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# Connecting the Dots

Intertextuality and Narrative in LazyTown

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## Abstract

**Title:** Connecting the Dots–Intertextuality and Narrative in *LazyTown*

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**Summary:** The aim of this study is to analyze the intertextual and narrative components of the children's TV-program *LazyTown*. This show has become very successful internationally, making it a rewarding subject for this sort of study, as well as the importance that intertextuality plays in the media today. From the previous research included in this analysis it becomes clear that genre plays a big role when conducting a qualitative analysis such as this one, and that one must always keep the intended target audience in mind. Characterization is the part of narrative theory that are in focus in this study. Resultwise it became apparent that there are few specific intertextual allusions, instead the intertextuality lies in the thematic broad strokes; for example what a single episode is about. The characters of *LazyTown* are defined as various stereotypes; such as the hero, villain, disciple and so on.

**Keywords:** Intertextuality, narrative, characters, TV-show, stereotypes, genre, villain, hero.

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**I**n today's hypermediated world the televised images fight a continuous battle against other media for people's attention. The Internet, radio, video games and computer games, newspapers, books and other printed media make up a vast source of information to choose from, and one that is getting bigger all the time. In order to win over an audience you need something out of the ordinary, something that captivates you and does not let you go.

The advent of digital television provides its users with the possibility of getting hundreds or possibly thousands of channels to watch from around the world, but still it seems more than before that the actual content of the programmes are diluted down to a distillation consisting of watered down nothingness. Postmodern theory has an explanation for this phenomenon, with its roots in Friedrich Nietzsche's theories about nihilism; the realization that the various institutions and ideas many people took for granted as pillars of society are nothing but chimeras; God is dead and morality itself is questionable at best.<sup>1,2</sup> Postmodern thinking builds upon this into the idea that TV among other media today doesn't transmit messages anymore, the images being sent out have now been stripped of meaning and it is the mediation itself that is the purpose.<sup>3</sup>

The postmodernistic turn in which we lead our lives today can be related to the TV-show *LazyTown* and the world it presents to the viewer. The main character Stephanie talks and interacts with the puppets of the show as if they were human beings, but of course they are not. The buildings and the colors of them look like no city on planet Earth, further cementing the place as a non-geographical one, rather one situated in the limbo space Jean Baudrillard chooses to call the hyper real. A rather surreal situation resulting from the way the program is set up is that Stephanie's uncle who she supposedly is related to is in fact a puppet. Surely even children will realize that Stephanie cannot possibly be biologically related to a puppet, but within the show's hyper reality the rules are twisted out of place, making it perfectly acceptable, just like the fact that you can walk up to a simulated Donald Duck in Disney Land

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<sup>1</sup> An embracement of this void and the possibilities it grants you is – according to Friedrich Nietzsche – the only is the sound thing do to.

<sup>2</sup> Lyon (1994), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> McGuigan (1999), p. 55.

and shake his hand. It is not by accident that the only channel where *LazyTown* is aired in Sweden at the time of writing this is the Disney Channel. The overly optimistic and politically correct version of reality that is reproduced by the show fits perfectly into Disney's vision of good entertainment.

One of the problems of letting the *LazyTown* world be a hyper real plasticene non-reality, as opposed to a grey and dull imitation of real life, is with its main agenda of sending out a message of a healthy lifestyle to the children watching the program. Since the world of the show is visibly detached from reality, is it not possible that kids watching the show will associate the health message with something hyper real which there is no point in pursuing? I think that the health message is another example of a postmodernistic sign that has lost its meaning. You do not have to think about it for long until you realize the absurdity of sitting down indoors watching a show that actively preaches against an inactive lifestyle of sitting down and just passively watching, for example, a TV show. It's a hypocritical situation whose meaning can be found in postmodern theory as well. The health message in this case has lost its intended meaning of actually making people going out to exercise, but the positive connotation is there.<sup>4</sup> When parents see their children watching a show that promotes a healthy lifestyle, that seems like a good thing and let their children continue to do exactly what the show itself speaks against.

The reason why this show is interesting to study from society's point of view is because of how important intertextuality has become in the world in general.<sup>5</sup> Given that intertextuality is permeating society as a whole; can it also be found in children's programming? This is an unexplored question which motivates a study such as this one. Intertextuality means that the images in a TV program or film correspond to a similar image in another TV program, film or some other facet of popular culture, or even historical image banks like myths and various historical figures. The image that the intertextual image refers to gives it a sense of purpose and it lends its characteristics as well.<sup>6</sup> *LazyTown* is most definitely abound with intertextual imagery. The main character Stephanie shares a whole host of traits with Pippi Longstocking; she is living without her parents, is energetic, a bit of a tomboy, defiant, has an outrageous haircut etc.

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<sup>4</sup> Jansson (2001), p. 45pp.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 108.

Naturally every one of the kids who watch *LazyTown* cannot possibly know about Pippi Longstocking or make the connection to Astrid Lindgren's character, but that's where postmodern theory comes in to help. The sense of purpose made by the intertextual connections is not about what message they transmit but about the connections themselves.<sup>7</sup> There are two facets of intertextuality, at the same time as it often refers to an actual image like that of Pippi Longstocking, it can also refer to a more widely known and less well-defined image of, in this particular case, 'the tomboy girl'.<sup>8</sup> This is the reason why the media consumer doesn't necessarily need to have access to the information about exactly what the intertextual text refers to in order to get something out of it.

*LazyTown* is a very successful TV program which shows the significance of intertextuality today when it comes to mediated images of any kind. The fact that intertextuality plays such a big role when it comes to both commercials and films like the ones by Quentin Tarantino makes this study worth pursuing. The study of intertextuality is common when analyzing feature films and to some degree commercials as well, but less frequent when it comes to qualitative studies of media texts such as TV programs, therefore making it a field worthy of further expansion. The different genres that compose the various television shows are also defined from the use of intertextuality. A specified type of an intertextual sign is the genre convention, which defines the genre which the program in question belongs to. For example the film genre 'The Western' has an assortment of genre conventions that confirms its belonging to the particular genre: There is a shootout between the hero and an outlaw at some point, there is a scene in a saloon which involves a bartender and so on.<sup>9</sup> Bearing this in mind, it is impossible to analyse this sort of TV program without considering which genre it belongs to. When it comes to *LazyTown* it sits firm in the children's TV show genre.

In order to delve deep into an analysis of intertextual imagery, I have as mentioned earlier, chosen to focus on *LazyTown*. The program is about a young girl called Stephanie who travels to the town called LazyTown to live with her uncle. This is no ordinary town however; the inhabitants are mostly puppets much like the creatures of a previous famous show in the same genre called *Sesame Street*. The only humans except for Stephanie is Sportacus, the program's

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> Supra.

<sup>9</sup> Bordwell & Thompson (2001), p. 43, p. 96.

archetypal super-hero although he lacks evident super human abilities except for an extremely good sense of timing and perhaps a little too perfect athletic abilities. Furthermore we have Robbie Rotten, the evil character who wants to retain the overall lazy mentality residing in LazyTown.

