

“Missed Opportunity”: The Oversight of Canadian Children’s Media

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ABSTRACT *Canadian communication studies have largely ignored Canadian children’s media as a field of study. The children’s cultural industries in Canada are rich and diverse. This article argues that these cultural industries need to be constitutively integrated into scholarship on the Canadian mediascape, as does the presence of young people as active participants in Canadian media culture. Focusing primarily on English-language television to illustrate this point, the article first outlines the long history of children’s media production in Canada, then discusses reasons why such scholarship is missing from the field, and concludes by outlining the impacts of this oversight.*

KEYWORDS *Broadcasting; Television; Children; Youth; Mass media*

RÉSUMÉ *Les études en communication canadiennes ont généralement négligé la recherche sur les médias canadiens pour les enfants. Pourtant, les industries culturelles pour enfants au Canada sont riches et diverses. Cet article soutient que la recherche sur les médias canadiens devrait tenir compte de ces industries culturelles ainsi que de la présence de jeunes en tant que participants actifs à la culture médiatique canadienne. Portant principalement sur la télévision anglophone pour illustrer cette nécessité, l'article passe d'abord en revue la longue histoire de la production médiatique pour enfants au Canada, soulève ensuite des raisons pour lesquelles la recherche sur ces productions a été lacunaire et se conclut en présentant les conséquences de ces lacunes.*

MOTS CLÉS *Radiodiffusion; Télévision; Enfants; Jeunesse; Médias de masse*

I was a child of the seventies. I have fond memories of watching *Polka Dot Door*, *Mr. Dressup*, *The Friendly Giant*, *The Racoons*, CBC’s family shows such as *Matt and Jenny*, *Road to Avonlea*, *The Edison Twins*, and my favourite, *Just Like Mom*. I suppose I was aware that these were Canadian shows, but that did not seem to be important because I also watched *Sesame Street* and a whole series of stock cartoons with low production values from the United States, like *Josie and the Pussycats* and Hanna-Barbera’s *Superfriends*. I loved television. It was definitely the medium of choice for this young girl growing up in suburban Canada in the 1970s. Thirty years later I became a professor teaching courses with titles such as “Mass Communication in Canada” and “Media, Culture, and Society,” in which students routinely proclaimed that, although they val-

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ued the concept of Canadian cultural industries, in reality Canadian media “sucked” and they did not watch it, read it, or listen to it. In class discussions students invariably held disdain for the Canadian media system. “It’s not any good and the production values are always cheesy,” they would say. Or they would suggest that “it’s just a cheap imitation of American TV anyway—we don’t do anything ourselves.” Or they would argue that the Canadian media system does not produce anything that is worth consuming—“except *Hockey Night in Canada*,” they always added. But they *did* consume it, I would proclaim. I would ask them to tell me what media they consumed as kids. They would list shows such as *Franklin* (1997–2003), *Fred Penner’s Place* (1985–1997), *Today’s Special* (1981–1987), and of course the venerable *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001–present) and *Road to Avonlea* (1990–1996). They would nostalgically sing Sharon, Lois, and Bram’s “Skinnamarink” and would talk about the hours they had spent reading Owl magazine. But they had never thought about these texts as Canadian.

Canada has a long and rich history of producing media texts for children and youth.¹ Our children’s television, film, music, magazine, and video game industries produce a wide array of content that is both consumed at home and exported around the globe; for example, Franklin, Fred Penner, and Sharon, Lois, and Bram are all international superstars. At its peak in 1999/2000, screen-based production aimed at children was budgeted at a total of \$398 million (YMA, 2009). It is this history that prompted Geoff Pevere and Greig Dymond to write in their 1996 book *Mondo Canuck*, “In the world of children’s entertainment, Canada is something approaching its own Hollywood: it enjoys world renown and near-global market saturation. It is looked up to and envied, and it has been far more often challenged than surpassed” (p. 116). Yet despite the depth of children’s cultural industries in Canada, and their global presence, the genre is woefully understudied and under-assessed. While there are a few exceptions, such as Michele Byers’ work on *Degrassi* (2005, 2012) and André Caron’s studies on the current state of children’s television in Canada (Caron, 2010; Caron, Hwang, & McPhedran, 2012), Canadian children’s cultural industries are largely invisible in the field of Canadian communication studies. The purpose of this article is to investigate this oversight and explore why, despite the national and international prominence of the industry, Canadian children’s cultural industries remain such an understudied scholarly topic in the field. The article will do this by first identifying the gaps, by taking stock of the Canadian children’s cultural industries. Second, the article will contemplate reasons for the near absence of such scholarship in the field of communication studies. Third, it will assess the impacts of this omission on both the industry and the broader frames of Canadian nationalism. Although this dearth of scholarship applies to both French and English children’s content, for the purpose of being concise I will focus mainly on the English-language market and predominantly on television as an entry point into an assessment of children’s cultural industries as a whole. In addition, lumping both French and English children’s media together is a dubious proposition, since they are two discrete media systems with distinct infrastructures and address very different audience tastes.

