

2013

U.K. youth television: moral panic and the process of U.S. adaptation in *Skins*

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

Thesis

**U.K. YOUTH TELEVISION:
MORAL PANIC AND THE PROCESS OF U.S. ADAPTATION IN SKINS**

by

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B.A., State University of New York—Potsdam, 2010

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

2013

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ABSTRACT

U.K. youth television increasingly gains popularity in the U.S. as international format sales and online viewing increases. Both U.S. and U.K. youth television are produced in an environment of moral panic over youth. Youth programs in the U.K. address the moral panic of “Broken Britain” and create an alternative narrative about youth. This liberating aspect of U.K. youth programs is migrating to the U.S. in the form of shows like *Skins* and *Misfits*. The original versions of these programs are very popular, and when these programs are adapted, they remain popular but lose their unique stylistic qualities and their alternative political messages about youth. This thesis examines how the process of international adaptation homogenizes U.K. youth television, making it acceptable to censorship groups in the U.S. This process affects the quality of U.S. adaptations of U.K. youth television by removing the liberating stylistic and subcultural aspects of the original program that allow U.K. youth television to address and combat moral panic over youth. Ultimately, although U.S. youth audiences would benefit from alternative narratives to that of moral panic, until U.S. producers find a way to translate the innovative stylistic and subcultural aspects of U.K. youth programs, adaptations of U.K. youth programs will not be able to provide this alternative. Incorporating generic tropes and broadcasting on cable networks may allow these adaptations to fulfill their potential as sources of alternative narratives about youth.

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Introduction

Cultural Symbiosis: U.S. and U.K. Youth Television Address Moral Panic

In the U.S., during the 1990s, a period of moral panic about the state of youth reached its peak. This moral panic was constructed by an array of stories shared by many adult experts, such as journalists, politicians, educational policy makers, and academic researchers. The panic used high-profile events involving youth, such as the Columbine Massacre, youth drug and gang wars, and provocative subcultures like the club kids of the early 90s, to support the negative narrative surrounding youth. Karen Sternheimer (2006) characterizes this negative attitude about youth using a 1999 U.S. poll issued by the Public Agenda Foundation around the time of Columbine. This poll showed that “seventy-one percent of the general public described teenagers as rude, wild, or irresponsible” (1). Many events related to these wild youth cultures have been reduced to dramatic and/or cautionary educational storylines by fictional media targeting teens since the peak of this panic in the 1990s. Few of these media representations offered sympathetic depictions of the youth issues that the moral panics were built on, but now a similar moral panic in the U.K. is helping to increase the demand for quality representations of teen life in the U.S.

The United States and the United Kingdom have long been considered cultural cousins, partially due to their lack of language barriers but largely because of their entwined histories. These nations share a similar history of the development of youth culture and the attitudes this culture engenders in adults. Sometimes these similarities offer opportunities to learn the truth behind media-constructed moral panics surrounding

youth. For instance, recent political rhetoric in the United Kingdom resulted in a panic about youth that parallels the concerns of the United States in the 1990s.

David Cameron, the current prime minister of the United Kingdom, coined the term “Broken Britain” in the year 2007 to describe the morally questionable situation of youth in the country. The “Broken Britain” label encompasses many major issues that center on youth, and the media has responded with panic. The perception that Britain was “broken” reached its peak with the 2011 London Riots, which included many disenfranchised youth and minorities. However, even earlier than this event, the U.K.’s experimental television industry addressed issues associated with “Broken Britain.” Channel 4 and other networks responded by creating programs that established the new “Broken Britain” genre of youth programming. This genre focuses on teen issues using stylistically experimental techniques, such as point-of-view camera with subjective effects and satirical postmodern elements that comment on the phenomenon of “Broken Britain.” These programs provide an alternative narrative to that which underlies moral panic. This alternative narrative has become popular with U.S. audiences as well because it is largely absent from youth programming produced in the U.S. Broken Britain youth programs comment on current events and youth issues to subvert this political rhetoric. These programs establish a safe position from which young viewers can question political authorities and understand their own identities. These programs offer teen audiences sympathetic and relatable representations of the “politicized youth issues” that contribute to moral panic. In order to understand the significant effect the parallel moral panics of the United States and the United Kingdom had on the media targeting teen viewers,

researchers must review the history of ideological perceptions of youth in both countries.

This chapter will detail the shared educational, journalistic media, and fictional media history of youth in the U.S. and the U.K. This history illuminates the media process that supports moral panic about youth in these countries. The negative perceptions of youth that result from this process may be combated through the creation of alternative visions of youth in fictional media. Currently, the genre of Broken Britain youth programs that are being translated for U.S. audiences offers a blueprint for producers to create programs that combat the process of narrative replication that solidifies negative perceptions of youth in the U.S. and U.K.

History: Educational Systems and Youth Transitions

The state educational systems of both the U.S. and the U.K. depend upon the process of selectivity to organize students. The state educational system in the United Kingdom based its system on that of the United States, which separates students by skill level. This skill level typically relates in some way to their class status. Anthony Crosland (2010), a politician and researcher of state comprehensive education in the U.K., discusses why selectivity is present even in a state system. Crosland states “comprehensive schools have not, as many feared (and some hoped) that they would, mixed children of different abilities in the same class, but have adopted a system of testing and differentiation designed to produce homogenous classes” (152). This system of differentiation mimics the United States’ system, which separates children into tracks. This system reinforces the divisions of class by predetermining the social and intellectual abilities of children. The lack of vocational studies combined with the method of

tracking children, especially in the United States, contributes to the number of students from low-income households who do not complete the basic level of education. Class and privilege define negative perceptions of “disadvantaged” youth who are often more inclined to vocational pursuits because of their experience in a low educational track.

The hidden curriculum of moral education also maintains the educational divisions based indirectly on class and privilege. Educational researcher Edgar Z. Friedenberg (1970) presents an early case against the class divisions that the hidden curriculum promotes, whether purposeful or inadvertent. Friedenberg lays out the benefits of adult control this curriculum creates. He states “the experience of schooling and its routines develops in the young and malleable the skills and the disposition to fill the social roles that exist in the status-system of the present society, while weakening by anxiety and attrition their power to conceive of alternative social arrangements. Positively, this is called socialization” (19). Friedenberg points to some of the mechanisms by which schools create moral education, such as the schedule and arranging of children by status, part of the tracking system that Crosland also refers to. Some schools require volunteer work and in-school leisure like organized sports and after-school clubs in order to prepare youth for serving in class positions. These mechanisms keep children under the control of adult supervision as often as possible.

Schools serve as an alternative to parental control, and intend to limit youth leisure time. Historian Jon Savage (2007), author of *Teenage*, a history of youth, argues that despite the level of control that schools exert over teens, the highest levels of moral panics surrounding youth often occur during the periods with the lowest drop-out rates,

such as war time. This paradox indicates that school dropout rates do not correlate to moral panic. Instead, the overall conditions of the culture, especially during periods of crisis like war, define the level of moral panic surrounding youth. In the current era, control of leisure is still one goal of compulsory education. Peter Dwyer and Johanna Wyn (2001) discuss the reasons that adults currently perceive youth leisure as being out of control. They state that the new generation is most interested in what they call “choice biographies” (91). Dwyer and Wyn assessed the reaction of several researchers to their youth subjects, determining that researchers have struggled to understand the fractured career and leisure paths of the current generation. One researcher they cite, du Bois-Reymond, stated that “one of the ‘most disturbing’ findings was that ‘young people do not like adulthood’.” Dwyer and Wyn explain that “What [du Bois-Reymond] was referring to was [young peoples’] preference for blending different aspects of their lives-- study, work, personal relationships and leisure interests, in contrast to their parents” (2001, 94). Du Bois-Reymond’s comments represent adult fears of this generation’s interest in the freedom of choice. In adults’ present understanding of youth, only linear models of the transition to adulthood are acceptable.

Dwyer and Wyn point to economic circumstances as an explanation for youths’ mixed lifestyles rather than the presumed commitment to leisure over work that most researchers discuss. Instead, they claim these scattered patterns are a survival mechanism. Dwyer and Wyn stress the importance of “warning against exaggerating or romanticizing elements of ‘choice’ in the life circumstances of a generation that is faced with the twofold pressures of a collapsed youth labor market and increasing demands

from educational credentialism” (2001, 91). Educational credentialism demands that there is a universal or “inclusive” completion of schooling through the high school level in order to compete in the job market. When youth are unable to fulfill this inclusive completion policy, they are often without work due to the currently unpredictable job market. Therefore, leisure and other private aspects of life become more important. This shift of priorities is one result of the educational and political inequalities of class on youth. Youth use leisure to cope with the inequalities in their lives. Overall, educational policy reinforces the inequalities that youth suffer in their everyday lives, and these inequalities directly reflect the societal issues that cause moral panic.

Moral Panic: From Politics to Media

Moral panics over youth magnify and intensify the problems of society as a whole, focusing the blame for an environment of drug use, violence, and sexuality on youth during times of crisis. Sociological researcher Christine Griffin (1993) explains that “‘Youth’ is still treated as a key indicator of the state of the nation itself: it is expected to reflect the cycle of booms and troughs in the economy; shifts in cultural values over sexuality, morality, and family life; and changes in class relations, concepts of nationhood, and in occupational structures” (9). During the 1990s, many of these aspects of life changed significantly in both the U.S. and the U.K. Teenage issues reflected the problems that adults faced during this period. For example, at that time in the U.S. and the U.K. a discussion about the role of single mothers emerged alongside concerns about increases in teenage pregnancy. Many researchers and parents perceived that teenage pregnancy led to single motherhood. The AIDS epidemic also renewed the

panic over adolescent sexuality outside of the heterosexual standard. The parallel between adult societal issues (single motherhood and AIDS) and youth issues (teenage pregnancy and adolescent sexuality) is not coincidental; moral panic concentrates larger societal concerns on specific sites of crisis, such as youth. By investigating policy decisions and prominent political issues in the decades leading up to the 1990s, the prejudices that evolved into panic can be identified.

Political decisions centering on youth in the 1980s acted as a precursor to the popular moral panic that swept media outlets in the 1990s. Prejudicial attitudes towards youth grew rapidly during this conservative decade. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (2012), the author of *Childism*, stated that in the 1980s “Youths were described as domestic terrorists who carried guns to school, conducted drive-by shootings on a daily basis, dealt drugs, joined terrorist organizations, and generally ran amok” (34). Similar concerns about youth unemployment and its effects on youth leisure in the U.K. demonstrate the way that concerns affecting both adults and youth were confined to discussions of youth problems, making teenagers targets for the conservative policies of the New Right. Griffin explains that policy decisions addressing youth unemployment during this administration treated youth as the main concern to mask the effects of their decisions (1993, 32). Focusing on the symptomatic problems of youth allowed the New Right to redirect the unhappiness of the nation, in the face of unemployment and welfare cuts that were the result of their policies, onto youth as a whole. This process of refracting negative perceptions of the government onto youth issues reinforces the societal prejudice against youth as domestic terrorists that Young-Bruehl characterizes. The New Right, as well as many governments

before and after, used research projects that they themselves funded to search for a specific result that supported their policy decisions (Griffin, 1993, 30). Despite the similar political environment that triggered the moral panics about youth in the U.S. and the U.K. during the 1990s, there are several important differences between each country's developing moral panic.

The rhetoric of "Broken Britain" that appeared in the U.K. differs in several important ways from the U.S. panic over youth, including the breadth and timing of the issues involved. The U.S. panic over youth drew direct comment as a trend only later by a minority of researchers because the panic reflected an abstract phenomenon. Yet several prominent incidents in the course of this panic affected political agendas. For instance, the 2000 presidential election used the Columbine Massacre to draw issues of gun control, school safety, and media censorship to the fore. One thing is certain about this panic; its effect was evident in media coverage of the massacre. James Garbarino (1999), an expert on youth violence, wrote for *Time* magazine that the lives of young killers, like those at Columbine, "start with abuse, neglect and emotional deprivation at home. Add the effects of racism, poverty, the drug and gang cultures, and it is not surprising that in a violent society like ours, damaged children become deadly teens." Garbarino's generalizations collapse concerns about a disparate variety of youth issues upon concerns about teens turning "deadly," a very rare outcome.

The process of generalizing youth issues and focusing on the exceptional was common of the moral panic of the 1990s. Charles Acland (1995), writing at the height of this period, provides a good description of the moral panic in the U.S. He states, "the

ample public belief in the increasingly violent nature of American youth must be understood as a felt crisis ... an 'affective epidemic' as one that consists of a fetishized mobile site that is 'invested with values disproportionate to their actual worth,' where in addition to ideological meaning, there is a 'daily economy of saturated panics'" (8). In this process, media invest youth with societal significance but youths' individual circumstances are obscured, turning teenagers into the object of societal problems. The fetishization of youth problems becomes an everyday source of entertainment in media. However, transforming these youth issues into entertainment dramatizes them to appeal to media users' emotions. As a result, these media outlets build an economy of panic. This panic is affective rather than effective because emotional appeals can be abused to win support for ideological arguments. The victims of Columbine become lost youth, justifying a need for increased gun control and school security. Significantly, the moral panic over youth subsided in the U.S. following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Considering Young-Bruehl's description of the 1980s attitude toward youth as domestic terrorists it is not surprising that a large-scale terrorist attack supplanted the media's focus on the internal threat of youth. Moral panic about youth increased after the 1999 Columbine Massacre but in the early 2000s the media shifted its focus away from youth problems to cover the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. Young-Bruehl describes the ways that the new terrorist threat mirrored the concerns of the old. She states "much of the anxiety that has developed around sexual abuse and [Satanic Ritual Abuse] was rechanneled into a panic over terrorism following the attacks of September

11. The attackers struck commentators as a new kind of Satanist— ... politicized pedophiles” (2012, 212). The terrorists’ disregard for typical separations between civilian and soldier populations in the attack struck many as an attack on innocence, much like sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is a youth problem in which the concern about teenage victims is often diminished to face the arguably more important challenge of protecting younger children. Regardless, Young-Bruehl’s argument shows that the terrorists of September 11 were the new scapegoats for U.S. political problems. The new threat may have allowed youth to become less prominent victims of political opportunism, but diverting the focus from youth also stunted the national conversation about youth issues. Recent cases in the U.S., such as the Trayvon Martin murder and Sandy Hook school shooting, spurred a reassessment of youth issues at the national level. However, “Broken Britain,” which began in the 2000s, continues this conversation within a more definitive national context regarding youth.

“Broken Britain” is a term coined by conservative Prime Minister David Cameron to discuss the general decline in traditional values that is most evident in the U.K.’s youth. This term applies broadly to life in the U.K. However, as Kathy Evans’ (2011) review of the recent policy nicknamed “Big Society” shows, this rhetoric often has the most important impact on youth. Evans discusses how the “Government’s narrative ... suggest(s) the need for named and overt inclusion of children and young people within plans for building local community and citizenship, precisely because of how often they are excluded ... or more negatively, perceived as a threat to their communities’ sense of peace and safety” (168). Preoccupation with youth as a political category bridges

disparate areas of Cameron's political work throughout his time in office. However, treating youth as a political category allows government officials to appeal to adults' fear of youth and to use that fear to create support for their own political agenda.

Evans' comments point to the way that inclusion of youth in policies can act as a control mechanism to prevent them from becoming threats. Indeed, many other sweeping rhetorical gestures enacted on behalf of Cameron include youth to remind adults of teenagers' questionable nature. For example, Cameron created the "hug a hoodie" campaign to extend compassion to "hoodies," the most commonly referenced teenage threat in U.K. culture. However, by including the street label of "hoodie" in the title of his campaign, Cameron supports the negative connotations of the term and contributes to panic. The ease with which "Broken Britain" policies targeting youth can be identified makes this rhetoric a useful context in which to start a national conversation about youth. As such, media representations of "Broken Britain" have been instrumental in illuminating the effects of this rhetoric and its significant political consequences, unlike U.S. media that address youth moral panic.

Journalistic and News Media: Selling Sensational Panic

Fictional media representations of youth issues that cause moral panic often conform to the narrative expectations set by their nonfictional counterparts. Each type of representation, from factual journalistic accounts to fictional films and television programs, uses a different set of narrative conventions to portray the problem of youth. Peter Hitchens (2010) describes some of the common journalistic techniques that distort evidence of moral panic within the "Broken Britain" rhetoric. The guiding principal of

journalistic techniques is that “events, by themselves, have no meaning. They have to be connected with a wider pattern” (15). In this case, “Broken Britain” acts as a guiding narrative pattern that connects many disparate events. Other techniques that Hitchens mentions support this pattern, such as the media’s emphasis on reporting sensational crimes involving youth. Acland also discusses the implications of limiting news stories to spectacular events. He states “the crisis is a *spectacular* one, having to do with representation and performance. It is good magazine and newspaper copy, it makes for popular reading and moviegoing, and it is the topic of policy debates in public offices. The politics of youth has to do with the politics of spectacle” (1995, 20). Entertainment media, especially fictional genres, dramatize youth stories, increasing their cultural importance as this entertainment format also increases the stories’ sensational aspects. Acland points to the process of replication these stories go through, from one genre and form of media to another until the narrative becomes a popular fact. Media users disregard the spectacular quality of these stories after this process is complete. These events are no longer understood as exceptions or even narratives but rather real-life examples of politically questionable youth behavior. Politicians and citizens inscribe these stories into public action, inevitably affecting youth in their everyday life. By looking at specific examples of real-life youth behavior, the process of narrative inscription can be reviewed.

Subcultures represent one real-life facet of youth that media associate with the spectacle of delinquent behavior. In the 1970s, subcultures became visually prominent symbols of youth’s subordinate political position, largely expressed through clothing.

Stuart Hall (2000) and the Birmingham School wrote the foundational text of subcultural theory, *Resistance Through Rituals*, to address the media's use of subcultural images to identify youth behavior. Hall states, "[Subculture] consists both of the materials available to the group for construction of subcultural identities (dress, music, talk), and of their contexts.... Journalistic treatments, especially, have tended to isolate *things*, at the expense of their use" (53). In the moral panics of the 1990s and 2000s, things, most notably clothing, symbolized deviant youth activity. To believe that clothing predicts behavior is simplistic, and yet there are numerous examples of clothing styles that are understood as deviant in journalistic constructions of events. For example, hoodies symbolize violent youth in both the U.S. and the U.K. The hoodie as a symbol of violent youth culture in "Broken Britain" resulted in thugs being labeled "hoodies" by popular newspapers and films. This symbol is featured in several films, including *Heartless* (Philip Ridley, 2009) and *Harry Brown* (Daniel Barber, 2009). The image of a hooded youth offender became so prominent that it crossed the Atlantic to play a role in the recent Trayvon Martin shooting.

After a neighborhood watch volunteer killed a harmless African-American youth, the media evoked the image of the hoodie as symbolic proof that the boy was doing something wrong. One FOX News reporter stated that "the hoodie Martin was wearing the night he was followed, shot and killed ... made him a suspicious looking 'gangsta wannabe,' and thus made him an obvious target for a suspicious neighborhood watch captain" (Zakarin, 2012). The connotations of gangster culture and suspicious youth behavior attached to this article of clothing are prevalent in both "Broken Britain" and

U.S. narratives of youth behavior. Positively, others in the media criticized this reporter for making assumptions that connected clothing to behavior. A positive response came from the basketball team, the Miami Heat, in Martin's hometown. The team tweeted pictures of themselves in hoodies as a tribute to the boy (Boren, 2012). This gesture offered a positive connotation to the image of the hoodie. However, images with simplistic connotations, like symbolic clothing, are easy to replicate across sensational and fictionalized genres of programming.

The spectacular quality of news stories means that media outlets benefit financially from the negative connotations of youth. As a result, the most visible parts of a subculture, which are also the parts that are labeled deviant, are often also the most profitable. In one chapter of *After Subculture*, author Keith Kahn-Harris (2004) discusses how media fail to differentiate between truly delinquent subsets of the heavy metal subculture and the everyday or "mundane" subsets. He states, "Extreme Metal is barely even known.... This is partially the result of much lower record sales than Heavy Metal, meaning that Extreme Metal rarely reaches the mass media" (110). The most extreme deviant behavior in the Metal subculture, including murder, occurs within Extreme Metal subculture, but because this style does not represent a mass cultural trend the deviancy of this group transfers to the less extreme portions of the subculture. The mundane aspects of metal subculture appear in *Skins*, a Broken Britain youth program that features youth in their last two years at a further education college. Metal-head Rich is the same as everyone else besides the music he enjoys and the clothes he wears, yet people are prejudiced against him. Kahn-Harris points to the media's underlying motivations that

initiate the subordination that Rich experiences. Sensational stories define public perception of subcultures, but only if those subcultures have enough financial and cultural capital to generate interest. Media users do not widely recognize the trend in profiting from youth deviancy, which creates a lack of media accountability.

Although the “Broken Britain” narrative has a direct label and the equivalent U.S. panic does not, these movements have many broad consequences that no societal institution has been made accountable for. The difficulty that researchers have pinpointing the effects of policies used to combat “Broken Britain” speaks to the broadness and overall ineffectualness of rhetorical strategy. For instance, Evans spends a page attempting to define “Big Society,” a policy broadly perceived as a reaction to “Broken Britain,” and ultimately states “The Big Society is many things to many departments, but rarely quite the *same* thing in each. [There are] three main broad agendas in which the term Big Society features — public service reform, active citizenship, and transparency and accountability” (2011, 165). Policies of such breadth admirably attempt to create widespread accountability, but they cause confusion at the level of enacted policy, and create unintended negative consequences for youth. For example, the “Big Society” project does not take into account the inequalities of class that will be maintained by localizing volunteer work. Many of Cameron’s engagements with media have resulted in similarly unanticipated consequences. Cameron’s other attempts to interest youth in politics, most notably the “hug a hoodie” campaign, have only made youth bigger targets of the media. Media attention can benefit youth but not when it reinforces the simplistic stories that are being told by the news media. Fictional

youth media should allow youth to consider perspectives outside of this adult moral panic about youth.

Fictional Youth Media: A Safe Space for Alternative Narratives?

In order to understand what Broken Britain youth programs do differently from most youth television to engage a youth audience, one must consider the limitations that affect the typically problematic representation of teens. Youth do not possess the ability to participate in the production process of youth programs and, as a result, these programs speak from an adult perspective about youth. Acland discusses the ways that film invokes the adult perspective to represent youth. He says “Two criteria determine the measure of a youth film’s authenticity: the extent to which a film *connects with youth*, being taken up as speaking with some resonance to or for youth; and the manner in which a film *cautions adults about youth*” (1995, 116). Because these films feature an adult perspective, not all of them will be appreciated by youth audiences. The adult perspective of these films speaks with the institutional authority of media, but youth audiences can still sense when these representations lack realistic relevance to youth. These films use similar conventions as the sensational news media, utilizing spectacular events and personalities to represent youth.

In television, the adult perspective is less obvious in the text, yet the structure and themes of youth television are often organized around the spectacular qualities of youth as perceived by adults. For instance, a large majority of youth television is built on the episodic approach, which uses each episode to deliver a moral lesson about delinquent youth, usually from a trusted adult. Even serialized youth dramas often use an episodic

structure to discuss specific issues, such as abortion. The episodic structure reinforces the “youth issues” approach to teen television that limits understanding of the difficulties of youth by proposing that youth delinquency has simple moral answers. The trusted adult enunciates its authority in youth television, and this authority characterizes youth as unable to take responsibility for their own problems.

The techniques of individualizing and moralizing about youth issues through an adult voice of authority alienate the youth audiences of U.S. youth programs. The individualization of youth problems allows sociologists to simplify the complexity of youth issues, and youth television replicates this process of justifying moralistic corrections to youth problems at the level of the individual. Individualizing approaches are largely psychological and distract from structural problems in society by treating each individual as a separate case rather than pinpointing the societal implications of these individual problems. Griffin indicates that the individualized approach contributes to policies that search for specific answers to support their cause. She states “The construction of the problem defined the nature of the solution, which lay at the level of the individual subject” (1993, 35). This perspective applies to television that uses stereotyping to address youth problems. Programs that focus on a subculture or youth issue predetermine the actions of their characters and what they will learn from their actions based on previous media representations and academic research. For example, *Degrassi*, a Canadian youth program that is popular in the U.S., discusses cutting as a problem that affects youth who have alcoholic parents and are attracted to gothic subcultures. The program proposes individual counseling as a solution for this behavior.

