

**Youth socio-political participation in a context of change:  
Media representations of the young active citizen in Canada,  
1960s to 2000s**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Youth socio-political participation in a context of change: Media representations of the young active citizen in Canada, 1960s to 2000s**

Brandi L. Bell, Ph.D.  
Concordia University, 2009

It is currently a common belief in Canada that for a democracy to be effective its population must be engaged and active in the processes of politics and governance. In this context, the participation of youth has become a concern for Canadian decision-makers and the general public. Complaints and worries regarding young Canadians' disinterest in, or apathy towards, politics and low levels of young voter turnout in elections are common. The government and society at large are increasingly calling upon youth to act in their role as citizens: To participate in the social and political realms of Canadian society. But how are youth being asked to participate? Who is invited and under what circumstances?

The encouragement of particular forms of youth social and political participation has consequences for youth as Canadian citizens. Through a contextualized examination of representations of youth social and political participation found in selected National Film Board of Canada films and Canadian websites I present, in this thesis, an exploration of the forms of citizen identity and power relations promoted and presumed by the discourses circulating about youth participation in society.

Over the past four decades, from the late-1960s until the present, the place of youth in society has changed, as have perceptions of youth and youth socio-political participation. Focusing on these changes and the impact they may have on the situating of young Canadians as participatory citizens, I explore the conflicting perspectives,

tensions, and compromises that have marked representations of youth citizen participation over the years, ranging from children's rights discourses and youth media to consumerism and an enduring belief in generational difference.

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## **Introduction – Where youth stand: Active citizenship & young Canadians**

*There is no doubt that youth suffers from a 'left-out' feeling. If young people had more opportunity for proper participation in public affairs they would feel more social responsibility. (Canadian Youth Commission, 1948, p. 118)*

*How youth see and understand their relationship with the state is at the heart of the notion of citizenship. (Beauvais, McKay, & Seddon, 2001, p. 84)*

*A healthy Canadian society depends on the active involvement of its citizens in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the nation. It requires individuals not only to pursue their own goals, but also to contribute to the growth and well being of the community. Active, engaged citizens participate in community building, help maintain the economic vitality of society, and pursue communal interest alongside self-interest. (Barnard, Campbell, & Smith, 2003, p. 6)*

### **Youth, citizenship, & participation**

An emerging debate among government, media, and academics in recent decades has focused on youth citizenship, particularly in terms of participation rights and expectations. Canadian government and non-government activities demonstrate that youth are increasingly considered as both important targets for social policy and as potential active participants in social and political arenas. In such activities there is an underlying assumption that the participation of youth as citizens is associated with the health of Canada, especially in terms of social cohesion and well-being. For example:

#### 1994

A comparative review of international youth policies and programs regarding citizenship and identity reveals that there is a growing trend “toward a focus on young people as a major target group for public policy” and that Canada “is not out of step in viewing young people as a principal vehicle through which to advance economic and social policy objectives as well as to forge a more cohesive country with a strong and confident national identity” (Butt & Motzney, 1994, p. 2). This research, conducted under the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate of the Government of Canada’s Department

of Canadian Heritage, identifies youth participation models emphasizing active citizenship and democratic participation.

### 2001

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), a non-profit Canadian think tank, releases a literature review on youth and citizenship in Canada (Beauvais et al., 2001). The authors conclude that “examining their situation shows youth to have a precarious citizenship status” (p. iii).

### 2003

A research study funded by Canadian Heritage, Human Resources Development Canada (now Human Resources and Social Development Canada), and others, examines Canadian youth between 15 and 34 years of age for evidence of civic engagement (Barnard et al., 2003). Researchers investigate whether “social well-being and social cohesion are being threatened by the attitudes and behaviours of [these young Canadians], and the extent to which there is a crisis of youth civic engagement in Canada” (p. 3). Through a consideration of charitable giving, volunteering, voting, activism, participation in political parties, social and recreational participation, faith-based participation, and employment, the authors conclude that Canadian youth “are redefining what it means to be an active citizen” (p. 99).

### 2005

CPRN conducts an on-line survey of Canadian youth between 18 and 25 years of age to engage them in a discussion on policy issues. This is followed by a three and a half day dialogue and summit with youth from across Canada in which young people discuss the kind of Canada they want to see, especially in terms of learning, work, health, environment, and citizenship (Saxena, 2005; Canadian Policy Research Networks [CPRN], 2006).

### 2006

The Policy Research Initiative (PRI), which conducts research in support of the Government of Canada, holds an invitation-only seminar and roundtable on youth policy and research as a “pre-implementation activity” for their interdepartmental research project *Investing in Youth: Evidence from Policy, Practice and Research*. Invitees from Canada, the United States, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Wales discuss international concepts and trends as well as specific issues concerning Canadian youth (Policy Research Initiative [PRI], 2006a).

### 2007

The PRI holds a follow-up invitation-only roundtable to hear from Canadian experts on recent youth-focused research. The roundtable has three objectives: (1) “to provide a conceptual and theoretical basis on how to approach ‘youth,’” (2) “to examine existing data to describe the changing characteristics of youth transitions in Canada,” and (3) “to identify key emerging issues and challenges facing different subgroups of youth, in terms of integration/inclusion and social exclusion” (Policy Research Initiative [PRI], 2007, n.pag.).

CPRN holds a workshop with Canadian youth to discuss participation and citizenship, commissions research reports on youth participation, and holds a follow-up roundtable. The final report, *Lost in translation: (Mis)understanding youth engagement*, stipulates that “how young people think and talk about their civic and political engagement is different from previous generations” and that “much of this is not captured by traditional research methods and academic discourse about what constitutes political participation” (MacKinnon, Pitre, & Watling, 2007, p. iii).

These and other activities of the Canadian government and researchers not only demonstrate an effort to understand youth as citizens but also notably approach youth as ‘active’ citizens who are encouraged and *expected* to participate in defining what it means to be Canadian and to act accordingly. In addition to research and policy activities, the government’s cultural industries, for example the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), as well as popular and news media, participate in this work to build and (re)define the role of youth in Canadian governance and society: Each of these circulate messages, aimed at both adult and youth audiences, which address youth as citizens and reflect particular discourses of citizenship and participation.

In a nation and historical moment where many believe that “effective democracies require active and engaged citizens” (Gidengil, Blais, Nevitte, & Nadeau, 2004, p. 18), the participation of youth has become a concern for Canadian decision-makers, as well as the public. However, the encouragement of particular forms of youth social and political participation has consequences for youth as Canadian citizens. Through a contextualized examination of selected films, websites, and federal government reports, I present in this thesis an exploration of the forms of identity and power relations promoted and presumed by the discourses circulating about youth participation in society, particularly those associated with active citizenship. As young people are represented actively participating in their schools, communities, or country, how are they framed and situated? What are

they seen to be capable of? What is presented as beyond their ability or concern? Over the past four decades, from the late-1960s until the present, the place of youth in society has changed, as have perceptions of youth and youth participation. As I argue throughout, even as youth are encouraged to participate in society and politics, representations of youth action have become more constrained in recent years, offering limited acceptable forms of youth participation and, thus, youth citizenship.

### **Research problematic: Research objectives & questions**

As efforts to engage young people in discussions about citizenship and the Canadian nation are evident in the activities of numerous federal departments and agencies, arms-length government institutions (such as the NFB), as well as the general public, questions are raised about the nature of youth citizenship, particularly regarding the levels and types of participation evidenced and/or desired. Calls for more youth engagement in social and political activities, panics over low voter turnout among youth and supposed lack of interest in politics, and a new focus on youth participation rights on a global level each provide a glimpse at changing perspectives on what it means to be a good and productive young citizen. The notion of encouraging youth to be more ‘active’ as citizens runs counter to traditional assumptions about young people as immature and incompetent and suggests a need to fully explore the shifts taking place in how young people are perceived as citizens and as socio-political actors.

As the definitions of childhood and youth continuously change and the image of the child or youth citizen becomes more and more common, both in children’s activist circles, as well as in academic literature and government documents, it is important to

examine what is being said about youth as citizens and how young people are being situated within the power dynamics of citizenship and governance. With recent years seeing an increase in such discussion of youth and in activities aimed at young Canadians *as* citizens, it is an opportune moment for critical examination of how discourses of youth participation, or active citizenship, function in contemporary Canadian society.

Recent research on citizenship has asserted “that the way in which people understand themselves as citizens is likely to have a significant impact on their perception of their rights and obligations and on whether they participate, in what form and why” (Jones & Gaventa, 2002, p. 13). The way youth are situated as citizens in terms of their identity and social/power relations is, therefore, important to youth’s perspectives on their place as Canadian citizens and on their perceived potential for socio-political action. At the same time, the concept of ‘youth’ “serves as a symbol of how a society thinks about itself and as an indicator of changing cultural values, sexuality, the state of the economy, and the spiritual life of a nation” as it requires us to think about the future (Giroux, 1996, p. 10). Thus, how youth are conceptualized as citizens not only affects the perceived role(s) of young people in society and politics, but also reflects many aspects of Canadian society.

My approach to citizens and citizenship goes beyond considering only civic and political aspects and encompasses issues of identity and social relations, as I describe further in chapter one. In this vein, my approach to the notion of active or participatory citizens encompasses youth participation in ‘active’ forms of citizen engagement such as student politics, volunteering, and raising or discussing social issues. I combine this approach with an understanding of ‘youth’ as a constructed social and cultural category



with the aim to improve understanding of how young Canadians are perceived in their roles as participatory citizens.

Through the examination of selected National Film Board of Canada (NFB) films, government/non-government websites, and federal government reports and documents, I analyze representations of Canadian youth as a means of identifying shifts in the conceptualization of the 'young (active) citizen' and of exploring how these characterizations work to establish or promote particular perspectives on youth as citizens. I understand these representations of the young active citizen as they are embedded within particular social and political contexts, and aim to make sense of them as they circulate in an environment where definitions of youth continue to change and where the role of youth as citizens is being re-thought. My central research question is:

In the context of changing definitions of youth, how do representations of Canadian youth participating in socio-political action function to situate young people within certain subjectivities and work to establish particular relations of power?

Secondary questions aimed at illuminating this include:

- What is the image or ideal of the young active citizen in Canada?
- How do representations of active Canadian youth reinforce or challenge the assumptions we have about youth?
- How do representations of active Canadian youth contribute to a progressive view of youth or re-inscribe limitations on young people?
- What relationship is constructed (or envisioned) between active youth and the Canadian state or its representatives?
- What relationship is constructed (or envisioned) between active youth and other social groups? (e.g., adults, young children, authority figures, etc.)
- (How) Is diversity articulated in representations of active Canadian youth?

## **Methodological approach**

Scholars in many fields and from a variety of perspectives have undertaken youth research, predominantly in Britain and the United States (Griffin, 1993). The theories of adolescence put forth by these different fields will be found throughout the thesis. There are a number of different approaches to youth and adolescence, each of which makes different assumptions about what it is, when it is, and why it is. Côté and Allahaar (1994) argue that early approaches focused on youth-as-transition, particularly following from Hall's 1904 work (often considered the first large-scale scientific study of youth) in which he outlined the developmental stage of adolescence. Psychiatric and psychological approaches to youth have followed in this tradition (for example, see Coleman, 1980; Santrock, 1990), approaching adolescence as "a development stage, or at least as a period in which stages of cognitive and emotional development take place" and, thus, focusing attention on "changes within the adolescent rather than on the role of culture in bringing about these changes" (Côté & Allahaar, 1994, p. 6).

These approaches dominate popular constructions of 'youth' and, Griffin (1993) argues, "the biological domain is constructed as privileged over the social, historical and economic realms in most mainstream academic narratives about 'youth' and 'adolescence'" (p. 11). While there is variation within this perspective and a recent move towards acknowledging social and cultural factors, scholars adopting such views tend to see youth as individuals who are inherently incomplete and immature, often serving to legitimate social structures which control young people and ensure they conform to the status quo (e.g., the juvenile justice system).

The other major stream of approaches to youth and adolescence is sociological. In these perspectives adolescence is considered “a product of social expectations associated with a given culture,” and those in this field “believe that adolescence and youth are institutions imposed on those coming of age by forces beyond their control” (Côté & Allahaar, 1994, p. 16). Sociological approaches are many and include functionalist and structuralist approaches which focus on the changes of childhood and adolescence caused by industrialization, subcultural approaches which focus on how youth form their own subcultures (often in opposition to adult culture) as a way of finding meaning and identity (for example, see Brake, 1985), postmodern approaches which address issues from gender to information technology, and political economic approaches which focus on youth as a disenfranchised class and on youth identity and consumer culture.

As Maira and Soep (2004) suggest, ‘youth’ is a contested category among the various approaches to youth research, not to mention within Western societies in general. Traditionally, youth has been understood with respect to processes of change and in particular the change from childhood to adulthood. Thus, youth-as-transition has been the predominant conceptualization of the notion (Chisholm & du Bois-Reymond, 1993). The classical developmental approaches to youth are now being challenged by theories of modernization which stress individualization and destructuring and argue that “young people are growing up today in a socially open space, where few things are certain, where many choices are possible, and where it is not clear which options will be possible and impossible – and for whom” (Chisholm & du Bois-Reymond, 1993, p. 260).

Wyn and colleagues have drawn attention to recent research about youth, suggesting that our assumptions about the transitions between childhood and adulthood

that young people undergo are not as predictable as they were for earlier generations. They argue that linear models of youth development and youth-adult transitions are no longer applicable, highlighting the ways in which our constructions/conceptualizations of youth may be lacking (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999, p. 6). Studies in Australia, Canada, and other countries have found that young people are mixing and blending the different areas of their lives (e.g., education, paid employment, volunteerism) in order to develop opportunities for themselves and keep their options for the future as open as possible. These choices are in contrast to earlier generations where education and skills training were expected to lead to employment and career development in a more direct manner. Wyn and White (2000) take this insight further to “suggest that research needs to be much more sensitive than has hitherto been the case to the ways in which young people are actively reshaping their own lives in ways which both reflect and feed back into contemporary institutional arrangements” (p. 168). The work of Wyn and colleagues stresses the constructed nature of childhood and youth while encouraging a rethinking of such constructions and associated assumptions.

As researchers in the last two decades have attempted to move past assumptions about the passivity and incompetence of youth and to address the realities of young people’s lives, the contradictions and paradoxes of youth’s lives have surfaced as important elements of youth research. Scholars of childhood and youth have engaged in a shift in focus (at least in part) to more emphasis on changing child/youth-adult relationships and socio-cultural contexts, as well as to the issue of children and youth as social agents.

As I discuss below, my approach is drawn from sociological perspectives on youth, ranging from functionalist to political economic. Yet it is important to acknowledge and be aware of the power of perspectives influenced by psychological and psychiatric approaches, particularly as these views are often espoused in public policy and the media. Lesko's work to "trouble teenagers" and confront common conceptions of them as "public problems – most recently, violent Internet-addicted suburbanites, teenage mothers, and urban criminals" (2001, p. 2) – has helped to reveal "the cultural weights that are put on a particular way of understanding adolescence as portentous, uncontrollable, and naturally occurring" (2001, p. 3). In addition, she has shown "how the speakers on adolescents' transitions to adulthood are invested with authority" while youth often remain silent and disempowered (2001, p. 3).

Similarly, Côté and Allahar (1994) have argued that despite the fact that many biological assumptions underlying youth-as-transition approaches have proven to be faulty, such views reflect

a vested interest in maintaining the view that the problems of youth can be addressed by 'adjusting' them, rather than by changing society. Moreover, policy-makers want to hear this because making significant social reforms is not to their advantage since it would require taking initiatives that act against dominant interests; instead they stick with the bureaucratic ritualism that passes for policy-making. The establishment protects dominant political and economic interests by turning back the frustrations experienced by youths on them rather than acknowledging their sources in the society. (Côté & Allahar, 1994, p. 13)

Buckingham (2000b) has also discussed the tendency to blame youth for problems they face (or are perceived to be facing). In his study of youth, politics, and television news, Buckingham (2000b) argues that youth are often blamed for their lack of interest in news and politics, "implicitly condemned for being lazier and less socially responsible than

their parents,” with little attention paid to the possibility that news media and politics may themselves be alienating young people (p. 5).

In this thesis, I acknowledge the importance of the youth-as-transition perspective, particularly to the state and its institutions, as well as within popular discourse. On a practical level I employ one of the Canadian state’s age definitions of youth (those between 15 and 30) to guide my selection of research sample (as discussed later in this chapter). Age definitions shifted in the late 1970s, in Western society, as social norms regarding the transition to adulthood changed. The particular ages associated with social roles and responsibilities shifted as a result of “the breakdown of institutions like marriage, the pluralism of cultural values, and the postponement of certain transitions like parenthood” (Gaudet, 2007, p. 7). My adoption of this age-based definition of youth is, however, only a means to acknowledge the state’s attempts to delimit ‘youth’ and to manage the scope of the research, rather than a blind acceptance of such ambiguous attempts to define ‘youth.’ Overall, my thesis is much more influenced by sociological approaches to youth, reflected in my interest in the social and cultural aspects of youth’s lives and, in particular, the role of political and media discourses in structuring and defining ‘youth.’ This research also shares common threads with sociological approaches focused on the social, cultural, and economic changes currently affecting youth’s lives.

While engaging with various approaches to youth, my methodology is drawn more directly from the fields of youth studies and communication studies, embracing the interdisciplinarity each affords. Youth studies is defined as “research that recognizes the agency of youth – their meaning-making, narratives, cultural productions, and social

engagements – in relationship to cultural and political contexts” (Maira & Soep, 2004, p. 246) and encompasses a broad field influenced by a number of different perspectives. I draw from it a fundamental focus on youth as active agents in the world and particularly in regards to being both social and political actors.

Communication studies provides a grounding for this thesis primarily in its contributions to the areas of media and culture, particularly with respect to youth subcultures and the relationship between youth and media. Subculture and cultural studies have influenced youth-focused research as those in the field of youth culture follow the traditions established by British scholars who examined resistant youth cultures, giving attention to “the student radicals of the 1920s and 1930s, to the civil rights movements of the 1960s and transnational and anti-globalization movements today” (Maira & Soep, 2004, p. 259). Scholars such as Hebdige (1979) and McRobbie (1991; 1993) have made contributions to this research as they take seriously the cultures and subcultures of those often marginalized in society (namely working-class youth), articulating the potential for youth cultures and subcultures to provide spaces of expertise, knowledge, and agency for young people.<sup>1</sup> Scholars in the associated field of the political economy of the media have also produced research that informs this thesis: Buckingham (2007), Kapur (2005), and Riordan (2001) have each explored the issues of consumerism and consumption in children’s culture and media.

In discussing the future of youth studies, Maira and Soep (2004) suggest an interdisciplinary approach that draws from the many areas influencing youth research. They propose ‘youthscape’ as “a way of thinking about youth culture studies, one that

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<sup>1</sup> See Valentine, Skelton, and Chambers (1998) for a detailed overview of studies of youth within the field of cultural studies.

revitalizes discussions about youth cultures and social movements while simultaneously theorizing the political and social uses of youth and offers a lens for re-reading youth cultures in relation to national processes” (p. 262). Cohen and Ainley (2000) similarly propose an interdisciplinary approach, urging youth studies scholars to overcome the trenches of economism and culturalism and to find “a third space between a narrow empiricist focus on transitions and a quasi-anthropological concern with exotic instances of youthful deviance and difference” (p. 89).

Grounding this thesis within youth studies and communication studies, while heeding these calls for interdisciplinarity, I draw upon various sources of data and diverse literature in an attempt to make sense of the “discourses or belief systems that circulate around and through youth” (Maira & Soep, 2004, p. 252), particularly as they are situated as participatory or active citizens. I build upon Lesko’s (2001) work “to question the knowledge and practices of knowing that created and maintain the modern, scientific adolescence” (p. 8) through an approach focused on examining the creation and maintenance of an image of Canadian youth as citizens.

I start from the social constructionist perspective that as discourses circulate by means of institutions, policies, and media they work to influence and structure identities and power relations. As Hall (1997) argues, it is through language and other practices of representation (i.e., photography) that meaning-making occurs, and meanings “regulate and organize our conduct and practices” (p. 4). I contend that the ways in which young people are discussed and represented in government policy, popular and scholarly literature, news media, NFB films, and internet websites combine to create particular



perspectives on the meaning of 'youth' and, in the context of this thesis, what it means to be a young Canadian citizen.

Foucault's focus on the important role of discourse in producing knowledge and power relations lies at the heart of my approach. He argues that "in appearance, speech may well be of little account, but the prohibitions surrounding it soon reveal its links with desire and power" (Foucault, 1971, p. 8). Employing a Foucauldian approach, Hultqvist and Dahlberg (2001) insist that there are "only the historically produced discourses and power relations that constitute the child as an object of knowledge, practice, and political intervention" (p. 2). Similarly, Lesko (2001), in her study of adolescence, focuses on "systems of reasoning, or *discourses*" (p. 8) in order to "see how adolescence is part of very broad networks of knowledge, policy, and reason" (p. 9). In Canadian youth scholarship, Raby (2002a) examines discourses of adolescence to "consider regulation and resistance through age" (p. 5). In the domain of citizenship, authors such as Mouffe (1992), Buckingham (2000b), and Lister (2003) have critically examined the concept of 'citizenship,' deconstructing it as means of understanding how it often marginalizes and excludes women and young people in particular.

Building from and extending these studies on youth and on citizenship (as discussed in later chapters), I employ a social constructionist approach in this thesis, understanding both 'youth' and 'citizenship' as socio-political constructs, with the aim to explore the constitution of the young Canadian citizen through varied representations and associated discourses.

### Object of study

Given this emphasis and grounding, my analysis is concentrated on representations of Canadian youth engaging in social and political action from the late 1960s until the early 2000s.<sup>2</sup> The primary representations chosen for analysis originate from National Film Board of Canada (NFB) films and a selection of websites which provide a wide range of discourses and sources from which to gather data and draw conclusions. In addition to these, I use federal government documents, popular and academic literature, as well as news media sources to provide context for the analysis of films and websites and to offer other examples of representations of youth as citizens. This combination of data sources allows for a broad examination of discourses about youth that circulate in Canadian society.

There were a number of considerations with respect to selecting NFB films and websites for examination. My focus on youth as a specific group of Canadians presented a challenge in terms of defining ‘youth’ and selecting appropriate materials for analysis. Since defining ‘youth’ is bound up with representing and identifying youth as (active) citizens I deal with the issue in more depth later in the thesis; however, at the outset of research it was necessary to engage a particular definition, if fluid, in order to limit the scope of the project.

As Jones and Wallace (1992) state, “terms such as ‘adolescence’ or ‘adulthood’ are related to life-course events and social relationships, and are relatively loosely

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<sup>2</sup> This timeframe was chosen as a means of bounding the study but also reflects the fact that the roles and participation of youth in society and politics became a particular issue of concern in the late 1960s. Also, as I discuss in future chapters, the Baby Boomer generation of the 1960s is often considered the point of reference for the generations that have followed. In addition, the attention paid to youth and youth issues in the late 1960s resulted in changes in popular and national culture: Beginning in late-1960s NFB films, for example, parents and adults were given only supporting roles as young people became the subjects of films in their own right. For a detailed discussion of the portrayal of children and youth in NFB films prior to the late-1960s see Low (2002).

associated with physical age. Youth is a process of definition and redefinition, a negotiation enacted between young people and their families, their peers and the institutions in the wider society” (p. 4). Such fluidity in the definition of youth is evident in youth and citizenship literature where it is often unclear who is being discussed and young people are grouped together in an undifferentiated mass, as well as in legal definitions where age limitations for behaviours vary (e.g., driving, sex, voting).

In order to provide both scope and coherence to this thesis it was important for me to clearly define what I meant by ‘youth.’ My interest here is not in children or adults, but rather that elusive in-between group: Those considered too old to be children but not yet old enough to be full adults. The difficulty defining this group is outlined in a backgrounder to a December 2006 Government of Canada seminar on youth policy:

In some cases, [youth] corresponds to the period of adolescence, which ends at the age of majority. In the youth justice system, for example, “youth” is defined as persons aged 12 to 17. Statistics Canada and international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank extend this age definition to include youth between 15 and 24 years of age. In certain administrations, the age boundaries are even pushed into the 30s (Ville de Montréal, Youth Strategy), reflecting trends toward longer transitions to independent living. (Policy Research Initiative [PRI], 2006b, n.pag.)

Reflecting this delineation, many Government of Canada initiatives specifically address youth between 15 and 30 years of age (e.g., the Government of Canada’s Youth e-Cluster, the Youth Employment Strategy, etc.) and I, thus, took this definition as a guiding principle for this thesis.<sup>3</sup> This age group is one which most people consider to be at the prime stage/age for learning about citizenship and how to themselves act as

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<sup>3</sup> This decision regarding age group was meant as a guide and not a strict delineation of what is relevant to the thesis: Rather, it means that I chose to analyze NFB films and websites which appear to be aimed at ‘youth’ in this age group (rather than younger age groups, for example), but I did not ignore discourses surrounding other age groups or exclude materials if they did not perfectly fit the age definition set out. Indeed, I discuss perspectives on children and children’s rights extensively as these influence perspectives on youth.

citizens, whether through voting (once they have reached the age of majority), joining political parties, volunteering, or otherwise participating in community-based projects.

The choice to examine representations of youth action found in National Film Board of Canada (NFB) films was inspired by the work of Canadian scholar Druick (1999; 2000; 2007) who has documented both the history of the NFB and its citizenship films and effectively shown how “the National Film Board of Canada provides an exceptional opportunity to think about how the state, cultural institutions, filmmakers, filmgoers, and film itself are all participants in a complex dialogue about the social world” (2007, p. 14). Druick has provided scholars with a new way to consider the NFB and its films by demonstrating how “the NFB archive of films about Canada are acts of government realism that can tell us a great deal about Canadian society and the discursive frames that have been used to interpret and direct it” (2007, p. 184). The relationship between the NFB and the Canadian government, particularly in terms of citizenship and nationality, is fundamental to the NFB’s history and functioning: Notably, the NFB was part of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration portfolio from 1953 to 1962 and has been part of the Ministry of Canadian Heritage portfolio since 1992.<sup>4</sup> Druick (2007) argues that “the NFB presents an excellent site for reading narratives of ideal citizenship” (p. 23). Given the NFB’s aim to reflect Canada to Canadians and to play a role in promoting social cohesion and unity, as well as its longstanding connection to government, citizenship, and education (discussed in chapter one), representations of youth action in NFB films can be considered examples of the “discursive frames” being used to situate young Canadians as citizens.

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<sup>4</sup> In the interim the NFB was under the responsibility of the Secretary of State (1962-1978), the Secretary of State and Communications (1979-1981), and the Department of Communications (1981-1992) (Druick, 2007).

The NFB films selected for analysis are those that portray Canadian youth being politically and/or socially active in their communities (local or national), and thus provide examples of youth acting as participatory citizens. Analysis and discussion of these films is interspersed throughout the thesis, particularly in chapters two through four. Choosing the NFB films I would analyze was a complex process which involved searching the NFB catalogue, visiting the archives, and screening films. The films chosen are those which depict Canadian youth between (approximately) fifteen and thirty years of age participating in their communities or nation through social and political action (e.g., as protestors, peer helpers, volunteers, etc.). As a way of further delimiting the sample the films chosen are all documentary films (rather than experimental or dramatic) meant to depict the realities of Canadian life. My selection process resulted in the following list of fifteen films (in order of production year):<sup>5</sup>

- *Encounter with Saul Alinsky - Part 1: CYC Toronto* (1967)
- *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967)
- *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968)
- *Occupation* (1970)
- *Beyond Kicks* (1972)
- *Thin Dreams* (1986)
- *Mile Zero: The SAGE Tour* (1988)
- *Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* (1992)
- *Silence & Storm* (1995)
- *Bronwen & Yaffa (Moving Towards Tolerance)* (1996)
- *Someone To Talk To: Peer Helping in High School* (1996)
- *Taking Charge* (1996)
- *Respect Revolution* (2000)
- *Salt* (2000)
- *Discordia* (2004)

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion my selection process and more information about these films, please see Appendix A.

This list contains a wide variety of films from a number of different decades which allows for comparison as well as tracing of change over time.<sup>6</sup>

There are also a number of NFB films that, while they do not fit my criteria, provide important contextual information regarding youth of the various decades. These include the following retrospectives and overviews (in order of production year):<sup>7</sup>

- *The Invention of the Adolescent* (1967)
- *The Children's Crusade* (1984)
- *The Summer of '67* (1994)
- *All the Right Stuff* (1997)
- *XS Stress* (2004)

One final note about the selection of films: There is no doubt that I have failed to include NFB films that fit the criteria outlined above, especially since there are films which are difficult, if not impossible, to locate and screen. While I have done my best to include as many applicable films as possible and was as thorough as possible in my selection process, the list of films I chose to examine is necessarily incomplete and not meant to represent a full list of films about youth social action by the NFB. Instead, this list represents a diverse group of films that span the last four decades, incorporating adult-made films about youth and youth-made films about themselves.

An important aspect of the Canadian government's current approach to youth is its reliance on interactive media technology such as the internet to communicate with young people. Research has shown that these media are important in young people's lives, especially as different forms of media converge (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001;

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<sup>6</sup> I use decades throughout the thesis as "an intellectual shorthand" recognizing all the same that time cannot be sub-divided so cleanly (Smith, 1998, p. 264). Using decades as 'shorthand' means that I do make generalizations regarding the time periods (e.g., youth in the 1960s were often represented as rebellious), however, I also make efforts to indicate where and how trends continued or shifted through time and have attempted to examine youth over time without being swayed or distracted by decade-based assumptions.

<sup>7</sup> For more information see Appendix B.

Media Awareness Network, 2004) and the government of Canada, the NFB, and others are focusing efforts on using interactive media to engage and communicate with youth in Canada (Belanger, 2005; Mandate Review Committee, 1996; Service Canada, 2005, August 9). Thus, in chapter five, I examine four websites for evidence of how youth are positioned as (active) citizens in this domain.

The Government of Canada's *Youth e-Cluster* (<http://youth.gc.ca/>) and the NFB's *CitizenShift* (<http://citizen.nfb.ca/onf/info>) were chosen for analysis because they are currently the primary English websites of the federal government and the NFB, respectively, which aim to communicate with or engage youth. In the case of the Government of Canada's *Youth e-Cluster*, the website is entirely meant for youth and is one of the government's most prominent online means of communication with young Canadians. The NFB's *CitizenShift* is not meant only for youth; however, it has many elements which focus on attracting and engaging youth audiences and participants and it is explicitly focused on issues of citizenship and participation.

In addition to these, the Governor General of Canada's website *Citizen Voices* (<http://www.citizenvoices.gg.ca/>) and the Canadian non-profit website *TakingITGlobal* (<http://www.takingitglobal.org/>) are also analyzed. *Citizen Voices* provides another example of government-associated representations of youth as citizens, while *TakingITGlobal* is a Canadian-based but non-government website aiming to engage young citizens. Importantly, *TakingITGlobal*, is also youth-founded and youth-driven. Examination of these websites builds upon the analysis of films, government documents, literature, and news media, exploring how discourses of active and participatory citizenship are surfacing in this newer realm of youth engagement and participation.

With respect to choosing a set of government documents for analysis, my goal was to select documents which explicitly engage with the subject of young Canadians as (active) citizens. Browsing of the Government of Canada's online catalogue of English publications ([http://canada.gc.ca/publications/publication\\_e.html](http://canada.gc.ca/publications/publication_e.html)) and of AMICUS, the online national catalogue of the Library and Archives of Canada and other libraries across Canada (<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/amicus/index-e.html>), revealed that many government documents and reports are not directly engaged with issues of youth and citizenship, but more often focus on particular demographics, statistics, or issues (e.g., adolescent suicide, youth employment, etc.).

The main area of government activity that is applicable in this thesis is the issue of children's rights. This area of government attention directly involves discussion of young Canadians as citizens, both nationally and internationally, and also engages with the issue of active citizenship especially in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and changing conceptualizations of childhood and youth.

The government documents chosen for analysis, presented mainly in chapter one, are focused on this topic. The documents and reports are as follows (in order of date released):<sup>8</sup>

- *Canada's first report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1994, June)
- *Canada's second report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (2001, April)
- *Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Responses of Canada* (2003, September)
- *Opening statement from Senator Landon Pearson on presentation of Canada's second report - Convention on the Rights of the Child* (2003, September)
- *A Canada fit for children* (2004, April)

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on these documents see Appendix C.



- *Who's in charge here? Effective implementation of Canada's international obligations with respect to the rights of children. Interim Report.* (2005, November)
- *Children: The silenced citizens. Effective implementation of Canada's international obligations with respect to the rights of children. Final Report.* (2007, April)

This is not a comprehensive list of government documents or reports on youth as citizens by any means, and I discuss and refer to many other government documents throughout the thesis. This list does, however, represent important documents which provide foundational information regarding how the image of the child and young citizen is changing at both international and Canadian levels.

Throughout the thesis the discourses and representations of youth found in these sources are analyzed and examined in relation to the historical contexts in which they were created and are situated. Thus, a number of sources of data and information are incorporated in order to provide a broad sense of which discourses and representations circulate(d) about young people and how and where those circulate(d). I discuss academic and popular literature, newspapers and news magazines, government and non-government reports, relevant NFB films, as well as NFB production files and other archival records throughout.

Combining such contextual research with the analysis of representations of youth found in NFB films, on websites, and in government documents and reports, I aim to strengthen the grounding for my own interpretations – necessary since, as Spigel (1992) argues, discourses are “part of a complex orchestration of social forces” (p. 4). In this way I am able to present evidence of the complexities of various depictions of youth participation and active citizenship throughout the last four decades in Canada while also providing appropriate commentary and conclusions regarding how these representations

have worked to situate youth within certain subjectivities and power relations related to their role as citizens over time.

### **Either/Or: The polarizing of ‘youth’**

As early as the 1960s it was remarked that “the problem of youth is that of being expected to be involved but being powerless” (Allen, 1968, p. 328). In recent years, scholars concerned with theorizing youth and youth studies have drawn attention to the polarizations and contradictions which often mark discussions of young people, both in academia and popular culture. Scholars have made calls for rethinking or moving beyond these frameworks towards more fluid and less-structured perspectives which acknowledge change and complexity in the lives of youth.

At the forefront of these polarizations is the debate over structure and agency, most notable in sociological approaches to youth (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 2003; Raby, 2002a). As Wyn and White (2000) have argued,

young people may be characterized mainly as active agents, particularly with regard to subcultural activity and identity formation, who consciously shape and choose their own destinies. Alternatively, they may be presented as relatively homogenous and powerless, as simply the objects of universal stages (for example, adolescence) and institutional processes (such as schooling), which define their social position and developmental prospects for them. (p. 166)

In a study of Canadian youth cultures, Wilson (1999) points to the polarizations found in theories of youth, organizing these on a ‘conceptual continuum’ with “theories that emphasize youth creativity, activity and resistance on one end of the continuum...and theories that focus on the way youth are passive and/or constrained in everyday life on the other end” (p. 22). This, he argues, is “a response to oversimplified, undertheorized, and seemingly discrete (i.e., theoretically ‘anchored’) approaches to youth culture” (p.

231).<sup>9</sup> Taking an interdisciplinary approach, I hope to move beyond such limitations and explore both agency and structure as they work together to situate youth as active citizens.

Extending out of the structure/agency polarization are two other tensions frequently associated with youth which are central to this thesis. First is the opposition of protection of youth and participation of youth. This debate is highly visible in discussions of children's rights, particularly as children's participation rights are becoming the focus of attention whereas protection and paternalism have historically been central concerns (I discuss this more fully in chapter one). This debate influences perspectives on youth as young people are positioned in-between children and adults, considered in some ways more competent and responsible than children, but not yet as fully capable as adults. As Lesko (2001) argues with respect to rethinking the concept of youth, "a remade adolescence must take up the contradictions of being simultaneously mature and immature, old and young, traditional and innovative" (p. 196); however, current thinking still tends towards either emphasizing the need to protect young people (e.g., from internet predators, drugs, or negative media influence) or the autonomy of youth (e.g., to make their own decisions and to participate in society in the ways they choose).

Another apparent contradiction relevant to this thesis is the division drawn between the roles of citizen and consumer. As I discuss throughout the thesis, the concept and image of youth is tied up with both discourses of governance and the state, as well as those of consumption and consumer culture. These are often seen as conflicting positions – one in which young people are concerned with the public good (as citizens) and the

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson (1999) discusses these theories of youth in depth as he constructs this 'conceptual continuum.' See chapter two of his dissertation for more detailed information.

other in which they are concerned with the self (as consumers). Notably, the concept of youth or adolescence is intimately associated with both citizenship and consumerism.

Lesko (2001) has argued that adolescence emerged as a category in the early 1900s when it was believed that the teen years were the appropriate time in which to instill (particularly in White boys) a sense of national and international order and responsibility. Thus, as Maira and Soep (2004) state, “adolescence, then, answered a need at the time for the belief in a ‘civilizing’ process for individual minds and young bodies, in a society anxious about the perceived threat of social degeneration” (p. 249).

Notably, the image of the child is intimately bound up with any discussion of youth as youth are seen to be transitioning from childhood to adulthood and thus reflect characteristics of both. In a concrete way, children and young people are used in order to produce a particular impression or emotional response: “Children are undoubtedly the most photographed and the least listened to members of society. There is a strong tendency on the part of adults to underestimate the competence of children while at the same time using them in events to influence some cause; the effect is patronizing” (Hart, 1992, p. 9). More abstractly, the image of the child is a powerful cultural construct particularly prone to attracting diverse meanings and acting as an important signifier in our culture: “youth is both an enabling and disabling category....It simultaneously serves as a symbol of how a society thinks about itself and as an indicator of changing cultural values, sexuality, the state of the economy, and the spiritual life of a nation” (Giroux, 1996, p. 10).

This greatly affects how we may understand the child or youth in a framework of citizenship and socio-political participation. As Lister (2003) has argued, “the child in

particular takes on iconic status” in government discourses about the state and its future (p. 437), and the image of the child is employed in such ways as to justify and explain the government’s actions with regards to its citizens. According to Fawcett et al., “for governments, children symbolise ‘the future’, ‘social renewal’, ‘survival of the nation’ or equivalent sentiments” (qtd. in Lister, 2003, p. 434) and Grossberg (2005) has argued that “on the one hand, kids can be used to justify almost any political agenda or public policy....And yet, one cannot seem to be using kids for one’s political agenda...or to be too directly politicizing kids” (p. 8) pointing to the emotionally-laden symbolism of children and youth. This use of the image of the child in citizenship discourses is of central concern in this project. It is important to investigate how, “rather than citizenship rights being constructed and mediated through formal political mechanisms, they are constructed and mediated *within* the multi-sited arenas of citizenship struggles” [emphasis in the original] (Jones & Gaventa, 2002, p. 17), where discourses of citizenship communicated through media are such arenas.

Berlant (1997) has further elaborated on the role of the image of the child in citizenship discourses, particularly those found in media which attempt to shape a ‘national symbolic.’ The ‘ideal’ American citizen, according to Berlant (1997), has shifted from one of an informed adult to one of an innocent child, which she refers to as the infantile citizen. This image of the infantile citizen serves to construct a utopian and nostalgic national fantasy in which children, once again, come to signify the dream of a better national future and represent the ‘ideal’ citizen since they have yet to be tainted by the realities of political history. Berlant (1997) argues that “citizen adults have learned to ‘forget’ or to render impractical, naive, or childish their utopian political identifications in

order to be politically happy and economically functional” (p. 29) and that the dream of a better nation is, thus, situated within the image of the child. According to Berlant (1997), the media “are normative technologies of citizenship that seek to create proper national subjects and subjectivities” (p. 31) such that representations of the infantile citizen in the media, like images of the child in government discourses, may be understood as technologies of citizenship, or of governance. Important to my project is recognition of this potential use of the image of the child as the ‘ideal’ citizen and as the foundation of a nostalgic and utopian view of the nation. As Gardner (1999) has argued in response to Berlant and others writing about national identity, “these books spell out important lessons as to how the ideals of nation have been deployed in the service of an exclusionary and disciplining practice of citizenship” (p. 122).

In addition to considering the ways the image of the child is employed or reflected in state discourses and discourses of citizenship, particularly concerning innocence, danger, and the future, the image of youth must also be understood in relation to its connection to capital and commercial interests. As Record (2002) has outlined, the notion of the teenager (a subset of the broader category of ‘youth’) became intimately tied to capital in the 1950s, when the teenager came to symbolize “profit potential” (p. 183). Despite the fact that youth culture and the idea of the teenager or youth existed prior to the 1950s, it was in this post-war period, Record (2002) argues, that youth came to be seen as a consumer market and be strongly associated with commerce: During these years, “teenage consumption practices rose in earnestness and impact” and “teens spent money freely and often” (p. 184). In addition, “marketers and advertisers began to take teenagers seriously as a viable consumer market” (Record, 2002, p. 184), a trend which

continues to this day. As Côté and Allahar (1994) have argued, “young people have increasingly been targeted as consumers of ‘leisure industries’ (e.g., media and music) and ‘identity industries’ (e.g., fashion and education)” (p. xvi).

To complicate matters, Buckingham (2007) has commented on the ways in which the “idea of the child as sovereign consumer often slips into the idea of the child as citizen, as autonomous social actor” (p. 16) and Raby (2002b) has shown that discourses of youth as consumers often provide young people with more space for agency than those situating youth as citizens. I further discuss such associations of youth with both citizenship and consumption in later chapters.

These dichotomies and polarizations which often frame studies and discussions of youth appear as threads woven throughout this thesis as I struggle to understand discourses of youth citizenship and representations of Canadian youth as active citizens. While I employ an interdisciplinary approach and draw inspiration from studies of youth which seek to move beyond dichotomous thinking, the influence of these perspectives is important to how young people are perceived as participatory or active citizens. Over the past forty years, the position of ‘youth’ in Canada has shifted and changed and these dichotomies continue to dominate our ways of thinking about young people as social and political actors.

Throughout this thesis I examine how these and other factors are playing a part in rethinking Canadian youth as citizens, particularly as participatory citizens, and I show how youth action has, in recent years, become both more frequently encouraged and more often presented as controlled and constrained by adults. Youth remains today a social group rarely recognized as competent social or political actors, instead attracting

attention most often for their shortcomings and perceived faults. Representations of youth action may help to remedy this lack of attention; however, as I argue, films representing Canadian youth as participatory social actors have shifted from presenting collective youth actions to presenting examples of adult-sanctioned youth actions with a focus on individual youth rather than collective social issues. In addition, representations of youth action are becoming increasingly segregated from adults as they are targeted towards youth audiences (often in school settings) rather than at general audiences of youth and adults. Struggles over political and social power, including the power to name and represent, are continuously being contested between youth and adults, as unstable as these conceptual groupings are.

### **Thesis outline**

In the following chapter I engage, theoretically, with the concepts of youth and citizenship, examining the literature in childhood and youth studies, as well as citizenship studies. I argue that each of these fields has paid limited critical attention to youth as active or participatory citizens, particularly with respect to the ever-changing, and often complicated and competing, perspectives on the socio-political roles of youth. In order to frame the remainder of the thesis, I also examine the Canadian state's efforts to engage with the image of a participatory child citizen in response to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child where participation rights are explicitly outlined. I conclude the chapter by addressing the important role of media in defining and maintaining certain views on citizens and citizenship, particularly in the Canadian context. I outline the important role of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) in



providing symbolic representations of Canadians as citizens and in educating Canadian youth.

In chapters two through four I present my analysis of NFB films and their contexts, discussing changes in the representations of youth over time, informed by theoretical considerations. Chapter two deals primarily with youth socio-political action and participation. I outline how the definitions and conceptualizations of ‘youth’ have changed over the decades, particularly focusing on the influence of these changes on the perception of youth as socio-political actors. My examination of trends in the representation of youth action in NFB films demonstrates that those representations have shifted dramatically, just as the definitions and conceptualizations of youth have changed. I argue that representations of youth socio-political participation have become more limited in recent years, focusing increasingly on individual youth actions in controlled situations and on educating youth audiences. Finally, I discuss how the roles of youth as citizens and consumers are becoming blurred, as youth are offered participatory power in the form of consumer choice rather than in the socio-political realm.

In chapter three I examine the concepts of generation and age more closely, reflecting on youth/adult relationships and interactions. I consider the concept of a ‘generation gap,’ the role of nostalgia in reinforcing the perception of generational differences, and common stereotypes of youth through the decades. Analysis of NFB films shows that representations have shifted away from portraying intergenerational tensions to failing to portray intergenerational relationships at all. I argue that a preoccupation with intergenerational tensions and differences is detrimental to efforts at engaging youth in socio-political participation, and that segregating youth and their

actions limits the impact youth can have, and, importantly, reflects a continued devaluing of the role of youth in society.

Chapter four deals with youth media and youth voice, where I address a gap in youth studies and alternative media studies with a critical examination of youth media in the context of citizenship. I provide insight into how Canadian youth have participated in the production of NFB films portraying youth action since the 1960s, as well as how their involvement impacts representations of youth as citizens. This is framed at the outset with a discussion of the role of media in youth's lives, youth (sub)culture studies, and youth media. Using Hart's (1992) ladder of children's participation, I examine the various roles youth have played in NFB film production (from directing to acting as consultants or film subjects) and demonstrate that youth continue to struggle to make themselves heard and to be valued as cultural producers, despite having opportunities for such participation. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of diversity issues (class, gender, race and ethnicity, etc.), arguing that there are clear inequalities regarding which youth are provided with opportunities to participate in youth media production and that there has been limited attention paid to youth's multiple subject positions as citizens.

In the last of the chapters presenting data analysis, Chapter five, I introduce the internet into discussions of youth citizenship and participation. I present the examination of websites in the context of Canadian technology policy, expanding upon themes developed throughout the thesis. I discuss how these online spaces work to position young people as citizens or otherwise affect perceptions of youth participation. Through my examination of four Canadian websites that seek to address youth as citizens (two government, one NFB, and one youth-created and youth-driven) I outline some of the

different ways in which internet technology is being used to promote youth participatory citizenship. While I highlight the potential benefits of such activity, I am also critical of these spaces and argue that persistent trends regarding youth consumerism, inequalities, power struggles, and intergenerational tensions often limit the ability for youth to meaningfully engage in socio-political participation online.

Finally, in the concluding chapter I reflect back on the research process, examining my findings based on the original research questions, offering thoughts on future research, as well as suggesting needed changes with respect to how those in power (or with relatively more power) perceive youth, particularly as active and participatory citizens.

## Chapter 1 – But they're just kids: Youth as citizens

*In society's eyes,  
we aren't even individuals,  
just statistics and criminals.  
By our peers we are ridiculed,  
to the rest, we are pitiful.  
Conditions literally unlivable  
(segment of a young woman's rap performance in the NFB film XS Stress, 2004)*

As demonstrated in the introductory chapter, definitions and perceptions of youth are in flux with recent years seeing Canadian youth caught at the intersection of various shifting discourses as they are more frequently called upon to act as social and political actors and to define themselves, and be defined, as participatory citizens. In this chapter I outline some of the theoretical foundations and transitions which situate youth as active citizens, providing grounding for later discussions of the representations of youth action found in films and on websites. I begin with a general discussion of citizenship theory and the concept of active citizenship before broaching the subject of youth in particular. I situate youth within the citizenship literature and address children's rights as an important aspect of redefining youth citizenship. Finally, in order to prepare for my analysis of films in proceeding chapters, I end with a detailed discussion of the National Film Board of Canada: Its history and current context, its role in creating and circulating citizenship narratives, and its relationship to Canadian children and youth.

### **Citizenship & citizens: Shifting terrains**

As Nyers (2004) has argued, “citizenship is at once one of the most celebrated and most problematic of political concepts” (p. 203), and a review of recent literature reveals it to be alternately described as identity, process, and set of social relations (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003; Stasiulis, 2002b, 2004). My approach to citizenship encompasses all of these, focusing on an understanding of the concept that reaches beyond civic and political citizenship (often evidenced in rights discourse) towards social and cultural citizenship more broadly.

Citizenship theory has traditionally focused on issues of rights and responsibilities, influenced by the post-war work of Marshall (1950) who developed a theory of citizenship built around political, civic, and social rights. Marshall (1950) also incorporated discussion of civic obligation into his theory which has led some to understand his approach as an effort to combine liberal and civic republican (or communitarian) ideas about citizenship. A liberal approach to citizenship focuses heavily on rights and the sovereign individual, and has “reduced citizenship to a merely legal status, indicating the rights that the individual holds against the state” (Mouffe, 1992, p. 377). The civic republican and communitarian traditions, on the other hand, focus on civic duty and the citizen’s responsibility to a wider community, emphasizing “the value of political participation and the notion of a common good” (Mouffe, 1992, p. 377), themes that often reappear in discourses of active citizenship.

While the liberal and civic republican traditions are still evident in citizenship discourses today, as Lister (2003) has explained, “questions of culture and identity are more central and contested in the contemporary theorization and politics of citizenship”

(p. 14). Accordingly, I believe that an approach to citizenship which considers it not only in terms of membership (and the rights and obligations associated with that membership), but also in terms of identity and social relations, is most suited to this thesis: “An understanding of citizenship in terms of membership *and identity* underlines that what is involved is not simply a set of legal rules governing the relationship between individuals and the state, but *also a set of social relationships between individuals and the state and between individual citizens*” [emphasis added] (Lister, 2003, p. 15).

The traditional approaches to citizenship rest upon a conceptualization of the citizen as an individual and independent subject. For this thesis, I align my work with that of Chantal Mouffe who has outlined a different approach to citizenship grounded in a notion of multiple subject positions. She puts forward a view of citizenship as a political identity where it “is an articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty” (Mouffe, 1992, p. 378). As such, her approach to citizenship as political identity encompasses identity and social relations and relies on a view of the citizen in terms of “‘subject positions’ within a discursive structure” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 115). As Mouffe (1988) has elaborated,

social relations determine positionalities or subject positions, and every social agent is therefore the locus of many subject positions and cannot be reduced to only one....Furthermore, each social position, each subject position, is itself the locus of multiple possible constructions, according to the different discourses that can construct that position. Thus, the subjectivity of a given social agent is always precariously and provisionally fixed or, to use the Lacanian term, sutured at the intersection of various discourses. (p. 90)

This theory of the subject, or citizen, aligns with my social constructionist approach and grounding of this thesis in Foucault’s emphasis on the role of discourse in structuring the social world and power relations. Drawing from this, and from the notion of citizenship

as identity and social relations, I explore in this thesis the ways in which discourses, particularly those found within NFB films, websites, and government documents, work to conceptualize Canadian youth within specific subject positions and relationships which affect perceptions of youth as (potentially) participatory citizens.

### **Active citizenship & citizen participation**

In recent decades, Western governments have begun to emphasize active citizenship, encouraging their citizens to be active participants in their communities and nation through such things as voting, joining political parties, and volunteering (Chandler, 2000; Marinetto, 2003): “individual citizens [are encouraged] to recognize their moral responsibilities to care and provide for their needy neighbours, and to meet their obligations to give of their talents and skills in the management of public and welfare services” (Kearns, 1992, p. 20).

The idea of active citizenship can be considered as a technology of government, a means through which the government aims to achieve its goals. In a general sense, the discourse of active citizenship “is a key part of the redefinition of the individual:state relationship” (Kearns, 1992, p. 21). Through encouraging active citizenship, stressing individual participation, voice, and empowerment, governments (and others) work to form citizens into specific subjectivities: “Encouraging active citizenship promotes a particular type of personal morality and positive forms of life for communities, individuals and governments” (Marinetto, 2003, p. 109).

As scholars have argued, however, this encouragement of active citizenship by state governments is not a straightforward matter and the changing of governing parties

and shifting uses of the discourse continues and is caught up in many other social and political issues. In Canadian scholarship there has been little discussion of active citizenship discourse as a technology of government despite evidence of parallel trends between Canada and other nations where the issue has been discussed extensively (e.g., the United Kingdom). While there has been limited use of the term ‘active citizenship’ by the Canadian state, there has been discussion about the active participation of Canadian citizens. This is evident, for example, in studies of how ideas of citizenship are constructed through participation in community centers (Glover, 2004) or of how participatory democracy is encouraged through consultations and referenda (Mendelsohn, 1996). As Mendelsohn (1996) argues, “if we hold up a mirror to Canadian political practice, we find a growing number of political spheres that expect or require citizen participation, though we have yet to acknowledge the scope or influence of this participation” (n.pag.). For the purposes of this thesis, active citizenship will be approached in terms of the notion of participation and I will use the terms interchangeably, in addition to referring to ‘youth action’ as a way to specify youth participation in social and political activities.

In the 1960s, American scholar Arnstein (1969) authored an influential article entitled “A ladder of citizen participation” in which she outlines different levels of potential participation. Here she argues that

citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society. (p. 216)



Others have engaged a broader definition of citizen participation that reaches beyond political or governance structures. The Public Policy Forum, a Canadian non-profit organization concerned with government, has supported the definition of citizen participation put forward in a 2004 report entitled *Investing in Canada: Fostering an agenda for citizen and community participation*. Here it is argued that there is a spectrum of citizen participation, encompassing activities “that are consciously targeted to beneficially impact the well-being of others” (Sport Matters Group & Public Policy Forum, 2004, p. 12). These range from voting to participation in sports or cultural communities. Hart (1992) defines participation with respect to children as “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” (p. 5).

For the purposes of this thesis I define social and political participation somewhere in the middle of these two extremes: Youth socio-political participation is more than just participation in formal political/economic structures but does not encompass any and all social activity – there must be a sense that the participating youth wish to encourage or instigate social change. While citizen participation clearly encompasses such activities as voting and otherwise participating in formal political processes, youth are often excluded from such potential forms of participation, and a definition that focuses on only such activities would fail to capture youth involvement. As a means of providing reasonable scope for the thesis and retaining this focus on citizenship, I concentrate on youth participation in activities concerned with politics and social change. This includes student protests and politics, volunteering, and raising issues

among ones peers (e.g., through a youth group, making one's own film, or engaging in online discussions about social issues).

There remains a need in Canada to critically examine citizenship discourses that encourage participation and the possible effects they may have not only on the structure of governance but also on the ways citizens are envisioned and envision themselves. Of particular interest is the application of active citizenship discourse to youth since this group is increasingly being called upon to participate in 'shaping the nation' through active participation. In this thesis, I begin this work by examining how representations of Canadian youth socio-political participation over the last forty years have served to position young people within certain subjectivities and power relations as citizens.