The fact that children’s media has been largely overlooked in the field of communication studies is highly concerning given that in Canada the production, distribution,

and consumption of children's media is a constitutive component of our national mediascape. The objective of providing content for children (defined as being under the age of 18) is woven into the core of the Canadian Broadcasting Act. The Act states that the "Canadian Broadcasting system should, through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspirations, of Canadian men, women *and children* [emphasis added]" (Government of Canada, 1991, art. 3[d][iii]). The Act states that the programming provided by the Canadian broadcasting system "should be varied and comprehensive, providing a balance of information, enlightenment and entertainment for men, women *and children* [emphasis added] of all ages, interests and tastes" (art. 3[i][i]). While the Broadcasting Act recognizes children as distinct constituents of Canadian society, this recognition has not transferred into scholarship on broadcasting in Canada, where children's broadcasting has virtually been ignored.

Taking stock

The first thing to do in exploring this omission of children's media within the field is to take stock of what is missing, to illustrate the depth and richness of the industries here in Canada. The most glaring oversight is perhaps the lack of history of children's content produced by our national public broadcaster, the CBC/Radio-Canada (formerly the CBC/SRC). Children's television programming in Canada was part of the inception of Canadian television itself. On September 6, 1952, the CBC/SRC bilingual station went on the air in Montréal, and the following day, Canada's first children's program debuted: *Pépinot et Capucine* (1952–1955), a French-language puppet show filmed in Montréal (Rainsberry, 1988). Since that beginning, the history of children's content includes long-running programs such as *Mr. Dressup* (1967–1996), *The Friendly Giant* (1958–1996), *Bobino* (1957–1985), *La Boîte à Surprise* (1956–1972), and *Nic et Pic* (1971–1977). Private broadcasters have also produced a wealth of programming, from CTV's *The Littlest Hobo* (1963–1965, 1979–1985) to Global's *Ready or Not* (1993–1997). Canada has also produced an extensive number of successful television exports, for example, the venerable *Degrassi* franchise—which included *The Kids from Degrassi Street* (1979–1986), *Degrassi Junior High* (1987–1989), and *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001–present)—and the renowned *You Can't Do That on Television* (1979–1990), which was the flagship show of Nickelodeon in the 1980s. More recent examples include *Franklin* (1997–2003), *Max and Ruby* (2002–2013), *Fred Penner's Place* (1985–1997), and *Caillou* (1997–2006).

The success of many of these Canadian children's shows is built on the legacy of animation in Canada. The National Film Board (NFB) began producing animated films in 1941 and became one of the global leaders in experimental animation. Many animated NFB films were geared for children, including the 1979 film *Every Child*, which won an Academy Award in the category of Best Short Film: Animated. Since then, many more Canadian animators have received Oscar nominations. Most recently, in 2015, three of the five films nominated for Best Animated Feature Film were directed by Canadian-educated animators, and a Canadian director won the Best Animated Short Film Oscar for a Disney production entitled *Feast*.

These programs have many avenues for distribution, as Canadian children have their own television stations, including Treehouse, YTV, the Family Channel, and BBC Kids Canada. Many other stations, such as CBC and TVO, have long-running interstitial programming such as *Kids CBC* (2003–present) and TVO's *The Space* (1994–present) and *Gisèle's Big Backyard* (1998–present, originally called *The Nook*), which are interspersed with two- to three-hour blocks of Canadian children's shows.

But television and film are only part of the story; a diverse range of cultural industries in Canada have been very successful in catering to the child audience. For instance, the children's music industry has many Canadian superstars, including Anne Murray, Raffi, and Sharon, Lois, and Bram, prompting Pevere and Dymond (1996) to call children's music in the 1980s a "virtual Canuck monopoly" (p. 116).² Its legacy continues. In 2008, for example, the Barenaked Ladies released their clever children's album *Snacktime*, which peaked at number 61 on the Billboard 200 and won a Juno for Best Children's Album. There is also a vibrant domestic magazine industry for children. The company Owlkids is over 40 years old and reaches more than 850,000 readers every month through its magazines *Chickadee*, *Owl*, and *Chirp* (Owlkids, 2013). The history of quality publishing continues with the Canadian magazine *Brainspace*, launched in 2013 and recognized as a leader in producing interactive content. By 2015, *Brainspace* had won gold in the Parents' Choice Awards for Best Magazine (presented by an American foundation), beating out perennial favourites *Owl* and *National Geographic Kids*. Further, Canada's gaming industry has been ranked as third in the world after those in the United States and Japan and currently employs 16,500 people at over 300 studios (Maimona, 2013; Nowak, 2013). An example of the success in the Canadian gaming industry is Club Penguin Entertainment, a Kelowna, BC, company that was bought by Disney in 2007 for US\$350 million. Club Penguin is a massive multiplayer online game geared to children aged 6 to 14 (Marr & Sanders, 2007).

Supporting the development of these cultural industries is a vibrant professional infrastructure. The national professional association YMA (Youth Media Alliance/Médias jeunesse) hosts a yearly conference attended by over 250 delegates. Of the more than 125 members of the YMA, most are corporate members, including broadcasters such as the CBC, Télé-Québec, Corus Entertainment, and Astral Media, along with production houses such as 9 Story Entertainment, which has over 200 employees, and DHX Media, which has close to 300 employees. There are many post-secondary programs on children's media and entertainment, including the world-renowned Children's Media program offered at Centennial College in Toronto, while Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario, is considered one of the top schools in North America for animation training (YMA, 2009). And perhaps most tellingly, *Kidscreen*—the top trade publication for what it calls the "global children's entertainment industry"—is produced in Toronto, demonstrating the depth of cultural capital here in Canada. *Kidscreen* is published eight times per year and according to its website reaches "15,000 industry decision-makers around the world." The Kidscreen Summit is the publication's annual industry conference. Held in New York, it is attended by over 1,600 delegates from 46 countries (Kidscreen, 2013).

