

**WHOSE CULTURE IS IT? –
TRANS-GENERATIONAL APPROACHES
TO CULTURE IN CANADA**

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by

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INTRODUCTION

This short paper was developed in response to a questionnaire prepared by CIRCLE (Cultural Information and Research Centres Liaison in Europe) for its 2004 Round Table in Barcelona, Spain. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the main trends in youth culture today and to determine whether youth culture differs more from mainstream culture than in earlier generations. The central research question to be explored was whether a new type of culture, network culture – characterized by the predominance of virtual rather than face-to-face relationships – was emerging.

Rather than responding to each question separately, this paper groups the questions under three sections: A) Trends; B) Impact on Society; and C) Policy Issues.

A. Trends

1. What are the main trends of youth culture in your country?
2. Is “network culture” a decisive feature?
3. Are practices and behaviours attributed to network youth culture discernable in later age groups as well? What are these?
4. In what measure is new youth culture being market-driven or not?
5. Characterize the extent and nature of “internationalism” (or the globalized nature) of youth culture – primarily network culture – in your country today.

The first challenge in discussing trends in youth culture is to define “youth”. In Canada, while there is no standard definition of youth, it is generally acknowledged that this cohort represents a significant, though shrinking portion of the total population. In 2004, about 19% of the Canadian population was under the age of 15. However, in some contexts, it is customary to count anyone over the age of 10 and under the age of 30 as “youth” (particularly in the marketing world). If the latter definition of youth is used, then about 27% of Canadians can be considered “youth”, representing some 8.6 million individuals within a total population of just under 32 million.¹

One of the main trends is a prolongation of the pre-adult period for the majority of Canadian youth. Partially as a result of a sluggish economy, many young people who came of age during the 1990s continued to pursue their education, rather than enter the job market. Many also often continued to live in the parental home. Their generally higher level of education and familiarity with information and communications technologies has led them to be more at ease with change and complexity than their elders. Michael Adams, a prominent Canadian pollster who has spent a lifetime studying the evolution of Canadian values, has stated that:

Young Canadians eagerly embrace a number of egalitarian and pluralistic values, including flexible definitions of family, a permissive attitude regarding sex, a desire of egalitarian relationships with others, including their seniors, and the pursuit of happiness over devotion to duty.²

¹ All figures are taken from Statistics Canada population data at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/demo10a.htm>.

² Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium*. (Toronto, 1997), pp. 102-103.

In a post-9/11 environment, there is some evidence to suggest that youth are seeking a more humanistic approach to life, one that is less reliant on technology.³ A recent survey indicated that in 2004 almost 90% of Canadian youth had access to the Internet, a slight drop from 2003 and that young people spent almost one hour less a week on line, compared to 2003.⁴ Nevertheless, another national survey of Canadian youth between the ages of 13 and 29 conducted in April 2004 showed that young people spent an average of over 11 hours per week online for work and study purposes and over 10 hours for communication purposes. This compares to about 9.5 hours spent watching television and just under 7.0 hours spent listening to radio.⁵ Part of the high figure for Internet communication may be attributable to the growing use of text messaging on cell (mobile) phones by young people. While there are no reliable figures on the number of hours spent sending text messages, one source suggests that 60% of young people aged 12 to 24 now own a cell (mobile) phone, so it can be assumed that a fairly high proportion of them are making use of this feature.⁶

While Canadian youth are undoubtedly at the vanguard of Internet users, it should be noted that their elders are not far behind. A survey of Internet use conducted in Spring 2004 indicated that about 87% of Canadian adults between the ages of 35 and 54 had access to the Internet and that Internet access among adults over 55 years of age was now at an all-time high of 57%.⁷ A poll conducted in 2000 by Northstar Research Partners for Youth Culture Inc. (a media and research firm) compared and contrasted how teens and their parents used the Internet (see Table 1). The figures suggest that both youth and adults are using the Internet for similar purposes, but that young people are considerably more active in using the Net for cultural purposes.

Table 1 – Internet Use Patterns – Canada, 2000 (Percentage doing activity)		
Activity	Youth	Adults
Research	93	67
Get information on performing artists	80	37
Play games	75	38
Listen to music, download MP3 files	74	34
Get music lyrics or scores	72	33
Get information on celebrities	69	29
Join chat sessions or discussions	68	27
Download software	59	62

SOURCE: Northstar Research Partners, 2000⁸

In Canada, as in other post-industrial economies, a portion of youth culture is certainly global and market-driven. As Naomi Klein observed in her widely-quoted book, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, “Cool, alternative, young, hip – whatever you want to call it – was the perfect identity for product-driven companies looking to become image-based brands.”⁹ The result, as another researcher has noted, is that “Despite different cultures, middle-class youth all over the world seem to live their lives as if in a parallel universe. They get up in the morning,

³ Presentation by Youthography, *A fresh look at the youth market*, September 30, 2004.

