SITUATIONS OF VIEWING: CLASS, GENDER AND THE EVERYDAY PRACTICES AND
PROCESSES OF WATCHING TELEVISION

SITUATIONS OF VIEWING: CLASS, GENDER AND THE EVERYDAY
PRACTICES AND PROCESSES OF WATCHING TELEVISION

By

JUNE M. MADELEY, B.A, M.A

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO

THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

Descriptive Note

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2004)   McMaster University

(Sociology)   Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Situations of Viewing: Class, Gender and the Everyday Practices and Processes of Watching Television

AUTHOR: June M. Madeley, B.A. Hon.(University of Regina), M.A. (Dalhousie)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Knight

NUMBER OF PAGES: *iv*, 291

Abstract

The gender and class one brings to viewing are factors in what meanings are generated by viewers and what modes of viewing they employ. I have attempted to get at this process from both sides, to investigate the impact of the viewer's class and gender on their viewing, but also to look at how class and gender are represented to these viewers. This research investigates the salience of class and gender to the viewing process among viewers who are also class and gender identified.

The data collected for this research comprise four distinct sets: 1) a background questionnaire, 2) participant observation during prime-time television viewing, 3) focus group interviews, and 4) individual interviews. The research participants were drawn from the student population of a large Canadian University located in Southern Ontario. These data are rich with insights into the process of viewing. There remains a paucity in the literature of research on male viewership and of comparative research on class, gender and viewership which utilizes both male and female research participants. My research addresses these gaps.

There are essentially three chief findings of this research. First, there is a common conceptualization among the research participants of working-classness as something visible or notable, while middle-classness and the nuclear family are defined as normal, despite not being the reality for a majority of actually situated viewers. Second, and related, is that working-class participants have a better developed and clearer understanding of structural class inequality than middle-class participants. Nevertheless, they express a desire to achieve a middle-class lifestyle as depicted on TV. Third, women reading women on TV were seen to both accept and reject these messages. There was an indication of both pressure to conform and protest against such impossible ideals of femininity. Men, on the other hand appear to accept ideal gender depictions on TV as unrealistic and unattainable and merely the province of fantasy.

Acknowledgements

I'm grateful to the current and former support staff in my Department: Brenda Nussey, Olga Cannon, Corinne Jehle and Jackie Tucker, who over the years assisted in my efforts to complete both my degree and this dissertation. Further thanks and acknowledgement are owed to Christine Brittain at UNBSJ for all of her support and assistance at the end of a long road.

Gratitude is also due to my supervisory committee: Graham Knight (supervisor), Phil White and Rhonda Lenton for sticking with me and providing their valuable guidance and insight.

I would like to thank all of the research participants for their time and commitment to this research. The participants were generous with their thoughts, views and general musings about television and their daily lives. Without them there could be no project at all.

The road that led to the completion of this dissertation was often long, winding, bumpy, uncertain, and all too often up-hill. Through it all so many supportive people in my life have stepped up to keep me on my path or to put me back on it. Some helped to collate, stuff and staple questionnaires, some shared a sympathetic ear and a cold beer (or two...), some shared laughter, frustration or tears and some were just there at the end of a phone line or more likely the other side of an online conversation. For all of these small kindnesses and the bigger ones as well I thank the following people (listed alphabetically) who know what they mean to me and what incalculable contribution they have made to this milestone on my life's journey: Frank Bedek, Margaret Bessai, Dr. Jason Childs, Marla Childs, Ken Collier, Wade Deisman, Leni Deisman, Mark Dimirsky, Herb Gamberg, Jane Gordon, Kate Hayter-Reid, Catherine Hudson, Geoff Hudson, Ian Hussey, Murray Knuttila, Dr. Jack Laughlin, Jacki Low, Jon Millman, Graham Morgan, Evan Morris, Kevin O'Fee, Carol Pearlstone, Dr. Sandy Preston, Brendan Reid, Joe Roberts, Gerald Saul, Jackie Seidel, Vicky Smallman, Mike Sosteric, Neil Stubbs, Ray Westcott, and Jesse and Alice Vorst. My undying gratitude especially goes to (in no particular order): Wade, Kevin, Leni, Ray, Sandy and Jack without whom I could not have completed this work.

Finally, I need to acknowledge my parents. I am eternally grateful to my father, Mac Horgan, for his unwavering belief in me and for being one of my best friends. Although my Mother, Rita Madeley, died just shortly before I embarked on my doctoral studies, she has been supportive in spirit every step of the way.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to investigate how one's cultural background(s)

(class, race, ethnicity, age, gender) interact with the television viewing process. While I

have an interest in all these indicators, the later stages of data gathering were aimed

specifically at the intersection of class and gender in the viewing process. I would not

argue that one's class or gender are determinants of viewing, yet these characteristics do

seem to be quite salient to the process of viewership. The gender and class one brings to

viewing are factors in what meanings are generated by viewers and what modes of

viewing they employ. However, the class and gender of characters, sports figures,

newscasters, hosts (from documentary programmes to cooking shows) and families

depicted on television are also important factors. I have attempted to get at this process

from both sides, to investigate the impact of the viewer's class and gender on their

viewing, but also to look at how class and gender are represented to these viewers. This

research investigates the salience of class and gender to the viewing process among

viewers who are also class and gender identified. Specifically, is there evidence of a

gendered or class-based mode of viewing? How, if at all, do these modes of viewing

intersect with each other? What is the gender and class make-up of the TV images that are

part of the viewing experiences of the research participants? How do participants read

class on television? How do participants read gender on television? When making

meaning from televisual images does the viewer's class or gender have any noticeable

influence? Finally, how do the class and gender of participants intersect, if at all, in their

meaning-making while viewing? I have pursued these research questions in an effort to

understand the broader process of television viewership in contemporary society. This

research represents a contribution to the research into television viewership and

audiences.

The data collected for this research comprise four distinct sets: 1) a background

questionnaire, 2) participant observation during prime-time television viewing, 3) focus

group interviews, and 4) individual interviews. The research participants were drawn

from the student population of a large Canadian university located in Southern Ontario.

These data are rich with insights into the process of viewing. There remains a paucity in

the literature of research on male viewership and of comparative research on class, gender

and viewership which utilizes both male and female research participants. My research is

an attempt to fill in some of this gap.

The Study of Media Effects and Audiences: An Introduction

In general terms the research into media effects started out theorizing strong and

powerful effects on individual media users (stimulus-response models such as the

'hypodermic needle model'). Empirical research in the U.S. in the 1950s seemed to

indicate that the media had rather weak effects (the 'limited effects paradigm'). The uses

and gratifications approach looked at what factors limited the effects of the media and

brought about the recognition that audiences are active users of media. The pendulum

swung back again in the 1970s to theories and research that suggested that the media may

indeed have quite powerful effects (cultivation analysis, critical cultural studies), yet the

hypothesis of active audiences remains with us. Emerging out of the critical paradigm we

have seen a focus on class, gender and race and/in media. Feminist film scholars of the

1970s paved the way for a great deal of reception studies and textual analysis with a focus

on gender, in particular women, and various aspects of television viewing. Such work has

led to a broad perspective of feminist media studies which utilizes gender as a central

variable in analysis. It is useful to trace the trajectory of media audience and effects

research in order to situate the present study in context.

Hypodermic needle model

This model emerged out of research that was conducted in the early stages of the

development of mass media. It was based largely on psychological research and a

stimulus-response model of media effects (Croteau and Hoynes 2000:237). The belief

was that media were so powerful that they could "inject" meanings into their audiences.

None of the social factors that come into play when one consumes media were taken into

account in these early models of media effects. Members of media audiences were viewed

as atomized individuals who were mere passive receivers of media messages. Such an

approach held much sway in the wake of two world wars that had revealed that

propaganda was a powerfully persuasive weapon (Martin 1997:30).

The hypodermic needle approach was found lacking. It "did not hold up under the

scrutiny of early empirical research" (Crotneau and Hoynes 2000: 238). A group of

functionalist sociologists in the USA began proposing a new model that would place

media use into its social context (Martin 1997:31).

Media effects research

Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues conducted research during the 1940 U.S.

presidential campaign of Wilkie and Roosevelt (see Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet .

1948). Their research on political campaigns led to a two-step flow model of media

effects. It became clear that individuals were not so much influenced by the media, but by

other people. That is, personal contact was seen to be more important than media content

in the research results. Their focus was on the impact of media on public opinion.

Television was not yet widely available so they focussed on newspapers, magazines and

radio. The study, which was first published in 1944, represents the first large-scale

research project that set out to analyze the impact of media on public opinion.

During the six months leading up to the November presidential election, the

researchers asked 600 residents of Erie County, Ohio about the sources of their political

views and about any changes in their views over the course of the study. Their results

showed that the media appeared to reinforce opinions that people already held. This was

in contradiction to the hypotheses about strong media effects on public opinion. The

researchers speculated that something may be muting the anticipated powerful effects of

the mass media. They noted that research subjects had indicated more often consulting

with people they knew than reading newspapers, magazines or listening to the radio. The

Erie County research prompted Lazarsfeld, Katz and others at the Bureau of Applied

Social Research at Columbia University to abandon the idea that the media have strong

direct effects on people. It is clear that social factors started to become visible and visibly

important in the research on media effects in the 1950s following these voter studies

conducted by Lazarsfeld et al.

Katz and Lazarsfeld hypothesized that media still had effects, but that they

occurred indirectly in a two-step flow process. They believed that first the media have a

direct impact on "opinion leaders" such as doctors, clergy, prominent neighbours or

perhaps teachers, and then these leaders in turn shape the opinion of individuals within

their circle. It was argued that opinion leaders act as a kind of mediator between the

media and the audience. They are thought to be particularly receptive to media

information on social problems of concern to their community. The opinion leaders form

an opinion on this information rather quickly and then it spreads to people within their

circle. The effect is thought to be especially persuasive if the mediator is thought to

already be somewhat knowledgeable on the issue. Basically, his or her role is to verify the

information as accurate or not. So first the message has an effect on the opinion leader

and then on the masses through the personal contact with these leaders in a two-step flow.

The model was later expanded to a multi-step flow model to recognize the complexity of

the social relations between individuals. Those who have continued in the minimal effects

paradigm "have, on the whole, reiterated the Lazarsfeld findings of limited effects, while

contributing to the further specification of the conditions under which the media may

indeed affect change in people" (Katz 2001:271). In his influential summary of the early

research, Joseph Klapper (1960) summarized that, "mass communication does not

ordinarily serve as a necessary or sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions

through a nexus of mediating factors" (8). It was believed, however, that the media could

affect opinions on new issues, or issues about which people had yet to formulate an

opinion. So in general, they argued for "limited effects" in comparison to earlier research,

but certainly saw the media having some effect and specific functions. Mainly, the media

were understood to reinforce opinions and beliefs that are already widely held and to have

a stronger impact on matters about which there has not yet been strong opinion formation.

Lazarsfeld collaborated with Robert Merton on, "Mass Media, Popular Taste and

Organized Social Action," in which they outlined the three main functions of mass media

(1948). The functions they drew attention to were: 1) conformity; 2) status conferral; and

3) narcotizing functions. In a recent commentary on this paper, Katz suggests that rather

than functions, the contentious term 'effects'" (Katz 2001:273) is appropriate. It is

unclear in the paper why he prefers the term, but it seems likely that this is an effort to

distance the work from functionalism which is no longer fashionable in the social

sciences. Conformity effects refer to the tendency of media to affirm the status quo and

leave any alternatives largely invisible. Status conferral involves what we often refer to as

the agenda-setting role of the media. By giving some viewpoints wide coverage and

others none, the media confer legitimate status on these covered topics and issues. It has

been said that the media do not tell people what to think, but tell people what to think

about. By conferring the status of "think about *this*" on some matters and not on others,

the media may be shaping what we think about, what are seen as proper and legitimate

beliefs or actions. Narcotizing effects refer to the belief that the media lull their audiences

into passivity. This effect is said to be facilitated by the overwhelming volume of news

and information, which is thought to have the result of de-politicizing people. This de-

politicization was seen not just as a result of being lulled by escapist entertainment media,

but also from "the delusion that good citizenship means informed citizenship rather than

civic participation" (Katz 2001: 273). An example of this effect is when people pick up a

great deal of information from the media on an issue, such as the degradation of the

environment, and believe that they are doing something about the problem, when in reality they are merely well-informed about it. They are then said to be narcotized into passivity.

Within the theory and research into the process of media effects there are important distinctions that have been made by Lazarsfeld and others who followed. Most research has been carried out at the individual level of occurrence, but other levels have been distinguished in the model. Essentially, distinction has been drawn between the levels of: individual; group; social institution; whole society; and culture (McQuail 1993:256). There has also been some distinguishing between effects, especially as the complexity and variety of phenomena involved became more evident. Generally, there have been distinctions made between effects which have to do with knowledge and opinion (cognitive), those which have to do with feelings and attitudes (affectual), and those which affect behaviour (behavioural). In effects research it has become difficult to sustain these distinctions especially since they are perceived now to be overlapping and less distinguished in a logical flow from one to the next. Finally, the type and direction of effect is an important consideration. Klapper (1960) suggested that there had been distinctions made between conversion, minor change, and reinforcement. Conversion indicates change that occurs according to intentional efforts to change attitude, behaviour or opinion. Minor change refers to change only in form or intensity of views or opinion. Reinforcement indicates confirmation of existing beliefs and opinions held by the receiver of the media message. Reinforcement might involve no discernible change in attitude or opinion among research subjects. In addition to these three, there is also the

possibility of change being prevented via deliberately one-sided content that is meant to curb change and reinforce conformity. It has also been a feature of effects research to distinguish between the nature of the response by the audience whether immediate, short-term, long-term, on individuals and/or initiating institutional changes (Katz 2001: 274). While this distinction was made in theory, the research was focussed on short-term effects almost exclusively.

In his recent assessment, Katz indicates a broader scope for effects research. However, one of the main criticisms of the approach was its focus on a narrow set of interpersonal relations among neighbours or communities. The wider set of inputs implicated in a multi-step flow model remain steeped in a kind of narrow empiricism. Silverstone (1994) argues that there are components missing in the framing of all research following the media effects approach (144). First, there seemed to be little recognition of non-rationality and unpredictability as part of the viewing process in effects research. Second, the research lacked a sense of the individual as located in a political economy, which may not be visible or expressed in everyday behaviours that are observable in empiricist research on patterns of interaction. Finally, the focus was only on short-run effects with long-term effects rarely considered and even more rarely measured (Silverstone 1994:145).

Research in this tradition revealed that there was little evidence that the media change opinions, but it was believed that they reinforce already existing opinions and could shape opinion on new issues. The limited effects model argues that the ability of the media to shape opinion on new issues should not be interpreted as evidence of the power

of media to "inject" opinion into audiences. Most significantly, the model focuses on the

social context and on what individuals do with media messages and content, rather the

opposite of the "hypodermic needle" model's focus on the powerful effects of the media

on individuals. What effects research can be seen to have done is "define a space for

critical attention, and raise the question of the nature of the relationship between the

social and the individual as elements in the dynamics of the audience's relationship to

media output" (Livingstone 1994: 145).

Cultivation Analysis/Cumulative Effects

Some researchers revisited the powerful effects paradigm, but in a more

sophisticated form. Cumulative effects theory (see Noelle-Neumann 1993) and cultivation

analysis (see Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli 1994) both suggest that the media do

not have immediate effects, but that effects over time can be quite powerful and profound.

Noelle-Neumann's cumulative effects theory argues that no one can escape the

media due to its ubiquity in western societies. She also argues that the media's messages

generate a kind of redundancy. She cites the example of multi-media advertising

campaigns which drive home the same message over and over in various forms so that it

cannot be avoided. One stark example is the impact that the Disney empire is believed to

have on children and their play. Analysts who were interviewed in the documentary video

Mickey Mouse Monopoly (Picker 2001) argue that the happy meal toys, backpacks, t-

shirts, videos, sing-a-long CDs, video games, stage adaptations, theme park rides, and

other associated advertising for any given Disney animated feature film cannot help but

be influential among the target audience-children. Analysts discuss the uncanny

9

similarity of children's play all over the world, that follows the characterization and

narrative of the source movie which has been cross-promoted and advertised in all

corners of the globe. There is also a redundancy in news reporting, where pack

journalism results in the same event being covered by every broadcast outlet and

newspaper.

There are some disconcerting implications to cumulative effects theory. Noelle-

Neumann argues that the media actually work against diverse and varied treatment of

issues and topics. This lack of diversity obviously has an impact on democracy. She

suggests that people are encouraged to speak out when they are aligned with the majority,

but those who feel they are in the minority are inclined to speak out less, if at all. The

result can be that the dominant views become consensus views without sufficient debate

or challenge. Noel-Neumann has developed the spiral of silence model, in which views

and voices which are in the minority are bullied into silence by constant spread of the

dominant view through the media. The model assumes that those whose views deviate

from the dominant view are threatened with isolation and that concomitantly individuals

fear isolation. The fear of isolation causes individuals to constantly assess the present

climate of opinion such that they determine whether to conceal or reveal their views. The

main avenue, according to Noelle-Neuman, through which to assess the climate of

opinion is the mass media. She argues that individuals have a sense with which they

determine "which opinions and modes of behavior are approved or disapproved of in their

environment, and which opinions and forms of behavior are gaining or losing strength"

(Noelle-Neumann 1993:202). This model presents a challenge to the common-sense view

that the media allow the free flow of ideas within democratic societies. Although, due to

Noelle-Neumann's associations with Hitler's Nazi party her critics either dismiss her as a

biased former-propagandist or suggest that her model does not apply to societies with a

free press like Canada and the USA. In either case, her theory indicates a turn back to the

powerful effects paradigm, although such effects are seen as cumulative over the long-

term and not isolated from their social context. Certainly, Noelle-Neumann raises some

important issues, but I find the reliance on universal social-psychological needs (such as

to resist isolation) problematic. The theory of the spiral of silence is rather totalizing in its

scope. However, the concept of an agenda-setting media remains a common element in

media research. The problem with the model of a spiral of silence is that it builds on a

powerful media effects model, where there appears to be no role for an engaged and

thinking viewer or media user.

A better known American champion of a cumulative effects theory is George

Gerbner who developed the theory of cultivation analysis. In 1964 Gerbner became the

Dean of the newly founded Annenberg School of Communication, at the University of

Pennsylvania. In 1968 Gerbner was appointed by U.S. President Johnson's National

Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence to analyze the content of

television shows. This was the beginning of the Cultural Indicators Project, the

longest-running continuous media research undertaking in the world. Researchers with

the project analyze the number of violent acts committed on American television, by

whom, against whom, whether there are consequences, whether the violence is treated as

humorous and so on. These data have been collected since the project started and

continue to be recorded in a large statistical database. It is from these data that Gerbner

developed the theory of cultivation. Morgan and Signorielli (1990) summarize cultivation

analysis as a project which "concentrates on the enduring and common consequences of

growing up with and living with television: the cultivation of stable, resistant, and widely

shared assumptions, images and conceptions reflecting the institutional characteristics and

interests of the medium itself and the larger society" (23). Television, which really came

into its own during the early days of Gerbner's Institute, is seen as the common symbolic

environment in the everyday lives of a majority of North Americans. Like Noelle-

Neumann, this model emphasizes the ubiquity, redundancy and persuasiveness of

television as being at the heart of contemporary culture, more so for those who are heavy

viewers over the long-term. This is not a model of whiz-bang effects, but rather one that

sees television, particularly for those who view television most often and over the long-

term, as the main definer of cultural reality for people. Of particular concern are the

dominant values represented on television that are hypothesized as defining reality for

viewers who watch television the most heavily.

Mainstreaming is a concept used to represent how heavy television viewing works

to "absorb and override differences in perspectives and behaviours that ordinarily stem

from other factors and influences" (Morgan and Signorielli 1990: 25). Through this

process of mainstreaming, the recurring themes that are found in television shows create a

culture and an image of the way things are in the world for viewers. This occurs through

repeated and long-term exposure to these consistent televisual messages, not in any single

viewing. In general, cultivation analysis seeks to understand to what extent television

cultivates our understanding of the world.

The most potent example of mainstreaming is the "mean world syndrome." Throughout thirty years of data collection, the Cultural Indicators Project has documented staggering figures on televised violence. As such, the televisual messages about violence have remained of primary concern to the project. The immense quantity of violence on television is said to give the message that aggression and violence are normal. In this way we are said to become desensitized to aggression and violence and succumb to the mean world syndrome. Basically, television depicts the world as worse than it is and viewers are thought to become anxious and more willing to trust in traditional authorities. Gerbner sees the mean world syndrome as encouraging phenomena such as the establishment of gated communities in suburbia and for reinforcing violence as a solution to problems among less affluent communities (see video *The Killing Screens: featuring George Gerbner*, directed by Jhally, 1994).

Beyond a focus on violence, the notion of long-term effects of television media consumption bears some scrutiny. While it has proven impossible to isolate the effects of television from other everyday influences on people's beliefs and actions, there does seem to be some evidence of dominant cultural ideals evident in most television programming. Further, the present research indicates that research participants exhibit elements of the dominant North American culture, such as a consumerist orientation and belief in a classless society. The research participants often exhibit a consumerist orientation in the way that they focus on things that television characters can afford as a strong element of class location. The participants often are focussed on what the TV

characters have (trendy clothes, cars, apartments, etc). It will also be seen that many of

the research participants view a middle-class lifestyle as normal and those that deviate

from that lifestyle are seen as revealing, among other things, their class location.

While there may be some evidence of cultivation effects, even in the present

research, the theory remains controversial. One strong argument against the theory is that

it has proven difficult to replicate beyond North America. In the UK, there has been little

evidence of long-term effects of culturation. There has also been little attention to the

social context of viewing in cultivation analysis. The myriad other factors that might

reinforce dominant cultural themes such as the mean world are almost never included in

such analysis. There could be many elements of the every day, where television is

viewed by individuals or family groups, that have a large or small influence on one's

view of the world alongside the televisual content. In addition, the research tends not to

differentiate between genres, taking television flow as one great "inculturator" of viewers.

Uses and Gratifications

The results of research within the "limited effects" paradigm indicated that the

media uphold existing beliefs, rather than shape or change the beliefs or opinions of the

audience. In general, this is a model that challenged previous notions of audiences as

passive receivers of media messages. The uses and gratifications approach focuses on

why people use particular media rather than on content, in contrast to the concern of the

'media effects' tradition with 'what media do *to* people.' The uses and gratifications

paradigm furthers the argument for an active audience, with needs that must be gratified

if media are to be accepted and utilized by them. This could be seen as the powerful

audience paradigm. This paradigm is concerned with what *uses* people make of media for

the *gratifications* of their needs. At bottom, it is assumed that individuals make choices in

order to best fulfill, or gratify, their needs. The approach springs from a functionalist

paradigm in the social sciences, presenting the use of media in terms of the gratification

of social or psychological needs of the individual (see Blumler and Katz 1974). The

significance of this tradition is that it challenges the notion of a passive audience and

instead valorizes the conscious and motivated choices of audience members between a

variety of media content and channels.

McQuail (1993) has summarized the four basic needs that audience members are

believed to be looking to satisfy in their use of media. The four basic needs are:

surveillance, personal identity, personal relationships and diversions (McQuail 1993: 72-

74). Surveillance refers to the need to know what is going on around us and in the world.

Viewers who satisfy this need might achieve a sense of security based in knowledge.

However, this need can be satisfied by using a variety of media, not just those more

factually based such as newspapers or broadcast news reports. For example, respondents

in Andrea Press's (1991) research indicated that they learned about money management

from watching *The Cosby Show*. Personal identity need is about finding out who we are

and how we may compare to others. Media content can be used to gratify this need when

we compare ourselves to television characters that we admire or dislike. Our feelings

about these characters can help us define ourselves in relation to their qualities. Personal

relationships refer to the need for social interaction. Television can gratify this need in a

number of ways: it shows us how other people live, it depicts characters with whom we

can relate or identify which provides a sense of belonging, and it provides us with

common subject matter for conversation. People often use an example from a television

programme to help them make a point. Families sometimes use the media such as

television as a catalyst for family interaction or perhaps to occupy children. Isolated

people such as the elderly or the unemployed might use television as a companion.

Diversion indicates the need for entertainment, relaxation and/or escapism from everyday

worries. Emotional release and sexual arousal are also sometimes counted within the need

labelled diversion. Clearly, the use of pornography could satisfy the need for sexual

arousal. Watching a sentimental, tearjerker, movie (such as *Terms of Endearment*) might

meet a need for emotional release. Many people might come home from work and

collapse in front of the TV, perhaps not really paying that much attention, but still

escaping from the thoughts of their day.

Empirical research in the uses and gratifications tradition might typically involve

audience members completing a questionnaire about why they watch a TV programme.

One major focus of research into why people use particular media is on the genre of TV

soap opera. Richard Kilborn applied a uses and gratifications approach to the genre and

suggested a number of reasons for watching soaps such as: escapist fantasy, involvement

and identification with characters, reward for completing household work, and solving the

puzzle of what might happen next based on familiarity with the genre (1992: 75-84).

Since the mid 1970s when this theory re-emerged there has been some

reformulation. The emphasis on needs has been greatly reduced (see Rosengren et al.

1985; Palmgreen and Rayburn 1985). The reformulated version emphasizes "certain key

linkages: between social background and experience and expectations from media;

between prior expectations and use of media; between expected satisfactions and those

obtained from media, with consequences for continued use" (McQuail 1993:235). The

newer version is less functionalist than the early formulations by Katz et al (see Blumler

and Katz 1974). Some analysts suggest that the "effects" paradigm and the "uses and

gratifications" paradigm have been moving toward a kind of merger over the last decade:

> recent 'uses and effects research' has been able to show in some detail how
> media use of particular content types by particular categories of
> individuals under particular conditions calls forth effects of particular
> types, which in its turn calls forth mass media use of a particular type - and
> so on, in long, perhaps never-ending spirals of uses and effects (Jensen &
> Rosengren 1990: 217).

Critiques of the uses and gratifications approach focus on a number of interrelated

issues. The approach is seen to be too focussed on the individual and to at times ignore

the social context of media use. The emphasis in the approach is on individual needs and

the gratification of those needs via media use. Within the social context of viewing, a

number of factors beyond the individual and her/his conscious needs might have an

impact on viewership; such factors tend to be ignored in uses and gratifications research.

The most weighty critique draws attention to media content, which is practically

ignored in uses and gratifications research. The focus of research has been on why people

use media, but not on what meanings are made by viewers in their media use. To find out

what people specifically get out of their media use, we need to turn to reception analysis.

The present research attempts to get at viewership in terms of meanings that viewers

create while viewing, and also by investigating the participants' modes of viewing

television.

A final criticism is that the approach looks at mass media as part of a pluralist political system and ignores matters of ownership and power. The uses and gratifications approach asserts that all media serve a useful function and therefore may lend implicit support for the organization of media. With the proposition that individuals only use media which meets some need, the approach may serve as reinforcement for the argument that media regulation is unnecessary (Martin 1997:36). Presumably, in this pluralist system, the media not meeting audience needs will find no market.

Critical Perspective

The chief failing found in the above approaches to media research is that they tend to analyze the media independent of their broader social context. The critical perspective links the political economy of mass media with the form and content of its images and messages. There is a vital connection seen between the ownership and control, production and use of media and the economic, social and political conditions in which they exist and are formed. Much of previous effects research focussed on how the media affect audiences, or how audiences (by their choice of which media to use to gratify their needs) affect the media. Researchers within the critical perspective see the social context within which media are consumed to be vital to understanding communication. The theories of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci and members of the Frankfurt School (Critical Theory) have been most influential on this perspective, which has a strong focus on exploitation and inequality within society. This focus generally takes the role of the mass media in capitalist society as one that works to reinforce the existing power relations between .

owners and workers, men and women, people of colour and those who are white etc.

Critical perspectives can be divided between approaches that focus on issues of political economy (for example, ownership and control of the media, the role of the state in relation to media and the conflict over political and economic issues) and those that focus on cultural studies (for example, the ideological aspects of the media, the ideas that exist in media content and the conflicts over that content). However, in much critical research there is overlap between cultural studies and political economy approaches. Much of the research from a critical perspective begins with Marx's premise that "[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force" (Marx and Engels 1975:59). That is, it examines how ideas in media content reflect the interests of the capitalist class and other powerful groups in society. However, there is also much research that considers how audience members actually interpret and sometimes resist these ruling ideas. Research from a critical perspective, in contrast to that of minimal effects or the uses and gratifications paradigms, views the media less as part of a pluralist political landscape, and more as part of an inequitable and highly stratified society.

Research from this perspective has argued that the high cost of production leaves the creation of media content largely in the hands of those with wealth and privilege in society (see Hackett and Gruneau 2000; Giroux 2001; Bagdikian 1997). While there are alternative outlets such as college radio stations, progressive publications and independent news sites on the Internet, most mass media and its content remain under the control of an ever-shrinking group of media conglomerate owners, for whom the primary

motive is profit. In the case of cultural commodities such as books, records or films, the

product is as much about the creative vision of the artist or artists as it is about the need to

reach a large audience. Investment is required before the profit potential is known so

some ventures will fail to turn a profit, but decisions about which cultural commodities to

support is governed by the expectation of profit from mass sales. To help generate these

profits there are huge budgets allocated to publicity in order to generate interest and

demand for the cultural commodity - for example, Hollywood film publicity (which is

discussed below). In the case of flow culture, such as broadcast radio and television

content, the motive is primarily to secure the largest possible audience (Martin 1997:61).

Flow culture is generally financed through advertising, subscription fees (cable),

membership fees (public broadcasting), and sometimes it is financed by the state.

What is key in this approach is that the financing of each type of content is seen as

fundamental to understanding media. Cultural commodities, such as books and records,

are financed by those who purchase them. Feature films are financed by box office

revenues, video/DVD sales and rentals, and rights to be shown on broadcast and pay-per-

view television. Flow culture is almost entirely financed by advertising revenue (Martin

1997:61). Radio and television content are consumed as they are broadcast (with the

exception of time shifting by use of video recording) and so attracting a large audience

when the programme is broadcast becomes crucial. Some have argued that the content

itself is not that important, only that it generates an audience that can be sold to

advertisers who sponsor the programmes. Dallas Smythe argued that "[t]he purpose of

the mass media is to produce audiences to sell to the advertisers" (1981: 38).

While these two types of media (cultural commodities and flow culture) are consumed differently they have in common the global media concentration of their ownership. In early 2002, *The Nation* profiled the "big ten" multi-national conglomerates that provide the majority of mass media content to the world (*The Nation*[on-line], January 7, 2002). Vertical integration means that a book publisher can advertise books in magazines, newspapers, television stations, Internet sites and radio stations also owned by the same company. It also means that there can be cross-pollination of media content and that they can have a virtual monopoly, along with the handful of giant media conglomerates, over mass media content. Ownership concentration leads to less diversity in programming and content. However, an overly conspiratorial view ignores that texts are open to a variety of readings by audiences.

Early on these Marxist based approaches were primarily theoretical arguments augmented with textual analyses. What was seen to be missing was attention to actual audiences. This lack of attention to actual readers and how they confronted texts led to a sense of audiences being duped by the dominant ideology. A prominent model of the process of meaning production which tries to address this criticism is Hall's encoding/decoding model. Meaning is seen to be encoded in media discourse, but not in a closed way. Contradictions also exist within the meanings that are encoded into a particular media text such as a television show or film. There is another moment of meaning production when audiences decode the text. Decoded meanings are not necessarily the same as those encoded by media institutions. Hall supposes a lack of equivalence between two sites of production of meaning, the encoding and the decoding

(Hall 1980: 131). Feminist media studies often take this model as a starting point when

they look to understand how gender discourse is negotiated in the "moments of

construction of media meanings-production, text and reception" (van Zoonen 1994: 9).

Based on reformulations such as Hall's, the critical approach sparked a number of

significant reception analyses which have inspired the present work and are discussed in

some detail in Chapter 2 (see Morley 1986; Press 1991; Jhally and Lewis 1992; and

Liebes and Katz 1993).

Feminist Media Studies
There is a discussion of research on gender and/in media in the next chapter.

However, some discussion of the importance of feminist insights in the trajectory of

effects and audience research is warranted here. The importance of feminist critiques has

been to put gender issues on the agenda of research on communication and mass media.

Feminists have posed a series of challenges to the male dominated academy and research

and scholarship on audiences and media effects has been no exception. According to van

Zoonen (1994), "[t]he new themes that feminist media scholars added to the agenda of

communication research were the stereotypical images of women in the media and the

effects of these images on the audience" (16). We can see an alignment here with the

effects research discussed above, except that the feminist scholarship highlighted issues

of gender.   Still, the basic thrust of the analysis that focussed on stereotypes argued that

women were being symbolically annihilated by television's portrayal of them. The

audience was often conceived of as a passive mass, soaking up the bad role models that

were presented. However, such research "on stereotypes has proved particularly valuable

in its exhaustive documentation of stereotypes and prejudice which women in many

countries have been able to use to raise the awareness of communicators and put pressure

on their media to improve the images of women" (van Zoonen 1994:18).

Feminists have also been keen to theorize and do research on the matter of

ideology and media, particularly as some streams of feminism see ideologies as a crucial

component of societal views and beliefs about gender (Barrett 1980; O'Brien 1983, for

example). Feminist media studies that follow this theme are generally aligned with the

critical cultural studies approach discussed above. As feminism found some space in the

academy a variety of areas of research were opened up, such as feminist film studies and

theory. The groundwork that was laid, particularly by British feminists in the late 70s and

early 80s led to an interest in women and television viewership and efforts to theorize and

analyze such gendered processes of "looking." Ultimately, the contribution of feminists is

the highlighting of gender as an axis of power along which viewers struggle to make

meaning out of media texts such as those produced and viewed on television.

Conclusion

Viewership is varied and complex, but we can try to unravel some of the

complexities by investigating the meanings viewers make from their viewing and how

they watch--what modes of viewing they employ. This research highlights the axes of

class and gender in the process of viewership, although it is not likely that these axes are

absolute determinants of viewership. Class and gender are, however, salient in the process

of television viewership and bear closer investigation. Early research from a critical

perspective, such as that conducted by the Birmingham School, focussed largely on class

and viewing. Later, feminist scholars put gender on the agenda of research into viewing

processes, although most research has been conducted with women viewers only. These

axes of power have a history as a focus of investigations of viewership, along with race

and age. The research population did not accommodate attention to these other issues, but

was suited to investigating class, gender and television viewership.

This research is broadly seeking to uncover the institutional relations that are

embedded in everyday life. The general research purpose is an exploration of the process

of viewing television with a focus on class and gender as salient features of that process.

Previous research has demonstrated the salience of class and gender and the available

research population facilitated a focus on these features of viewership. Despite this focus,

I would not argue that class and gender are determinants of viewing, merely salient

factors in a complex process embedded in the myriad relations that are part of the

everyday lives and experiences of people.

This project utilized four distinct data sets, four lines of sight into the viewing

process among the sample of participants. Because I am using an exploratory approach,

rather than having specific hypotheses and data gathered to strictly test those hypotheses

it is better to have a view of the process from several angles. This triangulation can lend

credibility to the findings of such qualitative work as the present research. More

importantly, it has been made clear by critical media analysis that television viewing is a

complex process embedded in the everyday where it is impossible to isolate one aspect,

such as television viewing, from all the others. The embeddedness of television viewing

makes several lines of sight into the process that much more useful.

This research takes a critical feminist perspective, but also borrows from other approaches discussed above. Cultivation analysis does provide some useful insights, but lacks attention to actual reception of the messages that researchers log from television programming. However, the notion of television providing a common symbolic environment is worth exploring and will be discussed further in relation to these data. A critical perspective puts a focus on power, profit, and media content and its reception by socially situated viewers. This perspective also argues for an open decoding process of viewing where a number of decodings are possible at the moment of reading media content. Viewership is conceptualized as a dialectical process. Corporate media conglomerates create television content that is meant to serve their primary interest in profits, while socially situated viewers apply their previous experiences to their viewing and read TV content in a variety of ways that do not always correspond to the dominant encodings.

In the following chapter I discuss the theory and scholarly literature that has informed this research particularly in the areas of: the meaning-making processes of audiences; conceptualizations of media texts; and class and gender, in general and on television. Chapter 2 also contains lengthy reviews of the four reception analyses that have motivated my research: Morley (1986); Press (1991); Jhally and Lewis (1992); and Liebes and Katz (1993). The present work addresses a number of the issues raised in previous work on media effects, uses and gratifications, cultivation analysis and critical and feminist cultural studies. First, my work is from a critical, feminist approach. I am chiefly operating within the critical perspective and combining that with feminism.