The commitment to children's media reverberates in policy as well. The major self-regulatory boards of the media, Advertising Standards Canada and the Canadian

Broadcast Standards Council, have codes that deal specifically with advertising and broadcasting to children. These codes are upheld around the world as standards to live up to (Coulter & Murray, 2001; Lisosky, 2001).

Admittedly, the examples above present just a snapshot, but it is enough to illustrate the breadth of cultural industries for children in our country. Despite this breadth and diversity, scholarly conversations on Canadian media generally ignore children's cultural industries.

Assessing what is missing

It is evident from the examples above that Canadian children's media are a key component of the Canadian mediascape and that children's cultural industries have played an integral role in the development of Canada's media industries. However, there has been very little scholarship on this, which leads to a broader exploration: What exactly is missing in terms of scholarship on the topic? To begin with, there is little analysis of the texts themselves. For example, hardly any existing scholarship critically assesses the actual content of young people's television shows. There are a few exceptions; most notably, the *Degrassi* franchise has been assessed by numerous scholars, including Byers (2005, 2012) and Levine (2013), and there is Patsy Kotsopoulos' work on *Road to Avonlea* (2004a, 2004b). Scholars of television studies point out that Canada is not alone in the lack of scholarly attention paid to its own programs. Byers notes that a similar observation has been made in regards to television series produced in Australia and Britain, which fail to gain much scholarly attention, despite a huge amount of scholarship focused on American television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, and *Sex and the City* (Byers, 2012).

Some of the most comprehensive work on children's media in Canada has come from the Centre for Youth and Media Studies at the Université de Montréal, under the direction of André Caron, with a recent study published in two parts conducted in partnership with the Youth Media Alliance (YMA). The first part of the study, *A National Study on Children's Television Programming in Canada* (Caron, 2010), is a content analysis designed to investigate the current state of English- and French-language children's television programming for two- to 12-year-olds across Canada. Although this study is an important contribution to our knowledge of television content for young people and allows for a deeper understanding of the actual content of children's programming in Canada, it is not enough on its own to fill the void in the scholarship.

There is also a wide deficit of historical research on the texts of the past. In 1988 Fred Rainsberry, former head of children's programming for the CBC, wrote *A History of Children's Television in English Canada, 1952–1986*. Rainsberry's book (1988) provides an exhaustive inventory of television productions, referencing close to 300 shows, but there is little critical analysis of these shows and the evidence he provides is largely anecdotal. The value of Rainsberry's book is that it clearly illustrates the abundance of programming in Canada. It also demonstrates how the production of children's programming has played a key role in the development of broadcasters such as the CBC and TVO, where a focus on educational children's programming was mandated. Rainsberry also reminds us of the incredible wealth in local productions for children,

such as *Harrigan* (1969–85) for CKWS (Kingston); *Magic Tom* (1961–76) and *Johnny JellyBean* (1962–67) at CFCF in Montréal; *Archie and His Friends* (1965–86) for CKY-TV in Winnipeg; *Uncle Bobby* (1964–79), which ran on CFTO; and *You Can't Do That on Television*, on CJOH (Ottawa).

While there is little scholarship on the texts produced for children, there is even less on texts *about* children—more specifically, on how children have been portrayed or represented in Canadian media. There is one fascinating study by Brian Low, entitled *NFB Kids: Portrayals of Children by the National Film Board of Canada, 1939–1989* (2002), but little else.

Despite the fact that all of the works above are important contributions to understanding Canadian children's content, they do not fully constitute a broad knowledge of the Canadian children's mediascape, nor do they offer enough to fully flesh out Canadian children's media as a significant field in Canadian communication studies. Further, they fail to talk to one another in a significant way that would suggest the beginnings of establishing shared ground as a field.

Second we know very little about how Canadian young people engage with and use the media texts that are produced for them. Very little work exists on reception, with the exception of the second part of Caron's study discussed above, entitled *Are the Kids All Right? Canadian Families and Television in the Digital Age* (Caron et al., 2012). Caron's work is an intensive national study of the ways Canadian children and families incorporate media and media content into their daily lives. The study explores the role of media content in young people's lives and the "meanings they give to media during their daily social interactions with family and friends" (p. 4). Caron's study raised many interesting findings, including the fact that in both English- and French-speaking households, "preschoolers to around 7–8 year olds are relatively loyal to Canadian programming since producers here offer a variety of programs known for their quality. After the age of 8, there is a sort of vacuum, and Canadian content for this group becomes more and more rare" (p. 115). Clearly, Caron's work begins to fill a critical void in the field. Unfortunately, outside of his study, the field is fairly sparse concerning the ways in which Canadian young people have engaged with the content that is produced for them in this country.

Third there is very little consideration from a political economic perspective of the modes of production or distribution of children's content. Academic oversight in terms of modes of production is not limited to Canada. Dafna Lemish (2010) suggests that there is a widespread ignorance of children's media production across the board, and she laments that critical studies of the product domains of children "are few and far between" (p. 8). As a result, she argues, we know very little about "what media professionals assume and expect of their child audiences, and what roles they assign themselves" (p. xiv). David Buckingham (2002) confirms Lemish's view and suggests that even in a global context (in English-speaking countries, that is) there is a dearth of scholarship on production.³ Furthermore, virtually no scholarship deals with the government policies that feed, support, and shape the production of children's media. There is one study—a cross-cultural comparison of policies on children's television in Australia, Canada, and the United States, completed by Joanne Lisosky (2001)—but it

is too short to fully fill in the gaps of knowledge. This lack of attention paid to policy is the opposite of what has occurred in the field of television studies in Canada as a whole. Beaty and Sullivan (2006) argue that work in television studies has tended to emphasize the media industry, technologies, or telecommunications policy, rather than the actual text. But this is not the case with children's television studies, where the focus is on content.