### **Youth, citizenship, & the active/participatory citizen**

The area of citizenship and youth is a relatively recent development within childhood literature and remains rare in citizenship literature itself. Scholars have recently moved beyond an approach to youth as citizens-in-development towards one which focuses on the active child citizen (Stasiulis, 2002a) and encourages a child-centered approach to the study of citizenship (Lister et al., 2003; Smith, 2005). This thesis is situated within this approach, which mirrors my previous discussion regarding citizenship as identity and set of relations: Young people are seen as capable of identifying as 'Canadian' in various ways, participating in processes and relationships which constitute elements of citizenship, and they are increasingly being encouraged to relate to themselves and others in their role as citizens.

An important point to be made about scholarship in the area of youth and citizenship is the common failure to define what is meant by ‘child,’ ‘youth,’ ‘adolescent,’ or other terms used to categorize this segment of the population. As outlined in the introductory chapter, I have chosen to define youth based on one version of the Canadian government’s perspective (those aged 15-30 years of age). What is important, theoretically, to this project is the understanding that categories such as childhood and youth are social constructs, and ones which continue to shift and change.

Scholars in the field of childhood studies have written much about the conceptualizations of childhood and adulthood in Western societies, pointing to the social construction of these age-based categories. In reviewing this literature, Spigel (1998) argues that “the child is a cultural construct, a pleasing image that adults need in order to sustain their own identities. Childhood is the difference against which adults define themselves....Childhood has less to do with what children experience (since they too are subject to the evils of our social world) than with what adults want to believe” (p. 110). Spigel and others draw attention to the constructed nature of childhood and adulthood and encourage recognition of the broader issues shaping those constructions. In his introduction to *The children’s culture reader*, Jenkins (1998) provides a comprehensive historical look at the conception of childhood, arguing that “we do not so much discard old conceptions of the child as accrue additional meanings around what remains one of our most culturally potent signifiers” (p. 15).

In this historical overview, Jenkins (1998) focuses specifically on the notion of the innocent child who requires protection from natural, social, and cultural threats. This conceptualization of the child as innocent directly affects approaches to citizenship since

it necessarily excludes children from various social, cultural, and political domains, such as governance and politics (Jenkins, 1998): The dominant view of childhood innocence “presumes that children exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political; we imagine them to be noncombatants whom we protect from the harsh realities of the adult world, including the mud splattering of partisan politics” (Jenkins, 1998, p. 2). Thus, in much of the existing citizenship literature, children and youth are not understood as citizens or civic actors in their own right: As Weller (2003) has argued, “children and young people are excluded from the ‘adult’ realms of socio-political participation and citizenship” (p.154).

Despite this historical focus, children and youth are increasingly being considered in terms of their social and political rights as well as their ability to participate in society, thus challenging and altering conceptualizations of children and youth as inherently innocent and as separate from politics and citizenship. Stasiulis (2002a) locates this shift in thinking about children as citizens in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter referred to as the Convention) which was adopted in 1989: “A major innovation of the Convention, in comparison to its predecessors, is that for the first time, it articulates the right of children to have a say in matters affecting them, and to have children’s opinions taken into account” (p. 508). In this way, children and young people are no longer considered to be citizens only in terms of their future, but as Stasiulis (2002a) states, they “are cast as full human beings, invested with agency, integrity, and decision-making capacities” (p. 509). This is significant in that

the Convention not only constructs children as persons and as rights-bearing citizens with a range of social, political and civil rights, but also calls upon states to ensure that they are *active, participating citizens*, playing a role in governance

‘according to their age and maturity’, rather than simply being passively governed. [emphasis added] (p. 509)

Evident here is a discourse of active citizenship where governments become bound to demonstrate the ways in which they are working to encourage the active participation of youth in governance.

As Stasiulis (2002a) has demonstrated, however, government application of active citizenship discourses does not always serve to benefit the child, as the UN Convention would suggest and encourage. She argues that, similar to other countries, “Canada is raising the issue of children’s rights...in a manner that is compatible with the state’s larger neo-liberal and economic liberalization agenda” (p. 509) such that the model of active citizenship envisioned in the Convention does not match the realities of policy-making and governance in Canada. This reflects Chandler’s (2000) assertion that with active citizenship discourses “what is being devolved downwards and outwards is symbolic participation and consultation, not power or accountability” (p. 10). We then must question what purposes the discourse of active or participatory child and youth citizenship serves and what effects it has on governance and the image of the young citizen.

In many ways the adoption of an active citizenship view with respect to youth runs counter to our assumptions about childhood and adolescence, and when we consider notions of youth agency and action in governance we confront an image of youth which emphasizes protection rather than participation. As Stasiulis (2002a) has argued,

when children are considered to lack the requisite reason, wisdom, competence and autonomy to make decisions about their affairs, or when they are viewed merely as potential adults or incomplete persons, their status as autonomous citizens capable of exercising their political will and participating in political and social life, is severely undermined. (Stasiulis, 2002a, p. 511)

Despite the important role the UN Convention has played in redefining youth citizenship (as I discuss below), much of the literature on children and citizenship remains strictly focused on issues of rights and responsibilities, only recently addressing the ways in which citizenship exists in terms of identity and belonging outside of this narrow focus. It stresses instead what rights children have in various national contexts and the structures through which those rights are fulfilled (or not) (Ben-Arieh & Boyer, 2005; O'Neill, 2004).

In Canada, we find ourselves in a situation where the government and broader society are encouraging youth to actively participate socially and politically and where children's rights activists and others are challenging definitions of childhood to emphasize agency and participation. Little, however, is known about the ways in which these shifts are playing out, especially with respect to how they are affecting the image of the young Canadian citizen presented to Canadians.

### **Youth socio-political participation & agency**

As outlined previously, the notion of active or participatory citizenship promotes the idea that good or effective citizens will actively participate in their community, nation, or society through such activities as voting, joining political parties, volunteering, or otherwise helping others, or by including their voice on issues of governance (e.g., consultations). What active citizenship thus encourages is an exercising of personal agency to meet specific ends: Often these ends, in Canada, are presented in terms of social cohesion and inclusion. As Chandler (2000) has argued, active citizenship discourses are often based on the idea that a strong nation is built on the inclusion and

participation of all citizens and that participatory mechanisms are increasingly being promoted in order to “involve the uninvolved” (p. 6).

Suggested by my approach in this thesis, I am engaging with a Foucauldian sense of power and agency such that power is not seen as a binary relationship of dominance and submission, but rather as relations circulating through discourses and practices. Taking a similar approach in her work on discourses of Canadian youth, Raby (2002a; 2002b; 2005) understands agency as “the ability to make choices, to reflect on and influence one’s own actions, and to potentially make change in the world around us” (2002a, p. 236). In her study of how Canadian girls’ identities and lives are shaped and regulated through the constructed nature of adolescence, she identifies five discourses of adolescence (storm, at-risk, social problem, becoming, and pleasurable consumption). Each of these, she argues, presents (or denies) youth particular forms of agency: “The storm creates an understanding of teenagers as powerless in the face of the inevitable tempest of hormones and uncertainties that they must cope with” (Raby, 2002b, p. 443); at-risk discourses provide agency to youth in their ability to resist or recover from risks (thus, self-regulation) (Raby, 2002b, p. 443); “discourses of becoming frame adolescents as having a high degree of agency in that they are understood to be in a period in which they experiment, and search for identity” but this agency is seen as temporary and often dismissed (Raby, 2002b, p. 443); “discourses of adolescence as a problem easily re-deploy resistance as naturalized rebellion or ‘acting out’” (Raby, 2002b, p. 444); and, consumption provides youth with a high degree of agency through consumer choice (Raby, 2002b, p. 444). Raby (2002b) argues that, in fact, consumerism is often presented

as “the only acceptable avenue for articulation of self and resistance, and young people seem to embrace it” (p. 444).

As Raby’s work suggests, the prominent discourses of adolescence do not afford youth with agency with respect to their active participation in social and political contexts. Rather, agency is construed as individual and limited in context, for example, having the power to self-regulate in order to avoid drugs or the power to choose one commercial good over another. This is in contrast with recent efforts to involve young people in governance decisions and other such activities where they are expected to act as competent citizens, suggesting a contradiction between dominant discourses of youth and recent calls for increased citizen participation among young people.

In their article “Negotiating social change: The paradoxes of youth,” Wyn and White (2000) argue that “there is a paradoxical relationship between perceived choice and agency among young people at an individual level and the structural conditions of young people’s lives, which for many precludes the attainment of adult social goals” (p. 166). Wyn and White’s (2000) introduction of the paradox of youth (between structure and agency) is important to this thesis and my attempt to understand changing notions of youth citizenship and particularly active citizenship.

A central factor of Wyn and White’s (2000) paradox is what they refer to as “an intense process of individuation” (p. 172) resulting in a focus on individual equality and empowerment. This plays an important role in how youth envision their place in society and consequently how they choose to participate. Discipline and self-control are emphasized and “agency is constructed in terms of rational choice involving incentives and disincentives, and each person is thought to be fully responsible and accountable for



his or her own actions” (Wyn & White, 2000, p. 174). Through such discourses of agency and accountability youth citizenship becomes constrained such that being a good citizen means contributing through individual means (e.g., gainful employment) rather than collective ones. Much like Raby’s findings on the dominant discourses of youth, Wyn and White’s discussion of the paradox of youth between structure and agency, as well as increasing individualism, points to possible (re)configurations of youth agency which will affect how youth participation is enacted and envisioned.

### **Children’s rights**

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s the topic of children’s rights has gained prominence as many nations developed and adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention). A number of scholars have commented on the importance of the Convention with regards to child and youth participation, particularly drawing attention to the participation rights accorded to children in the Convention (Covell & Howe, 2001; Freeman, 2000). It is important to provide a short outline of recent children’s rights discourses, particularly with respect to issues of participation, as this has effects on how young people are perceived as social and political actors not only as children but also as they approach adulthood.

At the outset, I must point out that discussing children’s rights in a thesis about youth is somewhat problematic as it re-introduces the issue of defining age groupings. Indeed, the Convention itself focuses on legal minors who are, for the most part, those under 18 years of age. In *Canada’s First Report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (made to the UN in 1994), the issue of defining age is outlined in detail with both

the national government and provincial/territorial governments reporting the age of majority applicable in different areas of law. Thus, the Convention is meant to set out the rights of children (those under the age of majority) which is an age group different from, yet overlapping with, the age group I investigate in this thesis. For that reason, children's rights are not a large part of the discussion or analysis in this project, but rather an important element to consider with regards to changing notions of citizenship among non-adults or younger adults.

What is important about the Convention within the auspices of this thesis is the increasing attention it has placed on the participation rights of minors. As discussion of child and youth participation becomes more common in rights discourses it also becomes more common in social policy efforts as governments attempt to meet the goals of the Convention. So while the Convention itself is focused on legal minors, my own discussion of it is shaped by my interest in the social and political participation of youth between 15 and 30 years of age and, to that end, I focus explicitly on the Convention's elaboration of participation rights, as well as the Canadian government's actions in this regard.<sup>10</sup>

### *Children's rights & the UN*

The United Nations (UN) has been involved in promoting the well-being of children and youth for many years prior to the establishment of the Convention. In 1959 a Declaration of the Rights of the Child was made by the UN General Assembly and signed by Canada; however, this Declaration had no binding effect on governments and acted

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on children's rights and the UN Convention in Canada see Covell & Howe (2001), Howe & Covell (2005), and Jenson (2001).

only as a statement of principles (Covell & Howe, 2001, p. 20). The UN declared 1979 to be the International Year of the Child, focusing on two objectives: (1) “to provide a framework for advocacy on behalf of children,” and (2) “to promote recognition of the fact that programs for children should be an integral part of economic and social development plans” (Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child, 1979, p. 5). Canada’s focus at this time was on ensuring the well-being of children, primarily through provision and protection measures on the part of adults. A commission was established in order to promote the “widespread involvement of individuals, communities and organizations in activities designed to advance the rights, interests and well-being of children in the context of their families and society” (Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child, 1979, p. 5). By 1985, when the UN declared International Youth Year, child and youth participation rights were beginning to get attention. The themes of the year were “education, the fuller participation of youth in our societies, and peace” (Coleman & Baum, 1985, p. xiii), with participation being highlighted as a major issue.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was developed over many years, finally being presented in 1989. The Canadian government signed the Convention in 1990 and it was ratified by parliament and the provinces (except for Alberta) in 1991. In contrast to the earlier 1959 Declaration, the Convention is a legal agreement and international commitment (Covell & Howe, 2001, p. 20) which explicitly states the rights of children rather than assuming their inclusion in other general statements of human rights.

As part of Canada's signing of the Convention, the government is required to provide reports on the efforts made toward reaching the Convention's goals. These reports include an initial report two years after joining (1994 for Canada) and then every five years following (Canada submitted its second report in 2001 with the third and fourth scheduled to be submitted in January 2009). In addition, the UN receives reports from NGOs and others regarding the state of Canada with respect to the Convention (some of which will be discussed below). For reference purposes, the table below provides basic information on the reports discussed in the following sections.<sup>11</sup>

<b>Author/Responsible Department</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date of Publication</b>	<b>Period Covered (if applicable)</b>
<b><i>Reports to the UN</i></b>			
Canadian Heritage	<i>Canada's first report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>	June 1994	From ratification (1991) to December 31, 1992
Canadian Heritage	<i>Canada's second report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>	April 2001	January 1993 to December 1997
<b><i>Other Government Reports</i></b>			
Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights	<i>Who's in charge here? Effective implementation of Canada's international obligations with respect to the rights of children. Interim Report.</i>	November 2005	
Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights	<i>Children: The silenced citizens. Effective implementation of Canada's international obligations with respect to the rights of children. Final Report.</i>	April 2007	
<b><i>NGO Reports</i></b>			
Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC)	<i>The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: How does Canada measure up?</i>	1999	
CCRC	<i>The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: How does</i>	May 2003	

<sup>11</sup> Further information on some of these reports can also be found in Appendix C.

	<i>Canada measure up? 2003 Update to Canada's report to the UN Committee for the Rights of Children</i>		
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**Table 1: Canadian government and NGO reports on children's rights**

*UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

As Covell and Howe (2001) outline, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out children's rights in three general categories: provision needs, protection needs, and participation needs (p. 7). They argue that participation needs are relatively new and are generally given less attention in Canada (and other countries): We are more likely to discuss the need to provide for children (shelter, education, health care, etc.) or the need to protect children (from abuse, poverty, and other harms) than to give credence to the importance of children's participation in society. As Covell and Howe (2001) argue, however, "participation in decision making both improves the child's sense of self-worth and helps children meet their need to feel part of a family and part of a community" (p. 9).

With respect to participation rights, the Convention encompasses "children's rights to express an opinion in matters affecting the child and to have that opinion heard (article 12)", children's "right to freedom of expression and information (article 13), freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (article 14), and freedom of association and peaceful assembly (article 15)" (Covell & Howe, 2001, p. 23). According to Covell and Howe (2001), the principle of participation in the Convention arose out of a compromise between child liberationists fighting for children's self-determination and child protectionists who were concerned with weighing the various perspectives in light of the best interest of the child (p. 25). Thus article 12 states that "States Parties shall assure to

the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” while article 13 limits children’s right to expression, stating that “the exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions” (Howe & Covell, 2005).

These limitations, as Freeman (2000) argues, are an area of the Convention in need of improvement. As he states:

It will have been observed that the child’s views are regarded as relevant in ‘all matters affecting the child’. The significance of this should neither be underestimated – thus there is no reason why the child should not be able to express views on matters outside the Convention – nor overestimated – ‘affecting’, it seems, means ‘directly affecting’ so that, for example, the child is not to be given the opportunity to express views on the construction of a new road. (p. 288)

Thus, children and youth may only be considered as active participants in specific contexts which are already associated with their age group rather than the Convention drastically challenging perceptions of children and youth to expand their potential sphere of influence to everyday decisions beyond the scope of family or education, for example.

Despite these limitations, this recognition of children’s participation rights is part of what Covell and Howe (2001) consider a shift away from paternalistic protection (the view dominating Canadian policies regarding children until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) towards a “newly emerging concept of children as independent bearers of rights....Under this concept, children are entitled to have their needs provided for not because parents have obligations or because the state has a paternalistic duty to children, but because children have fundamental rights to having their basic needs fulfilled” (p. 19). From this perspective, children and youth gain a stronger role as citizens who can act and speak on their own behalf, rather than always relying on adults to determine the best course of

action for them. This it seems is rarely achieved, however, as the critiques discussed below suggest.

### *Critiques of the Convention*

There have been a number of criticisms of children's rights discourses and of the Convention in particular, coming from various political orientations. Freeman (2000) provides a useful overview of these criticisms as well as his own suggestions for strengthening the Convention. As Freeman (2000) outlines, those on both the Left and Right of the political spectrum have voiced criticisms of children's rights discourses.

From the Left, it has been argued that the concept of rights is too vague and indeterminate to be effectively applied. Thus, it is believed that those in power are able to wield the discourse of rights in ways that meet their own ends. Despite this critique, many still believe that children's rights are important and useful, rather than inherently bad.

Those on the Right, often from the perspective of communitarianism, argue that there are too many rights and too few responsibilities perpetuated by a focus on rights discourse. As Freeman (2000) points out, "the right's critique of rights is particularly prominent" where "giving children rights is seen as undermining families and the ability of parents to make decisions" (p. 280). Communitarian critiques allege "that many societal ills can be attributed to an emphasis on rights and a concomitant neglect of responsibilities" and argue that rights "are unduly individualist and associated with highly undesirable characteristics including selfishness and indifference to others" (Freeman, 2000, p. 281).

As Freeman (2000) ultimately concludes, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is only a beginning step in fully recognizing children's rights globally. He sees the Convention as a "spur to further action," citing additional protocols and continuous re-thinking of children's rights issues as important next steps (Freeman, 2000, p. 282). In his own criticisms of the Convention, Freeman (2000) raises numerous concerns relevant to this thesis and the focus on youth participation. First and foremost is the point that children did not participate in the development of the Convention:

The 1989 Convention was not formulated by children, nor did they have any real input into it. How different a convention in which the child's voice is heard would look is a matter of some controversy. There is, though, not a little irony in having a Convention which emphasises participatory rights (in Article 12) whilst foreclosing the participation of children in the formulation of the rights to be encoded. The next Convention cannot afford to ignore the voice of children. (Freeman, 2000, p. 282)

Second, Freeman (2000) points to the lack of acknowledgement of children's diversity. He questions whether "there [is] not still an image of the child pervading the Convention which betrays the source of its thinking as Eurocentric, as phallogentric, as adopting an emblematic and essentialist vision of childhood" and argues that "the lives of too many children are glossed over in the Convention" (p. 282). Those he feels have been left out include disabled children, gay children, girl children, street children, and others (e.g., refugee children, indigenous children). Thus, despite efforts to include participation rights of children, the vague wording of the Convention combined with a failure to explicitly address and rethink perspectives on children as diverse citizens means that the Convention does not effectively support children and youth as active citizens. The Convention, instead, allows for broad interpretations regarding the best interests of the child and the areas in which youth are (or should be) permitted to participate in socio-political discussions and decisions.



### Canada & children's rights

Canada has had a longstanding international role in promoting children's rights, having "helped draft the Convention and [having] co-hosted the 1990 World Summit for Children," for example (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children [CCRC], 1999, p. 7). Full analysis of Canada's official reports to the UN regarding the Convention is not applicable here; however, it is interesting to note some of the dominant discourses and themes emphasized, particularly with respect to participation rights and citizenship.

Canada's first and second reports to the UN focus heavily on some obvious themes: education, family and parental rights, health, vulnerability and protection, etc. Oftentimes these are discussed with respect to ensuring children's future success and ability to contribute as productive members of society. For example, in Canada's first report, it is stated that

the present Convention provides useful guidance to parents, non-governmental organizations and governments about the appropriate standards to ensure that Canadian children grow up in an environment conducive to the full and harmonious development of their personalities, and are fully prepared to live an individual life in a free and democratic society, as envisioned in the preamble to the present Convention. (*Canada's first report*, 1994, June, n.pag.)

Similarly, later in the first report the provincial statements regarding education often point to the role of education in developing children into future productive adults. For example, in Canada's second report, the authors discuss the importance of a national policy conference held in 1996: Notably entitled *Canada's Children – Canada's Future* (*Canada's second report*, 2001, April, n.pag.). Such a perspective on children as future productive citizens of Canada is also present in Senator Pearson's opening statement to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child upon Canada's presentation of its second

report. Here she refers to the goal of helping “children reach their full potential” (*Opening statement*, 2003, September, n.pag.).

In Canada’s first report there is much discussion of the role of different sectors in implementing the Convention, from different levels of government to NGOs. One of the central initiatives presented in the report is the Action Plan for Children which was established in 1992. This plan, as well as the Children’s Bureau of Health and Welfare Canada, are presented as being central components to Canada’s efforts to implement the Convention (*Canada’s first report*, 1994, June, n.pag.).

The first report does contain some discussion of youth participation in decision-making, however, it doesn’t go very far in terms of explicit discussion of youth participation. There are mentions throughout the report of the importance of youth voice, stating, for example, that “the Government of Canada hopes that [their] national strategy will contribute to increased participation in decision-making by youth” (*Canada’s first report*, 1994, June, n.pag.). Despite this, discussion of participation rights of Canadian youth focuses heavily on the child’s right to be heard in court cases relating to youth crime or family and divorce proceedings. Reflecting Freeman’s (2000) critique, there is little to no concrete acknowledgement of the rights of youth to participate in decision-making on a broader level.

Notably, the NFB is mentioned in Canada’s first report to the UN. This is done in the context of discussing the importance of providing children with appropriate information. The NFB is described as “a federal cultural agency that produces and distributes films that are to ‘interpret Canada to Canadians and other nations’” (*Canada’s*

*first report*, 1994, June, n.pag.). The NFB is also mentioned in the section of the report outlining Canada's actions to disseminate the Convention itself.

Canada's second report contains many of the same themes as in the first report, including detailed discussion of how the various sectors (including different levels of government and NGOs) are working together to implement the Convention. One major focus of the second report is youth as a policy priority and the ways in which the Canadian government is focusing on children and young people. The National Children's Agenda (NCA), announced in 1997, is presented as a "federal-provincial-territorial and multi-sectoral initiative, ...launched to develop a shared vision and common goals to enhance the well-being of Canada's children" (*Canada's second report*, 2001, April, n.pag.). In addition to the NCA, the establishment of a Secretary of State for Children and Youth in 1997 is emphasized as an important step. While these new initiatives are discussed, there is little mention of the Action Plan for Children highlighted in the first report, and the Children's Bureau so central in the first report is mentioned as having been replaced by the Childhood and Youth Division of Health Canada (*Canada's second report*, 2001, April, n.pag.). Thus, much has changed at the federal policy level with respect to how children's issues and policies are addressed; however, there is little sense of continuity in programs and initiatives from one report to the next.

Thinking forward to Canada's third and fourth reports, due in January 2009, it is likely that such changes and lack of continuity will once again be a factor. Since the second report, there has been little development with respect to the NCA (at least not publicly reported) and the Minister of State for Children and Youth (previously the Secretary of State for Children and Youth) was abandoned in 2004 (Echenberg &

Phillips, 2008, April). In 2005, Senator Landon Pearson, a longtime advocate for children's rights and representative of Canada to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, retired. At this time, she commented on the Canadian government's move away from a focus on children's rights: "The government's decision to abandon its file on children and youth in late 2004 was disheartening. We need a re-evaluation of the fact that someone in government with access to the levers of power has to speak for children" (L. Pearson qtd. in Makhoul, 2005, November, p. 4).<sup>12</sup>

Since 2002 (and as of January 10, 2009), there have not been any further reports to the UN with respect to the Convention itself (the next two reports are expected to be submitted in January 2009). There has, however, been a federal-level initiative in Canada to address children's rights through the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (the Committee). The Committee was "authorized by the Senate to examine and report upon Canada's international obligations with respect to the rights and freedoms of children" in 2004 (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2005, November, p. 8). The Committee presented an interim report entitled *Who's in charge here?* in November 2005 and a final report entitled *Children: The silenced citizens* in April 2007. Both reports are highly critical of Canada's actions with respect to implementing the Convention and I discuss these critiques further below.

In addition to government initiatives such as these, Canadian NGOs and academics have taken up important work in researching and promoting children's rights

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<sup>12</sup> In April 2008, the Canadian parliamentary information and research service produced a document entitled *Minister of State for Children* (Echenberg & Phillips). This short report outlines "the mandate and potential roles and responsibilities of a minister of state for children" while also providing an overview of previous child/youth advocates in parliament. It also provides information on other countries' efforts towards representing children and youth within governance structures (e.g., Australia) and other options for Canada (e.g., Children's Commissioner, Ombudsman, etc.). Whether there is any movement towards such representation in parliament or the federal government remains to be seen.

in Canada. Among these are the Cape Breton University Children's Rights Centre (<http://discovery.capebretonu.ca/children/>) and the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights at Carleton University (<http://www.ottawakids.ca/site/childrensrights/index.php?page=193>).

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) is another important body which, since its establishment in 1989, has played a central role in bringing together interested individuals and groups to exchange information, educate the Canadian public, and dialogue with government about children's rights (<http://www.rightsofchildren.ca/>). The CCRC engages in monitoring of children's rights in Canada and coordinates the non-government responses submitted to the UN as part of the review of Canada's implementation of the Convention. I discuss these in more detail below.

#### *Critiques of Canada's implementation of the Convention*

There have been a number of critiques of Canada's efforts to implement the Convention. While many agree that it is laudable that "Canada helped draft the Convention and co-hosted the 1990 World Summit for Children, where governments of 71 countries agreed to a 10-year agenda for improving the well-being of children," there is also concern that while "children's rights are an explicit priority in Canadian foreign policy...., it is not clear how well this philosophical commitment is supported in practice" (CCRC, 1999, p. 7).

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) has carried out research and monitoring of children's rights in Canada, and presented the results in the non-governmental report to the UN entitled *The UN Convention on the Rights of the*

*Child: How does Canada measure up?* (1999). This report was submitted at the same time as the Canadian government's first five-year report to the UN. The CCRC report concludes that while "Canada meets most of its obligations" under the Convention, there remain many areas where children's rights need more attention and action (p. 3). Issues mentioned include lack of recognition of children as rights holders, lack of promotion of (or education about) children's rights, homophobia among high school students, and the vague nature of "best interests of the child" (p. 4).

In the CCRC's measuring of the Convention articles dealing with children's freedoms (13, 14, and 15), it is argued that "many children are not taught about rights and freedoms in Canada" and that there is a lack of public discussion about children's rights (p. 10). The CCRC concludes that:

children are not fully recognized as active subjects of rights in Canada; adults can often place arbitrary limits on children's freedoms; children are not systematically taught about their fundamental freedoms; and there are few redress mechanisms available to children. Finally, it can be said that children's fundamental freedoms are very dependent on the good intentions of adults. (1999, p. 37)

In more recent reports, the CCRC has continued to raise important cautions regarding Canada's actions with regards to children's rights. In a 2003 follow-up report to the UN, the CCRC argues that "although some level of progress may be observed...there remains a substantial gap between the promise and reality of children's rights in Canada" (CCRC, 2003, May, p. 3). In addition to outlining the gaps they have found, the CCRC highlights other emerging areas that fall outside the limits of the report. Notably, youth participation appears here: The report concludes that "to fulfill children's participation rights will require significant partnerships among all levels of government, NGOs, and other civil society actors and organizations" where "a leadership role by the federal government would be welcomed" (p. 63).

Currently the CCRC is engaged in the preparation of the next non-governmental report to the UN to be made in January 2009. To this end, they have outlined a framework and process for collaboration to guide interested parties (available on their website at <http://www.rightsofchildren.ca/pdf/Canada44.pdf>).

The federal government has also taken steps to demonstrate its concern with children's rights in recent years, evident in the work of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights regarding children. In their interim and final reports, the Committee raises a number of concerns and criticisms with respect to Canada's implementation of the Convention. The interim report (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2005, November) focuses its critiques on "the federal government's unwillingness to directly incorporate international human rights treaties" (p. 4), ineffective coordination of various jurisdictions and lack of transparency or clarity regarding UN reporting (p. 4-5), a lack of "uniform national standards in a number of key areas with direct impact on children's rights" (p. 5), and, importantly, a "lack of awareness in government and among the children and the general public about the Convention and the rights enshrined in it" (p. 5). The Committee's recommendations weigh heavily towards the federal government acting in ways to improve the effectiveness of implementation of the Convention through such measures as a Children's Commissioner, interdepartmental working groups, and adequate funding (p. 5-6).

In the final report (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2007, April), the same message is repeated:

The Committee finds that the federal government's approach to compliance with children's rights, and with the Convention in particular, is inadequate. Jurisdictional complexities, the absence of effective institutions, an uncertain approach to human rights law, and lack of transparency and political involvement

indicate that the Convention is being ineffectively applied in the Canadian context. (p. xiii)

The Committee argues that Canadians remain unaware of and/or uneducated about the Convention and children's rights and that the lack of a government body to ensure both education about the Convention and its implementation is detrimental. The final report also addresses the oft criticized lack of child and youth participation, stating that "most importantly, through its recommendations the Committee seeks to strengthen the active involvement of children in all institutions and processes affecting their rights" (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2007, April, p. xiv).

The Committee also makes a point to raise the issue of where and when children are provided the right to have their opinions heard. According to them, "even beyond the individual's ability to participate in his or her own life, the Convention emphasizes that youth have a right to participate or to be consulted on broader issues and decisions that have an impact on their lives" (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2007, April, p. 56), stressing that participation rights reach further than the traditional contexts of school and family. In addition, it is emphasized that *meaningful* participation is required: "When consulted, children should be included as active participants in decision-making – it is crucial that the voices, and not only the choices, of children are heard. Adults must not interpret the needs and wishes of children, but listen to them directly" (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2007, April, p. 56).

Both the Convention itself and Canada's implementation of the Convention are commonly critiqued with respect to this paradox of children's participation rights. As Freeman (1998; 2000) has argued, it is ironic to have such rights explicitly stated in the Convention while children played no role in the development of the Convention itself.



Thus, while the right for children to participate in decision-making is encouraged by the Convention it has not been present in practice at the international level of the UN or the national level in Canada where criticisms have been made of the failure of the government to implement effective child and youth participation measures.

In the context of this thesis it is important to note this paradox. In examining discourses of youth participation (how it is portrayed by the government, the NFB, and others), it is paramount that we remember that such discourses are just that – discourses. While it may be encouraging that representations of youth participation exist, there is no guarantee that effective participation measures or opportunities for youth have been, or will be, put into place. As the CCRC has argued, there is often a gap between the promises made and the realities of youth's lives (2003, May, p. 3). There needs to be an ongoing investigation of youth participation initiatives and their effectiveness, particularly from the perspective of children and youth themselves, and it is my aim to provide a foundation for such research with this thesis.

### **Media & citizenship**

Rarely is the role of media discussed in youth and citizenship literature, although Torney-Purta (2002) has suggested that media is an important tool in the civic education of young people. My choice to examine selected NFB films as one point of entry for exploring representations of youth is based on the fact that the NFB, as a departmental agency under the Canadian Heritage portfolio, is considered to be an important “national provisioner,” focused on developing and reflecting unique national and regional cultures in Canada through production and distribution of film (Evans, 1991). Thus, it is seen to

play a role in developing national identity and discourses of citizenship (Druick, 1999; Druick, 2000; Druick, 2007). Thus far, scholars have only considered the role of media in citizenship in limited ways.

Historically, within a narrow definition of politics and citizenship, the news-media have been understood as an important site of civic education and of public access to the information needed to effectively participate as citizens (Buckingham, 2000a, 2000b; Keum, Devanathan, Deshpande, Nelson, & Shah, 2004; McLeod, 2000; Sherr & Jenkins, 2003). While Buckingham's (2000a; 2000b) work clearly shows how news programs aimed at youth attempt to define youth as citizens in particular ways, it only does so with respect to the ways in which youth engage with news media as a means of entering a public sphere. What is missing from his analysis is an examination of how media work to influence citizens with respect to identity and social relations beyond strictly political discourse and information dissemination. Buckingham's work in this area, however, does suggest possible ways in which the media may help to make citizenship, and particularly forms of active citizenship, recognizable to young people as they present youth with representations of young people participating in political and community activity.

In addition to the focus on news media as a means of communicating political knowledge, the media has been discussed in youth and citizenship literature with respect to how new technologies may be used to encourage political participation among youth (Della Carpini, 2000; Finn & Detlor, 2002; Iyengar & Jackman, 2003). Again, there is a focus on political participation in a narrow sense in terms of voting and participating in political party activities, resulting from concerns about lack of political interest and low

voter turnout among youth, and a conceptualization of the citizen heavily weighted towards citizen rights and responsibilities. There is a lack of scholarly work investigating the use of media to situate and manage youth as citizens in a broad sense, and little critical discussion of the use of media for such purposes. In contrast, I actively interrogate how NFB films and government and non-government websites are used to conceptualize youth as citizens, particularly in active roles, including how they incorporate youth voices and perspectives in order to promote youths' active involvement in constructing representations of their selves, lives, communities, and nation.

With respect to issues of power and discourse, not only is citizenship a matter of identity and relationships, but it is, according to Cairns (2003), "possibly the most important of the central institutions of the modern democratic state" and "an instrument to socialize individuals" (p. 501). As I have already argued, the way a person conceives of themselves as a citizen is understood to have an important impact on the way they believe they can act or participate in society. Thus, as discourses of citizenship suggest particular subject positions to youth, youth will in turn react to those discourses, whether by accepting the presented vision of themselves or altering or resisting it. In order to address this negotiation I have made efforts to include in my data set films and websites that provide insight into the perspectives of youth on their place as active citizens (chapter four). While this does not allow for a full examination of the interplay between forms of governance (of self and by others), it does allow for recognition of the fact that adult and state discourses do not determine subjectivities without negotiation.

There has been much literature theorizing the relationship between the state and culture, especially with respect to citizenship and national identity. Issues of social

inclusion and cohesion, which are often raised as positive outcomes of active citizen participation, are implicated in this discussion as the role of the Canadian state in cultural production is often posited as one means of ensuring an inclusive and cohesive Canadian nation and people. Canada has a long history of state involvement with culture that has been discussed at length in Canadian scholarship and policy. Many Canadian scholars' discussions of the state and culture foreground the 1951 Massey Report which argued that the problems of isolation and diversity in Canada could be resolved by bringing "the regions into the mainstream of Canadian life through national cultural programs....Thus, the government would tie the nation together not only through a communications infrastructure, but with a cultural infrastructure as well" (Dowler, 1996, p. 334). This concern with developing a cultural infrastructure meant to unify Canada resulted in the state taking a central role in supporting cultural production (Dowler, 1996, p. 335).

Another important consideration with respect to the role of the state in Canadian culture is that of Canada's unique geographical and historical position in relation to the United States, a powerful cultural producer. As Dorland (1996) has argued

much of the history of Canadian institutions has been profoundly preoccupied, often agonistically, with seeking the ways, strategies, symbols and indeed the language by which to demarcate Canadian activities from American ones and provide the space, ranging from the economic to the symbolic, in which such activities might be undertaken, continue and even flourish. As a result, the role played by the Canadian state in making such activities possible, in encouraging them and in framing the very language for their pursuit, has been fundamental, particularly in the sphere of culture. (p. ix)

These particularities of Canadian culture and the role of the state are evident within histories of the NFB and reinforce the importance of that institution as a source of national and citizenship discourses meant to guide the perspectives and actions of Canadians.

### *A brief history of the NFB*

Established in 1939, the National Film Board of Canada is a Canadian cultural institution focused on supporting the production of films by Canadian filmmakers. In its early years, as Evans (1991) argues, “it seemed that, as a whole, the National Film Board was serving a useful national and international function,” creating films for various government departments and Canadian educational institutions, as well as for distribution abroad, primarily to educate others about life in Canada (p. 7). Stories of the NFB are littered with references to its role in Canadian culture and society, reflecting the mandate of the organization and also the vision within which its production and other activities take place. In a 1981 brief from the NFB to the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, for example, the NFB defines culture as “our traditions, our myths, our education, our entertainment, our hopes, our aspirations,” which it claims are those things that teach “us who we are, where we are, and what we want to be” (National Film Board of Canada [NFB], 1981, p. 3). They argue that “cultural expression is not only fundamental to the quality of each of our lives, it also plays an essential role in the survival of our country” (p. 6), articulating an approach to its activities firmly grounded in notions of nationality and citizenship.

Despite shifts in vision over the years, the NFB has remained relatively fixed in its role of representing Canada and Canadians through expressions of Canadian culture. The latest NFB Strategic Plan, covering 2008/2009 to 2012/2013, clearly sets out the current vision of the organization, situating its place in Canadian culture and its role in articulating Canadian citizenship: The NFB “is unique in providing Canadian creators a

place to develop new forms of authentic, socially relevant works that are central to creating common democratic, civil values in a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse society....It is the most trusted provider of Canadian audiovisual content to Canada's educational system and is a significant carrier of Canadian values to Canada's youth" (NFB, 2008, p. 5). The NFB also argues in the Strategic Plan that "we need to animate public space, we need to give public space vibrancy, we need to allow it to breathe because it is the breath of our nation" and that "the NFB is an essential part of a process of reconfiguring, reinventing, reinvigorating the public space" (NFB, 2008, p. 4). Thus, the NFB continues to situate itself as a central Canadian institution in terms of its role in defining Canada and the Canadian citizen, and argues that "rebuilding the connection with Canadian youth is of enormous importance to the future of the NFB and to the future of this country" (NFB, 2008, p. 11).

A number of structural changes to the NFB in recent years are relevant to a discussion of its role in articulating Canadian citizenship. The government introduced significant budget cuts to the institution in the March 1996 federal budget which prompted the NFB to re-examine its activities. In that year, the NFB's budget was cut by approximately 32%, making its 1996-97 funding from Parliament \$56 million rather than the \$82 million it received in 1994-95 (NFB, 1996). Despite this challenge, the NFB remained committed to its 1995 mission to enrich Canadian society through film and audiovisual production and set goals to ensure its visibility among, and value to, Canadians (NFB, 1996).

Part of the NFB's restructuring meant a decentralization of operations, and there are now regional production facilities in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto,

Montreal, Moncton and Halifax, as well as a production office in Quebec City (NFB, 2005, p. 7). The organization has continued to produce many films per year and in 2006-07 it produced 75 NFB productions, 52 co-productions and 32 websites (NFB, 2007, p. 70). As these numbers indicate, another recent change to the organization has been the expansion into Web production and new media, which I discuss further in chapter five.

### *The NFB & youth*

Children and youth have had a longstanding place of importance in the activities of the NFB. In the 2002-2006 Strategic Plan, youth is considered a “key audience” that programming should focus on (NFB, 2006, Strategies) and in the most recent Strategic Plan it is proclaimed that “our young people are our future” and that “young people will become an even more crucial audience for the NFB” (NFB, 2008, p. 16). Since its beginnings, the NFB has deemed youth programming important, particularly in the realm of education. This is tied to the NFB’s role in defining Canadian citizenship as many of these educational films represent images of Canada and Canadians or explain the history and political system of the nation to young viewers, helping to guide them into becoming responsible adult citizens.<sup>13</sup>

Historically, the NFB’s relationship to youth has centred on educating and representing youth through film. As Swan (1984) articulates in a paper on the educational activities of the CBC and NFB, “NFB films were the first educational films seen in Canadian classrooms. During the forties, teachers in elementary and high schools used

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<sup>13</sup> The NFB website provides a full list of NFB films about/for children and youth (<http://www.nfb.ca/collection/films/resultat.php?ids=55&nom=Children%20and%20Youth&type=sous-categorie>). An examination of this listing provides a sense of the types of films made by the NFB for youth. Low (2002) provides a detailed discussion of NFB films portraying Canadian children and youth in his text *NFB Kids: Portrayals of Children by the National Film Board of Canada, 1939-1989*.

NFB films to support lessons in geography, history, natural science, art, and health” (p. 11). She discovered that “during 1950-51, almost five million school children saw NFB films in their classrooms” (p. 11) and that in 1984 “more than 70 per cent of all NFB films [were] used, in one way or another, in Canadian elementary schools, colleges, and universities” (p. 12). This emphasis on educating young people has not subsided and, in a review of the NFB by the Mandate Review Committee in 1996, the Committee argued that the NFB’s role in providing educational materials should be reinforced (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 168). The NFB itself has also stressed this area of activity situating youth as a target audience in its 1996 Action Plan (NFB, 1996) and, more recently, focusing on increasing and organizing its “educational efforts” (NFB, 2008, p. 16).

Druick (1999) has argued that such cultural products as NFB films, as sources of representations of Canadian citizenship, are “one component in the symbolic production of Canada” (p. 25) where “the efforts of the Canadian state to comprehend and manage the Canadian population may be read” (p. 26). Druick’s work (1999; 2000; 2007) connecting the NFB and citizenship through the concept of governmentality provides an important foundation for this project and is unique in that the majority of writing about the NFB tends to “focus on aesthetic excellence or political chicanery” and, therefore, “overlook the rationale behind government funding of this institution and the characteristics of its most common type of film: the tale of citizenship” (Druick, 1999, p. 56). Druick’s work to remedy this gap in scholarship is important and insightful, focusing primarily on the historical development of the NFB in the context of discourses of social science and on the content of films produced between 1939 and 1999 about everyday life.



While her work provides an important foundation for my project, as discussed in the previous chapter, my focus on examining representations of youth social and political participation in NFB films over the last four decades, and firmly situating them in the broader context of changes in approaches to and definitions of youth citizenship, will lead to an elaboration on her work and on the themes she presents.

As suggested by Druick (1999; 2007), the majority of scholarly work about the NFB has focused on its history or specific programs, and the personalities present in each.<sup>14</sup> Low (2002; 2003) has conducted research pertaining to children and the NFB, focusing his study on representations of children in NFB films between 1939 and 1989.<sup>15</sup> While this work is important to my project in some ways, Low's choice of focus and approach leaves many questions still unanswered about the role of the NFB with respect to youth. Low's object of study is what he refers to as 'NFB society': The world that exists within the NFB's films. From this perspective, he discusses the content of the films in detail (and sometimes the context of their production), examining 'NFB kids,' 'NFB adults,' and 'NFB schools,' for example. As such, his work is useful in outlining the ways young people have been depicted in NFB films and how this has changed over time, but not in terms of issues of socio-political participation or citizenship. His work provides some guidance with respect to looking at the NFB's approach to youth historically; however, I take a different approach and address the issue of how the NFB's films, in addition to various websites, government documents, and news/popular media, inform youth's positions as citizens through particular representations of youth socio-political participation. I, therefore, consider citizenship discourses more broadly (beyond the

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<sup>14</sup> For examples, see Evans (1991), Nelson (1988), and Marchessault (1995).

<sup>15</sup> Note that Low's definition of 'kids' or 'children' includes infants, youth, and adolescents, based on the idea that this stage of life ends with one's integration into working life.

NFB) yet provide a more focused look at youth representations in NFB films than that offered by Low (2002; 2003). By situating my use of NFB films as sources of data within a broad context of changing definitions of youth and citizenship (evidenced in government documents, news and popular media, websites, etc.) this thesis addresses the work of both Druick (1999; 2000; 2007) and Low (2002; 2003) while expanding upon the themes articulated by each.

## **Conclusion**

There are a number of elements converging to complicate current perspectives on youth as active citizens. From an enduring association of children with innocence and a tension between simultaneous calls for participation and protection of children and youth, to reconceptualizations of citizenship in terms of participation and agency, youth citizenship is being passionately contested in academic and government/policy circles. But how are these developments surfacing in popular discourses of Canadian youth? In the following chapter I address this question by examining representations of Canadian youth engaging in social and political action in an attempt to make sense of conflicting and converging trends. Building upon the context of the National Film Board of Canada which I have set out here, its role in providing symbolic representations of Canada and Canadians as well as the connection between education and citizenship which the NFB embraces in its programming for young people, I engage in an analysis of NFB representations of youth socio-political action over the past four decades.

## Chapter 2 – The active citizen: Representations of youth socio-political action

*We did it hoping one thing: that we would be able to get somebody to listen for once. (young person commenting on why youth took councilors' seats during a council meeting, in the NFB film Flowers on a One-Way Street, 1967)*

*We live in a society based on self-interest, and groups form that have their own interest and they lobby for their interest in the political forum. Young people don't have any such interest group. They don't have people to speak for them. They're basically excluded from the political process, all the way through, from the municipal level all the way up to the federal level. So they don't have anyone to speak for them. So when decisions are made as to what salary to pay for what job, and who will work for this wage, then those who are making the decisions, and you know, these are thousands and thousands of decisions that are made continually every day in our society, it percolates down. The group, one of the last groups that can be legitimately exploited, according to current thinking, are young people. (young person commenting in the NFB film All the Right Stuff, 1997)*

Despite the continuance of the dominant perspective that youth are in-transition to full adulthood and citizenship and thus incomplete citizens, considered incompetent or incapable of making citizenship-related decisions, academics and activists are currently engaged in a rethinking of youth such that they are understood as complete beings and potential active participants in citizenship roles. In this chapter I address this rethinking of the concept of youth, particularly as it pertains to youth's active participation in social and political issues, and I present research findings which demonstrate that perspectives on Canadian youth participation and citizenship are changing: Expectations of youth participation are being redefined as (adult) organized and controlled actions are supported over broad-based collective action initiated by youth themselves, and youth participation is becoming tied up with increasing individualism and consumerism.

Recent scholarship has challenged the view of children as passive and innocent, instead emphasizing the ways children understand and act in social and civic ways (Jans, 2004) and striving to understand the view children and young people have of their role as citizens (Hine, 2004; Howard & Gill, 2000; Lister et al., 2003; Smith, 2005). As discussed in chapter one, Stasiulis (2002a) has examined the ways in which Canadian government policies and court decisions have employed a discourse of the active child citizen, arguing that “while it is now commonplace for adult politicians and advocates for children’s rights to parrot aphorisms such as ‘children are now social actors, subjects in their own right, and active citizens, merely than objects of adult concern and intervention’, this view is often not borne out in Canadian formal policies or governance practices” (p. 531) which she argues have only considered children’s participation within the areas of family and juvenile law. Stasiulis (2002a) does not specifically address government practices in terms of media or broader social trends and my discussion of government reports and NFB films in the context of youth socio-political participation will examine her claim that consideration of children and youth as active citizens is only occurring in particular contexts and ways through these other means.

The concept of the active citizen is one that is becoming more common in images of citizenship generally, and, as authors such as Stasiulis (2002a) and Marinetto (2003) have argued, governments are incorporating this discourse into political and state rhetoric regarding their citizens. Marinetto (2003) connects the state’s incorporation of the ‘active citizen’ into its discourses of citizenship with the concept of governmentality, arguing that “ideas of community and active citizenship operate as strategies, enabling the state to

govern more effectively,” thus situating the idea of the active citizen as a potential technology of governance (p. 117).

In examining representations of youth social and political action in NFB films between the late-1960s and early-2000s, and viewing these firmly within the social and political contexts of circulating discourses about youth, a number of themes emerge concerning how society perceives of young people’s participation as active citizens. It is evident from this examination that while youth action was, and still is, represented in NFB films (as well as other Canadian media), changes in how youth are considered as social actors has had effects on how those representations position youth as citizens. I begin this chapter with an examination of the changing expectations of youth, particularly in the domains of volunteerism and civic education. Following this I discuss some major changes to the representations of youth social and political action since the late-1960s, most notably a shift towards adult-sanctioned and controlled action, a focus on individual endeavours, and a blurring between consumer and citizen actions.

### **Changing expectations of youth**

In the introductory chapter I discussed the difficulty in attempting to define ‘youth’ in terms of a particular age category. This challenge is exacerbated by ongoing changes in what we perceive to be the rites of passage to adulthood, whether that be moving out on one’s own, finishing school, or obtaining a full-time job, for example. In a discussion paper written for the Government of Canada’s Policy Research Initiative, Gaudet (2007) explores these changes within a policy context. In the period following World War II, attaining adulthood was thought to be achieved by following the sequence

of school, marriage, parenthood; however, “around the early 1970s, a change occurred in the standardization of the ages associated with roles and the sequence of those roles. In fact, the change resulted from the breakdown of institutions like marriage, the pluralism of cultural values, and the postponement of certain transitions like parenthood” (Gaudet, 2007, p. 6).

In recent years, “social, environmental and biological pressures are shortening childhood and resulting in an ever-longer waiting period before early adulthood,” and youth “has been extended to such a degree that it can now be broken down into two phases: adolescence and early adulthood” (Gaudet, 2007, p. 7). Those changes that have resulted in longer periods of adolescence or early adulthood include academic/occupational trajectories where 1980s and 1990s youth faced difficulties joining the labour market and, thus, those privileged enough extended their time in educational institutions; delay of parenthood by women entering the labour market; and, living in the family home longer, as well as returning to the family home after living away. The 2006 Canadian census data reveals such a trend among Canadian twenty-somethings: “In 2006, 43.5% of the 4.0 million young adults aged 20 to 29 either stayed in the parental home or moved back in, up from 41.1% in 2001. Twenty years ago, 32.1% of young adults lived in the parental home” (Statistics Canada, 2007, September 6). As Gaudet (2007) has concluded, “in short, youths in their twenties take on fewer conjugal, family and occupation commitments” than did their elders at the same age (p. 13).

Concepts such as ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 2004) and ‘postadolescence’ (Galland, 2001) have been proposed to mark those in their late teens and early twenties who “no longer feel like teenagers without necessarily feeling like adults” (Gaudet, 2007,

p. 16), calling attention to the changes in our perceptions of age-based and life-course categories. As Grossberg (2005) has argued, as the transition to adulthood has become more elusive, “modern culture has filled in the space between child and adult with so much – adolescent, teenager, youth, and more recently, tween – even while it is pushing back the moment of adulthood. Society cannot decide when the child becomes an adult, or when the child can claim to be an individual” (p. 303). In the 1960s there was no need for extra categories between adolescence and adulthood because the transitions appeared much clearer. Over time those transitions have changed drastically and it is no longer a straightforward progression from one category to the next for most young people: We have developed new categories as it takes longer to attain full adulthood in our society.<sup>16</sup>

As whom we consider to be ‘youth’ continues to change, those who are older in age are being grouped with young people rather than adults, affecting their ability to identify and act as citizens. With this change in definition and its root causes comes a shift in the expectations we have of youth and their participation in society. While it used to be expected that young people would focus primarily on securing a ‘good,’ career-focused job and on participating in society by means of the economy through labour (and consumption), they are now increasingly being asked to also contribute to their community or broader society through volunteering or otherwise helping others.

#### *Youth (un)employment & participation through labour*

In late-1960s and early-1970s NFB films, viewers see adults and youth often disagreeing on issues of morality and responsibility, particularly on how youth should be

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<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that American studies have shown that, when asked what makes a person an adult, youth rank processes such as “accepting responsibility for oneself” higher than discrete role transitions such as marriage and parenthood (Arnett & Galambos, 2003, p. 92).

participating in society. *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967) and *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968) were both produced in the late-1960s and focus on the actions of youth in Toronto's Yorkville neighbourhood during the summer of 1967. At this time, Yorkville was known as the hippie centre of Canada, often compared to Greenwich Village or Haight-Ashbury, two prominent United States urban areas known for their populations of counterculture youth.

As documented in both these films, Yorkville youth during this summer were becoming more active and explicitly confronting Toronto politicians with an attempt to close Yorkville Avenue to traffic.<sup>17</sup> Both films feature footage from a meeting between a group of Yorkville youth seeking to close the street to traffic and the former-mayor of Toronto, Allan Lamport, then a city councilor. Lamport repeatedly asks the youth if they are working or why they are not working, emphasizing that seeking paid labour is what they should ideally be doing. The young people counter Lamport by stating, "don't you think we are working in this moment by coming down here to talk to you?" Clearly the youth and Lamport have very different ideas of what constitutes responsible participation in society.

Further pointing out this dissonance, one young man in *Christopher's Movie Matinee* is filmed giving a speech about his take on the current state of society, arguing that youth are rejecting the increased mobility and consumerism they see championed by their elders: "You constantly have to be on the move, you know, or you're dead. I mean

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<sup>17</sup> This struggle over public space is particularly interesting as more recent research on children/youth and geography has shown that "the space of the street is often the only autonomous space that young people are able to carve out for themselves and that hanging around, and larking about, on the streets, in parks and in shopping malls, is one form of youth resistance (conscious and unconscious) to adult power" (Valentine, Skelton, & Chambers, 1998, p. 7).



it's connected with Yorkville. They can't stand people just sitting there doing nothing, you know." In *Flowers on a One-Way Street*, youth leader David Depoe clearly sums up the differing perspectives when he says, "we talk about sharing, they are talking about making profit. You know, they see us as a threat to their way of life." He later states that "we are talking about changes in values and we are not talking about man being judged by his properties. We are talking about him being judged by his personal work." These films portray the young people of the late-1960s challenging the adult-voiced assumption that labour and consumption are the ultimate forms of participation in society.

In the 1980s, youth (un)employment remained an issue for adults writing about youth. These concerns surfaced not only in Canada, but also in the United States and Europe. Notably, while the United Nations declared 1985 as the International Year of Youth and focused on the themes of education, participation of youth in society, and peace, the European Youth Forum lobbied to have unemployment considered a major theme (Coleman & Baum, 1985, p. xiii). Bibby and Posterski (1985) found, in a 1985 survey of Canadian high school students, that they were also experiencing concerns about unemployment: Youth were worried about what they would do after school and "for some that anxiety is intensified by current economic conditions" which included high levels of unemployment for 15 to 24 year olds (p. 57).

In an article analyzing Canadian youth unemployment and future job prospects, Hatton (1985) clarifies the situation in Canada. He argued that "the issue of youth unemployment has probably become the number one social problem in Canadian society at this time" (p. 48). According to the data, "in March 1984, there were 1,541,000 unemployed in Canada, of which 557,000 or 36.1 per cent were in the age group 15 to 24

years. The rate of unemployment for this age was 20.3 per cent, substantially higher than the national average rate for all ages of 12.7 per cent” (Hatton, 1985, p. 50). And these numbers, Hatton (1985) points out, only represent the ‘official’ unemployed, not those who were discouraged or hidden from employment.

