I dunno, they’re – they’re not the channels the kids tend to watch anyways. But as you’re flicking through, you find –
Dad I find, actually, you mentioned Teletoon, and kids don’t watch a lot of Teletoon but I find a lot of uh, if you glance upon it, it’s actually disturbing.
B11 It is.
Dad The humour is pretty crude.

The strong opinions these parents have formulated regarding appropriate networks and programs tie directly into the previous discussion of co and active viewing. Because parents in St. John’s are actively watching programs with their children, they are able to judge for themselves what is appropriate and what is not, thus enabling them to censor which programs they allow their children to watch. A further example of this can be seen in the adolescent focus group where all six teenagers admitted their parents did not allow them to watch The Simpsons when they were 10 years old.

“The Canadian shows say ‘eh’”

When asked if families see a difference between American and Canadian produced television programs and, if so, which do they prefer, the answer generally lacks a strong opinion. Though parents admit to enjoying adult Canadian programs such as Republic of Doyle, both their children and themselves have a hard time differentiating between Canadian and American produced children’s shows. For the most part, the origin of the program they watch is never an issue or cause for concern. As the Doherty mother states, when speaking on her 12 year old daughter’s behalf in response to the question,

I don’t really think she knows where they’re originating from, so I don’t think she’d be able to answer that question.

Some children are able to distinguish between the two production origins by small clues, such as the 11 year old Carlson boy who thinks that Canadian programs use the word ‘eh’ and the 11 year old Forrester girl who remembers being confused when watching a Thanksgiving special of one of her favourite programs that took place in November. When asked to choose which one they would prefer watching, the children are divided. Some choose American-made television since their favourite programs are already produced in the United States while others choose Canadian, but only if they are able to produce programs of equal or superior quality to those made in the US.

The Carlson mother is a middle school teacher who sees first-hand the influence American television has over her students, particularly in terms of politics, geography and current events:

INT But you said the kids in your class – in terms of – at least in terms of knowledge, they seem more knowledgeable about current events on the American side than-
Mom Yes, absolutely. And like I said, prior to this federal election, I would say I don’t
know, if not half wouldn’t have known who the Prime Minister of Canada was. Whereas I’d say about 95% would have known that Barack Obama was President of the United States.

Most parents feel that, if possible, it would be beneficial to have more Canadian children’s programming available for the 9 to 12 year olds because they could only name American such programs currently being aired. That being said, both parents and children alike agree that they place more importance on content quality than production origin.

“It’s the parent away from the parent”

It is indisputable that television plays a major role in the lives of the families interviewed in St. John’s. Discovering the different types of roles each family assigns the television is a particularly interesting part of the analysis since roles can sometimes vary even between individual family members. Universally, the families use it as a means of entertainment, or to “take away time” as one 11 year old puts it. It also plays the role of conversation initiator, a shared common interest, an educator and a reason to spend time together as a family. There are, however, other somewhat unconventional roles that television plays in these households.

The 12 year old Doherty girl uses television in her bedroom as a nightlight. She has grown accustomed to muting the television and leaving it on all throughout the night while she sleeps. According to her mother, she takes comfort in the light given off by the screen. While she is the only one to speak of who keeps television on all night long, many of the families interviewed admit to keeping the television on throughout the day, even if there is no one around to watch. In this sense we see television taking on an omnipresent role in the household. Even when it is not at the foreground of someone’s attention, its endless presence in the house signifies its ubiquity and thus, in a way, its newfound role as a replacement for the radio.

The Doherty father sees television as a learning tool and role model to teach his child appropriate social behaviour. He goes even further to call television a “parent away from the parent”, a sort of learning tool for their 12 year old daughter when she doesn’t feel comfortable speaking to her parents about certain peer issues she may be facing. According to him, television (more specifically the programs broadcasted on Family Channel) acts as a model or guide for demonstrating good social behaviour and showing children how to resolve problems with peers. They also reassure children that they are not alone in facing these problems, that everyone deals with the same universal issues. In this respect, the father allot a portion of his parental duties to the television, entrusting it with the important role of helping to raise his daughter and teach her valuable life lessons.

For the Carlson’s, the habitual morning viewing of Family Channel during breakfast is more than just a form of entertainment. It has become an indicator of time and scheduling. The father and son rely on the order of the morning programs to know when they must leave for school. In this
From a Child’s Perspective

“Sometimes I go on my computer at the same time”

Media multitasking is a term used to describe the act of using multiple forms of media at once. In the case of these children, most say they multitask while watching TV by using other forms of media on a regular basis (i.e. laptop, internet, chat with friends, play DSi, text on cell phone, etc). It should be noted that in terms of media multitasking, there is a varying degree of frequency amongst those who do so which is typically reflective of the child’s ages.

For the older children (11 and 12), media multitasking has become the norm, as we see with the twin 12 year old Hannigan girls who do it “100% of the time”. They will habitually use their laptop to chat with friends online while texting other friends on their cell phones, all the while watching television.

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Their father offers his own interpretation of his daughters multitasking habits.

Dad What happened with the girls, I noticed that she can be on Facebook, on her computer, the TV can be on and like I said, if I go to change the channel, they won’t let me change the channel, I say “you wasn’t even paying attention to what was on”.

Mom Yeah.

Dad And every now and again I’ll notice that they’ll stop on the Facebook and then they’ll start texting.

On the other end of the media multitasking spectrum sit the younger children, aged 9, 10 and 11, who tend to focus more on only one activity at a time. The three 11 year olds interviewed in St. John’s all give roughly the same answers when discussing media multitasking. The boy will sometimes play with Lego while in front of the television while the two girls are more likely to colour or read and sometimes send text messages during commercials. Regardless of what they are doing, the three children make it clear that television is still at the forefront of their attention.

It should also be noted that children are asked if there is ever a show they watch that is so entertaining it warrants their entire attention, so much so that they will stop media multitasking when it is on and focus solely on television. We found that among all children who admit to media multitasking, all of them have at least one favourite show for which they will drop everything and just watch. The 12 year old Doherty girl lists the shows during which she will not multitask and the reasons why they receive her undivided attention:

The children each named one or two programs that require their full attention and therefore during which they will never multitask. The list includes Star Wars the Clone Wars, Degrassi, Instant Star, All My Children, ER, One Life To Live, Criminal Minds and Hannah Montana.

“Oh, I love that show”
Though at times it is difficult for children to describe how certain shows make them feel, most are able to express their rationale as to why they prefer one show over the rest. The following are excerpts of children explaining their rationales. The first one is from the 11 year old McLeary girl as she becomes animated when describing her four favourite programs, Hannah Montana, Suite Life of Zack and Cody, Good Luck Charlie and Shake It Up.

INT Ok, and why do you like those shows?
G11 Cause they’re really funny and they’re like-
Mom She says ‘like’ a lot.
G11 They’re fun to watch and um they’re exciting and they like take away time and stuff like that.
INT And how do you feel when you watch them?
G11 Happy. Hehe.

The 11 year old Carlson boy shares similar enthusiasm when describing his favourite program, a cartoon called Star Wars the Clone Wars.

B11 Uh I dunno, I just find it really exciting and stuff.
INT It’s exciting?
B11 Yeah.
INT Anything else? The characters or –
B11 Well, sometimes I just want to like figure out when the next one comes on because it’s usually like ‘to be continued’. That’s usually all of them.
INT So you can’t miss one without missing a little bit of the action.
B11 Yeah.
INT You said you were excited a little bit?
B11 Yeah. And anxious to see what’s next or something.
INT That’s it, eh?
B11 What will happen.
INT The “to be continued”
B11 Yeah.
INT Hehe. So there’s kind of a suspense in it, eh?
B11 Yeah.

Offering a deeper explanation for why she loves her favourite program, the 11 year old Forrester girl recognizes the positive influence Hannah Montana has had on herself. She feels the show is inspirational and sets a good example for how to ‘live out your dreams’. She also draws many parallels between the main character and herself, such as a mutual love for singing.

INT And how did those shows you mentioned, your favourite shows, how did they make you feel when you watched them?
G11 Happy
INT Yeah? How so?
“I like that channel the best cause it’s about people my age”

While children may watch other shows on different networks, the Family Channel appears to be the ‘default’, or ‘go to’ channel when they turn on the television. It also plays host to the majority of their favourite programs, the most commonly mentioned being Hannah Montana, Suite Life of Zack and Cody, Wizards of Waverly Place and That’s So Raven. The 12 year old Doherty girl in particular, who keeps her television in her bedroom on but muted all night long, confirms that it is the channel that is always kept on:

Mom  Well, she keeps her TV on all night. It’s a habit she’s gotten into. But she puts the volume way down. She just likes the light from it hehe. So I think when she wakes, she’s probably watching it but not hearing it for a while.

INT  Ok. What channel is it on?
G12  Um Family. Yeah. And I watch YTV and stuff.

INT  So, when you go to bed, your TV is on but the sound is off?
Mom  Yes.

She then offers her an explanation as to why she prefers watching it over others:

I kind of watch the same channels cause every other channel is not really for my age. I find Family the best one cause it’s about people my age and they make up shows about it and stuff.

The Doherty girl is not the only child who admits to watching this channel more often than other networks. The 11 year old McLeary daughter recounts how the main television set in the living room is almost always tuned into this channel, since, as her mother reaffirms, “she controls the TV down here”. Her reasoning for liking these programs is because they are “really funny”, “exciting” and they “take away time”. Though they all prefer it for different reasons, it appears to be the most watched network among the children interviewed in St. John’s.

“One day, it just never came on no more”

One subject that is quick to bring emotions to the surface is favourite television programs that have been cancelled and are no longer broadcasted. Often times, some of the most popular shows will cease producing new episodes but replay old episodes, although sometimes these will only play in late-night programming slots that are inaccessible to children or taken off the air all together. Though these emotions typically manifest as anger or sadness, the children in St. John’s are very
open to sharing their feelings on this subject matter. The McLeary girl openly discusses some of her favourite shows that have been taken off the air and how frustrated she felt when they were no longer broadcasted. In the instance below, she expresses her irritation over the cancellation of Zoey 101 and That’s So Raven.

INT How did you feel when those shows went off the air?
G11 Really mad. I loved them shows.
Mom She was sad.
G11 Like one day, it just never came on no more.
INT Oh no!
G11 I liked them shows.

The 11 year old Forrester girl shares the same feelings of frustration over the cancellation of one of her favourite programs, Smart Guy.

INT Ok so Suite Life and That’s So Raven? Those would be your two main favourite shows? There’s not a third one that you could add?
G11 Well it used to come on but it doesn’t any more, Smart Guy.
INT Ok, Smart Guy. And they – they took it off?
G11 Yeah.
INT Oh, that’s disappointing. How did you feel when they took it off?
G11 I wasn’t very happy.
INT No? Why?
G11 I just loved to watch it and it was so funny.

The girl mentions that she will now go online to watch old episodes of Smart Guy and another program called Dave the Barbarian on YouTube, but does so only because watching them on television is no longer an option. Besides going online to watch episodes taken off air, none of the children in St. John’s spend much time watching television online. In fact, the only mention of this activity comes from the McLeary girl who will sometimes search her favourite clips from Hannah Montana on YouTube and rewatch them over and over. Aside from that, the children much prefer to watch television on the actual television set. In terms of broadcaster websites, there is some talk of venturing on family.ca and ytv.ca to play games, though not much. The 12-year-old Doherty girl mentions how she used to frequent those sites a year or two ago but finds herself visiting them less and less now that she has found other online gaming sites to play on.

Children take on the role of television producer

“There needs to be hot geeks in the show”

One activity in the children’s focus group encourages them to assume the role of television producers and brainstorm the ultimate children’s television program. The children in St. John’s decide to have their television program be set in Canada, specifically on a beach in Newfoundland. The show would focus on two siblings, a girl and a boy, who have survived a plane crash and are now stranded on a remote beach. Each 20 minute episode would focus on their different attempts at being rescued. They would like to see a ‘Tom and Jerry’ style rivalry between the boy and girl character which would allow children to sympathize with one or the other, depending on their sex.

The children also feel that humour is the most important element of a television show, much more important than having knowledge-based
content as they worry that a show cannot be funny if it is educational. The only educational aspects they would like to see included in their program is island natives teaching the siblings survival skills. As one 9 year old girl says, "Not like teach teach but they teach them how to do it. Like educational but not." Another 9 year old feels that having "hot geeks" in the show is essential. When asked how its' viewers should feel after watching the program, one girl states they should feel like "they really want to write a letter to the people that invented it".

Some of the children in the family interviews expressed ideas for new programs and frustrations with current television productions. When asked what kind of program she would make for children her age if she were a producer, the 12 year old Doherty girl gives a very detailed and well thought out answer. Her suggestions seem to mimic the Family Channel formula of live action programs focusing on the lives of pre-teens, their family and friends, and the social issues children typically face at that age. She is very insistent on the program being live action over cartoon since it is more realistic.

INT What would be the storyline?
G12 Um well, I'd want it to be a good show for my age because I'd want people to like it so I'd put like real actors in it and I'd make up a problem, like maybe me and my friends got into an argument or something and my friend's mom and dad and my mom and dad talked about it and then we like talk it out, like cause I find it really cool that they – all the shows are about how people can fix their problems and they know how to work it out and the people who are watching it, they do the same thing. So it helps.

INT So things – things that happen in everyday life?
G12 Yeah. Like in ordinary yeah.

INT Things that happen – that could happen to you?
G12 Yeah, like real stuff.

INT And see how that's resolved?
G12 Yeah.

The 11 year old McLeary girl has strong feelings towards the state of today's children's television that are not so much suggestions for producers as much as general observations and complaints. She and her mother are both of the same opinion that there are currently too many new shows on television. They feel these shows are being created too quickly and without much thought or attention given to detail; that they are of lower quality and less original than the older Family Channel shows. She feels they are "running out of ideas" for new shows, making them not nearly as entertaining.

Mom Yeah, everyday there's a new show. Every single day.
G11 Yeah and they're not good at all.
INT Oh no?
G11 They're not good. Like Shake It Up's sort of new but that's a really good show. It's funny. But like now the newest shows coming out say like now, like in a week, they're getting really bad and they're just like running out of stuff to do, I think?

INT Mm hm
G11 And running out of shows to make because they're all about like something because like Wizards of Waverly Place, that's like about wizards and they don't want to make no more about wizards so like they're trying to think of something new.

Mom That's what she finds, she says "Mom there's way too many shows" she thinks that they actually are running out of ideas to put into shows and she finds they're not getting as good.

G11 Yeah, they're like taking away shows that people really like, like Zoey 101 was like my favourite show ever, and
now it don’t come on no more. And that was a really good show, and now they’re adding weird show.

From an Adolescent’s Perspective

The group of Newfoundland adolescents interviewed in a focus group can provide us with a unique point of view concerning the state of children’s television. Seeing as how not long ago they themselves were of the target study age, the teenagers recount vivid memories of their childhood television watching experience and draw comparisons and critiques to today’s programming with ease. They provide an interesting reflection on the quality, appropriateness and entertainment value of current children’s television from a more relatable and closer perspective than that of the parents.

At the beginning of the focus group, the teens are asked to think back to when they were 10 years old and their experience with television at that age. All the participants remembered watching television with their family. They admit that the mention of their favourite shows like Hannah Montana and SpongeBob SquarePants brings back fond memories of time spent with their parents and siblings. On an individual note, Hannah Montana was especially important to some of the girls because it “gave (them) something to look forward to, growing up”. They also remember acting out scenes from these programs with friends at school and in the home. In terms of parental mediation, none of the teenagers were allowed to watch The Simpsons, Family Guy or programs that came on too late in the evening. One girl recalls arguing with her father every week over extending her bedtime so she could watch Totally Spies at 9pm.

Interestingly enough, the majority of the adolescents interviewed admit to still watching old reruns of these same programs. For the girls, they continue to watch Hannah Montana for the entertainment factor. For the boys, they like to watch SpongeBob for the nostalgia. One girl in particular explains that watching Hannah Montana now has her re-examining past episodes from a different perspective. When she was younger, she looked up to the main character and found her a source of inspiration, whereas now she can relate to the main character as a peer, making the show “much more interesting to watch”.

In terms of children’s programming today, the teens feel that kids are watching many of the same shows they did at that age. While there are new programs being broadcasted, the teenagers with younger siblings observe them watching Hannah Montana, iCarly and SpongeBob SquarePants on a regular basis. When the subject of Family Guy is broached, all the teenage interviewees agreed that, although they personally enjoyed the program, it was not suitable for children aged 9 to 12. Moreover, they would not feel comfortable allowing their own siblings to watch it.

There are two points touched upon by the adolescents which they find to be very important aspect of children’s television. The first is the distinction between boy and girl programs, or the categorization of television shows by what is watched by which sex. They feel there is very little cross-over between one’s sex and the shows they watch. They explain that if someone does enjoy watching a specific show from the other gender’s category, it should never be said out loud for fear of being teased. The second is the importance of having a catchy theme song for the opening title credits. The teenagers are proud to say they still remember the words to all their favourite programs opening song and feel that a great title tune makes a show that much more appealing. As one girl puts it, “it’s an accomplishment to be able to sing and know every word.”

The final activity in the focus group is collaborating on the development of a new
television program for children aged 9 to 12. The teenagers were torn between producing a cartoon or live action show and thus decided to make two separate programs. In terms of cartoons, they felt the show should be humorous yet unrealistic and take place in an exotic location, such as the inside of a volcano or on a snowflake. The characters should be ‘creature-like’ and reflect the environment in which the show takes place (i.e. elves if the show is set on a snowflake). For the live action program, the show should feature a mix of same aged and older children, giving the audience certain characters to relate to and others to look up to. The show should have a limited number of adults and present a mix of real life situations and supernatural events (i.e. an adventurous storyline or character leading a double life, similar to the current programs on Family Channel). The adolescents feel it is important to set the show in a high school so the storyline can touch upon social issues such as bullying, judgement and peer issues. This also gives the young audience something to look forward to and gets them excited for their impending transition to secondary school. Finally, few of the teenagers felt the country in which the show was set served a purpose. According to them, having a show take place in Canada over the United States was of little importance, as long as it was set in an ‘exciting’ location they would like to visit.

Final Thoughts

Representing the easternmost region in this study, St. John’s brings an enchanting east-coast feel to everyday life in terms of media appropriation. While the families interviewed here do share some commonalities with other regions in Canada (as we will see in subsequent chapters), it is not just their half hour time difference that sets them apart. Through our qualitative interviews, we have observed the characteristics that make them a very unique and traditional community which allows them to stand apart from the rest with regards to some of their media and television habits. Out of all that has been presented in this chapter, we feel there are certain traits that highlight the distinctiveness of this particular Maritime region, such as a strong emphasis on the importance of family co-viewing but also the need for adopting an even balance between extra-curricular activities, outdoor play and technology use. The level of active viewing and participation on the part of parents, in terms of watching children’s television programs is the highest seen across the nation. Although St. John’s is the smallest and most isolated city in this report, the participants are by no means lacking in technology and are on par, if not exceeding, other regions in sheer number of electronics in the home. While we recognize the importance they put on balancing television and outdoor life, we must also stress that the families interviewed in St. John’s appear to watch the most television on the whole, compared with the other four regions. They are the most likely to keep the television on all day long, even if no one is there to watch. In St. John’s we also find the highest number of our families interviewed who eat dinner together in front of the television on a regular basis. It is clear that, for the families we encountered in St. John’s, television is still very much present in their daily lives.

In the following chapter, we head to our Québécois region of study, Montréal, to continue our look at television and media habits among Canadian children and families. There we will explore their interesting and unique perspective on the phenomenon at hand.
Regional Analysis of Montréal, QC
Introduction

Representing the francophone population in our nation-wide study are the Québécois families interviewed in Montréal, Québec. The city itself ranks as the largest francophone city in Canada and is second only to Toronto as the largest Canadian city with an estimated metropolitan area population of 3.8 million inhabitants. The five in-house family interviews from this portion of the study were conducted with families within the city and its suburban areas. On the whole, these families ranged mostly from lower-middle to upper-middle class income brackets with parents in their late thirties to mid-forties and at least 2 children between the ages of 9 and 12 years old, all of whom were born in Canada. These families hail from very different socio economic backgrounds, from one family on welfare with a disabled child to an ex-military personnel, a blue-collar worker to an early childhood educator, as well as a technology engineer.

Similar to the layout of the St. John’s chapter and all subsequent chapters henceforth, this section of the report will begin by presenting an in-depth profile of the family that best embodies the archetypal household out of all those interviewed, particularly in terms of television and other forms of media consumption. As is customary in this report, the names of all participants in this study have been altered in order to ensure confidentiality and provide anonymity. An additional detail worth noting is that all participants in the Québec portion of this study are native francophone speakers, therefore the interviews were conducted entirely in French. For the purpose of this chapter, the original citations have been left untranslated to preserve authenticity, though explanatory summaries written in English will accompany all French text included in this section of the report. It is also worth noting that Montréal was the first region where data was collected and the interview protocol was first tested. As a result, some of the themes broached in the other 4 regions of Canada were explored in different ways. Very slight changes were made to the protocol after this initial testing, primarily in regards to the children’s focus group protocol, where one activity was removed and the producer’s game was reconfigured.

The Nadeau’s

The Nadeau’s are a reconstructed middle-class family of four residing in a semi-detached home located in northern Montréal. The mother, an early childhood educator in her early thirties, has two children from a previous relationship: 12-year-old Charles and 10-year-old Béatrice; two bright and outgoing participants who are eager to discuss their habitual media practices with the researchers. Their mother’s live-in partner is also present for the interview and appears to be very involved in the children’s lives. All four family members gather around the kitchen table and are eager to answer our researchers’ questions.

The children begin by recounting the particularities of their habitual weekly media routine. Though there is no television viewing before school, they will return home in the afternoons and balance their time between watching television, playing on the computer, playing outside with friends and completing their homework. At suppertime, the four traditionally eat together in the kitchen with televisions shut off. This is a rule the mother is insistent on, since she grew up in a household where television watching during dinner took precedence over conversation – a habit she is set on avoiding now that she has a family of her own. After dinner viewing is a common practice in the Nadeau household and one that is done together as a family roughly half of the time. In terms of favourite programs, Charles, age 12, has begun to lean towards more teenage-targeted programming (i.e., Les Simpson, Les Griffins (Family Guy) and shows on Musique Plus) while Béatrice, age 10, still enjoys shows made specifically for her age group (such as Une grenade avec ça? and Gérald McBoingBoing). Since the brother and sister have different tastes when it comes to programming, the siblings
spend a fair amount of time watching their favourite shows independently of one another. With four television sets in the household, it is not difficult for each family member to watch their separate programs simultaneously. While that rings true, everyone admits that the most frequently watched television set is the one located in the living room, where they will all gather to watch television together (typically a mix between general-audience and children’s programs). Béatrice reserves her weekend mornings for watching television while Charles tends to spend more time doing so in the afternoons or playing video games, as he prefers to sleep in. Both parents agree that were they to summarize the children’s media consumption between television and other media platforms, they would describe Béatrice’s as being 70/30 while Charles’s has recently begun to even out as he enters the preteen years, and now lies somewhere around the 60/40 mark.

Speaking to the amount of technology they have in the home, they are a very high-tech family. Béatrice has a television set in her room and Charles has a desktop computer in his, which he uses predominantly for online game playing and to check Facebook. The household has four computers in total as well as four gaming consoles and each child has an iPod. The mother admits that having so much technology in the home requires a fair amount of mediation and tries her best to implement rules. She admits that while she is very diligent about monitoring Charles’s video game intake, she is less strict when it comes to his television viewing. However, the mother and her partner still some very insightful opinions to share regarding the state of children’s television for 9 to 12 year olds, or the lack thereof. This outlook will be explored in greater detail in an upcoming section of this chapter.

Media Habits in Montréal

When it comes to weekly television consumption, each family reported their children watching 10 or more hours per week; viewing that typically occurs after school, during evenings and on weekends. A few of the children interviewed attest to spending some of their afternoons playing outdoors with friends as opposed to watching television, though this is contingent on the weather. Everyone admits to watching much more television in winter when outdoor play becomes restricted due to freezing temperatures and limited daylight. When they do chose to watch, viewing is never an issue as the average number of televisions per household among the families interviewed is 4.4 sets (the highest among all five regions in Canada), with 3 out of 5 children having a television set located in their bedroom (second only to Toronto, where the average is slightly higher). There is no explicit mention of PVR in any of the households, and almost half of the families subscribe to satellite or digital cable.

The families interviewed in Montréal own an average of 2.2 computers per household and everyone has access to high speed Internet. Generally speaking, children reported using the computer to play games, watch video clips on YouTube, research homework, and access social media sites. 3 out of 5 of the children interviewed have a Facebook account, though none of them meet the 13 or older age prerequisite required to for membership. As for other electronics, each household averages 2.5 video game consoles (Wii, Xbox, Ninteno DS), while half of children interviewed have their own cell phone and 2 out of 5 have their own iPod.
From a Family’s Perspective

Through analyzing the data collected from all five family interviews and four focus groups conducted in Montréal in November 2010, some interesting trends have emerged. As we will see, some mirror the findings discovered in other regions across Canada while some are specifically unique to Montréal. The following is a detailed account of these themes, highlighted with summarized examples, direct citations, and researcher observations.

“It’s one of those things we sometimes watch together”

If researchers are to elaborate on the most common observation seen throughout the Montréal data regarding family television co-viewing, it seems that families do watch some television together, particularly in the evenings after supper and sometimes on the weekend, and thoroughly enjoy this time spent together as a family. The mother from the Robillard family explains how much pleasure she derives from spending time watching certain programs with her children, as long as they can agree on a show they all want to watch:

Je trip sur le fait que l’enfant va écouter l’émission avec nous. J’aime ça l’écouter en famille.

The Robillard mother outlines an important factor that surfaced in all the Montréal interviews: it is clear that the programs these families view as a group are typically programs that everyone enjoys watching. If certain family members wish to watch something more suited to their own individual taste, they need only retire to another room to enjoy these different shows.

The mother from the Desiré family echoes this way of thinking, albeit on an escalated scale, and says she rarely watches television with her children simply because they have different tastes in programming. For this reason, she will often watch television with her husband in their room while her children watch their programs either in their bedrooms or the main room. The one exception to this rule is movie night, when the family will gather in the living room to watch a DVD all together:

Mom On ne regarde pas beaucoup la télévision en famille. Moi et mon mari on utilise surtout celle de ma chambre. Les enfants chacun dans leurs chambres, mais des fois on va dans le salon.

G12 Pour regarder des DVD.

Mom C’est ça, pour regarder des DVD.

The key factor mentioned here by the Desiré mother is films. Many of the families interviewed attest to watching more films all together as a family than television programs, which could be a solution to create more family viewing time if they cannot all agree on a television program they all collectively enjoy. This common practice of “movie night” is seen throughout all the five regions of this study and is an affective way to bring families together for co-viewing. As shown in the aforementioned Media Habits section, the Montréal participants interviewed have an average of 4.4 televisions sets per household, meaning that if one is occupied, it is easy for the remaining members of the family to watch somewhere else. Interestingly enough, one may initially assume that the high number of television sets is found only in wealthy homes, though this is not the case. For example, in the low-income households interviewed in Montréal, even the family on welfare, researchers observed the same, if not more, number of television sets and other types of technology as were found in the wealthier homes. Two siblings from the focus
group explains how the practice of separate viewing habits due to the number of televisions can occur in their household:

B10  On a quand même 4 télés.
G12  Oui je sais mais toi tu ne veux pas aller en bas. Moi non plus.
INT  Non ? Alors qui va en bas ?
G12  Des fois je vais en bas, elle va en haut, une fois sur deux, ou elle va dans sa chambre.
B10  Et mon père il va dans son garage.

The one program mentioned time and time again that seems to bring the entire family together is Les Parent, the Radio-Canada general-audience sitcom in its’ third season of production centred around a Québécois family. Almost every family in both in-house interviews and the focus groups mentioned watching this particular program on a regular basis with their children. Even the Desiré mother, who admits to rarely watching television shows with her family, enjoys watching Les Parent from time to time with her children as she finds that it reflects the realities of family life:

Mom  Ouais [Les Parent] c’est une des affaires qu’on regarde des fois ensemble.
INT  Pourquoi ?
Mom  Parce que ça reflète la réalité, ça ressemble pas mal [au quotidien].

Though they do not always watch television together, this is not to say that parents do not have an understanding of what their children are watching. While there may not be as high of a percentage of co-viewing as what was seen in St. John’s, there is still a high percentage of active viewing on the part of the parents, who take the time to watch and understand the content of their children’s favourite programs. To recap, the distinction between having a viewing awareness and actively viewing a television program is evident when parents are able to explain and discuss the shows their children are watching in detail, thus demonstrating the level at which they are paying attention to the programs their children watch, even if it means only actively watching a few episodes. An example of this can be seen with the Tremblay parents who, while they admit to not watching much television as a family, are still very aware of their daughter’s favourite show, Occupation Double, and the premise of the program. When the show first began, the parents co-viewed the first couple of episodes to ensure that it was appropriate for their children. However, since content-wise it does not interest either parent, they no longer watch it regularly with their daughter. The Robillard father mentions he also takes the time to get to know his children’s favourite programs by accompanying them in the living room from time to time as they watch television:

Dad  Moi je peux arriver puis m’effoirer dans le salon. Je vais m’asseoir pour l’écouter avec elle.
INT  Vous allez écouter Tactik ?
Dad  Exactement ça me dérangera pas.