A fourth gap in the scholarship is the absence of an appraisal of Canadian children's media as an export industry. As outlined above, Canadian children's content has had a huge presence in the global context. Specifically, there is a long history of Canadian productions being exported overseas. *Road to Avonlea* (1990–1996), for example, was both a mainstay of the Disney Channel and broadcast in over 150 export markets (Kotsopoulos, 2004a). Nelvana's *Franklin and Friends*—which started off in 1986 as a book series published by Kids Can Press and has since sold 65 million books in at least 24 languages—has been broadcast on television around the world. Although recent statistics are hard to come by, in 2007–2008 Canadian children's television programming generated an estimated \$103 million in international export revenue (YMA, 2009). At last count, in 2007–2008, the Canadian government has co-production treaties with over 53 countries, and Canadian shows are shown in over 70 countries (YMA, 2009).⁴ But, with the exception of the few articles on the *Degrassi* franchise and *Road to Avonlea* already mentioned, there is very little analysis of Canadian productions on the international stage.⁵ Nor does much work address the presence of Canadian productions within the American television industry. The lack of scholarship in this area—not only regarding children's content, but in all genres of television—has been acknowledged by Byers and VanderBurgh (2010), who state that the “migration/repurposing of Canadian content within American networks [has] been under-theorized” (p. 114).

A very specific story can be told about children's programming for the American market; however, the place of Canadian content in shaping American television is a story that is largely untold. Canadians have produced a wide array of children's media, from the beginning of the industry in 1950 to the rise of cable stations in the 1980s and through the transformation of the digital age in the late 1990s. Children's programming was created by the national public broadcasters as well as by regional station groups, which could produce live-action children's shows at a relatively low cost and thus fill space in their daytime schedules. One example is *Romper Room and Friends* (1981–1992), which was produced by CKCO in Kitchener, Ontario, and had made close to 3,000 episodes by the end of its run.⁶ In the 1970s *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein* (1971), which was produced by CHCH in Hamilton, Ontario, syndicated over 130 episodes to both Canadian and U.S. stations. By the time the Canadian cable station YTV was launched in 1988, a healthy production sector was in place.

The situation in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s was much different. Very little children's content was made because Disney had essentially cornered the market. American broadcasters focused their resources for daytime content on producing soap operas and talk shows—which provided lucrative syndication opportunities—instead of children's content. To compensate, American cable stations looked to Canada to

augment their offerings. Perhaps the most notable illustration of this is the case of Nickelodeon. When Nickelodeon premiered in 1981, it turned to Canada as a resource for content.⁷ Lacking a budget for original programming, Nickelodeon turned to shows like *Sharon, Lois, & Bram's Elephant Show* (1984–1988) and *Today's Special* (1981–1987), which formed the backbone of the station's programming schedule (Sandler, 2004). Nickelodeon's first breakthrough hit was the Canadian show *You Can't Do That on Television* (YCDTOT) (1979–1990). The show was originally produced in Ottawa for CJOH and consisted of comedy sketches about typical preteen experiences, including arguing with parents, being in detention, or visiting a video arcade (Sandler, 2004). The program eventually aired five times a week on Nickelodeon and became the station's flagship show. It was so popular it was spun off into Nickelodeon's first original program, *Double Dare*. One of the signature moments in every episode of YCDTOT was the "sliming," where a bucket of green slime was dumped on a character. This signature green slime from the show was incorporated into Nickelodeon's logo, solidifying the starring role of YCDTOT in the corporate history of the station (Sandler, 2004). YCDTOT's witty representation of children as empowered citizens within the spaces of adult culture helped Nickelodeon to imagine its audience as active consumer citizens. Indeed, positioning the child as an active consumer citizen became the hallmark of the station (Banet-Weiser, 2007). One wonders whether other Canadian shows positioned the child as an active consumer citizen, or if YCDTOT was an exception. Without committed scholarship on the topic, it is difficult to know.

Finally, children's media is missing from our national history. Virtually no work has reviewed children's media industries and connected them to the broader context of the media in Canada. The only text that even comes close to offering an overview of any of these cultural industries is Fred Rainsberry's book, *A History of Children's Television in English Canada* (1988), but since its publication, not one text has surveyed the Canadian children's mediascape; moreover, as mentioned previously, Rainsberry fails to connect children's television to any wider historical contexts. But children's media production is an integral component of Canadian media history. Children's media is not a separate or tangential industry; it is not produced in a vacuum away from other media. It has been and continues to be intricately woven into the national mediascape.