This program makes the issue of cutting one that is not resolved at the societal level but rather the personal level.

Broken Britain programs avoid these simplistic single-factor representations of youth problems and acknowledge that psychology cannot completely account for subjective experience. For instance, most of the youth featured in *Skins* drink and use drugs, often without comment from each other or even adults. Yet there is a storyline that addresses the negative effects of drug use without giving the audience a clear moral judgment. This storyline features a girl who hallucinates on mushrooms with her friends. Another girl intimidates and attacks her in the woods. The drugs alone cannot be seen as responsible for this action because drug use is a communal activity on the program. Indeed, the program shows the trauma of both the attacker and the victim, which makes both girls sympathetic. Broken Britain youth programs are also innovative because they feature institutions as structural devices to address common youth problems without ignoring their ideological importance.

The progressive techniques that Broken Britain youth programs use to change the typical structure of fictional youth programming reflect the aesthetic differences between U.S. and U.K. television. The problems that U.S. television faces when adapting programming from British television originate with differences between each country's typical television aesthetic. Even the British government's Department of Culture, Media, and Sports concluded that the general U.K. aesthetic was "too dark; too slow, unattractive; too gritty or socio-political" (Steemers, 2011, 9) to translate well on U.S. television. However, the perceived weaknesses of British programming, especially the

gritty and unattractive aesthetic and sociopolitical focus, apply well to U.S. youth programs that feature youth issues and a stylized but realistic aesthetic. The U.K. programs that have been translated focus on lower-class areas, such as Bristol, and primarily remain in institutional settings that are undermined by the poor quality of the image. The character-driven focus of these programs, unlike U.S. programs with a moral focus, allows the socio-political aspect of British television to show the problems that youth experience in these institutions from their own perspective. The style of U.K. television does not seem to put off youth audiences in the U.S., most likely because these programs answer the U.S. youth audiences' need for an alternative narrative to that of adult moral panic.

International Programming and a Global Cultural Forum

Broken Britain youth programs represent the positive effect of the transnational flows of corporate media on the international television market. These programs acknowledge cross-cultural themes, like youth delinquency, as international cultures continue to converge. According David Chaney (2004), a contributor to *After Subculture*, globalization creates youth subcultures that are internationally relevant, rather than uniquely based in a single country. Chaney states "the direction of change is away from what typically has been presumed to be a global collection of unique, identifiable and distinctive cultures" (37). The convergence of youth cultures across international borders indicates that there is a large amount of overlap between youth experience in different countries. These similarities offer possibilities in cross-cultural symbiosis of media, especially between the U.S. and U.K. because their language, history

and political beliefs are so closely aligned. The globalized reality of youth culture explains why, despite cultural differences, Broken Britain youth programs speak to U.S. youth.

The symbiotic relationship between U.S. and Broken Britain youth programming facilitates an international discussion about youth. As a result of media convergence, the conditions that Horace Newcomb (1994) discusses for television as a cultural forum now apply internationally. He states, “we must examine the role of network executives who must purchase and program television content. They, too, are cultural interpreters, intent on ‘reading’ the culture through its relation to the ‘market’” (570). Newcomb’s comments apply strictly to U.S. television, but alternative viewing markets like Hulu and Netflix have created an international cultural forum by making foreign importation common practice. Broken Britain formats were initially purchased for adaptation because U.S. executives and programmers saw how popular the original programs were on alternative platforms and the potential diversity these adaptations could offer U.S. youth television. Programmers for international markets fulfill their role as cultural interpreters by purchasing television that offers an alternative vision of youth life in our current culture. Comparing international youth programming requires an acknowledgement of the differences between the cultural and industrial contexts in which these programs are created.

Questions and Preliminary Answers

The differences between the creative and social contexts of United States and British youth programming offer important questions about Broken Britain youth

programming. Why are these programs popular in the U.S. but unable to be replicated for U.S. audiences? What conditions of the British television industry support the mature and honest representations of youth that Broken Britain youth programs offer? Or what conditions of the U.S. television market prevent adaptations of Broken Britain youth programs from succeeding? Are the aesthetic freedoms allowed in U.K. programs the reason that they succeed at rewriting the “Broken Britain” narrative that is present in spectacular media accounts? Perhaps the darkness and sociopolitical quality of British television as a whole allow youth television to use safe, conventional, British television style to undermine the British narrative of youth. Does the popularity of the original U.K. programs eliminate the need for U.S. remakes? Or do the remakes change something aesthetically progressive about these programs, causing them to fail?

The moralistic approach to themes in U.S. youth television is absent from Broken Britain youth programs. This moralistic approach is also typical of adult programs in U.S. television. Is the character-driven approach to themes the main device that these programs use to subvert the “Broken Britain” narrative? Or is the combination of aesthetics and themes necessary to create socially subversive representations of youth? Are there certain genres that are riper for successful adaptation than others? How do aesthetic innovations contribute or detract from audience identification? In order to answer these questions, this analysis must attempt to avoid the typical limitations of youth research.

Interdisciplinary research allows academics to avoid some of the pitfalls of sociological research. The field of Cultural Studies combines the most useful aspects of

various theories to create a new, dynamic interpretation. Cultural Studies is also the cornerstone of youth research and the interactionist perspective of Hall and the Birmingham School. Hall's theory attempted to "explain both social action and social reaction, structurally and historically in a way which attempts to do justice to all levels of analysis" (2000, 6). Hall helped to establish the combination of media, psychological theory, and subcultural imagery as sources for research. Although his approach applied too narrowly to the specific historical moment of the 1970s, his method created a baseline theory that is being updated today to include globalized youth cultures.

Media representations are often judged against each audience member's subjective understanding of society. Therefore, theories addressing real youth subcultures in cultural studies can easily combine with the visual interpretation required in television studies. Real-life youth cultural configurations offer a good basis for judging the emotional realism of media representations. The aesthetic signifiers of subcultures and the subjective representation that many Broken Britain youth programs offer allow the audience to draw a variety of moral conclusions. Newcomb believes the effect of cultural theory on formal or aesthetic theories is to encourage a multiplicity of viewpoints. He states, "television does not present firm ideological conclusions—despite its *formal* conclusions—so much as it *comments on* ideological problems" (1994, 566, emphasis in original). Formal resolution, such as the happy ending of a traditional sitcom, does not predetermine the ideological proposals of any representation. Instead, many ideological perspectives on an issue can be found in the formal or stylistic qualities of a work. The multitude of interpretations offered by media allows discussions of media

to become constructive for youth audience members.

Constructed from a detailed ethnographic study of fan behavior, Henry Jenkins' theory of fan interpretation reveals the structures and types of identification that are common for emotionally invested media audiences. Jenkins' study, documented in the book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* and expanded on in *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*, builds on cultural studies and subcultural identification to describe the process of fan understanding of media texts. Because many of his observations about fan behavior relate to the aesthetics of programs that encourage fans to identify with the text, a more general understanding of how aesthetics promote viewer identification can be drawn from this study. Upon multiple viewings, the structural openness of identification in *Skins* becomes evident. Jenkins describes the process of re-reading that occurs alongside the repeated viewing behaviors of emotionally invested viewers. He states that during repeated viewings "the desire to resolve narrative mysteries loses its grip on the reader.... Interests shift elsewhere, onto character relations, onto thematic meanings, onto social knowledge assumed by the narrator" (1992, 67). Within these categories of character, themes, and social knowledge central to all dramatic programming, Jenkins' describes a variety of fragmented narrative techniques and standards of emotional realism that audiences use to identify with textual material. Furthermore, Jenkins states that emotional investment and fan interpretation are even more important to marginalized audiences. One of the marginalized groups Jenkins' references is youth.

Chapter 2 discusses the ways that political economy and industrial limitations

marginalize youth audiences and Jenkins' theory of fan interpretation discusses the ways that viewer identification combats marginalization. Emotional investment and self-analysis through textual material works for youth audiences' much like Giroux's (2001) study of media use in the educational classroom. These techniques create the same type of empowerment and agency for those interpreting the text as Giroux's experiment but in a more intimate setting, the home. Creating a fictional experience that is personally authentic to viewers is integral to overcoming feelings of youth audiences' marginalization. Emotional realism and authenticity are also the standards that Acland cites as central to youth audiences' judgment of a cultural text. While Jenkins attributes self-analysis to female re-reading, Giroux and Acland's observations show that women are only one of many marginalized groups that can use these techniques. Self-analysis strategies in fan reading are "ways women have found to circumvent male-centered narratives and to rewrite them" (1992, 113). Media texts also force young adults into these contortions of identification because media texts typically feature central adult characters and are produced by adults. Jenkins believes that re-reading techniques allow psychological freedom for marginalized audiences. This freedom causes some theorists and mainstream viewers to accuse cultures that identify closely with texts to be "infantile and regressive" (1992, 74). These techniques exist outside of the institutional demand for distance in textual reading. Reducing the distance between the character and viewer is central to the aesthetic language of many Broken Britain youth programs, making them appropriate texts to study using Jenkins' theory of fan interpretation.

Despite each country's similar understanding of youth as cultural scapegoats since

the 1970s subcultural era, U.K. media representations advanced an alternative, empowering narrative of youth long before the U.S. Hall writes of the post-war historical conditions that created our modern conception of youth transatlantically. These historical changes are “‘affluence’, the increased importance of the market and consumption, and the growth of ‘Youth-oriented’ leisure industries [and] the arrival of *mass* communications, *mass* entertainment, *mass* art and *mass* culture” (2000, 18, emphasis in original). Both the U.S. and the U.K. experienced a financial boom after World War II, and advertising and marketing began targeting youth. At the same time, Hall’s comments indicate that mass media were a large influence, especially on youth who were a sought-after market. Youth in both countries responded by increasing their use of and identification with products and media images. The integration of youth and media from a historical perspective shows how media became central to young lives. The fact that these conditions were shared across the Atlantic by both the U.S. and the U.K. also explains their shared targeting of youth with media over time.

International comparisons of media not only ground representational theory in a shared historical trend but also consider the possibilities for cultural translation and a public forum for ideas. Comparing international adaptations of media requires the format that is adapted to represent a problem with ideological repercussions for both cultures. There are important differences between the U.S. and U.K. television industries; the U.S. system is primarily commercial and the U.K. system is primarily public and experimental. There are also important differences between the central events that drive moral panic in each country. For example, the U.S. media feature youth gun violence

more prominently in news coverage, and the U.K. media discuss gang violence more often. This difference exists because, in the U.S., the crimes that occur in cities are secondary to those exceptional incidents that occur in middle-class neighborhoods, whereas in the U.K., the lower-income areas of cities are targeted as the centers of delinquency. Overall, these differences should be examined on a case-by-case basis through textual interpretation. These distinctions will offer some explanations for the U.S. industry's inability to produce or even successfully adapt the concepts of Broken Britain youth programs.

The most important questions this thesis will answer are the following: which aspects of Broken Britain youth programs empower and attract young viewers, and what are the ideological implications of youth's presentation in these programs? This thesis focuses on the success of the specific fictional dramatic format of Broken Britain youth programs that are directed at youth in the U.K. These programs have become popular on online viewing platforms in the U.S., and the MTV cable network has attempted to adapt several of these program formats. The disparity between the success of U.S. adaptations and the very popular originals is perplexing considering that there is a trend for U.S. audiences to prefer domestic television. The anthology *American Remakes of British Television* discusses the ways that universal values and cultural content interact in the translation of texts internationally. Researcher Jeanette Steemers (2011) states, "Britain's export successes are dominated by entertainment and drama formats, which can be indigenized and adapted by the receiving culture and in their more 'universal' appeal"

(1). Therefore, there must be some textual aspects of the original programs that differ greatly from those offered in U.S. programs.

Research Terms

In order to analyze youth programming, researchers need to define research terms that respond to the difficulties that previous researchers faced. In response to the many contradictory texts that youth research offers, this thesis will maintain strict limitations on its use of certain terms. Dwyer and Wyn eloquently establish the primary tension that youth researchers face as adult outsiders talking about youth as a politically ineffectual section of society. They pose the question, “How do we take risk factors seriously without demonizing those affected, but also how do we avoid demonizing them without belittling the difficulties they are trying to face” (2001, 150)? Risk factors are too often used as the basis for all discussions of youth problems. These factors are commonly foci of the individual psychological interpretations that sociologists prefer. Risk factor studies lack the critique of social institutions that is required to avoid demonizing youth. As such, youth issues will be used as a generalizing term that encompasses a variety of what are traditionally interpreted as risk factors, such as race, sexuality, gender, and delinquency. Any reference to “youth issues” will appear in quotations to remind readers that this is a generalized and potentially negative but convenient catch-all term. The thesis will avoid referring to youth as “adolescents” due to the term’s association with psychological perspectives, opting instead to refer to them as youth or teenagers interchangeably. Political leaders created the term “Broken Britain” to address a cultural trend they perceived within their country. U.S. journalists created no unifying term for

the moral panics surrounding youth in the 1990s. As such, “Broken Britain youth programs” is a term that refers to programs addressing “youth issues” in the U.K., and no label will be used for their U.S. equivalents.

Chapter Discussions

This thesis will provide an overview of the industrial differences between the U.S. and the U.K. youth media, one case study about the process of adapting the U.K. program *Skins* that emphasizes different aspects of the “Broken Britain” genre through an examination of audience identification and subcultures and a conclusion about what U.S. programs can learn from their U.K. counterparts. This thesis will prove that industrial limitations and the narrow view of youth culture in the U.S. currently prevent the successful adaptation of U.K. Broken Britain youth programs. However, if producers translated the stylistic aspects of these programs, as well as their subcultural realism during the process of adaptation without relying too heavily on the U.K. source material, then these programs may provide an alternative narrative to U.S. moral panic over youth.

The case of Broken Britain youth programming in the U.S. reveals the rewards and difficulties of translating media products across international borders. Chapter 2 will discuss the industrial constraints that define the major differences between U.S. and U.K. youth programming. The history of Britain’s experimental television industry, which is publicly operated and provided to serve unique audiences, will be discussed in opposition to the commercial history of the United States television industry that has recently begun to aesthetically innovate in narrowcasting venues, like cable. The commercial aspects of U.S. television require self-regulation from the industry to prevent government

interference with programming. As a result of self-regulation, the industry has been slow to produce aesthetically innovative or controversial programming, especially for the youth audience that conventional wisdom says the media must shield from violent and sexual images. Advertisers invest in programming for youth audiences based on their acceptability to parental control groups. As a result, stylistic innovation takes a back seat to the application of Hollywood standards to television products. These differences have made the aesthetic and thematic innovation of Broken Britain youth programs like *Skins* difficult to maintain on U.S. television, even on a niche cable network like MTV. Ultimately, adaptations of Broken Britain youth programs are subjected to moderation of content, including censorship, and a lack of stylistic innovation. The industry's creative limitations marginalize U.S. youth audiences to the extent that outright censorship is rare but significantly restrains the development of youth programming.

Skins is the most successful example of a Broken Britain adaptation in the U.S. and yet the original is popular with U.S. audiences as well. Chapter 3 compares the U.S. and U.K. versions of the youth television hit *Skins*. This program offers a twist on the "youth issues" approach of typical youth television by restricting each episode to a single character's perspective. Jenkins' theory of fan interpretation helps pinpoint the innovative techniques of the program that deepen its emotional realism, calling for youth audiences to identify with the characters. The stripped-down aesthetic and plot-driven changes in the U.S. adaptation of the program break the sense of realism that stems from the subjective camera, narrative techniques, and sensitive, complex portrayal of "youth issues" of the original U.K. version.

Chapter 4 compares real-life subcultural configurations, such as tribal, genderqueer, and bedroom subcultures, with their representation in both versions of *Skins*. The comparison of viewers' real-world experiences and the portrayal of youth cultures in *Skins* contribute to the authenticity that Acland describes as crucial to youth identification. These aspects of youth culture are also presented as liberating, rather than destructive, in the original *Skins*. Although *Skins U.S.* struggled to maintain an authentic vision of youth subcultures, the program successfully presented some aspects of youth culture (bedroom culture). *Skins U.K.* also represents the adult point of view as one that exists on the fringes of youth experience, undermining this perspective in almost every episode. Adult institutions act as an ideological vision of the world, and undermining them favors the youth perspective. Both the original *Skins* and the adaptation are successful to different degrees in constructing an alternative narrative through this criticism of institutions. The program's combination of positive youth representations and a critique of the adult voice of authority allow *Skins* to create an alternative narrative to moral panic.

The conclusion will examine the potential of U.S. genre and cable programming to represent alternative narratives of youth. Several programs in the United States now include more sympathetic representations of young people. However, a majority of these characters are token youth on adult programs. Several examples of programs that neither demonize nor idealize their delinquent youth characters are *Weeds*, *American Horror Story*, *Shameless*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and *Glee*. Only *Pretty Little Liars* is a program meant exclusively for youth, and it is significant that this program tends to emulate the

darkness, slow pacing, and moral complexity of Broken Britain youth programs. The majority of these programs and Broken Britain youth programs engage with genre, using generic tropes to undermine adult perspectives. Because these examples are the exception rather than the rule, this chapter will also contain a more general discussion of the aspects of Broken Britain youth programs that offer the opportunity for a public dialogue about “youth issues.” Without a doubt, adults need to be shown sympathetic representations of youth because they are saturated with accounts of delinquent youth behavior.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the different genres and phases that narratives of moral panic must pass through in order to be accepted in U.S. and U.K. cultures. Establishing the typical markers of journalistic and fictional youth media that replicate messages of moral panic will differentiate programs that offer negative messages about youth from those that create an alternative narrative. The translation of much more innovative U.K. youth programs for U.S. audiences represents a potential next step in the progression of quality youth television in the U.S. Once Broken Britain programs are able to engage the U.S. discourses of panic in their process of translation, U.S. audiences may see an alternative narrative to panic emerge. In the meantime, researchers should analyze the translations that have been successful, like *Skins U.S.*, as well as the new audience being exposed to international youth programming through alternative viewing platforms. Given the close cultural history of the U.S. and the U.K., especially concerning youth

cultures, these international translations offer the potential for the cultural forum to expand cross-culturally and say something positive about U.S. youth to correct the misconceptions of moral panic.

Chapter 2

Youth Television: Competing Industrial Models and Censorship

Together, the U.S. and the U.K. represent the strongest global media presence, yet their television industries use competing models: the U.S. uses the commercial model of television, but the U.K. uses the public service model. These very different television business models result in any number of different effects on the media products of each country. The limitations of the commercial model are evident in moments of censorship like the U.S. moral panic of the 1990s and the style of youth programming presently represented by U.S. commercial television. Generally, the commercial system negatively impacts audiences that are marginalized by other institutions as well. Both countries heavily favor the voice of the largely white, usually male producer. However, the public service model of television represented in the U.K. requires a larger degree of diversity from its programming based on its policies, which support experimental television. Broken Britain youth programs show the diversity of U.K. television by openly addressing issues of teenage drug use, sexuality, and violence from the perspective of class and racial differences that are typically neglected in United States youth programming. Ultimately, this industrial dichotomy defines the ways that U.S. youth programming both marginalizes its audience and uses their marginalization to control content.

This chapter will analyze the opposition between the U.S. and U.K. television industry, and how these differences affect the quality and complexity of programs targeting youth audiences. The U.S. commercial model marginalizes youth audiences by

censoring programs on the basis of their promotional material and the amount of offensive content shown in these youth programs. While the U.K.'s history as a public service model of television allows them to serve youth audiences outside the self-regulation necessary to attract advertisers, U.S. youth television answers to diverse interests like advertisers, parents, and programmers who decide what youth may see. These limitations placed on U.S. producers restrict youth programming's ability to create alternative narratives to those of moral panic.

Youth Audience Marginalization by Media Industries

Mass media, from their inception, were understood to be powerful tools of persuasion. In response to this realization, media became subject to a large degree of regulation; commercial models use self-regulation to please advertisers and delay government interference, while public service models are not only regulated by the government but also receive government funding. Historically, television industries limit offensive content, unless this content is justified as serving the public interest. These early content control mechanisms still affect media audiences today. In the United States, commercial television has begun to loosen its self-regulation but is still well-known for offering programs that are less than intellectually stimulating. British television critic Janet Street (2011) commented that "American television 'tells you a story in a childlike, simple way and then clobbers you over the head with it' ... they patronize viewers" (66). This negative view of U.S. television primarily applies to broadcast network television. Content continues to be limited to innuendo on broadcast network television, and only television that appeals to the appropriate commercial

audience (18-49 year old white males) is regularly allowed the financial risk of creating more offensive content. These lowest common denominator programs adhere to the mainstream narrative surrounding youth in order to offend the fewest viewers.

Risks often occur on U.S. cable television, indicating that the correct venue is most important when considering where to air an adapted Broken Britain youth program. For instance, HBO could successfully air a Broken Britain adaptation due to its subscriber based model and risky content. As Amanda Lotz (2007) states “The institutional characteristics of subscription networks allow them to create programs with distinctive voices and clearly demarcated ‘edges.’ [These edges] deliberately exclude audience members who will be offended by the normalization of particular stories and depictions” (91). HBO could present a vision of youth that acknowledges youth behavior outside of the acceptable adult standard without risking the same loss of viewers as broadcast and basic cable networks, but due to their target audience of older adults this potential will likely never be realized. The program *Shameless* on Showtime, another subscription network, presents the closest approximation to an adult content-friendly vision of youth on U.S. television in 2013. Unfortunately, subscription cable neglects realistic or alternative representations of a youth audience, as do the majority of broadcast networks and niche cable networks.

Youth audiences suffer from broadcast and cable networks’ tightly constrained content, and youth are unable to participate in production because all the producers, writers, and often even actors on youth television are adults. As a result of commercial limitations, media marginalize youth audiences much like other institutions that are

central to their lives, such as school. Jenkins' (2009) work on youth audiences concludes that youth marginalization in media and other aspects of their lives leads to frustration. He states that "young people's lack of interest in news and their disconnection from politics reflects their perception of disempowerment ... even in the areas of social life that affect and concern them to a much greater extent than adults--most notably education" (12). Youth are left out of the debates, like educational policy, that have direct implications for their lives, meaning they are marginalized within these institutions, yet unable to avoid or affect them. These institutions' disregard for youth leads to apathy and mistrust in large numbers. According to Harvard University's Institute of Politics (2012), "Thirty-eight percent of America's 18- to 29- year olds trust the United Nations to do the right thing all or most of the time – a greater proportion than those saying the same about the federal government (twenty-seven percent)."

Additionally, media news stories shape teens' perceptions of themselves and reinforce adult control of their lives. Other institutions, like education, further limit their understanding of media. In Jenkins' earlier work he discusses how schools teach the decoding of media as a process of determining authorial intent rather than personal meaning (1992, 24). Summarizing Jenkins' discussion of youth apathy reveals the multidimensional and all-encompassing marginalization that youth feel in their everyday lives. This marginalization is typically reinforced by media representations of youth. However, Broken Britain youth programs work to negate youth exclusion from both their content and production.

Broken Britain youth programs privilege the youth audience by including young

voices in their productions and allowing a larger degree of questionably tasteful but realistic content. Many of these programs appear on the youth-oriented network, E4. This network and its sister network Channel 4 produce creative, radical youth programming because they are experimental television networks mandated by the government for public service. E4 was created under the initiative that it would provide “‘programmes that are slightly wild and different and unafraid to stand against the status quo’ [and] ‘answer needs not met elsewhere in the broadcasting system’ and ‘innovate and experiment in form as well as content’” (Lury, 2001, 29-30). E4 experiments with youth content and gives opportunities to young producers. In an interview with Bryan Elsley, who created the Broken Britain youth program *Skins* with his young son Jamie Brittain, he states that the program is “characterized from the point-of-view of the many young people who write [the program]” (2011, Vary). Most Broken Britain youth programs use the same pool of fresh, young talent associated with E4. These programs are also well-known for using actors that are the same age as the characters they play, whereas in the U.S., youth programming tends to cast young-looking adults for youth roles. These young actors bring their own experiences to their roles, imbuing the characters with an enhanced sense of authenticity. These production techniques place uncommonly young authors and performers in direct contact with their target audience. This strategy equates authors with their potential audience members, decreasing the extent to which the text marginalizes the audience.