He says he does not mind watching children’s programming with his children, though he does not make a habitual practice of it. More instances of parental active viewing will be presented in the following section, when we explore parent’s opinions of their children’s favourite programs and see the scope of their understanding of today’s programming frequently watched by their children.

“I especially like those programs that show good family values”

When asked what parents in Montréal think of their children’s favourite television programs, they feel there are a few appropriate shows that deliver good content and values, though not nearly as many quality programs as were offered to their children during their preschool years. Generally speaking, they feel that public-run
stations such as Télé-Québec and Radio-Canada offer superior preschool programming such as Toc Toc Toc that is educative, stimulating, and appropriate. The partner in the Nadeau family sums up this feeling in stating that:

*Mais il faut aussi peut-être un peu diviser ce que fait le privé du public. Je pense que Télé-Québec et Radio-Canada ont des programmes jeunesse qui sont quand même assez développés et qui ont un bon contenu donc c’est une dépense qui vient dans leur plan de fonctionnement. Beaucoup plus que Vrak.tv ou Télétoon où c’est vraiment une dépense qu’il faut rentabiliser.*

The Nadeau mother voices a similar opinion and prefers the programs broadcasted on public channels for her children to watch, since she trusts them more than the private networks. While this may be true, the parents recognize that the type of programming broadcasted on the public networks is intended for a younger audience than their 9, 10, 11 and 12 year olds, which explains why their children watch shows on Vrak.tv and Télétoon.

Though they may not always measure up to shows from their children’s past, there are still some programs (on Vrak.tv especially) that parents feel make for fun and appropriate television. As a network, the majority of parents are more trusting of Vrak.tv and Télétoon than some other general-audience network, in comparison. The Desiré mother states that she feels more comfortable when her children watch Vrak.tv because she does not need to monitor the content they are viewing, unlike other channels where she must mediate and actively watch the programs to discern their appropriateness:

*J’aime bien ça quand ils sont sur Vrak.tv parce que je sais que le contenu y est quand même assez sécuritaire, j’ai pas vraiment besoin de trop surveiller. C’est sur qu’il y a certaines heures qu’il ne faut pas dépasser. C’est plus rassurant tandis que s’ils sont en train de regarder autre chose, il faut vrai-

ment que j’observe et que je mets le contrôle parental.*

Though this is the general consensus, there are still some parents who feel that Vrak.tv programs do not always know where to draw the line. The partner from the Nadeau family admits he sometimes feels the content presented in some of the newer Vrak.tv shows, such as Vrak la Vie, are not always staying in the 9 to 12 range, content-wise, and can get a tad too mature for his liking.

While that may be, when asked to name their three favourite current children’s programs, Une grenade avec ça?, broadcasted on Vrak.tv was by far the most cited by parents participating in this research initiative because they feel it demonstrates good moral values and is humorous. Moreover, it is a Québécois program that features Québécois actors and reflects the culture in which they have raised their children. One of the fathers participating in the focus group indicates that he encourages his daughter to watch it over shows broadcasted on Music Plus because of its’ appropriateness and heightened morality that reflect the values he tries to instil at home:

*Moi j’aime surtout les émissions qui vont véhiculer les bonnes valeurs. Une grenade avec ça?, je pense que ça véhicule des valeurs nobles. Il montre la hiérarchie entre le patron et les employés, tu sais ? Si je compare cette émission là à une émission de Musique Plus, c’est claire que je vais plus orienter ma fille vers ce type d’émission parce qu’il y a des valeurs.*

iCarly is another show cited as being one of the best for the 9 to 12 age range and is mentioned during the mother’s focus group as being positive because their children can relate to the characters. Once again, Les Parent is named as an appropriate show for their children as well as a family favourite.

Speaking to programs they do not like their children watching, Les Simpson is the most often mentioned and criticized for being vulgar, for
demonstrating negative stereotypical characters and for being disrespectful towards parents and adults. Though American Disney children’s sitcoms such as Hannah Montana and La Vie de Palace de Zack et Cody (The Suite Life of Zack and Cody), which air on Vrak.tv dubbed over into French, are extremely popular among those in the 9 to 12 year age bracket, many parents voice their criticisms. The Tremblay’s feel that these types of programs do not represent accurate or appropriate depictions of teenager or pre-teen behaviour. Both the mother and father find the adolescent characters to be annoying, dull and generally lacking in intelligence. While their children do not agree, as their 12-year-old daughter finds these programs to be humorous, the parents are not fans. That being said, they do not ban their children from watching them, unlike the majority of the other parents interviewed who restrict their children from watching Les Simpson.

“There’s a gap between the two (age groups)”

The general consensus regarding the state of current children’s television for the 9 to 12 age range is this: though there are a fair number of shows being broadcasted, parents still feel there is a gap in quality programming offered to this age bracket. While they feel that there are excellent quality shows being made for their children 8 and under, and programs for teens that present mature content, the 9 to 12 year olds are left with few options that would stimulate and inspire them. These parents note that since the programs offered to their children do not maintain their interest, they continually gravitate towards teen and adult programs than may not yet be suitable. The Nadeau parents explain this phenomenon the best, calling the 9 to 12 age bracket a difficult in-between stage that is left behind production-wise since the majority of the quality Canadian programming is focused on younger children:

Both the fathers and mothers from the focus group notice a similar gap in their children’s television programming, more specifically that it seems to jump right from preschool content to suddenly slipping in inappropriate themes such as boyfriends/crushes and to demonstrating behaviour that promotes a lack of respect towards parents. Some even feel that the shows made specifically for their age group are not making the cut, as they display messages that are either too subtle for the 10-year-olds to grasp or too “simple and babyish” for the 12-year-olds to keep their attention. One father describes this gap by explaining that if you asked his daughter, she would claim her favourite programs are entirely appropriate for her age group, whereas when he watches the same programs from a parental perspective, he disagrees completely. If he could choose, he would much rather his daughter watch programs that were “more soft” in nature, though he admits that may be coming from his innate desire to protect his daughter from growing up too fast:

Si je pose la question à ma fille, elle aurait dite non, parce que dans sa tête, toutes les émissions qu’elle regarde sont parfaites. Mais moi, si je les regarde avec mes yeux de parents, je vais dire non, ça ne fit pas. Peut être parce que je veux la garder – je veux trop la protéger face à des choses. Mais à mes yeux, j’aimerais mieux qu’elle regarde les émissions un peu plus soft. C’est ça que je veux qu’elle écoute.
Many of the parents compare the current programs available to their children with those that they watched when they were 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age. Generally speaking, parents in Montréal (as well as the rest of Canada, as we will see in the chapters to come) feel a sense of nostalgia towards the programs they grew up with which, in their opinion, contained more visible morals and better quality programming than the shows their children watch in the present day. The Tremblay father laments the lack of creativity, morals, values and overall appropriateness that he remembers in the shows from his childhood. He also feels the programs being broadcasted today come on much too early, with prime-time slots being filled with adult shows that cannot be enjoyed by the whole family:

Moi je trouve ça dommage. On reviens à mon temps, les émissions comme la petite maison dans la prairie ils avaient quelque chose d’intéressant à l’intérieur de ça, ils avaient toujours un message qui passait. Aujourd’hui honnêtement, je regarde même aux heures de grandes écoutes tu te dis pourquoi ils ne montrent pas quelque chose de plus génial, plus intéressant, plus créatif. C’est vraiment insipide d’écouter cela, c’est trop adulte, comme Occupation Double, tu parles d’une heure pour montrer cela aux enfants, c’est carrément stupide... aujourd’hui c’est pour ça qu’on lâche de plus en plus la télé.

The Laverdure’s feel that cartoons have become overly violent and disrespectful, and the Desiré’s are frustrated at the fact that quality programs do not seem to remain on-air long enough to incur a following and gain popularity, like she feels they did when they were younger.

Since an overwhelming number of the parents interviewed are disappointed by this “gap in programming”, the researchers asked them what they feel are the essential key ingredients necessary to make the perfect program for their 9 to 12 year olds. While small details varied across the map, the same general themes were specified by all. Parents want their children’s programs to be entertaining and fun to stimulate their imagination while still presenting age-appropriate content and important themes such as respect towards adults and peers, politeness, and strong family values. If the shows can accurately represent their culture while promoting tolerance and acceptance, then all the better. The Nadeau parents incorporate all these suggestions as well as recommending that producers mimic the effective style and delivery of the Télé-Québec and Radio-Canada programs their children used to watch, but targeted for an older age group.

“We present different social values by showing everyday life realities”
Many parents also mention the benefits they believe having interactive programs would bring, such as keeping the child viewers engaged and allowing them to participate and feel involved. One father in the focus group stresses the importance of asking children what they most want to see since, after all, the programs are ultimately destined for the 9 to 12 viewer bracket. A few parents also feel that putting children’s programming between 4 and 6 o’clock is unrealistic since the majority of children are not home at that time, they are either at babysitters or doing extra-curricular activities/sports. As a result, the children end up watching more adult programming in the evenings since that is what is being broadcasted when they are most often available.

“Regarding this, we set boundaries”

Overall, our interviewees demonstrate a fairly consistent number of rules and mediation practices when it comes to their children’s television and media habits. Most parents try to implement certain parameters, such as completing homework and chores before watching television, and limiting the amount of time their children are allowed to play video games or use the Internet. Half of the families admit to watching television during mealtimes, though not 100% of the time.

Every family has different ways of implementing the boundaries they feel their children need. The Desiré mother, for example, explains that her cable is hooked up through a computerized card that she removes from the cable box if her children are not complying with the house rules set in place. Though it can be frustrating to have to resort to such measures in order to enforce rules, she admits it is extremely effective. After months of back and forth debate, the Tremblay’s finally decided to unsubscribe from Music Plus since they did not agree with most of the programs their children were watching. The Robillard mother takes a different approach to mediating her children’s television viewing. While she does not limit the amount of time they are allowed to watch, she stresses the benefits that occur when she accompanies them in their viewing. Though she feels that television on the whole has a great amount of potential, it can be even more beneficial not to mention safe, if an adult supervises the children and engages them in what they are watching:

_Cela dépend de l’encadrement que tu fais avec l’enfant. Moi je ne suis pas du style à limiter l’enfant avec la télévision je me dis c’est un média y en partout dans la maison. C’est savoir gérer des fois. Moi je pense que c’est un média qui a beaucoup de potentiel, de pouvoir, mais on doit s’en servir d’une bonne manière, oui il y a une période où tu peux laisser aller, mais il y a une période où ils ont besoin d’encadrement. C’est pas juste une question de temps devant la télé c’est aussi une question de qualité puis c’est une question d’encadrement._

Besides banning Musique Plus or specific inappropriate programs such as Les Simpson, the majority of the parents admit they do not regulate or monitor what their children are watching on television as strictly as they do with the Internet and video games. The Nadeau mother enforces a 30-minute per evening video game rule with her 12-year-old son since without it, she says, he would play for hours non-stop. She jokes about the frustration she recently incurred when her son broke his thumb and the doctor recommended that her son play video games for one to two hours per day, as apparently it is the best form of rehabilitation. She goes on to explain how she finds it difficult to control his television intake since she spends so much time regulating his video gaming. Many other parents admit to enforcing stricter rules regarding Internet as opposed to television viewing, though these rules typically monitor the amount of time children spend online rather than the content they are viewing while online. On the whole, parents admit to worrying more about the actual numeric amount of time their children are online as opposed to the need to monitor what they do online. This is because they feel they already have a
good idea about what their children are accessing: social media, game websites and chatting with friends. Besides, as the Robillard mother says, they can always check the Internet history if they need to monitor what websites their children have been visiting.

Taking a different approach to mediating technology use, some parents try to restrict their children’s television intake by supplementing it with other things, such as encouraging their children to join sport teams and extra-curricular activities or even simply to play outside. A father from the focus group explains that he sees many positive changes in his daughter ever since he encouraged her to join the local competitive swim team. Not only does she have less time for watching television, but the group of girls on her team have proven to be positive role models who all share similar interests (which exclude television):

Moi je les oriente vers le sport. Ma fille, elle fait de la natation compétition et mon fils, il fait du baseball puis du ski et snowboard. Donc, j’essaie de les pousser dans le sport parce que ce que je me suis rendu compte au fil des ans c’est qu’en les poussant vers les sports, ils sont moins devant la télévision. Puis le cercle d’amis fait qu’ils se regroupent avec leurs amis de sport. Ma fille, son cercle d’amies sont toutes des filles qui font de la natation puis ne sont pas des filles qui regardent trop la télévision.

“I’d say Quebec shows try to include more moral aspects than American ones”

When discussing the question regarding Canadian versus American content with the Montréal interviewees, the general consensus is that children cannot tell the difference between Anglo-Canadian and American made television. They can only distinguish between Québécois-made programs and those made in the United States, since all English productions are dubbed in French thus making it is easy to recognize. For the children interviewed in Montréal, some are only concerned about content quality while others stress the importance of good quality programming that is made in Québec. Also, the older the children become, the more they seem to be capable of making the distinction between American or Québécois programming and critically deciding if they enjoy it or not. While there were some of the older child interviewees who vocalized their distaste for American-made children sitcoms, such as the 12-year-old Desiré girl who calls shows such as Sonny With a Chance “generic”, “boring”, and “not real enough”, one 12-year-old girl in the focus group remarked how she finds English language television on the whole to be of better quality and funnier than French language television, even though Québécois programs are easier to understand:

Je ne sais pas normalement d’où ils viennent mais je trouve que celles faites en anglais sont meilleures. En français je comprends mieux mais en anglais je les trouve mieux faites et plus drôles.

According to the parents, most feel that at least half of programs their children watch are American-made shows rebroadcasted in French. The greatest distinction they find between American and Québécois productions is that they see
the former as more of a source of entertainment while the latter (especially in reference to preschool programming) as being more educational and culturally relevant. While most would prefer their children to watch Québécois programming, they understand that there are not enough shows being produced for that to be possible. As one father from the focus group explains, he admits to sometimes prejudging American children’s programming and feels he has a pre-existing negative opinion of American television. That being said, he does not try to influence what his daughter watches, as he feels it is her decision to make.

C’est sur que moi, je vais privilégier une émission comme Une grenade avec ça? par rapport à une émission américaine. Personnellement je vais la privilégier, mais je ne vais pas l’imposer à ma fille. Je ne sais pas trop pourquoi, peut être que j’ai une mauvaise opinion des téléséries américaines. Peut être se sont des préjugés qu’on a comme parents.

From a Child’s Perspective

“Everything makes me laugh and those adventures are extremely amusing”

The children in both the family interviews and focus group were asked to share with researchers their favourite programs and the reasons justifying said preferences. Unlike what was seen in St. John’s where, for the most part, the children enjoyed watching relatively all of the same programs (predominantly those shown on Family Channel, YTV or the Discovery Channel), the children interviewed in Montréal offer up a much wider list of favourite programs and different criteria for defining what makes a show their favourite. The following is a complete list of all the television shows named by the child participants as being their favourites, divided by age to present readers with a better understanding of age preference division. Keep in mind, the programs listed as American-made are still broadcasted in French to the children in Montréal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Favourite Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Une grenade avec ça? (CND); Gerald McBoing Boing (US); César, l’homme qui parle aux chiens (Cesar the Dog Whisperer) (US); Les stupéfiants (Mythbusters) (US); Comment c’est fait (How It’s Made) (CND); Jobs de bras (CND); Le dino train (Dinosaur Train) (US); Yakari (FR-BE); Batman (US); Bob l’éponge (SpongeBob SquarePants) (US); SpieZ! Nouvelle génération (The Amazing Spiez) (FR); Kaboum (CND);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Les simpson (US); Bakugan (JAP); Les têtes à claques (CND); Bob l’éponge (SpongeBob SquarePants) (US); Il Était une fois dans le trouble (CND); iCarly (US); Tactik (CND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Palmarès (CND); Les simpson (US); Les griffin (Family Guy) (US); Sports; Juste pour rire (CND); Les parent (CND); Occupation double (CND); Les frères Scott (One Tree Hill) (US); Gossip Girl : L’élite de New York (US); Tactik (CND); Fringe (US);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Also worth noting in Montréal is the high number of children who mentioned watching a specific channel in lieu of a specific show when asked to name their favourite programming. Through observations we find that children attach themselves to specific channels that broadcast the majority of their preferred programs and will therefore instinctively visit these channels first, a phenomenon known as the “default channel” or “go-to channel” that we will revisit throughout the report. Those listed by the children in this study include Vrak.tv, MusicPlus, Télétoon, Télé-Québec, Canal D, TVA and BT.

Though it is not always easy for children to describe how certain shows make them feel, most interviewed in Montréal were able to describe their rationale as to why they prefer one show over the rest. The following are excerpts of children explaining these rationales. Our first excerpt comes from a 12-year-old girl from the children’s focus group who admits that the reason Les Parent is her favourite show is that it’s so funny she “freaks out” if she misses an episode and loves watching it to “annoy her parents”.

Her father reaffirms his daughters love for Les Parent while discussing his children’s favourite programs as part of the father’s focus group exercise. He states that his children typically follow a regimented afternoon routine of setting the table, doing chores and completing homework before watching television. However, on nights where Les Parent is playing, all that routine goes out the window: “tout se pose autour de la maison, boom, ils courent vers la télévision et ils s’assoient et la regardent.”

The 11 and 12-year-old girls from the Robillard family can always agree on watching Tactik, one of their favourite programs. This pre-teen sitcom that focuses on the lives of young Québécois soccer players is regularly broadcasted on the Télé-Québec network. When asked why the girls enjoy this show in particular, they attest to enjoying watching stories about characters their age, not to mention the fact that they have been dedicated fans since the beginning and have enjoyed watching the show evolve season after season.

**INT**  Pourquoi c’est bon ?

**G12**  C’est des jeunes de notre âge

**G11**  De notre âge puis c’est comme plein d’histoires qui leurs arrivent et ils jouent au soccer.

**Mom**  Moi j’ajouterais que ça rejoint aussi les interventions parents-enfants.

**G12**  J’aime l’histoire parce que tsé c’est des séries et je les suis depuis un bout.

**INT**  Donc t’aime cela quand il y a une progression tu vois l’évolution de l’histoire ?

**G12**  Ouin c’est ça

**INT**  Puis toi ?

**G11**  La même affaire
Two of the other children in the focus group, one 11 year-old boy and one 10 year-old girl, list Bob l’éponge (SpongeBob SquarePants) as being their favourite show, though they have different reasons for calling it their favourite. The boy enjoys Bob l’éponge because it presents a bizarre and unique story, while the girl considers it to be funny and adventurous, so much so that it makes her excited for the next episode.

B11 Quand ils sont dans l’eau, c’est bizarre, quand ils sortent de l’eau, ils sont normaux. Comme une vraie éponge.

G10 Je rie de tout, c’est drôle! Et ses aventures sont très amusantes. De plus, comme il y a plusieurs aventures, il y a plus de moments drôles et plus il y a des moments drôles plus tu veux écouter la prochaine émission.

The 10-year-old Tremblay boy admits to very much liking science based programs such as Les Stupéfiants (Mythbusters) because they are funny as well as action-packed, rendering them “never boring like other shows”.

INT Qu’est-ce que t’aime dans cette émission?

B10 Il y a de l’action.

G12 Il est drôle, le gars.

B10 Il y a des camions et ils font des expériences des fois ça explose et plein d’autres affaires. C’est drôle.

INT Qu’est-ce que t’aime dans cette émission? Pourquoi t’aime ça ?

G10 Parce que c’est un film d’espionnage puis j’aime les émissions d’espionnage.

INT Oui ? Pourquoi t’aime ça ? T’apprends des trucs ?

G10 Oui si je veux espionner quelqu’un.

INT Comment tu te sens quand tu écoutes cette émission-?

G10 Je ressens de la joie, des fois de la peur parce qu’il y a des gros monstres.

“I just want to watch television doing nothing”

On the whole, it is safe to say that the children interviewed in Montréal are not big on multitasking while watching television. To reiterate, media multitasking is a term used in this research to describe the act of using multiple forms of media simultaneously. In this case, we are referring specifically to children watching television while accessing another form of media or technology at the same time (i.e. laptop, internet, chat with friends, text, play DSi, etc).

Through interviews, researchers learn that more often than not, the children prefer sitting and devoting their full attention to the screen while they watch television. The only exceptions to this were with some who do homework, some who play on their iPods, some who draw, one who reads cartoon novels and one who practises the piano (though these are all activities done primarily during commercial breaks). Aside from that, the two Robillard girls admit to texting their friends fairly frequently while watching television, but they never hold conversations regarding what they are currently viewing.

Finally, one of the 10-year-old girls from the focus group expresses the emotions she feels when watching SpieZ! Nouvelle Génération, a spy-based cartoon made in France that is a spin-off from the older program Totally Spies. She recounts how watching this show makes her feel joyful and teaches her how to spy, but at times also scared because there are big monsters in some episodes.

INT Qu’est-ce que t’aime dans cette émission? Pourquoi t’aime ça ?

G10 Parce que c’est un film d’espionnage puis j’aime les émissions d’espionnage.

INT Oui ? Pourquoi t’aime ça ? T’apprends des trucs ?

G10 Oui si je veux espionner quelqu’un.

INT Comment tu te sens quand tu écoutes cette émission-?

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There is not a high percentage of children migrating online to watch episodes of their favourite programs they may have missed. One or two children have tried but, as they prefer to watch shows on the large television screen, do not make a regular practice of watching online. The 12-year-old Desiré girl will sometimes watch Les Parent on radio-canada.ca because it broadcasts live in a later timeslot than she is allowed to stay up to watch. Similarly, both the 10-year-old Laverdure boy and 10-year-old Nadeau girl admit to having browsed Vrak.tv, Téléquebec.tv and Télétoon.ca websites to check out the available episodes, though they have never made a habit of watching them. Others, such as the 10-year-old Tremblay son, prefer to avoid watching episodes online because they take too long to load. The 10-year-old Desiré boy does not see the appeal in rewatching old episodes online since he has already seen them all on television.

While they are less eager to watch actual episodes online, these children will, however, frequently visit the broadcaster websites to play the games and enter contests. Almost all the young interviewees speak to accessing their favourite broadcaster websites on a regular basis (the most common being Télé-Québec, Télétoon and Vrak.tv) to play the many program-themed games and submit their names into contests, hoping to win. One 12-year-old girl from the focus group recounts how a year ago she even managed to win a fan-club contest for one of the Vrak.tv programs. Though she found this win to be very exciting and rewarding, she now admits to being “too old” for entering contests. While a similar tone is echoed among the older participants who have begun to outgrow broadcaster websites, it is clear that the younger ones still frequent these sites and thoroughly enjoy the games, especially the games that they are linked with their favourite programs. As the 10-year-old Nadeau daughter excitedly puts it:

Je vais sur Télé-Québec, Radio-Canada, il y a une section enfants avec un petit dinosaure puis il y a une section où on retrouve des jeux de Kaboum, des jeux et plein de choses!

### Children take on the role of television producer

“Fantasy shows, you know, outside reality”

As discussed in the methodology outline, one of the activities conducted in the children’s focus group is to ask the participants to pretend they are in charge of creating a brand new show for their age group of 9 to 12-year-olds. In this particular focus group, we had seven children ranging from 9 to 12 years of age and hailing from Québécois families residing in the Montréal area. In this case, the children were asked to each voice their own opinions regarding what makes for interesting children’s television and to invent a new show on their own (a formula which was later tweaked in the four other regions to ask the group of children to work together and invent one show that incorporated all of their ideas). The following is an overview of some of their unique answers which show us just how diverse children are in terms of individual tastes:
From an Adolescent’s Perspective

The adolescent focus group conducted in all five regions is always an interesting discussion because it offers us a unique perspective regarding the current state of children’s television. Since these teenagers themselves were not so long ago part of the target age of this study, they are able to recount vivid memories of their childhood television watching experience and easily draw comparisons as well as critiques to today’s programming. That being said, this particular group of adolescents admit to ‘not being very technology savvy’. Two group interviews were held consisting of three girls and six boys aged 15 through 17. In total, their opinions regarding the state of today’s children’s television come from their own personal experience at the age of 9 to 12 as well as their ability to critically analyze the clips shown to them from the current most popular programs on the air in Montréal.

At the beginning of the focus group, the teens are asked to think back to when they were 10 years old and discuss their favourite programs at that time. It seems that the participants watched a fair mix between Québécois and American programming at that age, though it was almost all dubbed over in French. While that may be, two of the teens say they still preferred watching Québécois-made shows such as Mixmania and Dans une galaxie près de chez vous because they presented more relatable depictions of the Québécois life these teenagers led, as well as more appropriate storylines. As one girl explains,

*Mixmania était un production local avec lequel je pourrais plus m’identifié qu’avec les séries américaines où il y avait les couples et tout ça puis t’as 12 ans et tu ne comprends pas ce qui ce passe.*

Half of the teenagers interviewed admit to having watched Les Simpson when they were 10-years-old, even though they realize that even at that age, they did not understand the majority of the humour. One 17-year-old girl finds it interesting to watch the show at her current age and reflect on how little she once understood of the jokes and cultural references:

*Les blagues sont très adultes et il y a des références culturels que maintenant je comprends mais je me suis dit ‘mon Dieu, quand j’ai écouté ça, je ne comprenais rien.*

Speaking of other shows that may have been ‘over their head’ at that age but were watched regardless, several of the adolescents admit to beginning to watch teenage comedies and dramas at the age of 10, 11 and 12, the most commonly mentioned show being Les Frères Scott (One Tree Hill). One girl explains that she began watching this particular program due to the fact that she was a year or two younger than everyone in her class and therefore was influenced by what
her peers were watching. Being 17 years of age now, she can look back on this time in her life and critically understand that peers play a huge part in what children decide to watch on television, as she remembers wanting to fit into the conversations about Les Frères Scott at school. The 16-year-old boy participant also remembers beginning to watch that very show at an early age, though it was the only live action program he remembers enjoying (he was always very taken with the cartoon shows that broadcasted on YTV and Télétoon such as Bob l’Éponge (SpongeBob), Jackie Chan, Yugio, Les Simpson and Looney Tunes).

Similar to what was seen when rewatching Les Simpson, these teenagers now realize things about their past favourite programs that come from being older and having gained some maturity and perspective. The 16-year-old boy explains how when he happens to catch a rerun of Bob l’éponge nowadays, he is able to pick up on hidden moralistic messages that was unaware of at the age of 10, when all he considered Bob l’éponge to be was a humorous cartoon. One 17-year-old girl has similar realizations after having rewatched the show Totally Spies and can now recognize why out of the three main characters, the redhead was her favourite. Since she herself is brunette, she never gave much thought as to why she preferred the redhead as a child. Whereas now, as a mature teenager, she recognizes it was not the hair colour that she identified with the most but in fact her intelligence and strong will that made the redhead her favourite character and someone to look up to.

There is some mention among the adolescents of family co-viewing memories, though these were commonly reserved for time spent watching after school programs with their siblings. The teenager who loved Dans une galaxie près de chez vous recounts the entire afterschool ritual she and her younger sister had in order to prepare for their 4:30pm viewing. They would rush to put away their lunches, change out of their school clothes, make a snack and move the couch to the appropriate position all before their favourite program came on, which they enjoyed watching together every afternoon after school. The 16-year-old boy remembers similar fond memories of watching cartoons with his twin brother, since they shared the same tastes in television. The only co-viewing with parents to speak of were weekend movie nights and some weekday evening viewing.

The adolescents alluded many times to the notion of “default channel” or the act of sitting and watching one channel in particular, even if the programs being broadcasted were of little interest to them. One 17-year-old girl recounts how she would watch programs like La vie de palace de Zack et Cody (Suite Life of Zack and Cody) or Zoey (Zoey 101), even though she found them boring, because her sister and her had developed the habit of watching television at that particular time. Though they would have preferred watching something more enjoyable, they continually watched these programs since it was what was being offered during their scheduled “television time”:

Les après-midis, il y avait ces programmes genre La vie de palace de Zack et Cody que j’ai trouvé vraiment très boffes mais quand même comme c’était à la même heure, on l’a regardé un peu parce que c’était notre habitude. Puis à un moment donné on s’est dit c’est vraiment pas bon, alors on a arrêté de regarder la télé après école.

To add to this, she explains that although her family never purchased the téléhoraire, she never had a problem figuring out when her favourite shows were on the air because they adopted the habit of watching at certain times and memorizing the schedule:

J’ai jamais acheté le guide TV mais en même temps, je savais à quelle heure il y avait certaines émissions. On prend l’habitude.

These comments demonstrate how children between the ages of 9 to 12 easily internalize the habit of watching television at a specific time. This means that even if they do not particularly
enjoy what they are watching, if it is broadcasted during their habitual television viewing timeslot, they are likely to watch just for the sake of watching television and not for the enjoyment factor.

Finally, the last portion of the teenage focus group interview protocol asks the participants to collaborate on the development of a new television program for children aged 9 to 12. They decided to create something generic with characters around the 12 year age mark. One girl feels this age insistence is important because she wants the youth of today to understand that 12-year-olds do not have to act older than they are and must not mimic the inappropriate teenage behaviour often shown in older genre programming. If their show could feature positive role models aged 12 who share the same interests as the viewers, then children would likely be more drawn to them, and understand that it is “ok to act their age”. That being said, others in the group feel the characters should be a bit older since having older characters already in high school attracts a younger audience. They feel that since they themselves always watched shows with older characters, around 17 years old, who acted like they were 12 (i.e. High school musical), the formula should work for today’s 9 to 12-year-old viewers.