The main storyline of every 24-minute show is that Stephanie and her lazy puppet friends go out and play a game, Robbie Rotten disguises himself and tries to influence them into doing something predominantly lazy or in another way unhealthy, and it always ends with Sportacus saving the day and teaching the children a morally sound lesson about doing the right thing, thus defeating and kicking the demonic Robbie Rotten headfirst down into his underground lair until the next time. So far nothing particularly strange about all this, but there is so much more than meets the eye here. Upon first viewing *LazyTown* looks like any other Nickelodeon children's show with its bright primary colors and outrageous buildings with slanted angles as if inspired by the expressionist films of the German silent era or modern art for that matter. In fact, *LazyTown* was not produced in the United States as one might think, but by Magnús Scheving from Iceland—the country where the program was filmed as well. Scheving, once a successful gymnast<sup>10</sup>, also plays Sportacus in the show and its success has made him very rich. The show's hyper real<sup>11</sup> fantasy world has no nationality associated with it and is aired throughout the world. Iceland doesn't have a big population and is perhaps mostly known for its unique nature with geysers, hot springs and volcanoes; however it also has a proud tradition of storytelling. Egil Skallagrimsson and Gunnlaug Ormstunga's fairy tales harken back to the medieval time period and are considered an important part of early literature, as well as the Icelanders folk tales about various mythological creatures living in the small hills of the countryside. Connecting *LazyTown* to the more traditional forms of telling stories might be a long shot, but there is no doubt that the program's narrative of polarizing between good and evil is a theme as ancient as human history itself, possibly deeply connected to the way our psyche experiences the outer world around us.

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<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magn%C3%BAs\\_Scheving](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magn%C3%BAs_Scheving)> 2010-04-15

<sup>11</sup> McGuigan (1999), p. 153.

## Theory and previous research: narrative theory

The study of narrative theory concerns itself with how a story is told; what kind of small building blocks it consists of.<sup>12</sup> In order to define something as a narrative, it needs to have a well defined beginning and an end, and the events that unfold themselves must do so on a cause and effect basis; A princess is kidnapped by a dragon, a knight sets out to kill the dragon, he manages to do so and rescues the princess after which they live happily ever after. The cause and effect formula usually means that there is first a status quo to the situation which is then interrupted—the princess is safe in her castle but she gets taken away. At the end of the narrative this status quo is returned to its initial state just like in the archetypical fairy tale about the princess and the dragon previously mentioned. At first narrative theorists studied Russian folk tales in order to determine a set of well defined characters that appeared in most of the stories in different variations.<sup>13</sup> This is just one part of what narrative theory covers however, other aspects are the different layers of the story called *fabula* and *sujet*, identifying the turning points in the story which follow certain patterns and so on. When it comes to *LazyTown* the parts of narrative theory which look at what the narrative in general is composed out of is, as mentioned earlier, not of much interest to utilize. The narrative setup of the episodes is formulaic and repeats itself in each episode with few variations.

What would be interesting to look at instead are the characters and to try to define them out of a library of well-known and easily recognizable stereotypes.<sup>14</sup> The postmodern theorists mostly talk about an emergence of non-narratives, like music videos, which one can link the characters used in the show to in the way that the archetypical “evil” or “good” characters they represent means that the story can be simplistic without it hurting the show’s appeal particularly much. This can also be understood as an aspect of intertextuality; the characters are intertextual in the way they refer back to previous characterizations in different circumstances. The setup of a character encompasses both the actions he or she undertakes but also visual features such as posture and outfit.

Narrative theory claims that storytelling is as old as human existence itself, that it’s something deeply embedded into our minds. Narratives can be found in almost anything that involves

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<sup>12</sup> Berger (1997), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P. 54.



written text or spoken words since we are accustomed to automatically speak in stories, it is something that is inherited in our very beings.<sup>15</sup> Because of this the characters that make up a narrative can be traced even further back into our history than the Russian fairy tales. Long before even the printing press was invented, people told stories about mythology. Joseph Campbell was a researcher who spent his academic career studying mythology, and his goal was to show how the various mythologies around the world were connected; how motifs of the stories repeated themselves in completely different religions. One of his books is called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in which he describes a defined array of characters who inherit the various mythological tales from the world religions.<sup>16</sup> Campbell knows nothing about narrative theory, and the stories he writes about are clearly not set up in a well-defined narrative way; it's not particularly effective storytelling judging by narrative theory's standards. But none the less the connection can easily be made to bridge the gap between the characters of *LazyTown*, narrative theory and the mythological characters.

## Intertextuality

When searching for previous research for this study I have included studies concerning intertextuality and televised messages in some form. Jonathan Gray has thoroughly studied media texts using intertextuality as a theoretical tool. His take on the study of intertextuality differs from what I have in mind with this thesis; never the less some points worthy of noting are brought up in his work. Gray stresses the importance of relating intertextuality to genre, something discussed by other scholars as well.<sup>17,18</sup> No genres exist in a vacuum, and the TV-series *The Simpsons's* genre is no exception. Gray situates *The Simpsons* in the parody genre and explains his reasoning for doing this. In *The Simpsons* episodes the intertextual references are used for two main purposes. The first is to create absurd situations which become comical because of their strangeness. The second is the use of what Gray refers to as *critical intertextuality*; where the intertextual references are used to criticize society in some way. An example of this is a scene where the Simpson family are watching a commercial. In it a scene out of WWII is played out where a German soldier is killed by a US counterpart, ending with

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<sup>15</sup> Berger (1997), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell (1949), p. 271.

<sup>17</sup> Gray (2006), p. 4, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Jansson (2001), p. 106.

them both plugging a soda drink.<sup>19</sup> The scene alludes back to popular images from WWII movies like *Saving Private Ryan*, but normal commercials as well, creating the absurd but in a way familiar situation that is the trade mark of *The Simpsons*. Something which sheds light on the importance of understanding genre happened when *The Simpsons* first was aired in Sweden. Traditionally in Sweden animated cartoons are associated with children's programming, therefore the channel airing the show decided to dub it in Swedish. This was a mistake as you naturally have to be an adult or at least an adolescent in order to understand the jokes made in the show. After quickly realizing this, the network stopped dubbing *The Simpsons* and it was aired in its original language with subtitles instead.

Gray's motivation why *The Simpsons* is worth studying is because of its big success around the world, and that it has become a part of everyday life as people quote it and refer to it not just as a TV show but a really integrated part of popular culture. Gray doesn't perform the kind of in-depth analysis which I will undertake with this thesis. There is no well-defined method to his studies. Furthermore, the sort of intertextuality that Gray discusses is also different from the one I will study in *LazyTown*.<sup>20</sup> The intertextual references which he focuses on are very explicit and outspoken, whereas the ones in *LazyTown* which I will concern myself with are more disclosed and not so easy to find. For example, Gray sees a reference to a celebrity making a guest appearance on *The Simpsons* as intertextuality. The reasoning for this is makes perfect sense; this is how *The Simpsons* creates humour and parody by referencing to the well-known. But when it comes to *LazyTown* though, one must use interpretation to a much larger extent in order to find intertextuality because of the more inexplicit form it comes in.