In 2006, around the time that David Cameron first coined the term “Broken Britain,” a trend of violent and offensive films featuring youth appeared in U.K. theaters.

Some early examples of this genre include *This is England* (Shane Meadows, 2006) and *Kidulthood* (Menhaj Huda, 2006). These films established the generic markers that eventually evolved into Broken Britain youth programming. In an overview of 2011's "Broken Britain" film hits, *The Guardian* critic, Steve Rose, described this formula. He states "When they're not busy rioting, Londoners are often to be found selling drugs, wearing hoodies, taking drugs, obtaining firearms and chasing each other ... all to a blaring grime soundtrack." Broken Britain youth programs, like the films, feature open rebellion, drug use, hoodies, street gangs, violence and free reign of whatever city or suburban environment (typically working-class) the program is set in. Some of the films within this genre, such as the horror films *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008), *Heartless* (Philip Ridley, 2009), and *Harry Brown* (Daniel Barber, 2009) use horror tropes to address the audience from a lone adult "survivor's" perspective. These genre conventions make youth into a violent and, in the case of *Heartless*, a demonic, faceless enemy. However, the large majority of these films, especially the break-out films of the genre, *This is England* (Shane Meadows, 2006) (which had a spin-off television series on Channel 4) and *Kidulthood* (Menhaj Huda, 2006), focus on youth perspectives of life in England. This genre of films is slowly migrating to U.S. theaters as well. U.S. theaters exhibited the theatrical film version of the Broken Britain youth program *The Inbetweeners* (2012) and the film achieved some financial and popular success. The film was released in conjunction with a U.S. adaptation of the television program. The influence of this trend is also evident in the upcoming U.S. film *Warm Bodies*, which features *Skins*' veteran actor Nicholas Hoult and uses young adult horror themes to show

the perspective of a “monster zombie” teen.

This genre undermines the adult perspectives that Acland claims is the narrative center of youth films. These films offer a fresh perspective on “Broken Britain” that does not scapegoat youth. Broken Britain youth programs combat audience marginalization by sustaining the generic markers and outrageous content of these films. However, in the process of adapting these programs for the U.S. television market, the commercial system changes the content to appease adults and advertisers at the expense of U.S. youth television audiences.

Structural Dichotomy

The United States’ commercial television industry is defined by the conservative legacy of government regulation and industrial self-regulation. U.S. television notably separates offensive content from acceptable content through the structural dichotomy of cable versus network broadcasting. Youth occupies a special role within this dynamic because they are often cited as a group that needs protection from offensive content on television, justifying a universal conservatism in the medium. The root of this argument, like the root of current characterizations of youth, harkens back to early television history. Early research on television was conducted to prove the deleterious effects of television on the young, especially the effects of viewing violent content. The Kefauver hearings in the early 1950s established a precedent for researching the effects of children’s exposure to television on juvenile delinquency later in life, a very important concern during that period of moral panic over youth (Lazarsfeld, 1955). These hearings and others like them aided the industry’s decision to implement self-regulation. Current

cable programming exists outside these regulatory borders. The political legacy of this research often initiates arguments about specific events, like Columbine, during periods of moral panic. When the media discuss youth as perpetrators of crime, they search the culprit's history of media consumption in an attempt to clarify the causes and motivations of their actions. Regulators may use these concerns about youth to justify content limitations, while avoiding accusations of censorship. This form of regulation contributes to the marginalization of youth audiences even in the post-network landscape of television because this research supports adult moral panic at its political roots. U.S. youth programs have exhibited some loosening of regulation, primarily on cable networks.

Launched in 1981, MTV is the foremost cable network featuring youth programming, and also the network that has been most impacted by its international sister network in the U.K. Both of the most important adaptations of Broken Britain youth programs, *Skins* and *The Inbetweeners*, premiered on MTV only to be canceled within a single season. MTV defines its international brand using similar terms as the U.K.'s experimental Channel 4 and its youth spin-off E4. MTV's own executives stressed the irreverent qualities they hoped the network would bring to television. MTV's ideal description in its heyday was a network "much rougher, real and more credible than TV—with plenty of room for spontaneity" (Denisoff, 1989, 60). R. Serge Denisoff (1989) notes that MTV's contributions to television were much like radio. The network targeted the underserved demographic of youth with its music and fictional programming, especially reality television. Currently, the international presence of MTV influences its

programming decisions. MTV has continually innovated by importing Broken Britain youth programs and creating sleek original programs to pair with them. Their hit programs *Teen Wolf* and *Awkward* use some of the same techniques as the Broken Britain youth programs that the network adapted. For instance, *Teen Wolf* creates characters that seem very stereotypical yet undermines these stereotypes using generic tropes and plot twists, much like the MTV adaptation of *Skins*. However, the role of advertisers limits the amount of gritty realism and frank content in adaptations of U.K. programs. Despite the efforts of MTV to innovate, the network is still beholden to the commercial system, limiting its ability to adapt Broken Britain youth programs. The majority of youth programming is still controlled by major networks and their sibling cable networks.

Most U.S. youth programming is less innovative than MTV's because it is subjected to the conservative limitations of broadcast programmers. Youth is primarily considered a niche audience and is therefore unimportant to most major broadcast networks. However, during the 1990s, at the height of the moral panic, new broadcast networks emerged specifically targeting this niche. Michele Hilmes (2011) discusses what was innovative about the initial programming choices of the primary youth broadcast network, the WB (Now the CW). She states "What seemed to distinguish the WB's programs from others was their combination of youthful adventures with verbal and narrative sophistication; these young characters faced adult-type problems ... in a way that drew in older viewers while still capturing younger ones" (433). These programs treated youth as though they lived in same world as adults and experienced similar difficulties. However, these programs were also inflected with conservative

values. For instance, 7th *Heaven* on the WB showed the struggles of a religiously devout family. Each of the lesson-driven episodes would ultimately offer a religiously dictated message, forgoing any moral complexity. Additionally, most of these programs used the conservative “youth issues” approach that is typical of the adult moral panic.

In the past decade, the networks bought new, conservative, cable-affiliated networks. ABC Family is a major youth cable network owned by the ABC conglomerate. The network’s conservative history precedes ABC’s ownership. The network premiered as the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), a religious network owned by a televangelist. To broaden the appeal of the network CBN was renamed The Family Channel (later purchased by FOX and sold to ABC). ABC Family’s programs reflect the conservativeness of ABC and the network’s origins. Critics complain that the popular ABC Family program *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* displays an anti-pregnancy bias and offers didactic messages; this conservative stance is likely because the program was endorsed by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008, Stanley). *The Secret Life* is exceptional due to the fact that it is sponsored, in part, by a political campaign with an obvious agenda. However, viewers did not question this endorsement. This example reflects the trend of programming offered on networks and any associated sibling cable networks they own to create programs featuring more adults, “youth issue” and “after-school special” episode formats, and increasingly specific and hyperbolic settings and premises. For example, *Gossip Girl* features the socialites of the Upper East Side in Manhattan. All of these techniques, as well as the limitations of broadcast content, caused the initially successful youth

programs on broadcast network television to stagnate and marginalize their audience in the process.

While the majority of U.S. commercial broadcasters hesitated to rely on imported programming, U.K. imports have improved the offerings of U.S. public service broadcasting, but this reputation has often been developed at the expense of youth audiences. Early in the public service industry's development, the fledgling U.S. public service broadcaster PBS gained the derisive title the "Primarily British Service" because the U.S. public system, intended to promote localism, was depending on foreign public service broadcasting for its programs. Hilmes' history *Network Nations* (2012) explains how the importation of British programs defined PBS' target audience as upscale, adult intellectuals. She states that after entering co-productions with the BBC, "Time-Life began to take out full-page ads in the *New York Times* trumpeting its role in such [co-productions] as 'grownup television' and boasting of their many awards" (295). Articles like these about PBS' trademark series *Masterpiece Theatre* branded public service broadcasting as too prestigious and adult for the chaotic style of youth programming that still dominates in the U.S. While PBS eventually branched out into educational programming for young children, the network's efforts to remain "grown-up" neglect teen audiences. One of the few notable instances when PBS targeted youth audiences with its BBC co-productions was a syndicated run of the adult educational program *Civilisation*, which aired on commercial television (Hilmes, 2012, 294). The target audience of public broadcasting in the U.S. has never been youth because of its legacy of producing prestige programming with British public broadcasters. However, this

cooperation with the BBC established a precedent for cooperation between U.S. and U.K. industries.

If the U.S. model overcame many boundaries to air progressive youth television, then the U.K. built an industry that aims towards audience satisfaction and variety of programming. Megan Mullen's (2008) description of the public service model includes "Efforts to make program selection reflect the ethnic composition of the population, a balance of entertainment with educational/informational programs, and a goal of social improvement through the effective selection and balance of programs" (22). These trends are upheld in the composition of Broken Britain youth programs. *Skins* highlighted its diversity by creating special holiday videos that educated audiences about the each character's religious faith, most importantly the Muslim traditions of the character Anwar. These programs also help to fulfill public service television's goal to reflect the population by addressing youth and minority audiences. Unlike their U.S. counterparts, Broken Britain youth programs also balance entertainment and education. By allowing the characters to make mistakes, these programs offer a moral complexity that is intellectually stimulating, especially for the youth that identify with the issues portrayed. Broken Britain youth programs also contribute to social improvement by commenting on national policy debates in their reflections of life in modern Britain. These aspects of the public service model help to create the conditions for progressive youth television.

The public service model may support the creativity of Broken Britain youth programs, but these programs also have stylistic precedents from the early cable era of

television in the U.K. During the 1980s, as the cable television industry was expanding, another style of youth programming, nicknamed “yoof” television, created a visual and intellectual world view for young audiences. In her book, *British Youth Television: Cynicism and Enchantment*, Lury (2001) gives an extensive description of how the burgeoning cable industry affected the structure and business strategy of the U.K. television industry. She states,

After 1982 there were four terrestrial channels, rather than three, with the new channel, Channel 4, obliged within its remit to cater for youth as a specific audience. On top of this, new satellite and cable channels became available over the course of the decade. The high profile launch of MTV Europe in 1987 had a significant impact, as it gained a prominent position in the emerging perception of a newly invigorated youth-directed media environment. (17)

Not only was the public service model targeting youth audiences during the 1980s, but the rising cable networks chose youth as their primary target audience. This alignment of industrial factors led to the creation of a visually experimental style of “yoof” television that was uniformly applied across both domestic and international youth productions. MTV Europe created a new style of youth television during this period, and other domestic broadcasters simply replicated MTV’s success.

Aesthetically and intellectually the “yoof” style represented a new era in media self-consciousness and post-modern visual technique. The majority of this programming was non-fictional news programs, offering commentary on popular culture like our current infotainment programs. Lury describes the visual impact of these programs stating “MTV's visual style and aesthetic pyrotechnics accrued a specific importance because they were felt by [domestic] programme makers and critics to be the source of a

new kind of television that seemed, like other youth-oriented entertainment, to be dense, chaotic, loud, flat, empty, and technologically self-conscious,” (2001, 39). The speed and fury of the aesthetic characterized these non-fictional programs, like the swiftly changing characters and plots that characterize Broken Britain youth programs today. However, because Broken Britain youth programs are a fictional genre, there are also large differences in the manifestations of visual style within the genre. For instance, some programs like *Skins* foreground technological self-consciousness by using creative cinematography to layer character and audience identification. These types of techniques represent the post-modern awareness that the audience understands visual codes. Programs like *Misfits*, however, remove technological self-awareness to create ironic commentary on media constructions of reality, often revealing the chaotic emptiness of the “Broken Britain” rhetoric as a whole. Youth television influences aesthetics and industry because of the Broken Britain genre.

The Broken Britain genre reveals the convergence of commercial and experimental television interests at the level of the youth viewer. Mullen predicts the limitations of the public service model in the multichannel era. She states “The newer television options have caused the public service systems to make some compromises regarding their original mandates in order to remain viable, and many analysts doubt that the public service model has much of a future” (2008, 22). Despite its start on Channel 4, an experimental public service station, the U.K. television system profits from Broken Britain youth programs. However, the public service industry compromised by allowing Channel 4 and its affiliated teen network E4 to find commercial sponsors for their

programs. Youth audiences are ideal targets for advertising and so far this compromise in the public service model has not largely affected the quality of these programs. In fact, the commercial shift may have facilitated the evolution of “yoof” style into the Broken Britain genre. Perhaps the financial incentive of advertising is one of the reasons that the U.K.’s public service station, the BBC, has premiered several youth programs, including *Being Human*, which focuses on young adults with supernatural abilities living on their own, and *The Fades*, another supernatural drama about younger teens. Despite the increasing creativity and financial success of Broken Britain youth programs in the industry, U.K. youth television programming, including the experimental Channel 4, sustains their commercial interests by importing U.S. teen programming. Importation reduces the amount of public service programming created specifically for U.K. viewers and leads to criticism of international partnerships like those experienced by PBS. However, if the trend of selling U.K. Broken Britain youth formats to the U.S. creates a popular hit, then imported U.S. programs may gradually become more progressive like their U.K. counterparts. This potential future seems unlikely given the extensive difficulties with censorship that affect U.S. youth programming and the Broken Britain remakes that the U.S. industry has attempted.

Who do Control Mechanisms Serve?: U.S. Conservatism and Broken Britain Youth Programming

Many different forms of authority scrutinize the content and promotional image of youth television programs. Advertisers, parental groups, and programmers act as control mechanisms on youth programming. Each of these groups imposes a variety of

competing agendas on youth television. These groups attempt to censor youth television programs for reasons that rarely reflect the concerns of youth audiences themselves.

Advertising and the Commercial System: Money over Program Sophistication

One of the common tensions that ignite controversy over youth programming is the relationship between promotional advertisers, meant to entice youth audiences to watch programming through appealing campaigns, and parents who reject the values advertising promotes. For example, the creators of promotional material for the broadcast network that targets youth, The CW, often use shocking sexual promotional campaigns to gain exposure for the network's programming. While the "Catch VD" promotional campaign that was created for its hit program *The Vampire Diaries* was dismissed as harmless wordplay, the "OMFG" campaign for *Gossip Girl* incited a large critical response from parents (Fig. 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3). TV critic Don Williams (2008) summarized the controversy stating "most parents would rather their teens not think about sex or what that 'F' in OMFG stands for. There are some people out there who won't be fond of the soft-core porn angle these ads are going for." Williams points to the parents as the only real opponents to the campaign. Unlike the parents, Williams does not deny that most youth do think about sex and do know what the F stands for. However, he calls the images of the couples in sexual positions "soft-core porn" due to the messy hair and open mouth of one of the young women on the posters (Fig. 2.3). This visual confirmation that the F is about sex, which adults maintain youth should not be thinking about, contributes to fears about moral degradation. The fact that many parents likely did not know what the internet abbreviation meant before this campaign,

but their teenage sons and daughters did, also may have upset some parents. In the end, those creating promotional campaigns for youth programming choose the campaigns that will successfully create buzz and draw in their audience. By appealing to a forbidden topic like sex in their promotions and receiving unwarranted attention through the controversy that these parental reactions cause, promotional teams can successfully advertise a program using questionable subject matter. *Skins*' promotional teams in both the U.K. and the U.S. used similar shock techniques to sell the lifestyle featured in the program.

Despite the limited representation of drinking and drug use in the U.S. remake of the program *Skins*, the promotional campaign announcing the adaptation's premiere mirrors the promotional material used without rebuke or comment by the original U.K. program. Fans of the original *Skins* feared that MTV would limit the adult content of the program. These reservations were both addressed and inadvertently confirmed by the U.S. promotional campaign. The publicity stills from *Skins U.S.* highlight drug use above all else. For instance, in (2.4) we see a boy whose face is obscured by smoke simultaneously putting a pill into his mouth. The reason drug use is so heavily emphasized in these stills is partially explained by the fan comments attached to the images. In the stills, (Fig. 2.4 and 2.5) the comments "This show will be sh*t" and "They are going to censor it and it's just not going to be *Skins* anymore!!!!!!!!!" appear over the radical images. These comments are intended to be ironic next to the excessively shocking photos, yet the addition of the * in "shit" hints that these fears of censorship are not unfounded. In terms of the content of the program itself, the original U.K. *Skins*

features much more drug use on screen, but the promotional campaign touched on a different taboo.

The original *Skins* U.K. promotional campaign emphasized character, a key characteristic of the original *Skins* that is poorly translated in the U.S. remake. In the original publicity stills, the U.K. images are absent of any directly offensive actions. Instead, these images add nuance to the characters of the U.K. series. For instance, in (Fig. 2.6) we can see scars from shallow cuts on the inside of the blonde girl's thigh. The girl in the photo, Cassie, has an eating disorder, and cutting behaviors often accompany these disorders. This emotionally realistic detail is never mentioned in the program, but it adds another dimension to the audience's knowledge of the character. Jonathan Gray (2010) discusses the importance of aligning these promotional materials with the values of the program. Gray states promotions play "a vital role in establishing the text and in creating initial expectations and the all-important inter-textual and evaluative frames [for viewers]" (56). By highlighting drug use instead of character, those promoting *Skins U.S.* mistakenly thought they were being true to the content of the program that fans familiar with the original would expect. The U.S. promotional campaign sacrificed depth of character for the shock value they saw in the original. This shock value is present in both the U.S. and U.K. version of *Skins*, which glamorized aspects of delinquent behavior in their trailers.

Context makes drug use and sexuality acceptable to the majority of television censors, but without context parents and critics accuse promotional campaigns of making delinquent behavior seem desirable. Although drug use is common in both the U.S. and

U.K. trailers for the first series/season of *Skins*, the U.S. trailer plays in reverse, only pausing on moments of drug use. This trailer glamorizes drug use by taking it out of context. Television censorship groups believe that without establishing a narrative motive for negative behaviors promotional teams and producers glamorize drug abuse. The trailer confirms these concerns about glamorization by using loud music, laughing and smiling, and techniques like blurred edges to highlight the way that drug use can make the world disappear. This message is also supported by the beginning and end of the trailer, which feature everyday noises and a parent complaining loudly at a teen. Similarly, *Skins* U.K. could also be criticized for glamorizing teenage sexuality in its trailers. The first trailer for *Skins* U.K. features the majority of the cast in their underwear (Fig. 2.7). The second trailer surpasses the first, showing a group of cast members kissing in a large group and wearing lingerie. The surreal quality of these scenes set among anonymous parties removes the characters' motivations from consideration. However, the "orgy" scene foreshadows some of the character relationships that change in season two. These edgy promotional campaigns might suggest that those creating promotional material are not affected by censorship.

In the commercial industry of the U.S., advertisers occasionally need to defend themselves against parents and other activist groups by pulling or censoring their ads. A program can lose advertisers when the financial risk of sponsoring a program becomes too great. Advertisers' loss of interest in sponsoring racy remakes of U.K. programs and MTV original programming has had a lasting impact on the programming risks taken by the network. The negative reaction to the *Skins* U.S. remake by advertisers characterizes

these ongoing struggles between commercial interests and programmers. The MTV remake was cancelled after losing at least three major advertisers, including Taco Bell, the majority of whom backtracked to deny that their ads were even meant to air during the program (Hibberd, 2011). MTV removed other potentially offensive but innovative programs from their line-up with little to no explanation. For example, when MTV cancelled *I Just Want My Pants Back*, the network stated “We’re proud to have aired *I Just Want My Pants Back*, with its impressive creative pedigree and talented group of actors. Many factors go in to determining renewals, however, and ultimately, we decided not to move forward with an additional season of *Pants*” (Andreeva, 2012). Rumors indicated that *I Just Want My Pants Back* was pulled simply because MTV had an overwhelming number of upcoming programs planned and this one had low ratings. However, as MTV’s statement shows, the program received a positive critical reaction, hence their pride at airing the program. Overall, MTV’s dependence on ratings and its inability to attract advertisers for its more progressive programs show the severe commercial limitations that affect youth television that attempts to include sexual or otherwise frank content. Even when youth programs earn high ratings or garner critical praise, like *Skins U.S.* and *I Just Want My Pants Back*, the commercial system acts as a counterweight, determining the threshold of offensive material that can be allowed. Advertisers and programmers mediate this balance, but parental groups can also influence advertisers’ and programmers’ choices.

Parental Watch Dogs: Adult Values over Teen Values

Parent-driven television watchdog groups monitor the appropriateness of

television content based purely on the length of time that offensive content is shown in a program. Many of these groups, like the Parents Television Council, have a set agenda that supports conservative values. Although generally speaking the effect of these groups is negligible, many adults support these groups when warned of a particularly harmful trend or program. These groups protested the U.S. adaptation of *Skins* based solely on its reputation before the program even premiered. The show-runners did not anticipate the negative reaction from parents because in the U.K. the program had rarely received complaints. In fact, *Skins* was well-received by British critics who saw it as innovative programming that was offensive with purpose. The program was so widely watched by both youth and adult audiences that it won the Phillips Audience Award from BAFTA for its 2008 season. However, in the U.S. commercial television environment, parental groups played a pivotal role in scaring advertisers away from supporting *Skins*.

Shortly after *Skins* went on the air in the U.S., parental groups began to publicly encourage a boycott of the advertisers' products. The boycott highlighted the dangerous and inappropriate nature of *Skins* before the program aired. Some of these companies, like Taco Bell, pulled their support of the show to stop this boycott (Armstrong, 2011). Parental Groups and newspapers reporting on the controversy also highlighted the network's laborious process of verifying that *Skins U.S.* did not violate the child decency laws due to the young age of the cast and the sexually explicit material they performed. The creator of *Skins*, Bryan Elsley, issued an explanation to MTV regarding these criticisms of the program. His statements describe the central problem of realistically portraying teenagers' lives on television. Elsley said the program was "a very serious

attempt to get to the roots of young people's lives. It tries to tell the truth. Sometimes that truth can be a little painful to adults and parents" (Vary, 2011). Like the parents that were upset about the insider implications of the "OMFG" *Gossip Girl* campaign, the parents protesting *Skins* disliked an honest view of teenagers that represented the open experimentation of teens with many behaviors that are meant to be off-limits.

The actions of these parental groups lead to an uneven treatment of certain "risk-factor" themes, such as teenage sexuality. Parental watch groups are often very open about their agendas, or their values are evident in the double standards plaguing their protests. Not only are these groups marginalizing youth television and youth producers by protesting these programs, these groups also marginalize the young adult audiences that watch this programming by insisting that there are only a few appropriate messages that should accompany every "youth issue." For example, parental watch groups protested an episode of *Glee* called "First Time" because it offered a variety of perspectives on teenage sex besides abstinence. The episode multiplied the understandings of teenage sexuality on the program, just like *Skins'* many characters offer different subjectivities within similar experiences. In "First Time," each of the female characters describes her feelings, some terrible and some magical, about losing her virginity. The adult characters promote an educated view of sexuality in conjunction with the abstinence-only model. This balanced perspective on teenage sexuality allows teens to make informed decisions about sex, rather than believing that the difference between right and wrong is always so clear. The PTC's negative response to the episode was based on their conservative view of teenage sex and the belief that watching sexual

behavior on television makes teens more likely to be sexually active. The complaints of the Culture and Media Institute were explicit about the fact that “First Time” violated their views on homosexuality. This group promoted the double standard that heterosexual relationships are appropriate to represent on television, but that homosexual relationships are inappropriate. This group stated that “the show is now stepping up its campaign of homosexual promotion” (Snarky Amber, 2011). The Culture and Media Institute’s accusation that a homosexual agenda is buried in the program marginalizes teen viewers who may already be struggling with their sexuality. *Glee*’s non-fictional spin-off *The Glee Project* shows real-life teens that benefit from the varied representations of youth, even homosexual teens, available on *Glee*. *The Glee Project* confirms that the popularity of *Glee* is partially due to its sympathetic portrayal of those teenagers typically dismissed as “risk-factor” students. These portrayals are often absent from television, neglecting youth audiences outside the mainstream and isolating youth who share these experiences.