Second, some aspects of cultivation analysis seem useful, particularly as regards the

consumerist orientation of young TV viewers. Third, I focus on axes of power such as

class and gender in relation to viewership. These axes and power relations have an

impact on viewing that a narrow focus on social-psychological needs and 'free-agent'

viewers in the marketplace such as that of the uses and gratifications approach do not take

into account. Ultimately the uses and gratifications approach is too functionalist to be

useful to a critical analysis of television viewing. I would argue that needs are cultivated

in our consumer culture. For example, it has been reported that some Hollywood films

now have higher promotional than production budgets (Clifton 1999). While such claims

may seem extreme, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) statistics

indicate that since 1999 promotional budgets on Hollywood films have increased total

production costs by about half again the average cost of production (MPAA 2003:17)[1].

This example clearly illustrates that great expense is made in order to cultivate the need to

see a particular Hollywood film. Such promotional processes are not adequately

addressed by the uses and gratifications approach.

The critical perspective combines a focus on power and political economy of

production as well as the form and content and what actual viewers do with media. This is

a much richer approach to media analysis in general, and television viewership in

particular. This research investigates the salience of class and gender to the viewing

process among viewers who are also class and gender identified. In particular, the

---

[1] The MPAA reports that in 2003 the average negative cost (salaries, editing, writing, costumes, etc.) for its member associations to produce a film was 63.8 Million USD. The average cost for prints, advertising and promotion was 39 Million USD.

following questions guided the research process. What modes of viewing are employed

by the participants? Are there modes of viewing that can be seen as class-based or

gendered? How, if at all, do these modes of viewing intersect with each other? What is

the gender and class make-up of the TV images that are part of the viewing experiences

of the research participants? How do participants conceive of class and gender, in

general? How do participants read class on television? How do participants read gender

on television? Finally, when reading televisual images does the viewer's class or gender

have any noticeable salience? I have pursued these research questions in an effort to

understand the broader process of television viewership in contemporary society. This

research represents a contribution to the research into television viewership and

audiences.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The following review of literature focuses on the elements of viewing that are

salient to this research. In order to begin to interrogate the viewing process, it is vital to

have a sense of how viewership and viewing practices have been theorized and studied by

other media scholars. This discussion necessarily draws upon research that was prominent

at the time the data for this project were gathered as well as more recent developments in

television audience research. The discussion of viewership and viewing practices

necessarily hinges on the conceptualization of audiences and different views on the

relationship(s) between viewers and TV texts.

There has been some recent rethinking of the conceptualization of the media

audience (see for example: Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998 and Alasuutari 1999).

There is a sense among such thinkers that audience research and theory have begun a new

phase. Alasuutari (1999) outlines three phases of audience research and suggests that the

third generation is only in its infancy. Alassuutari (1999) and the other contributors to this

edited volume argue that a new turn is evident in recent research and thinking about

media audiences. "This wave of critique and self-reflection [has] meant a thorough

rethinking of the place of the media in everyday life, the concept of 'audience' and, along

with that, the place of media research itself in the whole picture" (Alassuutari 1999:6).

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that what they call the incorporation/resistance

paradigm is in crisis and a new paradigm is emerging. They cast much of the critical

reception analyses from the 80s and early 90s (many emerging from the Birmingham

Centre) as situated along a continuum from models that focus on dominant text to ones

that highlight the dominant audience. They enumerate three main sources of strain that

they perceive as putting the paradigm in jeopardy. "There have been three main sources

of difficulty – the active audience, the gap between empirical studies and the theory of

hegemony, and the nature of power and its relationship to commodification"

(Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 28). In the space left by the breaking up of the old

paradigm, Abercrombie and Longhurst suggest that a Spectacle/Performance (SPP)

paradigm is emerging (1998:36). SPP is focussed on audiences as they are embedded in

everyday contexts and argues for a more complex conceptualization of the relationships

between producers and consumers of media content. There is clearly an emerging debate

about an apparent turn in audience research. The present research fits into this liminal

space.

A review of conceptualizations of texts in research on television viewing is also a

necessary step in putting the present research in context and framing the data analysis that

follows. The structures of texts have some bearing upon the meanings made by

audiences, or the meanings available to be made. The structure of TV texts will be

discussed below.

The research is not merely about class and gender on television, but also about

popular conceptions of gender and class outside of the sphere of media representations. It

is necessary to set the stage with a discussion of class and gender both on and off screen

so that the way that participants read gender and class can be seen in context.

It is not uncommon in research on viewership to find participants using a

discourse of realism in order to evaluate television texts. To understand this phenomenon

more clearly is it important to clarify what constitutes television realism and how research

participants have responded to its representations on television.

This chapter concludes with a review of the four television reception studies

which motivated the present research. The work of Morley (1986), Press (1991), Jhally

and Lewis (1992) and Liebes and Katz (1993) shares similar aims to the present work and

the findings of my research serve to augment their work in the field of audience reception

of television. In the scholarship on audiences and television viewing these studies

continue to figure in the present debates around both theory and research in the field,

particularly in the area of class, gender and the process of viewership.

Viewership and Viewing Practices

A critical perspective draws upon the scholarship and research of a number of

media scholars. There are a variety of theoretical and empirical accounts of viewership

that may be drawn upon and perhaps synthesized for use in the present research. The

discussion below begins with a rather impotent conceptualization of TV viewership, but

one which draws our attention to the role of sound and to TV as background in the

everyday lives of viewers. The other end of the spectrum is the active audience of

fandom, which provides clues about the agency of a variety of audiences of TV. A

broader and more complex conceptualization of viewership is developed out of these

theorizations and augmented with more recent developments in the conceptualization of

audiences.

Ellis (revised 1992) theorized a viewer who is never engaged and whose attention

needs to be drawn by any given broadcast (162). The role of sound is seen as vital in the

efforts of television to garner the attention of audiences. He sees the viewer as removed

from the process, distracted, glancing over it. Ellis argued in <u>Visible Fictions</u> that the

domestic setting of television viewing, its forms of address, and the nature of the

broadcast TV image and sound all affect our relationship with television and what we see

on it.   This is an impotent conceptualization of the viewer. Ellis is theorizing the viewer

in the home, where the uses of television are bound up with the social processes of the

private household and where distractions from attentive viewing are often ever present.

The work of Ellis highlights important features of the conceptualization of

viewership. Ellis's theory of broadcast TV viewing calls attention to the importance of

sound in the process, not just visible images. In addition he conceptualized broadcast TV

as creating and enforcing norms, such as the norm of the nuclear family. This is a norm

among television characters and in advertising, but not among actual viewers. It will be

seen that many of the participants in my research view TV norms as actual norms and

assess matters such as social class based on how closely or not behaviours and situations

conform to these TV reinforced norms. Ellis concentrated on the construction of the

nuclear family as "normal," so much so that viewers were believed to be positioned as

members of nuclear families in relation to TV content, despite their own actual family

situation since the norm in Britain at the time was not the nuclear family at all (Ellis

1992:114). Morley (2000) affirms that "it is now well attested that statistically, the

conventional nuclear family, consisting of married parents and their dependent children,

accounts for a steadily declining population of households throughout the countries of the

industrial West" (77). Despite this, what Cynthia Carter (1995) calls "the politics of

normalcy" (188) continues to valorize the nuclear family as not just one among many

family configurations, but the naturally preferable family form.

Ellis also elaborated on the notion of broadcast TV as something in the

background and often not one's primary activity (Ellis 1992: 160). The emphasis for

Ellis is on the contrasting of cinema spectatorship and TV viewing. Therefore, he sees

the possibility of TV as merely background as in stark contrast to watching a movie for

which one has gone out to a theatre, paid for a ticket, and so on. A movie cannot be in the

background, one either watches the show or leaves the theatre amid hisses and complaints

from other spectators who resent the interruption. However, TV is part of an often-busy

everyday scene of household activity. This relates to the context of viewing in the private

household where Ellis views TV as embedded in other daily experiences. Viewing is no

less embedded in the everyday for university students, although their days are much less

structured than we might expect of the archetypical nuclear family audience. Participants

in the present research made frequent comments about TV being "in the background," not

something they necessarily conceived of as an "activity," and many were at pains to

downplay the time they spend viewing. Gauntlett and Hill (1999) found similar attitudes

toward television among the survey respondents participating in their research (123-126).

As with the viewers that Gauntlett and Hill (1999) studied and Ellis (1992) theorizes, the

participants in the present research rarely acknowledge TV viewing as their primary

activity and it will be seen in Chapter 4 that this has an impact on their modes of viewing.

One of the profound insights of Ellis's work is the recognition that TV sound is a

vital component of viewership. He sees sound as TV's strategy to entice viewers who are

seemingly constructed by the broadcast industry as having very short attention spans. It is

through sound that continuity is maintained because one can pay attention to sound and

not the image and still follow the narrative; in fact, TV narrative is seen to rely more on

sound than on visual images (Ellis 1992:129). It may be that we listen to TV more than

we watch, which would make it difficult to get accurate accounts of time spent viewing.

A TV may be on in a room, but if it is being treated as background, perhaps it will not be

recorded or noted as viewing time. Even as background noise it may be that TV continues

to produce a common symbolic environment for people. We still hear the events unfold,

the news, the commercials and can follow the on going storylines of most sitcoms and

dramas despite missing episodes or mainly listening to them. Ellis argues that TV uses

sound to carry the details of broadcast TV and that it anchors meaning. However, Ellis

says nothing of the advent of *mute* buttons, which can eliminate TV sound. While I agree

that attention to sound is important, it is clear that for Ellis the emphasis on TV sound is

about the distinction from cinema. In that comparison, TV viewers are less attentive than

cinema spectators and he sees sound as having a special role in the attempts of TV to call

back viewers' attention. This calling back is not necessary in cinema spectatorship.

Ultimately, Ellis conceives of a distracted viewer, who is addressed as part of a "normal,"

nuclear family, listening more than watching, glancing rather than gazing. I would argue

that viewers may be distracted, particularly if we are comparing to cinema spectators

watching movies in darkened theatres, but that is just one mode of viewing. Ellis

conceives of only one position offered to viewers to take up when viewing, I would argue

that there is a continuum from glancing to gazing. Some viewers do gaze and there are a

number of points of oscillation along the glance-gaze continuum, which will be discussed

in Chapter 4.

Jenkins (1992) asserts the social agency of television viewers (63). His study of

the practices of fan culture in response to several programmes reveals an active audience.

The fan culture produces texts outside of the broadcast programming. There is extensive

evidence of interaction with the texts. The fans in his study produced artwork, music,

videos and other artifacts based on the texts of their favorite programmes. In many cases

fans attempted to influence the TV text through letter writing or Internet activity. Fans

also rewrite texts to satisfy their own imagination when producers fail to do so. This

practice occurs in formalized settings such as fan conventions or fanzines and also more

informal settings such as Internet news groups where alternative text writing is the theme

of the group. One such group *alt.TV.x-files.creative*, offers fans the opportunity to create

their own stories about the characters of *The X-Files*. Pullen (2000) notes that,

> Even solidly mainstream programmes have active internet fan communities. For
> example, the highest rated, most expensive and most Emmy-nominated programme
> in the U.S., *ER*, has at least five fan fiction sites, with plots ranging from the
> imagined homosexual relationship between Dr. Mark Greene and Dr. Doug Ross, to
> cross-overs with other television characters such as the doctors on another hospital
> drama *Chicago Hope*, to alternate endings to the relationship between Dr. Ross and
> nurse Carol Hathaway (56).

There are many such fan fiction groups that focus on other programmes that range from the

marginal to the mainstream. Even prior to the internet fan communities produced fiction and

artwork based on their favourite fictional characters in amateur publications such as fanzines.

Bacon-Smith (1992) analyzed fan culture among women fans. She characterized

the process of interpreting images as a function of what is on the screen and of the

34

cultural assumptions or the worldview of the viewer. The screen presents the viewer

with,

> a combination of craft, employed with the intention of communicating a message,
> and unintentional messages based on tacit assumptions the creators of the source
> products make about the real world and unconsciously incorporate into their art
> (Bacon-Smith 1992:180).

Viewers make choices to accept or reject these messages based on their fit into the

range of possibilities that their culture recognizes. Bacon-Smith was interested in the fan

culture of women who took source products like *Star Trek* and created their own artwork

and stories for distribution and discussion in fanzines or at fan conventions. Clearly those

involved in fan culture represent an active audience. In their review of research on fan

audiences, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) suggest that "fans are not unthinkingly

accepting of what is produced for them. They are actually discriminating in their

approach, even towards the series of texts which are their favourites" (125).   They further

suggest that throughout the 1990s with the advent of new technologies such as the

Internet many more viewers began engaging in these involved modes of viewing that

have often been attributed primarily to fan communities. Therefore, critical engagement is

coming to be seen as an ever more common mode of viewing and interacting with TV

texts.

As Hall has argued, we are all potentially several different audiences at once and

can be constituted as such by different programmes (Hall quoted in Morley 1986:10). As

viewers, we can utilize different modes of viewing television. We can mobilize different

competencies in our viewing (Hall quoted in Morley 1986:10). Our constitution as

audience is dependent on a number of factors. In particular, type of programme, air time

of programme, first run or re-run, and accessibility (cable, pay-TV etc.) affect what kind

of audience we are constituted as at any given time. However, social location (on a

variety of axes), mood, life circumstances and a number of other individual characteristics

also come to bear. Clearly, a viewer may be active sometimes and merely "glancing" at

other times depending on individual characteristics, social context and other factors

mentioned above. Television is watched for many different reasons and with different

degrees of attentiveness; it is inserted into a range of viewing contexts.

Viewership is a process, involving negotiations and mediations both between

viewers and the television texts they view and among viewers who either share specific

viewing experiences or share in the broader culture of viewing. These negotiations and

mediations involve bringing one's own worldview to bear on the interpretation of the

images and messages offered by television content. As Bacon-Smith has argued, viewers

make choices, interpret and reinterpret viewing content according to what fits with their

previous experiences, views, beliefs, struggles and questions. Viewers are likely to share

a culture of viewing if the TV content that they are exposed to is similar. For example, in

North America many viewers are known to watch the top-rated shows and therefore share

a culture of viewing such programmes, the genres, the characters and actors, the

narratives and history of popular television in general. This culture of viewing has the

potential to interact with one's process of making meaning while viewing television, just

as one's more idiosyncratic viewing experiences, which may or may not be shared with

others, might play a part in negotiating meanings among those viewers or in one's own

internal processing of TV content.

The notion of "active" viewing is a somewhat contested concept among reception researchers. Silverstone (1994) argues that it has practically become meaningless due to its combined ubiquity and lack of clear conceptualization among researchers (152-158). Still, it cannot be denied that viewers engage with television texts and that the viewing process is one that is mediated within a complex social, psychological, economic and political context. Viewers do not merely soak up the messages that TV transmits. In fact the myriad of textual analyses of television programmes assures us that multiple meanings are always on offer to viewers, depending on a number of factors: genre, narrative style, time of day, first run or re-run, the viewing context and so forth. While there is considerable debate over how this process works, many audience researchers now acknowledge that most viewers are engaged in some kind of negotiation with the text most of the time when they view TV (see for example, Hall as quoted in Cruz and Lewis 1994; Gray 1999; Gauntlett 2002; Ruddock 2001; and Silverstone 1994). If the term "active audience" is problematic, we still must account for the practices of viewing--as bound in process among viewers, their viewing contexts and the television texts they encounter. This, I believe, is a necessary point of departure for any attempt to study television viewership.

Although television viewing is conceived of as practice and in process, this does not necessarily mean that the process of viewing is always rational, conscious, or purposeful. Some viewers are very attentive in their viewing at some times and barely pay attention to the programme at others. What variables can we use in an attempt to

understand the process of viewership? Certainly, there is ample evidence that aggregate

characteristics such as class, gender, age, race, ethnicity all have some relationship to

one's modes or practices of viewing (see for examples: Gantz and Wenner 1995; Hobson

1999; Jhally and Lewis 1992; Kinder 1991; Liebes and Katz 1993; Modleski 1984;

Morley 1986 and Press 1991). However, there seems to be much variation even among

those who share such characteristics. "The way that audiences make sense of the media

depends, then, not only on obvious attributes of collective identity, but also on the

idiosyncratic factors that influence the contextualized experience of these identities"

(Ruddock 2001:133). This variation is evident in the present research where the

intersection of class and gender with viewership is under investigation. In addition, the

context within which one views has some relationship to the modes and practices

employed in viewing. In the case of this research, participants were nearly all living in a

co-ed university residence. This particular viewing context brings with it some unusual

viewing circumstances. Most viewing in residence is shared viewing with others in a

common TV room. Even if viewing is not shared it has a high likelihood of being

interrupted by others using the common space for other purposes such as meeting others

or cooking a meal. Perhaps this interruptability is not so unlike the familiar domestic

viewing context, where family members enter and exit the room where television is being

viewed and often interrupt viewing with other activities, such as conversation, meals,

chores etc. The domestic context of viewership is one that has been the focus of much

television reception research (see for example the work of Morley 1986, Morley and

Silverstone 1990, Silverstone and Hirsch 1992, Silverstone 1994 and Gauntlett and Hill

1999). Moores (1996) suggests based on his research on satellite viewing activity that

groups (such as university students living in residence) that view together could be

considered domestic groups (65).

Television viewing is rarely an activity that takes place exclusive to other

activities, or if it is there is always the potential for other aspects of our everyday life to

occur concurrently with viewing. We may sit down to watch our favourite drama, only to

have the phone ring, or a sibling request assistance with homework, or a partner ask that

we do some sort of household chore, and so forth. When we study television viewership,

much as when we engage in other sociological study, we are confronted with the

problematic of everyday life. Silverstone (1994) offers the foundation for a theory of

viewership that connects television viewing both with the everyday and with the wider

structural constraints on that micro-social context. Viewership is a complex process

embedded in the myriad activities and relations of everyday life. Ang (1996) has argued

that we can no longer conceive of TV and media culture as "easily researchable,

contained and containable realit[ies]" (3). The present research shows that getting a

handle on what viewers think about watching TV, what meanings they create and what

processes produce one meaning instead of other possible meanings is a challenging

endeavor. Yet, it is valuable to investigate and interrogate these meanings in an effort to

better understand everyday life and the various processes that occur in that context, not

the least of which is television viewing. It will be seen that the analysis of viewing

practices (see Chapter 4) is more straightforward and yields more typical data (categories,

measures etc.) than the analysis of processes of meaning-making while viewing (see

Chapter 5). Meaning-making, we shall see, is a multiple and contingent process, the study of which requires resources that are often not readily available. Hence, we find that the literature has yielded only mere clues and much debate about the process of viewership and meaning-making, rather than anything approaching the more solid ground we stand on with regard to viewing practices. In a retrospective on audiences and audience research, Ann Gray (1999) asserts that "it is still the case ... that there are very few actual studies of audiences/readerships, but the volume of critical work and 'overviews' of audience work are legion" (25). The present study seeks to address the need for more "actual studies of audiences/readerships."

Texts

Theorists working from a critical perspective in the 80s and early 90s proposed, working from Althusser, that ideology works to resolve contradictions between real and imaginary relations to social realities. For Althusser, ideology was seen to exist in the way we are positioned as actual, thinking, meaning-making subjects in relation to an authoritative idealized Subject. For example, recall Ellis's (1992) argument that TV programmes address themselves to members of the ideal nuclear family while the majority of citizens in his country do not fall into this type of family category. Textual strategies that propose a final "truth" of the text work by resolving contradictions. Such attempts to "fix" the meaning of a text often work by association to already normalized ideas and meanings in society. Texts that are bearers of dominant ideology, and yet are popular among oppressed and subordinate groups, must contain contradictions that such readers can activate in the text to serve their cultural interests. For example, the women

fans in Bacon-Smith's study open up the contradictions within the *Star Trek* texts and use

those to create their own stories, music and art (Bacon-Smith 1990: 293). These women

fans create stories, songs and artwork that place *Star Trek* characters in completely

different scenarios than ever existed in the official texts. Gauntlett (2002) argues that

contradictions in texts are often desired by today's media producers, "[t]he contradictions

are important, however, because the multiple messages contribute to the perception of an

open realm of possibilities" (255). Kellner (1995) also sees contradiction as the key to

television's ability to appeal to diverse audiences. Polysemy, or multiplicity of meanings,

is a central characteristic of television texts which are read in particular ways by viewers

who are differentially situated socially. While polysemy allows for texts to be open, this

does not mean that there are no limits to the possible meanings that viewers can make in

the process of reading. The rather crude determinism of earlier effects models is rejected,

but audiences are not free to make whatever they will of television content. "Just as we

are not free to make what we will of social reality, so too audiences are only relatively

autonomous, and a key task of audience research is to discover the processes that limit

this freedom" (Ruddock 2001:181). So we are not so much talking about "alternative"

readings to an ideologically dominant encoding, but rather a process that involves text,

reader and social context. This process has yet to be fully articulated and understood, but

has become a focus of much scholarly work and debate on media audiences (see for

example: Silverstone 1994; van Zoonen 1994; Ang 1996; Abercrombie and Longhurst

1998; Alasuutari et al 1999; and Ruddock 2001).

     Bakhtin (1981) asserted the notion of multi-vocality, where viewers perceive

television as a pastiche of discourses which must necessarily include contradictory ones.

This notion of multi-vocality also fits with his supposition that all narratives are

composed of an interweaving of voices (heteroglossia) that cannot be structured into any

controlling hierarchy. Any society will have many voices all struggling to be heard and

in order to be popular, texts must also contain many voices to get the attention of a

diverse audience. Kellner (1995), in a similar vein, argues that "media culture is a contest

of representations that reproduce existing social struggles and transcode the political

discourses of the era" (56). That is, we find evidence in media culture, such as television

texts, of competing social and political viewpoints that arise from social struggles at the

time of the production of these texts.

Bakhtin is careful to place this heteroglossia within a context of power relations.

There is a constant struggle among social groups to articulate words and meanings for

their own purposes. Heteroglossia not only results from multiple voices emanating from

diverse social positions, but also helps to maintain their diversity (Bakhtin 1981:276).

Heteroglossia, polysemy and contradiction are all processes by which differences and

inequalities are represented textually. Viewers are always differentially situated socially,

politically, ideologically and discursively, and they engage in a dialogue with a television

programme. They contribute their voices to the exchange of meaning.

"Media messages are diverse, diffuse and contradictory " (Gauntlett 2002:256).

Like all media texts, TV texts are a site of contradictory meaning. Typically these texts

limit the encoding of meanings to those which promote dominant ideologies even though

the contradictions and heteroglossia set up spaces where such meanings cannot really be

"fixed" in the text. The hegemony of a text is never total, but the meanings within a text are structured (Fiske 1987:93). All meanings are not equal, but they exist in relations of power to the dominant meanings proposed by the text.

Conceptualizations of texts in the literature tend to focus either on political economy approaches, semiotic approaches or a blending of the two. There has been criticism that attention to texts has taken a back seat to a focus on class as a primary determinant of viewing experience (see Nightingale 1996). Most research calls for attention to both, but the emphasis in reception studies has been on structural characteristics like class and gender and how they affect what readings are available to viewers. Textual analyses tend to focus on teasing out the possible readings from a specific text, but often do not test those readings among actual audience members. Without adequate resources, it is quite difficult to conduct research that combines these approaches, and yet such a multiple approach seems vital. We need to be able to take stock of the texts as well as of the uses and meanings that actual, socially situated viewers make of them. It is also important to analyze the political and economic relations which give rise to such texts. Kellner (1995) argues for "the need to focus on the production, reception, and effects of the texts of media culture" (199). Research findings indicate that the factors that affect audiencehood are multiple and contingent and the texts are open to a variety of possible readings.

TV texts are often most recognizable or easily categorized in terms of genre. Genre at once pre-determines texts and meanings while at the same time has a shifting set of characteristics which are modified with each new programme. It is so difficult to

predict what will become a hit show that the use of genres or generic conventions which

are known to be popular will help to minimize the financial risk of a new production.

Some scholars argue that genres are most popular when their conventions relate closely to

the dominant ideology of the time (Fiske 1987:109). However, ideological contradictions

such as the rise of feminist discourse in the late 1960s tend to result in genre mixing. The

mixing of genres allows for the text to remain open to a wide range of viewers. *Star Trek*,

for example, mixes action/adventure, space opera, comedy and drama, allowing for it to

be open to a variety of reading strategies and meanings. Genre is a means of constructing

both the audience and the reading subject. It influences "which meanings of a programme

are preferred or proffered to which audiences" (Fiske 1987:114).

Genre works to promote intertextual relations. With each example the viewer calls

up his or her genre knowledge, which frames the expectations of a programme as well as

calling to mind similar texts. Barthes (1975) proposes that the intertextual is the primary

site of culture. That is, all texts ultimately refer to each other and not to some true

"reality." So a TV programme can be understood in relation to other TV programmes or

other texts rather than by any relationship to the "real" world. There exist a limited

number of cultural knowleges according to Barthes, such as "the Greeting" and our

reading of these all refer back to other readings-to our cultural knowledge-rather than to

personal experience of similar situations in our own lives. Hall (1986) speaks of the

prominence of images, read in relation to other images. In this way the "real" is read as

an image. This is because the images and sounds of TV are always necessarily

representations, no matter how closely they resemble the originally recorded (or drawn)

object. The meaning is not necessarily tied to the veracity of the recording of a person, place or thing, but is rather to be found in the relationship between the reader and the recording (the text). The emphasis is on situated reading, rather than on a fixed meaning in the text. Meaning is not found in the text itself, but in its reading by a socially situated viewer with knowledge of a variety of related texts.

In the moments of making meaning, viewers bring to bear not only their historical and social existence, but also their cultural experience of other texts. Secondary texts such as publicity photos, entertainment media, magazines, director's commentary tracks on DVDs and so on, work to promote the selective meaning of the primary text. These "secondary texts play a significant role in influencing which of television's meanings may be activated in any one reading" (Fiske 1987:118). It must be noted that secondary texts are no more univocal than primary television texts and it is clear that secondary texts can activate the primary text in different ways. Certainly, one's reading of *Friends* is likely to be influenced by one's knowledge of the personal lives of the cast members. However, it is by no means certain that all viewers will read images and stories that allude to eating disorders among the female cast members in the same way, nor that these will have the same impact on their viewing of the primary text.

Regardless of polysemy and heteroglossia, the meanings and articulations read from TV texts are not without structure, but are organized around textual and social power. There are limits to the freedom that viewers have in their reading strategies, but so too are there limits to the power of the text to control meaning.

Television narrative is more open than that of the film or the novel, which are

45

more likely to strive for closure and a return to a state of equilibrium (Fiske 1987:144).

This is due in part to the fact that television viewing is more interactive and so the

narrative is more open to negotiation (Fiske 1987:147). Television narratives must be

more open because they have a greater need to be popular. In a heterogeneous society

this means building in (encoding) contradictions and multi-vocality in order to appeal to

the broadest possible audience. While this provides a large audience to sell to advertisers

it also necessitates that TV narratives have contradictions built in which weaken their

closure. Television texts also suffer from fragmentation (due to advertisements), which

deny unity and also make for a more open text (Fiske 1987:147). Finally, television texts

are more likely than other media texts to be interrupted by or have to compete with other

everyday activities for the viewer's attention.

Therefore, the television text necessarily evokes a variety of possible reading

positions and the positions a viewer may take when creating meaning from television

viewing are a result of a multiple and contingent process. We may find general trends

among women or men, persons from the same class, age group or ethnicity, but the

present research shows that there are also many contradictions and mixings of meanings

among and between viewers who fall into such categories or into several of them.

Class and Gender: On and Off the Screen

Gender
        Inevitably, when research includes the variables of class and gender it is necessary

to conceptualize these variables because the possible meanings have become nearly as

varied as meanings created while watching television. In the case of gender, the need for

explicit conceptualization is a fairly new imperative. It has until recently been quite

commonplace to assume gender as an independent variable; respondents are either male

or female and there are a variety of implications that are assumed to derive from one's

gender. Van Zoonen (1994) argues that we must conceive of gender as a dependent

variable and as a process rather than a given state of being (149, for further discussion see

also Kirby and McKenna 1989, Mackie 1991, Mandell 1998 and Nelson and Robinson

1999). I have to agree that we should be thinking of gender in this way. However, in order

to organize research, we do need some ways of categorizing research subjects and some

bases upon which to compare the data that are collected. In the present research gender

was utilized as both a way of categorizing the research participants and as a primary

concept under investigation. Participants were asked to discuss gender on television,

what they thought of women and men depicted on television, their jobs, clothing, and so

on (see the interview schedules in the appendices), but were also situated as gendered

individuals reading gender.

Feminist media research has generated a wealth of data on gender and/in mass

media (see Ang 1996 and van Zoonen 1994 for examples). The research which has

focussed on gender and/in media has been of three types. First, there is a variety of

research which has been focussed on women in media production (see Ettema 1982,

Gitlin 1983, and Saferstein 1991). Such research has often been based on the premise that

there would be fewer negative female stereotypes in media content if more women were

part of the production of media. It has been found that women hold a minority of higher

status jobs within media production and that much of the work they are found doing in

this industry can be seen as an extension of their traditional domestic role (van Zoonen

1994:51). However, given that media production is a highly collaborative process, that

profit and minimizing of financial risk are the main imperatives and that therefore the

institutional organization seems extremely resistant to change, it may be that more

women would not create different encodings than we currently find on television. The

second type of research that has been conducted on gender and/in the media has been

textual analyses of programmes, films and other media texts (see Allen 1983, Modleski

1984, Kaplan 1988, Badley 2000, Roberts 2000, and Overbey and Preston-Matto 2002).

Such research turns our attention to the gendered positions available in texts for readers to

take up in their readings of such media. Van Zoonen (1994) and Ang (1996) have both

suggested that there is a risk of feminist paternalism implicit in such research (a majority

of which has been conducted by feminist researchers and has had a focus on women,

rather than men), although the stated political purpose is one of empowerment for

women. A gap is created where the feminist expert tells the "ordinary" woman what the

text is saying to her and more importantly that she must resist these messages (van

Zoonen 1994:107). The implication is that women media consumers are suffering from

false consciousness and require feminist experts to save them from their misguided

pleasures in romance novels, melodrama, soap opera and other so-called women's genres.

Finally, there have been several reception studies conducted primarily with women that

have focussed on the implications and articulations of gender in the process of media

reception. The research of Andrea Press which is discussed below is a good example of

such research. There have also been studies of soap opera viewers which highlight issues

of gender in the processes of viewing this "woman's genre" (see Hobson 1999).

There has also been other research that might not be squarely feminist, but considers gender as a salient variable in the process of viewing. One study by Gantz and Wenner (1995) looked at the issue of fanship and viewing. They interviewed 707 adults in the cities of Los Angeles and Indianapolis. They found that sports fans, whether male or female, were more invested in sports viewing than non-fans. However, they noted that more men than women are fans so in many households a male fan is watching sports with a female non-fan. Gantz and Wenner note that this may have implications for the family: "In households where only one person is a fan, TV sports may be a source of conflict, with disagreements ranging from the mere exposure to TV sports to the ways in which one responds to watching such programming" (1995:71). In households where only one person is a fan, the viewing experience will not be shared, even if both people watch the same sports programme (Gantz and Wenner 1995:71). They also found that female non-fans were less involved in viewing sports than male non-fans "because they were further from being fans than their male counterparts" (Gantz and Wenner 1995:71). Gantz and Wenner speculate that these findings may also be applicable to fans of other television fare, such as soap opera. What is also instructive about this research on fanship is that Gantz and Wenner place their analysis squarely in the private realm of the household, where viewing takes place among other social interaction.

While all of this research has contributed enormously to our knowledge of gender and/in media, of particular interest to the present research is that which has been generated about television. It is clear that there is a need to combine a variety of methods

in order to come to a greater understanding of class, gender and television viewership.

The research on media production highlights inequities that are also found in the capitalist

production system in general. The research which analyzes gender and/in texts, including

the analyses of images of men in media texts (see Craig 1991 and 1992, Cohan and Hark

1992, and Katz 1995), reveals the matrix of meaning within which viewers are

negotiating the viewing process. Finally, reception analyses bring us closer to

understanding the complex process of viewership, the meanings made and under what

conditions, the modes of viewing employed and the various contradictions that have been

found in the results of such research (see discussion of Press below for example).

The findings of research on gender and/in television have revealed that gendered

viewing is a complex and contradictory process and that representations of gender on

television, and in other media, seem to have some association with traditional notions of

appropriate gender behaviour in our society. However, the causal relation between media

exposure and such attitudes remains unclear (van Zoonen 1994:35). Van Zoonen also

argues that the notion that there is some "real" woman who is not finding airtime is highly

problematic (1994:30-31). What is at issue in feminist media studies is more accurately a

concern that women are not represented in all their diversity (mother, housewife, worker,

Black, Asian, White, lover, lesbian, professional, etc.), however the same can be said for

representations of men. While it is clear that representations of men on television have

been more diverse than those of women (Elasmar, Hasegawa and Brain 1999), they still

fail to represent the diversity of maleness that exists in society. Macdonald (1995) argues

that: "[w]hen women complain about the lack of realism in the media's representation of

themselves, they are criticizing lack of diversity in portraying and defining women's lives

and desires, not asking for a hall of mirrors" (3) What would it mean to have "realistic"

representations of women or men on television? Whose reality would be represented? It

seems clear that the diversity of possible representations of masculinity and femininity

make such a representation not only unattainable, but also inadvisable. Since there is no

discernible essence of masculinity or femininity the arguments that portrayals of gender

on television are somehow unrepresentative or unrealistic are problematic. While we may

crave a greater diversity of characters with which to identify, try on, reject or criticize this

should not be tangled up with a call for more "realistic" portrayals of gender. Attempts to

implement such a portrayal would most likely lead to the most dangerous of

essentializing and only compound the problems identified within the study of gender

representations and media consumption.

Ang (1996), van Zoonen (1994) and others have argued that we ought to think

about gender positions that are available for viewers to take up in any given viewing

situation. This allows for us to sever the often taken-for-granted connection between

one's gender and gendered reading positions. While it may often be the case that viewers

take up a gendered subject position with respect to viewing, there is also evidence of

cross-gender identification with characters as in the case of horror films (see Clover

1992). In his recent work on media, gender and identity, Gauntlett (2002) concludes:

> In contrast with the past – or the modern popular view of the past – we no longer get singular, straightforward messages about ideal types of male and female identities (although certain groups of features are clearly promoted as more desirable than others). Instead, popular culture offers a range of stars, icons and characters from whom we can acceptably borrow bits and pieces of their public persona for use in our own (255).

Gauntlett's conclusion is perhaps more optimistic than those of earlier scholarship on gender and media, but does suggest that change, though slow, is occurring in both social attitudes and practices of gender and in the imagery of gender within media such as TV.

A survey of content analyses of gender roles on TV supports the conclusion that there are more diverse images of gender, particularly femininity, on TV than there were in the past. Content analyses of prime-time U.S. network television reveal that in the period from 1956 to the early 1980s the presence of female characters in major roles comprised between 25 and 35% (Elasmar, Hasegawa and Brain 1999:23). Gender disparities among television characters have differed by programme type. From the 1950s to the 1970s female characters were found mainly in comedy programmes and found to be primarily focussed on domestic concerns within the household and family-issued consistently portrayed as less important to male characters (Gunter 1995:13-14). Researchers have noted increases in the overall numbers of female characters on prime-time TV since the 1950s, but have noted variation in terms of importance of these speaking characters and the type of prorammes on which they appear. Elasmer et al found a steady overall increase in women speaking characters on prime-time U.S. TV over the years and suggest that this trend may be attributable to a slow but steady change in American values concerning working women (Elasmer, Hasegawa and Brain 1999: 31). Such changes in

values are difficult to track, but certainly we know that more women than ever are both

working for wages and playing a major role in the domestic work in family households.

Statistics Canada reported that 60.7% of adult women (aged 15 years and older) in 2002

were participating in the paid labour force (Statistics Canada 2003). Despite their

movement into paid work, there are many challenges that face women in the pursuit of

equality. The work force continues to be gender stratified, wage disparities that appear to

be gender based persist though gaps are closing, women remain the ones primarily

responsible for child care and domestic labour despite moving into the paid workforce in

greater numbers. It is difficult to claim that we have achieved gender equality, but it must

also be acknowledged that we have seen improvement and change over the last 30 years.

In the introduction to her edited volume Mandell (1998) observes:

> The institutions in which we work, receive health care, and become schooled have
> begun, slowly, to shift their foci in response to individual and social claims for greater
> flexibility and individuality. These and other trends have lead to the virtual demise of
> traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity. Gender ideologies created in everyday
> and institutional practices no longer condemn women and men to restrictive patterns of
> behaviour. (*vi*).

It is within this gendered environment that participants in the present study live their

everyday lives and negotiate their own gendered identities as well as the content that they

view on TV.