Both academic research and news media reflected the concern many adults had about youth unemployment in the 1980s, reinforcing the view seen in the NFB’s late-1960s/early-1970s films that economic participation and labour were the desired activities of youth (and the way they entered into full adulthood and citizenship), at least according to adults. The message to youth was that if they were responsible young citizens they would focus on succeeding at school, developing employment-related skills, and finding a job.

### *New youth responsibilities*

Even though unemployment was an issue of concern for Canadian adults (and youth) in the 1980s, a new area of responsibility was added to the image of the young citizen in NFB films of the 1980s and later. While the adults in the late-1960s and early-1970s films encouraged responsibility with respect to youth excelling at school and securing jobs, the films of the 1980s, especially those associated with nuclear issues, including *Mile Zero: The SAGE Tour* (1988), *Bombs Away* (1988), and *Alive in the Nuclear Age* (1989), introduced the theme of responsibility to others in society.

*Mile Zero* (1988) addresses the issue of youth action as it documents the travels of four high school youth from Montreal as they embark on a cross-Canada tour of Canadian high schools to promote nuclear disarmament and peace. The film, directed by

well-known NFB director Bonnie Sherr Klein, the mother of one of the high school students featured in the film, *Mile Zero* is much like a travel diary, offering the viewer glimpses of the youth as they drive in their old station wagon, meet with the press, speak to students, experience car trouble, and have their own internal disagreements on how to approach the issue and their school presentations. The youth on tour repeatedly encourage the students they meet to start their own peace groups at their schools, suggesting that the issue of peace is one that youth have a responsibility to address and fight for.

The 1990s films about youth social and political action continue to emphasize youth responsibility to others and to broader society (perhaps even more strongly). Responsibility, and particularly the responsibility youth have to act on their own behalf or to help others, is a recurring theme during the 1990s.

*Bronwen & Yaffa (Moving Towards Tolerance)* (1996) features two young women organizing an anti-racism concert in their hometown of Halifax. Like *Mile Zero*, this film documents the actions and struggles of the two women as they work to raise awareness: Talking to youth on the streets, arranging for a venue when the original one falls through, getting permits, and re-establishing a relationship with an acquaintance who is trying to remove himself from the White supremacy movement. The film reinforces the perception that youth have a responsibility to others and to society, for example, when Yaffa, one of the young concert organizers, states: "If people really want to change things in their community, they got to get with it and put in some time."

In another 1990s film, *Someone To Talk To: Peer Helping in High School* (1996), this sense of youth responsibility remains prominent. As the title suggests, this film

addresses school-based peer helping and does so through documenting a peer helper program at an Ottawa high school. It features interviews with peer helpers and guidance counselors, as well as footage of peer helpers making presentations in classrooms and undergoing training. There is much talk in the film among the peer helpers, and from guidance counselors, about why peer helping is important both to individuals and within the school system. For peer helpers, it is a way to feel involved and helpful and many recount troubled times in their own lives that help them relate to younger students. The students repeatedly mention the importance of being there, providing support, and just being 'someone to talk to.' The message sent to viewers (who are assumed to be youth since, as I discuss below, these films tend to be educational and geared towards school-based viewing) is that it is their responsibility to help others and to spend their time trying to improve their school or community.

News media stories about youth action also emphasize the responsibility of youth to volunteer their time for particular social causes. Often, 1990s youth were encouraged to participate in this way by the news media. Stories ranged from government encouragement of youth volunteerism (Investing in idealism, 1990, November 30; New Katimavik to lead to jobs, 1995, August 28) to profiles of programs focused on peer helping (Rosenberg, 1991, July 7; Green, 1993, June 13), youth-run community centres (Judson, 1991, July 18), and youth media production (Klein, 1994, September; Featherstone, 1996, February 26).

Reports during the 1990s also highlight some new initiatives, in both the United States and Canada, where youth were invited to participate in policy-making and funding decisions (in some cases only after determined fight on their part). In Canada, Ayed

(1998, August 14) reports that there were “about 150 bright teenagers from across the country who gave up a week of the precious little summer they have left to talk policy – on how to end child poverty” (n.pag.) and, in Edmonton, a Children’s Circle Forum was held in which youth were able to voice their concerns to officials (Young people have something to say, 1999, November 1). In addition, Kruzenga (1999, April 1) reports that a First Nations Youth Council was set to be established in Manitoba.

Unfortunately these images of youth as intelligent and competent citizens who can and do act in citizenship roles were not the predominant ones during the decade. These stories were likely to have been lost within the coverage of youth crime and commentaries on Generation X slackers. When the media did publish positive stories about youth, however, the stories often worked to encourage youth participation, reinforcing the idea that responsible young people would engage in such activities. Notably, these encouraged activities were much more controlled and organized than in earlier decades (as I will discuss later), often in school-based groups, community centres, or other adult-run associations.

In the early-2000s such media coverage of youth action persists, as does the conflicting view that youth are apathetic and/or dangerous and need to participate more in their communities in positive ways. While stories about youth crime, drugs, and other dangers still dominate news media and apathy and materialism are prominent features in stereotypes of youth, there are some stories which focus on youth spaces and youth actions. Milan (2006, April) argues that “although Canadians, in general, have a reputation for helping others when needed, young people do not always enjoy such a positive image. Popular opinion and the media often portray youths in our society as lazy,

or indifferent. However, many young people are actively engaged in positive and altruistic social behaviours” (p. 11). Thus, community-based projects such as teen hotlines staffed by youth (Rosenberg, 2001, January 7) and programs that invite youth to participate in community development through facilitation (Feeney, 2007, January) have proved popular among some young people.

News stories in the 2000s have also profiled young activists or groups, with climate change and environmentalism becoming an especially popular focus. Kuchment (2007, April) argues that “changing the stodgy image of the environmental movement is at the heart of what many young activists are trying to do” (p. 76) and stories such as “Youth groups unite, demand action on climate change” (2006, October) and “Young people are taking responsibility” (2007, January) highlight the activities of youth engaged in social and political action. Notably, environmentalism became a much more accepted arena of activism in 2007 with the popularity and success of the film *An Inconvenient Truth* featuring former U.S. Vice President Al Gore raising the issue of global warming.<sup>18</sup>

These NFB films and news stories of the 1990s and early-2000s that focus on youth’s responsibilities to participate in society by helping others coincide with not only increasing awareness of children’s rights (particularly participation rights) as discussed in the previous chapter, but also with concerns over lack of political participation by youth and the integration of volunteerism and civic participation into the education system.

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<sup>18</sup> This film went on to win a number of awards, including the 2007 Academy Award for best feature-length documentary film and has resulted in a popularization of discussions regarding climate change, energy consumption, and carbon offsets.

## **Volunteerism, civic education, & politics**

While children's rights discussions increasingly incorporate participation rights, North American news media report growing concern with a lack of youth participation, particularly in politics. Beginning in the 1980s, reports in the United States reflected growing concerns about youth leisure time, with stories on after-school activities and the benefits of volunteerism (Brooks, 1987, January 4; Fischer, 1982, September 23). Calhoun (1986, May 31) argued: "We should challenge teen-agers, make them feel part of their communities and channel their energies to positive ends....What is needed is an approach that gives them the message that they are responsible and are needed" (p. 27).

Although concern over youth participation in politics has long existed, it became a more commonly reported issue in the 2000s with stories about low voter turnout among Canadian youth alongside reports of government attempts to attract youth attention and votes. In a study of citizenship and Canadian citizens Gidengil et al. (2004) found that "the single most important determinant of voting is age" with voting rates increasing along with age (p. 109). While some authors simply lament the low voter turnout of youth others are more critical. Davidson (2005, December) argues that

the decline of voter turnout among young people has been of paramount importance ever since the Canadian Election Study (CES) first brought this trend to light after the 2000 general election....It showed that the decline of electoral participation in Canada over the past 15 years was largely due to an unprecedented drop in turnout among the youngest age groups, combined with generational replacement. (n.pag.)

Similarly, Gunn (2003, January) states that "researchers argue that a directive must be formed to bring young voters into active citizenship" (n.pag.). This attitude that youth must, or should, do more and participate in organized politics is now a common public view.

While mainstream and popular reports often assume the benefits of increasing young voter turnout is a matter of commonsense in terms of improving democracy and making sure elections remain relevant, there is much debate in academic and research circles about whether low voter turnout among youth is a matter of life-cycle or generation. Those who argue that low voter turnout among youth is a matter of life-cycle believe that as people age they become more rooted in their community and they have stronger ties to government as they begin paying taxes. It is believed that young people will eventually start voting when it is more relevant in their lives, most often occurring in the late-20s and into one's 30s (Gidengil et al., 2004, p. 110). Those who believe low voter turnout is a matter of generation argue that there is something inherent to the current group of young people that differentiates it from earlier generations. They argue that these young people will not begin voting as they get older, but that they will continue to vote in low numbers. In a study of voting behaviors and citizenship in Canada, Gidengil et al. (2004) found that, in fact, "much of the decline in voter turnout among Canadians since 1988 is attributable to generational replacement" rather than life-cycle (p. 110) and they point to Canadian youth's lack of interest in, and knowledge about, politics as the main factor. Similarly, Putnam (2000) argues that "the more recent the cohort, the more dramatic its disengagement from community life. This is a strong clue that the overall decline in civic engagement in America over the last several decades had its roots in generational differences" (p. 251).

This is despite the fact that 2003 Statistics Canada data shows that "while young adults are less likely to vote than those over 30, this is not true of their political behaviour in other regards. In the year preceding the survey, nearly three in five (58%) 22- to 29-



year-olds engaged in at least one non-voting political activity” such as seeking out political information or signing a petition (Milan, 2005, p. 3). Putnam (2000) has pointed out that, in the U.S., “the last ten years have seen a substantial *increase* in volunteering and community service by young people,” though he cautions that this may be due to increased social pressure (e.g., requirements for high school graduation) (p. 265) rather than pro-social motivations.

With increasing concern regarding young Canadians’ voter turnout and political interest and participation, finding means to engage youth has become a priority. One area in particular is the incorporation of civic/citizenship education and service learning programs in schools. Following a focus on Canadian studies and multiculturalism in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, citizenship education in the 1990s experienced “a step back, if not even the abandonment of citizenship as an educational goal” as Canadian “schools were reassigned an economic agenda, so as to prepare students for the competition and entrepreneurship, supposedly necessary to our survival in a globalized economy” (Hébert & Sears, 2008, n.pag.). Students were treated as individualized consumers rather than citizens in this context. This seems to have also been the case in the United States:

Education apparently is not meant to allow people to take control of their government, to participate fully as citizens in the making of their own political future, or to imagine their own possible place in society....Instead, public education will teach students the skills of the job market, allowing the vast majority of students to fill their economic roles in the nation’s economy. (Grossberg, 2005, p. 73)

The 2000s have “seen a re-emergence of citizenship as a central focus of public schooling in Canada at least at the level of official rhetoric” and provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia have introduced high school civics courses while other

regions have revised curricula to emphasize “the development of active engaged citizens” (Hébert & Sears, 2008, n.pag.).

In some cases, schools are implementing service learning programs such that students are invited or required to volunteer or otherwise participate in the local community as part of their education. In one case, however, a former high school teacher in the United States writes about the resistance he had from parents in a conservative community when he encouraged youth to join a peace group called the Young leftists. His story reveals some of the tensions existing between youth and adults (Bruno, 1987, August 9), particularly around notions of citizenship and participation. Notably, his article is entitled “On the ‘Crime’ of Good Citizenship.” Such stories reveal interesting trends, particularly the encouragement of youth to participate in organized and supervised settings where activities are condoned by adults.

In addition to changes in education to emphasize citizenship and participation, recent news stories often discuss what the government is doing for youth or to engage youth. Nelson (2007, May 20) reports on the Manitoba Conservative party’s attempts to “win the youth” by promising to get Winnipeg’s NHL team back, while May 2007 saw a number of press releases about “Canada’s New Government” investing in youth through the establishment of a Service Canada Centre for Youth in Vancouver (Service Canada Centre, 2007, May) and through funding projects aimed at facilitating the transition to the workforce for Saskatchewan and Aboriginal youth (Canada’s new government invests over \$5.7 Million, 2007, May; Canada’s new government invests in Aboriginal youth, 2007, May). These funding initiatives clearly revert back to the common 1990s (and earlier) concern with youth employment and market participation rather than more recent

attempts to address issues of identity and socio-political participation within communities.

Recent decades have seen added responsibilities for young citizens who are now expected not only to find a job and participate in the economy, but also to participate in bettering society through volunteering and political participation (often meaning voting). As I introduced above and discuss further below, representations of young people in NFB films focus on such actions to better oneself through self-reflection and to help others through participation in volunteer initiatives or (more rarely) through self-initiated projects aimed at bettering society. Young people learn from these films that they have a responsibility to use their time and energy in these ways, and this is reinforced by civic education programs and service learning initiatives in schools.

### **Youth movements to peer helpers: Organizing & controlling youth action**

#### *Youth movements of the late-1960s: Young people can make a difference*

In the late-1960s, American and Canadian scholars and media were concerned, or perhaps obsessed, with what they termed the ‘youth movement(s)’ and contemporary scholarly texts pertaining to the 1960s continue to focus on this aspect of the decade (stretching into the 1970s as I’ll discuss below). As Flacks (1970) and Keniston (1971) suggest, the 1960s saw an explosion of writing, both academic and popular, about the youth of the time, particularly about the youth movement and protests. North American youth became a topic of lively discussion: Fears of out of control youth, of a growing generation gap, and of violent and destructive youth protests inspired many authors to write about what they considered unprecedented trends in society.

While student protests had been experienced in other countries, this level and form of activity among youth was new to the United States and Canada: “The feeling that there is something new about generational revolt is not accurate in global terms; but it is substantially correct for societies like our own” (Flacks, 1970, p. 119). As Keniston (1971) suggested about the U.S. at the time, “the ‘problem of youth,’ ‘the new generation,’ ‘troubled youth,’ ‘student dissent,’ and ‘the youth revolt’ are topics of extraordinary concern to most Americans....’Campus unrest,’ according to a June, 1970, Gallup Poll, was considered the nation’s main problem” (p. 5). While American accounts make up much of the history of the youth/student movement of the 1960s, Canadian scholars have argued that similar trends were evident among youth in Canada and that Canadian youth were affected and influenced by many of the same events and politics, albeit within a different context (Levitt, 1984).<sup>19</sup>

As many scholars writing about the times argue, the youth movement in the 1960s and 70s was comprised of different phases or periods. As Levitt (1984) has explained:

The movement first arose as a moral criticism of specific social and political practices and policies which were taken to be violating traditionally held and publicly professed ideas. Somewhat later, the New Left began to develop a global or ‘holistic’ critique of modern society (which it variously referred to as ‘corporate-liberal,’ ‘bureaucratic,’ ‘capitalist,’ ‘imperialist,’ ‘de-humanizing,’ and ‘materialistic’). At the same time, there was a shift in the movement away from issue-oriented protest to radical politics. (p. 7)

Scholars argue that non-violence and participatory democracy marked the beginning of the movement but that this gradually gave way to the following of powerful leaders and

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<sup>19</sup> For the purposes of this thesis I only provide a brief overview of the major trends discussed by scholars and popular writers. For more detailed accounts of the 1960s youth and student movements in North America, please see Flacks (1971), Heineman (2001), Keniston (1971), Levitt (1984), Roszak (1968/1995), Sampson & Korn (1970), and Westby (1976). For a Canadian account, particularly of the Toronto Yorkville area, see Henderson (2007).

to more violent and explosive actions of protest, or, as Flacks (1971) has explained it, a shift from pacifism, protest, and reform to confrontation, radicalization, and resistance.

For most scholars, the youth movement of the 1960s is closely tied to the student movement and, at times, there is little effort to distinguish between the two. The general consensus seems to be that the movement began at colleges and universities where youth gathered and formed protest groups and organizations; however, the movement eventually attracted interest from youth outside those institutions. According to Levitt (1984), “the spread of the counter-culture was not confined to the university, although the campuses soon became a visible stronghold of it, as one might have suspected” (p. 46). In addition, and as a reflection of this role of the universities as focal points, the youth movement of the 1960s was also associated primarily with urban centres, for example, New York and San Francisco in the United States, and Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver in Canada. This is reflected in the NFB films on youth of the late-1960s: Those focused on youth political and social activity are situated in large cities, namely Toronto and Montreal. The movement did expand outward, however, reaching beyond the universities and urban centres: “The new bohemia reached out to middle class youth and seized hold of it even in the middle of suburbia” (p. 46). In contrast, youth in rural and remote regions are rarely seen or heard in accounts of the 1960s youth movement, a theme that will recur throughout this thesis.

Scholarly writing on youth of the 1960s and early-1970s concentrates heavily on finding explanations for youth’s actions at the time. There was an overwhelming concern to determine why young people were participating in the youth movement, why they were resisting traditional social structures and ways of life, and why they were involving

themselves in political causes and protests (Flacks, 1970, 1971; Keniston, 1970; Westby, 1976). Most scholars' discussions of the reasons for such youth activity touch on themes of parental permissiveness and youth's expectations of decision-making power stemming from more democratic households, as well as the increasing numbers of youth attending post-secondary education (Flacks, 1970, 1971; Heineman, 2001; Keniston, 1971; Levitt, 1984; Westby, 1976). Many also conclude that youth activists of the 1960s were primarily from middle-class or upper-class households (Flacks, 1970; Keniston, 1971; Levitt, 1984).

While the African-American civil rights movement inspired many youth earlier in the decade, nearing the end of the 1960s the Vietnam War mobilized many more youth in North America (especially in the United States). The movement began what many consider its decline in the last half of the decade; however, *Time Magazine* named "today's youth" Man of the Year in the January 6, 1967 issue, reporting that "in the past three years, TIME has run more than 150 stories on one aspect or another of youth" (TIME'S 40th Man of the Year, n.pag.) and 1968 was seen as a particularly key year in the United States as it was marked by "violence, threatened and actual" (Levitt, 1984, p. 52).

In the NFB's portrayals of 1960s youth activism in Canada, 1967 marks the culminating year. The summer of that year was an active one with respect to the Canadian youth movement, at least in Toronto, and the NFB released two films documenting the particular aspects of the movement: *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967) and *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968), as introduced earlier. The NFB also released a retrospective film, aptly titled *The Summer of '67*, in 1994, looking back on the

films and youth movement of the 1960s. As Henderson (2007) has noted, “by 1966, Yorkville had become synonymous with the bohemian youth movement in Canada” (p. 20). The media compared it to New York’s Greenwich Village and later San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury, suggesting it was a place of deviant behaviour, drug use, and sexual promiscuity. The media attention brought both more youth to the area and more concern from adults, leading to increased police presence and tension between the city and Yorkville youth. As Henderson (2007) recounts, the summer of 1967 was notable for some key events, including a Victoria Day Love-In and a later sit-in protest to shut Yorkville Avenue to traffic. These events marked important and highly publicized moments in the history of the Canadian youth movement of the 1960s and are portrayed in the NFB films about youth action of the decade.

An important aspect of the youth movement of the 1960s was the sense that it was a broad-based and (relatively) far-reaching movement where large numbers of youth were concerned with improving or changing their lives and those of others: “All of these young people want to change the world, a world they consider bigoted, politically unresponsive to the masses, and headed for serious trouble” (Powledge, 1964, March 28, p. 20). Such broad-based and youth-instigated actions are portrayed in the NFB’s late-1960s and early-1970s films on youth socio-political participation.

The 1960s films *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967) and *Christopher’s Movie Matinee* (1968) have a common theme, and even share some footage, however, they are markedly different in style. Both are concerned with youth of the 1960s, particularly in Toronto, where a large group of youth attempted to have Yorkville Avenue closed to traffic, holding demonstrations and sit-ins to protest this and other issues. As will be

discussed further in chapter three, both of these films are filled with scenes of conflict between adults and youth.

Despite their common theme, while *Flowers on a One-Way Street* is a classic documentary film where the director (Robin Spry) is behind the scenes calling the shots, *Christopher's Movie Matinee* is explicitly presented as a collaboration between youth and the NFB. *Christopher's* was a project in which the NFB invited young people to participate in making a film about youth in the 1960s and the film contains many scenes of the youth planning shots and debating the filmmaking process with the NFB director (Mort Ransen) and crew. Thus, unlike *Flowers* which is aimed at documenting the Yorkville debates from the director's/NFB's point of view, *Christopher's* was, from the beginning, meant to be a film in which youth could depict their lives themselves. I discuss the youth-direction aspects of the film further in chapter five.

What most scholars seem to agree on is that the youth movement was contained within the 1960s, at least in terms of its more formal organization. As Levitt (1984) argues, "the movement was a phenomenon which belonged to the decade of the sixties; it was born with it, just as it died with it" (p. 8). It is believed, however, that the 1960s youth movement has had a sustained impact on society, that "the feminism, environmentalism, committed journalism, and academic radicalism of the seventies and early eighties owe their existence in no small measure to the generation of the New Left, for they are highly dependent upon the leadership and support of former New Leftists and of those who were influenced by the student movement" (Levitt, 1984, p. 9). Despite this insistence that the movement itself 'died' with the end of the decade, NFB films



portraying youth in the early-1970s, such as *Occupation* (1970) and *Beyond Kicks* (1972), continue to evince similar themes of protest and counterculture.

*Occupation* (1970) documents the protests of political science students at McGill University as they fight for more power in the hiring process of their department, continuing some of the themes of rebellion, protest, and conflict found in the 1960s films. The director and camera crew lived with the students who staged a sit-in at the political science building. The film documents the meetings between students and faculty, as well as discussions among the students about tactics and next steps as the protest goes on.

*Beyond Kicks* (1972) is rather different as it presents a look at a youth-run drug clinic where young volunteers help people (mainly youth) stay safe while coming down from drugs. This film's focus on youth and drug use reflects an important issue of the time, and the choice to document youth's volunteerism is the beginning of a shift in approach to youth participation in society as young people are seen working in an organized setting with the guidance of adults. Whereas films in the late-1960s focused on documenting youth's public protests and self-initiated attempts to challenge the status quo, later films such as this, were more likely to focus on presenting youth participating within organized structures, more often than not initiated by adults.

Thus, in the late-1960s, NFB films representing youth social and political action focused on presenting youth-initiated actions from love-ins and protests to meetings with the councilors of Toronto, and explicitly did so with the aim of showing a broad audience of adults and youth that young people could actively participate in social change. *Flowers on a One-Way Street* director Robin Spry states in his film proposal that it "would be a film about the possibility and nature of social action, it would be a film to show that

people can still affect their environment and their lives and it would be a film which would try to prove that anyone who says ‘There’s nothing I can do about it’ is wrong” (Spry, n.d.). In a similar vein, the director of *Occupation* (Bill Reid) writes in “Some notes from the filmmaker” (Reid, n.d.) that he wanted to “convey some sense of the real feeling of a political action as opposed to the retrospective clarity so often imposed on an event when a film is made” (p. 2), highlighting his desire to portray youth social action at the centre of his film.

Contrary to these films, the NFB films from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s that present youth social and political action focus heavily on educating youth in particular about how they can (or should) participate in society, and over the years it becomes increasingly evident that youth participation should come in the form of adult-sanctioned and adult-organized activities.

#### *Organizing & controlling youth participation: 1980s to the present*

Scattered throughout the 1980s across Canadian newspapers one finds stories about youth participating socially and politically in Canadian society. David Suzuki (1989, November 18) discusses the role of youth in the environmentalism movement, *The Gazette* (Youth workers reaching teens, 1989, November 15) carries a story about an organization reaching out to youth in arcades and other popular youth spaces, and DiManno (1989, November 15) reports on youth trying to help their cohorts live drug-free. The NFB film *Mile Zero* and the students’ cross-Canada tour for nuclear disarmament and peace is reported on in *The Gazette* (Scott, 1986, July 15). Each of these stories is a one-off discussion of youth participation. Unlike the late-1960s and early-

1970s, there is no sense of a ‘youth movement,’ either in scholarly or mainstream publications. Instead, 1980s news coverage of youth tended towards portraying troubled teens, with the occasional article about how one youth, or a small group, tried to contribute to their community. In most cases, these efforts on the part of youth are celebrated, however, at times, they are criticized for not being enough (DiManno, 1989, November 15).

The NFB films of the 1980s that focus on youth socio-political action display a shift in how such action is represented, moving from documenting a broad-based youth movement and its actions to showing small groups of young people addressing particular issues on a much more limited scale (or at least aiming for more modest impacts). As discussed above, the 1988 film *Mile Zero: The SAGE [Students Against Global Extermination] Tour* (1988) is about a Canada-wide tour by four youth who work to raise awareness about nuclear war and disarmament in Canadian schools. The film shows explicitly how the school is becoming a site of youth action. As the four youth tour Canada, it is through speaking primarily at high schools that they get their message across. In addition, the youth encourage and help the students they speak with to organize their own peace groups at their schools. While these actions are youth-initiated and young Canadians are seen speaking their minds and encouraging participation by other youth, the actions of the young people are understood to be sanctioned by the authorities at the schools they attend.

In *Thin Dreams* (1986), a young female director addresses the issue of girls and body image through conducting a focus group-type discussion session with young girls and interspersing this footage with short dramatized skits written and acted out by the

young discussion participants. Here the school plays a less explicit role; however, it was through local schools that the director recruited young women to participate and the school cafeteria features prominently in one of the dramatizations. The role of the school in supporting youth action, as a space in which to organize and/or to raise issues among youth, begins to take shape in the films of the 1980s and is something that continues to be seen in more recent decades.

One possible connection to this trend is the increasing concern parents had in the 1980s and more recent decades about the safety of their children. This may have resulted in the need for more adult-supervised and sanctioned activities for youth rather than the less-structured forms of youth activity seen in the 1960s and 70s. According to Valentine (2004), there is “a popular belief that contemporary children are more vulnerable to danger in public space than today’s adults were during their own childhoods, although there is no evidence to support this perception” (p. 99). Due to such fears, the emotional value of children, and the intersection between parenting choices and adult identities, many parents “choose to restrict their children’s outdoor play because the consequences of not doing so and losing a child make the risk not worthwhile” (Valentine, 2004, p. 100). Also, Grossberg (2005) has argued that “kids are growing up in an environment in which the slightest sign of deviance is met by diagnosis, control, and punishment” (p. 52). These trends have resulted in fewer opportunities for young people to participate in activities in public spaces, instead withdrawing into private homes or adult-organized spaces: “Outdoor play is now more home-centred and children are now spending increasing amounts of leisure time engaged in institutionalised (and often education or skills development) activities rather than independent free play” (Valentine, 2004, p.

101). This shift in the relationship between children, youth, and public space can be seen in changes in how youth action is represented in NFB films beginning in the 1980s and continuing through later decades.

The NFB films about youth social and political participation in the 1990s continue the trend towards showing young people participating in school-based or adult-sanctioned groups and being active and vocal about particular social issues. In *Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* (1992) youth are seen addressing issues of race and discrimination in their school, *Someone To Talk To: Peer Helping in High School* (1996) introduces viewers to a group of peer helpers in an Ontario high school, and *Taking Charge* (1996) shows different youth groups tackling various forms of discrimination in school settings. As discussed further in the next chapter, there is less intergenerational conflict present in these films as youth are seen acting in ways that are either implicitly or explicitly supported by the adults and authority figures present (where they are present).

*Speak It!* (1992) follows a group of high school students in Nova Scotia (with the film narrated by one young man in the group) as they deal with issues of race. The young people are seen attending a rally and subsequently forming a Cultural Awareness Youth Group chapter to raise awareness about racial issues in their school. They invite guest speakers (adults) who lead them in discussions about Black history, the education system, and what young people can do about discrimination. The youth plan and perform a play about Black history in Nova Scotia for their peers and attend the Provincial Black Youth conference.

The film, which was directed by Sylvia Hamilton, went on to become one of the NFB's most successful in the decade. In addition to reaching the intended youth

audiences the film was widely screened and won a number of awards. There was extensive press coverage of the film across Canada since the film's campaign was comprised of a number of events: "a launch in Halifax, where it was filmed (Feb. 5), a TVOntario telecast (Feb. 9), a series of community public screenings across the country (Feb. 10-Mar. 24), and a Nova Scotia-only telecast on CBC-TV (Feb. 22)" (Rennie, 1992, May 16, p. 2). In addition, the film was screened at the Margaret Mead Film Festival in New York in October 1993 (Rennie, 1993, September 27) and at the Atlantic Film Festival in the same month where Hamilton won the Rex Tasker Award for Best Atlantic Documentary (Rennie, 1993, October 5). The film also won the Canada Award (formerly the Multiculturalism Award) at the Gemini Awards in March 1994 (Gagnon, 1994, March 4, n.pag.), further demonstrating its reach, influence, and positive reception.

Like most other films of the 1980s, 90s, and 2000s that depict youth action, *Speak It!* was intended for a youth audience "in schools, clubs, institutions and community agencies" (Hamilton & Mahoney, 1991, p. 2), primarily for the purposes of educating young people. Thus, a User's Guide published by the Black Educators Association of Nova Scotia accompanies the video and outlines the historical context of the film and suggests themes for discussion (with discussion questions and suggested activities).

This is markedly different from earlier films in the 1960s and 70s that were aimed at a broad audience and meant to document youth actions and encourage social and political participation on a broad scale. Films from the early 2000s continue this trend with educational films such as *Respect Revolution* (2000) in which young people are seen publicly raising the issues of gender roles and sexual stereotypes and *XS Stress* (2004)

which presents an overview of the role stress plays in youth's lives (each is accompanied by a user's guide featuring tips for viewing and discussion questions).

With respect to the increasingly common portrayal of organized and controlled youth actions, as opposed to broad-based and youth-initiated/controlled ones, it is interesting to note that the 1984 film *The Children's Crusade* recounts the story of the Company of Young Canadians (CYC) – an attempt to organize 1960s youth – and its downfall. In *The Children's Crusade*, Donald Brittain, a well-known NFB filmmaker, narrates the story of the CYC, interspersed with stock footage from the 1960s and interviews with former CYC volunteers and staff who reflect back on their experiences.<sup>20</sup>

The Canadian government, we learn in the film, established the CYC as a means “through which the energies and talents of youth can be enlisted in projects for economic and social development.” As Donald Brittain's film proposal outlines, while the idea of the CYC was controversial it was eventually accepted and the group was created as a Crown Corporation with a budget of \$2 000 000 to be controlled by the volunteers (this was in contrast to the American Peace Corps). The story of the CYC as told in the film does highlight some of the good the youth did in their volunteer positions in Canadian communities (e.g., helping to organize local residents against demolition of their homes) but focuses more on the organizational disasters of the program, from the ‘pop-psychology’ training sessions that reportedly left some participants suffering from emotional breakdowns, to government interference and lack of support for the volunteers (e.g., offering one volunteer a horse and then a large fancy car when she requested a beat-up Volkswagen for transport in her rural location).

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<sup>20</sup> For more information on the Company of Young Canadians (CYC), its history and its demise, see Daly (1970) and Hamilton (1970).

This film is interesting for its retrospective look at how the government tried to organize and control the youth rebellion of the 1960s and how the attempt back-fired, eventually requiring the forced shutdown of the CYC when the government was criticized for financing protests and riots. What the film demonstrates is that attempts to organize young people's social and political participation were occurring prior to the 1980s where it takes hold more firmly, at least as portrayed in NFB films. Notably, it was not until the 1980s that such a film about organizing 1960s youth action was made.

Thus, running parallel to social and political trends in Canada to consider young people as social and political actors and to encourage their participation, NFB films shifted from documenting youth action in the late-1960s and early-1970s to educating youth about (proper) means of participation in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Films about youth participation shifted from documentaries broadcast to wide audiences to educational films for classroom use that were accompanied by user's guides and discussion questions. No longer portraying youth-organized forms of participation that explicitly questioned the status quo, NFB films in recent decades have instead focused on school-based youth groups such as peer helpers and cultural awareness or anti-discrimination groups.

This is not to imply that these social and political actions on the part of young Canadians are not worthwhile or valid, rather that such changes in representations of youth participation promote particular forms of participation when considered from a social constructionist perspective: Forms which are organized within adult-imposed structures, meaning that youth's actions are more likely to be adult-supported and sanctioned. In this way, NFB films about youth participation no longer present young



Canadians with images of fellow youth challenging the status quo or confronting adult authority figures as in the 1960s and 70s. Instead, these films teach young people (and the fact that the films are explicitly 'educational' reinforces this) that the proper way to participate in society is through non-confrontational and adult-sanctioned means.

### **Individualizing youth problems & actions**

In addition to changes in the forms of youth action represented over the years (youth-initiated/controlled and adult-initiated/controlled), changes have also occurred in terms of how youth are presented as individuals or as part of a social group. While youth action in the 1960s is represented as collective, with (large) groups of youth congregating for political and social purposes, more recently youth's actions and problems have been presented as individual matters, drawing attention away from collective action on the part of youth towards individual actions for self-improvement and individual success.

#### *Individual problems*

In this vein of individualizing youth issues, perceptions of youth drug use provide a compelling example. Use of illegal drugs is a theme running throughout scholarly and popular writing about youth between the 1960s and today. In the 1960s and early 70s many adults voiced concern about rising rates of drug use among youth; however, in the 1980s concerns about youth and drug use took on a different spin. No longer were adults concerned about youth wasting their lives away using marihuana, now they were making connections between drug use and youth crime, particularly as disadvantaged youth were perceived to be drawn into selling drugs in the face of unemployment and economic

hardship (Blumstein, 1995; Butts & Travis, 2002). Thus, youth drug use was no longer associated with love-ins and youth counterculture, it was now about youth crime and violence and signaled to adults grave problems among youth. While youth drug use in the 1960s was seen as a youth culture issue (a different lifestyle choice), it became individualized in the 1980s such that youth using drugs were seen as deficient or 'at risk' rather than as participating in a youth culture (however problematic).

With respect to drug use among youth, many authors during the 1980s analyzed statistics and studied the various potential causes for the increased use being found. As Kandel (1980) explains, research on drug use shifted in the 1970s from focusing on "extreme forms of dependence (e.g. heroin addiction and alcoholism) to the variety of use patterns observable in a normal population" (p. 238), demonstrating the vast cultural change being felt in America at the time. While this interest in more everyday or 'normal population' drug use may have been the perspective from the early 1970s until the early 1980s, by late in the decade and into the 1990s things had changed and concerns with youth violence and crime were highlighted: Blumstein (1995), for example, concludes that "the predominant change in homicide is attributable to a dramatic growth in youth homicide beginning in the mid-1980s" and attributes that growth to the "recruitment of young people into illicit drug markets" (p. 10).

In Canada, articles pertaining to youth and violence or crime were likely to be about the Young Offenders Act (YOA) which took effect in 1984. In 1986, authors reviewed the impact of the YOA, particularly the unexpectedly high numbers of youth in jails (New youth law, 1986, July 16). Later in the decade, changes to the Young Offenders Act were proposed prompting more articles (Vienneau, 1989, December 21).

In addition, there were stories throughout the decade regarding particular problems with youth violence and crime, or the systems in place to deal with them (Fine, 1989, March 23; Linder, 1988, February 5). Reflecting the tendency to individualize the issue of drugs, Canadian reporters during the 1980s focused primarily on the stresses in youth's lives that led to drug use, such as family structure and experiences of abuse (Brown, 1989, December 17; Haynes, 1989, November 19); however, rather than questioning these as broad social (collective) issues and structures they were regarded as individualized experiences.

As with the issue of drugs, youth unemployment became an individualized problem in the 1980s, as it largely remains today. Hatton (1985) rightfully points out in his discussion of Canadian youth unemployment in the 1980s that "in response to this intolerable crisis, one would normally expect some type of political response on the part of youth. However this has not materialised in any significant way" (p. 50). This reflects what is most notable (for our purposes) in the literature on youth in the 1980s: While there was much writing about 1960s youth's social and political activism (extending into the 1970s), very little was written about such actions on the part of 1980s youth.

Hatton's (1985) findings regarding youth unemployment suggest that youth blamed themselves for their lack of success in the job market, rather than finding fault in the broader society. What he concluded was that "the perceived source of unemployed youth's plight resides within themselves as, for example, in their lack of training and expertise. They are inclined to cite personal deficiencies, not broader structural factors in the economy and society, as the cause of their predicament. The result is a passive and individualistic withdrawal from society" (p. 50), rather than any social or political fight

for social change. Similarly, Brabazon (2005) argues that “the politics of desperation that shadowed young people through the 1980s and the 1990s resulted in inward attacks on the self, rather than outward assaults on the state” (p. 13).

As a consequence, the lack of attention paid to youth social and political action, particularly collective forms of action, continued in the 1990s. According to Wyn and White (2000), “the weight of responsibility on individuals – as a general social process – is further reinforced through a public devaluing of collective action taken by young people” (p. 174). Here they not only draw upon their theory that increased individualism is helping to define youth’s lives, but also conclude from their research that youth’s political and social actions (particularly collective ones) are most often looked down upon by adults, reinforcing a view of youth who employ agency only for individual purposes such as career advancement, rather than for instigating social change.

The trend towards focusing on youth’s individual skills and abilities is reflected in 1990s Canadian studies and reports concerning the country’s youth. Bibby’s (2001) book, *Canada’s teens: Today, yesterday, and tomorrow*, is based on national surveys of youth (mostly between 15 and 19 years of age) and adults conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, with one final youth survey in 2000. In it he outlines what youth reported as important to them (friendship and freedom ranked highest), their major concerns (life at school and after school, followed by time and money), social concerns (these include child abuse, AIDS, violence in schools, teen suicide, drugs, and racial discrimination), the increasing importance of friends and peer groups, and mutual stereotyping of youth and adults, among other data.

Interestingly, Bibby (2001) suggests that the high value that youth place on freedom and choice point to the predominance of individualism in youth's lives, connecting his findings to the arguments put forth by Wyn and White (2000). This issue is raised again by Bibby (2001) when he discusses the fact that youth of the 1990s "are somewhat more likely [than 1980s youth] to think they can transcend social constraints, and more likely to believe there is a chance element to what happens in their lives, be it in the form of supernatural forces or luck" (p. 178), resulting, perhaps, from the social emphasis on equality of opportunity and individual empowerment.

In *Generation on hold*, Côté and Allahar (1994) outline the political economy of youth and the contemporary contexts of Canadian youth's lives. Of particular interest here is their discussion of the social control of dissent. They argue that "the apathy, alienation, and disaffection of today's youth make them unwitting pawns in a system that does not really respect them. From the viewpoint of those in control, however, the secret is to not have the young recognize their servitude as servitude, or their apathy as apathy" (Côté & Allahar, 1994, p. 130). They highlight the value of youth who do not take political or social action to the powerful in society. Instead, youth are encouraged to act individually and "to narrow their thinking and to focus on issues of personal materialism and consumerism, from which big business is the principal beneficiary" (Côté & Allahar, 1994, p. 134). These examples of research on Canadian youth in the 1990s point to the changes taking place in how young people viewed themselves and were viewed by others: Young Canadians in the 1980s and 1990s were presented as focused on material gain and encountering problems such as drug use or unemployment primarily because of

their own shortcomings, and those in power benefited from youth adopting this view of themselves.

### Individual actions

We see a marked shift between the concerns about, and approaches taken to, youth in the 1960s and 70s where youth action was represented as a broad collective movement (or counterculture) and the concerns and action of youth in the 1980s and later where youth participation, when it does appear in mainstream representations, focuses on individual actions and issues. In these later decades, youth collective action is often absent and individual deficiencies are blamed for youth's problems such that the focus of change is placed on individual efforts (e.g., training, rehabilitation, consumerism) rather than actions aimed at widespread social change. Encouraging young people to 'participate' through building material wealth and presenting them with power through freedom of choice (over consumer goods) introduces a struggle between citizenship and consumerism that continues today and which I discuss further below.

The shift towards a focus on individualized actions and issues that began in the 1980s is reflected in the NFB films of that decade and onward. The two NFB films analyzed from the 1980s clearly show the changes between the late-1960s/early-1970s and the following decade. While the 1960s and 70s films pertaining to youth social and political action tended to be about a widespread youth movement (although the films themselves focused on Toronto youth) and its broad political aims and counterculture, the films of the 1980s depict individuals or small groups of young people organizing around particular issues. As introduced earlier, *Thin Dreams* (1986) is a film about girls and

body image directed by a young woman and *Mile Zero: The SAGE Tour* (1988) documents a Canada-wide tour made by four teen-agers who work to raise awareness about nuclear war and disarmament.

In *Thin Dreams* particularly there is no youth action beyond the making of the film (which is not to say that it was not an important act for the young director). Rather, while the film does address a particular issue facing young women at the time by showing girls discussing that issue, the film does not go any further to show any potential broader actions on the part of the girls or any implications for youth or society more broadly. *Mile Zero* is somewhat better at showing how the youth on the tour were actively encouraging the students they met to start their own disarmament groups at their schools. The film does not, however, provide any sense of whether those youth did start groups or whether a broad-based movement emerged from this tour. It was the tour and the four youth involved that were the focus of the film and it often seemed to be more about their personal journeys than the issues or opportunity for social change.

This focus on individual problems and actions rather than collective actions on the part of youth continues into the 1990s and early 2000s. As discussions below and in the remaining chapters will show, presentations of youth action increasingly promote participation through consumption, adult-sanctioned activities where youth are segregated from adults (and others), and actions which develop skills related to future employment. Interestingly, this trend towards focusing on individual youth's issues and actions in NFB films about youth social and political participation parallels trends found in U.S. news media representations of citizens: "Overall, we found that news paints a picture in which citizens have experiences and feelings rather than opinions" (Lewis,

Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, p. 136). As Lewis et al. (2005) argue, one potential consequence of focusing on citizens'/youth's individual experiences or affect is to suggest "that it is not appropriate for regular people to talk about politics in public" (p. 138). Rather, young people (and U.S. citizens in general, it seems) are encouraged to concentrate on their own individual matters and to react to social and political issues instead of actively confronting them with ideas or solutions that would require social change. Interestingly, Lewis et al. (2005) found that while citizens were represented as primarily passive, consumerism was one realm of action which was portrayed positively by U.S. news media.

#### **Youth: Citizens or consumers?**

##### *The youth market & consumption*

As early as the 1960s commentators were writing about the increasing power of youth within the commercial marketplace, arguing that the concept of the teenager was crafted by post-WWII marketers in the United States seeking a new demographic to sell to (Record, 2002). In popular media, for example, Hechinger and Hechinger (1961, March 19) wrote about youth and the market, voicing concern over the "growing and unreasonable domination by teen-agers over American adults, American life and American standards" (p. SM27). By 1968, news stories were reporting on the trend of youth charge accounts. A *Time Magazine* article (1968, February 2) entitled "Touting the teen-agers" claimed that "teen-age consumers not only account for an annual bonanza of some \$15 billion, but putting them on the credit rolls seems a good way to capture future customers" (n.pag.).



This connection between youth and consumption has only intensified over the decades. In the 1980s, news articles reported growing concern about corporations marketing directly to youth, although this was a trend evident more in the United States than in Canada (Douris, 1988, July 22). Such articles did point to the growing purchasing power of youth and the increasing amount of influence youth had on household purchases.

Discussion of youth and consumerism became even more frequent throughout the 1990s and 2000s with news stories about how to market to teenagers alongside commentary about what effects the youth market was having on culture and on youth themselves. Stories about trends in youth-targeted advertising are now common and cover issues such as the use of smart-aleck male teens in ads (Elliott, 1991, May 10), new youth-focused advertising agencies (Elliott, 1999, July 8), and package design and branding for youth (Pigeon, 1998, December). In addition, there is much written about the growing numbers of teens and tweens (generally thought of as those aged 8 to 12 years) and their spending power (Antilla, 1993, April 4; Kid power, 1999, November). So far in the 2000s, stories have focused on issues such as advertising prescription medicine to youth (namely acne treatments) (Winters Lauro, 2000, March 16), home décor for teens (Rohrlich, 2003, Mar 20), and use of celebrity power and technology in innovative marketing campaigns for style and hygiene products (Neff, 2007, May 7; Paoletta, 2007, May 12).

Beginning at least as early as the 1980s, the stereotype of youth began to include negative undertones of materialism. In fact, money was as important to Canadian youth, as it was to their parents. Nicholls (1989, August 12), for example, reported that “today’s

youth seem obsessed with material success. But for most in the 15-24 age group, money is only a means to an end. Happiness is the goal, although the definition of happiness varies” (p. A10). As he goes on to explain, material success was a common desire among Canadian youth at the time and many were working hard at jobs to fulfill their desires. Bibby and Posterski (1985) found that 1980s high school students ranked money as their second highest concern (following post-graduation prospects). As the authors argue, this was due to the increasing importance of designer clothing and other products being marketed to youth: “The power of youth peer pressure is carefully tapped by advertising firms” (p. 58), they point out.

But while surveys of young people showed their interest in money as a means to success and happiness, the stereotype of 1980s youth was that they were excessively materialistic and shallow. There was an overwhelming sense that youth in the 1980s were not interested in social or political action to better society but were more concerned with material gains. Kakutani (1984, April 22) demonstrates how this view of youth was reflected in 1980s teen films where she found the theme of rebellion (popular in earlier teen films) watered down: “Although they [today’s teen-age movies] appropriate imagery from the old rebel films, these movies associate rebellion less with social issues of moral principles, than with the ‘me generation’ concerns of ambition and self-fulfillment.” In reflecting youth of the 1980s, films of that decade portray youth who “not only share their elders’s [*sic*] expectations, but also suffer few confusions over who they are. They know what they want, and what they want is usually pretty much in line with the status quo” (p. H22). This perception of youth reflected in mainstream culture drew attention

away from any social or political actions youth may have been involved in, perhaps playing a role in the lack of discussion about youth action in the 1980s.

Another possible explanation for the decline in public interest in youth movements of the 1980s could be the effects of co-optation of the 1960s movements. As Sheleff (1981) has argued, the quiet that followed the 1960s movements was, in some respects, “because many of the ideas of the counterculture had been accepted or co-opted” (p. 285). In fact, “the changes in the worlds of advertising, fashion, and business in general during the sixties were a greater part of the cultural upheaval of the period than is customarily acknowledged” (Frank, 1997, p. 230). According to Frank (1997), “hip is the cultural life-blood of the consumer society” (p. 234) where “rebel youth culture will always be found to fit the same profile, will always be understood as an updating of the 1960s original....No matter what the kids are actually doing, youth culture as we see it in ads, television, and mass circulation magazines is always a flamboyant affirmation of the core tenets of hip consumerism” (p. 235). “‘Alternative’ is, and always has been, good business,” argue Heath and Potter (2004, p. 130). Generation after generation, youth culture and rebellion is adopted and adapted by corporations and marketers, and “the sixties...are a commercial template for our times, a historical prototype for the construction of cultural machines that transform alienation and despair into consent” (Frank, 1997, p, 235). As I discuss below, the roles of citizen and consumer often overlap, especially for youth.

### The power of consumer choice

As Wyn and White (2000) state, “research and writing on young people during the past decade has produced a complex picture in which young people’s lives are often characterized by contradiction,” and where youth “is a category of disqualification or lacks as a legal subject, but as a commodity, youth is highly desirable and powerful” (p. 165). According to Côté and Allahar (1994), “in Canada, marketing researchers estimate that teenagers spend \$6 billion per year on consumer products” (p. 119), and that was in 1994.

For researchers such as Miles, Cliff, and Burr (1998) youth consumption requires further examination. They argue that “whilst place and class allegiances have broken down in recent years, young people have apparently come to look to consumer goods as a means of self-fulfillment” (Miles et al., 1998, p. 82) and they set out to examine consumer meanings. They conclude that “consumer goods appear to provide the only viable resource by which constructive and arguably creative, conceptions of self can be established....In the end, what is really important here is the fact that young people *feel* that they need consumer goods to fill a gap in their lives” [emphasis in the original] (Miles et al., 1998, p. 93). This is similar to Raby’s (2002b) finding that discourses of consumerism often offer youth more agency than other discourses of adolescence.

This trend is reflected in a discussion of youth and employment in the film *All the Right Stuff* (1997) which highlights how changing patterns in labour may be contributing to an extension of youth and increased consumerism. *All the Right Stuff* is a film focused on marketing to youth and youth consumption. The film follows a young man through a shopping mall as he shops, and interviews with him and others at the mall (including

other youth, sales-clerks, local musicians and artists, as well as ‘experts’) are interspersed. Youth discuss the importance of clothing labels and particular styles within their experiences of youth culture, while also commenting on how they know advertisers are marketing to them to encourage them to buy. They are clearly aware of this paradox: “Young people like to think we’re being original, and yet we also want to fit in with the right crowd. Advertisers take advantage of that every chance they get,” comments one youth in the film.

The adults and ‘experts’ interviewed are not derogatory towards youth but talk about how powerful the marketing machine is and what effects it may be having on young people. Youth express frustration at feeling that they are unable to demonstrate responsibility in a relevant job. One young man says that there are not many jobs for youth and that most of them are not good jobs, while another argues that you “always have to start at the bottom. And nowadays, there’s a real good chance you’ll stay there, too.” A middle-aged female ‘expert’ featured in the film (she is not identified by name) discusses the issue and connects it to the importance of a sense of belonging and of responsibility. She argues that

the low economic status of young people means that an entry level to adulthood is inaccessible to them. They are not permitted to enter the community as adults. If you don’t give them an opportunity to be meaningful participants in the construction of objects or community or houses or books or ideas or anything like that, well, then they’re only left to be consumers. And if you can only be a consumer, then you gotta consume.

Both youth and adults in the film sense that young people are striving to participate in the adult world, however, they are facing a number of barriers which prevent them from feeling fulfilled through employment. At the same time, marketers are scrambling to

capture youth's attention, providing them with a sense of power and belonging through consumption.

The young author Manji (1997) supports this view, arguing that consumption by youth is often pitted against (or presented as an alternative to) citizenship: "I find the citizen-or-worker ultimatum as deadening as the neo-conservative tendency to equate citizens with consumers. Fact is, neither the centrally planned economy nor the free market can be relied on to promote belonging" (p. 145).<sup>21</sup> Along similar lines, Kapur (2005) states in her book *Coining for capital* that "the invention of children as consumers" has resulted in "a growing up of children as they are granted certain recognition and autonomy as consumers" (p. 163).

Other authors have pointed to these trends as youth marketing and research companies are established and commercial interests infiltrate the various areas of children's and youth's lives. In commentary-style news pieces Lee (1997, November 9) and Kakutani (1997, May 11) both discuss a social shift in which the younger generation is taking over control of popular culture. Lee (1997, November 9) questions what this popular culture is doing to youth, quoting Howe who says that the new generation "is being taught to be good citizens, not to think too deeply about the issues" (p. ST4). Similarly, Powers (1998, April 29) comments that "since consumerism is the only kind of citizenship they are usually offered, young people use it the best they can, turning the rhymes of hip-hop into shared histories and transforming Internet chat rooms into impromptu community forums" (p. G8).

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<sup>21</sup> Irshad Manji was notably a young journalist in Canada during the 1990s and is now a successful journalist, author, activist, and scholar. For more information see <http://www.irshadmanji.com/>.

My focus in this thesis on the citizenship aspects of youth's participation in society is intimately tied up with questions of consumption and youth markets. It has even been suggested that the current preoccupation with young voters in Canada may be driven by their role as consumers rather than citizens: Korski (2006, January) argues that other underrepresented voter groups are ignored while the media care about youth voting "because young Canadians are the kind of people who spend \$150 on shoes" (p. 7).<sup>22</sup> The line between citizen and consumer becomes increasingly blurred as "youth is, after all, often the ideological battleground in contests of immigration and citizenship as well as the prime consumer target for the leisure industry" (Maira & Soep, 2005, p. xix).

What complicates matters is that, historically, youth movements have often utilized consumption as a means of protest, or at least of distinguishing youth culture from adult culture (e.g., through music and fashion). In more recent efforts, consumption and youth movements are tied through the increasing use of boycotts and protesting against corporations because of their practices and products (Klein, 2000; Quart, 2003). Thus, not only are citizenship and consumption tied together as governments treat citizens like consumers and corporations sell youth a sense of belonging through the power of consumer choice, but also in that social and political movements often incorporate elements of consumption either as ways of presenting an 'alternative' to the mainstream or as the target of protests and social action. As Klein (2000) has argued,

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<sup>22</sup> In a more direct and explicit manner, the blurring of citizenship and consumption in the United States intensified following the attacks of 9/11. In a study of news media representations of citizens, Lewis, Inthorn, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005) found that "news media defined shopping as a way in which citizens could make an active contribution to the well-being of their national community" and "consumerism became defined as an active form of citizen engagement" (p. 123) despite citizens being otherwise portrayed as passive and reactionary rather than active in setting any social or political agenda.

however, “anticorporate activism walks a precarious line between self-satisfied consumer rights and engaged political action” (p. 428).

Despite this fine line, campaigns for social change continue to engage the public as consumers and “try to satisfy teens’ errant high-mindedness and altruism...by associating their brands with a good cause, a method termed *cause-based marketing*” [emphasis in the original] (Quart, 2003, p. 192). In 2006, for example, popular singer and activist Bono helped launch (RED), an organization which partners “with the world’s most iconic brands to produce (PRODUCT)RED branded products. A percentage of each (PRODUCT)RED product sold is given to The Global Fund” to support those affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa ([PRODUCT]RED, n.d., n.pag.). The public is called upon to act in their capacity as consumers as means of helping others and participating in society: “You, the consumer, can take your purchase to the power of (RED) simply by upgrading your choice. Thus the proposition: (YOU)RED. Be embraced, take your own fine self to the power of (RED). What better way to become a good-looking samaritan?!” ([PRODUCT]RED, n.d., n.pag.).

