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**The Effects of Popular Culture on Youth Sub-Culture and How it Plays a Role in the  
School Environment**

**Lisa Anne Deschamps**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Education**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Effects of Popular Culture on Youth Sub-Culture and How it Plays a Role in the School Environment**

**Lisa Anne Deschamps**

This study examines the effect that popular culture has on youth sub-culture and how it relates to or plays a role in the school environment. This exploratory study is based on unstructured interviews with high school students from one all female private school, one all male private school, and one public school. This was done so that I would have an equal representation of male to female students as found in the public school.

The focus is on student involvement in three particular popular cultural forms: film, television, and music. The data collected indicates that the extent of student participation in various popular cultural forms merits serious consideration to address this phenomenon in the school curriculum, educational practice, and classroom activities. Suggestions as to how this can occur and further research are discussed.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of popular culture on youth sub-culture and how it relates to or plays a role in the school environment. Teenagers have become the largest consumers of goods and services through the many forms of popular culture, which has a myriad of outlets. For the purpose of this study only three areas will be examined; these are film, music and television. The participants for this process are adolescents (grade eleven high school students) since they are the most susceptible to peer pressure and consumer ploys.

#### **Popular Culture**

In this study I use the terms popular culture and youth sub-culture to mean the following. Payne. (1998) states that "...popular culture is defined as that culture which is produced *for* the people. The 'people' in this approach are thus taken to be a sector of the market, a body of consumers, and 'popular culture' describes certain commodities". (p. 415) Moreover, due to mass consumerism of popular cultural items, it is said that 'mass culture' is affected by popular culture's myriad of ploys, ads, TV shows, magazines, films, posters, photographs, music, fads and fashion, and so on. This belief is connected to the industrial means of production and to the economy status of supply and demand. Whatever is deemed 'popular' and lasts for a long period of time can then be considered part of the culture known as 'popular culture.' In addition, Payne notes popular culture "is both a quantitative and qualitative concept; it refers to audience size – to be popular a record or film or fiction must sell or be viewed in relatively large numbers (relative to the

sales and viewing figures for high cultural or elite goods); it also refers to the quality of these consumers and viewers, to their attitudes to and use of cultural goods". (p. 415)

Popular culture also expresses cultural beliefs, values, and traditions. Therefore, it can claim to have the everyday person in mind, attempting to depict the verbal skills, dress, food, worship, play, work, etc. Even though this may be difficult to achieve, popular culture attempts to make an effort to adopt this angle. Moreover, 'popular culture' is a whole way of life and has created a powerful culture unto itself with complex systems of stratification and hierarchy. Due to this, popular cultural fads, trends, and the like have left people to run around trying to keep up with the 'hype.'

### **Youth Subculture**

The dominant culture has become "out of touch with the times, and unable to understand" (Coleman, 1961, p. 2) much less accept adolescent or youth sub-cultures in its multiple forms of interest. The important issue to note is that high schools are segregated from the rest of society, thus students are left to their own devices and peer pressure. Coleman's work still holds true to today's understanding of adolescents; he states,

With his fellows, he comes to constitute a small society, one that has most of its important interactions within itself, and maintains only a few threads of connection with the outside adult society. In our modern world of mass communication and rapid diffusion of ideas and knowledge, it is hard to realize that separate subcultures can exist right under the very noses of adults-subcultures with languages all their own, with special symbols, and most importantly, with value systems that may differ from adults. (p. 3)

Due to this unique and individual youth sub-culture, the dominant culture's mass communication attempts to exploit this new culture. Therefore, all marketing ploys are aimed at catering almost exclusively to the youth sub-cultures. For example, Coleman

(1961) states, “popular music is the most important and movies; since television took away their adult audience, [they] have moved more and more toward becoming a special medium for adolescents”. (p. 4) Moreover, these youth sub-cultures are removed from the adult world of responsibilities due to their attitudes and interests.

How should the adult world or dominant culture deal with these individual youth sub-cultures? Coleman, states that these “adults must come to know either how to shape the directions this society takes [youth sub-cultures] or else how to break down the adolescent society, thus re-establishing control”. (p. 12) Another way to confront the issue of youth sub-cultures might be to study and understand how they interact with one another and with the dominant society. Finally, learning about the adolescent community, as a community, may prove beneficial in an academic environment in order to establish control and communication.

### **Mass Culture, High Culture and Popular Culture**

Strinati (1995) believes that people have their own point of view when it comes to popular culture and that the view does not develop from the dominant society. Furthermore, popular culture can be seen as having two forms. The first is the *inferior kind*, which includes, popular literature, and popular press. The second form works to deliberately win favors as in popular journalism or popular entertainment. Students usually enjoy the latter that is, music, TV or films that attempt to evoke different senses of emotion.

Strinati asks, “does the increasingly universal market for popular culture ensure that it is truly popular because it makes available commodities people actually want?” (p. 3) If so, that is why we yield to commercials, film products, magazine ads and so on. As

Strinati (1995) states, maybe popular culture is giving us what we want; the newest and coolest trends. Teens today buy into the hype of TV, music and film because they are the target audience.

Institutions and communities have no influence or knowledge on how to aid teens in shaping their identity. Teens do not learn about morals or values that once reigned in the 50s when shows like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* emphasized the P's and Q's, telling us what is right from wrong. Thus, our fast pace technological world can not conceive the effective solutions to problems that arise in our daily lives. I believe many teens do not know how to socialize, be polite or respect themselves or others. One can envision that eventually students might become robots of the fast pace world. Instead, they must grow up, learn how to use a computer, become socially inept and have difficulty with creativity and expression of their senses. If we allow education to deconstruct popular culture in school and give back the voice to the voiceless then our students have a chance of becoming critical thinkers. Students may escape becoming mindless robots. Strinati concurs by saying, "not only are the contacts between people purely formal and contractual, but they lack any deeper sense of moral integrity since moral order is in decline in a mass society". (p. 7) Something needs to be done in order to aid our youth!

Rushkoff (1996) believes that teenagers are the largest consumers of popular cultural goods and commodities and it is for that reason that I believe that teens control what stays and what goes. If they are not purchasing tickets to concerts or to movies, then these forms will not succeed. Strinati (1995) believes that, "we need to acknowledge that audiences may be more knowing, more active, and more discriminating in their

consumption of popular culture than has generally been conceded in much popular culture theory". (p. 49)

According to Strinati, (1995) culture can be divided into two parts: High Culture (Art) and Mass Culture (Popular Culture). High culture is seen as the masculine aspect with production, work, intelligence, activity and writing as its categories while mass culture is the feminine aspect with consumption, leisure, emotion, passivity, and reading as its categories. He states that, "it can therefore be suggested, for example, that fear expressed by high culture critics about the role of mass culture in making its audiences passive and vulnerable, and prone to consumerism, is equally a fear about the audience becoming feminine, indicating, how central gender is to our understanding of popular culture". (p. 191)

Strinati discusses postmodernism as an alternative perspective, which encompasses all forms of popular culture. He writes, "postmodernism is said to describe the emergence of a social order in which the importance and power of the mass media and popular culture means that they govern and shape all other forms of social relationships". (p. 223-224) In other words, popular culture aids us in defining ourselves and the world around us through its many forms. To look for signs of postmodernism in TV or film one would only need to look at style, presentation, special effects and images, at the cost of content, character, plot, and social comment. Finally when discussing popular music as a perspective form of postmodernism Strinati states,

The recent history of popular music can be seen to be marked by a trend towards the overt and explicit mixing of styles and genres of music in very direct and self-conscious ways. This has ranged from the straightforward remixing of already recorded songs from the same or different eras on the same record, to the quoting and 'tasting' of distinct musics, sounds and instruments in order to create new sub- and pan-cultural identities. (p. 233)

In conclusion, I have no doubt that postmodernists attempt to depict and recreate different avenues when it comes to understanding, defining and expressing popular cultural forms and genres.

### **Summary**

This is an exploratory study, based on unstructured interviews with eighteen students from a private boys school (PBS), a private girls school (PGS) and a mixed public school (MPS). I felt it was important to have an equal ratio of male to female interviewees, therefore I had to choose two private schools in order to achieve this goal. The breakdown is as follows: grade eleven classes from each of the schools were asked to randomly volunteer six students for my study. The economic background of the schools is important to note. Both PBS and PGS are considered middle-to upper-class schools whereas MPS is of lower-to middle-class. The ratio ended up being seven boys to eleven girls. Explanation of this occurrence will be expressed in Chapter III.

Specifically, this study investigates how popular culture and youth sub-cultures play a role in the school environment. In Chapter II, I examine the various perspectives developed to explain this social phenomenon; Chapter III focuses on the methodology used in this study. Chapter IV analyzes the findings and compares them to the various theories or perspectives which focus on this process. Chapter V provides a conclusion and presents suggestions for further research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section examines various studies focussing on popular culture and schooling. What is important to remember is the possibility of implementing these popular cultural concepts and theories into the curriculum in order to aid students who have difficulty adapting to the traditional curriculum.

#### **Popular Culture and Schooling**

Freire and Giroux (in Giroux and Simon, 1989) state many views about the school environment and the dominant society. One view that is most poignant is the insistence that schools return to their original tasks of placing emphasis on a critical education. They state.

At its best the language of educational theory should embody a public philosophy dedicated to returning schools to their primary task: to be places of critical education in the service of creating a public sphere of citizens who are able to exercise power over their own lives, and especially over the conditions of knowledge production and acquisition. (p. viii)

Popular culture as part of the curriculum would allow the gap between students and teachers to close for it permits teachers access into the realm of student behavior. Therefore, this will not only give a voice to students but also to those students who are marginalized or silenced! What silences students? Freire and Giroux believe it is power and knowledge which silences and de-silences student voices. They argue that the educational curriculum should empower students with the knowledge of how power progresses in the educational medium. Students need to learn the 'production of social practices', meaning that schools should essentially provide a sense of place, identity, worth and value for their impressionable teens.

For a more universal curriculum educators need to strip away the language of the white, Anglo, middle to upper class texts and replace it with a more adequate multi-cultural text. Freire and Giroux (in Giroux and Simon, 1989) state that, "at stake here is the need to reclaim a cultural literacy for each and every person as part of a democratic idea of citizenship that dignifies and critically engages the different voices of students from both dominant and subordinate groups in ways that help them to redefine schools as part of the communities and neighborhoods they serve". (p. x-xi)

Student experience and voices are extremely important to the educational process. Educators know of the many forms of popular culture that are readily accessible to them yet theorists believe teachers ignore the role in which popular culture expresses and affects student behavior. By teachers not looking at how society outside of school affects students' identity, politics, and culture, they risk silencing them. "Educators who refuse to acknowledge popular culture as a significant basis of knowledge often devalue students by refusing to work with the knowledge that students actually have and so eliminate the possibility of developing a pedagogy that links school knowledge to the differing subject relations that help to constitute their everyday lives". (p. 3)

By learning about the dominant culture and deconstructing its 'hold' over people students can be free to think, analyze and be empowered to create a better environment. Giroux and Simon believe that popular culture cannot be seen as authentic because the dominant culture has manipulated us through the use of the media industry to conform us to their ideology. That ideology is one of total superiority, utter abandonment, similarity, organization, and idleness. Moreover, because of this the puppeteer master, meaning the dominant society, transforms us into puppets who will purchase, watch, read and so on.



We can no longer, criticize, analyse, resist, reject or mediate because of this, for we are numbed by the experience.

When teaching popular culture through pedagogical practice teachers must be mindful of critical analysis, learning styles, and allowing the voiceless to be heard. McDade, (in Giroux and Simon, 1989) states, "this is a critical pedagogical form that affirms the lived reality of difference as the ground on which to pose questions of theory and practice. It is a form that claims the experience of lived difference as an agenda for discussion and a central resource for pedagogy of possibility". (p. 23) There are many ways students and teachers can partake in the learning process of popular culture in the forms of knowledge or power which can then create a terrain that not only empowers but allows critical thinking, discussion and debate.

Smith, (in Giroux and Simon, 1989) reveals the usefulness of PCCT (popular-cultural-commodity-text) in the classroom. Smith says it is rare to see these texts being used in the classroom by teachers "often PCCTs function in classrooms as lures and come-ons offered by teachers to students reluctant or unwilling to appreciate the virtues of the canonical curriculum". (p. 33) Teachers are starting to realize the importance of PCCTs to aid students in articulating or evaluating their own experience. Using PCCTs can enhance communication and critical thinking in the classroom environment by studying their meaning and their relationship to the dominant society or sub-cultures. Finally, PCCTs are there to expand skills to associate, correlate and so forth to the real world.

Ellsworth, (in Giroux and Simon, 1989) points to how popular culture has a place in the school curriculum in the form of educational films. By using flashy images,

special effects, sounds, and music, students will be more accepting of the material. Ellsworth (in Giroux and Simon, 1989) believes that students will compare educational films to regular films in the theatre and if educational films do not carry forms of popular culture then the learning process will be lost. Ellsworth continues by saying, "students construct their own intersections when they legitimately and illegitimately use popular cultural forms in everyday classroom life to elaborate upon, resist, subvert or escape the subjectivities schools attempt to construct for them". (p. 48)

Ellsworth draws on Hoban who did research on popular cultural material of educational films. By the use of questionnaires and tests Hoban was able to deduce several important features. One example Hoban gave was that students enjoy watching films where they can identify with the characters. When characters are doing desirable things that young teenagers like do to you, students can relate to them. He goes on to say that if they use 'emotional possessives' in educational films students could very well be left with the feeling of responsibility to continue their learning or perform similar acts of kindness and so forth. Hoban concludes that students enter the classroom with certain tastes and standards that are found in the entertainment world, therefore, they view educational films in terms of movie theatre standards.