Another requirement is touching upon interests such as sports, music, and arts, and not only on social interactions like romance and relationships. There should be humour but intelligent humour, such as word-play, so that the children must pay attention in order to understand the jokes. The show should focus around a trio of best friends – a dynamic these teens find intriguing because it engages the audience and is fun to watch how the trio solve problems and interact with one another. They must also be relatable characters with varying traits so viewers can pick the one with whom they identify the most. It is also interesting to have this ‘gang’ of characters since the focus of each episode can rotate to feature all different storylines and offer different perspectives instead of simply following one hero. That being said, the teens feel that it is important to present each character as a caricature of sorts at the beginning of the season so everyone has a clearly defined role. However, once these have been established and the show continues, each character should be further developed and presented as multi-faceted.

Finally, instead of romance as the main tone of the program, they decide to focus more on the friendships that exist between all the characters. While that is the main flavour of the show, there should be at least one or two characters who engage in slight flirtation and establish some innocent boy-girl interactions. According to the interviewees, by demonstrating to 9 and 12 year olds appropriate ways to interact with the opposite sex at their age, there will be less stigma, less social awkwardness, and also less chance of them beginning romantic relationships too early or engaging in behaviour that is too mature for their age group. They feel that adults often impose their model of formulaic shows on children’s television, and producers should bear this in mind to ensure they remain entirely focused on what 9 and 12 year olds want to see.

Final Thoughts

Representing the only Québecois region in this study, it is clear from the beginning that Montréal has its own separate television programs but also its own unique flavour and set of opinions regarding media appropriation. While the families interviewed here do share some commonalities with other regions in Canada, they are also a very unique and diverse metropolis that stands apart from the rest in terms of some media and television habits. Out of all that has been presented in this chapter, we feel there are certain traits that highlight the distinctiveness of the Montréal region and Québecois culture, such as a strong emphasis on the importance of excellent and age-appropriate quality Québecois programming yet a disappointed realization that it is somewhat lacking for the 9 to 12 age range.
The high number of television sets per household also has an effect on the amount of co-viewing that takes place. That being said, while there may not be the same level of family co-viewing when compared to what was observed in St John's, there is still a fair amount of family time spent watching television together, approximately half devoted to television shows and half devoted to movie watching.

While that may be, the children and families of Montréal do share similar media habits with their Canadian counterparts. On average, the children appear to be slightly less involved in media multitasking and watching television online than other regions of Canada. Though they do watch teen and general audience programs, on the whole they enjoy watching a mix between Québécois-made television shows and some of the same English children's television programs as their peers in other provinces (though normally dubbed into French). Moreover, parents cite roughly the same characteristics as the rest of Canadian parents in terms of important criteria that should be present in their children's television programs.

In the following chapter, we continue to look at television and media habits among Canadian youth by heading west to explore the nation's largest metropolis, Toronto, Ontario, and discover its' interesting and unique perspective on the phenomenon at hand.
Regional Analysis of Toronto, ON
Introduction

Data collection for central Canada occurred in Toronto, the capital city of Ontario, over a 3 day period in February 2011. With an encompassing population of 6 million inhabitants (including the suburbs that make up the Greater Toronto Area or GTA) it is the largest metropolis in Canada. Our participants are middle to upper-middle class families living throughout the GTA with parents age ranging from late 30’s to mid 40’s. Each family has at least two children between the ages of 9 and 12 years old. The annual family household income ranges from $45-125K. All of these parents were either born in Canada or have lived here for more than 10 years. They currently work full-time, typically white-collared and service industry positions with at least one parent holding a college or university degree. The types of employment varied from professional video gamer to government employee to telecommunications technician. All of the children were born in Canada and reported watching more than 10 hours of television per week.

As is customary in each chapter of this report, we will begin by presenting an in-depth profile of the family that we feel best embodies a ‘typical family’ out of all those interviewed. However, due to the greater diversity of families encountered in Toronto, we feel it is important to examine two different profiles, both of which exuberate a common family dynamic native to this particularly large, diverse and ever-growing region of Canada. As always, the names of the families presented in this chapter have been altered to protect participant confidentiality and ensure anonymity.

The Rajput’s

The Rajput’s are a middle-class family of five with three children: a 12-year-old girl, a 10-year-old boy, and a 6-year-old boy. They reside in a newly built two-story home in an up-and-coming suburban development located in Brampton, Ontario (roughly 45 minutes from the downtown Toronto core). The father is in his mid forties and of Middle Eastern descent, having grown up in Pakistan and moved to Canada as an adult. The mother is in her early forties and also of Middle Eastern descent but was born and raised in Hamilton, Ontario. Both parents work fulltime and must bend their work schedule to ensure that one of them is home to tend to the children. In order to achieve this, the father (a telecommunication technician) leaves for work at 5am in order to return home early afternoon and oversee his children’s after school activities. As a result, the mother remains home in the mornings to prepare her children for school and then takes the commuter train to her workplace in downtown Toronto, a trip that takes over one hour each way. Since she does not arrive at work until mid-morning, she tends to works later into the evenings.

A typical weekday for the Rajput’s begins with the mother helping her three children prepare for school. The two boys will often eat their breakfast while watching cartoons, and the 12-year-old gets ready in her bedroom where she too will watch television (usually the Family Channel). Though the mother admits that television viewing at this time of day causes many distractions and adds more chaos to their morning routine, it seems to have become a staple activity in their daily lives. In the afternoons, the daughter will pick up her two brothers from school and accompany them home where they will have a snack and watch a bit of television until their father returns from work. Once he has arrived, at around 4pm, the television is shut off and homework begins. The father is very involved in his children’s schooling and often insists on them working on additional homework or workbooks to further their education, not to mention the daily religious study they practice together. Shortly after homework, the
father prepares dinner and they eat at the table as a family. Once the meal is finished, the children are allowed to watch television or play on the computer, though the father always encourages them to watch knowledge-based television programs. He enjoys watching Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy with his sons every evening while his daughter will watch her own favourite children and teen shows in her bedroom, such as Wizards of Waverly Place and Pretty Little Liars. When the mother arrives home from work at around 8 pm, she is greeted by her three children who catch her up on the day’s stories before heading to bed.

Overall, this family is well organized in terms of their life and media consumption. How the parents and children appropriate their media use and content is closely related to their individual preferences, age and the availability of time. Perhaps due to its semi-immigrant family background, the parents' view of media consumption and rules tends to be more "traditional" (when compared to all the other Toronto families we interviewed). Here, television viewing is regulated among all the other things the children are expected to do at home (e.g., family meal time, homework, and religious study). In other words, the television has a particular function in this family: it fills the time between after school hours and dinnertime or before and after homework.

In all, the family has 4 televisions: one in the living room where most family viewing takes place, one in the parents’ bedroom, one in the daughter’s bedroom and one that is in the midst of being installed in the 10-year-old boy’s bedroom. For the most part, television viewing takes place in the living room and is by and large controlled by the father, who also wants his children to ask permission before watching. Though this rule applies to the two younger boys, the 12-year-old girl is able to sidestep her father’s mediation and watches television more often since she has her own set in her bedroom. The family also enjoys watching movies together on the weekends.

In general, the 10-year-old boy watches knowledge-based television (such as programs on the Discovery Channel or trivia-based shows) with his father and younger brother as well as cartoons like SpongeBob and Pokémon. Though he and his brother will play on the computer frequently, it is clear that for this child, television is still the preferred form of entertainment. While the parents still have total say over the media habits of their two younger sons, they are finding it increasingly difficult to monitor their 12-year-old daughter, who frequently watches television late at night, spends a good deal of her time on social networking sites, and argues with them to raise her allotted number of text messages per month on her cell phone. Though they do not seem overly concerned as of yet, it is clear that their daughter has begun to pull away from family routine and chooses to spend more time in her room and socializing with friends.

One interesting remark made during the interview speaks to the differences the father notices between the way his children are raised with television compared to his own experience. He recounts how growing up in Pakistan, television was considered a luxury item that was only used for news gathering purposes. Now, he looks at the way in which his children use the television, which is solely for entertainment. This point of view could explain why he encourages his children to watch knowledge-based television as opposed to cartoons.
The Sanders

The Sanders are an upper-middle class family of four living in a large two-story house in Pickering, a nearby suburb of Toronto. The family is interracially mixed, comprised of an Asian mother, a Caucasian father (both in their mid-forties) and their two sons, ages 12 and 10. Both parents are university educated and hold full time jobs working for the Canadian government. Together, their annual income ranges somewhere between 100,000$ and 120,000$. In all, they have four television sets: one in the main living room and one in each respective bedroom.

The Sanders’ family begins their weekday morning routine with the parents and children readying themselves for work and school. The 10-year-old typically watches about 20 minutes of SpongeBob SquarePants in the mornings while eating his breakfast. Though his older brother claims to be no longer interested in these types of shows, he will sit and sometimes watch with his brother while eating. Supper at the Sanders is by and large a time where the family tries to sit down all together; a feat that is not always possible due to everyone’s hectic schedules. For the 12-year-old, the evenings after supper when homework is finished are the only moments he regularly allocs for watching television. At 9 or 10 pm, he enjoys watching teen and general audience shows in his room before falling asleep. The younger brother spends more time watching television than his older brother, both after-school and on weekends, since he appears to be less occupied with extra-curriculars and homework. He still prefers to watch children’s programs, both live-action and cartoon. His favourites are iCarly, SpongeBob and Suite Life of Zack and Cody. Among all the equipment in the house, the two boys seem more attached to their portable devices. Because of the recently acquired laptop, the 12-year-old has been using it for all kinds of online activities (mostly chatting with his friends). He also likes to use his cell phone and send text messages. The 10-year-old boy likes to play with his iPod touch and PS3 every day.

Overall, the family does not watch very much television together nor do they have specific viewing schedule, aside from the weekend movie nights they try to have once a week. The parents rarely join their children in co-viewing their favourite programs, mostly due to the fact that they lead busy work schedules and often bring their work home with them in the evenings. Generally speaking, the father is more aware of his children’s media practices than the mother, who seems very disconnected from her sons’ habits and preferences. In terms of mediation, the parents do not feel the need to intervene very often in their children’s media consumption, though the father is beginning to feel that his eldest son requires more rules and limitations with respect to his program preferences and excessive online/cell phone use – a topic that will be broached further on in the chapter.

Media Habits in Toronto

Speaking to overall television consumption, the children in the families interviewed in Toronto report watching 10 or more hours per week. While that may be, it does not account for the added time spent playing video games, surfing the internet, and texting/talking on the phone which, as we will see, takes up a fair bit of the week as well. The children typically report watching at least one or two programs prior to leaving for school on weekday mornings, though the majority of their viewing is done after school and in the evenings. To note, the older children tend to watch less television after-school as they report having more homework to complete and more extra-curricular activities in which they participate.

These same families report an average of 3.2 television sets per household, 4 out of 5 of who subscribe to satellite or digital cable boxes. With three televisions available, and 2/3rds of children having their own television in their bedroom, there does not appear to be as much family
co-viewing, in comparison to other regions. Generally speaking, children are left to their own devices to watch their shows in the mornings, after school and weekends, while the parents typically join in during weekday evenings to watch more general audience and adult-centered programming. That being said, family weekend movie night is a very common occurrence, one that occurs on a weekly basis in every family interviewed.

Though each family’s television habits vary from household to household, computer and Internet use among children seemed relatively uniform. Those interviewed in Toronto have an average of 2.8 desktops or laptops in the home and every one of them have access to high speed wireless internet. Children (especially the 11 and 12-year-olds) spend a good deal of their free time online, either playing games or participating in social media websites. 3 out of 5 of the children interviewed had a Facebook account and nearly everyone had email and accessed YouTube on a regular basis. While this may be, there was a very low instance of children streaming television shows online. As for other electronics, each household averages 4 gaming consoles (i.e. Nintendo Wii, PlayStation, Xbox, DSI, etc...), 3 out of 5 of children interviewed owned a cell phone and 2/3rd had iPods, the majority of whom were able to access the Internet via said iPod.

“**My dad just sometimes reads the newspaper and he might just watch a little bit**”

Overall, the most reported “family viewing time” that occurs in the participating households is dedicated to watching films on weekend evenings. In terms of co-viewing actual television programs together, many parents spend at least some time accompanying their children while watching television. That being said, these instances typically tend to be reserved for watching more adult-centered or general audience programming.

Generally speaking, there are three different profiles of Torontonian families that surface in terms of level of parental co-viewing. The Robinsons represent the most co-viewing since, although they watch almost exclusively adult programming, they do the majority of it together. The mother from the Robinson family sums up this point when she states that:

> Operation Repo is what they watch with me, it’s sometimes what I like watching. I like watching A&E, shows like First 48, 48 Hour Mystery, like you know about true crime? And I find that fascinating, I’m really into that and they watch that with me sometimes, right? So we watch that together. They watch – well we watch movies. We can always sometimes watch movies together as a family.

Though these may not be typical programs destined for the 9 to 12 age bracket, both her 11 and 12 year old daughters list these same programs as being some of their favourites and admit they enjoy watching them with their mother. Interestingly enough, though the family has three television sets, they still tend to watch most programs together in the main room.

**From a Family’s Perspective**

From all the data collected and interviews conducted, several important themes have surfaced among the participating Toronto families; some of which are reflections of themes seen in other provinces, some of which are unique to this location in particular. The following segment is a detailed account of these themes, highlighted with examples from the five family interviews and four focus groups that were conducted in February 2011.
Representing a moderate level of family co-viewing is the Mancini family. The parents are very insistent on the importance of knowledge-based program and openly admit they do not enjoy watching programs made specifically for children, particularly cartoons. We see this when their 12-year-old daughter is asked if she watches her favourite programs, Pretty Little Liars and iCarly, with her parents:

G12: Well, sometimes I’m watching it in there, and they come in, but they don’t really sit down and watch.

Dad: Change! I don’t watch this! Hehe. ((Joke))

It is important to note that though her parents do not enjoy watching “kid shows” with their daughter, this does not necessarily mean they do not watch television together. As seen below, the family discusses the programs they like to watch together, programs that create special moments that are shared between parent and child:

G12: There’s a show that Daddy and I used to watch on Monday nights. The one about those like ancient roman stuff

Dad: Yes. That was good. You liked that one. Yeah, I liked that one.

INT: And does it happen that you record those shows to watch them later if you don’t have time, or?

G12: Uh...we used to do that with the Bachelor and the Bachelorette.

Dad: That’s their night together. ((referring to mother and daughter))

The Sanders family is interesting because they personify a common trend noted among the Torontonian parents interviewed: it appears that many of the parents interviewed have the added responsibility of bringing work home in the evenings which leaves little time for watching television. This is also seen in the Rajput household, where the mother must commute an hour and a half into the city. This typically means she arrives home around 8pm most evenings and is therefore not present to join her children in their afternoon/evenings television watching routine. This general lack of parental co-viewing due to hectic work schedules is confirmed during the adolescent focus group, where all 6 Toronto teenagers cited this to be the reason their parents rarely joined them to watch television when they were ten years old. Though they all agreed that their parents were “too busy to sit and watch” and few took the time to actively view their children’s favourite shows, they felt their parents still had some viewing awareness regarding what they were watching. As one 15-year-old girl puts it when referring to her mother, “she’d ask, but she wouldn’t watch it with us”.

On a separate note, the Robinson family offers a unique example of how parents can use other technology as a way to spend time and connect with their children aside from television. The Robinson father has spent many years playing video games with his daughters and proudly recounts how good his daughters have gotten; so much so that they often beat him as opposed to it being the other way around like when they were younger. While this approach works well in this particular family, many other parents find it harder to connect with their children who are more prone to gaming than television watching. The Clark mother explains that there are not many shows they watch together since her sons would rather be playing video games:

Ah, only if they’re like reading the newspaper or something. My mom is usually not, she is usually not. She’s like working or something but, my dad’s just sometimes reading his newspaper, and he might just watch a little bit.
Mom: We watch that uh iCarly and that whole-
B11: Only when there’s a new one.
Mom: Yeah, a new one and then we watch Zack and Cody. I think that’s about it, those couple of shows. But rarely. We rarely watch TV.
INT: Because there are games?
Mom: Yeah, He plays, X-box.
Mom: Yeah, because they go online.

Another trend noticed among almost all the families interviewed in Toronto were instances of parents and children bonding over a shared appreciation for older programs, particularly ones that used to be a favourite of the parents. In the Rajput household, the father enjoys spending some time watching Scooby Doo with his children, since it was a beloved program of his as a child. He insists that “we think it’s a small step, watching cartoons with the kids, but you’re actually building a relationship with them. So, if they’re watching Scooby Doo – ‘Papa, it’s a good episode’ – Ok, I sit and watch with them no problem”. In the same way, his children also feel that watching Scooby Doo is an opportunity to bond, since his 12 year old daughter admits that she purposely turns on that particular show so that her father will watch and they can spend time together. Similar situations are seen in the Mancini family, where the father and son enjoy watching reruns of The Three Stooges, and in the Robinson family, where the daughters have the same appreciation for their father’s favourite old cartoons, such as Thundercats.

“"They aren’t learning from it, it’s more just entertainment"”

If there is one point the parents in Toronto cannot stress enough, it is the importance of “educational television” in their children’s lives. To note, when parents refer to “education television”, they are actually referring to knowledge-based programming; programs that are typically general-audience targeted that focus on specific subjects such as nature, history, science, biographies and so forth. When asked what their children should be watching, every parent participating in the in-house family interview named the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, National Geographic or the Food Channel as their top choices because of their “educational” content. When pressed for further shows that were made specifically for the 9 to 12 age group, parents mentioned they find programs broadcasted on the Family Channel and YTV to be appropriate, not necessarily because of their entertainment value but because some believe that by watching programs like Hannah Montana or the Suite Life of Zack and Cody, their children are gaining knowledge as well as learn lessons from the characters as they experience daily life situations that are common for that age group.

Many parents feel that watching cartoons like SpongeBob SquarePants are fine to watch “once or twice a week” but stress that their children “aren’t really learning from it. It’s more just entertainment. It’s a waste of time”. On the whole, these parents want their children to maximize their time by learning from the programs they watch. One mother even goes so far as to suggest that children’s television programs “need to gear more to the learning and not the fantasy”. There is much talk about the state of present-day television in general, especially when compared to the quality programs of past generations, though this is an area upon which we will elaborate further on in the chapter.

The Rajput family offers a good example of the gap that can exist between the programs parents want their children to watch and the actual interest their children have in those suggested shows. The parents urge their children to watch the Discovery Channel and other programs that, although are not made specifically for children, are knowledge-based (i.e. Jeopardy and Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader). In contrast, their 12 year old daughter is not as keen on watching those programs as her parents would like, and
prefers to watch her own favourite shows in her room. When the mother mentions her frustration at how the Discovery Channel does not seem to attract many children viewers, her daughter responds “because Discovery channel is boring and weird so I turn it off.” Though her answer exemplifies the opinions of some of the children interviewed, it does not reflect everyone’s. On the contrary, her 10-year-old brother enjoys watching knowledge-based programming and agrees with his parents that there is not enough pedagogic content geared to his age group. That being said, in this particular instance it was hard for the researchers to determine whether the boy was voicing his own personal opinion or reiterating that of his father’s.

An interesting point worth noting is this: when parents were asked to name the three best programs currently on television for their children, almost every parent provided a network name in lieu of a program title, the most common answers being Discovery, History or Family Channel. Yet when asked to provide the names of current programs developed specifically for their children’s age group, most parents had difficulties naming more than one or two. As one mother states, “I probably wouldn’t know how to answer that, because I don’t watch a lot of TV”. Another mother echoes that same sentiment when she says “I’ve never really evaluated it, I don’t really know what’s out there”. A typical response to the question was usually the name of a knowledge-based program, such as How It’s Made, followed by a justification as to why it is considered appropriate for children. Some parents named programs such as Suite Life of Zack and Cody, iCarly and Wizards of Waverly Place as being “appropriate, acceptable shows”. Overall, most parents were unable to describe any of the children’s programs in detail, leading the researchers to affirm what was speculated in the co-viewing section: there is a much lower instance of parents actively co-viewing their children’s favourite programs in relation to other regions. This fact is all the more evident when the data is compared with the findings in St. John’s where, generally speaking, active co-viewing was a staple part of family life.

The Torontonian parents explain that they tend to recommend the educational programming on channels such as Discovery due to a serious lack of quality programming for their children’s age bracket. As the Robinson father states, “A lot of today’s TV is pure garbage. You know what? Put something worthwhile on there for our kids to watch.” Though the Sanders father agrees to a certain extent, he makes a valid point on the state of television that is worth including in this report:

TV, you know, it’s often criticized as showing nothing but junk, which really isn’t accurate. I mean, it’s what you make of it. There’s always good show out there, that if you pursue them, and you watch them, you can benefit from them. And there’s also the crap. But TV, you know, it doesn’t dictate to you what you watch.

Though quick to criticize, the parents in Toronto are full of suggestion for ways of improving the current state of children’s television. Overall, they feel the programs should be more knowledge-based and the messages should present relatable real life situations that their children can learn from. One mother suggests having more programming that centres on Canadian youth so that her own children can feel more of a connection with the characters. The mothers in the focus group would like to see more of an insistence on respecting elders and parents – a message they feel is sorely lacking in the programs their children are currently watching. They also stress the importance of having programs touch upon hot-button issues such as bullying and acceptance, and to ensure that the moral lessons presented in today’s children’s programs are more pronounced, as some of the mothers worry that the messages are not coming in clear since “there’s so much going on – they put too much story into the story”. This remark was made in comparison to television programs she grew up watching, as she felt that back then, shows like Little House on the Prairie had less cluttered storylines with easier to spot values and life lessons.
“It seems like a pretty safe channel”

In terms of network preferences, we have already seen that Torontonian parents are overwhelmingly more partial towards knowledge-based broadcasters such as the Discovery Channel and so forth. However, when asked to discuss networks devoted solely to children’s television programming, some parents appear to prefer the Family Channel, as it is considered to be a “safe” and “appropriate” network that hosts the majority of their children’s favourite programs (such as Suite Life of Zack and Cody, Wizards of Waverly Place and Phineas and Ferb). One 11-year-old girl in the children’s focus group explains that “my parents don’t have a problem with us watching that channel.” The Mancini’s feel that, in comparison with the other options out there, “Family continues to be probably one of the better stations (because they) show movies and Disney and stuff.” Though they do not usually have a problem with their 12 and 10 year old watching YTV, they feel it becomes inappropriate after 10 o’clock and therefore have less faith in the network. Furthermore, the Mancini’s express reservations towards Teletoon because, as their son puts it, “it has lots of swearing and bad shows like Robot Chicken and American Dad.”

Turning back to Family Channel, many of the parents state similar reasons they prefer it to other children’s networks, such as their “age-appropriate content”, “relatable characters” and the fact that the messages presented in each episode are reflections of “real life” social behaviour that their children can learn from. As the Rajput mother of 3 puts it, 

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I think what they focus a lot more on are social issues that children that age group go through. Um Hannah Montana, she has all sorts of issues with social issues with friends. Even That’s So Raven, that it’s got a humour content to it but it’s also shows how she deals with emotions

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and situational issues she comes across in interacting with people.

One mother in the focus group discusses some of the reasons as to why she feels the live-action programs broadcasted on this channel are appropriate for their children:

I think because you don’t really see a lot of adults in them. Right? So for me, it’s really focusing on the kids and they’re talking at a level that our kids can understand, and yeah, the parents step in sometimes or but it’s mostly they’re the main characters. I just think cause there’s not a lot of adults in them, do you know what I mean? Maybe that draws their attention more. Kids showing kids how to be kids.

“We looked forward to those shows, it was family time. We don’t have that as much anymore.”

Another point upon which the parents of Toronto come to a resounding consensus is the nostalgic longing for television programs “like we used to watch growing up”. There is an overwhelming call amongst the parents interviewed to have today’s children’s television return back to the sitcom formula they themselves enjoyed when they were young. They feel there is a definite lack of values, appropriate subject matter and overall quality in today’s television in comparison to older programs such as Little House on the Prairie, the Cosby Show and Family Ties. Interestingly though, all the programs mentioned by parents are family-targeted shows and not programs made specifically for children. The father from the Robinson family expresses his frustration with the current status of television below:

Back in the day, “No, don’t put that negative content in, we don’t want people to
be like that”. But not from today’s time. Today’s TV, we talk about this all the time, it’s like today’s TV compared to back in the day’s TV programming is pure garbage. Things like Family Ties, You know, things like that when we used to watch. Those were educational programs.

The Mancini parents feel very strongly that although their children may have more selection and variety in the range of shows available to them on today’s television compared to before, the parents themselves grew up with more quality programming, respectively. A mother from the focus group agrees that there is a noticeable difference in content quality from both generations, stating that her shows had more values and morals: “they were trying to teach us right from wrong and it came out more clear than the messages in the newer shows”.

One of the biggest problems worrying the parents interviewed in Toronto is that there are no more quality television programs that are appropriate for the entire family to watch together. One mother from the focus groups goes as far as to pose the question “are there any family shows even out now?” to which the remaining mothers have a hard time responding. It seems as though one of the aspects they miss most about the programs from their youth is the family viewing component. In regards to the difference between television now and television then when she grew up, the Clark mother notes that “Family Ties, Cosby Show, and Cheers. That was like – we looked forward to that. It was family time. We don’t have that as much anymore.”

While many feel the programs from the past were superior and should be the model that today’s programming strives to recreate, one mother in the focus group brings up an interesting point that leads to a relevant discussion worth reporting. Though she agrees that the programs from her youth presented more wholesome values, she also notes that the programs were “naïve” and “simple”, that they did not accurately reflect everyday society:

Growing up, we rarely saw interracial couples, we rarely saw gays, we never saw lesbians, and things are different now. The world is changing and so the TV shows have to be changed to match. If we’re still stuck in 1980, we’re never going to move forward as a society. Personally, as a mom, I want my children to know that there are different types of families, there’s different types of races, there’s different types of religions and that we have to be accepting.

Though not all the mothers agree on what should be presented as “appropriate content” to reflect our current society, they do concede that their children are far more advanced technologically and are introduced to more adult content at a much younger age than they were before. For this reason, they feel that children’s television should reflect this reality, albeit in a conscientious and appropriate manner. If used responsibly, they feel that “TV is a way to expose them to the real world.”

“He’s getting older, it’s a tough decision, but right now, I haven’t said no.”

On the whole, the parents interviewed in Toronto are less concerned with mediating their children’s television viewing habits and more concerned with controlling their excessive cell phone, laptop and video game use. Besides a fairly consistent “no television during supper” rule seen in most of the families, there does not appear to be a cut-off on the amount of time children are allowed to watch television. As the Clark mother puts it, “there has never been an issue with too much television watched.” There is, however, priority placed on homework completion before leisure activities, a rule that is especially enforced in the Rajput household where the father spends his afternoons helping his children complete their homework before they are allowed to watch
cartoons. When asked about their daily activities, almost all the children mentioned making time for homework as well as watching television.

While limiting television viewing time does not seem to be a primary concern, Internet, cell phone, and video game use are a different story, particularly among the 12-year-old children. Almost all parents admit to worrying that their eldest child is becoming oversaturated with new media exposure. It appears that the more time their children spend on their phones and online, the more the parents feel a sense of separation growing between them, as if a blockade is building between the child and themselves and ultimately altering the family dynamic. The Sanders parents explain how the relationship between their 12-year-old son and the rest of the family has become strained since they purchased him a new laptop computer:

Mom With (boy12), since we got the computer a couple weeks ago I guess. A laptop. Um, we’ve noticed that he is not with the family so much. Like we used to always be in the family room, and now he’s up in the bedroom or he’s up in the office. So he’s gone, and you know, when he’s texting as well on the phone, he always leaves. So we’ve noticed that we see less and less of (boy12).

Dad Which, you know, we’re not really thrilled about.

Mom We’re trying to figure out how to bring him back in.

Dad Yeah, I mean Facebook certainly has been a uh, a big drawing card for him. And that’s impacted upon the time we spent together certainly.

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Dad Yeah, I mean Facebook certainly has been a uh, a big drawing card for him. And that’s impacted upon the time we spent together certainly.

The Mancini parents are undergoing a similar situation with their 12-year-old daughter who, like the Sanders boy, is spending more and more time on the laptop in her bedroom. The parents explain that it has been difficult to find a fair equilibrium for the amount of time their daughter spends online. On the one hand, they do not wish to stifle her independence or social life. On the other hand, they feel a disconnect growing with their eldest child and want her to participate in more family activities. As a solution, the parents have devised a compromise: “she helps out half an hour, I let her stay in front of the computer for half an hour.” They also receive notifications from their blackberries that inform them of their daughter’s Facebook activities.

Though they try to restrict the amount of time their children spend on the computer, parental monitoring in these families extends only so far. While the parents are very conscious of when and for how long their children spend on the computer, they are less concerned with monitoring what their children are actually doing online. Interestingly enough, four of the five sets of parents each offer a different explanation as to why they do not feel obligated to strictly monitor the websites their children visit. Though the Rajput father feels very strongly that “when kids are on the on the computer, you should watch them [because] you never know what’s going on”, he and his wife do not typically follow through with this doctrine. As the mother states, “I find that anytime I come into the room, because the door is always open, they’re playing the same games, you can hear it. So, I always know what they’re doing”. The Mancini parents are once again torn between infringing on their 12 year old daughter’s privacy and supervising her online activity. When asked if they participate in their children’s internet use, the mother explains that:

Not really at this age. They’re pretty self-sufficient. They’re pretty...unless they need me, they’ll call me. Other than that, I don’t wanna feel like I’m watching them. ‘Cause they’ll tell me, ‘what are you doing? Why are you standing there’?