Class

Traditional Marxist definitions of class rely on the relationship to the means of

production as the salient factor in determining one's class. In the traditional Marxist

scheme there are basically two classes, the owners of property (the means of production)

and those who must earn a wage by selling their labour power. Later neo-Marxists,

needing to incorporate the rise of a huge class of managers, looked more closely at how

much control people had over their work. Weber's class scheme focussed more on the

distribution of power in society along the lines of class, status and party. He essentially

wrestled with the ghost of Marx and accounted for social mobility as well as the

development of the middle class. He based the divisive relations between groups on a

basic split between "property" and "lack of property" as in the kind of property that

provides useful returns, such as a college degree. Groups form around these types of

property: capitalists (large property owners), petty bourgeoisie (own enough property to

have control over own labour), white-collar workers (have specialized marketable skills),

and manual working class (tend to have only their general capacity to labour to sell).

Various status indicators such as occupation, education level, and income level are often

used to determine class and/or socio-economic status.

Livingstone and Mangan (1996) undertook to compare a variety of class schemes

using data comprising a sample of 318 employed men from the city of Hamilton[2] and

determined that at least in general the various class schemes tend to divide people into the

same basic groups (36). Regardless of scheme used the same basic division exists

between "haves" and "have nots" although some schemes will assign more or less people

to the working class or the "have not" category. Livingstone and Mangan (1996) did

determine that in the relationship between class consciousness and class identity some

---

[2] While their larger project included men and women from Hamilton families. the testing of class schemes used data specific to employed men in their sample.

class schemes were more applicable than others. In particular they note that occupational

status scales (Pineo-Porter and Blishen) are generally better than Weber's or Marx's

original class schemes at predicting subjective class identity (Livingstone and Mangan

1996:50). That is, popular conceptions that people have of "class" seem to usually be

"closer to neo-Weberian status concepts [Pineo-Porter, Blishen, and Bordieu] than to the

antagonistic interest notions of neo-Marxists [Poulantzas, Carchedi, Wright, and

Livingstone]" (Livingstone and Mangan 1996:50). When researchers ask participants to

self-identify or to discuss class, we need to bear in mind that participants are most likely

using these sorts of schemes. Livingstone and Mangan (1996) indicate that there is

support in their data for the suggestion made by Vanneman and Pampel (1977) "that

many people harbour multiple class and status models, and that they will give expression

to these models depending on the question asked and its context" (Livingstone and

Mangan 1996:39). Class is likely to have multiple meanings for any one person and to be

experienced in a variety of ways by individuals in their everyday lives.

In their analysis of the Hamilton Families data, Livingstone et al (1996)

discovered that over 90% of participants in their project said that social classes exist in

Canada (37). Despite this they found no consensus at all among participants about

whether classes exist in harmony or in conflict in Canadian society. In Canadian surveys

a majority of people will self identify as middle class (Livingstone and Mangan 1996:39-

40), but we know that fewer people than that actually constitute what social science

researchers would define as the middle class. In research and surveys there is a tendency

toward the middle when it comes to identifying one's class position. Livingstone and

Mangan (1996) believe that this "indicates the general vagueness of the concept of

class...as well as the social unacceptability of denoting oneself to be exceptional in what

is supposed to be a democratic society" (40).   Whatever our structural position in

capitalist society, most people do not see themselves in terms of class and rather think of

themselves in terms of status categories such as gender, occupation, education level or

ethnic group. Canadian survey research indicates that those who can (those whose

linguistic or ethnic identity is white and Anglo) will see themselves as part of the cultural

mainstream or middle strata of society --neither exceptionally affluent nor exceptionally

poor as would be indicated by taking the label upper-class or working/lower-class.

Livingstone and Mangan (1996) argue that "[g]iven the prevalent tendency toward the

middle, the disposition to identify oneself as "working-class" or "lower-class" probably

provides the most sensitive indicator of the respondents' recognition of a personal

location of subordination within class-based or status-based social relations" (40).

Steeves and Crafton Smith (1987) began with Wright's broad distinction between

popular definitions of class, which are gradational and relational definitions which

determine positions within market relations. Gradational conceptions of class focus on

inequities between people based on how much or how little of something they have;

usually income difference is the focus of such thinking about class. Gradational

definitions of class are likely to focus on consumption practices and what individuals or

families can afford to buy and consume. Consumption and not just production is viewed

as a defining class activity and is often portrayed as such on TV. Bettie (1995) observed

that "*Roseanne* portrays consumption, and not just production, as a defining class activity;

and it is here in its exploration of women's traditional concerns with shopping and buying

that *Roseanne* specifically genders class experience" (136). The intersections of class and

gender will be discussed further below. It will be seen that when discussing class on TV

many of the participants in this research called upon gradational definitions of class and

consideration of consumption activities in their comments. Participants in this research

tend to speak in terms of what rich people can afford, rather than what power they may

have over others. As in the research by Livingstone et al (1996) discussed above,

participants in the present research seem to believe that social classes exist, but how they

view such classes and how they experience their own class location and class identity (if

they class identify at all) varies widely. Those participants who recognize their own class

location as one that is subordinate within Canadian society are more likely to call upon

relational conceptions of class when discussing class on TV and in their own experiences.

Researchers who continue to utilize Marxist theoretics argue that class is primarily

a matter of political and economic relations. Despite the fact that many people at an

experiential level do not "see" class it continues to be seen as central in efforts to

understand society. Erik Olin Wright (1997) argues that "[o]wnership of the means of

production and ownership of one's own labour power are explanatory of social action

because these property rights shape the strategic alternatives people face in pursuing their

material well-being. What people have imposes constraints on what they can do to get

what they want" (30). Clearly, material relations in society are an important structural

feature of the everyday lives of people who live in capitalist societies-but debate

continues about just how central a feature these structural relations are in determining

people's life chances. Further, feminists and anti-racist activists among others have

insisted on integrating gender and ethnicity in considerations of both class location and

class identity. Livingstone et al (1996) utilize the concept of "household classes" to

indicate that the class location of families and cohabitating couples is a result of the

combination of their individual class locations. Such conceptualizations recognize the

fact that women may often have their own class location and class identity that does not

derive solely from that of their spouse. As Wallace Clement (1991) has noted:

> [Classes] are relations and processes. Since these relations and processes *are*
> experienced through people, they never manifest themselves in "pure" form, but take
> on and are affected by the characteristics of people—that is their gender, race, region,
> etc., all of which are themselves social characteristics. Similarly, objective positions in
> the labour process are not identical with class, nor is class reducible to such positions;
> yet these positions have social, political and ideological effects that contribute to the
> experience of class (26).

The debate about the continuing relevance of class in contemporary western capitalist

society is beyond the scope of this work (see Nakhaie 1999 for an account of the debate).

It is important to acknowledge this scholarly debate and to note that most surveys

indicate that people living in capitalist societies are less likely to acknowledge such

relations and instead will focus on gradational and status indicators when asked to talk

about class in society or on TV. While I contend that class is significant and salient in

current social relations and efforts to understand them there are also many and varied

factors at both a structural (gender, ethnicity, age etc.) and individual level that must be

taken into account when we investigate how class is meaningful in the everyday lives of

both research participants other members of any given society. It is significant that in

popular conceptions class has become either invisible or displaced onto other relations

such as those bound more clearly to gender or race. Discussions about the continuing

relevance of class in everyday life within Western Capitalist societies have ranged from

feminist and anti-racist critiques (see for example the work of bell hooks, Dorothy Smith

or Patricia Hill Collins) to the huge body of work that might be covered by the umbrella

term "post-modern critiques" (see the work of Richard Harvey, Frederic Jameson, or Jean

Baudrillard) and many points in between. Some argue that capitalist work organization

has been transformed by a shift to greater service sector employment and that has

reconfigured class relations and challenged the relevance of class (see Crompton 1993,

Bettie 1995). Feminist correctives have taken issue with the focus of class concepts and

analysis on both male and white subjects and found such conceptualizations limiting (see

Mandell 2001). The intersection of class with other axes of inequality such as gender and

race will be discussed further below. Within audience studies it has been concluded by

some that participants lack a language for discussing class issues (see Jhally and Lewis

1992) in part because such concepts have become invisible in North American culture

where a pluralist and politically liberal view of society is dominant (see Press 1991;

Jhally and Lewis 1992; and Livingstone and Mangan 1996). The invisibility of class

among TV texts and in contemporary society will be taken up further in the next section

and in the data analysis (Chapter 5).

Representations of class on television and class-based readings of television texts

are also well-researched areas. There are some notable exceptions (Archie Bunker,

Roseanne Connor and Homer Simpson for example), but on television middle-class

characters far out-number their proportion in society (Fiske and Hartley 1978; Steeves

and Crafton Smith 1987; Butsch 1992; Bettie 1995).

> Only those jobs that serve a dramatic function in a story are regularly portrayed on
> prime-time. For instance, the work of law enforcement officers, doctors, and lawyers is
> often more exciting, suspenseful, interesting and prestigious than that of farmers and
> laborers. The former jobs have good story-telling material. Consequently, television
> consistently over-represents these types of occupations while it under represents blue-
> collar occupations (Signorielli and Kahlenberg 2001:5)

Certainly, some work is not very compatible with TV narrative style. However, I would

argue that many working-class jobs (waitress, housekeeper, sales clerk, bus driver)

actually offer more in the way of opportunities for interaction and dialogue between

characters than many middle-class jobs. The full range of service occupations are

characterized by work with other people, where all kinds of interaction can take place on

the TV screen. Some blue-collar factory work can also allow for interaction between

characters and movement of the story, such as the lunchroom in the plant that Grace

works in on *Grace Under Fire* or the lunchroom at the factory that Roseanne worked in

during the early seasons. Fiske and Hartley (1978) found that jobs depicted on TV tended

to be disproportionately of high prestige, such as professional and managerial jobs. That

is, the occurrences of such high prestige jobs in TV situations far outweighed the actual

occurrence in society (Fiske and Hartley 1978:21). They are not alone in suggesting that

the working class is underrepresented on television (see De Fleur 1964; Jhally and Lewis

1992; and Signorielli, 1993, 2001). Most of the working-class images that are

represented on television are comic images (Press 1989:246). Analyses have also found

that there are disproportionate depictions of poor, working-class and people of colour as

criminals on news and crime shows like *Cops* (Henry et al 1995) and much has been

written about the opportunities offered to "ordinary" people who are able to appear on TV

talk shows (see Livingstone 1994, Morse 1998, and Grindstaff 2002).

Fiske and Hartley (1978) utilized the Marxist distinction between class *in itself*

and class *for itself* to demonstrate that "in the world of television divisions between

classes *in themselves* are rarely if ever presented as such" (Fiske and Hartley 1978:102).

They suggest that on TV, managers, professionals and labourers are all part of the same

class for itself, they all have to sell their labour power because they lack control over the

means of production (Fiske and Hartley 1978:102). Television is here suggested to be a

class leveller, to make one's situation seem the same regardless of one's class position for

itself. In a similar vein Bettie (1995) demonstrates the "class inflation" that has occurred

over time among TV characters where working-class portrayals are rare, but portrayals of

dual professional households and households with servants are plenty (127). There is a

tendency for middle-class values to be discerned in popular entertainment such as

television. TV reality, which is a privileged, white, upper middle-class reality, passes as

normal, class-less, and average (Croteau and Hoynes 2000). "In TV land, everybody, or

everybody with an ounce of merit is making it" (Jhally and Lewis 1992:133). In their

study, Jhally and Lewis (1992) noted that characters like Roseanne become noticeable

because they defy the norm. She stands out simply by being working class (Jhally and

Lewis 1992:133). New working-class sitcoms appeared in the early 90s (*Roc, Grace

Under Fire, South Central, 704 Houser*), but they all had relatively short lives on the air.

It is worth noting, however, that *Roseanne, All in the Family,* and *Married...With

Children* have continued to have extensive airplay in syndication on U.S. and Canadian

stations to the present day. Clearly they garner large enough audiences to keep them on

the air, despite their norm-defying characterizations.

Intersections of class and gender and....

Butsch (1992) looked at four decades of situation comedies and "concentrated on

how gender has been used to construct contrasting images of the working class and

middle class" (389) on television. Out of 262 situation comedies that aired between 1946

and 1990, only 11 featured a blue-collar employee as head of the household. When he

expanded the analysis to included clerical and service workers, the series which depicted

working-class characters still made up only 11% of all series aired in the U.S. during that

time period (Butsch 1992: 388). He notes that working-class series have emerged

primarily during transitional periods for network television, such as the mid-50s, the early

70s and the late 80s. Working-class families have been less scarce on television when

"'normal' fare wasn't established or sustaining ratings" (Butsch 1992:388). In contrast

middle-class characters have been the norm, representing 70.4% of domestic situation

comedies that aired during the time period he studied (Butsch 1992:389). Further, the

middle-class families that appear on television are overly affluent and disproportionately

depict professional heads of the household.

Success is the norm on television. Therefore, working-class males are often seen

as failures, deviant, and responsible for their own failure (Butsch 1992:390). Middle-class

men on sitcoms are found to be capable, intelligent and all the things that our culture

expects a man to be and all the things that the wives in working-class sitcoms tend to be

(Butsch 1992:390). The humorous situation in most working-class sitcoms is usually

some blunder that the man has gotten himself into and that he needs help getting out of

from his wife and/or children. In middle-class sitcoms the humorous situation is usually

one that the children get into and the man ends up helping them out of, with the help of

his wife. Butsch argues that this gender inversion serves to buttress social order: "The

confinement of the inversion and disorder to the working class and the contrasting of

these to the order of middle-class series creates a whole that effectively confirms the

status order of class" (1992: 397). This gender inversion serves to devalue these

characters as men and also to represent their subordinate class status. While there is

variation over the four decades studied, the foolish working-class male character persists

as the dominant image of working-class men on television. The participants in the present

research recalled few working-class characters in their interviews (except when the

questions were focussed on a particular working-class programme) and those they noted

were of the same stereotype that Butsch found in his research. One noted exception was

Dan Connor from *Roseanne* who is admired by his children and is not consistently the

butt of all jokes on the show. It seems that there has still been little change in the

depiction of the working class on television since Butsch's research in the early 90s.

Bettie argues that "folk" understandings of working-class have long been tainted

by a stereotype of the blue-collar hard hat—read white and male (Bettie 1995: 128).

However, she sees this identification of working-class with white men as waning some as

shifts and transformations take place in the overall organization of work and the

workforce becomes much more diverse (129). In her analysis of newer working-class

representations on TV in 1994, Bettie found that only eight out of 35 sitcoms that aired

during the 56 hour period could be coded as working-class. Four of the eight sitcoms

featured Black families (*Roc, Thea, 704 Hauser, South Central*). Out of the 36

programmes she viewed, only six revolved around female characters and only four of

those (*Thea, Grace Under Fire, Roseanne*, and *The Nanny*) featured working-class

women (Bettie 1995: 129). "The few images of *white* working-class men are generally as

in the past, those of buffoons (witness Homer Simpson of *The Simpsons* and Al Bundy of

Married…with Children. Roseanne's Dan Conner may be the exception)" (Bettie

1995:129).

Bettie's critical reading of the sitcom *Roseanne* reveals several examples of how

the programme specifically genders class experience. The programme highlights

women's concern with shopping and buying for the working-class home. Consumption is

portrayed as a defining class activity where Roseanne purchases the makings of meatloaf

in contrast to the steaks that other families from her daughters' school can afford to bring

home for dinner. "In *Roseanne*, class experience is also inflected by gender, through its

portrayal of women's role as the family's status producers. Women, that is, produce and

express class culture through consumption" (Bettie 1995: 136). In her analysis of

Roseanne, Bettie reveals a complex interplay between class and gender portrayal. She

goes further into a discussion of class as race, building on the work of Jhally and Lewis:

> Since "whiteness" most often goes as an unstated but assumed racial referent (that is,
> when race is not mentioned whiteness is assumed), when it is present it reveals much.
> The phrase "poor white trash" alludes to the racist assumption that colour and poverty
> and degenerate lifestyle "automatically" go together, so much so that when white folks
> are acting this way, their whiteness needs to be named. That is, it is a racially marked
> category used to describe those who are not performing whiteness (read normative
> middle-class whiteness) appropriately (Bettie 1995:140).

Much as when we use labels such as "male nurse" to indicate that the described person is

defying the norm of females performing such work roles, such language reveals the

unstated norm. In the example from *Roseanne*, the class difference of the characters from

the middle-class norm is made visible by the use of the race identifier "white" which

usually goes unsaid as the norm on TV along with middle-class and male.

The intersection of class and gender (and race) is an important aspect of not just

television content, but also an important aspect of one's everyday social experience. In

Media Matters, Fiske suggests that "class is better conceived as a scale of privilege that is

primarily, but not exclusively, economic and that has objective and subjective dimensions

that may coincide more or less closely" (1994:65). He returns to a simpler division

between "haves" and "have-nots" which are more fluid and multi-axial categories. We

often conceive of class in such rigid terms that it cannot accommodate the true flexibility

of social distinctions. Bettie (1995) suggests that in sociological, leftist political and folk

understandings of class there is a tendency to invoke the image of the "hard-hat

stereotype which promotes the invisibility of white women, and of women and men of

colour as class subjects" (128). More flexible conceptions of class allow for the

inevitable and complex interplay among multiple axes of difference and inequality that

exist in the everyday world of people's experiences.

Fiske also suggests that a multi-axial understanding of class is necessary, that "we

have to recognize that race is strategically constructed in part by economic power and

equally that class privilege is coloured" (1994:66). Gender enters into the picture to

complicate it further and age too is an axis of power; a current of meaning with political

effects. For Fiske, "class, race and gender, then are not so much stable social categories as axes of power along which strategies are deployed and tactics practiced; they are terrains of struggle" (1994:67). Readers of television are engaged at one level or another in these terrains of struggle as they negotiate meanings in their decoding of TV texts. The positioning of the viewer along these various axes of power has an impact on the meanings they make from viewing television. Therefore, the way we see class on television depends on our own class position (Jhally and Lewis 1992:75). However, class is often tangled up with these other axes and therefore negotiated differently by viewers located variously along race, gender, and class axes of power.

The imprecision in such terms as "haves" and "have nots" allows for some flexibility "so that at times the 'haves' may be defined more by their whiteness and masculinity than by their economics: at others, the priorities among the axes of power and definition will be changed" (Fiske 1994:65-66). Others who have worked at combining class and gender into their theorizing on stratification and inequality have come to similar conclusions (see for example Armstrong and Armstrong 1984).

Fiske's notion of a basic division between "haves" and "have-nots" may be a good place to start. Still, such categorizations will always be somewhat arbitrary. How do we decide where the dividing line is to be drawn? This is the sort of question that every researcher must answer, using the large body of literature on class and stratification as a guide. The conceptualization and operationalization of class in the present research is discussed below in Chapter 3.

In the discussion of the major reception studies that are discussed below, there is

no shared class scheme at work and certainly research participants can be seen to vary in

their conceptions of class and how these conceptions are impacted by other aspects of

social difference such as race or gender. For the most part their research also shares roots

in Marxist theorizing on class and inequality. It is unlikely that useful comparison can be

made among research that looks at class, gender, race and television viewing unless we

focus on this more fluid sense of class division. The basic divisions that I have utilized

with the research participants in the present study are between working class and middle

class and male and female. In this way I hope to uncover some of the ways the class and

gender intersect in the process of viewing.

"Realism" on Television

When research subjects suggest that television characters are unrealistic, what

they seem to be actually commenting upon is their ability to relate to such characters,

their affinity with the characters represented on television. Many viewers do seem to use

such language to assess the value of a given programme, its plot and/or characters.

Viewers will claim that a given TV show is "totally unrealistic," or that they "can't relate

to those characters." This should not be translated into a desire on the part of viewers for

more "realistic" television. Several reception studies (see Press 1991 or Jhally and Lewis

1992 for examples) have indicated that viewers speak negatively of characters, storylines

and situations that are too much a reflection of real life, since often the motivation for

viewing is escape and entertainment. Viewers do not expect a mirror of their lives, they

watch TV to escape and fantasize. Kellner (1995) asserts that "[i]ndeed, who would want

to watch a drama of a family losing job, home, and then being torn apart, an event which

has become all too familiar during the past decade of permanent economic crisis" (138-

139). Yet, such research also reports that research subjects use a discourse of realism to

assign value or to disparage a variety of television characters, programmes or other TV

content.

Content such as found on soap operas, *The Jerry Springer Show*, *Big Brother* or

televised pro-wrestling is labeled as "silly," "cheesy," or "ridiculous" and is often derided

by both viewers and critics (see Grindstaff 2002; Manga 2003; Morley 2000). This type

of response seems to arise from the stigma that viewers associate with watching too much

TV, or with watching what are perceived to be "low-brow" programmes (Gauntlett and

Hill 1999: 111). It appears to be part of an attempt at constructing an attitude of

superiority--"some people think that stuff is real, but not me!" However, there is no doubt

that such derided programmes garner large audiences--many viewers are watching

despite the lack of "realism." The use of a discourse of realism to evaluate and condemn

these programmes indicates more of an effort to defend against the stigma associated with

watching fictional TV than a call for more realism on TV.

There is a very complex process at work here. On the one hand, *The Jerry*

Springer Show, *Big* Brother, and soaps garner good audience ratings numbers; on the

other hand people often are reluctant to admit to watching them (Höijer 1999:182). If

such programmes are some modern version of the carnivalesque, they are bizarre TV-era

versions. Instead of a mass audience in a stadium (although admittedly pro-wrestling

offers this type of entertainment as well as the TV broadcasts and pay-per-view events),

individuals participate from the privacy of their homes, separated from the mass audience

who is also enjoying the same spectacle. Perhaps this privatizing of the carnivalesque

type of TV programming contributes to the stigma associated with viewing these

programmes in particular and viewing in general. Mass group participation in the

carnivaleque would lend acceptance to the activity that perhaps isolated TV viewing has

removed from the experience. It is also possible that for many viewers such programmes

constitute guilty pleasures. That is, part of the pleasure in viewing is that the programmes

are derided as "fluff," "cheesy," or "tacky." It will be seen that among the participants in

the present research there is evidence of viewing for "guilty pleasure."

It seems that many viewers indicate that plausibility is important in their

assessment of the value of TV texts. This use of a discourse of realism to evaluate TV

programmes is a common finding in reception research. However, research indicates that

often viewers desire quite the opposite from TV—to escape, to be entertained and to

fantasize (Ang 1996:93; Alasuutari 1999:11; Gauntlett and Hill 1999:127-128). At these

times viewers do not desire TV that mirrors real life. Of course, when watching news or

documentary type programs there is a clear desire and expectation of realism in the

content.

I would argue that viewers use a discourse of realism primarily to assign value to

some TV programmes and content and to deride others-ones that *other* viewers watch!

Such evaluation occurs when viewers are placed in a position where they feel the need to

defend or explain the activity of TV viewing which is both stigmatized, and yet nearly

universal in western industrialized societies (see similar findings discussed in Alasuutari

1992, Hagen 1999, and Gauntlett and Hill 1996). When research participants are asked to

evaluate their viewing, there is a tendency to respond in terms of this discourse of

realism. However, such responses are not an indication of a desire for "realistic" images

that are seen to be missing from TV content. This discourse of realism seems to be at

least partly about creating a moral distance from TV (Alasuutari 1999: 96) and it is a way

of indicating that viewers are not fooled by TV--they *know* it's not real. Female viewers

know that the women they see on TV are ideal images and that without digital

processing, make-up and effects those women do not look that perfect either. It will be

seen in the results of the present research that this knowledge does not prevent female

viewers from feeling some pressure to conform to these ideal images, or from feeling

some frustration as a result of that pressure. Male research participants indicated that they

know that the women they see on TV are ideal and they claim not to expect to meet

women like those they see on TV. Male (heterosexual) viewers appear to be using these

ideal female images as fuel for fantasy, but say that they do not expect to find such

women in their real lives. It is unclear whether they desire such women and just accept

that they do not exist, or they simply leave such images to fantasy and their own visual

imaginations.

In the present study the participants were asked specifically to comment upon the

relationship between the programmes and characters they were describing and real people

they knew or of whom they had heard. It will be seen in the findings from the present

research that such a discourse of the "real" was frequently used by the participants. It is

impossible to know if they would have used such language if they had not been

prompted, but given the ubiquity of such comments in other reception studies it seems

likely. It will be seen that some of the participants refer to men and women on television

as "extreme" or "totally unrealistic." When talking about the images and depiction of

gender on TV, participants often compare these representations to men or women in their

own lives. The widely held view that women on TV are totally unrealistic does not seem

to detract from a more general assessment of TV as realistic at some general level which

accords it some value. There is a separation between the realism of characterization and a

general acceptance of the plausibility, or its importance, within TV texts. Some

participants in the present research lauded *The Simpsons* as the show most representative

of diversity in society and of how real families interact. These statements were made

about a cartoon, yet the animated images (further from the "real" than live action images)

were conceived as better representing real life.

Ultimately, the matter of television realism is rather complex. In the context of

the present research the use of a discourse of realism among the participants is connected

to the common sense view that watching television is a waste of time (see Gauntlett and

Hill 1999; Morley 1986; Hobson 1982; Gray 1992; and Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi

1991 for further discussion of this concern among viewers). In order to guard against

being seen as people who waste time, respondents may call upon notions of realism as a

way of distancing themselves from the pleasures and entertainment value they get from

watching television.

Meaning-making: Audience Reception Studies

The work of Morley (1986), Press (1991), Jhally and Lewis (1992) and Liebes

and Katz (1993) which are discussed below shares similar aims to the present work. The

findings of my research serve to augment their work in the field of audience reception of

television. Due to the resources and time required to carry out such research there is still

ample room in the field for more data that contributes to our knowledge of meaning-

making and the practices of television viewership. The study of such a multiple and

contingent process as television viewing requires much data to be gathered in order that

we might achieve some greater understanding of this aspect of people's everyday lives.

While theoretical work and textual analyses are plentiful, there remains a paucity of

research that interrogates the reception of actual viewers. In particular there are few

studies that compare the reception of male and female viewers as is the focus of the

present study.

During the 1980s researchers of television turned their attentions to ethnographic,

audience reception studies. Much of this work emerged from the Birmingham Centre for

Contemporary Cultural Studies where researchers found the media effects models of

viewership lacking and turned their attentions to a critical perspective and an

encoding/decoding model developed by Stuart Hall. Essentially, this model conceives of

television viewing as a two-fold process: 1) encoding of messages into programmes; and

2) decoding of messages from programmes by actual, socially situated, viewers. The

approach is based on the premises that: 1) an event can be encoded in more than one way;

2) the message always contains more than one possible reading; and 3) the meaning-

making process is problematic and complex despite the apparently mundane practice

involved (Morley 1992:85).

The work of David Morley used and refined the encoding/decoding model and

sought to move away from the more simplistic "media effects" approach to television

research. These more contemporary approaches have brought to light the "complex and

contradictory 'living room wars' [that] are taking place wherever and whenever television

(and other media) sway people's daily lives in the modern world" (Ang 1996:8).

Morley's work is important because he stressed the social context of viewing as a vital

aspect of any research on television viewing. He also considered not just gender, but

gender relations within households and their impact on television viewing practices.

David Morley operationalized television viewing as an essentially social activity

in his 1986 study of family television viewing. Morley interviewed 18 white families

from the same area of London, England who were divided by class. While taking the

family as his unit of analysis, Morley nevertheless provided many insights into the

viewing of "gendered individuals" which he acknowledges in the Afterword of Family

Television (1986:174). Morley found that watching television had a number of social

functions within the families he interviewed and that many of these were also governed

by gender relations within the family.

In his sample, men controlled the viewing and controlled the remote. Morley

ascribes the differences to power differences in the household suggesting that male power

derives from social definitions of masculinity, of which the bread-winner norm is part

(Morley 1986:147). In households where the male's bread-winner status is ambiguous,

men seem to show some anxiety to demonstrate that they are the boss. Morley suggests

that this may be linked to a need to possess the remote, especially where the bread-winner

role is more tenuous as in dual income or male-unemployed households.

Morley also noted gendered styles of viewing. Men, he found, viewed in silence, while women tend to chat during viewing (Morley 1986:149). Women are more likely to treat viewing as a social activity or to do other household tasks while viewing. Due to the differences in domestic responsibility among those in his sample, men tend to plan the viewing and women tend to have more of a "take it or leave it" attitude (Morley 1986:153).

The amount of time spent viewing was also differentiated by gender in Morley's family television research. Men in his sample watched more television. He notes that other research shows women watching more TV, but this may be because they are home more, with the TV on, rather than a matter of women watching attentively (Morley 1986:154). Despite the differences in reported time spent viewing, women more often admit to talking about TV, while men are more reluctant to do so. Morley suggests that men may feel that talking about TV puts their masculinity in question, showing either too much viewing or that they have nothing else to talk about (Morley 1986:155).

Morley also noted that programme type preferences were gender differentiated in his research. Men in his sample preferred factual programmes such as the news, science programmes or biographies. Women preferred fictional programmes and romance in particular. He also found that women hated "zany comedy." He posits that they view these as some kind of insult to domestic order (Morley 1986:170). Their husbands and children (both sons and daughters) all enjoyed such programmes. The basic premise of such shows is that domestic disorder is funny. Women in Morley's sample, who are primarily responsible for maintaining domestic order in their household had a strong

dislike for "zany comedies."

Morley also found that watching television had a number of social functions within the families he interviewed. For example, television was used as a playmate for children or sometimes fulfilled a babysitting function (Morley 1986:29). The research was designed to investigate the changing use of television among families of different types, from different social positions, and with children of different ages. It is not surprising that TV was noted to serve a useful function with respect to childcare and family relations.

Turning on a television does not always mean "I want to watch TV" it could also mean "I don't want to talk" (Morley 1986:20). Alternatively switching on the TV set could be an attempt at making contact. Morley argues that most TV programming does not require complete attention (Morley 1986:30). The television can therefore be used by family members to further interaction. It was noted that touching or cuddling is more common when watching TV together than on other occasions (Morley 1986:33). Television was used in a wide variety of ways by the family members in the study.

Power relations and economic relations also factored into TV viewing. As was discussed above, the control of the TV can be explained by one's position in the family. Usually the Father of the household had control, not only of the remote, but also of the evening's viewing agenda. Differential control alludes to difficulties for women to construct leisure time and space for themselves in the home (Morley 1986:37). Further, his data show that television viewing is somewhat different in middle-class and in working-class families. The majority of the families in Morley's study were working

class or lower middle class. Those whom he places in the middle class are "those who have 'made good' rather than educated professionals" (Morley 1986:53). It is evident from the interview synopses he provides that those in the "higher" class categories tend to be at great pains to minimize the time they admit to spending on TV viewing. On the other hand, the unemployed and working-class families readily admit to having the TV on all the time, or even admit to being "TV addicts" (Morley 1985:74). These families are more likely to use television as a form of inexpensive entertainment, as well as using it to occupy children while other chores need to be done.

Morley's study reveals a variety of uses for television beyond what might traditionally be the focus of popular culture studies. In fact, he tends to focus primarily on the social context in which viewing takes place rather than on the texts being viewed or the meanings being made. In recent comments about this early work Morley notes: "I was attempting to recontextualize the original analysis of programme interpretations by placing them in the broader frame of the domestic context in which television viewing, as a practice, is routinely conducted" (Morley 1999:197). In the context of recent debate about a "third generation" of audience studies beyond this earlier recontextualization that Morley represents, this emphasis on viewing practices is being "reframed, within the new focus on the broader discourses within which media audiences are themselves constructed and inscribed" (Morley 1999:197). While some changes in gender relations have clearly taken place and been documented in other media studies (see Gauntlett and Hill 1999), Morley continues to assert that gendered viewing practices remain evident in the current contexts and practices of viewing (Morley 2000: 93-97).

In her 1991 study, Andrea Press interviewed 41 American women with a focus on

comparing working-class with middle-class women's interpretations of and responses to

television characters and narrative. In addition to the class comparison, Press also

investigated generational differences in women's responses to television. Press (1991)

designated informants as working class based on their own, their husband's or their

father's occupation (blue-collar or pink-collar work) (184). She utilized the mother's

occupation in the cases where informants were raised by single mothers. In the case of

independent women she looked at their own occupation in making her judgement. In the

cases of occupations that seemed "borderline" she looked to level of education in addition

to occupation. The middle-class informants were all professionals most of whom had

post-secondary education or they had husbands or fathers with these characteristics. The

same qualities (occupation and education) were used as selection criteria for middle-class

and working-class informants (Press 1991:184).

Press provides an analysis of the images of women presented in fictional TV texts

since the 1950s. The images are classified as pre-feminist, feminist and post-feminist.

Pre-feminist images consist of the 50s and 60s sitcom wives such as Lucy of *I Love Lucy*.

The feminist images emerge from the late 60s to the early 80s when TV women are

usually depicted in the workplace. She notes Mary of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as an

example of a female character whose activities were depicted squarely in the public

realm. In the late 80s Press sees images of women reverting back to an emphasis on

women in their family roles. Most female characters have a work identity, but it is largely

superfluous to the role they have as wife/mother in the family. The example of this sort

of post-feminist image is Clair Huxtable of *The Cosby Show*. These are also mainly

images of very glamorous workplaces such as on *Murphy Brown*, and *LA Law*. Press

argues that any problems that women face on TV are personalized and rarely seen as

connected to anything systematic or structural. She sees this emphasis on individualism

as a symbolic annihilation of the women's movement and the solidarity of women which

was such a large part of the second wave of feminism. This consideration of the

predominant images of women lays the background against which middle-class and

working-class women's interactions with television texts are analyzed.

Press found that class affected how women considered the realism on TV and

whether or how they identified with TV characters. Middle-class women in her study all

expected TV to be unrealistic (Press 1991:84). However, they also become involved in

the family relationships of the characters which they can relate to their own experience.

Middle-class women invoked gender-specific themes and related easily to popular female

TV characters such as Samantha on *Bewitched* and Mary of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.

Not only did middle-class respondents relate to these characters, they also indicated an

admiration of them (Press 1991:75).

Press found that working-class women had more difficulty identifying with these

characters. Her working-class respondents were vaguely hostile toward these overly

glamorous characters which the middle-class respondents loved and admired. Working-

class women in her study were more likely to expect TV to be realistic, but for them

realism equalled a middle-class realism (Press 1991:102). TV has influenced their ideas

about typical domestic life in America. They were quite critical of depictions of working-

class life on TV (such as on *Alice*), while accepting depictions of middle-class life as

standard (Press 1991:97).

Working-class women not only expected TV to be realistic, but also looked for

information about the world outside of their own experience from TV. Some noted that

they had learned about money management from *The Cosby Show* (Press 1991:108).

Press argues that these working-class women have come to accept TV images as more

real than their own experience (Press 1991:110). However, working-class women also

often spoke of the use of TV to "feel good" or for escape from everyday life. Like Jhally

and Lewis (1992) who are discussed below, she also notes that working-class respondents

in her research struggle for a vocabulary to speak of class structures. She notes that "one

can sense in working-class women's statements a search for words that would be

adequate to conceptualize class differences, armed as are most of us only with concepts

and a vocabulary that steadfastly ignore the importance of class in our social system"

(Press 1991:113).

Press concludes that the hegemonic aspects of TV are more gender-specific for

middle-class women and more class-specific for working-class women. Working-class

women interact with TV as more of a function of their class than their gender (Press

1991:177). Press finds that women's reception of TV is affected by their class, their

gender and their age. In fact, Press argues that TV contributes to women's oppression as

women (noted for middle-class respondents) and as members of the working class (Press

1991:177). The functions of TV are complex and often paradoxical. Press's work raises

the possibility that class and gender are important for the study of mass media audiences-

and television audiences in particular. Working-class and middle-class women in her

study showed different expectations of television. Working-class women expected TV to

be realistic, but their responses show that their evaluation of realism is based more on

their desires for the material comfort of middle-class life, than on some objective

assessment of TV's portrayal of "real" people, places and events. She notes a clear

tension between the desire of working-class women for realism on TV and their

contrasting desire for entertainment and "feeling good." Working-class women also did

not seem to identify with the predominantly middle-class TV characters. Yet, middle-

class characters are more often accepted as realistic by working-class respondents.

TV seems to support what Press calls a "hegemony of middle-class realism" for

working-class women, and may serve to obscure their own position in an inequitably

divided society. For middle-class women, television supports a gender hegemony

depicting women who put family duties ahead of all else. Press notes that the Lucy

character of *I Love Lucy* is a notable exception. This character, always struggling for her

own identity, can work counter-hegemonically for middle-class women. Press found that

working-class women generally disliked the character. Television, it would seem from

Press's findings, has both hegemonic and counter hegemonic possibilities.

Jhally and Lewis (1992) conducted their study of audiences of *The Cosby Show*

with a focus on the variables race, class and gender. There were 52 focus groups of 2-6

people who were subdivided by race (Black and White) and by social class (using

standard socio-economic occupational categories). The issue they were investigating was

how television influences the way we think, and how American society thinks about race

in the post-Civil Rights era (Jhally and Lewis 1992:22). While they worked to achieve

some gender balance in their 52 focus groups, the issue of gender was not much of a

focus of their analysis. The focus was clearly on issues of class and race in the

contemporary U.S.