Ellsworth also notes that educational films display numerous messages and meanings. One such example would be the use of character cause and effect. In educational films there are always experts that aid the character in transforming emotionally and creating closure. With the use of the expert the main character can move from a state of ignorance to one of bliss or enlightenment. The experts become the role models for students and Ellsworth says they must be portrayed as having different

knowledge or more wisdom than other characters. An expert can be seen as a leader, a motivator, an analytical thinker, a moral and ethical individual who looks after the character that needs guidance and support. Thus, educational films can be seen as both entertaining and knowledgeable.

The significant point is that popular culture should have a place in school curriculum in order to give students a voice and to raise important issues regarding life, economy and politics. It is also important to introduce popular cultural forms because it is seen as entertaining and fun whereas traditional educational practices are seen as tedious and boring. Critical pedagogy accepts student voices and experiences in classroom learning, which in turn becomes empowering for both teacher and student. Giroux and Simon (1989) note, "we will have been successful if we have stimulated the search for new ways of thinking about the notion of popular culture and specifying its relation to a pedagogy of possibility". (p. 233)

### **Teaching Popular Culture**

Kraig (1994) investigates the benefits of teaching popular culture in school by studying the language of popular culture. She states, "although educators in the United States often bemoan their monolingual students, they forget that young people do know an international language with words like Mercedes, Schwarzenegger, Sanyo, Rap, Reebok, and Coke". (p. 16)

Popular cultural trends like shopping malls, credit cards, cars, music, films, advertising and supermakerts all encompass the world of youth subcultures. Words like 'charge it' or 'I'll be back' have thrown themselves into the vocabulary of young

impressionable teens. Kraig (1994) points out that students experience popular culture everyday and sometimes they get trapped into its consumer-centered commercial culture.

Students need to learn about the history of popular culture, consumerism, mercantilism and capitalism. By doing so they can better assess their roles in society as consumers, workers and citizens. Introducing popular culture to your students is quite easy. Teachers may begin by asking students to define popular culture, which usually incites examples such as television, movies, celebrities, music and so on. Also, students would come to class already prepared because they experience popular cultural forms everyday in a variety of ways. For example, students watch television, discuss and analyze shows with friends; the results of these exchanges could then be brought into the classroom for debate on genre, style, content, characters, plot and the like.

Kraig notes that students need to learn the roles and powers of producers and consumers. Moreover, the material components of popular culture are subject to the laws of supply and demand. We should also understand that neither dominates the other, instead, they work as a circular unit. For example, the consumers look for a specific product that suits their needs, and thus students will purchase it if it is at a reasonable price. On the other hand, producers may create a new product that will entice the consumer to want to purchase it. Students can then study the explanations to why people purchase certain things. In order for them to understand the cycle they must first learn the historical or current evidence about those involved in the marketing and production aspects. Students will then comprehend what incentives and disincentives motivate peoples' choices. Kraig writes,

*Cost and benefits* also apply to social, political, racial, ethical, environmental, and other aspects of the human experience. When students examine all possible

categories for the range of benefits and costs considered by choosers (consumers and producers), they usually move beyond reductionist explanations of human experience. (p. 17)

After the students discuss all this, they can begin to view popular culture as a whole. Students can review and study violence in TV and film, commercials, censorship of rap lyrics, the environmental effects of automobiles and so forth. Students can ask many questions such as, “Did movies make smoking popular in the 50s? Did Wal-Mart kill off the mom and pop shops on Mainstreet U.S.A.?” (Kraig, 1994, p.17) All these issues are important to understanding popular culture trends and its history.

Kraig concludes by stating that the tools and methods students learn in school when assessing popular culture can save them from becoming vulnerable to the manipulation of the marketplace and they will be less likely to let conclusions of experts determine their own judgement. Through reason and analysis students can state their opinions on what matters to them and their roles as consumers. Kraig uses this example. “social studies teachers who support them in this process contribute not only to their growth as consumers, but to their growth as responsible, thoughtful citizens”. (p.18)

### **Pedagogy in Popular Culture**

Schwoch, White and Reilly (1992) give credence to the ideology that television can and is a form of pedagogy. They state, “here, television as a medium--as the exemplary mass medium--is understood as having the capacity to produce modes of knowledge that are culturally significant, and thereby to function as a mode of pedagogy”. (p. 1) Television is a part of everyday life from the news to the evening programming and depending on what show you watch we as a society can learn a great deal of information. History for instance, plays a crucial role in this medium and the

saying 'history-in-the-making' holds true to what we as a society see on television. The news shows us images and tells us stories from all over the globe. Moreover, history can also be found in popular cultural forms such as movies, music videos, advertising, and television.

Schwoch, White and Reilly (1992) want students and teachers to view television not only as a medium, but also as a teaching tool. There is value in the way television produces history. We view audiovisual contents of events and experiences that span not only the globe but also eras. The authors believe, "television's production of history as a category of knowledge, once broken loose from self-absorption, may hold the potential to empower teachers and students to tell their own histories in new ways which include popular culture". (p. 19)

Commercials are another aspect of the television genre. Although most are ignored there are some that are registered in our minds at various levels of consciousness. As a form of pedagogy, commercials display anti-drugs, anti-smoking, new pharmaceutical drugs on the market, cancer, diabetes and the list goes on. They are small public service announcements that aim to inform the public in order increase their awareness and educate them. Schwoch, White and Reilly write, "as such, television advertising is a site for the reception and formation of everyday knowledge and therefore a site of ideological formation. From this perspective, analysis of television advertising has several facets, ranging from effectiveness as a vehicle to sell goods and services to harbinger of cultural changes and expressions". (p. 21)

Advertisers and corporations attempt to target a certain audience range when creating their 30-second window of opportunity. Besides targeting different types of

professionals and cultures, commercials also aim at specific genders. Feminists would adhere to this belief, for Strinati (1995) states that consumerism is part of the feminine dichotomy. Schwoch, White and Reilly (1992) accept that advertising has changed and has transformed the submissive, quiet woman of the 1950s into an assertive, intelligent woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can also trace this transformation through other avenues of popular culture. For example, they declare that, “women’s pictures, melodrama (in film and television), and popular literary forms are privileged because they afford insight into the channeling of women’s fantasies, potential avenues and strategies of protest, and the nature of women’s voice within the confines of an otherwise male-oriented culture”.

(p. 81)

Schwoch, White and Reilly conclude by saying that when people are able to voice their opinions it is one sign of a democratic society, and the voicing of difference from students and teachers is a crucial component in the evolution of critical citizenship. The discourse of critical citizenship and language of resistance empowers students to an intellectual transformation. Critical citizenship not only gives voices back to those who were once silenced but also allows them to take charge of their own lives and eventually transform existing social inequities and injustices. They stress that the values of studying media and popular culture in turn will have students not only learning from teachers but vice versa.

### **Summary**

Various studies have demonstrated how popular cultural forms can be implemented into the traditional curriculum. The main argument presented is that by introducing these forms of popular culture (such as film, television, music, etc.) in

classroom discussions, students would develop knowledge grounded in their own everyday experiences. Furthermore, this can easily occur within the context of a structured curriculum.

The belief is that students and teachers can become critical thinkers about what they are learning through subject content that draws on popular cultural forms. This pedagogical practice empowers both teachers and students providing a basis for good citizenship. Many of these notions and other research studies are further elaborated in Chapter IV in the discussion of student responses to the questions posed. In the following chapter I review my methodology and procedure for the interviews and analyse how that experience enlightened my perception of my thesis statement.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The interviews with PBS, PGS and MPS were completed within a month. As stated previously in Chapter I, I felt it was important to have an equal ratio of male to female students hence, the decision to chose two private schools. The method of procedure stayed the same, which was an unstructured interview. The questions were slightly transformed in order for students to comprehend. No second interview was needed for my research.

#### **Questions asked to the Students**

The students were asked a series of eleven questions pertaining to popular culture. Occasionally, students responded differently to some questions and similarly to others. This forced me to explore outside my literature review for the replies. Below is a list of the questions:

- 1) How do you define popular culture?
- 2) What forms of popular culture do you enjoy?
- 3) What forms of popular culture do you participate in most with friends?
- 4) Roughly how much do you spend per month purchasing popular cultural items?
- 5) How many times in a month do you go to the movies, rent a film, buy a CD and how many hours do you spend watching TV/day?
- 6) What genre of film do you like?
- 7) What genre of TV do you like?
- 8) What genre of music do you like?
- 9) What is your favorite movie, musician/group and TV show? Why do you enjoy them?
- 10) Do you think that popular culture should have a place in your school curriculum? Why?

#### **Interview Process and Experience**

The process itself was not a difficult one. I simply contacted the school principals and wrote a letter to the perspective teacher and his/her students asking for volunteers. After they agreed I faxed a letter thanking them for participating and sent along with it

their consent forms to be signed by the student and one of his/her parents/guardians. At this point students were given the choice to choose a fictitious name for the interview process so as to protect their rights as minors. On a whole the experience was enjoyable, the students were interested in my thesis topic and communicated gracefully. Responses for some of the questions were not what I expected, but this enriched my research. Some students even continued to discuss topics or issues after we had finished the initial interview. The only complication was with two students who did not attend the interview process on the scheduled day and finding them during lunchtime proved to be of some difficulty. Nevertheless, I eventually located them and rescheduled for the next day. Another student had injured herself (strained her wrist) and was unable to attend and again I had to reschedule which was much easier because the instructor informed me of her absence at the beginning of the interview. I must note that most of the students were pleasant and that I learned from each of them.

### **Limitations**

Due to numerous factors my limitations for this study are as follows: at MPS only one male student volunteered for my research study. Thus, making the ratio 7 boys to 11 girls. After speaking to their instructor she informed me that the ratio in her class was equal, 15 boys to 15 girls. The equality surprised her because as she continued to explain, in an enriched English class there are usually more girls than boys. This destroyed my previous belief that perhaps there were fewer boys in the classroom. Also, even though I asked for random volunteers from each school the bias of choosing the brightest and more articulate students reigned. PBS and MPS chose students from their enriched English classes whereas PGS chose students from their Media Literacy course. I

contacted different organizations for information pertaining to popular culture. Blockbusters of Canada refused to give me their top five-rented genre types for the year (2000) even though I was able to find the USA chain's top rented films (2001) on the Internet.

Nevertheless, I did receive information from both HMV and Global Canwest Television. HMV provided me with their top genres sold by percentage for the year (2000). As for television Canwest researcher Lisa Blue gave me the raw data from both Toronto and Montreal, Spring 2001. The Toronto data is based on the Nielsen People Meter, which gathers TV ratings 365 days of the year. Montreal is based on a smaller system of data entry called '*Diaries*', written by anglophones, which surveys viewership for four weeks in the Spring usually within a three month period. (from February to mid-March) in the Summer (two weeks) and in the Fall, four weeks (from September to November). Montreal is different from that of Toronto merely because of language.

### **Popular Culture in the Curriculum**

All three schools had some form of popular cultural curriculum that was given as an elective in either grade 10 and/or 11. The MPS class is called Mass Media. Their textbook is *Understanding Mass Media* by William Jawitz. A workbook also is provided for students. Students learn about the evolution of Mass Media and how it plays a role in society. They are given tests (3-4 per term), and they have media labs (3-4 per term), workbook exercises (each chapter must be completed) and reflection logs or media journals (5 per term). The majority of the students' time is spent creating 12 Media projects, which is due at the end of the year. Most topics surround school functions such as: taking pictures of the dance, audience involvement in the variety show, multicultural

show, CD reviews, a movie about something happening in school, surveys or polls about the school cafeteria food and so on.

PGS classes are called Media Studies and their program goes more in depth than that of MPS's. Students have 3 major and two minor projects. The major projects consist of a photographic assignment (interpretation of a partner through photography), an audio/visual assignment (must be 15 minutes) and a research project on an advocacy group or issue that is often hidden from media's attention. The minor projects are a writing assignment (must be 3 pages) and another audio/visual assignment (must be 3 minutes).

They begin by learning about photography: how to use a camera, how to create depth and lighting, different types of photography and, finally, how to print photos. Their assignments for this topic are to create a word collage of different words and fonts that capture some messages found in the media and they must also submit a research project on the holdings of the top media conglomerates in the world. Moreover, they must write a paper on a famous photographer, make a slide photo essay of an issue or illustrate a poem through slides, and finally they must set up a photo shop with a partner, choose six photos they have taken, and enlarge them on contact sheets.

Their next topic is comics and cartoons as well as advertising. For instance, they must learn about political comics vs. gag comics, their function in society, and so on. Students will learn about the history, different ways of advertising, techniques and effects of advertising on society. Their assignments are audio advertising of a real or fictional product and a 30-or 60-second public service announcement. In addition, they have to enlarge a black and white photo scanned into the computer then add text and transform it

into a public service announcement as found in newspapers. Finally, they must research advertising stereotypes or distorted realities regarding men and women.

They then address television and newspapers to study the history, types of TV shows, censorship, and effects on society. When it comes to newspapers they learn about the process of assembling a newspaper as well as content (what goes in and why). Assignments include a collage of headlines on a particular topic, writing letters to the editor of a local newspaper, writing a newspaper article about a school event, and finally writing letters to advocate change in government policy.