Sadly, this failure to contextualize children's media also extends to the textbooks surveying the Canadian mediascape that are often used in undergraduate courses in communication studies. These textbooks rarely include references to children's cultural industries at all, much less to Canadian children's industries. For example, Mike Gasher, Rowland Lorimer, and David Skinner's text *Mass Communication in Canada*, now in its seventh edition (2012), is one of the standards in first-year communication courses. It contains virtually no mention of children or young people. Nor does *Intersections of Media and Communications: Concepts and Critical Frameworks* (2011), an anthology for Canadian students, edited by Will Straw, Sandra Gabriele, and Ira Wagman. Only *Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communication*, originally edited by Paul Attallah and Leslie Shade and now in its fourth edition (Shade, 2014), has included one chapter on young people in each edition, but that is all. In these textbooks, not

only is the media produced for children mostly ignored, but young people themselves are largely absent. The same holds true for broader survey works on the cultural industries in Canada. Often these texts cover the standard categories—the film industry, the television industry, and so on—but they fail to mention children's media production. Examples include Michael Dorland's book *The Cultural Industries in Canada* (1996) and its contemporary follow-up, edited by Peter Urquhart and Ira Wagman, *Cultural Industries.ca: Making Sense of Canadian Media in the Digital Age* (2012). Continuing the pattern, Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan's 2006 book *Canadian Television Today* includes only a passing mention of YTV, while Marusya Bociurkiw's book *Feeling Canadian: Television, Nationalism, and Affect* (2011) does not even address children's television, which is surprising given that children are written right into the Broadcasting Act.

There are a few bright spots, however, including the anthology *Slippery Pastimes: Reading the Popular in Canadian Culture* (2002), which includes a chapter by Joan Nicks on youth television in Canada called "Straight Up and Youth Television: Navigating Dreams without Nationhood." Still, the chapter is an analysis only of teen television and does not mention television for younger children. There is also Marian Bredin, Scott Henderson, and Sarah Matheson's anthology *Canadian Television: Text and Context* (2012), which contains a fascinating piece by Kyle Asquith (2012) on the hypercommercialism of YTV and a chapter by Michele Byers (2012) on youth and identity. But these few bright spots are simply not enough to string together a cohesive sense of the industry in Canada, nor do they really coalesce into anything that approaches a body of study.

For the most part, children's media production in Canada has been shut out of scholarship on the cultural industries in Canada. The story of children's media production in this country is not part of our national narratives about media. To rectify this oversight, children's media needs to be acknowledged as constitutive of—as opposed to derivative of—Canadian cultural industries.

Why has children's media been overlooked?

The wider question that needs to be asked is this: Why are children and children's media shut out of much of communication studies in Canada? The marginalization of children is part of a broader tendency in academia as whole that has marginalized children's texts, cultures, and experiences. This is true of the fields of literature (Clark, 2003; Nodelman, 1992, 2008), consumer culture (Cook, 2008), and cultural studies (Buckingham, 2008). However, we are seeing children and childhood as a growing focus of concern in Canada, perhaps most notably in the rise of children's studies programs, including those at Brock University and York University. The development of the Centre for Research in Young People's Texts and Cultures (CRYTC), in Winnipeg, and its associated publication *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, as well as the establishment of the Association for Research in Cultures of Young People (ARCYP), are all efforts to rectify the current shortfall. Yet despite these investments in the study of young people's texts, the study of Canadian children's media and texts is still a fairly marginal field, particularly within Canadian communication studies.

One of the difficulties in studying children's media is in defining what actually constitutes children's media. Unlike other media genres, such as drama, documentaries, and news, children's media tends to be defined by its audience rather than by its content. The problem with this definition, argues Perry Nodelman (2008), "is that the first audience for children's texts are often not children at all, but rather the adults who write, direct, produce, finance and edit the text" (p. 54). Adults involved in the production of children's literature have the power to produce or withhold knowledge as they construct childhood as a particular, bounded time, with "ideas that tend to separate children from other human beings by imagining a space in which it is safe to be childlike and thus also a less safe space beyond it" (p. 59). According to Nodelman, "The person a child can be now, and will be beyond childhood, constitutes the central tension among the adults who decide what books should be made available to the market" (p. 59). Thus the child audience is a fiction—or, as Jacqueline Rose (1988) stated so eloquently, an "impossibility." Children's literature "rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple" (p. 58). But there is no such child. Children's fiction "sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims unashamedly to take the child in" (p. 59). Rose argues that since children's fiction is not produced *by* children, but *for* them, the texts produced for children are adult constructions of the meanings of childhood and, by extension, of adulthood. Instead of speaking to a real child, adult constructions of childhood discursively define adult expectations of "childhood," both for the actual child and for our own definitions of our childhoods.

Debates on children's literature inform the field of children's media studies. Actually defining what is meant by children's media raises all of the arguments posed by both Rose and Nodelman. An adult "audience" produces the media for an imagined child. In doing so, the texts produced are actually discursive framings of childhood, adulthood, and the expectations of both. Yet despite these tensions in defining the object of study, scholarship on children's media should not be thrown out with the proverbial bathwater. Scholarship on children's literature has been able to acknowledge the "impossibility" of the term, yet still remain a defined and robust field of scholarship. In response to the conundrum of defining children's media, Buckingham (2002) has declared that in his work he studies the "media of children," as opposed to children's media, as a way to dump the baggage of the term "children's media" (p. 8). There is plenty of opportunity to trouble the term "Canadian children's media," while still focusing on it as an object of study.

The small amount of scholarship on children's media that exists primarily focuses on Canadian teen media, to the exclusion of children's media. This is the second reason for the critical oversight of children's media; in the field of Canadian television studies, teen television gets much more attention than children's television. There is a body of work, albeit small, that has looked at teen TV—most notably, the *Degrassi* franchise—while there is very little that has assessed children's television. This is part of a larger issue in academic research where young children are marginalized in favour of teens. Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham call this a "division of labour" (as quoted in Jenkins, 1998, p. 2) within academic research, in which youth culture receives a lot of at-

tention from scholars in the fields of communication and cultural studies, but the child is largely relegated to the field of developmental psychology. There is a long tradition of celebrating resistant or subversive teen/youth cultures that are often older than 18 years old, but children's cultures are rarely given the same consideration (Jenkins, 1998).