Jhally and Lewis acknowledge some of the chief drawbacks of ethnographic

audience reception research. In the context of U.S. popular culture, they propose that

ideas are built by association rather than based on reason. They see this mode of thinking

as originating with the rise of the advertising industry and its reliance on appeals based on

association, rather than based on providing consumers with information about products

(Jhally and Lewis 1992:16). "Accordingly, we can and indeed do, hold two conflicting

ideas in our minds without ever realizing it" (Jhally and Lewis 1992:16). For example,

male and female viewers may realize that ideal images of masculinity and femininity that

are portrayed on television are unattainable (without make-up artists, special lighting and

CGI enhancement), while at the same time working to approximate such ideals. TV

helps to cultivate a vast array of mixed messages based on association rather than

persuasion or argument. Jhally and Lewis (1992) perceive that the latter would require

that TV viewers pay attention, which they posit few are inclined to do. Despite this lack

of attention, they see television as having an influence over our view of the world.

Therefore, an understanding of television programming can yield an understanding of

how we view the world (Jhally and Lewis 1992:17).

Most television reception studies find that viewers often talk about the reality of a

show or its characters when evaluating television programmes. Indeed, during my

interviews there were many comments lauding the realism of some show or admonishing

the lack of it in another. At the same time viewers tend to develop a sense of familiarity

with TV characters and families that allows them to blur the distinction between fantasy

and everyday life. This blurring is a rather common finding in reception studies,

including the present research. The comments of respondents in Jhally and Lewis's

research reveal a high degree of engagement with the messages of television. Viewers

speculate on the motivation of characters that often goes beyond the confines of the

narrative that has been presented (Jhally and Lewis 1992:20). Further, a viewer's

assessment of television's realism is not dependent upon the similarity of the character's

experience with the viewer's own. Respondents, the majority of whom are not upper

middle class like the Huxtables, were still able to see them as "normal," a "normal

family" or at least "normal for TV" (Jhally and Lewis 1992:26). The "normal" effaces

social difference that might connote structural inequality in many cases among the

participants in the present research as will be seen in the discussion in Chapter 5. It

would seem that identification with television characters is far more complex a process

than merely articulation of similarities with them. Jhally and Lewis found that working-

class, middle-class, Black, and White viewers were all able to relate to the Huxtable

family depicted on *The Cosby Show*.

The analysis of Black and White responses to *The Cosby Show* revealed that its

depiction of Black people in America was problematic. The show at once broke down

racist attitudes and at the same time reinforced those attitudes. However, this problem

arises out of the images of class that the show represented as well as the context of

American culture, where individual effort should enable any diligent person to succeed;

to achieve the "American Dream." Using U.S. census data, Jhally and Lewis are able to

show that for real Black Americans fortunes are declining, while on TV they are

upwardly mobile. This creates a trap, unless we use both race and class analysis. Too

often race-based explanations are used to explain class-based phenomena. They explain

this transference partly in relation to there being a lack of a language to speak of

structural social class divisions among the respondents.

Among Black respondents the "absence of a notion of class results in the

substitution of the notion of race: 'upper middle class' becomes '[W]hite'" (Jhally and

Lewis 1992: 82). They note that an analysis of class structures is absent from the

vocabulary of American popular culture. Respondents can only fit them into "White"

culture since they lack a notion of upper middle-class culture. What passes for normal on

television is middle or upper class-ness, although because it has this normative presence,

viewers tend not to see the class structures. Social barriers like race and class are invisible

in the TV world. "To acknowledge such barriers would make too many viewers

uncomfortable" (Jhally and Lewis 1992:134). Certainly *The Cosby Show* had to meet

certain popular audience expectations in order to stay on the air.

The class-less, racism-free world depicted on TV lets White people off the hook.

White respondents made many comments indicating that racism was something of the

past, something that we have resolved. The effect of this denial of racism is that

programmes such as Affirmative Action policies are seen as redundant; an especially

dangerous turn in the downsizing, conservative-cut-back type of times we have been

experiencing since the early 1990s. On television a positive image is one of prosperity,

so realistic portrayals of Black people have become negative. In fact, realistic portrayals

of any poor, or even working-class characters are very rare on television. *Roseanne* was

one notable exception. Jhally and Lewis note that other cultures do not elide class

structures in their television programmes (the UK is one obvious example). They argue

that the reasons why American popular culture cannot manage this are,

1) the ideological dominance of the American Dream, and 2) the expectations of

commercial television. In the first instance, the American Dream is sustained by its

ubiquitous presence in our popular culture. Class barriers are made largely invisible as

the image of success is portrayed as the norm. In the second instance, the system of

commercial television production requires immediate returns on investment; innovative

programmes are often not given a chance to find an audience. Some recent examples of

innovative shows that were cancelled before they could find a large enough audience to

sell are *Firefly* (FOX, 12 episodes, 2002), *American Gothic* (CBS, 22 episodes, 1998),

and *Nowhere Man* (UPN, 25 episodes, 1994). Such programs had huge cult followings,

if web sites and news groups are any indication, and all had high praise from critics in

such publications as TV Guide[3]. They were cancelled while there was some indication,

via petitions and letter campaigns, that they did have a loyal audience. Innovation is often

feared in television where productions costs are high and advertisers will not wait for

---

[3]One critic comment posted on http://members.tripod.com/~Gothic_Phantom/praise.html states
that, "Gothic is an American classic. The premiere episode is as frightening and atmospheric as we've seen
in years - that includes the X Files and Twin Peaks... The year's gutsiest program... A compelling chance
taking series. - Steven Cole Smith, Fort Worth Star Telegram."

high ratings. What Jhally and Lewis's study ultimately sheds light on is "that we need to be more attentive to the attitudes cultivated by normal, everyday television" (Jhally and Lewis 1992:143).

In their 1990 (released in paperback in 1993) study of cross-cultural readings of *Dallas*, Liebes and Katz investigated the reception of this programme in the U.S., Israel and Japan. Their purpose was to explicate how a programme like *Dallas* could be so universally understandable and how it was understood outside the U.S. (Liebes and Katz 1993:3). They were curious about the attraction of this programme across cultures, but in their findings observed that "viewers are much more alert and able than most critics give them credit for and that they put even highly standardized television programmes to a variety of unanticipated uses (Liebes and Katz 1993: 154). Their research, although focussed primarily on ethnicity and viewership, yielded more broadly applicable findings about the involvement of viewers with the television that they watch.

Liebes and Katz developed an extremely detailed coding scheme from a sub-sample of their focus group interviews. In an effort to counter-balance what they perceive as a lack of rigour in focus group research, they created a rather unwieldy coding scheme. At a general level their codes were useful, but I found they were not specifically applicable to my data. The difficulty in applying their scheme lies largely in the focus of their research on ethnicity, rather than class or gender and their use of focus groups exclusively as a method of data gathering. My analysis of class, gender and viewership could only make use of their types of involvement and framings in a general way. Their general categories of involvement and associated types of viewer opposition can and have

been broadly applied to the comments by participants in the present research.

In their study, Liebes and Katz (1993) found that two basic types of framing

emerged, the *referential* and the *critical*. Each mode indicates a different type of

involvement on the part of the viewer. The referential frame reveals connections between

the programme and real life (Liebes and Katz 1993:100) "Referential readings are

probably more emotionally involving; critical readings are more cognitive, dealing as

they do with genres, dynamics of plot, thematics of the story and so on" (Liebes and Katz

1993:100). Liebes and Katz found that there were far more referential than critical

statements made by viewers in their study. This does not mean that they concluded that

most viewers accepted a hegemonic reading. "Emotional involvement...need not be

passive and unthinking; one may accept the reality of a text and actively confront it,

nevertheless" (Liebes and Katz 1993:113). Even hegemonic readers enter into

negotiation with the text to some degree. In the present research it was clear that

referential framings were among the majority.

Their template offers a way to typify broad forms of involvement in television

programmes. Liebes and Katz define involvement in terms of investment of resources

such as thought, time, energy, or emotion (1993:100). Referential readings are likely

more emotionally involving (hot), while critical readings are more cognitive (cool)[4]. It is

not a matter of difference in degree of involvement but a difference in type of

involvement. The referential is exemplified by two types of involvement: *moral* and

---

[4]This usage does not follow McLuhan's, but rather refers to responses of viewers.

ludic. "The more traditional groups involve themselves morally, that is, they relate to the

programme as real and argue with it" (Liebes and Katz 1993:128). The ludic form of

involvement often entails role playing, fantasizing "tak[ing] an idea from the programme

and play[ing] with it subjunctively in their minds or in interaction with others" (Liebes

and Katz 1993:104). Critical readings are associated with *ideological* and *aesthetic* forms

of involvement (Liebes and Katz 1993:128). Ideological involvement is exemplified in

responses of concern about manipulative messages in programmes. For example a

viewer might "express awareness of the politics of the programme and of a theme or

message to which they are opposed" (Liebes and Katz 1993:129). Aesthetic involvement

reveals "appraisal of the programme not for the values of its characters or for the

ideological manipulation of its viewers, but for its artistic quality" (Liebes and Katz

1993:89). If viewers complain that the story is endless and there is never any resolution,

this could be considered aesthetic involvement.

Each of the four types of involvement can be associated with a type of defence

against the influence of a programme. Liebes and Katz determined that each form of

involvement included a mechanism of defence (1993:128). In speaking of defence, they

are really referring to types of opposition—oppositional readings. The types of

opposition developed by Liebes and Katz are reproduced in Table 1.

Table 1

Types of Opposition

	Referential	Critical
Hot (emotionally involved)	Moral	Ideological
Cool (cognitively involved)	Ludic	Aesthetic

(slightly modified from Figure 8.5 in Liebes and Katz 1993: 128)

Table 1 shows that the combination referential/hot may produce moral opposition

to the content of a programme. The combination critical/hot may produce ideological

opposition through an awareness of the manipulation of the programme. It should be

noted that the forms of opposition are diverse (Liebes and Katz 1993:129). The types of

opposition are represented schematically in Table 1, but are not reducible to this cross-

tabulation. For example moral opposition could be either referential, when one accepts

the message as reality and then argues with it, or critical, when one shows an awareness

of the construction of an ideological message (Liebes and Katz 1993:129).

Liebes and Katz found that the viewing process, regardless of one's culture, is

complex (Liebes and Katz 1993:151). Such programmes as *Dallas* may transmit a

homogeneous message to the global village, but there is a "pluralism in the decoding"

(Liebes and Katz 1993:152). They observed different levels of involvement from viewers

of different cultures. In addition, they found a relationship between type of involvement

and defence against the dominant ideology/meaning encoded in the programme. They

also saw vulnerabilities associated with each type of defence. They suggest that each type

of opposition might both defend a viewer and possibly open them to influence (Liebes

and Katz 1993: 129). A moral defence entails some level of acceptance of TV content

and responding to it as worthy of argument. It will be seen that female participants in this

research tend to utilize a moral defence and are both defended by and made vulnerable

due to utilizing that form of involvement. Liebes and Katz suggest that ideological

defence makes a viewer vulnerable to assuming the opposite of the message they

encounter in TV programming is *the* Truth. An aesthetic defence risks letting the

ideological message slide by without reckoning with it and the ludic defence may inhibit

serious engagement with the media and its messages. However, these types of

involvement and associated defence positions are conceived of as ideal types or

tendencies; it remains possible to engage in moral opposition while using a critical frame.

　　　While the findings of Liebes and Katz have been valuable to the present research,

their use of the language of "opposition" in reading frames is somewhat problematic in

the current context. Reception analyses have moved beyond such rigid categories of

readings as either oppositional, negotiated or aligned with the dominant encoding of any

given TV text. As discussed above there is a sense among reception researchers that there

are a wide variety of potential meanings to be made from any TV text. In their own work,

Liebes and Katz suggest that viewers put TV texts to a variety of uses, not merely

acceptance or opposition. Their use of such terminology seems associated with a concern

for rigour and the possibility of systematisation of qualitative focus group data. Despite

this framing and their outmoded terminology, their work has been utilized selectively in

the present research (particularly in the matter of designing the focus group interviews and the conceptualization of viewers' general framings).

Each of these studies shares many similarities to my own, including similar aims (as seen above in comparison to my research purpose and questions), theoretical premises and some similar findings. Press utilizes hegemony theory, British cultural studies and feminist theories in her research. Jhally and Lewis also credit British cultural studies and Gramsci while noting that they are trying not to bog readers down with "theoretical abstractions or scholarly citations" (Jhally and Lewis 1992:xv). It is clear in their analysis that their work is influenced by Marxist theoretics of class and inequality within capitalist systems.

Morley (1986) provides a critique of post-Marxist theorizing of subjectivity and ideology suggesting that they leave us with a passive notion of the subject—the viewer (Morley 1986: 43). Instead he "want[s] to try to formulate a position from which we can see the person actively producing meaning from the restricted range of cultural resources which his or her structural position has allowed them access to" (Morley 1986:43). Therefore, he asserts that we cannot determine from a viewer's race, class, gender, or age how they will read a given text "though these factors do indicate what cultural code she or he has access to" (Morley 1986:43). It is evident that race, class, gender or age are not conceived of as determinants of viewing in some rigid functional sense, but that they are all seen to be salient in the process of viewing.

In a similar vein, Liebes and Katz note that through their research they hope to prove that viewing is an active and involving experience and that the nature of

involvement varies with the cultural background one brings to viewing (1993:21).

Hence, their interest in interviewing groups of people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Liebes and Katz are also utilizing Marxist theoretics with a focus on the notion that media

can be consumed oppositionally and not only hegemonically (Liebes and Katz 1993:

114).

These works are primarily based on data collected with British or American

viewers, with the exception of Liebes and Katz. None of these works has studied

Canadian viewers as mine does. The situation of Canadian viewers is unique, in that most

of the programming that is consumed is produced in the United States. While it can be

argued that there are significant differences between Canadian and American society,

there are also many similarities. We have come to share a dominant consumer culture

and Canadian viewers are accustomed to their TV content being primarily American in

origin. Although it is beyond the scope of this research, it would certainly be worth

pursuing research that would explore the impact, if any, of our predominantly foreign TV

content.

While these studies all embrace the notion that we must utilize multi-axial

understandings of inequality and oppression, they tend to focus on certain axes while

putting others into the background. My research is focussed on gender and class, with

less emphasis and attention to issues of race, ethnicity and age. While Press also was

interested in an analysis of class, gender and viewership, her focus was on women

viewers only. Ang (1996) has noted that work on gender and media consumption has

"tended to concentrate almost exclusively on women, not men and media consumption"

(Ang 1996:110). Perhaps this is due to the large feminist presence in film studies, which has also branched out into cultural studies more generally. Much of the research on gender and viewing has been conducted with women as the viewing subjects (Gauntlett and Hill 1999:217). My research involved equal numbers of male and female interviewees in the hopes of being able to make some comparisons of how they view television. Of the other research which has looked at male and female viewers, most do not have a focus on gender and viewing. For example, the research conducted by Jhally and Lewis (1992) and Liebes and Katz (1993) included men and women in their focus group interviews, but neither study interrogated gender as a factor of viewership.

While there are many similar findings between my research and these studies, there are also areas where our findings differ and where my research addresses issues not addressed by any of these previous works.

Conclusion

This literature review provides a point of departure for the investigation of the central research questions of this research. The research is focussed on an investigation of class, gender and television viewership. The conceptualization of audiences and viewers as active and engaged in their viewing has been established in the literature as discussed above. However, viewers are not always engaged and purposeful in their viewing, sometimes viewers glance rather than gaze at television. This research is designed to explore factors that have an impact on where viewers land on a glance/gaze continuum of viewership as well as whether viewing is casual or ritualized and if there is any discernible gender- or class influenced mode of viewing television.

The discussions above of television texts reveals that the content of television can be read in a number of ways by variously situated viewers. However, there are dominant viewing positions that are correlated to both the status quo and what producers believe will garner the largest audiences. The desire for large audiences to sell to advertisers is what creates the openness of television texts. The openness of TV texts stimulates interest from a variety of differently situated viewers, and thereby allows for a variety of possible readings of the same content. This means that viewers who are differentially situated along axes of gender, class or race may decode different meanings than those encoded by the producers of the content. This research explores just how open TV texts are to various reading positions and to what extent reading positions are attached to one's gender and/or class position. The present research is largely limited to readings positions that have links to the viewer's gender or class, however the interview schedule (discussed below in Chapter 3) was only semi-structured so that participants would have the opportunity to reveal their more idiosyncratic viewing styles as well.

Class and gender are conceived of as axes of power along which viewers' positions are contingent on many interrelated factors. It remains difficult to locate viewers in a specific class or gender position since the very intersection of class and gender (not to mention race or age, which are not within the scope of this research) is likely to have an impact, not just on viewing, but on everyday experiences as well. Participants are categorized into broad class and gender categories, but these are abstractions necessitated by the practical needs of organized research. Despite this somewhat bifurcated categorization of the participants into one of two gender categories

and into one of two social classes, I have approached the data with a multi-axial

understanding of class and gender.

I hope that applying these fluid conceptualizations of class and gender will help to

reveal the class and gender make-up of TV content that is viewed by participants as well

as the ways in which their own location along axes of gender and class impact their

process of meaning-making while viewing TV.

The four model studies that have inspired this research each offer valuable

insights that are expanded within the present research. Morley's work provides a clear

conceptualization of TV viewing as embedded in the everyday of viewers. In his study,

the setting was the family-household, in the present research the setting is co-educational

student housing with often larger groups sharing viewing space than in the traditional

domestic household. Nevertheless, Morley's insights on the embeddedness of TV

viewing can be both interrogated and expanded in research conducted in the university

residence setting. Further, Morley's findings offer a starting point from which to

compare the present findings of gendered modes of viewing among the research

participants. Jhally and Lewis's research reveals the complex class readings of TV

viewers and the intersection between various axes of power along which viewers are

situated. Although, they focus on race and class, many of their insights on the class

positions and readings of viewers have proven useful models for the present research

which is focussed on class, gender and viewing. The findings of Andrea Press have

provided the point of departure for an investigation of gender and viewership. Press is

lacking any data on male viewers, which the present research provides as a method of

comparing women's and men's viewership. Finally, Liebes and Katz provide a helpful matrix of readings that can generally be applied to the present data. Their research also offers evidence of a complex process at work when viewers watch television: a process that includes myriad salient factors such as ethnicity and viewing context.

This research investigates the salience of class and gender to the viewing process among viewers who are also class and gender identified. The method by which the participants were identified into their class and gender groupings is discussed in Chapter 3 below. The broad research questions arose from a review of the literature on: TV audiences and viewership; conceptualizations of class and gender; textual and content analysis of class and gender on TV; and an analysis of the neglected areas of viewership in the extant reception studies. The research questions arise as important in the search for a greater understanding of TV viewership and the viewing process as we begin the new millennium. The following questions guided the research process. What modes of viewing are employed by the participants? Are there modes of viewing that can be seen as class-based or gendered? How, if at all, do these modes of viewing intersect with each other? What is the gender and class make-up of the TV images that are part of the viewing experiences of the research participants? How do participants conceive of class and gender, in general? How do participants read class on television? How do participants read gender on television? Finally, when reading televisual images does the viewer's class or gender have any noticeable salience? The questions are rather open because the process of viewing is one that is contingent upon so many possible intervening factors as discussed above. The data gathering cast a wide net in order to

generate data on viewership that has not been plentiful in the literature. In particular the

paucity of reception analysis focussed on gender and utilizing male research participants

is one gap in the existing literature that this research seeks to fill. The present study also

enters the liminal space opened up by the turn in audience research that has been

emerging since the mid-1990s (see Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; Alasuutari 1999;

Gauntlett and Hill 1999; and Morley 2000).

Chapter 3 - Methodology

My research methodology, derived in part from the work of Dorothy Smith, is

rooted in the notion that the everyday world renders social organization visible. Smith

(1990) stresses that an "insider's sociology" has as its goal to find out how the terrain

under study is put together rather than theorizing this in advance (Smith 1990:7).

When putting this notion into practice it is imperative that we do not transform

people into objects (Oakley 1980:41). Social science research is not a one-sided process

where the researcher collects data from the researched and there is no effect on either of

them. Rather, social science research directly affects those who are the "object"[5] of

study. This aspect of feminist methodology is an important guideline to keep researchers

from objectifying those who agree to be research participants. It is important to

interrogate the data provided by research participants and also to endeavour to give back

to those who have offered their "everyday life" to be observed and analyzed by social

researchers. Respondents in this study are always referred to as research participants in

order to indicate the two-way process of the research. The participants will be mailed a

summary of the findings so that they can see the outcome of their participation and

therefore learn from themselves, as I have been able to learn from them.

Further, this method explores the social relations individuals bring into being in

and through their actual practices. Focus group interviews can simulate "the process of

negotiation through which individual readings are selectively accepted and rejected, re-

---

[5]"Object" here refers to actual human participants in research rather than inanimate objects such as
texts. However, textual analysis is a "construction" and as such does have affect on the text at least in terms
of the parameters of its interpretation.

97

fashioned as candidates for incorporation into the culture" (Liebes and Katz 1993:82).

Watching groups of students watching television provides a glimpse into the social and

cultural relations that play out during such activities. These everyday experiences are not

just fascinating stories about individuals but rather are attempts to explicate common

bases of experience grounded in specific sets of social relations. The aim is to explicate

institutional relations that constitute everyday worlds.

My research starts from the everyday as articulated by university students who

view television in a co-ed residence, family home, or student shared housing. It is

important to locate the research participants in their social context. The strength of

ethnographic[6] work is the possibility to gain a contextual understanding of the

phenomenon (Morley 1992:184). Morley argues that we must focus on the embedded

audience. "Watching television" is ill-defined short hand for the multiplicity of situated

practices and experiences in which television audiencehood is embedded (Morley

1992:197). "Television is everyday life. To study the one is at the same time to study the

other" (Silverstone as quoted in Morley 1992:197). Obviously, there is more to everyday

life than television, but television is an activity that is embedded in everyday life for most

North Americans.

My analysis is an examination of the experience of television viewing as it is

conceptualized by the research participants. My methodology seeks to discover order and

themes rather than impose them from the outside. Spradley (1979), Kirby and McKenna

---

[6]While my own methodology is ethnographic in nature, taking the interview style, it is **not** ethnography *per se*.

(1989), and Smith (1990), argue that structures of order remain outside the awareness of research participants. This is where the analytical skills of the researcher enter into the process, after the interviews have been recorded and coded. It must be noted that the researcher's interpretation is an interpretation and is by extension a construction. We have to recognize the subjectivity of the researcher and scrutinize its impact on the research (Morley 1992:190).

The most important task in the preparation of this project is doing "conceptual baggage" (Kirby and McKenna 1989:21). It is important to deal with one's conceptual baggage from the beginning and throughout the research process. I have kept a journal of my thoughts and reactions to the research process. Every time I found myself thinking about the research I noted these thoughts in the journal (which I have carried with me from the time I began formulating the method). The purpose of this practice is to facilitate my own awareness of biassing as well as inform the locating of myself in terms of the research. My location is important to the project in a number of ways, not the least of which is the entry into the research setting and the establishment of rapport with the research participants. If I can clarify where I am coming from and what my intentions are, I can articulate these more clearly and fairly to those that I ask to engage in this research process with me-for us.

Data Gathering -The Method

Today's students are of a generation that has been regularly exposed to televisual imagery their whole lives. Meaning production during viewing is not a solitary process,

but rather a social and public one[7]. The group-viewing situation can yield some

interesting data. Liebes and Katz (1993) suggest that observation of viewing in public

spaces may help to determine if the more obtrusive methods of investigation are

exaggerating findings of alertness among viewers (Liebes and Katz 1993:155). The

residence community brings viewers of diverse social, ethnic, class, and gender locations

together. It is for these reasons – the familiarity with televisual imagery; public viewing

situation, and diversity of the community - that the residence community was chosen as

the primary site of this research.

Statistics Canada has released statistics on amount of viewing by age and province

that were collected in the fall of 1997, just months before the individual interviews began.

It is instructive to look at the general viewing patterns, in terms of time spent and the

gender differences among viewers of the university age group. We can see in Table 2

below that males watch significantly less television than females who watch an average of

5 hours more per week according to the Canada-wide totals. The males in the university-

aged, 18-24 group watch the least amount of television according to these data for Ontario

where the present research was conducted.

The research participants are all students attending a southern Ontario university.

In order to garner participants I mailed out a questionnaire, which formed the background

to the research. The questionnaire was sent out to each of the 530 co-ed residents of a

residence hall on campus. All subjects who participated in the research filled out a

---

[7]Few residents have a TV in their own room. I would speculate that this is because, at the time I
interviewed residence students, Housing Services would not hook up cable to individual rooms in the dorm
style residences. Common room TVs had all the available cable/pay services and were utilized by most of
the residents.

questionnaire, even those asked to participate later in the process. Due to confidentiality

issues the Housing Office would only provide me with the P.O. box numbers of students.

I had to rely on respondents to provide their name on the name tab, which was attached

to the questionnaire (See Appendix A). Each questionnaire was numbered and the P.O.

box number was cross-tabulated with the questionnaire number. In total I received 89

questionnaires from residents of the hall and from other students who were invited to

participate after the initial mailing.

Table 2
Average hours per week of television viewing, in Ontario by age/sex
groups - Fall 1997

Average hours/week

	Average hours/week
Men	
18 +	21.1
18 - 24	13.7
25 - 34	18.1
35 - 49	18.9
50 - 59	21.7
60 +	31.7
Women	
18 +	25.4
18 - 24	18.9
25 - 34	21.6
35 - 49	22.5
50 - 59	25.7
60 +	35.3

Basic survey data have been collected by BBM from a sample of Canadians aged two and over. Viewing data for each viewer cover seven consecutive days and were collected using a diary-type questionnaire over a period of four weeks (October 29 to November 25, 1997). Data is from Statistics Canada, the Daily Jan 29, 1999
http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/990129/d990129.htm#ART2).

This questionnaire provides a sense of the diversity of the sample on various

indicators such as class, race and gender. In addition, some information about general

viewing habits was gathered through this questionnaire. Participants were asked about

times they viewed, what shows they thought of as favourites, whether they watched alone

or in groups, whether they planned their viewing, whether they engaged in other activities

while viewing and other questions about general viewing habits as indicated on the

questionnaire (see Appendix A). As this is background to the primary data, only basic

statistics were generated to augment the research findings.

The questionnaire was useful in determining the composition of the focus groups,[8]

selecting interview participants and in developing the focus group and interview

questions. The participants for the focus group and individual interviews were all drawn

from the original sample of 89 questionnaires. Further, the programme(s) of focus for

this research were selected based on viewing habits of the research population. Questions

18 and 20 were used to determine which television texts are most familiar to the

respondents. I believe it is preferable to engage participants with a text with which they

are familiar. The focus group research was focussed on *ER*, a text that is popular and

familiar to many of the research participants. *ER* was in its second season (and the top

Neilsen rated programme of the 1995-96 season in the U.S.)[9] when I began this research

and it was very popular in the common TV lounges of the residence hall. According to

popular press at the time, *ER* garnered 37 million viewers a week and that was split about

---

[8]Focus groups can be composed either randomly or purposively (Berg 1995:79). When the focus is on how certain social characteristics (ie gender, race, class) may inform their readings of television, a group composed of persons of like gender, age, ethnicity etc. is desirable. It is assumed that groups composed with like social characteristics share a definable set of attitudes, values and social relations which derive from the shared characteristic(s).

[9] Based on information gathered from the 1997 A&E Entertainment Almanac and posted on http://www.chez.com/fbibler/TVstats/1995-96.html

evenly between male and female viewers (Scheller 1996). However, it became clear in

subsequent stages of the research that sitcoms were more universally popular across

gender lines. *ER* might have more appeal to male viewers than most drama series, but it

was not very familiar to male research participants. It would be valuable to have focus

group data focussed on a particular sitcom with which to compare these data. *Friends*

proved to be the most popular show among both women and men in this sample

As further preparation I followed the most popular programmes throughout the

1995-96 and 1996-97 television seasons (*ER, Seinfeld, Friends, Roseanne, Chicago

Hope, The X-Files, Beverly Hills 90210, Party of Five, The Simpsons,* and *Melrose

Place*). It is impossible to survey the entire field of television imagery that the

participants have experienced. In order to be familiar with the widest possible field of

programmes, I also followed popular entertainment news magazines such as

Entertainment Weekly. Analysis of the questionnaire data reveals that the only day-time

programming with any popular following is *The Young and the Restless.* The paucity of

stated interest in day-time programming may be mitigated by the university course

schedule which concentrates class time during the day, but generally ends at the same

time that *The Young and the Restless* airs.

The data collected comprised three components, plus the background

questionnaire. First, I observed behaviour at the time of viewing. This observation

occurred during prime time viewing hours during the period of March 4, 1996 to March

20, 1996. These observations took place on weekdays (Monday-Thursday) during the

observation period. It was common for the students (a majority of whom had a parental

home within 1-2 hours ground travel) to return home on Fridays and return to campus on

Sunday evening so I did not observe viewing on Fridays or during the weekends.

Television viewing in residence, much like in the home, is often interrupted by other

social activities. During one evening during which I intended to observe viewing there

was a road trip planned by the social committee of the Hall. Of 530 residents 300 were

attending the event, leaving few for me to observe. In addition, the television schedule of

repeat episodes also affected my chances of generating meaningful observation; when a

repeat is aired students generally vacate the common room if they saw the show on first

run. It is due to such contingencies that I chose the duration of the observation of viewing

so that I could ensure that I would have valuable data from which to work. When

engaged in this phase of the data gathering I participated as a viewer in the common room

on a randomly selected floor each night. There are 10 floors in the building and I used a

10-sided die to decide which one I would observe. I have a separate notebook for my

field notes which include the date, time, channel, floor, my observations and a synopsis of

each programme that aired during the observation session. As a participant observer, I

tried to note as many aspects of the viewing scene as possible. I noted how many viewers

were in the room, what they were doing besides watching TV, noted the general content

of conversations and whether they occurred during the programme or not. I tried to keep

track of gender composition, but was unable to observe the class of viewers. A typed copy

of my field notes from an observation session on March 20, 1996 is contained in

Appendix E. These observations were vital to the data on modes of viewing which is

discussed in Chapter 4. I wrote these notes as soon as I returned to my apartment from the

common room where I had been observing. The insights gained from this stage of the

data gathering were helpful in the development of questions and probes posed at the

subsequent individual and focus group interviews. These data also provide another line of

sight on the viewing practices of the research participants.

Second, focus groups were conducted with participants of the study. Focus

groups are preferably composed of between 6 and 12 people (the optimum is 8 or 9) who

are similar to each other (Blum and Foos 1985:235). Groups for this research generally

conformed to this guideline. There were 5 focus groups in total. Organizing focus groups

tends to be a time consuming and complicated process. Sometimes participants simply do

not show up. I invited 10 participants to each group so that if some did not attend there

would be enough participants left to generate good data.

The background questionnaire was used to guide the composition of these focus

groups. Questions 1-16 (see Appendix A) are based on indicators of class, race, age,

ethnicity, and family make-up and groups were composed which contained participants of

like characteristics in as much as this was possible given the limited number in the sample

pool. A half sheet was attached to the questionnaire requesting the respondent's name and

times they might be available for focus group interviews (see Appendix A). Times listed

on these sheets were used to help ensure that the focus groups were as well attended as

possible. Those who indicated that they were willing to participate in a focus group were

invited to one of the five groups: male, minority, working-class, women1 and women 2.[10]

---

[10]These groups were structured this way based on the characteristics of those who had both
responded to the questionnaire and indicated a willingness to participate in further interviews.

These socio-demographic groupings are used to try to isolate (however artificially) some

of the potential positionings of viewers. Male viewers may take up a masculine mode of

viewing, or perhaps a feminine one, and perhaps not always the same gender position

depending on programme, viewing context and other factors. However, it was necessary

to try to isolate potential positionings in order to try to get at their influence, if any, on

viewership and I used those that are commonly occurring in the literature (see above).

Research on gender and viewing has routinely taken samples of female viewers and

collected data with the intention of interrogating gendered viewership—how do women

view television and what connections are there between how they view, what they view,

when they view, and their gender? As discussed above, gender is coming to be viewed as

a dependent variable in social research, particularly that conducted by feminists.

However, research indicates that many viewers seem to take up viewing positions that are

associated with traditional norms of gender behaviour in our society (Morley 1986, 2001;

Press 1991; Livingstone 1994). However, as van Zoonen and others have argued, we

need to sever the taken-for-granted connection between one's gender (class, race, age,

sexual orientation, etc) and particular viewing positions they may take up in one instance

or all instances of television viewing. Severing this taken-for-granted association and

ignoring socio-demographic categories that tend to organize our research and our social

structure are different matters. I believe that in our society most people do have an

affinity with reading positions that are consistent with their position along continua such

as the axes of gender, class or race, but that this is by no means necessary, fixed, nor

constant. In fact, I hope to show how the messages about class and gender, the positions

available to viewers of different classes and genders that are available on television, serve

to reinforce the dominant and popular conceptions of gender and class in our society.

However, as noted above, television texts are open to a variety of readings that are not

always consistent with dominant ideologies. By interrogating class, gender and

viewership, we may find some clues as to when class or gender may be more salient in a

particular viewing situation.

I invited potential participants to focus groups by asking them in person and I

followed up with an invitation in writing with the confirmed time and place. The focus

group interviews took place in large rooms on the main floor of the residence building in

which the participants lived. Participants were asked to sign the consent form (see

Appendix B) upon agreeing to participate.

The focus group interviews were conducted from April 1-April 9, 1996. These

focus groups were semi-structured and were focussed on exploring the participant's

experience of viewing. At the beginning of the session participants were asked for

contact information (home phone, home address) for future contact and so that a brief

summary of the research findings can be mailed to them at the conclusion of the research.

The session started with a brief explanation of the procedure and discussion of ground

rules (speak one at a time, there are no right or wrong answers etc.) and then participants

introduced themselves. I provided pop and food and we viewed an episode of the hospital

drama *ER*. This drama, which airs on NBC Thursdays at 10pm, is set in a hectic County

Hospital emergency room in downtown Chicago. County is also a teaching hospital

where the main characters are in various stages of completing med-school or instructing

others who are medical students as well as treating patients. The show, which is presently

in its tenth season, blends the personal and professional lives of these professionals in

training. The focus is on the young doctors and not on their mentors; who make

infrequent appearances. *ER* has long been on top of the U.S. Neilson ratings, rarely (3

times) dropping below number five during the recent 2003-2004 season[11]. Its average

reported viewership in the United States was approximately 30 million per week at the

time the data were collected[12]. It is shot in the style of MTV videos with short scenes and

rapid transitions between them, especially in the trauma rooms. Perhaps its claim to fame

is the routine depiction of the removal and repair of a variety of innards which

nevertheless do not make the audience squeamish. Since not all participants are regular

viewers I elected to show an episode prior to the focus group. I selected an episode that

aired during the February sweeps rating period. The episodes aired during sweeps

periods are created to capture as broad an audience as possible so it seemed likely to

involve the non-viewers as well as those who may have seen the episode in its first run.

The episode "Baby Shower" focussed on motherhood and birth, but involved male

characters to a large degree.

Once the interview schedule for the focus groups was developed, I conducted a

self-interview. This interview was not tape recorded, but rather answers were recorded in

writing. Reflections from my own responses were useful in improving the interview

schedule and in establishing my own answers in advance of the actual interview. The

---

11 Based on analysis of U. S. Neilson ratings posted weekly on www.canoe.ca
12 Based on figures printed in *Entertainment Weekly*

purpose of self-interviewing is to establish points of potential bias or interference in the natural flow of the focus group among the participants.

Prior to conducting the focus group interviews I held a practice interview with 5 graduate students from the social sciences and humanities. The purpose of a practice interview is to test the length of the schedule and to see if the questions are eliciting the expected topics of discussion. After the practice interview we discussed the questions and I made notes of the feedback of the practice participants. The practice focus group was audio recorded, but not transcribed.

Open-ended questions (See Appendix C for the focus group interview schedule) were used to attempt to ferret out how the nature of involvement in a programme varies with the socio-cultural background one brings to viewing. The questions began at a general level and then moved into specific questions focussed on issues of class, race and gender on television. Focus groups occurred in the residence building in a large room with a table. Sitting at a table is desirable; this allows for eye contact with other participants. The sessions were video and audio tape recorded[13] This type of data gathering often reveals much in the body language of participants which is more easily preserved for study through video taped record, although, in this case the frame of the video was so wide that it was difficult to discern body language from the image in any detail.

This type of research protocol focuses on the attitudes of the research participants.