The Clark mother, though upset that her 12 year old son is spending more and more time playing video games online, is reassured by the fact that he is playing online with friends in his class, and therefore considers the activity to be more social than solitary. Finally the Sanders mother admits she would like to monitor her son’s Facebook activity more closely but does not feel technologi-
cally adept enough to keep up with his social interactions on that particular website:

When (boy12) got access to Facebook and MSN, he said that we could come and read anytime. But now he's kind of hiding it from us. He turns his computer. He tells us to go away. Um, so yeah, I wish I had, we you know, would be there more with him. Like I'm there [if he's] just like doing homework or something but um, when he's socializing with his friends, it's like he wants us to leave... I have gone on, on occasion where he's left it on, and I've kind of read some of the stuff, but I don't know how to get into it. And like I don't have a Facebook account. I can just read like maybe 1 line. I don't know how to read the whole dialog.

Another reoccurring theme seen often in the parents' testimonials is the ever present question of “when to say no” and the underlying factors that affect this decision. For some, sticking to the rules they enforce is no easy task, especially when confronted with begging children who appeal their case convincingly. In the Rajput family, for instance, they have a difficult time allowing their daughter to have a television in her bedroom, since they often catch her up late watching inappropriate shows such as Law and Order. As the mother explains, “we disconnect it and she begs and pleads and then we feel soft and we reconnect the cable.”

It can be argued that the most difficult factor affecting parental mediation is that of peer pressure, or children wanting something so that they can “fit in” with their friends who already have it, regardless of the recommended age restrictions. A classic example of this has been seen in all 5 regions with parents allowing their children under the age of 13 to open a Facebook account, even though 13 is the minimum age required by the organization for membership. The Mancini parents faced a similar dilemma this past Christmas season, when their 10-year-old boy asked for the video game Call of Duty. Though the parents were aware of the 18+ age restriction and hesistant to purchase it for him, they ultimately gave in, citing “that decision was more peer pressure than anything”. The Sanders father faces a similar moral dilemma every week when his 12-year-old son watches Jersey Shore. When asked how he feels about his son’s self-proclaimed favourite show, the following conversation ensues:

INT Is it because all your friends are watching it, or?

B12 Mainly, yeah. It’s really popular in my class, in my school.

Though these parents have a hard time justifying their permission-giving, in the cases of the families interviewed in Toronto, it seems that more often than not, parents are giving into their children’s demands even when they feel the request may impinge on the rules they set out. Interestingly enough, the question of Jersey Shore’s appropriateness surfaced many times throughout the Sanders interview and ultimately prompted the father to reconsider the rules (or lack thereof) he has in place when it comes to his children’s television viewing:

INT And what about TV, are there rules for television?

Dad Ah, well I wouldn’t say we’ve carved any out in specific. But we’re certainly, certainly aware of what they watch. So we try and make sure that we’re exercising good judgment and... As I say that I, I think back to Jersey Shore and how I’m gonna – I keep coming back to that
in my mind. Because it’s not consistent with the, you know the values that we abide by as a family.

“He’s sitting in front of the computer. I don’t want that. I want him outside socializing.”

In contrast to other regions, the children in Toronto rarely mention playing outdoors as a quotidian activity in their daily lives. If brought up during an interview, it was normally mentioned by the parents who wished their children would play outside more often. Most expressed frustration at the fact that their children preferred to watch television or use the computer instead of spending time outdoors in the neighbourhood. The Mancini mother expresses her disappointment with the fact that her 10-year-old son, even when spending time with friends, will typically choose to play indoors:

Mom We’d rather them go outside and actually do physical activity. That’s what we did. So he’s out with his friends, you know, when he goes to his other friend’s house, he’s sitting in front of the computer. I don’t want that. I want him outside socializing. That’s what I want you to do, ’cause that’s what we did.

That being said, it is not fair to generalize and declare this the norm for all children. In the Robinson family, it is the 11-year-old daughter who often mentions playing outside as a favourite hobby. Though it is clear she enjoys her time spent outdoors, it can only take place after school when she goes to her grandmother’s house, as the family resides in an apartment in a more commercial area of Toronto and do not have a backyard of their own.

A possible explanation for this decreased interest in outdoor play in the Toronto region is provided by the Rajput mother, who feels that living in their new subdivision, they do not share the same sense of community as she did growing up in Hamilton:

We don’t really know our neighbours... And I also don’t think that culture that used to exist, where you used to go to your neighbours and friends, I don’t think that exists so much anymore?

When asked to offer an explanation for this change in ‘culture’, the mother explains that:

I think parents are just so busy, for one. Um, a lot of times parents are both working. And when I grew up my mom didn’t work, my mom was always home, my friends moms were always at home. Where as now, the little time parents are home, they want to spend with their children. As opposed to have friends over and then the kids are gone off again.

Once again, we see the mention of work brought up as a factor that impedes not only on family time, but on time spent participating in the community as well.

“It’s just that Canadian and American lifestyles are so different”

Asking parents and their children how they feel about Canadian versus American television programming yields mixed results. Speaking to Canadian productions for all ages, some parents felt that though Canadian television was of “poorer quality” technically (due to an inferior budget), it was of “superior quality” to American productions in terms of the morals and values it contained, as well as “less negativity”. The mother
from the Robinson family explains that this is a reflection of our two societies: “It’s just that the American lifestyle and Canadian lifestyle are so different”. That being said, they all agree that there are barely any Canadian-made children’s programs currently on the air made specifically for the 9 to 12 age group. The Rajput mother points out that “I think the US programming dominates the television that we watch in Canada. All of the shows that they watch, they’re all USA. I just don’t think they know the difference”. When asked to comment on the state of Canadian children’s television, the Mancini’s had this to say:

Dad  American
Mom  All American.
INT  Oh yeah?
Mom  It’s all American.
INT  Do you think that’s lacking? Do you think there should be more Canadian content out there?
Dad  Yeah, there should be.
Mom  Yeah.

When posed the same question, however, the children in each family had very different responses. Though there were some neutral cases, or children who did not have a strong viewpoint either way so long as the program was interesting, others were much more opinionated. On the one hand, we have the 12-year-old Rajput girl who was extremely vocal about her distaste for Canadian-produced television. She feels that:

American people have better TV shows. United States, they have stuff that actually we want to watch cause they get better ideas and stuff. But then in Canada, it’s just Canada, like I dunno... I don’t watch Canadian children’s programs.

While her preference clearly lies with American programming, the girl was unable to provide the names of any Canadian shows she disliked, save for How To Be Indie. When it comes to this girl’s particular taste, she feels that the American shows exhibit a more appealing lifestyle than those presented in Canadian shows.

On the other side of the spectrum lies the Robinson daughters, ages 11 and 12, who very adamantly support Canadian-made television. They feel that American television presents more questionable and inappropriate content that is not suitable for their age group. The 12-year-old explains that:

I think American programs have a lot of negativity and a lot of bad stuff to it. I’m not saying Canadians are perfect, they’re not but, they have more like – Canada is more of a nature country so I guess they have a lot of like outdoor stuff and like fishing shows and everything. Not necessarily ah bad stuff like uh drinking and sexual stuff and everything, you know. So I think Canadians have more appropriate shows than Americans.

To highlight their point of view, the girls offer the example of Degrassi: The Next Generation, a program that is Canadian made and produced. While it used to be one of their favourite television shows, the girls are much less keen on watching it now since they think the production company switched hands. Based on what they can tell by the new ‘spin’ the producers have put on the program (raunchier content and new actors), they feel the show has become too ‘Americanized’ for their liking:

Mom  Degrassi, remember Degrassi?
G11 Yeah, I don’t like the new episodes because the new episodes are now like, more bad now
Mom  It’s not for your age group
G12 They’ve brought a lot of Americans onto it
Mom  Yeah, it’s a lot of Americans now
G11 Lots of sexual stuff now, it’s more about that, so now I don’t watch that show anymore
Interesting. So, so now it doesn't appeal to you as much?

No

No

No? Because of the themes?

Yeah and the way it’s presented

It’s not the same, not the same

Not the same, they won’t watch it anymore

Another fact worth mentioning is that when the children in the Toronto focus group were asked where they would like to make, produce and set their imaginary new television series, everyone agreed that it should be a Canadian-made production set in Canada. We can clearly see from these examples that children's tastes differ on the types of programming they prefer, as well as on production origin.

“There’s a little bit of Miley Cyrus in her”

When asked if parents feel that television has an influence on their children, many different responses were given, all of which were either positive or neutral. In one respect, both the Mancini family and Clark family agree they see the impact that television has had on their children in a more materialistic sense. The Mancini mother observes that her 12-year-old daughter has been very influenced by “new outfits and the fashion and dressing”, a pressure she notices more and more during mother-daughter excursions to the mall. The mother from the Clark family reciprocates these feelings, noting that advertising in television shows influence her sons in terms of the clothes they wear (“like the skinny jeans”), the way they look and style themselves, and the games they play. Her boyfriend feels this is a natural occurrence, since “that’s what TV is made for. The most marketed product will always sell the best, right?”. Though it is an undeniable influence, neither set of parents express concern, leading researchers to believe that it is considered a harmless or neutral influence.

As the Rajput mother reflects on this topic, she comments on several points pertaining to the influences television has on her children, including behavioral imitation and character identification. For instance, she feels that her oldest daughter (12) is very influenced by the characters in her favourite television series. She can recognize the ways in which her daughter identifies to these characters, stating that “there is a little bit of Raven in her, and there’s a little bit of Miley Cyrus in her,” meaning she has a tendency to act like the main character in the television shows That’s So Raven and Hannah Montana. Though the mother is conscious of this influence, she does not consider it a negative impact, especially since she recognizes similar influences on herself and draws parallels between her personality and that of the Elaine character from Seinfeld.

When talking about influences from television with the children’s focus group, many children were able to offer examples of classmates who mimic styles, personality traits and actions seen on the television. One 11 year-old girl in particular recounts her experience below:

Um well a guy at my school, he was like copying people from like other shows. It’s kinda funny.

What does he do?

His hair, his clothes, like, everything. His actions, the way he talks...

And what does it resemble? What TV show does it resemble?

Jersey Shore
Finally, the Robinson’s use the influence television can have on their daughters to teach them life lessons. The father, who hails from a difficult past including some time spent in correctional facilities, likes to watch programs such as Beyond Scared Straight with his 11 and 12 year old daughters so they can understand real-life hardship and the consequences of poor decision-making:

G11  There’s also a show, it’s like a good show to learn like how to not be in prison, it’s called Beyond Scared Straight.
Dad  Yeah it’s a good one.
G12  You see how in prison life is like.
G11  Yeah and its not good like to get there, like not to do it. So, that show is interesting to me too.
Dad  And with Scared Straight, I never really – at the beginning I never thought it was going to be a good program for them. But being a guy that came from prison, I sat there and watched it and said ‘you know what, you guys better pay attention’.

Though he recognizes at first glance that it may not be a show for a younger audience, he feels that there are lessons there to be learnt. He hopes that by watching this show, it can influence his children to make better decisions in their future so they may avoid making the same mistakes he did in the past. He also believes it is important to co-view these programs with his daughters so that he can answer any questions they may have and be sure they understand the gravity of the situation. As a result, not only are his children very aware of his troubled past, they all admit to feeling much closer as a family and are able to maintain a very open dialogue on all subject matter.

“And she watches it on 51”

Though it is a small and perhaps inconsequential detail, the researchers have noted a trend specific to the Toronto region. Both the children and parents interviewed have a tendency to refer to specific broadcasters by their channel number and not their name. The designated channel number of a network operates like a heuristic; they know the number, but not necessarily the name of the network and it functions a bit like branding. For example, this is how the 12-year-old Robinson daughter explains her typically television watching routine: “sometimes we watch music videos on channel 29. We watch mainly that. And sometimes we watch 51, and then we watch, at 9 o’clock at night time we watch Operation Repo on channel 58”. The 12-year-old Rajput girl provides another example of how children, so used to using the channel number, are at times are not even aware of the broadcaster names:

INT  What about CBC?
G12  Well, on Saturday mornings on channel 18 they have like That’s So Raven and stuff like that.
Mom  No, sweetheart, CBC is channel 6.
G12  Oh. Channel 6 is for like old people.

Though no explanation was provided, it was a trend the researchers felt was worth noting as it was seen across the board in all families interviewed and focus groups conducted.
As seen throughout our data collection, most children have different tastes in regards to their favourite programs. The following is a complete list of all television shows named by the children participants as being their favourites. It has been divided by age to present readers with a better understanding of age preference division:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Favourite Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>iCarly (US); Sponge Bob (US); Phineas and Ferb (US);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>SpongeBob (US); iCarly (US); Ben10 (US); Suite Life on Deck (US); Pokémon (JP);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairly Odd Parents (UK); Bugs Bunny (US); The Three Stooges (US); Glee (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>iCarly (US); Family Guy (US); The Simpsons (US); Wipeout (CDN); Phineas and Ferb (US);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vampire Diaries (US); Pretty Little Liars (US); Wizards of Waverly Place (US);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sonny with a Chance (US);</td>
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Regardless of the name or subject matter of their preferred program, however, children tended to give the same reasons as to why they enjoyed it the most; the top three reasons being if a program is funny, if a program shows characters doing weird/interesting things, and if a program offers enough variety/interesting subject matter. Below are some examples of children explaining their favourite programs and why.

The 10-year-old Sanders boy discusses his love for the live-action Family Channel comedy The Suite Life of Zack and Cody:

B10 It’s called Suite Life of Zack and Cody. I like that one.

Dad Are you entertained? Are you happy? Are you sad?

B10 Yeah, I’m entertained. It’s kinda funny sometimes. Because, just. Like these weird kids who live in this hotel, kind of thing. And then, it’s just really different, every single show. It’s different. So, that’s why I really like it.
One 10-year-old girl in the focus group, when asked to write about her favourite show, had this to say:

*I like Family Channel because it has lots of kid shows and my favourite show is Pair of Kings because it’s really funny how it has all the weird and crazy adventure that they get into. It makes me feel interested to watch and it makes me feel funny.*

One trend worth noting from Toronto was this: in comparison to the other regions across Canada where data was collected, Toronto had by far the highest number of pre-teens (10,11,12 year olds) not only watching adolescent or adult programming, but listing them as their favourite shows. For example, The 12-year-old Rajput girl often watches Gossip Girl and Law & Order while the 11 and 12 year old Robinson girls felt they were “growing out of Family Channel shows” and preferred watching Operation Repo, True Crime, and 48 Hours with their mother and father. As for the 12-year-old Sanders boy who prefers Jersey Shore to other kid shows because it is “cool to see how they deal with situations”, the data from the children’s focus group shows that he is not alone in enjoying this particular show. In fact, 4 out of 8 children in the focus group admitted to watching the show and provided some interesting comments. One 11-year-old girl says “for me, it inspired me. Like you know how they work out and stuff, and it inspires me to do things like that.” Her sister (another girl 11) says: “I like Snookie, Snookie’s funny and she’s tiny, and I like her voice.” The 10-year-old boy comments that, although he’s only watched it once, he likes the characters, “yeah, it’s not fake it’s just real”. The following is an exert from the note one 11-year-old girl was asked to write regarding her favourite program:

*I like Jersey Shore because it’s funny and there’s a lot of drama. I like it because the guys are cute and everyone in the house has different things to do makes it interesting and funny. Some parts in Jersey Shore make me feel happy, sad and all different emotions because of what happens and doesn’t happen. I also like Jersey Shore because it’s all real and everything the characters say and do is just real. Some of the girls and guys inspire me also.*

During another section of the children’s focus group, the children are shown clips from 6 of the currently most popular children’s television shows broadcasted for their age bracket. This is done to give researchers more information regarding what makes and breaks a successful television show – valuable feedback that comes straight from the children themselves. In this case, they were shown Total Drama Island: World Tour, H2O, SpongeBob SquarePants, Life With Derek, Sonny With a Chance, and Drake and Josh. The children were very vocal and keen to share their point of view regarding the positives and negatives of each program. Though children have their own unique likes and dislikes, there are some overall consensuses made. Firstly, SpongeBob SquarePants was by far the most well received clip, with children cheering when it came on and almost everyone singing along to the theme song. All agreed that it was a good show because it was “funny” and had “funny characters”. When looking generally at the comments made for all the cartoon clips, the children seem to enjoy those that are “weird” and “completely unrealistic”. Acts of violence are also considered to be “funny” by the majority of the group.

In terms of live action programming, the children seemed to appreciate shows that were relatable, such as Drake and Josh, because it centers on a reconstructed family and the sibling rivalry that ensues. They were very quick to criticize any show that seemed “too predictable” and enjoyed when programs switched up their formulas to present the audience with different scenarios, as seen with the show Suite Life of Zack and Cody. Finally, they felt that live action shows cannot stray too far from reality but must have some “unrealistic” elements to keep them entertained. For example, the show H2O (which centres around the adventures of young girls who can transform into mermaids) is far too unrealistic to be entertaining. On the other hand, Life With Derek is too realistic and formulaic to maintain interest,
as noted by this 10 year old girl: “I watched a few episodes and got bored of it cause it’s usually just the same routine”. When considering all the feedback presented, we can see why The Suite Life of Zack and Cody, which follows the life two brothers facing everyday relatable challenges that slightly amplify reality (since they live in a hotel) was overall the most liked live-action program by the children’s focus group.

“Too many little ads”

Although the children in Toronto allot a certain portion of their time to the computer and being online (particularly the older ones), there seems to be very few instances of children using the computer to actively seek out and watch television shows online. There are, however, two specific reasons for which children would do so.

Some children will venture online to view content they could not normally access on the television, such as an 11-year-old boy from the focus group who will go on YouTube to watch old episodes of the original Spiderman cartoon or the 12-year-old Robinson girl who likes to YouTube specific music videos that are not playing on Much Music. The other reason for watching online is if they missed a particular episode, which was only mentioned by the 12-year-old Mancini and 12-year-old Rajput girls. Both girls will sometimes venture onto the Much Music website in order to watch missed episodes of Pretty Little Liars or Make it or Break it, though they say it does not happen often. The Rajput girl will also go on YouTube and search for missed episodes of Family Channel programs such as Wizards of Waverly Place and Suite Life on Deck.

That being said, the interviews from Toronto show that overall, children prefer to watch television shows on television as opposed to online. The only reason offered for this preference is given by the 12-year-old Rajput daughter who says there are “too many little ads coming up everywhere” to make watching television online worthwhile.

“When I watch TV, I go on my iPod and wait for someone to answer on Facebook”

Similar to what was reported in St. John’s, media multitasking (a term used to describe the act of using multiple forms of media at once, primarily watching television and using another form of media or technology simultaneously) is usually practiced in one way or another by almost all the children interviewed in Toronto, though it is not always a commonality. Through analyzing the information gathered from all locations, it is becoming more apparent that, although many children media-multitask, it is more common with older children (11 and 12) than the younger ones (9-10). From what the researchers saw, there was no mention of whether media multitasking also occurred during family viewing, such as weekend movies nights. In this excerpt from the Sanders interview talking to the two brothers aged 10 and 12, we see very clearly how this difference in age and media multitasking habits correlate:

INT All right. And when you two watch TV, does it happen that you ever do any other activity? Any media activity while you’re watching TV? Like, for instance, do you,(boy12) do anything else sometimes when you watch TV? I don’t know, play on the computer or do different things?

B12 Um, when I’m watching TV sometimes I’ll text. Or I’ll be on my laptop.

INT On your phone or?

B12 Yeah in my phone.

INT Okay. But what do you do on your laptop? While you’re watching TV?
B12 Usually on Facebook.
INT Okay.
B12 And then YouTube or something.
INT And what do you mostly do? Are you mostly on Facebook and just having TV in the background? Or are you watching TV and having Facebook more in the background?
B12 Kinda both. Probably TV in the background.
INT Okay. And, what about you?
B10 Um, well when I’m watching TV, I don’t go on the laptop, or anything, cause I don’t go on Facebook. I probably just go on my iPod sometimes when I watch TV, and that’s probably it.
INT How often do you think you do something else while you watch TV? Does that happen when you watch TV, or?
B10 No, not at all. Not a lot. Depends, it depends what I’m watching. If it’s something that’s like, that I actually want to watch, then I’ll probably just watch it. But if it’s something that’s kinda like... that I’m not really interested in, then I might just use my iPod, but that doesn’t happen a lot.

Another example is seen with a 12-year-old boy in the focus group who explains his regular television watching habits as “when I watch TV, I usually go on my iPod while waiting for somebody to answer back on Facebook”. This commonality that older children (12) share when it comes to media multitasking can be explained by their embarkment into the pre-teen years and their need to connect more frequently with their peers, not to mention the use of social media that so many children begin with at that age.

One particularly interesting case of media multitasking is seen in the 12-year-old Robinson girl, who uses both the desktop computer and the television at the same time to simultaneously watch music videos – online on YouTube and on the television on Much Music:

G12 Watch TV and go on the computer. I do that a lot in the morning time.
INT Yeah? So what do you do on the computer?
G12 Uh I go on uh YouTube and look at music videos and while I’m listening to music videos I watch the TV too so I know how to multitask hehe.

There then demonstrates her media multitasking to the researchers by using a swivel chair to easily switch the direction she is facing. The chair allows her to attend to both screens at the same time, as the computer and the television set are situated on opposite sides of the room. As her mom says, “yeah, she does that all the time.”

While these cases ring true, we cannot generalize that they are the norm among the older children. The 12-year-old Rajput girl says she will sometimes go on Facebook or do homework while watching television but only during the commercials as the programs are always at the forefront of her attention. Likewise, the 11-year-old Robinson girl is not as keen on media multitasking as her older sister. At times she will draw or read while the television is on but does not tend to use other forms of media simultaneously with television. The 9 and 10-year-old children interviewed were all much less keen on media multitasking and reported only sometimes “going on their iPod” or “having a snack” while watching television. For them, television is still at the forefront of their attention.

It should also be noted that children were asked if there was ever a show they watched that was so good it warranted their entire attention, so much so that they would stop media multitasking while it was on and only focus on watching that particular show. We observed that amongst all children who admitted to media multitasking, they all had at least one or two favourite
programs for which they would drop everything and do nothing but watch. The key point seen over and over again in these interviews is this: children are more than happy to put away their laptops and put down their phones when “a good show comes on”. The bottom lines seems to be that if a new and interesting episode is being broadcasted, television is chosen over new technology and even social media.

A list of these favourite programs, which are considered so good that children will not multitask through, includes SpongeBob SquarePants (US), iCarly (US), Glee (US), Jersey Shore (US), Pretty Little Liars (US), Vampire Diaries (US), Operation Repo (US), Suite Life on Deck (US), Wizards of Waverly Place (US), Drake and Josh (US), Sonny with a Chance (US), and Fairly Odd Parents (UK).

Children take on the role of television producer

“After watching it, I should feel like a new person”

Another segment of the children’s focus group interview asks the participants (in this case, 8 children ranging between the ages of 9 and 12 and hailing from 4 Torontonian families) to pretend they are in charge of creating a brand new show for their peers. Children are encouraged to share their ideas with the group and devise a premise, setting, plot line, characters, even a name for the new show. On the whole, the children of Toronto chose to create a live-action comedy program centered around characters their age or a bit older that deal with everyday issues they could relate to.

The participants decided to create a live-action comedy set in a Canadian high school. The plot would focus on a new student who has recently moved to town and the difficulties he faces fitting in with new friends. They feel there should be one “happy” main character that has at least two good friends and the rest of the characters should be “pathetic”. They would like it to be educational but in a subtle way, teaching them more life lessons than actual facts. Some of the children feel it would be beneficial if the main actors were well known celebrities who are recognizable to the viewers. Although they feel that, in general, Canadian programs are not very interesting, they are keen to make the “first interesting Canadian show”. As for a title, they feel it should be a question as well as a title, one that sums up the theme of the show. One 12-year-old boy suggests “My Miserable Life” as a working title. When asked how kids should feel after watching an episode of their program, one 12-year-old boy says they “should feel like a new person”.

Some of the children interviewed participating in the family interview had many suggestions to share with television producers as well, particularly the 11 and 12-year-old Robinson girls. When the researchers asked the girls what their ideal children’s television program would look like, they suggested presenting good morals, straying from negative imagery and focusing on the positive side of situations. Both girls emphasize the point that all children are different with different tastes:

I kind of in a way get mad at how they took off some shows that were so good and now are putting on shows that are not that much interesting, it’s like now more drama to it. So, it’s like, just because now, how technology’s changing, like kids are liking different stuff, now they’re thinking like all kids are changing to like drama and stuff. But like I think kids are different, so like some kids are gunna get mad that you’re taking off some shows.

As we can see, these girls are quick to note that producers cannot assume everyone will enjoy
the same type of programming and should consider children’s individuality and personal taste when deciding to remove a show from their broadcasting lineup.

From an Adolescent’s Perspective

The Toronto adolescents interviewed in a focus group provide the researchers with a unique point of view concerning the state of children’s television. Seeing as how they themselves not long ago were of the target study age, the teenagers are able to recount vivid memories of their childhood television watching experience and draw comparisons and critiques to today’s programming with ease. Moreover, all 6 teenagers have a younger sibling between the ages of 9 and 12 and are therefore very familiar with the target age and their program preferences. They provide an interesting reflection on the quality, appropriateness and entertainment value of current children’s television from a more relatable and closer perspective than that of the parents.

At the beginning of the focus group, the teens are asked to think back to when they were 10 years old and their experience with television at that age. Their answers were all relatively consistent, with more of them preferring the live-action Family Channel comedies over cartoons, save for SpongeBob SquarePants and Fairly Odd Parents, which were among the most commonly named favourite shows. An overall consensus was made that the Suite Life of Zack and Cody was the best and most popular program when they were 10 because it was unrealistic in a fun way, but not too unrealistic to be unbelievable, which they feel made it “memorable”. The characters had a good balance of sibling rivalry and fun activities and there was always a lesson to be learned. They all agreed that in terms of the characters, “it was pretty easy to relate to them”, which they all appreciated. In discussing the appeal of the live-action children’s comedy genre, one 15-year-old girl explains why she enjoyed similar live-action comedy shows such as Zoey 101,

Um, I liked it because when you’re a little kid, you always want to know how the older kids act and stuff, so when you watch that show you’re like, “oh”. You see how they do this, how they dress like this, and how they just talk about all these cool things.

One teenager explains that in order to make an interesting, successful children’s television program, it must have a catchy theme song:

It’s its identity. I dunno, like, other than the characters, if the song is good, people will be into it. I dunno, like in the beginning when people are like “what’s this show”, if the song is weird, people won’t watch it.

When thinking back on their favourite shows at that age, all participants are reminded of the times they spent watching those programs either with a sibling or on their own. As seen previously in the co-viewing section, the participants did not spend much time watching television with their parents when they were younger due to their parents hectic work schedules. While most of the teenagers did mention that their parents would pass by and check in on what they were watching, they said it was rare to have them sit down and actively co-view children’s programs alongside them. As one 14-year-old boy states when referring to his family, “yeah, we don’t really watch TV with each other.” While that rings true, the teenagers do admit to watching a fair bit of television with their younger siblings and are very conscious of the influence this has on them. They feel their younger siblings have been exposed to older programming at a younger age than their peers normally would since, when they watch television together, it is typically the older sibling who controls the remote. With that in mind, they do admit to trying to restrict the inappropriate shows they watch together so as to not expose their siblings to too much unsuitable content. Some even make a point to split their viewing time “50-50” and watch shows that interest their younger siblings.
In discussing the difference between how they watch television now as opposed to when they were ten, the teenagers had some very interesting points to make. Not only do they feel that they watched much more television at the age of ten, mostly due to lighter homework loads and less extra-curricular activities, they also feel they were less selective about what they watched. While today as teenagers they tend to only tune in for specific programs, they used to be much less selective at the age of 10 and thus watched a lot more programming that was not necessarily their favourites. This also meant sticking to a select three default channels (Family, YTV and Teletoon) and only flipping between these three when watching television. Since they tended to stay within a 3 channel viewing circuit, they feel this is one of the reasons they watched less adult or inappropriate programs, as those were advertised and shown on different channels. Thinking reflectively about their siblings’ television habits today, they all note that their younger siblings engage in the same “watching for the sake of watching” behaviour that they used to. This means the 9 to 12 year olds are spending a good portion of their time simply watching television rather than specific programs. They admit that, as teenagers, they are no longer afforded this luxury as they have busier schedules, more homework and fuller social calendars, leaving them with little time to “watch TV for the sake of watching”.

Every participant agrees that, while YTV was a popular station when they were 10 years old, the broadcaster’s appeal has somewhat decreased in the eyes of their younger siblings today. One 15-year-old says it would no longer be his younger brothers “default channel” as it once was for his when he was 10. On the flip side, everyone unanimously agrees that their younger siblings appear to consider the Family Channel as their favourite and default network because they perceive that their younger siblings believe “the shows are more age-appropriate and more interesting”, because “they’re about kids their age”, and because “there is a bigger selection that appeals to both boys and girls”.