Finally, students learn the fine art of film production but first they must understand the history, techniques and sample different genres. Assignments are to construct a storyboard and make a short video film (edit film), write a review of a current film, make a video of unusual camera angles of a room in their house, and research (group project) a topic, person, or event (make a 10-minute documentary, edit).

PBS's class on Media Literacy uses the text *Mass Media and Popular Culture* by Barry Duncan. They also use videos bought from the *Media Education Foundation* on such topics as *Media, Gender and Culture; Commercialism, Globalization and Media; Race, Diversity and Representation; and Educational Strategies, Skills and Literacies*. The assigned text also discusses media and representation and examines advertising, media environments, global citizens and technologies, under the following headings television, film, advertising, music, news/journalism and popular culture.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

I will present the findings based on the interview questions stated in the previous chapter. I critically reviewed the possibility that popular culture to some extent *does* play a role in the school environment. Students whom I have interviewed proposed many reasons and explanations to back up this statement. Furthermore, whether it is individual, social, or academic, popular culture has become an effective learning tool. In order to fully comprehend how the latter is possible we must analyze the method in which this outcome has evolved. We must also keep in mind that my three topics of concern are movies, music and television.

*“Popular culture is what is in or cool to people especially adolescents, cause that’s the main target”. (interview with Lenix; from PBS, Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>, 2001)*

The first question asked to the students was how they defined popular culture whether it is through its plethora of mediums or as an actual definition. Eight students defined popular culture by its mediums while ten students gave some form of a definition.

Q. 1 *How do you define popular culture?*

	By medium	Gives definition
PGS	2	4
PBS	2	4
MPS	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>

The most noticeable difference between the private schools and the public school was that more students at the public school defined popular culture by its medium. For

example, Patrick states, “popular culture is sort of the values and umm interests of the masses. It’s umm like popular culture is umm celebrities, entertainment that’s part of popular culture and umm books and other forms of mass media”. (Oct. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2001) This meaning is not inaccurate but lacks an understanding of what popular culture is and why it developed. One student at MPS does not even express her definition but instead states why she did not like popular culture. Spike says, “I don’t try to get into the popular thing really. I’m more into the independent things, what I like my own, I’m not really into the whole like, universal sense of what’s cool and what’s not, I am more interested in personal things”. (Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001) Her subculture, as she stated to me, was punk rock, which can be seen as a form of popular culture within itself because it has become a way of life not only for Spike but also for all punk rockers. She did not realize that she was in fact sharing in a fad or trend that was created by popular culture in the early 80s.

The one detail left out by most students, except for one, was the connection between popular culture and economic consumerism. Payne (1998) discussed the means of supply and demand when it came to the market. He believed that popular culture was created for the public and therefore it reflected their needs for a new style of clothing, film, music, and so on. The everyday person came to mind when corporations wanted to make more money and produce new/trendier items. Moreover, popular culture is seen as a complex system of stratification or hierarchy that in turn has created a whole new way of life and a new culture onto itself.

At PGS students adhered to the ideology of hierarchy within schools. They idolized the popular girls and expressed their envy for such a way of life. Some girls

were obviously upset with such a double standard while others believed it to be a positive influence in transforming non-popular girls into better people. Crista states,

I myself enjoy the fact that pretty people and less pretty people are sub-divided a bit. Its weird, and very shallow to say that but it makes you want to push and be the best person possible. Sometimes with intelligence it gets like divided too, and ah, I like that segregation a bit cause its always pushing people to do better than what they can do and that's good. (Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001)

Not every young girl has such wisdom or knowledge to take a sometimes-painful high school experience and transform themselves into a refined person. I must mention that the young woman was never asked if she was popular or not, which could in turn have changed my perception. It seemed to me that the young women at PGS had other issues besides popularity as a form of hierarchy. Some believed popular culture to be all about body image meaning they must be thin, beautiful and a smaller size. Amanda told me.

Umm. I say its anything that's ah, is popular with anybody, like not only like music and movies, movie stars or anything like that. But anything that you see everybody like tight flare jeans, low cut jeans something like that that's part of pop culture cause that's all you see anywhere. (Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2001)

This is a very skewed perception of popular culture, it is obvious that magazines, TV, and realty has made this young woman hypersensitive to her weight. I must note that the young woman Amanda was not overweight. Popular culture in PGS has taken on a new life where popularity, hierarchy and body image have become the new fad. As Payne (1998) notes I did not view such definitions as forms of popular culture but perhaps they are products of what popular culture does to our young impressionable teenage girls.

How do PBS's young men explain popular culture? They say popular culture is something people want to copy or pose as in order to fit in. Max says that students want



to buy into the hype so that others do not ostracize them. Their answers were very concise and direct. Lenix brought in the idea that economics plays a factor as stated above. Payne (1998) would agree with such a remark for Lenix has touched upon the core relationship between popular culture and economic consumerism.

When it comes to understanding what popular culture is and how it plays a role in society and the school environment we must remember to leave room for interpretation. Some students' views were similar, others varied, which led me to believe that popular culture may encompass more than just what Payne had to offer.

*“All of them, yeah the, I mean, music, movies, television everything you name it”. (interview with Sonia; from PGS, Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2001)*

In question two students were asked what forms of popular culture they enjoy the most. An overwhelming response declared music to reign as the number one most enjoyed medium, followed by movies, books & magazines. If you look below you will see the breakdown of my analysis.

*Q. 2 What forms of Popular Culture do you enjoy?*

	Music	TV	Movies	Plays/ Concerts	Dancing	Books/ Magazines	Sports	Video Games/ Internet	Fashion
PGS	6	2	3	1		1	1		2
PBS	6	1	3			1	1	2	1
MPS	6	2	1	2	1	4			
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

My response to this overwhelming result was why do students prefer music? One theory can be because it appeals to everyone on a universal level. Another reason may be that it is influenced or influences numerous forms of popular culture. We ascertain that music is connected to the Internet through the form of mp3s in which students can

download entire versions of songs. We hear it on the radio, see it on television stations, for example, Illico subscribers can purchase up to 30 music channels; we hear it in theatres, music classrooms, choirs, bars, from DJs and we are even able to burn CD's to make a personal copy. With so many choices and most of them free it is no wonder that students love music. Yet, besides its accessibility does music also have a connection to student's emotions?

The interviewees subsequently in this chapter will answer this question. Budd (1992) discusses the connection between mind and emotion vs. emotion and music. He ascertained that music, because it was not a living organism, could therefore not be able to invoke an emotional response. On the contrary, he also believes that the misallocation or transference of emotions from humans to music is not always wrong, for the composer or artist has attempted to summon those emotions through their work. Budd states, (in reference to artists and composers), "his experience is inside him; in order to make it available to others he must externalize it: and by expressing it he hopes to pass it on to others". (p. 121) Therefore, in a manner of speaking, music possesses an emotional quality that can be a rewarding intrinsic experience.

Another theorist Capurso (1952) author of *Music and your Emotions* did a study of how music aids in recovery after surgery. This study was compiled at a hospital with severally ill and terminal patients. *Dr. Patch Adams* believed that a smile could prolong a child's life even if they had a terminal illness. That is why he created the Auucho Hospital for terminally ill children to go and seek medical and emotional help. Humor was this doctor's real gift. Capurso believed the same results could yield for his study and to some extent it did. He found that some forms of music like *William Tell's*

*Overture* increased stress and anxiety, while *Rhapsody in Blue* by *Gershwin* was found to be very stimulating, joyous, and triumph.

Music can aid us in visualizing our suppressed memories like the first dance with a girl or boy you really liked or remind you of a deceased loved one. Whatever the emotion music can bring us back to that day, that minute, that second or that moment in life where something changed for the better or worse. Musical styles bewitch us differently because of the way we interpret them, for some people certain styles do not invoke emotional responses. Other people may not recall unconscious memories but create new ones. Capurso (1952) said, "in 1922 Pfeifer claimed that music provides a method of escaping reality through its basic rhythm, which preoccupies the consciousness to the degree that unconscious fantasies are released". (p. 34)

Some of these theories may explain why students enjoy music, why they admire certain styles and why they associate with the lyrics. Emotions are a large component of human existent and life. Everyday we experience, sense, perceive and interpret our reactions towards other people and what we view or listen too. Students like to have a favorite song that reminds them of their boyfriend or best friend. It justifies and connects their lives to another person and alone makes them feel loved, safe, respected, accepted and wanted. I believe that is all anybody desires!

Movies can be found in the theatres, on television, and we can rent them. Students have various tastes when it comes to the genre, as you will see later in this chapter. So why do we like to watch movies? One theory might be because of the emotional connection to the character, plot, scene and the like. Carroll (in Plantinga and Smith, 1999), revealed that there are different forms of emotion one could have while

viewing a film. For example, “garden-variety” emotions which include such feelings as anger, sorrow, fear, hatred etc. is what most students admitted to feeling and thus were relevant emotional attachments to their particular films. Carroll (in Plantinga and Smith, 1999) states, “a little apperceptive introspection quickly reveals, that throughout our viewing of a film we are generally in some emotional state or other, typically one prompted and modulated by what is on screen”. (p. 23) Hence, if we see the lead character get hurt automatically without thinking we feel anger or sadness. This is due to our response of what is right or wrong or even deals with our societal norms. I believe some students, especially with their hormonal changes and mood alterations, would experience higher levels of emotion than the average adult would when watching a film. Thus, students can ultimately experience more than one emotion throughout the viewing process. Carroll states,

Emotional states are temporal affairs; they endure over time intervals; they are episodes. When we detect the object of our emotional state and the relevant cognitions ensue, our perception becomes emotionally charged. It casts the cause or the object of our state in a special phenomenological light; it fixes our attention upon it and alerts us to its significance (e.g., *x* is dangerous). (p. 27-28)

The filmmakers themselves have a part to play in our emotional attachments to the movies. Filmmakers organize the scenes, the language and so forth, then hand it to us on a silver platter. The reason Carroll believes that most emotion comes in the form of “garden variety” is because the filmmaker already sets the emotion in place for us. Carroll concludes,

Generally, in fiction films, that is, the detection work that our emotions need to do for us is somewhat minimized because the scenes and characters in such films have very frequently already been made or designed from, so to speak, the point of view of anger to begin with; or, to say it differently, they have been emotively prefocused or predigested for us. (p.30)

Books and magazines were a bit surprising, as the third preferred popular cultural form. However, we need to examine what this does to the female psyche. Due to the unfortunate results that led me to interview only seven young men instead of nine the outcome is six girls to two boys in this category. I questioned why young girls enjoy reading magazines and books. It is noted, however, that both boys admitted to reading books usually based on fantasy or fiction and that they got this love of reading from their fathers.

Girls from MPS informed me that they enjoyed books like horror, drama and mystery. They also occasionally partake in reading magazines for example, *Vogue* or *Rolling Stones*. The true readers of magazines came from PGS. These young women were more self-conscious about body image, beauty and boys. Even though magazines/books were not one of my original chosen topics I feel compelled to investigate why young girls read magazines and how it affects them. I discuss the manipulation/pressure that the dominant society has over our young teens to be thin, beautiful, popular etc. Also it is important to allow these girls to have a voice that can express their choices for them, I am that voice and here are their answers.

Currie (1999) author of *Girl Talk* gives insight into the realm of teenage girls and their reading habits. From the 1940s to the early 80s women's magazines portrayed false images of women based on men's interests and fantasies. She says, "furthermore, because the stereotypes of women in magazines are restrictive, they are seen to distort the true interests of women, to repress women's authenticity". (p. 56) An example, of this would be advertising in magazines where we see a young girl talking on the phone

curling her hair and wearing pj's while her friends in the background are having a pillow fight.

Over time themes in young girls' and women's magazines have changed to some degree. Currie (1999) did a study from June 1993 to May 1994 on themes found in four young women magazines (*Teen*, *Young Miss (YM)*, *Seventeen* and *Sassy*). The outcome was not surprising. In the title of feature article meaning topics of interest that are written occasionally, three out of four magazines had articles on fashion and one on beauty.

*Subject of feature articles in four adolescent Magazines: Top five: rated from 1 to 5 (1 being the highest % wise) (June 1993-May 1994)*

	Teen Magazines			
<i>Themes</i>	<i>Teen</i>	<i>Ym</i>	<i>Seventeen</i>	<i>Sassy</i>
Beauty	1	3	2	N/A
Fashion	2	1	1	1
Stardom & Celebrity	4	1	4	4
Romance & Guys	3	2	3	N/A
Self-discovery	5	N/A	N/A	N/A
Social issues	N/A	5	N/A	2
Personal testimonial	N/A	4	N/A	3
Family relationships	N/A	N/A	4	N/A
Female success stories	N/A	N/A	5	5

Table was extrapolated from Currie's study (1999) p. 50

At PGS the young women confided in me that beauty, boys, body image, popularity and fashion were very important to their social standing. Even though they wore uniforms there was a visible distinction that a hierarchy existed. Some students might sense that by conforming to what magazines say and display they can have it all. Crista from PGS informed me that to be popular at her school meant you, "would be getting attention from PBS kids like your really gorgeous type of thing, if your not that

pretty you're looking up to them". (Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001) Amanda explained to me that, "really small sizes is part of pop culture cause that's all you see". (Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2001)

These two examples demonstrate the negative feedback popular culture creates. Their self-esteem is riddled with guilt, unhappiness, and dissatisfaction with their body image. So where do teens look for insight? Perhaps it is at advice columns in teen magazines where, as Currie (1999) notes, they play an important social role in a world where teens do not have access to therapeutic venues. Currie also believes it can do more damage and harm by making young women feel guilty, embarrassed or ashamed.

