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Reconsidering Canada's Popular Middlebrow: The Case of "Peak Season"

In her 1995 essay, "Marginal Notes on Cultural Studies in Canada," Jody Berland argues that in Canada, a long history of state support for the arts, constant anxiety over the influence of the US, and attempts to promote highbrow artistic forms have created a murky distinction between popular culture and high culture. Because of this, many of Canada's cultural artefacts are placed in its ever-expanding "popular middlebrow cultural terrain" (Berland 521) and judged on their "usefulness"—for example, whether they tell us something about what it means to be Canadian, or promote Canadian values abroad. This paper examines the way in which media critics have claimed MTV Canada's reality television series, "Peak Season" (premiere date 2009), as part of Canada's popular middlebrow. Ignoring or downplaying the obvious parallels between this program and its American MTV predecessors, "The Hills" and "Laguna Beach," critics maintain that "Peak Season" is "refreshingly authentic" and representative of the "full spectrum" of Canadian society (Kaplan B15).