⁴ Ispos-Reid Corporation, *Reconnecting Government with Youth 2004*. (Ottawa, May 2004), pp. 26-27.

⁵ Presentation by Youthography, *A fresh look at the youth market*, September 30, 2004.

⁶ Personal communication from Max Valiquette of Youthography, November 12, 2004.

⁷ Ispos Reid, *The Canadian inter@active Reid Report*. (1st Quarter, Spring 2004), p. 4.

⁸ Quoted in Sue Ferguson, “Teens and the Internet”, *Maclean's* (May 29, 2000).

⁹ Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. (Toronto, 2000), p. 68.

put on their Levi's and Nikes, grab their caps, backpacks and Sony personal CD players, and head for school.”¹⁰

Yet, in Canada, there seems to be another side to youth culture. In 2000, the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, administered by Statistics Canada, a federal government agency, found that 29% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 were volunteers, which is not all that different from the 30% volunteer rate among adults aged 35 to 54. Most of this youth volunteering took place in three types of organizations -- education and research (19% of youth volunteer hours), social services (22% of youth volunteer hours) and arts, culture and recreation (18% of youth volunteer hours).¹¹

A study conducted for the Department of Canadian Heritage in early 2004 suggested that youth (aged 15 to 24) were even more likely than adults (25 years of age and over) to be involved in artistic activity – 79% as compared to 61%. In fact, in some areas, youth involvement far surpassed that of their elders. For example, 47% of youth had acting, dancing, singing or musical involvement, compared to 21% of adults.¹² Another recent study attempted to gauge the frequency of youth attendance at arts and cultural activities and found that 25% attended at least once a month, while a further 17% attended less than once a month, but regularly.¹³ Nor does consumption of more traditional media forms seem to be diminishing among the young. Another recent survey indicated that youth between the ages of 13 and 24 saw an average of 1.6 films per month in a cinema and rented an average of 3.2 films per month to view at home.¹⁴

B. Impact on Society

6. To what extent do the main trends of youth culture – particularly network culture – seem long-lasting?
7. How does network culture affect social exclusion, inclusion and related issues?
8. Do concepts related to Europe – integration, enlargement, etc. – find reflection in the above-described processes? (not applicable to Canada)

In some senses, youth may have moved beyond adult fixations about network culture. There is growing evidence to suggest that youth consider the Internet and new media simply as new tools for expression and communication. They use these tools much as youth have always done – to “stretch the envelope” of adult-dominated culture. It is important to make this distinction between network culture as a “new thing” and network culture as a means of accomplishing or renovating “old things”, as policy interventions that miss the point could cause more harm than good.

For young Canadians network culture, as indicated above, might mean doing research to find out what is happening in traditional culture. A recent survey discovered that “A majority of young Canadians say that they would be likely to use the Internet to look up cultural topics such as music (84%), art/sports/leisure (82%), interactive games and tools (70%), science and

¹⁰ Chip Walker, “Can TV Save the Planet?” *American Demographics* (May 1996), 42, quoted in Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, p. 119.

¹¹ Statistics Canada, *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians – Highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*. (August 2001), p. 46.

¹² Decima Research Inc., *The Arts in Canada: Access and Availability – 2004 Research Study Final Report*, (Ottawa, March 2004), p. 30.

¹³ Ipsos-Reid Corporation, *Reconnecting Government with Youth 2004*, (Ottawa, May 2004), p. 44.

¹⁴ Presentation by Youthography, *A fresh look at the youth market*, September 30, 2004.

technology (65%), history (63%)”.¹⁵ Many young Canadians consume traditional cultural products primarily through the Internet. For example, *Say Magazine*, a Canadian lifestyle magazine for Aboriginal youth, distributes only 50,000 printed copies per month, but averages over 100,000 hits per month on its website.¹⁶

The key difference that networked information technologies have introduced is the ability to practice “do-it-yourself” culture in a much more sophisticated and far-reaching manner. For example, another Canadian on-line magazine called *Spank! Youth Culture Online* bills itself as “youth culture defined by youth”. In existence since October 1995, it provides youth news and youth forums where young people can exchange information and views. It is run by a combination of peer volunteer moderators from around the world, supported by a small core group of people in Calgary, Alberta “who keep this place supported with technology and time”.¹⁷