So what does this all mean? I believe that nothing has changed since the 1940s. Women are still being told to follow society's neurotic norms when it comes to their appearance and behaviors. Ethnocentric ways of man, society and culture still control the reigns of our economy and even though most teen magazines are inappropriate and archaic they do try to bring forth a feminine venue through more positive articles such as female success stories and self-esteem.

*"I try to get them too. (Laughs). They do yes". (interview with Patrick; from MPS, Oct. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2001)*

In question three students were asked whether their friends enjoyed the same forms of popular culture. The results were thirteen yes' to two nos. It was not surprising since I believe that what draws us to people on a general level is usually similar interests. Most students adhered to the belief that with respect to music their tastes were different. Again that would have to do with distinctive styles and genre that are accessible to the music industry. Plaid derails my theory of similar interests or tastes, she says. "basically hang out as a group, it doesn't really matter what you look like, how you dress or kind of

music you listen too. Just if you like the people and you can get along with them, that is what sort of brings us together”. (MPS, interviewed on Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001)

The interest for them might vary due to diversity, learning from others and teaching new things to each other. After all that is what school is all about, it is a melting pot of different cultures and ethnicities. Students learn to tolerate others and become friends with people who might like the same movies, style of clothing, music or TV shows.

Teachers play a role in student hierarchy which they call typification or type casting students into groups like intelligent and below average. Barakett and Cleghorn (2000) state, “generally the constructs to assess a student’s character are appearance, language ability, conformity to discipline, acceptance of their academic role, general likeableness, and relations with peers”. (p. 97-98) Teachers may even have access to students’ records and social background, which thus becomes ‘evidence’ when teachers assess their perception of students. Even though many factors need to be reviewed many students never, in essence, receive fair judgement whether from teachers or peers and perhaps their friends.

Numerous sub-cultures exist within the school environment, to name a few, jockeys, punk rockers, cheerleaders, teeny boopers, nerds/geeks, popular and rich. These sub-cultures exist on the basis of similar interests, socio-economic backgrounds, etc. We not only view these hierarchical structures in school, these have also filtered out into popular culture, where movies and TV shows demonstrate the teen angst of different sub-cultures. For instance, *Freaks and Geeks* look at the world of the labeled “stoners” who are considered cool vs. the geeks who want to be cool. Sub-cultures and acceptance



plays a vital role in teen identity, and thus it is not surprising that students would attempt to emulate others or their favorite TV/movie actor in order to fit in.

*“Oh, all of what I make, all of it, (laughs) all of it”. (interview with Plaid, from MPS, Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001)*

The fourth question asked to the students pertained to the amount of popular culture items they purchased in one month. Ninety-five percent of the students stated that they purchase \$20.00 or more a month on goods and services. Most students received money from their parents, others worked as babysitters or held a part time job to afford the luxuries to which they were accustomed. In the table below you will view the cumulative amount spent per school per month.

*Q. 4 Roughly how much do you spend per month purchasing popular cultural items?*

	Amount spent/month
PGS (total combined)	\$ 730.00
PBS (total combined)	\$ 340.00
MPS (total combined)	\$ 695.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1765.00</b> <b>(roughly \$98/student/month)</b>

Students from PGS and MPS spend more money cumulatively than boys from PBS who spent nearly three times less. Patrick from MPS admitted to spending \$300.00 dollars per month on popular cultural items. That was almost the total amount for PBS high school. Whether male or female, teenagers are the largest consumers of good and services through out the world, it is imperative to understand why students spend so much and what attracts them to purchasing popular cultural items. Rushkoff's (1999) video called the *Merchants of Cool* (see Appendix A p. 78) discusses the evolution of mass marketing to teenagers.

Rushkoff (1999) states the 150 billion-dollar dream thrives in the United States. Teenagers overpopulate malls, theatres, and restaurants, and by meeting the demands of teens everywhere marketers are doing both the industries and consumers a service. Knowing what teens want, desire, need, and comprehending their lingo, Ebonics and slang, marketers are advertising products 'in teens terms'. Rushkoff believes that the truism of economic business declares that the teen market is a massive empire that the industries are attempting to colonize. Italy, a student from PBS knows what's going on. He says, "ah, usually I think it's a bunch of old guys behind desks, bunch of old guys behind desks selling prepubescent boys and girls to little girls who they think they have a strangle hold on them. I know what's going on". (Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001) Rushkoff would concur that the market is aimed at young teens and that unfortunately, most teens are exploited, brainwashed or entranced by advertising.

Imitation is the best form of flattery, if only these teens realized that all the marketing and advertising industries are doing, is selling their own images back to them! It's a cycle better known to Rushkoff as the "copy cat syndrome". He states, "the media watches kids and then sells them an image of themselves; then kids watch those images and aspire to be that mook or mid-rif girl on their TV set". (Public Broadcasting Station; video)

Most of the interviewees did say that they want to look like the popular kids in their school or like their favorite super model. The young women from PGS mostly agreed with this, whereas the girls from MPS leaned towards personal taste and individuality in their choice of clothing and the like. PBS stated that fashion, for example;

was not a big issue but admitted they preferred to purchase name brand clothing like *Tommy Hilfiger*.

It is most obvious that teens and popular culture are interconnected because there does exist a symbiotic relationship. Teens already know what product to buy and where to buy it. This means that teens view TV, movies, and advertising as comforting: unlike the authoritative parents, popular culture delivers on a whim teen's every desires, needs and wants. How does this affect the classroom environment? Well, students tend to hang out with people of the same interests in clothing, sports, CDs. In schools segregation or hierarchies are more visible as explored in the previous question. Schools need to teach students about the economic world of business and advertising. They need to learn not to be gullible and manipulated. Moreover, teens can become intelligent consumers and learn the importance of saving. Something sorely lacking in our youth orientated world.

*"Probably about, about 10 in the cinema. [CD's] depending on the month about one or two". (interview with Zoey, from MPS, Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001)*

*"Renting ah, again in the summer I'll do like a few a week, I like renting movies. About like 2 or 3 per week. [TV] too much, too much...ah, per day probably like two hours. But I use to be a lot worse". (Interview with Kris, from PBS, Oct. 31, 2001)*

In question five students were asked to roughly estimate the amount of times they go to the theatre, rent a movie, buy CD's and the amount of hours per day that they spend watching television. The combined results are presented below.

*Q. 5 How many times in a month do you go to the movies, rent a film, buy a CD and how many hours do you spend watching TV/day?*

	Theatre /month	Rent/month	CDs purchased/ month	TV/day	TV/ month
PGS	17	35	9	14 hrs & 30 mins	400 hrs/ 40 mins
PBS	18	19	5	10 hrs & 30 mins	288 hrs/ 40 mins
MPS	21	29	17	15 hrs	420 hrs

After reviewing my students' interviews of this question (on audio cassette) what the above represents is that within one month a student per day will watch on average 2 hours of TV, purchase one CD, rent 2 to 3 movies and observe 1 to 2 movies in the theatre. However, I have also found a discrepancy which is that if you review the amount spent per month on popular cultural items (in question 4), and compare it to the above table you will notice that they do not correlate. In fact, the amount viewed, rented or bought is higher for PBS and MPS, whereas PGS's was lower. Other factors may play a role in the discrepancy, for example boyfriend, girlfriend, or parent paid for the theatre show, rental or CD. Nevertheless, we must remember that this a small concentrated group of only 18 students which is not enough to state that this is a normative accumulation of the population. Also two of the students interviewed informed me that they did not watch TV. Plaid from MPS informed me that TV pollutes her mind while Dayn from PGS states that, "to me sometimes the media gets on my nerves and ah. I don't, personally I don't have the time to sit down and watch TV, I prefer to be outside, being active and making use of my time". (Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2001)

These are two rare cases because the other sixteen students admitted to viewing anywhere from half-hour to three hours a day. Brooks (1998), states that in one day a student can listen to music, watch a movie on TV, and then watch a TV show, after dinner he/she can play video games or surf the net. Popular culture is, "not just a teenage sidelight, it is the milieu in which they operate". (p. 21) Thus, students spent more time on non-printed materials than on printed word.

By allowing students to use knowledge they already have about the popular cultural society students become empowered and are sometimes given a voice where

once they may not have had. For example, Mary Jane from MPS states that she felt unrestrained when it came to speaking her mind and that the territory of popular culture is more familiar to her. Schools now strive to bring forth popular cultural contexts in all classrooms and sometimes even as a class on to itself. PGS, PBS and MPS all have conformed to the ever-changing world by bringing in a mass media or popular cultural class that examines the effects it has on students and the dominant world. It is important to note what authors have to say about the implementation of these popular cultural forms and what they offer to the classroom environment. They express not only popular cultures usefulness as a learning tool but also it aids students in the educational process.

Whipple (1998) believes that, "by expanding the notion of what qualifies as 'text' we are also expanding the prevailing notions of which literacy experiences are valuable and who gets to participate in classroom conversation". (p. 144) She adheres to the belief that community within the classroom should be created where the atmosphere is one of acceptance and comfort. then students can feel free to express their genuine responses. As noted previously, Freire and Giroux (in Giroux and Simon, 1989) believe that the educational curriculum should emulate an environment of freedom. Students can then use their preconceived knowledge that they acquired from living within a multi-cultural and popular cultural world. Therefore, using film in school as stated before as an intertextual format will empower and give self-esteem to students. When teachers take advantage of popular cultural forms it not only validates their work as teachers but students begin to understand the vastness of its multiple roles in media and school.

Witkin (1994) states, "without parental input, television may teach and influence by default" (p. 9), thus, widening the gap between adult authority and child adherence.

Television and film in the classroom can then make students critical thinkers by having them understand, debate and analyze social issues or storylines in order to 'get the facts right'. If students are not properly armed with the correct knowledge then it can cause emotional, physical and mental damage. TV and films are fictitious and should not be viewed as real life, truth givers or teachers. That is why it is up to the educators and parents to explain to students the ramifications of the character actions, the consequences, the morals and values and the like.

When it comes to music in school there is only one type – school music! School music is not the norm, it does not have a catchy rhythm or interesting beat and depending on the school it can range from catholic hymns to school patriotic mottoes. O'Toole (2000) believes that music is profound and that it can alter our perception of the world and our lives. O'Toole continues by saying, "we've observed that humans don't just listen to music, they feed on it. fulfilling emotional and physical hunger. As they ingest this auditory nutrient, their energy revives and moods elevates". (p. 35) Students love music and its myriad of forms, they spend a lot of their monetary income on tickets to concerts, CDs, magazines about music and so forth. Even their fashion for example, Spike and Plaid who love Punk music also sport the retro 80s styles!

O'Toole believes "when humans hear music they react physically—heads bob, fingers tap, and often the entire body begins to move energetically, sometimes spasmodically...another reaction is singing along". (p. 36) This does not occur when school music is played because students do not see it as entertaining and enjoyable. Spike informed me that she finds, "the music program's a little weird cause they make you sing like the little chore songs". (from MPS, Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001)

If teachers changed the program to incorporate ‘outside’ music would it work? O’Toole did not examine this aspect but I believe that it could aid as a teaching method to understanding lyrics, meanings, symbolism’s of music, tastes, personal interests and rhythms. Most likely, students would be more willing to participate and welcome class.

*“I like anything with a twist at the end, I like romance, like everything except it has to be, have something different about it, something quirky or [a] good story”. (interview with Amanda, from PGS, Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2001)*

Question six addresses students’ interest in genre types. Students were asked what style of genre of film they most enjoyed. Half the students I interviewed admitted they enjoyed Action flicks. The table below shows the genre types for the interviewees.

*Q. 6 What genre of film do you like?*

	Romantic/ Teen Flicks	Horror/ mystery	Action	Drama	Musicals	Comedy	Sci-fi/ Fantasy	Independent/ History
PGS	2	1	2		2	3		
PBS			4			3	2	2
MPS	2	5	3	3	1	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

As you can see the top three favorite genre types are action, comedy and horror/mystery. These are the three styles I examine more closely in order to understand what drives students to watch them, and whether they would be appropriate for classroom discussion. I thought it would be interesting to compare students’ genre tastes to that of the dominant society thus, the table below demonstrates their differences/similarities in genre.

*Blockbuster U.S.A. top five most rented movies for 2001 and their genre type.  
(Canadian data was unavailable)*

Blockbuster top 5	Genre Type	Student genre type interest
Meet the Parents	Comedy	7
Cast Away	Drama	3
The Family Man	Romantic comedy	4
Traffic	Drama	3
What Lies Beneath	Horror	6

It is fascinating to see that comedy, horror and finally romantic comedy reigned in rental choices. Americans admire their action heroes, and thus it is surprising to see that not one was listed out of the top five. It could be a discrepancy where there was no action flicks made that year or one worth renting. Students compare pretty much equally to that of the USA in tastes demonstrating that the generation gap between genXers and generation Y is closing in.