After the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 parents gained a whole new level of control over their children’s viewing. Not only did the Act require ratings to appear on every program that airs, but this act also mandated v-chip technology in all new television sets to enable parental control of programs. Now these parental control options are available on every main cable carrier, meaning that parents have the ability to limit what their children view at home. According to research conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, parents largely make decisions about what their children watch based on content. According to the study “only

17.3 percent [of parents] say they are most concerned about the number of hours their child spends with the medium while a full 71.1 percent say they are most concerned about the types of programs their child watches” (Jordan, 1998, 88). However, as the short analysis of *Glee*’s “First Time” shows, content regulation is often complicated because television supports a variety of meanings that are important to some underserved audiences, such as homosexual youth. Yet some audiences find these representations offensive. Parents tend to focus on the fact that offensive content is shown, as indicated by the ratings, rather than the reasons that this content is chosen. This skewed focus causes some youth viewers to be marginalized within their own homes. Although “First Time” was not withheld due to any parental groups’ interference, the matters of taste that these groups use to support their arguments for censorship are occasionally used by programmers to support their decision to remove episodes from the schedule, especially after culturally traumatic events.

Events and Censorship: Tasteful “Youth Issues” over the Cultural Forum

Even though violent and controversial events are often difficult to explain using a simple approach and would benefit from an open dialogue, media censorship by programmers is often a knee-jerk reaction to these events in our culture. Often this censorship occurs as a tasteful way for broadcasters to offer their sympathies to those involved in tragic events, while avoiding complaints about traumatic or offensive material. Although there is little wrong with the intention of these programming choices, they can also limit opportunities to start a dialogue about these events. As the recent response to the Sandy Hook shooting by political leaders and citizens has shown, media

outlets can aid dialogues about these events. Early media responses can greatly influence the direction of these discussions based on the narrative they use to report these incidents. During CBS' on the scene coverage of the Sandy Hook shooting the reporters repeatedly declared "We have endured too many of these tragedies ... when is it going to get so bad that lawmakers, people in Washington get involved" (Dec 14, 2012)? Unlike the media response to former incidents, the narrative became one of action spurred by other recent shootings like the Aurora Shooting. The young age of the children targeted by the shooter also contributed to this response. Supported by President Obama and citizens, the Sandy Hook Shooting's journalistic narrative encouraged political action in the form of a petition for gun control legislation. Media response to earlier school shootings stifled this type of policy debate by focusing on the effects of media instead of meaningful action.

Censorship characterized the response to the Columbine Massacre, and it limited our cultural dialogue about this national tragedy. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, one of the break-out hits of the WB network (notable for verbal and narrative sophistication that Hilmes notes), adds thoughtfully to the dialogue on school shootings with the episode "Earshot." However, the episode never aired because of the Columbine Massacre. *Buffy* was not the only program to have episodes pulled after the shooting occurred. However, it was one of only two programs pulled to actively comment on the relevant problem of school shootings. Although taste would dictate that not airing the episode was a wise choice on the part of the WB's programmers, the episode that was pulled added many considerations to the very limited discussion of motive and prevention that was occurring

in other media outlets.

The discussion of causal factors in the shooting primarily examined the influence of “pop” culture and related youth subcultural affiliations on the shooters. Michael Moore (2002) highlights this limited discussion in a collection of television news clips featured in his documentary *Bowling for Columbine*. This sequence quickly lists offensive media influences, such as “Angry heavy-metal subculture, parents, violent movies, *South Park*, video games, television, entertainment, Satan, cartoons, society, toy guns, drugs, shock rocker Marilyn Manson.” The news media interpreted these pop culture influences as being directly responsible for instigating violent behavior. However, the media responded to the moral panic erupting around youth with a frantic search for the appropriate “youth issue” to frame a response to the school shooting phenomena that reached a peak with Columbine. However, the episode “Earshot” offered alternative considerations by focusing on the reasons that these incidents are so hard to understand in a simple way.

On the surface, “Earshot” may appear to reinforce some of the false rumors that occurred after the Columbine Massacre, such as the targeting of school athletes by the shooters, but the episode also offers a more universal truth about the cause of violence. The episode utilizes teenage stereotypes that were cited as potential problems in Columbine High School. For instance, the episode features the standard high school cliques, pitting the Goths against the athletes who bully and torment the geeky student. Buffy herself displays the shallow self-consciousness of the pretty blonde stereotype she embodies when she learns she may be cursed with a demon part. Buffy understandably

fears that this change will further isolate her from normal teenage life. However, these stereotypes are all complicated by the end of the episode, revealing the multidimensional considerations that affect every individual's daily decisions. Although all of Buffy's friends and potentially the viewer believe the shooter will be the Goth boy, the meek geek is revealed to be the potential shooter. Buffy's final speech in the episode finds the common root between the shooter and the viewer. Based on her own experiences of isolation, she tells the shooter, "Every single person down there is ignoring your pain because they're too busy with their own. The beautiful ones, the popular ones, the guys that pick on you. Everyone. If you could hear what they were feeling, the loneliness, the confusion ... it looks quiet down there. It's not. It's deafening." The message that emotional pain is universal and can cause otherwise moral individuals to do immoral things would not have been welcome in the volatile post-Columbine media landscape. The episode further emphasized the connection between emotional distress and senseless behavior by revealing that the shooter only intended to commit suicide. During the moral panic of the 1990s, a sympathetic representation of a school shooter did not conform to the narrative that was created by the media.

A shift in gun control and violence response discourse occurred in the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting that mirrors the progression of the censored *Buffy* episode "Earshot." Mental health became a major concern for lawmakers hoping to enact stricter gun control. The facts show that the majority of mass shooters, whether they are youth or adults, have exhibited some kind of emotional distress and warning signs before committing these crimes (Stoller, 2013). While there is still debate about the level of

restriction necessary for mentally ill individuals, as well as concern for patient confidentiality laws, mental health has finally entered the debate. If an appropriate policy is enacted, teenage mental illness may affect the way that schools construct their violence prevention plans. However, this shift would never have occurred had the media reaction towards the perpetrator of the Sandy Hook shooting, a young adult male with Asperger's syndrome, not shifted from one of demonization to sympathy. This attitude is evident in *The New Yorker's* commentary on gun control and mental health. Journalist Adam Gopnik (2012) asks his readers "How [many reasons are there to use a gun] inappropriately—because you were tired, afraid, or drunk in a confrontational situation? There are lots and lots of chances." Rather than stigmatizing or targeting specific mental health concerns, this article and the conversation they contribute to cite everyday mental stresses as likely causes of crime. This shift mirrors Buffy's realization in "Earshot" that everyone has moments of mental distress and that everyone also deserves sympathy for that distress. "Earshot" may not have initiated this debate if it had aired, but not allowing the episode to air limited alternative narratives. The singular story of "Earshot" and Columbine reveals that focusing on youth as the cause of moral panic limits discussions of important cultural issues.

Commonly Censored "Youth Issues": The Same Threshold for Adult Programs?

Many episodes of U.S. youth programming that address current issues affecting both adults and youth are removed from network schedules to avoid controversy. Two episodes censored by programmers because of the "youth issues" they represent are the abortion episode of *Degrassi: The Next Generation* and an episode of the groundbreaking

youth program *Freaks and Geeks*, “Kim Kelly is my Friend.” This episode of *Freaks and Geeks* brutally represented domestic violence. Both of these episodes feature issues that politicize teen bodies without considering their importance to adults as well. While both of these episodes eventually aired on television (the *Degrassi* episode only aired in the U.S. after a fierce two-year fan campaign), the justifications that the programmers made for pulling the episodes show a bias supporting “youth issues” approaches.

Abortion storylines have been used on several broadcast network programs about teenagers (*Everwood*, *The O.C.*, *Dawson’s Creek* to name a few). However, *The New York Times* called abortion one of the most persistent taboos on television (Aurthur, 2004). *Degrassi* creator Linda Schuyler gave insightful comments about her motivation for writing about abortion for a young audience. She stated “If they’re talking about it in the schoolyard, we should be able to talk about it on television.... [The character] was presented with a lot of options, and she chose something that’s the right and legal decision for her,” (Aurthur, 2004). Schuyler’s comments point to two problems that are neglected when television programs politicize “youth issues”: youth occasionally confront these problems whether they are educated about their options or not, and each teen has a different set of circumstances that influence his or her decisions. Adults who seek abortions often face a very different set of circumstances, without the same threats of being labeled as “at-risk” for their sexuality and teenage motherhood.

“Kim Kelly is my Friend” was censored because it shows adults and teens in an equally negative light. Paul Feig, co-creator of *Freaks and Geeks*, stated “[The episode] was so rough. The network felt that too, and they were afraid of so much conflict,

especially with the crazy parents, and the dad running out and turning the car over. They all freaked out” (Koski, 2012). This episode featured a prolonged scene of violence where a father figure yells threats as he bangs on Kim’s car, rocking it up and down until she starts the car and drives away. The network’s biggest concern about the episode was the behavior of the abusive adults rather than the teenagers, despite the fact that Kim is very much like her crazy parents. Kim later tries to run her boyfriend over with her car for flirting with another girl. The episode places the blame for youth delinquency on the parents, showing how Kim acts out towards her boyfriend after her parents tell her not to come home. These two examples of censorship show that a network deciding to censor an episode of a youth program is based more on the anticipation of responses from parents and political groups than the fear of exposing teen audiences to adult content. Ultimately, all of these forms of censorship marginalize youth by privileging adults’ and advertisers’ opinions over those of the audience that youth programming is meant to serve.

Conclusion

This chapter details the industrial history of U.S. and U.K. youth television to show the different forces that influence each country’s quality of youth programming. Unlike the U.K. television industry, the U.S. industry’s commercial model attempts to please diverse groups like advertisers, parents, and programmers, which limits youth television’s ability to create alternative narratives of youth and marginalizes the interests of the youth audience. Youth audiences are trapped within a complex web of commercial and industrial influences. These influences often share some type of corporate parentage

with the media outlets that write the narrative of moral panic. Advertisers, parents, and programmers contribute to the marginalization of teen audiences that occurs as a reaction to this moral panic. The limitations of the U.S. industrial system make the importation of U.K. youth programs vital to the potential for establishing an alternative vision of youth outside of delinquency in U.S. youth programming. As the success and cultural acceptance of *Skins* in the U.K. shows, there is a space where art and television addressing “youth issues” can meet, but U.S. producers have yet to learn this lesson from their U.K. counterparts.

Chapter 3

Cultural Translation of Aesthetic Style and Narrative:

Skins U.S. and Audience Identification

Discussing the significance of specific Broken Britain youth programs requires an analysis of the interactions between style, industry, and technology that foster the increasing export of U.K. youth programs to the U.S. Innovations in U.K. programming and the interest in international programs shown by U.S. audiences facilitate cooperation between international television industries. Cable networks, such as BBC America, premiered Broken Britain youth programs that later migrated to alternative viewing platforms like Hulu and Netflix. Maintaining financial success in the multichannel era of television requires programmers to pay heed to trends in alternative viewing in order to minimize competition, and to repeat commercially successful programming formats until they are no longer effective. Format adaptations that cross international borders must carefully translate the cultural specificity of the text while maintaining its overall significance. For Broken Britain youth programs this process includes properly translating details like setting, style, and narrative techniques that allow these programs to favor the youth perspective.

The translation of *Skins* for U.S. audiences reveals the difficulties of cultural adaptation. Resulting stylistic changes alter the potential for youth viewers to identify with these texts. Comparing the original U.K. *Skins* with *Skins U.S.* reveals many stylistic changes that favor brand identity, complying with MTV's requirements for conflict in their dramatic programming over the maintenance of audience identification.

The strongest sequences from the original program are included in the adaptation. However, the new material in *Skins U.S.* is disproportionately small compared to the large amount of content that is similar to the original *Skins*. This new material focuses on one plot and upsets the narrative balance of the adaptation. Furthermore, stylistic problems with the adaptation hamper audience identification, especially for audience members familiar with the identification techniques of the original U.K. *Skins*. This audience is important for two reasons: First, MTV targeted repeat viewers in its advertising campaign for the adaptation, and second, because the increasing similarities between the later episodes in the adaptation and those in the original series may have alienated this audience. The stylistic and structural qualities that shape *Skins* and its adaptation's narrative validate the need for aesthetic continuity in adaptation in order for Broken Britain youth programs to offer youth a more open text for audience identification.

This chapter establishes the industrial and stylistic factors that facilitate the process of international adaptation and uses the example of *Skins* and its U.S. adaptation to examine the success of producers translating U.K. programs. *Skins U.S.* ultimately fails to main the innovative subjective and narrative techniques of its U.K. counterpart which limits the audience's identification with the text. The original *Skins* utilizes point-of-view camera techniques, visual effects, and repetitive montages featuring everyday behaviors to connect viewers to the single-character perspective of the show. The original *Skins* also creates an open narrative text using fragmentation, a two season structure, and unpredictable narrative patterns in order to encourage audience members to

mold the show's material to their experience. *Skins U.S.* fails to maintain the majority of these techniques and creates only one new technique, parallel narrative "crossover," to connect the audience to the characters in the program which prevents the audience from constructing an emotionally realistic and authentic experience of the text that relates to their lives.

Industrial Factors Influencing Adaptation

Recently, the U.K. enacted policies to increase its global media presence, offering U.S. programmers more quality international formats for purchase. One of the most recent policies created by David Cameron intends to "embrace globalization, free trade and international competitiveness in ways that place British creative industries on the world stage" (Steemers, 2011, 9). The sale of formats helps to achieve this goal by establishing U.K. television in the U.S. market. Without the increasingly symbiotic relationship between the U.S. and U.K. television industry that this policy supports, the Broken Britain genre might never have appeared in the U.S. All of the Broken Britain youth programs that have been remade for U.S. television have been purchased and developed as formats, some closer to the original than others. International format adaptations, especially in dramatic programming, require a clever cultural translation to be accepted by a different country's audience. The wide availability of the original program may limit an adaptation's ability to be accepted individually. The original version already found many dedicated viewers who may harshly judge the adaptation. However, given the appropriate cultural translation, format adaptations of Broken Britain youth programs could easily survive on U.S. cable television due to their niche appeal,

built-in audience and potential to subvert adult moral panic.

Youth audiences have always been attractive to advertisers due to their burgeoning commitment to brands, yet they were largely neglected by television programmers until the birth of cable television, which targets smaller audiences with untapped potential. Not only do programmers increasingly target youth audiences in the multichannel era, but those who purchase international formats find youth to be a profitable market for their products. Appealing to a smaller niche is crucial for establishing the demand for international programs, as well as the audiences they deliver, because popular niche programs do not necessarily translate into ratings. Jeanette Steemers (2011) states, “the overall impact [of British imports] is probably negligible in terms of direct audience impact” (2). Luckily, programs on cable networks require a negligible audience impact to succeed. Indeed, *Skins U.S.* received high ratings for cable (3.2 million viewers) for its premiere but steadily declined to less than a million viewers by its fifth week (Murphy, 2011). Yet rumors indicated that MTV would renew the series simply to solidify its edgy brand until the majority of the program’s advertisers departed. The advertisers left because of the negative attention the program received from parental groups. Tension between advertisers and producers characterizes the commercial industry because producers continually surpass the threshold of acceptable content for advertisers, leading to threats of censorship or cancellation of programs. Censorship plays a central role in the adaptation of *Broken Britain* and other international programming, because self-regulation of content can erode the audience almost as easily as the absence of self-regulation can.

The amount of sexual, violent, and substance abuse content included on U.K. television sets it apart from U.S. television, meaning that U.K. television adaptations must either be placed on an appropriate network or be censored during the process of cultural translation. Balancing the desires of youth for authentic representations of teen life and adult desires to limit questionable content in youth programs restricts producers' ability to successfully translate Broken Britain youth programs. However, there is a general tendency for U.S. producers to regulate U.K. adaptations during translation, rather than find an appropriate place for them to exist on U.S. television (potentially HBO or Showtime). Broken Britain youth programs exacerbate the limits of censorship because the formats that are being adapted are already familiar to youth audiences in their original uncensored form. If producers cannot manage representations of sexuality, violence and substance use without talking down to the youth audience, then adaptations of Broken Britain youth programs can become just as conservative and unrealistic as U.S. youth programs.

The programs that have been adapted in the U.S., *Skins* and *The Inbetweeners*, are widely available to youth audiences on alternative viewing platforms and cable networks. According to Hulu's statistics, 1.5 million households subscribe to Hulu and 73% of these households only watch television through the service (Harden, 2012). Although *Misfits* is the only Broken Britain youth program listed as a top 100 program on Hulu, the program's popularity convinced Hulu to invest in other Broken Britain youth programs. For instance, Hulu picked up *Skins* and *Inbetweeners* due to these programs' previous success on Netflix and BBC America, as well as *Misfits*' success on the platform

(Johnson, 2011). The success of these programs is evident in their wide release and popularity. However, adaptations of these programs can fail because audiences have already accepted the original U.K. program, controversial content and all. The rise of niche markets like cable and alternative viewing platforms make Broken Britain youth programs important to U.S. television, although the U.S. market has yet to find a way to successfully adapt their cultural material.

Style and Authorship Influencing Cultural Translation

Cultural translation is a difficult but integral process to adapting international formats; Maintaining an innovative aesthetic style and controversial voice is central to the cultural translation of Broken Britain youth programs. Adaptations can succeed at the process of cultural translation in several ways. Daniel Downes (2011) outlines the requirements for successful cultural translation, stating “the cultural object develops and maintains an aesthetic integrity based on authorship, creativity, or national culture” (23). Changing the style of a program too drastically in translation may fracture the original program’s appeal and cultural impact. For example, the *Skins U.S.* adaptation attempts to maintain the identification between each episode’s central character and the audience to privilege youth perceptions, creating an alternative narrative for U.S. moral panic as it did for “Broken Britain.” Yet, the point-of-view and reaction shots that establish this connection in the original *Skins* are rarely used.

So far, no Broken Britain adaptations have managed to translate aspects of U.K. culture for a U.S. audience. The culturally specific input of British creators may hinder the cultural translation of U.K. television. Yet, continuity based on authorship is one of

the conditions that Downes cites as important to cultural translation. The U.S. version of *Skins* and *The Inbetweeners* maintained input from their original U.K. production teams but to varying degrees. The input of these creators reflects how effectively these adaptations specifically address U.S. culture. *Skins U.S.* was the first adaptation of a Broken Britain youth program to appear in the U.S., and it maintained the original U.K. show-runners with no other U.S. producers credited. The creators' extensive U.K. influence is evident in the way the program handles class differences, reinstating the public vs. private dichotomy that is central to U.K. schools but less prominent in the U.S. Treating this educational system as dichotomous neglects other factors that cause adults to send their children to private school in the U.S., such as safety or quality of education, rather than wealth. There are also several instances in which the U.K. writers poorly adapt dialogue due to their ignorance of current U.S. slang. For instance, the adaptation still uses the U.K. term "spliff" to indicate a joint.

Due to the format's development by a U.S. producer, *The Inbetweeners* chooses its cultural references more carefully than *Skins U.S.* *The Inbetweeners* attempts to create a uniquely American voice by choosing to translate episodes based on their relevance to U.S. culture. The U.S. version of the program adapted episodes set in a theme park and dance club instead of episodes about U.K. community service programs in schools and other culturally specific plots. *The Inbetweeners* failed for reasons besides its cultural translation, such as poor casting. Perhaps the show's strategy for cultural translation may have succeeded for a different program because the producers approached the cultural material of the program from a U.S. perspective. The anticipated *Misfits* remake, to be

released in 2013, also chose U.S. producers as show-runners. Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage (*The O.C.*, *Gossip Girl*) established a track record for creating popular and occasionally innovative youth programming. These producers' influence on the translation of the *Misfits* adaptation may refine the balance of U.S. and U.K. production teams, creating a more successful formula for adaptation.

Not only does the difference in authorship help shape the success of Broken Britain youth programs' translation, but the difference in the budget and technological quality of U.K. programs presents several difficulties for cultural translation. U.K. television creates programs that look less expensive than U.S. programs, but sometimes budgetary and technical limitations can encourage stylistic innovation that is absent from most U.S. programming. The British government's descriptions of U.K. television as dark, unattractive, and gritty acknowledge these technological limitations. Positively, these limitations breed visual experimentation. Karen Hellekson (2011) introduces the idea of "Britishness: the notion that small is beautiful and that British ingenuity is superior to American technological hardware" (163). While some Broken Britain youth programs look as sleek as U.S. programs, they also harness the limited technological freedom they have to make degraded or unattractive aesthetics integral to their storytelling, proving their ingenuity. For instance, both *Skins* and *Misfits* utilize many subjective camera techniques, such as blurring and distortion, to make an experimental and less expensive aesthetic relevant to character development and emotional realism. *Misfits* reuses the same locations with little to no variation, but the dystopian cityscape becomes a stylistic signature of the program in the process. Adaptations of Broken

Britain youth programs often lose sight of the artistic importance of these innovations, choosing instead to use their big budgets to alter the style of the adaptation. For instance, *Skins U.S.* greatly alters the cinematic language and signatures of the original program by extending the length and size of the party sequences to show off their budget, abandoning point-of-view shots. These technological concerns reflect the process of Hollywoodization, which alters formats to match the sleek and attractive image quality that is valued in U.S. adaptations; a different concern of Hollywoodization, mainly the truncation or elongation of plot, also changes the tone and style of remakes.

Several of the articles in Lavigne's anthology highlight the way that U.K. translations undergo changes to their plot in order to sustain the U.S. translation beyond the life of shorter U.K. series or to eliminate cultural material that does not blend well with U.S. television (including offensive content). Even popular U.K. programs are occasionally cancelled or ended by the program's creator/writer after only a few seasons, and the U.K. has fewer episodes per season (also known as series in the U.K.). However, the U.S. industry expects U.S. programs to continue as long as they are profitable with few exceptions, and U.S. television seasons are generally longer, even on cable. In general, those purchasing formats wait until there are several seasons of the original program released to begin creating the adaptation, giving the new series more material to work from. The success of the adaptation stems from delaying the purchase of the format. However, these adaptations struggle to balance aspects of the original and their own additions to plot and character. *Skins U.S.* chose to keep many of the original characters and plots, presumably because its U.K. creators maintained creative control.

This choice makes the adaptation's alterations, such as the addition of a dramatic will-they-won't-they romance centering on the adaptation's one new character, appear disproportionate to the original program's material and arbitrary. Yet *Skins U.S.* was a ratings hit for the first half of the season when most of its new material aired, proving that the program did resonate with a U.S. audience outside of those who saw the original program. The rest of this chapter details the specific stylistic difficulties of remaking *Skins*, and how the lack of stylistic consistency in the process of cultural translation can affect the identification patterns of youth audiences.

***Skins*: Cultural Translation and Audience Identification**

Skins defined the essential elements of Broken Britain youth programs and established these programs' positive cultural reputation in the U.K. The program features a new cast of characters every two years in order to show the individual development of group members in their last two years of school at a Bristol further education college. Each episode follows one teen in each group, except for some special episodes titled "everyone" that focus on group identification. A typical episode details the different priorities in these young people's lives, positioning the characters within a mix of public and private spheres. Maria del Mar Grandio (2012) maps out the spatial configuration of these different spheres, stating *Skins* "has the ability to show unique spatial spheres for each character. Here we can define four main references: Personal sphere: home and family. Private sphere: their bedroom (their intimate world). Public sphere: school or work. Social sphere (relationships): leisure areas and parties" (565). This balanced and easily compartmentalized view of each character's life, as well as the stylistic elements of

the program that bind the character's subjectivity with the viewer's subjectivity, creates a complex and multifaceted picture of a youth culture that is understood to be delinquent. *Skins* uses viewer identification to create an alternative narrative to "Broken Britain"—one that is sympathetic and emotionally realistic so that youth audiences can identify with these characters outside of readings offered in news media coverage and adult perceptions of youth. *Skins*' aesthetic language encourages self-analysis in its viewers by establishing an authentic narrative of youth that privileges the subjectivity of teens.