When the topic of Canadian versus American programming is broached, almost everyone agrees that Canadian programs appear to be lacking in entertainment value. Words like “too cheesy”, “weird”, “too normal”, and “try too hard to relate to kids” were thrown out during the discussion. Overall, they feel that Canadian children’s television faces the challenge of creating shows that are not too close to reality, which they admit to finding boring, but also be careful not to make ones that are too far-fetched, which they claim makes them lose interest quickly. Though they admit there are “a couple of good ones”, they still feel that “most are bad” for the reasons stated above. In terms of their younger siblings preferences, they all agree that they watch more American programming, not necessarily because they prefer American but because they believe the actual programs are “superior quality” strictly in terms of entertainment value, not production value. That being said, they all admit that if they had the choice between watching Canadian-made shows and American-made shows that were equally entertaining and well-made, they would all prefer to watch the Canadian ones. Once again, we see that the interest for more homegrown productions is there, the teenagers simply do not feel this interest is currently being met.

The final activity in the focus group is collaborating on the development of a new television program for children aged 9 to 12. The teenagers were torn between producing a cartoon or live action show and thus decided to make two separate programs. In terms of cartoons, they feel the show should be a comedy with lots of adventure that takes place in a forest, more specifically in a village of tree houses that are connected via underground tree roots. The main characters should have human-like qualities but they should be creatures. The program should feature some morals in each episode but they should be hidden among the ‘silliness’ of the antics that occur in each episode. Ideally, they would like to see this program being broadcasted on weekdays at 4pm on Family Channel.
For the live action program, the participants would like to produce a comedy show with some elements of adventure that takes place in a fictional suburb or a fictional big city. The group of main characters should comprise of a mix of boys and girls who are good friends. Specific emphasis is put on the importance of having main characters of both sexes since they want the show to appeal to both girl and boy viewers. These characters should have something ‘special’ about them, something that makes them ‘unique’ (for example, super powers) and should be seen hanging out in a few key locations, such as a school, the park, or a local restaurant. They feel that there should be cleverly placed witty references to pop culture woven into the script, something that viewers will pick up on but that are not blatantly incorporated into the show. Finally, they would like to have this program broadcasted following their cartoon, so weekday afternoon at 4:30 pm on Family Channel.

that may be, the children and families of Toronto do share some similar media habits with their Canadian counterparts. On average, the children appear to be on par with other regions in terms of media multitasking and watching television online. Though they do watch teen and general audience programs, on the whole they still enjoy watching the same children’s television programs as their peers in other provinces. Moreover, when asked to produce a television show for their age bracket, the children’s focus group in Toronto creates roughly the same type of show as seen in other regions, leading researchers to believe that they all share the same needs in terms of quality children’s programming.

In the following chapter, we continue our look at television and media habits among Canadian youth by heading west to Calgary, Alberta, which in itself offers a very interesting and unique perspective on the phenomenon at hand.

Final Thoughts

Generally speaking, while the families interviewed in Toronto share some commonalities with other regions in Canada, they are also a very unique and diverse metropolis that stands apart from the rest in terms of some media and television habits. Out of all that has been presented in this chapter, we feel there are certain traits that highlight the Toronto region’s uniqueness, such as a strong emphasis on the importance of knowledge-based television for children yet less active and co-viewing of children’s television programs on the part of the parents, as well as less parental mediation on the technology front. These characteristics can be explained in part by a number of factors, such as a reported weaker sense of community among neighbourhoods, a success-driven attitude with high importance placed on academic, extra-curricular and vocational achievements, an ever-growing population of diverse families with different backgrounds and family governing styles and a greater need for parents to commute and remain competitive in the job market. While
Regional Analysis of Calgary, AB
Introduction

Acting as the collecting ground for the central western section of this Canada-wide study is Calgary, the largest city in Alberta. With a population of over 1.2 million inhabitants in the downtown and its’ surrounding areas, Calgary is the fifth-largest metropolitan area in Canada. Data collection took place over a period of four days in September 2011. Generally speaking, the five in-house interviews were conducted with middle to upper middle class families with parents in their forties. Each family has two children or more with at least one child between the ages of 9 and 12 years old, all of whom were born in Canada. The annual household income ranges from $65-125k and all five families reside in one of the many suburban communities surrounding the downtown Calgary core, the majority of which are newer housing developments. At least one parent per household has earned a college or university degree, and the parents interviewed held employment in a variety of sectors, from accountant to aircraft mechanic, homemaker to laborer or engineer in the oil trade.

Following the pattern of each chapter of this report, we will begin by presenting an in-depth profile of the family that we feel best embodies the archetypical family from all those interviewed in this region; one that paints an overall picture of the reality of family life and media consumption in present day Calgary. As always, the names of the families presented in this chapter have been altered to protect participant confidentiality and provide anonymity.

The Bradford’s

The Bradford’s, a family of four residing in one of the newest subdivisions of the Calgarian suburbs, are an interesting representation of a common Albertan family in terms of their media use. The father, Jason, works full-time as an accountant for a corporate construction company while the mother, Marissa, is a homemaker. Both parents are in their early forties and at least one of them has a university degree. Their annual family income ranges between $65 and 100K. They have two children: Sarah, an outgoing and sporty 12-year-old eighth grader, and Mike, a bright and inquisitive 9-year-old fourth grader. As far as we can tell, both parents and children were born in Canada.

The interview takes place in the dining room around the dinner table where the family readily shares the details of their routine media practices. The Bradford’s own four television sets: one in the parent’s bedroom, one in the upstairs media room, and two older models in the basement rumpus room. Interestingly, the family does not own a television on the main floor of their house, a decision that was consciously made in order to have a “TV-free zone” that encourages conversation. The children will typically use the televisions in the basement for video games and movie watching, especially Mike who enjoys watching the Star Wars movies on VHS and playing his Wii. Those televisions are also where the children watch the majority of their ‘kid shows’. The upstairs television located in the media room is primarily reserved for family viewing. On average, the parents estimate that their children watch one and a half hours of television per day, though that average is not always consistent and varies due to their active lifestyle. Generally speaking, the parents enforce moderate of rules in terms of their children’s television watching, particularly banning inappropriate shows and insisting that homework and chores be completed before viewing begins. More examples of the Bradford’s mediation styles will be explored later on in the chapter.
A typical day for the Bradford’s begins with the children getting ready for school. No television is watched at this time, partly due to the fact that there are no television sets near the kitchen to watch while eating breakfast, and partly because of their busy morning schedule (Sarah often leaves for school early because of extra-curricular commitments). After returning home from school in the afternoons, Mike will first complete his homework then choose between playing outside with friends or watching television. If the latter occurs, SpongeBob SquarePants is typically his program of choice for weekday afternoons. Sarah, on the other hand, is very involved in sports and currently plays on her school’s volleyball, basketball, and soccer team. Her afternoons are normally spent at practice or games, and so she more often than not arrives home with just enough time to finish her homework before dinner. Supper at the Bradford’s is eaten as a family around the dining room table with no television – a rule that Marissa is very adamant about enforcing. Finally, evenings are spent watching programs together as a family; programs such as Survivor, Glee, and certain Discovery channel shows. On weekend mornings, Mike will watch cartoons such as SpongeBob and Kid vs Kat in the basement while Sarah enjoys watching reality cooking programs on TLC and the Food Network. As a family, they enjoy watching movies that they rent via Shaw on Demand most weekend evenings.

The use of the PVR in the Bradford residence is a new but very welcome addition to their media routine, as it provides them with the freedom to choose when they want to watch their favourite programs and to skip over all the advertisements. As Marissa puts it, this means they no longer have to worry about missing Survivor when they attend Sarah’s many evening soccer games. Now, because of their PVR, it will be waiting for them, commercial free, when they arrive home. They also pre-record children’s programs for later viewing, such as iCarly, Suite Life of Zack and Cody, and SpongeBob SquarePants. Though the family watches a fair amount of television together, the children usually watch these types of programs on their own time, though the parents will sometimes sit in when asked to.

In terms of other types of media, the Bradford children each have a Nintendo DS, Mike has a Wii gaming system and Sarah has an iPod, all of which are used for playing games. There are two computers in the home, a desktop in the living room and a laptop that the children share. They typically use the computer for online game playing, as neither child has a Facebook account. Sarah also has a cell phone with a minimal talk and text plan which seems to be working out well since her parents say she is not an excessive cell phone user as of yet.

# Media Habits in Calgary

In terms of standard television viewing, the children from the five in-house interviews reported watching more than 10 hours of television per week, save for the Brown’s, whose children watch somewhere between 5 and 7 hours. While only one family spoke of watching television before school and most families typically watched a few afterschool programs, the majority of television viewing done by the children interviewed in Calgary occurs during the evenings and on weekends. This trend does tend to fluctuate, as the children reported spending more time playing outdoors during the summer months and more time spent indoors watching television in winter, when the weather is unpleasant and the daylight hours are shorter.

Among these same families interviewed there is an average of 3 television sets per household. While this number falls slightly below the figures seen in St. John’s and Toronto (3.8 and 3.2 respectively), the biggest difference lies in the location of said televisions. Out of the five families interviewed in Calgary, not one child has a television in their bedroom. This statistic is all the more noteworthy when compared to Toronto, where 2/3rds of the children interviewed have
their own television. Generally speaking, a fair amount of television is consumed as a family, as they tend to plan out specific evenings to watch general-audience programs together. That being said, with three out of the five families now using PVRs, the level of pre-recorded television being watched is on the rise and transforming viewing habits. 4 out of 5 of families subscribe to digital cable or satellite television.

Speaking to computer habits and online activities, each household has an average of 2.2 computers that are shared among the family members. Since only 1/3rd of children interviewed have a Facebook account, it seemed the majority of time children in Calgary spend online is either allotted to game playing, YouTube video watching or homework. An interesting fact specific to the Calgary region worth noting is that all children who go through the Calgary Board of Education are given an email account where they are sent information regarding school activities. There are also new programs being implemented such as Desire 2 Learn (D2L), an online platform controlled by the Board of Education which includes a series of Internet tools that teachers and students use for communication, course content delivery, evaluation, file storage and sharing of work. As a result, much of the Calgarian children’s homework is done on the computer.

As for other electronics, each household averages 3.2 video game consoles (i.e. Wii, PlayStation, Nintendo DS, etc...). With respect to hand held devices, 1/3rd of children interviewed own their own cell phones (though no Smartphones) and 4 out of 5 of children have their own iPod or iPod touch.

From a Family’s Perspective

From all the data collected and interviews conducted, several important themes have emerged and resonate among the families in Calgary. The following is a detailed account of these themes, highlighted with examples from the five family interviews and the four focus groups conducted.

“She is into sports a lot. She doesn’t have a chance after school to watch much TV”

Though it was reported in the above section that, generally speaking, the children who were interviewed watch 10 or more hours of television per week, the researchers agree that there is a particularly distinct and unique Calgary attitude towards television, especially when compared to its other Canadian counterparts. The general consensus observed from these interviews is this: though a fair amount of television is consumed on a regular basis, viewing is not the most essential activity in the everyday lives of these families. In other words, television is seen as a secondary activity whose purpose is to entertain and fill the downtime in these peoples’ lives. As the mother of the De Luca family puts it, referring to her two sons viewing practices, “you know, if they’re not doing anything else, that’s when they’ll watch”. While that may be true, we will see how the families in Calgary do not appear to have as much downtime to fill compared to other regions.

The researchers have drawn these conclusions by analyzing the in-home interviews they conducted, where in most cases, television was not always at the forefront of the discussion surrounding typical weekly schedules in the home. An example of this can be seen in an excerpt from the Brown family interview, when the family discusses their weekday quotidian routine:

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You guys didn’t really mention TV as an activity, but when do you watch TV during the week?

G12 Usually if we’ve done our homework or if its -

Mom Friday nights and weekends.

G12 Yeah.

G9 And Tuesday.

Dad We don’t watch much during the week at all.

INT So after schools, no TV?

G12 Nuh uh. We’re never home.

A similar response to this is given by each of the five families who, though they may watch more television than the Brown’s, all cite other activities and obligations as being a higher priority than television. This attitude is not exclusive to television and is seen in terms of computer and video game use as well. The 9-year-old boy from the Jones family, while explaining his typical Xbox usage, recounts how he would like to play everyday but has trouble finding the time: “sometimes I can’t [play everyday] because I’m really busy but usually I try to squeeze it into my day”.

There are many possible explanations for this general observation, such as children’s involvement in sports and extra-curricular activities, more outdoor play, stricter parental mediation and even the newfound use of PVRs.

This response of “we’re never home”, as cited in the above paragraph by the 12-year-old Brown daughter, is a common answer seen across the board in all the families interviewed. Though they each vary in their degree of out-of-home activities, it is clear that each of these families feel they live busy lives filled with extra-curricular activities, sports, groups and other scheduled commitments. As the De Luca mother puts it, “They’re both active kids; active with sports in school and playing outside the home”. Of all the families interviewed, at least one of their children was heavily involved in one or more sports that take up a great deal of their afternoons. For example, the 12-year-old De Luca boy is a member of his school’s cross-country team and plays on both the school and community basketball team; the 12-year-old Brown daughter participates in competitive dance which is a four day per week commitment; and as seen in their profile, the Bradford daughter plays volleyball, basketball and soccer. Her father sums up these commitments by stating that “She is into sports a lot. She doesn’t have a chance after school to watch much TV”. The sheer number of commitments made outside the home seems all the more impressive when compared with the results gathered in eastern regions. For example, the mention of extra-curricular activities by the children interviewed in Toronto was few and far between.

Not only do these children seem to keep busy with sports and other activities, there is an overall interest expressed by the children themselves in outdoor play, one that has not been noted in this research report except for in St. John’s. In the De Luca household, for example, the 10 and 12-year old brothers spend most of their afternoons playing outside with the children from the neighbourhood. They enjoy playing basketball in the summer, tobogganing in the winter and recently have been spending a good deal of time building a pirate ship playhouse in the backyard. Their mother attributes this in part to the fact that they live on a crescent street with little traffic flow and strong community ties. A similar situation is seen in the campbell home, also on a quiet cul-de-sac with a public park situated in the middle. The campbells also share a sense of community and trust with their neighbours since all the children have grown up playing outside together. When discussing whether or not the mother feels the need to mediate her 12-year-old daughter’s television consumption, she states:
Well, with her, because she’s got kids of her age on the block, and we’ve got the park, she is way more interested in playing with her friends and outside, than in on the TV or computer. So we never really have to reinforce much.

This is even seen when children go to friend’s houses for play dates. While some parents in Toronto express frustration that their children will have friends over only to play video games, almost all the children interviewed in Calgary say they engaged in a mix of outdoor play and media use when visiting with friends. According to the 9-year-old Brown daughter:

> Well when I go to one’s friends place, I like playing on the trampoline and playing outside with friends just around the corner. But sometimes when I’m at like another friends house, I’ll watch TV or watch movies.

While this may be true for three out of the four seasons of the year, the children’s habits tend to change in winter when it is difficult to spend an extensive amount of time outdoors, due to the freezing weather and shorter daylight hours. That being said, the 12-year-old Campbell girl is motivated to play outside all year round:

> In the fall, we always make a leaf pile. In the winter, we always make a cool snow fort, and in the summer, we have a little house game, called hotel Maui.

“We’re a big PVR family”

In recent years, the Personal Video Recorder (PVR) has risen in popularity among Canadians. In the confines of our research, this trend is all the more noted in the western provinces where, on average, more of the families interviewed owned PVRs and spoke highly of the positive effects it has on their television viewing habits. In Calgary, 3 out of 5 of the families interviewed and 4 out of 5 of the focus group families owned a PVR. Every one of these owners attest to using it frequently and being very satisfied with the results. What’s more, when discussing the family’s habitual television practices, in each of these cases the PVR was brought into the conversation organically, thus leading researchers to believe that it has become an integral part of their television watching style. The Bradford father says it best when stating “PVR? Yeah, it’s become a staple now. It’s amazing”.

Parents cite many reasons they prefer to watch PVR programs, such as having the ability to fast forward through commercials, gaining an extra 15 minutes by watching a pre-recorded hour-long program, having the flexibility to watch on their own time and no longer being restricted to set television network scheduling. As the De Luca mother says:

> But often we’re out, so we tend to PVR things. And then we come back because we don’t have to watch commercials, it takes less time to watch it and we can watch it whenever is convenient. So maybe it’s a week later but you watch it whenever you can.

The Jones family even goes so far as to PVR live programs in real time in order to benefit from these same advantages, particularly escaping advertisements and having the freedom to pause the show mid viewing if need be:

> Even if we catch it live, typically what we’ll do is pause it and wait for it to get ahead in the show so we can pause it. That’s the beauty of having PVR really. So yeah, even if we’re watching it live, it’s not really live. We do watch a lot of PVR TV.

It is also worth noting that all three families who own a PVR admit that it has revolutionized when, where and how much they watch television. In fact, the De Luca’s feel it is the biggest media shift they have undergone in the last 5 years, even more so than the shift in popularity from television to internet, which is typically the number one response given by the families interviewed.
Two other flourishing in-home television options worth noting are the use of Video on Demand and Netflix. Almost all the families interviewed admit to renting their weekend movie-night films directly from their cable provider (usually Shaw on Demand). At least two families mentioned the benefits they’ve seen since subscribing to Netflix. The De Luca’s are particularly pleased with their Netflix subscription because it allows them to introduce their children to older television programs they feel are more appropriate and enjoyable to watch than then newer shows being broadcast live on network television. It also grants their sons the freedom to pick and choose when and at what time they are able to watch their favourite shows. Since subscribing to Netflix, her sons no longer watch Saturday morning cartoons on cable but will instead watch their favourite older cartoons that are no longer on the air, such as X-Men cartoons, Danny Phantom and Avatar.

“For me, it’s not about the TV, it’s about if they want me to be with them, than that’s what you do, right?”

If we are to compare the amount of time Calgarians spend watching television together as a family to the results this study has seen in other regions of Canada, it is safe to say they fall somewhere between Torontonians (who spend less time co-viewing) and Newfoundlanders (who spend the most time co-viewing). While that may be, both the parents and the children in Calgary seem to spend less time watching television on the whole than those interviewed in St. John’s. Generally speaking, Calgary families watch some television together in the evenings after supper. This evening viewing is typically reserved for special programs they enjoy as a family on certain nights, such as Castle on Monday nights in the De Luca house, American Idol and Survivor on Wednesdays and Thursdays at the Campbell’s, or The Amazing Race on Sundays at the Brown’s.

- INT What’s on Monday nights?
- B10 Castle!
- INT Castle eh? Big fan?
- B10 Mm hm
- Mom Yeah, we all sit down and watch Castle together, don’t we?
- INT The whole family?
- Mom Yeah yeah, that’s a big one on Monday nights. We all pile up on the couch to watch, we love that.

Overall, it seems that the times these families do spend watching television during the evenings is spent co-viewing. However, as seen above, the programs they watch tend to be more general-audience targeted rather than shows made specifically for children. The general consensus gathered is that family viewing time is allotted to shows that everyone enjoys watching whereas children’s television programs are watched during the children’s free time. As the Bradford parents explain:

- INT When they watch TV, are they watching it by themselves? Or do they watch with you? Are there any programs that you watch together?
- Dad Hmm, most of the reality shows we watch together, I guess.
- Mom Survivor, Glee. Our nighttime is we usually watch together, television together. So usually, the majority of our TV watching is together. He watches his Sponge Bob kind of by himself and stuff. But in the evening, when we do sit down at night, it’s usually family watching.

While the majority of the parents admit to predominantly watching general-audience television with their children, that is not to say they will not sometimes join them to watch their favourite children’s programs. All the parents interviewed
not only have a general awareness of their children’s favourite shows, but a basic knowledge of the character names and some past episode plotlines, leading researchers to believe that they do spend a little time actively co-viewing children’s television shows as well, as opposed to merely possessing a viewing awareness. An example of this is seen when the Brown’s discuss their television family viewing habits:

Mom We don’t often sit and watch Family. Steve and I don’t but every now and then I might watch and I’ll say something like “Oh well that was kinda good or that was nice” or something.

Dad Sure. Yeah. Like the Smarty-Pants. That was my favourite Wizards [of Waverly Place]. That was a great episode. Remember when she wore the smarty pants?

The Jones parents are of the same school of thought as the Browns. While it may not be their first choice, they will sit and watch the Family channel with their children, especially since their two boys PVR most episodes:

Mom But the other shows [on Family Channel], yeah, I’ll watch it all of those, I have no issues with them.

Dad Yeah, I don’t mind Suite Life.

Mom Yeah yeah. As long as its not something we’ve seen 100 times, I don’t mind, I’ll sit with the kids and watch it.

As we will explore in an upcoming section, the De Luca mother is not a fan of today’s children’s television programs on the whole and does not enjoy watching them. And yet, though she has a very clear idea of what they watch on YTV and Teletoon Retro, she would rather not have to watch cartoons on a regular basis. That being said, she feels it is important to stress that she will watch some of her sons’ favourite programs, “but more if they wanted to ask me to spend that time with them. Because for me, it’s not about the TV, it’s about if they want me to be with them, then that’s what you do, right?”. It is important to stress that almost all the parents interviewed admitted that as adult viewers, they do not personally enjoy watching the current programs made specifically for children. Yet, regardless of this fact, parents will still make some of an effort to join their children in watching these programs from time to time. This concept will be expanded upon further along in the chapter.

Weekend movie night is also a popular time for family co-viewing among the Calgary families interviewed, all of whom admit to setting aside at least one night each weekend to watching a movie together. The Brown’s have recently taken their traditional movie night online and into the twenty-first century, switching over to a “YouTube night”. Their father explains the concept below:

Well just like an example, the family entertainment has changed so much too. We did music night the other night, was it last Friday? And we just sat down in front of the laptop and hit YouTubes. So everyone took a turn picking songs. It was actually a lot of fun but, you know, the difference right, from watching music on your laptop rather than going downstairs and flicking on the TV. Its just a different way of entertaining yourselves.

No matter what form of media the families chose to spend their time together watching, the simple act of enjoying a shared activity as a family yields positive results. Look no further than the 10 and 12-year-old De Luca boys to see these effects:

INT Do you like that? When you get to watch TV with your whole family?

B10 Yeah, mm hm.

INT And why do you like that?

B12 He likes to cuddle.

((Everyone laughs))

Mom We all do, right? You guys all pile up.

B12 Yeah, we’re a really close family.
“We’re very careful with what the kids watch”

A general observation made after analyzing the data collected from family interviews and focus groups in this region is this: on the whole, Calgarian families tend to enforce more conservative and traditional values in the home in comparison to what was seen in other regions. This is reflected in their hands-on approach to mediating and actively involving themselves in their children’s television and other media practices. While all five families intercede in specific ways, researchers notice different levels of mediation depending on the family; levels that will be broken down into low, medium and high, and explained in the paragraphs to come. That being said, there is one universal trend seen across the board in all in-house family interviews: a no-television-during-supper rule. Though this rule is at times bent for special occasions such as eating a pizza in the living room on movie night, it is strictly enforced during the rest of the week.

At the lower end of the parental mediation scale lies the Campbell family who have two daughters aged 15 and 12. The mother readily admits to not monitoring what her 12-year-old watches on television or does on the Internet. This is due mostly in part because she has never felt the need to. She believes her two girls already maintain a healthy balance between media and other activities and therefore sees no reason to lay down ground rules.

Filling out the middle level of parental intervention are the Jones and Bradford families, each of whom involves themselves in their children’s habits and establishes set rules to follow while still allowing their children some leeway. In the Bradford household, the parents have mapped out some specific rules that must be followed, such as no television or computer use before homework is completed, bedrooms are cleaned and chores are finished. They also maintain the

The researchers feel this heightened level of co-viewing in Calgary may stem from the fond memories parents have of their time spent as children watching television with their family. During the mother and father focus group sessions, parents are asked to reflect on the role television played in their childhood, reflections that more often than not evoke strong memories of moments shared among family members. As one mother from the focus group states:

Sunday nights I remember the Wonderful World of Disney. And that was with my mom and sister. When I was much younger, I remember Star Trek with my dad and that was one of those things... because I’d sit there with him in his Lazy-Boy chair and watch with him.

Generally speaking, it appears that the parents in Calgary have tried to keep this time-honored family tradition they so cherished in their past by taking the time to watch programs with their children today. Just as they grew up spending Saturday evenings as a family watching Hockey Night in Canada and weeknights together watching the Cosby Show and Family Ties, they as adults try to recreate these traditions in the present day by allotting certain evenings to family viewings of American Idol and Survivor, not to mention their weekly movie night. The strong family values seen across the board in those interviewed in Calgary are reinforced by the time they spend watching appropriate and entertaining television together as a family. This continuation of family television traditions mirrors what was seen out East in St. John’s, where many participants mentioned the satisfaction they feel by being able to share that family time together just as they did when they were young.

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rule seen in their previous family profile of no televisions on the main floor of their home; a decision they have made to create a space with no distractions that facilitates conversation. In terms of flexibility, however, they have allowed their children to make their own decisions when it comes to certain forms of media use (although both parents engage their children in a discussion before the decision is made). For example, when asked if they did not allow their 12-year-old daughter to open a Facebook account, the mother explains:

*I said to her, if you really want us to give you access to it, I need to have full access to whatever you do. You know, we sat down and read the rules of Facebook and stuff, and she just says “I don’t think I am ready for that”.*

Both Bradford parents feel the implementation of rules is important, but that involving their children in the making of those rules is a more effective way to enforce them.

In the Jones household, specific things have been banned, such as programs like Family Guy, and certain video games like Call of Duty and Halo which the parents feel are inappropriate. The parents also make attempts to monitor their children’s Facebook activity regularly by adding their child’s friends to the father’s account and by surveying their Internet history. Their main strategy as parents is to control their children’s media exposure on the whole and to balance it with outdoor play and other activities. Here we see the Jones mother elaborate on her and her husband’s approach:

*I think overall, we try really to limit how much we do expose ourselves to all these things. We are very active outside the house as well. Um, I’m not overly concerned. Like some people will limit their kid’s screen time and things like that and think that it’s going to have an impact but I think it’s all part of their learning and growth process. I think we have a pretty healthy attitude towards TV compared to our peers, com-

pared to a lot of people. So I mean, I think it’s a balance.*

Finally, at the highest level of mediation seen in Calgary are the De Luca’s and the Brown’s who, generally speaking, seem much more conservative in their family values as well as their media rules. The De Luca’s are a family consisting of 5 children aged 10 to 18 and are very involved in the local church. The mother outlines the house rules, such as no watching television or using the computer before homework is completed and children must ask permission before turning on the television and watching a specific show. When it comes to the types of programs they allow their children to watch, these must reflect the values the De Luca’s hold as a family: no coarse language, nothing inappropriate and the programs must promote respectful behaviour. The De Luca’s feel this is important since the television they watch should reflect the values they instill in their children. Moreover, the mother insists on watching a new show with her children before they are allowed to watch it on their own. In this respect, not only is she aware of what they are watching but she can evaluate the programming and ensure it is appropriate. In terms of other forms of media, neither her 10 or 12-year-olds have Facebook or a cell phone, and they use the internet solely for pre-approved game playing, homework or Netflix viewing. When talking about the implementation of rules in their household, the mother asserts “we’ve never just made a rule and said ‘well it’s a rule just because.” We explain to them why. Which is that we want them to be able to respect their own parents, other peoples parent, their teachers, etc.”

The Brown’s maintain a similar doctrine to the De Luca’s and enforce plenty of rules when it comes to their 9 and 12-year-old daughters’ media habits. For instance, they have a ‘no gadget’ rule on weeknights, meaning no television, computer, iPod or video game playing during the week. This is due in part to the girls’ very hectic extracurricular activity schedule, but also because their parents want them to spend time reading and engaging in other activities. On weekends, they are allowed to watch television and use the com-
puter as long as they eat their breakfast beforehand. Though this weekend only rule is typically enforced, there are special exceptions made, such as on Tuesday evenings which they spend at their grandparents and are allowed to watch television, and Sundays at 9 o’clock when the entire family watches The Amazing Race together. Also, the computer rule is less strictly enforced since the girls use it for homework and tend to stay on to play games afterwards. It should be said that they too, like the Bradford’s, have a ‘no-television-on-the-main-floor’ rule in order to create a TV free zone. The father justifies his reasons for implementing these rules by saying:

I was working in Vancouver for 7 or 8 months or so. And everybody and their dog has got a gadget that I could see downtown. So I know for me, with these guys, I try to restrict the gadget time cause I see people with these things in their face all the time and I think it really affects their ability to communicate all the time and just be more open really and just enjoy what’s around them rather than having their face in a gadget all the time. So I try and influence them in the same way because I know their little mind is very influential. Easily influenced. So I try to keep their minds a little more open.

Regardless of the rules being made, it is clear than in this province of Canada, the families interviewed are aware of their children’s media habits and tend to put more of a conservative spin on their parental mediation tactics than that observed in other regions.

“They can be annoying, but as far as what’s best for our kids, they’re the best”

As a general rule, the parents interviewed in Calgary want their children watching programs that are age-appropriate, humourous and respectful, programs that demonstrate life lessons and reinforce strong family values. That being said, deciding upon what programs actually meet those criteria vary according to each household. While some parents feel today’s children’s television presents undesired behavioral traits and attitudes, others feel they are harmless forms of entertainment for their children. But all parents admit that the majority of their children’s favourite shows are uninspiring to the adult viewer.