This blurring of activism and consumption is highly criticized by Heath and Potter (2004) in their book *The rebel sell: Why the culture can’t be jammed*. They argue that “one of the biggest ironies of the antiglobalization movement [or current counterculture] in general is that for all its opposition to consumerism, it effectively reduces citizenship to consumer action” (p. 330). The various social and political challenges we perceive, from environmental damage to excess consumption, are seemingly so complicated and beyond our control that the perceived solution, according to Heath and Potter (2004), is “individualistic sartorial and stylistic rebellion” (p. 322). They argue, instead, that the



solutions lie in democratic politics and working through national governments and other representative institutions, suggesting a refocusing on the role of citizens in relation to the state and democracy and a move away from considerations of citizens as primarily consumers.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last four decades, perceptions of youth have continuously changed as the age range associated with adolescence and youth has shifted to include older age brackets as life-course events no longer occur in straight-forward and clear-cut trajectories, effectively mapping out the transition to adulthood. Rather, as young people face lengthening stretches of education to meet employment standards and successful careers take longer to establish they find themselves in precarious positions as citizens with limited (economic) independence. These transitions have affected the ways in which youth are considered as participatory citizens with recent concerns over youth's lack of interest in politics and voting and a renewed interest in civic education and volunteerism in Canadian schools. Youth now face added responsibilities not only to themselves in terms of becoming educated and skilled for gainful employment, but also to others in their communities whom they are expected to aid.

Changes in perceptions of youth as socio-political actors and citizens is also evident in NFB films across the decades where representations of youth action have shifted away from documenting broad-based youth-initiated collective actions (as seen most clearly in late-1960s films) to promoting small-scale adult-sanctioned youth action in the form of student groups and volunteer initiatives, often through educational films.

And despite the growing emphasis on youth volunteerism and community service, NFB representations of youth action have, in recent years, focused on individual youth problems and actions, refraining from making connections between youth issues and broad social structures. Instead of questioning the political economic aspects of youth labour, for example, the news coverage and NFB films of the 1990s and early-2000s promote activities such as volunteering as means of improving one's resume and gaining important employment skills (in addition to the moral goal of helping others and being a 'good' citizen).

Finally, in this chapter I discussed the important issue of youth consumerism and the blurring line between citizen and consumer. As young people are increasingly held back from full adult citizenship due to changing life-course trajectories which leave them dependent on others for longer periods, corporations and marketers are offering youth power in the form of consumer choice and courting them through targeted marketing campaigns and innovative strategies.

In the following chapter I address the fundamental issue of age and generation while considering how representations of Canadian youth participation help to construct youth/adult relationships. The changes to how youth and youth action are perceived, as discussed in this chapter, are necessarily affected by considerations of age and generation as the categories of youth and adult are defined against one another, and representations of youth/adult relationships play an important role in defining the position of the young Canadian citizen.

### Chapter 3 – Defining the ‘good’ young citizen: Youth/Adult relationships

*I don't know. I think it says a little bit about the parents, though. It is kind of disappointing, when you realize that we were – like they're always saying students don't know what they're talking about, they're not – they don't do anything for the school, for the community, and yet, here are a group of students who, you know, had a good intention, they wanted to do something about it. They want to help students – help parents bridge the gap between them, and yet the parents are the ones here who decided not to come and not to participate in this. And it's a little upsetting. And you kind of think, "Well, maybe the students aren't always the ones to blame in situations." (young man in the NFB film Someone To Talk To: Peer Helping in High School, 1996, reflecting on a failed attempt by students to engage parents)*

In this chapter I shift from discussing the rethinking of youth as a concept and its effects on perceptions of youth actions in society to address the issue of age more specifically, particularly how the concepts of age and generation work to produce particular power relations between youth and adults as they are defined against one another. Age categories and comparisons between generations (often influenced by nostalgia for one's own childhood/youth or an idealized version of such) serve to position children and young people as lesser beings and as always incomplete in relation to adults. This is reflected in youth stereotypes and media representations of youth, as well as more broadly in how young people are considered as citizens and active members of society. As my discussion in this chapter will show, North American society has been, and remains, preoccupied with generational differences which results in drawing attention to intergenerational conflict and tensions.

## **Generation & age**

A concept closely aligned with that of 'youth' is 'generation.' The word 'generation' is heard often in contemporary North America: 'Generation Y' and 'the next generation,' are phrases recurrent in popular and news media, as well as political rhetoric. As Pilcher (1994) has argued, 'generation' is, however, an often overlooked term despite our common use of it to differentiate age groupings (e.g., 'my generation' and 'future generations') and to locate ourselves in historical time (e.g., the 60s generation, Generation X).

Generational approaches to youth and youth cultures are focused on "the continuity/discontinuity of inter-generational values" (Brake, 1985, p. 24), unlike structural explanations of youth which focus more on the relationship between youth and social class, particularly how the social order evolves and continues (Pilcher, 1994). In the structuralist vein, scholars such as Parsons (1942/1964) and Eisenstadt (1956) have produced models of youth where youth is primarily seen as a transition period between childhood and adulthood (a view common in psychological perspectives as discussed in the introductory chapter), and it is argued that youth "do not seek to change society, but to re-enter it" (Brake, 1985, p. 25). The generational perspective, on the other hand, focuses on age-cohort collective experiences developing out of social circumstances and aims to provide more insight regarding social change.

Mannheim's (1923/1952) "The problem of generations" is considered to be one of the first important works on this topic. In it "Mannheim identifies generational location as a key aspect of the existential determination of knowledge" (Pilcher, 1994, p. 483), suggesting that behaviors, feelings, and thoughts are likely to be associated with a

particular generation – with persons experiencing young adulthood at the same historical moment. According to Schuman and Scott (1989), Mannheim “emphasized that a generation is a social creation rather than a biological necessity” and that “only where events occur in such a manner as to demarcate a cohort in terms of its ‘historical-social’ consciousness, should we speak of a true generation” (p. 359). For Mannheim (1923/1952), “*youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units*” [emphasis in the original] (p. 304). Further, Mannheim’s approach suggests that “the more rapid the [existing social] change, the greater the gap between generational sets of consciousness” (Brake, 1985, p. 25). Thus, Mannheim’s theory of generations and generational units depends on the socio-historical context rather than on cyclical or rhythmical patterns (Pilcher, 1994, p. 482) and has more to tell us about social change than structuralist approaches to youth.

A generations approach to youth often surfaces in discussion of youth participation in (formal) politics, as suggested in my comments on youth and voting in the previous chapter. As Rintala (1974) has stated, “implicit in a generations approach to politics is the assumption that an individual’s political attitudes do not undergo substantial change during the course of his adult lifetime” but are instead formed mainly during young adulthood (p. 17). This is in contrast to a life-cycle approach which contends that youth will be more likely to vote as they get older and become more involved in their communities and the nation (e.g., through school boards or paying taxes, etc.) (Gidengil et al., 2004).

Much like the difficulties of defining ‘youth,’ defining a generation is equally challenging. According to Pilcher (1994), there is a tension between the qualitative nature of generations (particularly social generations distinguished by qualitative experience) and the quantitative nature (marked by age and time measured in numerical units) (p. 487). While Mannheim (1923/1952) did not set out a particular age in which generational formation takes place, according to Schuman and Scott (1989), he implicitly suggested the span between 17 and 25 years of age, focusing on late adolescence and early adulthood as the most formative years for political and social views.

This delineation remains vague, however, and there has been little agreement among scholars as to what constitutes a particular generation or how to distinguish between them. The label Generation X, for example, has been applied to various age groups, from those born in the late 1950s and the 1960s (Coupland, 1991) to those born between 1961 and 1981 (Strauss & Howe, 1992). It is not my intention here to delve into the intricacies of generational theory: Rather, I wish to point out that the concept of generation is commonly used when we speak about youth in our society. This is particularly the case with respect to youth socio-political participation and this tendency often introduces an aspect of comparison between age groups: Comparisons that, like those of age, inevitably leave young people at a disadvantage.

As argued by Raby (2002a), “age is one of the fundamental organizing categories across societies” (p. 19). It plays a fundamental role in our view of human development and structures the education system, not to mention pensions and other forms of social support. We associate (and regulate) particular life events – from marriage, employment, and child bearing, to drinking, driving, and sex – with particular ages. As Lesko (1996b)

has argued, youth “cannot go backward to childhood nor forward to adulthood ‘before their time’ without incurring derogatory labels, for example, immature, loose, or precocious” (p. 456). Age is used to differentiate people from one another, to outline what is (in)appropriate for certain groups/cohorts at certain points in life: “The distinctiveness of adolescence is captured and condensed in age....Teenagers are deemed worlds apart from adults on the basis of age; they are said to inhabit a different time, which is radically separate from the time of adulthood or childhood” (Lesko, 1996b, p. 456).

In her discussion of the education system, Lesko (1996b) outlines a reliance on age and age-based assessments, arguing that “narrow age groups also increasingly isolate younger people from older ones, so the peer-organization of social institutions forces continuous comparisons among age-mates” (p. 465). This, she argues, has resulted in youth being “multiply inferior” and in a position where “they are expected to measure up to finely tuned assessments of productivity, learning, morality, achievement while remaining in a social position that is dependent and watched over by not only adults but by their age-peers, as well” (Lesko, 1996b, p. 465).

The use of age to structure perceived norms of development and life choices has resulted in an essentialized view of age where children and youth are necessarily seen as ‘in development’ (becoming) and thus incomplete and inferior to adults. Lesko (1996a) argues that “age is a positional superiority in which adults always come out better, no matter what the particular issues or behaviors” (p. 149). This position of inferiority experienced by youth in relation to adults is reinforced both by the use of age as a primary structuring concept as well as by continued generational comparisons. As I

explore in the remainder of this chapter, youth/adult relationships are oftentimes marked by tension and conflict and how these relationships play out has impacts on (perceptions of) youth social and political participation.

### **The generation gap**

The issue of generation, and in particular a generation gap, took hold in the 1960s as adults experienced youth challenging the status quo and choosing lifestyles and values different from their own. At the time it was stated that “not only has the gap become a political issue, it has been elevated to the level of a national problem” (Bengtson, 1972, p. 197). Scholars during this time drew upon generational theory to explain these social changes. Flacks (1971), for example, uses Mannheim’s theory of generational units as the basis of his discussion of the student and youth movements of the 1960s. He argues that Mannheim’s explanation of how “small groups of young people form around a particular set of new perspectives and begin to establish a distinct and visible cultural pattern in opposition to those that are established” reflects the experiences of the 1960s (p. 51). According to Flacks (1971), while “the youth culture that prevailed in American high schools and colleges prior to the sixties was smoothly integrated with the most conventional values and sentiments held by American adults,” the early 1960s marked the emergence of a new generational unit (p. 51). While the newness of the 1960s youth movement/rebellion has been challenged (Sheleff, 1981), the focus scholars and the media placed on generations during the 1960s and 1970s is important: This focus led to comparing and contrasting generations and resulted in a preoccupation with the ‘generation gap’ and generational differences.



In his research on 1960s politics, Rintala (1974) argues that “generational conflict is one of the major themes running through most of world literature” (p. 16). The news media also reported changing demographics during the 1960s and pointed to the power of the younger generation as it grew in size, fueling discussion of shifting power between the generations. For example, there were a number of news articles in the late 1960s which focused attention on the large number of youth in America at the time: A February 2, 1968 *Time Magazine* article claimed that “more than half the national population will soon be under 25 years of age” (Touting the teen-agers, p. E12) and according to a December 24, 1965 article, “nearly half of all Americans are now 25 or under, and the rest of the population, while not yet in danger of being liquidated, appears rather nervous and definitely on the defensive” (On not losing one’s cool about the young, 1965, n.pag.).

As I discuss throughout this chapter, NFB films also reflect this unease between youth and adults during the 1960s. As one example, the film *The Invention of the Adolescent* (1967) is entirely about the development of the idea of the adolescent, explaining the history of the concept within the context of a 1960s generation gap and efforts to come to terms with the tension between young people and adults. The narrator of the film argues that conceptualizations of children and youth had changed over time and that such changes led to a situation in the 1960s where young people and adults were seemingly less and less alike, referring to the “more bitter, more widespread, more ominous” rebellion of the youth of the 1960s than of previous generations.

This perspective was also common in popular media of the time as the focus on the generation gap drew upon and reinforced fear and anger between youth and adults. As Lubell (1971) argues, “one of the more disquieting aspects of the much advertised

‘generation gap’ is our apparent inability to analyze, diagnose, and understand it” (p. 107). In fact, his research suggested that there was more continuity in the views of youth and adults than discontinuity and that youth valued the role of parents in their lives (Lubell, 1971, p. 108). This perspective seems to have, for the most part, been overlooked, however, as the differences and gap between the generations remained the focus of popular and academic discussion.

In an effort to understand the differences between youth and adults, scholars such as Sheleff (1981) used the framework of generational conflict. From this perspective, he argues that the causes of generational conflict “lie in the different perceptions that different generations simultaneously inhabiting the earth bring to bear on social reality: the old in terms of their accumulated personal experiences of the past, the young in terms of their hopes and plans for the future” (Sheleff, 1981, p. 5). Thus, the generations (of youth and adults) will always be in a tenuous relationship since they only see society from their own perspective relative to their position in the life-cycle.

This tenuous relationship is imbued with power relations as the generations struggle to define society and means/avenues of social change. Younger generations often have less social, political, or economic power and as Sheleff (1981) found, little attention was paid to adult hostility toward the young in the 1960s and 1970s and that “in many cases, the hostility of parents and adults was blamed on the young, who were seen to have provoked a reactive force” (p. 6). He concludes that “while generational hostilities are in reality bidirectional, too often it is presented as flowing only from the young to the old” (p. 8).

Some news articles reported increasing fear of young people among adults in the 1960s. For example, in a speech made in 1961, Bishop (1961) argued that adults “are frightened by the fact that today’s youth do not cherish the heritage which we wanted to hand on to them” (p. 92). The sense of fear among adults with respect to youth is palpable in other writing and speeches of the day. One powerful example is Shofstall’s speech in 1963 in which the Dean of Students of Arizona State University outlined the “ten fatal delusions” he believed youth had accepted and that had “softened them up” making them “almost certain victims of the propaganda of Socialism” (p. 400). The delusions in question included: There is no eternal truth, material change is progress, and right and wrong are relative, for example.

From the mid-1970s through the 1980s there was less talk of a generation gap as fewer youth were seen openly protesting existing values. Rather, youth and adults were often perceived to agree on important social and political issues and to act in collaboration (e.g., against nuclear war). Visibility of youth-centred movements was limited in the 1980s and as Sheleff (1981) suggested at the time, “the youth movement seems to have become almost moribund” (p. 4). In addition, the 1960s emphasis on the growing number of youth in North America declined in the early 1970s when reports of an aging American population became more common. Warner (1973, September 17) claimed that in the 1960s, “as a result of the post-World War II baby boom, the age group of 14 to 24 expanded by an unprecedented 13 million, or 52%....In the 1970s, however, this age group will increase by only some 4.3 million, while in the 1980s it will decline” (n.pag.). Such reports served to quell some of the fear that there was a large group of young people taking over.

Notably, the generation gap remains a theme in popular and academic work on youth. As Grossberg (2005) asserts regarding generational conflicts during the late-1980s and 1990s,

what was at stake was a question of what it meant to be young, of the 'proper' way to be young, and of who can claim 'youth' as its own possession. Youth is, after all, not only biological and generational; in U.S. society it has powerful affective, ideological, and economic resonances. It is as much about attitude and lifestyle, politics and worldview, as it is about the condition of one's body. (p. 38)

In the 1990s, this conflict was exacerbated when the story of changing demographics and a growing number of youth resurfaced. It is not surprising that youth-focused news articles were common in a decade when one opened with the following: "If you thought teenagers were relatively powerless in the grand scheme of things, try to imagine what 800 million of them could do if they put their minds to it. That's the scenario that's got population experts worried as next summer the world's teenage population reaches the highest level it's ever been in the history of the human race" (Ayed, 1998, November 12, n.pag.). As baby boomers (those who were youth during the 1960s and 1970s) were feeling the pressure of a new generation gaining ground, Canadian and American headlines pertaining to youth in the 1990s and the 2000s covered a number of topics from youth violence (and the Young Offenders Act in Canada) to how to market to teenagers. At the end of the decade, David (1999) pointed out that "adolescents as a whole are considered to be a problem population, but one in which the problems are said to reside with the age cohort, rather than with the society or individual" (p. 8).

The notion of a generation gap has not been as explicitly talked about in the 2000s as in previous decades; however, the ways in which the baby boomers and subsequent generations (including their children) are discussed in news media suggest that such a gap is still perceived to exist. Frequently, stories compare one group to another, at times even

pitting them against each other, whether competing for jobs or for holding different values and morals. For example, Slatalla (2001, March 29) claims that “the young are not like you and me” (p. G6) and goes on to recount how she is trying to understand her 12 year old daughter’s thinking by browsing popular online teen shopping websites. The title itself points to the assumption that teenagers are ‘alien’ by referring to “The Mind of the Teenus Horribilis.” In a similar vein, the Canadian book *My son is an alien: A cultural portrait of today’s youth* (Danesi, 2003) was published in 2003, and as recently as the Summer of 2008 CBC Radio 1 ran a weekly show about teenagers entitled “Alien Nation,” demonstrating that the tendency to think of youth as ‘alien’ and ‘other’ has not subsided. In the American context, Grossberg (2005) argues that “youth are represented as somehow essentially and radically different, as mysterious freaks of nature” (p. 18).

In more concrete terms, an article in *Fortune Magazine* entitled “Attracting the twentysomething worker” (Hira, 2007, May 28) puts forth the view that as baby boomers retire a new workplace culture will emerge. Generation Y is ‘profiled’ and characterized as follows:

Its members are different in many respects, from their upbringing to their politics. But it might be their effect on the workplace that makes them truly noteworthy – more so than other generations of twentysomethings that writers have been collectively profiling since time immemorial. They’re ambitious, they’re demanding and they question everything, so if there isn’t a good reason for that long commute or late night, don’t expect them to do it. When it comes to loyalty, the companies they work for are last on their list – behind their families, their friends, their communities, their co-workers and, of course, themselves. (n.pag.)

This kind of article works to further differentiate youth from adults, the new generation (Generation Y) from the baby boomers, and also reinforces mostly negative stereotypes regarding youth’s behavior and choices.

Further highlighting the continued emphasis on differences between youth and baby boomers, “How (Not) to Talk to Teens” (2007, May), in which a university student claims that “teens aren’t all that scary” (p. 32) and alludes to the fact that many politicians may think of youth as ‘alien’ and ‘unknown,’ provides tips for talking to young people. These are:

- (1) “Don’t talk down to us”
- (2) “Talk about issues that we care about”
- (3) “Ask us our opinions”
- (4) “Be yourself”
- (5) “Make sure we understand”
- (6) “Get online, now!”<sup>23</sup>
- (7) “Go back to school”

Articles such as these perpetuate the idea that there is something fundamentally different between youth and adults and they build on adults’ and youth’s sense of alienation from each other. Many times, however, these articles are superficial, simply further entrenching the two groups rather than building bridges between them. For example, looking at popular teen websites tells you little about youth as people and most of the above suggestions on how to talk to youth are applicable to persons of any age.

### **Generations, youth, & nostalgia**

One reason that the relationship between youth and adults is often tenuous could be that “more than any other social variable, generational contacts are too closely bound up with our own personal histories” (Sheleff, 1981, p. 6). It is not uncommon for one’s own nostalgia for childhood or youth to influence perspectives on younger generations. As Sebald (1968) argues, each generation has its own stories of the ‘adolescent problem’

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<sup>23</sup> The student suggests using social networking websites such as Facebook and Myspace to engage youth because “you will have a direct connection to youth and what is important to them” (How (Not) to Talk to Teens. 2007, May, p. 32).

and the stories most often amount to complaints that “frequently conclude that youth has never been more degenerate than at present” (p. 17), implicitly comparing oneself as a youth with the youth of today. He concludes that “such reminiscing is more sentimental than factual” (p. 17), pointing to the need for diligence when considering perspectives on young people.

Highlighting the importance of memories of the past, nostalgia has been defined as “a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore” (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245). According to Breeden and Carroll (2002), “nostalgia may be based on myth, abstraction, personal memory, or a combination of the three” (p. 102); however, most often, “at the cognitive level – sometimes referred to as collective memory or generational memories – this entails a bias towards recalling key moments associated with one’s youth” (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003, p. 108) with collective memories carried primarily by those who experienced the event in their adolescence or early adulthood (Schuman & Rodgers, 2004). Age is tied directly to collective memory and nostalgia, and Breeden and Carroll (2002) argue that “adolescence remains memorable, perhaps because of the awakening of self-awareness, empowerment, and independence” (p. 103). Thus, in this discussion of generation, age, and representations of youth over the last four decades, acknowledging the role of nostalgia and collective memory in the process of representation is fundamental.

### *Remembering/romanticizing the 1960s*

It is particularly common to reminisce about the 1960s in North America. This is evident in the NFB films made to provide retrospective looks at the decade, particularly

about youth. In *The Children's Crusade* (1984), for example, the director looks back at the Company of Young Canadians (CYC), a government-funded program that attempted to channel youth activism in order to support particular social development projects. In a review of the film, Groen (1984, February 25) argues that “the balance gets upset when [the director, Donald Brittain] starts generalizing from the particular, viewing the CYC as an avatar for the entire Sixties generation” despite the fact that the number of CYC volunteers was never very large.

*The Summer of '67* (1994) is a film which provides retrospective looks at two 1960s NFB films (*Flowers on a One-Way Street* and *Christopher's Movie Matinee*) from the perspective of participants in those films, who were young in the 1960s, but in their mid-life when *The Summer of '67* was filmed in the 1990s. Most interesting is watching these adults watch themselves as youth in the earlier films, commenting on their youthful naïveté and happiness. The adults cringe at some of their actions, but also laugh and remember the community they felt. Some of the most interesting reflections they make are regarding issues of class and gender – issues not discussed in the original films themselves (I address these further in chapter four).

In an NFB news release, Albert Kish, a co-director of *The Summer of '67*, is quoted as having remarked that the film “is not an exercise in nostalgia” but that the directors “wanted to examine the influence of that distant summer on the lives of the ordinary, middle-class kids who gravitated towards the scene” (Lewis, 1994, July 25). Despite this, reviewer Mietkiewicz (1994, August 14) argues that the film “rarely rises beyond self-indulgent nostalgia” because it does not provide perspectives beyond those of the participants in the original films and is focused entirely on self-reflection. In fact,



much of the film is comprised of shots of the participants watching themselves in the original films such that we can see and hear their reactions to seeing their youthful selves.

In *Yearning for yesterday: A sociology of nostalgia*, Davis (1979) argues that “nostalgia is one of the means – or, better, one of the more readily accessible psychological lenses – we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities” (p. 31). In a film such as *The Summer of '67*, viewers are treated to a glimpse of that process of identity-(re)making as adults consider their youth and are seen integrating representations of their young selves into their current self-image: “nostalgia is a distinctive way...of relating our past to our present and future” (Davis, 1979, p. 31).

According to Holbrook and Schindler (2003), and borne out by the production of NFB films looking back on the 1960s, “now is a time characterised by a flourishing of nostalgia” (p. 107). The authors argue that this focus stems from both the turn of the millennium and from the position of baby boomers that have something to be nostalgic about as they experience middle-age. Marketers have picked up on this and the feelings of belonging that nostalgic products, images, events, etc. can produce, resulting in

a proliferation in the use of pop-culture icons (Humphrey Bogart, Louis Armstrong), music (‘Revolution’, ‘I Want to Teach the World to Sing’), and styles (film noir, Beat Generation) from the past parading across the television screen in movie reruns, sit-com revivals, and television commercials aimed at target segments whose age characteristics and personal motivations render them especially vulnerable to appreciating such images drawn from the period of their youth. Furthermore, increasingly numerous new products appeal directly to consumers’ nostalgic feelings. (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003, p. 108)

The NFB’s production of films such as *The Children’s Crusade* and *The Summer of '67* are part of this interest in the youthful memories of baby boomers and must be viewed in this context. Just as one’s own experiences of adolescence and early adulthood may

influence perspectives on the youth of future generations, so too can nostalgic feelings towards certain decades, events, or cultural icons. The associations we make with childhood and adolescence, and the times when we experienced these, are often emotionally laden and important to our sense of belonging: “A feeling of being, or having been, integrated into a time imparts a sense of belonging and purpose. Thus, more than arrested development keeps a person nostalgic for and identified with one’s past. Today, even a ten-year-old American can remember a simpler time” (Breedon & Carroll, 2002, p. 101).

### **Stereotyping & differentiating youth**

Perceived differences between generations and age groups are reflected in stereotypes we hold of these segments of the population. Throughout the last four decades it is possible to pinpoint some common stereotypes of youth and through this means identify the ongoing tensions between youth and adults. As Lubell (1971) has argued, one “obstacle to understanding the ‘generation gap’ is the practice of pinning a label such as ‘the alienated’ upon the younger generation without determining what that label is supposed to mean” (p. 111).

Stereotypes of youth in the 1960s were highly influenced by the youth movement and media representations and discussions focused heavily on images of youth who reflected the counterculture. Media representations and stereotypes of youth influenced by the youth movement were common and according to Westby (1976), views and representations of 1960s youth fell along two polar extremes:

Those opposed have viewed radical students in terms of negative stereotypes – arrogant, violent, intolerant, and vicious – images reinforced by the media in both

obvious and subtle ways, and even by presidential and vice-presidential rhetoric. The more or less liberal minority, on the other hand, has emphasized the idealism and humanitarianism of the students, though often condemning what are believed to be their methods. (p. 62)

This media focus on youth counterculture dominated headlines despite the fact that, as Keniston (1970) argued at the time, “the majority of America’s 7,000,000 college students still remain generally uncritical of the wider society, fundamentally conformist in behavior and outlook, and basically ‘adjusted’ to the prevailing collegiate, national, and international order” (p. 159). News and tales of dissenting youth and their seemingly unorthodox actions and values overshadowed the fact that not all young people fit the stereotype. Rather, much news and magazine writing about youth in the 1960s discussed the growing unrest and disobedience of youth, most often suggesting that parental authority and societal restrictions needed to be reinforced (for example, see Hechinger & Hechinger, 1961, March 19). Articles early in the decade commonly referred to the ‘New Generation’ and focused on how the youth of the 1960s were unlike previous generations (Taylor, 1961, January 29).

Probably the most visible and evident aspects of the 1960s youth movement that were used to set it apart from adults were the unique style of dress and unconventional approach to sexuality and lifestyle adopted by these youth at the time. As Levitt (1984) has explained, in countries such as the United States and Canada, “students adopted a style of dress, a sexual code, private jargon, in general a ‘life-style,’ which not only differed from those of ‘straight’ society...but in addition could not help but provoke the older generation (especially the older ‘working class’ members of it)” (p. 46). Thus, popular writing and media often portrayed images of youth that focused on these lifestyle and fashion choices.

As Levitt (1984) notes, “during the latter half of the [1960s] decade the Vietnam protestors were portrayed in the American popular press as hippies, freaks, drug addicts, and outside agitators” (p. 46). Keniston (1970) describes “a highly inaccurate stereotype of the student activist” reflected in the media:

Bearded, be-Levi-ed, long-haired, dirty, and unkempt, he is seen as profoundly disaffected from his society; often influenced by radical Marxist, Communist, Maoist, or Castroite ideas; an experimenter in sex and drugs, unconventional in his daily behavior. Frustrated and unhappy, often deeply maladjusted as a person, he is seen as a failure – or, as one United States Senator put it, a reject. (p. 161)<sup>24</sup>

Similar descriptions of the “young ideological rebel” can be found in Esler (1971, p. 26).

The resulting stereotypes aroused “deep and ambivalent feelings in nondissenting students and adults – envy, resentment, admiration, repulsion, nostalgia, and guilt” (p. 160), according to Keniston (1970). Flacks (1971) has similarly reflected on the youth stereotype and its role in creating intergenerational tensions:

The new youth fashions, whatever they might have meant to those who adopted them, quickly became labeled as a direct challenge to deeply held cultural values with respect to the sex role, work, sensuality, and efficient use of time and money....the fully dressed ‘hippie’ youth became a target of verbal insult, physical abuse, and discrimination in many communities. Also, he was likely to experience forms of harassment from law enforcement agencies. (p. 67)

These trends are also visible in NFB films from the 1960s. While the NFB attempted to avoid relying on such stereotypes, evident in the prominent roles a variety of youth were given in film production and in voicing their opinions, it is clear from the films that interactions between youth and adults were highly charged, with adults often making derogatory statements about youth’s appearance and life-style choices. These

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<sup>24</sup> In this and other descriptions of the image of the 1960s youth rebel the masculine pronoun is used. Young women were less likely to be explicitly included in this youth activist image reflecting, as I discuss in chapter four, the limited visibility and voice young women were provided at the time. Scholars such as Thorne (1975) have remarked on the sexual division of labour and subordination of women found in social movements such as the student and youth movements of the 1960s, arguing that these experiences of inequality have often influenced subsequent political and social movements among women.

issues were a lightning-rod for deeper political issues and were connected to the perceived roles of youth in society and in politics. As is evident in NFB films analyzed for this thesis, the labels applied to youth became highly politicized and stereotyping of youth was prevalent.

Adults in late-1960s and early-1970s NFB films frequently comment upon the appearance and style of youth. In *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968) there are many such comments from adults, raging from "I don't see that they have to have bare feet and beards to get their point across" (said by an unnamed adult) to former Toronto mayor and then city councilor Lamport's view that since the youth "haven't been washed for weeks" they "are not seeking dignity, are they?" These adults judge youth's appearance based on their own generation's standards and connect appearance with issues of morality and responsibility. For Lamport, youth's style indicates a lack of interest in paid employment and taking responsibility for one's life.

In a few instances, youth talk about school officials insisting that they change their appearance in order to attend school (and, presumably, to be better students). One drug user in *Beyond Kicks* (1972) describes this sort of difficulty and in *Christopher's Movie Matinee* a young man says that the staff at his school "got all worried about long hair and then the long hair becomes more important than learning. I mean sure it is a ridiculous thing but it's not nearly as important as learning." These differences between youth's and adults' appearance and style are reinforced by images showing youth with long hair and casual clothing in contrast to most of the adults shown who, when male, have short trimmed hair, no facial hair, and are often wearing suits and ties.

An interesting aspect of these films is the terms used to refer to youth, particularly by adults. While the use of 'hippie' is not explicitly challenged by the youth in these films it becomes clear upon viewing that the label is not always welcome by youth and that it is often used in a derogatory manner by adults. In one scene near the end of *Christopher's Movie Matinee*, some of the youth are reading newspaper reports about the film and joke about being referred to as hippies: "Oh, that's funny, they call us a hippy band on Sunday, a bunch of hippies....I didn't know I was a hippy....What if your mother sees that?" Earlier in the film one boy is also seen hesitating about being involved in the film because he doesn't want to be seen as a hippie: "I am just wondering what type of movie it will be...whether it will be all hippy or if it is to do with teenagers."

In addition to referring to youth as hippies, adults in the films also use other terms and phrases to refer to young people. Lamport in particular refers to youth in a number of derogatory ways. In *Christopher's Movie Matinee* he is seen referring to the Yorkville street where youth congregate as "a cancer area" and states that they are "trying to ferret that out." In *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967) he remarks that the youth on Yorkville "are acting like a zoo" and then proceeds to claim that the unhealthy car fumes on the street may be "one way of getting rid of all them in there." Occasionally adults also refer to young people in their teens and twenties as "children" reinforcing their own authority over the young people.

There is less evidence of general youth stereotypes during the 1980s as attention to generational differences, and to youth in general, waned. The exception was attention paid to youth in relation to issues of drugs, violence, and gangs. There are limited references to a generation gap made in the news media, however, where a gap is

mentioned it is explicitly linked to adults' views on youth drug use and violence. In one case, a Toronto official is quoted as having said that "the prime issue of the next two years is to restore (public) confidence in our young people and confidence in themselves" since adults perceive that many youth are "swarming around in gangs" and this is likely to lead to a growing generation gap (Tonks qtd. in Fine, 1989, March 23, p. A16). In a letter to the editor of a Canadian newspaper, a reader comments on what she calls the "anti-teen propaganda" espoused in an article. The article in question linked youth directly to drug problems in a local downtown shopping mall, but the reader argues that the article "was an outright attack on persons in the 13-19 age bracket" (MacGregor, 1987, September 1). It was this commentator's fear that "through her article the writer has furthered the belief of many adults that all young persons are aimless drug addicts, vandals, loiterers, and a public nuisance" and has thus contributed to the generation gap. A survey of Ontario students during the 1980s also mentions the generation gap, but argues that "the report appears to suggest a fundamental shift in the nature of the generation gap" where youth are less likely to withdraw from adult society as they were perceived to have done in the late 1960s and early 1970s (qtd. in Ferri, 1986, February 22).

Discussion of youth stereotypes resurfaced in the 1990s; however, while adult stereotypes of youth made headlines, youth were also openly responding. The media's alienation of youth and tendency to marginalize youth issues was not new, but the 1990s seemed to contain much anti-youth sentiment. As Bessant and Watts (1998) point out, "representations of young people [Generation X] as victims and/or agents of social disorder are now routine" (p. 5) with youth being a "social identity that has been

constituted not by young people themselves, but by adults who are frequently far removed from the life-worlds of young people” (p. 10).

The many explicitly negative accounts and images of youth published during the 1990s (particularly regarding youth violence, following high-profile stories of youth killing other youth in school shootings, for example) inspired commentaries with respect to how the media represent young people. A 1993 article in *Rolling Stone* magazine is one I remember reading as a teenager. Claiming that the mainstream media alienate youth by not taking them or their interests seriously then telling them they are unintelligent for not consuming those media, it is a story that highlights a generation gap (although, unlike in the 1960s, it is not called that) between youth and the baby boomer generation. In the article, Katz (1993, November) demonstrates how mainstream media and culture have alienated youth:

Today the academic, corporate and editorial factions that dominate journalism continue to see kid culture as repulsive and dangerous. Thus computers are a medium for invasion of privacy, not a new way to communicate. TV isn't a medium that has transformed the politics of the world as well as the lives of the young but a transmitter of crude, stupid, violence-inducing programs. Rap is not a powerful and influential form of racial and political expression but a trigger for bigotry, sexism and violence. Video games are dangerous and addictive, unhealthy breeders of illiteracy. (n.pag.)

In Canada, similar sentiments were reported by young journalists such as then 23 year old Naomi Klein who argued in a June 1993 article for *This Magazine* that “we [youth] don't read papers and magazines or, for instance, listen to CBC radio because they are increasingly filtered through and tailored to the perspectives of people the same age as our parents” (n.pag.). She discusses the effects of Canadian media outlets' hiring freezes on young journalists (and audiences) and is critical of media coverage of youth issues, arguing that in covering a youth social action event in Toronto “the national media



attempted to depoliticize young people's rage with the jargon of 'youth alienation'" rather than trying to understand the issues from the point of view of the youth (n.pag.).

Other youth weighed in on this issue as well. A youth empowerment event in the United States found that portrayals of youth in the media was one of the more pressing issues on the minds of youth and a panel discussion with newspaper and television representatives resulted in youth-initiated questions regarding negative coverage of youth and particularly minority youth (Hevesi, 1990, November 19). In a *New York Times* article published in 2000, Johnson argued that youth are tired of adults complaining that they do not read enough: "Teenagers hear in such lamentations the tone of a sneer. On a range of issues, they say they feel wounded by characterizations of teenagers as shallow at least, and menacing at worst" (Johnson, 2000, January 1, p. E22). Where youth voices were heard in the media during the 1990s it was clear that the stereotypes of youth they encountered were not representative of their lives and were, in fact, a source of concern. Such stereotypes, if not indeed widening the generation gap, did nothing to bring youth and adults into meaningful conversation: Rather, the groups became increasingly alienated from one another.

Stern's (2005) study of popular American films from the late 1990s and early 2000s featuring teenagers as central characters found a "virtual absence of depictions of teens as workers, volunteers, and caregivers," arguing that "the lack of images of teens declaring their interest in helping others, doing good, or changing the world in a positive way serves only to highlight the abundance of images of teens who express their desire for personal gain, such as through a romantic relationship or making money" (p. 34). As Stern (2005) demonstrates, negative stereotypes and narrow views of youth remain

prevalent in popular culture and these representations, Stern (2005) argues, will affect the perceived role of youth as citizens, particularly as these representations of youth fail to portray them as socially or politically active and caring.

### **Intergenerational relations: From conflict to collaboration**

The alienation between youth and adults reinforced through stereotypes, negative media representations, and a continued focus on generational differences throughout the last four decades is seen in the interactions between youth and adults in NFB films depicting youth social and political action. Oftentimes these interactions are marked by conflict and moments of collaboration are rarely evident until the 1980s when youth social and political action became less oppositional and more often subsumed within adult-led and adult-controlled institutions (it was also, notably, less prominent).

Intergenerational conflict is undoubtedly the most apparent theme from the NFB films from the late-1960s and early-1970s. *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967), *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968), and *Occupation* (1970) are each concerned with documenting broad or specific conflicts between youth and adults, while *Encounter with Saul Alinsky – Part 1: CYC Toronto* (1967) clearly demonstrates conflicting view points between youth and Alinsky, further stressing generational differences.

In *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967), viewers are presented with a look at the debates over Yorkville Avenue in Toronto – debates which pitted the youth who were calling for a closure of the street to traffic against the adults (particularly City Council) who were resistant to youth's demands. Much of the film revolves around a group of young people and their interactions with local government. The Yorkville youth were

seemingly led by a young man named David DePoe, the son of CBC reporter Norman DePoe and a “paid representative of the Company of Young Canadians (CYC)” who was “to enter Yorkville and work with the inhabitants toward community development and empowerment schemes” (Henderson, 2007, p. 22). A meeting between the young people and Allan Lamport (then the ex-mayor and city councilor of Toronto) is civil, however, it is clear that the politician does not agree with the youth. While he repeatedly asks them if they work and wonders aloud “why are they [Yorkville youth] not in bed? Why are they out? Why are they not doing their work? Why are they not doing the things the rest of the society is doing?,” the young people try to argue to have the street closed to traffic for health and safety reasons. Following this meeting, DePoe says, “for the first time we really saw that the city government did not really understand and not only that, it was not equipped to understand, to deal with our problems.” There is then extensive footage of a city councilors meeting where DePoe was invited to present a brief following sleep-in protests held by youth at Toronto City Hall.

Rather than documenting DePoe presenting a brief and then discussing it with the councilors, however, the footage of the meeting shows interminable conflict and bickering over whether DePoe should be allowed to present at all. As Verzuh (1989) argues, “this [meeting] took the cake for silliness. And the testy city controller, Allan Lamport, was the source of most of it. Toronto’s conservative mayor in the 1950s, Lamport had no time for the long-haired crowd of the 1960s. He spat insults at the youthful rebels of Yorkville as DePoe made his case for the street” (p. 96). Lamport is seen leading the argument against DePoe at the meeting, saying that the city should require a proper written brief be submitted before DePoe can present. The other

councilors reject this based on the fact that DePoe had been invited (at the last minute) and is already present, but the meeting degenerates into a shouting match among the adults. This meeting clearly shows how emotional and tense issues around the Yorkville youth were at the time as the issue of power and age/generation influences this whole debate.

In the end, this battle among the adults is the highlight of the meeting, and DePoe's brief, which he is allowed to give after providing copies of his notes, is somewhat anticlimactic after all the build up. What is interesting during the presentation of the brief, however, is Lamport's interruptions of DePoe and his challenge to the young man over what he *should* be doing: "Now tell me this, in the aims and objects of the Company of Young Canadians will you tell me where it is mentioned in here that you are supposed to defy authority to get your way?" DePoe counters by stressing that he is there representing the youth of Yorkville and not his own views or those of the CYC. Following the meeting a young man says they came to the meeting "hoping one thing: that we would be able to get somebody to listen for once." This is what much of this film demonstrates: The fight of the Yorkville youth to be heard in city politics.

*Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968) also uses the footage of these meetings to present the conflict between youth and adults. In addition, *Christopher's* provides a glimpse into the lives and perspectives of these youth as they hang out, protest, and attempt to make a film. There are two separate sequences where a youth confronts an adult on the bus (one female set and one male set), highlighting the different approaches to life each age group has. For example, in the male exchange, the older man says to the youth that the world "has been doing pretty darn good" but the youth counters that "it

hasn't. It's been having some pretty hellish wars." The two continue to debate issues such as masculinity and conformism, and the conversation ends with the older man saying to the youth: "You do come up with some real questions, boy...silly ones, really."

*Christopher's* also shows footage of interactions between youth and police on Yorkville Avenue, documenting, for example, police dragging youth apart and into a police van during a street protest.

*Occupation* (1970) provides a different outlook on youth rebellion of the early-1970s, presenting a picture of student protest within a university setting. The film, which documents a sit-in by political science students at McGill, has the film crew joining students in a take-over of the department's floor in a university building, as they fight for more power in the faculty hiring process. This reflects some of the literature of the period where authors commented on the university situation: Greater numbers of students attending university and students who were used to privilege and control demanding more influence on the university itself (Dietze, 1970; Keniston, 1971; Levitt, 1984). With respect to intergenerational conflict, *Occupation* demonstrates how youth and adults in this particular environment struggled over who had the power to make decisions and over different approaches to education. In one instance, the students debate with professors about the importance of diversity in the classroom and how increased diversity can be achieved, with students arguing for the hiring of minority faculty to effectively teach such issues while the professors resist these demands stating that issues of diversity could be taught by themselves (seemingly privileged White people).

In *Encounter with Saul Alinsky* (1967), young volunteers with the Company of Young Canadians (CYC) are seen in a discussion with Saul Alinsky, an early figure in

American community organizing, debating various issues pertaining to community organizing and the work of the CYC. It is a short film (under 30 minutes) which highlights the different approaches of youth and adults, this time specifically regarding means of social change. Most notable is a discussion between Alinsky and a young man at the end of the film where the two discuss their views on progress. When Alinsky likens the world and progress to “mankind sort of going up a mountain” the young man disagrees and says, “I believe he’s going to destroy the mountain and that the whole struggle won’t even be meaningful.” It is clear from this exchange that the two men are approaching the issue from vastly different perspectives and Alinsky admits as much when he says “I don’t even know how the hell we can communicate because I just don’t understand the world...what the hell this world is you’re talking about.” The film ends with the young man saying to Alinsky, “Maybe your hang-up is that you see my world as being a hang-up,” and Alinsky agreeing with a laugh. This easily sums up the overarching theme of intergenerational conflict seen throughout most of the films about youth political and social action of the late-1960s and early-1970s.

Connected to the issue of intergenerational conflict is the prevalence of adult opinions and perspectives on youth presented in these films. While some of these are positive reflections on youth and their actions (“If I were their age, I would probably be a hippie myself,” from *Christopher’s*) or more dismissive comments (“Oh, well, after all, they are only young,” from *Christopher’s*), many are clearly negative and judgmental viewpoints which tend to fuel the conflicts discussed above. Adults in these films spend much of their time countering youth’s positions and opinions and voicing their own opinions on the youth of the day.

With respect to adults' comments on youth's perspectives, often adults staunchly reject youth's ideas and are at times quite derogatory. For instance, in *Encounter with Saul Alinsky* (1967), Alinsky responds to a young man discussing the alternative values of hippies by saying that "the kind of people you're talking about dropped out. This is the cowardly way out." In various exchanges, adults and youth are seen to disagree on issues of morality and responsibility. As discussed in chapter two, in a meeting between Toronto city councilor Allan Lamport and a group of youth he repeatedly asks them if they work or why they do not. The youth have a different perspective and see their attempts to fight for the closure of Yorkville as an important form of work which is not being valued. Youth leader David DePoe clearly sums up the differing perspectives when he says, in *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967), "we talk about sharing, they are talking about making profit. You know, they see us as a threat to their way of life." He later argues that "we are talking about changes in values and we are not talking about man being judged by his properties. We are talking about him being judged by his personal work." This conflict is related to the changing expectations of youth discussed in chapter two: While adults were focused on paid employment and participation through labour, youth were also concerned with participation through activism and other means of changing society for, what they believed was, the better.

Archival material pertaining to the late-1960s and early-1970s films supports these findings on intergenerational conflict. In the case of *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967), newspaper clippings in the archives tell of protests to the film particularly by Toronto Mayor Dennison (Bragg, 1969, November 26; Calder, 1968, November 26; City officials, 1968, November 26). The articles describe Dennison's desire to have the NFB

stop distribution of the film after Canadian and American screenings resulted in letters to the mayor's office stating outrage at the mistreatment of the youth by City Council and police. Following a special screening for city politicians, Dennison is reported to have said that he didn't want the film banned, but that it should be "improved" with editing and that he felt there had been collusion between the CYC and NFB to "create a manufactured news situation" (City officials, 1968, November 26). The director of the film denied such claims stating that there was no collusion and that "most of the footage used in the film of the meeting had been acquired from the CBC and from the Canadian Television network" (Bragg, 1969, November 26). Such tension, while palpable during the late-1960s and early-1970s, was less evident in films of later decades.

The NFB films of the 1980s are distinguished from earlier films by a move away from portrayals of explicit intergenerational conflict towards more collaborative efforts between youth and adults. There was declining public interest in the political and social actions of youth in the 1980s which was in part due to less direct intergenerational conflict than in the late 1960s and early 70s. While youth of the late 1960s were often considered to be rebelling directly against the adult world, proposing drastic changes to the status quo with respect to lifestyle and politics, active youth in the 1980s were less of a direct threat to adults' way of life. Instead, 1980s youth in North America appeared to be more concerned with nuclear war and unemployment – issues that also concerned adults.

In films such as *Thin Dreams* (1986) and *Mile Zero: The SAGE Tour* (1988), youth are not rebelling against the adult world as a whole, but against very particular aspects of broader society. In *Thin Dreams*, girls attempt to come to terms with media



images of women and the dominant social and cultural values associated with the body. In *Mile Zero*, youth are speaking out against nuclear war, however, are ultimately portrayed as fighting for peace. Thus, in both films, young people are taking up issues that adults can (and did) also fight for or against. As Coleman and Baum (1985) argue, “the eighties do not exhibit much generational conflict. In social surveys the majority of youth in Europe and North America state that they get along well with their parents” (p. xviii). This lack of intergenerational conflict is especially evident in *Mile Zero* which was notably directed by one of the participating youth’s mothers (Bonnie Sherr Klein).

*Mile Zero* (1988) is markedly different from films of the late-1960s and early-1970s which depicted charged confrontations between youth and adults. In *Mile Zero* audiences see instead conversations between youth and adults. For example, we learn in the film that the youth were invited to a reception organized by parliament during their visit to Ottawa and we see them meet with politicians including Robert Kaplan, Warren Allmand, and Lloyd Axworthy. During this discussion, the politicians ask the youth about what they are hoping to achieve with their tour of Canada and the youth ask politicians to explain what would be the best way for youth to raise issues to the government. The film also depicts the support the youth’s tour received from the Canadian media (including student presses). The youth were, for example, interviewed on CBC Television’s *Midday* program and profiled on the CBC’s child and teen program *Switchback*. Archival material pertaining to the NFB film and the tour itself further reveals the important role of the media in advertising the tour and the issues the youth were focused on through a long list of press coverage, encompassing television, radio,

newspapers, and magazines. As discussed below, however, hierarchy continued to mark the intergenerational relationships in this film despite the absence of overt conflict.

### **Intergenerational hierarchy**

While youth-adult interactions were marked less by explicit conflict in 1980s films than in earlier ones, there is ample evidence of a continuing hierarchy existing between youth and adults. With respect to the interaction between the youth of *Mile Zero* (1988) and politicians discussed above, in a *Canadian Tribune* article Orgresko (1985, November 25) comments that “as we watch *Mile Zero* we see the four students speak convincingly not only to their peers, but also to our so-called leaders – on Parliament Hill they more than hold their own as they meet MP after MP who tell them that demonstrations don’t work” (n. pag.). As this comment suggests, despite the relatively supportive nature of the youth-adult discussion, politicians in this decade continued to resist youth protest as an acceptable or effective means of political and social action.

Similarly, not all of the press coverage received by *Mile Zero* was supportive. In a particularly harsh review, Pressey (1988, December 7) argues that “the possibility of grassroots organizing for social and political change is never addressed in this film, rendering it nearly useless....Contrary to these people’s beliefs, the world is not clean, white, and sugar sweet” (p. 3). The reviewer also comments on the “definite upper class white bias” of the film and the “very little acknowledgement of any kind of oppression” (p. 3). While Pressey (1988, December 7) is correct with respect to the lack of diversity or recognition of oppression, it is hard not to think that perhaps a film by and for youth

with the aim to encourage other youth to act is not the film the reviewer was hoping to see.

Within the film itself there are a few moments which clearly show the hierarchy between youth and adults. In one instance, two of the youth are guests of a call-in radio show. An adult male calls to voice his opinion and does not allow the young woman from the SAGE tour to react to him. He attempts to continue speaking and the radio host must cut him off, saying to the caller: "No, listen, James, listen I want to hear what she has to say." In another instance we see two of the youth speaking to a classroom of students when the teacher interrupts them and concludes their talk for them. After the students leave, the two youth confront the teacher about this. The teacher stresses his role of authority in the class, stating: "You know, that as the teacher I'm responsible and if I thought you were going off the topic at all, I had to come in, just bring you back on line." The students hold their ground and argue that he did not give them a chance to do it their own way; however, there is little sense that the teacher cares about their way and he is seen dismissing them and their attempts to retain some amount of power and control in the situation.

The NFB's 1990s films contain even less interaction between youth and adults than those produced in the 1980s. As I will discuss in the following section, films about youth action made in the 1990s and early-2000s have shown young people acting in isolation from adults, whether in school-based adult-sanctioned activities where adult presence is implied but rarely shown or in independent youth-initiated activities where adults are not present except where necessary (for example, by law).

One exception that highlights both the segregation of youth and the enduring hierarchy between adults and young people occurs in *Someone To Talk To: Peer Helping in High School* (1996) in a scene where a group of young peer helpers have planned a meeting with parents during the high school's parent-teacher night. The youth, however, sit waiting for over an hour when no parents show up. In the quote below (also used at the outset of this chapter), one of the peer helpers expresses the feelings of the group, highlighting the tensions that exist between adults and youth in society:

It is kind of disappointing, when you realize that we were – like they're always saying students don't know what they're talking about, they're not – they don't do anything for the school, for the community, and yet, here, are a group of students who, you know, had a good intention, they wanted to do something about it. They want to help students – help parents bridge the gap between them, and yet the parents are the ones here who decided not to come and not to participate in this. And it's a little upsetting. And you kind of think, "Well, maybe the students aren't always the ones to blame in situations."

This example makes evident that youth's actions continue to be ignored or unseen by many adults, while at the same time youth are criticized for not doing enough. This harkens back to the dichotomies prevalent in current perceptions of youth, particularly the tensions between protection and participation discourses which highlight the ambivalence adults often have regarding young people's socio-political participation. Perhaps, as suggested earlier, there are benefits to regarding young people as passive and to downplaying or ignoring their efforts at social change (even in such actions as planning a meeting with parents) or perhaps the stereotypes of self-absorbed, apathetic, and materially-focused youth prevent adults from seeing these activities as meaningful participation.

Stemming from the traditional conceptualization of citizenship and politics as adult realms of activity, such stereotypes prevent young people and their actions from

being seriously considered as political. In *The Invention of the Adolescent* (1967), a film outlining the historical development of the concept of adolescence, the narrator concludes that “whatever form rebellion takes, much of our youth is seriously alienated from the adult world. The cliché is that the young have withdrawn from the world of their seniors, in the protest against its values and authority. But some thoughtful observers say that the young have not withdrawn, rather they have been excluded” (narrator, *The Invention of the Adolescent*, 1967). Similar arguments have been made more recently by scholars such as Buckingham (2000b) whose study of television news programmes aimed at youth “confirms the view that young people’s alienation from, and cynicism about, politics should be interpreted as a result of exclusion and disenfranchisement, rather than ignorance or immaturity” (p. 207). Thus, an intergenerational hierarchy which provides adults with political and social power while failing to allow for the positioning of youth “as political subjects, let alone as political agents” (Buckingham, 2000b, p. 219) persists, and is especially evident in 1990s and early-2000s NFB films where youth actions and voices become increasingly segregated from the adult world – the world of power and politics.

### **Segregation of youth & their actions**

The decline in portrayals of youth-adult interactions in NFB films that began in the 1980s continues to the present and as stereotypes of youth persist and the gap between generations is often presented as a given, representations of youth’s social and political actions have shifted. As discussed in the previous chapter, expectations of youth are changing and volunteerism has become a desired form of participation (according to

adults), while youth action is increasingly represented as more controlled and individualized. In addition, representations of youth action are changing with respect to youth-adult interaction as young people are seen more often acting under the control or organization of adults, however, often without their immediate presence. Coleman and Baum (1985) found that the 1980s did “not exhibit a great deal of inter-generational contact,” meaning that youth and adults became further segregated and less aware or interested in the other groups’ actions as long as they were not disruptive to them (p. xviii). This lack of intergenerational contact was also evident in Stern’s (2005) study of American films featuring teen characters (from 1999-2001): “Most of the teen characters in the films existed without roots in a residence and without the guidance or supervision of parents. Even when they were shown, parents were depicted as only mildly competent and in touch” possibly suggesting “to adult viewers that they should expect to become irrelevant to their children once they become teenagers, and that it is unreasonable for them to expect to have positive, nurturing, and intimate relationships with their teenagers” (p. 34).

Beginning with the NFB films of youth social and political action in the 1980s, youth are rarely seen engaging with adults. In the 1986 film *Thin Dreams* the only adults shown are those who play roles in short skits that are interspersed with the young women’s group discussion of body image issues. The short skits were written by the young women themselves and are used to demonstrate different scenarios where body image and weight came up in the young women’s lives (e.g., shopping for clothes, eating lunch in the school cafeteria at lunchtime, and dealing with boys and dating). Thus, the adults in the film are there only to act out parts written for them by the young women and

they have no voice in the film at all. In *Mile Zero* (1988) adults are shown only when they interact with the young activists, and this is rare. Mainly these are teachers and school officials, but there are also a few instances when the youth interact with media reporters and politicians, as discussed earlier.

In the 1990s films there remains a lack of adult voice or interaction with youth. Similar to the 1980s films, there is little evidence of intergenerational conflict primarily due to the fact that the actions youth are involved in are either contained within the auspices of an adult-run institution (e.g., school) or are otherwise sanctioned by adults. As youth take on particular issues, such as race and violence, adults join these fights or at least implicitly support them. In the films of the 1990s young people are, in fact, rarely seen in the presence of adults and there is no sense of the need to document or discuss intergenerational communication or action. This reflects a continuing separation of youth and adults as parents and other authority figures become busier and have less time for youth (Bibby, 2001), as well as increasing adult fears of leaving one's children in public places without adult supervision (as discussed in the previous chapter). As a consequence, youth are seen participating in more school-based activities or in other organized groups.