The privileging of teen media to the exclusion of children's media leads to the third reason for the dearth of research on children's media. Children are seen as asocial, or pre-social—on a developmental path toward becoming fully formed adults. Often, they are not considered social actors who engage in meaning-making practices (Cook, 2008; James, Jenks, & Prout, 2004; Jenks, 2005). Thus the stage of childhood is conceptualized as a period of powerlessness in which the child is being conditioned or socialized to become an adult. The child, presumed innocent and devoid of social agency, is considered to be “immature,” “irrational” (Jenkins, 1998, p. 2), and vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation. Specifically, the child is seen as a “special” (Buckingham, 2011, p. 185) audience whose particular needs and vulnerabilities differ from those of adults.

As a “pre-social” being, the child is easily relegated to the field of developmental psychology and subject to concern over the “effects” of the media, as a “special” audience that needs adult protection. The perception that media threatens children, that it embodies a risk of harm to children, has long been a major motivation in the funding of research on children and media. The Payne Fund Studies of 1929 to 1932, for instance, investigated young people's film viewing; other research addressed concerns over comic books in the 1950s and, later, moral panics about video games and media violence in the 1990s. There is a long history of attention paid to the effects of media on children. Constantly being embroiled in debates over media effects, as Drotner and Livingstone (2008) suggest, unfairly positions the field of children's media as seemingly “narrow, uncritical, empiricist and conservative” (p. 11), further alienating the topic of children's media. While children's media is not unworthy of scholarship, the authority of the “effects” tradition can serve to discourage other scholarship.

A final reason for the oversight is more practical. Very few resources are available to enable the actual study of children's media content, particularly historical resources. This is connected to a much broader issue in Canadian television studies as a whole, the fact that there is no national archive of Canadian television at all—a situation that many scholars have previously noted (e.g., Bociurkiw, 2011; VanderBurgh, 2012). It is surprising—given that Canada produces a lot of content, much of it publicly funded—that there is no real mechanism for archiving the content produced by these funds (Shade, 2012), nor is there any requirement to make these freely available to the public (Byers & VanderBurgh, 2010). As Byers (2012) points out, this is a kind of double jeopardy. The failure to archive this material means that Canadian series are not only invisible in scholarship but in jeopardy of “being erased from the cultural map” (p. 117). To compensate for the absence of archives, as Byers and VanderBurgh (2010) note, Canadian television scholars end up “trafficking” texts; that is, they resort to relying on informal networks in order to find illicit collections of archival television (p. 112). For scholars of children's media, accessing archival television is even more precarious. Although there may be avenues through which scholars can procure old VCR tapes of shows such as *Degrassi Junior High* or a particular soap opera, the chances are slim

that someone saved old tapes of *Polka Dot Door* (1971–1993) or locally produced shows such as *Tiny Talent Time* (1957–1992) and *Just Like Mom* (1980–1985). At the moment there are new opportunities to see clips of shows online, via such sites as YouTube and TVarchive.ca, but again this is a precarious way of accessing material, and one that forces researchers to rely on the selective goodwill of fans as opposed to being able to research complete seasons or even complete episodes of a given show.

Making the case for scholarship on Canadian children's media

If we as scholars of communication studies in Canada are to have a real understanding of the scope of the Canadian mediascape, then children and children's media need to be constitutively integrated into our field. Their oversight has had serious implications in the field. Firstly, leaving children out of this scholarship means leaving them out of the national story. As Marc Raboy (2013) and many others have pointed out, Canadian broadcasting has developed on the principle that communication is central to nation-building and to national representation. According to Raboy (1990), "The story of television in Canada is totally intertwined with the story of Canada itself" (p. 4). Broadcasting in Canada is considered a "public service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and sovereignty" (p. 3). The lack of scholarship on children's spaces within Canadian broadcasting structures means that children's media, and ultimately children as a whole, are not contextualized within the story of national identity and sovereignty. Representations of the child are often repositories for qualities that adults see as precious and problematic. As such, to not study children is, to use Raboy's term, a "missed opportunity" to study Canada's sense of itself (1990). Canadian children's media provides rich opportunities to explore Canadian constructions of childhood, expectations of children, and, by extension, cultural meanings and expectations of Canadian adulthood.

Secondly, as Michele Byers (2012) argues, Canadian teen television offers "potential opportunities to disrupt myths about Canadianness as a social location" (p. 115), since teen TV offers narratives on youth who are Canadian but are often "at the margins of Canadianness" (p. 130). Episodes of such shows as the *Degrassi* series and *Ready or Not* (1993–1997) often deal with young people at coming-of-age moments who struggle with the tensions of age, agency, and racialization/ethnicization. These shows challenge what Byers calls the "mythic idea of Canadianness in which 'Canadian' is a unified subject position that is open to everyone" (p. 130). There are similar opportunities in children's television, which may not necessarily deal with such coming-of-age moments, but which still offers the potential to explore our framings of "Canadianness"—an idea that, according to Beaty and Sullivan (2006), is "one of the least understood and least clearly articulated concepts in the nation's lexicon" (p. 12). Children's media could be used to assess the shifting ways in which we define both childhood and citizenship. Such scholarship would also allow for opportunities to challenge assumptions that Canadian broadcasts are just cheaper versions of "good" American shows and that Canadian media are an "imitation of something more authentically produced elsewhere" (Byers, 2012, p. 117). Canadian children's television has often been at the vanguard of children's media globally. Shows like *Road to Avonlea*, *You Can't Do That on Television*, and *Mr. Dressup* were not imitations; in fact, quite the

opposite. They were innovative shows that provided new models of television to be copied elsewhere.