Scott R. Olson has performed studies on television programming and the various definitions of intertextuality available. Olson subscribes to the definition of intertextuality which explains it simply as allusions.<sup>21</sup> This is not in itself wrong, but it is a limited view of the term which only scrapes the surface of its complete meaning. Intertextual texts do allude to other texts, but that is only one part of it; the implied meaning that the reference itself creates is another very important aspect of intertextuality which—referring to it only as an allusion—omits. Olson is concerned with *self-reflexiveness*; TV programs that refer to themselves or the audience.

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<sup>19</sup> Gray (2006), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Olson (1987), p. 287.

Indeed this is intertextuality, but of a kind that John Fiske calls *vertical intertextuality*;<sup>22</sup> the text refers to other texts that are explicitly linked to it, such as reviews, advertisements, different parts of a franchise such as the Marvel comics *X-Men* and so on. The kind of intertextuality that is of concern to this thesis is another type that Fiske calls *horizontal intertextuality*,<sup>23</sup> which has to do with genre and the more “hidden” intertextual images that define genres, such as the children TV show genre which *LazyTown* belongs to.

Robert H. Deming brings up the point that the study of televised texts are problematic since it is impossible to relate to them without considering that media consumers have a preset frame of interpretation which they use to make sense out of what they see.<sup>24</sup> Deming suggests that one cannot completely dismiss that an audience will interpret a text using a specified set of parameters, but at the same time one cannot completely dismiss that a text is not utterly dependent on what frames of interpretation a media consumer is equipped with, it still has some sort of ability to “guide” him or her into seeing it in a certain way. One must have three aspects in mind when studying texts: the text itself, the context and the audience.<sup>25</sup> The relevance of discourses is brought up originating from the cultural studies field. A person’s social and economic characteristics and status is important when considering what they make out of a text. This includes factors such as class, gender, race, region, nation, ethnic group, etc.<sup>26</sup> Relating this to *LazyTown*; it becomes clear how important it is not to forget that *LazyTown* is a program intended for children, and not to forget this when performing an analysis of it. Deming stresses that it is important to always have in mind the surrounding texts when analyzing a text, the supertext as he calls it.<sup>27</sup> When it comes to *LazyTown* this will be the other children’s TV programs it refers to, in other words the texts that are included in the same genre.

When performing the analysis for this thesis the intertextual images will be divided into specific and broad intertextuality. Specific intertextuality directly refers to a previous text, and demands the media consumer to have knowledge about that text in order to get something out of the reference. Broad intertextuality refers to a general well-known image which does not require the media consumer to have any specific knowledge about the referenced text. An

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<sup>22</sup> Fiske (1987), p. 117.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> Deming (1986), p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> Supra.

<sup>27</sup> Deming (1986), p. 41.

example of specific intertextuality is the main character called 'The Bride' in the film *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* wearing an identical yellow jump suit as Bruce Lee's character wore in his film *Game of Death*. If one is not aware of the intertextual reference made here, The Bride's clothes will not seem like anything worthy of noticing. However if you do know about it, recognizing it will give you pleasure and it will make The Bride borrow Bruce Lee's characteristics of a fearsome kung fu specialist.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, a more broad intertextual reference is for example an allusion to the fairy tale about Little red riding hood. Fairy tales are common knowledge, but even for someone who has never heard this particular one, the themes and the characters are so archetypal that prior knowledge is not required. There is no question that the big bad wolf is the antagonist of the narrative, it explains itself. Naturally, intertextual texts can have more than one layer and be both broad and specific at the same time.

## Problem

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<sup>28</sup> Hitchon & Jura (1997), p. 156.

With this thesis I will perform a qualitative text analysis of *LazyTown* with the focus on intertextuality and narrative aspects of characterization. It is my hypothesis that these aspects of the show are one of the main reasons for its ability to speak to its target audience and in turn its global success.<sup>29</sup> In the world we live in today where people have access to a multitude of mediated material it is the intertextuality of the various images portrayed in the show that give it an almost subconscious meaning and value. As mentioned, intertextuality is the interconnectedness and similarity of a certain image with another picture used in a different context; as in, another TV program, a film or in real life. Via the use of recognition, the familiarity makes the viewer connect with the TV show on another level and give the mediated message a sense of purpose and high regard, without considering what the actual message being transmitted happens to be. All this has to do with the fact that TV first and foremost is a visual medium. This does not mean that intertextuality is all about what we see, things like music scores and spoken lines can be intertextual as well, even though it is less common. Furthermore I will analyze the narrative characterizations of the show, by looking at how the characters are used to convey the messages portrayed, but also by relating them to the overall storylines. Of course, this part of the analysis will not be performed completely detached from the intertextual analysis, since they work together; certain imagery is one of the main things which define the different characters.

Because of the nature of *LazyTown* one cannot analyze its contents without adhering to the overall message it tries to put across, even though doing this will not be the main focus of this thesis. The show's key agenda, which could not be expressed more clearly, is that of making children maintain a healthy lifestyle, by eating right and through exercise.<sup>30</sup> This to see which narrative means are used to put forward the message, for example in the use of a polarized characterization between evil and good.

In order to summarize the above, the following will be the scientific problem that will be addressed in this thesis: *To analyze LazyTown and how it is constituted as an effective media text.* The following are the questions I will attempt to answer:

- How are the different characters that inherit the story defined from a narrative point of view?

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<sup>29</sup> *LazyTown* official home page, <<http://www.lazytown.com/partners/>> 2009-12-30

<sup>30</sup> Now, since this message is so very blatantly advocated it is not of great interest to look into it too much, mind you it will be included in the analysis of the narrative aspects of the various episodes of the show.

- Which intertextual images can be found in the imagery of *LazyTown*?

## **Method**

In order to analyze the postmodern aspects of *LazyTown* I will be using a process defined by David L. Altheide in his book *Qualitative Media Analysis*.<sup>31</sup> This method proves the best to examine the points of interest that I've brought up about *LazyTown*. In other words; to extrapolate how the different characters that are around in *LazyTown's* world are defined and what their places are within the narrative, via the use of a theoretical framework regarding narrative theory. The one thing that could be done differently is to look at the whole narrative setup of the episodes as a main perspective, but the reason I want to concentrate on the characters is that the other narrative parts are mostly concerned with things that are very closely related to how the story in general progresses. As mentioned earlier the storylines of the *LazyTown* episodes are in general very simplistic to warrant the use of a euphemism; an extended narrative analysis of them would be of no real purpose. Another possible way of analyzing the show is to perform a thorough film analysis, but there are a number of problems with this; film analysis as defined<sup>32</sup> is again mostly concerned with story elements which are of little interest in this case. Furthermore, even though the narrative might be structured in a similar way, a *LazyTown* episode is not a film; it is a TV show with all of the different surrounding things that you have to take into account because of that fact.