Skins' Aesthetic Language

The central aesthetic choices in *Skins* that encourage identification and reduce the distance between the character and the viewer are connected to innovations in the language of point-of-view camera and pacing or structure. A style that favors subjectivity facilitates these innovations. *Skins* expresses teen identities from inside their own skin (the origin of the title), allowing the program to discuss "youth issues" without reducing youth to objects, unlike the process of moral panic. Dwyer and Wyn emphasize how "youth issues" approaches are reductive of youth experience. They state that "What is seen as distinctive about those 'at-risk' is what is dysfunctional in their lives—and, unfortunately, even those who are in a sense 'on their side' and concerned about their futures tend to highlight failure, alienation, and family breakdown, so that young people with problems come across as 'problem kids'" (2001, 86). Research and media representations take the "at-risk" portion of youth identity as its object, defining all of the problems and solutions of "at-risk" experience as stemming from single-factor cause and effect. However, experiencing the many different areas of one teen's life, like family and

school, through the subjective identification of *Skins* allows the viewer to see how “youth issues” affecting only one of these spheres can be disproportionately stressed in studies of youth life.

Although many characters on *Skins* represent “youth issues” common to moral panic, like youth delinquency and teen pregnancy, the subjective approach of the program allows the audience to understand the “at-risk” aspects of the characters from diverse perspectives. This perspective includes an understanding of the moral complexities of human choice and the priorities of youth lifestyles, much like the “choice biographies” Dwyer and Wyn highlight in their research. The consistency of *Skins* U.K.’s aesthetic and narrative language establishes the techniques that appear in most Broken Britain youth programming. Yet the *Skins* U.S. adaptation breaks the important connection between the viewer and audience that allows the original to morally complicate “youth issues” and create sympathy for “at-risk” teens.

Multiple viewings of *Skins* increase the likelihood that a viewer will find the program relatable to their lived experience, a phenomenon studied in Jenkins’ research on fan interpretation. A viewer’s experience of the text deepens based on the aesthetic and narrative openness of the text, as well as the textual materials that are important to the viewer’s personal experiences. Jenkins discusses how repeated viewings allow audiences to refocus: “the desire to resolve narrative mysteries loses its grip on the reader.... Interests shift elsewhere, onto character relations, onto thematic meanings, onto social knowledge assumed by the narrator” (1992, 67). Jason Mittell’s (2010) work on genre calls this shifting awareness the “operational aesthetic” (150). Audiences enjoy the

mechanics of the program beyond their narrative meaning, on the terms of performance, character, and visual style. Some of the aesthetic and narrative techniques of *Skins*, such as the use of point-of-view camera or fragmented narrative, help the audience expand on the text using their own emotions and experiences when viewing the program in an operational mode. This process encourages self-analysis by using style to enhance the viewer's emotional connection to the text. Re-reading during personal viewing encourages emotional investment as "episodes become enmeshed in the viewer's own life, gaining significance ... evoking memories as rich as the series itself; these experiences alter viewer's identifications with characters and the significance they place upon narrative events" (Jenkins, 1992, 69). After repeated viewing of a media text, the audience can begin to recognize how their interest in the text reflects the priorities and experiences of their everyday life. Although it is impossible to know how many viewers of *Skins* were repeat viewers, the program's style, as well as MTV's advertising campaign which targeted viewers of the original series, encourages the process of identification that Jenkins describes.

Subjectivity and Skins

As Jenkins' states, viewers identify with certain characters upon re-reading, and the aesthetic choices of *Skins* encourage the viewer to experience the emotional realism of these characters. Establishing a relationship between the characters and viewer requires a sympathetic depiction of the "youth issues" that tend to negatively define teen life. Viewers decide, upon repeated viewing, which characters speak to their own emotional experience. Jenkins describes the way that personal experience establishes the

emotional realism of programs through the viewer's subjective construction of the text.

He states that

‘emotional realism’ is not a property of fictions so much as it is an interpretive fiction fans construct ... what counts as ‘plausible’ in such a story is a general conformity to the ideological norms by which the viewer makes sense of everyday life. Such a conception of the series allows fans to draw upon their own personal backgrounds as one means of extrapolating beyond the information explicitly found within the aired episodes. (1992, 107)

The construction of emotional realism by the viewer contributes to the authenticity of a text, and every individual will understand the emotional reality of a specific character in *Skins* differently. These different readings are productive, allowing viewers to use the text for self-analysis without an institutionally imposed meaning. Free from the power of media institutions, youth viewers create positive understandings of their own experience like Giroux's media education experiment. The program encourages this process by using point-of-view camera techniques and sound layering to allow the audience to share in each character's emotions.

Skins U.K. establishes a very specific grammatical language based on the manipulation of point-of-view identification and shot-reverse shot editing patterns. These techniques connect the character featured in each episode with the viewer, establishing subjectivity and showing the character's body language and behavior through reaction shots. These techniques consistently appear in the majority of the six seasons of *Skins* U.K. For instance, the iconic *Skins* season-opening shot regularly includes the central character's face as he or she is lying in bed. This shot appears in season one with the episode “Tony” and reappears regularly, even as late as the first

episode of season five in “Franky.” These shots connect the audience with the character, initiating identification in a space where the character is alone and inactive with no other individuals for the viewer to identify with.

The alternation of close-ups of the characters with shots from their point-of-view directs the audience’s attention to the central character’s concern, attributing the subjectivity of the episode to the character and revealing his or her emotional reactions to the world. For instance, in the episode featuring “Sid,” the audience experiences the distractions that keep Sid from his school work. Point-of-view shots of Sid’s pet hamster stirring in his wheel interrupt shots of the blinking cursor on his empty computer screen. A shot of Sid’s bunched-up face confirms his distraction. The establishment of this shot pattern connects the images of the hamster and computer screen to Sid’s perspective. Without the early establishment of these shots, the main character’s perspective is undermined.

Visual effects enhance the connection between the characters’ subjectivity and the viewer to create sympathy. These moments often amplify visual and aural aspects of the scene to reveal the character’s insecurities. For instance, Franky, a genderqueer character, is unlikely to be relatable to the majority of *Skins* viewers. However, a shot of Franky walking through the girl’s locker room from her point of view emphasizes her discomfort in a way that can be felt by the audience. The tilting and shaky camera shows the disorienting quality of the small space, allowing the viewer to feel the claustrophobia and discomfort that Franky experiences. This scene conveys the universal feeling of being talked about after entering a room by panning down a row of scantily clad girls

staring strangely toward the viewer paired with the sound of whispering that does not match the image. These feelings are relatable to any self-conscious teen and create an emotional connection between the character and viewers who might initially feel they have little in common with this genderqueer character. These moments of visual effect can also contribute to the moral ambiguity of the character's actions by showing their disorienting experiences. For instance, after a long and adventurous drug-induced trip sequence (signaled by lights, the character's face in the frame spinning and blurring), Chris wakes up to find his pet fish dead and his house destroyed. These harsh consequences stem from an accidental circumstance. The viewer, who experienced the pleasure of the trip with Chris, feels just as startled as he appears by the condition of his home. The use of visual effects can show viewers the pleasure of conventionally condemned behavior, allowing the effects of that behavior to create many responses in the viewer besides judgment. Visual effects in *Skins* signal the program's authenticity by simulating the emotions and behaviors of "at-risk" youth, as well as their effects, for viewers without aligning the program with the adult perspective.

While *Skins U.S.* attempts to maintain the connection between the characters and the viewer, the adaptation makes the mistake of depending too heavily on the grammar of the original pilot, only to deviate sharply from that style in later episodes. Although the U.S. pilot begins with the same signature *Skins* opening shot of Tony in bed, later episodes of the adaptation violate the point-of-view grammar of *Skins*. First of all, there is an increased dependence on over-the-shoulder shots in the adaptation. These shots make the audience feel like part of the scene but not necessarily connected to the

sensations of the character like direct point-of-view shots. This change interrupts the connection between the character and the viewer.

The U.S. version of *Skins* also violates the implicit rule that only the central character's point-of-view should be shown. Instead, multiple characters are given point-of-view shots in each episode. For instance, point-of-view shots of Tony staring at Tea, the only entirely new character in the adaptation, appear in nearly every episode. Tea and Tony's dominant storyline is central to nearly every stylistic disruption that occurs in *Skins U.S.*, indicating the difficulty and importance of limiting plot elongation in adaptation. Splitting point-of-view shots between multiple characters in every episode, even if these moments are brief and understood, takes focus away from the main character's perspective and separates them from the audience. The increased distance between the character and the viewer in *Skins U.S.* establishes a questionable foundation for the type of intimate identification that the original U.K. version offers audiences.

Skins U.S. further violates the stylistic limitations that the original series used to sustain the single-character perspective, by giving secondary characters' point-of-view shots that are enhanced with visual effects. These sequences, which use visual and aural effects to show the emotions of secondary characters, do not encourage the same sympathetic connection between the main character and the viewer. Additionally, these moments that violate point-of-view do not enhance the emotions of the character. Ultimately, *Skins U.S.* struggles to successfully maintain the connection between the viewer and character while creating its own autonomous style. For example, in the episode "Tea," both Tony and Cadie are given point-of-view shots, but Cadie's point-of-

view is also accompanied by music that blocks out the sound of those around her. As she gives her attention to Tony and Stan by taking off her headphones, the music recedes. This moment does use visual effects with point-of-view, but the effects do not serve an emotional goal as with Franky's insecure vision of the gym locker room. These sequences in *Skins U.S.* most often highlight the technical skill of the director, rather than an emotional or moral goal. There are many visual effect sequences that use a shot-for-shot style of format adaptation. For instance, *Skins U.S.* replicates the trip sequence that appears in "Chris" shot-for-shot in the U.S. adaptation. While this scene serves the same moral ambiguity as the original, the repetition lessens the impact of the scene for viewers of the original—viewers that *Skins U.S.*' advertising appealed to substantially.

Skins U.S. greatly alters the role of another technique in *Skins* that encourages self-analysis: the routine montage. *Skins U.K.* created the routine montage to introduce the everyday life and behaviors of the program's characters, giving viewers minor details and concrete behaviors to use in their own self-analysis. Young people's everyday behaviors are defined by their routine, which is represented by the different spheres (school, family, home, social life) that they encounter. *Skins* shows the process and behaviors these youth engage in throughout their daily routine but most importantly when they are alone. In *Skins* many of the characters' time alone is explored using a montage sequence. Often these montages repeat throughout the character's episode in order to show that these behaviors and activities are habitual. For instance, Mini, a girl with body image problems only openly copes with her difficulties in her time alone. When she is alone, Mini goes to the gym, eats nothing but nuts and berries, and practices sexual

positions in anticipation of her first sexual experience. She struggles with superficiality and perfection even without anyone to judge her. Mini's insecure behaviors reveal that she does not think she is good enough. She feels she is not skinny enough, and she is nervous about being a virgin. However, when Mini is in a group she is the center of attention, full of confidence, and claims to have a lot of sexual experience. Revealing a character's actions alone can complicate the audience's understanding of their own behaviors and the character's, especially when compared to the character's behaviors in a group. Perhaps this viewer is someone like Mini or knows someone like her, and these scenes can allow a greater understanding of the self and others.

Authentic representations of teen life should show the way young people understand themselves alone and what occupies their time, which is why routine montages in *Skins* feature characters in their individual space and free time. These sequences help to define the boundaries between personal and group identities, both of which the program examines. But these sequences also represent a variety of behaviors that viewers can use in self-analysis. Behaviors are central to self-analysis because they can signal problems that reflect "youth issues" in a subjective manner. Jenkins states that in fan re-reading, "The nonverbal dimensions of performance (the exchanged glances, gestures, and expressions actors bring to their roles) become the focus of interest as those decontextualized gestures reveal 'hidden aspects' of television characters" (1992, 228). These behaviors can also make viewers aware of hidden aspects of their own emotional experience. Many teen viewers may recognize each character's behaviors as activities or interests in which the viewers also participate. As a result, these moments can make the

audience more aware of the significance of their own behavior.

Routine montages appear sparingly in *Skins U.S.*, which causes the characters to appear more one-dimensional, despite the producers' continued effort to shoot in multiple locations and represent multiple areas of youth life. *Skins U.S.* establishes the importance of the routine montage in the pilot, "Tony," and the only other entirely new episode of the series, "Tea," though the series does not use these montages throughout the season. The routine montages in the original "Tony" and the U.S. adaptation are identical with the exception of a few small details, such as Tony's exercise routine. By replacing the fairly standard weight lifting scene with a boxing routine, the U.S. adaptation codes Tony as more traditionally and aggressively masculine than his U.K. counterpart, a change that remains consistent throughout the season. Because MTV targeted repeat viewers, changes to the details about already established characters may have added complexity and interest for these viewers, especially if these changes resonated with U.S. culture more specifically. However, in other episodes like "Chris," routine montages simply replicate those of the original U.K. episode. Concentrating all of the changes in *Skins U.S.* on Tea and Tony destroys the character balance of the program and confuses the target audience of repeat viewers by giving them too little new material that is disproportionately invested in a minority of the show's characters.

Relying too heavily on the source material makes the U.S. remake unable to stand as an autonomous project, because it offers no incentive for repeat viewers. These scenes may grant insight to a new audience but their inconsistent use does not foreground their importance as prominently as the original *Skins*. Ultimately, the promotional team for the

program targeted a repeat viewing audience, yet the producers did not offer enough new material to retain this audience. The inconsistent use of the routine montage also interrupts the audience's identification with the characters because not all of the characters are given notable behaviors that allow audience self-analysis. Perhaps neglecting the routine montage was necessary to accommodate the shorter run-time of the U.S. episodes, but these montages are important for U.S. youth audiences because U.S. youth programming typically highlights the sensational and dramatic moments of youth life, which are not always the most relatable.

Narrative Techniques: Structure and Skins

The adaptation not only interrupts audience identification with the single-character perspective, it reinstates hierarchies of meaning that are common to television but undermined in the original *Skins*. Fan re-reading resists the hierarchy of major and minor characters that dramatic programming often imposes on its viewers. One purpose of re-reading the program is to make minor characters more central, giving them new roles outside that of the television text. Gray's (2010) work on paratexts explains the process of refocalizing that can occur with repeated viewing. He states that material and self-analysis outside the text can "create a reflective space in which viewers can engage more closely with the psyches, motivations, and specificities of multiple characters than they might be able to in the films or programs themselves" (144). *Skins'* choice to represent a single perspective per episode allows this type of rounded analysis to be applied to each of the program's characters.

Each episode is also structured by the relationships between the central character

and those within the group. Mar Grandio summarizes how character can structure plot. She states, “Character-development determines the main story’s characteristics and each episode’s structure” (2012, 567). Each character develops an individual linear story over the course of the season. Each of these characters’ relationships are clarified and altered over the course of the season, as one character’s emotion for a close friend or lover may be unexamined until the episode featuring that friend or lover. These episodes tend to be structured based on which characters grow together, developing feelings or emotional proximity over time. For example, Chris and Jal seem like casual friends until their individual episodes, which feature more moments with them together on screen than with the other characters in the series. These moments are small in terms of the structure and screen time of a single character’s episode. However, these scenes define the way the characters and their relationships change over time.

Skins’ rotating perspectives violate many of the narrative norms of ensemble programs. Jenkins discusses the typical layering of narrative importance in ensemble programs using the rules of interpretation. He explains the “rules of notice,” defined as an interpretive framework that “give(s) priority to particular aspects of narratives as potentially interesting and significant while assigning others to the margins” (1992, 133). The split between major and minor characters defines programs that obey the rules of notice. However, the construction of *Skins* alters the notions of marginal characters and storylines by filtering the significance of events through the point of view of whichever character is the title character. The producers organize episodes to prohibit audiences from deciding what they deem to be significant events upon first viewing. For example,

the groups split into any number of minor stories. In the first season, Tony, Michelle, and Sid share an interwoven plot that unfolds over the course of the season, whereas Anwar, Maxxie, Chris, and Jal have their own individual plots. The second set of characters has episodes interspersed throughout Tony, Michelle, and Sid's storyline causing some of the action between the trio to occur off-screen. This staggered construction ensures an equal development for all of the characters and delays the satisfaction of audience curiosity, denying the typical linear format of serial dramas. However, upon re-reading viewers can track these narrative patterns, focusing on those plots that appeal most to them. All that the viewer has to know is the episode title, which is the central character's name, in order to simplify his/her re-reading. Audience members observe patterns in the seasons' structure that reflect the emotional connections between the members of each generation of *Skins* characters.

If the traditional rules of notice that Jenkins discusses are undermined in the original *Skins*, then these rules are reinstated in the adaptation. These rules create a linear path in the program's season storyline and allow certain stories, in particular the narrative of the new character Tea, to dominate each episode. The adaptation inserts major scenes featuring the new character Tea in all but two episodes to varying effect. The original *Skins* allows the characters' proximity to define each character's importance to the episode. If the audience observes that the season treats Tony and Tea's romance as the central storyline (which is implied by the disproportionate amount of scenes they share), then introducing the season with the episodes "Tony" and "Tea" signals the creators' intention to make these characters central. Similarly unwieldy romantic storylines appear

in the original *Skins* in season three and season four. However, these seasons are also judged as inadequate in comparison to other seasons by fans because they move away from character development (Hunn, 2012). Designating major storylines interrupts the unpredictable flow of *Skins*' seasons.

Tony and Tea's story, a will-they-or-won't-they romance, structures the season, and at times this structure is awkward. Tea's confrontation with Cadie in the episode "Cadie" violates emotional proximity by placing characters without an established relationship into a scene in service of the major season plot. This scene functions as a plot device to move the episode forward and symbolize Tea's inner struggle over Tony. After confronting Tea about Tony, Tea tells Cadie, "I haven't been good in lots of ways. I'm really sorry." When Cadie asks Tea "What for?" Tea replies, "Stan invited you here for your drugs." This exchange doubles as an admission of Tea's guilt about cheating with Tony in order to advance the season storyline and clumsily reveal the central action of the episode, Stan's betrayal of Cadie. Inserting this type of expositional scene cements Tea as a central character in the season's story, yet *Skins U.S.* must simplify the scattered and unpredictable storylines of the original program in order to include this scene.

Scenes focusing on Tea frequently interrupt at inappropriate moments, causing the adaptation to focus on on-screen moments and neglect off-screen fragmentation of character relationships. Jenkins discusses the importance of narrative fragmentation as a popular reading technique. He states, "readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience" (1992, 26). *Skins* develops its own formula for fragmenting a media

text. By separating audience identification and plot into two separate layers, narrative gaps occur on screen without explanation. Audience members must insert their knowledge of character motivations, often determined by their personal construction of the characters' emotional reality, into these gaps to make sense of the text. In a sense, the producers consciously answer the audience's demand for narrative ambiguity by including these gaps. Indeed, there are times when the limitation of point of view is flaunted, leaving the audience to fill in the gaps.

Audiences can fill gaps with their social experiences, which can create vast differentiation in interpretations of these fragments. One such fragment occurs in the season five episode "Grace." Grace is too busy caring for her drunken boyfriend to interject when four of her friends start an argument. This fight appears on screen but the environment of the scene, a booming night-club, drowns out all of the sound. Despite the absence of sound, the interpersonal effects of this confrontation are central to the next episode. By purposefully withholding the audience's experience of this scene, the program encourages the audience to fill in the gap. Their interpretations will be determined by the combination of their individualized relationship to the various characters and the behavior of those characters in the next episode. This gap encourages speculative readings, keeping audiences engaged between episodes. Mar Grandio highlights the importance of this off-screen space, stating "This extension of the story is key in off-season periods, as this is when viewers might forget or 'disconnect' from the series" (2012, 564). These speculative readings occur during this time away from the program, suggesting a high level of engagement with the text. The narrative gap

primarily rewards a re-reading audience because upon initial viewing these moments are barely noticed or create confusion. These gaps add ambiguity to the emotional relationships between characters, by creating conflict that must be read into by the viewer to be understood.

Skins U.S. does not use the fragmentation techniques that the original program employs; instead, all of the important incidents occur on screen, bringing perspectives outside of the main characters into the episode and using moments of eavesdropping that are visually foregrounded. Because U.S. television speeds up the narrative progression of events, these crossover techniques, which create moments of connection between parallel narratives or character arcs, create more beats of action per episode. Yet these techniques can also potentially be useful for re-reading. Although “crossover” is a trope of fan writing, these moments can occur visually within a program to increase audience speculation. Peter G ldenpfennig (2011) describes the function of crossover within a text. These techniques allow “a more thorough exploration of well-known (at least by fans) relationships between characters in the source material” (8). These explorations often expand on small moments between unlikely but popular character relationships, allowing the audience to imagine what their further interactions would be like. By using crossover techniques, *Skins U.S.* presents confrontations and moments of interaction between characters with little or no emotional proximity yet who may share a similar experience or struggle in the series. These crossovers lead the audience to acknowledge these similarities, which they can expand upon in their own re-reading of the text.

“Cadie” demonstrates the positive potential of the crossover technique that is

limited by MTV's brand of dramatic programming. Cadie's episode uses crossover to foreground the encounter between Tea and Cadie. The audience sees the confrontation between Tea and Tony that Cadie only hears, because the scene is framed in the margin of the screen. These visual moments occur in the original program as well. For instance, Jal sees Tony kissing a girl who is not his girlfriend in her episode. Jal sees this action from a distance, framed in the background by the door to another room. However, in the original series, little context is provided for these moments, and they are not used to expand on character because there is no confrontation. Including a confrontation draws similarities between characters that share little screen time into the open. Viewers can interpret these similarities through their experience to expand these relationships. The scene with Cadie and Tea implies the similarities between Tea's lies to her girlfriend about Tony and Cadie's mental illness which includes compulsively lying to the point where she becomes delusional about her own life. Viewers may imagine a friendship between these characters based on their struggles to become more honest individuals. In fact, Tea does extend her sympathy to Cadie for Stan's lie, stating "Stanley should treat you better than that. We should all be better." The girls' shared secrets could establish a friendship that allows them to become "better" as Tea seems to hope. However, using this emotional moment for story exposition forecloses the meaning of Tea and Cadie's similarities; both girls are liars. This moment also depends on the viewer's judgment, a negative dramatic technique that supports conflict. Furthermore, these characters share no important moments later in the series to validate or complicate their connection. Denying ambiguity in these scenes means that viewers have less material to reinterpret

for self-reflection. Also, these moments of reflective crossover that are unique to *Skins U.S.* are most often used to create conflicts, breaking the connections between characters to create drama.

One of the most innovative aspects of *Skins* is its positive image of a diverse youth community finding harmony, but this peaceful vision of youth does not match the generic requirement for conflict common to U.S. youth dramas. Some U.S. programs that use dramatic storylines alter aspects of this formula. *Glee*, for example, uses the Glee Club as a metaphoric safe space where boundaries of difference can be overcome. *The O.C.* balances dramatic and comedic storylines between its core characters. Ryan and Marissa are typically part of the dramatic conflict, while Seth and Summer are the comic relief, yet these four characters have a supportive relationship with one another. However, these programs are the exception, and MTV programs, in particular, offer more dramatic conflict. These tendencies stem from the early conception of MTV's audience. According to Denisoff, early directors of MTV programs believed that MTV's audience "is more interested in images, emotions, and energy than plot and character and words" (1989, 253). This reactive quality in their series led the network to value reality programming, which depends on reactive documentary aesthetics. This aesthetic blends with their fictional programs, making them emotionally driven so they focus on relationships and conflict rather than plot and character.

Skins U.S. alters the goals of the original program in order to fit into MTV's brand of conflict. Passing or minor conflicts in the original series, such as the dissolution of Tony and Sid's friendship and Michelle's anger at Tony for cheating, continue until the

end of the adaptation. Visual effects often heighten these moments; for example, the use of handheld camera during Michelle's fight with Tony in the cafeteria emphasizes the violence of the moment. However, even moments of crossover, the most potentially beneficial technique used in the adaptation, facilitate conflict. Eura, Tony's younger sister, is a minor character throughout the program, meaning she is often used in crossover moments. She and Cadie connect over their similar experiences with mental illness, a positive moment of crossover that deepens both characters. Eura also helps another character's younger sibling throw a wild party, creating conflict. Eura's presence often acts as a catalyst for development in other characters.