At one end of the spectrum lies the De Luca family, whose mother feels that the children’s programs being broadcast today on Family Channel, YTV and Teletoon show negative portrayals of family dynamics and promote inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour among children:

I find that one thing they do is set up the parents to look stupid, that the kids know all that. That they are very kid focused, the parents aren’t involved, whatever is going on revolves around the kids lives, you don’t see parental interaction, they often don’t treat their parents right. You have all these YTV shows, a lot of them are kid-centered and whatever but even SpongeBob, it was one that I didn’t think it was appropriate. I don’t like the way it often portrays kids as being incredibly shallow.

Instead, she prefers her children to watch older cartoons, such as The Flintstones and The Jetsons. In an attempt to mediate what their children watch, they have chosen to unsubscribe from the Family Channel and Teletoon, and now
only receive the basic cable shows, which include YTV and Teletoon Retro. The Campbell parents also admit to not being the biggest fans of the live-action programs being broadcast today on Family Channel, but for an entirely different reason. The father feels uncomfortable with the fact that many of the Disney starlets branch out into music which creates a large gap between the character they play on children’s television shows and the often-sexualized singer side of their career, particularly in the music videos that air after the program in which they star:

With Selena Gomez and another girl like that, occasionally at the end of them they'll have music videos of the girls. I don't like them, personally. I find it tends to put them in a very sort of sexual scenario or video much older than what kind of kid they play on the TV shows, not a big fan of that!

The Campbell mother agrees and adds that she feels it is unreasonable that all the children television stars are “beautiful,” a fact she believes does not reflect the reality of everyday life and could impress upon her daughter a false image of beauty. While that may be, they do not ban their daughter from watching these programs.

When asked to name the three best programs on television made specifically for children, the remaining families and participants in the focus group name Family Channel live action sitcoms, such as Suite Life of Zack and Cody and Wizards of Waverly Place. These programs were listed as being the best for their children to watch because they are “silly,” “not crude,” “age appropriate,” “safe” and “funny for them.” Though the parents themselves admit to finding Family Channel sitcoms to be monotonous and unappealing to adults, they still feel that these programs, out of all the children’s television programs available today, are the best form of suitable entertainment for their children because of their humorous storylines and moral values reflect those they try and instill in their homes. Many parents are also quick to cite the Discovery Channel as providing quality programming that is suitable for children. They feel that shows such as Mythbusters, River Monsters and Daily Planet are appropriate because they “give them some critical thinking skills and help them to open a door to science that they wouldn’t have necessarily thought of”. Finally, the father from the Jones family vocalizes a point stressed in almost every household: the importance of humour in children’s television. He asserts that:

Dad And for me, anything with comedy.
Comedy is very important. They have to learn how to laugh.

INT Whether it’s for kids or not?

Dad Both. We watch Zack and Cody, Futurama, Simpsons, Corner Gas; anything making them laugh.

INT So it’s important for you that there’s humour in what they watch?

Dad Yeah, it is

The Campbell father echoes the same sentiment: “It’s entertaining. It doesn’t always have to be educational, it’s just funny”. For him as well as many of the parents interviewed, sharing a laugh is a great way to bond with their children, not to mention a way to unwind and to be entertained.

“There’s no good family show for all of us to enjoy”

While all parents feel there may be some acceptable programs made specifically for their children aged 9 to 12, there is an overwhelming consensus that today’s broadcasting lacks family-oriented programs that are appropriate and entertaining for children but that appeal to adults as well. As one father from the focus group puts it:

These programs now are directed to adults or kids. But not both. We used to be able to watch some shows together. Not everything but there would be some shows that, you know, the family could sit and enjoy. Maybe
we just had more limited choice I suppose. But now, what the kids are watching, they’re watching iCarly or the Suite Life or Johnny Test or one of these cartoons, and I don’t think they’re that entertaining. But I can’t let them watch what I’m watching. So there’s nothing left.

As shown in the above section, not many parents enjoy watching programs specifically made for children as they find them irksome and unrelatable. On the other hand, they feel uncomfortable allowing their children to join them in watching prime-time general audience programming as they feel it has become unpredictable, pushing the limits all too often and including inappropriate content. Many parents lament this lack of family-centered television and long for the programming they grew up with which, as we have already seen, was watched as a family and enjoyed by everyone.

Another father from the focus group expresses his frustration regarding this situation by explaining that:

*The number of programs that the family can sit down and watch together is pretty small. So what happens is, and this happens in our house, when I was growing up, as did everyone here, you only had one TV. So everybody sat down and the broadcasting was to a wider array of audiences. Ok. Today, it’s more targeted to young kids and adults. So what happens is you’ve got 4 TVs in the house and all 4 TVs are running and everybody’s watching a different channel.*

Because of these circumstances, if parents and their children wish to continue watching appropriate and entertaining television together, they feel they must resort to watching movies or contest-themed reality programs as they are sure to be enjoyed by all while remaining appropriate.

Not wanting to watch what they as adults consider to be lackluster children’s shows but afraid of exposing their children to inappropriate content in general-audience programs, many parents rectify the problem by making the switch from co-viewing situational comedies and dramas to specialty programming such as the Discovery Channel. That way, everyone is entertained and no one is exposed to unsuitable material. While this is a quick fix, it does not make up for the general lack of family-oriented children’s television that entertains both children and parents alike.

Parents also feel that their older children (11 and 12) are beginning to venture into watching teen or general-audience programs since the ones directed at them are not holding their interest. Other factors, such as peer or sibling influence, can impact certain children’s tastes in favourite programming. The mother from the Brown household expresses her concern over the content her 9-year-old daughter watches, content that seems to be made for her age group but broaches subject matter well beyond her maturity level:

*I think in some cases they might be a little too old for her age because all the kids in the shows are high school aged or college aged so sometimes some of the topics I find are a little bit wise, especially for a 9-year-old. They’re not there yet, with the whole dating and boyfriends and the stuff like that. And even cartoons get into that so really I don’t find there’s anything really suitable for her age. So she kind of gets stuck watching what my 12-year-old watches because she doesn’t want to watch her programs.*

When it comes to grabbing and keeping children’s attentions these days, parents feel the current shows are not making the cut, thus motivating their children to seek out new entertaining shows and channels. The De Luca mother’s reasons for feeling this way are simple:

*Personally, I think they sell kids at this age short. They just put on these things that are loud and flashy and colourful and just stupid so much so that there’s not enough depth to it. Whereas these kids, I think, can really understand much more — that’s why we tend to watch older stuff, it just seems to have more punch, more values.*
“As long as it’s good quality TV, I don’t really care”

For the families interviewed in Calgary, questioning the production origin of their favourite television shows is not a common practice. When asked how they feel about the difference between Canadian-made and American-made programming, no one has much to say on the matter. From the child’s perspective, some are unable to tell the difference between Canadian and American shows and they admit the thought has never crossed their mind. As one 12-year-old boy in the children’s focus group asserts: “as long as it’s good quality TV, I don’t really care”. Parents are quick to comment on the difference in “production quality”, stating that American television is “sleeker” and “polished,” while Canadian television has a more amateur feel to it, a fact they speculate has to do with having a lower production budget than in the States. It should be stressed though that this “inferior quality” they speak of is only for them in reference to the technical production and not the entertainment value nor the content quality of either production. Neither parents nor children are able to name a Canadian-made children’s television program currently being broadcasted on air. The exception to this is the Jones family, who claim to prefer Canadian programs because they appreciate the humour but find it hard to find shows on par quality-wise with American programs, especially those made for children. The only example that comes to mind is Total Drama Island, a Canadian cartoon that the whole family enjoyed watching: “the whole season, we watched every episode every time it came out. And it was great, it was awesome. But again, you could tell it was a Canadian show”. Also, the 10-year-old De Luca boy names Sidekick as one of his favourite programs, although he is unaware that it is a Canadian production.

After reflecting on the question, almost all the children and parents admitted they watched almost exclusively American-made television programs; a fact that does not bother them since for the Calgarians interviewed, they prioritize quality content before production origin. The Brown parents sum up this viewpoint when they answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Do you care if it’s Canadian or American?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Not really, no. I think if the content is there, it’s ok. If we’ve seen the show and there are good values to it and it makes us laugh, then it’s ok.</td>
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“She gets it from TV cause she didn’t get it from home”

When asked if parents feel that today’s children’s television can have an impact on their children, their lifestyle and their behaviour, everyone answered with a resounding ‘yes’, albeit each one with different examples of this impact. The De Luca family worries that some television shows their 10 and 12-year-old sons watch are teaching them “shallow values” that contradict the messages of independence and self-worth the parents try and instill in their children.

I think that it portrays that you’re not pretty unless your hairstyle is like this and you wear these clothes or you’re not a cool boy unless you talk like that and diss the girls, you know what I mean? So if they see that and that’s being portrayed as popular and desirable and they’re watching that everyday then that’s what they’re going to think and that’s not what we teach them.

Similarly to the De Luca’s, the Brown’s feel that their 9 and 12-year-old daughters pick up certain terms and subject matter from children’s television shows that are beyond their maturity level. The mother has noticed both her daughters mentioning boyfriends, beauty, fashion trends, and slang words that she is confident they are
learning from television, since her and her husband comment that those subjects are never broached in their household.

The Jones parents see an impact first hand in their two sons after deciding to let them watch WWE wrestling (a decision that took one year of back-and-forth discussing to reach). The only comfort they take in letting their sons watch this type of programming is that it is viewed within their home in a controlled environment, and the parents are able to intervene if too much violence is shown. The Jones mother especially worries about her children picking up violent tendencies from watching these types of programs since “kids are sponges, I think they pick up a lot of things from everything they experience”. The Bradford mother agrees, especially when it comes to her 9-year-old son watching programs like The Simpsons that she finds to be disrespectful and promote bad behaviour: “once in a blue moon, he will watch it, but I just try to really watch their behaviors, because it can rub off on them too, right?”

The Campbell’s, having raised two daughters, have seen first-hand the powerful influence television shows can have on their children. Though they have not noticed much impact on their 12-year-old, they feel that their now 15-year-old daughter was greatly influenced by watching children’s live-action sitcoms such as Hannah Montana.

She is convinced that she was destined to become a TV star, like one of these girls, and thought that modeling was the way to get in and start. I definitely see the influence. It’s annoying! I don’t think it’s a good thing. No. Again, they are heightening the level of these girls, they are all like dressed all beautiful, they all have so much talent, apparently they can all sing and so on, but what about the average person? You know, you need to be showing kids that it’s GREAT to be average.

As seen in the above examples, parents in Calgary feel that there are undoubtedly ways in which children are being influenced by the television they watch. Furthermore, these impacts are not described in a positive light, leading researchers to believe that they are unwelcomed. That being said, some parents seem less concerned by these influences because they are proactive in knowing what their children are watching and identifying possible influences. It appears as though the parents, upon recognizing these impacts, try and explain to their children the difference between what they see on television and how to act in real life. By confronting the issue head-on, parents appear to have these influences under control, or at least on their radar.
From a Child’s Perspective

“Name something more creative than a sponge living in a pineapple under the sea”

Though the reasons why vary exponentially, children on the whole have very specific tastes when it comes to their favourite television programs. The following is a complete list of all television shows named by the children participants in both the family interviews and focus group as being their favourites. It has been divided by age to present readers with a better understanding of age preference division:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Favourite Programs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Man vs Wild (UK),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WWE Wrestling (US),</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Futurama (US),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iCarly (US),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phineas and Ferb (US),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>America’s Got Talent (US),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SpongeBob (US),</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Castle (US),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SideKick (CND),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third Rock From The Sun (US),</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Turf Wars (US)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Suite Life on Deck (US),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mythbusters (US),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Man vs Wild (UK),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Drake and Josh (US),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Castle (US),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M.A.S.H (US),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wipeout (CND),</td>
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Regardless of the genre or content of their preferred program, children tend to give the same reasons as to why they enjoy it the most. The top three reasons are: if a program shows characters doing interesting/out of the ordinary things, if a program is funny, and if a program offers enough variety/interesting subject matter. Below are some examples of children explaining their favourite programs and why.

The 12-year-old De Luca boy explains the reasons why he enjoys Drake and Josh:

INT So what is it about that show that you really like?

B12 It’s mostly because they have humour that I understand.

INT Do you like the characters ever?

B12 Yeah, like their personalities and stuff

INT Can you think of an example?

B12 Like Josh, in Drake and Josh, he’s this really smug guy, but he’s really stupid

INT And you like that?

B12 Yeah. He doesn’t understand.

INT So do you like him cause he’s funny or the things he does or?

uwB12 Yeah, cause his little sister pulls pranks on him and he doesn’t see it coming and they’re really lame.
The 9 and 12-year old Brown daughters both have their separate reasons for liking iCarly and Wizards of Waverly Place:

INT And what is it that you like about them?

G12 Well I know a lot about the characters in them and I think they’re funny, so, yeah

INT And you’ve been watching them for a while?

G12 I’ve been watching them for a really really long time, yeah

G9 And with iCarly its really funny. And same with Wizards. Wizards is cool and fun.

Finally, this 12-year-old boy from the children’s focus group admits SpongeBob SquarePants is still one of his favourite television shows because of its creativity, continued originality and the loyalty he feels towards the program:

B12 I’ve watched it since I was one and they’re still making new episodes so I’ll watch it still.

INT And what do you like about it? What’s still making you hang onto it?

B12 Name something more creative than a sponge living in a pineapple under the sea.

As part of the children’s focus group, the participants are shown clips from 6 of the currently most popular children’s television shows broadcast for their age group in that specific region. This is done to give researchers more information regarding the positive and negative aspects of a television show – valuable feedback that comes straight from the children themselves. In this case, they were shown Total Drama Island: World Tour, H2O, Life With Derek, Sonny With a Chance, and iCarly. The children are very vocal and keen to share their point of view regarding the positives and negatives of each program. Though the children have their own unique likes and dislikes, there was some overall consensus.

Firstly, the laugh track used on children sitcom shows “are not fooling anyone”, as one 12-year-old boy puts it. The children all feel that laugh tracks added to comedies take away from the value of the program. Furthermore, they do not like being told what they should find funny:

“I don’t like it when shows do that, put the laugh track in the back and play it like a 120 times through the whole episode even when you really laugh just once or twice”.

Secondly, acting style and character development can make or break a television show. The children announce that though programs like Life With Derek and Sonny With a Chance can be comical, the “bad acting” and characters who “aren’t formed that well” take away from the humour. On the other hand, shows like iCarly tested positively because of their well-developed characters: “I think the characters are so well defined cause they have their own personalities [...] so you’ve gotta love each one for that”. Finally, creating tension and frictional dynamics between main characters is always a positive and interesting plot development. For example, the children enjoy the sibling rivalry they see on Life With Derek, regardless of the acting issues:

I like it and I don’t like it. I don’t like it cause its bad acting but I like it in the sense that they’re always fighting and it’s kind of like me and my brother, we’re always arguing about who gets to sit where and other stuff

The same goes for Sonny With a Chance and the love/hate relationship the two main characters have with one another.

Out of all the programs mentioned, the most well received was iCarly because of the good acting, hilarious characters and innovative web-show angle. They like Total Drama Island because it is funny and is an original idea (though they feel the new seasons have become formulaic and the characters can be repetitive and boring). Finally Sonny With a Chance is well received (though to clarify, they much prefer Sonny’s spinoff show So Random, because they enjoy the comedic skits
more than the behind-the-scenes antics shown on Sonny). Their least favourite program shown was H20, as they unanimously agreed that the program looked too childish, too girly and boring (though many had never seen an episode and were judging this solely on the 20 second clip that was shown).

“If there is a commercial break, I go on my iPod or something”

When compared to the results seen in Toronto and St Johns, it is safe to conclude that there are relatively fewer children in Calgary who partake in media multitasking. For example, children typically indicate that either they never use other forms of media while watching television or they only choose to do so during commercial breaks. Some, like one boy in the focus group, prefer to focus their entire attention on one thing at a time: “I never really do it [multitask]. I normally just pick one”. Others, like this girl in the same focus group, will take advantage of her PVR recording device to allow her the flexibility to switch activities with ease:

Sometimes I’ll play on my computer when I’m watching TV but usually I’ll pause the show or like record it and go back to what I was doing before. I’ll be on my computer and then go back to the TV.

The 9-year-old Jones boy echoes the same sort of response, saying he likes to play games on the laptop while watching television but finds it hard to do because he cannot concentrate. Ultimately, he feels that “I’d rather be doing one thing”.

The 12-year-old Brown girl tries to multitask by playing with her iPod while watching television but finds it too difficult and would rather focus her attention entirely on one activity: “I do it often but it doesn’t last long. I mean, I always [have it] with me but I usually play it and quit after a while because I get distracted by a show”.

“I didn’t even know you could watch TV online”

Unlike the difference in media multitasking habits, the children in Calgary share the same tendencies as their eastern peers when it comes to watching television programs online. The majority of the children interviewed have yet to venture onto the web to watch programming, save for accessing Netflix accounts or watching YouTube videos. In fact, only one child mentioned looking for missed episodes online, and she happens to be the youngest interviewee in all of Calgary. The 9-year-old Brown daughter attests to searching online once or twice for missed epi-
sodes of iCarly, though she could not remember which website she accessed the show from. As for the rest, when the subject of online television viewing was broached, no one had much to say. The Campbell girl even remarks “I didn’t even know you could watch TV online”.

Children take on the role of television producer

“Hidden messages” “Awesomely hilarious” “Epic”

The final segment of the children’s focus group interview asks the participants (in this case, 5 12-year-olds and 1 10-year-old from the Calgary region) to pretend they are charged with the task of creating a brand new show for their peers. Children are encouraged to share their ideas with the group and devise a premise, setting, plot line, characters, even a name for the new show. The children of Calgary decide to create an animated cartoon centered around a family who owns a pet purple hippopotamus named Earl, and will be produced by Canadians as well as set in Canada. This is decided on because they feel that Canadians have a better sense of humour and therefore should be able to make a superior cartoon than Americans. The children also feel there should be no educational elements within the content because “if it’s educational, it can’t be funny”. That being said, they feel it is important to include “hidden messages” that require one to pay close attention to in order to learn from and pick up on (subtle life lessons to ponder after the show has concluded). When all is said and done and their show has been broadcast, the focus group participants want their children viewers to feel their show is “awesomely hilarious” and “epic.” They decide to air the show on weekdays in the prime time slot at 7pm (since they will have already finished extra-curriculars, eaten dinner and finished their homework), but the show should be re-broadcast on the weekends for those who missed it during the week. They cannot, however, decide on a name for their new program. Though everyone is filled with ideas, no one agrees on a working title.

From an Adolescent’s Perspective

Following the same format as the teenage focus groups in other regions, this group of four Calgarian teens, two males and two females ranging from 13 to 15 years old, was interviewed in order to provide the researchers with a unique point of view concerning the state of today’s children’s television. Being not too far off from the target age of this study themselves, the teenagers recount vivid memories of their childhood television watching experience and draw comparisons and critiques with today’s programming with ease. They provide an interesting reflection on the quality, appropriateness and entertainment value of
current children’s television from a more relatable and closer perspective than that of the parents.

As always, we begin by asked the teens to think back to when they were 10 years old and their experience with television at that age. While the boys preferred watching cartoons like SpongeBob SquarePants and Fairly Odd Parents because they were “funny”, the girls preferred the live-action sitcoms on Family Channel, particularly Hannah Montana, Life With Derek, Popular and Lizzie McGuire. One girl remarks “I liked those ones because they were funny and I liked laughing at them. I guess I could relate better to the shows on Family Channel than the other ones”. The other girl goes into detail explaining why Hannah Montana was her absolute favourite program as a child, admitting to watching it everyday and acting out scenes from the show with her friends at school because Miley Cyrus was her favourite actress. Ironically, the maturity she has gained from growing up allows her re-watch old episodes and now interpret the show through different eyes. Now, when she catches reruns of Hannah Montana, she picks up on themes and possible influences she was unaware of when she was younger:

A couple of weeks ago I was talking to my friend about Hannah Montana and how we haven’t seen it in a while. And she said in some episodes, if you pay attention to her, she’s actually quite rude to some people sometimes but they make it seem like she’s not because she’s the main character. So I watched the show the next time it was on and it did seem that way but I would never have thought that when I was younger.

The teenagers remember watching certain programs from a young age that were not necessarily age-appropriate at the time, but that they watched with an older sibling or parent in order to spend time together. Three out of four remember watching Family Guy and The Simpsons from a very young age, one with her older brother and two with their father: “I watched it with my dad, it’s his favourite show. So if I was with him and he’s watching it, I’ll watch it with him. But I wouldn’t watch it on my own”. They all admit to not fully understanding the humour and often having to ask their parents or siblings to explain the jokes. Interestingly enough, when shown a clip of Total Drama Island, one of the boys mentions how he remembers loving it as a 10-year-old because “it’s not like Family Guy or the Simpsons, you got all the jokes”. Though this is not an inappropriate show, one girl explains how she was influenced into watching Arthur when she was very small because “I used to watch it with my sister. It wasn’t one of my favourites but she liked it so I wanted to like it because I wanted to be like her”.

When discussing clips of television shows, all four teenagers admit to having seen all of the Family Channel programs at least once, usually multiple times, even if they were not their favourite. One girl explains that this is because “if it was on Family Channel and on prime-time, I probably watched it a lot. Family Channel was my fallback from like the age of 7 to 13 probably. It was just the first thing I would go to always and I would just deal with whatever was on”. This concept of a “fallback” or “default” channel is a common theme and often surfaces in interviews with children. Similar to what was said in the Toronto adolescent focus group, the Calgarian teens feel that children tend to stick to one or two “fallback” channels because:

When you’re young, you don’t really explore the channels. So you just find a channel where you like one show and then just watch that channel. Its only when you get older really do you explore the channels.

Other observations worth noting include the reoccurring idea of “boy shows” and “girl shows”, a theme often mentioned in past teenage focus groups as being an important and deciding factor to determine what programs they would watch as children. To clarify, it should be noted that this boy/girl show differentiation is more an observation teenagers make when reflecting on their interpretation of programs they watched as children, rather than actual distinctions that the researchers have seen 9 to 12 year olds make.
themselves. Another point to mention is that when asked if they remember the afternoon or morning broadcasting line-up on their favourite channel as a child, the adolescent participants are able to recall the sequence of the programs with ease. One 15-year-old girl lists: “Hannah Montana, Suite Life with Zack and Cody, Life With Derek, Phil of the Future – yeah hehe.” This is an example that demonstrates how children do tend to stick to one “fallback” channel and watch everything that it broadcasts, as even though not all of these listed were her favourite shows, she would still watch them and can still name the lineup since she would habitually stick to watching the Family Channel on weekdays.

They decide the plot will follow this group of teenagers who have all come together to work at a resort because they are being punished for pulling a prank. As a result, a judge sentences the group to complete a certain number of hours of community service on the grounds of this resort. Each episode will follow the group as they begin the punishment given out from the previous week, then ultimately decide to pull a new prank on the judge thus being resentenced to more community service. They decide to name the show “The Troublemakers”.

Final Thoughts

After having analyzed the testimonials of the Calgarian families regarding television and other media habits, researchers have arrived at certain observations. First and foremost, there are certain aspects of the conservative Albertan political culture that are reflected in the attitude of the households interviewed in Calgary. More specifically, this is manifest in the emphasis on time spent together as a family (as seen with the heightened level of parental co-viewing when compared to other cities in the East), as well as stricter parental mediation and control of television and Internet, not to mention a generally higher comprehension of the types of shows their children frequently watch, due to their practice of active viewing. This knowledge of the programs plots, characters and content is achieved by what we are calling active co-viewing, where parents take some time to watch their children's favourite shows with them. Though these instances are not as frequent as we observed in St. John’s, it is still more present than other regions. Also, it must be noted that the children and families in Calgary tend to put less importance on time spent watching television as they lead busy active lives and spend more time outdoors, both of which take precedence over viewing time. Television is seen as a secondary activity whose purpose is to entertain and fill the downtime in the lives of these individuals. A final observation is the growing popularity of PVR and Netflix viewing.
in this western province. This is a tendency that seems larger and more present in their daily television routines than we have observed out East.

In the following chapter, we will conclude our look at television and media habits among Canadian youth by heading to the furthest western region of our study: Vancouver, British Columbia, which, in itself, adds a very interesting and unique perspective to the research in question.
Regional Analysis of Vancouver, BC
Introduction

Vancouver, British Columbia represents the culminating and westernmost city where data collection took place in this Canada-wide research study. With an encompassing population of 2.3 million residents in its’ downtown core and affiliated suburbs, it is the most populous and most densely populated city in Western Canada, not to mention the third most populous metropolitan area in the country. The participants in this region range from middle to upper-middle class families living in different neighbourhoods in or very close to the downtown core of Vancouver. The annual family household income ranges between $65-125k or more. The parents are all in their forties and working either a full or part time position in a variety of sectors, from tour guide operator to arborist, ESL teacher to kayak builder. Most of the parents are college graduates. Each family has at least two children between the age of 9 and 12, all of whom were born in Canada.

Mirroring the structure of the last four chapters of this report, the Vancouver section will begin by presenting an in-depth look at the Vancouverite family we feel best embodies the archetypal family out of all those interviewed in this region, particularly in terms of quotidian television practices and overall media consumption. We will subsequently present the overarching themes that surfaced during data analysis, some of which are unique to Vancouver and some of which have already been seen universally across Canada. As always, the names of the families presented have been changed in order to protect participant confidentiality and provide anonymity.

The Johnson’s

A family of four residing in a semi-detached home located in the west end of downtown Vancouver are the Johnson’s; a middle class family of four. The father, Tom, works full time free-lance in online advertising and Internet marketing while the mother, Meagan, works in administration for a British Columbia university. Both parents are in their early forties and at least one of them has achieved some sort of college education. Together they have two daughters: Adrienne, an outgoing and very bright 12-year old, and Dakota, an inquisitive and pensive 9-year-old. Both parents and children were born in Canada. The interview takes place in the living room, next to the large HD television and all four family members eagerly recount their habitual media routines for the researchers.

A typical day at the Johnson’s begins with the entire family up and getting ready, the parents readying for work and the girls preparing for school. They have made a collective rule that no television is to be watched during weekday mornings as it proves to be too much of a distraction for their daughters and slows down their morning routine. Once the girls have arrived home from school, they are allowed to watch television but encouraged to finish homework before they turn it on. Dinners are typically eaten in front of the television, since the parents and children alike choose to PVR their favourite programs and mealtimes are a convenient moment where everyone can gather and watch shows they all enjoy, such as America’s Got Talent and X-Factor in the summer, and general-audience comedies in the winter, as well as the occasional episode of SpongeBob Squarepants at Dakota’s request. Evenings are typically a continuation of family time after dinner, when they gather in the living room to watch sports games or general-audience programs that have almost always been pre-recorded ahead of time. Since there are only two televisions in the home (one main TV in the living room and one in the parents’ bedroom, though there is one in Dakota’s room but it has recently been disconnected), the...
majority of television viewing is done together as a family. On weekends, Dakota will awake before everyone and watch her favourite programs in the main room, such as SpongeBob or Wizards of Waverly Place. Adrienne will usually wake up next and watch a DVD of her favourite shows (general-audience sitcoms such as The Office or The Big Bang Theory) on the computer because she finds Dakota’s shows “too kiddish” nowadays. That being said, she admits to still enjoying watching episodes of Fairly Odd Parents, iCarly and Victorious because they’re “funny” and make her “feel happy”. The rest of the weekend is usually filled with running errands and out-of-home activities, though Sunday nights are reserved for watching movies as a family.

As for the parents, though they feel there were more wholesome shows being broadcast when they were young, they are not quick to discount the television programs being made for their daughters today. While the parents both admit to not watching many children’s television programs with their daughters, save for shows like iCarly and Wizards of Waverly Place, they feel the production and entertainment value of children’s television on the whole has improved since their youth. Ideally, they prefer programs that showcase strong and independent female characters that their children can look up to as role models. More regarding this matter will be covered in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Media Habits in Vancouver

Speaking to television consumption in Vancouver, it appears that the families are watching less television on average than what has been reported in the East of Canada. The five families say that their children watch close to 10 or more hours of television per week. Similar to what was seen in Calgary, television does not appear to be at the top of the list of activities that children do on a daily basis. Many of the children interviewed mention playing outdoors, a pastime they are able to continue all year round due to the mild west coast winter season. It should be stressed though that this outdoor play did not appear to be as prevalent as what was seen in St. John’s. Others point out that they are involved in extra curriculars and sports teams, while some simply speak of favourite hobbies that take up a lot of their free time, like one 12-year-old girl who enjoys baking and cooking. Moreover, when asked what they tend to do when visiting friend’s houses, hardly any of the children mentioned watching television or movies as an activity. That being said, it is clear that these children still are watching a fair amount of television and enjoy what they see.

There is an average of 3.2 televisions in each household interviewed, yet only 1 out of 3 children have a television set in their respective bedroom, none of which are hooked up to the cable and are therefore only used for watching DVDs. 3 out of 5 families own a PVR and use it on a regular basis, partly to take advantage of time shifting and partly to avoid watching advertisements. While two families use basic cable as their service provider, three of the five families subscribe to either HD Telus digital satellite or HD digital cable, which they enjoy because it gives them the freedom to pick and drop specific stations.