Often, however, the sophistication of the technology remains embedded in communal experience at the local level and serves primarily as a way for youth to reappropriate forms of cultural expression that have long been dominated by large corporate interests. For example, a gallery in Ottawa, Ontario recently hosted an interdisciplinary art event to showcase “young, amateur, subversive, refreshing, and innovative art forms of all kinds”. One of the featured filmmakers at this event made his films at home on his computer, and counselled other young filmmakers to “...ignore high production values, beautiful people, and glamorous Hollywood nonsense” since “anyone can make a film”.

This linking of “high tech” and “high touch” hints at one of the central paradoxes of youth network culture. It can be both a solitary activity, practiced in isolation in virtual space, but also a catalyst for communal sharing, often in real time and real space. Far from being a “virtual” event the screening described above, according to a local arts magazine, “...began with a packed room and an alarming lack of breathable air. The intimacy was electrifying”.¹⁸

In Canada, there is some evidence to suggest that the digital divide, at least among the young, has closed. A recent survey of Internet use among young Canadians indicated that those living in households with incomes below C\$20,000 per year use the Internet over three hours more per week than those who are university-educated.¹⁹ This does not mean, however, that social exclusion and marginalization do not exist among the young in Canada. Rather it suggests that the marginalized are socially embedded in a broader environment, cut off from multiple forms of capital – economic, social and cultural. In the case of deprived youth, recent Canadian research suggests that removing barriers to participation in traditional artistic endeavours and offering high quality instruction may lead to increased confidence, improved interpersonal skills and improved conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.²⁰ At this point, however, little evidence exists regarding the social effects of network culture on youth (although there is considerable concern about “cyber-stalking” and pornography).

¹⁵ Ispos-Reid Corporation, *Reconnecting Government with Youth 2004*, (Ottawa, May 2004), p. 46.

¹⁶ “About Us”, *Say Magazine*, at <http://www.saymag.com/about.php> (accessed November 10, 2004).

¹⁷ “About Spank! Youth Culture Online” at <http://www.spankmag.com/content/about.cfm/cc.2/p.htm> (accessed November 10, 2004).

¹⁸ Jovana Jankovic, “Judges, Juries and Executioners”, *Zygote – fusion of arts and youth*. Vol. 4, no. 1 (Autumn 2004), 4.

¹⁹ Ispos-Reid Corporation, *Reconnecting Government with Youth 2004*, (Ottawa, May 2004), p. 27.

²⁰ National Arts & Youth Demonstration Project, *Highlights*. (Montreal, 2004), p. 16.

C. Policy Issues

9. Are the latest youth culture trends – particularly network culture – reflected in the cultural policies in your country at the different levels (local, regional, state, etc.)? If so, in what way?
10. What other spheres of public policy relate to youth culture (e.g. copyright)?

Canadian governments at all levels, as well as non-profit organizations, provide a variety of cultural programs for youth, and many of them are moving toward a greater recognition and accommodation of youth network culture.

At the federal government level, a number of major cultural Internet portals exist. The Canadian Culture Online Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage administers a number of policies and programs to help bring the country's cultural content to Canadians and the world. Through its Culture.ca portal, a public space developed in partnership with the private sector, it provides links to a wide variety of cultural websites, including some that are youth-oriented.²¹ The Department of Canadian Heritage also hosts Culturescope.ca, the website of the Canadian Cultural Observatory, which aims at fostering cultural research, connecting cultural policy decision makers and encouraging informed decision making.²²

The National Advisory Board of the Culture.ca portal has underlined the need to focus on the digital cultural activities of youth. Its current business plan indicates that it will develop an interim CultureJunior section of Culture.ca as a precursor to the development of a full-fledged Culture.ca YouthZone channel. Culture.ca also intends to do a literature review of qualitative and quantitative studies to better understand the type of online service that should be provided for youth.²³

That being said, however, Canadian government support for youth networks is still very much a “hands-on” activity. For example, Exchanges Canada, a program of the Department of Canadian Heritage, provides funding to support two-way exchange visits between young Canadians aged 11 to 18 years. Another Canadian Heritage program, the Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre initiative, provides support for a network of urban youth centres to provide accessible, culturally relevant programs, services and counselling for urban Aboriginal youth.²⁴ It is likely that youth network culture initiatives will supplement, rather than replace, this type of intervention.