---

[13]Audio tape is more easily transcribed with stenographic machines which are readily available, video tape would prove more difficult for transcription.

their frameworks and categories. The interview schedule is very open allowing for

participants to talk as much as they want to. This openness often allows participants to

open up topics of interest to the researcher on their own; it lets them set the agenda

(Lewis 1996 personal communication). The researcher keeps topics in mind and attempts

to guide the focus groups in these directions if such information is not elicited from the

open questions.

Focus group interviews allow the researcher to observe the process of interaction

between participants (Berg 1995:91): "Meanings and answers arising during focus group

interviews are socially constructed rather than individually created" (Berg 1995:72). It is

based on this socially constructed group interaction that for topics of a cognitive or deep

attitudinal nature focus groups work well (Berg 1995:74). A partial transcript of one of

the focus group interviews, conducted with an all female group on April 8, 1996 is

included as Appendix D.

The focus group interviews were transcribed (verbatim) and printed. The

transcription of interviews with as many as 8 participants was an extremely time

consuming process lasting about 3 months. The printout and computer file were both

used to analyse these data. I found the word processor search function invaluable when

attempting to group similar reactions to the programme. Once the transcription was

complete, each participant who had participated in the focus groups was coded by class

and gender. The same colour codes as developed below for the individual interview data

were used to make margin notes and to begin to process emerging themes in the data.

The preliminary analysis of the focus group data was vital to the creation of the schedule

for the individual interviews. This analysis was quite time consuming and meant that the

individual interview schedule was not ready for practice interviews until December 1996,

at which point all of the interviewees were unavailable until the beginning of the

following Winter term.

Table 3[14]

Focus Group Composition by class and gender

Focus Group	W♀	W♂	M♀	M♂	Total
Male	0	0	0	3	3
Minority	2	2	1	2	7
WC	5	0	2	1	8
Women 1	1	0	3	0	4
Women 2	1	0	7	0	8

The table above indicates the composition of the focus groups by class and gender

of participants and provides the total participants in each group.

Finally, I conducted individual interviews with 32 participants drawn from the 89

respondents to the questionnaire. The interviews were conducted from February 13,

1997 through to May 15, 1997. Interviewees were divided by their class and gender. Due

to the small sample size and the class composition of the participants, class is here

---

[14]M indicates middle-class, W indicates working-class, ♀ indicates female and ♂ indicates male

111

divided into working class (W) and middle class (M). The classification of participants

was based primarily on their self-identification within four choices (upper class, middle

class, working class or poverty class) where those choosing upper class or middle class

are placed in the category "middle class" and those choosing working class or poverty

class are placed in the category "working class." However, based on close examination

of responses to questions from the background questionnaire regarding mother's and

father's occupations, household income, and number of siblings, respondents' self-

identified class location was tested. All respondents to the questionnaire were coded by

class (see appendix F for protocol used for coding) and gender and from these I

randomly[15] selected the 32 students to participate in individual interviews. My class

coding was reviewed by a colleague and any participants that we categorized differently

were reviewed again based on the coding protocol. Occupations were operationalized as

working class or middle class:[16]

> **Working class** occs are generally those that require low skill level, training or
> education; have traditionally low wages [such that they are basically living
> paycheque to paycheque and that getting laid off has immediate ramifications - ie,
> likely little capacity to save $]; have little input into the work they do, these are
> jobs where the tasks are assigned by supervisors/managers and the worker has
> little control over how it is to be done.

> **Middle Class** occs are defined here by, generally high wages/ input by the
> worker as to how things get done; often there is a supervisory function;
> professional occupations fit in here; work is more mental than manual;
> generally requires some post-secondary education.

The interviews were conducted with eight middle-class women, eight working-

---

[15] I selected numbers from a hat.

[16] These definitions are from the coding protocol in Appendix D.

class women, eight middle-class men and eight working-class men. At this point in the

research all participants were assigned a unique identifier comprised of a three digit

number (taken from the number of their background questionnaire), a symbol indicating

their gender, and an M or W to indicate their assigned class category.

The individual interview schedule is included as Appendix G. The schedule was

developed from an analysis of previous reception analyses, from an analysis of the focus

group interviews and from a survey of literature pertaining to ethnographic interviewing.

Prior to using this instrument, I conducted a written self-interview as I had done with the

focus group interview schedule. The original interview schedule was tested with a male

and a female participant from the residence Hall community, but not part of the survey

pool. These practice interviews were tape recorded and resulted in improvements to the

interview schedule. The majority of the interviews took place in my apartment in the

residence hall, 2 interviews took place in the homes of the participants. Interviews took

approximately one hour to complete and participants were invited to add any further

comments at the close of the interview. Those who had not also participated in a focus

group interview were asked to sign the consent form and provide contact information

prior to the start of the interview[17]. It is my intention to provide a brief summary of the

research findings to all the participants at the conclusion of the research.[18]

The individual interviews were transcribed verbatim and printed out. When large

margins were used, the fully transcribed interviews amounted to 517 pages of text. In an

---

[17]There were 30 participants in the total of the focus groups; 20 of these also participated in the individual interviews.

[18] Every effort will be made to contact the participants via their permanent mailing addresses that were provided at the beginning of the research process. In some cases it may not be possible to follow through on my intentions to inform participants of the findings they helped to generate.

attempt to make the information manageable, I created a four page worksheet for each

interview. It contained the main sections and space to note the substance of the interview.

The worksheet is included as Appendix H. While this was a necessary step, it was still

too much information to sift though and analyse. In order to try to parcel out the data into

manageable sections, a separate colour code was selected for each of the four categories

(pink-W, purple-M, blue-W, and green-M). Notes were made in the print out, using these

colours to indicate to which category the speaker belonged. In addition, coloured index

cards were used so that sections of the interview could be analysed more closely. A set of

index cards was created for the sections where participants discussed; 1) men on TV, 2)

women on TV, 3) depictions of visible minorities, 4) middle-class shows, and 5) working-

class shows. These sets of cards were easily laid out and compared to each other to find

themes, similarities, and contradictions in the data.

The use of multiple research strategies increases the depth of understanding an

investigation can yield (Berg 1995:6). The four-part data collection (background

questionnaire, focus group interviews, individual interviews and participant observation)

provides for triangulation which helps to add validity to qualitative research data. Every

method is a different line of sight aimed at the process of viewing. By combining these

lines of sight a better, more substantive picture of the process of viewing is more likely to

be achieved. In this multi-layered research approach I utilized the four most common

data gathering techniques in audience reception research. In addition, using all these

approaches allows for some comparison with previous research on viewership that has

utilized some of these same techniques.

Data Analysis - The Processes

The data analysis is presented in Chapters 4 and 5, however, here I wish to systematically

lay out the process that was followed when the analysis was done. Appendices C-E and

G may be helpful to concretize the data gathering process discussed below.

Observation at Time of Viewing

The purpose of the participant observation was to get a chance to observe the

student's viewing behaviour and be able to relate that to their descriptions of their

viewing gleaned from the questionnaires and the interviews. I kept specific note of how

many male and female viewers were in the common room, how many came and went

during the programmes, what they talked about during the programmes, during

commercials, and following programmes, what (if any) connection that seemed to have to

programme content, and I made note of the basic synopsis of the programmes we

watched. It was important to record everything that happened in the common room where

some were watching television, but some were cooking food or doing homework. The

activity seemed similar to what you would expect in a family living room. I kept notes in

a field journal that I wrote in immediately following the evening's viewing (see Appendix

E for a sample of field notes from one of the viewing sessions) . The purpose was to

create a snapshot of viewing behaviour against which I could later compare the other data.

The participant observation data was primarily used in Chapter 4 in the analysis of modes

of viewing.

Focus Group Interviews

The five focus group interviews were transcribed and printed out as 133 pages of

text. I had structured the interview so that participants engaged with topics I was

interested in hearing them discuss: what they liked/disliked about *ER*, particularly the

episode we watched, who they saw as important characters and why, whether the show

contained a message or lessons, how people of colour were represented in the media

generally and on *ER*, and what is likeable/unlikeable about their favourite and least

favourite men and women on television.

The focus group interview data was not used extensively in the data analysis. Its

purpose was largely to direct the individual interview schedule. The analysis of emergent

themes within the focus group data was a key element in the development of the

individual interview schedule. When I did utilize the focus group data in the analysis, I

paid closest attention to passages where participants were discussing representations of

gender on television as well as comments containing observations about viewing practices

(their own and those of family, friends and general viewers). I made note of the class and

gender of the speaker of the comments, using the same colour scheme as noted above.

Once the individual interviews were complete, I utilized the focus group data to augment

those data. The focus group discussions pertain mainly to a particular episode of *ER*, and

specific events and characters from that episode. The comments of the participants about

the particular episode, of a particular programme, served to provide a bit of continuity and

comparability to the data. However, the focus group data was secondary to the more in-

depth data that was collected from the individual interviews.

Individual Interviews
By the time that I collected the individual interview data I had refined my focus to

class, gender and television viewing. Not only did I want to discuss representations of class and gender on television, but also I wanted to divide participants on the basis of their class and gender. Due to this being the last set of data collected, the questions were more pointed and the data that much more rich. These data constitute the central data set, among the 4 sets of data collected (questionnaire, focus groups, participant observation and individual interviews).

Chapter 4, Modes of Viewing, is an analysis of data which largely comes from answers to the first set of questions during the individual interview. During this first section, participants were asked about their general viewing habits and practices. Participants indicated whether they considered themselves a regular or an occasional viewer and then went on to talk about their favourite TV shows. In the questionnaires and the interviews, participants were asked where they usually watch TV, with whom and what, if any, other activities they do while watching television. The questionnaire, participant observation and individual interview data were used to interrogate the modes of viewing that participants utilized when watching television. When coding the data, I was looking for any comments throughout the interviews where participants referred to how they viewed or how they believed others viewed television (such as friends and family). The participant observation data contained notes on conversations during viewing as well as the other activities that occurred simultaneously with viewing. These notes from the participant observation phase served as comparison to the comments participants made in the interviews about viewing practices.

Specific sections of each interview transcript were coded in a four stage process.

First, I went through the transcripts identifying passages that referred to, a) general

viewing practices, b) class, c) people of colour and d) gender on television. I used a pencil

and wrote margin notes on the comments in the transcripts. I compiled those notes into a

list of themes that were emerging from the data. That list of themes mainly fell into two

categories that later framed analysis chapters contained in this thesis, Chapter 4-Modes of

Viewing and Chapter 5-Class and Gendered Readings of Television. Below is an example

of a notation I made on the themes list after having analyzed the margin notes:

> In contrast to Morley's findings, both women and men in my sample often
> talk while watching TV. For those in Residence and those in houses with
> 3-6 roommates, it seems that watching television tends to be a social
> activity.

The emerging themes also connected to the research in this area that I had been studying

since I began to develop this project. Notes that referred to differences in my findings and

those of other research are common in the themes list.

The second stage of analysis involved a second reading of the noted passages in

the interview transcripts. I developed the colour scheme (middle-class men—green,

working-class men—blue, middle-class women—purple, working-class women—pink)

and used a highlighter to identify passages as having been made by speakers of one of

these four categories. In this way their comments could be connected to their own class

and gender.

I used colour coded index cards and recorded each participant's comments on

cards coloured to match their class and gender category. A set of cards was created for the

topics of: 1) men on TV, 2) women on TV, 3) depictions of visible minorities, 4) middle-

class shows, and 5) working-class shows. On these cards the participant's comments were

recorded in the same order on the card for easy comparison of the data. Cards could be

placed next to each other, categorized according to programme, similar comment, gender

of speaker, class of speaker, reading of characters, class, gender or comments on the same

programme. At this point in the analysis it became clear that the data from the section

where we discussed representations of minorities/people of colour on television was not

terribly rich. The analysis then became focussed on class and gendered readings and

viewing practices.

The third stage involved separating the data into the two emerging main themes of

viewing practices on the one hand and class and gendered readings on the other. Analysis

of each theme took a slightly different form. Mainly, this is due to the greater amount of

data under consideration when interrogating class and gendered readings by participants.

Analysis of viewing practices involved parts of all of the data sets. Colour coded

cards were used to indicate the class and gender of the speaker when data from focus

groups, questionnaires and interviews were used. Gender of viewers in the participant

observation data was noted, but not class identity. I began by looking at the participant's

indication of regular and occasional viewership. I soon realized that creating index cards

with a variety of viewing practice information was going to give me a clearer picture. I

created cards for all those participants who were part of the individual interviews. On

each card I included their indication of regular or occasional viewership, where they

usually watched television, what other activities, if any, they did while viewing, whether

they watched with others or alone, and what aspects of programmes they would talk about

with others while viewing. To this interview information was added their corresponding

information from the questionnaire, including how many hours of TV they indicated

watching per week. I was able to use the cards to see if any trends occurred based on class

and gender of viewer. Trends emerged immediately in that some class/gender groups

vastly underestimated their viewing. Having found this trend I decided to more

systematically analyze the viewing practices by class and gender. I used colour coded

summary cards and created averages and ranges of the time participants indicated they

spent viewing television. On the same summary card I included other information from

their questionnaires; most common time of day for viewing, hours spent on

extracurricular activities, hours spent on part-time work, hours spent on study, and

activities they said they did while viewing, if any. The summary cards for each of the 4

main groups in the study, middle-class women (purple card), working-class women (pink

card), middle-class men (green card), and working-class men (blue card), were helpful in

identifying modes of viewing that might be associated with class and/or gender. It became

clear that gender was associated with particular modes of viewing as will be seen in

Chapter 4.

      The questionnaire data that pertained to activities while viewing were coded as

part of the viewing practices analysis. The top three reported activities which are

discussed in detail in Chapter 4, were eating, homework and reading (in that order). The

other parts of the questionnaire that pertained to viewing practices (questions 17-25 of the

questionnaire, see Appendix A) were coded for all participants who had filled in a

questionnaire and analyzed for general trends.

      As indicated above, the participant observation data was coded for corresponding

behaviour during viewing. I had notes for particular programmes that included the kinds

of conversations that viewers had while viewing (see sample from field notes in Appendix

E) and the various activities that were going on simultaneously with viewing. These notes

were used to give some depth to the reports that participants made about their activities

while viewing and the conversations, if any, they reported engaging in while viewing.

The data for the class and gendered readings analysis were considerably more

dense. I began with the interview data and included the focus group interviews in the

analysis of gendered readings. In order to get a sense of how male and female viewers

read gender on television, I coded the portion of the interview where the participants

discussed the depictions of men and women on television. I created a separate coloured

card for each interview participant for their comments about men and their comments

about women on television. I could then look for any comments that seemed related to the

participant's own class and or gender. After arranging these cards in a number of

different ways, it became clear that there were some readings common to class/gender

groups. I decided to follow the same process as with the viewing practices and create

summary cards for each of the four class/gender categories. These summary cards

revealed some readings that seemed related to participants' class background and some

that seemed related to participants' gender. At this point in the analysis I went back to the

focus group data and looked at the comments made about men and women on television.

A summary card for each focus group was made and was colour coded by the four

class/gender categories. I looked closely at the language used to describe men and women

on television, at first reactions and later comments that involved more deliberation. The

other comments that seemed to have class-based differences were the discussions of the

jobs that men and women on television do. These themes became evident from further

and further condensing of the data. I started with the 2 sets of interview cards, refined

those to 2 sets of summary cards and then refined those further to one card each with the

emergent themes.

The analysis of the reading of class on television also involved two main sections

from the individual interviews. I went beyond the main sections where participants were

asked to discuss a middle-class and a working-class programme and included all

comments throughout the interviews where these programmes or class matters were

mentioned.

There were a smaller number of programmes that were designated as depicting

working-class characters. The advantage of the smaller number of choices was that most

participants chose to discuss either *Roseanne* or *The Simpsons*. This made for a good set

of comparable data where participants were talking about the same programmes. As with

the previous analysis, I created coloured index cards for each participant so that I could

easily identify any readings that appeared to be common to class or gender background.

On one side of each card I recorded the participant's description of the kind of work the

characters did on the show and on the other side I recorded the class in which they located

the characters and the indicators they provided for that class label. I added their comments

from other parts of the interview to the relevant side of their card and wrote those in a

different colour to indicate that they came from other parts of the interview rather than the

section specific to class readings.

It was difficult to look at all the cards that pertained to each programme so I created a large wall chart with the same information so that I could see it all at once. I wrote in the same colours as the cards to keep the class/gender categories in view. The class differences in terms of how participants read the class of the characters became visible. Since the majority (75%) of participants discussed either *Roseanne* or *The Simpsons*, I confined the analysis of the readings of working-class characters to discussion of these two programmes.

The same process was used to analyse the discussions of the designated middle-class programmes. However, the choice of programmes was not as concentrated so the discussions were separated by genre into those pertaining to drama and those pertaining to situation comedy.

At the conclusion of the discussion of the two designated programmes the participants were asked to compare the class locations they had assigned to each. I used a large wall chart to separate the groups of participants and to compare the class locations they assigned to each show and the bases upon which they made their comparison. The bases upon which participants made their comparison and the language they used was clearly related to their own class position. Four main bases of comparison emerged as common from my assessment of the large chart (these are indicated on Table 7 in Chapter 5).

Discussion-Problems and Lessons

Conducting qualitative research is a complex endeavour and often there are aspects of the data gathering that one would do differently after having learned from past

experience or the experience of other researchers. It is important to focus a critical eye on

the methods of data gathering and provide some insights into the various problems

encountered and lessons learned.

Questionnaire Response Rate

I had expected a much higher response rate on the background questionnaire. It

was mailed out to all 530 residents on February 12, 1996. Unfortunately, reading week

fell shortly thereafter. I found it much more difficult to get more responses after students

came back from their reading break. There are likely times during the year that would

have been better for mailing out the questionnaire. I believe that earlier in the winter

term or early in the fall term would have yielded a far better response. I had been

expecting a return of 200 surveys, given my status as the Hall Director of the residence

building.

By March 3rd, I had only received 43 questionnaires, I spent some time dropping

into the Hall's common rooms and giving out more questionnaires for people to fill out

who had not. Many, I was told, had just dumped them in the recycle bin, despite my

attempts to make them appear to be official mail. By the end of term, time was running

out to conduct the focus groups so I had to forge ahead on the basis of 60 questionnaires

returned, with 10 of those declining further participation. After the focus groups were

conducted I solicited further participation in order to increase the number of working-

class males (see discussion below) in the sample and this increased the total of

questionnaires to 89.

Structure of the Academic Year

Students are often viewed as ideal research participants, but many characteristics of student life make research with them more difficult. It is important to really examine the school year and when the busier times will be for students. The participant observation phase and the focus groups were conducted on the cusp of the winter exam period, a busy time for students. Unfortunately, the busy times are different for different disciplines so there may never be a perfect time. The structure of the school year was a serious barrier to this research. Due to lack of resources and practicalities, the data had to be gathered during the school year while the participants were located on campus. This put serious constraints on the research. It is likely that I would have achieved a greater response rate on the questionnaires if they had been sent out earlier. The low response rate delayed the setting of the focus groups which relied on the questionnaire data. It is likely that had the focus group interviews been scheduled earlier in the term the turn out would have been higher, perhaps more groups could have been convened. I certainly believe that the response rate on the questionnaires was negatively affected by the close proximity of the mail out to the February reading break. It seems likely that the students who did participate were those who were perhaps less anxious about their impending exams. The composition of the groups could have been affected by the timing of the focus groups at such a busy time of the year for the research participants.

Focus Group Composition

Residence students at the Hall where I conducted my research were often late for events. They were also prone to forget such meetings as the focus group I had invited

them to. Several participants were keenly interested in the research, but suddenly found they could not attend on the day they were invited. Since the groups were set with some broad characteristics in mind, this caused some difficulty. The minority group, ended up combining students who considered themselves part of a minority and working-class students because some participants needed to reschedule. I would imagine that industry focus groups are better attended because the participants get paid. All I could offer were munchies and pop, which on some days was not enough of an enticement.

I was also limited to Monday-Wednesday to conduct the focus groups because the weekends last longer for university students and attendance was guaranteed to be low. When observing students viewing television, I made sure to note which days there were fewer students around the common lounges. Thursday nights are party nights and many students return home on the weekends (Friday-Sunday) so that they can do laundry and eat good food!

I also needed to know more about the timing of sports championships. I inadvertently scheduled the male focus group for the last night of the NCAA basketball championships. Needless to say there were several cancellations. Consequently, the group only had 3 participants. In January of 1996 I conducted a second male focus group with 5 participants in order to ensure that I had not missed important data with such a small group. The results were similar enough to those of the previous male group so this second attempt was neither transcribed nor used in the data analysis.

Choosing the Programme for the Focus Group Interviews
I selected *ER* for the focus groups because it was the top rated programme at the

time and it drew huge numbers into the common TV lounges each Thursday night.

Garnering large audiences on the biggest residence party night is no small task. It may be

that those viewers choose to spend their leisure time watching television rather than

talking to researchers about their viewing. I found that, among the questionnaire

respondents, 26 (23 female and 3 male) listed *ER* as one of their fop 5 favourite shows

and 21 (19 female and 2 male) listed *ER* among the shows they plan to watch regularly.

Out of the total of 89 questionnaire respondents, the number who indicated that it was a

show they watch regularly amounts to 29% of the total group of respondents. The lack

of familiarity with the show as reflected in the questionnaire required that an episode be

shown as part of the focus group interview. Despite the absence of much mention of *ER*

on the questionnaires, it was clearly familiar to many of the women who participated in

the focus groups.

Unfortunately, *ER* was in repeats at the time of the focus groups and was going to

continue in rerun episodes until the season finale in late April. I had waited too long to

begin taping episodes in preparation for this kind of focus group interview. With the aid

of a colleague who then participated on an *ER* electronic newsgroup, I was able to have a

tape shipped to me, which arrived the day of the first focus group. The episodes were

from February and early March, one of which was a 2 hour special. Showing a regular

episode and conducting the interview were going to take 2 hours at least, so I decided to

use a regular one-hour episode. The focus groups had to start at 9:30pm so that they did

not conflict with night classes, this also was a factor in deciding against the 2 hour

episode. I chose the "Baby Shower" episode because it had run during sweeps and

seemed to require less background knowledge than the others to follow the plot of the episode.

Technical Difficulties

I was the facilitator of the focus groups and attempted to record some observations during the sessions. Often focus groups are conducted with a separate facilitator and recorder. However, I did not have the resources to employ a research assistant so I took on both roles. I had hoped the video tape of the interviews would be invaluable because the role of facilitator is a demanding one and it's easy to miss crucial observations, but I did not find the tape that helpful except in determining the speaker on the audio tape in those cases where I was uncertain. The technical difficulties did not end there. For one focus group the AVS function had accidentally been left on while I was recording. This meant that the machine began recording each time it detected a voice or voices and stopped recording when no voices were detected. Consequently, the first and last things that some speakers said were cut off of the audio recording. The video tape for this same group did not contain any sound. I had to rely on my notes and a good memory in a few cases.

Other researchers also admit that these video recordings are much less useful than the literature would have us believe. When interviewing fewer subjects, the frame of the video can be closer in and it might be possible to discern facial expressions. When there are 5-8 people in the shot, it is very difficult to observe any but the most obvious of gestures. It is really not worth the expense of renting video equipment. I did, however, find it easier at times to transcribe from the video tape. I would use the remote control

and transcribe first to paper and then key in to the word processor. When transcribing an

interview with more than one person, this method can actually save time. You are also

assured of assigning the comment to the correct speaker. After I completed the

transcriptions, I also viewed the video to ensure that I had not made a mistake in

assigning comments to speakers.

When interviewing more than one person, it is important not to use the 1/2 speed

recording function. The resulting cacophony is more frustrating than the savings on

audio cassettes is worth. It is not impossible to hear the speakers, but their voices are

more distorted and more difficult to make out on first or second or third listen.

Not Enough Working-class Males
As I was preparing for the individual interviews and had decided to interview 8

participants from each of the four groups I discovered that among my pool of participants

there were not even 8 working-class men! As a way of generating more working-class

male participants I addressed a series of large introductory classes in Labour Studies and

Sociology. I presented myself as a PhD student doing research on television viewing. I

did not tell potential participants that I was short of working-class men, but I did limit the

new participants to males when I made my request as quoted below.

> I'm a fourth year PhD student in Sociology here at the University, my
> research is on TV viewership among university students. I need some
> research participants for this study. It would entail filling out a
> questionnaire and if selected a 1-2 hour interview. I need participants who
> meet the following criteria: male, parents (either one) a member of a trade
> union or work in or are retired from an industrial or factory job, or work
> or are retired from service industry (retail, food, hotel).

Several students came forward and filled out a questionnaire. From among these I finally

had enough working-class males to select 8 to interview.   The following table indicates

the gender breakdown of the 89 questionnaires as well as those respondents who declined

any further participation beyond filling in a questionnaire.

Table 4

Questionnaires by gender and willingness for further participation in the research

	would interview	no further participation	Total
Female	20	23	43
Male	36*	10	46

*note that this number is inflated due to my search for more males to interview

I believe that the second round of male participants share enough characteristics

with the first round (all solicited from the large co-ed residence hall) that it has had little

negative impact on the data that were collected. In fact, the opportunity arose to interview

participants who were not living in residence and that was a helpful comparison when

looking at their modes of viewing. The participants came from a wide range of

disciplines and ranged from first to fourth year students.

It may be that the residence hall as starting point was more limiting than I had

first envisioned when developing the project. It was clear that most of the working-class

men who did participate still lived at home. It is likely, given the expense, that working-

class students are even fewer in number among the residence population than among the

student body as a whole. Clearly, post-secondary education serves as a class leveller.

Most of the students attending the university are from middle-class or upper-class homes.

According to the pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program there is a gap between

university participation rates among different socio-economic groups in Canada. Those

placed in the lowest quartile had a participation rate of 18% among 18-21 year olds in

1994. Young people in the middle half of the socio-economic spectrum had participation

rates of 25% and those in the highest quartile continued to show by far the highest

university participation rate, at 40% of 18-21 year olds.[19] It is not surprising then, that it

was difficult to find working-class participants in a university setting. Using university

students as a research population is problematic when attempting to compare class

experiences and their impact on certain social behaviours.

Assignment to Class Categories

Due to their similarity in terms of class, it was difficult to assign class categories

to the participants. There were a number of participants who chose the label of middle

class when it really did not apply. It is important to consider the effects of the

questionnaire design on the answers to such questions. There is research indicating that

until another category was added, such that the category of working class was not the

lowest one, many census respondents would not choose working class. After another

category was added, suddenly there was a giant increase in the "working class." I

provided 4 possible categories to participants: upper class, middle class, working class, or

poverty class. There were also a variety of other questions aimed at assessing the socio-

economic status of participants. Given the small sample size - 89 in total answered the

---

[19]Based on General Social Survey data and reported on
http://www.cmec.ca/stats/pceip/1999/Indicatorsite/english/pages/page28e.html

questionnaire - and the actual class composition, it made sense to collapse poverty and

working class into one class and upper class and middle class into one class.

Among the working-class women I interviewed, 4 had been shifted to working

class after the participants had identified themselves as middle class. Among the

working-class males I interviewed, 2 were shifted after having self-identified as middle

class. I based this on the coding of their parents' occupations both currently and in the

past, estimated family income, whether the student had a part-time job and on the size of

their family. As observed by Morley, the locating of research participants into classes is

"made by means of what is, in the end, an intuitive judgement" (Morley 1986:54 notes to

table). I believe that self-identification is, in most cases, the most significant determiner

of a participant's class location. However, there are also objective measures of socio-

economic class that have to be considered. In those six cases where participants had self-

identified as middle class, all the other evidence on their questionnaire was to the

contrary. In order to avoid personal bias I enlisted the aid of a colleague to independently

code for class (see the description of this process above).

Conceptual Baggage

Although I watch plenty of popular television, I do not tend to watch sports

television. I knew when I began this research that I would not be able to keep up to date

on all the possible television programmes that might come up in the interviews. I made an

effort to regularly read the entertainment press (mostly *Entertainment Weekly*). However,

I never made an effort to keep up on sports or even to watch students watching sports

television during the weeks that I conducted the participant observation phase of the

research. It was not until late in the research process that I realized I had focussed much

of both interview schedules on fictional television. Fictional television is more popular

with female viewers, but it became clear from analysis of the questionnaires that sports,

particularly hockey is what is most often watched on TV by male viewers in this age

group (18-24years).

Question 18 of the questionnaire asks "what programmes do you watch? List

them in order of preference, with 1 as most preferred." The most preferred programmes

listed by male participants are *The Simpsons* and *Friends*, in that order. However, the

third most frequent answer is hockey. Question 20 asks participants to list programmes

they plan ahead to watch. In many cases, male viewers place hockey at the top of this list,

but not as number one for question 18. What is clear is that hockey is a favoured aspect

of television for male viewers in this research, but the interview schedules did not offer

much opportunity to discuss this or any other television sports. It is quite likely that the

favoured sport would change depending on the time of year that the questionnaire is

administered. The seasonal aspect of sports on TV was also not well accommodated in

this research. The questions are geared to discussion of character and plots in fictional

television. Both news and sports personalities did come up in the odd interview, but I

believe that the interviews were biassed in favour of the fictional programmes, the shows

that women watch, that I watch.

Interviewing Men About Body Image and Sexism

In the parts of the interviews where participants were asked about men and

women on television, the issue of body image and sometimes sexist stereotypes often .

arose. I was concerned about male participants feeling uncomfortable discussing such

issues with me, or that they would work to say what they thought that I wanted to hear.

Certainly, the gender of the researcher can be an issue when the research is partly

focussed on issues of gender representation. I believe that there were moments in some

of the interviews where male participants were perhaps trying to tread carefully and not

appear sexist. However, there are certainly frank comments from male participants about

the use of ideal TV women as subjects for fantasy that were not held back. The use of a

variety of data gathering techniques is useful here so that data can be checked against

other sets. It is likely that comments on these topics would have been more open if a

male researcher conducted the interviews with male participants, but I do not think that

the data suffered much from this problem. I was conscious of this potential difficulty and

worked to make male participants comfortable in the interview situation.

Conclusion

Despite the foregoing discussion of problems, these data are rich with insights

into the process of viewing. I am not the first researcher to ever encounter such

difficulties, nor am I likely to be the last. However, it is important to analyze the data

gathering process for lessons to take into future research projects.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how one's cultural background(s)

(class, race, ethnicity, age, gender) are implicated in the viewing process. While I have

an interest in all these indicators, the later stages of data gathering are aimed specifically

at the intersection of class and gender in the viewing process. The gender and class one

brings to viewing are factors in what meanings are generated, how they are processed by

viewers and what modes of viewing they employ. However, the class and gender of

characters and families depicted on television are also important factors. I have attempted

to get at this process from both sides, to investigate the impact of the viewer's class and

gender on their viewing, but also to look at how class and gender are read by these

viewers. There remains a paucity in the literature of research on male viewership and of

comparative research on class, gender and viewership. My research is an attempt to fill

in some of these gaps.

Chapter 4 - Modes of Viewing

> We are all, in our heads, several different audiences at once, and can be
> constituted as such by different programmes. We have the capacity to
> deploy different levels and modes of attention, to mobilize different
> competencies in our viewing. At different times of day, for different
> family members, different patterns of viewing have different 'salience'.
> Here the monolithic conceptions of the viewer, the audience or of
> television itself have been displaced - one hopes forever - before the new
> emphasis on difference and variation (Stuart Hall in Morley 1986:10).

In the forward to David Morley's <u>Family Television</u> which is quoted above, Stuart

Hall suggests that we are all capable of being several different audiences and can be

constituted as such by different programmes (Hall in Morley 1986:10). As viewers, we

can deploy different levels and modes of attention, utilize different modes of viewing.

Viewers mobilize different competencies in the act of viewing and their constitution as

audience members is contingent upon a number of factors. In particular, type of

programme, air time of programme, whether we are doing other things while viewing and

whether we are viewing alone or in a group affect what kind of audience we are

constituted as at any given time.

While much has been made of the influence of various sorts of salient group

identifiers (such as race, age, gender or class) on one's viewing, less attention has been

paid to the capacity of the individual to be a different viewer in some instances than in

others. A viewer may be viewing actively at some times and merely "glancing" at other

times, depending upon individual circumstances, time of day, etc. When conducting

research on viewership we tend to lump viewers together based on their class, gender or

some other aggregate characteristic. In the literature there are many examples of such

research which does not recognize how individuals oscillate somewhere between the

"glance" and the "gaze"—sometimes during a given sitting in front of the TV (see for

examples: Morley 1986; Press 1991; Jhally and Lewis 1992; Liebes and Katz 1993;

Gantz and Wenner 1995; and Hobson 1999). The present research interrogates both

aggregate characteristics (class and gender) as well as individual viewing practices. The

challenge is to get away from the notion that class, gender or race determine viewing and

instead account for the salience of these axes, while also recognizing the power of the

individual to take up viewing positions that may not be in line with their class, gender, or

race.

Ang (1996) has postulated that "televisual discourse constructs a variety of types

of involvement for viewers" (Ang 1996:21). In Living Room Wars, Ang is trying to

demonstrate the above postulate, but with mainly (theoretically informed) speculation,

which will need further refinement (Ang 1996:21). My research answers this call; it can

be used to demonstrate not only that viewers have access to a variety of modes of

viewing, but that individual viewer involvement varies in multiple and contingent ways.

The same viewer may hurl insults and comments at the television while they watch

Melrose Place, and yet watch *ER* in total silence until a commercial comes on. The same

viewer my watch a show attentively one week and pay more attention to her homework

the next week that it airs. The same viewer may be an avid viewer of *Friends*, but if he

gets invited to the campus bar, he will leave the show in the middle. The same viewer

may claim to hate soap operas, but stay in the common room to eat their lunch while

others are watching a favourite soap.[20] The same viewer may prefer to watch television

with others, but if it's lunchtime and no one is around, will eat in front of the TV anyway.

Clearly, viewership varies in multiple and contingent ways.

Each of the sets of data provides a different line of site into the modes of viewing

that participants use under different conditions of viewing. I am drawing upon each of

these data sets in this analysis of modes of viewing among the research participants.

Each participant is distinguished by gender, class and questionnaire number. The

notation following a quote from the participants will appear as "M003," for example. W

or M denotes working class or middle class, the gender symbol ($\female$ = female, $\male$ = male)

denotes the gender of the participant, and each participant has been assigned a three-digit

number that corresponds to the original questionnaire that they filled out.

There are a number of things about this research sample that are unique. Students

are unique in several ways that impact upon their modes of viewing television. Most of

the students involved in my research are living away from home temporarily, most return

to the family home for the summer (May to August). Therefore, the context of their

viewing is within a different set of social relations than most other reception analyses

have investigated. Morley takes "the dynamic *unit* of consumption to be more properly

the family/household rather than the individual viewer" (Morley 1986:15). This focus is

meant to highlight the relationship between individual viewing activity and social

relations, in his case primarily within the family. My research takes a different focus, but

---

[20]There is evidence in the data that some male viewers became regular watchers of *Days of Our Lives* because it is on during lunchtime. When they moved off campus, they gave it up, because none of their male roommates watched it. One participant was quite grateful for this turn of events.

also analyses individual viewing activity within the social relations in which it occurs.

Television viewing should be seen in relation to other household, social and leisure activities (Morley 1986; Silverstone 1994; Ang 1996). However, the university student's sense of leisure time is not the same as we can posit for those who work outside of the home and return at days end, or women who spend their day performing domestic labour in the home. Students' lives are structured differently. There are structured elements such as classes, exams, homework, assignments, labs and so forth, as well as a variety of extra-curricular activities. Activities such as eating and sleeping tend not to follow regular patterns, as may have been the case for the student when living at home. The main focus for university students is their studies, it is the reason they are attending a university. Whether they attend all, most or only some of their required classes, school tends to be the anchor in their otherwise fairly unstructured lives. In my sample, 38 (43%) of participants stated that they held down some part-time work averaging nine hours per week while attending school. This work would also provide an element of structure. Ultimately, the lives of students are quite different from that of the usual subjects of reception research.

Unlike the spectator of cinema, the television viewer tends to be separated from the millions of other viewers of the same programme. The theatre or cinema audience shares the same experience, at the same time, in the same place. Television viewers are separated from each other and do not have this sort of shared experience. Although, in the university residence situation there is often a large group (sometimes more than 35 students) viewing television together as a group in one large room. During the weeks that

I observed their television viewing there was an average of nine viewers for each

programme. Those who move off campus tend to live with several roommates (four or

more) and again tend to watch television in groups rather than alone. Further, television

viewing intersects with a myriad of other social activities such as homework, reading,

eating, and knitting. The following are some of the responses taken from interview

transcripts when participants were asked if they "do other stuff while watching TV:"

> **cooking, and I knit and stuff (M♀001);[21]**

> **sometimes I read, during commercials, for school, or I eat, if that
> counts (M♀378).**

The participant quoted above wonders if "eating" counts as an activity. This is

remarkable in that, for most of the participants eating tends to happen while watching

television, or is that vice versa? Here are two activities that one might think of as

mundane aspects of everyday life, so much so that the participants wonder if "that

counts" as an activity at all. For many TV is just something in the background,

something that barely rates as a thing they are "doing:"

> **sometimes I eat, um sometimes I do homework or kind of like
> planning things or just doing chores or something I'll probably have
> the television going kind of thing...it's usually just going in the
> background (W♂174).**

Other participants recognize that television can tear them away from some of the things

they feel they should be doing instead of watching television:

---

[21] Participant's words are always in bold and reproduced verbatim with as little intrusion from
editorial comment as possible. Where necessary clarification is inserted in square brackets. Effort has been
made to preserve the way that participants spoke in their interviews and to express that as clearly as
possible as written text.