Action flicks have been broken down into two styles, pure action and action adventure. Pure action films have no real plot lines only spectacular effects of impending catastrophe or disaster, which is the selling point. Meanwhile, action adventure films states Wheeler (in Dixon, 2000), “involve a more complicated plot involving more flamboyant and colorful characters, malignant villainy, dastardly deeds, and larger-than-life characters who will ultimately save the day”. (p. 161) Most action films can cost over a 100 million dollars per picture, making them the most expensive. They also draw over 1 billion dollars in box office and merchandise sales. So what do action flicks need to make a picture successful? They need a hero and some impending catastrophe like natural causes or aliens. They also need to save the planet, country or neighborhood from imminent doom. This takes care of the plot line but they also, on occasion, include a damsel in distress, or leading love interest, as well as a muscle bound, handsome and



healthy male. The task as stated before is to disarm, avert, control, thwart and save the day.

The real question is why do teenagers like it so much? Wheeler (in Dixon, 2000) believes that teenagers enjoy such films because they are giving them what they want. Wheeler notes, "action adventure spectacles are testosterone movies designed to match the interest of juvenile audience-far-fetched, overstated, male-driven, often cartoonish, depending mainly on special-effects wizardry and hype-up soundtracks". (p. 169) Teens also derive pleasure from the hero's idiosyncrasies, signature quirks, phobias or catch phrases like 'I'll be back' or 'Hasta la vista, baby' (from *Terminator*) that they imitate or emulate.

I believe that you can analyze anything so long as you approach it in the right manner. By discussing action flicks in the classroom environment one can criticize the plot or storyline, character development, special effects and the like. The financial aspect, the actor's aspect, the producer's aspect, the stuntmen, the set designers and so forth could be reviewed as well. Analyzing these aspects help students understand the business of film making. How teachers can break this down is simple. In economics class they can review the financial aspect. They can learn the details of script writing in English class and comprehend the physical demands of stuntmen in gym class. Moreover, they can learn the preparation of actors in drama class and in art class or woodshop they can create set designs. Home economics allows students to sew costumes and biology explains the physical stress of the muscles during the making of an action film and can discuss proper diet and exercise that actors use to stay fit. Finally, in math class students can examine the technical and mathematical aspect of cinematography. All

of these topics can be taught separately or in conjunction with other courses. Students would be less likely to ignore the lecture because of the interest in the subject matter. This is just one way to get students' attention and participation.

The above can also apply to comedy and horror/mystery films. Comedy has a playful edge; it is humorous and packs an emotional punch. *Jim Carrey* is one such actor who brought back the entertaining form of physical comedy to the screen and students just crack up. Laughter is key to the longevity of these films and fosters cohesion. Eitzen (in Plantinga and Smith, 1999) states, "empirical humor research suggests that our pleasure at comic elements in movies is merely an extension of a particular emotional response to ordinary, everyday experiences". (p. 86) Students relish in the human like behaviors of characters and can empathize with them by stating, 'I've done that' or 'I'd just die if that happened to me'. When the everyday is brought to life on film it aids students in understanding that sometimes good or bad things happen to us but we can move forward and overcome obstacles. It may also help students who have low self-esteem by seeing themselves in the characters and by viewing him/her overcome the odds which can be ego boosting and motivating. I believe through humor a real message can sometimes be conveyed and students subconsciously adhere to it.

This idea would express why students watch comedy films because they like the feeling of being free to laugh, empathize, poke fun of and smile. Most comedy films are watched in-groups making the atmosphere a cohesive community. Laughter and smiles, whether in private or at the movies, are positive social experiences. Perhaps that is why students enjoy viewing the same film over and over again because of the emotional experiences they derive from it.

Students and adults alike laugh when they are embarrassed or feel inadequate. Laughing helps them diffuse the emotions they feel inside especially in social situations. Laughter thus becomes a powerful tool to deal with life's highs and lows. It masks our true feelings at times but also allows us to laugh at ourselves when we make a mistake or fall down. Being human means not being perfect, and when we see actors being silly or clumsy in films it enhances their human side and reveals to us that everybody has self-esteem issues.

When teachers discuss comedy films in the classroom they can touch upon the self-esteem issues, the feelings of inadequacies and acceptance among peer groups. They can also look at the positive way that comedy can aid in understanding social situations. These topics and more can be reviewed in social studies class, religion and so on. It's occasionally taxing on teachers to get their students to listen and learn, thus using comedy in the classroom lectures can enhance the learning experience and make class interesting, amusing and enjoyable for both parties.

Finally, when viewing horror films we see a different side of our students, one that is morbid, sinister and dark which could be compared to our polluted, overpopulated world. Perhaps that is why students like horror films because it compares to the violent, dark and smog infested world they are forced to live in. Moreover, horror flicks are just one way to activate one's imagination to become fearful, nauseous, repulsed, or have your spin tingle and throat clog up. Horror films are made for the purpose to make us cringe, feel vulnerable and scared to death. Supernatural events, cults, monsters, mad scientists, graveyards, uncharted islands, and old castles are just some of the locations for horror films. What they intend to do by way of sound effects and music is "fool

ourselves into seeing what we have been led to expect". (White in Grant, 1977, p. 128) Another interesting aspect of horror films is when there is an authenticity and/or believability in the storyline that seems realistic. This leaves the audience feeling uneasy because it can happen to them. That is the secret to good filmmaking.

Violent death scenes and/or immortality are key elements to any good horror flick. Even though we naturally fear death it still fascinates us and we enjoy watching the process of dying. Horror flicks utilize that fear of death and manipulate it to make the film successful. When students feel powerlessness, have no protection, no warning, or no escape it heightens their awareness and biologically makes them edgy, spooked or nervous because of the unknown. As White notes, "the force at work in a horror film might be defined as the triggering of our basic fear of the unknown, our fear of being unable to deal with our environment". (p. 132) Some students like to be frightened, scared and afraid because of the adrenaline rush and the ability to laugh at oneself or at a friend during or after the fearful depiction on screen. That is why they derive pleasure from riding roller coasters, walking through haunted houses in amusement parks and so on. Also, some students love to feel alive by being scared to death, a true oxymoron.

What about discussing this topic in school? Teachers can look at the psychological aspects. What drives filmmakers to create such a genre? Why do we put ourselves through the fear and torture of watching? Biologically what happens to our bodies when watching horror film? Moreover, what fears or phobias do we have, and is it realistic to be afraid of, for example the dark? Or what causes the fear in the first place and how can we get over our fears and phobias? White believes that the antidote to the latter question would be realistic horror films that touch upon everyday fears as stated in

the beginning of this section. White (in Grant, 1977) says, “they can help people deal with such fears, [it] can help both those who make the film and those who experience them to face and, as a result, see more clearly not only the nature of the fears brought on by contemporary society but the nature of that society itself”. (p.144)

***“Funny, sexual comedy cause that’s the biggest eye opener that’s’ the like the big curiosity stage at my age right now”. (interview with Crista; from PGS, Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001)***

Question number seven required the students to state their preferred genre for television. Rushkoff (1996) believes that intelligent viewer’s search for more on television. For instance, they search for different genre styles like drama, comedy, and soap operas. Below is a breakdown of the genre types and the students’ selections.

*Q. 7 What genre of TV do you like?*

	Comedy	Drama	TLC	Sports	History	MTV	Cartoons	Soap Operas	Movie Network
PGS	2	2	1	1					
PBS	3	3			1	1	1		
MPS	1	3	1					3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>

I was curious to find out if what my students choose (drama, comedy and soap operas) would correlate to the interests of the public. Below is the list for both Toronto and Montreal ratings.

*TV ratings for Spring (Jan-May) 2001; Adults 18-34, Anglophone; Mon-Sun 6am-2am + Student interest in genre.*

Toronto top 5 watched shows	Toronto Genre	Student Genre type interests	Montreal top 5 watched shows	Montreal Genre	Student Genre type interest
Survivor 2	Reality	2	Temptation Island	Reality	2
Temptation Island	Reality	Ibid	Survivor 2	Reality	Ibid
Simpson's	Comedy	6	Dark Angel	Drama	8
Friends	Comedy	Ibid	Simpson's	Comedy	6
Malcolm in the Middle	Comedy	Ibid	The West Wing	Drama	Ibid

Toronto unfortunately did not correlate as much as Montreal's data did with my students' interest by genre type. Soap operas were the only ones not listed in the above choices and in the original raw data that I had received, these were rated the lowest. Nevertheless, I must state that it is difficult to accurately assess this data due to the size of my concentrated group that cannot be deemed representative of society. In this section I examine why students like to watch TV and why we should incorporate it into the classroom.

### **What's On TV?**

Students watch an accumulated 40 hours of TV per day and Rushkoff (1996) believes that watching television can be addictive especially with the plethora of choices for genre types. Many years ago actors and writers would use TV as stepping stone to bigger and better things (i.e. getting into movies). TV was said to be the "bastard child" of film and was not well respected. Nowadays all that has changed for TV has created a forum that allows its creators to push the limits and entertain audiences. Television is so respected now that many big name actors are returning to the small screen as actors, or

producers. For instance, *Sandra Bullock* has produced a half-hour family sitcom that depicts for the first time an all Hispanic cast (*The George Lopez Show*).

Dramality defined as a mixture of both drama and reality is the most common genre for our generation. Johnson (2001) has no doubt that reality TV is a misnomer, which leads people to think that they are watching reality at its best. In fact, all it is as Johnson states, is the new mainstream pornography for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century where people can become exhibitionists or spectators. Obviously, Johnson has honed into his ability to understand TV or he is just very offended by the choice of programming offered by television. Nevertheless, he clearly sums it up with a *Survivors* analogy. Johnson proclaims,

Call it Survivor: The Outback of Television. Armed with only a clicker, each TV viewer is marooned in a wasteland of shows about adulterous couples, horny singles, conspiring castaways, iron chefs, unknown pop stars, brides for sale, wanna-be-millionaires, paranoid tourist, diva loft dwellers, and performing cops. The challenge: to find any evidence of the real world, as we know it. The reward: temporary immunity from the sinking feeling that what passes for reality on television is overproduced, under-scripted fiction with amateur actors. (p.56)

Due to the great success of dramality's *Survivor*, Fox network decided to get into the game by creating reality-dramas like *Temptation Island*, *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire*, *Who Wants to be a Playboy Centerfold* and so on. ABC has created *The Mole* and *The Millionaire Show*, NBC has *Chains of Love*, and Canwest Global has created *No Boundaries* and *Popstars*. The Life network has even created *U8TV The Lofters* and *Love Shack* and the list is endless. The ultimate goal for these shows is to force strangers into intimate situations to see how they react which usually guarantees excitement and unpredictability. The biggest lure for these shows is the promise of nudity and sex which is unfortunately what sells in our society. Johnson believes that

reality based TV shows makes audiences feel guilty for prying into other people's lives. Like pornography we are viewing a side of people that we should not see and that attraction is a shameful addiction for many viewers. It has always been known that TV exists within its own sphere of reality separate from that of normative reality. Now that dramality exists audiences can become the puppets and the entire world a stage!

Another genre of television is crime dramas where fictitious police officers, medical doctors, firemen and the like thwart natural occurrences and villains in order to bring about peace and justice in the American way. Johnson (2001) concurs, "drama, relies on clever casting, juicy scenarios, visual flares, teased suspense, a lush soundtrack and editing that fosters a retroactive sense of poetic justice". (p. 57) Reith (1999) notes that people take pleasure in observing crime dramas in order to see the villain get defeated, for it restores in the audience a faith in the system. She also discusses the possible link between aggressive behavior and violence found on TV. Reith quickly derails that philosophy and says, "by showing how antisocial aggression of the criminal is defeated and punished, the crime drama may deflect the antisocial aggression of the viewer". (p.211-212)

To sum up students can review, in the classroom, social issues and how they are depicted on TV. They can discuss reality TV vs. reality. They can look at violence on TV. Sexism, racism and gender bias can be reviewed and critically analyzed. There are so many topics and genres to talk about and teachers can perhaps parallel these to the curriculum. Finally, teachers can discuss why students emulate, dress and so on, like their favorite TV actor or character? What does this do for their self-esteem, personality/identity and individuality?



Comedy TV is like the movies for their sole purpose is to make the audience relax, laugh, release stress, and get over a bad day. May (2002) states that comedy and drama account for almost three-quarters of the prime time scheduling. May notes, "with more than 50 years of laughs under its belt, the sitcom has evolved into a complex storytelling medium". (p. 3) True comedic TV shows rely on more than just edgy storylines, they rely on a lot of talent and luck. It also helps if you have the star, the right writer, the right network and the right timeslot all of these things are essential to making it work.

The family comedy like *The Cosby Show* and *Roseanne* were milestones of time, the first being the most popular African American family, and the latter being the blue collar family with a mom who was not perfect. At that point in time African Americans did not have their own medium and images on TV. This was a step in the right direction but still today it is rare to see the portrayal of a minority family. We have *The PJ's* (which is a cartoon), *My Wife and Kids*, *The Hughleys*, *The George Lopez Show* and *The Bernie Mac Show*. There are more available but you need to access *BET* (Black Entertainment Television). As for the not so perfect American family portrayal we have *According to Jim*, *That 70s Show*, *The Job* and so forth. These shows attempt to express the American blue-collar family trying to make ends meet. The African American families on TV demonstrate a level of higher education and monetary income than that of the Caucasian blue-collar family. This shows us that economically, in the realm of TV fantasy, the tables have been turned and minority families are now the upper echelons of society. For students who are minorities these characters are great role models and allow students to have bigger dreams because TV shows it is possible. Everybody needs role

models in their life and since most teenagers are looking for them outside of the home and on TV, its fascinating to see that there are a variety of characters and families to emulate or respect.