Since I am in a way interested in why and how *LazyTown* became so successful, another completely different take on this research project would be to interview or send out a survey to children in order to find out what they find so appealing about the show, if they do. A question which still remains is if children really respond to intertextuality the same way as young people and adults do? Couldn't it be that the reason why a show like *LazyTown* appeals is just the nice bright colors and the catchy tunes? Children can relate to intertextuality much like adults, possibly even more so. My motivation is that we live in a hypermediated world where we are bombarded daily by images and information; the very foundation of intertextuality. Curious children brought up in this world I propose will have no problem recognizing things they have seen before when watching a show like *LazyTown*. Some of the previous research has shows that you do not necessarily need to recognize the intertextual reference in order to get something out of an intertextual text.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Altheide (1996), p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ekström & Larsson (2000), p. 247.

<sup>33</sup> Giaccardi (1995), p. 127.

## Materials and sources

*LazyTown* is a television series which was originally aired from the year 2004 to 2007. Each episode has a running time of 30 minutes and there are 52 episodes in total.<sup>34</sup> Since the focus of this study is on intertextuality and narrative characterization, it is plausible that I could choose something else than *LazyTown* to analyze. The reason this show is so fitting to analyze from my proposed point of view is that it is a good example of using intertextuality to forward its message. Upon viewing it seems like you “have seen everything before”, not in the negatively charged notion, but in a positive one. The use of intertextuality is subtle and clever, absolutely not to be confused with plagiarism. Intertextual images are not chosen at random, the fact that the main character of *LazyTown*, the young girl Stephanie shares a whole host of traits with individualistic female characters in books by Astrid Lindgren, is a testament to the quality of the TV program. With this being said, of course there are other fine examples of shows that could be subject for this sort of study, but I chose *LazyTown* because of its unique quality considering its genre and frankly because the show has gained so little attention despite its success, keeping in mind that *LazyTown* only gets limited airtime in Sweden today.

I will provide a synopsis for each and every one of the episodes included in this study in order to serve as an orientating compliment to the analysis. The first episode will be described in the first part of the analysis, the remainder here. In the episode called “Swiped Sweets” Milford is going to bake a cake for the birthday of his love interest Bessie Busybody. He doesn’t really know his way around the kitchen that well however, so the children headed by Stephanie take it upon them to bake the cake for him. All is well until it gets stolen by Robbie Rotten. The devious plan Robbie has come up with is to blame the theft on Sportacus, which he does. Masquerading as a private eye he smears cream from the cake on the ladder reaching up to Sportacus hideout, setting him up for the crime and promptly landing the hero in captivity. Eventually the children find out that Robbie is the real perpetrator and Sportacus is released.

In “Rottenbeard” the children learn of an ancient stone where *LazyTown*’s motto is engraved, only the last part is missing. Robbie Rotten disguises himself as a pirate and creates a fake last piece of the stone. He tricks the children into searching for a treasure chest where he has put the fake stone. They find it and piece it together with the initial one, resulting in the message

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<sup>34</sup> Wikipedia, <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LazyTown>> 2009-12-30



that 'LazyTown should always be lazy'. Sportacus arrives not long after and senses that something is fishy about the motto. The children find the real stone which says 'happy' instead of 'lazy'.

'Cry Dinosaur' is takes place mostly at night and is darker than a majority of the other episodes of the show. In it Stephanie, Ziggy and Stingy are camping out in a tent telling ghost stories. They talk with Sportacus about fear, and he says that he's not afraid of anything, except possibly dinosaurs. Robbie Rotten has listened in on the conversation with his strange telescope. He wants nothing more than to scare Sportacus away from LazyTown, so Robbie dresses up in a dinosaur costume with huge teeth. Unfortunately he only manages to scare the children until they find out that it is just Robbie and not a real dinosaur.

Finally the episode 'Dancing Duel' from the show's second season. Robbie Rotten is in his underground lair eating cake and minding his own business, when he completely by accident runs a miniature clockwork version of himself through a magnifying device of some sort. Robbie Rotten 2 is created, a mentally handicapped version of Robbie who is set out in the town to instill disorder. The result of this is that the robot enters Robbie into a dance contest against Stephanie. He again uses the magnifying device but this time runs a small clockwork ballerina through it. Rottenella is created, an evil robot much better suited for dancing than the clone of Robbie. Stephanie and Rottenella compete at the contest and even though Robbie tries to cheat, Stephanie emerges the victor.

## **Selection**

It would surely be an insurmountable task to analyze each and every one of these episodes; a narrowing down is called for in order to be able to complete the analysis within the given time frame for this sort of thesis. If I would attempt to analyze every episode, the analysis would also most definitely be too sparse and rushed since there would be such a great deal of material to cover, overlooking important details that a more thorough analysis would not. When choosing how many episodes I will include as material for the analysis, one has to keep in mind which method I will be using, the scientific problem I wish to address, and last but not least the way the episodes are structured.

When considering how the analysis of the intertextual aspects will pan out, it becomes clear that the characters inheriting the narrative do not change much from episode to episode, with the possible exception being their outfits. Even though I will look at other intertextual images, the characters and how they are defined will be the main focus of the analysis. Considering this it would probably be enough to analyze a very small sampling of episodes in order to get a basic idea of what defines the characters and how you can relate them intertextually to other characters in popular culture. The main advantage for viewing a slightly larger number of episodes is that I will end up with a much more clear and well-defined picture of the citizens of *LazyTown*. Doing this also makes sure that I will get to include all of the various supporting characters since they do not all appear in every show. Of course not everything worthy of analyzing stays the same throughout the episodes, the plots, themes and the set pieces where the story takes place all differ to mention a few things.

Of the available episodes I will choose a number that are representative of the series as a whole, and where the intertextual aspects are clear enough and somewhat easy to be found. Altheide refers to this process as theoretical sampling where you find the emphasis, meanings and themes of the units of analysis.<sup>35</sup> Doing this saves you a great deal of work as a wider selection than a just a representative one will yield more or less the same results. As it has been mentioned earlier, the general setup of the narrative in the episodes is more or less the same no matter which episode you look at. A quick scan of the whole series will be done in order to find suitable episodes. Next is the problem of figuring out how many episodes should be included in the study. The right number should be enough to get a sufficient amount of findings to be able to answer the questions posed, but not too much so the study will take too long time to perform, since I have to be able to analyze the units of data after I have collected them from the material. At a running time of roughly 24 minutes each, 20 episodes mean eight hours which is too much. Approximately five episodes should be a good number, resulting in two hours of total material. One way of knowing when you've reached a fair conclusion is when your analysis stops coming up with new findings, in other words when you start repeating yourself. If five episodes appear to not be quite enough, one could add a couple of episodes for good measure. Since the analysis of the material will be as extensive as possible, the quantity of the episodes is not what matters the most, rather the quality of them

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<sup>35</sup> Altheide (1996), p. 33.

in relation to my research questions, which is also another motivation for using a representative selection.

When choosing the representative selection the goal in mind is to find clear examples of intertextuality. Another possible selection would be to catalogue all of the intertextual images in the whole series which would call for a large amount of episodes to be included in the analysis. That is not the intention here, partly because of the time limitations one has to take into account when writing a thesis such as this one. When identifying the character's roles within the narrative, it would most likely be enough with only a couple of episodes, a few more certify that enough representative examples of intertextual allusions will be found.