The 1990s NFB films *Someone to Talk To* (1996), *Speak It! From the Heart of Nova Scotia* (1992), and *Taking Charge* (1996) are each about school-based programs and activities. In *Someone to Talk To*, youth and guidance councilors are seen working together in a high school peer helping program. Black high school students create a youth action group in their high school in *Speak It!* and are seen working with invited guests (adults) to deal with issues of discrimination and to take back their own local history. In

*Taking Charge*, viewers are introduced to different groups of youth who lead discussions with, and perform for, high school students regarding issues of abuse, gender, and race.

Unlike these films, *Silence & Storm* (1995) does not take place within a school setting or deal with school-based/sanctioned actions. Instead, this film about “system kids” documents a Leader-In-Training (LIT) pilot program at Camp Weredale that was fully sanctioned by the authorities of the camp (then owned and run by Youth Horizons). The film itself is a direct documentation of the lives of these youth at the camp. The filmmakers were “an integral part of the LIT program” and lodged and ate with the campers (Our words, n.d., p. 1). The LIT pilot program pre-existed the film and the film was conceptualized with the goal of documenting the program and the youths’ experiences of it. Within the film itself only the filmmakers, the youth, and the two young camp leaders are featured. There are no adults present although it is clear that the structure of the camp and the LIT program have been imposed to a certain degree.

A 1990s film in which the youth action takes place outside the confines of adult-run institutions, *Bronwen & Yaffa (Moving Towards Tolerance)* (1996) is a film about two young women who confront racism in their community by organizing an anti-racism concert. The women address their feelings about racism and white supremacists in the local community and are seen discussing these issues with other youth on the streets as they advertise their concert. A young man they know, Scott, discusses his own involvement with the Ku Klux Klan and the film shows discussions between him and Bronwen as she attempts to support his move away from the Klan. The young women face challenges as their venue becomes unavailable and they must scramble to get proper permits for a new venue as well as change all the posters. The end of the film documents



the concert where local musicians and artists perform and Scott takes the stage to speak about his experiences in the Klan and his struggle to get out.

Unlike another 1990s film *Speak It!* (1992), where the youth address racism in their school with the help of adult ‘experts,’ the youth in *Bronwen & Yaffa* are seen to be acting independently of any adult input. The only adults present in the film are the young women’s parents (who make only brief appearances and speak little) and a man who appears to be the Mayor or an employee of the city when the women go to obtain a permit for the concert. He plays a very small role as the film focuses on the two young women and their efforts to organize an event for their peers. The fact that these women’s actions were not situated within a school environment and thus seemingly sanctioned by adult authorities was unique in the 1990s but figured more prominently in the 2000s films where the youth actions presented were often separate from adults and film portrayals were even more focused on youth’s voices (particularly individual youth) beyond the school environment.

As in earlier decades, the themes of school, race, gender, and sexuality are prominent in NFB films about youth action in the early-2000s; however, the films of the early-2000s are notable for their focus on youth’s opinions and actions, rather than on those of adults. Three very different films were chosen for analysis from this period: *Respect Revolution* (2000) is a film in which young people are seen publicly raising the issues of gender roles and sexual stereotypes, *Salt* (2000) is a ‘film zine’ made up of short films directed by young women as a part of a high school project, and *Discordia* (2004) is a youth-directed film documenting the aftermath of protests at Concordia University in Montreal.

Young people's voices make up the basis of each of these films, whether those youth were directing the film or being interviewed on camera, or often both. *Salt* is notable for the self-reflexivity of the youth featured and the film includes a lot of commentary by youth on issues pertinent to them (e.g., cutting, the punk image/lifestyle, youth's own personal histories, bullying, etc.). In fact, all four films analyzed from this decade (the three listed above and the 2004 film *XS Stress*) explicitly involved youth in the production process in addition to presenting them as key figures (youth involvement in filmmaking is discussed further in the next chapter). The films, once again, feature few if any adults and those that do appear are only peripheral: It is clear to any viewer that it is the young people and their voices that are deemed important.

In *Respect Revolution* (2000), few adults appear and they are rarely given the opportunity to speak. This film depicts a group of youth who call themselves 'Respect Revolutionaries.' They are seen speaking directly to the camera, giving their opinions on gender, sex stereotyping, and sexuality, and they are also shown going into the streets in small groups, talking to youth about these issues. The film revolves around these youth's opinions, voices, and actions. Among the few adults shown, for example, are a man and woman who are approached by the Respect Revolutionaries on the street. Viewers see the youth explaining to the adults why they are on the street talking to other youth about sexual stereotypes but we do not see the adults respond. The only adults that do speak in the film, and this is very brief, are local media reporters who are covering the story of the Respect Revolutionaries.

*Salt* (2000) is comprised of four short films, each directed by a different high school student (all female). The short films address different issues and feature a different

mix of adults and youth. For example, in one short film about the education system, the Director General of the English Montreal School Board, an education professor, and a high school teacher (who notably looks young) are interviewed and provide their opinions on alternative education and the current system. These interview segments make up a small proportion of the short film, however, and are overshadowed by interviews with students and former students of MIND, the alternative high school the four *Salt* directors attend. In the short film about independent music many of the featured musicians, as well as a music producer they visit, appear to be young, possibly in their 20s or 30s. In the short film about self-mutilation, there are no 'experts' or adults at all. Interviews with two young women who self-mutilate are interspersed with the reading of poetry. This film is unique in this sense since popular media regarding self-mutilation by young girls during the late-1990s was often from a psychological perspective focused heavily on adult fears and concerns rather than on attempts to understand young women's perspectives (e.g., Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*, 1995). In the final *Salt* short film about punk, adults appear once again only briefly. One is an author and professor, while the others are a punk couple.

Thus as the problems in young people's lives are increasingly being perceived as individual and needing individual, rather than collective, action for change, representations of young people's social and political actions, where they are found, more often show youth acting to address specific issues (such as body image, racism, or self-mutilation) on a small scale, often with little or no input from, or interaction with, adults other than (assumed) consent in the case of school-based or organized actions. No longer are young people shown acting, or being encouraged to act, on broad social issues in

collective ways that would constitute a social movement. Instead, where young people are encouraged to act, it is suggested they do so on a small scale at an individual level or within the confines of school. The educational nature of recent films and their narrow focus on school-based audiences of youth reinforce this perspective, as discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Youth & the economy**

With respect to youth-adult relations, issues of marketing to youth, commercializing and co-opting youth movements, and managing youth (un)employment are increasingly relevant to discussions of Canadian youth's lives. This perspective on adults' roles in the consumer/citizen struggle extends the discussion of consumption begun in chapter two.

Following the 1960s and 70s era of youth movements and protests, scholars commented on the role of media and corporations in co-opting the styles and symbols of the youth counterculture, arguing that it effectively removed the political charge initially intended by their adoption by youth. Flacks (1971) claims that most reports on youth written in the 1960s and 70s were "profoundly inaccurate and incomplete" (p. 1) and he is critical of media reports in particular. Besides concern that they distract from local issues, Flacks (1971) further argues that "the media not only popularize, but commercialize, countercultural symbols and sentiments" (p. 135). This commercialization was of particular concern in the 1960s as youth were increasingly becoming a target market, especially for lifestyle and leisure products, as discussed in chapter two. Flacks (1971) states:

One of the central ironies of the youth culture is that virtually all of the symbols, words, fashions, and experiments that were formulated in opposition to commercialism and business values have become marketable items, advertising gimmicks, and ways to make a buck. In this situation, symbols rapidly lose their specific meaning, the counterculture loses its sense of independence and opposition, and members lose the ability to distinguish true friend from exploiter. (p. 136)

Thus, what once were symbols of youth rebellion and protest became commercial products for young people to consume. This watering-down of political symbols is not unique to youth and its political movement(s) but is notably tied up with the increasing importance of the youth market as discussed in chapter two.

In addition to the commercialization and co-optation of youth symbols and styles, economics also play a role in youth's lives with respect to employment opportunities and the value of youth labour. This issue is raised in the NFB film *All the Right Stuff* (1997) where the adult 'experts' in the film repeatedly argue that as the system currently exists (a system run by adults), young people are stuck in low-level service jobs where they are

producers in our economy in our society. They are the ones who run the fast food chains, most of the big chain stores prefer to hire young people whom they can pay less, with no benefits and what have you. So they are a major source of profits in the system, and those profits are not being ploughed back into their own welfares. On the other hand, not only are they key producers, but they're also major consumers in the society, of goods like the fashion industry, the music industry, and all of those glitzy things that is a mega-billion dollar industry in our society. These are the people who are consuming those things. So they're producers and consumers and we find that we are taking more from them than we are giving to them. (said by an unidentified adult male 'expert')

When considered closely, those realms of society we consider 'adult,' from business to politics, expose the unequal power relations existing between youth and adults.

Hierarchies of social and political power are further entrenched as young people struggle to achieve adult status in labour markets which use their labour as a profit-making tactic and as their particular forms of style, rebellion, and even activism are co-opted by

marketers and sold back to them through intensive marketing strategies. As these inequalities make it harder for young people to reach the benchmarks of adulthood (e.g., gainful employment, career, property ownership, etc.) they also contribute to the blurring of consumer and citizen as young people are perceived to have value and power in their roles as consumers but not as producers or citizens.

## **Conclusion**

Stereotypes and representations of youth are highly influenced by the current prominent conceptualizations of age and generation which serve to differentiate youth from adults and position young people as in-development and incomplete, rendering them inherently inferior. Thus, young people are caught in a position where they are at once called upon to act as responsible members of society (to vote and volunteer, for example) but where their own opinions and actions can be easily overlooked or dismissed as immature, or as simply youthful rebellion, rather than as meaningful efforts towards social change. As Raby (2005) has stated, “it is more positive and empowering to define activities as resistant than as delinquent or rebellious” (p. 157). Rebellion can be easily dismissed as part of growing up and the “rebellious teenager, it can be argued, is not fully conscious but rather ‘irrational’ or unreflective in his/her actions. In contrast, resistance suggests conscious, political and directed actions, yet is rarely used outside of sociological, cultural studies, activist projects and psychoanalysis to describe the activities of teenagers” (Raby, 2005, p. 157).

As perceptions of youth rely on age-based and generation-based perspectives, relationships between youth and adults in North American society continue to be marked

by difference and alienation, even as explicit intergenerational conflict has diminished. Changes in how NFB films present youth action demonstrate the increasing segregation of youth action and voice in this context. While the focus on youth opinion and voice is refreshing after the 1960s and 1970s films where youth struggled just to be heard, the fact that youth voices are being segregated and that youth action is portrayed as taking place apart from adults reflects a lack of attention to intergenerational collaboration. There is a failure to address the power imbalances between youth and adults or to help those with less power (youth) to feel that their actions are meaningful in a society run by adults:<sup>25</sup> Our society continues to be one in which youth's social and political actions are often devalued while their labour and work as producers is designed for adult profit rather than for the benefit of youth themselves.

In the next chapter I address the issue of youth voice in more depth and consider youth as cultural producers, particularly their participation in the NFB's filmmaking activities. As representations of youth action are increasingly focused on youth voice and youth opinion, examining how, or whether, this shift represents a change in the power relations between youth and adults is important when considering the positioning of youth as citizens.

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<sup>25</sup> As an example, in a study of British youth's (16-19 years) attitudes towards politics and protest actions, Fahmy (2006) found that youth "expressed a deep frustration with the way in which they perceived that their views were largely ignored by their political representatives" (p. 129). The tendency for youth to feel excluded and apart from politics, particularly formal or conventional politics is also discussed by Buckingham (2000b).

## Chapter 4 – This is who we are: Youth media, youth voices

*I am no minor and there's nothing minor about me. And I also think that there's a question of um, of power. Whose voice is present? Whose voice is absent? And who benefits by the presence and the absence? So who gets to speak? Who gets to decide? Who doesn't get to speak or decide? And, who benefits by that? (youth speaking in Amber's short film as part of the NFB film Salt, 2000)*

In this chapter I investigate evidence of youth's own voices and participation in the production of representations of themselves as political and social actors. In previous chapters, dealing with perceptions and representations of young people's social and political action and the relationships between youth and adults, it may have seemed as though youth are wholly influenced by adult-produced representations of youth found in news media, academic literature, NFB films, and government documents. While adult-produced representations are undoubtedly most common and have influence, it is important to remember that youth are not passive recipients of such information and that they actively accept, resist, or challenge adults' perceptions of them on an ongoing basis, recalling the structure/agency relationship discussed in the introductory chapter. This chapter explores where and how youth's voices and efforts are present in constructing representations of youth action, particularly examining the roles youth play in the production of NFB films, in an effort to draw attention to some elements of youth agency in a thesis focused primarily on how representations of youth act as structuring agents.

As suggested in the previous chapter, adult/youth relationships are often marked by tension and conflict; however, in NFB films portraying youth action there are examples of attempts to produce films collaboratively, incorporating youth in a variety of



ways. Following a discussion of the role of media in youth's lives and the literature regarding youth culture and youth media, I examine youth participation in the production of NFB films portraying youth action, from youth-directed films to evidence of increasing incorporation of youth voice.

### **Media in youth's lives**

As discussed in chapter three, the media have played an ongoing role in helping to situate youth and adults within particular subject positions and relationships of power: They are important means of communicating particular discourses which serve to construct young people in certain ways as participatory citizens. For example, by popularizing stereotypical images of youth, the media have perpetuated often negative perspectives, from the unwashed hippie of the 1960s to the apathetic Generation X-er of the 1990s or the demanding member of the current Generation Y. Each of these images of youth has had impacts on the ways in which young people are perceived as (potential) socio-political actors. In recent decades, youth themselves have begun to question how they are represented in the media (Hevesi, 1990, November 19; Johnson, 2000, January 1; Klein, 1993, June).

While the perpetuation of youth stereotypes is an important aspect of the relationship between youth and the media, this perspective is primarily concerned with how media affect adult audiences' views of youth. As Stern (2005) has argued, adults

are likely to be influenced by images of teens they encounter in theaters, on television, in magazines, and on the Internet. Indeed, the mass media provide consumers with a wealth of information about various social groups' behaviors, attitudes, and roles. Just as media have been shown to play a role in generating and promoting cultural messages about a host of other subpopulations (e.g.,

minorities, older people, women), they are also likely to reflect and shape popular conceptions of teenagers. (p. 24)

In addition to examining the media's influence on adult audiences and their perceptions of youth, there is also a long history of academic and popular concern with other aspects of youth and media, particularly the more direct effects of media on youth and the media's role in commercializing youth's lives.

### Effects research

One major area of influence on how we think about youth and media is the field of media effects research.<sup>26</sup> The effects of media, and particularly mass media, have been researched since at least the 1930s with concern about “violence, sexual behaviour, ‘bad language’, [and] moral values” being the focus (Newbold, 1995, p. 118). Notably, these concerns align with general social concerns about children and youth, and effects research often falls into the domain of discussing how to protect children from the harms of mass media effects (Barker & Petley, 2001). Livingstone (2007) argues that those who study the effects of media on children believe that “children are particularly vulnerable to media influence and, further, that the media do harm some children, in some ways, under certain conditions” (p. 6), drawing attention to the vague nature of some media effects claims.

In Canada, the Media Awareness Network, a non-profit media literacy and education organization, reports that the field of media effects research operates within three constraints: the difficulty of defining and measuring media violence (e.g., does a

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<sup>26</sup> My brief introduction to the field of media effects research serves only to frame my discussion of youth media production later in this chapter and is consequently limited. For more information on media effects research see Martinez (1992), Bryant & Zillmann (2002), and Barker & Petley (2001). For a recent discussion of future directions for the field see Livingstone (2007).

verbal threat of violence count?), disagreement over whether data supports a causal relationship between media and behavior, and disagreement over how media violence affects children (e.g., psychologically, physiologically, etc.) (Media Awareness Network, n.d.). Despite these critiques and others (see, for example, Gauntlett, 1998) there is ongoing interest in media effects research, particularly among policy-makers who seek evidence to support policies aimed at protecting children from harm.

Recently, scholars such as Livingstone (2007) have argued that the media is only one among many factors in children's lives that may affect their behavior; however, a factor that should not be ignored. With respect to young people in particular, the context of youth's lives across the globe has been a subject of intense discussion in recent years within both academic and popular literature, and the role of the media continues to be of central concern: "That the media and its multiple personalities have an enormous influence, which is often positive on contemporary society, especially children, is beyond question" (Tobin, 2004, p. 141). Scholars such as Tobin (2004) also point to the negative influences of media with respect to youth. As Sherman (2002) has stated, "mainstream media's predominant representations of young people are fundamentally bleak. News and entertainment media hammer the public with steady messages, most backed up by no data whatsoever, that teenagers and young adults are disengaged from community life and put society at risk" (p. 76). These types of messages, combined with "the proliferation of child pornography, the relative invisibility of racial groups and cultural differences, gender stereotyping and the levels of violence to which children are exposed in the media" (Tobin, 2004, p. 141) have given many cause for concern about the relationship between youth and popular/mass media, often positioning young people as passive and

uninformed audiences who may be harmed by their exposure. In addition to such potential harms, media's role in increasing commercialization of youth's lives and marketing to youth has become an area of interest.

### Commercialization & marketing

Commercialization of children's lives and marketing to children has recently developed into an area of great concern for parents and scholars alike. As discussed in chapter two, news stories about youth and consumption have long been evidenced; however, many scholars argue that commercialization and marketing are now becoming more insidious in children's lives as younger markets are defined and more forms of media are used to target these new 'markets' (Buckingham, 2007). In contrast to effects research, which tends to view children as passive media audiences and victims, marketers "emphasise the competence and autonomy of children," celebrating children's power to consume (Buckingham, 2007, p. 17). But as marketers define more niche markets based on age they also redefine those age groupings in terms of consumer goods. As Langer (2004) has stated:

The incorporation of children into the market is part of a broader social logic through which capitalism reconstitutes life stages as cradle-to-grave markets, as in the 1950s construction of "teenagers" through consumption of age-specific culture and the recent emergence of consumer lifestyles for "seniors". In the last quarter of the 20th century, children proved a particularly profitable "frontier" for global capital, both as "sites of consumption" and independent consumers within an age-segmented market for toys, games, clothing and entertainment, all subject to cycles of fashion and obsolescence. (p. 254)

The media play a large role in this incorporation of children and youth into a consumer logic and scholars continue to research the area of children and consumption, examining children's media and consumer goods (Hendershot, 2004; Kapur, 2005; Steinberg &

Kincheloe, 1997; Waetjen & Gibson, 2007), globalization of children's culture (Langer, 2004; Lukose, 2005), and many other issues.

Scholars have written much about the increasingly commercial nature of youth's social and cultural environments and their relationship to media in this context (Dowmunt, 1998; Mayer, 2001; Ralph, Brown, & Lees, 1999; Tobin, 2004). Dowmunt (1998) argues that "young people are very much at the cutting edge of 'media imperialism'," often as a primary target market (p. 245). Others echo this message, cautioning about the potential for manipulation of young people: "If children are not shunned by the media in preference for more 'attractive' and 'appealing' stories, they are often 'used' by the media to serve commercial objectives in isolated or short term relationships that compromise the welfare and rights of a child" (Tobin, 2004, p. 140). Mayer (2001) argues that we are currently living in "a time when the voices of youths are increasingly central to media markets and advertising campaigns" where "young consumers form one of the most vibrant niche markets for media programs and the product industries that sponsor those programs" (p. 320).

As introduced at the outset of this thesis and discussed in chapter two, there is also increasing concern that the lines between citizenship and consumption are becoming blurred as youth are offered purchasing power but not citizenship rights and as they seek to express themselves through consumer choices. The promotion of the image of the child consumer by the media contributes to this such that "the hegemony of the market as a source of all good and the elision of notions of consumer choice and consumer rights with citizenship make children's access to consumption a 'natural' extension of the 'rights of the child'" (Langer, 2004, p. 270).

This confusion between children's rights, citizenship, and consumption has garnered many comments from scholars who warn against the potential effects. As Buckingham (2007) asserts, an image of the child consumer "is often accompanied by a kind of 'anti-adultism'" (p. 16), pitting children and youth against adults and further entrenching those of different ages and generations into conflicting groups (as discussed in chapter three). This continued differentiation between youth and adults also comes to play as consumer markets not only target children and youth directly but also target their parents through nostalgia: "The psychological dynamics of children's attachment to toys and the particular place of children's consumption in sustaining adult nostalgia for a lost world of 'innocence' and 'enchantment' locate children's consumption, and the production on which it depends, within an emotionally loaded cultural space" (Langer, 2004, p. 270). Thus, consumerism and marketing to youth, supported heavily by mass media, contribute in various ways to perceptions of youth as social actors, tending to cast young people as consumers with the right to consumer choice rather than as citizens with citizenship rights and responsibilities, as well as creating/highlighting differences between youth and adults and perpetuating adults' nostalgia for youthful innocence.

### **Youth culture/subculture studies**

Within the fields of communications and cultural studies, youth cultures and subcultures have long been a research focus where young people's active consumption and production of cultural products and environments have been examined in an attempt to shift focus away from media effects and towards youth agency. Most notably, the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England (CCCS) supported

scholarly work on resistant youth cultures beginning in the 1970s (Jenkins, McPherson, & Shattuc, 2002, p. 23). Those such as Hebdige (1979) and McRobbie (1991; 1993), in particular, examined youth cultures from punk to girls' magazine culture, insisting that young people were not simply passive and victimized audiences of popular culture, but rather that youth used culture as a form of resistance or to find openings for resistance and possibilities for change.

As Jenkins et al. (2002) suggest in their overview of popular culture research, the “tension between the productionist and consumptionist analyses of popular culture remains a guiding thread in British cultural studies” (p. 25). Studies of youth culture(s) remain common as scholars investigate and report on different facets of youth's interactions with popular culture. Subcultural studies continue to be published (or re-published) (e.g., Hall & Jefferson, 2006; Wood, 2006) and are recognized for their important contribution to addressing youth agency; however, some have criticized this work, particularly regarding how issues of agency and resistance have failed to be thoroughly theorized (Muggleton & Wienzierl, 2004). Raby (2005), for example, delineates modernist and postmodernist approaches to youth resistance, particularly with respect to power and agency, arguing that the modernist “subcultural approaches [of the CCCS] can be divided into two categories: resistance as deviance and resistance as appropriation....In either case, emphasis is placed more on young people's resistance as members of the working class than as youth” (p. 155), and youth and their actions are understood within clear-cut power relations with a failure to acknowledge further complexities. As my examination of youth participation in NFB film production below will suggest, the power relationships associated with youth agency in this context are

contentious. Youth are continuously (re)negotiating their positions as students, artists, sons/daughters, and citizens, while their identities as youth intersect with other facets of their identities (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.). As a result, a complex understanding of power relations is fundamental to an appreciation of youth's actions as citizens and a social constructionist approach focusing on the role of discourses in structuring meanings and power relations provides important insights.

### *Youth cultural consumption & production*

While there continues to be much discussion of the potential harms of media for youth, a number of scholars have pointed out that focusing on these harms often positions youth as vulnerable and passive instead of realizing the potential youth have for agency and resistance (Downmunt, 1998; Maira & Soep, 2005). According to Maira and Soep (2005), for example, "youth are assumed to be incomplete social actors, or subjects less able to exert agency in the face of globalization" in much of the globalization literature (p. xxii). In contrast, work on youth cultures has placed a focus on youth agency, particularly evident in early British Cultural Studies research which emphasized the resistant nature of youth subcultures, as discussed above: "Media studies of young people have come a long way in demonstrating how youths are knowledgeable and creative media users and critics" (Mayer, 2001, p. 319). Recent work tends to be tempered with more apprehension, however, in light of the commercialization trends mentioned previously.



Thus, debate and discussion over the role of media in youths' lives continues with questions over whose voices are heard and what those voices say about youth. As Lipsitz (2005) has argued,

despite an avalanche of talk about family values, educational reform, the sanctity of human life, abuse by pedophiles, and the need 'to put children first,' young people in affluent societies can see that they do not count. No one seems to care what they think, or if they think. Public policy and mass media discourses on youth position young people largely as a problem, as a population to be controlled and contained....But by and large they are not given important work to do, not invited to say yes to anything except consumption. (p. x)

There is much ongoing discussion about the power of media to manipulate youth on the one hand and the power of youth to subvert and resist such manipulation on the other. Despite any lack of consensus, what is evident is that the relationship between youth and media is complex, requiring a move away from the reliance on polarizations between structure and agency often found in such discussions (Buckingham, 2007).

Despite shifts in research focus towards critically examining the conceptualizations of childhood/adulthood and changing social contexts, youth culture has remained an important site of interest for scholars. Informed by earlier research on youth culture and subculture, particularly from a cultural studies perspective, youth cultures from music to fashion, continued to be studied into the 1990s. Epstein (1998), for example, begins his examination of Generation X with a discussion of music culture, subsequently discussing more general issues of style.

In more recent work on youth culture the focus has shifted to include examinations of youth-made culture rather than only youth consumption of culture (although this may be a fine line). Authors such as Blustain and McCarthy (1999) write about the importance of young people creating their own writings, publications, and music, for example. The popularity of DIY (do it yourself) among youth is likely to have

had an impact on this stream of youth culture research during the 1990s (for example, see Duncombe, 1997; McKay, 1998b; Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998). McKay (1998a) goes so far as to claim DIY was a kind of 1990s counterculture (p. 2). Like the subculture studies of the CCCS, what is interesting in this approach is the focus on, and valuing of, youth voices, opinions, perspectives, and actions. Blustain and McCarthy (1999), for example, state that teen journalism used as peer-support “brings together people who can learn and gain confidence by sharing their struggles” (p. 10). It is through creating their own culture (in this case researching and writing about issues for a publication) that youth both learn about the world around them and engage actively with it.

While those investigating youth’s consumption of culture struggle with the question of whether youth are passive or active audiences or consumers (and to what degree), those who study youth cultural production can tend towards a utopianism and over-emphasis on resistance, where the production of media by youth is, at times, celebrated with little recognition of the broader power structures and relationships in youth’s lives. Indeed, much of the literature on youth media, beginning in the 1990s, is concerned with documenting youth media projects and their benefits for youth and their communities, as I discuss in the following section.

As cultural studies scholars and others examine youth (sub)cultures and youth consumption or production of media, researchers are also pondering the question of youth agency in relation to a variety of different social areas. This is reflected in texts such as the *Handbook for working with children and youth: Pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts* (Ungar, 2005) and *Designs and methods for youth-led research* (Delgado, 2006) in the fields of psychology and social work, *Youth participation and*

*community change* (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006) in the field of community organizing, and *Representing youth: Methodological issues in critical youth studies* (Best, 2007) from a social sciences and humanities perspective. Each points to the current rethinking of methodologies with respect to involving youth, whether in community development programs or academic research.

Children and youth are perceived increasingly as active and conscious agents in their own right and thus capable of participation in community, national, or even international events and discussions in meaningful ways. Many scholars continue, through the early-2000s, to discuss the importance of treating young people with dignity and respect, and encourage community practitioners, politicians, and researchers (anyone wishing to engage or learn from/about youth) to find meaningful and appropriate means of inviting young people to participate or become engaged. As Weller (2003) argues from her study of youth in England, “it is important...to view teenagers as experts regarding their own citizenship” and to recognize “the diverse thoughts, voices, experiences and competencies of society as a totality” (p. 169).

Consequently, scholars are more frequently questioning the methods and ethics of researching children and youth with many calling for more youth-centred and youth-led research (e.g., Delgado, 2006). Some are theorizing new methods and approaches for working with young people in an attempt to bring value to the process for those participating as well as to ensure the youth participants find the research (and process) meaningful and appropriate. Mitchell and colleagues, for example, have done extensive work with children in the context of AIDS research and have incorporated visual methods such as photo-voice into their work: Through the opportunity to take photographs of their

everyday experiences and geographies, children are offered an innovative way to communicate to researchers and to their own communities about their lives (for example, see Mitchell, Moletsane, Stuart, Buthelezi, & de Lange, 2005). As I outline in the concluding chapter of this thesis, I hope that my research here will provide a basis for such work with young people in the context of their roles as active and participatory citizens.

What is common in these reconceptualizations of youth participation is their emphasis on youth action and youth voice, rather than treating young people as passive and incapable. Instead, these new approaches focus on developing and discovering young people's talents and expertise and on valuing their input and perspectives. This is in many ways parallel to children's rights discourses which emphasize the agency of youth and which have begun moving away from paternal understandings of the state with respect to young people.

Stemming from this increased attention to youth voices, the 1990s saw an increase in publicly accessible, and sometimes even popular, youth-created culture, as well as efforts to incorporate youth media production into activist and community development programs (Goodman, 2003; Tolman & Pittman, 2001). This emphasis on youth voice in media production coincides with the calls for increased youth participation in governance and politics that inspired this thesis and is, thus, implicated in discussions of youth citizenship. In addition, media literacy and media education programs and curricula are increasingly seen as important for children and youth: As Kline, Stewart, and Murphy (2006) argue, "to make responsible consumer choices, today's citizens-in-training need to be aware of the benefits and the risks associated with all consumption

practices, including the use of media” (p. 148). In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss youth cultural production and focus on youth-directed NFB films, as well as evidence of youth voice.

### **Youth media**

As Campbell, Hoey, and Perlman (2001) have commented, “within Youth Media there is a tremendous amount of passion and excitement” (p. 37): Understandably, these sentiments often lead to research about youth media that focuses on the documentation of successes, especially since youth media programs and projects are generally focused on improving youth’s lives and experiences, and celebrating the accomplishment of these goals is considered beneficial to that cause. The focus of youth media scholarship on descriptive pieces and analyses focused on the importance of such projects mirrors what Rodriguez (2001) has found within alternative media scholarship more generally. As she has argued, it is important that we move beyond these types of work in order to come to understand alternative media, or youth media, in a broader sense – in terms of its impact on people’s everyday lives and politics, as well as the power relationships that affect their everyday lives and their ability to participate in media production or other activities.

In a number of the NFB films that depict youth social and political action, youth have been explicitly involved in the production process of the film, in addition to having their voices and actions featured as the film’s focus. Youth-directed (or co-directed) films such as *Christopher’s Movie Matinee* (1968), *Thin Dreams* (1986), *Silence and Storm* (1995), *Respect Revolution* (2000), *Salt* (2000), and *Discordia* (2004) can each be considered youth media since youth were directly involved in the process of film

development and production. I will briefly discuss youth media research prior to an in-depth analysis of the presence of youth voice and participation in these (and other) NFB films.

Scholarly work on youth media often tends towards documenting projects rather than examining the broader implications of youth media: “While there is much discussion of the potential of Youth Media, there is little study of Youth Media’s impact on participating youth, audiences or on society” (Campbell et al., 2001, p. 24). More research has questioned the ways the mainstream media represents youth and how that might have an impact on them than has investigated youth as media producers or analyzed the media created by youth (Niesyto, Buckingham, & Fisherkeller, 2003). This is, in part, due to the tendency to consider children and youth vulnerable and in need of protection (therefore, there is a need to understand how media affects them) in addition to a common failure to listen to young people’s perspectives in our society generally (which we have seen reflected in the increasing segregation of youth and their actions, for example). As Kinkade and Macy (2003) have pointed out, the lack of academic work pertaining to youth media, especially with respect to program evaluations, is also “in large part due to funding limitations” (p. 11).

Analyses of youth media have primarily attempted to clarify and explain two things: What youth media is and what its goals are. Generally these discussions are accompanied by an evaluation of whether the goals have been met and what the ‘best practices’ are.<sup>27</sup> As Rodriguez (2001) has argued with respect to alternative media, such

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<sup>27</sup> I will not discuss these in detail here since they relate to specific projects and it is not my intention to provide evaluations regarding the effectiveness of youth media. For a review of selected youth media projects from across the globe, outlining challenges and successes, see Kinkade and Macy (2003).

attempts to determine whether a project has been successful or not too often rely on narrow definitions of what success is.

Youth media, as media primarily developed and produced by youth, comes in many forms, including print, radio, film, and online (Campbell et al., 2001; Sherman, 2002). In addition, youth media differ in their distribution and content. youth media can be distributed via mainstream media channels, at film festivals, on community television, and at local community exhibitions, for example, and content can encompass anything youth find important: Common themes found in a study of American youth media include health, education, technology, social and community issues, international events and news, the justice system, and race (Campbell et al., 2001). The organizations that produce youth media also vary in terms of structure and organization: Some youth media projects are part of a larger organization that has broader goals, such as the NFB, while others exist solely for the purpose of producing youth media. In Campbell et al.'s (2001) examination of American youth media, they found that projects most often engaged youth between 13 and 19 years of age, but that some projects include those as young as 8 or as old as 26. In addition, they found that many programs target specific groups of youth such as incarcerated youth, youth of colour, or Aboriginal youth.

With respect to the goals of youth media programs, Campbell et al. (2001) have argued that they fall into two categories: One where youth media is a tool for “youth development, media literacy, career development” and other goals, and another where youth media itself is the end goal with the emphasis on “getting youth voice out and on using that voice to impact audiences and the media in general” (p. 15). They stress that

these two categorizations are not mutually exclusive and that in many cases the different goals and aims combine within one project.

For Campbell et al. (2001), the most common benefits of youth media projects are encouraging youth voice and social change, career development, youth development, media literacy, and academic enhancement (p. 10). For Greenaway (2003), the main benefits are to help counter isolation youth may feel, to provide space in which youth can challenge mainstream perspectives, to demonstrate the value of youth voices, and to legitimize those voices and perspectives. Finally, for Kinkade and Macy (2003), the goals include “facilitating the expression of youth voices, highlighting urgent social issues, impacting public opinion, equipping young people with employment skills, and promoting their positive development” (p. 9). Each of these different perspectives highlights the importance of youth media as a means of using youth voice for social and political action – for encouraging social change, challenging the status quo or affecting public opinion, and drawing attention to social issues.

In Campbell et al.’s (2001) separation of youth media programs into two categories (youth media as a tool to meet other goals and youth media as a goal in itself), there is one distinction that is important to consider: The difference between focusing on process or on product. In projects aimed at achieving goals beyond media production, process is often a focus, while projects primarily concerned with media production more often focus on the end product and its perceived quality (Campbell et al., 2001, p. 16). This distinction is important in light of the different ways in which youth are incorporated into NFB filmmaking projects, as discussed below. In some instances the resulting film allows the viewer a glimpse of the process of making a youth-directed or co-directed film



(e.g., *Christopher's* and *Salt*) while others do not, rather presenting the film itself as the most important output of the project (e.g., *Silence & Storm* and *Discordia*).

Considering the lack of research on youth media and the narrow scope of the approaches taken when such work is done, there is a need for complex and critical understandings and analyses of youth media, especially in Canada where there has been little critical scholarly work in the area until recently.<sup>28</sup> Such examinations will fill a gap in both youth studies and alternative media studies where youth media tends to be overlooked. As youth are increasingly encouraged and expected to participate in governance and social issues and are doing so, in part, through cultural production, such studies will help to explore issues of youth citizenship and social action.

### **Youth & NFB filmmaking: Genuine participation?**

#### *Hart's ladder*

As a means of analyzing and discussing youth involvement in the cultural production aspects of NFB films, I will employ Hart's ladder. In 1992, UNICEF published Hart's essay *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship* in which he outlines a ladder of participation based on the idea that "participation is the fundamental right of citizenship," referring to 'participation' as the "process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives" (Hart, 1992, p. 5). Although Hart (1992) refers specifically to children and is concerned

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<sup>28</sup> Scholars have recently critically addressed youth cultural production, especially in the area of new media. For examples, see Weber and Mitchell (2007) or Weber and Dixon (2007). Cultural production by young girls (American, British, and Canadian), in particular, has also been a recent focus of scholarship and activity. For more information and references, see Weber and Dixon (2007), Kearney (2006), and Kearney's blog at <http://girlsmakemedia.blogspot.com/>. There has also been important recent work in the field of education (Hoechsmann & Low, 2008).

primarily with the participation of those younger than thirteen (referring to those thirteen to eighteen as ‘youth’ or ‘teenagers’ rather than ‘children’) his ladder of participation, as it outlines different levels of involvement in decision-making and action, is equally useful when considering other age groups, as in this thesis.<sup>29</sup>

The bottom three rungs of Hart’s (1992) ladder encompass instances of non-participation where young people are involved in activities but do not play a meaningful role.

1. manipulation
2. decoration
3. tokenism

Hart labels these as manipulation, decoration, and tokenism, emphasizing that these levels of involvement reflect “a strong tendency on the part of adults to underestimate the competence of children while at the same time using them in events to influence some cause” (p. 9). The remaining five rungs of the ladder indicate means of child/youth participation in projects and advance as follows:

4. assigned but informed
5. consulted and informed
6. adult initiated with shared decisions with children
7. child initiated and directed
8. child initiated with shared decisions with adults

The assigned but informed rung of participation requires that the youth understand the project and why they are being asked to participate (and by who), and also that the youth’s roles be meaningful. The next rung, consulted and informed, requires that the youth “understand the process and their opinions are treated seriously,” for example

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<sup>29</sup> Hart’s ladder of children’s participation is based on Arnstein’s (1969) metaphor of a ladder used to describe participation more generally. Hart’s typology is used here since it is specifically concerned with participation by the young and, therefore, conceptualizes the categories of participation in relation to young people’s relative social standing and degree(s) of power.

in a consultation project with children that is iterative so that the youth can see how their ideas are being implemented (Hart, 1992, p. 12). At the level of adult initiated with shared decisions with children it is further required that decision-making throughout the project be done in collaboration with youth. Child initiated and directed projects comprise the next rung. Here, Hart (1992) argues that it is difficult “to find examples of child initiated community projects” because “adults are usually not good at responding to young peoples [*sic*] own initiatives” or they wish to “play a directing role” (p. 14). In the final rung, child initiated with shared decisions with adults, youth go beyond organizing their own projects among themselves and invite adults to participate as well. Hart (1992) argues that these kinds of projects are rare and that “it is usually only children in their upper teenage years who tend to incorporate adults into projects they have designed and managed” (p. 14).

This ladder of participation helps to break down some of the possible ways children and youth may be involved in a particular project, and in the discussion of youth participation in NFB films below it will be useful to reflect on these different levels of possible participation. Hart (1992) argues that “through genuine participation in projects, which involve solutions to real problems, young people develop the skills of critical reflection and comparison of perspectives which are essential to the self-determination of political beliefs. The benefit is two-fold: to the self realization of the child and to the democratization of society” (p. 36). Similarly, with respect to digital media and media education, Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel (2006) have argued that ‘participatory cultures’ where young people can contribute artistically or civically, and

where they feel their contributions matter, have a number of benefits, including knowledge and skill development.

As the NFB has a goal to reflect Canada and Canadians, the involvement of youth in NFB filmmaking directly suggests such benefits of participation as proposed by Hart (1992) and Jenkins et al. (2006). Youth involved in the production of NFB films, and particularly the films examined in this thesis, have the potential to not only have their voices heard but also to talk with other youth about issues important to them and to demonstrate to audiences some of the ways young people can participate in society. This, however, is heavily dependent on the NFB and its representatives affording young people the power and freedom encouraged by Hart (1992). In addition, avoiding inequalities in media access and use and ensuring reflexive and ethical practices that perpetuate a 'participation gap,' according to Jenkins et al. (2006), are fundamental to meaningful and effective youth participation in what they call 'participatory cultures.'

#### Roles of youth in film production

A number of the NFB films selected for analysis in this thesis can be considered youth-directed (or co-directed) based on what is seen in the films or written in the documentation and press coverage. For example, *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968) was directed by NFB director Mort Ransen in collaboration with a group of youth in Toronto. According to the film proposal, youth were invited to participate and given the use of an NFB director and crew (Ransen, n.d.). This appears to be a meaningful way to incorporate youth, however, as discussed below, there were many concerns over power and responsibility that arose between the NFB, its employees, and the youth. *Thin*

*Dreams* (1986) is a film conceptualized and directed by a young woman as part of International Youth Year and *Silence & Storm* (1995) was proposed and directed by a 25-year-old young man. All four films analyzed from the early-2000s explicitly involved young people in production: *Respect Revolution* (2000) is described on the video jacket as “a hip, media-savvy film” created by “a group of youth, ages 14-18,” although their exact roles are unclear (*Respect Revolution Video Jacket*, 2000); *Salt* (2000) is a ‘film zine’ comprised of short films conceptualized and directed by four 17-year-old young women; *Discordia* (2004) was co-directed by two then-recent graduates of Concordia University (although they are not referred to as ‘young’ in the promotional material or media coverage of the film); and *XS Stress* (2004) was “made in close collaboration with a youth advisory council” (*XS Stress Video Jacket*, 2004). More than in previous decades there is currently a clear effort on the part of the NFB to engage youth in the production of such films and to ensure the presentation of opinions and experiences from youthful perspectives. This reflects the NFB’s *Strategic Plan 2002-2006* (2006) which stressed “giving voice to younger generations” as a key priority for enhancing programming (Strategies).

This corresponds with the trend, discussed in chapter three, of fewer and less frequent appearances of adults in the NFB films of the 2000s with focus instead on youth voices and perspectives. This focus on youth perspectives is accomplished particularly with the direct involvement of youth in film production. The levels of participation of youth, however, vary depending on the film. In some cases youth have acted as (co)directors with professional film crews and, at times, an NFB director also on-site (e.g., *Christopher’s* and *Thin Dreams*), while in others they were much more independent

as directors (e.g., *Silence & Storm*). Among recent films *Salt* and *Respect Revolution* would fall into the first group since, in each case, the young filmmakers were seemingly heavily supported and guided by adults. *Discordia*, on the other hand, would fall into the second group since the two young directors appear to have had full control over the production.

### Content of youth-directed films

For the most part, there are no striking differences between those films made with youth explicitly involved in production and films made without such input. Upon close reflection a few differences are noticeable: These pertain primarily to the choice of topic for the film. For instance, *Thin Dreams* (1986), *Silence & Storm* (1995), *Salt* (2000), and *Discordia* (2004) each deal with issues important to their young directors: girls and body image in *Thin Dreams*; youth at a youth-in-crisis summer program in *Silence & Storm*; alternative schooling, independent music, self-mutilation, and punk culture in *Salt*; and, the aftermath of protests at Concordia University in *Discordia*. In each case, the young director(s) proposed the film and its subject matter to the NFB, engaging in what Hart (1992) would consider a high level of meaningful participation. In other instances, such as *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968), *Respect Revolution* (2000), and *XS Stress* (2004), it is less clear how much input the youth had in developing the initial ideas for the film or in choosing its subject matter.

In addition to the increased ability to choose the subject matter that youth-directed films sometimes allow young people, such participation of youth in production also has an effect on what kinds of scenes are included in the film. One thing that is interesting

about *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968) is that it provides more of a glimpse of life from youth's perspectives than the other films of the period. This is accomplished through sequences in which the youth are seen discussing issues amongst themselves, both pertaining to the filmmaking process and to other things, as well as within staged discussions that they were able to initiate themselves. This is in contrast to the other films from the late-1960s and early-1970s which include more structured discussions (e.g., meetings), often with adults. This is also true of *Thin Dreams* (1986) which is comprised mainly of an informal group discussion among high school girls moderated by the film director. The film does not incorporate any structured interviews or present any adults or 'experts' but rather focuses on the young women's discussion. In addition, the young women involved wrote and performed short skits in which they act out some of the life experiences brought up in the group discussion. Thus, the young women were given not only an opportunity to share their thoughts on body image issues with others, but also to creatively express those issues through writing and acting.

In other films, however, the young film subjects are not as actively involved in film direction. The one youth-directed film analyzed from the 1990s was *Silence & Storm* (1995), a film documenting youth-in-crisis as they participate in a leadership pilot program at summer camp. The 25-year-old director, Jeremiah Hayes, intended the film as a "portrait of ten youth-in-care living and working together for a summer" (Our words, n.d.). One of the stated goals of the project was "to give young people an opportunity to play an active role in the filmmaking process" however this is not evident when viewing the film. Instead, the film documents the goings on of the camp with occasional informal interviews between the young director and the young campers.

### Goals of youth-directed films

As with content, the goals of youth-directed NFB films are not so different from those of adults making films that portray youth social and political action: To provide an outlet for youth voices and/or to raise important (youth) issues. I chose to examine *Thin Dreams* (1986), for example, because it is a youth-directed film in which the young director, Susie Mah, specifically set out to raise awareness about girls and body image. In a proposal for the film, Mah writes that “aside from acting as a catalyst for a discussion on body-image, the aim of this film is to get the girls who view it to think about their relationships to their bodies, the ways they behave with dissatisfaction towards themselves, where their dissatisfaction comes from, and what it does to their self-esteem” (1986, January 19, p. 6). To this end, the video jacket accompanying this film includes discussion suggestions and questions (*Thin Dreams* Video Jacket, 1986).

What is important to note, especially following the discussion in chapter three regarding the segregation of youth’s actions and of films representing such actions, is the fact that many recent NFB youth-directed films have been made/marked for educational purposes among youth. Thus, with a film such as *Thin Dreams* (1986), a young woman is given the power to choose the film’s subject matter and to make decisions about direction; however, the film is not meant to reach a broad audience of youth and adults. Rather, it is aimed at high school students (*Thin Dreams* Video Jacket, 1986) and accompanied by a guide ostensibly for an adult teacher to use in a classroom or educational setting. This is similar to other recent youth-directed films such as *Respect Revolution* (2000), aimed at 14-18 year olds (*Respect Revolution* Video Jacket, 2000),



and *Salt* (2000) which, while not labeled explicitly for a youth audience, is referred to as a 'film zine' situating it firmly within youth culture. There are exceptions to this: For example, *Silence & Storm* (1995) was not explicitly made for a youth audience, however, it appears aimed at professionals who work with youth or youth themselves based on the comments and warning (that the content may 'disturb' some adolescents) published on the video jacket (*Silence & Storm* Video Jacket, 1995) and by the fact that an audience survey conducted prior to filming (based on the film proposal) involved interviews with social workers, child care workers, psychologists, university professors, and program directors as representatives of potential audiences for the film ('In our words,' n.d.).

*Discordia* (2004) is the one recent film analyzed in which youth directors made a film clearly aimed at a broad audience of both youth and adults; however, in this case, the film was about older youth (those in university) rather than high school youth and the protests that figured as the catalyst for the film were connected to broad social issues that affect many adults in Canada (despite the film's focus on students and student politics which serves to isolate the youth's actions in the film, as I discuss below). Thus, while the NFB is providing young people with more opportunities to participate in filmmaking and to use their voices and cultural productions to raise important social and political issues, the segregation of youth from adults continues in this domain as youth-directed films are often not intended for adult audiences. This results in lost opportunities to communicate between age groups and generations or to inspire collaborative social and political action.

### Power struggles

Despite the fact that the NFB was, and remains, open to collaboration with young people in terms of filmmaking, and it is a stated goal of the NFB to help train and support young Canadian filmmakers (NFB, 2006; NFB, 2008), there are a few glimpses into the realities of such collaboration in the films analyzed here which highlight the complexity of the power relations involved. Issues of age and power, often hidden behind the scenes of such projects, are at times revealed on film or in print coverage.

*Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968) is the prime example of how age-based power relations can result in conflict during collaborative projects. The only film analyzed from the late-1960s and early-1970s which explicitly involved youth in the filmmaking process, it was conceived (by adults) as a youth-directed film, but one in which there was an NFB director and film crew lent out to the youth. At certain points in the film, viewers are treated to a look at the filmmaking process, often comprised of disagreements between the director or crew and the young people. For instance, near the beginning of the film we see the youth trying to convince Ransen (the director) that a script won't be necessary and that they will just film based on an idea, while Ransen attempts to make clear that film is expensive and they need to plan out their scenes carefully. At one point, one of the cameramen asks if he should shoot a scene just because a youth asks for it even if he thinks it's "stupid" and points out that he is "putting [his] professional reputation on the line" by doing so. Displaying the true power relations behind this production and the limited control given to the youth, the director states that "the point is that we are not really giving you the camera...we are giving you the crew," in an effort to set boundaries. In another scene later in the film we see a young man take

over directing a scene which leads to a cameraman stating “that’s the craziest shot I ever done in my life” but admitting that it was fun. Despite these disagreements, scenes at the end of the film show how close the youth and crew have become as the groups part ways and the NFB employees return to Montreal for editing and post-production (in which youth are not involved).

Many articles and reports in the NFB archives discuss the filmmaking process of *Christopher’s*, focusing on the role of the youth. In one article, it is reported that the film caused tension at the NFB where upper management disagreed with the director’s “demand that the film must remain within the control of the kids themselves” (Ritchie, 1969, February 7, n.pag.). In Ransen’s (n.d.) “notes on the style and purpose of the film,” which was written prior to production, he recounts meeting with young people and discussing various topics, himself struggling to keep up with their pace (although he was only in his thirties at the time). He wrote that “we want a film that the kids will think of as ‘theirs’, an accurate expression of the way their generation thinks and feels. Ideally, they should make it themselves” (p. 2).

Filming of *Christopher’s Movie Matinee* was unceremoniously halted partway through when the *Globe and Mail* published an article claiming the NFB was involved in staging a large ‘film-in’ in Toronto, and much of the archival material on this film relates to that controversy. The *Globe and Mail* article (Delaplante, 1967, August 25) reveals the emotions involved in the situation as NFB spokespersons and those involved in the film try to detail the relationships between the various players and who was responsible for what – essentially trying to make explicit the power relationships behind the production. Stakeholders attempted to make stark divisions between NFB employees and non-

employees, which was difficult since the youth involved in filmmaking were not paid for their services yet were seen moving equipment and carrying out other tasks generally done by NFB personnel. According to various reports, the controversy resulted in the film not being distributed effectively: The CBC chose not to air it (Excerpt, 1969, January) and it was “hidden away in school board libraries for educational board purposes” rather than in school libraries for in-class viewing (McCracken, 1969, February 22). This was seemingly rectified, however, in March 1969 when the film was aired on CBC television (NFB features on TV, 1969, March 24).

Over time there has been a shift in the NFB’s willingness to work with youth in the sense that they have recently worked with younger groups on films about social and political issues. As a media report on the 2000 film *Salt* states, “it’s a rare event when a bunch of 16-year-olds get hired as professional movie-makers” (Fidelman, 1999, September 13, p. E1). According to the article, the four young directors were “the youngest film directors in the NFB’s 60-year history” and were provided with an office, equipment, personnel and crew, as well as a \$200 000 budget. The film was about giving youth voice, but rather than doing that through adult-led and adult-structured interviews and film, the NFB allowed these young people to have more control over the way they and their issues were represented. As the poster for the film states, “in an era in which young people are marginalized and stereotyped, *Salt* allows young people to air issues important to them *on their own terms* – and not through the lens of media obsessed with casting teens as slackers, stoners and criminals” [emphasis in the original] (*Salt* Promotional Poster, 2000). That said, the video jacket of the film reveals that the process was not an easy one for the youth who state:

When we came to the Film Board with our proposal, we did encounter some resistance and doubt, and we continued to – right up until the film was completed. It seemed difficult for people to accept that youth today were worth their salt. We are not ‘just kids.’ We are filmmakers, students, artists, writers, musicians, actresses and activists. Salt is ours and it is true to ourselves and other young people. (Goodwyn, Gage, Shamy-Smith, & Brown, 2000)

Thus, as also seen in the example of *Christopher’s Movie Matinee* (1968), there are still power issues between adults and youth that are being negotiated as such collaborative projects are undertaken, particularly within the auspices of a national cultural organization. Despite the encouragement of youth voices and participation, young people continue to face challenges in terms of getting their own voices heard and being granted the resources and the power to do so effectively. Power relationships based on age continue to affect young people’s efforts at social and political participation even when their actions and voices are seemingly being welcomed.

Even when they do manage to find some space to act and voice their perspectives in and through film, those films are often focused on individual actions or perspectives (rather than collaborative ones) and frequently remain segregated with respect to audience, being circulated primarily among youth themselves as educational resources. As Fleetwood (2005) has argued about youth video, oftentimes involvement in the process of production provides more impact than the final product, as youth develop relationships and skills while they engage with particular discourses. The youth videos themselves, Fleetwood (2005) states, rarely see wide circulation, limiting the effects they can have. In the case of NFB films about youth action, these are increasingly being presented as educational films remaining within the confines of the youth sphere. They, thus, do little to promote intergenerational understanding or suggest to Canadian adults

(or youth for that matter) that youth are capable of responsible social and political participation on a broad scale.

### **Whose voices?**

#### *Only youth allowed*

As discussed in chapter three, compared to films from earlier decades the films from the early-2000s have fewer appearances from adults. Along with those films already discussed in regards to segregation of youth action, *Discordia* (2004) also focuses much more heavily on youth perspectives than on adults or their views. In this film documenting the aftermath of protests against Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Concordia University, the adults who appear in the film only provide context within which to understand the actions at Concordia (e.g., the Director of Communication) or the actions of individual student activists (e.g., their parents). There is also a short segment in which one of the central student activists speaks with Noam Chomsky; however, the scene is brief and focuses mainly on the student. In fact, a *Globe and Mail* article (Hays, 2004, January 31) reveals that the directors also filmed interviews with Robert Fisk (British journalist and Middle East correspondent) and Alan Dershowitz (Harvard law professor, known for his support of Israel), "a coup for first-time filmmakers" (p. R5), but left much of the Chomsky interview and the entirety of the other two on the cutting-room floor. Hays (2004, January 31) argues that this was intentional on the part of the directors who "wanted to keep [their film] primarily expert-free, instead telling the story through the eyes of three students" (p. R5).

The film is clearly dedicated to documenting the experiences and motivations of three student activists at Concordia and the film stays focused on the students instead of broadening to look at the roles or reactions of adults, either within or outside of the school, in any meaningful way. In one interesting moment, one of the student activists profiled in the film raises the issue of age: “The point is right now, to whatever extent we are involved in political activity, that’s not a bad thing; because we’re all kids, you know. So to me actually, in some ways, the most childish and the biggest hindrances are those behind the scenes: the adults, the parents, the lobby groups, the commentators, that have a huge role in forming opinion.” These players, however, do not have a place in the film and this issue is not explored further.