Even in her own episode, Eura is an outsider meant primarily to facilitate conflict through crossover moments. In one of these moments, the camera shoots over Eura's shoulder as she approaches Michelle from behind, foregrounding her intrusion. Michelle states "It's not nice to follow people around Eura," confirming both Eura's outsider status and the imminent "crossover" moment. Michelle's point of view dominates the scene as the camera focuses on the letter from Tony that she is reading. This choice subordinates the main character Eura's point of view. Although Eura believes she is re-connecting Michelle and her brother in a sympathetic way, this moment offers a misleading connection. In the same shot, Michelle turns over the letter to see a sketch of Tea. Although Michelle does not react violently, she and Eura both begin to cry and Eura runs away, transforming a moment of connection into conflict. This use of the crossover technique reduces the emotional impact of a connection between two unlikely characters to a negative connection in service of conflict. In the case of *Skins U.S.*' failed crossover

technique, MTV's preoccupation with conflict in its dramatic programming limited its narrative innovation.

The often petty relational conflicts featured on MTV programs rarely address important "youth issues." Themes associated with moral panic play a large part in young adult oriented television because they validate the "youth issues" perspective of most adult producers. Drug use, sexuality and violence characterize most teen programs and appear regularly in *Skins*. Themes are important because audiences "are drawn to particular programs because they provide materials most appropriate for talking about topics of more direct concern. Such discussions offer insights for resolving personal problems" (Jenkins, 1992, 83). *Skins*, like other programs targeting teens, takes a thematic approach meant to offer personal insight into societal "youth issues." Yet, most programs do not offer a realistic treatment of themes because they are morally simplistic. *Skins'* moral ambiguity subverts the problems of other teen programs like *Degrassi*, which are morally unrealistic and therefore condescending to youth audiences. On a typical teen program, bad things are always clearly bad. The music guides the emotions, and the adult states moral lessons. This typical outline means that youth may not be able to see their experiences in these either/or solutions and reject the adult perspective.

Skins' insights may have a greater impact because they are tied to subjective effects in the cinematography that support ambiguous moral meanings. Despite their moral ambiguity, themes in *Skins* undermine the "youth issues" approach of other youth programs by creating sympathy for those experiencing these issues. Producers subvert "youth issues" by addressing and undermining the conventions of moral panic that

typically define them. These “youth issues” themes use cultural knowledge to show that “all reading is essentially re-reading, as we draw upon cultural codes and social assumptions” (Jenkins, 1992, 67). *Skins* represents the typical cultural assumptions about “youth issues” in order to show the effect that these assumptions have on youth who experience these issues.

The original *Skins* offers complex situations without simple solutions. The program does this by taking behaviors, like drug use, that are common to a large number of youth on the program and creating a situation where the negative effects of that behavior are evident but morally ambiguous. For example, in season three’s “Effy,” the main character, who is hallucinating on drugs, hits another girl over the head with a rock. The camera work disorients the viewer, providing point-of-view shots that place the audience in the position of the attacker. The viewer experiences a combination of visual disorientation and the intense emotional shifts of the victim, leaving the attack morally ambiguous. Each viewer makes individual judgments about whether the attack was an act of self-defense. *Skins* makes the audience complicit in bad behavior, allowing them to experience the negative effects of an issue, like drugs, without losing sympathy for the character.

One of the most important episodes of *Skins* addresses anorexia with a degree of sympathy that is absent from other representations. Although many teen programs treat anorexia as an irrational behavior, programs that give the audience the subjective vision of an anorexic’s world encourage sympathy for those with the disease. Cassie’s episode subverts the simplistic formula that teen television uses to address “youth issues” like

anorexia. In “Cassie,” the audience experiences Cassie’s hunger-induced hallucinations. Cassie’s friends hold culturally mainstream beliefs about her disorder. For example, her friend Michelle mumbles in her sleep that Cassie is a “crazy bitch, never eats.” Michelle’s words remind the audience that culture codes the behavior of “not eating” as irrational or crazy. However, the audience’s proximity to Cassie shows that views like this are ultimately harmful to her ability to recover. Cassie likes a boy who is similarly criticized by their friends. After a mutual friend insults her crush, saying “I wonder why you bother to get up in the morning,” calling him a “slob,” Cassie pushes food onto the friend’s lap. She defends her crush from the type of criticisms she also faces. Indeed, this friend also calls her “dippy” when he enters the scene. The text messages and notes that say “eat” produced by Cassie’s hallucinations reinforce her feelings of subordination. Although she believes her crush is responsible for these notes, she discovers he is not. After discovering these signs are a hallucination, Cassie asks, “Who is telling me to eat?” Cassie’s realization that she is fixated on something that does not exist, like her weight problems or these text messages, influences the audience’s experience when they view the episode for a second time. Although her friend’s preconceived notions of Cassie’s disorder blind them to her progress recovering, Cassie cannot fool herself, the one ultimately responsible for these messages. Sympathetic representations of youth problems allow the audience to relate to the characters despite their flaws. This sympathetic approach to “youth issues” may also help teens accept and confront their flaws more readily. Cassie may help some anorexics overcome their denial, a key aspect of the disease that is often coded as irrational.

Skins U.S. alters the plot twists the original uses, and the plot twists that are included largely adhere to MTV series' penchant for conflict. While Cassie's episode uses the ambiguity and eventual revelation of her hallucinations to address anorexia, the only *Skins U.S.* episode to use an original hallucinatory effect and plot twist does so purely for entertainment value. The plot twist featured in the episode "Abbud" places Tea and Tony's storyline above the central character's perspective. Abbud has many point-of-view shots in the episode, most of which use visual effects like handheld camera combined with rustling and chainsaw noises in the woods, to connect the audience to his fear of the woods that stems from horror films. However, the plot twist is that although Abbud has been hallucinating for the majority of the episode, one of these visions is real. Running from imagined noises, Abbud stumbles upon clothes strewn on the ground. Abbud follows the clothes to find Tea and Tony having sex. Just as Cadie's role in her episode is reduced to her discovery of Tea and Tony's affair, Abbud's role is reduced to one of discovery. Abbud has a crush on Tea. Tea is a self-proclaimed lesbian who has rejected Abbud, so he feels hurt when he discovers them together. This plot twist only exacerbates the conflict between Tea and Abbud and the plot abandons the build-up of the chainsaw killer that Abbud imagines. Most importantly this plot does not focus on a particular "youth issue" or create sympathy for any of the characters based on their experiences as "at-risk" youth. The disconnection between the subjective effects and their ultimate meaning within the episode, paired with the privileging of Tea's story within the episode, reduces the typical *Skins* plot twist to an entertainment device.

There are several "youth issues" addressed in *Skins U.S.*, such as abandonment

and the overmedication of youth, but these themes do not have subjective effects and plot twists attached to them. The plot twists simply repeat the structure of the original *Skins* episode they are based on. These plot twists allow the audiences of the original to re-read in an operational mode. Gray states that reading in this mode “does not take away from [the audience’s] enjoyment of the program’s performances, dialogue, production values, humorous moments, and focus on character relationships and development” (2010, 150). However, programs offering plot twists that affect re-reading must provide elements of quality in these other categories to maintain the audience’s interest. Ultimately, *Skins U.S.* inconsistently addresses “youth issues” and does not undermine them, or use them to create a positive sympathetic opinion of the character.

Sympathetic identification with characters is often developed over time in the original *Skins*, which uses emotional realism to create continuity for its characters between the first and second season in which they are featured. The generational structure of *Skins* allows the program to attach multiple meanings to a character over time. Mar Grandio explains how this structure is observed in each generation of characters. She states “The first season is used to introduce the characters, and the second one is devoted to exploring in depth their intimate dramas” (2012, 567). Both the first and second season episode for each character examines a similar theme or variation of a similar experience. For example, Chris’ first and second season storylines study the effects of abandonment on a teen over time. Chris’ ability to find his own home in the second season shows the character’s growth over time. In the first season, Chris’ teacher finds him a home within Roundview College but in the second season he must contend

with losing this home as well, after he is kicked out for generally delinquent behavior. His friend Jal asks him to make an effort in his life, and he goes from being a drugged out homeless boy to a man with a job and his own apartment in a matter of weeks. By showing a character dealing with the real-world problems of getting a job and finding a place to live, the program may empower individuals who share the emotional experience of parental neglect.

Drastic shifts within characters, such as this one, also occur off-screen between the first episode and second episode that focuses on a character's singular experience. These shifts exemplify Mar Grandio's comments about the necessity of off-screen characterization. Indeed, the creators of *Skins* use transmedia outlets such as video blogs, Facebook, and even official novelizations to contextualize the shifts of characters between seasons (2012). However, the emotional realism of the characters allows an audience member who may not use these transmedia sources to place their own emotional experience into the text in order to contextualize these character shifts. The open interpretation of these shifts can occasionally be problematic if fans believe that there is an unstable or simplistic characterization over time. These instances compromise the viewer's construction of the emotional realism of the character. For example, some viewers may doubt that Chris could change within the span of an episode, and prefer that this change occur off-screen to preserve the program's sense of emotional realism. These shifts generally upset fans of *Skins* the most. Hunn's case study details the negative reaction of fans to the changes made to the couple "Naomily" in their second season

(2012). These shifts are occasionally problematic for fans, but these shifts use off-screen space and time effectively.

Conclusion

This chapter describes some of the stylistic techniques that the producers of Broken Britain youth programs use to connect their audience to the emotionally realistic and authentic material in their programs. These innovations do not appear regularly in U.S. adaptations of Broken Britain youth programs, partially due to the commercial goals of the U.S. television industry. The absence of these techniques limits the potential of these programs to offer personal authenticity to youth audiences. *Skins* created some very specific techniques for subjective visuals and narrative structure that can be translated in U.S. television. *Skins U.S.* limits these techniques due to the constraints of industry, authorship, cultural translation, and brand placed on this adaptation. However, both versions of the program offer potential techniques that encourage audience identification. This potential defines the style of the original program, as well as the “crossover” technique of the adaptation, and offers a liberating text to marginalized youth audiences. While the adaptation was not a success, the other Broken Britain youth programs that are currently being adapted can learn much from *Skins*’ failed experiment. Placing the viewer in the character’s skin allows a more sympathetic treatment of teen characters, free from the morally restrictive “youth issues” approach of most U.S. youth television.

Chapter 4

Skins' Authentic Representation:

Constructing an Alternative Narrative to Moral Panic

Subcultural theory articulates the relationship between media representations of youth and the authentic cultural experiences of youth beyond the possibilities that Broken Britain youth programming offers for audience identification. Media and youth cultures share a tremulous relationship that hinges on the adult control of the media institutions that disseminate information regarding youth's relationship to spheres as disparate as family, education, and general societal standards. Examining *Skins'* relationship to both subcultures and the "Broken Britain" movement ties media and youth cultures together in a fictional examination of real-world moral panic. *Skins* and other Broken Britain youth programs rewrite the narrative of this moral panic from the same position of authority as the journalistic media sources that perpetuate the panic. Subcultures, which are most often used to support the sensationalistic accounts of youth that sell newspapers, are reclaimed in the program.

Skins represents the positive and liberating aspects of subcultural identification, such as group identity and the bedroom culture. The program updates Hall's rigid concept of subcultures by transposing subcultural identities to a wider array of youth lifestyles. At the same time, *Skins* questions the adult institutions of family, education and society. Media use these institutions to establish their authority in narratives about "youth issues." *Skins'* reversal of this real-life standard allows an examination of youth subcultures as they are described by media through the negative rhetoric of "Broken

Britain.” *Skins* builds positive images of youth communities to act in opposition to the “Broken Britain” rhetoric by criticizing the institutions of family, education, and society that are central to this rhetoric; however, *Skins U.S.* translates the fluidity of youth cultures only to maintain a sense of antagonism within its youth cultures while inconsistently upholding the adult voice of authority.

This chapter will discuss how *Skins* constructs a positive alternative vision of youth culture by opposing positive subcultural representations of fluid youth lifestyles, tribal youth cultures, and bedroom cultures to the critical representations of adult institutions and society in the program. *Skins U.S.* alters the subcultural position and institutional criticisms of the original. These changes limit the adaptations authenticity to youth audiences while also neglecting the opportunity to create an alternative narrative about youth to correct moral panic. Broken Britain youth programs have established an authentic vision of youth cultures but U.S. producers have yet to translate these positive alternatives to narratives of moral panic about youth for U.S. audiences.

Updating the Birmingham School

Hall and the Birmingham school laid a foundational approach to theorizing the real-life impact of youth cultures and their relationship to the media. Hall believes that subcultures are a visible manifestation of the relationship between youth and media. The interference of a controlling institution or agent was central to Hall’s concept of the relationship between youth culture and media, especially the portrayal of “deviant” cultures in the media. Hall characterizes the relationship between the media and control culture as symbiotic, categorizing the “control culture as primary definers” that led to the

“media as reproducers” (2000, 75). Hall states that this relationship places the control culture in the role of the primary definers of deviancy until the media and control culture “each legitimates the other in turn” (2000, 76). This symbiotic relationship makes the creation of a narrative that lies outside the definition of the control culture nearly impossible. This process also naturalizes the narrative of the control culture by legitimating the opinions of the control culture as fact through repetition.

The visibility of youth culture was central to the post-war concerns about mass culture that spread through British culture. The symbiotic relationship between media and control culture naturalized the negative perception of youth as “deviant,” in part, by criticizing youth’s interest in mass culture. Hall discusses “The notion that Youth Culture was the result of such ‘mindless’ imitation by teenagers, fostered by shrewd and ‘manipulating’ commercial interests [and] representing the worst effects of the new ‘mass culture’ – its tendency to ‘unbend the springs’ of working class action and resistance” (2000, 19). The dichotomy of youth culture and media (specifically news media) as bad versus good was constructed during this post-war period by the collaboration of the control culture and media. The co-optation of commercial products by youth characterizes subcultural affiliations as a highly visible ground of contestation for the negative effects of mass culture on society. Through this period, the connection between youth and the negative effects of mass media solidified which created the conditions for later moral panics. *Skins* speaks about subcultures and youth culture from a position of media authority and subverts the dichotomy between youth and society.

However, Hall’s description of the dynamic supporting the symbiotic relationship

between the media and control cultures reveals that creating an alternative narrative to that of the primary definers is more difficult than simply speaking with media authority. Hall states “The structure of ‘balance’ *requires* the admission of alternative definitions, but these almost always come *later*, and so are required to reply on terrain already marked out by the primary definitions; and they, too, must come from accredited alternative sources (organisations or ‘experts’), and not from ‘deviants’ themselves” (2000, 75, emphasis added). *Skins* ultimately complies with the need for an alternative narrative from an accredited source, but its production by youth also allows the voices of deviants themselves to take on that level of authority, subverting this process from within. This process of accreditation and authority still fuels adult moral panic in our current culture.

Many parts of Hall’s theory must be updated in order to be applied to the loosely defined youth cultures that are represented in *Skins*. Parent cultures and generational conflict played a larger role in the development of subcultures during the post-war period in which Hall was writing than in current configurations of youth culture. Hall summarizes the relationship between youth cultures and parent cultures based on each generation’s similar experiences of class limitations. He states “the young inherit a cultural orientation from their parents towards a ‘problematic’ common to the class as a whole, which is likely to weight, shape and signify the meanings they then attach to different areas of their social life” (2000, 29). These observations still broadly apply to a select number of youth subcultures in the U.K. For instance, the “chav” subcultural label is associated with a broader perception of the lower class as affecting elements of

“trashy” culture, such as revealing clothing, fake mumbled accents, and for girls, heavy make-up. However, problems arise when this formula is applied to cultures outside of the U.K.

In the updated anthology *After Subcultures*, criticisms of the Birmingham School’s preoccupation with a historically specific vision of working-class white males reveal the difficulties of transposing this theory to other cultures. The authors state “The specificity of CCCS subcultural theory to a British academic context is further evidenced by youth culture research in the USA, which has remained far more sensitive to issues of race, culture, and locality as factors that cut across, or at the very least problematize, structuralist explanations of youth” (Bennett, 2004, 9). U.S. subcultures are much more disparate than the British subcultures of the 1970s that Hall and his colleagues were examining. These disparate cultures only loosely or incidentally relate to the class of their parents because class is largely the center of British social tensions. However, even in Britain, the effects of fragmentation and multiplication on youth subcultures compromise the relationship between parent and youth cultures.

Two of the most important areas in U.S. and U.K. culture that reveal the fragmentation of youth culture are the areas of class and race, both of which the original *Skins* addresses. *Skins*’ setting in working-class Bristol places these characters within the tense class dynamics of the U.K. A similarly working-class setting, Baltimore, was chosen for the adaptation. In both of these programs, class acts as a subtextual presence, and resembles the split between parent cultures and subcultures. Defining the setting of *Skins* and its adaptation using class boundaries allows an examination of class constraints

on youth life. However, the geographic location of the youth cultures depicted in these programs and the many alternative youth styles of the characters in these programs represent the fragmentation within these images of class. In *After Subculture*, Bennett and Kahn-Harris interrogate Hall and his group's assertion that class is the central guiding principle to youth cultures. They state "the formulation of 'class' upon which the CCCS subcultural theory is based may, in itself, be a rather oversimplistic model that glosses over significant variations in class sensibilities.... Geographical specificity is a factor in subcultural studies that cannot be overlooked [and consequently] works need to tone down their stress on the universality of subcultures" (2004, 8-9). The awkward translation of youth cultures from U.K. to U.S. categories in the *Skins* adaptation highlights the tension between geography and subculture. For instance, the adaptation overemphasizes the difference between public and private education in the U.S. by reducing it to a dichotomy of class, ignoring the predominant racial differences in its Baltimore setting. The main group lives in the cheap tenement houses of Baltimore, and the private school children live in a presidential-sized mansion. This class separation ignores the other reasons, such as personal safety, that determine whether a parent sends their children to a private school or public school in the U.S., especially in a crime-ridden city like Baltimore. This adaptation retains the U.K. producers who might magnify U.K. class issues that are less central to U.S. youth subcultures. *Skins'* U.S. adaptation fails to renegotiate the tension of class that is central to the original, leading the program to neglect the racial dimensions of U.S. subcultures.

Skins U.S. suffers from the same reductive collapse of class and race as Hall's

own work, erasing the fragmentations that racial tensions cause within class structures. U.S. youth television as a whole largely erases both class and race by setting the majority of programs in generic suburban U.S. towns. *Skins U.S.* uniquely represents the class tensions of a specific location unlike most U.S. youth programs. Other youth programs that represent these tensions, like *Dawson's Creek* or *The O.C.*, also require a specific location to configure this dissection of class. Yet these programs still neglect racially diverse images. Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson (2004) discuss the potential challenges that race poses to subcultural studies, while also highlighting their importance. They state "the very nature of cultural formation cannot be understood within racialized societies ... *without* an account of how the processes of racialization mediate taste cultures, give value to certain styles above others, and how these are often used to maintain, and occasionally change, social hierarchies" (71). The U.S. suffers from more pronounced racial tensions than U.K. culture, and this difference makes both U.K. theories of youth subcultures and U.K. television representations of race untenable on U.S. television without some acknowledgement of this difference. U.S. youth programs often ignore race, but with a careful consideration of how race and locality intersect, this weakness could be overcome.

Whereas the majority of U.S. youth programming maintains the racial dominance of the white hegemony, Broken Britain youth programs address racial difference. *Skins* features an African immigrant, showing the inequalities of his life through his excitement about living in an apartment that should be demolished. He showers in brown water yet smiles. *Misfits* questions the ability of rave subcultures to overcome racial differences.

One of the characters, Curtis, an Olympic athlete who represents racial exceptionalism, finds his status stripped away after being charged with possession during a rave. The cops even tell him that his “profile” urges them to punish him beyond the average sentence, his profile being both Black Briton and famous. While *Skins U.S.* cast actors of many different races (an Asian girl, a mixed race girl, a middle-eastern boy), none of these characters are treated as though they experience racial inequalities. Especially since the adaptation is set in a culturally diverse and racially contentious locality like Baltimore, writing characters of color by addressing their unequal experiences is crucial to the program’s emotional realism and complexity. The lack of racial representation in U.S. youth television exacerbates the need for diversity. Most U.S. youth programming casts youth of color selectively and rarely addresses their racial identities unless the program is dominantly non-white (*The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Moesha*). Even in these few exceptions, race is often secondary or subtextual in most of the series’ episodes. While class and race complicate the representation and cultural understanding of youth subcultures, the fragmentation of youth cultures should also be examined by subcultural studies.

The accumulation of youth styles and subcultures since Hall and his group wrote *Resistance Through Rituals* indicates that the historical specificity and limited number of youth cultures he addressed must be reconfigured to account for the fluidity and variety of later youth cultures. Hall defines subculture based on the highly visible and distinct cultures that his study addressed, which limits his theory’s applicability. Current youth subcultures represent an amalgamation of the styles that came before and the ever-

increasing selection of commodities that youth have to choose from. Because of the breakdown between subcultural distinctions, a new term, lifestyles, has been proposed.

Bennett and Khan-Harris define lifestyle as:

[focusing] on the issue of consumer creativity, acknowledging the ways in which commodities function as cultural resources whose meanings are generated at the level of the everyday through the inscription of collective meanings. Similarly, lifestyle attributes the reflexivity which informs individual consumer creativity to a desire on the part of individuals to take an active part in the making and remaking of their image and identity. In the case of youth, this may lead to ongoing shifts in musical and stylistic taste, thus giving rise to more temporal forms of youth cultural affiliation. (2004, 13)

Lifestyles consider the collective meanings of individual style, and these styles grant individual youth agency in both the creation of their own identity and the maintenance or alteration of that identity. The diverse and shifting subcultural identifications of the youth featured in *Skins* present a realistic picture of contemporary youth lifestyles. The sense of agency that the term lifestyle connotes was missing from earlier subcultural studies. Agency is one of the most positive effects of subcultural identification for youth.

Hall stresses the importance of subcultural identification for creating an identity and sense of agency independent from the parent culture. In Hall's study, he posits that the connection to the parent culture is primarily meant to resolve the tensions that class places on youth. Hall addresses this relationship as an "imaginary" solution to the difficulties of class. Class is the "real relation" that subcultures cannot overcome because there is no structural/political resolution offered by being part of a subculture. Hall acknowledges some of the weaknesses that focusing on real versus imaginary solutions cause for analyzing the importance of subcultures. He states "By concentrating on the

imaginary, ideological relation in which sub-cultures stand to the life of a class, the analysis may now have gone too far in the direction of reading sub-cultures ‘ideologically.’ Not enough account is perhaps taken of the material, economic, and social conditions specific to the ‘sub-cultural solution’” (2000, 33). Hall anticipates the contemporary criticisms of subcultural theory with these observations about the lack of insight given by reading subcultures as resolutions to class problems (or ideologically). As subcultural identification becomes more fragmented it also becomes more defined by the material, economic and social conditions that the ideological analysis of subcultures underemphasizes.

Rather than focusing on the ideological potential of subcultures to change, in a real or imagined way, the social position of working-class teens specifically, theorists now discuss how these groups can cut across the differences that separate youth communities outside of class. Finding alliances with different groups through subcultural identification, even temporarily, unifies the disparate groups of contemporary youth. Bennett and Kahn-Harris’ work focuses on the ways subcultures unite youth across social and class boundaries and the different degrees to which subculture is used to construct personal identity for teens. They state “Most working-class teenagers pass through groups, change identities, play their leisure roles for fun; other differences between them – sex, occupation, family – are much more significant than distinctions of style.... There’s a distinction here between a vanguard and a mass, between uses of leisure *within* subcultures” (2004, 8). By shifting the importance of subcultures from their ideological meanings to their personal meanings, researchers view youth subcultural identification

from youth's perspective in relation to other spheres of their lives. When discussing the representation of youth subcultures in media, this shift becomes important because it defines the boundaries between the adult perspective (which is part of the cycle of media that Hall describes, connecting youth cultures to ideological/societal meanings) and the authenticity that is central to Acland's observations about youth accepting representations of youth culture. Favoring the adult perspective over more complex and self-constructed ideas of subcultural affiliation limits the authenticity of U.S. youth programming.