### **Mode of procedure**

To start with, I will have to define the units of analysis from which I will attempt to extract data from.<sup>36</sup> It is clear that for this study, the units will have to be the individual episodes of *LazyTown*. Next one should create a protocol by the use of which the data will be collected from the text.<sup>37</sup> The protocol will include various categories divided into items by which you can identify the unit of analysis, such as the name of the episode, its number of succession and in which season it belongs. But the most important categories are the ones that are directly linked to the research questions. In this study these points will be set up as follows: intertextual image: and then a choice of what kind of intertextual image it is and if it's a character, an inanimate object or a situation. Altheide stresses that the best way to come up with a good protocol when doing this is step is by trial and error, one should test it by performing a very small pilot study and revise it until you have come up with a good protocol that suits the text and sufficiently answer the research questions.<sup>38</sup>

When collecting the data, one should use the preset codes of the protocol, and write down as many examples as possible. I will look through the episodes I have chosen in my theoretical sampling from start to finish and enter into the protocol the different intertextual imagery I come across. Now, already here there needs to be an analytical step since I have to distinguish between what can be seen as intertextuality and what can't. This is where the protocol I will

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

have created will be of good use. I will also take notes about the way the characters are set up and act in regards to each other and the story, and summarize the narrative after having viewed each episode. The categories that concern the intertextual imagery will have to be summarized as well.

After having collected the data in this manner I will have to analyze it further in order to answer my questions. Altheide writes about the importance of reading through your notes carefully repeated times.<sup>39</sup> Things to look for in the data are extremes and key differences within categories and points. The ideas about the intertextual aspects will be examined more thoroughly by looking up information about the corresponding images or traits. The reason for the different choices will be discussed. By combining more than one piece of data, more general results will be found about the series as a whole, the characters, the locales and so on.

## **Validity**

Regarding the scientific quality of this study it is hard to be objective when doing something like analyzing a moving image. The way to combat this affecting the results too much is to always be aware of the danger of interpretation; that you will put too much of your own thoughts into what you come up with. One has to be very clear about the distinction of what is interpretation and what are facts, when using descriptions. Any results should be as well argued as possible, with a theoretical foundation. Again the protocol I will be using will surely mean the data collection and the subsequent analysis will be as structured as possible.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

## **Analysis and results: how are the different characters that inherit the story defined from a narrative point of view?**

The following is a synopsis of the first episode of *LazyTown* called ‘Welcome to LazyTown’, which also proves as an introduction to the show itself and what it’s all about. In the pilot episode Stephanie comes to LazyTown to live with her uncle over the summer. It is in this town all of the action of the show takes place; LazyTown has bright colors and a plastic otherworldly feel to it. Upon arriving she notices that it’s all quiet and that apparently no kids are playing outside, much to her disappointment. Also the town appears to be a bit run-down with weeds growing here and there, and various junk lying about. Stephanie goes to see her uncle Milford Meanswell who also happens to be the mayor of LazyTown. She is determined to find some kids to play with and meets Ziggy who leads her to the other kids who live in the town. These children aren’t accustomed to be playing outside however, so Stephanie has to teach them how to lead an active life style that involves playing games, doing sports and dancing to music. All this commotion stirred up by the newcomer girl disturbs a peculiar fellow called Robbie Rotten who lives in an underground cave. He ventures up to the surface to bribe the children into quit playing and go back to their former inactive quiet life style. He gives lollipops to the candy-loving Ziggy; Pixel gets a new video game and so on. Stephanie is saddened by these turns of events; it seems all her effort to get the town back up on its feet was in vain. But all hope is not lost, Milford tells his niece about a hero who used to live and operate in LazyTown, simply called ‘Number nine’. A special messaging system was used to contact this hero, and Stephanie uses it as a last resort even though it hasn’t been used in a long time. From nowhere the hero Sportacus appears and convinces the children that being active really is important. Robbie Rotten’s plans have been thwarted for this time, but he will try to get his will through again and again in the episodes to come.

This study shows that there are six identifiable main characters in *LazyTown*: Stephanie, Sportacus, Robbie Rotten, Stingy, Ziggy and the mayor Milford Meanswell. These characters appear in each and every episode. Besides these characters there are a couple of recurring ones who appear often but not in every episode, they are Trixie and Bessie Busybody. Finally there are characters who appear briefly only in a single episode; for example the unnamed robotic clone of Robbie Rotten who I have chosen to call ‘Robbie Rotten 2’ and Rottenella.

Stephanie is the principal character of the program and as such is the one who the target audience is supposed to identify with. This is made easier by the fact that she along with Sportacus and Robbie Rotten are the only characters who are played by human beings (except for a few characters who only appear temporarily), of whom Stephanie is the only child. Usually the main protagonist of a narrative is the hero,<sup>40</sup> but in *LazyTown* this role is already taken by Sportacus. Therefore Stephanie's role is more of a disciple who one day will learn to become a hero but for the time being will just have to trust Sportacus and what he says.<sup>41</sup> This is a common theme in narratives and mythological storytelling as well. Usually the "old wise man" guiding the hero-to-be disappears from the narrative, leaving the learner to step up to the true hero role, but because of the nature of the storytelling in *LazyTown* this does not happen. There is a narrative being told within the episodes, but there is no character development—the characters all have very well defined roles that stay the same throughout the seasons. As a prototypical hero Stephanie tries to guide her friends to doing the right thing like Sportacus does, but she does not own the knowledge or experience in order to do it to the same length as him. Furthermore, Stephanie has faults which stand in the way unlike Sportacus who has a completely flawless persona. For example, in the episode "Dancing Duel" Stephanie enters a dancing contest but she lies in bed and reads comics instead of practicing. She thinks she is so good she will win without any sort of practice. Sportacus picks up on this and guides her to the right path. Stephanie also has other traits of her character that are very human and separates her from the characters with smaller roles. In the previously mentioned episode she doubts her ability to win the contest and therefore initially doesn't even want to go up on the stage. Again Sportacus supports her and talks her into doing her dance number, which she does resulting in her winning the contest. Where the children characters portrayed as puppets all have their own individual visible flaw, Stephanie is just a normal kid which further cements her as the one character the target audience is supposed to identify with.

Sportacus plays the hero role of the narrative and as such he is the role model, but he is rather the role model for the characters within the narrative than the children watching the program. Instead of walking Sportacus does somersaults and back flips in order to go from point A to point B and he has perfect timing in whatever he does. Thus his character certainly is larger than life and not a realistic goal for a child to reach up to. It is Sportacus's actions that define him as a hero, but these actions in themselves are less heroic than what one can expect from

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<sup>40</sup> Berger (1997), p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Campbell (1949), p. 57.

super heroes the likes of Superman or Batman. The ‘dangerous’ situations that Sportacus saves the inhabitants of LazyTown from are very trivial and downplayed, for example in one episode Ziggy gets stuck in a trash can and Sportacus has to pull him out. There is rarely any real danger involved, but within the genre this is what you can get away with as tense and ‘dangerous’ situations, and they need to be there in order for Sportacus to play his role as a savior.