> **I've attempted to do homework or do other things, but usually I get interested in a programme and so I forget it, cancel that (M♂589);**
>
> **oh yeah I'll read...yeah, I'll look up, if I hear laughter (W♂585).**

In answer to a similar question from the background questionnaire, respondents

mentioned several other activities that they do while watching TV: playing chess,

studying late (using TV to keep awake), and playing cards. The top answers, similar to

the individual interview results, were eating, homework and reading (in that order).

Often viewing is not the primary activity at a given moment of viewing. The data

indicate that students make an effort to define television viewing as a thing they do not

have time to do:

> **I don't get a chance to watch it [*ER*] that often, since I'm here [at school] [laughs] I don't have time to do anything (M♂340).**

Most of the participants stated that they were occasional (56%) rather than regular (38%)

viewers. Middle-class participants in particular took great pains to downplay the amount

of time they spend watching TV when they recorded it on the questionnaire, yet their

estimates were contradicted in the other data that I collected. The participant quoted

above, M♂340, stated that he watched an average of two hours of television per week on

his questionnaire. It was clear in the focus group interview and in the individual

interview that he was familiar with a great many television texts, clearly he

underestimated his viewing, or it changed dramatically between different stages of data

collection.

The description of TV as background seems to relate to Ellis's point about the

role of sound. Television sound allows for viewers to do other activities while still

following the narrative of whatever show they are watching. It is difficult to evaluate how

important the role of sound is in the viewing of the participants. Certainly, the sense of

TV as something in the background may have contributed to the discrepancy between

subjective estimates and objective observations of the amount of TV people watch. It

may be that people listen to TV more than they watch. This might account for the greater

familiarity with TV texts, than the stated amount of viewing would be likely to engender.

The television audience is clearly not some knowable, discernible or definable

entity. *The audience* is necessarily an abstraction much the same as *the public*. Viewers

of television are also of diverse gender, class, racial and ethnic backgrounds. We must

acknowledge these differences between viewers. The meanings and pleasures that

viewers find in television are necessarily pluralized (Fiske 1987:63). It is important to

avoid the narrow casting of television executives and think rather of audiences.

> Institutional knowledge [that is knowledge produced by the television
> industry] is not interested in the social world of actual audiences; it is in
> 'television audience' which it constructs as an objectified category of
> others to be controlled (Ang 1991:154 brackets mine).

The industry's view of television audiences must be resisted in popular culture research.

Viewers must be seen as occupying multiple and mobile subjectivities (Ang 1991:162).

We cannot speak with the voice of the 'real' audience because there is no such

thing (Ang 1991:165). Rather, the standpoint of actual audiences is a discursively

constructed, virtual position from which we can elaborate always partial and provisional

understandings that evoke the dynamic complexity of television audiencehood (Ang

1991:165). The conditions affecting the location of viewers along the glance/gaze

continuum are multiple and contingent.

In his analysis of the difference between cinema spectatorship and television viewership, Ellis (1992) argues that "TV's regime of vision is less intense than cinema's: it is a regime of the glance rather than the gaze" (Ellis 1992:137). The "gaze" implies concentration on the part of the spectator, while the "glance" implies that the viewer is making no extraordinary effort or investment. My research shows that sometimes viewers do "gaze" at television; it is not merely the province of the regime of the "glance." Ellis theorizes a viewer who is never engaged and whose attention needs continually to be drawn by any given broadcast (Ellis 1992:162). He sees the viewer removed from the process, glancing over it (Ellis 1992:164). This is a viewer who is not emotionally involved in programming. Ellis is theorizing the viewer in the home, where the uses of television are bound up with the social processes of the private household and where there is often distraction from attentive viewing. Morley (1986) conducted research with viewers in the home and found that there were a variety of modes of viewership, not just the "glance" as Ellis suggests. A continuum, which ranges from the glance to the gaze is a useful heuristic device in the analysis of television viewership.

It is impossible to account for all of the conditions affecting one's mode of viewing. Taking my cues from the data I collected, I can specify a number of points of oscillation along a Glance/Gaze continuum that might help open up this topic for discussion. These are set out in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

Glance/Gaze Continuum and Points of oscillation

Glance<--->Gaze

Social<----------->Solitary

At School<-------------------------->At Home

Among<--------------------------------------->Primary
Activities　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Activity

The first point of oscillation is between **solitary** and **social** viewing. I have found that

participant's viewing practices vary by whether they are in a social viewing situation

(watching with other people and/or being in a room where more than just television

viewing is going on) and in a solitary viewing situation (watching alone).

Often participants watch alone because no one else is interested in the programme

they watch or because they are embarrassed about watching a particular show. The

participant quoted below watches most shows with others, but she hides out in her room

to watch her soap:

> **I have a little tiny TV, so I watch in my room, but for *ER* and *Party of***
> ***Five* I watch that in the common room, I just watch my soap opera on**
> **my TV [laughs] I don't want them to know that I'm watching my soap**
> **opera [laughs] (W♀163).**

Other participants noted that they watch alone, because no one else watches the same

programme:

> **informative programmes no one really watches, really, no one. News,**
> **go figure, go to university no one watches news (W♀313).**

The majority of participants (24/32, 75%) said that they usually watch TV with

others, but some participants noted that if others are not around they are likely not to

watch television on their own:

> **yeah, I don't like to watch, if there's nobody else there I usually won't watch it unless it's something I really, really, really want to (W♀561);**
>
> **if I'm by myself and it's on then I'll watch it, but I don't go in to watch TV by myself (W♀566).**

For these participants watching television is a decidedly **social** activity. If no one else is

there, they would rather not spend time in front of a television. TV viewing for these

participants is constructed as an activity to be shared with others, otherwise it is not an

activity worth doing. In other cases, participants noted that they watch a favourite show

regardless of whether others are watching as well. Only one participant (a working-class

woman) stated that she would usually not watch TV at all if no one else was watching.

Among the female participants, 100% stated that they usually watch TV with others.

Among male participants only 50% made similar responses to the same question. A

significant number of working-class male participants (5/8, 63%) indicated that they

normally watch TV alone. Most indicated that the reason for this solitary viewing was

that no one else was around when they watched TV. It is important to note that four of

these participants were living in their family home when the interview was conducted,

rather than in residence or in shared student housing. It seems clear that the environment

in which one views has an influence on one's modes of viewing.

There are many highly ritualized viewing situations that take place in the **social**

context of the common room in residence. In some instances the lights are turned off, so

as to discourage those who would study during the programme. The message is "serious

viewers only" and often talking is only allowed during the commercials:

> **sometimes when we're watching TV we don't answer the phone or anything, like if the phone rings we don't answer it during TV shows, it depends how intense it is...sometimes we have a no talking rule if it's a really ...like the season finale of the show or something, we, if someone comes in from a night class, say and the show started at 9:00, you know, there's no talking until the commercial or something (W♀057).**

Some programmes garner a large audience and viewing is ritualized, but talking is

encouraged or even expected. For example there were many accounts of watching

Melrose Place and almost all suggested that talking goes on throughout the programme.

This is in stark contrast to the typical viewing situation when *Party of Five* airs, the lights

are off, no talking is allowed, and any intrusion brings a slough of "shhhh" and "wait 'til

the commercial" warnings from fellow viewers. Modleski (1984) suggests that soap

opera "reinforces the very principle of interruptability crucial to the proper functioning of

women in the home" (Modleski 1984:100). Perhaps the women in this sample need to

manufacture interruption, by talking and heckling during the show since, as students,

their life provides no such interruptions as childcare, housecleaning or cooking. If this is

the case then why is such behaviour reserved for programmes such as *Days of Our Lives*

and *Melrose Place* rather than *ER* or *Party of Five*? If the focus group discussions are

any indication, most participants see a difference between *ER* and these other "soaps:"

> **people don't watch it [*Beverly Hills 90210*] for the show, people watch it to see Branden and Kelly and Dylan and Brenda, who they killed, which I never understood (M♂212);**

> **it's [*ER*] a little notch above [*Beverly Hills 90210*] but not a big notch (W♀057);**

other doctor shows they're not as realistic 'cause they're more soap opera-y, I think (W♀108);

with *ER* they don't do any of that hokey stuff, like the hokey stuff has been cut right out, well from what I saw (W♀566);

usually I don't watch soap opera and if this [*ER*] was purely soap-ish, I wouldn't watch it (M♀387).

While some thought it was the same old soap opera style:

I think it's [*ER*] too like soap-ish (W♀313).

The participant quoted above had criticized *ER* for being totally unrealistic, while many other participants praised it for how realistic it was. Although, several commented that there were more traumas in an hour than one would really see, even in a busy, big-city hospital. Despite the heavy flow of the sick and injured into County's emergency room, the participants saw this as necessary for drama, but still praised the show for its realism otherwise.

This is a clear example of how the programme can affect the mode of viewing. While both situations are social in that large groups watch together, clearly the mode of viewing *Melrose Place* is more the "glance" and involves more social interaction during the programme, while the mode of viewing *ER* tends to be more the "gaze" where the interaction occurs during the commercials and after the programme. One participant noted that in some social viewing situations no one talks until the commercial:

ER is a big social thing, so's *Party of Five*... definitely, [wait for the commercials to talk] no one speaks during *ER* [laughs] (W♀163).

The participants in my research had an opportunity to compare their **at home** viewing with their **at school** viewing. Many suggested that at home, they usually

watched alone, while at school they usually watched with others. Already we can see that

there are connections between these points of oscillation, where the situation of **at home**

or **at school** overlaps with the situation of **solitary** or **social**:

> **in [city where the interviews took place] at school I do [watch with others], and at home usually by myself 'cause my parents aren't home and my brother's at school (M♀416).**

Among the participants in the individual interviews this sort of comment was common

throughout the interview. Certainly, their viewing practices differed between **at home**,

and **at school**. In contrast to Morley's findings from among British viewing families,

about 1/3 of the participants suggested that when they were at home, they watched

television alone, whereas when they watch at school, they watch with others. One factor

that might contribute to their viewing in groups at school is that each floor only has one

TV lounge. At the time the data were collected there was no cable hook up available in

individual student rooms so few students had a TV in their own room, if they want to

watch they usually have to deal with other viewers.

I did not ask explicitly about who controlled the viewing choices in their family,

but I get the impression that as young adults these participants watch television late at

night when no other family members are around. The life of a student is often one of late

hours, so when they return home, there is no one else who stays up late with them, except

the television. During the summer most students return home and work to earn money

for the next year of university. The experience of a full-time workweek has an impact on

their viewing habits. Those participants whom I interviewed during the summer

commented on the difference between their viewing while at school and at home and how

they watched quite a bit less because they were working all day. It is clear that various

aspects of student life affect the types of viewing, amount of viewing and modes of

viewing of the participants and that these are contingent upon whether they are **at home**

or **at school.**

During the interview participants were asked if they usually watched television

with others and the answers seem to cleave along gender lines. Eight of 32 participants

(25%) stated that they tended to watch television alone. All of these participants were

men, most of them were working class and also lived at home rather than in residence or

in a student house with several roommates. For these participants the reason they

watched alone was situational, there was no one around the house to watch with, but

some had specific reasons:

> **usually shows that I like, I like watching by myself instead of everyone**
> **else, telling them to keep quiet and watch the show, you know**
> **(W♂606).**

For this participant, watching alone meant watching in silence, uninterrupted.

Although all the female participants said that they usually watch TV with others,

there were a few women who specified times when they might watch television alone or

would like to. W♀313 said that she watched the news alone, because no one else

watches it. Another participant suggested that there were times when she would like to

watch alone:

> **some things I like to watch by myself, some things that I find shocking**
> **or disturbing I sort of like to be on my own to watch that sort of thing,**
> **personal preference I guess (W♀057).**

Finally, there is a clear oscillation between viewing as **among activities** (TV

viewing plus one or more other tasks) and viewing as the **prime activity** (just watching

TV). For the participants in my study, there is an obvious connection between eating

meals and television viewing. When asked if they do other things while watching TV,

the predominant answer is cooking or eating. There were several who also attempt to do

homework or read and some of the women said they liked to knit or do crafts while

viewing television.

I believe there is a complex relationship between students and the notion of

leisure time. Many comment that they are too busy to watch TV when they are at school,

because they have to study all the time. Research participants often referred to their

viewing as "break time" from studying and other schoolwork. Several mentioned

planning their meals to coincide with their favourite show, because they do not feel that

they can take time out for both. Many of them say that they are too busy, but in my

experience of living in the residence environment, much time is spent on leisure

activities. Students do have time for leisure activities, and time for television, they either

do not want to admit it, or they really do not see television viewing as an "activity" that

one takes time out for. It seems as if they have the impression that they should always be

in class or at the library and if they are not they seem to feel guilty about it.

Gauntlett and Hill (1999) note that:

> It is certainly the case that some people feel guilty about watching too much TV,
> and express concern that they should be doing something more productive than
> relaxing in front of the telly, but on the other hand it would appear that people do
> value television as a form of companionship and as an opportunity to relax. This
> creates an interesting tension between work and leisure time in the home (111).

Their study involved many participants, some of whom were university students. It is clear that this interesting tension is also part of viewing that takes place outside of the home and in other domestic viewing situations such as the university residence.

It is likely that combining television viewing with another task is going to place a viewer more within the glance side of the continuum than toward the gaze. Although, if eating alone one can use the television as companion and can be watching rather intently and actively. Activities other than eating, however, are likely to evoke other modes of viewing that are indicative of less involved viewing. Those who read and do homework in front of the TV are usually doing more of one than the other. That was my finding from the times when I watched the participants watching TV. On March 12, 1996 a special came on called *Top All Time Sitcom Weddings*, and one viewer in the room complained "I'll never get my work done now!" Clearly, she was unable to concentrate on her homework and was interested enough in the programme to put off working for another hour. Several participants commented during the interviews that they could not do homework in front of the television because they cannot concentrate. Some just wanted to be with others while doing their work and were not paying very much attention to the programme on the television. In fact, the common TV room was more of a social milieu for them, some background, while they worked on homework or reading.

In these instances TV seems to be a secondary activity to eating, homework or reading. I think this way of placing television viewing in a secondary role is part of the guilt or stigma associated with watching television. Watching TV appears to be seen as wasting time, in fact The Comedy Network plays on this fear with its tag line "time well

wasted." When asked how much time they spend watching television middle-class

women clearly downplayed their viewing. They stated that they watched an average of

3.4 hours per week, yet the interviews revealed considerable familiarity with television

texts—more than I think one could get from a range of from one to five hours of

television per week. To be fair, the questionnaires were administered near to reading

week and participants may have been focussed primarily on studies at the time, while

having watched more television throughout the year. Oddly enough the male viewers

reported much higher hours per week spent on viewing, and yet were demonstrably less

familiar with fictional television texts than female participants were. They did not talk

much about sports during the interviews, but it is clear that one failing of the interview

schedule is that it was focussed more on characters and other aspects of fictional

television.

Middle-class women, while downplaying their viewing, reported an average 17

hours per week on studies (the range was from 5-50 hours per week). I find it telling that

they overestimate their hours per week spent on studies in comparison to the time spent

watching television. It would seem that these women want to avoid the stigma of

laziness that is often associated with television viewing. Certainly, these participants

consider television as a secondary activity rather than a primary one. Television viewing

is constructed as something one does when they have nothing else to do.

This notion is a surprising one coming from research participants who are all

students between the ages of 18-21 and are therefore of an age group that has grown up

with television. Despite the statistics that indicate otherwise (see Table 2 above), there is

a perception that young people watch a great deal of television, and that watching

television is not a good use of one's time. These students seem keenly aware of that. The

sorts of extracurricular activities that seem worthwhile, and therefore legitimate, are such

things as participating in sports activities (such as intramurals), working out, and

volunteering.

FIGURE 2

Casual/Ritualized Continuum and Points of Oscillation

CASUAL<-->RITUALIZED

Away from home

Type of Programme

Competing with other events

It will be seen that the Glance/Gaze continuum and the Casual/Ritualized

continuum (Figure 2 above) have some tendency to overlap; there are also some

distinctions that deserve highlighting. In the data that I collected, whether viewers

utilized a casual or ritualized mode of viewing appeared to be contingent upon 3 basic

factors, which are depicted in Figure 2 above. First, whether participants were **away**

from home had an impact as it did in the previous discussion of the Glance/Gaze

continuum. Second, I noted that the **type of programme** was a key to which mode of

viewing might likely be utilized. Third, **competition with other events** seems to

influence whether a viewer will adopt a casual or a ritualized mode of viewing.

Watching television in the strange surroundings, **away from home,** of a residence

hall, or a "student house" can often be a **casual**, social activity. The common room[22] seems to be a meeting place and television is a brief diversion while they wait for the group to assemble. The television provides students with an excuse to hang around the common room until others come on the scene to invite him/her to do something else. The common room can provide a place where students can wait around, without feeling self-conscious.

There are also popular **types of shows** for which large groups meet and watch together (*Friends, Party of Five, Melrose Place, ER, Beverly Hills 90210*). These group viewings are **ritualized** in several ways. There is often a "no talking" rule and viewing occurs in the dark so that only serious viewers are around. Viewing in the dark clearly emulates cinema-like viewing situation, and like seeing a movie these weekly shows are a big event worthy of students' close attention. The cinema-like viewing situation creates a special event out of the everyday (or weekly) activity of viewing. For students who say that they organize break times around the schedule of their favourite programmes, it makes sense that for at least some types of shows they engage in more ritualized and attentive viewing. Despite the "no-talking" rule during the broadcast, there is much speculation and reaction during the commercials and directly after the show ends. The show provides a launching pad for all manner of conversations and hence is social as much as the situation of viewing where talking occurs throughout. In fact, the "in-the-dark and quiet" viewing situation may very well be seen as more social, in that more

---

[22]Even when they live in a shared house with several roommates, the participants tend to call the TV room or living room the "common room."

serious interaction occurs as a result of the programme. The discussion is often based on

the connection between their life experiences and those depicted on the show:

> **I guess stuff like how ridiculous things are or what you'd do in that
> situation that type of thing (M♀260);**
>
> **I think maybe it's relationships or issues in life that people deal with
> like the one where Julia got pregnant, so stuff like that I guess is what
> is kind of a discussion (M♀384).**

With a programme such as *Melrose Place*, there is commentary throughout, but it is very

much more like heckling. In one of the interviews a participant described the type of talk

that takes place when viewing *Melrose Place*:

> **we hoot and we holler an we're like "oh my God!" and if somebody
> does something that's very stereotypical like if a guy does something
> then we talk about that (W♀057).**

Another participant made similar comments:

> **I'll do a running commentary [laughs] I can be bad sometimes about
> that, but like if we're watching *Melrose Place* like that show, I think
> the only reason we watch it is to make fun of it, because the acting is
> so bad and stuff like that and you know so we'll talk through it just
> making general comments like oh why is she wearing that?! (W♀547).**

The programme is not taken seriously and the discussion tends to focus on the

quality of hair styles and outfits. When I watched an episode of *Melrose Place* with a

group of students, the above was very much an accurate description. I recorded such

comments as "I like her hair like that," which was a comment about Amanda's new hair

do. During one of the focus groups one participant commented:

> *Melrose* and *Beverly Hills* and I guess *Malibu Shores* they don't make
> me think about anything, it's honestly it's an hour that you sit back
> and I know they try to have these moral issues and stuff, but it just
> doesn't work on me, and I just sit back and almost laugh at how
> cheesy it is and that's what I think TV is for me it's just like escape
> from reality, I don't need more reality (M♀533).

It is clear that she does not take these shows seriously, they are "cheesy" to her, but that

does not mean she does not enjoy them. On the contrary, they are just the sort of escape

she is looking for from TV. The viewing strategy that this participant is describing would

fall into the ludic type that Liebes and Katz described in their research. She is exhibiting

a kind of playful viewing similar to that discussed above among the *Melrose Place*

viewers. It is a playful framing of the programme, but also one that is cool or distant and

potentially an assertion of cultural superiority over those who such messages "work on."

She may also be trying to create some distance so that she is not "found out" for taking

pleasure in such shows.

If a show is on at a time of day when intramural sports, classes or **other**

competing events/activities are also taking place, then the focus on the programme is

usually more casual. The students view the programme until a large enough group gathers

to go out or it's time to participate in some event. Television is used here as a kind of pit

stop. When I observed students viewing I made frequent notes about the traffic in and out

of the common room. Students are meeting each other, cooking a snack, seeking help

with an assignment or computer problem, checking to see who else is around or what

others are watching. On Thursday night after *Friends* is over, the viewing tends to be

much more casual, often no one stays for an entire programme, until *ER* comes on at

156

10pm. Obviously, the line-up of shows on any given night is also a factor in one's mode

of viewing.

Clearly, gender is a factor that cannot be separated out of the foregoing discussion

of Glance/Gaze and Casual/Ritualized viewing. Yet, gendered modes of viewing merit

some separate and detailed discussion apart from the relation to these other modes of

viewing.

Of the 89 questionnaires, 30% answered "No" to the question of whether they do

other activities while watching TV. More male respondents than female respondents

answered "No" to this question. This would seem to support Morley's findings that

"[e]ssentially the men state a clear preference for viewing attentively, in silence, without

interruption in order not to miss anything" (Morley 1986:150). The interview transcripts

seem to bear this out as well. Of those who clearly stated that watching television was

their primary activity while viewing, all were male participants (only 3 of 32 made such

clear statements, however). Obviously, the interview situation is quite different from the

filling in of a questionnaire. Even these three participants noted above suggested that

sometimes they eat while watching TV.

In both kinds of social viewing that I encountered during the participant

observation research, the audience is very much dominated by women viewers although

some men also view these programmes. Generally speaking, women are much more

likely to both talk about television and talk during television viewing, while men are

more likely to watch in silence. A number of male participants suggested that they found

the talk during viewing to be annoying:

> **I find that idiotic, I hate that when I come back from with my lunch
> and all the girls are talking about soap operas, they're all looking at
> each other instead of the screen, it might as well not even be on, you
> know they're talking about three shows back and here it is you know
> this great action is unfolding and everything and they're not even
> caring about it and then they're wondering what happened, so the
> next time it's two shows later they'll be talking about the one that was
> just missed because they were too busy talking to each other, so no I
> don't converse (M♂092).**

Some of the focus groups were made up of all female or all male participants.

Prior to the focus group interview the participants watched an episode of *ER*. Despite the

commentary above that "no one speaks during *ER*," the female groups did talk a little

during the viewing. It is possible that they felt free to talk because some had seen the

episode before. However, they wanted to watch in darkness just as they usually do. In

addition, female participants were more vocal during the interview that followed. The

discussion among the male group was much less chatty and not very spontaneous. I was

left feeling that the women would have talked about this programme even if there had not

been a formal interview set up. The following comment from one of the participants in

the male focus group illustrates the point:

> **if we hadn't had this discussion I would never have thought twice
> about some of these things about someone doing coke and uh
> pregnancy (M♂340).**

Another participant in the same group suggested that the sort of talk that does go on about

television, particularly soap opera tends to be focused on what characters are wearing:

> **like ok whose dating who now, or whose wearing what, like "oh that's
> a real ugly dress"** [rather than about any sort of] **"moral issues"**
> **(M♂212).**

With few exceptions the female interview participants were also much more at ease talking about television during the individual interviews. It was clear that they had conversations about television with their friends. From the questionnaire responses it seems that male participants tend to repeat one-liners from comedy programmes, or re-live sports highlights, while women talk about characters, plot, and speculate on what will happen next. The talk that women have about television tends to be described by them as more conversational than the talk that the male participants described.

This finding is very much in keeping with Morley's research on families watching television. Morley found that "even if women watch less, with less intent viewing styles, none the less they are inclined to talk about television *more* than men, despite the fact that the men watch more of it, more attentively" (Morley 1986:155). In my data it's clear that talking during some shows is allowed and even expected (*Melrose Place, Beverly Hills 90210*) while talking during other shows (*ER, Party of Five*) is sanctioned by other viewers and governed by established viewing rules (such as no talking and no answering the phone). The above are all shows that have a mostly female audience among the research participants.

In the "pit stop" situations, female viewers are more likely than male viewers to become "trapped" by the programme and stay until it ends. Male viewers are more likely to leave the television when it's time to go, regardless of whether the programme has ended. This seems to contradict the common notion that female viewers watch less attentively than male viewers. For particular shows, such as *Party of Five*, women tend to watch in the way that is often ascribed to male viewers-intently and in silence. It

should be noted that the female viewers tended to watch the same programmes, while the

male viewers seem to be less concentrated on any set of programmes. At the time when I

collected my data, the majority of prime-time programmes that were viewed in the

residence hall, were the programmes that the female participants favour. There were, of

course, occasional disputes over whether to watch hockey or *90210*, but these were less

common than I would have expected. Despite such disputes the students were not

inclined to record programmes to watch later, although this did happen on occasion.

It is the female viewers who tended to engage in ritualized viewing[23]. It is

possible that one of the reasons for dimming the lights was so that no one would be

caught crying. Some of the shows they watched in this way, *Party of Five* and *ER* for

example, often made viewers cry. During one of the focus groups the participants

discussed some events in the show that were sad:

> **that was kind of upsetting [laughing, embarrassed about being
> touched, moved by TV] it's embarrassing (M♀445).**

When I asked if she cried during the episode we watched she said, "**almost, almost**"

(M♀445). Perhaps these emotional reactions are less embarrassing in a group-viewing

situation if the lights are out. The dark setting puts one in mind of a movie theatre and the

experience of cinema spectatorship. For the women who tended to watch in this way, it

was clearly an expression of their intention to view intently and without interruption.

Also, there was a tendency to spend time in the TV room doing homework or talking, but

---

[23]It is likely that male viewers engaged in ritualized viewing of sports, particularly of play-off
sports, but during the time when I conducted participant observation, there were no big sports events that I
witnessed the students viewing.

for these shows "no talking" rules were instituted in order to rid the viewers of

distraction. When students entered the room to use the kitchen facilities or came in and

were not watching they suffered sanctions from the assembled group of viewers.

While the Casual/Ritualized modes of viewing had some fairly clear gender

dimensions, it was less clear whether gender was a point of oscillation along the

Glance/Gaze continuum. The findings here are somewhat contradictory. Women tended

to watch television with others and yet were more likely than the men in the sample to

watch attentively, to Gaze rather than to Glance at the television. This may very well be

inextricable from the concentration in this research on discussion of certain programmes,

which are most popular and well known among the female participants.

Conclusion

From the data collected in my research I have classified the modes of viewing into

three basic streams. First, viewers tend to land on a Glance/Gaze continuum. There are a

number of points of oscillation along this continuum, these are **social or solitary, at**

school or at home and whether viewing is the **primary activity or among activities**.

Second, there is a continuum of Ritualized/Casual viewing which is contingent upon

three factors: **away from home, type of programme,** and **competition with other**

activities. Finally, there is some evidence of gendered modes of viewing among the

participants in this research although the findings seem to contradict some previous

research on gendered modes of viewing.

In the following chapter the data that pertain to reading class and gender on

television are analyzed and discussed. It is useful to have this sense of how the

participants view TV as a point of departure for an analysis of what meanings they make

from their viewing.

Chapter 5: Class and Gendered Readings of Television Programmes

The individual interviews were conducted with eight middle-class women, eight

working-class women, eight middle-class men and eight working-class men. The

interview schedule is included as Appendix G. In the section about gender, participants

were asked a common set of questions about men and women on television. The basic

format was to ask participants to talk to me about the men and women they see on TV,

about what the men and women on TV are like and about how they feel about the

portrayals of masculinity and femininity they see on TV. These opening questions were

followed up with more specific probes: what kind of women/men are they? Do they seem

typical? Do you know women or men like them? What kind of jobs do they have? And,

do you relate to them or find them attractive? There was some alteration of questions

asked based on the gender of the participant (see interview schedule in Appendix G).

In order to investigate their reading of class on television, participants were

provided with two sets of programmes and asked to choose one from each with which

they were familiar. The two sets were divided into those which depicted working-class

characters and those which depicted middle-class characters. The questions for each

programme were the same. I tried to get them talking about the family or characters,

their jobs and lifestyle and then asked the participant to assign them to a class. Once they

had provided a class label, I inquired about what it was that led them to choose that label.

There was also a final comparative question to get participants to compare the lifestyle or

characters from the two programmes. Table 5 indicates the middle-class programmes and

how many participants in each category chose to answer questions about them. Table 6

indicates the working-class programmes and how many participants in each category

chose to answer questions about them.

Table 5
Middle Class TV Shows by Class/Gender

TV Show	♀W	♀M	♂W	♂M	Total
Friends	2	2	1	2	7
Party of Five	3	3			6
Seinfeld		1	2	2	5
Home Improvement	1		2		3
Beverly Hills 90210	1	1			2
Martin			1		1
Spin City		1			1
Mad About You			1		1
Frasier				1	1
The Young and the Restless				1	1
The Single Guy				1	1
Melrose Place			1	1	2
ER	1				1

Table 6
Working Class TV Shows by Class/Gender

TV Show	♀W	♀M	♂W	♂M	Total
The Simpsons		4	6	5	15
Roseanne	5	4			9
Family Matters	1		2		3
Married... With Children	1			3	4
Grace Under Fire	1				1

There are significantly more top rated programmes which depict the middle class

than those which depict working-class lifestyles and characters. The class make-up of the

TV content that participants tend to view appears to be skewed toward depictions of

middle-class lifestyles, characters, and events. In this chapter I will be looking at the class

and gender depictions within the content that the participants encounter in their everyday

viewing. The central questions to be taken up in this chapter involve the participants'

readings of class and gender on TV, their perceptions of class and gender in general, and

whether and to what extent their own class and gender seem to have an influence on these

readings and perceptions. In addition, I am looking for some indication of the intersection

of class and gender on participant's reading of TV content.

The chapter is divided into five main sections. In the first 3 sections, 1) Gender on

Television, 2) Reading Class on *Roseanne* and *The Simpsons,* and 3) Reading Middle-

Classness, I have largely let the participants speak for themselves, but with analysis and

commentary throughout. The last two sections, 4) Comparison of working-class and

middle-class readings, and 5) Discussion, focus more on the analysis of data presented in

the chapter.

Gender on Television

During the interviews participants were asked about men and women on

television in general rather than being limited to discussion of specific shows. The

responses often cleave on both gender and class lines, depending upon the focus of the

discussion. When talking about the jobs that men and women on television hold, there are

obvious class differences in how these characteristics are read by participants. When

generally considering the representations of men and women on TV, the responses are

more often divided by gender than by class.

When participants were asked about women on television, the responses were

strikingly divided along gender lines. Participants were specifically asked to talk about

the women they see on TV, to indicate what kind of women they seem to be. Half of the

female participants immediately stated that the women on television are "skinny" or

"thin." This was in response to a question that did not specifically ask what women

looked like on television, yet that was the most common response:

> **oh um slim and blonde and very, very good-looking you know they**
> **just stepped off the runway on to the show (W♀547);**

> thin, good-looking, they're always in make-up always dressed up, you don't see them looking like slobs. um typical like ideal, like model type (W♀313);

> they're all beautiful, usually beautiful, I'd say um very tall, usually quite skinny, you don't really see a lot of um fat women on TV (M♀533);

> I think they are very, very thin, like overly thin and attractive (M♀260).

There was little hesitation from women whose thoughts seemed immediately to go to the way women look on television. when they were asked about the kind of women they see on TV. Their further comments in response to probing about what they thought of those images clearly showed that they disliked the images of women on television:

> oh I hate it, I really hate it. 'Cause I'm not thin and beautiful and tall and blonde like they are and you know, they're too perfect, they're too, they're too beautiful you know and you wonder how many hours and how many people have worked on them to achieve that look and you know, for the hour show they have to tape (W♀547);

> I think it kind of sucks because a lot of people can't live up to that portrayal and if that's all you see then you're always comparing yourself to that person and that is hard because a lot of people cannot relate to that because they're not like that (W♀313).

Clearly these women are responding negatively to the lack of diversity of women who are represented on television. The fact that they or women they know cannot measure up or "relate to" these images makes them angry and at the same time indicates a palpable effect that they see these portrayals having on the self-image of women in general. They indicate some feelings of pressure to conform to such images (although it is unclear where this pressure comes from) and yet they also clearly denounce these images as unattainable. at least without a make-up and hair team and hours of spare time.

Most of the male participants, in contrast, suggested that women on television

were "good-looking" or some variant of that general description. They were not as quick

as the female participants to react critically to the representations of women they were

describing:

> **definitely see skinny, model-type women. Extremely good-looking,**
> **the clothes they wear are quite provocative (M♂235);**
>
> **well, they're beautiful, blonde, perfect bodies (M♂589);**
>
> **usually I would say um good-looking women (W♂174).**

The following quote indicates that 139 saw television women as generally not extreme,

but rather average:

> **there's the skinny you know average size you know not too tall not too**
> **uh short, but you know the women on *Friends* and on *ER*, they have**
> **you know just the average size, you know they're not the extremes of**
> **the spectrum (W♂139).**

This description of the women on *Friends* as average was not very common in the

interviews. In fact in recent years the speculation that these actresses suffer from eating

disorders has been the subject of many entertainment and tabloid news stories. Since the

participant begins with the descriptor of "skinny" and then qualifies the images as

"average," it seems possible that he was reacting to something in the interviewer's

response to his use of that term or just to her gender. Most of the participants suggested

that these women dressed way beyond their means, in provocative clothing and that they

were of the "model" type:

> **they're [women on television in general] beautiful and sexual and**
> **attractive and visual, they're really visual, strikingly visual (W♂587);**

you see beautiful women that are sort of um well sometimes they're portrayed as not very intelligent (W♂588).

It is interesting that 75% (12/16) of male participants suggested that the portrayals of women on television were unrealistic while only 38% (6/16) of women made these sorts of statements. It is possible that some of the women did not see this as something that needed to be spoken. However, during out discussion of men's and women's work, 416 uses the distinguishing term "normal" to indicate that is something most women on TV are not:

you never really see a really normal looking woman working with a man, kind of it's always attractive, pretty girls who come to get the jobs and you don't really see the older women, the established women who have families or whatever (M♀416).

Clearly their use of descriptors such as "skinny" was loaded with emotional reactions to the impossibility of measuring up to these images. It would seem that the male participants did not suffer from such perceptions of the ideal man and the impossibility of measuring up to it. They not only saw television women as "good-looking," but also see television men as "good-looking:"

you definitely see good-looking guys, very muscular, and smooth talking type of guys, all of them are very sure of themselves you don't usually see like a weak guy type of thing (M♂235);

just portraying an ideal type, if you want, of what men should be (M♂092);

[men on TV are portrayed as] big, strong, tough, good-looking that sort of deal (M♂578).

There was some articulation among working-class male participants that the men on television are generally the sort of men that women find attractive, and that women want

as boyfriends, husbands or partners:

> **[men on TV are] gregarious, usually assertive, good with women you know approaching women that kind of stuff, usually attractive (W♂585);**
>
> **I guess [men on TV are] big, big strong fellows that are handsome and that uh sort of all the women talk about, well some of them I guess are portrayed as intelligent, other ones they sort of play the dumb jock stereotype um yeah pretty well like all the positive things (W♂588).**

Still, in general male participants considered the portrayals of women and men on television to be totally unrealistic and few indicated much sense of concern about measuring up to these ideal images. One male participant expressed concern when he heard his girlfriend compare herself to TV women:

> **I enjoy watching it, it's always nice to look at someone who's good-looking, reality doesn't, to me TV is just a way to get away for a little while and just let my mind be nothing so I don't really think of it as reality. The only time it does bother me is when I hear someone like [his girlfriend] saying "I wish I was as skinny as her" type of thing and I just think, you know that's not realistic (M♂235).**

This participant does not see any connection between his desire to look at the "good-looking" women on television and his girlfriend's desire to look like they do.

The use of a discourse of realism was common among the participants. When discussing male and female characters on TV, the connotation was that "unrealistic" meant unlike anyone they know or have met. In the context of discussing whether a programme was realistic or not, they tended to be talking about what seemed plausible. Earlier, it was noted that *ER* was described as realistic in comparison to TV soap opera, but participants also recognized that so many traumas would not occur in such a short space of time. The abundance of trauma and injury for the sake of drama was not viewed

as unrealistic, but poorly done fake blood or plastic organs would be seen as unrealistic.