*Discordia* (2004) and many of the other recent films analyzed focus almost entirely on youth perspectives. Unlike in previous decades there is little sense that adult ‘experts’ need to be consulted to make a film or its message legitimate. In fact, of the films analyzed from the early-2000s, the reliance on adult ‘experts’ is only seen in the short films of *Salt* (2000) which was made as a high school assignment and, thus, was perhaps influenced by academic and documentary traditions which would suggest the need for such ‘legitimizing’ voices. Just as the directors of *Discordia* explicitly decided to keep their film expert-free, the production of *XS Stress* (2004) was guided by a seven-member youth advisory committee “ensuring [the film] wasn’t just an adult’s perception that was portrayed” (Bruemmer, 2005, May 24, p. D12). On the video jacket of *XS Stress*, one of the suggested discussion questions asks viewers to consider why the filmmakers decided to feature “only youth – no experts” and to think about how the film might be different “if it included expert opinions” (*XS Stress* Video Jacket, 2004).

One potential consequence of focusing this heavily on youth perspectives and actions is that collaboration between youth and adults is not seen as an important means of social or political participation for youth. This runs counter to Hart's (1992) ladder in which collaborative actions, particularly those initiated by young people, are considered to provide some of the most meaningful forms of participation for young people. In some cases of NFB filmmaking the participation of youth appears to have been more limited, such as *Respect Revolution* (2000) where the film was made by youth but within a larger project of a Women's Sexual Assault Center or *XS Stress* (2004) where an adult director and crew considered input from youth.

Are these films simply reflecting the reality that youth's lives are isolated and separate from the adult world? While it is encouraging that youth's voices are being respected and adult 'experts' are no longer deemed inherently superior or necessary, is there a danger in failing to show intergenerational collaboration? The final rung of Hart's ladder of participation emphasizes youth initiated projects with shared decision making between youth and adults, emphasizing the importance of collaboration in projects aimed at social and political change or development. There is a fine line between listening to youth's voices and co-opting them: Are youth advisory boards effective means of involving youth in filmmaking? While they could be if youth are actually playing an active and ongoing role, such consultation with youth often ends up meaning little to the youth involved who are not effectively incorporated into the whole of the project. Thus, it is important that we remember the different levels of participation outlined by Hart (1992) as such collaborative films are undertaken.



In focusing more heavily on youth's own voices, the early-2000s films continue the shift away from trends found in 1960s films in which youth voices were often silenced or unheard (or youth were seen struggling to be heard), and even beyond those found in 1990s films in which youth were often seen to be acting under the direction of adults, namely teachers or other authorities. In the early-2000s films, there is a sense that young people's voices are being respected and listened to (at least by other youth); however, there remains the question of whether youth social and political *action* is accepted and in what forms. In *Salt* (2000) and *XS Stress* (2004) there is little sense of public action on the part of youth (beyond the making of the film in question) or of adult reaction to youth's political or social participation.

In *Discordia* (2004), the only film of the decade to really broach the issue of youth political action (in this case, a large-scale protest and student politics), the fallout is documented mainly within the confines of the students involved. While this, importantly, allows those young men to voice their perspectives and aims to tell their stories, the approach doesn't incorporate outside perspectives (except marginally). Thus, there is little sense of how young people's actions are viewed by society more generally, or even by other youth, limiting what the film can say or reflect regarding youth action since these young people are portrayed within such a misleadingly bounded and limited environment. Thus, while youth voices are being encouraged and are given space, there is little consideration given to presenting youth action as a valid and important part of social life generally. Rather, in films such as *Discordia*, youth action and voice is presented as important primarily to the youth population, and even more importantly to the involved youth themselves as individuals on personal journeys.

### Diversity of voices

While the primary focus of this thesis is on the social and political actions of youth and how those are represented, it is imperative that issues beyond age be considered when examining voice. While it is important to determine whether and where youth voices are heard it is also important to ask *which* youth voices are heard as youth's subject positions are multiple and complex (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Valentine, Skelton, & Chambers, 1998). Class, race/ethnicity, gender, and other aspects of identity all figure into the films analyzed for this thesis, whether as explicit issues tackled within the films or as underlying factors influencing youth identities and power relations.

As Druick (2007) outlines in her study of the NFB's role in nation-building, struggles over cultural difference figure heavily in the NFB's development of citizenship discourses throughout the history of the institution. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, First Nations populations and immigrant workers were presented in NFB films in order "for the wider society to understand its relationship to them" (Druick, 2007, p. 110); however, by the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Druick (2007) argues, changes in government policy "reflected the shift in politics from the earlier period of Canadian citizenship discourse, which had been organized around eugenics, white settler nation building, and immigrant assimilation, to one built around the emergence of identity politics and the New Left" (p. 127). This coincided with changes in filmmaking approaches and the development of the NFB's Challenge for Change program which encouraged participation in filmmaking by individuals and communities and films which

featured discussions and dialogue shaped by the film subjects.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the politics and participation of ethnic and linguistic groups, as well as women and the poor, became a focus of government and of NFB films on citizenship.

The NFB's policies and films often closely coincide with broader government aims, as Druick (2007) explains, and the films portraying youth action analyzed in this thesis can be seen as part of these shifts and changes at an organizational level. The films of the late-1960s and early-1970s, *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967), *Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968), and *Occupation* (1970), reflect the concerns of the New Left in student/youth politics as well as changes in filmmaking style, particularly in *Christopher's* where the filmmaking process is featured and youth were invited as collaborators as well as film subjects. The 1980s films *Thin Dreams* (1986) and *Mile Zero: The SAGE Tour* (1988) reflect the importance of Studio D, the NFB's woman's studio, which was established in 1974 and responsible for many films on social issues. By the end of the 1970s it was considered "the NFB's most important producing unit" (Druick, 2007, p. 162). Both films were Studio D productions and *Mile Zero* was directed by Bonnie Sherr Klein, well-known for earlier NFB films including the Studio D's *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography* (1981).

Druick (2007) argues that the 1980s were a period of transition as government policies, social science methods, and NFB filmmaking shifted towards a focus on diversity, autobiography, and the personal. These trends are evident in the 1990s and early-2000s films about youth social and political action, particularly those such as *Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* (1992), *Bronwen & Yaffa (Moving Towards Tolerance)* (1996), and *Discordia* (2004) which focus on issues of race and ethnicity.

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the Challenge for Change program, see Marchessault (1995).

Notably, *Speak It* was directed by Sylvia Hamilton, the administrator of the New Initiatives in Film program at Studio D, which “aimed at providing opportunities for women of colour and First Nations women” during the early to mid-1990s (Druick, 2007, p. 171). Recent films such as *Salt* (2000), *Discordia* (2004), and *XS Stress* (2004) also focus on the NFB priorities of “identity, voice, and the question of difference” (Druick, 2007, p. 178).

### *Class*

The issue of class is rarely explicitly raised in any of the NFB films analyzed for this thesis. It is most evident as an issue in the films from the late-1960s and films reflecting back on that period. For example, a disagreement on class occurs between American community organizer Saul Alinsky and a young man in *Encounter with Saul Alinsky* (1967). In this dialogue, Alinsky states: “When I talk to the poor...when they ask you to work with them, you know what they want? They want a bigger, better piece of these decadent, degenerate bourgeois values.” The young man responds by arguing that they want this because “that’s what the media’s taught them to want” and that perhaps there are different values to consider when working in a community. This youth, a member of the Company of Young Canadians (CYC), is trying to determine how best to help the communities he is sent to work with. This issue of class is one that is central to the CYC and also raised in *The Children’s Crusade* (1984) where former CYC volunteers comment on how difficult it was for them, as middle-class (sub)urban youth, to go into often poor and rural areas with little training or knowledge of the circumstances and try to support community development projects.

The retrospective film *Summer of '67* (1994) also provides some reflection on the issue of class in the 1960s as the youth featured in earlier NFB films, now middle-aged, discuss their experiences. With respect to class, many of the adults, who are now professionals (e.g., physiotherapist, optometrist, teacher, lawyer, and psychiatrist), are clearly situated in the middle-class and some comment on the fact that they were middle-class during the 1960s as well, many traveling to Toronto's Yorkville area from their parents' homes in the suburbs. One woman in particular comments: "Materially, I was pretty advantaged, and really took that for granted for a long time."

In films from subsequent decades class issues are not raised in the films and it is easy, as a viewer, to assume the youth in most films are middle-class (i.e., well-dressed, seen in school settings or involved in extra-curricular activities, living in typical middle-class homes, considering university, etc.). There is a lack within these films of a sense that youth who are either particularly poor or rich engage in social or political action: Rather such participation is portrayed as being for middle-class youth.

### *Gender*

Much like the issue of class, gender was not raised as an explicit social issue in the late-1960s or early-1970s films; however, men are much more heavily represented and given voice in these films than in those produced in subsequent decades. This is not to say that women (both young and adult) did not have roles which were sometimes prominent. In *Flowers on a One-Way Street* (1967), for example, there are a few female city councilors who speak up in the meeting with the youth, however, they are often interrupted and have to fight to be heard among the male voices of the council. In

*Christopher's Movie Matinee* (1968) the NFB director and film crew (those seen or heard on camera) are all male and the most prominent youth voices in the filmmaking process are also male. There is, however, one young woman who is seen speaking at length in the meeting with Lamport and on one of the bus exchanges featured in the film. Her role is the most powerful one for young women in the films of this era and it is interesting to see how that is reflected upon by the woman when she is older.

In *The Summer of '67* (1994) this woman discusses her youth activism in the 1960s, and her involvement with the filming of *Christopher's* (1968) while at home with her daughter, preparing food for her family. This provides an interesting contrast between her youthful political voice and actions and her middle-aged domestic actions. This is not discussed in the film beyond this woman's own statement about her eventual realization that her youthful rejection of society was not healthy for her and that she "did want to live with one man and be loved and laugh and be normal." A male interviewee in the film also comments on gender roles in the 1960s, stating that while the youth appeared to be arguing for less structure and more gender equality, gatherings of youth would eventually be such that "all the women would be in the kitchen doing the cooking and preparing the food, and the men would be out in the front still doing...you see, we still had that tribal thing inherited from our parents' generation." Thus, while gender was not an issue addressed in the films of the late-1960s, such issues have become more visible in later decades such that these adults now reflect upon them when considering the social and political actions of their youth.

As discussed above, gender became a more significant issue in the 1980s as identity and New Left politics gained prominence in Canada, and the NFB films from this

decade reflect this. *Thin Dreams* (1986) is an example of such films where gender differences and inequalities were discussed and issues particular to boys and girls were highlighted. Other NFB films of the decade, such as *Being Male* (1980) and *Girls Fitting In* (1980) also focus on this increasingly important topic. *Thin Dreams*, a youth-directed film in which a group of young high school girls gather to discuss issues related to body image, from feeling fat to media images of women, raises a number of gender-related issues through discussion and short dramatizations: The difficulty larger-sized girls have finding fashionable clothing, dieting and peer pressure, and the connection between body image and dating/relationships. Unlike the films analyzed from earlier decades, girls are given all the space to speak in this film (there are no boys who are given voice) and are able to raise the issues and concerns most important to them.

This girls-only approach to film is in contrast with the other film analyzed from the 1980s, *Mile Zero* (1988), in which four youth (two boys and two girls) travel across Canada to raise awareness about nuclear disarmament. In this film, we see the group struggle to achieve gender equality. Unlike the films of the late-1960s and early-1970s where gender was a non-issue and no one was seen raising concerns about who was given the chance to speak and act, in *Mile Zero* there is a scene in which the youth comment on their efforts to ensure equality. One of the boys states that “sometimes the girls felt they weren’t getting enough chance to talk” on the tour, suggesting that there was awareness of the issue.

As a general political issue of equality, gender was not prominent in news media coverage of youth in the 1990s. It was, however, a factor at times, mainly in coverage of youth violence which was given an explicitly gendered aspect in some news coverage.

DeCloet (1997, August) tied his discussion of “violent crime by girls” to feminism, entitling his article “Fatal feminism is on the rise: violent crime by Canadian girls is up 300% in a decade” and McGovern (1998, January 19) argues that “with the exception of sexual assaults, teenaged females are leading the increase in every criminal category from assaults to auto theft. While teenaged boys still commit the majority of youth crimes, the gender gap is closing at an astounding pace” (p. 26). These perspectives on gender, youth, and violence in popular media were significantly different from recent academic research which has suggested that “within Canada, the girl child is subjected to a range of violent behaviours, attitudes and practices” including murder, sexual and physical assault, and child poverty (Jiwani & Berman, 2002, n.pag.). In the news, there was also attention paid to issues such as the early onset of puberty among girls (Hunter, 1999, March) and to girls fighting for a place in community centres (Klein, 1994, September). The 2000s saw more interest in girls’ health issues with stories about the lowering rates of teen pregnancy (Hanes, 2007, May 17) and controversy surrounding the HPV vaccine and whether it should be mandatory (Teen girls voice mixed thoughts, 2007, April 19).

*Taking Charge* (1996) was the only film analyzed from the 1990s that dealt with gender issues. Originally proposed as a series of films about gender-based violence to be entitled *Tomorrow’s Women Facing Today’s Violence* (Giguere, 1994, September), the end product does not highlight the plight of young women as much as originally intended. The focus of the film instead broadened from gender to other issues of inequality so that it deals not only with sexual harassment, but also racism, school violence, and general self-esteem. As discussed below, the 1990s films were more often concerned with race than gender.



As an analytical viewer of the early-2000s films, gender stood out as an interesting issue in terms of whose voices were heard and whose actions were seen: Young women were much more prominently portrayed than in films analyzed from previous decades. In *Salt* (2000), for example, all four young directors are women. Only one, however, places herself as a central figure in her film. In this short film, she addresses the punk image and lifestyle (one to which she's wondering if she herself subscribes) and does address gender in the movement, particularly when speaking with Lauraine Leblanc, author of *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture*, who states that "for girls, in lots of ways [punk] runs completely counter to what mainstream femininity is, to like what teenage girls are supposed to be like."

In *Respect Revolution* (2000), gender stereotypes and sex roles are the central concern and young people are seen in school hallways and on public streets talking to other youth about the issues, arguing that we must all demand respect and act respectfully in our sexual relationships. The film was distributed in part by the NFB but is a production of the Women's Sexual Assault Center in Victoria, B.C. who developed Project Respect in 2005 as "a prevention program for youth ages 14 to 19 that aims to stop sexual violence"

([http://www.yesmeansyes.com/mod.php?mod=userpage&page\\_id=10](http://www.yesmeansyes.com/mod.php?mod=userpage&page_id=10)).

In the film, young Respect Revolutionaries provide their own opinions in one-on-one interview segments and conduct interviews with other youth. For example, in one scene a group of Respect Revolutionaries interviews youth in a school hallway about what they think of the word 'slut.' This prompts the students to discuss sexual double standards and what it feels like to be labeled. In one example of a one-on-one interview

with a Respect Revolutionary, the young person discusses the need to explicitly say ‘yes’ during sexual encounters rather than assuming consent. This one-on-one interview is juxtaposed with shots of the ‘Revolutionaries’ discussing this issue with young people on the street. The film ends with young people daring other youth to get involved and “take the respect challenge.”

While films reflecting youth social and political action from earlier decades rarely explicitly addressed gender issues and tended to portray male actions and voices as central, more recent films have attempted to raise the issue by including young women’s voices and demonstrating young women’s ability to make films or otherwise act in socio-political ways.

### *Race & ethnicity*

As with gender, issues of race and ethnicity have become more explicitly talked about in NFB films in recent decades. In a few instances in the late-1960s films, youth do connect their struggles with those of the civil rights movement in the United States (although there is no evidence of self-reflection regarding the White-ness of these youth), however, these are often dismissed by adults who refuse to see the connections between the Canadian youth’s actions and perspectives and those of the American civil rights activists. For example, in *Christopher’s Movie Matinee* (1968) a young man says that the Yorkville youth and the “Negroes in the States” are both “reactionary movements” that are reacting against the existing status quo, but the older man he is talking with responds with shock at this comparison exclaiming “Ha! Come on, be your age!”

In the 1980s films race was not raised as an issue, however, in the 1990s it became central in films about youth action. Both *Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* (1992) and *Bronwen & Yaffa (Moving Towards Tolerance)* (1996) are about youth dealing actively with issues of racism. In *Speak It!*, youth confront race issues in their high school by forming a youth action group, putting on a performance about Black history in Nova Scotia, and participating in a local conference about racism. In *Bronwen & Yaffa*, two young women organize an anti-racism concert in their community where they are concerned racism and white supremacy is on the rise.

The issue of ethnicity is central in the 2004 film *Discordia*, which documents the aftermath of protests to a planned visit to Concordia University by Benjamin Netanyahu. It focuses on the lives of three student activists involved: a member of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights, co-president of the Jewish students' association Hillel, and VP of the student council who is portrayed as both Jewish and sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. While the film makes no efforts to comment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the heart of the initial protest, ethnic and religious issues are central as viewers watch these young men struggle to support causes close to their hearts and homes in a highly emotional and politicized atmosphere. In one scene, for example, there is a conflict in a main gathering spot on campus when Concordia Hillel (a chapter of the Jewish campus organization, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life) is accused of recruiting for the Israeli Defense Forces on campus. In another, students are seen heckling and shouting at a Hillel-organized Hanukah rally.

As these films demonstrate, beginning in the 1990s and continuing today, race and ethnicity are issues that youth are actively dealing with as they fight against

inequality and discrimination. While films from earlier decades did not address such issues, and people of colour or of varying ethnicities were rarely seen or heard, recent films more often include the voices of more diverse groups of youth.

*Other issues: Sexual orientation & geography*

In addition to class, gender, and race/ethnicity, recent films have also dealt with other factors of inequality. *XS Stress* (2004), while it doesn't deal with issues of diversity at its core, does broach the subject of gender roles and sexual orientation. In one of the film's youth profiles, a 17-year-old young man recounts his experiences of being bullied, particularly for being too effeminate:

Grade eight, it was a living hell. Oh my God, every day. Kids are even crueler in high school. I would go and the whole day, I would just get harassed in the hallways. "Gay, fag...queer, fudge packer"...it just goes on. I tried to change the way I walked and talked, like, to be like the other guys, but hey, I'm not the other guys, I'm me, you know. So I figured it was...it was pretty messed up to try to change myself. By the time grade eight came to the end, I said it's enough! I have to do something about it. One day I just told them, "You're wasting your time. I know what I am, you don't. You're probably just bullying me because you're insecure yourself." (Jarrel, *XS Stress*)

In the same film, during an interview with students, a girl says that her black eye is due to a fight with a girl who wanted to "smash [her] face in" because she is a lesbian. Like *Discordia* (2004), *XS Stress* does not take any particular stance on the issues or attempt to draw any broad conclusions about gender roles or sexual orientation. Rather, the film works to point out the emotional and physical strain youth experience in dealing with such identity issues marked by inequality and discrimination.

Geography as an important factor in youth subjectivity (e.g., rural and urban divides) is not raised in any of the films analyzed but is suggested in *The Children's Crusade* (1984) when adults reflect back on their experiences as 1960s youth from

(sub)urban areas going to rural and remote regions with the intention of ‘helping’ those communities. NFB films depicting Canadian youth’s social and political action tend to be filmed in major cities (where the location is made explicit or obvious). For example, of the films analyzed here, the late-1960s and early-1970s films were set in Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg, two of the 1990s films were in Halifax and one in Ottawa, and the 2000s films were filmed in Victoria and Montreal. Even in *Mile Zero* (1988), where the youth travel to various communities across Canada, the youth themselves are from Montreal. While the geographical locations of many of the films depicting school-based youth action are not made clear, there is little sense from these films that the locations would be rural and it is easy to assume they are also urban or suburban. Thus, these films do not adequately capture the voices and actions of rural youth and viewers are left without a sense of how rural Canadian youth may participate in society (or whether they do at all).<sup>31</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In an effort to address some aspects of youth agency with respect to representations of youth action by Canadian young people, I presented in this chapter an examination of youth involvement in NFB filmmaking and a discussion of the presence of youth voice in films. While much research and popular discussion concerns the media’s (negative) effects on children and youth, especially as popular media reinforce the commercialization of youth’s lives, this approach focuses primarily on the need to protect youth from harm rather than appreciating the potential agency young people have

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<sup>31</sup> Recent research is beginning to fill this gap. See Peddle (2008) and Gray (2009).

as media audiences and consumers, or, importantly, the roles young people can and do play as media producers when they are afforded the opportunity.

Drawing from Hart's (1992) ladder of participation which values collaborative actions between youth and adults, particularly those initiated by youth themselves, I have argued that while the NFB has made important efforts at involving youth in filmmaking, such processes are heavily influenced by age-based power relations and discursively constructed subject positions which limit what may be accomplished with respect to encouraging citizen participation among youth. Continued struggles over who has the power to make filmmaking decisions, lack of confidence in young filmmakers' abilities, and the limited distribution of many youth-made NFB films about youth action result in a circumscribed effort at affecting the Canadian public and at promoting youth filmmaking and youth action. In addition, the focus on youth voice and neglect of other voices (e.g., children's, adults', seniors', etc.) and the limited attention paid to youth's multiple subject positions as classed, gendered, raced, (dis)abled, sexualized, and geographically-situated, for example, promote individualized and youth-targeted actions among particular youth regarding specific issues rather than collaborative efforts that involve a diversity of young people critically engaging with social and political issues on a broad scale.

Youth media and youth involvement in NFB film production are undoubtedly encouraging signs that young people are being afforded opportunities to have their voices and perspectives represented in media: Youth involvement in NFB filmmaking suggests that there is potential for listening to youth voices and perspectives, valuing their opinions, and acknowledging their expertise regarding their own lives and conditions.

However, this represents limited gains with respect to the position of youth as citizens. Their voices and actions continue to be segregated as youth-directed films are most often aimed at youth audiences for educational purposes and as films concentrate more and more on youth only without portraying collaborative actions or providing any sense of how or whether youth actions reach beyond the youth population (e.g., to affect the world of adults – politics, the market, etc.).

As in the example of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which calls for increased child and youth participation in governance and decision-making but whose drafting process failed to include any young people, the rhetoric and realities of youth participation are often misaligned and require critical examination. In the following chapter I address recent efforts to encourage youth participation on and through the internet where a careful balance of the rhetoric and realities is necessary since utopian discourses of the democratic potential of internet technologies, particularly for children and youth, are common.

## Chapter 5 – Keeping young citizens ‘active’? New media initiatives<sup>32</sup>

*Well, take this very [web]site for example. What are we doing here? We are exchanging ideas and information to try and build a more positive future for us all. It can be anything from meeting people, getting together and forming a foundation, or it can be as simple as having a conversation with someone which might change their views on the world for the better. (posted on a TakingITGlobal forum by Shawn S. [Shmo], 2007, July 20)*

*What a wonderful idea to set up a blog! There is so little connection between one generation and the next. (posted on a Citizen Voices forum by nancy, 2006, September 27)*

Recently, the government of Canada, the NFB, and other associations and organizations have broadened their approach to connecting and communicating with youth by expanding their activities into the realm of information technology. Not only does this reflect recent changes at the NFB due to funding constraints and a mandate to (re)connect with more Canadians, but it also acknowledges changes in young people’s media environments. It has been argued that “the more than 70 million individuals born in the United States during the last two decades of the twentieth century represent the largest cohort of young people in the nation’s history, and the first to grow up in a world saturated with networks of information, digital devices, and the promise of perpetual connectivity” (Montgomery, 2008, p. 25). In Canada, a recent government report argues that the internet is one of youth’s desired means of communication with the government (Service Canada, 2005, August 9, Sections 12.3.2, 12.3.3, and 12.4) and an extensive study of political interest and participation in Canada reveals that “predictably, younger

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<sup>32</sup> Sections of this chapter have appeared in a working paper for the Canadian Research Alliance for Community Innovation and Networking (CRACIN) entitled *Children, youth, and civic (dis)engagement: Digital technology and citizenship* (Bell, 2005).



Canadians are much more likely than older Canadians to have used the Internet to track down political information” (Gidengil et al., 2004, p. 33).

Canadian governmental cultural industries and others are using new media and seeking new ways to communicate with, and engage, youth. In an article describing the development of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s (CBC) youth-focused Radio 3, Belanger (2005) states that “digital media, and the Internet in particular, can serve as effective channels to reach today’s youth and perhaps even begin to address their growing apathy toward the affairs of their country” (p. 122). He points to the fact that “the political will to include youth in the national dialogue need not simply refer to the resolve of political actors in the formal institutions of government – it can also extend to arms-length governmental cultural organizations such as the CBC,” (p. 122) or, as I examine in this thesis, the NFB.

The Mandate Review Committee’s evaluation of the NFB in 1996 stressed the need for the institution to reach new audiences, suggesting that new media may play an important role and that the NFB was in a position to lead the way in use of technology (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 169). The NFB has followed this recommendation, particularly in terms of internet media, launching its website *CitizenShift* in 2004-2005, and reorganizing the French version, *Parole citoyenne*, in the same year (NFB, 2005, p. 27). According to the 2006-2007 annual report, there were 32 website productions during that year and the NFB’s increasing visibility via the internet is stressed: “with 3,693,571 individual hits, the number of visitors is up by nearly 30%, while user sessions are up by more than 25%, making a total of 42,522,550 pages displayed, i.e. more than 6,000,000 up from the preceding year” (NFB, 2007).

The incorporation of these interactive new media into the NFB's activities is in many ways related to the budget cuts and challenge to reach audiences faced by the organization in the 1990s, but also reflects the NFB's focus on encouraging and facilitating dialogue among Canadians. In their *2004-2005 Annual Report*, the NFB (2005) claims that "more than ever, NFB productions reflect the concerns of Canadians and nurture debate" (p. 15). With respect to the use of new media, they argue that the NFB's various websites, especially *CitizenShift* and *Parole citoyenne*, "serve as a starting point for dialogue" (p. 27). This emphasis on dialogue and debate connects with the idea of the active citizen in that it is hoped that Canadians will be more active participants in creating cultural expressions and in developing representations of what it means to be Canadian through such new media environments. Similarly, websites such as the federal government's *Youth e-Cluster*, the Governor General's *Citizen Voices*, and non-profit organization *TakingITGlobal* each represent current efforts to connect youth to social, civic, and political ideas and to engage youth through the use of internet technology.

Like childhood and youth studies more generally, there is a large body of literature concerned with the relationship between children/youth and digital technologies: How children use those technologies and how those technologies may be changing the nature of childhood are of particular concern (Papert, 1993; Postman, 1982; Sefton-Green, 1998, 1999; Wartella, 2002). Selwyn (2003) argues that the "emblematic role of the child has been exemplified in ongoing debates concerning the increasing role of technology in society and the perceived shift of countries such as the UK into a post-industrial era and associated 'information age'" (p. 351) and argues that "we need to be aware of what these discourses of the child computer user include and exclude" (p. 374).

In this chapter, I explore contemporary attempts to engage and inspire youth citizen activity through the use of internet technology within the context of a history of media technologies where children and youth are simultaneously considered expert users and vulnerable users (recalling the participation/protection polarity previously discussed). I begin with a discussion of youth and technology, especially in the Canadian context. Following this I discuss recent efforts to employ communication technology, specifically the internet, to encourage youth socio-political engagement and I examine selected websites for variations in how youth are represented as potentially active and participatory Canadian citizens. I structure this examination of websites around the themes and tensions raised in previous chapters of this thesis in an effort to expand further from those discussions. These are: citizen vs. consumer, diversity issues, ‘appropriate’ youth participation, exclusion or segregation of youth and their views/actions, and generational differences.

### **Youth & ‘new’ communications technology**

Popular and policy discourses that attempt to frame, guide, and control the uses of computers and the internet by children and youth have accompanied the widespread introduction of these technologies into Western societies. As Coleman (2008) has argued, these attempts to manage young people’s actions in the digital realm directly affect their positions as citizens as “contemporary governments seeking to promote sociocultural cohesion increasingly turn to ICT [information and communications technology] to cultivate and regulate norms, routines, and rituals of citizenship” (p. 190).

Historically, efforts to come to terms with new media technologies have encompassed an approach that designates children and youth as a special category of users – a new generation with a different relationship to media technology. From radio to television, and now computers and the internet, youth have been considered in a league of their own with respect to media technologies: On one hand, children and youth are seen as expert users of computers and the internet, inherently skilled with new technologies, while on the other hand, they are considered vulnerable citizens who require protection from the possible dangers computers and the internet are perceived to bring with them, including access to sexual or violent material and contact with strangers (Best & Kellner, 2003; Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005; Montgomery, 2000; Papert, 1993, Selwyn, 2003; Suoranta, 2003; Wartella, 2002).

This dichotomous perspective on young people and the internet reflects earlier discussions in the introductory chapter and chapter one regarding participation vs. protection of youth. Those who consider the participation aspects of the internet for young people focus on the possibilities the technology brings, particularly for education and learning. Alternatively, those who consider the protection aspects focus on the dangers of the internet and argue for measures to shelter young people from the harms they perceive.

Throughout history, the introduction of ‘new’ communication technologies into society has been met with concern and debate over their potential roles and uses. A theme which runs throughout the history of communications technologies is the perceived role of children and youth as audiences and users. The importance of ‘childhood’ and ‘youth’ as organizing and ideological categories can be observed in histories of media, such as

radio and television, where children and youth were specifically addressed as a special group of users, requiring protection, and, at times, encouragement. Much of this can be understood within the framework of what Sefton-Green (1998) refers to as “the changing nature of young people’s lives” which involves “an increase in the provision of media technology in the previously closed and protected domains of the family and the school” (p. 2).

Accounts from Douglas (1986) and Spigel (1998) on the introduction of radio and television into society, respectively, recall the important role of children and youth as early users of the technologies but also as the locus around which discussions regarding technology’s harms took place. As Spigel (1998) states in her history of television:

Since the medium’s rise in the late 1940s, educators, citizen groups, the clergy, and other social organizations have attacked television for its unwholesome effects on children. Graphic violence, suggestive sexuality, and bad behavior of the Bart Simpson kind are continually seen as threats to youngsters, threats that need to be researched and controlled. (p. 110)

It is important to note that children were constructed with respect to television as “both innocents and arbiters of progress” and, as Spigel (1998) argues, this construction of the child in relation to technology “served to legitimate the institutional power of scientists, policy-makers, and media experts who turned their attention to children’s welfare” (p. 113). As discussed in chapter four, the media effects research tradition, in this vein of protecting children from harm, has had a longstanding influence on research and policy.

According to Seiter (1999), the widespread implementation of computers in the home is following a similar path to that of radio and television: “Computers are advertised on utopian claims to enrich family life, enhance communications, strengthen friendship and kin networks, and, perhaps most importantly, make children smarter and give them an advantage in the educational sphere” (p. 120) while also being criticised for

their potential harms (e.g, internet predators, pornography, etc.). Despite such similarities, Montgomery (2007) claims that there is something “distinctly different about this new media culture and the role that young people have played, and continue to play, in its development and expansion” (p. 4). Since the early 1990s, she argues, “a powerful combination of technological, social, and economic trends has placed children and youth at the center of digital politics, commerce, and culture” (Montgomery, 2007, p. 4).

In Canada and the U.S. it is commonplace to equate youth with computer skills and savvy as computers become part of children’s lives at earlier ages and as they are more fully integrated into everyday activities: Terms such as ‘power users’ and ‘cyberkids’ have become ways of referring to young people who we often assume to have, or easily attain, technology skills (Facer & Furlong, 2001; Malyn-Smith & Guilfooy, 2003). With studies showing that 93% of American teenagers between 12 and 17 use the internet, and that those aged 12 to 28 are embracing social and creative uses of the internet, including instant messaging, blogging, and playing online games (Fox & Madden, 2005; Macgill, 2007), it is clear that the internet is increasingly playing an important role in the lives of many American youth. Canadian studies have revealed similar trends in computer use among youth: A 2005 study found that 94% of Canadian youth aged 9 to 17 have internet access at home, many having their own computer with internet access (Media Awareness Network, 2005), and another study in the same year found that “Canadians between the ages of 18 and 44 (85%) were over one and a half times more likely to use the Internet than those 45 years of age and older (50%)” (Statistics Canada, 2006, August 15).

Despite the high levels of internet use among youth and the tendency to equate youth with technological skill, we must remain cautious of over-generalizations in both respects. Having a home computer with a high-speed internet connection is not ubiquitous in Canada and work-based and public internet terminals remain important in communities across the country. As a 2005 Statistics Canada study revealed, for example, “only 58% of residents living in small towns or rural areas accessed the World Wide Web [for personal non-business reasons], well below the national average” of 68% (Statistics Canada, 2006, August 15). In addition, as scholars such as Livingstone et al. (2005) have argued, youth’s internet and computer skills “are variably, and unequally, distributed across the population, with age, gender and socio-economic status all associated with differences in literacy” (p. 3). This reflects broader trends in Canadian internet use where higher levels of income and education correlate with increased use of the internet and where younger users (aged 18-44) report higher use, as do adults with children under 18 years of age in their household (Statistics Canada, 2006, August 15). In light of the findings discussed in chapter four regarding the limited diversity of youth involved in NFB films documenting social and political action, the inequality regarding internet access and use is of utmost concern as governments and organizations increasingly use technology to engage youth in socio-political endeavours.

### **The policy context in Canada**

A number of authors have written about the importance of political and policy discourses with respect to technology and youth, recalling the highly complex ideological functioning of these age-based categories. According to Selwyn (2003), political

discourse and policy represent one discursive arena where notions of the child as computer user are constructed and enacted. He argues that the child is often situated as both the recipient of, and reason for, technology policies (p. 371) and that the “notion of the child computer user has also functioned as a powerful means of ‘selling’ government strategies and policies to the general public” (p. 370).

One example of this is Canada’s SchoolNet program, whose many sub-projects have now been scaled down or abandoned due to funding cuts, but which initially had the mandate “to work with public and private partners to extend Internet connectivity into K-12 classrooms” (Shade & Dechief, 2004, p. 131). It is a particularly interesting case with respect to children’s rights.

In Canada’s second report to the United Nations (UN) regarding implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, SchoolNet is presented as an important program for dissemination of the Convention. Described as “a collaborative effort to connect all Canadian public schools and public libraries to the Internet by March 31, 1999” SchoolNet is celebrated in the report for enhancing “the access of Canadian children to information promoting their well-being and development” (*Canada’s second report*, 2001, April, n.pag.). SchoolNet is further discussed with regards to promoting non-discrimination and freedom of expression, where it is argued that “children and youth are also encouraged to express themselves through SchoolNet, an Industry Canada initiative to promote the effective use of information technology among Canadians” (*Canada’s second report*, 2001, April, n.pag.). SchoolNet is also celebrated in the report for providing appropriate information to children through the media, as well as for being an international model. It is also promoted as an important educational tool, “helping



young Canadians acquire the information technology skills they need to succeed in the knowledge-based economy” (*Canada’s second report*, 2001, April, n.pag.). In Canada’s response to the UN Committee’s questions regarding the second report, SchoolNet is highlighted as an important federal program with respect to the Convention (*Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 2003, September).

Despite all of this, the government has drastically cut SchoolNet funding in recent years and the SchoolNet programs and resources celebrated in Canada’s second report to the UN are now no longer readily available to the public.<sup>33</sup> This example provides further evidence of a lack of continuity with respect to programs and policies dealing with children and youth at the federal level, as discussed in chapter one, as well as the challenges of sustainability in online environments. Thus, the Canadian government has historically made efforts to use computers and the internet as means of encouraging children’s rights and participation, however, it has failed to support its own implemented projects in recent years, calling into question the government’s commitment to such use of technology.

### **Technology & citizen participation**

The primary aim of this chapter is to consider the ways in which discourses of youth, internet technology, and citizen participation are converging and how young people are represented (or represent themselves) in recent efforts to engage them through the internet. ‘New’ communication technologies such as computers and the internet are often considered to have particular effects, or promote certain trends in society, with

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<sup>33</sup> The SchoolNet website was taken offline on June 29, 2007, however, versions of the website from 1997-2007 can be viewed via the Internet Archive, Wayback Machine, at [http://web.archive.org/web/\\*/http://www.schoolnet.ca](http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.schoolnet.ca).

respect to social and political participation. Scholars commonly argue that the internet provides new opportunities to build social capital through activities such as joining virtual communities; however, the internet is also often blamed for contributing to the increasing globalization and commodification of social and civic interactions. Thus, the internet, as a communication technology always in flux, poses a number of challenges to the study of youth social and political action.

Despite its frequent construction as a democratic space of participation (Grossman, 1995; Katz, 1997, April), the internet is considered by many to be much more problematic. Chun (2001-2002) highlights this complexity in her statement that “we need to resist narratives of the other-worldliness of the Inter-net in order to see how inequalities travel through and repeat themselves within these inter-national spaces” (p. 188). As Nakamura (2002) argues with respect to racial inequality online, “the celebration of the Internet as a democratic, ‘raceless’ place needs to be interrogated, both to put pressure on the assumption that race is something that *ought* to be left behind...and to examine the prevalence of racial representation in this supposedly unraced form of social and cultural interaction” (p. 32). The continued existence of inequalities online, as well as unequal access to technology itself, has a profound effect on participation; therefore, in an examination of youth action and internet technology it is critical to closely interrogate the ways in which inequalities reproduced online position people as (non)participants or suggest particular forms of participation while neglecting or dismissing others.

Others similarly call attention to the persistence of inequality in an increasingly networked and information-focused society, claiming that “in spite of their potential

usefulness..., the influence of electronic networks at large in the cultural realm may well be to reinforce the cosmopolitanism of the new professional and managerial classes living symbolically in a global frame of reference, unlike most of the population in any country” (Castells, 2000, p. 393). Thus, participation may be enhanced for those privileged enough to have access to online spaces and the resources required to use them effectively, however those already marginalized will not likely benefit and may in fact see their social and political influence diminish.

This argument is made by Warschauer (2004) who claims that “the ability to assess, adapt, and create new knowledge using new information and communication technology is critical to social inclusion in today’s era” (p. 9). Consequently, those without access to information and communication technology, and the means to use it effectively, will have an increasingly limited ability to participate in socio-political activities and decisions. Being able to effectively use information and communication technology is important, according to Warschauer (2004), because “being part of this network is critical not only for economic inclusion but for almost all other aspects of life today, including education, political participation, community affairs, cultural production, entertainment, and personal interaction” (p. 28).

In the realm of youth social and political participation online, Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2008) have found that “efforts in the online civic engagement space are often more strongly suited for enabling or more deeply engaging young people who are *already* civically minded” [emphasis in the original] (p. 161). To complicate matters, Ito et al. (2008) have argued that “adult lack of appreciation for youth participation in popular culture has created an additional barrier to access for kids who do not have Internet

access at home,” as libraries and schools place restrictions on the access and use of technology. The authors stress the need for “a public agenda that recognizes the value of youth participation in social communication and popular culture” (p. 36).

The constructed dichotomy often made between online and offline worlds and activities also has implications for the way we conceive of online participation. Wajcman (2004) has argued that “the problem with these theories of virtual community is ambiguity about the extent of their likeness to communities on the ground, and their relation to those grounded communities that necessarily remain” (p. 61). She rightly questions the supposed freedom created in virtual communities, concluding that “new technologies may be ‘epistemologically open’, but many of their current forms are similar in their material relations to pre-existing technologies” (p. 75). Participation in virtual communities, therefore, remains connected to real material bodies and other forms of participation in important ways.

Bakardjieva (2004) supports this position when she argues that there is an important connection between the real and the virtual and when she criticizes internet researchers for creating a separation between the two. Based on data collected through ethnographic research, she reveals that, for her research participants, “actions and interactions in online forums were closely intertwined with participants’ projects and pursuits in their offline lives” (p. 134). This is an important point with respect to the ways in which technology may be used to encourage citizen activity since it suggests that it might be possible to enhance social and political participation through technology by connecting online participation with offline issues and activities.

Despite the potential uses of technology for democratic purposes, recent trends in the development and use of the internet suggest that these democratic uses may not be collective or collaborative. Putnam (2000), for example, places much of the blame for declining civic participation on media, arguing that watching television and other screen media are private and passive activities which are becoming increasingly individualized due to target marketing and audience fragmentation (p. 244-245). Bennett (2008) has argued that the social and economic changes associated with a move towards a network society have had drastic effects on the role of the individual, primarily in promoting “many loosely tied associational chains that connect them to their social and occupational worlds” rather than more traditional connections through a church or political party, for example. As a consequence, he argues,

individuals have become more responsible for the production and management of their own social and political identities....This transformation of the relationship between individual and society places increasing strains on parties and governments to appeal to highly personalized political preferences that are more difficult to address, much less satisfy, than the broad group or class interests of an earlier era. At the same time, individual citizens – particularly younger generations who have grown up in this new social and economic matrix – feel that their personalized expectations of politics are perfectly reasonable (reflecting who they are) and often find that politics and politicians either ignore them or are far off the mark in their communication appeals (Bennett, 2008, p. 12)

Reflected here is the increasing individualism discussed in previous chapters, suggesting that the shifts associated with technology use and a network society may be contributing to a perception of the self focused on individual value and identity. As I discuss later in this chapter, the commercialization of the internet is a related concern, as “the move toward increasingly personalized media and one-to-one marketing may encourage self-obsession, instant gratification, and impulsive behaviors” (Montgomery, 2008, p. 42) associated with individualism, rather than promoting collective action.

## **Media, computer/internet technology, & youth citizenship**

Extending from the literature on the internet as a space for socio-political action and citizen participation and from research on youth and media, scholars have begun to explore ways of encouraging youth participation and engagement in social and political issues/actions through the internet. Much work on youth and civic participation has tended to include media and the internet only as marginal factors (Andolina, Jenkins, Keeter, & Zukin, 2002; Russell, 2002; Torney-Purta, 2002; Youniss et al., 2002) and the research that does focus on the role of media has been criticized by McLeod (2000) who argues that “if media are analyzed at all, the focus is usually on television rather than other media, and measurement is of time spent rather than exposure and attention to particular content” (p. 48). A focus on news media and television is apparent in work such as that by Rahn and Hirshorn (1999), Putnam (2000), Sherr and Jenkins (2003), and Keum et al. (2004), as well as the Canadian study on citizens by Gidengil et al. (2004). The traditional approach to studying media in citizenship and citizen participation research often positions children or youth as a passive media audience and focuses largely on media effects and formal political participation.

Researchers such as Buckingham (2000a and 2000b) and McLeod (2000) are encouraging a move away from a focus on effects research within a narrow definition of citizen engagement, looking instead to the ways in which children and youth incorporate and make sense of media content and activities in their lives in potentially social and political ways. In an effort to combine a broadened definition of citizen participation with a child-centred approach to media, McLeod (2000) argues that

shifting the focus from formal political outcomes to the informal processes necessary for democratic deliberation directs attention to the development of such skills as critical and reflective strategies for processing information from the media; formulation and expression of opinions; understanding and tolerance for diverse points of view; listening and taking turns; principled reasoning; and bargaining and compromise in group decisions. (p. 47)

This approach informs many networking initiatives which rely on technologies as a means to engage youth in social and political activities.

Recently, researchers have begun to address forms of media and technology other than news media in their work on youth social and political participation. Iyengar and Jackman (2003), for example, conducted an “exploratory study to test whether young Americans’ enthusiasm for digital technology can provide a meaningful opportunity to engage them in the world of politics” (p. 17) and found that it did in their specific case of distributing a CD-Rom of interactive political information. The internet has been addressed by Della Carpini (2000) who argues that information and communication technologies seem to provide “access to young adults, an increased ability for organized interests to more effectively reach young adults, and new or easier opportunities for already engaged (and perhaps interested but not yet engaged) young adults to participate and do so more effectively” (p. 348). Finn and Detlor (2002) report on a project that engaged youth in the design and development of the Government of Canada’s *Youth e-Cluster* (one of the websites examined later in this chapter). In a study by Livingstone, Bober, and Helsper (2004), addressing youth participation on the internet, it was found that “young people cannot simply be divided into those who participate more and those who participate less. Rather, a more complex explanation, based on demographic and internet use factors, leads young people to take up opportunities to participate online in different ways” (p. 14). This difference in participation requires further interrogation,

especially in terms of the ways in which the internet and internet websites aimed at youth may help to construct young people within particular subjectivities as citizens.

In 2003, Livingstone argued that few research projects had examined the opportunities that new technologies such as the internet provide for communication, identity, and participation; however, increasing concerns regarding youth participation in both politics and broader socio-cultural society has led to more interest in the opportunities new technologies may offer in this area. Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles, and Larson (2004, March) argue that

scarcely audible amidst the hubbub over piracy and pornography and the clamor of the media marketplace, a low-profile civic upsurge – created for and sometimes by young people – has been taking root on the Net. Hundreds of websites have been created to encourage and facilitate youth civic engagement, part of an emerging genre on the Internet that could loosely be called “youth civic culture.” (p. 2)

In their study, Montgomery et al. (2004, March) present a number of youth civic engagement categories which suggest the diverse ways in which the internet may play a role in youth social and political action, including volunteering, voting, youth philanthropy, engagement with the local community, global issues and international understanding, online youth journalism and media production, access and equity, tolerance and diversity, positive youth development, and youth activism.

In a survey of youth who frequent websites aimed at involving them in civic or political issues, Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2008) found that “young people who are interested in civic, community, or activist issues are looking to the Internet for information about causes important to them, connections to like-minded peers and organizations, and for ways to organize and mobilize” (p. 170). According to Montgomery (2008), youth perceive the internet as a place where they are able to make



connections and communicate through “online polls and questionnaires; invitations to submit essays, poetry, artwork, and other original materials; and discussion boards that encouraged collaboration and debate” (p. 28). Recalling the earlier discussion of the relationship between online and offline worlds, however, another important aspect to youth’s online engagement in social and political websites is their role as “facilitators of action” (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008, p. 162). As Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2008) found, “the majority of civic engagement activities resulting from online engagement actually happen in the offline world” since youth leave such websites “armed with the support of like-minded individuals, tools to organize, and the right information,” making them more prepared and able to instigate or support social or political actions in their communities (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008, p. 162). Levine (2008) provides an important caution here, however, suggesting that

there are limits to any strategy that gives kids online opportunities without changing their lifeworlds. Factors such as segregation and stratification are powerful determinants of how people use technology. I do not believe that youth media can be fully satisfactory until young people’s communities become more democratic. That is a very tall order, but I suggest that technology does not provide an alternative to the hard task of reforming the offline communities and institutions in which young people come of age. (p. 133)

Thus, as we consider the possibilities that new technologies may offer for young Canadians to participate in social and political ways, we must remain cognizant of the realities of young people’s lives and how these may impact the potential for actualized youth participation.

Within this context, scholars have introduced the notion of e-citizenship to encompass public participation and political engagement through the use of technology. Coleman (2008) argues that e-citizenship is a “technology of governance,” aligning his approach to citizenship with my own: “That is not to say that e-citizenship is about

governing young people, in the traditionally coercive and dominating sense, but that it is about nurturing forms of conduct consistent with being a citizen. The function of e-citizenship is to conceive, create and sustain members of a political community” (p. 201). However, Coleman (2008) also contends that the technologies of e-citizenship can be used to challenge dominant conceptualizations of citizens and of citizenship itself. He argues that there is a tension between managed e-citizenship, which assumes that the internet is unsafe for youth and that it must be used in controlled ways, and autonomous e-citizenship, which embraces the openness of the internet and related technologies. This tension will be apparent in the discussion of websites later in this chapter, as the Canadian government and organizations struggle to encourage youth participation online while at the same time wanting to maintain control over the discourses and actions of youth.

### **Engaging Canadian youth through the internet**

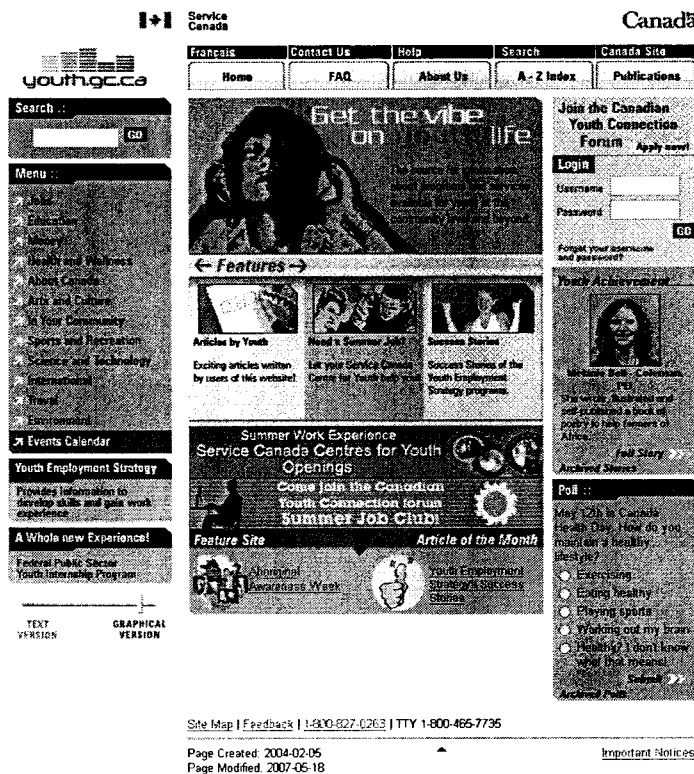
For the purpose of providing a more in-depth consideration of how young Canadians are being positioned as citizens within the context of these ‘new’ internet-based engagement initiatives, I chose four websites for close analysis.<sup>34</sup> These four websites, while all Canadian-based and aimed at Canadians (one is global in scope), are very different in origin, purpose, and style. Each, however, offers insight into important themes developed throughout this dissertation and provides information on how young people are considered as citizens by various organizations seeking to engage youth in

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<sup>34</sup> Analysis took place between October 2006 and December 2007. I also visited the websites more recently and indicate any additional data from these visits. While I have made efforts to update the website information when I noticed changes online, it is inevitable with this kind of analysis that some of the discussion here will now be out of date. I have dated the screenshots to indicate when they were taken, since online content is often dynamic.

social and political actions via the internet. Following an introduction of each of the websites my analysis of them will further the discussion of themes previously introduced in the thesis, showing how they continue to be relevant and contentious in this new arena of youth engagement and action.

*The Government of Canada Youth e-Cluster (<http://youth.gc.ca/index.jsp>)<sup>35</sup>*



**Figure 1: Screenshot of the Government of Canada’s Youth e-Cluster, <http://youth.gc.ca/yohome.jsp?lang=en&flash=1> (May 28, 2007)**

According to the ‘About Us’ section of the Government of Canada’s youth-focused website, “Youth.gc.ca is all about helping youth between 15 and 30 years of age.

<sup>35</sup> A new version of this website was launched in December 2008 and it is now under the auspices of Service Canada. It is much more stream-lined with less content and focuses on the four themes of jobs, education, money, and careers. The discussion in this chapter reflects the earlier version of the website as found in late 2006 and throughout 2007 and most of 2008, however, I have added a few notes on the new version where applicable.

It is THE place to tap into a wide variety of information” (*About Us*, 2007, June 29).

Launched in 2002, the website is comprised mainly of links to resources deemed useful for Canadian youth. These are divided into themes: Jobs, Education, Money, Health and Wellness, About Canada, Arts and Culture, In Your Community, Sports and Recreation, Science and Technology, International, Travel, and Environment (these have been streamlined, as mentioned above). The mandate of the website is focused on providing links to job resources and skill-development programs and services, stating that “Whether you need a hand finding a job or would like to start your own business, it is all here at your fingertips on youth.gc.ca!” (*About Us*, 2007, June 29).

The website is relatively large, in both English and French, with textual and graphic versions, all with the same content. In addition to the theme pages which are comprised of lists of relevant links, the website highlights special links to the Youth Employment Strategy (a Government of Canada program) and the Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program (from Human Resources and Social Development Canada and the YMCA). There is also an events calendar (populated mainly with job search workshops and similar events), as well as profiles of Canadian youth (“Youth Achievement”), articles written by youth, government success stories, polls, links to government programs for youth, and advertisements for contests. An index of topics and list of publications highlights the portal nature of the website and its focus on providing links to resources.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> As of January 2009 most of these aspects of the website are no longer present. The content now focuses strictly on government information and services, listed under the topics jobs, education, money, and careers, and organized according to population (unemployed, Aboriginal, disabled, and newcomer youth, and employers). Resources are also offered in regards to ‘Life Events’ such as moving and filing taxes.

The partners associated with the website are outlined on the 'Partners' page (<http://youth.gc.ca/yoaux.jsp?&lang=en&flash=1&ta=1&auxpageid=14>), where visitors learn about what the participating government departments and agencies do and why they are involved in youth.gc.ca. There is little information, however, on what each of the partners contributed to the website or its development. In many cases, the descriptions focus on the programs or services the partner offers for youth and the fact that these are linked on the website. The partners include: Canadian Heritage, Citizenship and Immigration, Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Health Canada, the Department of Justice Canada, Service Canada's Aboriginal and Youth Programs Directorate, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Industry Canada, the Department of National Defence, the National Research Council, Natural Resources Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Department of the Solicitor General, and the Canadian International Development Agency.<sup>37</sup>

Citizen Voices (<http://www.citizenvoices.gg.ca/>)

The *Citizen Voices* website (available in French and English) is subtitled "Breaking down solitudes" and is a project of the current Governor General (GG) of Canada, Michaëlle Jean. Upon entering the English-language version of the website, the visitor encounters photos, video, and information about/from the Governor General (e.g., recent speeches and reports of visits). In 2007, the website was divided into four themes: Belonging, Youth, Women, and Art Matters (as of January 2009 these had changed slightly; however, youth remain prominent within a 'Youth Dialogues' theme). Each

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<sup>37</sup> The 'Partners' page no longer exists.

theme has an introductory page where the Governor General (GG) has written a brief message, followed by links to the website's forums and blogs associated with the theme, as well as external links of interest.