Robbie Rotten is the only antagonist of the show which means that he has a lot of space within the narrative to fill out. This in turn means that his character can be allowed to change slightly between episodes unlike the other characters of *LazyTown*. In most episodes the children disturb Robbie’s peace and quiet by playing games, prompting him to disguise himself in order to make them stop. This includes a running gag where he rates four costumes going from one to the other until he finally settles on the last one. The way in which he uses the disguise to his advantage differs though. In many episodes he becomes a false friend to the children, but in one episode he simply uses a dinosaur-disguise and scares them. In the ‘Dancing Duel’-episode he even takes on the role as the mad scientist when he doesn’t utilize the disguises for one episode and instead first creates Robbie Rotten 2, a Frankenstein’s monster-like character, and Rottenella. What is true for all cases however is that his actions define him as ‘evil’,<sup>42</sup> and precisely as in the case of Sportacus’s ‘heroic’ deeds, what Robbie Rotten does cannot really be described as particularly evil at all. The children’s TV program genre does not allow Robbie Rotten to be truly evil and kill or threaten people; he is forced to resort to stealing cakes and cheating in dancing contests. To add to this, the way in which Robbie Rotten commits his malicious deeds is as if he’s just playing around. Especially after the kids find him out he will excuse himself in a manner that implies he was not serious about what he was doing, further taking the edge off the gravity of his actions.

When it comes to the puppet children who make out Stephanie’s friends, they all have their individual negative characteristic which defines them. Stingy is egoistic, cheap, has a holier-than-thou attitude and doesn’t want to share. Pixel is a ‘nerd’ who talks in a strange technological jargon and just wants to stay inside and play video games. Ziggy is overweight and has a sweet tooth, and finally Trixie who is much less prominent than the others throughout the episodes is a tease; she likes to mess with people. The functions of these

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<sup>42</sup> Berger (1997), p. 43.

characters are to teach the children in the target audience how you are not supposed to be. The puppets personify the things you are not supposed to do as a child; you ought to share, be kind to one another, not eat too much candy etc. Stingy, Ziggy and the others have no real personal characteristics which define them, in one episode Ziggy becomes scared by the dark, but this is just a coincidence, it could just as well be Stingy who got scared by the dark. There is nothing in Ziggy's character which motivates that he becomes scared easily. From a character-defining point of view, these children are more or less the same; they are a single entity with several representations. This is a result of the genre *LazyTown* belongs to, in a program intended for an older target audience all these puppets could just as well be combined into one wrong-doer character. An example of a character like this is Huckleberry Finn from the classic novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* written by Mark Twain. Huck Finn represents all the bad qualities a boy shouldn't have; he smokes tobacco, his parents do not care very much about him, he doesn't go to school and his clothes are worn-out. To Tom Sawyer who is the protagonist of the book, Huck Finn represents what Tom really would want to do, but at the same time what he because of his proper upbringing knows he shouldn't.

Milford Meanswell is the mayor of LazyTown and Stephanie's uncle. In the absence of Stephanie's parents Milford should be her role model or father figure, but he fails miserably at this prospect. The character traits of Milford are nothing which are required for a role model; he is clumsy and unsure of himself. Ironically even though he is the mayor his character is that of the village idiot. Of course the reason for this is so Sportacus can step in and be a real role model for Stephanie in place of Milford who personality-wise does not have the proper abilities to do so. Bessie Busybody is a small character who appears in some episodes, but her role is little more than to be the love interest of Milford and another way for him to prove how clumsy and foolish he is.

As established earlier the characters' visual features are important when defining the role they play within the narrative. One visual characteristic which stands out is beauty vis-à-vis ugliness. It is difficult to be objective about beauty; it truly is in the eye of the beholder. However, there are signs which denote if a character is beautiful or ugly independent of any subjective definitions of it. For example, Sportacus is well trained and has a perfect posture—signs which denote beauty. Robbie Rotten has an abnormally large chin, weird clothes and a terrible posture which tells the viewer that he is ugly. Of the *LazyTown* characters Stephanie and Sportacus are beautiful, Robbie Rotten is ugly, and the rest of the cast have a neutral



appearance. When it comes to stories about good versus evil, having the good characters being beautiful and the evil ones ugly-looking is an ancient powerful way of telling a story through imagery. The problematic part comes when thinking about what sort of message this sends out in *LazyTown*. There is no other way to interpret *LazyTown* other than that ugly people are evil and good-looking people are good. The program has an intended agenda of transmitting a message of maintaining a healthy way of life, but the values about the superficial which are also there are promoted just as clear. In today's society the inherent value of beauty is continually reproduced by all kinds of media, so *LazyTown* is far and away the only perpetrator.

## Conclusion

The characters in *LazyTown* are all characterized as stereotypes and play clearly defined roles within the narrative. Stephanie is the disciple 'hero-to-be', Sportacus is the hero and Robbie Rotten is the archetypal villain. The other children all have their one weakness which defines them, and Milford is the village idiot. One of the clear conclusions which can be made by analyzing the characters of *LazyTown* is that they along with the program itself appear to be in a kind of suspended animation or stasis. The characters stay in place and never change or develop throughout the seasons. In TV series aimed for adults or adolescents characters will often develop throughout the season by learning from their mistakes etc. The reason that the *LazyTown* characters are in stasis is a question of genre; if they did develop it would probably be too much for the target audience to handle and it would be impractical, even unnecessary. The advantage of leaving the characters in stasis is that you don't have to watch every episode in sequence in order to make sense of the episodes. *The Simpsons* uses this formula as well since the comedy is the main purpose of the show, and it relies on the characters being defined in a certain way and not showing any sign of development throughout the seasons.

## Which intertextual images can be found in the imagery of LazyTown?

The chosen episodes of *LazyTown* presents the viewer with a field rich of intertextual imagery, however the characteristics of this imagery is one of repetition, not of insertion of a new set of intertextual images in every episode. The isolated individual intertextual images are there in most episodes but the larger portion of the intertextual images is repeated in each episode. Naturally this does not make them less intertextual. Examples of intertextual images which repeat themselves in more or less every episode are miscellaneous set pieces, props, costumes and so on. In some cases these features combine into a situation or theme which is used as an intertextual device for giving the TV series a purpose and meaning. I will go through some of the main broad intertextuality below.

The head character of *LazyTown* is Stephanie. In the introductory episode Stephanie moves to LazyTown supposedly to stay there with her uncle over the course of the summer. The appearance and mannerisms of Stephanie makes her an intertextual allusion to Astrid Lindgren's character Pippi Longstocking. Stephanie is not exceptionally strong or rich, but just like Pippi she has a peculiar hair style; her hair is pink where Pippi Longstocking has two braids sticking out at a horizontal level from the sides of her head. Also both Pippi and Stephanie wear almost the same type of dress, stockings of some sort and they virtually are orphans in the sense that their parents are absent. Most important of all is Stephanie's attitude and her way of life; she is a go-getter who leads the other children into action in place of inaction the same way as Pippi does with her friends Tommy and Annika.