Rigid Youth Subcultures: The Stereotypes of U.S. Television

U.S. youth television utilizes clear markers to signify the subcultural affiliations of teen characters. All of the characters wear clothing that fits into a stereotyped category. *Glee*, for example, features football players and cheerleaders constantly in uniform, an Asian girl who dresses in all-black clothing as a "Goth," and a nerd who is defined by her decision to wear crazy sweaters covered in cute animals. Some programs, like *Glee*, use these stereotypes in order to subvert them. For instance, the "Goth" Asian teen comments on her frequent changes of style, and the principal repeatedly makes a fool of himself because he believes that vampires are real and this girl is a vampire. However, even programs that subvert these stereotypes reinforce the negative connotations related to certain subcultural symbols and/or the rigid and occasionally antagonistic relationships between them. There is no sense of the diverse communities or fluid identity shifts that are reflective of real-life subcultures.

The result of these negative connotations and antagonistic boundaries is an image of youth culture that does not fulfill the requirement of authenticity that Acland outlines.

For example, in *Glee*, one of the main sources of humor is the ongoing humiliation of being associated with the Glee Club. Although the program represents the expressive possibilities of Glee Club and the social support that extracurricular activities provide youth, it still maintains the hierarchy between different extracurricular groups. The program *Freaks and Geeks* negotiates the historicity of these rigid boundaries by focusing on deviant subcultures that are ideologically at odds with the school and socially at odds with each other. This program was cancelled after a short time. Yet due to the historical setting of the program (1979) on the verge of this change in youth cultures, the program possessed the potential to present a fluid evolution from rigid subcultures to fluid lifestyles. For instance, one of the “freaks” began to casually engage in “geek” hobbies (Dungeons and Dragons) before the end of the program, reflecting a shift towards the fluid and partial identifications of subcultures today. These negative connotations about subcultures and stereotypes, as well as the antagonistic relationships between different groups of youth, affected the *Skins U.S.* adaptation.

Youth Lifestyles and *Skins*

Skins offers many diverse representations of teenage experience including varied races, religions, and sexualities. Occasionally, certain subcultures claimed specific characters on *Skins* as their own. Subcultures claim characters because they lack a variety of representations in media. Two of the subcultures represented in *Skins* are the metal subculture and genderqueer subculture. Although the symbolic artifacts of subcultures appear in the program (long hair for the metal character), each group of characters as a whole represents a wide cross-section of teen culture. This choice is

important because it shows youth united by their subordination rather than by any subcultural identity or type. Each of the characters expresses his or her individuality rather than representing a specific cultural group. The breadth of the characters represented in *Skins* prohibits viewers from investing too much meaning in a particular subculture in order to more closely resemble the fluid experiences of teens.

While breadth of representation positively widens the audience's choices for identification, it can also violate a subculture's narrower idea of itself in the real world. Attachment to subcultures violates the emotional realism of certain characters after the second season shift, defined as the development of characters that occurs off-screen between season one and two of each generation of *Skins*. The audience invests personal meaning in representations of subcultures as part of the constructed emotional realism that Jenkins discusses. He states "The characters are understood as 'real' people with psychologies and histories that can be explored as fictional constructions whose shortcomings may be attributed to bad writing or the suspect motivations of the producers" (1992, 66). Therefore, when a character's subcultural signifiers change, the audience scrutinizes this change. Viewers examine the surface style of characters to determine whether these stylistic changes correlate with the character's emotional journey. In re-reading practice, "Changes in costume or hairstyle between episodes may be examined for evidence for shifts in character motivation and self-image" (Jenkins, 1992, 72). In other words, physical details help viewers determine the authenticity of shifts in subcultural identification. However, once a subculture claims a character, the writers must adhere to the rigid boundaries of that subculture because fluidity will violate

the emotional realism of the character for those participating in the real-life subculture.

The negative audience response to the shift of subculturally marked characters in *Skins* shows the drawbacks of producers committing to an underrepresented subculture. Franky Fitzgerald, an androgynous female character, was highly praised as a representation of the genderqueer community when she first appeared in *Skins* season 5. However, in season 6, the producers altered the physical appearance of the character to such a large degree that many fans questioned the emotional realism of the program, as well as its institutional motivations. Genderqueer blogger Riese (2012) states, “*Skins*’ insistence that [Franky’s] new style reflects new confidence is both confusing and problematic. If S5’s Franky was confident about anything, it was probably her outfits.... She clearly had a passion for a certain kind of fashion.” In season five, Franky was an outsider because she wore short slicked-back hair and men’s suits of her own creation that covered her from head to toe. However, in season 6 she wears provocatively short dresses and jumpsuits that show off her cleavage. Although clothing may seem like an insignificant detail, for a genderqueer audience that lacks representation the shift from masculine to feminine clothing can be read as problematic. This danger may negatively affect an audience composed of teens still trying to define themselves. Perhaps Franky’s change would have been a successful shift from confidence defined by style to confidence defined by sexuality if it had been motivated narratively. For example, my personal re-reading of Franky’s shift does not agree with these criticisms. Franky begins to wear feminine clothing more often as season 5 progresses, making the shift seem natural, since it occurs on-screen. She makes these clothes for herself, showing her

agency in this stylistic shift. Franky also rarely wears dresses in season 6, preferring shorts, overalls, and jumpsuits. This shift corresponds to her emotional development; she shows off more skin and dresses more feminine as she makes new friends and gains confidence in her body. This divergent interpretation shows that re-reading can produce different meanings for different viewers. Significantly, Franky's shift eliminates her identification with a subculture.

Young adult viewers that defy gendered appearance may be confused by Franky. However, the *Skins* institution is built on individual change. Riese states "the thing is that I trusted *Skins* to tell that story in a way I don't trust many franchises to tell a story" (2012). Viewers often trust *Skins* despite its position as a franchise because it is emotionally faithful to its characters, allowing audiences to accept the program as an authentic representation of youth life. The structure of the program allows audience members to insert their own characteristics to a large degree but when the program shifts the appearance of its characters, identification with a subculture that may have personal significance for some viewers becomes difficult. Subcultural identification also opposes the fluid identification of the majority of *Skins*' characters and the temporary quality of youth lifestyles that the program is built on. The shift in the stylistic identities of characters is also a part of *Skins*' structure. Therefore, *Skins* purposefully limits its subcultural identifications. The program changes its characters in order to reject the typical types that most teen programs use. The tension between audience identification with underrepresented subcultures and the reality of more fluid subcultural identification makes characters that defy subcultural boundaries more relatable and authentic to the

experience of teen audiences.

While *Skins U.S.* does not fall into the rigid stereotypes of many U.S. youth programs, the creators had trouble identifying contemporary youth cultures in the U.S. and representing them outside of the parent culture-youth culture dynamic described by Hall and the Birmingham School. *Skins U.S.* may be more progressive than the rest of U.S. television because it does not insist on pushing its characters into subcultural types, but it offers instead an inconsistent use of subculture that recalls the creators' difficulties translating cultural material for U.S. audiences. The only episode to directly invoke a subcultural image relevant to the U.S. and a corresponding parent culture is "Tea." In this episode, Tea attends a musical performance at a lesbian club called "Northern Soul." She dresses in Converse shoes and skinny jeans while dancing "ska" style to the light combo jazz/punk/Rasta style of "ska" music. However, this brief sequence does not define Tea because her friends do not associate her with "ska" style, although they are aware of her lesbian identity. The fluidity with which Tea transforms from a "ska" lesbian in an undefined subculture to an average teenager authentically reflects the connections that youth have to musical cultures in cities, also referred to as scenes by subcultural analysts.

Teens balance the "everyday" or "mundane" aspects of life with their sensational experiences in musical scenes. Kahn-Harris discusses this balance stating "the majority of scene members manage the complex relationship between the scenic and non-scenic worlds, even while most scene members emphasize discursively the distinction between the scene and the rest of the world" (2004, 113). Tea separates all of the different aspects

of her life, managing her image in each sphere distinctly. For instance, at school Tea is a cheerleader. At home she shares in the mixed Italian-Jewish culture of her family, even helping her father with his second implicitly “mob” family. On her own, she enacts her lesbian identity through the local music scene. It is important that although Tea has multiple identities, fluid subcultural affiliations allow her to shift between them. Tea may be tied to several identifiable subcultures (cheerleading, ska, lesbian), yet without considering the interaction of these identities in her life it is difficult to understand the character. This problem is exacerbated by the emphasis the narrative places on her father’s parent culture.

Although Tea has a fluid personal identity in *Skins U.S.* her narrative is co-opted by the class-based parent culture of the “mob,” which her father is associated with. The plot of the episode centers on Tea, used as an instrument of the parent culture. Her father sets her up on a date as a favor for another “mob” contact. Her date just happens to be Tony, another Italian-American character. This episode reinforces the influence of the parent culture because Tony and Tea initially connect over their shared heritage. By approaching Tea’s identity through her parent culture, *Skins U.S.* reinstates the outdated stable youth culture of Hall’s theory. The rigidity of Hall’s argument about subcultures stems from his insistence that class is the most prominent determining factor of a youth’s subcultural options. Hall states “the membership of a sub-culture cannot protect [youth] from the determining matrix of experiences and conditions which shape the life of their class as a whole” (2000, 15). “Tea” shows the intergenerational aspects of subcultures, upholding the over-determined and outdated parent culture class dynamic of Hall’s

argument.

Tony and Tea's similarities stem from the values of their shared parent culture. Throughout the adaptation, Tea's other identities, especially her lesbian identity, are suppressed or restricted by her connection with Tony. After they connect over their shared heritage and have an ambiguously pleasurable hook-up, Tony begins to pressure Tea into sexual encounters with him. His repeated refrain regarding their encounters is "I matched you." Although this comment does not invoke the parent culture of the mob, the two discuss matching their partners based on their shared level of emotional detachment from their relationships. The implication of this scene is that the unemotional favors Tea completes for her father's "mob" parent culture define both Tony and Tea's sensibility about relationships. If this is the case, then Tea's sexuality and the subcultures that she participates in due to her sexuality become incidental, rather than constructing her personality. Indeed, later episodes ignore these subcultural aspects of Tea's experience, and her main association becomes Tony and her male friend Abbud for the remainder of the season. Tea's character reveals how parent cultures define *Skins U.S.*' concept of its characters and relegate youth cultures to the background.

Tribal Youth Cultures and Positive Community in Skins

Skins and *Skins U.S.* use many party sequences to represent the "neo-tribal" behaviors of current youth cultures, but the U.S. adaptation often does not reflect the positive connotation of "neo-tribal" when describing youth cultures. "Neo-tribal" is another term common among contemporary subcultural theorists that reflects not only a new sense of subcultural fluidity but also a positively diverse and accepting community

of youth. Paul Sweetman (2004) defines neo-tribal formations as “informal, dynamic and frequently temporary alliances, centered around their members’ shared lifestyles and tastes, around *feelings* rather than a commitment to particular ideologies or beliefs” (86, emphasis in original). The original *Skins* offers a constructive view of youth culture by showing this neo-tribal freedom. Each of the program’s characters distinctly (with few exceptions) reflects their individuality instead of a specific, identifiable subculture. This diversity allows the relationships between characters, their feelings rather than their superficial identifiers, to define the shape of the portrayed youth community. Furthermore, these characters often share tastes and lifestyles. These group formations are typically centered on the party behaviors of going to clubs, holding wild house parties (the program even introduced the term “skins parties” in the U.K.), drinking, and using drugs. These behaviors and environments, along with the school Roundview College, represent the only uniting factors of each generation of *Skins* characters. *Skins* uses this formation to subvert rigid ideas of moral behavior, making only exceptional instances of drug use, violence and sexuality suspect because these signifiers are the youth cultural norm. This vision of youth culture offers authenticity and fluidity, rather than strict subcultural roles.

The original *Skins* represents youth party culture as a liberating expression of generational solidarity. Each of *Skins*’ groups is subordinated by institutional authorities ranging from school administrators to parents, but this subordination unites them. The unity of neo-tribal youth culture is expressed in the many group party scenes that play on images of childhood and innocence in comparison to adulthood. For instance, one of

these parties uses a Peter Pan theme to express the characters' fear of growing up. In contrast, the season five finale celebrates the elopement of lovers Rich and Grace, who are getting married despite their parents' disapproval, and ends with a wedding reception. These images form a collective teen identity based on age (either the group is too young or too old for their behavior) and reaction to the institutions (like family) that subordinate them. The collaboration of diverse teens in reactive activities reflects the youth audience's experience of teen culture. These diverse groups find a neo-tribal identity based on their current situation, a temporary alignment of values and experiences as a generation of students.

Each generation of the original *Skins* also uses neo-tribal formations to undermine the rigid boundaries between subcultural types prevalent on most youth television. Because subcultural formations begin with social differences, like class, gender, and race, overcoming these boundaries and the rigid types in media representations moves toward fluidity in youth cultural representation. Maria Pini (2004) discusses the coexistence of group and individual identity that supports these connections. In these formations, youth retain their awareness of individual markers of race, class, and gender but still connect to others despite these differences. Pini "responds to and critiques less grounded postmodern interpretations that over-emphasize the extent to which sex/race/class-bound identities tend to 'disappear' within the liminal spaces of rave by suggesting instead that these identities remain intact although they are reworked within these spaces" (69). *Skins* explores differences through friendships that both respect the individual identities of friends and create unlikely connections within the liberating space of the dance scene.

Unlike many programs, which reinforce types and their separation, *Skins* creates realistic friendships between unlikely but distinct types. The party girl (Effy) and the innocent (Pandora) become best friends. The prom queen Mini and the androgynous Franky have a romance. The neo-tribal culture *Skins* represents suggests a positive view of youth sharing common experiences. This positive community resists youth television's tendency to separate individuals based on a stereotype or first impression.

There are many contradictory and unmotivated negative images of youth culture in *Skins U.S.*, which represents an unfortunate consequence of MTV's brand preoccupation with emotion and visual excess over character and plot. The adaptation presents a negative view of youth culture, due to the antagonistic relationships between characters and the focus on party sequences. While the original *Skins* showed destructive partying behaviors (Michelle throws a food fight at her home, Rich honors his injured girlfriend by throwing a house party in her home), these were rare sequences and served the emotional goal of the episode (Cassie's fear of food is expressed in the food fight, Rich's anxiety over his girlfriend is taken out on the house). In *Skins U.S.*, these parties rarely connect to the emotional center of the episode, and these scenes often violate character continuity. For instance, in the pilot, the *Skins* teens trash the home of the private school teens. Daisy, who is later presented as the voice of reason for the group, also participates, spraying a fire hydrant in the house. One reviewer commented on this change, stating "Without a character to pipe up and remind everyone that, yes, there are consequences to stealing someone's car and driving it into a river, any semblance of actual stakes gets thrown out the window. Daisy may well prove to be that voice in the

future, but it doesn't bode well that, if she does, she's already betrayed her convictions before we've even learned them" (Carlson, 2011). This example shows how the program's momentary dedication to excess and style over character can compromise the integrity of that character and detract from the authenticity of the program. These parties also show the micro-level of personally destructive behaviors in *Skins U.S.* The confrontation between Cadie and Tea, for example, highlights the level of contention between these teens. Also at that party, Cadie is sexually harassed by the boys in the group who grab at her and tell her to "Take that top off." The boys insult her when she refuses. These little slights and insults paired with the permanently ended relationships in *Skins U.S.* suggest that antagonism between youth is natural. The general tone and language within the group is more hostile than liberating, and destructive imagery, like house parties, is often enhanced in the adaptation.

Bedroom Cultures and Skins: De-gendering Private Expressions of Youth Culture

While *Skins U.S.* struggles with adapting the positive and liberating aspects of youth party culture, both *Skins* and *Skins U.S.* successfully represent another individualistic expression of youth culture: bedroom culture. Although subcultural theorists underemphasize this youth culture due to its early associations with feminine youth culture, *Skins* attributes this form of youth culture to both male and female characters and uses details about the bedroom space to both deepen and fully realize its characters. Like the routine montage, the detailed *Skins* sets reveal personal details about the program's characters. According to Sian Lincoln (2004), the fluidity of youth cultures is represented by each youth's bedroom. Lincoln states that the bedroom is

“rigidly defined through ‘style’ and ‘membership.’ One teenage girl’s bedroom is never the same as another, but is specific to the individual teenager in relation to her ‘social labour’ imposed on bedroom space to maintain it as a representation of contemporary cultural and social life” (98). Bedrooms represent the cultural and social aspects of a teenager’s life. However, their habits and personality are also displayed in their bedroom. For instance, in the pilot episode of both versions of *Skins*, a panning shot across Sid’s (Stanley in the U.S.) bedroom introduces the character. The shot shows that his clothes are strewn across the floor and some are even sticking to leftover food. These details establish that Sid is a slob with poor hygiene and cleaning habits, facts which are verified throughout the series. The camera pans across the bed to show Sid lying next to a bong and clinging to a porn magazine. This moment shows his position in his social setting. He is involved in a drug culture and is the hyper-sexualized virgin of the group, a fact which guides the majority of the pilot episode. These details in set design create an image of Sid before we even hear him speak. This image is nuanced and deepened by Sid’s use of his personal space throughout the program.

Skins not only shows the details of characters’ rooms, like band posters and personal belongings, but the program also shows its characters interacting within their space. The organization and use of space, divided into “zones,” reflects a central concept of bedroom culture. Lincoln defines zones and their uses. She states,

A zone is a visible arrangement of furniture, technical equipment, beauty products, school books, in fact any item that is ‘contained’ within bedroom space. It is orientated by the social activities that take place within the space, therefore it may not be fixed in physical or cognitive activities; zones can over-lap and integrate. The zone can also become a mediated and fluid construction, enhanced through technologies such as

the TV or the sound system, the mobile phone and the Internet; therefore, the space of the bedroom is a fluid and dynamic cultural domain. (2004, 97)

Skins adheres to the realism of fluid room constructions and is consistent with the structure and uses of its characters' bedroom space. Returning to the example of Sid, the zones featured in his room construction shift between the first and second season in which the character is featured. Sid's room is initially separated into two distinct zones. He uses the bedroom zone, which features his bed surrounded by pornographic posters, for social encounters and sleeping. In the first season, Cassie often visits his room, and they always talk on his bed. The second zone is his work and study zone, which features a corner desk partitioning his work area from his sleep area and a computer on the desk with a television in front of his computer. Sid arranges this zone for work, and it is where we see Sid sitting as he struggles to concentrate on his school work. Both his hamster cage and television, which distract him as he works, are arranged on this half of the room. This realistic split of the zones in his room offers an authentic use of the bedroom space along with the details that deepen his character.

In the second season, Sid's room becomes more fluidly constructed and focused entirely on the absence of his girlfriend, Cassie. In the second season premiere, we see that the bedroom and work space have integrated, in part because Sid now has a laptop but also because Cassie is the main force in Sid's life. The large, nude picture of Cassie that hangs behind Sid's bed symbolizes his dedication to her. Notably, Sid still interacts with Cassie on his bed via webcam. We do not see Sid engage in any school work in this season, and his desk sits abandoned in the corner. The changes that Sid makes to his

room show how his priorities have shifted from all women to one particular woman. The blending of work and social spaces is facilitated by Sid's increasing access to new technology, in this case his laptop. This realistic vision of bedroom space and zones shows how teen spaces reflect their individual priorities and changes in their lives.

Bedroom culture also allows researchers to analyze the dynamics of privacy within youth lives and *Skins*' use of bedroom space in conjunction with its routine montages highlights the importance of boundaries within a family setting. Mini's superficially driven behaviors (practicing sexual positions, looking through magazines) take place within her bedroom, a safe place within her home. Mini manages to hide her pregnancy from her mother until she is showing by hiding out in her bedroom, although this level of privacy is somewhat unrealistic. Lincoln discusses how bedrooms offer barriers between youth and their family. She says the bedroom is "a room that provides respite from the demands of peer, siblings and parents, in which unmediated activities such as sleeping, reading books and magazines, daydreaming and 'chilling out' take place. The teenager can exert control over what level of 'the public' can filter into bedroom space through zones" (2004, 96). Mini's story shows how easy it can be for teens to manage this space. However, Sid's story is quite the opposite. He struggles with his father for control over his bedroom space. Sid's designated work space also doubles as a strategic positioning of his computer away from the door, obscuring his dad's vision of his activities as he frequently bursts in unannounced. On one of these occasions, his dad removes the television that is distracting from his work but will not enter Sid's work space. Sid's father sees the work zone as a boundary he will not cross, although he has

no problem taking Sid's belongings. Sid's father signals his respect for Sid by finally knocking on his door before entering, after Sid's mother moves out due to the family's incessant fighting. Bedrooms offer the privacy that youth enjoy after rotating through school, social events, and family gatherings all day. The teenager's relationships with his or her friends and family are also defined by the familiarity and level of respect other individuals show to his or her bedroom space.

The level of realism that *Skins* uses to represent the dynamics of bedroom culture adds authenticity to the program and deepens the audience's understanding of the characters' personalities and relationships. *Skins* shows the importance of the bedroom to youth culture, and several other U.S. programs have acknowledged the importance of these spaces as well. For instance, *Dawson's Creek* establishes the importance of the bedroom in the first episode. Dawson's ladder allows his friends to directly access his space without encountering any adults, and his room is covered in Steven Spielberg posters. Later in the program, when Dawson undergoes a personal crisis about filmmaking he removes these posters. *The O.C.* also uses bedroom space effectively. Seth's room is covered in alternative music and sailing posters with an aquatic theme, and his favorite toy, Captain Oats, has a place of honor by his bed. In stark contrast, Ryan's position as an outsider to Orange County is signaled by his habitation of the pool house, a room he never personalizes. Unfortunately, these programs (along with *Skins U.S.*) are the exception to the rule because of their detailed sets.

Most U.S. youth television minimizes the decoration and details on their sets in order to keep production costs down. However, on youth programs this causes producers

to miss an opportunity for a quick, deep, and authentic characterization of their young protagonists. The bedroom sets in *Pretty Little Liars*, for example, all look the same instead of differentiating between the distinct personalities of the protagonists. All of the rooms are painted in neutral colors with minimal decoration, and the furniture is all arranged on a one-dimensional stage-like plane. The girls rarely interact in their bedrooms. Instead, the main actions and interactions of the series take place in the houses of the girls, which are not personalized and always mysteriously empty of parents and siblings. The absence of family and the flatness of room design neglect a chance for youth programs to be authentic to youth experience. The absence of parents also creates a logical gap. Detailed sets are an efficient, affordable way for the producers of U.S. youth television to add authenticity and depth to their representations of youth life.

Translating “Broken Britain”: Does *Skins* U.S. Present an Alternative to Moral Panic?

Questions of accountability to youth are part of the larger cultural discussion about education in the U.K. Many popular press articles discuss the marginalized status of further education colleges, which are like community colleges in the U.S. These schools are marginalized because they are a lower level vocational alternative to the university system in the U.K. and are transitional schools like community colleges in the U.S. *The Guardian* states “It is time to ask again why we persist with an Upstairs Downstairs-style division between higher and further education” (Boxall, 2012). *Skins* premiered at a time when this division served the purpose of distinguishing quality institutions from those that were struggling. Roundview College is a struggling

institution. As such, the poor quality of the college validates the rebellious attitude of its students. Jenkins discusses how dissatisfaction with real life institutions creates reactive rebellious reading practices in viewers. Viewers “employ images and concepts drawn from mass culture texts to explore their subordinate status, to envision alternatives, to voice their frustrations and anger” (2006, 60). In other words, young adults use narratives about school to imagine a space where they are free from institutional subordination. Because the program undermines Roundview College within the text, *Skins* addresses the subordination felt by its young viewers by validating their distrust of institutions. The structure of the program and many of the plots involving the adults at the school engage the discourse of subordination that teens experience in their everyday lives.