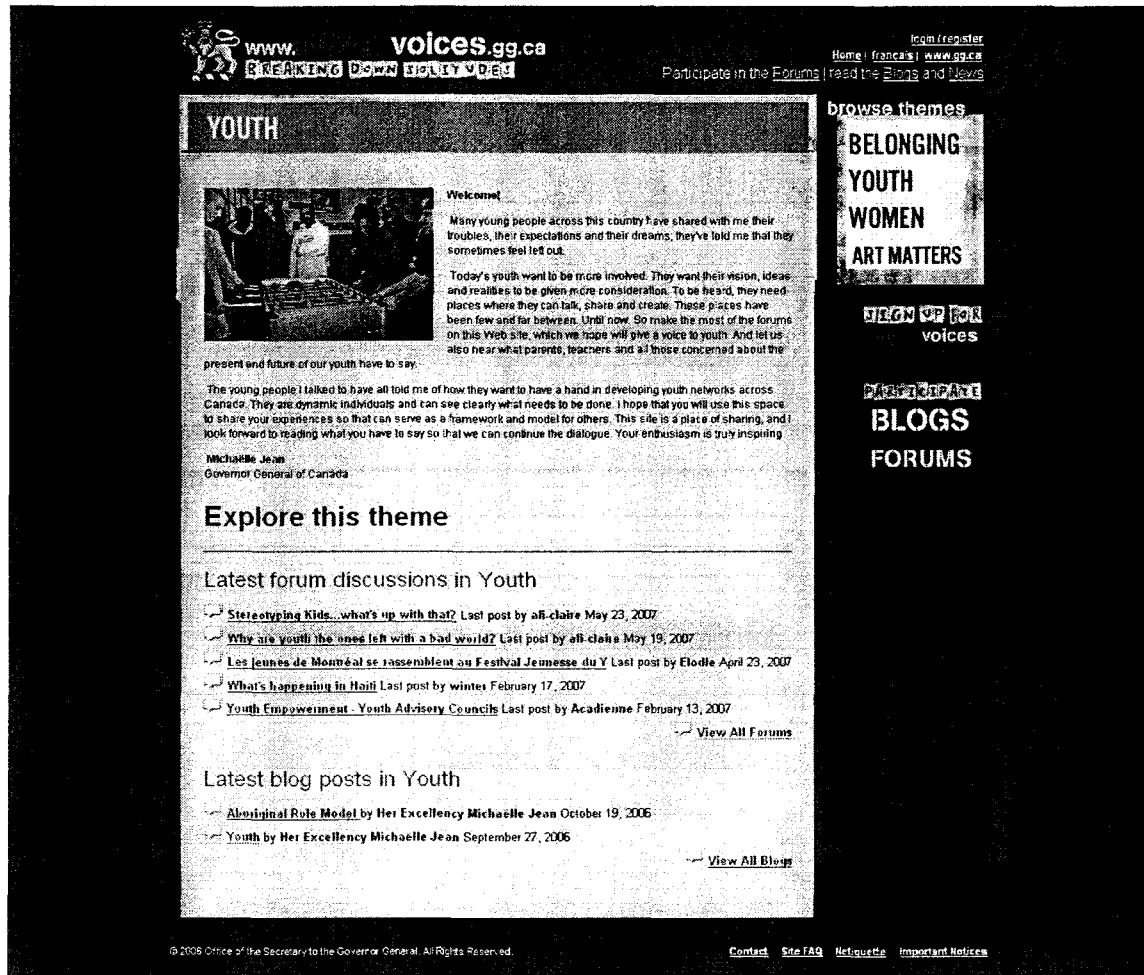


Figure 2: Screenshot of *Citizen Voices*' Youth theme, <http://www.citizenvoices.gg.ca/en/themes/youth> (May 28, 2007)

When the website was launched on September 26, 2006, the GG posted the following to welcome visitors:

This site is for you. It is a place of dialogue. Forums, blogs, chat – join in and share your concerns, your ideas, your experiences, and your achievements. Talk with other Internet users across the country. Every day, as I meet with citizens across Canada and around the world, I am witness not only to terrible hardships but also to extremely positive initiatives. I want to share with you all that I have seen and heard. I hope to tell you about the women, men and young people who

are working to make this a better world. I hope that this site will bring people together and break down the solitudes that separate us. (Jean, 2006, September 26)

Since the website is focused on the ‘voices’ of Canadians, as this comment suggests, the current aim is to develop the website’s interactive elements, primarily blogs and forums, in order to encourage Canadians to participate in discussion and sharing. At this point in time, visitors to the website are able to participate through the forums or scheduled on-line chats (only one of which has been undertaken – as part of the launch of the website in 2006).

Youth are a priority for the GG and this is reflected in the fact that it is one of the four themes of the website. The youth theme was highlighted during the launch of the website and an online chat with the GG, addressing youth issues, took place following the launch (*Chat on-line with the Governor General!*, 2006, September 25). The launch events helped to both advertise the website and draw attention to its potential for engaging and encouraging Canadians, particularly youth, to voice their opinions about issues important to them.

The focus of the website is on citizen voices and, other than videos posted by the GG, the blogs and forums are the most active areas. Youth are positioned and presented as if they are able and competent to contribute to discussions regarding important social and political issues, with the GG, youth themselves, and adults all commenting on and discussing the unfair nature of youth stereotypes and the potential youth have for effective participation in society and politics. In the ‘General’ forum of the youth section of the website, posts cover issues such as the environment, what it means to be “proud to be Canadian,” living in and changing “at risk” communities, the annual seal hunt, and others.

While providing a space for the voices of Canadians is a prime motivator for the website and it is made up mainly of blogs and forums where registered visitors can post comments and start forum threads, it is unclear from the website itself how young people (or others) learn about the website or are being encouraged to participate. The connection between the website and educational institutions was made apparent at the launch which took place at La Cité collégiale in Ottawa (*Chat on-line with the Governor General!*, 2006, September 25). In addition, the online discussion of youth issues that followed that launch was primarily populated by the college's students. As the GG stated in her speech at the launch: "What is so wonderful is that I am standing before a group of young people from across the country who have agreed to take part in a discussion on civic engagement and the role that the Internet can play. Your opinions are so important, and I can't wait to hear what you have to say" (Jean, 2006a, September 27).

This is a relatively new website so, unlike the others analyzed here, there is little history to it (that is public) and only the basic framework and interactive elements have been implemented thus far. While the forums and blogs are currently active and there are efforts to incorporate more content, it is still unclear how the website will develop or whether this forum for discussion will effectively engage young people in social and political discussions.





Figure 3: Screenshot of CitizenShift (old), <http://citizen.nfb.ca/onf/info> (May 28, 2007)

The NFB website CitizenShift is “an interactive platform where you can explore social issues through: films, photography, articles, blogs and podcasts” (About, n.d.). On the main NFB website, it is referred to as “a National Film Board of Canada Web site initiative dedicated to citizen engagement and social change” (Short Films, 2007).

Initially launched by the National Film Board of Canada in 2004/2005, it was inspired by the NFB’s 1960s Challenge for Change program in which communities were invited to participate in documentary filmmaking for the purposes of instigating and facilitating

<sup>38</sup> This website underwent a re-design during the process of analysis, thus, I will discuss elements from the website prior to the re-design (data from October 2006 and May 2007) and following the re-design (data from December 2007) in an effort to capture both some of the initial (or earlier) tendencies with respect to representations of youth, as well as any changes that took place. The new platform was launched on December 3, 2007.



Figure 4: Screenshot of CitizenShift (revised), <http://citizen.nfb.ca> (December 19, 2007)

social change. CitizenShift draws on the themes of community, documentary, and social change, offering what they consider “a unique online platform that gives users a forum to debate social issues and encourage social change” (About, n.d.). Prior to the re-design of

the website, it was subtitled “Free range media for social change,” as seen in the main logo on the top left throughout the website, and currently it is subtitled “Online media for social change,” indicating that the dedication to social change remains central.<sup>39</sup>

Youth are not explicitly stated to be a primary audience of or primary contributors to *CitizenShift*. They are, in fact, not mentioned specifically except in the context of particular youth-focused projects profiled on the website. It is the combination of new media and social issues that makes *CitizenShift* an important website for examination in this thesis, in addition to the role it plays in expanding and extending the actions of the NFB with respect to teaching Canadians about being Canadian. The intersection of new media and citizenship, as well as the NFB’s continuing stress on education, means that *CitizenShift* is tied up in discourses pertaining to youth and new media, as well as media and participation. Even though youth are not explicitly named as an audience for the website (in the same way that they are not always the only intended audience for NFB films), the new media approach, youth-directed programs and content, and style betray a desire to appeal to young Canadians.

Up until a re-design and re-organization, the website was divided into six main themes: Reel Community, Rebels with a Cause, Through the Lens, Web Initiatives, Blogs and Podcasts, and About CitizenShift. The re-design of the website removed these themes and implemented a new structure based on the following sections: Topics, Contributors, Dossiers, Our Blogs, and Contribute.

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<sup>39</sup> Like other government of Canada websites, there is also a French version of this initiative. Entitled *Parole Citoyenne*, the two initiatives are separate entities and contain different content geared towards different language groups in Canada. The websites, however, are similar in approach (both were inspired by Challenge for Change) and content (in 2007 both featured the same main categories and themes, as well as web projects and blogs).

‘Reel Community’ featured short films made by experienced filmmakers, community members, and first-time filmmakers, exploring issues such as water, femicide, autonomous media, and young women’s lives. In addition to being able to view each short film, there was extra information pertaining to each, including links to related NFB films, featured music, photos, and relevant readings, as well as web links of interest. These pages, focused around film projects, can now be accessed through either the ‘Topics’ section which lists projects by the topics Arts & Music, Economy & Labour, Education, Environment, Gender, Health, Human Rights, Immigration, Media, Politics, Poverty, Racial Justice, Religion & Spirituality, War & Peace, and (notably) Youth, or through the ‘Dossiers’ page which presents projects, as well as profiles on selected filmmakers, in alphabetical order.

‘Rebels with a Cause’ was comprised of profiles of filmmakers who work for social change. At the time of initial data gathering there were nine profiles, including both men and women ranging from younger filmmakers who are somewhat established (e.g., Avi Lewis) to those with more experience (e.g., Bonnie Sherr Klein). None of these short profiles referred to the age of the filmmaker. This content appears to be consistent following the re-design although the profiles are now less prominent on the website, accessible through the ‘Topics’ page or the alphabetical index in ‘Dossiers.’

‘Through the Lens’ featured documentaries in progress. Similar to ‘Reel Community,’ this section presented clips from the developing films as well as links to other relevant materials. Like the projects initially in the ‘Reel Community’ section, these are now accessible through the ‘Topics’ and ‘Dossiers’ sections of the re-designed website, however, the content is for the most part the same.

‘Web Initiatives’ was where visitors could find links to online communities working for social change. Those listed included HomelessNation.org, The Global Women’s Memorial, Patagoniabolivia.net, and The Ties that Bind. These initiatives are still present on the website, including the same content, however, are now accessible through the ‘Topics’ and ‘Dossiers’ sections. Instead of simply providing links to external websites, *CitizenShift* offers their visitors short film clips, photographs, and readings relevant to the organization and issue in question. Most of these are websites external to the NFB (except for The Ties that Bind) but generally feature the NFB as a partner.

Prior to the re-design, the ‘Blogs and Podcasts’ page was comprised of the ‘*CitizenShift* Community Blog’ where participants post entries about their latest experiences filmmaking, links related to issues they are working on, or new content on the website (particularly new podcasts). This page, although now referred to as ‘Our Blogs,’ has not changed and still resembles the old *CitizenShift* design. The blog posts in the ‘Community Blog’ continue to be copied from the other blogs linked on the website so the community blog is always updated every few days with quite substantial posts, providing visitors with a reason to return. On this page there are also links to featured blogs and other blogs which are each related to a particular film or issue being explored by a particular filmmaker. The podcasts, which are no longer alluded to in the section title, are found linked in blog posts in one of the featured blogs (‘Podcasts’). Users can also subscribe to the podcast.



*TakingITGlobal* is an international organization begun by youth in Canada in 1999, which solicits donations from foundations, governments, and corporations, as well as individuals, and is partnered with numerous foundations and organizations focused on youth. *TakingITGlobal Canada* (<http://canada.takingitglobal.org/>) is a country-specific website of this much larger initiative which provides Canadian youth with opportunities to share ideas and thoughts with others around the world, and acts as a resource of information on local and global programs.

*TakingITGlobal* (TIG), subtitled “Inspire. Inform. Involve,” “is an online community that connects youth to find inspiration, access information, get involved, and take action in their local and global communities” (*TakingITGlobal: Inspire, inform, involve*, 2007). It is claimed on the website that TIG is “the world’s most popular online community for young people interested in making a difference” (*TakingITGlobal: Inspire, inform, involve*, 2007).

From its beginnings in Toronto in 1999 it has expanded, working with “global partners that include United Nations agencies, major companies and youth-focused organizations” (*About TakingITGlobal*, 2007) and the *TakingITGlobal* website is both a portal for finding information and a place for interaction. It is comprised of member stories, project tools and summaries, links to country-specific websites, an online publication, an online art gallery, blogs, discussion boards, a calendar of events, and a database of organizations working for social change around the globe.

The organization situates itself and its development at the heart of trends involving youth, technology, and globalization:

Young people disproportionately feel the effects of global issues, though they are often the healthiest, most educated and driven members of a society.... Young

people also lead the world's information society, readily creating and adopting new technologies. They spearheaded almost every major innovation in the Information Technology, from the World Wide Web to Open Source software. Young people access technology more than any other group – from home PCs to local Internet cafés. They appreciate technology's potential to connect with other cultures and viewpoints, and use it to express themselves and tap into new information and opportunities. This curiosity is deeply linked with young people's desire to participate in and contribute to the global society they will inherit. (*About Us: Overview*, 2007)

Thus, in 2000, *TakingITGlobal* was officially launched in this spirit of engaging youth and building on trends in technology and global reach. The organization is currently funded by a number of supporters and partners including RBC Financial Group, Microsoft, Industry Canada, and the Department of Foreign Affairs Canada, among others.

There is a lot of content and interactivity that makes up *TakingITGlobal*, making it the largest and most complex of the websites analyzed here. Major themes organize the content and tools into sections.<sup>41</sup> 'Make Connections' includes message boards, groups (to discuss specific projects), member stories, member search, newsletters, and other tools. 'Take Action' provides access to two TIG-authored guides: One about youth action in general and one specifically about HIV/AIDS. The section also includes links to TIG projects, forums, and tools for getting involved in decision-making or organizing workshops. 'Browse Resources' is comprised of searchable databases of organizations, events, financial or professional opportunities, and toolkits and publications gathered from various global sources. 'Express Yourself' provides users with spaces for interaction including online galleries where members can post their artwork, the online publication *Panorama*, TIG blogs (which any member can create), as well as others.

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<sup>41</sup> Note that these section headings have changed as of January 2009. however, there is little substantial change to the categories, organization, or content of the website so I continue to use the 'old' headings here for the sake of consistency and clarity.



‘Understand Issues’ focuses on providing youth with information about global issues. Featured themes have included disability, urban sustainability, online safety, food, women’s rights, participation, music, refugees, and many others while the static issues include education, employment, environment, media, poverty and globalization, etc. Each featured theme or issue page includes information and definitions as well as personal stories and other resources. ‘Explore the World’ allows visitors to explore statistics, regions and countries through an interactive global map and links to TIG country-specific pages.

### **New spaces & continuing trends**

#### *Commercial media, citizen participation?*

A theme running throughout this thesis has been the tension between citizenship and consumption, particularly the ways in which perceptions and representations of young people are configured within the roles of citizen or consumer. As I have shown in previous chapters, there is currently much debate and concern regarding the targeting of young consumers and the increasing commercialization of young people’s lives, not to mention the complexities of youth un(der)employment. As I have argued, a paradox has been set up wherein young people are offered power in the form of consumer choice rather than in the way of meaningful opportunities for participation in socio-political decision-making.

The tension between citizenship and consumption remains palpable within internet-based initiatives aimed at youth engagement, particularly since the internet itself is a predominantly commercial space. In a survey of young Canadians in grades 4

through 11 it was discovered that youth's "favourite sites are, without exception, sites that deliver fun and entertainment" (Media Awareness Network, 2005, p. 25), including websites for television networks and sports teams. The report points out that a number of these are "Product-centred' sites...designed in whole or in part around brand-named products" (p. 31). Underlying marketing and corporate themes are even evident on websites meant to encourage youth engagement: "Increasingly, opportunities to participate online are branded such that even when young people produce and share their own media, they do so under terms set by commercial interests" (Jenkins et al., 2006, p. 16).

This recalls the structure/agency debate where young people may be encouraged to communicate online and to exercise this particular form of agency in participation, however, the structures of capital and consumerism work to frame and constrict those attempts at exercising power. As Willett (2008) has found in her examination of girls' online play and cultural production, "we could argue that online cultures contain complex and contradictory possibilities, but that young people's agency is nevertheless framed within commodified spaces" and that "young people's voices online can also be seen as highly constrained and constructed through particular discourses" (p. 56). She argues that while we should be careful not to dismiss youth's online actions we must be critical of how they are managed, resulting in online spaces "framed by a kind of compulsory individuality, where the 'freedom' to express oneself becomes a requirement, which then allows identities to be managed and regulated" (Willett, 2008, p. 56).

As described above, the Government of Canada's *Youth e-Cluster* is predominantly made up of information and internet links the creators/owners feel are

important for Canadian youth and, notably, the majority pertain to jobs, employment, and skills training. While other issues such as health and the arts are also addressed, these are much less prominent than the information and links encouraging young people's participation in the economy. Evidence of the focus on jobs and training is, for example, found on the 'FAQ' page where the majority of questions are about jobs and skills training. These include:

- "How do I get a job in the government?"
  - "Resume writing? Cover letters? Interviews? I need advice!"
  - "I want to start my own business, where do I start?"
  - "What student loan programs are available to me?"
  - "What employment programs are available for Aboriginal youth?"
- (*Frequently Asked Questions*, 2007, June 10)

While this focus on employment and training issues is not surprising given the government partners involved and the leading role of Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) in the development of the website, it does little to bring awareness to the inequalities and challenges faced by young Canadians seeking meaningful employment or the broader issue of participating in society in non-economic ways. This harkens back to the approach to youth prior to the 1980s when, as discussed in chapter two, youth (un)employment was a major concern and there was less interest in youth social or political participation (e.g., volunteering, voting, decision-making, etc.). Although the website does not promote consumption in the sense of selling products to young people or explicitly positioning youth as consumers in the market-place, it reinforces the view that economic participation is the most important means for young people to participate in society.

Youth social and political action is overshadowed and indeed barely visible on the website. The first three section headings on the website are 'Jobs,' 'Education,' and

‘Money’ and there is notably no section dedicated to politics. The closest the website comes to addressing youth action is in the ‘In Your Community’ and ‘Environment’ sections. Within ‘In Your Community,’ visitors can find, among more links to resources for jobs and training, information about volunteering and leadership opportunities under ‘Lend a Hand.’ In the ‘Environment’ section there is a ‘Get Involved’ page which provides links to local and national organizations and information on how to protect the environment (e.g., an Environment Canada website article on the 4 R’s – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover).<sup>42</sup>

Without a section dedicated to politics, information on political parties or voting in elections is difficult to find. While ‘political parties’ and ‘elections’ can be found in the website index, ‘voting’ is not an entry. The information is found only through the ‘About Canada’ section of the website under ‘Government’ (which you must scroll down to find below other links such as ‘Fun Facts’ and ‘National Holidays’). The overall message from the Government of Canada through the *Youth e-Cluster* website is that youth should focus on becoming economically successful Canadian citizens, via education, training and jobs, rather than working to improve Canada through other forms of social or political participation.

Other websites analyzed, namely the Governor General’s (GG) *Citizen Voices* and *TakingITGlobal*, provide a different perspective and suggest possible ways in which internet engagement of Canadian youth (and others) may lead to critical awareness of the tensions between consumption and citizenship. In the case of *Citizen Voices*, the GG explicitly approaches young Canadians as “full citizens” and invites them to share their

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<sup>42</sup> On the new website, as of January 2009, there is a ‘Get Involved!’ menu which includes links for: Volunteer, Vote, and Be Heard. Each of these redirects youth to other government websites (e.g., Volunteer Canada, Elections Canada, and online means of contacting the government).

experiences of social and political participation. To open the *Citizen Voices*' youth forums, she posted the following:

We must recognize the efforts and commitment of so many young people across Canada....All these young people hope to be seen as full citizens. They are tired of being branded with the stereotyped image of an individualistic, irresponsible generation focused solely on consumption. Not true! Across this country, I have seen young people who reflect, young people involved in their communities, young people who are true role models for the world. Their involvement in society has given them renewed confidence. They have much to say, do and offer. And so I ask you, which stereotypes about youth bother you? How are you involved in your school, neighbourhood, city, community? What gives you confidence? (Jean, 2006b, September 27)

The GG approaches youth as citizens who she believes can make important contributions to their communities and to Canada. In this statement, she refers to specific youth initiatives in Canada and explicitly challenges stereotypes of lazy and materially-focused young people, pointing instead to the ways youth are socially and politically involved in the world around them and inviting youth to share similar stories and react to youth stereotypes. Importantly, she refers to the notion of citizenship and young people's desire "to be seen as full citizens."

The *TakingITGlobal* website similarly contains forums in which young people are invited to discuss issues such as stereotyping of youth and their own local, national, or global actions. This website is far more interactive than the others analyzed, having incorporated various ways for young people to contribute (e.g., discussion boards, an art gallery, online magazine, and blogs). Part of participating on this website involves becoming a member: If you are a member, you can interact with other members in various ways and have access to tools such as internal instant messaging and your own blog. By requiring membership, the website is able to build a virtual online community (of over 230 000 members according to the website on January 13, 2009) at the same

time as it supports youth's actions in their own local and national communities around the world.

Building a community of youth focused on using technology for social change situates young people as competent and significant citizens and helps to support not only individual actions but also collective action, countering the individualization of youth's problems and actions and demonstrating that the internet can be used for non-commercial purposes that promote youth citizenship and action. As Canadian member kurshauna states about *TakingITGlobal* in a forum post:

Not only is this one of the only websites whose sole agenda is youth empowerment opposed to the *franchising of youth*; this site gives youth the opportunity to reach other youth through the power of thought, creativity, and reflection, which are terms that have rarely been used to describe the actions of the world's youth. It is because I am a member of the TakingITGlobal community that I have truly begun to feel like not just a Canadian citizen, but as a global citizen as well. [emphasis in the original] (kurshauna, 2007, October 20)

Thus, while some websites continue to position youth primarily as consumers, not only of the website itself but also more generally within society, others are more successfully trying to counter the current online trends towards commercialization by providing non-commercial opportunities for youth to discuss such issues and move beyond the role of consumer.

### Diversity issues

As discussed in chapter four, there are many challenges with respect to the incorporation of a diversity of youth in representations of youth social and political action in Canada. Minority youth and those less privileged or further from urban centres continue to be sidelined and less visible in NFB film productions about young people's participation, despite some movement towards recognizing differences. Statistics on the

demographics of internet use among young Canadians provides some insight into how these sources of inequality may be affecting internet-based efforts to encourage and support youth action: A 2003 report concludes that “gender, rural-urban location and parental education all seem to affect patterns of use and attitudes to ICT [information and communication technology]” and that “while some of the differences are not large, they seem to be persistent and are likely to have an impact on the ways and the extent to which members of different sub-groups involve themselves in the ‘information society’” (Looker & Thiessen, 2003, June, p. 19). Income, education, and geographical location continue to remain important factors according to a 2005 Statistics Canada study (Statistics Canada, 2006, August 15). There is, thus, a fundamental issue of access and experience with respect to diversity and internet use among young Canadians which puts some young people in a more privileged position where they are more likely to have come into contact with the websites discussed in this chapter, let alone actively participate on them.

Beyond this issue of unequal internet access and experience, scholars have also raised concerns that unequal power relations based on gender, race, and other factors persist in online environments, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Everett (2008) argues that

despite idealistic rhetorics purporting that the Internet, and other digital technologies, would help to usher in a new millennial ethos of tolerance, of digital democracy, and of colorblind social interactions, this lofty goal has yet to materialize. There has been an interesting turn on the colorblindness front as the emergence of covert hate sites are replacing many overt ones of the recent past. (p. 7)

While the websites examined here do make at least a small attempt to represent diversity, some are more successful than others. As an example, the Government of

Canada's *Youth e-Cluster* splash page (<http://youth.gc.ca/index.jsp>) allows visitors to choose the English or French version of the website and includes eight changing images of young people beside the [jeunesse.gc.ca/youth.gc.ca](http://jeunesse.gc.ca/youth.gc.ca) logo. The images include males and females in different poses (some active, e.g., on a skateboard, and others passive). The blue-tinted photos make it difficult to determine racial diversity, however, the contemporary style of dress in all the images fails to indicate the diversity of Canadian youth: There are no photos of youth in clothing that would reflect their ethnicity or religion or in styles of various youth subcultures (e.g., Goth, Hip Hop, etc.). There is one image of a young woman in a wheelchair and this is the greatest effort made at acknowledging diversity. The images used to portray Canadian youth are remarkably similar and would give youth little sense that the website is meant for them unless they fit into the narrow visual mold presented.<sup>43</sup>

In its effort to be an international website/organization and to engage and inspire youth to act globally, *TakingITGlobal* does include some features that suggest it may be possible to effectively reach out to a diversity of young people through the internet. The website itself is available in English, Spanish, French, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Russian, Romanian, Turkish, Arabic, and Chinese. On the main international website there is extensive participation on the message boards which are offered in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and Portuguese. In addition, each country has its own message boards.

The country-specific pages are an important aspect of *TakingITGlobal* in that they help youth attain information and resources specifically about their country or region. For

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<sup>43</sup> As of January 2009 the splash page has changed. It is no longer dynamic with changing images, but instead consists of a static banner portraying different youth. Racial diversity is more clear in this version than previously, however, diverse youth (sub)cultures, ethnicities, religions, and abilities are not evident.



example, the *TakingITGlobal Canada* home page features links to TIG content that is specific to Canada: profiles of Canadian members, art work by Canadian youth, links to provincial and territorial pages (including a new Aboriginal Canada page), Canadian news headlines, profiles of Canadian organizations, and listings for Canadian events and opportunities (financial and professional). It also provides links to TIG blogs and projects by other Canadian TIG members. Thus, the website and country-specific pages allow youth to find and use information in different ways, facilitating their participation in local as well as global issues, projects, and events.

It remains the case, however, that while there are some visible efforts to represent and engage youth of different ethnicities, abilities, nationalities, and languages among these websites, there remain challenges with respect to both internet access and content which continue to limit the possibilities the internet currently offers for engaging a diversity of Canadian youth.

#### *(Re)Defining 'appropriate' youth action*

In previous chapters, I dedicated much discussion to exploring the various ways young people were presented as active citizens and what kinds of activities they were involved in. What was repeatedly evident is that Canadian youth are invited and expected to participate in socio-political realms in very specific ways. In chapter two I outlined the expectations that adults have of youth to participate in volunteer activities and the dismay over lower voter turnout among young Canadians, but also the failure to include young people in the development of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and continuing debates over whether young people are capable of contributing to such policy

decisions. I also argued that recent representations of youth action frequently present adult-organized and adult-controlled youth participation and position youth problems and actions as individual rather than collective concerns. The websites analyzed here provide different perspectives on these questions of what are appropriate forms of social and political participation for Canadian youth and similarly position young people in particular ways regarding how to properly act as citizens.

While the Government of Canada's *Youth e-Cluster* is predominantly devoted to encouraging youth participation in the economy (as discussed above), it does promote a different means of participation through an invitation to join the Canadian Youth Connection (CYC) Forum.<sup>44</sup> The focus of the CYC Forum is to be "an online forum for youth aged 15 to 30 that provides young Canadians with a secure online environment" in which they can meet other Canadian youth, "participate in surveys and on-line testing of various government services for youth to provide feedback to the Government of Canada," discuss issues, and "gain volunteer experience," while having fun and developing important skills. The description of the CYC refers to "e-consultation activities" and "youth engagement activities," defining youth participation in a way that emphasizes youth as consultants (*About Us*, 2007, June 29).

The main page of the *Youth e-Cluster* website has a link to the CYC Forum in the upper right corner, as well as a box in which visitors can enter their username and password to login directly. The CYC Forum link takes visitors to a page where they can apply to join the Forum. The application form opens with the following invitation:

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<sup>44</sup> The CYC Forum developed out of Virtual Youth Canada, the group whose volunteers participated in the initial development of the website. As of January 2009 the CYC Forum is no longer active or accessible from the *Youth e-Cluster* website.

Calling all youth! Do you have ideas to share on how the Government of Canada can improve its services for young Canadians? We are looking for young people across Canada to participate in an online panel through the Canadian Youth Connection Forum to help us take a look at various Government of Canada services through the eyes of youth! (*Application Form*, 2007, December 13)

Visitors can preview the Forum with a screen shot of the message board, download “CYC consultation activities and reports,” and view a screen shot of the announcement of the second annual CYC online holiday party (from 2005). The requirements to join are that you be between 15 and 30 years of age, that you have access to the internet, and that you be a Canadian citizen, landed immigrant, or permanent resident. If you answer ‘yes’ to these questions you are invited to choose a username, display name, and password (you are told to *not* use your full name), and are asked to provide your email address, age, preferred language, province/territory of residence, whether you live in an urban or rural area, your work/school status, and how you learned about the CYC Forum.

A review of the activity reports reveals that most CYC Forum activities involve youth being asked to answer specific questions and provide their opinions. For example, Activity #2 asked youth what they thought about the information the *Youth e-Cluster* website made available in each subcategory of the website. Activity #5 involved youth responding to questions about how they currently obtain government information and services and how they would like to do so in the future. Activity #25 asked youth to provide feedback on a promotional campaign for Canada Career Week.

For Activity #22 youth were invited to provide feedback on a March 2005 youth photo contest. This report is interesting because it gives some insight into how youth think the government should encourage participation. For example, 55% of respondents suggested changes to the contest. Feedback from youth suggested that Canadian youth be invited to vote at different stages of the contest, meaning more involvement for young

people. The majority of the activity invitations and reports posted online reveal that the government primarily used the CYC youth in such an e-consultation fashion, often in the form of filling out surveys.

The reports provide summaries of the youth feedback obtained but do not reveal whether or how youth feedback was incorporated into the government's future actions. Thus, it is unclear whether the young people's views are listened to or incorporated into policy or program development, which could limit the benefit of such an endeavor. As Hart (1992) suggests in his ladder of participation, the consultation process must be iterative and make sense to the youth for it to be meaningful and effective.

The CYC Forum message boards are comprised of many different categories and multiple threads (topics) within each.<sup>45</sup> For example, categories include General Discussion, the CYC Summer Job Club, Travel, and Entertainment, while individual threads range from "pepsi or coke?" and "What's your take on regifting?" in General Discussion to "Festivals!" in Travel and "Canadian eating habits" in Thoughts and Views. At the time of analysis, many threads had been updated in the last week and some had a number of responses. In General Discussion, the "Weird names" thread had 25 posts from 8 Jun 2007 to 16 July 2007 and "IF you had to choose..." (in which youth reveal which store they would shop at for the rest of their lives if they could only choose one) had 67 between 17 Feb 2005 and 21 October 2007, demonstrating that some topics continue to be popular over time. In the Creative Corner category, the "Three Word Story" thread where each participant adds three words to the end of a story was started on 14 Jul 2006 and had 184 entries as of 18 November 2007. In the CYC News category a moderator posts an update of activities launched and contests going on, for example, as

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<sup>45</sup> Like the CYC more generally, the forums are no longer available via the website.

well as links to threads that may be of interest to members. There is no information on how many members there are, but there are too many different screen names to easily count based on message board posts. On both 16 July 2007 and 19 December 2007 there were other members online at the same time as myself: Six in July and three in December.

Thus, while the overall message to youth from the government's *Youth e-Cluster* website is that they should participate in society primarily through education and employment, the invitation to join the CYC forum also suggests to young people that it is possible to also participate in online discussion of issues and everyday topics, as well as to act as consultants to the government (albeit in a limited manner structured by the government).<sup>46</sup>

On the Governor General's website, *Citizen Voices*, young people are not considered as consultants in such a specific sense, but as citizens with important ideas and contributions that they are invited to share on the website. The focus of website itself is on discussion of issues and encouraging youth voice and action, however, unlike the CYC Forum where youth are consulted on specific government activities, the website does not in and of itself provide any means of participation beyond online discussions. Young people are invited to participate as citizens by raising issues online and are encouraged more generally to get involved in their communities. To this end there are a number of external links provided in the youth section of *Citizen Voices* which include Canada World Youth, Free the Children, Katimavik, the Kids Help Phone, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, as well as educational and employment related links. What is interesting

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<sup>46</sup> The abandonment of the CYC and of the online message board changes the message the government is communicating through the website: Youth are now presented in even more limited ways as citizens, no longer being invited to actively participate in discussions on the website or in government consultations.

is that while there are a few links related to employment, the majority are concerned with non-school-based educational experiences (e.g., Girl Guides, global exchange programs) or participatory/activist experiences (e.g., Katimavik, Free the Children). This diverges from the other government website analyzed (the *Youth e-Cluster*) which primarily promotes training and employment opportunities. The *Citizen Voices* website assumes that youth want to be involved in their communities and to learn about and participate in the world in political and social ways, rather than only through employment, suggesting that these are valuable means of contributing to society for Canadian youth.

The NFB website *CitizenShift* similarly focuses on the voices and contributions of Canadians as means of bringing people together and promoting social change. Visitors to the website are invited to “Watch the films. Check out the photography. Download the podcasts. Read the articles and blogs” (*About*, n.d.) and to respond by sending their thoughts to the *CitizenShift* website team or by posting comments online. At first glance this does not appear highly interactive since people are directed to consume others’ creative products; however, it is also stated that *CitizenShift* “is a chance to become informed, engage with others and to share your creative work,” suggesting that there are opportunities for everyday Canadians to have their own work featured on the website (*About*, n.d.).

The new December 2007 website design more clearly identifies the multiple means of contributing (text, photos, audio, video), provides profiles of contributors and links to their contributions, and allows contributors to make contributions specific to existing dossiers (e.g., adding an article or internet link pertaining to the content of an existing film project). As of December 19, 2007 there were 24 contributors listed but by

August 2008 there were over 300. The change from prominently profiling NFB directors in the old 'Rebels with a Cause' section to instead profiling independent filmmakers and Canadians contributing to the website in the new 'Contributors' section marks an important shift. This may prove, in time, to help move the website away from primarily supporting and advertising the work of the NFB and those it employs/supports towards a more broad-based platform for the public to contribute. Through further promotion of the contribution aspects of the *CitizenShift* website it may be possible to position young people as citizens able to participate through the creation of artwork.

The *CitizenShift* website also encourages youth participation in NFB film projects through its promotion of those projects online: It is unclear, however, how youth become involved in the projects featured on the website. In many cases, these projects are already completed (or at least well on their way to completion if ongoing) and most are joint projects with community groups or schools where youth would already need to be involved. Similarly, the blogs and podcasts are currently populated by NFB voices rather than the general public, although it is possible to comment on the blog posts and the podcast blog includes an invitation to contact the coordinator at the NFB to get involved.

Prior to the re-design of the website, *CitizenShift* included a 'Speak Up' page as one of the main themes. This linked visitors to a message board where they could participate in discussions related to the film projects featured on the website or on other relevant issues. 'Speak Up' was present in October 2006 when I first began website analysis, but had disappeared by May 2007 when I returned to the website again. Telling perhaps is the fact that in October 2006, while there were many threads which had been started (over 40), few had any replies. The message board was not functioning as a place

for discussion; however, doing away with this section removed the most interactive means through which the general population of Canadians could participate at the time. It meant that the interaction from visitors was then mainly in consuming NFB materials and, while *CitizenShift* is clearly focused on involving various groups of Canadians in filmmaking (like its predecessor Challenge for Change), there appear to have been challenges in encouraging such participation via the website. The recent growth of the ‘Contributors’ section of the revised website, however, would suggest that the NFB may currently be having more success at attracting participants to the website.

*TakingITGlobal*, as the only youth-created and youth-managed website analyzed, goes furthest in inviting youth to participate in a variety of ways and in providing models of such participation. The staff page (<http://about.takingitglobal.org/d/people/staff/staff>) profiles the many young people involved in the organization and while their ages are not provided, many are listed as being undergraduate or graduate students and their pictures suggest that many of them are young. The job listings for both paid and volunteer positions (<http://about.takingitglobal.org/d/getinvolved>) also reveal the importance of youth involvement as a number stipulate that the ideal candidate would be a university student or recent graduate. In some cases the listings explicitly state that they are seeking a young person although the term is not age-defined. This organizational information makes it clear that TIG is a “youth led” initiative, as they state in much of their promotional material.

Since youth and youth participation are central to the mandate of *TakingITGlobal*, youth presence is felt heavily throughout the website from individual profiles and message board discussions to tools and resources developed specifically by and for young



people. For example, the TIG *Guide to Action: Simple Steps Toward Change* (TakingITGlobal, n.d.) states that “this guide was created by young people who have worked to achieve their goals and initiate positive change in the world” (p. 2) and website visitors have access to toolkits and research reports submitted by *TakingITGlobal* members in a variety of categories and languages, and from various countries.

Images and photos of youth appear on many pages of the website, often depicting young people participating in events, workshops, or other community-based work. The ‘Voice’ page for example (in the ‘Take Action’ section) features a banner across the top in which young men and women are seen speaking at a microphone, as well as listening on a panel and in an audience. While many of the images and photos are not attributed, the participation of youth in contributing visual images to website is explicit in the Global Gallery (of the ‘Express Yourself’ section) where there are multiple pages of featured artwork by youth. According to the website,

the Global Gallery was established as a program of TakingITGlobal in April of 2001. Since then the program has made massive progress, constantly striving to become an outstanding space for young artists to express their talent, as well as an inspiring platform for creativity and multicultural dialogue that pursues high standards and reflects the program’s vision and mission. (*Global Gallery*, 2007)

From its launch in April 2001 until February 2003, the gallery had received over 2000 submissions from over 100 countries, helped in part by the organization of art contests by TIG members.

Through providing various means of posting youth social and political contributions online (e.g., art work, writing, toolkits, etc.) and by offering models for youth action in the profiles of founders and staff, *TakingITGlobal* presents a portrait of youth which highlights their competency and skill at working for social change. In the featured theme on participation, the importance of youth participation is made clear:

Youth participation is necessary in today's world. In times of terror and war, decision-making takes place by a handful of world leaders, usually without the consultation of those who feel the effects the most. Although many youth are challenged to have their voices heard, there are ways and opportunities for them to be involved and affect the world around them. (*Featured Themes: Participation, 2007*)

Thus, youth perspectives and actions are not only considered valuable but indeed “necessary” and this perspective of youth as citizens is reflected throughout the website, demonstrating the potential for an expanded view of what are appropriate social or political actions for young people.

As these websites demonstrate there are a wide range of possibilities for online youth engagement in social and political activities and, for the most part, youth participating in these online environments often have access to information about pressing social and political concerns, as well as a range of options for engaging with others regarding these issues (whether as consultants, discussants, artists, event planners, etc.).

### *Struggling with meaningful inclusion*

In the previous chapter I raised the issue of meaningful or genuine youth participation based on Hart's (1992) ladder, differentiating non-participation from various levels of youth involvement ranging from adult initiated to child initiated with variations of each. I argued that even when youth participate in filmmaking or other projects aimed at reflecting youth action, youth and their voices are not always meaningfully included. In addition, there have been many struggles between youth and adults over who has the power to make decisions and voice opinions on important social matters, affected by the continuing focus on generational and age differences discussed in chapter three.

Struggles over power relations and the ability of youth to contribute in social and political ways persevere in the digital sphere. As Livingstone et al. (2004) have argued,

for young people to become more engaged with the civic potential of the internet, greater efforts are needed from the producers of civic sites to ensure that young people get something back from these sites. Beyond receiving information, it is unclear what young people stand to gain from the opportunity to 'have their say' online. They wonder who is listening, what happens to their votes and what will follow from their engagement. (p. 17)

Despite the oft stated claim that youth are more skilled and comfortable with online media than are adults, it remains the case that monetary and time resources (among others) are needed to develop and maintain a website that would encourage and support youth participation in social and political action. Adults remain the more powerful social group with access to such resources and are more likely to be able to create and shape these online environments. They are, thus, more able to manage and control the actions and contributions of youth. This is not to say that young people cannot mobilize resources for this purpose and *TakingITGlobal* is a prime example of this; however, there remains an overall power imbalance regarding who is afforded the opportunity to shape online representations of youth and means of youth involvement.

As mentioned previously, the Government of Canada's *Youth e-Cluster* was launched in 2002, created with the help of eighteen federal partners and guided by youth volunteers as part of Virtual Youth Canada. According to the website, "hundreds of young Canadians were chosen, and divided into online Teams, each with a Team Leader" (*Virtual Youth Canada*, 2006, December 21). Finn and Detlor's (2002) analysis of youth involvement in the development of the *Youth e-Cluster* website provides more detail, explaining that there was an in-person group of youth in the Ottawa area as well as online teams. For the in-person group only 19 youth were selected from over 200 applicants.

According to Finn and Detlor (2002), the “primary function of the group...was to act as team leaders” for the online teams so they were provided technical support and training where needed in addition to developing the initial website structure and establishing the online working environment, among other tasks (p. 15). Each team has its own webpage on the website, documenting their experiences over what appears to have been eight months of collaborative development. The biographies of the team leaders reveal the hard work and effort that youth put into developing the framework and layout of the website, many recounting good times and new friendships; however, little is written about the process of collaboration between the youth teams or between the youth and the government and web developers so it is difficult to determine what decisions youth made or how their ideas were gathered and incorporated.

Finn and Detlor (2002) describe the process as follows:

Virtual Youth Team members were given an activity every ten days. They were given a week to answer the questions or complete the tasks and do so in their team rooms. They were free to discuss their activity with team members and their team leaders provided guidance and encouragement throughout the process. Once the activity was completed, team leaders submitted a summary report to the project staff at HRDC [Human Resources and Development Canada, now Human Resources and Social Development Canada]. (p. 16)

They explain that the youth teams were involved in the “development of the top and second level subject headings for the site, determined what functional applications the eCluster would contain (message board, webcasting, etc.) and selected the URL and logo for the website” (Finn & Detlor, 2002, p. 18).<sup>47</sup>

As Hart (1992) argues, when youth are in a consultative role in relation to adults it is important that they both understand their role and how their opinions and contributions

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<sup>47</sup> It is notable that the December 2008 re-design changed all of this organization and resulted in the loss of interactive elements such as the message board.

will be incorporated/used, preferably through an iterative process. The government appears to have made an effort towards this as “the regular posting and sharing of project updates ensured that team members were aware of the project’s overall progress and could see the effect of their participation” (Finn & Detlor, 2002, p. 22). There is no information, however, on how youth felt about this process or whether it was meaningful to them. In addition, while Virtual Youth Canada has been replaced by the CYC Forum, there is little sense that youth have ongoing input into the *Youth e-Cluster* website.

While the website is heavily influenced by the government partners and acts mainly as a space in which to advertise and promote government programs and services for youth, particularly those related to employment and training, this emphasis seems to be partially balanced with other interests and issues (from health to the environment and sports) which is perhaps due to the involvement of the youth teams in developing the “top and second level subject headings” (Finn & Detlor, 2002, p. 18) at the outset. It appears that youth initially played a role in making the website a broad-based source of information (e.g., including youth-authored articles on different social issues) but now the website is more oriented towards government concerns with only remnants of the non-employment themes remaining.

In relation to this, it is notable that ‘Article of the Month’ and ‘Articles by Youth’ (both link to the same list of articles) are neither articles published each month (e.g., there were only articles for January and July in all of 2007) nor are they all explicitly written by youth (e.g., *Did You Know...You Could Be In Danger?* published in June 2006 lists some statistics on and information about workplace safety and isn’t attributed to an author). In earlier years there was success in making the articles monthly publications and

many months had numerous articles by youth. These included Rob's article on sports (*Individual v. Team Sports*, 2002, December 18), Breanne's thoughts on *Same Sex Marriages* (2002, December 4), and John's reflections on *Teen Killings in Schools* (2002, October 24). Youth covered a range of topics in these early articles, but those published since late 2006 are fewer and farther between and cover a limited number of issues. Many are stories of participating in government programs and services (for example, J. Caron's *My First Work Experience in the Public Service*, 2006, December). Given that this is one section of the website that is dynamic (much of the rest is made up of static links to resources), the fact that it is not regularly updated may indicate a lack of interest on the part of government and/or youth in continuing to ensure the website is current and that it incorporates youth voices. Also, the 'Youth Achievement' profiles are not original content but links to external websites, resulting in the *Youth e-Cluster* itself feeling very static.<sup>48</sup>

The Governor General's *Citizen Voices* website is similarly an adult-initiated online space where youth are invited to participate. To introduce the youth theme of the website the Governor General (GG) posted the following:

Many young people across this country have shared with me their troubles, their expectations and their dreams; they've told me that they sometimes feel left out. Today's youth want to be more involved. They want their vision, ideas and realities to be given more consideration. To be heard, they need places where they can talk, share and create. These places have been few and far between. Until now. So make the most of the forums on this Web site, which we hope will give a voice to youth. And let us also hear what parents, teachers and all those concerned about the present and future of our youth have to say. (Jean, 2007)

Referring to youth as "dynamic individuals" and the enthusiasm of youth as "truly inspiring" (Jean, 2007) shows the respect the GG has for young people and their potential

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<sup>48</sup> Notably none of these elements remain following the re-design in December 2008.

contributions to the Canadian landscape. She reflects on the fact that young people have voiced a desire to be heard and listened to, not to mention a place to discuss issues, and has attempted to provide such a space and to listen. It remains to be seen whether and how the website will effectively promote and encourage discussion among youth and between youth and adults. While it is a laudable effort, there is little evidence over a year after the website's launch that it is attracting Canadian youth or enabling youth participation beyond posting messages online.<sup>49</sup>

As mentioned previously, most of the NFB's *CitizenShift* website does not contain any content that is explicitly for youth. Youth is included as a theme through which visitors can access projects and youth involvement is visible within some of the project/dossier webpages where it is possible to discern how youth were involved in different projects. On the project page for *Umoyo (Life): Through the eyes of young women*, for example, there are clips from a documentary featuring Canadian teens who traveled to Zambia to meet other teens. Also presented are photos of the trip, audio stories told by the young women, biographies of the filmmakers, and other information. Importantly, the website includes excerpts from the journals of the Canadian girls on the trip, providing insight into their experiences. They reflect on seeing the graves of children and on the strength they see in their African counterparts, the games they played, as well as the tensions they felt around the process of filmmaking and the discrepancies in wealth. In one young woman's post trip reflection, she reveals that the young women did play some role in the filming: "I enjoyed the process of making a documentary in that I

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<sup>49</sup> Recently the 'youth' theme on the website has been renamed 'youth dialogues.' Content focuses on the offline activities of youth (and events attended by the GG), such as the Francophonie Summit and the World Youth Congress, bringing attention to different ways in which young Canadians can get involved in local, regional, national, and international activities. There has been little online development in this regard, however.

really got the chance to learn how to use the camera equipment and learn about lighting, sound, etc. I think that film can be so powerful in that it can capture the expressions on people's faces that show so much. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words" (*Katrina's Post Trip Reflection*, 2006, September 18). Thus, in this small section of the *CitizenShift* website, young women are given the space to reflect on a filmmaking project in which they were able to take part.

Similarly, the *FOCUS* and *Turning Points* projects provided youth with opportunities to participate in the filmmaking process "by turning the microphones and cameras over to young people" (Kuzmarov & Sauri, 2006, August 2). Despite explicitly aiming to engage young people in filmmaking for social change, the youth's reflections on their participation do not make it clear that the youth were involved in the technical aspects but rather suggest that they were involved mainly in acting and providing the 'stories' based on their own lives (e.g. see *Focus Students' Experience in Making This Film*, 2006, August 2). What the online platform of *CitizenShift* does allow, that previously was not available and which may enhance the significance of youth involvement, is broad access to youth-made films that may not otherwise be publicly aired (countering the segregation of youth films), as well as the opportunity to add other materials related to the film and its production such as youth's reflections.

At the top of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation are child initiated projects with shared decisions with adults. This is exemplified in *TakingITGlobal* which was started by two Canadian youth and which explicitly remains committed to providing services and support to youth through a youth-run organization. This is in contrast to the other websites discussed above. In the third *TakingITGlobal* podcast on the topic of youth



engagement a young person raises the issue of how advertisers and others often target youth, asking them to become involved in something. They imply that youth-initiated and youth-led projects may be more likely to inspire young people to get involved, especially when they are approached by their peers who are sharing something interesting with them rather than trying to 'sell' them something. As the different websites analyzed here demonstrate, the internet may provide young people with the opportunity to develop and promote their own projects among other youth as they maintain control and ownership, however, there also remains the possibility that youth participation will be controlled and managed by adults who have the power and resources to shape online environments.

#### Overcoming generational divides

A recurring theme in this thesis, addressed most directly in chapter three, is the importance of the concepts of age and generation with respect to how young people are considered as active citizens (or citizens at all). These concepts inherently set up a power imbalance between youth and adults where the young are cast as incomplete and incompetent in contrast to the wholeness and superiority of adults. A focus on age suggests a hierarchy and posits youth as a stage of transition while a focus on generation points to differences between age groups and leads to attempts to compare/contrast. As demonstrated in chapter three, the unequal power relationships set up between youth and adults in Canada often result in a sense of alienation of each group from the other where both adults and youth perceive so many differences between the groups they cannot fathom understanding one another.

Age-based inequality is also evident in NFB films about youth action, and I argued in chapter three that there has been a shift from documenting the explicit generational conflicts of the 1960s towards showing more collaboration between youth and adults, however in relationships where youth generally have less power. In fact, recent films have tended to focus only on youth and youth audiences, segregating young people and their actions from adults.

As discussed in the previous section, the internet remains a space where adults often retain power, particularly over the resources required for large-scale endeavors (the kind that attract a lot of attention). The internet, however, does present young people with a new outlet for action and participation. With respect to generational divides and intergenerational relations there is hope (as there always is with new technology) that the internet will help to bring youth and adults together and provide benefit to all Canadians. A recent U.S. study reports that “not surprisingly, parents, siblings, and other family members use media together while they are hanging out at home” even though young people tend to avoid parents and other adults when participating in social networking activities online (Ito et al., 2008, p. 19). Playing video games and watching television are the activities most often shared among family members, however, the study also found families “who created digital projects together” using digital cameras, video cameras, and editing software (Ito et al., 2008, p. 20). The authors conclude that “families do come together around new media to share media and knowledge, play together, and stay involved in each other’s lives” (Ito et al., 2008, p. 20). Despite these recent findings there is evidence that generational divides continue to exist on the internet and affect young people’s social and political action therein.

The government of Canada's *Youth e-Cluster* is a good example of how generational divides and differences remain present and relevant on internet websites aimed at encouraging youth involvement in social or political action. In the 'About Us' section of the website adult and youth groupings are differentiated through use of 'us' and 'them/you' terminology. At the outset of the section youth are set up as the target audience of the website: "Whether you need a hand finding a job or would like to start your own business, it is all here at your fingertips on youth.gc.ca!" (*About Us*, 2007, June 29). Later in the section 'us' is used to refer to the producers of the website in the phrase "Other Federal Departments and Agencies have worked in tandem with us" (*About Us*, 2007, June 29). It is made clear that the website was created by adults (albeit with the input of youth, as discussed above), and is aimed at youth, a different group of people. In fact, the first line of the 'About Us' section sets the website up as a resource where adults (the government) 'help' youth, particularly in finding information: "Youth.gc.ca is all about helping youth between 15 and 30 years of age" (*About Us*, 2007, June 29), putting youth in a position of requiring something from those providing this service and the government in a position of power in being able to provide information of their choosing

The Governor General's (GG) *Citizen Voices* website is similar in that it was created and is maintained by adults who are inviting youth to participate. Unlike the *Youth e-Cluster*, however, the GG's website does not set out to provide 'help' or information to young people, but rather positions young people as capable and important Canadian citizens whose voices and opinions deserve to be heard. Thus, at the outset at least young people are less explicitly considered an 'other' to the website owners.

The content of the *Citizen Voices* website also addresses issues concerning intergenerational relationships. For example, in a comment responding to the GG's blog post opening the discussion of youth, a young person writes:

As a youth, I am bothered by the stereotypes applied to me for no reason other than my age. I am bothered most by the notion that we youth do not care about the future, either for Canada or for ourselves. When older Canadians see youth spending their time pursuing troublesome and worrisome activities – working jobs that cut into our school performance to buy clothing that's cool, doing drugs or drinking alcohol to have a good time, not caring about the future enough to protect it by driving safely or to enhance it by volunteering – I feel shamed seeing that same gaze cast over all Canadian youth, as if the actions of the few shows the true heart of the many. (canadianpatriot, 2006, September 27)

Similarly, visitors such as diskadia argue that the website is an important project because youth are not listened to by politicians otherwise: "Maybe I'm in the right place. Youth can not vote in Canada until the age of 18 and thus politicians seldom listen to youth. What good is talking to an audience and addressing thier [sic] views if they can't even vote for you? A waste of time is what may run across many politicians [sic] minds. This endeavour [sic] by Her Excellency [the Governor General] is what youth need" (diskadia, 2006, September 27). In each of these cases, youth express their concerns over the negative (or ambivalent) views adults have of Canadian youth and their hopes that the internet can help to encourage people to listen to youth voices.

The GG invites both youth and adults to comment on and discuss issues important to them, including youth issues, so there is an initial attempt to avoid segregating youth and their issues (although 'youth' is marked as a separate theme on the website).

Examination of the comments to blog posts and the online discussions reveals that there are also adults who participate. One example is stantonsr who says: "As someone who works with youth I am proud of the fact that there are so many bright and amazing kids out there" (stantonsr, 2006, October 7). Also, RCG agrees with an earlier post by a youth,

stating that “as my young sons have told me, young ppl tend to be hassled in public places, such as when store clerks practically follow them around while youth are simply browsing, and when police take an overbearing, bullying attitude toward ppl in their teens and 20s” (RCG, 2006, October 11).

It is also interesting to see that a discussion forum post by blacklikeme entitled “The battle for the hearts and minds of our youth” initially received no responses. Posted in the Youth/General thread on November 25, 2006, the poster is concerned that “certain rap artists are stealing and brainwashing our children’s minds” and argues that adults need to properly guide youth in their lives. The poster is clearly an adult, referring to “our children” and “our youth” and referring to “we as parents and educators” (blacklikeme, 2006, November 25). There was no response at all to this post (which is unusual given that all other posts under the theme at the time had garnered replies) until 12 July 2007 when Rory replied that “even though modern rap music blows (say 80% or so), ‘gangsta [sic] thug’ rapstars are not battling any one but themselves. The fabric [sic] of society wont [sic] tear apart as a result of their songs” (Rory, 2007, July 12). Given the attitude conveyed by the original post and blacklikeme’s failure to open the issue for discussion or ask for youth input it is not surprising that visitors to the website would pay little attention to the post; however, it demonstrates the continued (adult) assumptions about the inferiority and naïveté of youth, as well as the associated belief in the need to protect young people from harm.