As for computers and Internet use, there is an average of 2 computers per household and therefore lots of sharing that takes place between family members. 2 out of the 10 children interviewed currently have an active Facebook account, though it should be noted that these two children are both 12 years old. Speaking to other electronics, only 1 out of the 5 children interviewed has a cell phone (all of which are smartphones) and 4 out of 5 have their own iPod. The Vancouver households have the lowest number of video game consoles (Wii, Xbox, DSi, etc.), ringing in at an average of 2.2 gaming systems per home. This number seems all the more impressive when compared to Toronto, where the average was almost twice as many.
From a Family’s Perspective

Through analyzing the data collected from all five family interviews and four focus groups conducted in Vancouver in September 2011, some interesting trends have emerged. As we will see, some mirror the findings seen in other regions across Canada while some are unique to Vancouver. The following is a detailed account of these themes, highlighted with summarized examples, direct citations, and researcher observations.

“It’s the left coast”

Similar to what was seen in Calgary, there seems to be a different feel or attitude in Vancouver when it comes to television’s presence in the home, especially in comparison to what was seen out East. Though television does play an important role in the daily lives of these families, it is not attributed as much importance or used as often as in Toronto and St. John’s. This is not to say that children do not enjoy watching television; they all still have their favourite programs and enjoy spending time watching them. It is more of a different approach that parents and children alike seem to take towards television consumption. For example, when asked what her typical television watching routine is, the 12-year-old Anderson girl answers:

For me, I don’t use TV very often. I’m more into art. I don’t watch it in the morning cause I have school. I watch it like maybe now, I watch it maybe three times a week after school and in the evenings. Sometimes on Fridays we watch movies in the evenings. And on the weekends I don’t watch very much because I’m busy and the weekends I have other activities to do.

Though this example is perhaps a tad more extreme than the average, most of the children interviewed did mention the time they spend playing outdoors or engaging in other activities as being a habitual part of their weekly routine.

While they did not appear as committed to extracurricular activities as children encountered in Calgary, they have found other ways to occupy their time rather than devoting it entirely to television and new technology. For example, the White sons, aged 10 and 12, only watch approximately an hour of television per evening. The rest of their free time is spent playing Lego, playing outdoors in the backyard or reading.

Interestingly enough, three of the families interviewed admitted that they allowed their children to watch much more television compared to their other adult friends, attributing this to the “left coast” attitude they feel is very reflective of West coast culture. As the Johnsons say:

We have a lot of left wing friends that don’t believe in TV. Some of our friends don’t have cable at all or they don’t have TV... It’s the left coast.

The Anderson’s mirror these same sentiments, stating that:

I think that most of the parents we know are much stricter about TV watching and internet and computer than we are. We’re probably looser than most parents. We’re probably more laid back. But that’s just in our group of friends.

Even the Davies mother feels that “my kids watch way more TV than their friends do”, leading the researchers to believe that more of an emphasis is made on practicing an overall multi-faceted lifestyle that includes but is not overrun by television. The Anderson mother goes on to offer an explanation as to why she feels that most children in Vancouver, at least the peers of her children whose behaviour she witnesses firsthand, watch less television on the whole:

But I think the definite culture in their school is less TV, more outside play. And all the parents, like all the kids are involved in a lot of activities. Like almost too much activities. It’s almost like they don’t get enough free time. There is no time to be watching hours of TV. No. Because there
are a lot of people who have soccer, swimming, skating, you know, there are a lot of kids who do soccer and hockey at the same time. And that's like well there goes every weekend. It's crazy.

As previously mentioned, though these families may not watch as much as their Eastern counterparts, television is still an important part of their lives and, as we will see below, both the children and parents alike have much to say on the subject.

“I think they derive something out of programs we watch as a family”

When it comes to enjoying television together as an entire family, the Vancouverite parents interviewed for this study admit to spending a good deal of time co-viewing television with their children, especially when compared to Toronto or Montréal. That being said, they also watch less television on the whole than their eastern counterparts, so this must also be taken into consideration. From what surfaced during the data analysis, it can be said that Vancouver families in our study typically spend some of their evenings watching television together and part of their weekends as well. Evenings are reserved for family-type shows, sometimes children’s programs that both the parents and children enjoy watching, but normally general-audience programs. Weekend evenings are predominantly set aside for movie nights.

The Johnson’s spend a fair amount of time watching television together in the evenings particularly, a fact that is all the more evident through the language they use to describe their collective television viewing schedule. When recounting their typical television routine, everyone always uses “we” or “the family’s favourite” to describe the shows they watch in the evening. It seems as though, collectively, they have found programs that everyone enjoys watching, and will often eat dinner and spend part of the evening watching these programs that have been pre-recorded together in the living room:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mom</th>
<th>Um in the summer, the family, we were a big fan of the talent shows.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G12</td>
<td>Like America’s Got Talent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>America’s Got Talent, X-Factor. Yeah. Not so much So You Think You Can Dance but its more the rounded talent shows. And that was a big thing for viewing in the summer for our family. Those talent shows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>In the winter and fall?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>We’ll watch the new shows, the comedies. But in the fall and winter, we’ll watch hockey and new shows. Comedies. We’ll watch comedies with the kids.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They will also watch some programs made specifically for children together as a family. For instance, the father does not mind spending the time watching SpongeBob with his 9-year-old and particularly enjoys iCarly:

iCarly, I have no problem watching that. It’s entertaining, it’s fun. Um, so I’ll watch that with them.

In the Walker family, the mother spends a great deal of time co-viewing children’s programs, mostly cartoons, with her three children, though this is a particularly unique case. The Walker’s have three children between the age of 12 and 9; the eldest is autistic and the middle child has a severe learning disorder, making it a challenging home environment for these parents to control. The mother explains to the researchers that television is an excellent way to keep them calm and focused, as long as they are watching non-violent cartoons. Moreover, she has noticed that her mere presence on the couch when co-viewing alongside them yields even greater positive results and helps to calm and control her children.
One trend emerges very clearly among those interviewed in Vancouver, and that is the way in which parents use television, more specifically certain programs, to connect with their children. Time and time again during these interviews, researchers note both parents and children mentioning programs they both enjoy, at times using emotive language which shows that not only do they feel it is important to share a bond or mutual interest regarding specific television shows, but that it represents a time they can spend together, enjoying one another’s company. For example, the Anderson parents enjoy watching The Simpsons and Futurama with their children, not only because they themselves enjoy the show but because they feel that by accompanying their children in watching it, they can explain the difficult jokes or hidden cultural references and help them learn from these programs. The Anderson parents also insist on making their children watch the news with them on a daily basis. They feel it is important for their children to understand what is taking place in the world outside of their own lives. As the father says, “I think they derive something out of programs we watch as a family.” The father goes on to explain the satisfaction he gets from seeing his children enjoy and appreciate one of his personal favourite programs: “it’s nice that we can all share and laugh at it.” Interestingly, in the Davies and White household, the mothers both admit to not watching much television and so it is the fathers who spend time co-viewing programs with their children. Coincidently, in both of these households the fathers spend time watching sports and the British science fiction series Dr. Who with their children. As a result, both the fathers and the children speak fondly of this mutual interest they share for this particular series and regard the time they spend watching it together as fond moments. At the Johnson’s, the father proudly explains how he and his 12-year-old daughter will watch many of the same programs since “she and I have similar tastes, so she’ll watch hockey and The Office and things like that with me”. One father from the focus group shares the same bond with his daughter, as he explains below:

INT You’re smiling, what are you thinking?

Dad2 I’m just trying to figure out what to say. I guess I don’t mind my daughter watching the Office. I mean, that’s what she does, she records 20 episodes of that.

INT That’s your favourite for her?

Dad2 I don’t mind it. I like some of the dark humour. But I think that my daughter does appreciate it. So that’s one thing that we can connect with.

Another mother from the focus group recounts how she will share her favourite shows from her past, primarily Degrassi High, with her children now, and derives great pleasure from seeing her children enjoy the same program as herself:

And then two shows I really loved growing up were Degrassi Junior High and Degrassi High. Those were like my all time favourite and I still like to watch them now. I have the box set. And it’s funny cause my kids really like them. It’s funny to watch with them because I really enjoyed those shows when I was their age so to see them enjoy them is great.

This act of a parent co-viewing old episodes of their past favourite shows with their children today is a common trend seen across the country in all five regions. Researchers believe this is a comfortable way for parents to share part of their past with their children, as well as find a mutual interest to share since most parents do not enjoy watching and cannot relate to the children’s programs being broadcasted today.

While the shows these parents tend to share with their children are predominantly adult or general-audience programs, there is a high instance of active viewing of children’s shows seen amongst the parents interviewed. To recapitulate, the distinction between viewing awareness and actively viewing a television program is evident in the way in which parents are able to explain and discuss shows their children are watching, thus demonstrating the level at which they are actively paying attention to the programs and the content being shown. When parents
are aware of what their children are watching, they are usually able to name the program title and perhaps a character or two, whereas when parents are actively co-viewing television shows their children habitually watch, they are able to name characters, discuss plot lines, and even describe past episode synopsis with ease. Even if some parents in Vancouver are not impressed with some of the programs being produced for 9 to 12 year olds at the moment, they demonstrate through their testimonials that they have actively viewed the programs their children are watching and have spent time evaluating these programs in order to decide if they are appropriate or not. For example, we see below how the father from the Anderson family discusses his son’s favourite shows, Phineas and Ferb and Spliced (a Canadian-made cartoon that airs on Teletoon), with ease:

Spliced is a really good show, it’s got a former Kids in the Hall actor on it. It’s hilarious. They’re all genetic mutants. They’ve all been created in a laboratory, they live on this island. It’s hilarious…

Phineas and Ferb, it’s well written and it’s funny. Good voice actors.

These instances of active viewing among parents are also evident when looking at the number of parents interviewed in Vancouver who have decided to unsubscribe from certain specialty channels because of their distaste for the programs being aired. Since they took the time to join their children and actively watch these types of programs, they were able to judge for themselves the content being shown and made an informed decision that they did not like what was being offered to their children. This subject will be fully touched upon later in the chapter.

“I PVR everything so I can buzz through the commercials”

Another west coast trend worth mentioning that carried on from Calgary is the use of Personal Video Recorder devices in the home and the effects it has on a family’s media consumption. In Vancouver, three out of the five in-home families and 3 of the 5 focus group families interviewed all owned and frequently used their PVR. There seem to be three main benefits these families experience when watching pre-recorded television shows. The first is the freedom to watch programs whenever and at whatever time of day. Because of the time shifting, they are able to record shows earlier and watch them at an earlier time. For instance, the Johnson’s will record new episodes of The Office and The Big Bang Theory when they air earlier in Ontario, then watch them at an earlier West-Coast time that is more convenient for them, typically during meals. This goes both ways and also allows parents to watch their favourite adult shows at a later time, usually after the children have gone to bed. Secondly, the PVR device allows families to store a certain number of recorded episodes, meaning children and parents can access their favourite recorded programs to rewatch when there is nothing of interest on regularly broadcasted television. The Davies children will often watch reruns of their favourite programs on weekends if they cannot find shows worth watching on live television. Lastly, parents enjoy being able to fast forward through advertisements, an act that allows them to skip commercials to save time since programs are shorter without ad space taken into account.
“They’re attracted to ones that are engaging, intelligent and aren’t talking down to them”

As mentioned in the co-viewing section, the parents in Vancouver are, for the most part, actively watching their children’s favourite television series alongside them and therefore are able to comment and critically analyse what their children are watching. The parents interviewed are very quick to offer their opinion, both praise and criticism, regarding the shows their children frequently watch. Interestingly, though each family chooses different shows they feel are the ‘best’ for their children to be watching, everyone agrees on which they feel to be the worst, and for exactly the same reasons. To begin, we will explore the programs parents feel are the best shows for their children aged 9 to 12 to be watching.

The Anderson parents have a very good grasp of the shows their children watch and are very vocal in their opinions. The father, a self-employed tour guide operator who has studied film in the past, is very critical of children’s shows and looks specifically for intelligent writing and well developed characters. While at times he can be a tough critic, he offers high praise when he feels producers have done a good job. According to him and his wife, the best shows for their children to watch are The Simpsons, Phineas and Ferb, Fosters Home For Imaginary Friends, Total Drama Island and Spliced (the latter two are Canadian cartoon productions). Though they recognize that The Simpsons is not a children’s show, they feel the knowledge and enjoyment their children get out of watching it with them makes it a top contender. As for Phineas and Ferb, the parents feel that:

Dad You know, they’re attracted to the ones that are engaging and intelligent and that aren’t talking down to them. And that’s why Phineas and Ferb and Foster’s Monsters are so great.

Mom Yeah I think Phineas and Ferb, like if I had to say one kids show-

Dad It’s a smart show.

Mom You’re actually trying to learn life lessons and they’re actually getting them across. But in a funny way. He’s got this really uptight older sister that’s always trying to tell on him. And just how they deal with their siblings, how they deal with their parents, and how it all works out in the end, right? So just like the Aesop Fables, just told in a modern more funny way. It’s like if you want to interest kids and you want to also make it I guess acceptable for parents so they think “ok, they’re actually getting more out of this than just entertainment”.

The father goes on to explain why he feels it is important for his children to watch well-written programs that are engaging:

I think the thing is that they live in this household which is quite interactive and there’s a lot going on. And so when they watch TV, they’re looking for something that satisfies that as well, provides that engagement.

The Walker mother explains that the only appropriate shows for her children to watch are non-violent cartoons, such as Care bears, Garfield and Berenstain Bears. Though these are not typically the favourites listed among the other children in Vancouver and tend to be directed at a much younger audience, the nature of her family’s situation makes watching these types of cartoons not only essential but welcomed. She explains that anything made for her children’s actual age group are either too violent or too stimulating for her disabled children, and therefore they mostly stick to watching shows on Teletoon Retro.
In the Johnson residence, the parents feel that the two best shows currently on air for their children are iCarly and Wizards of Waverly Place. Their 9-year-old daughter loves SpongeBob SquarePants which, though they do not have a problem with her watching, they consider to be more of a means of entertainment than a program with actual value. The dad prefers iCarly because:

I like it because it’s fun, it’s not too silly, it doesn’t lead them down the wrong path. It’s just kids that are doing good stuff.

Whereas the Anderson mother chooses Wizards of Waverly Place as the best show for her daughters because:

It’s a good family – like the parents are a strong influence in the show and that would be one of the ones that I was always fine with them watching it. It was a good show.

The father also mentions how he and his wife look for shows that have strong positive female role models as the main characters, a trait he finds is important for his daughters to watch and learn from. For this reason, both parents thoroughly enjoyed the show Kimpossible that their daughters used to watch a couple of years ago.

I liked her super hero kind of thing. Crime fighter. It showed strong girls. I like shows where the girls are strong. Not weak and submissive and crabby, bratty.

Generally speaking, both the parents in the home interviews as well as the focus groups agreed that the best shows for their children aged 9 to 12 should be entertaining, well written and provide positive messages of respect and good behaviour. We see just how important these criteria are when examining the reasons why some parents in Vancouver dislike certain children’s shows.

The overall consensus gathered from parents interviewed in this region is a surprising distaste for “Disney-made children’s sitcoms”. This is all the more interesting when comparing these opinions to those seen out East, where the majority of parents praise this type of children’s programming. In Vancouver, the majority of families interviewed and all five mothers in the focus group vocalized their disappointment in shows such as Hannah Montana, Suite Life of Zack and Cody and other live-action children’s comedies that air on the Family channel. In fact, this dissatisfaction has grown so much so that two of the in-house interviewee families and three of the focus group families have decided to unsubscribe from receiving the Family Channel as part of their digital cable package. The reasons for their dislike of these shows are relatively all the same. Firstly, and this is similar to what was voiced by some parents in Calgary, parents find the main pre-teen characters to be “obnoxious” and that they lack respect towards adults and parents. They believe these characters are a negative influence on their own children. As some mothers from the focus group say:

Mom2 I find the characters, they are really disrespectful and they talk back to adults and they think they just run the show. And then I watch the kids turn around and do the same thing and I’m like “you’re not in the show”

INT Oh so you see your kids imitating?

Mom2 I can see that. Especially my daughter, I can really really see it. And I said, you know, enough, you guys aren’t watching that kind of stuff.

Mom3 Yeah, I hate too in those shows is the actual absence of any parents or adults in the show. When you’re watching it, especially iCarly or Suite Life on Deck, shows like that especially. There is almost a complete absence of any parents or adult people. But even if there are adults in the show, it’s like the kids are running it. They’re running the show. The adults do what the kids want.

Other parents are frustrated with the formulaic nature of these types of programs, finding them repetitive and uninspiring. Both the Anderson and Johnson parents feel this type of program-
“It’s going to entertain an adult as well as a child”

Since it is clear that the parents in Vancouver have very strong opinions regarding which shows are the best for their children to watch and why, researchers asked what elements they feel are the most important to include in order to produce first-rate children’s programming for 9 to 12 year olds. Parents were at the ready and full of suggestions for how to improve television programs made specifically for their children’s age group. One interesting opinion unique to the parents of Vancouver is this: some feel that the key ingredient to producing a successful and well-received children’s show is to make one that appeals to adults as well. Though we have seen across all five regions of Canada the plea from parents to producers to make family-oriented shows that everyone can enjoy, here we explicitly see parents stress the importance of producing children’s programs that can entertain adults. The Anderson mother explains the logic behind this theory as such:

Mom We were just talking about this this morning. It’s just like a well written book. You know? It’s going to entertain an adult as well as a child.

INT So you think a children’s show should also entertain adults?

Mom Yes. Definitely. I think it’s if it’s a good show, an adult is going to appreciate it just as much as a child. Like I can sit and watch Phineas and Ferb and have just as many laughs as they can... Cause I think it’s important to like actually spend some time watching TV with your kids, cause if you just use the TV as a babysitter, they don’t really like it. Like they want you to sit there and watch with them. They don’t want you to always be busy and they don’t want you to be putting the TV on so they’re entertained either, right?

The mother from the White family shares the same feelings, stating that:

I noticed that, if you can engage an adult in a children’s show, something geared towards children, it’s probably very well made. The kids pick up what they pick up, which might be different, and they might be 2 levels of humour, so they might not get the, maybe historical events, or like sarcasm, whatever. But the kids will get it at their level, but it is not insulting to kids, or over their head, and it’s not insulting to adults intelligence either.

In keeping with the suggestion for a “family” show that everyone could enjoy, many parents feel that revamping or remodelling the formula of older general-audience sitcoms they used to watch when they were 10-years-old would make for excellent family viewing material. That being said, the Johnson father makes an interesting point about the difference in both generations and how television shows today must reflect that difference; a challenge he feels the current ABC sitcom Modern Family has undertaken beautifully:

I would think Modern Family is a family type show. Its not as wholesome as the kids, like the kids in the Cosby show weren’t perfect but they never talked back to the parents. But that’s not reality, either, right? Like we want our kids to have opinions and speak up to us with respect but
argue with us if they don’t agree with what we do. But I’m fine with that. To me, that’s the modern family. It is more modern than Cosby. That family isn’t real anymore.

Other suggestions for ways to improve children’s television programs include reworking the attitude in many of the current shows to make them less child-centred and more family focused, with a specific emphasis on encouraging respectful behaviour towards parents and adults. A mother in the focus group sums up this general opinion shared by all the participants in stating that:

*I just think, again, I think shows like iCarly for instance, what’s wrong with toning that down a bit, like how the girls act, that “whatever” attitude. And what’s wrong with showing maybe when she comes home from school and showing mom in the kitchen maybe starting dinner, or dad starting dinner, whomever does that, talking to their parents about things. Just, yeah, incorporate more normal family scenes into it.*

Another interesting point brought up by the fathers in the focus group is the need for more content that teaches children how to think critically and be capable of properly interpreting media and what they watch and absorb from new technologies:

*Dad2* I think the concept is hard to package in just one answer but uh anything that would make or would have the kids have critical reasoning. I think that’s what’s lacking. I mean, pretty much, there’s not facts, but a lot of information. And you need to decode that information. So you need the tools that will help you to decode that information.

**INT** Kind of a media literacy type thing?

*Dad2* That would be one aspect, yes.

The fathers in the focus group also call for less advertising in their children’s television programming, an aspect they fear causes their children to become materialistic and greedy.

“He has a tendency to parody what he sees on TV when playing with friends”

When discussing possible influences parents feel that television may have on their children, the subject does not garner much response. While some parents feel there can be an influence, either negative or positive, others disagree and even more of them have nothing much to say on the subject at all. As seen in the above sections, many parents feel their children are negatively influenced by watching children sitcoms such as The Suite Life of Zack and Cody because they promote disrespectful behaviour towards adults. Many of the mothers in the focus group have noticed a change in behaviour and lack of respect from their children, something they attribute to being picked up from these types of television shows.

The Davies have noticed a slight influence on their 10-year-old son, but mostly in terms of recreating scenarios seen in television shows during imaginative play with his friends. Though he will sometimes parody fighting scenes with friends, they do not feel this is a negative influence in any way. In the Johnson household, the mother and father disagree on the amount of impact television has on their two daughters. The mother believes that the type of programs her children watch can influence a great number of things, especially compared to when she was a child:

*I think it affects a lot. It depends sometimes, it affects what they want to listen to, how they want to dress, the way they speak. I think so. You know, if there’s a phrase on a show, every now and then you’ll hear the kids say it. Yeah, so I think so. I think it has more of an effect on them now than it did when we were young.*
The father disagrees, stating that he believes his daughters are intelligent enough to understand the difference between real life and television and understand how to act accordingly:

Yeah I don’t think they’re really influenced, I don’t see them acting out like some of the kids of TV are acting out.

Finally, the Anderson parents firmly believe their children are influenced by the television they watch, but only in a positive way. In watching shows like *The Simpsons* with their kids they feel their children are learning, especially in terms of expanding their knowledge and cultural awareness. They have not noticed any influences in terms of their children’s behaviour, mostly because they feel they spend a fair amount of time discussing appropriate behaviour and the importance of respect with their children.

“**They’re pretty good in terms of rules. They’re easy kids**”

Aside from the White household, where rules concerning media use are in abundance, there seems to be more of a laissez faire attitude when it comes to parental mediation in Vancouver. This laid-back approach to parenting is all the more evident when analysing the way parents describe rules and routines in the household. For example, the following statement made by the Johnson father is in sharp contrast with the more traditional rules seen in Calgary:

*Homework first. Well, its pretty much homework first, make sure everything is done. And then if their room is tidy, well not always room is tidy but, homework first, rooms relatively half decent, then they get to watch a little bit of TV.*

In terms of television, none of the parents in our study allow their children to have access to cable television in their bedrooms. The Johnson’s let their 12-year-old girl have access for a short period of time and, after realizing how much time she began spending alone in her room, quickly decided to unplug the cable. There seems to be a general understanding amongst these families that as long as media consumption is being done out in the open, it is acceptable. Though there are certain programs they are not allowed to watch, these rules are not always followed, and parents seem to be the first to break them. The Anderson’s laugh at how their mother doesn’t like her children watching Family Guy yet the father always lets them watch with him regardless. 

The mother in the White household stresses the importance of only allowing her children to watch G rated cartoon shows, though this is because anything with violence or too much activity will over stimulate her disabled children and can lead to behavioural problems. The Davies parents explain that their only media rule in the house is strictly content based: if they do not feel what their children are watching is appropriate, it is
shut off. They explain how it is relatively easy to keep this rule in tact since the children do not have a television in their room, making it easier to control what they watch. This rule seems to go over well since, as their mother says:

They’re pretty good in terms of rules. They’re easy kids so the only time they would oppose is when we say “turn it off, its bedtime, or dinner time.”

Many of the families speak to not having many set rules that are applied religiously but more so to guidelines or “mutual understandings” of what is appropriate and what is not. Parents stress that since they lead such busy, ever changing lives, it is easier to just “go with the flow” instead of having to constantly make and break rules which no longer fit into their family routine. The Andersons discuss their parental mediation style below, which researchers feel is emblematic of the parenting style of most of the Vancouver families who were interviewed:

Mom We have the computers in a public area. I don’t like the idea of them going in their bedrooms with their computers.

Dad Yeah exactly. Internet use is in the common area. And then just basic deal making where ok you can play that game for an hour but after that you have to do your dicté.

INT So there are no set rules but a lot of mutual understanding?

Dad Striving for balance?

INT Right

Mom Yeah we play a lot of it by ear, right? Because it depends on how the day is going and how busy they are and stuff.

One father from the focus group reiterates that similar doctrine in stating:

I find our rules are always evolving, you know? Cause they always find some loopholes or something new comes out that you didn’t know about and you’ve gotta make a new rule, change things up a little.

While these examples give a well-rounded overview of the general approach Vancouverite parents take to mediating their children’s television intake, one family interviewed went far above and beyond any form of mediation seen to date across all five regions of Canada. The parents in the White family keep a very tight leash on the amount of media their 10 and 12-year-old sons are allowed to use. Below is an excerpt of the mother explaining her household rules:

I hide the DS, it’s generally not used, they don’t take it to school. And we have a password on the computer, which is why they are not on it all the time. And also the office has a lock on the door, so that they can’t just go down and turn on the TV. I put in the code for the computer and I put in the code for the door to get into the dad’s office for the TV.

It should also be noted that there is no television watching in this home before school or during mealtimes, and the boys are limited to roughly one hour of television per day. By enforcing these rules and insisting that she unlocks the computer or television room before use, the mother feels she is in complete control of what her children are accessing and for how long they are doing so. Moreover, by constantly accompanying them in their media intake, she and her husband can ensure they are watching appropriate television shows and looking at age-friendly content online.
“Things like that ... they look like they could be American”

Generally speaking, both the parents and the children in Vancouver agree that they enjoy the idea of Canadian programming, of programming representative of their country and community. That being said, it is very difficult for most to be able to name Canadian children’s programs in the first place. Most find it hard to distinguish between the two production types, and typically tend to assume what they are watching is American-made. While that may be, there are little clues that the children tell us help to tell production origin apart, such as the answers given by these three 12-year-old girls from three different families:

G12 Canadian shows are more like – sometimes they’re more well written and they have more, better humour I think. And then American shows is opposite.

G12 There are some shows where you can only really tell in the end where it’ll go like “Ontario” and you’re like, oh. Or sometimes they’ll say things like “a Canadian girl”. But you don’t really know.

G12 Canadian shows have less laughter in the background. Like on Family its all American and they have laughter in the tracks but on YTV and Nickelodeon they don’t and a lot of those shows are Canadian.

At the Johnson residence, this question of American versus Canadian-made television productions leads to a very telling discussion about the “quality” of Canadian programs, speaking to the technical production quality, and how much improvement they have undergone, so much so that nowadays, to be undistinguishable from American productions is considered a compliment:

Dad I don’t always know which shows are Canadian and which aren’t

G12 Well, YTV shows are Canadian.

Mom It used to be the production value, right? That’s what I always thought.

Dad Back in the day, it was poorly done. Like a Canadian drama, depending on what it is. But I think a kids show, like this Indy.

G12 How To Be Indie.

Dad Yeah, things like that... they look like they could be American, Disney made.

INT And that’s a compliment?

Mom Yeah.

Dad Sure yeah, it’s a compliment.

Mom Or there’s one that uh Mr Young?

G12 Mr Young, yeah.

Mom That could be American.

G12 Yeah, you can’t really tell.

Mom That’s on YTV and that could totally be an American show, like the quality is up there.

G12 Yeah and all the kids act the same, like they don’t look really different.

INT And the story lines and the values?

Mom I think they’re all pretty much on par.

Some parents, like the Anderson’s, try and encourage their children to watch more Canadian content if they feel it is an entertaining and worthwhile show. It is evident that in this household, as well as some others interviewed in Vancouver, it is the parents who are more informed and better able to distinguish between Canadian and American programs than their children. For example, the father always points out to his children that Spliced and Total Drama Island are Canadian productions, as well as the fact that many of the writers on The Simpsons hail from Canada. He feels that we, as Canadians, have a very distinct and special type of humour that he hopes to instil his children with an
appreciation for at a young age. The mother also notes the benefits of watching Canadian-made programs and feels it is important to be able to make that distinction:

But I think, like you say, being able to recognize that it’s Canadian. Really. Like if you can watch a show like That’s So Weird and you see them in the streets of Canadian towns, interviewing people just like they do on CBC, then it sort of gives you a connection. So I think for kids, that’s a great thing. They feel like they’re watching something that is part of their community.

Though this may be the attitude of some parents, researchers find that it is difficult to spark and maintain an interest for Canadian productions with all children, especially when they are not aware of the production origin of most of their favourite shows. During the children’s focus group, the participants are asked where they would like to set the make believe program they are designing for other 9 to 12 year olds. As is evident from the excerpt below, it is not every child who is as interested in Canadian productions as others:

INT So you guys said you don’t care if it’s Canadian or American?
((everyone says no))
INT If you had a choice between a Canadian TV show and an American TV show, who would choose Canadian?
((boy9 raises hand)).
INT You would? And why?
B9 Cause I’m Canadian
INT Cause you’re Canadian. And the rest, who would choose American?
((everyone else raises their hand))
INT Everyone else? Why?
G12 Well because the best shows are American, like the Office and Big Bang Theory
B9 The shows people actually watch are American

This might suggest that it is very important to maintain an interest in Canadian productions at this particular viewing age in order to create loyal viewers who will continue to watch and support Canadian productions as adults. Though Canadian children watched many Canadian productions during preschool, the amount of shows for older children aged 9 to 12 decreases and, as a result, they begin to drift towards American-made content. If producers are able to hook the 9 to 12 age bracket on Canadian shows, they will have more success maintaining their loyalty in the future.

From a Child’s Perspective

“There shows... I feel just like really warm. Like, happy.”