Thirdly, in the global marketplace the “world renown and near-global market saturation” of Canadian children’s media, as described by Pevere and Dymond (1996, p. 116), provides an opportunity for a more critical discussion of the local production and global distribution of Canadian media, which upsets the assumed centrality of the United States in studies on global media. As noted above, statistics from 2007–2008 reveal that Canadian cultural exports of children’s television represented a total of \$103 million (YMA, 2009). A comprehensive study of children’s television may follow Byers’ (2012) prediction for teen TV, providing opportunities to disrupt television studies as U.S.-centric. The complex system of global distribution of Canada children’s media products has a long history, and a comprehensive study of this history would highlight the position of Canadian cultural products within the global marketplace. Studying this history could also determine whether Canadian children’s programming offers something that is uniquely Canadian and question how the genre negotiates the delicate balance of cultural specificity and internationality. Both Byers (2012) and Levine (2013) have begun to address these questions in terms of *Degrassi*, yet there have been many missed opportunities to ask similar questions regarding children’s programming. This is a critical loss, since programming decisions for children have historically been largely moral decisions, based on socializing future citizens as well as educating young people on Canada’s culture, heritage, and institutions.⁸ Explorations of children’s media open up opportunities to ask critical questions about the intersections of national identity, citizenship, and the media and, by extension, provide a new angle in the debates over Canadian media as being either culturally specific or global and homogenous. Of course, the near absence of such research is also a missed opportunity to reflect upon the policies in place that both allow and hinder access to the global market for Canadian productions.

Fourthly, developing a body of scholarship on children’s media production in Canada is not only an academic exercise; it also has real implications for the industry. A past president of the YMA, Peter Moss, has recently stated (2012) that without a history of children’s television, the industry is “becoming unaware of what the fundamental edge is that contributes to our success. We may have come to this state in the industry without a deep understanding of what it is we actually do well.” Moss is worried that “we are in danger of losing touch with the foundation of our past success. We have not developed an institutional memory.” He contends that with hindsight, the appreciation of success is much clearer. Canadian children’s media, Moss claims, is unique and special. The success of the industry “is not just based on economic advantage and skilled labour. Our success may in fact be based on the philosophical and generative elements that we take for granted (and often bemoan) as Canadians” (Moss, 2012). While there is some research to back up Moss’ claim (see Byers, 2012; Caron, 2010), there is not enough scholarship to support his claim adequately. Peter Moss is a veteran of the industry, having worked in it for over 25 years, and has been creative director for children’s programming at CBC Television and vice-president of programming and production for YTV and Treehouse TV. His argument that Canadian media

companies offer something unique in the field of children's production is based on a wealth of experience. It has validity, but without a real depth of scholarship, we will never be able to fully substantiate Moss's claim.

Losing the history of our past success would have serious consequences for the future development of children's media. In the past few years, government commitment has dropped dramatically. For example, in the CBC English-language licence renewal with the CRTC, the CBC's commitment to children programming has dropped, from a historical high of 28 hours per week to only 20 for children, with only one hour a week committed to original programming (CRTC, 2013). There is a sense in the industry that most conventional broadcasters have abandoned the genre (CRTC, 2013), a fact substantiated by Caron's report (Caron et al., 2012), which states that private generalist broadcasters account for 1 percent of children's programming in Canada. Furthermore, CTV is expected to broadcast only 2.5 hours per week of programming for children, while CHUM is not required to broadcast any children's programming at all (YMA, 2009). Public funding of children's television production dropped from \$102 million in 2000–2001 to \$87 million in 2007–2008 (YMA, 2009). In the age of budget cuts and government belt-tightening in all industries and services, it is difficult without a history or public awareness of the genre's value to make a case to governments for increasing—or even maintaining—their financial support. Furthermore, without this “institutional memory” the invisibility of children's media in academic scholarship will become even more deeply ingrained. Without knowledge of the value of Canadian children's media, no effort is made to push for the preservation of materials that could be used for future research. At the moment our archives are in a state of distress. The recent Conservative government was systematically dismantling the nation's public archives and libraries, a situation that has dire consequences for all forms of academic scholarship but will most certainly be detrimental to the field of children's media. Virtually all Canadian media content is currently under threat (Marchessault, 2013), but children's television, which has been overlooked in favour of adult productions, is even more vulnerable since there is even less support to save it. Although there are some small pockets of materials, such as the archives at the CBC and Radio-Canada, there appears to be no systemic archiving policy or strategy (Shade, 2012). There is a real potential that the history of our cultural past will be lost. Without archives of material, there is a good chance that children's shows such as *Polka Dot Door*, *Tiny Talent Time*, and *Romper Room and Friends* will be virtually deleted from our collective memories and cultural histories—a situation that has serious implications for our understanding of the contributions of children's cultural production to our national cultural industry.