The participants were asked about how women and men dress on TV and most

(11/16, 69%) of the female participants stated that women on television dressed in

revealing clothing or clothing that was too dressy for what they were doing.

> **It's believable [the way women dress on TV]. I really don't know if they'd have a different outfit for every day, but it's TV (M♀387).**

This is one of many examples where participants indicate their belief that TV does not

look like reality, just because "it's TV."

> **I find the *Friends* cast, like uh Jennifer Aniston and particularly her, she kind of dresses very, you know to go out clubbing kind of thing almost all the time, it looks like she's ready to just you know go from working in the coffee shop to going out to a bar. It just doesn't seem realistic, you don't see a lot of people that dress up in a skirt and blouse and heels to work in a coffee shop, especially if you can dress how you want to dress, you don't really see that a lot, so I don't find that her dressing particularly agrees with how people are. She's more of a doll (W♀363).**

The above is just one example where participants referred to how characters who were

unemployed or underemployed seemed to be dressed in the latest styles and always

seemed ready to go out "clubbing". There were frequent comments about characters'

ability to afford these great clothes:

> **oh on *Friends* they all dress so nice and all so skinny and they seem like they have money coming out of their ears, none of them have like a real job (M♀002);**

> **some of these people [characters on TV] they don't have these fantastic jobs but they've got fantastic apartments, they've got fabulous clothes (W♀057).**

The female participants tended to talk about TV clothing in terms of the

character's ability to afford the latest styles, following the latest fashion trends, or its

appropriateness to the character's work and lifestyle. This may indicate their knowledge

of designer fashions and the cost of such clothing.

Of the male participants, 38% (6/16) suggested that women on television were

depicted sexually or as sexual objects:

> **when they're [women] on TV they're portrayed as, like you know basically sluts, you know like you'll have one sitcom and they will sleep with this man, that man and this man, you know and before you know it they end up sleeping with the woman that lives in their neighbourhood you know! (W♂573);**

> **[women on TV are] more open sexually tend to be more assertive in relationships, usually portrayals of an equal relationship (W♂585);**

> **the clothes they [women on TV] wear are quite provocative (M♂235);**

> **especially for *Friends* and that sort of thing, I know some of my, a good friend of mine who watches it because of the women who are on it, you know [the implication was that his friend watches in order to fantasize about these beautiful women] (M♂037).**

Among the middle-class women, 63% (5/8) suggested that television women were

strong, independent or professional, with little emphasis on this being an improvement in

their image on television. There was an almost taken-for-granted attitude toward this

issue. The same proportion of working-class women (63%) seemed to believe that the

image of women was improving – as, for example, in the quotes below:

> **on the soap opera [that she regularly watches] a lot of them have good strong roles and they're business women a lot and they're quite equal to the men (W♀163);**

> **I think we're [women] coming to the forefront a little bit more and the roles are a lot less stereotypical, but I think they're still, there's still a long way to go (W♀057);**

> **I find there's a lot more professional women now on TV than there used to be, it used to be always the professional husband and the stay at home Mom and now there's a lot more women on TV that have professional jobs (W♀561).**

Both 163 and 561 take note of what they see as improvements in the work roles that women on television have taken on. When talking about the roles of women on television having improved, most female participants, regardless of their class, referred to their higher status and greater authority in work roles:

> **on *The X-Files* and *ER* I think the women are portrayed as pretty strong, but I mean like how the girl, the doctor with the limp in *ER*, she's like pretty high up there and she has a lot of like pull and authority, that's really good (M♀002);**

> **I think women are getting higher ranked like just doing jobs and they're being portrayed as a lot higher up in the work environment now in modern TV programmes, they can be themselves and speak their mind (M♀378).**

The male viewers tended to describe television men as "tough," "big," or "muscular." Working-class men and women were more likely to use the word "macho" to describe the image of men on television. The working-class participants tended to use such terms to describe men on TV:

> **the majority of the guys are the macho, you know they can do all kind of, always getting the woman (W♀560);**

> **typical nuclear family, the macho guy has his tool show [referring to *Home Improvement*] and does his little grunt (W♂600);**

> **They're all macho [men on TV]. Yeah I'd say they're all macho, they're all good-looking (W♀313);**

> **they're more emotional guys [on TV], like I think now, like they can be masculine without having to be macho all the time (M♀378);**

> **Mulder [lead male on *The X-Files*], he's a guy but he's not um I don't know he's not as macho as some of these other guys on TV, like Tim Allen, *Home Improvement* [imitates the trademark guy grunt], he knows everything, don't tell him, don't tell him what to do, don't stop for directions (M♂567)**

It is striking that the descriptors regarding men seem to have a potential class basis, while most of the readings of women on television were gender based with male and female participants differing in their general readings of male and female characters on television.   When middle-class participants used the term "macho" it was generally a negative descriptor, something men on TV now generally are not anymore. The middle-class women in my sample did not use the term "macho," but most female participants, regardless of class saw men on TV as dominant, often in comparison to TV women:

> **guys usually play more of a, a dominant role, I'm trying to think of a submissive male on TV, but I'm having a hard time [laughs] um a lot of times the dominant male role I think he's kind of, it's portrayed more in fun, in something like *Home Improvement* with Tim Allen, he's portraying the dominant male type, but he's also making fun of that kind of thing. So I think males are portrayed in a dominant role, but I don't know how seriously it's dealt with (M♀001);**

> **they're [men on TV] typically good-looking. Strong kind of, or they're the ones who go around protecting, they're in the dominant positions I suppose normally (M♀416);**

> **I just find that men on TV, they still seem to be the dominant, like they seem to dominate over women especially so (M♂235).**

Only one respondent noted that there are "**no fat guys on TV**" (W♂139).

Certainly, the notion that men on television are generally good-looking was prevalent, but he was the only one who framed it in these opposite terms. Generally, men in the sample seemed comfortable describing television men as "good-looking" or "attractive to

women:"

> **you definitely see good-looking guys [on TV], very muscular, and smooth talking type of guys (M♂235);**

> **big, strong, tough, good-looking that sort of deal (M♂578);**

> **uh gregarious, usually assertive, good with women you know approaching women that kind of stuff, usually attractive (W♂585).**

Where the female participants hated the idea that television women were "too perfect," "the model type," or "skinny;" just over half (56%) of the female participants described men on TV as "good-looking" or "hot" (5M and 4W):

> **ohhh, hot guys, no um they're kind of more sensitive (W♀057);**

> **most of them are very good-looking (W♀163);**

> **good-looking, maybe higher class (M♀387).**

About half of the women also suggested that the men on TV are not typical or representative of any men they actually know. In contrast, 81% (13/16) of male participants suggested that men on TV were "extremes" or "non-typical." It is interesting to note that it is women who are most affected by the ideal images on TV as evidenced by my findings and the work of Bordo (1993) and Wolfe (1990) to name a few, but that they seem less likely to view images of men as also "not typical." In fact there is evidence in the quotes above, though playful, that indicates some objectification of the ideal men on television by the women in the sample.

In reading gender, male participants suggest that images of women and men are unrealistic, inaccurate and not typical of people they actually know:

> **no I don't think TV is typical of anything (M♂092);**

> **it's kind of extreme, if a person acted that way all the time that's a little extreme (W♂139);**

> **uh I don't know, they seem extreme (M♂567);**

> **I don't think it's realistic [portrayal of men on TV], it's just uh it's more sort of, well I guess the TV producers want to portray someone succeeding rather than not succeeding, which is not always the case, I mean you walk around, people don't always come out on top, that's sort of unrealistic (W♂587).**

When we talked about the work that men and women on television do, the

responses seemed to be strikingly class-based. 63% (5/8) of working-class women said

that men on television had glamorous jobs and that they made a lot of money:

> **oh it's so, it's glamorous, like nobody's working at McDonalds and wearing old Levis or anything with the holes in them. Like everyone's got sensational jobs, if they're struggling it's a glamorized struggle it's not a daily, day-to-day thing, everyone's extremely good-looking and I suppose a "catch" (W♀057);**

> **they [men on TV] all seem sort of wealthy or well off, I mean the new character they introduced to *Melrose* is a billionaire (W♀566);**

> **well most of them [men on TV], if they don't have high powered jobs like attorneys or doctors or something like that, then they're writers or actors. Even though, they're portraying actors on the show, which I always thought was kind of funny [laughs] so usually they'll be doctors or lawyers, they'll be in very high powered positions (W♀547).**

The exact same proportion of middle-class women said that television men did

"everyday" and "normal" work:

> **[they have] typical male jobs I guess (M♀001);**

> **the types of jobs that are there [on TV] are definitely everyday jobs that like anybody could get (M♀378);**

> **yeah I guess so [the jobs seem typical], normal jobs (M♀384);**

I don't know I guess it [jobs on TV] sort of portrays the real world (M♀416).

These women were talking about the same characters and the same group of television

programmes so it would seem that they have different ideas, quite likely linked to their

own class, of what constitutes "normal" work.

Working-class male participants noted the few working-class jobs that are shown

on television or they commented on their absence. Middle-class males either suggested

that men on television are shown in a range of jobs (38%) or that work was generally not

shown on television (25%). That is, most characters supposedly have jobs, but you never

see them actually working; their jobs seem not to get in the way of their interesting social

lives.

There is a clear gender difference in readings of the images of women on

television in the sample. The popular shows to which they referred did primarily contain

these ideal portrayals of incredibly beautiful women, which the female participants

indicated they "hate." The female participants tended toward referential framings, while

the male participants tended more toward the critical framings that are discussed by

Liebes and Katz (1993). Participants did not discuss older women on television although

there are some. In fact one participant complained that you never see older, established

women on television. The characters that the respondents discussed were primarily young

characters and among such characters the ideal image of woman is quite prevalent. It

may be that viewers in this age group simply do not notice older characters on TV; they

may watch them, but they did not talk about them in the interviews.

Female respondents, regardless of class, registered anger about the ideal images of

women that they felt were unattainable and yet they also indicated some pressure to

aspire to that ideal. Their use of terms such as "skinny" and their descriptions of how the

images of women on television make them feel seem to indicate a multi-layered reading.

They seem to at once accept and reject these images. Their readings correspond to what

Liebes and Katz referred to as moral opposition. That is they accept the images as reality

(a referential framing), but still rebel against them at the same time (see Table 1). Despite

these kinds of readings from women in the sample, relatively few (38%) actually called

the women on TV unrealistic, while 3/4 of the male participants clearly indicated that

they saw women on TV as entirely unrealistic and merely ideal. Male participants tended

to see images of men and women on TV as equally unrepresentative of anyone they know

or expect to know and there was little indication of a feeling of inadequacy in comparison

to the images of men on television. A few of the working-class male participants

indicated that the type of men they see on TV are the type that are good with women and

whom women want to date, but it was much less clear whether they felt any concern

about not being able to measure up to these ideal images as was clearly the case with

most of the responses from the female participants.

There was a strong class difference noted in the way that women from each class

talked about the work that men do on TV. Middle-class female respondents saw these

jobs as "normal" and "typical" everyday jobs. Working-class female participants saw

these jobs as glamorous, prestigious and noted an absence of characters who have to

struggle to get by. There was also a much weaker class-based reading of men on

television as evidenced by the different terms used to describe TV men by working-class

and middle-class participants. Only working-class participants refer to TV men as

"macho" and also often use more physical identifiers such as "muscular," while middle-

class participants tended to refer to qualities such as "sensitivity." However, the class

cleavage here was much less evident than in the previous examples.

Reading Class on Roseanne and The Simpsons

For this section I have confined my analysis to the 24 interviews where *Roseanne*

and *The Simpsons* were chosen by participants as the working-class shows to discuss

during the individual interview. Participants were not informed that this section of the

interview pertained to class, nor were they informed that the two sets of shows were

divided based on their depictions of class.

As you can see from Table 6, nearly half (15/32) of all the interview participants

chose *The Simpsons*. The number of women who chose to talk about *Roseanne* (9/16,

56%) is also remarkable when compared to the number of men who did, which was none!

Roseanne was most familiar to most of the working-class female participants: 63% (5/8)

chose that programme.

It must be noted that participants only had five choices among the working-class

shows. There simply are not as many shows which portray the working-class on

television. The paucity of depictions of the working class has been well documented

throughout television's brief history (see Fiske and Hartley 1978; Steeves and Crafton

Smith 1987; Butsch 1992; and Bettie 1995). There are many possible explanations for

why participants primarily chose one of these 2 shows from the list of five. In the

179

southern Ontario city where the research was conducted, both shows air in syndication

several times during the dinner hours (4pm to 7:30pm), which is a time when this age

group tends to be in front of the TV. In addition, both shows were ranked high among the

top 30 shows in the Neilsen ratings (Canadian and U.S. ratings) at the time when data

were collected.

Roseanne first aired in the 1988 season and ended a nine-year run in the spring of

1997. From its inception the show received much critical attention, based primarily on

the central figure and creator, Roseanne Barr[24]. She took her stand-up comedy routine

and based the sitcom on the "domestic goddess" she personified in that routine. As a

producer, Roseanne had more control over the direction that stories would take than

female sitcom stars ordinarily achieve, which led to her being criticized as difficult,

controlling and unreasonable on the set of the show. The show was in the Neilsen top

five for its first six seasons. *Roseanne* is about the Connor family: parents Roseanne and

Dan; daughters Becky and Darlene; and son DJ (for David Jacob). There are also

frequent visits (interruptions) from Roseanne's sister Jackie, various neighbours who

came and went over the seasons, and Roseanne's needy Mom. The show depicts a

working-class family, trying to get by in middle America (Lanford, Illinois).

The Simpsons began as short filler segments on 1987's *The Tracey Ullman Show*.

In 1989 they debuted in their own thirty-minute show: "a cynical cartoon sitcom" (Jones

1992:267). This working-class family resides in Springfield (a town whose name derives

---

[24]She was known as Roseanne Barr until her 1991 marriage to Tom Arnold (co-producer on the show at the time), they divorced in 1994 and now she is simply known as Roseanne.

from that which was the setting of *Father Knows Best*). The Simpson family is

constituted rather traditionally: Father, Homer; Mother, Marge; and three children: Bart,

Lisa, and Maggie.

Homer Simpson is "a paunchy slob, not yet forty but already skidding downhill

slaving away in Springfield's nuclear power plant" (Jones 1992:267). Bart is the

troublemaker son, a pre-teenaged failure at school. "He's street smart, not school smart"

(Fiske 1994:122). Lisa Simpson is the ineffective intellectual. One of the participants in

this research described her as Cassandra of Greek mythology:

> **like Lisa Simpson's the voice of reason saying things like, "oh I could get**
> **hurt" you know there's that character in like the Trojan war, this woman of**
> **Troy who was cursed with the ability to see the future, but have no one**
> **believe her. She was like "don't let that horse into the city! Don't let it in it's**
> **full of enemy soldiers!" they brought it in destroyed Troy. So it's like that**
> **very pragmatic voice of reason, which is all too often ignored... (M♂212).**

Marge is a stay-at-home mom and Maggie is the baby, neither walking nor

talking. "This is no true sitcom, to be entered vicariously. This is a bitter self-dissecting

satire" (Jones 1992:268). *The Simpsons* throughout its time on the air has generally been

in the top 20 of the Nielsen ratings for the USA (frequently it makes the top five shows

for the week). Undoubtedly, the commercial merchandising of everything from T-shirts

to lunch boxes adds to the general familiarity of *The Simpsons*. The show has recently

begun its 15th season.

When asked to put a class label on *The Simpsons* or *Roseanne* some of the

participants had a difficult time arriving at a decision or used a blending of class

positions:[25]

>   **um, I think um middle, middle class. Or maybe lower class (M♂037);**
>
>   **yeah working class, upper-lower class, or lower middle (M♂212);**
>
>   **um I think the middle class or maybe working class...middle class, probably middle class (W♂587);**
>
>   **it's pretty middle class...yeah...working-middle class (M♀002).**

All but one of these participants, who are referring to *The Simpsons*, are middle class and

they seem to have a difficult time articulating a class position for the characters on the

show. It is striking that they all finally come to decide on the label of "middle class."

The indicators that these participants use are fairly consistent; the fact that they have only

one car, one TV, they do not have luxuries to flaunt, and that there is only one source of

income in their household. These participants seem to be reluctant to label the Simpson

family as working class, despite providing indicators that are more commonly descriptive

of working-class, rather than middle-class people.

The following respondent is not very certain of class terms when referring to

Roseanne:

>   **um I don't know if this is a class, I'd put them in the upper end of lower-middle somewhere (M♀001).**

The participant is clearly conscious of the fact that the class of the family on *Roseanne* is

unlike her own, and is lower, yet still wants to locate them in the middle class

somewhere.

---

[25]Table 8, in Appendix I, indicates the show and class label used by participants who discussed
Roseanne and *The Simpsons*.

Jhally and Lewis (1992) found in their study of race, class and *The Cosby Show*,

that their subjects did not have a way of talking about class structures; they did not have a

language with which to talk about and make sense of class structures and inequalities

(Jhally and Lewis 1992:133). This seems to bear out in the above illustrated confusion

and blending of class terms to describe the Simpson and Connor families. The literature

on stratification clearly indicates that when asked to determine their own class most

respondents tend toward the middle, partly because no one wants to seem extraordinary.

It is likely that the sense that middle class is normal (as it is often described by other

participants below) leads these participants to choose that class label once they have tried

on a few other possible labels. The research, discussed above, conducted with Hamilton

steelworkers and their families by Livingstone et al, also found that some respondents

labelled themselves "working middle class" indicating that they earned their living by

working and achieved a modest middle-class living standard (Livingstone and Mangan

1996:161).

The only working-class participant who seemed to hover around and then choose

a "middle-class" label finally became focused on the suburban locale:

> **middle class, probably middle class. Probably 'cause of his job and
> their house, their community they live in...he's the only one working,
> so she's not working so, he's working for a living so I don't know how
> much income that is, they live in a pretty big house, nice
> neighbourhood and nice city or whatever (W♂587).**

When describing Homer's job and workplace he was quite critical of the depiction of

factory workers as slackers, all jolly and sitting around playing with dials. There seems

to be some contradiction in the way that 587 views Homer's job and the class location he

assigns the family. He does mention their house, which is a fairly large, two-story cartoon

house. It may be that the exaggeration of its size gives some contradictory information to

participants who, when reading class, combine that with the suburban setting of many

domestic sitcoms and see them therefore as representing the middle-class. Unlike the

setting of *Roseanne*, which is both more starkly real (because it is not a cartoon) and

clearly less ambiguously impoverished, these participants read a number of contradictory

indicators and go for the "normal" label when pushed to come up with one for *The*

Simpsons.

A significant number of participants (7/24, 29%) labelled the characters middle

class based primarily on their so-called average characteristics, although in some cases

the indicators given were quite in contrast to what we usually think of as middle-class

characteristics:

> **well they're [the Simpsons] not in poverty and they're not filthy rich.**
> **Um you know, it's just a very typical nuclear family thing, there's**
> **nothing, you know what there's nothing typical about the nuclear**
> **family anymore, but I guess on TV shows it is (M♂092).**

This participant seems to base his assessment on the representation of the Simpsons as a

typical nuclear family, or at least typical of TV, where being middle class is also typical.

Another participant designates the Simpsons as,

> **you know the average middle-class type family, struggling to make a**
> **living you know...they have a family...they have their own house, they**
> **have their own backyard, a white picket fence type thing you know.**
> **That type of family home (W♂139).**

He seems to be equating the typical family representation, with the designation "average

middle class". He goes so far as to describe their "white picket fence" which they do not

have. This equation, middle class=normal=nuclear family is a recurrent theme in many of

the interviews. Among the seven participants who identified the characters as middle-

class, six viewed *The Simpsons* as representative of the middle class, 1 viewed *Roseanne*

as representing the middle class using the same indicators of "average" and "typical

family" to determine that class location:

> **they live in an average house with an average I mean, well I guess
> before they won the whatever the millions or whatever, just plain
> nothing extravagant in the family room or the kitchen, just kind of
> necessities (M♀260).**

She reveals a greater familiarity with the text by noting that the family had recently won

the lottery, but still sees them prior to that as having been average, which translates as

middle class. It's interesting to note that this participant is middle class, and despite the

location she assigns to the family, she makes a comment that it's **"not a lifestyle that I**

would choose" (M♀260).

The Simpsons are located in the middle class by 416 because **"they drink beer,**

they watch a lot of TV, they, I guess that's about it, I don't know" (M♀416). She also

notes that they do not live in a really large house. It is clear that she remains uncertain of

what class to assign to the Simpsons or of the salience of class structures in general.

These indicators that she uses seem incongruous with traditional notions of the middle

class. However, they do accurately describe the Simpson family. As with other

participants noted above, she can describe characteristics of the Simpson family that

relate to their class position, but she is either reluctant to label them working class, or sees

these characteristics as indicators of middle-class membership.

Another participant saw the Simpsons as "very middle class" but noted

exaggeration of that for the sake of the comedy:

> **they live in suburbia, they have 2.5 kids like exactly because Maggie's**
> **like I'd say 0.5 of a kid, they have a cat and a dog, they live in a 2 story**
> **house, it's just everything you'd think of as like the suburban middle**
> **class with the husband working and the wife at home you know**
> **(M♀533).**

She also commented that the middle-class is "**such a wide class**" (M♀533). *The*

Simpsons does portray the sort of nuclear family common to American sitcoms, and who

are normally middle class; perhaps this is why these participants located them in the

middle class. It would seem that the reading of family, as typical, average and nuclear is

the prime indicator of middle-classness for these participants in the research.

Among the four (16%) participants who thought that these shows depicted either

lower class or poor class, this seemed to be based primarily on critical views of the

characters' laziness, rudeness, or excessive beer drinking. Referring to *Roseanne*, one

working-class female participant locates the class of the family as "low income class:"

> **the house is just a little bit, [well it] needs to be updated and the stuff,**
> **like the way they deal with society it's kind of rude and especially**
> **Roseanne's character and the kids are, they can't seem to have control**
> **of their kids, they're slightly dysfunctional, like one daughter running**
> **off to get married and when she was like eighteen or something like**
> **that (W♀561).**

In other parts of the interview, 561 was clearly critical of the characters in *Roseanne*

because they do not seem to value education and they are rude, sarcastic and angry.

Another participant echoed similar criticisms, but also commented on their struggles with

money as a reason for locating them as "**pretty lower class**" (M♀387). She was also

very critical of the depiction of a family that suffers from financial insecurity but does

nothing to "try to change that:"

> **I guess if people [like the Connor family] really do have financial
> difficulties and it's really hard at times, and often people are stuck in
> jobs that they just really don't want to be doing...But then, the fact
> that they want to stay, they don't seem to be doing very much to try to
> change that...they just sort of accept it (M♀387).**

In the case of *Roseanne*, part of the narrative situation is that they always struggle to

improve their lot and get out of poverty, but the stable situation of the comedy is their

poverty. In the final season when the family wins the lottery, although this turns out to be

a fantasy, it is a sign that the series was coming to a close; the struggle had largely ended

for the Connor family. The struggle with poverty was played for laughs on *Roseanne*

and the resolution by lottery windfall is also playing up the dream of an easy way out of

poverty. However, the lottery win turns out to be mere fantasy, because it is meant to be

only a dream, not a real way out for folks who struggle to get by.

The participants who located the Simpsons in "poor" or "lower" class, also

seemed to base that on the characters' cynicism, laziness and propensity for drinking

beer. The issue of beer drinking comes up as an indication for those who place the

Simpson family in middle, lower and working-class. It would seem that participants can

inflect that characteristic with a variety of class locations. The following quotes are

descriptions of indicators that the Simpsons are lower class:

> **sitting around drinking beer and when they're not working being very
> lazy... (M♂235);**

> **the kind of opportunities they have, the fact that Homer's always in
> the bar drinking away (W♂174).**

It seems clear that those who locate these shows as depicting "lower class" or "poor

class" are basing that primarily on their dislike for the cynicism, laziness and rudeness of

the characters. Although, in the case of *Roseanne*, participants also made it clear that

they did not want to find themselves in that lifestyle.

Of the eight (33%) participants who said that *Roseanne* and *The Simpsons*

represent the working class, all but one were also working class themselves. The 24

participants from the sample included in this analysis comprised 11 working-class and 13

middle-class participants. It seems clear that working-class participants (8/11 or 73%

labeling the working-class programme as working-class) are somewhat more class

conscious in their viewing. Unlike the respondents above, they are not judgmental about

the laziness or cynicism of the characters, and the one participant who mentions "drinking

beer" does not seem critical. She notes it as one of many things about *Roseanne* that are

typical of the working class:

> **the whole set is built up like a working class, you know like they're not**
> **decorating, there's no crystal chandelier hanging from the walls, the**
> **girls share a bedroom, back when they used to live together, that's so**
> **typical, I mean everyone doesn't have their own room and their own**
> **bathroom or anything like that, the food they would eat, you'd see**
> **them with, like in the kitchen when they would have dinner, *father***
> ***would come home and have a beer, you know it's just so typical*, they**
> **didn't drive a Porsche, they have a beat up truck they're always trying**
> **to fix up [emphasis mine] (W♀057).**

The indicators that these respondents give tend to include: problems with money, the

typical working-class jobs, small house, old furniture, that they have just the basics, and

that they cannot afford to send their kids to university or do other things that others may

take for granted. The notion of underprivilege with regard to educational opportunities is

not lost on a number of participants who were describing *Roseanne*:

> **the children, I can't see them as having future opportunities or**
> **different things at home that'll help them further their education, like**
> **they have the TV and I guess they spend a lot of time behind the TV**
> **which isn't necessarily that good but they don't have encyclopedias, I**
> **don't think they have a computer or anything like that, that would**
> **help them to higher levels of education (W♂588).**

The participant quoted below is referring to a particular dilemma that came up in a few

episodes. When Becky is ready to apply to college she asks Roseanne about her college

fund and finds out that they had to spend it to fix the truck or on some other necessity and

that she cannot expect to get financial support for college. Darlene is later able to go to

college because she gets a scholarship:

> **they worry about money and they worry about their kids being able to**
> **go to college like that's another big issue that they dealt with like um**
> **Becky and Darlene wanting to go and then Becky went and got**
> **married and all that junk (W♀547).**

The middle-class respondent who places the characters from *Roseanne* in the

working class also notes their inability to send the kids to university:

> **struggling with things that are easier for other people, like money-**
> **wise, about kids being educated like going to university, bills. Kind of**
> **not the luxuries that or things they might get more excited about that**
> **other people take for granted (M♀384).**

This participant was engaged in a programme of study that focussed on class and gender

inequality and an awareness of these issues was apparent throughout her interview. These

kinds of observations were not apparent in any of the other interviews. Given that this

participant was a Women's Studies Minor, it would seem that such study and analysis can

lead to a more critical framing when viewing television and examining the social world.

It seems clear that it is mostly working-class participants who are more aware of class structures and class inequality. They seem to have at least a broad sense of class and stratification in our society and they do not exhibit the kinds of judgmental remarks that other participants used in describing these characters as "lower class."

It is hardly universal, but there does seem to be some dislike of *Roseanne* among the male participants in particular and among a few of the female participants. The dislike seems to be based primarily on feelings about Roseanne herself rather than on the show in particular:

> **I don't like Roseanne, I find her obnoxious (W♂174);**
>
> **have you seen the movie *She Devil*?...she has a mole on her face, she's just not attractive... very gross and I turned on *Roseanne* a couple of months ago and she was walking around the house in just a bra and I just didn't want to see her walking around in just a bra, she is funny at times...I think it's more just her, I don't like her (M♂235);**
>
> **I have to be in the right mood to watch shows like Roseanne because it just kind of depresses me that your life could turn out like that (M♀533);**
>
> **Roseanne, like I sort of dislike...because it sort of gives the idea of well like sort of a not so nice family life (W♂588).**

On the other hand, working-class women seem to relate to the characters on *Roseanne* and one woman noted that the show is trying to portray a segment of society that rarely gets represented on television:

> **when it first came out, my mom said something about they must have been peeking in our windows before they filmed it, it was just like I come from a lower working-class family. Um, she's not perfect you know meatloaf for supper, fighting and everything like that, it's so much like our family...so you could totally see. I mean we weren't the Cosby family by any means, I mean that [*The Cosby Show*] was nice to watch once in awhile but that wasn't reality (W♀057);**

> **_Roseanne_ seems to be a little bit more realistic and relevant to most people watching TV, I think people can relate to _Roseanne_ a little bit more than to _90210_...I think that she's trying to represent a lot of people that get neglected...a lot of the working class just gets overlooked and it's just kind of I don't know I guess they don't have the same bid, there's not a whole lot of representation...I think she's trying to say that there's a lot of people that are in the working class and this is a realistic view of the way they would look (M♀384).**

These comments above are from the same participant who was discussed earlier whose programme of study was focussed on class and gender inequality in society. This type of critical framing where the intentions of the producer were discussed, was rare in the sample. In the case of this participant I would argue that she is more conscious of structural inequalities and more likely to analyze media content with this critical lens.

It seems fair to say that 574♀W is class conscious:

> **I can identify with Roseanne because she, you know, she just wants to have, she wants to have good things for her family and she works really, really, really hard and puts up with a lot of crap to get the little paycheque that she does so and I understand that. Like I can, I can see that like my Dad it was always like that in our household so and I know that when I get out into the workforce I'm sure that it's going to be crappy for me too. So I can see she's kind of disgruntled with the fact that there's people out there who are so rich and do absolutely nothing, and then there's people like us who want to work for a living and who want, you know, nice things but it doesn't always really happen that way (W♀547).**

This kind of class conscious commentary was, with one exception noted above, confined

191

to working-class participants. They voice an awareness of and an experience of economic

inequality in our society that was not found among middle-class participants, save the one

who was a women's studies student. One participant also noted that **"*Roseanne* is the**

only show that revolves around a not good-looking lady" (M♂092). Certainly there is

support in these reactions for the view expressed by Rowe (1995) that Roseanne is an

expression of ideological contradictions about class and gender, that there's an

ambivalence associated with her (Rowe 1995:49). Some people see Roseanne as crude

and others admire her, relate to her, and share the feelings of frustration that her character

on *Roseanne* often embodies. The fact that only five working-class shows were on the air

and popular at the time the data were collected is clear evidence that portrayals of

working-class characters on television are rare. Perhaps it is partly because they are so

rare, that so many of the participants exhibit confusion about class, particularly when

attempting to label poor or working-class characters. The participants seem to lack a

consistent and definite sense of class distinctions in our society, which is consistent with

the televisual depictions of class relations that they have experienced.

Reading Middle-Classness on Television

There were several more shows designated as middle class from which

participants could choose to discuss during their interview. The questions were exactly

the same as those asked about the shows that had been designated as working class.

Because there are so many more shows that depict middle-class characters, there is less of

a concentration of choices as was found with the working-class shows, where most

participants either talked about *The Simpsons* or *Roseanne*. As Table 5 shows, the top

choices were *Friends*, *Party of Five*, and *Seinfeld*. It is interesting to note that no male

participants chose to discuss *Party of Five*. Since these were the most common choices, it

makes sense to focus on the class readings of them so that there are some comparative

possibilities. One has to consider the particulars of each programme beyond its depictions

of a middle-class lifestyle. As has already been briefly noted in the discussion of *The*

Simpsons above, it makes a difference whether a programme is a comedy or drama, live-

action or animated, satirical or not, farcical or not and so on. Genres have certain codes

attached to them that affect, not only one's reading of a programme text, but also one's

interest in watching. In the following section, I look at the readings of the sitcoms,

focussed mainly on readings of *Seinfeld* and *Friends*. I have separated the readings of

middle-class dramas in order to control for some of the effects of the different genre of

the programmes. For example, there is exaggeration in drama programs, such as dozens

of emergency patients in one hour on *ER*, but the exaggeration played up for laughs in

sitcoms is quite different and likely to elicit different readings. I will look at the readings

of class on the drama *Party of Five* in comparison to readings of class on *Melrose Place*

in a separate section below.

Reading Class on Seinfeld and Friends

Friends and *Seinfeld* are both prime-time situation comedies. *Seinfeld* aired on

NBC for nine seasons at 9:30 pm on Thursday nights. It centred on: a thirty-something

comedian, Jerry; his good friend, the precariously employed George; weird neighbour

Kramer; and former girlfriend, Elaine. The programme was marketed as a "show about

nothing" and writers were instructed to create storylines with "no hugging and no

lessons." *Seinfeld* was a hit show, rating in the Neilsen top 10 through nearly all of its run

on NBC[26] and now showing in syndication on many stations several times each day.

    Friends emerged as the lead-in to NBC's "must see TV" Thursday night line-up in

September of 1994, and recently ended (by choice rather than cancellation) after its tenth

season. It has also been a top-rated show and has been airing in syndication as well as the

first run shows, since its third season. The show follows a small group of six good

friends through their various adventures as twenty-somethings starting out in New York

City: siblings Ross and Monica; former debutante Rachel; flighty Phoebe; novice actor,

Joey; and mystery professional Chandler.

    Both programmes tend to follow a traditional sitcom narrative style, but are not in

the "domestic" sitcom genre; neither depicts a nuclear family and action among family

members such as is the case with *Roseanne* and *The Simpsons*. Like most sitcoms, the

action takes place largely in the domestic setting of one or another of the Friend's

apartments. Many sitcoms follow a traditional narrative structuring in that there is usually

some threat to the stability of the family situation, which is resolved by the end of the

episode; thus bringing a return to the stable situation. Both *Friends* and *Seinfeld* have

some elements of this style of narrative, but the initial "stable" situation is not in the vein

of the "family situation" but rather a bit less structured. The fact that neither of these

programmes focuses on a domestic family situation is exactly what leads the research

participants to favour these programmes. It can be seen in the comparison between these

shows and the working-class shows (in the next section of this chapter) which were all

---

[26] Based on the Neilson ratings reported in *Entertainment Weekly*.

domestic (family) sitcoms, that the difference between looking after a family and being

single was a factor noted by most participants when comparing the lifestyle of the

characters on these programmes.

Out of the 32 participants, seven (22%) chose to discuss *Friends*. It was clear

from the background questionnaire that *Friends* was the most popular show among those

surveyed. It is, therefore, not surprising that so many chose to discuss this show in the

individual interviews. When asked to describe the lifestyle of the characters, most

participants clearly envied it and suggested it was a lifestyle they would like to have:

> **I think it's cool! I wish I could hang out in a coffee shop all day
> [laughing] it's really cool because they have their close knit [friends]
> that's their circle you know and they can go to them and call them up
> at you know 3 in the morning and cry and you know and they do all
> sorts of things all together and I really, really, I really like that and um
> you know like they all have really cool jobs and they have really cool
> clothes and a really cool place to hang out so it's cool, you know I like
> that (W♀547);**

> **definitely one [a lifestyle] I would enjoy, I love the, living right across
> from your friends in a nice apartment type thing, living with one or
> two people and it seems to be for the most part a happy environment
> (M♂235).**

When asked which class they thought the characters represented, a majority (5/7, 71%)

located them in the upper class or upper-middle class. One middle-class male participant

suggested they were "**around middle, somewhere**" (M♂567) and one working-class

female participant called them "**working-class to upper working-class**" (W♀163). It is

worth noting that 163 placed *Roseanne* just a bit above the poverty line, so it would seem

that her own class scheme is shifted somewhat lower than that of other participants. When

describing the Connor family as just a bit above the poverty line, she was not passing

judgement like the middle-class participants who located the Connors in the poverty or

lower class. Among all the participants the class scheme she was using to identify

television characters placed them in lower classes in comparison to the other participants.

Some participants had a sense of a range of class locations for the characters on

Friends. They placed Phoebe (part-time massage therapist, sometimes cab driver, and

folk music hobbyist) in a lower class than Ross who is a palaeontologist at a museum:

> **when they talk about their parents, well except for Phoebe, but Ross,**
> **Monica and Rachael, you know that their parents were like lawyers or**
> **doctors, very professional parents, Chandler's mentioned that he's**
> **gone to private school before, themselves they're probably middle**
> **class because they're not, like they don't have the best jobs, but I think**
> **they came from upper middle-class families, but Phoebe she grew up**
> **with her grandmother in a Manhattan apartment, I think so it may**
> **have been that she's lower middle-class (M♀533);**
>
> **someone like Ross would be upper-middle, whereas the others are I**
> **guess the lower end, thinking back to their parents and they're just**
> **still...starting out, still struggling to find their place and where they're**
> **going to succeed (M♂235).**

For the above participants, the class location is a bit confusing, because they can see that

the background of the characters is one of privilege and they can see their potential to

succeed. Although there is some ambivalence about the character of Phoebe, who did not

come from money, does not have professional parents and is not clearly on a path to

success. Rachel is a former debutante who is "finding herself" after narrowly escaping a

predictable life as the wife of a dentist. Rachel started out as a waitress in the café that the

characters hang out at, now she has managed to break into her dream career path, the

fashion industry, just by her own determination and tenacity. Participants can accept this

model of success and see it as normal, where Phoebe represents a more ambivalent class

location, based on her vague career aspirations as well as her decidedly less affluent

background.