Another unique style of comedy is sketch comedy most usually found in Canadian television. Shows like *This Hour has 22 Minutes*, *The Red Green Show*, *Kids in the Hall*, and *Royal Canadian Air Farce*, demonstrate and elaborate parodic sketches, impersonations, semi-improvised ensemble sketch exercises and so on. Pevere (1998) gives credence to the belief that Canadians are one of the funniest cultures in the world that have produced *Mike Myers*, *Jim Carrey*, *Dan Aykroyd*, *Leslie Neilson* and the like. Pevere describes British comedy as very different from that of American and Canadian. He says that the British enjoy the big, untidy and ugly visual gags (like *Mr. Bean*) whereas Americans immerse themselves in comics who stand in front of a microphone firing off rounds of jokes (such as *Eddie Murphy*). Canadians seem to be disinterested in the big payoff. Pevere explains that when it comes to comics from Canada its all about a joke in the telling not the telling of a joke. Hence, it is more about the process and maybe the punchline than the payoff of laughter. It is a fine combed craft, woven in mystery and cloaked in desire. The desire is to perform, to be realistic in the context they are representing, and to achieve the goal. Pevere also believes that comedy is strangely becoming more Canadian and “it’s arguable that export forms of Canadian comedy have just meshed with the American comedic mainstream, but have strongly influenced its direction, current and depth, for better or worse”. (p. 44)

When it comes to using comedy sitcoms in the classroom there are many options to review. One such option is using the history of Canadian comedy shows, actors,

writers and how they influenced the American culture in various courses in the curriculum. There is also race, gender and sex that can be discussed to see if they are being portrayed or represented accurately on TV. Teachers can bring jokes or phrases found in comedy TV shows into the classroom so that students can learn to deconstruct the hidden meaning. Moreover, what is funny to one person may not be to another, for instance, stereotypes, racial jokes, cultural jokes and so on. Another option is have your students write a story about something funny that happened to them or a family member. Then they can share it with the class to see how people interpret different things to be humorous.

Soap operas have a recipe for success, which includes four components. These are: repetition, serial tales, history of characters, and identification. Through repetition the audience gains a sense of familiarity with the characters and setting which allows the audience to participate in a fictional world. Serial tales denote that the storyline expands over a period of episodes often using cliffhangers. History of character is essential for the audience so that they might understand, love, or hate the characters. It is also important for the audience to see personal traits of characters. Finally, there is the identification aspect: not all audience viewers identify with characters but may wish to emulate them. Geraghty (1991) notes, "it is this multiple identification with a number of characters which is a strong element in soap's ability to engage in so powerfully". (p. 18)

Why does the audience like soap operas? There are the fantasy aspects of family, romance, attention, accessibility and so on, that attract viewers. For example, the accessibility of family members to aid in household chores and child rearing is extremely appealing to stay at home moms or even working moms. Geraghty notes that we also

view women of different ages, sizes, appearance and status on soap operas with which the everyday women can identify. She (1991) states, “soaps rehearse to their female audience the process of handling personal relationships, the balancing of each individual’s needs, the attention paid to every word and gesture so as to understand its emotional meaning”. (p. 43)

Soap operas are also famous for exaggerated storylines, outrageous twists, and sneaky villains. On the other hand, they are known for their increasing awareness of AIDS and other personal social issues. Such issues are adultery, divorce, incest, alcoholism, illegitimacy, kidnapping and so much more. Even though soap opera’s main responsibility is to entertain it has become an ideal forum for women to learn about social issues that plague their gender and their society.

How can teachers draw on soap operas in classroom activities? Teachers can certainly look at the personal and social issues presented in soap operas. Social awareness allows students to comprehend the world in which they live in. Tolerance and understanding will develop and students could become more empathic to the plight of humanity. Criticizing, analyzing and explaining is also key to acceptance and compassion. Therefore, soap operas are tools of education in our high tech popular cultural world.

***“Music, Jazz is one, the thing is I’ll listen to anything, but if I were to pick some, I’d pick Jazz, Jazz”. (interview with Saotome; from PBS, Nov. 1, 2001)***

In question number eight I reviewed music and students stated a variety of choices that were diverse in taste. Below is a compellation of their testimonies and as you will see hard, soft and pop rock reigned as number one, followed by dance, rhythm and blues (R&B), rap and hip-hop, then came alternative, classical and jazz.

Q. 8 *What genre of music do you like?*

	Dance/ R&B/ Rap/ Hip-hop	Hard Rock/ Pop Rock/ Soft Rock	Alternative	Classical / Jazz	Country	Oldies	70s / Punk Rock
PGS	4	5	2	2		1	
PBS	1	3	1	1		1	1
MPS	3	3	1	1	2		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

Their tastes are so diverse because popular culture has created a wide spectrum of styles. I wanted to ascertain whether their choices in music were consistent with purchasing in the Montreal region at HMV music stores. Below is the accumulated data for HMV stores found in the Montreal region.

*HMV and Students interest for 2001*

Top 5 Genre at HMV in Montreal Region	Students interest
Dance (rhythm & blues, rap, hip-hop)	8
Rock (hard, soft, pop)	11
Alternative	4
Francophone + Movie Soundtracks	0
Other (jazz, classical, country etc.)	6

Although this a small study the data can be deemed, in this case, representative of society. Students enjoy the same forms of styles as the population of the Montreal area due mostly to the idea that music has no barriers; it is universally known. I've decided to look at the following: hard, soft and pop rock; hip-hop, rap, and rhythm and blues; then alternative music simply because this preference was stated before classical and jazz.

In the beginning there was the blues which created Jazz and rock-n-roll. Rock-n-roll gave birth to hard rock, soft rock and pop rock and many more genres/styles. Hard rock was mixed with heavy metal, soft rock was mixed with the classic oldies more like elevator music, and pop rock was created from the 50s bubble gum pop and do-whoop

sound. Each style had its known unique and distinctive sound with a hint of rock-n-roll and that is what made it different. It is easy enough to understand that the attraction to these forms of music was that students knew that their parents would not like it. Defiance, rebellion and independence are conflicts that take place in most homes with young teens. They want their freedom to discover their identity, tastes and interests, while the parents want to control, protect, and influence.

One way to analyze musical forms is through classroom practice either in popular culture class, history or music. By comprehending the history of music, what instruments existed, why music was created, students would have a greater appreciation for all genres. They can write papers on the evolution of classical, jazz or the blues. They can learn about musicals, operas and why they were a popular form of entertainment in their times and why people still enjoy them. These topics are the basis of music, once students realize that, then they can discuss popular cultures wave of styles in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The African American culture played a large role in the creation of hip-hop, rap, and rhythm and blues (R&B). This music made people think, react and criticize the multi-cultural world in which we live. Nelson and Gonzales (1991) state, "the term itself embodies the media's and an uniformed public's misconception about hip-hop. To them the music isn't a legitimate artform that has influenced everything from fashion design to current slang, its an open invitation for thugs and hoods to break wild". (p. xvii) The hip-hop sound was created to give African Americans a new outlet. It even had an historical context that could trace back to the times of the African tribal rituals, *James Brown*, and the chatter of men at the barbershops. The music 15 years later in the 1990s has evolved

and, “invaded the hearts and souls of folks throughout the world” and will continue to do so for many years to come. (Nelson and Gonzales, 1991, p. xix)

Rappers like *Ice-T*, *Will Smith*, *Ice Cube*, sing about social issues in forms of stories that plague our society like drugs, abuse, racism and so on. These rappers attempt to inform us through provocative and shocking lyrics that slap reality in our faces. There is nowhere to run or hide from the truth (or their interpretation for the truth) and this makes the audience conscious. Historically stories in songs existed back in the time of the African tribes, slavery and the Underground Railroad. Storytelling through oral tradition has been apart of many cultures. In today’s multi-cultural society rappers are no longer only African American; they are from many ethnic groups. Everyone wants to get into the game in order to have his or her say about our world.

In the 50s rock-n-roll and rhythm and blues (R&B) music was very popular, out of billboards charts top 125. 25 R&B and rock-n-roll records were listed as the most purchased and listened to. It was no longer a cultural sound for Caucasians that was most popular, the African American sound was enjoyed as well. Minority markets were explored by *Atlantic* and *National records*, which found the styling of rhythm and blues as newest and coolest sound. Though some companies used minority markets to turn a profit, others did so because they loved and delighted in the sound. Ward (1998) states that, “Black-orientated radio was a vital cog in the commercial machinery and creative process which enabled rhythm and blues to establish itself at the heart of a national black popular music culture and then cut across customary, and in the South, legal barriers between the races to make that music available to young whites”. (p. 30)

Rhythm and blues attempted not only to entertain but brake the color barrier in the South. Many Caucasian male and females listened, enjoyed and fully immersed themselves into the experience of the music. Music effects emotions and can create a bond between people of all colors and race. Someone once said that music can sooth even the savage beast. The beast at the time was racism and though it was not the only thing that aided in the fight it did create a transformation that enlightened a generation.

Most students are natural learners and seek knowledge in all walks of life; it makes sense that students would take pleasure from a plethora of genres. Schools should no longer study black history in the month of February but in conjunction with the regular course curriculum. By doing so students can learn the history of slavery, oral traditions, racism, music etc.

The dictionary defines alternative as, "espoused or reflecting the values that are different from those of the establishment or mainstream". ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com), 2002) As in the case of music the definition is vital to the comprehension of what alternative genre entails. Professor Homzy (teacher of Musicology at Concordia University) says that Ryan Fluery musician believes that, "alternative music is a tricky one. it means different things to different people, what was alternative ten years ago is mainstream and even generic now, and is still called alternative". ([homzy@vax2.concordia.ca](mailto:homzy@vax2.concordia.ca), 2002) Back in 1989 to 1995 the Seattle grunge scene exploded, the sound was so unique that it was labeled as alternative genre. Bands from all over came to live in Seattle because of the low cost of living, which allows bands to jam, drink and work part-time. Seattle quickly became the hot spot for bands, big label companies, at the rate of once a week, were signing them. Therefore, the competition for club space and notoriety was



ferocious and this phenomenon lasted for many years until it became saturated. Bands like *Counting Crows*, *Pearl Jam*, and *Nirvana* became overnight success stories thanks to the Northwest City which gave bands not only a home but also stardom. Alternative bands luck ran out in 1995 when the music world left in search for the next big thing!

Many young adults enjoyed the lifestyle of Seattle with its bars and underground music scene. It was wonderful luck for both bands and the audiences throughout the early 1990s. The grungy rock sound invoked numerous emotions for young men and the visual longhaired sweaty guitar players plucked at the heartstrings of many young women. It had a little bit for everyone, and since the alternative genre was so contrary from anything they had ever heard it was all the more reason to relish in the moment.

In school, teachers can look at the economic factors that created this surge in Seattle. They can also address the changes occurring in the music scene and how it came to be that alternative genre was created. What made these bands so different from others? Besides the sound, what about the look? I cannot stress enough the importance of receiving a well-rounded education, which allows the student to converse on a myriad of subjects. Through the awareness of musicology students can study the history, economics and the multi-cultural importance of music.

***“Oh my God, favorite film...of all time? Umm, what would...I have to say for that one, I'd go with Carrie, it's a classic. [For music] I'd go with Ripcords they're a Montreal band. [TV show] Umm, Trauma Life in the ER on TLC”. (interview with Spike; from MPS, Oct.15<sup>th</sup>, 2001)***

***“[Sound of Music] I just like the story, the songs themselves are easy, I know the whole script by heart. [Backstreet Boys] I like their talent, I like their looks, I like their voice, [and] I like the image they project to the world that they don't have to be anything that they aren't, they're just average people. [CSI] I love William Peterson, I think he's such a good actor. The way the show is set up and the graphics they use, they make it so real. It's just that I can't help but watch, like if I blink I just freak out. I***

*don't want to miss something; I'm so addicted". (interview with Jen; from PGS, Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001)*

Question number nine deals with the what and why. What film, musician/group and TV show do they like and why do they like it? I will approach this topic differently by separating the results by school instead of the typical combination of results. The reason for this is because the responses are not the same, and therefore it would be confusing and/or complicated to understand. I will begin with PGS, then PBS and conclude with MPS's data.

Insight into the minds and thoughts of teens today gives way to comprehension of their personality, interests and what appeals to their intellect. By doing so we can begin to see the influences that popular culture have on them. You can see in the table below the wide array of choices for each topic from the women of PGS. They range from romantic comedies to musicals, from pop rock to rap and from comedies to drama.

*Q. 9 What is your favorite movie, musician/group and TV show?(PGS data)*

	Movie	Musician/Group	TV Show
Crista	Happy Gilmore	Gwen Stephani	Friends
Amanda	Sixth Sense	Our Lady Peace	Simpsons
Sonia	Les Miserable	U2/ Edwin	Whose Line is it Anyways
Ruby	Best Friends Wedding	Bon Jovi	Third Watch
Dayn	Fight Club	Limp Biscuit	N/A
Jen	Sound of Music	Backstreet Boys	CSI

Using their responses we can better identify the ways in which students interpret popular culture. When it came to film they stated that the key important elements were simplicity, realism, good acting, intellectual content, sentimentality, interesting storyline, humor, and shocking twists. It would have been too lengthy to express each individual explanation. Yet, at the same it is important to see if the dominant society concurs with

their interpretation. Thus, I have chosen different film, music and TV show reviews to better understand them. Due to the difficulty in finding information I used the Internet (one of the popular cultural forms) to locate articles or reviews by both professional and non-professional writers. This may seem a little unorthodox but nowadays the Internet is receiving acclamation for its plethora of good and useful information. The Internet also allows the voiceless (like our students) to state their opinions in a non-judgmental format. Therefore, the Internet can be seen as an effective learning tool.