**Figure 1. Top: Pippi Longstocking. Bottom: Stephanie.**

The other main protagonist of the show is Sportacus; he is the hero who saves the children from Robbie Rotten's evil schemes in each episode. To aid him he has a crystal attached to his chest which flashes every time someone in town is in trouble. When the crystal flashes

Sportacus inexplicably manages to find the individual who is in trouble and rescues said person from whatsoever clutches of peril they are in. The intertextual reference being made here is to the comic super heroes Spider-Man and Superman's super-human abilities. Spider-Man has a spider-sense which allows him to see into the future and anticipate things that will happen before they do, usually various threatening things happening. Superman has an extremely sensitive hearing which allows him to hear people in danger from far-away distances. The intertextual likeness lies less in how the actual ability is constituted, but more in its function; it allows the hero to find the person in question who is in danger and save him or her.



**Figure 2. Interiors: Top: LazyTown. Middle: Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith. Bottom: 2001: A Space Odyssey**

While on the subject of Sportacus and intertextual facets of his character, he also has a peculiar moustache which looks like the one sported by the character Zorro, another well-known hero but more of a rogue character than a super hero. In fact, Sportacus himself says in the introductory episode when posed the question if he's a super hero, that he's "a little more than average hero". He doesn't need to be a full-blown super hero since his enemy is not very powerful either; Robbie Rotten is in fact a blundering fool. Furthermore, just like Robbie Rotten is defined partly from where he lives, so is Sportacus. The 'little more than average' hero lives in an airship flying high above LazyTown. Here Sportacus exercises and eats healthy food, in a predominantly white environment which looks

like the spaceship from *2001: A Space Odyssey* or the blockade runner from the end of *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*. The geographical difference between where Sportacus and Robbie Rotten lives is referencing a broad intertextual allusion to Alighieri Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. In the book the author himself goes on a voyage to the lowest bowels of hell and then to heaven in the skies. In other words; evil belongs low underground, and good up in the sky.

Robbie Rotten is the head antagonist in *LazyTown*, and his persona, his mannerisms and the way he looks, as well as his underground lair where he schemes and plots, is a two-layered intertextual allusion to *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. It is two-layered in the sense that some parts of it is specific whilst other more broad; The allusion to *The Grinch* is specific, but in turn the notion of an evil person residing in an underground cave is as an old storytelling plot device. As a media consumer you do not have to know about the specific intertextuality to understand the general idea behind Robbie Rotten's characteristics, but doing so only adds to the experience when watching *LazyTown*. The motion picture *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*



**Figure 3. Top: The Grinch.  
Bottom: Robbie Rotten.**

is based on a very popular children's book with the same name written by an author who goes by the pseudonym of "Dr. Seuss". In the film, the character that is called The Grinch lives in an underground cave residing close to a generic town. The Grinch is a lonely, strange, "ugly", self-loathing, deeply unhappy and miserable character who, instead of trying to deal with his issues, wants to make other people share his misery. His appearance is that of an anthropomorphic humanoid kind of hairy beast; the member of an unspecified and unknown species (very similar-looking to an assortment of other characters appearing in Dr. Seuss's other books). What the Grinch hates most of all is Christmas, a time when everyone supposedly is happy. Because of this, the Grinch wants to "steal" Christmas by dressing up as Santa Claus and break into people's homes and take their gifts away from them. The narrative is ended by a little girl melting the Grinch's heart and making him realizing that rather than trying to spread his own misery throughout the world, he can reach out to the citizens of the nearby town and they will accept him into their community, no matter how ugly he is.

Most notions of Robbie Rotten's character are very similar to those of The Grinch. Robbie even has a prosthetic chin to make him look ugly, his clothes are strange and he's lonely. In most episodes Robbie Rotten disguises himself just like the Grinch takes on the appearance of

Santa Claus. Robbie lives in an underground lair much like the Grinch, and where the Grinch doesn't want people to be happy because he is not, Robbie Rotten wants the children to remain lazy and eat unhealthy. Unlike in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* however, the reasoning for Robbie Rotten's actions is a bit unclear. In most episodes Robbie doesn't want the kids to play since it is too loud and disturbs his peace and quiet. The reason why he wants the kids to eat candy instead of vegetables is kept in the dark, other than it just being his general malevolence speaking.

Robbie Rotten is one of the supporting characters in the show, one that appears in every episode as he is the only antagonist of the story. Therefore the motif of his underground cave and his scheming and plotting repeats itself as well, making the intertextual reference to *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* repeat itself too. Another more general broad intertextual reference is the one which alludes to the overall look and design of the set pieces and backgrounds, as well as the puppets that make out the supporting cast. The colors are bright and clearly define the geography of LazyTown as being not of this world. The angles of the houses are slanted and out of proportion. Everything seems to be made out of plastic; the set pieces, props and even the puppets do not look the least bit 'alive'. This is an intertextual reference to other popular children's programs, mainly *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show*.

Another play with genres that appears in nearly every episode is the musical number. Without warning the characters of the show will start to sing and dance just like in a motion picture musical. The song covers the main theme of the episode with both lyrics and the played out actions of the characters. Even outside the film genre the musical, these sorts of numbers are common in other TV children programs such as *Sesame Street*, making it a genre convention. This certain example of intertextuality is very broad and repeats itself in every episode of *LazyTown*.

The specific isolated intertextuality which alludes directly to another text is much more uncommon than the broad variant. There are a few examples, but on the whole the broad intertextuality which repeats itself dominates the series. In some episodes specific intertextuality is completely absent. I will describe some intertextual images the analysis has come up with, and their meanings.

In the episode called ‘Dancing Duel’, we are treated to a scene incorporating Milford Meanswell going about his business in the kitchen of his home. The camera focuses on a glass of water standing on a table. A muffled sound is heard and the glass shakes, the vibration causing ripples on the surface of the water.

This is a clear intertextual allusion to the film *Jurassic Park* where a character watches the ripples on the surface of a glass of water as a foreboding of the approach of a giant *Tyrannosaurus Rex* dinosaur.

In this particular scene in *LazyTown*, there is no fearsome beast around the corner; it’s just Stephanie playing loud music in her room causing the ripples on the surface of the water.



**Figure 4. Ripples on the water:**  
*Top: Lazytown. Bottom: Jurassic Park.*

In the same episode Robbie Rotten creates a robotic clockwork version of himself completely by accident. The text that is being referenced here is the book *Frankenstein* written by Mary Shelley. In the novel Dr. Frankenstein creates a monster that becomes his undoing, and in likeness Robbie Rotten’s creature gets him into trouble when he is set out to wander around in *LazyTown*.

## Conclusion

The intertextual images to be found in *LazyTown* are mostly allusions to other texts within the genre. Allusions are for the most part not specific ones, but instead very broad and relatively easy to possess the knowledge about. Having too much specific intertextuality could be seen as taking away from the importance of the more broad variant, or perhaps the children in the target audience (four to seven years old), are not considered media literate enough to be able to make sense of too many specific intertextual images.