Conclusions

I must acknowledge that part of my reason for wanting to fill this void in our collective imagination of our cultural history is a sense of national pride; I would be remiss to indicate otherwise. I cannot help but feel pride in the diverse range of children's media products that are Canadian, and I want my students to have this sense of pride as well. Pevere and Dymond (1996, p. 116) do not state that we are “approaching our own Hollywood” for nothing. At the same time, this call for the development of a robust

body of work on Canadian children's media goes well beyond national pride. Failing to fully include children's media production in our collective understanding of the Canadian mediascape is a missed opportunity to fully appreciate the richness and depth of our cultural heritage, it is a missed opportunity to constitutively integrate children and children's culture into this cultural heritage, and it is a missed opportunity to challenge the assumption that Canadian media have little presence in global media culture.

The goal should not be simply to add children's media to the existing scholarship on Canadian cultural industries, but rather to open up the field of Canadian communication studies to the essential and non-negotiable presence of young people by incorporating the genre into broader discussions on Canadian media. Children's media should be not only an afterthought plopped into scholarship on Canadian media, but incorporated as a constitutive component of the mediascape, in the same way other genres such as news and drama are. There is a need to recognize that in Canada the production, distribution, and consumption of young people's media is and has been a constitutive component of our national mediascape. Children are written into the Broadcast Act, industry associations such as the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) and Advertising Standards Canada (ASC) have specific regulatory codes for children, and children's media have been an integral part of the daily programming of our national and provincial public broadcasters right from the beginning. In 1999–2000, CBC broadcast 26 hours of children's programming per week. In 2013 the provincial public broadcaster TVO has 4.8 million unique visitors to its website TVOKids.com, and only 1.5 million to its TVO.org website, the adult counterpart (TVO, 2012). Canadian children's media serve economic, artistic, and nationalist goals, the values ascribed to Canadian cultural policies (Wagman & Winton, 2010). They constitute a large genre that straddles many industries (television, print media, film, video games, and digital media), employs tens of thousands of people, and has provided creative spaces for a plethora of Canadian artists as it often tells stories of "Canadianness."

The constitutive integration of children's media into Canadian communication studies needs to build upon the theoretical framings of the field of children's studies, which recognizes children not as passive consumers of media passing through stages of development as adults-to-be, but instead as young people who are "active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live" (James & Prout, 1997, p. 8). They are active agents of change. They do not simply react to narratives provided by media culture; instead, they actively participate in the meanings, practices, and productions of media texts. By fully integrating young people, as active participants in media culture, into the scholarship on Canada's mediascape, we can rectify some of the missed opportunities acknowledged above. Hopefully, with this scholarship in place, the next time I teach a communication studies course on mass media in Canada, my students will at least know that they have consumed, and enjoyed, a wide range of Canadian content as young people.

Notes

1. Media industries largely refer to the genre as "children and youth," children being aged 2 to 11 and youth aged 12 to 17. The industry separates the two categories, and there are slightly different regulations

for the two groups. For example, according to articles 64 and 65 of the CBC licence, the broadcaster must program 15 hours per week for children (ages 2 to 11) and 5 hours per week for youth (ages 12 to 17). In contrast, the government's reference to children in the Broadcasting Act refers to all children under the age of 18. For the sake of clarity in this article, I use the terms *children* and *children's media* to apply to young people and the content for young people under the age of 18.

2. Murray's 1977 album *There's a Hippo in My Bathtub* went platinum in Canada and was re-released by EMI Music Canada in 2001. In 1992, the *Washington Post* described Raffi as "the most popular children's singer in the English-speaking world" (*Washington Post*, May 31, 1992). He has produced over 20 albums, including many classic songs such as "Baby Beluga," "Brush Your Teeth," and "Down by the Bay." Sharon, Lois, and Bram have released close to 40 albums over a 30-year span, starting in 1974. The group also starred in a TV show called *Sharon, Lois, & Bram's Elephant Show*, which was broadcast by the CBC from 1984 to 1988 and picked up in syndication by Nickelodeon in 1987. Given the turnover of audiences, the show ran in reruns on Nickelodeon and in 1993 was ranked second in a top-10 list of children's television shows by *TV Guide*.

3. There are a few notable exceptions, including Heather Hendershot's anthology on Nickelodeon (2004), Norma Pecora's *Business of Children's Entertainment* (1998), Sarah Banet-Weiser's *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship* (2007), and Janet Wasko's work on Disney (2001).

4. The fact that these statistics are dated illustrates the underlying point of this article: that children's media is an under-studied and subsequently undervalued component of the Canadian mediascape. There has been very little commitment on the part of governments to keep track of data on this industry. The data that are available have been produced primarily by the industry's lobby group, the YMA.

5. *Road to Avonlea* was a co-venture between the CBC and Disney in that they both funded the Canadian company, Sullivan Entertainment, that produced the show.

6. *Romper Room* was originally produced for different locations across Canada, each with its own host. In 1972 it was produced solely for CKCO. Ten episodes were taped each week for a period of 14 weeks, to produce about 140 episodes per year. The show ran for close to 25 years (Rainsberry, 1988).

7. Nickelodeon was launched in 1979 as Pinwheel. It became Nickelodeon in 1981.

8. A good example of this commitment can be seen in the YMA's official statement of quality and commitment (http://www.ymamj.org/a_propos_en.html), created by the former Alliance for Children and Television, which provided the foundation for the Children's Television Charter, which in turn governments and broadcasters around the world are now ratifying.

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