Crista believes that the movie *Happy Gilmore* makes her not only laugh but transforms a troublesome day into a good day. Crista enjoys the silly antics and obnoxious rhetoric of *Sandlers* character. Crista says that this film is very entertaining, dynamic and hilarious. The only annoying aspect of this film as stated by Berardinelli (1996) is the product placement which was over the top and out of control. Crista never mentions that *Happy Gilmore* is one big *Pepsi*, *AT&T*, and *Subways* commercial. Perhaps this has to do with the amount of advertising students unconsciously digest each day.

When it comes to music the girls denoted the following, good looks, talent, good lyrics and sound, uniqueness, the image they project to the world, the message they express and realism. These are all-important factors for a successful musician or group. Sonia enjoys the styling of *U2* and their song *It's a Beautiful Day* which she says expresses the message of love, peace and healthy living. Advertisers for a car commercial, which can be seen on both the big and small screen, use this particular song. Wenzel (2000) says that they use, "rock music as a vehicle for transmitting the message of 'feeling good' regarding products of all kinds – cars, shoes, soup, perfumes,

underwear, you name it". ([www.Idb.org](http://www.Idb.org)) Teens fall victim to this advertising ploy because they use popular music and students' emotions to lure them in. Thus, there will be a permanent connection between the music they love and the product they purchase. This would cause students to buy from the same company more than once.

TV shows whether a half-hour or full hour brought about an abundance of emotions from these students. Most admitted to the anticipation of waiting for their TV show and the enjoyment of watching as well as the relaxation that occurs. These girls love to learn, enjoy the realism, the actors' looks, the acting, the sets, the humor, the morals and values, and the explanation about life, romance and sex. One interviewee, Dayn stated that she did not watch TV because she preferred to be outside and make use of her time. Crista on the other hand likes to watch TV and explained why she likes the TV show *Friends*. She says, "because I like, I've only kissed like three boys in my entire life and ah, I'm 16 and compared to a lot of girls...it explains those types of things and its really funny". (Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001)

She goes on to say that sex plays a very large role in their prepubescent years and due to their curiosity they want to learn about sexual behavior and humor so that they can become aware of how one should act and react. This makes her feel more mature, informed and responsible. Simon (1999) correlates the characters of *Friends* to Shakespeare's play *Much Ado about Nothing*. Simon views the play as a bunch of unmarried "twenty-something's" who flirt with each other, play tricks on each other, and fall in and out of love. This is very true to the characters on *Friends* who follow the paths of the characters *Hero* and *Claudia*, *Beatrice* and *Benedict* and so on. Crista also finds

these characters to be inspirational and role models. Television has become the parent who teaches them the lessons of life, love and death.

PBS's students' tastes defer from that of PGS in most categories. Their responses to film revealed to me that young men relish in a developed storyline, cultural significance, interesting characters, historical aspect, originality, complexity, strangeness, and excellent directing. In the table below it demonstrates PBS's preferences.

Q. 9 *What is your favorite movie, musician/group and TV show?(PBS data)*

	Favorite Movie	Favorite Musician	Favorite TV Show
Lenix	Boiler Room	Weezer	Simpsons
Kris	American Beauty	Beatles	Simpsons
Saotome	Braveheart/ Snow falling on Cedars/ Grave of the fireflies	Yoko Cano (composer)	Star Trek/ CSI
Max	Godfather II	Alanis Morissette	Simpsons
Kilgore	Nightmare before Christmas	Vandals	Recess
Italy	Gladiator	Pearl Jam	The Sopranos

Saotome liked *Braveheart* because of the historical content. He felt that he learned a lot about *William Wallace* and his crusade. Even though the movie had minor discrepancies Agronsky (2001) believes that *Braveheart* was an honest portrayal of the struggle, triumph and tragic demise of a great man. She also said the attention to detail of the period was quite accurate with its hand-to-hand combat, barbaric forms of capital punishment, and brutal nature of warfare. Most importantly, the movie introduced a legendary and revered man of Scotland who struggled to maintain his national identity and independence. Agronsky concludes, "historically accurate or not, it is a story worth telling if only to remind us that humanities struggle for freedom transcends culture, nationality and time". ([www.suite101.com](http://www.suite101.com)) I think we watch movies like *Braveheart*,

*Gladiator*, and *Schindler's List*, to remind ourselves of past tragedies, conflicts in order to not repeat them. We can all investigate the past and maybe that is what these young men are compelled to do...remember, but do not forget!

Music not only influenced PGS but PBS as well. They said that music must discuss issues that relate to life, reference popular cultural elements, have great lyrics/sound, be good role models and help them relax. Italy says he likes to listen to the song *EvenFlow* by *Pearl Jam*. This song is about a poor man that cannot read, who sleeps on concrete, and cannot find a job. Moreover, this man does not know that through the *Evenflow* of life and rebirth, he will live again maybe then his life will change for the better. Italy notes that *Pearl Jam* is a wonderful role model not only because through their music they teach about the harshness of our world but they also do a lot of community work. He goes on to say that they were part of the Tibetan Freedom Concert and *Eddie Vedder* the lead vocalist is into Woman's Rights politics.

Politics transformed and increased the importance of music in a variety of ways. Wenzel (2000) says for example, that the Vietnam War was the direct reason for Woodstock and the Summer of Love to exist; also the lack of creditability of political parties established alternative forms of music. The underground bands were able to poke fun at government officials, social issues, etc. Freedom of speech reigned where all forms of interpretation could be heard. Kilgore says that the punk rock group *The Vandals* even poke fun at popular cultural elements like Atari and its game Pong, *Farah Fawcett's* (Charles Angels) hairstyle and so forth. These young men demonstrated to me that world politics could be found in all forms even popular culture.

TV shows like the *Simpsons* created a wonderful format for young and old. Majority of the young men stated they liked to watch this show as well as others. They declared that TV helps them relax, demonstrates satirical skits, portrays the average family, it is insightful, intellectual, humorous and correlates to society. Denton (1995) talks about the *Simpsons* and says, “there is almost no value held sacred by the moral majority which the *Simpsons* hasn’t trashed. It does it better and more constantly than any other program I’ve ever seen”. ([www.labyrinth.net.au](http://www.labyrinth.net.au)) Kris would concur for as a child he saw the *Simpsons* as a cartoon show, now as a young adult he believes it is really an intellectual show.

The *Simpsons* writers and creators do attempt to bring to light moral situations such as vegetarianism. In the episode where Lisa becomes a vegetarian we learn about pro-animals rights, human cruelty/destruction towards our planet, and violence towards animals. Most TV shows are deadest or clumsiest when trying to lecture its audience but not the *Simpsons*. Rosenberg (1995) says that they neither lose their sense of humor nor blunt appetite for wicked satire. This show is cleverly written, keeps up to date information on our media/politics and delivers a creative and informative half-hour program. It is obvious why PBS’s men enjoy this program for stated before they want to analyze and understand every form popular culture has to offer.

MPS proved to me that they had their own style and individuality just like the latter two schools. The only discrepancy was that as stated in the methodology section I only had one male participant out of a possible fifteen. This made it difficult to determine which forms of popular culture the average high school boy liked. Below is the list of films, musicians/groups and TV show selections.

Q.9 What is your favorite movie, musician/group and TV show?

	Movie	Musician	TV Show
Zoey	Exocrist	Ludicrous	Passions
Mary	Shawskank Redemption	Snoop/ Two Poc	Boston Public
Spike	Carrie (original)	Ripcords	Trauma: Life in the ER
Plaid	Beetlejuice/ Swingers/ 3000 miles to Graceland	Meteors	N/A
Patrick	Rocky Horror Picture Show/ A.I./ Moulin Rouge	Madonna	Buffy the Vampire Slayer/ Friends
Tara	X-Men/ Centerstage/ That Old Feeling	Nsync/ Westlife	As the World Turns/ Buffy the Vampire Slayer

For MPS the important elements to a good film must have the following, an engaging storyline, romance, unpredictability, suspense, complexity, good cinematography, originality, and excellent visual effects. Patrick searches for originality and good lyrics when it comes to musicals. for he is very picky and demands a lot from a film. *Moulin Rouge* was the answer for Patrick. He wanted a modern musical that was stunning and delightful. He thought that the music was amazing, the costumes were beautiful and the visual atmosphere was astounding. Murray (date unknown) believes that *Moulin Rouge* is a, “vivid assault on the senses from the opening to the final credits. The movie’s breathtaking costumes and vibrant production numbers invade your mind and fill your eyes with luscious, sensuous treats”. ([www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com)) This movie is about the story within a story like Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer’s night dream*, where the plot is about love. It is simply, uncomplicated and beautifully written. The truth about musicals is that it has usually about 20 minutes of story packed into one and a half-hours, which could generally be summed up in less than five words. Yet, it is through the



elaborate dance scenes, convincing emotions and modern songs that bring the movie to life.

MPS informed me that of all the forms of popular culture they liked music the best because of its accessibility. Music for them has to have the following, love songs, killer beat, catchy tune, good lyrics, and audience participation. Wenzel (1999) says that people love fast, catchy tunes that stay in your head. If the song lasts longer than three months it then becomes a part of your life forever etched in your heart, soul and mind. This is very true for Zoey told me that her sweet hip-hop song reminds her of her boyfriend.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was originally a B-rated cheesy horror/comedy movie that did not receive much acclamation. Yet, Joss Whedon writer and producer decided to create a primetime television version which has been extremely successful and has quite a cult following. The stories are incredible, the characters are interesting and every year they just get better. Patrick and Tara say they adore this TV show. Patrick finds this show to be deeply profound about life and death. Tara notes that *Buffy* is a great role model, for she is independent, courageous, strong, and can take care of herself. Fudge (unknown date) states that, "Buffy was explicitly conceived as a feminist reimagining of the horror genre: screenwriter/TV producer Joss Whedon has said in interviews that his very inspiration for Buffy came from years of watching horror movies in which bubbleheaded blondes wandered into dark alleys and got murdered by some creature". ([www.bitchmagazine.com](http://www.bitchmagazine.com)) *Buffy* has become the poster girl for girl mass media/culture throughout our decade due mostly to her marketability.

Though meant for entertainment purposes only, movies and TV shows do have an obligation to its audience as informers, teachers and role models. Like the latter two forms, musicians need to be accountable for their appearance and lyrics. Young adults learn first by seeing, then by doing. Therefore, they need to be aware of the affect they have on our youth and to take some responsibility for their actions. Teen's role models are popular cultural icons and so they need to understand the severity and sensitivity of the issue. Parents and teachers also play a smaller role in the upbringing of our future generation by teaching them to be aware of life's deception and how the rules of the dominant society operate.

*"No, because you see it everywhere. It's already in like the school within the students' individually you know, and I think if it was anymore, it would just be like, where could you get a break. For people who aren't into that they wouldn't have a place, it would just be unfair". (Interview with Max; from PBS, Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001)*

*"Well, you can't say I mean it depends on how popular culture would influence the curriculum. I mean if you are teaching using with reference to elements of popular culture then that's, I think, I have no objections with that because then there's sort of a referral to the world we're living in". (Interview with Kilgore; from PBS, Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001)*

The final question asked to students was should popular culture become a part of the curriculum. Popular culture plays an intricate role in students' and teachers' lives everyday and in every possible way. All the students adhered to the ideology that teachers should transform their lectures in order to obtain the attention of its target audience. Most students admitted that every individual person learns in a different way, therefore teachers have an obligation to fulfill the needs of their students in order to be successful. Most students viewed the concept of integrating popular cultural mediums such as movies, books, TV shows, to have a positive and negative influence. They did not however, comprehend that by learning about popular culture they will learn about

becoming knowledgeable consumers, become less ignorant about advertising ploys/manipulations, and succeed as citizens within the dominant society.

PGS students had an abundance to say about whether popular culture should play a role in the school curriculum. Most agreed, one disagreed and one was undecided. Crista and Dayn felt that it is important to learn about popular culture in school but they did not want to have its belief forced upon them. Jen like Kilgore said that it would be a good idea because, "they need to adapt to the real world and not just to the world the school has built for them". (PGS, Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001) Amanda thinks that popular culture should be allowed as references in lectures and as evidence in papers, project or presentations. Sonia was the undecided vote for she waivered between the positive and negative effects of popular culture and worried about the outcome for students. Finally, Ruby like Max stated that popular culture was not needed due to its surplus outside of school. She says that school is for education and that hobbies should be left for the home.

PBS boys had there own preconceived notions when it came to popular culture in school. Kris agreed with Ruby and Max that popular culture already has too much influence outside of school, and thus do not feel the need or see a point in having it in the school curriculum. Italy and Lenix both agree that by analyzing and criticizing popular culture they can become less ignorant. It would also be beneficial when attempting to understand school subjects if they used popular culture as references. Soatome had a different perception on why it should not be allowed in the school curriculum. First, he believes popular culture to be too flexible and that it would cause problems because not

one person enjoys the same thing at the same time. Lastly, people would be ostracized by popular culture if they do not enjoy or take interest in its plethora of forms.