## Allusions and roles in *LazyTown*: defining genre and themes

I have now gone through some of the main intertextual images, but what can be said about the reason for choosing them? Being the hero of the show and one of the main protagonists, Sportacus defines how a character within the narrative is constituted. Sportacus's crystal settles him firmly as a super hero-like character through intertextuality, but it also means a mix and match with genres as the super hero character does not usually appear in children's programming, it usually belongs in comic books or films based on the said genre. Since so many other aspects of *LazyTown* situates it in the children TV program-genre<sup>43</sup>, introducing a super hero does not disrupt the order of things, especially not since comics about super heroes are very popular among children; it is something they really can relate to even though it is a slightly new take within the frames of the genre.

The air ship where Sportacus lives looks like the interior of several spaceships from various science fiction-films. Sportacus's habitat lends the positively charged characteristics of futurism and technological advancement from the mentioned motion pictures. Also the geographical difference of where the protagonist and antagonist resides has implications for narrative characterization. Evil belongs in the ground, good in the air above us.

One of the main functions of the allusion of making *LazyTown* look like previous children's programs is to situate *LazyTown* in a genre. Placing a TV program firmly and unquestionably within the borders of a genre is extremely important in order to attract the right target audience.<sup>44</sup> *Sesame Street* was one of the first really popular and successful children TV programs, it virtually created the genre, therefore alluding to it is rewarding not only because of its success, also since one of the main functions of *Sesame Street* was to educate children.<sup>45</sup> *LazyTown* shares this agenda with the aforementioned program, with the difference that while *Sesame Street* wanted to teach children about basic things like letters and numbers, *LazyTown* sends out a health message. Whether or not *LazyTown* succeeds in sending out its supposed message is secondary at best, from this point of view. Simply situating it in the "educational programming"-genre is enough for it to gain this sort of validity.

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<sup>43</sup> Gray (2006), p. 4, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Fiske (1987), p. 110.

<sup>45</sup> Deming (1986), p. 41.

Considering that the target audience for *LazyTown* is too young to have seen *Jurassic Park*, the purpose of the allusion to this text is unclear. The way to explain it is to bear in mind that one of the main reasons for this sort of intertextuality is the fact that it references another text directly and specifically, not the reason for it doing so. Or rather that the satisfaction one gets from the recognition is enough to motivate an intertextual allusion.<sup>46</sup>

The allusion to *Frankenstein*, it being a classical novel is part of the next point made clear by this analysis of *LazyTown*. Operating on an even larger scale than the individual broad intertextual references, are the ones that make up the themes or the larger narrative frames which define the story of the episodes. Every episode that was subject for analysis in this study except for the first introductory one has a theme which is intertextual. ‘Dancing Duel’ as mentioned relies heavily on the Frankenstein mythos about man trying to artificially create life, ‘Swiped Sweets’ features the private eye or film noir mystery theme with Robbie Rotten disguising himself as Sherlock Holmes, ‘Rottenbeard’ deals with the pirate myth originating in Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel *Treasure Island* and ‘Cry Dinosaur’ is set up precisely as a horror film although in a way appropriate for a children’s program.

In order to summarize the above: the reason for choosing intertextual images from other texts within the same genre is in order to situate the show’s genre belonging and since that’s where the children watching the show will be able to recognize the images being used. The images are chosen so that they lend characteristics automatically, particularly to the characters, defining them and rendering prolonged explanations of them unnecessary. *LazyTown* is a TV program where intertextuality plays an extremely big role, but this analysis shows that the intertextuality doesn’t lie in a single specific image here and there. The way the makers of the TV show use intertextuality is with the broad strokes, extending from the characters to the whole themes of the episodes. The very purpose of the episodes is created via the use of intertextuality.<sup>47</sup>

In this thesis several points have been brought up concerning *LazyTown* and its place in the media world today. Starting with the fierce competition that exists in media in general and TV in particular, I have argued that a TV program needs something unique in order to win over an audience. Intertextual means is one way of doing this; narrative such are available as well.

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<sup>46</sup> Hitchon & Jura (1997), p. 156.

<sup>47</sup> Supra.



When it comes to intertextuality, the situation of *LazyTown* in a genre is one way of utilizing these means, by the use of genre conventions. I have established through previous research that it's of high importance to consider the outer lying super text when performing an analysis like this, and the target audience as well.<sup>48</sup> The term intertextuality has been considerably harder to define as time has progressed and it's been used by a multitude of researchers and in different contexts. A distinction has been made in this thesis that there are two main kinds of intertextuality; broad and specific. Broad intertextuality is commonly known and is usually of archetypal nature, while specific refers to a considerably more narrow text where prior knowledge is key to the understanding of the reference.<sup>49</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive though.

Narrative theory is the analysis of storytelling and its smallest components, for this study meaning the roles that the characters play within the narrative. These roles are more than often stereotypes which are defined both by their visual features and by their actions.<sup>50</sup> Stereotypes are generally well known, and make it easy for an audience to relate to the characters. Usually the characters are divided into a good and evil side, detaching the TV program from real life where allegations like this are debatable and there is more of a grey scale to things. In *LazyTown* this study shows that there are six main characters, and indeed they are recognizable as playing apparent defined roles. Sportacus is the hero of the show and as such a role model, Stephanie a learner whom the target audience is supposed to identify with, Robbie Rotten an evil scoundrel etc. There are visual features that define the roles, such as posture, outfits, ugliness and whether or not the character is played by a doll or a human being. Even though a "good versus evil"-theme is present, because of the target audience everything needs to be downplayed. Robbie Rotten "plays" evil, and the hazards Sportacus saves people from are never really dangerous.

When analyzing *LazyTown* it becomes clear that a majority of the intertextual allusions which are there are from within the same genre. Most of the references are broad, not specific. Intertextual references can be found in characters and the overall themes of the stories of the episodes. The allusions do situate the program within the children's TV program-genre. Children are probably not extensively knowledgeable about intertextual references, the

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<sup>48</sup> Deming (1986), p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> Hitchon & Jura (1997), p. 156.

<sup>50</sup> Berger (1997), p. 54.

narrative characterization and the good versus evil theme could be what makes *LazyTown* appealing. A future research prospect that would be interesting to undertake would be to analyze a media text which has adolescents and adults as target audience, where intertextuality will be understood to a greater degree.

As has been made clear by the results of this analysis, the narrative structuring of *LazyTown* is very limited in terms of character development and there is a lack of an overarching storyline throughout the seasons. There are no strong emotions or serious actions in the episodes; everything that happens does so with moderation. Clearly one of the main reasons for this is that it's a result of the genre that *LazyTown* belongs to. In a children's TV program one cannot portray scenes which might scare a child, because then parents will not let their children watch the show and it might even get taken off the air as a result. But there is another aspect of this when juxtaposing the results of the narrative analysis with the ones from the research questions regarding intertextuality. Where the narrative means of telling a story are very limited in *LazyTown*, the intertextual themes are ever-present. Instead of using a complicated story arch with characters that change throughout the season, the purpose of the show is created by intertextual allusions. The media consumer is treated to a near non-narrative that uses intertextuality to create purpose and meaning, just like in Baudrillard's ideas of postmodernity.<sup>51</sup> This is also the reason to let the world where *LazyTown* takes place be in a state of stasis where nothing changes narrative-wise; to let the intertextuality stand out and speak for itself.

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<sup>51</sup> McGuigan (1999), p. 55.

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