As discussed above, the NFB website *CitizenShift* is not overtly aimed at youth or encouraging youth participation. Like the *Youth e-Cluster* and *Citizen Voices* websites, *CitizenShift* is (or appears to be) an adult-created website; however, unlike those

websites, it does not specifically invite youth to participate but rather treats youth as any other population group. Where youth are most visible on the website is on the project/dossier pages documenting film projects undertaken with, or about, youth. Similar to earlier NFB initiatives that attempted to engage youth in filmmaking, however, it is at times difficult to tell what role the young people played in these projects. In one example, *FOCUS*, the setting of the project was the Focus school, an alternative school in Montreal, aligning this project in some ways with the film *Salt* which grew out of student projects at MIND high school (also in Montreal). As Kuzmarov and Sauri (the producers/directors of the *FOCUS* project) state in their *Producer's Note*, "FOCUS, above all else, is a human adventure. It's the story of the daily lives of teenagers and the school that supports them" but it "is also a group of young filmmakers who came to listen to these teens and to give them space to express themselves without being judged. We were thrilled to be able to help channel their energy and to experience so many meaningful moments. We wanted to FOCUS on them -- to let them know that they are important" (Kuzmarov & Sauri, 2006, August 2). This suggests that not only are the teens from the school defined as 'youth,' but so are the filmmakers. While like *Salt*, in that the film project grew out of a school environment, the two projects differ in that the youth involved in the *FOCUS* project appear to have mainly been actors and providers of subject material rather than directors making the decisions about the film.

There are many other youth-oriented projects featured on the website, and some initiatives appear to have provided youth with more power and autonomy in the filmmaking process. *Youth: Towards Tolerance*, for example, involved young Canadians "making media in a bid to end stereotyping, racial discrimination, sexual discrimination,

and homophobia” through the production of public service announcements (PSAs) (*Youth: Towards Tolerance*, n.d.). *Youth for Peace and Conflict Resolution* documents the experiences of “young Canadians [who] travel to Serbia to share understanding of peace” (*Youth for Peace and Conflict Resolution*, n.d.) and one of the short films featured on the website is *Road of the World*, by 20 year old Ryan Knight, which won the People’s Choice Award in the NFB’s Make Shorts, Not War! Filmmaking contest. *Revolution Underground* is a project initiated by young Black activists in Montreal who set out to find out what their peers and others thought about ‘revolution.’ The film project is described as a “portrayal of resistance, a challenge to apathy and a testament to the power of solidarity” (*Revolution Underground*, n.d.). It involved the NFB providing training and support for the youth-initiated documentary project (*How it all began, and where it needs to go*, 2005, May 5). Through such profiles on the *CitizenShift* website it is possible to glimpse some of the NFB projects involving youth that may be pushing the boundaries of what roles youth may play in filmmaking. The website itself, however, has yet to encourage such youth autonomy and participation, and, as mentioned above, it is not clear on the website how youth interested in such projects would go about getting involved.

Finally, *TakingITGlobal* demonstrates that a youth-initiated and youth-managed website aimed at engaging youth in local, national, and global action and decision-making can successfully attract large numbers of youth. As discussed in the previous section, TIG is an example of the highest rung of Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation, suggesting that youth may find a genuine and meaningful participation platform through the website and its related projects. In terms of generational issues, *TakingITGlobal* has

managed to stay youth-focused and youth-driven without completely segregating itself or the voices/actions of its members. While the membership of the website is evidently made up of primarily (if not entirely) young people, the organization has established and maintained ties with global youth organizations, youth-led initiatives, students and educators, as well as international organizations.

## **Conclusion**

On the subject of generational differences and encouraging youth socio-political participation through the internet, it has been suggested that a generational divide persists and is evident in the different ways in which technology is used by youth and adults, particularly towards civic or political ends. Xenos and Foot (2008), for example, propose that “differences between [political] campaigns’ and young voters’ perspectives on interactivity, control, and the value of coproduction may be significantly compromising the full potential of the Internet as a positive force for reinvigoration of youth political participation” (p. 52).

Interactive aspects of the internet are considered part of Web 2.0, “an emerging category of applications such as social networking sites, blogs, and other collaboratively authored documents” (Xenos & Foot, 2008, p. 57) which promote participatory action on the part of users and are highly valued by youth (Jenkins et al., 2006; Montgomery, 2008; Xenos & Foot, 2008). Embracing these applications for political and social purposes, however, entails a relinquishing of control by those in power. As Bennett (2008) has argued,

what may be most important for politicians, educators, and young people themselves to learn is how to use the media that are now so richly developed for



social and entertainment purposes to build civic and political communities. The lessons involved here are likely to strain, and ultimately expand, political comprehension within and across generations. The learning required to encourage the creative involvement of young people in politics will be the most difficult for those older gatekeepers who continue to live in different political, social, and media worlds. (p. 9)

The websites examined here span a continuum of interactivity and coproduction and demonstrate both the opportunities and challenges associated with adopting the internet as a means to encourage youth social and political action. The Government of Canada's *Youth e-Cluster* has, as of yet, failed to embrace such interactive elements and remains primarily a static portal to information (in fact, removing interactive elements and moving towards a more stream-lined and static version in December 2008), the Governor General's *Citizen Voices* and the NFB's *CitizenShift* each show signs of attempting to incorporate coproductive and interactive elements, and *TakingITGlobal* is a good example of a youth-driven online initiative which has embraced many such tools with success. An additional issue with regards to the incorporation of coproductive and interactive elements into a website is sustainability: A website requires ongoing resources and attention in order to avoid remaining static, and for online initiatives focused on engaging youth on an ongoing basis, the content and visuals of the website need continual updating to ensure youth will visit repeatedly.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how recent efforts to engage youth through online means continue to position young Canadian citizens in particular ways, while they also provide some new opportunities for those suggested positions to be contested and challenged by youth when they are provided with (or can create their own) spaces in which to communicate and organize. Many of the themes found in earlier chapters remained relevant in this examination of internet websites, including the blurring of

consumer and citizen roles, the focus on individual identities and skills, the lack of diversity in representations of youth, and the challenge to provide meaningful opportunities for youth to participate in a society marked by age and generation-based inequalities.

In the following chapter I reflect on the thesis as a whole, returning to the framework set up in the introductory chapter, both the research questions and polarizations prominent in discussions of youth, in order to provide commentary on the current situation of Canadian youth as they are conceived as (participatory) citizens.

## Conclusion – Current thoughts & future directions

*A number of signs indicate that ageism may replace or at least equal racism as the [American] nation's most severe social problem in the twenty-first century. (MacManus, 1996, p. 252)*

*With policies for youth, there is all too often an even more profound dislocation between policy and public demand, for many young people do not yet have the vote, and therefore do not figure on politicians' radar screens, and those who do often speak a democratic language that does not easily translate into bureaucratic rationality. Ironically, therefore, much of the current emphasis by governments upon 'giving the kids a say' amounts to little more than acting upon hunches about what will keep young people quiet. (Coleman, 2008, p. 204)*

*We need joint community projects in which children and their elders offer to one another the special energies and perceptions of their generations. Productive collaboration between young and old should be the core of any democratic society wishing to improve itself, while providing continuity between the past, present, and the future. (Hart, 1992, p. 37)*

In this thesis I have examined aspects of the shifting discourses of youth as citizens, particularly with respect to representations of youth socio-political participation in Canada originating from the federal government, the NFB, and, in a limited way, from youth themselves. In this final chapter I map out where I have been and what I have discovered. I outline some of the struggles and tensions prominent in representations of Canadian youth action from the late 1960s until today and address how these have worked to help socially construct young Canadians between 15 and 30 years of age within certain subjectivities and power relations as (participatory) citizens.

As I have emphasized throughout, this thesis is an attempt to understand how young Canadians are perceived as participatory or active citizens in a broad sense, understanding that both citizenship and participation extend beyond the bounds of

politics to include issues of belonging and identity. I have examined National Film Board of Canada (NFB) films, websites, government documents, literature, and news media in order to cast a wide net; however, I have also remained primarily focused on Canadian representations, and on those which reflect government perspectives on youth as citizens. Here, I review how I see youth currently positioned as participatory citizens (while also noting that youth are not a homogenous category), consider what characterizes this point of time in the transition towards encouraging more participatory roles for young citizens, and suggest where I think things may be headed in the future. In effect, I review what I have mapped out in the thesis while attempting to speculate as to what my findings could mean for how young people are perceived as citizens and for potentially significant future research directions.

## **Overall findings**

### *Situating youth as participatory citizens*

I structured this thesis so as to facilitate the examination of dominant themes found in representations of youth as participatory citizens, as well as changes over time. Throughout the thesis I have shown that recent representations of socio-political action by young Canadians serve mainly to promote particular forms of youth participation which are controlled and circumscribed. In chapters two and three I drew from my analysis of NFB films to provide a glimpse of how representations of Canadian youth as participatory citizens have changed since the late 1960s: Individualism, increasing market and economic influence, and segregation of youth from adults emerged as important themes in recent years. Overall, I argued that many changes have taken place in terms of

how NFB films represent youth action. For the most part, in the late 1960s, youth action was portrayed as youth-initiated and collective (there was a sense of a ‘youth movement’), whereas more recent films have portrayed adult-controlled and adult-sanctioned actions for youth which often address the individual (e.g., school-based programs). Representations of contemporary youth action in NFB films portray it as limited in scope (for youth only), as focused on individual rather than social problems (relevant only to youth), and as adult-controlled (suggesting that the ‘best’ way to participate in society is through structures provided by those with power).

Such representations posit an ideal young Canadian citizen who volunteers or otherwise participates in controlled or sanctioned actions to benefit society, preferably working with other youth in these endeavours and focusing on youth as a target population or audience. As I have argued in previous chapters, the represented ideal active young Canadian citizen is also typically from a (sub)urban area and is middle-class, but may be male or female, of different races or sexual orientations. They will have a desire to help other youth and/or to better their community, but will also be focused on self-improvement, particularly with respect to skill attainment via educational, vocational, or volunteer opportunities.

#### *Power relations and the place of the young Canadian citizen*

The main challenge that I have seen throughout my research is the continuance of age-based and generation-based inequalities and a belief in the inherent inferiority of youth. These perspectives contribute to and exacerbate the issues I have described above regarding the limiting and circumscribing of youth’s socio-political roles. If young

Canadians are expected to be involved and engaged in politics, those with power need to truly value the input of youth and explicitly recognize the potential role of youth in such processes:

The outcomes for youth engagement, insofar as they involve the restoration of positive engagement with government alongside creative and expressive personal communication, depend importantly on the adults who shape the early political impressions of young people. Are politicians, parents, educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers willing to allow young citizens to more fully explore, experience, and expand democracy, or will they continue to force them to just read all about it? (Bennett, 2008, p. 21)

In my examination of the concepts of generation and age in chapter three I suggested that perhaps intergenerational and age-based tensions were perpetuated by stereotypes of youth and a belief in inherent differences between youth and adults. The fact that adults hold the majority of power in Canadian society (i.e., economic, political, etc.) suggests that many of the trends in representing youth participation may reflect the struggles adults are experiencing in trying to come to terms with the shift towards providing youth with more social and political power as participatory citizens. As Bennett (2008) has stated, “perhaps the ultimate question...is whether those who hold power in government and business will be receptive to sharing power when younger citizens eventually challenge it, as they probably will” (p. 20).

I return here to my argument in earlier chapters for the need for intergenerational dialogue and actions. Academics, policy-makers, reporters, and others who have the power to shape perceptions of youth need to move away from the alienating discourses that push age groups and generations apart. The segregation of youth voices and actions evidenced within, and perpetuated through selected distribution of, NFB films exacerbates the situation.

The representations of youth action presented in NFB films and online, in recent years, fail to present young people interacting with or otherwise relating to those other than youth. Such representations reinforce a sense of isolation and segregation and suggest that it is not the role of youth in society to work with the government or its representatives, with seniors, or with children, for example. Rarely, if ever, are youth portrayed as having any relationship to these groups. Thus, in attempting to answer my secondary research questions regarding the relationships being constructed or envisioned between young people and the Canadian state, its representatives, or social groups, the answer is: There are none. Youth are presented quite consistently as being almost entirely cut off from the rest of society in terms of meaningful citizen interaction or collaboration, although youth are, of course, most often presented within structures imposed upon them by adults.

#### *Current opportunities & challenges*

Clearly struggles over power heavily influence the changes taking place in representations and perceptions of youth as participatory or active citizens. As I presented in chapters four and five, however, there have been efforts on the part of adults to share social and political power, as well as efforts on the part of youth to exercise such power. Youth media projects, such as those NFB films which have put cameras in the hands of young Canadians to make their own films, and online youth initiatives such as *TakingITGlobal*, provide youth with forums through which to present their own views on youth action and on the roles young Canadians can or should play in socio-political decision-making.

Similar themes surfaced in these chapters as in earlier ones; however, my analysis of youth-directed NFB films and selected websites revealed that segregation of youth voices and actions, age-based and generation-based inequalities, and other issues remain contentious even in these spaces of youth action and voice. The inclusion of these chapters in the thesis demonstrates that youth with access to suitable tools and resources can enact a vision of their own with regards to their role(s) in society as citizens. While I feel these spaces are helpful and important in the process of (re)defining and situating youth as citizens, there is need for caution given persistent issues of inequality.

We do need to be careful that such initiatives are effectively supporting meaningful participation in terms of youth citizenship to avoid further circumscribing youth action and limiting it to individual or ‘youth-only’ issues. As both Hart (1992) and Jenkins et al. (2006) have stressed, youth participation can occur in a variety of ways, not all of which will be meaningful or effective in the lives of young people. Using Hart’s (1992) framework of child and youth participation, in addition to considering Jenkins et al.’s (2006) cautions of a ‘participatory gap,’ can encourage critical reflection on, and examination of, youth engagement efforts and activities. We need to ensure media production projects aimed at youth as citizens are used to encourage and enhance meaningful youth participation and that they challenge the trends which would limit what such projects are perceived to be able to accomplish. Particularly with online initiatives we must remember that “network structures are equally compatible with balkanization and can segregate those who have political interests from those who do not feel connected to the public sphere” (Levine, 2008, p. 133).



Such youth media are, however, examples of adults' struggle to share power with youth. I firmly believe, as Xenos & Foot (2008) have argued, that adults and youth alike need to work towards understanding how tools such as the internet and other media can be used in civic ways counter to corporate trends, acknowledging the different approaches adults and youth may have towards media and technology in an effort to avoid re-inscribing generational divides.

While films and websites may offer youth spaces to voice their opinions and to attempt to define their own roles as citizens, as I have shown, youth media (in the form of films and websites, in particular) is not a solution in and of itself. Involving youth in filmmaking and especially in making their own films for distribution, as well as inviting youth to participate in online forums and communities, is fraught with complications and power struggles. Employing a Foucauldian approach to power and the social construction of youth as citizens has enabled me to begin critically examining the complexity of these power relations:

Rather than looking for the single form or the central point from which all forms of power derive, either by way of consequence or development, we must begin by letting them operate in their multiplicity, their differences, their specificity, and their reversibility; we must therefore study them as relations of force that intersect, refer to one another, converge, or, on the contrary, come into conflict and strive to negate one another. (Foucault, 2003, p. 266)

Thus, we must recall that, as youth actively use these opportunities to envision and present their own perspectives on youth as citizens, it may also be the case that the provision of these spaces and opportunities allows adults to control and manage youth participation. When adults provide opportunities for socio-political participation within adult structures they can argue that they are valuing youth's opinions without necessarily meaningfully incorporating young people into decision-making or other structures of

influence: “The policy of ‘targeting’ young people so that they can ‘play their part’ can be read either as a spur to youth activism or an attempt to manage it” (Coleman, 2008, p. 191).

Young people are increasingly aware of being sold something and it is not surprising that youth are often suspicious of adult attempts to ‘engage’ them, particularly when they are rarely ever meaningfully involved in other ways (as reflected in the lack of any image of youth developing meaningful and productive relationships with adults or the state throughout my analysis). Those with power are able to argue (and perhaps actually believe) that youth are apathetic or uninterested/unengaged when they do not participate within the structures provided for them (leading to further blaming of youth), while young people are, in fact, being denied agency.

If those in power want young people to be interested and engaged in citizenship issues, youth need to be meaningfully incorporated into social and political decision-making (the world of adults). How could the representation of youth as participatory citizens work towards these ends? As I have argued, discourses and representations of youth participation are important in the process of meaning-making and help to socially construct conceptualizations of the ‘young Canadian citizen’ and situate youth within particular subject positions and power relations. Representations of youth action where adults are involved but not necessarily in charge, reflecting the highest rung of Hart’s (1992) ladder of child/youth participation, would go far to show both youth and adults what young Canadians are capable of. What we need are examples of youth-initiated actions and their effects – for other youth but also for adults, the wider community, and for policy.

I appreciate that focusing on youth voices can be, in itself, a step towards valuing their input and moving away from a reliance on adult ‘experts,’ but I am wary of the segregation taking place between youth and adults. The longer young people are limited to their own community of peers, the less experience they have engaging and struggling with broader political and social issues and processes. It would be inspiring to see media reflecting youth-initiated actions that involved everyone in a social community (e.g., cross-generational), especially in a film aimed at all of those people as audiences. Perhaps if youth are invited to become a part of politics they would be interested and engaged, alleviating concerns about youth’s lack of interest and their low rates of voter turnout in elections. As it stands, such intergenerational actions where young people have power are rarely portrayed or discussed.

### **Changing contexts**

In the introductory chapter and chapter one, I offered a discussion of the changing perceptions of youth as citizens in policy, literature, and research. I considered the questions being raised regarding youth’s role(s) in society against the backdrop of theoretical considerations of citizenship which often neglect youth, particularly as active citizens. Central to the contested nature of youth citizenship is the fact that the notions of youth and of citizenship are also being contested, as they always have been. A social constructionist approach has led me to critically examine these concepts and their shifting meanings. Considering the social, cultural, and political changes over the last four decades, it is necessary that we rethink the concepts of youth, citizenship, and participation in the context of youth as citizens and youth socio-political participation.

## Youth

In considering the changes in how young people have been perceived as socio-political participants over the last four decades, a striking shift was evident in how 'youth' has been understood and defined. Social norms that had marked the transition to adulthood during the 1960s and 1970s gradually shifted. As university has become more accessible and degrees more in demand, young people have spent more time pursuing their education and have delayed beginning their careers. For other youth, un(der)employment has necessitated longer periods of time dependent on their parents. People have begun marrying and starting families at an older age and young people now live in the parental home longer. These and other trends have been reflected in changing definitions of youth: As the traditional markers of adulthood (e.g., career, home ownership, economic dependence, etc.) are now achieved at a later age, 'youth' has come to encompass older age groups and the markers of adulthood have become less clear.

As I outlined in the introductory chapter, there have also been struggles between differing perspectives on youth in society: Structure/agency, consumer/citizen, and protection/participation polarizations broadly encompass these differences. These various approaches are, at the root, about power and whether youth are perceived to have power at the level of citizenship – power to shape their own lives and to shape social and political aspects of society.

The paradox between structure and agency in youth's lives has been evident throughout my research and is crucial to an understanding of the complex power relations at play in conceptualizing youth as participatory citizens. As young Canadians are

encouraged to participate in politics and governance it is understandably assumed that they are being provided with the agency required to effectively act in their role as citizens. Such encouragement of youth participation is often praised as it challenges the traditional assumptions held about youth as passive and incompetent. And, at times, when youth do meaningfully participate (whether invited to or not) such assumptions are challenged: For example, as seen in films depicting youth organizing to fight racism in their community. Repeatedly, however, recent representations of youth socio-political action have reflected opportunities for youth participation only within adult-imposed structures. Situating youth action within these structures serves to limit the amount of control or freedom to act that youth may exert. Thus, even within characterizations of youth that emphasize participation and agency, the unequal power relations between youth and adults are clear. Researchers must continue to be watchful of the ways in which structure and agency each play out in youth's lives and how their interplay can sometimes disguise the efforts of the powerful to control and limit youth participation.

A fundamental challenge with regards to youth socio-political action and youths' subject positions as citizens is the ongoing and intensifying convolution of citizenship and consumerism. This theme resurfaced over and over again throughout my research and was addressed in academic texts, popular and news media, NFB films, and online discussions. Both youth and adults are clearly aware of the commodification of youth's lives and have commented on the challenges youth face as valued consumers and un(der)valued producers in society. The blurring lines between the roles of citizen and consumer are particularly worrisome and further research is required to investigate the specific role of capitalism in situating youth as citizens. As young people continue to negotiate their

multiple subject positions as consumers and citizens (among others) it will be important to examine the ways in which this is experienced by youth in their everyday lives.

The polarization often constructed between protection of youth and participation of youth has been central to this thesis. It is at the core of shifts in how young people are considered as citizens, with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child providing one example of the shift away from paternalism and a focus on protection towards an emphasis on participation rights.

### *Citizenship and citizens*

Attention must be paid to the fact that citizenship is not solely about legal rights and responsibilities (although these are also important and often contentious in the current climate of globalization and increasing mobility), but that citizenship is also associated with feelings of identity and belonging on various levels (e.g., personal, local, regional, national, global, etc.). As an example, Milan (2005) found that youth engagement in civic activities such as voting or volunteering works in conjunction with a sense of belonging in childhood and youth to influence socio-political participation (p. 4). Such a broadened definition of citizenship is crucial in examining the role of youth as citizens since it moves beyond only considering youth as *in becoming* and recognizes the struggles young people experience in trying to understand their role as citizens and to integrate that facet of their identity with the many others that make up their multiple positions as subjects.

Youth are rarely recognized as a social group in terms of their needs as participatory citizens or as social actors but are, instead, addressed as a group when there

are concerns about risk (either to youth themselves or to society from youth) or proper preparation for the future (i.e. the need for protection), or when they are considered as consumers. Young Canadians are not generally perceived as a social group who can make contributions to social or political issues since they are not understood to have such forms of power. Currently, there is no sense of a movement of Canadian youth although certain youth are understood to be involved in particular forms of social and political action, including cause-based marketing and celebrity-endorsed causes (e.g., [PRODUCT]RED), the anti-globalization movement, the environmental movement, and digital activism.

This tendency to think of youth only with regard to their need for protection is in contrast with children's rights discourses where the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly incorporates participation rights and emphasizes the role children can and should play in voicing their perspectives and contributing to governance decisions. The Convention has opened the door, in some respects, to encouraging youth participation, and thus far it has been used by a number of scholars and NGOs to point out Canada's shortcomings with respect to child and youth participation and to fight for more effective and inclusive state interactions with young Canadians. For the most part, young Canadians are still considered, most importantly, as *future* citizens and as innocents that require protection from the harms of the world to ensure they will successfully develop into productive adults.

The failure to consider youth as a social collective that can influence society in socio-political ways is also connected with the individualism evident in more recent NFB films. As films representing Canadian youth as participatory social actors shifted from showing collective actions in the late 1960s and early 1970s to presenting examples of

adult-sanctioned actions, a move has also been made towards a focus on individual youth and issues on an individual level (e.g., peer helping within the confined space of the school in *Someone To Talk To: Peer Helping in High School*, 1996, or individual youth exploring issues of identity in *Salt*, 2000). The individual youth is considered much more important in these representations than any collective sense of 'youth,' and even when young people are shown as citizens working to improve a wider community, they are portrayed as individual actors with the focus placed on the journey of the individual involved rather than on how those youth's actions affect society more broadly.

Such representations reinforce a focus on individual citizens and result in a failure to connect youth's issues to broader social structures. In an environment where youth hold little social and political power, the individual-focused and adult-sanctioned actions portrayed and encouraged in recent NFB films may provide youth with a sense that they are capable of doing something worthwhile and that they are valuable members of their communities; however, in failing to portray youth actions that would potentially address broader issues and challenge the status quo, the films operate within the limits of current power relations making it seem that such broad-based actions are unrealistic. Youth are most often considered as participatory citizens primarily as relatively isolated individuals on personal journeys of identity development or skill attainment.

As recent films portraying youth socio-political action have focused more often on youth audiences rather than on audiences of adults or other social groups, youth voices and representations of youth action in NFB films are also being increasingly segregated from the world of adults. Fewer and fewer adults appear in NFB films about youth participation and youth are rarely seen working with adults or speaking to adults



through film. Instead, young Canadians are involved most often in making educational films for audiences of other youth. This further circumscribes youth's power to act in the world and suggests that young people are not capable or that they should not talk to adults about these issues, signifying that the issues are not important beyond the world of young people. Such segregation does little to encourage youth to act on a broad scale and positions youth as active citizens only within the scope of youths' own social spheres.

### Citizen participation

This understanding of citizenship as identity and belonging, in addition to legal membership, goes hand in hand with a view of socio-political participation that encompasses activities beyond voting and participating in formal politics. While these activities undoubtedly remain critical to democracy as we experience it in Canada, thinking broadly about what it means to be an active or participatory citizen more effectively captures the actions of young people, particularly those who are removed from the political process, due to age or other factors. With a broad consideration of citizen participation, youth can be understood as engaged participants as they work towards social change on various levels and in different ways: as discussants actively constructing their own identities and influencing others, or as volunteers and activists.

Bennett (2008) has proposed that there are generational trends with respect to changing perceptions of citizenship that reflect changing notions of civic participation. He proposes two citizenship styles, the dutiful citizen (DC) who feels obligated to participate in government activities, particularly voting as an act of democracy, and the actualizing citizen (AC) who focuses on individual purpose and is critical of the media

and politicians.<sup>50</sup> Arguing that these particular tensions are fundamentally age-based and generation-based, Bennett (2008) posits that “there is a broad, cross-national generational shift in the postindustrial democracies from a *dutiful citizen* model (still adhered to by older generations and many young people who are positioned in more traditional social settings) to an *actualizing citizen* model favoring loosely networked activism to address issues that reflect personal values” [emphasis in the original] (p. 14).

Although I am cautious of the continued focus on the concept of a generational divide and wish to move beyond such divisions, there is value in Bennett’s (2008) assertion that a new understanding of citizenship may be eliciting different forms of activism or participation. This corresponds with Xenos and Foot’s (2008) contention that youth value interactivity and coproduction in online (political) environments and their suggestion that the networked means of communication valued by youth are often in contrast to the targeted and controlled communication styles of traditional politics.

A rethinking of both citizenship and socio-political participation is necessary to ensure youth action is acknowledged. It remains a question, however, of exactly what these forms of participation may mean to youth or to contemporary politics and citizenship.

What is needed is true acknowledgement of the existing power imbalances, of the influence of adults to structure the meanings of ‘youth participation’ and what it means to be a young Canadian citizen, and of the continued marginalization and segregation of youth voice and action. A Foucauldian understanding of discourse as a means of organizing the social has prompted me to carefully examine the discursive constructions

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<sup>50</sup> Bennett (2008) provides a detailed outline of these citizenship styles. See especially Table 1: “The Changing Citizenry: The Traditional Civic Education Ideal of the Dutiful Citizen (DC) versus the Emerging Youth Experience of Self-Actualizing Citizenship (AC)” (p. 14).

of youth as Canadian citizens and to explicitly understand those constructions as they are developed and exist within, and through, complex power relations. As to whether representations of youth citizen participation provide a progressive or limiting view of youth, there are evident tensions: While those who argue for children's rights and youth engagement stress the need for young people to participate in society (and there are examples of, and opportunities for, this participation), I have found that young Canadians are, for the most part, being represented as citizens with limited means and avenues for action and with power primarily in the form of individual voice and consumer choice. Further examination is necessary to really understand how the dominant representations of, and discourses about, youth as citizens are reflected in, or influence, the everyday lives of young people.

### **Contributions of this study**

This has been a broad study of Canadian youth as participatory or active citizens, encompassing various literatures and perspectives and drawing from two main sites of analysis to examine representations of youth social and political action: National Film Board of Canada (NFB) films and Canadian websites. A project aimed at gaining a better sense of how the issues around youth citizenship, and particularly the recent focus on participation or 'active' citizenship, are being negotiated and contested (in academia, policy, and the media), the thesis reflects the broadness of the study and the literatures I have drawn from and used as data. Youth citizenship is in a moment of flux (as is the definition of 'youth') and there are many competing perspectives regarding youth and citizenship that I have attempted to understand as they help to construct the meanings and

subject positions associated with young Canadian citizens, especially as participatory actors in socio-political realms.

Given the lack of research encompassing such varying perspectives and discourses, particularly regarding youth and their relationship to citizenship and socio-political roles, this thesis fills a gap in the scholarly literature of youth studies and citizenship studies, as well as in Canadian youth research. Citizenship studies and youth studies rarely overlap; thus, my work here contributes to both fields as I critically engage with the notion of youth citizenship and the roles of youth as participatory citizens. In an attempt to encompass various perspectives and to better understand perceptions of youth as participatory citizens, I have presented a critical look at representations of youth social and political participation in the context of Canadian youth citizenship and have considered what forms of action are presented as meaningful and how youth citizenship is being structured by particular interests. I have provided a more nuanced and encompassing look at the conceptualizing of youth as participatory or active citizens than is generally found in popular or academic commentary on youth and politics which tend towards either specific and focused accounts of youth action (often in the form of voting), or superficial observations regarding youth's lack of interest and engagement.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach has helped me to avoid falling into the polarizing thinking common in youth research and has encouraged me to think about the many different factors which contribute to the lives and experiences of youth – from considering biological and life-cycle changes to the complex effects of class, race, and the economy, for example. Thinking about this research project in light of the concept of ‘youthscape,’ as proposed by Maira and Soep (2005), I considered youth as both a social

group and an ideological category and focused on some of the intersections between youth and the areas of social relations, technology, the economy, media, and ideology. I feel that such an approach was helpful with regards to the examination of citizenship since youth's identities as citizens are intimately connected to each of these.

In addition, I have sought to contribute to youth media studies and alternative media studies with a look at how youth participation in cultural production can be socio-political action in and of itself and can work to create 'alternative' representations of youth as citizens. In the realm of citizenship, media is rarely considered with regards to media production and is often only marginally addressed. Youth studies as a field continues to flourish and it is my hope that this thesis will provide a foundation for future research, particularly regarding youth cultural production as a form of citizen participation. There are still many questions that remain about what role youth media might play in citizenship, and about how young media producers understand or experience the processes of production in the context of socio-political participation.

Building upon the work of scholars such as Lesko (1996a; 1996b; 2001) and Raby (2002a; 2002b) I have taken seriously the notion of 'youth' as a social construct and investigated some of the ways the construction of 'youth' takes place in relation to the concepts of citizenship and particularly active citizenship. A social constructionist approach focused on the role of discourses and representations in helping to structure meanings and perspectives has required me to question the fundamental assumptions often made about youth as citizens and social actors. Such an approach can contribute to citizenship studies by encouraging critical examinations of the power relations behind

current conceptualizations – particularly important since citizenship is, at its heart, about inclusion and exclusion.

Likewise, I have contributed to the work begun by Druick (1999; 2000; 2007) with respect to understanding the NFB and its films as important instruments in the construction and negotiation of Canadian citizenship, employing her approach of examining “the relationship between policy, films, and citizens” (2007, p. 14) in the context of youth. While I have been critical of the NFB films I examined, I also acknowledge that the NFB is attempting to provide young Canadians with opportunities to act as cultural producers. While it may be a struggle at times, the institution does seem to understand that young people have an important role to play in producing Canadian culture and the NFB provides unique youth media opportunities not found elsewhere in Canada. A thorough examination of the NFB’s role and actions in this respect would be valuable.

### **Limitations & suggestions for future research**

As with any study, there are limitations to what can be achieved even within the scope defined at the outset. One of the main issues I feel needs to be addressed in future work on this topic is the diversity of Canadian youth and how it relates to the role of youth as citizens. Citizenship has long had a tenuous relationship with issues of diversity as people have been categorized as insiders and outsiders based on gender, race, religion, geographical location, and other constructed categories. I acknowledge that I have made generalizations here about ‘Canadian youth’ and while I feel this has been necessary to move forward in thinking about the issues I’m concerned with, it has not been my

intention to homogenize young people. Inequalities based on age and other factors need to remain at the forefront of discussions of youth citizenship and this is especially important when we consider participation at local, national, and international levels and the sense of belonging people feel as part of various communities. As individualism reigns and individual identity is celebrated, the power relations associated with markers of inequality remain important even if they are glossed over in many respects. *Which* young people are considered, and provided opportunities to be, participatory citizens is important, as is *how* diverse groups of youth deal with issues of inequality or oppression in their efforts to act as citizens.

Another important limitation of this study which I hope to address in future research is the lack of direct incorporation of youth voices and perspectives. I made an explicit decision at the outset of the research to focus on representations of youth found in literature, policy, and media with the aim of improving understanding of the discourses shaping constructions of youth as citizens. I have included, however, the mediated voices of youth as they appeared in NFB films or on websites (in the quotes at the beginning of, and interspersed throughout, each chapter, as well as through the analysis of youth participation in filmmaking and online activities) in order to begin to address youth's perspectives and avoid focusing solely on adult voices in the thesis. It is my hope that this research on the representations of youth citizenship in Canada will provide a basis for future research to build on what I have found regarding the shifts and tensions, and to investigate the realities of youth's experiences and understandings of participatory citizenship from their own perspectives. Given what I have said above, this will also be important in light of diversity issues, and there is need to examine the realities of diverse

groups of youth, particularly those who may feel they are rarely represented in images of youth action or those on the margins of citizenship (e.g., new immigrants, minority youth, rural and remotely situated youth, etc.).

There are a number of opportunities to move forward from this research. As I have stated, my hope is that this thesis can provide a foundation for future research that explores Canadian youth as participatory citizens in complex and critical ways. Avenues that I feel are particularly salient include:

- Examinations of **other sources of representations of youth as citizens**. What characterizes the representations found in popular media (e.g., television shows, movies, music, social networking websites, etc.), school curricula, and other sources? Which sources are most relevant to youth?
- Examinations of the **disjunctions between rhetoric and the realities of youth as citizens**, particularly with respect to participation and participation rights. Where there are claims that youth are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate, what are the actual lived experiences of youth?
- Further investigations of the **issues in moving towards online youth engagement**. As governments and organizations put resources into developing online spaces and new media tools to support youth socio-political participation there is even greater need to ensure the effectiveness, appropriateness, meaningfulness, and inclusivity of such endeavours.
- Explorations of **youth's own perspectives on citizenship and youth's roles as citizens**. How do youth understand citizenship and the role of youth as citizens? What are their views on socio-political participation in the context of citizenship? How are



representations of youth action viewed and understood? How is the subject position of ‘citizen’ negotiated as one of multiple subject positions?

- Studies that **acknowledge and aim to understand the diversity of youth and the varying experiences young people have of citizenship and participation**. The role of participatory citizen is likely to have different meanings and realities for different youth. It would be particularly interesting to explore participatory citizenship from the point of view of youth less frequently seen or heard in this role – minority youth, new immigrant youth, marginalized youth, rural youth, etc.
- Projects exploring **youth cultural production (youth media) in the context of, or through the lens of, socio-political participation**. Do youth identify their cultural production activities as acts of citizenship? What do the processes of production mean to them in their everyday lives as citizens and as members of various communities?
- Investigations of **programs that are making efforts to negotiate the tensions and transformations of active youth citizenship**. Initiatives such as *TakingITGlobal* or the NFB’s film training programs are relevant here, as are intergenerational forums (such as the World Youth Congress at a global level or Youth Connex PEI at a local level<sup>51</sup>) and individual youth actions which attract attention (e.g., the Facebook group *Beauty vs. Industry*, created by high school students, received local news coverage and attracted over 6 400 members in its first month online<sup>52</sup>). Another recent initiative

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<sup>51</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> World Youth Congress, held in Quebec City, August 10-21, 2008, brought together youth from around the globe to discuss sustainable development and youth empowerment. Youth Connex PEI is a provincial initiative in Prince Edward Island that organizes an annual forum to bring together youth and those who work with youth to discuss pressing issues.

<sup>52</sup> For more information see the Facebook group (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=9754275515>) or news coverage at <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/prince-edward-island/story/2008/02/07/beauty-industry.html>

is YouthScape, a Canada-wide project to engage youth in social change.<sup>53</sup> It would be valuable to survey these initiatives and to investigate how they are addressing the issues I have raised in this thesis with regards to youth socio-political action in Canada (e.g., individualism, segregation, diversity, power struggles, generation gaps, commercialism, etc.). It would also be useful to examine any evaluations of such programs to help inform future projects.

- **Exploring the role of schools in citizenship education and in supporting socio-political participation among youth.** Ito et al. (2008) have suggested that, in the realm of digital media, “social and recreational online activities are jumping-off points for experimenting with digital media creation and self-expression” and that “educational programs could be positioned to step in and support moments when youth are motivated to move from friendship-driven to more interest-driven forms of new media use” (p. 35). Investigations could examine the roles of curricula, school administration, and service learning programs.

## **Conclusion**

The Fall of 2008 provided an interesting glimpse at the continuing changes with respect to youth as citizens in North America. As both Canadians and Americans went to the polls in elections for the federal government and the President, respectively, there were stark differences in how youth figured into the campaigns and election coverage. The elections raise questions about how the current Canadian government views youth and youth participation, or, in fact, whether they consider it at all. Youth were not an

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<sup>53</sup> See <http://www.youthscape.ca/> for more information on this project, currently active in five communities across Canada.

issue in the Canadian election. Youth issues were rarely discussed and youth (like many in Canada) seemed unengaged throughout the campaign. Despite the fact that it was predicted that the rate of youth voter turnout would decline in this election from the last (Dramatic drop, 2008, October 1) there was no follow-up coverage of the youth vote or youth participation after the election.

The U.S. election, however, presented an entirely different perspective on the potential role of youth as citizens. The Democratic candidate, Barack Obama, ran a campaign focused on hope and change. The image of youth was present not only through Obama himself, a relatively young candidate at 47 with young children (especially in comparison with the Republican candidate, McCain, who was 72), but also through a focus on the future. Youth participation was an issue throughout the campaign, as large numbers of youth volunteered, filmmaker Michael Moore released a film about youth political participation in 2004 entitled *Slacker Uprising*, and, in the end, youth “exceed[ed] their 2004 [voter] turnout levels by at least 2.2 million” (Falcone, 2008, November 5).

These two very different reflections of youth as part of the formal political process demonstrate the ongoing struggles to include youth, but also the opportunities and potential for youth to become important participants. In many ways the example of the elections reflects the story I have told here of transition and change: Transition in how young people are constructed and represented as social and political actors – as participatory and active citizens. Today, young Canadians are caught between traditional perspectives that cast them as passive citizens *in becoming* and recent trends which emphasize the participation rights and responsibilities of youth. While the position of

'youth' is itself shifting and often contradictory, as it comes to encompass a larger age bracket and as polarized thinking dominates popular and academic perceptions about this population group, changes in how youth are represented as citizens are helping to shape views on youth action, not to mention potentially shaping the actions themselves. It is important that research in this domain continue and expand beyond superficial examinations that rely on stereotypes, generalizations, and oversimplified polarizations. Those with the ability to be heard and to make decisions must ensure that it is not only symbolic power offered to youth in socio-political domains, but rather that all Canadian youth are being provided with, or given opportunities to establish for themselves, meaningful ways to participate in social and political discussions and decisions.

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## Appendix A: Films selected for analysis<sup>54</sup>

### Selection process for NFB films

The selection process began with a search of the NFB's English Catalogue online (<http://www.nfb.ca/collection/films/>). From keyword searches for the terms 'youth,' 'teen,' 'teenager,' and 'adolescent' I narrowed down a list of 266 results to 89 films that might be applicable based on the titles and abstracts provided. I excluded films if they were not documentaries, were about subjects other than youth, were about youth from/in other countries, were for young children, or were stories about teen idols (e.g., Paul Anka, Leonard Cohen). I further narrowed the list by identifying films focused on documenting youth social and political action and highlighting the notion of being active in one's community and nation.

To this list I added films made by youth that were focused on social change. These films are, in their nature, examples of youth social action since it is youth themselves who are voicing their opinions or perspectives through film. In addition, the incorporation of such films allows for recognition of youth voices and opinions, particularly on the matter of citizenship and participation. In order to maintain coherence throughout the thesis, the youth-directed films chosen for analysis are documentary films explicitly meant to raise social issues or portray youth action.

A visit to the NFB Archives and interactions with a NFB archivist provided further information on possible avenues and research materials and more films were considered based on the following category searches: Children & Youth - Social Action

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<sup>54</sup> All abstracts in this appendix are from the NFB's English Catalogue, online at <http://www.nfb.ca/collection/films/>

(15 results), Social Issues - Young Adults (40 results), Social Issues - Adolescents (69 results). A small number of the films short listed were unavailable or difficult to locate (7); however, I screened the remainder and added or eliminated films as relevant. I excluded films focused on documenting programs for youth unless they portrayed youth participating actively as organizers or volunteers, as well as films providing cultural portraits of youth (either individuals or groups) since they are more concerned with showing the diversity of Canada than showing youth as social or political actors.

### **Abstracts of selected films**

#### *Encounter with Saul Alinsky - Part 1: CYC Toronto (1967)*

“This is a lively confrontation between Saul Alinsky, a professional activist from the United States whose efforts have been directed towards organizing the poor, and several members of the Company of Young Canadians. A dilemma of doubts is expressed in what he and the CYC members say about the means and the costs of securing social change, about the challenge facing all socially engaged people.”

#### *Flowers on a One-Way Street (1967)*

“Yorkville Avenue, Toronto, received newspaper prominence after it became what the papers called a ‘hippie haven.’ This film records what happened after the young people staged demonstrations to have the street closed to traffic, and civic authorities used corresponding persuasions to keep it open as a necessary traffic artery. The main confrontation takes place at a council meeting in City Hall, to which spokesmen for the young people have come to present their case. Here the film provides opportunity to judge both their attitudes and those of the city administration.”

#### *Christopher’s Movie Matinee (1968)*

“When movie cameras were put in the hands of a few young people, they made this film about themselves and their world. The footage they gathered is presented in this hour-and-a-half film with very little editing. There are sit-ins, love-ins, animated discussions among themselves about almost everything, and encounters with adults on a bus and on the street. The film is revealing in what it shows of a dissenting generation and its rationale.”

#### *Occupation (1970)*

“Concerned with the democratization of their university, striking political science students occupy the offices of the Political Science Department at McGill



University. The issue: greater student control over the hiring of faculty. The film crew lives with the students and follows their action through confusion, argument, dissent, and negotiations with faculty. The result is an intimate view of a student political action.”

*Beyond Kicks* (1972)

“In the early 1970s, a group of young volunteers, the Free Youth Clinic of Winnipeg, operated a ‘crisis bus’ to rescue young people experiencing bad drug trips, usually from LSD. This film documents the activities of the volunteers: responding to and treating emergencies, whatever the hour, and obtaining further medical aid for their patients, if required.”

*Thin Dreams* (1986)

“One of the films made by young women participating in a training program sponsored by the Secretary of State’s International Youth Year Secretariat and Studio D of the National Film Board. The film is a look at how young women in high school feel about their bodies, and how their self-images are affected by North American society’s obsession with thinness.”

*Mile Zero: The SAGE Tour* (1988)

“In September 1986, four Montreal high school students travelled right across Canada to speak in high schools about the threat of nuclear war and what they could do about it. Equipped with nothing but an ailing, third-hand station wagon, and leaflets and T-shirts to sell, they made their way from St. John’s Newfoundland to the end of the Trans-Canada Highway on the west coast – Mile ‘0’. This film chronicles their voyage through [sic] 150 Canadian communities, as well as the inevitable ups and downs of nine months on the road. This is a story about a generation finding its voice. More than of anything the message of the film is that individuals – of any age – can make a difference.”

*Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* (1992)

“In the environment of their predominantly white high school, a group of Black students face daily reminders of the presence of racism, ranging from abuse (racist graffiti on washroom walls), to exclusion (the seemingly ‘innocent’ omission of Black history from texts). They work to establish a Cultural Awareness Youth Group, a vehicle for building pride and self-esteem through educational and cultural programs. With help from mentors, they discover the richness of their heritage and learn some of the ways they can begin to affect change.”

*Silence & Storm* (1995)

“Every summer, Camp Weredale, located in the Laurentian mountains north of Montreal, is home to ‘system kids,’ offering them a safe haven and a chance to heal lives scarred by abuse and neglect. *Silence & Storm* documents two months in the lives of ten kids at this unique summer camp. For some, it was an opportunity to re-learn their capacity to be kids and just play; for others, it was a

chance to come to grips with the painful memories that haunt them. Despite backgrounds steeped in pain and disappointment, these young people were able to reveal themselves and express their hopes, fears, anger and loneliness. The result is a sensitive, revealing portrait of an unusual program for youth in care.” (Note: This film is youth-directed)

*Bronwen & Yaffa (Moving Towards Tolerance) (1996)*

“Against a vibrant soundtrack of punk and rap music, two extraordinary young women from Halifax create change at the grassroots level by organizing benefit rock concerts to raise money for Eastcoast Against Racism (E.A.R.). Bronwen and Yaffa have both experienced racism in their own lives and are determined to make a difference. Their message is simple to those who promote racism and those who struggle against it: ‘The world is getting way out of control. We don’t have to live this way. We can change it’....

*Bronwen & Yaffa (Moving Towards Tolerance)* chronicles the efforts of these two determined young women as they successfully rally against racism....After the show, they realize that, even though the battle is huge, ‘It is possible to get your message across and people do listen...and that’s worth everything!’”

*Someone To Talk To: Peer Helping in High School (1996)*

“To teenagers, teachers and guidance counsellors can sometimes seem distant or uncaring. The thought of confiding, even to friends, can be terrifying. Enter peer helpers. Specially trained student volunteers, peer helpers lend an understanding ear to teens facing personal problems. In the process, they learn about empathy and improve their own social skills. In over 6,000 Canadian schools, peer helping programs have been successfully training kids to help each other overcome everything from nagging personal problems to full-blown crises. This eye-opening portrait of a group of peer helpers follows volunteers from two Ottawa-area high schools. From one-on-one help to school-wide awareness meetings, *Someone To Talk To* captures the achievements and disappointments of a year of peer helping.”

*Taking Charge (1996)*

“**Taking Charge** shows teens taking the initiative to overcome the fears and vulnerabilities of growing up in an increasingly violent and rapidly changing society. Through role-playing, theatre groups, peer discussion groups and anti-violence collectives these young activists have ‘taken charge,’ educating themselves and their peers towards a deeper understanding of the effects of violence rooted in sexism, racism and homophobia.

We see through their various initiatives, as well as personal testimonies, that teens speaking and organizing against violence sends a positive message to everyone. **Taking Charge** encourages the viewer to re-examine definitions of violence, and shows how to effect change.

The defiant lyrics of the theme song match the bold and creative energy alive in these teens. Witty animation sequences add a layer of visual playfulness, but the message remains: Do something before it is too late!”

*Respect Revolution* (2000)

“A group of youth, aged 14-18 have created a hip, media-savvy video to generate discussion about gender stereotyping, labels, and miscommunication. Up-beat and direct, ***Respect Revolution*** gets youth talking about what healthy sexuality means to them, the root causes of sexual violence and gives the tools to set personal boundaries. For youth 14-18.”

*Salt* (2000)

“This is what this is about: this is about flavour, this is about different perspectives on the lives of youth, our own unique perspective on issues important to us. This is about our lives and our concerns - namely the school system, today’s punk movement, self-mutilation and the independent music scene. *Salt*, born of alternative education at MIND High School, allowed us four young women to pursue each individual vision (our own, mind you - not some exec’s or something). With the support and encouragement of experienced professionals like **Louise Leroux**, **Rick Blackburn** and **Pierre Lapointe** we discovered the ability to make a doc of our own.”

*Discordia* (2004)

“It’s September 9, 2002, and a scheduled appearance by Benjamin Netanyahu, the former Israeli prime minister, has sparked heated debate at Montreal’s Concordia University. By the end of the day, the ‘Concordia riot’ has made international news, from CNN to Al-Jazeera.

***Discordia*** documents the fallout from that eventful day – following three young campus activists as they negotiate the most formative year of their lives....Filmmakers Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal jump into the fray with street-smart bravado and a handheld camera. Buoyed along by hip-hop artist Buck 65, they offer a tonic reflection on the current state of Canadian student activism – and the enduring value of a tolerant and open mind.”

## Appendix B: Films selected for contextual research<sup>55</sup>

### 1960s:

#### *The Invention of the Adolescent* (1967)

“From the past, when distinctions between childhood and adulthood were not as finely drawn as they are today, this film traces the development of the adolescent and shows some of the real problems of this age. It notes that it was the defense of the young, the protection afforded by reformers and educators, that created the generation gap so evident today in Western society. What adolescents gained and lost from changing attitudes towards them is clearly illustrated in the film.”

#### *The Children’s Crusade* (1984)

“Flower children, hippies, drop-outs – names given to the radical youth of the 1960s. Their revolution grew out of a deep mistrust of the smug, postwar, middle-class world in which they had been raised. Against this background, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson announced in 1965 the creation of the Company of Young Canadians to channel youthful energy into social and community development. Although the Company was plagued with mismanagement, political intrigue and controversy, and was eventually placed under trusteeship, valuable work was done by CYC workers in remote, poor and disadvantaged communities all over Canada. The children’s crusade did not survive, but, as this documentary argues, the CYC, along with other young crusaders of the sixties, broke the ground for the formation of effective native associations, consumer pressure groups, the anti-nuclear movement, and for the breakdown of repressive sexual and educational traditions.”

#### *The Summer of ‘67* (1994)

“In 1967, the National Film Board produced two documentaries that captured the spirit of that turbulent year, as social and cultural revolution – and generational change – were part of daily discourse. One film followed the travels of fourteen Toronto teenagers over the course of the summer, while the other documented the conflict between the hippies of the day and Toronto City Council over the future of the Yorkville neighborhood, then Canada’s counter-culture capital. More than two decades later, the filmmakers have sought out some of the films’ participants, not as an exercise in nostalgia but to discover what traces remain in the lives of those who most deeply felt the impact of the ‘60s.”

### 1990s/2000s:

#### *All the Right Stuff* (1997)

“*All the Right Stuff* is about kids, malls, media and money. This video puts the role of youth in today’s corporate economy into perspective. Join Brendan on a tour through the local mall. With two hundred dollars of birthday money in his

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<sup>55</sup> All abstracts in this appendix are from the NFB’s English Catalogue, online at <http://www.nfb.ca/collection/films/>

pocket, he's ready to do some serious spending on music, clothes, and video games.... Intercut with Brendan's shopping trip are interviews with shopkeepers, young people who talk about the pressure on them to consume and to sport all the right logos, and members of the bands Thrush Hermit and Hip Club Groove on how the music and clothing industries target young people. With poor job prospects and little access to the political process, teens come to see themselves primarily as consumers. It's a self-image marketers are only too happy to encourage and exploit."

*XS Stress* (2004)

"Three youths tell their stories in *XS Stress: Teens Take Control* – an essential guide to staying afloat while navigating the choppy waters of adolescence. It's a time when youth undergo big changes and assume new responsibilities, juggling school, family and friends. Throw in work, dating, exams, racist remarks and extra-curricular activities - and it's no wonder teens get knocked off balance. Spoken word performer Kyra Shaughnessy and a diverse chorus of young voices provide running commentary, making *XS Stress* an insightful report from the teens of today. It's fun and full of good advice. It's powerful and real. It's teens taking control."

## Appendix C: Government documents selected for analysis

*Canada's first report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1994, June). Released by Canadian Heritage. Retrieved August 28, 2006, from [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pdp-hrp/docs/crc/index\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pdp-hrp/docs/crc/index_e.cfm)

Following signing (1990) and ratification (1991) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Canada was required to submit an initial report on the first two years of ratification. This first report was submitted to the UN in June 1994 and outlines measures taken by the federal, provincial, and territorial governments in accordance with the CRC prior to December 31, 1992.

*Canada's second report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (2001, April). Released by Canadian Heritage. Retrieved August 28, 2006, from [http://www.pch.gc.ca/ddp-hrd/docs/crc-2001/index\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/ddp-hrd/docs/crc-2001/index_e.cfm)

After the first report to the UN was made in 1994 (covering the first two years of ratification of the CRC), Canada is required to report every five years on the progress of implementation. This second report was submitted in April 2001 and covers the period of January 1993 to December 1997.

*Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Responses of Canada* (2003, September). Released by Canadian Heritage. Retrieved August 28, 2006, from [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pdp-hrp/docs/crc-2003/rep\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pdp-hrp/docs/crc-2003/rep_e.cfm)

This report responds to issues and questions raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child with respect to Canada's second report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (submitted April 2001). It provides updated statistics and information on initiatives implemented after December 1997.

*Opening statement from Senator Landon Pearson on presentation of Canada's second report – Convention on the Rights of the Child* (2003, September). Presented at the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Geneva, Switzerland, September. Retrieved August 28, 2006, from [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pdp-hrp/docs/crc-2003/hod\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pdp-hrp/docs/crc-2003/hod_e.cfm)

This text contains notes from a speech made by then Senator (of Children and Youth) Landon Pearson to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child upon the review of Canada's second report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights. (2005, November). *Who's in charge here? Effective implementation of Canada's international obligations with respect to the rights of children. Interim Report*. Retrieved August 15, 2007, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/38/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/huma-e/rep-e/rep19nov05-e.htm>

This is the first report from the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, a Committee tasked with studying Canada's obligations regarding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As outlined in the Chair's Forward (by The Honourable Raynell Andreychuk), the Committee "was to examine how Canada could maximize the impact and application of the United

Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* on behalf of Canadian children” but found that “both in theory and in practice, children’s rights in this country are not understood, or indeed provided” (n.pag.)

Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights. (2007, April). *Children: The silenced citizens. Effective implementation of Canada’s international obligations with respect to the rights of children. Final Report*. Retrieved August 15, 2007, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/huma-e/rep-e/rep10apr07-e.htm>

This is the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights. It presents general findings of the study as well as a number of recommendations on how the government should move forward to improve its implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.