MPS students were direct in stating that teachers need to figure out a way to make their students more alert. Mary Jane says it is important to discuss popular culture because it interests the class. She continues, "it might make it more interesting and make people pay more attention, if we actually had something to catch our attention in the first place". (MPS, Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001) Zoey would concur with her because she thinks that by incorporating popular cultural mediums in class it would make the learning process more enjoyable. Tara and Patrick both admit that popular culture is just one tool that should be used in the classroom for they feel that there would be better class participation, higher test scores, and it would be without a doubt, fascinating. Spike agrees with Crista and Dayn's philosophy that it would be good to use popular culture in the classroom activities so long as it is not manipulatory. Plaid agrees with Lenix's notion that a balanced combination of both text and popular culture can yield good results.

The majority of students interviewed wanted their teachers to hear their plea for a new course curriculum and teachers are listening, some have even begun to implement popular cultural forms as productive learning tools in the classroom. For example, Lenix says that his economics teacher showed them the movie *The Boiler Room* and Plaid from MPS says her enriched English class gets to view movies that originated as books. At PGS they watch films on social issues in order to tap into the real world. Besides these examples, all three schools have some form of media literacy or popular cultural course that students have the option of taking. Finally, it is becoming evermore clear that

both teachers and students enjoy popular cultural forms as tools and as valuable sources of knowledge.

### **Summary**

This chapter demonstrates the students' responses to the questions asked to them concerning their preferences in popular cultural forms, in particular, films, television and music. Their options in each of these and their consumption or involvement in terms of time and money spent in these activities was discussed. In examining these responses we can see that popular culture must have an important impact on students' learning and experiences in the school environment. In the following chapter I briefly summarize the findings which confirm the argument made by researchers in this area of study, that the school curriculum should include different popular cultural forms.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

I have discussed how popular culture influences youth sub-culture and how it plays a role in the school environment. Now I would like to note the extent of student participation in popular culture. Rushkoff (1999) states that students are the largest consumers of goods and services. They are also used in product testing by marketers in order to label the top products that students enjoy. This way marketers learn how some advertisers, more than others, call the attention of its target audience. Therefore, students play a vital role in choosing what needs to be done so that they take notice of old/new products. Furthermore, marketers and advertisers give them a voice which empowers our youth to think they are intelligent consumers.

There was not much difference between the private and public school students when it came to their responses to the questions posed. Three answers were the same for both private schools while two were the same for the female gender. This demonstrates that all the schools either had similar interests or displayed individuality when it came to tastes and opinions. Further investigation would be required before stating whether private schools and/or public schools succumb more readily to popular cultural resources. Gender should also be studied to see how female and male teenagers differ in their choices of popular cultural forms in which they participate.

I believe that popular culture is the milieu in which students function in. Thus, it only makes sense that popular cultural forms be implemented into the school curriculum and in classroom activities. Giroux and Simon (1989) adhere to critical education

through the use of popular cultural forms which empower the oppressed by giving students back their voice. An environment that no longer silences them allows teachers to view their students' pre-existing knowledge, skills and abilities. The pedagogy of possibility opens the door to a new way of thinking and creating a new canonical text.

Schwoch, White, and Reilly (1992) see popular culture as a mode of possibility which is rich in information and is universally significant. When students are able to express their experiences and ideas it is a sign of democracy. This also allows for the involvement of students in the transformation of social inequities and injustices because they learn the language of resistance and receive citizenship.

Finally, Witkin (1994) notes that by using popular culture as a learning tool in the classroom we could create a center for critical thinking. Witkin also believes that students are curious in nature about popular cultural forms and that it is this interest that can change the learning process. Obedience, respect and mutual admiration will take place between teacher and student because of this shift in dynamics.

It is becoming more evident that popular culture is being used in the school curriculum and in classroom activities. Whether it is popular culture that influences the curriculum or the students who bring forth their pre-existing knowledge into the classroom, both teachers and students are reaping the benefits.

### **Suggestions for further research**

There are so many ideas, topics and themes that can be discussed and here are a few.

- 1) Do teachers agree with the implementation of popular cultural materials in the course curriculum? Is it feasible? Should teachers in their teacher training learn how to incorporate popular culture into the school curriculum? Do teachers want to take the time to learn about popular culture and can they really incorporate it into classroom activities? Teachers may be more inclined to use popular cultural materials if it would make the learning process more efficient and enjoyable.
- 2) Has there been an evolution in popular cultural discourse? Have only the mediums changed with the times or has popular culture just been restyled? (What we should seek to comprehend is if there is a correlation between for example, the *effects* of violence on youth in the 1900s in comparison to youth in 2002). Research should be conducted on how debutante balls and prom dances are the same thing, just re-modified. It is all about the *effect* or *feeling* or *results*; have they really changed? This can be studied using social functions like school sports events and dances as a backdrop.
- 3) Does popular culture induce insecurities, embarrassment etc? and Why are young girls in high school ashamed of their body sizes, images and looks? This topic arose during my interview process with the young women of PGS and it troubled me to think that these concerns still exist today and might be getting worse for young women. When we look at fashion magazines, ads on billboards and models we see what men want or at least what popular culture denotes about men's desires. This is



why I think it is important to study this from a feminist perspective on sexism. We also need to look at what young men think about the “twiggy” syndrome and so forth.

- 4) Popular Culture has been accused of promoting aggression, violence, and teaching profanity to young men. But are these forms really caused by popular culture or are they just a product of our society’s dark ways? This topic came to me when I started to see news segments about fighting and killings over Pokeman trading cards in school. Do Kung-fu movies make our young men want to emulate them? Do young women like aggressive boys and do they think that rebels are still considered cool? What about physical abuse by aggressive men towards their girlfriends? Is popular culture to blame? At what point are parents and teachers to be blamed for these behaviors? This study is important because it may provide answers to this myth or urban legend that popular culture is to blame for society’s ills.
- 5) Do students really find popular cultural icons to be role models? This idea came to me when I read a study conducted a few years ago asking high school students who they felt were real role models. This study was conducted by Weber and Mitchell (1995) at the elementary and high school level. We ought to investigate if teens want to emulate these role models and why they think that these people are role models. What are the characteristics of a role model? Do role models aid students in discovering their individuality? Do schools, peer pressure and popular cultural influences allow students to be individuals? When studying role models we need to look at their appearances, behaviors and the like, to see if they are a positive or a negative influence.

- 6) Does popular culture play a role in students' decisions, to join a sub-culture? Do students really have a voice in what youth sub-cultural group they join or is it teachers, society, peer groups who influence their choices? How does popular cultural stereotype portray different sub-cultures? Due to hierarchies that are visible in the school environment I felt it is equally important to understand this phenomena of classifying students. Why and how do teachers and peer groups classify? Are they similar or different in their methods? Should there really exist a hierarchy and how does it affect youth esteem, behavior and identity? This would be a good time to use films and TV shows that influence and give credence to this concept.

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A

#### Merchants of Cool

This video presented by the Public Broadcasting Station (PBS), interviews individuals from marketers to, executive directors, writers, media critics, etc. to see what is cool among teens today and how do industries find this information. Rushkoff (1999) takes us into the world of teens from subcultures to mid-rifs to mooks. In an effort to explain what is cool, why is it cool, and what makes teens want to be cool! Rushkoff narrates, "They want to be cool, they are impressionable, and they have the cash". (PBS video) Thus, begins the journey into uncharted territory.

The 150 billion-dollar dream has evolved over the past 10 years, where teenagers have large quantities of disposable income and spend it on numerous products. Moreover, this makes teens the largest consumers in America: teens spend roughly, on average, 100 billion-dollar per year and force their parents to spend an additional 50 billion-dollars on them. Teens not only have more money; they also have more say on how to spend it.

Parents have an innate feeling to please their teens in order to keep them home, safe, or buy their love. Rushkoff calls this "guilt money" when parents are unable or unwilling to spend time with their teens; therefore, parents give their teens use of their credit cards, chequebooks or cash. It's not surprising that teenagers today truly run the market.

The History channel displays anthropologists studying cultures in order to verify, analyze, and understand their way of life. This concept rings true for the study of teens,

which is conducted not only by marketers but also by 'cool hunters'. Marketers pay teens to join focus groups in order to find out what's new, what's still cool and so forth. Marketers need to find this information out because it is worth billions of dollars to different industries such as *Sprite* or *Nike*. Marketing ads seen on TV, billboards, magazines, computers and so on are there for the sheer purpose to sell to teens. Rushkoff (1999) says, 75% of teens have a TV in their room, 1/3 of teens own a personal computer and by the time teens turn 18 years old they will have seen 10 million commercial advertisements.

If you understand teenagers needs, wants, language etc., you can create a better product for teens to want to buy. Therefore, everything needs to be 'in their terms' this is where *Look-Look Agency* comes in handy. This team of 20 to 30 year old women who were trend setters and formally cool students becomes hunters for the latest fads, clothing, hairstyles ... they are known as "Cool Hunters". What do they look for? They search for a certain type of personality and a certain kind of player, they look for the cool kids, the 20% who are trend setters and who can influence others. Cool Hunters want teens who look for inspiration outside their backyard, who are early adapters and who are leaders within their own groups. They may be difficult to find but once found the Cool Hunters take pictures, interview them and try to interest the teens in what the Agency is doing. Companies pay *Look-Look Agency* very handsomely somewhere around the \$20,000 dollar range to gain access to their Internet site in order to unravel the mysteries of teens.

What does this do to teen culture if the marketers use their own ideas and thoughts to get them to buy? Well, Rushkoff says that it's a circle, for the Cool Hunters

find the newest and coolest, then sell it to industries. Thus, by discovering cool you force it to move on to the next greatest and fashionable thing. Is it not also killing teenager's identities, freedom of expression, and individuality?

What happens when teens see marketers as the enemy? Well, they begin to market their product to teens without seeming so, because they become cool themselves. An example would be *Sprite* who started in the early 1990s with the ad 'choose for yourself, don't be told what to drink.' They wanted teens to know that *Sprite* understood what teens were all about.

Marketers say that the teen market is seen as a massive empire that they are trying to colonize. Consequently, they are perceived as invaders who use their weapons of books, Internet, movies, TV, music, in order to conquer. That is how marketers, critics and so on describe the present situation of business.

*MTV* struggled for a while until they decided to create *Total Request Live*. *MTV* viewing then skyrocketed when teens had more involvement in their TV viewing. *MTV* even began to visit viewers in order to get a better demographic understanding of their audience. Rushkoff (1999) said that *MTV's* audience is mostly white males therefore: *MTV* interviews spend the day with normal teenage boys. The researcher for *MTV* asks the young men questions about dating, parents, stress, thoughts, wants, needs and desires. *MTV*, after researching for many months came up with the "mook" concept. The mook is a crude flatulent daredevil who appealed to many teenage boys. *Tom Green*, *Howard Stern*, images of Daytona beach spring parties were considered forms of mookism that entertained, shocked, and grossed audiences everywhere and, at the same time, teens could not get enough. *MTV* believed that they had stumbled upon boys as consumers and



what sold. Rushkoff (1999) says, “you have to listen, think what they’re thinking, know what they want, so you could give them what you want them to have”. (PBS video)

Among 18 to 24 years old males, wrestling is the hottest thing going. It is seen as the most popular form of entertainment in America. The real question is why? Wrestlers say it is because of the ‘pop’ element of wrestling which can be defined as the big shock or surprise that happens in the ring when audiences scream ‘OH!’ or ‘WOO!’ and cry for more. Teen boys enjoy being able to get drawn into the world of violence, makeup and costumes. In the ring, rebellion reigns and choreographed fights rule.

What about girls? Well, Rushkoff says that they get sucked into the realm of mid-rifs (exposed upper waist to hips). These young pre-pubescent adolescents are ‘supposed to be empowered’ by the likes of *Brittany Spears* to flaunt what you got even if you do not know why you are doing it! Sex sells and talent agents are always looking for the next youngest and newest mid-rif to exploit. It is easy to exploit young teenage girls especially when thousands of them compete every year for talent agents at local talent searches, all between the ages of 11 to 18 years of age and all wanting to be the next star.

Besides teenage rebellion, marketers also found that teen shows and movies relating to the one topic of interest, SEX, gets high rating from teens. Why? Well, they are confronted with it everyday, and thus, are consumed by sex and talk about sex, states Suzanne Danielles Executive Producer of *Warner Brothers* (WB). WB attempts to handle the situation with the utmost respect, moral and ethically understanding. Shows like *7<sup>th</sup> Heaven* attempts too not only introduce moral issues but also the choices one has. Teens do not always realize they have choices when it comes to sex; for example, *Dawson’s Creek* teens are riddled with questions of sex and sexuality but again not all the teens on

the show are copulating. WB realizes its target audience and responsibility to teach teens about life choices, sex, and to have respect for oneself and one's partner. I believe they cover the issues with as much honesty and morality as possible.

Finally, we ask ourselves who is copying whom when it comes to the images that are sold to teens to purchase products? The giant feedback loop is a perfect example of the 'copy cat syndrome'. What happens is that, "the media watches kids and then sells them an image of themselves; then kids watch those images and aspire to be that mook or mid-rif girl on their TV set". (PBS video) Consequently, marketers and TV producers become superhero's in teenagers' eyes and teachers, parents, and adults are seen as nerds, non-authoritative, losers because they do not understand. The symbiotic relationship between media and teens is ever-present in all forms of popular culture and is viewed by teens as comforting due to the nature that marketers 'get' what teens want, need, and desire. The truism then becomes does consumerism allow teenagers to grow and to find new ways to express themselves? Do teens have anything that is just theirs alone? Only time will tell.