As mentioned earlier, the impact of online violence, pornography and hate on children and youth is an emerging public policy concern. Recently, the Government of Canada introduced draft legislation to protect children from sexual exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect. While it is currently an offence in Canada to use the Internet to communicate with a young person for the purpose of committing a sexual offence against that child, the proposed legislation would

²¹ Information on the Canadian Culture Online Branch can be found at http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/ccop/about_e.cfm. Information on Culture.ca can be found at http://www.culturecanada.gc.ca/cultureca_e.cfm (both accessed on November 11, 2004).

²² Information on Culturescope.ca can be found at <http://www.culturescope.ca> (accessed on November 11, 2004).

²³ Personal communication from Vladimir Skok, Director eCulture, Culture.ca gateway, dated November 9, 2004.

²⁴ Information on Exchanges Canada can be found at <http://www.exchanges.gc.ca> and information on the Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre initiative can be found at <http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/> (both accessed on November 11, 2004).

broaden the definition of child pornography and narrow existing artistic and scientific defences for the production of such material.²⁵ In the non-profit sector, the Media Awareness Network, an organization that provides information and tools on its website to help young people understand how the media work, has used network culture to educate both parents and youth about these issues.²⁶ Through its *Be Web Aware* public education program on Internet safety, it provides practical information to help parents teach their children about the potential risks of going online.²⁷

Copyright is another potentially divisive public policy issue related to youth network culture. As a good portion of youth culture (including such widely networked forms as rap and hip-hop) consists of a *bricolage* of media content, it frequently puts young creators in conflict with more established forms of cultural production. As Naomi Klein observes:

In this context, telling video artists that they can't use old car commercials, or musicians that they can't sample or distort lyrics, is like banning the guitar or telling a painter he can't use red. The underlying message is that culture is something that happens to you. You buy it at the Virgin Megastore or the Toys 'R' Us and rent it at Blockbuster Video. It is not something in which you participate, or to which you have the right to respond.²⁸

During April 2004, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage studied a number of copyright issues, including Internet service providers' liability, use of the Internet for educational purposes and technology-enhanced learning.²⁹ To date, however, Canadian copyright legislation has not addressed the wider issues of sampling and reproduction of audio and visual works.

An even thornier issue than creative copying is the downloading of content from the Internet by consumers. A recent survey indicated that 57% of Canadians aged 18 to 34 have downloaded a music file, although this figure is down from the previous year due to fears about lawsuits by record companies.³⁰ Ironically, while the recording industry in the United States does have the right to sue those who download music, the Federal Court of Canada ruled in early 2004 that file sharing on peer-to-peer networks is legal.³¹ While this ruling is being appealed, it does illustrate the legal ambiguities and complexities surrounding network culture, not the least of which is the apparent ability of legal rulings in one jurisdiction to cause a "chill" in another.

²⁵ Department of Justice Press Release, "Minister of Justice Introduces Legislation to Protect Children and Other Vulnerable Persons as First Bill in New Parliament", October 8, 2004.

²⁶ Information on the Media Awareness Network can be found at <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cfm> (accessed November 11, 2004).

²⁷ This initiative can be found at <http://www.bewebaware.ca> (accessed November 11, 2004).

²⁸ Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, p. 178.

²⁹ Report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, *Interim Report on Copyright Reform*. (May 2004) at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/InfocomDoc/Documents/37/3/parlbus/commbus/house/reports/herirp01-e.htm> (accessed November 11, 2004).

³⁰ Ispos Reid, *The Canadian inter@active Reid Report*. (1st Quarter, Spring 2004), pp.7 and 9.

³¹ Federal Court Docket: T-292-04, Citation: [2004 FC 488](http://www.fct.gc.ca/fct/2004/2004fc488.shtml), *BMG Canada Inc. vs. John Doe*. (March 31, 2004) at <http://www.fct.gc.ca/fct/2004/2004fc488.shtml> (accessed November 11, 2004).

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WEBSITES

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Canadian Culture Online Branch http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pcce-ccop/about_e.cfm

Culture.ca <http://www.culturescope.ca>

Culturescope.ca <http://www.culturescope.ca>

Exchanges Canada <http://www.exchanges.gc.ca>

Media Awareness Network <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cfm>

Say Magazine <http://www.saymag.com/about.php>

Spank! Magazine <http://www.spankmag.com/content/about.cfm/cc.2/p.htm>

Statistics Canada (population data) <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/demo10a.htm>

Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres <http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/>