Roundview maintains the subordinated status that the characters share with the viewers. The acts of rebellion that the students engage in can occasionally be connected to the questionable actions of those running the institution. In *Skins*, “authority figures, like teachers ... are just plain surreal,” according to one reviewer (Rodgers, 2008). One administrator pleads with a skilled Black-British clarinet player who has attracted media attention in a national competition to mention “the college’s upcoming bid for working towards sustaining excellence under the ‘everything’s getting better’ initiative. It’s for people like *you*.” This moment shows the institution’s expectation that youth will follow their instruction without question. In this instance, the school attempts to take advantage of the student’s race and achievement to boost their reputation. Yet, the student is an upper-middle class Black-British girl, and this initiative has no impact on her life.

Furthermore, her tense body language, glare, and smirk show that she is offended by the racial assumptions the administrator makes about her. As a result, the competitor does not adhere to these ideals in the interview. Instead, she is insistently negative, answering “No” to all of the interviewer’s questions. This negativity presents an example of a student expressing his or her frustrations and anger with his or her educational institution instead of following policy blindly. This character destabilizes the value of the educational institution’s reputation to show teens that they can express their discontent.

Skins also asks audiences to envision alternatives to their educational institutions. One episode about student government uses a race for student president between one of the school’s biggest troublemakers and a politically interested student to address this issue. The politically interested student only wins because the teachers rig the election. When she discovers this fact she supports her opponent’s victory. She pulls the missing slips from a teacher’s dress and reveals the sham of the election before starting a chant in support of her opponent. Her actions are an example of how the characters in *Skins* uphold the very values that their institution falsely claims to protect. The girl’s actions underline the lack of integrity and respect educational institutions have for their students. This representation offers young adults that experience hypocrisy in their everyday lives an outlet for their frustrations by creating a narrative of rebellion. The youthful producers of the program allow teens to accept representations of rebellion without feeling marginalized or criticized.

Skins U.S. offers a more tempered view of the school institution. *Skins U.S.* resists the educational discourse that accepts rebellion and promotes a critical analysis of

schools. Two storylines in particular demonstrate the limits of the program's criticism of the educational system: the episode featuring an adult female teacher's perspective, titled "Tina," and a confrontation between a school counselor and Michelle, in which the counselor is arguably the voice of reason. *Skins U.S.* devotes less screen time to events in school than the original, and the major interactions in school tend to occur in youth's separate spaces (the cafeteria, the bathroom). The original *Skins* devoted a large amount of screen time to scenes in classes that show students interacting with teachers. The episode "Tina," which follows a teacher, who is sleeping with a student (Chris), places the characters in school for the largest amount of screen time.

The premise of the episode, "Tina," indicates that high school teachers are nothing more than teenagers, which displaces the episode's criticisms of the school onto teachers. Tina herself is the first to remark that teachers are not good role models. She states "teachers are not grownups." There are several irreverent and interesting reversals of authoritative roles in the episode, and Tina is treated like she is a teenager and not a teacher. For instance, Daisy (one of the students) kicks Tina off the yearbook because she is irresponsible. This decision undermines Tina's role as the faculty sponsor for the club. Michelle and several other characters also tell Tina to "be a grown-up." These moments attempt to redefine the voice of authority to favor youth. However, the assumption that being a teenager means being irresponsible and immature destabilizes any criticisms of the institution. These negative assumptions about youth lay at the heart of this episode. Tina receives a scolding from the principal for her classes' dropping test scores. This scene reinstates the Principal, the head of the institution, in the position of

power. Tina also goes on a date with a nice businessman in the episode. This man criticizes her for saying “like” too often and ends the date after she suggests having sex in the car. The date calls this suggestion “so high school.” This episode attempts to redefine the hierarchies of separation between adults and youth but uses a different separation, teachers who are “teenagers” and the “real” adults, to reinforce a negative vision of youth behavior. Violating the youth voice of *Skins* in the adaptation may have proven radical if Tina had not been expected to overcome her youth-like state in order to be accepted.

The confrontation between Michelle and her guidance counselor proves equally sympathetic with an adult perspective on youth. Counselors appear in *Skins* but they are never shown doing an effective job. For instance, one counselor is terrified of children, running from the room every time she witnesses an act of delinquency, and another counselor insists that the students should not curse in her office, flinching each time this request is ignored. Much like the teachers, the guidance counselors in the original are both incompetent and surreal. The counselor in *Skins U.S.* appears only in the episode “Michelle” and offers an analysis of the character that Michelle also seems to accept. Due to her breakup with Tony, Michelle’s grades are slipping. The counselor perceives that relationship problems are causing this drop, and the counselor gives her some good, if harsh, advice. “Maybe other things are more important right now” the counselor states. As Michelle is walking out of the office, she adds, “1992, that’s the year I stopped acting stupid because I was pretty.” No strong subtext or criticism of the counselor underlies this encounter. Furthermore, Michelle seems to accept the counselor’s interpretation that

she is overly dependent on male attention. Later in the episode, Michelle praises Tea, stating, “I wish I was more like you Tea, you never let guys rule you ever.” Although this episode offers an empowering message to young girls about controlling their self-image and sexuality, an adult authority within the school system is the catalyst for this story. *Skins U.S.* allows adults within the school system to remain authoritative, rather than undermining their authority with surreal qualities and a broader critique about the school system.

The roles of parents are also undermined in the original *Skins*, although the adults are portrayed with equal sympathy as the youth. One critic stated that in each episode of *Skins*, “the audience briefly meets one of the characters’ parents who invariably prove as messed up as their kids” (Rodgers, 2008). Often the problems of the children reflect those of their parents. Mini’s experience can be seen as a direct reaction to her mother’s hypocrisy. She believes Mini should stay a virgin. However, Mini was the result of her mother’s teenage pregnancy, and her mother still engages in adult partying behaviors, often returning to the house after dawn. Therefore, Mini’s behaviors during her moments alone reflect her anxiety about her mother’s expectations. She emulates her mother’s superficial behaviors while also struggling to prepare for sex despite her mother’s pressure. The parental interactions in *Skins* express teenagers’ conflicted emotions about their family. Although family may often be portrayed as unrealistically negative in *Skins*, the program does show the ways in which family is an ideological institution just like any other. Mini is molded by her mother’s behaviors and insecurities, and this pattern is typical of many of the *Skins* teens. Just as the characters in the program must decide

whether to act with compliance or frustration towards their school, they must decide the same for their family.

Families in *Skins U.S.* add little depth to the teenagers featured in the program, in part because the parents seem to have inherited the surreal qualities of the school administrators in the original *Skins*, but more importantly because they are often held up as objects for criticism or are absent from their teenager's narrative. In the original program, parents put pressure on their children, but their motivations were always clear and sympathetic, if still supportive of the adult "youth issues" perspective. For example, Mini's mom did not want her to have her baby as a teenager because it was hard for her to raise Mini as a teenager. While this view does support an anti-teen pregnancy stance, personalizing the issue within a family dynamic and allowing Mini to make her own decision in the end makes this a balanced, realistic representation.

The parents in *Skins U.S.* are simply caricatures. For instance, in the episode "Eura," Eura stands in the background as her parents argue about Tony. They ignore her presence, as her dad asks "What's with these kids? They just get crazy. It's like we don't exist to them." Eura's mother responds "They're just a little self-absorbed. They'll grow out of it." In the background, Eura pours yogurt all over her body and is still ignored. While this scene does offer a fairly sharp critique of the family as an institution full of hypocrisy, the depth and sensitivity with which the parents were treated in the original *Skins* is absent. The tone of the scene resembles a sitcom more than an hour-long drama. The parents in *Skins U.S.* become comic relief through these moments, and it is difficult to understand the parents as more than comic relief because there are few

moments of connection between the teenagers and their parents. This one-dimensional representation also forecloses the possibility of understanding the teenager's values as they are expressed through their family. The possibility of examining the characters' relationships through the routine montages that express teen insecurities in the original is also limited by the absence of these montages. By transferring the humorous aspects of school administrative figures in the original *Skins* to the parental figures in *Skins U.S.*, family becomes an underdeveloped sphere of life in an otherwise well-rounded program.

The original *Skins* critiqued the negative perception of youth at the societal level by using characters that are strangers in humorous and decontextualized moments. These moments directly represent the "Broken Britain" society that looks down on youth without considering that their perceptions might be skewed. These moments are absent from *Skins U.S.* save for a sequence in the shot-for-shot pilot "Tony." These thirty-second detours from the main plot of each episode would allow *Skins U.S.* to directly confront and represent perceptions of moral panic at the societal level. In the original *Skins*, these moments play a pivotal role in reversing the dynamic of moral panics like "Broken Britain." These moments authoritatively combat this panic because they emanate from within the media itself. For instance, in season five's "Everyone," two different sets of teens from the main group encounter the same older gentleman. Despite the fact that these teenagers are dressed formally for a wedding and ask the man politely for directions, he ignores them. One of the girls in the group confirms the prejudice that keeps him silent when she asks "Does my boyfriend have to give you a blowjob?" and unabashedly steals the man's alcohol flask from his breast pocket before leaving. This

man also ignores another girl who comes by alone after the others have left. She asks politely for directions and without hesitation he responds “Bugger off!” The girl is appalled and responds, “Rudeness!” These two scenes act as a juxtaposition to show both why adults carry prejudices against youth (they are delinquents and steal property) and also how this misperception perpetuates negative behavior from youth. Both of the girls were polite when they first asked for directions, but because the man assumed the girls would behave like delinquents, at least one of the girls fulfilled that expectation. This cycle reflects the process of moral panic in the media. The program uses its position as a media authority to interject at the level of society and insist that it is not only youth that are rude and inconsiderate but adults are often the same way. Especially when adults believe that youths are delinquent, youths often fulfill those expectations. *Skins*’ moments featuring strangers are contextualized from the youth perspective because the audience sees the motives and situation from the youth characters’ perspective.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the appearance of current subcultural configurations like fluid lifestyles, tribal subcultures, and bedroom culture in *Skins*. These aspects of youth culture were unsuccessfully translated by U.S. producers in the program’s international adaptation. U.S. narratives of moral panic dominate youth television necessitating the positive perspectives of youth culture found in Broken Britain youth programs. This positive perspective combines with critiques of adult institutions and society in *Skins* to create an alternative narrative to moral panics like “Broken Britain.” The U.S.’ struggle with moral panic makes alternative narratives important for spurring a cultural dialogue

about youth. The shared history of youth cultures in the U.S. and the U.K. allow international format adaptations of U.K. shows to authentically represent similar youth cultural formations to those of the U.S. and offer youth a positive alternative narrative to moral panic. However, U.S. producers have yet to achieve a success in translating the cultural material of these programs.

Conclusion: Genre, Cable and the Potential of International Adaptation

Broken Britain youth programs introduce innovative stylistic elements and moral complexity to a youth audience. As these programs are adapted for a U.S. audience, a more sophisticated narrative standard may appear for assessing the quality of youth programs. More respect may also be paid to youth audiences by producers who struggle to overcome the limitations a commercial industry places on youth television. *Skins U.S.*' ineffectual adaptation suffered because the producers neglected the stylistic precedents of the original. These innovations relate to the subjective connection between character and viewer. The structure of the original *Skins* allows audiences to expand upon different moral and relational meanings in the text. These aspects of the program are common to Broken Britain youth programs. Coupled with the realistic representation of a youth community that allows subcultural identification to liberate youth, *Skins* presents an alternative discourse about youth outside of a "youth issues" perspective. The genuine and widespread interest in Broken Britain youth programs shown by U.S. youth audiences affirms the importance of this format for addressing youth in a different way than current U.S. television.

This chapter offers several options for future analyses of representations of youth on U.S. television. Broken Britain youth programs use genre to engage alternative narratives of youth, and genre programs in the U.S. have a history of subverting the limitations of censorship. If genre programs incorporated the stylistic techniques of Broken Britain youth programs, then adaptations and U.S. youth programs may succeed on basic cable or network television while creating an alternative narrative of youth.

Additionally, the role of cable is to provide niche audiences, like youth, with programs that serve their needs. Some of the youth characters on more risky adult cable programs prove that cable, especially premium cable, allows alternative narratives of youth to be created and exposes adult audiences to these alternative narratives in the process. Genre and the industrial position of youth programs must be reconsidered by the producers of U.S. youth programs in order to incorporate alternative narratives of youth.

Responses to Marginalization: Genre

In the U.S., genre allows youth programs to subvert marginalization and push the boundaries of acceptable content. The genres that are most represented in U.S. youth programming are mystery and science fiction/fantasy. Monsters act as metaphors for the transformations of youth, and the privileging of youth knowledge is much more common when youth are the ones solving the mystery. Programs that offer a hybrid mystery/monster-of-the-week format have successfully addressed youth audiences. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a pioneering program for youth audiences, initially used this format. As researchers of the hit WB show have found, *Buffy*'s metaphorical resonance with youth is what makes it important after a decade off the air. According to McConnell (2000), the program succeeds because "[it] is built on the generally accepted idea that high school has the attributes of hell, similar to those of childhood abuse trauma—to those embroiled in it, it is horrible" (122). The integration of horror tropes with high school is universally understood, even by adults who hope to shield their child from experiences that might make them "at-risk." By remaining at the level of metaphor, programs like *Buffy* and other supernatural dramas discuss issues of bullying, school

shootings, and abuse without as much interference from censors.

Pretty Little Liars evolves the mystery formula of *Buffy* and other supernatural teen drama past the level of metaphor by focusing entirely on a murder without any supernatural causes. This program succeeds at subverting the “youth issues” approach for two reasons; the main characters and even more minor ones are given a clear set of characteristics and motivations and the audience is privileged with all the same knowledge as the main characters. In *Pretty Little Liars* all of the traditionally “at-risk” characters, including the main quartet of mystery-solving girls, are treated like murder suspects until the complexities of their motivations come to light. The revelation of each character’s role in the central murder plot transforms them into well-rounded and misunderstood characters. Mystery and supernatural youth programs are able to use metaphor and character to be provocative with few consequences from censors.

Alternatively, comedy acts as a great equalizer, allowing youth programs to satirize both youth and adults. *Glee*’s satirical tone and MTV’s never-ending array of comedies, like *Awkward.*, include the embarrassing aspects of teen life and humorous criticisms of adults and parents that are typically meant to serve as role models in youth television. In *Awkward.*, Jenna’s life changes after receiving a harsh “care-frontation” letter anonymously. This letter tells Jenna that she is socially unimportant and should change that by finding ways to stand out. It is later revealed that this letter came from Jenna’s mother, who is represented as a fairly unreliable role model. Jenna’s parents represent the stereotypes in *Awkward.*, not the youth. The couple is presented as a jock and pretty girl who got married straight out of high school. Jenna’s mother often

criticizes Jenna about her looks and friends but is also a subject of critique in the show due to her partying lifestyle and negatively stereotyped past. Her husband even threatens to leave because of the letter. On *Glee*, a similar reversal of the hierarchy of jocks and beautiful girls on top is represented by the cheerleading coach Sue Sylvester. Sue's tough approach to coaching remains consistent throughout the show. Her humorous campaigns to destroy the Glee club using cheerleaders as spies and her constant need to push students and faculty violently as she passes them in the hallway define her character. However, even Sue is made sympathetic over the course of *Glee*, through her relationship with her sister and a student named Becky, both of whom have Down's syndrome. Fully developed but still negative characterizations of adults may allow adult audiences to better understand the perspective of youth. Furthermore, these characters make the youth characters on comedies seem more developed and less stereotypical in comparison. This comparison is important to comedies, because they offer a system of values, (for instance, Sue values power and winning) that adults and their children can assess together during family viewing.

Cable Representations of Youth

Cable television producers have occasionally written morally complex youth characters in programs aimed at adult audiences, especially in the sphere of premium cable. Ryan Murphy, who also created the broad and progressive youth musical/comedy *Glee*, introduced a pair of young protagonists on *American Horror Story*. Violet Harmon and Tate Langdon represent different facets of adult moral panic over youth, primarily the fear that youth are a threat to themselves or others. Violet's suicide turns her into a

ghost that just appears to be any other depressed teenager. Violet skips school, avoids meals, and sleeps all day, displaying classical symptoms of depression. Only later does the audience learn she has already killed herself. The slow development of this plot line and the use of this “youth issue” as a horror of suburban family life create sympathy for Violet and maintain the shock people often feel when someone they know commits suicide.

Tate also slowly reveals his secret, that he committed a school shooting before his murder by the police. Tate’s antagonistic relationship with Violet’s father, psychologist Dr. Ben Harmon, reveals the problems with demonizing these typically suicidal mass killers. In the pilot episode of the show, Tate describes his fantasy of committing a school shooting which is later confirmed to be a memory. Tate must confront those he killed, and slowly he begins to show remorse for the murders he committed. Tate’s caring relationship with Violet also humanizes the character. In the final episode of the season one anthology, Tate and Dr. Harmon have a final conversation that undermines psychological perspectives and the adult voice of authority to allow an alternative reading of Tate’s character. Dr. Harmon tells Tate, “You’re a psychopath Tate, and the worst kind. You’re charismatic and compelling and a pathological liar. But don’t listen to me, I’m a fraud. By the way therapy doesn’t work. We’re not so different Tate. I’m a bad person too.” These statements acknowledge the conventional cultural understanding of mass shooters, especially school shooters, as psychopaths and undermine the psychological theory responsible for this label by calling it a fraud. Dr. Harmon admits that he is not a voice of authority, allowing those in the audience who are sympathetic to

Tate to continue feeling sympathy. *American Horror Story* utilized American suburban life as a source of horror and sympathy through its character development and genre twists.

Some premium cable programs that do not depend on genre as heavily also manage to include images of youth that are typically labeled “at-risk” without the moral judgments that accompany them on most youth networks and programs. *Weeds* (Showtime) shows the long-term development of Shane Botwin, the son of a drug-dealing mom who showed signs of being traditionally “at-risk” even before being dragged into his mother’s illegal business. Shane witnesses his father’s death at a young age (the beginning of the show) and becomes fascinated with violent television, including a bear hunting show. He creates fake terrorists videos, even encouraging his little brother Stevie to do the same thing later in the show. Later in the series, Shane learns the art of killing and intimidation from Ignacio, the muscle of a drug-dealing politician. However, Shane uses these skills to kill a Spanish woman named Pilar who has threatened repeatedly to kill Shane and his brother. Shane’s loyalty to his family becomes the defining factor of his morality. He even becomes a cop by the end of the series, yet he is an alcoholic and gambler, often committing dirty acts as a cop. In the series finale, his mother Nancy begs Shane to get help and he agrees, indicating there is always still hope for those deemed “at-risk.” Shane’s character progression in *Weeds* occurs over a couple of decades and reveals an “at-risk” child’s mostly normal progression into adult life, allowing moral judgments of the character to evolve slowly over time and end in an ambiguous manner.

Another Showtime program, *Shameless*, offers the largest number of main youth characters in any premium cable program to date and represents many facets of “at-risk” behavior casually. The Gallagher children grow up in a largely unsupervised home environment. The opening of the program documents one day in the bathroom of the family, and all of the children cycle through, engaging in smoking, drinking, and masturbation. The revelation of the teenage ROTC cadet, Ian’s, homosexuality is a casual aspect of the first episode. His brother Lip is not offended that Ian is gay, only that he felt the need to hide it despite the family’s closeness. Overall, the delinquent behaviors of the Gallagher children are legitimated within the program as long as they are also helping out the family. These children can drink and smoke and have sex in their free-time as long as they are also earning money for the bills. They are also allowed to earn money through questionable means (one of the older boys makes fake IDs and does other people’s homework for money), as long as the money goes to the family. *Shameless* still airs on Showtime and the casual delinquency on the show is anomalous on U.S. television, although it still requires legitimization through the image of the family.

These three programs, *American Horror Story*, *Weeds*, and *Shameless* address “youth issues” in a way free of judgment and exceptionalism, often dismissing the typical narrative of youth moral panic in the process. *American Horror Story* airs on basic cable where there are still limitations to youth representation, like working within the confines of genre and using sensationalistic examples of youth behaviors like suicide and mass shootings. However, producers who use youth characters in adult television programs

allow the negative narrative of youth to be questioned more often and openly. *Weeds* and *Shameless* reflect the possibilities of premium cable to represent youth considered “at-risk” using adult narratives in a more flexible and uncensored light. Adults play a crucial role in assessing the quality of representations of youth and these progressive representations may also help some adults understand the realities of unemployment, violence, and substance abuse that affect our whole culture, not just youth.

Conclusion

As the transnational sale of media becomes more common, cultural translation becomes increasingly central to the process of media adaptation. Closely knit cultures like the U.S. and the U.K. may produce media products that speak to both cultures, addressing ideological problems and difficulties, like the moral panic over youth. Fictional representations of youth have proven a successful venue for this cultural symbiosis. However, the stylistic and positive aspects of the U.K.’s more progressive media culture complicate the process of translation. By analyzing the relationship between style, realism, and ideology, producers may find new ways to refine this process, increasing the ideological relevance of format adaptations like *Skins U.S* to different cultures. Ideologically, *Skins* and other Broken Britain youth programs retain their relevance to U.S. culture due to the shared moral panic over youth that affects these countries. While media in both countries (youth media in the U.K. and adult media in the U.S.) have made steps toward fairly representing youth to combat the negative rhetoric surrounding them, the importance of genre and adult perspectives of youth to these representations have yet to be addressed by researchers. Fictional representations of

youth have the opportunity to offer their target audience of teens an alternative to the moral panic that affects the everyday world they live in. Without the authority of these alternative media narratives, the cultural dialogue about youth will continue to be defined by the negative perceptions that adults have about youth culture.

Appendix 1



(Fig 2.1)



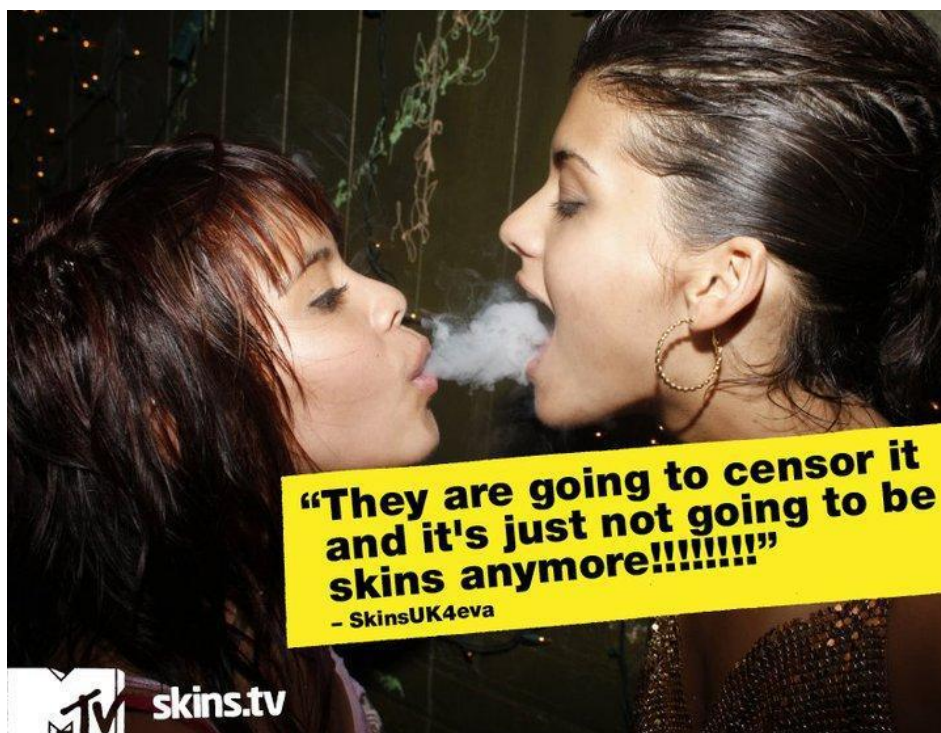
(Fig 2.2)



(Fig 2.3)



(Fig. 2.4)



(Fig 2.5)



(Fig 2.6)



(Fig 2.7)

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