The children in both the family interviews and focus group were asked to share with researchers their favourite programs and the reasons justifying said preferences. The following is a complete list of all television shows named by the children participants as being their favourites. It has been divided by age to present readers with a better understanding of age preference division:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Favourite Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Simpsons (US); Futureama (US); Phineas and Ferb (US); SpongeBob SquarePants (US);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On top of asking to name their favourite programs, children were also encouraged to express the emotions they feel while watching them and what specific elements of these shows they enjoy the most. Though it is not always easy for children to describe how certain shows make them feel, the majority of those interviewed in Vancouver were able to describe their rationale as to why they prefer one show over the rest. The following are excerpts of children explaining said rationales.

Even though the 12-year-old girl from the Johnson family's favourite programs are more general-audience comedies such as The Big Bang Theory and The Office, she still finds comfort in watching cartoons and live action programs made especially for her age group, such as Victorious, iCarly, and the cartoon Fairly Odd Parents, which she describes below:

“Um other good shows, there's that cartoon, Fairly Odd Parents, and there's like a kid and a boy and he has fairies, it's funny, just like a cartoon. Those are the shows I like to watch that are kid shows. I like to watch those shows. Those are the shows I like to watch when I just feel like watching something that's like - I feel really like just warm. Like happy.

On the whole, the younger interviewees, ages 9 and 10, mention the important characteristics of their favourite shows being “funny characters”, “weird stories” and elements of cartoonish violence. The 12-year-olds had more specific tastes depending on the types of shows they enjoyed watching, but humour was a very important aspect mentioned by all. They also tend to be more driven by emotions at this age, though it depends on their maturity level, which varies drastically from individual to individual. Another important element is their connection to shows that correlate with their personal interests. For example, the 12-year-olds who named the Big Bang Theory as one of their favourite shows did so because they say science is one of their favourite subjects. The 12-year-old Anderson daughter's favourite channel is the Food Network since cooking and baking is her favourite hobby.

One section of the children's focus group asks the children to watch and comment on clips from 5 of the currently most popular children's television shows broadcast in Vancouver for their age bracket. This is done to give researchers more information regarding what makes or breaks a television show – valuable feedback that comes straight from the children themselves. In this case, they were shown Total Drama Island: World Tour, H2O, Life With Derek, Sonny With a Chance, and iCarly. The children are very vocal and keen to share their point of view regarding the positives and negatives of each program. Though children have their own unique likes and dislikes, there are some overall consensuses made. The three most important elements that
these children hold in the highest regard are humour (seen in Total Drama Island), conflict tension between characters (especially siblings, like on Life With Derek), and well-developed comedic characters (the overwhelming favourite is Spencer from iCarly). What is most interesting about these three shows is that they had positive reactions from both 9-year-old boys and 12-year-old girls, two extremely different demographics. Below are some excerpts taken from the focus group that show children reacting to and engaging in a discussion about the clips of these three programs.

**Total drama island (CND)**

B9(1) I love this show! Total Drama Island!
B9(2) No, it’s Total Drama World Tour
B9(1) Really?
B9(2) They made a new one, two new ones
INT Does everyone know that show?
((everyone says yes))
INT Do you guys like that show? Do you enjoy that show?
((everyone say yes))
INT Tell me why. Go ahead
G12 I haven’t watched it in a while but I used to like it because it was funny.
INT What’s funny?
G12 Just some jokes.

**Life with Derek (CND)**

B9(1) I watch it
G12 I watch it
B9(2) I hate it
B9(3) I’ve sort of heard of it but I’ve never watched it
INT Who likes it? Ok, so almost everybody who has heard of it, likes it. And so what do you guys like about it? Go ahead.
G12 When Derek and Casey fight, it’s pretty funny.

**iCarly (US)**

INT Yeah? What do you like about it?
G12 It’s like different from other shows.
INT How so?
G12 It’s a different plot, nobody has a plot like that, like about a web show. And I like Spencer, he’s funny.
INT What do you like about it?
B9(2) Spencer
INT Ok, so you like the character. That one only?
B9 Um yeah.
INT And that’s it? You don’t like the storyline?
B9(2) I like the story but I like Spencer the most.
INT Ok what about you?
B9(1) It’s funny how like Sam is like a trouble-maker.
“I just recently decided to go to their website to watch Victorious episodes”

Children in Vancouver are models of an interesting reason as to why some children may venture online to watch episodes of their favourite television shows. Roughly half of the children participating in the in-house interviewed admit to accessing broadcaster websites in order to watch past episodes of television shows. While in other regions of Canada, the predominate reason for children to access network websites was to play games, it seems that in Vancouver there is a mix of game playing and program watching that occur on sites such as Family.ca and YTV.com. The 12-year-old Anderson girl admits to going online to both the Family Channel and YTV website to watch past episodes of Victorious, Phineas and Ferb, and Hannah Montana, though she says it was more of a habitual practice in the past and she does not frequent them nearly as often nowadays. The 12-year-old Davies girl will only go online to watch her favourite programs, Pretty Little Liars and Glee, if she forgets to PVR them when they air originally on television. She also likes to go online to stream movies from time to time. Her brother does not go online to watch television shows but does enjoy playing games such as Beaver Dam on YTV.com or other games on Teletoon.ca. The children in both the Walker and White households also very much enjoy playing games on Teletoon and YTV websites, which their mothers allow as long as they are playing non-violent games.

One of the main reasons researchers feel that some children in Vancouver choose to access broadcaster websites to watch their favourite programs is revealed by the Johnson daughters. As previously discussed, the Johnson parents (similar to the Andersons and many mothers in the focus group) have recently unsubscribed from Family Channel because they find the programming to be dissatisfying. As a compromise, their children can access their favourite programs via the website if they so choose to continue watching them. The 9-year-old Johnson daughter, who is still very much a fan of Family Channel programming, will go online and watch some of her favourite episodes for that exact reason:

**G12** Its more my sister that watches on the computer.

**Mom** Yeah she watches more on the computer

**G12** There’s a Family Channel website that they put them on.

**Mom** What shows do they put up? Wizards?

**G9** Full videos of um yeah Wizards of Waverly Place, um

**Mom** You still watch some Hannah Montana?

**G9** Yeah and Sonny With a Chance, Suite Life

**Dad** Sonny With a Chance, Suite Life of Zack and Cody?

**G9** Yeah

**INT** So you actually go to the internet because you don’t have (the channel) on your TV set?

**G9** Yes.

“Sometimes I’ll read when I watch TV. But sometimes, like, I’ll just watch TV”

In terms of media multitasking, the children in Vancouver offer similar answers to what has already been observed in the four other regions of Canada. Though the act of using other forms of technology while watching television can at times occur with some children, it is not the norm for any of the children interviewed. Some, like in the White and Walker households, never
multitask, unless they happen to be colouring or playing with Lego while watching television. This is not technically considered media multitasking since they are not using a second form of media. Others, like in the Anderson home, will play on their laptop or play with their iPod while the television is on. In these instances, however, they admit that television is more so on in the background and the other form of media is the main activity receiving all of the child’s attention. All children agree that when they want to watch a program, they prefer devoting their entire attention to it and leaving all other activities to the side. The Anderson 12-year-old girl also admits that she cannot multitask or even have the television on in the background when she needs to concentrate. When this occurs, she will physically remove herself from the living room in order to fully concentrate on her homework. No children voice a particular opinion regarding how they feel about media multitasking.

As seen in other regions, media multitasking typically becomes more of a common practice with older children, mostly the 11 and 12-year-old, as they enter into the pre-teen years and social media becomes more prevalent. The following is an excerpt from the children’s focus group interview that demonstrates the media multitasking habits of two 12-year-old girls and, contrastingly, three 9-year-old boys. It is an important example that helps to better understand the difference in multitasking practices depending on a child’s age:

**Children take on the role of television producer**

“Something universal, I guess, that everyone can understand”

Another segment of the children’s focus group interview asks the participants (in this case, 6 children ranging between the ages of 9 and 12 and hailing from 5 Vancouverite families)
to pretend they are in charge of creating a brand new television show for their peer group. Children are encouraged to share their ideas with the group and devise a premise, setting, plot line, characters, even a name for the new show. Seeing as how this particular focus group has four boys aged 9 and 10 who are paired with two girls aged 12, the age and sex difference creates a difficult dynamic with distinctive tastes and preferences. As a result, it is challenging at times to create one cohesive program that everyone can agree on. That being said, the participants manage to work together and chose to create a cartoon comedy program set in the future in outer space where the characters drive hover cars. They decide that the main character should possess super powers, such as the ability to fly and mutant healing powers. The group should consist of a mix of boys and girls, some of whom are good and some of whom are evil, all of whom will fight one another in each episode. In the vote over deciding where the show should be made, 2 children vote for Canada and 3 vote for the United States, therefore their program will be an American-made show. The show will air at 6pm on weekends, a time slot the children feel is the best time to air a show since it will be sure reach the largest audience of children. When asked how they want the audience to feel after having watched their program, children respond by saying:

B10 Excited to watch every episode
B9 Like it’s a cool show and awesome
G12 Be surprised about what happened

They also feel that good voice actors are very important and good quality animation. At one point, making the show in 3D animation is suggested.

During the Anderson family interview, their 12-year-old daughter describes to researchers her concept of the perfect show for 9 to 12 year olds. As you can see from the citation below, the program she describes is in essence a family show, one that can be enjoyed by and shared with every member of the household. It is clear that, for this 12-year-old girl, spending time with her sister and parents while watching an enjoyable television show is very important to her:

It would probably be fiction, like a sitcom, comedy. It would probably be about like 13 year olds, like a little older than me, but they’re still kind of like, they’re not really really like super mature. They’re kind of like kids but older. It would probably be like a comedy, again a feel good comedy that makes you feel good about something. It wouldn’t be like scary or bad language or anything like that. There would be like 4 or 5 kids and they’d probably just be like regular kids who like to, I dunno, be kids. I would want it to be friendly for all ages pretty much. So if you have a sibling who is 13 or 5, they can all watch it. It won’t be something that like you have to go downstairs to watch this or you have to leave if I’m watching it. So something that is friendly for everyone that parents can also laugh to sometimes. Jokes they’ll like but also kids will also get the jokes, so something that is universal, I guess, that everyone can understand. Yeah, I’d want it to be a family show.

From an Adolescent’s Perspective

The final adolescent focus group conducted in this study makes for an interesting discussion concerning the current state of children’s television. This particular group of adolescents consists of two girls and three boys aged 13 through 15. The five participants offer very interesting and insightful opinions regarding television programs made for 9 to 12 year olds; comments that come from their own personal television-viewing experience at that age as well as their ability to critically analyze the clips they were shown from the current most popular programs on the air in Vancouver.
At the beginning of the focus group, the teens are asked to think back to when they were 10 years old and discuss their favourite programs at that time. It seems that the participants watched mostly all the same programs, typically a mix between cartoons and Disney live-action sitcoms. Two of the participants spent their childhood in India and therefore watched older cartoons, such as Batman and Popeye, although upon moving to Canada they quickly familiarized themselves with all the popular programs and were thus able to contribute to the conversation. One 15-year-old girl admits that she was always “more into boy cartoons” at that age, but felt she had to simultaneously watch Family Channel sitcoms in order to better fit in with the girls at school:

INT So the Disney channel shows, the ones you mentioned, the Suite Life and those. Why did you enjoy watching those?

G15 Because they were probably more my age and I watched it because other kids were watching it. I thought it might be better to watch those and see what they were all about.

INT So would you say a lot of people and your friends talked about TV at school? Is that usually what would happen?

G15 Yes.

Some of the teenagers, after having matured and gained a bit more reflexivity on their childhood, are able to critically analyse their favourite shows and the effects they may have had on their personal development when growing up. One such example is given by a 13-year-old girl who feels that watching cartoons like SpongeBob SquarePants and Fairly Odd Parents as a 10-year-old made her much more outgoing and taught her how to be more sociable:

Well I kind of, like I dunno but for these shows, they’re always so outgoing. So I think it actually made me more outgoing than I actually was. Like apparently when I was little, I was super shy, like I wouldn’t talk to anyone. And like as I got older, watching shows like (SpongeBob and Fairly Odd Parents), I kind of started talking more. I guess I was just like learning more from them.

The participants are next shown clips from the most popular television shows from their past and asked to comment on them. When it comes to the live-action Disney sitcoms, the group is torn. At 10 years old, some very much liked shows like Hannah Montana and The Suite Life of Zack and Cody because of their “unbelievable” and “over-the-top” plot lines, stating that they were interesting to watch because it let them fantasize about a different, more desirable version of real life. On the other hand, others found the shows to be too unrealistic and were frustrated by the unrelatability of the characters’ lives and the scenarios they found themselves in. In relation to the clip of The Simpsons, one 15-year-old boy offers a very interesting interpretation of his take on the show when he was 10 year old:

I watched it sometimes but it didn’t really make sense because I was 8 or 9. When you’re 8 or 9, you need like colours and music in the TV and things that attract your eyes. This wasn’t really attracting. It was more like you understand the jokes, at that time you don’t really understand the jokes, you just want to laugh at them. So you laugh at the stupid stuff. The Simpsons was like that.

The next clip of SpongeBob SquarePants leads to a very interesting discussion, since all 5 participants were big fans of the show when they were younger. On the whole, they feel that the unrealistic nature of the SpongeBob world was the most appealing part of the show. Since it was a cartoon, and therefore the element of being outside of real life has already been established, the teenagers feel it is important for cartoons to be as outrageous as possible, which is exactly what SpongeBob delivers.

G13 Unrealistic cause like in Hannah Montana they’re trying to make it like it’s real life. So that just kind of makes it weirder. But in SpongeBob, you know it’s not real. It’s like a sponge living un-
derground with a squirrel and octopus and stuff and he’s living in a pineapple.
It kind of all adds up to make it funny

INT So the more out there it is, the funnier it can be?

G13 Yeah

B15 Watching people live underwater having fun, I was like this was a really critical thinking point for me. "How do they live underwater, I want to do that too". It was like every cartoon has like normal stuff but it was having fun, silly things. It was like completely different.

The final activity in the focus group asks the teens to collaborate on the development of a new television program for children aged 9 to 12. The teenagers decide to create a cartoon program and pull inspiration from the out-of-this-world wackiness they all cherish in SpongeBob SquarePants. As a group, they agree the show must take place in an outdoor and unrealistic location with outgoing characters. According to one 15-year-old, the most important question for set location is this:

*It should be somewhere where they don’t normally go, so somewhere exotic, somewhere they can dream about and say “hey, I want to go there, it would be cool, I wonder what would happen if I went there”.*

They ultimately decide to have the show set in the clouds, where their houses would rest and float all around the world. The main characters who live in the clouds would take the shape of some form of non-descript but non-threatening creatures who spend each episode looking down at earth and commenting on how ‘strange’ the ‘weird human species’ is. There will be two or three main characters, each with distinctive personalities so children can relate to at least one and choose a favourite, and they will be complimented with an entourage of secondary characters who add to the storyline and create new dynamics and scenarios. The cloud cartoon will not be set above a particular location but float around the world, so that each episode focuses on adventure in a new country or culture. In short, it will be “a globally focused cartoon, that way you’re getting the fantasy part and the realistic part”. The show should include some educational elements, such as learning about different cultures and include important morals or reinforce good behavioural traits, but all educational elements should be incorporated via hidden messages so as to not seem overly preachy. Finally, the show should be first and foremost a comedy with intelligent jokes that do not go over the head of its targeted age bracket. Bright, vibrant colours and a catchy theme song are also considered valuable assets to the success of this new show.

Final Thoughts

After having analyzed the testimonials of the Vancouverite families regarding television and other media habits, researchers have formulated certain observations. First and foremost, there is a definite feeling or flavour that echoes what the Johnson father spoke of, this notion of the “left coast”. Aside from one extreme example, the parents of Vancouver seem relatively laid back and take a more laissez faire approach to their children’s media consumption and mediation (especially when compared to its closest regional counterpart, Calgary). While that may be, the children and families in Vancouver tend to put less importance on time spent watching television as they lead busy active lives and spend more time outdoors, both of which can sometimes take precedence over viewing time. Generally speaking, television is seen as a secondary activity whose purpose is to entertain and fill the downtime in these people’s lives. Another observation worth mentioning is the common distaste for Disney formula children’s sitcoms on the part of some of the parents; a doctrine that was moderately seen in Calgary but very strongly vocalized in Vancouver. It is all the more interesting when compared to the rest of English Canada, where in St. John’s, for example, Family Channel is hailed by parents as being the best channel by far for their children’s age group and one that presents likeable characters who are positive role models. A final observation is the
growing popularity of PVR in this most westerly
region. This is a tendency that seems larger and
more present in their daily television routines
than what has been observed out East.

In the following chapter, we will wrap up our
report with a conclusion and provide an in-depth
exploration of the universal themes presented
in all five regions, the general observations that
have been made, and an outlook at the future
of children’s television and what it means for
present day 9 to 12 year olds.
Conclusion
This qualitative study provides the media industry with up-to-date data in terms of the ways Canadian children and parents appropriate media and media content in their daily lives. Through each detailed regional report of how families perceive the content of children’s television programming in Canada, we not only understand more about the role of television in the lives of Canadian families in the twenty-first century, but also gain a better understanding of what Canadian children and their parents think about television, content, and new technologies.

Most of the industry data that is collected on this subject matter is based on larger participant samples but limited to quantitative indicators. The qualitative approach we chose offered families time to reflect on and express why and how they are watching television. We feel confident that, since they are based on in-depth interviews reaching some 80 families with over 200 participants across the nation, the research findings are indicative of and validate the trends we observed.

In this report, many themes were explored in each region: children’s media use habits, the role of television in Canadian households, perceptions of children’s television, differences between Canadian and American programming, media appropriation and mediation, and so on. Our findings indicate that, on one hand, there are many interesting differences between each city/region with regard to these themes. For example, while St. John’s had the most whole-family television watching and highest number of hours of television viewing in general, its children also appeared to maintain the most even balance of outdoor play in comparison with all the other children nation-wide who partook in the study. The Québécois families interviewed in Montréal provided researchers with an interesting perspective on the realities of Québécois children’s programming and how those shows as well as American-made ones, resonate with their children today. It is interesting to see how children in Québec identify with and appropriate these two types of television programs, even though their parents often express a wish for more programs made for the 9-to-12 age range – preferably of Québécois origin. In Toronto, where researchers encountered the most diverse group of families, they all presented roughly similar models of a busy, modern family lifestyle. Though Torontonian parents seemed somewhat less connected with their children’s media habits, there was a strong desire for knowledge-based children’s television content in order to aid and compliment their children’s education. In short, children’s television in Toronto is meant to edify as well as entertain. Calgarian families seemed to embody some of the most traditional and conservative media appropriation of all the five regions. Here we encountered the highest number of instances of parental mediation but also of active involvement in their children’s lives. Interestingly enough, Calgary was the only city where not one of the children interviewed had his or her own television in his or her bedroom. We also saw the highest instance of active children, since most of the interviewees were involved in many extra-curricular activities that left less time for media consumption. Last but not least is the city of Vancouver, where the parents were involved and aware of their children’s media habits, but seemed to adopt a more laissez faire style of parenting towards their children’s media consumption. The children and families in Vancouver also tended to put less importance on time spent watching television as they seemed to lead busy active lives and spend more time outdoors, both of which can sometimes take precedence over viewing time.

Another differential trend of note is the popular use of the PVR in the Western provinces, where roughly 3 out of 5 families interviewed used it religiously and spoke very highly about the impact the PVR has had on their media routine and general television consumption. In contrast, there was barely any mention of the PVR out east. This could be due to the time shifting factor, which was mentioned fairly often. Other reasons mentioned include the ability to skip over advertisements and facilitate a more flexible television-viewing schedule.
On the other hand, we also saw similarities in families’ media consumption across the nation. All families were well equipped with a variety of entertainment/learning media. It is safe to say that our researchers observed high ownership of media equipment across the board, and there appeared to be little correlation between the amount of technology owned and the annual family income. The welfare households visited owned similar amounts of technology than the upper-middle class households visited. As such, some children seem to develop media multitasking behaviour in this kind of environment. Through observation and data analysis, we found that media multitasking does in fact exist, though it is not practiced by all. In addition, multitasking frequency varies typically according to the child’s age: media multitasking is more common among older children (11 and 12) than younger children (9 and 10). The greater multitasking levels among older children can be explained by their entrance into the social media stage of their life, where more importance is placed on peer acceptance and interaction. Moreover, our research also found that multitasking is not necessarily connected to what children are watching on television. For example, children do not indicate that they chat with friends about what shows they are currently watching: those are two separate activities.

Almost every parent we talked to was aware of the increasing influence of the Internet, which requires them to make unforeseen adjustments and set clear boundaries. However, in terms of children watching television online, our researchers found that although some children watch certain shows online, this tendency is nowhere near the norm. Children between the age of 9 and 12 are still watching the majority of their television on an actual television sets. What's more, children readily admit that television is still their preferred screen to use when watching television programs. Again, we must stress that roughly half of the children interviewed had never been online to watch a program, and the other half did not make a regular habit of it. In short, watching television shows online is still a marginalized activity and never the preferred way for children to watch their favourite programs.

While we know that Canadian content is extremely prevalent and well received at the preschool level (evident in the phase one study), it appears that it begins to taper off once children reach the pre-teen mark. To generalize, we could say that many people speak about perceived “inferior quality” but also “superior quality” of Canadian programming when compared with its American counterparts. For researchers, this generates many questions, since the term “quality” seems to mean different things to different individuals. Some of the participants we spoke with felt that Canadian productions do not have the budget to match their American counterparts production-wise, and thus considered Canadian-made shows to be of “inferior quality” on a purely technical level. Others felt that Canadian-made content tended to be of “superior quality” in terms of the values it presents and sense of community it instils in viewers. Even more still readily admitted they could not tell the difference between Canadian and American productions, stating that “quality-wise”, they were on par. Many felt this was a positive thing, meaning that Canadian productions are now just as sleek and entertaining as American ones, though others saw this as a missed opportunity. If they are indistinguishable, however, could this mean that Canadian productions are not presenting a strong enough identity or individuality, and thus not promoting the “sense of community” so many parents and children spoke of enjoying?

We believe that one way to garner the interest of younger viewers at the ages of 9 and 10 is to expose them to more Canadian content to show them that Canadian-made television is equally as entertaining as American. Otherwise, the older they get, the more they will continue to drift towards American content, a habit that will continue into adulthood. It is also up to parents to inform themselves of the Canadian content currently available to their children.
and encourage them to watch it. Even the exchanges shared during the family interviews in the presence of the researchers brought up discussions about Canadian television that many families admitted to never having had before. When all is said and done, it is safe to say there is a genuine interest in Canadian-made content among Canadian families, just as long as it is on par quality-wise with rival American productions.

**Final Thoughts**

If our researchers could summarize one overall observation seen collectively across all five regions of Canada, it would be the importance and value that Canadian families still attribute to television and its unwavering role in the household. Owing to the in-depth qualitative home interviews and focus groups held across the country, it is clear to our research team that amidst a sea of new technologies, television is still the most commonly used form of media and has the important role of bringing families together. Unlike the computer, which is often an individual activity that tends to isolate the user, television continues to unite family members as it is a media platform that can be shared by all, not just because of its size and location but because the content it displays unifies personal interests and creates bonds and commonalities between individual viewers. At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, as it appears to have been in the past, most parents and children agree that television still seems to be the most important form of media used to create a shared family experience.

This is not to say that our study finds new screens to be of less importance, merely that television plays a unique role in the media landscape of the modern Canadian family. Speaking to the role of new screens in today's homes, our research complements recent findings from other research, particularly the studies done by Viacom,¹ and Disney and Yahoo,² respectively, regarding the use of tablets as a second screen to enhance the traditional television experience. Their research suggests that second screens, particularly the tablet, do not pose a threat to television as a competitive form of media but instead provide viewers with more ways to actively interact with the shows they watch on television through apps linked to their favourite programs. The main goal here is not to compete with television but to keep its viewers invested in and dedicated to the programs they watch, especially when they are not actually watching. In a sense, the media industry understands the constancy of the role television plays in the home and, as such, looks to incorporate new screens into this established media routine in an attempt to aid and enhance the modern family's viewing experience.

In terms of 9 to 12 year olds specifically, the bottom line is this: Canadian children continue to watch television – it is not facing any threat of extinction, at least not in the foreseeable future. Although there are those who predict its disappearance, the parents and children interviewed across Canada feel that this prediction is off base and insist on television's importance as a staple item in the household with no sign of waning interest. Therefore, the physical act of children and families actually watching television is not the problem; the issue at hand is more what they are actually watching. Producers must address the concerns of many parents who feel there is a need for a greater variety of well-made programming for 9 to 12 year olds, and also call for more family-oriented shows that are appropriate for viewers of all ages. It is clear from our research that children in this age group still yearn for family contact

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and cherish the moments spent together. It is all the more important to capitalize on these moments since children in this age bracket are on the brink of embarking into adolescent life and will soon have less time for family activities. This is also the moment to rekindle their interest in Canadian-made television programs; a factor that is especially important if producers wish to create life-long loyal viewers of Canadian television. Though they may have been avid viewers of Canadian-made preschool programs, this interest is beginning to waver as parents and children alike both admit to a lack of awareness regarding Canadian-made programs for 9 to 12 year olds. Producing more quality programs for this age bracket would grip their attention once again and help young Canadians identify with their community as well as create long-term invested interest in Canadian arts and entertainment.

In addition to these revelations, entering directly into the homes of Canadian families and interviewing them first-hand about the way in which they appropriate television has offered a fascinating look at the variety of roles Canadians actually allocate to television. In other words, this study allowed us to discover the many ways in which television goes above and beyond its primary role of entertainment provider. In many families, television is used as a learning tool to teach children various types of lessons, whether it be through watching knowledge-based programming that teaches educational facts or sitcom-type shows that portray to children models of relatable social situations and present appropriate behaviour and plausible solutions to the everyday preteen issues they may face. Television can also serve as a means of instilling a sense of community among its viewers, particularly programs that highlight one’s culture and home region. Many parents spoke about watching certain programs with their children in order to expose them to their heritage or community, for example, a mother from St. John’s watches a local fishing show with her children so they can learn about how their fisherman grandfather earns a living. Finally, though it has already been stressed numerous times, television facilitates time spent together as a family. Though the families we met across Canada lead active lifestyles and have busy social calendars filled with soccer practices and play dates, the one constant seen across the nation is that watching television as a family not only symbolizes important time spent together and a way for family members to bond, but is an event that is valued by children just as much as by parents. These cherished moments spent together do not go unnoticed or forgotten. As one 12-year-old boy put it: “We all pile up on the couch to watch. I like it for the fun of watching TV, but also because I get to spend time with my family”.

In short, television is not just another media platform. It must not be seen as a mere content delivery system, and as such cannot be compared to single-user technologies such as the computer or cell phone. Unlike these other new screens, television is an event that gives family members leave from their individual-centred media platforms and creates a shared opportunity for families to spend time together. We saw first-hand through nostalgic discussions how television had brought the parents’ families together in the past and, through family testimonials, how it continues to do so today. Most importantly, we are confident that it has the potential to continue to bring families together in the future, so long as the content being delivered provides a reason for all to huddle up on the couch, share a favourite program, and be entertained.
Appendix 1
Cartoon

- outgoing characters
- location outdoors
- creatures (unhuman) look down on humans, think they're weird.
- 2-3 main characters, 10 supporting characters

/ 
outgoing/alternative - playful/young
serious - sporty
passive

- clouds float around the world

- look down on different places around world
- Fantasy/Realistic

- values
- sneaky knowledge
- teach responsibility to PPL

- funny
- kids should understand jokes.
Children Focus Group in Calgary

- Forest/city
- Comedy/Action/Adventure
- Animation = family → pet, purple hippo Earl.
- Canadian made
- hidden educational value
- awesome, hilarious, epic
- rerun-weekend
- weekday - 7 pm
Troublemakers

- Cartoon
- L.A./Vegas/Miami

- Characters to look up to
- Humans a bit older (14)
- Resort - having fun
- Making movies

- Needs drama - needs conflict
- Kids get in trouble for pulling a prank, have to do community service as punishment (on resort).

- Keep getting in trouble, keep getting community service.
- Adults get pranked, "dictator" gets pranked then gives out punishment.

Teen Focus Group in Calgary

*exotic hot want to visit*
“Draw a picture of your favourite program.”

Children Focus Group in Calgary
"Draw a picture of your favourite program."

Children Focus Group in St. John's.
St John's Teens - June 10th

- Kids (older to look up to and younger)
- Family to relate to

Cartoon
- Funny
- Unrealistic/far-fetched
- "Prank shows"
- Setting unrealistic: space, snowflake, under volcano
- Characters: human like animals
- Setting dictates type of characters (space = aliens, snowflake = elves)
- Must have a villain, appears in every episode,
- Put in moral to appease parents more than to benefit kid viewers
  
  Don't judge, bullying,

Live Action
- No parents - maybe one or two, teacher maybe as villain
- Teenage characters
- Set in high school (gets kids excited for us)
- Adventure/double life
- Element of magic/super powers, mix of real characters and supernatural events
- End vs American - not a huge difference
- "Exotic" location, place you would want to go visit.
* Real-life characters
  Set in Canada
  Beach
  NL
  Funny (how to survive)
  Evolution (plane)
  Girls/Boy - dumb character
  Siblings
  Stranded - survive
  Team/Fury?
  Short hot guys kings