Working-class participants seem to focus more on the material possessions the

characters can afford and the instances when it seems that they cannot afford their fancy

New York lifestyle rather than the professional background of their parents:

> **they did a show once where Ross and Chandler and Monica they
> wanted to go out to dinner to celebrate Chandler's promotion and
> Phoebe, Rachael and Joey couldn't afford to go and then also for, I
> can't remember whose birthday it was, I think it was Joey's birthday
> or something like that, they wanted to go to *Hootie and the Blowfish*
> and they couldn't afford to buy the tickets so the three who had the
> higher paying jobs they bought the tickets and that made them feel
> like crap and stuff like that so, but even though they did try to address
> that I still think they all represent being rich [laughs] (W♀547).**

Her comments are interesting, because later she goes on to explain that they are not

supposed to represent upper class, but by the amount of money they have and the things

they can afford, they actually do:

> **definitely upper class, like rich even though that's not really what's
> supposed to be happening (W♀547).**

The working-class participant quoted below also seems to focus on the things that the

characters can afford, and to desire that same sort of lifestyle and that kind of money:

> **I mean the guys have got two big couches, a big screen TV and a
> foozeball table in their kitchen, and in the girl's apartment they've got
> a nice couch and a little kitchen area and window, the apartments they
> look really pricey too, like they're upper-middle class...if I had the
> kind of money that it looks like they make from some of those jobs, I'd
> kind of like to live in places like that too (W♂606).**

Notice that he specifies, "some of those jobs," indicating a recognition that not all of

these characters can afford to live that way on the wages they would actually be making.

The responses of the middle-class participants tend to focus on the professional

background of the character's parents, on their having come from money and having

parents who can bail them out and who could afford to send them to college. There is a

sense that the characters are just starting out, and so might be in a lower class now than

they are going to be when they have achieved success. There seems to be no doubt

among middle-class participants that the characters are on a road to success, although

there is some ambivalence about the character of Phoebe.

Working-class participants are more likely to make note of the incongruity

between the material goods that the characters seem able to afford and the kinds of wages

their jobs would likely provide. They also focus on the fact that the characters can afford

to do things and to own nice things and that is a sign of affluence to these participants.

They are less likely to point to professional parents or to values of a middle-class family

as having brought the characters to their present class location. Perhaps this is because the

working-class participants want to believe that they can come to succeed in these same

ways despite their lack of professional parents living in lavish suburbs.

The number of women and men who chose to talk about *Friends* was nearly even,

but among those who chose *Seinfeld*, most were men (5/6, 83%). Most of the participants

placed the characters in the middle class (4/6, 67%). The one female participant located

them in the upper-middle class based mostly on the lack of financial problems of the

characters. She noted that Jerry was able to buy his father an expensive car in one

episode. One working-class male participant suggested there was a range from lower to

middle-class:

lower to middle, George usually doesn't even have a job (W♂587).

He bases this on the fact that the character George is perpetually unemployed and is

therefore of a lower class than the other main characters. It was also noted by several

participants that the way Kramer makes his living is kept a mystery in the show. It is

likely that his employment history is as chequered as that of George. However, Kramer is

Jerry's neighbour and is never searching for work or filling in unemployment forms so

while his job may be an unknown it is clear that he has some level of income that is

comparable to that of Jerry the stand-up comedian.

As was the case with the discussion of *Friends*, the working-class participants

seemed to focus mainly on money and the material luxuries the characters can afford as

an indication of their location in the middle class:

> **where they live or where they eat, I don't know about, like their jobs (W♂587);**
>
> **they have a lot of luxuries and stuff like that and if they ever want to do something like money never seems to be an issue on that show. Even when some of them are unemployed or whatever, they always seem to have money available (W♂600).**

One working-class participant noted their attitudes and the kinds of conversations that the

characters have as a factor as well:

> **their jobs, their attitudes the type of stuff they do, type of stuff that they talk about, and refer to, their conversations (W♂585).**

Middle-class participants seemed more likely to refer to the jobs of the characters in

particular, while working-class participants simply listed "jobs" among other indicators

such as "**money is never an issue**" (W♂600).

> **Jerry drives a SAAB and Elaine's a VP of a magazine, she's always well dressed too, George is middle class [laughs] uh I guess well Elaine's always dressed up and just what her job does, Jerry you wouldn't think'd have a lot of money, but then he's got the car so (M♂340).**

There is some blending in the above of a focus on things they can afford, and on the professional job, complete with fancy title.

Other than this weak class difference in the indicators used to locate characters from these top rated sitcoms that depict the middle class, there is little else that seems to cleave on the basis of class. Differences in readings based on gender were even less evident. However, it is clear that *Friends* is more popular among women and men, while *Seinfeld* would seem to have more of a male audience among the participants.

Reading Class on Party of Five and Melrose Place

Of the six (19%) participants who chose to talk about *Party of Five*, all were female. The questionnaire data suggest that this programme is primarily of interest to women. Generally, male participants identified sitcoms, sports and movies as their favoured television viewing fare. Few of the male participants had an interest in the drama programmes such as *Party of Five*, which was among the most popular dramas on television when the data were collected. According to *Entertainment Weekly* it was the No. 15 show among 18- to 34-year-old viewers, and No. 10 among 18- to 34-year-old women. The programme, which ended after its sixth season, focussed on five children whose parents were killed in a car accident and left them in the care of the oldest brother, Charlie. Charlie had been drifting from job to job prior to his new family responsibilities. When the series ended he had a young daughter of his own. Bailey, the next oldest

sibling, was holding the family together until alcoholism showed him that he needed them as much as they need him. When the series ended Bailey was running the family restaurant, after dropping out of college. Julia, the oldest girl, was a student at Stanford following in the footsteps of her mother. During the course of the series she was variously pregnant, married, divorced, and in an abusive relationship at college; as the series ended, she was trying to "find herself." Claudia was the second youngest of the siblings. She played the violin, although she quit from time to time in order to be a "real" kid. She attended a boarding school for a while, but did not like missing the action at home and so she returned to help care for her little brother Owen. Owen had started school as the series ended and was exhibiting signs of a learning disability. The programme began as primarily an episodic series with some story lines carrying over, but soon began following a traditional soap opera narrative style with continuing plot lines and non-linear scene arrangements.

Most of the women who chose to discuss *Party of Five* said they could relate to the characters, particularly the two girls. Julia had recently gone through some turmoil trying to choose whether to go to university right after high school and that sense of not knowing what to do next resonated with the participants. It was also pointed out by several participants that the characters have way too many problems:

> **they all have so many problems it's unbelievable. Every week it's something new (M♀002).**

The above quoted participant saw the characters of *Party of Five* as coming from the same class as *The Simpsons*, working class:

> **they're all pretty average, like they all have to work to make a living
> and they have all these like it seems like everyday normal problems
> that I'm sure a lot of people go through, not all at the same time like
> happens to them, but yeah they can't just bail themselves out with
> money (M♀002).**

The others all placed them in the middle class or upper-middle class. The most common

indicators were based on the view that the characters did not suffer money problems

(which as children living off of the life insurance of their parents and as restaurant owners

they did have over the course of the series). It is interesting to note that the working-class

participants called attention to the attitude toward post-secondary education, their large

house and the fact that they live in a good community as clues to their "middle-

classness:"

> **they don't worry about money and they live in a good community and
> you know it's got nice houses and whatnot (W♀363);**
>
> **their home, and their clothing, the kind of attitudes they have with
> school, they're going to school (W♀057).**

Participants range in their perceptions about such details as whether there are money

problems; only two participants see the family as having any money problems. A

working-class woman said that "**they still worry about money**" (W♀561), and another

saw the Salingers as, "**I guess the same as *The Simpsons*, like working class**" (M♀002).

The latter participant was among the least consistent of the in her use of class terms; she

had labelled *The Simpsons* "**pretty middle-class...yeah, working middle-class**"

(M♀002). It may be that the participants began watching the show after the first season,

during which the plot focussed on money issues regularly. In an *Entertainment Weekly*

review of the show, Ken Tucker writes:

> The most striking aspect of *Party of Five* is its meticulous obsession with
> money-getting it, saving it, spending it. People use money on television all
> the time, but they rarely talk about it the way the young Salinger clan
> does...The opening episode of *Party of Five* is full of dollar signs: We
> learn that, because Charlie lost $12,000 in a bad investment, the kids will
> have to live on a measly $2,500 for the next four months. The intricacies
> of extracting money from the Salingers' trust fund are explored in
> fascinating detail; their expenses are spelled out (mortgage, groceries,
> plumbing bill, a nanny for that squalling Owen) (Tucker 1994).

However, this focus on money wanes over the seasons and viewers in this research may

never have seen such episodes.

No men chose to discuss *Party of Five* during this part of the interview, but a few

chose other dramas. Men in this age group watch little television, and those that do tend

not to watch much drama. If there were *Star Trek* fans among the participants, they did

not make it very obvious. I would have expected the male participants to refer to one of

the recent incarnations of the Gene Roddenberry series or to *The X-Files*, but little talk of

any television drama emerged in the interviews with male participants. There were,

however, some male participants who chose to discuss the prime-time soap, *Melrose*

Place. Oddly enough, given the discussion of *Melrose Place* in other parts of the

interviews (see Chapter 4), no female participants chose to discuss it during this section.

Melrose Place concluded a six-year run as a staple of the Fox Network's Monday

night line-up in the Spring of 1998. The show (originally a spin-off of *Beverley Hills*

90210) centred on a group of characters who lived in the same modern apartment

complex in Los Angeles. Many of the characters worked for a successful advertising

firm, one started out as a receptionist and rose to the position of account executive. One

couple made ends meet by being the caretakers of the complex while the husband

finished medical school, thus opening the door for a cliché soap fixation on doctors and

hospital melodrama.

It is interesting that both of the two participants who discussed *Melrose Place* are

men. I would have expected more women to choose it, and many did discuss the show in

other parts of the interview. Both of the participants labelled the characters of *Melrose*

Place as middle-class. One of these participants noted there was a range from advertising

executives to bar workers:

> **not everybody works in advertising, they work at bars and you know**
> **have lower jobs (M♂589).**

However, he still viewed those with these "lower jobs" as middle-class because they lived

in the same luxury apartment complex as the advertising executives and bar owners. The

other participant also noted some class differences:

> **the doctors have pretty nice houses and stuff so you figure they're**
> **upper class, but most of the people who live in the Melrose Place**
> **complex are middle class (W♂174).**

Still, the general reaction was to place the characters of the show in the middle class.

However, there was a difference in how each of these participants generally felt about the

show. You can see from the following quote that 174 has a more negative view of the

"manipulative" characters:

> **there's certainly people that are like that, but I mean a lot of middle-**
> **class people are very you know hard working families and fairly**
> **genuine, and courteous and who are married and have kids and stuff**
> **like that, you don't really get to see kids on that show at all (W♂174).**

The other participant who discussed this show also noted that there are no families, but

seemed to see some humour in the cavalier way that characters married and divorced like

they were changing shoes:

> **there's no families on *Melrose* really, I mean the odd time there'll be a couple gets married, but they get divorced just as fast as they get married so [laughs] (M♂589).**

This may be evidence of a more "ironic" reading, much as many of the female

participants indicate in their various comments about watching *Melrose*, which were

discussed in Chapter 4.

Comparison of working-class and middle-class readings by participants

Participants were asked to compare the lifestyle depicted in the first programme

they chose (all of which depicted the working class) and the second (all of which depicted

the middle class). Their comparisons of these class images are useful to get a sense of

how the participants read class on television. The lifestyle and class comparisons fall into

4 broad categories: 1) acknowledgement of class, 2) perceptions of different

attitudes/values, 3) family/single distinction and 4) difference in financial/money issues

faced, with two participants not really fitting any of these. Table 7 (below) illustrates

which shows the participants compared and their primary comparison.

Key to Programme Abbreviations in Table 7

MwC - *Married....with Children*

Grace U Fire - *Grace Under Fire*

Po5 - *Party of Five*

MAY - *Mad About You*

HI - *Home Improvement*

Y&R - *The Young and the Restless*

Key to basis of comparison in Table 7

Sections are marked by bold line and table continues on to following page

Section 1 - acknowledgement of class

Section 2 - perceptions of different attitudes/values

Section 3 - family/single distinction

Section 4 - difference in financial/money issues faced

Section 5 - Other

Table 7

Comparison of working-class and middle-class Shows (Sections 1-2)

Participant	W Show	Designation	M Show	Designation	Comparison
001♀M	Roseanne	LM	Po5	M	different class
002♀M	Simpsons	W-M	Po5	W	same class
139♂W	Simpsons	M	MAY	M	S more accurate to class
174♂W	Simpsons	poor class	Melrose	M	better than S
235♂M	Simpsons	L	Friends	UM-LM	different class
378♀M	Simpsons	M	Po5	M	higher than S
384♀M	Roseanne	W	90210	U	diff. class
533♀M	Simpsons	M	Friends	UM	class not as obv. on F
567♂M	MwC	LM	Friends	M	higher class than Bundy's
600♂W	Simpsons	W	Seinfeld	M	higher class than Sim's
057♀W	Roseanne	W	Po5	UM	different values
212♂M	Simpsons	LM	Frasier	UM	F is serious about work
387♀M	Roseanne	L	Friends	M-U	F are happy not cynical
561♀W	Roseanne	L	Po5	M	Po5 value education more
566♀W	MwC	L	HI	M-UM	don't screw up as much
588♂W	Simpsons	W	HI	M	family relates better

Table 7 continued (Sections 3-5)

163♀W	Roseanne	W	Friends	UW	R has kids to worry about
340♂M	Simpsons	LM	Seinfeld	M	Simpsons more routine
547♀W	Roseanne	W	Friends	U	different priorities
573♂W	Family Matters	M	Martin	M	no kids, no moral at end
585♂W	Family Matters	M	Seinfeld	high M	one has family
587♂W	Simpsons	W...M	Seinfeld	L-M	family oriented on Sims
589♂M	MwC	L	Melrose	M	MwC is family oriented
606♂W	Simpsons	W	Friends	U	relate b/c younger
037♂M	Simpsons	L...M	Single Guy	M+	Sims struggle with $
260♀M	Roseanne	M	Spin City	UM	$ not concern on SC
313♀W	Roseanne	W	90210	U	R can't pay for PSE
363♀W	Grace U Fire	M-L	Po5	U	G struggles for $
416♀M	Simpsons	M	Seinfeld	UM	Sims can't afford stuff
578♂M	MwC	M	Y&R	U	Y&R is all lavish
092♂M	Simpsons	M	Seinfeld	M	Seinfeld more fantasy
560♀W	Family Matters	M	ER	M	pretty similar

For ten (32%) of the participants (featured in Section 1 of Table 7), the first response to

the question of comparison was based on an evaluation of the economic status of the

characters in the show. In some cases, they used class terms, in others they were a bit

more vague, but indicated that the characters of the middle-class show depicted a

"higher," "different," or "better" lifestyle. Perhaps they are indicating here a sense of the

general division between "haves" and "have-nots," and note that the one group of shows

(middle class) are populated by "haves" in contrast to the first group (working class)

which are largely seen to be populated by "have nots:"

> **well it's a better lifestyle for sure, with the money they have available...*The Simpsons* when they're representing the class it's a critique of society and *Melrose Place* there's not enough critique or you know it's not an obvious critique a lot of things are done for entertainment kind of thing (W♂174);**

> **I think they're [*Melrose*] higher than *The Simpsons*, but they're not well off (M♀378);**

> **I think most of the people on *Friends* would be from a slightly higher class than the Bundy's [*Married...with Children*] (M♂567);**

> **they are [*Seinfeld*] portraying the higher class I think [compared to *The Simpsons*] (W♂600).**

Some participants indicated that the two shows depicted "totally different"

classes:

> **on *Roseanne* the tensions that they're dealing with seem to be more [than on *Party of Five*] reflective of their class, more to do with money (M♀001);**

> **to me they're in a different economic class. That definitely makes a difference and I guess when I think of *The Simpsons* it's probably one reason I don't watch it too much because their life seems to be in a dead end type of way, like it doesn't seem to be potential to the future, whereas, and that's not something that I really care for, and you watch something like *Friends* where you do see that potential (M♂235);**

well they're totally different class represented um there's a reality check between the two, like one of them's [*90210*] very fantasized and over dramatic and *Roseanne* seems to be a little bit more realistic and relevant to most people watching TV, I think people can relate to *Roseanne* a little bit more than to *90210* (M♀384).

It is interesting that 001 suggests above that the depiction of the Connor family seems

more reflective of their class, that there is more mention of money and problems with

money. She seems to equate the acknowledgement of money, needing it, not having

enough and so on, as "reflective of their class," while the fact that the Salinger family

does not have these problems is not seen as "reflective of *their* class." Other participants,

such as these two examples below, also saw the working-class show as more "accurate to

their class:"

> **There is a slight difference, because you know I guess when you talk about the class you know you always talk about their income or how much money, so you know with the *Mad About You* the money doesn't really become an issue, but in *The Simpsons* there's you know everyday, they have to make payments, they have to pay for gas, pay for the car and there's one episode where they were missing mortgage payments and they needed help, Homer needed help and he didn't want anybody to know so he was taking a second job and stuff like that so, yeah I think maybe *The Simpsons* is a little more accurate to their class because you know, having to deal with money than with *Mad About You* (W♂139);**
>
> **you don't really know what class, I would say, *Friends* are (M♀533).**

Again, we see this connection between lacking money and being working-class, as though

a main indication of other *higher* classes is the invisibility of the indicators. "Class" for

this group of participants seems to mean working class, or poorer class—class means

some deviation from the norm. The middle class is, indeed, "classless" to these research

participants. It is the absence of the indicators of class that indicates that they must be

middle-class, average, normal. It is as though some participants have placed the middle-

class as the norm and deviations from their conception of that norm are the indications of

class. Events such as missing the mortgage payment are accurate depictions of working-

class life, while having no problems with money is an accurate depiction of middle-class

life according to these participants.

One participant, 002 noted above, suggested that the characters from *The*

Simpsons and *Party of Five* were from the same class. The only other difference she

noted was that the children on *The Simpsons* are younger and more dependent.

The second broad category of comparison (featured as Section 2 of Table 7) was

on the basis of different attitudes and/or values. As you can see from Table 7, most of

these participants (4/6, 67%) saw the characters on the working-class shows as "lower

class." As noted in the discussion of the working-class readings above, many participants

who chose this label did so on the basis of a negative attitude toward the character of

Roseanne in particular and to the poor depiction of family life in that show:

> **[the classes depicted are] complete opposites. They [characters on
> *Friends*] really seem to be happy with their lives and even when
> they're having crises everybody can laugh at everybody else and it's
> always funny in a positive way and with *Roseanne*, everybody seems to
> be laughing, but it's always cynical and yes the *Friends* people are just
> happier and I guess that comes with their economic standing, not
> having families and being younger (M♀387).**

This participant had some very negative views of *Roseanne* and the cynicism that it

seemed to champion. However, she does come to the conclusion that the economic

standing and lack of family responsibilities might likely contribute to the "happiness" of

the characters on *Friends*. The participant below indicates a clear sense of disapproval

with the characters on *Roseanne*, particularly their lack of respect for others:

> ***Party of Five* they value education a little bit more than on *Roseanne* it seems. Just seem to have a little bit more respect for others and stuff like that (W♀561).**

Their attitude toward education, higher education in particular, is noted in several of the

comparisons as an important difference in attitudes, rather than one of opportunity.

Even in the situations where participants were comparing two sitcoms, the sense

that work and family were taken more seriously by the characters in the shows that I have

designated as middle class was apparent in their responses:

> **well one is rather serious about work, like work is important for on the show *Frasier*, work is very important to the characters, very important part of their life, he [Frasier] feels he's doing a lot of good by it. Well on *The Simpsons*, for example, work is something that has to be done, and it should be avoided wherever possible. and there's also another key difference which is like the family idea. I think Frasier's relationship with his Father and he doesn't get along with him all too well, but puts up with him and then there's the more accurate portrayal of Homer Simpson, his father is shipped off to a retirement home, is rarely heard from, basically more or less ignored by the family and unfortunately most grandparents are ignored by their children and their children's children (M♂212).**

While this participant sees a more serious work ethic on *Frasier*, he also notes that the

way that aging parents are handled on *The Simpsons* is, unfortunately, more true to life.

There seems to be a suggestion here that one's attitude toward work ought to be the same,

one of seriousness, diligence and dedication, regardless of the type of work or one's

social class.

Participants acknowledged the money problems that characters on the designated

working-class shows had to cope with, but also noted a dysfunctional family life on such

shows which was not viewed as in any way connected to their structural inequalities:

> **They [*Home Improvement*] live a lot better and they don't manage to**
> **screw up as much [as the Bundy's on *Married...with Children]***
> **(W♀566);**
>
> **It's actually totally different at least with the way the family, the way**
> **the family members relate to each other and it's quite a bit more, I**
> **think more effective, more happy home. On *The Simpsons* are made**
> **to be sort of funny, but when you really think about it and you look at**
> **it, those things actually in reality wouldn't be that funny to have a**
> **father that didn't care about a whole lot or if you have a son who's**
> **always fooling around and getting into trouble and stuff, sort of a**
> **hopeless situation more than *Home Improvement* is where everything**
> **seems to be worked out and is pretty good (W♂588).**

These participants seem to view families that behave like theirs as normal and other

families whose economic location in society is quite different are viewed as dysfunctional

due to how they cope with the strains of being "have-nots."

One of the most noticeable differences between these groups of shows, is that the

bulk of the working-class shows are domestic family sitcoms, while those among the

middle-class shows that are sitcoms are predominantly shows about "twenty-somethings"

just starting out in life, unconstrained by family responsibilities. When asked to compare

the shows, 25% (8/32, featured in Section 3 of Table 7) of the participants note the family

situation as a key difference in lifestyle and in terms of constraints on the finances of the

show's characters. When comparing *Roseanne* to *Friends* the following participant

suggests that for the Connors the focus is on getting the bills paid and finding the money

to send kids to college, whereas the Friends are not very future-focussed at all:

> **[the Connors] worry about money and they worry about their kids
> being able to go to college like...that's the important stuff and family is
> really important to them and on _Friends_ it's just, _Friends_ is you know
> finding someone to spend their life with, you know finding a boyfriend
> or finding a girlfriend and just you know sometimes some of the shows
> like that they do are really dumb [laughs] just like the, they make it,
> they write it really well because it's funny and makes me laugh for
> half an hour, but like they don't, they don't see like down the road,
> they don't look down the road it's always now (W♀547).**

This acknowledgement that there is a key difference in the family status of the characters

is very common throughout the interviews. Family status is more commonly noted as the

main difference between the two sets of shows by male participants (28%) than female

participants (13%). This difference is likely due to the kinds of shows that male and

female viewers in this sample chose to talk about. The female participants were primarily

comparing programmes which each depicted a family setting (_The Simpsons_ or _Roseanne_

compared to _Party of Five_) so that was not as evident a difference. It is also possible that

female participants were more likely to accept the domestic premise as their own future,

while male participants seemed distinctly unready for such responsibilities. There was an

indication in their responses that family life was rather "routine" which the lives of

students are generally not:

> **I guess _The Simpsons_ is a little more routine, like Homer goes to work,
> the kids go to school, Marge does all the everything else, but on
> _Seinfeld_, they don't do anything, there's no real routine, they'll either
> go shopping or to a movie or they'll just sit and make fun of somebody
> (M♂340);**

> **Roseanne's family they're more concerned about the income and all the money and everything and I guess that would be because that's parents and children that they have to look after, so money is a big focus for them because they have to have enough money to put the food on the table and pay the mortgage and things like that, so they get frustrated a lot and argue about money and half the shows are concentrated on that topic because it is such a major focus in their lives whereas on *Friends* you don't really hear that a lot, like there was that one episode about that and then they don't do it a lot it's just kind of a minor thing, mostly they're happy go lucky and they're having their great lives and getting along and it's not such a major focus for them because they don't have children to support or their not a couple living on one wage, they're just all working themselves and supporting themselves kind of thing, so they only have to worry about themselves (W♀163).**

Much like the description of the Friends as not being very future-focussed, we see again in the above quotes the perception that on *Friends* the characters only have to look after themselves. This seems to resonate with university students who are just new to looking after themselves and seem uncertain of their future as partners or parents. The following quote also indicates that the main difference between the shows is family responsibility. The participant relates to the show *Martin*, because it is about a young professional couple just starting out:

> **very different, well they're all single [on *Martin*] in their 30s and just kind of having fun being single and meeting people (W♂585).**

A similar sentiment is expressed about *Seinfeld:*

> **well more family oriented on *The Simpsons*, uh the bachelor type lifestyle on *Seinfeld* (W♂587).**

For several (6/32, 19%) of the participants (featured in Section 4 of Table 7) the comparison of the two shows they discussed came down primarily to issues around the problem of money. They noted that characters on *The Simpsons, Roseanne* and *Grace*

Under Fire struggled with money:

> it's the same lifestyle [*The Single Guy* compared to *The Simpsons*] with
> success, but I think it's a basis for the show, so they don't have to deal
> with things like having to go to work or bills to pay or things like that,
> like you don't see that, I think it's more of a, just a, it forms part of the
> background (M♂037);

> Grace is trying to figure out how to support her kids and how to keep
> things going you know how to spend time with her kids and work her
> job and keep the money going and whereas they [*Party of Five*] are
> "hey we've got money, we can do this, we can do that." Meanwhile
> she's [Claudia] got her violin lessons and things like that so I think
> they're totally at different ends (W♀363).

She mentioned Claudia's violin lessons more that once during the interview. This is

clearly seen as a sign of privilege to her. In addition, she made a comment earlier in the

interview that Claudia often took a taxi to those lessons when her brothers were too busy

to drive her. It was clear that taking a taxi to these lessons was a sign of privilege also and

seen as rather wasteful by 363.

The following quote also indicates the awareness of a struggle with money for the

characters on the working-class show discussed by participant 313:

> [On] *Roseanne* they have to work for everything. Um, I know like on
> *Roseanne* the kids couldn't go to school [university] because like they
> had to work to go to school because the parents couldn't afford to pay
> for it. Whereas *90210* they all went to the same college. They all went
> on trips and stuff like that, so total opposite spectrum (W♀313).

For these two working-class women quoted above, the sense that Grace and Roseanne

have to struggle to have enough money to make ends meet is clear. They also are quite

aware of the difference between a family struggling with providing funds for post-

secondary education and the characters on *Beverley Hills 90210* who get a university

education plus trips, clothes, cars, cell phones and other extras.

Middle-class participants were more likely to express a similar view, but in opposite terms. They would observe that "money is not a problem" for characters on the designated middle-class shows, rather than focus on the struggle with money for working-class characters:

> in *Spin City*, slightly more, you get the idea that money's not a concern or whatever, whereas in *Roseanne* um it's slightly more of a concern (M♀260);

> *The Young and the Restless* they have like all this lavish stuff where *Married...with Children* they're just getting by with what they earn (M♂578).

Discussion

When reading gender on television, female participants seem more often to use gendered framings. The female participants were far more likely to read images of women in gendered rather than class framed ways. The discomfort and anger about the ideal images of women, as "skinny," "thin," and "perfect," resonated in the responses from half of the female participants.

Male participants on the other hand see images of men and women on TV as equally unrealistic and indicated that they had no expectations that women or men they meet would be like those they saw on television. Several of the working-class male participants did note that men on television were depicted as the sort of men who women find attractive. These responses may indicate some anxiety about not measuring up to such expectations.

The gendered readings that the women in the sample invoked seem to

simultaneously work at the level of acceptance and rejection of the images they see of women on TV. The anger and protest registered in their comments indicates that they feel some pressure to aspire to such images and yet know that they cannot attain these ideals. One factor, at least for heterosexual women, is the belief that the ideal women of TV are what men are looking for in women. There is a sense of their acceptance of the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of women (Mulvey 1988:62). The male participants suggest that "their friends" use the images of women on TV as sexual fantasies, but the vast majority have no expectations that women they know or meet will actually look like or be like the women they see on TV. Indications are that these ideal women are material for sexual fantasies (among heterosexual males), which are largely divorced from expectations of their real life female partners. Where then does the pressure to aspire to these images arise for the women in the sample? It is possible that the male participants were reacting to the gender of the interviewer and were less than forthcoming about the televisual objects of their gaze. However, when asked if these TV women seemed typical or were like anyone they knew, the majority indicated that they were not, nor did they expect them to be. Given that these are young men, a new generation, perhaps their responses indicate a new way of thinking about gender in the mass media.

There is more diversity of gender representations on television than these participants seem to notice, but it is clear that they mainly view programmes with young, exceptionally beautiful female characters and rarely spoke of other female characters on TV. In fact, some complained that other images, such as older women, are largely absent from TV. Such female characters do seem to be absent in the programmes to which the

participants most often referred. The programmes they referred to most often included:

Friends, Beverly Hills 90210, Melrose Place, Party of Five, ER, Seinfeld, Roseanne, The Cosby Show, All My Children, and *Home Improvement* and to a lesser extent: *The Young and the Restless, Family Matters, Martin,* and *Grace Under Fire.* The problem of a diversity of representations is complicated by the fact that viewers of a specific gender and age group tend to watch certain programmes, while generally ignoring others. On the other hand, all of these programmes were top-rated shows in the Nielsen ratings at the time the data were collected. Therefore, their readings are based on the most popular television programmes, the programmes with the largest audiences. Although, it must be noted that these were the first reactions, the gut reactions to the way women on TV look. Further discussion generated other descriptions such as "strong," "independent," and "professional," as noted below in the discussion of women's work on TV.

Research on the encoding of gender (and the production of television in general) indicates that whatever is believed to be the most popular—will garner the target audience to sell to advertisers—is what gets put on the air (Byars and Meehan 2000:151; van Zoonen 1994:45). Content analyses of the images of gender on television over the past 30 years "indicate that while there has been some change, there is still considerable stability" (Signorelli and Bacue 1999:552). It was noted by a number of participants that fat women and fat men are absent from television programmes. The success of *Roseanne,* which was noted by one participant to be based around a **"not good-looking lady"** **(M♂092)**, indicates that audiences will support programmes that do not merely represent the idealized, beautiful woman and yet *Roseanne* remains an exception in the TV world.

Butsch's (1992) study indicated that in four decades of situation comedy on television there had been little deviation from traditional gender roles for women and men as represented on television. This is one medium that is quite resistant to innovation. The financial risks involved in experimenting with television content appear to be too much for most producers except in the periods of transition noted by Butsch (1992: 389).

When discussing the occupations of male TV characters, the female participants tended to cleave along class lines. The working-class women indicated that TV men had glamorous jobs, while the middle-class women saw the jobs as typical, average and normal. Clearly, what seem like "normal" jobs to the middle-class women are seen quite differently by the working-class women. The female participants also spoke of TV women's careers differently. Working-class women were more likely to perceive that the image of women on television had improved over time. The indication of this progress was the achievement in professional careers and independent lifestyles depicted for women. Television women were described as "independent," "strong," and "professional," by middle-class women, who tended not to frame those descriptions in terms of progress. It may be that working-class women see this as an improvement, because they are not the children of professional women as are most of the middle-class women in the sample.

When describing the images of men on television, there seems to be a difference in how middle-class and working-class participants use the term "macho." For middle-class participants "macho" is a term that describes how men used to be on TV, those chauvinists who have been replaced by the sensitive 90s guy. For working-class

participants "macho" seems to merely stand for an independent, strong, muscular man. There does also seem to be some focus on physical description among the working-class participants who use this term referring to men on TV also as "strong and muscular," while middle-class participants do not use such a focus on physical characteristics to generally describe male characters on TV.

There are some interesting differences in these findings from those of Andrea Press who only interviewed women in her research. She found that working-class women were more susceptible to class-specific hegemony on television and middle-class women were more susceptible to gender-specific hegemony. The women who participated in my research appeared equally affected by gender-specific hegemony, despite class differences, at least when discussing some topics such as the portrayal of women on TV. This may be in part due to the class levelling effects of being university students, and yet class differences are also apparent in my data as will be discussed below.

The discussions of *The Simpsons* and *Roseanne* tend to bear out the findings of Jhally and Lewis (1992) that viewers lack a language with which to discuss class structures and that viewers use other determinants such as race to displace class structures. For some of the participants it was difficult to articulate a class in which *The Simpsons* or *Roseanne* fit. Several of them blended class labels that were contradictory, such as "working middle class" indicating a lack of consciousness of class structures in our society. This was further demonstrated by the large number of participants who not only labelled the Simpsons middle class, but then proceeded to give some fairly incongruous indicators for that label, such as beer drinking, watching a lot of TV and

laziness at work. In fact, the issue of beer drinking comes up as an indication for those

who place the Simpson family in the middle class, the lower class, and the working class;

it would seem that participants can read that particular characteristic in a number of ways.

Participants seemed much better able to place characters from the designated

middle-class shows, into the middle class. Although some confusion was noted in the

comments about some of the characters: Phoebe from *Friends* and George from *Seinfeld*.

Generally, middle-class participants read the professional background of the Friend's

parents and their clear potential success on their own (except for Phoebe) as signs of their

middle-classness. The working-class participants focussed on what the characters could

afford as well as noting the luxuries they have that they could not really afford on realistic

salaries for the work they do. As with the working-class shows, working-class

participants are more likely to see the incongruity; the class differences are more

noticeable. particularly the differences from their own experiences.

It seemed that the reading of family as typical, average and nuclear was a prime

indicator of middle-classness for many of the participants who located *Roseanne* and *The*

Simpsons as middle-class. These participants perceive that "middle class 'equals'

normal" and have used that as a framework to read class on television. This notion was

also visible in the gendered readings among the female participants, where TV men were

seen to have glamorous jobs according to working-class women and to have normal,

everyday jobs according to middle-class women. The middle-class shows are more

varied; fewer are domestic family sitcoms, which makes comparison between the two

discussions difficult. It's clear that family status resonates for the participants who see a

major difference between the two programmes based on the existence of family

responsibilities.

The working-class participants, by and large, have a better-developed

consciousness of class structures. They were more likely to view the working-class shows

as representative of the working class and gave detailed accounts of what indicators they

used to determine that class label. It would seem that class relations on television are

most visible to those who experience class inequality from the vantage point of the "have-

nots." These findings seem analogous to the "master-servant" parable (borrowed from

Hegel by Marx) where, from the servant's position, the working of the whole process is

visible, whereas from the master's position it is invisible. It seems clear that the working-

class participants are more aware of class and class inequality than are the middle-class

participants. The working-class participants also do not tend to exhibit the kinds of

judgmental remarks that other participants used in describing these characters as "lower

class." Those participants who did view these shows as depicting "lower class" or "poor

class" based that primarily on their dislike for the cynicism, laziness and rudeness of the

characters. These were the participants who tended to focus on the difference in attitudes

and values in their comparison of the working-class and middle-class shows.

All of the participants who discussed *Party of Five* were women. Most of them

read the social relationships more than the depiction of a certain class or lifestyle. Two

working-class women noted that the family has struggled with money, while the rest

indicated that the Salinger family does not have to worry about money. Participants

tended to use similar indicators for locating the Salingers in the middle class, big house,

nice neighbourhood, attitude towards post-secondary education, and no major financial

burdens. When asked to talk about *Party of Five*, these women were much more focussed

on the relationships between the characters; the details of their class situation were not as

forthcoming as had been the case with most of the sitcoms.

Several of the working-class women who participated in my research were able to

relate to *Roseanne*, while several of the male participants found her annoying or rude.

Rowe's supposition that there is ambivalence about the readings of *Roseanne* seems to be

supported by these data. Rosanne Barr had a syndicated talk show from 1998-2000. She

has been seen recently in a reality series called *The "Real" Roseanne* (about pitching a

cooking show) that began airing in mid-August 2003 on an ABC cable network. It would

be interesting to look at male and female viewer readings of her subsequent TV personae.

The comparisons of the middle-class and working-class shows tended to focus on

four primary points of comparison: 1) discussion of class, 2) different attitudes and

values, 3) family status, and 4) financial/money issues. Although some participants did

not use class terms, many stated that the characters of the middle-class show lived a

higher or better lifestyle than those in the working-class show that they had discussed.

Several described the shows as depicting "totally different" classes. The most interesting

finding from the discussion of class difference is the way that participants equated

working-class depictions with class visibility. Several suggested that class was more

obvious on the working-class show, or that the working-class show was more accurate to

its class. It seems that an indication of middle-classness is classlessness. Again we can

see the effect of the hegemonic message that middle-class is coded as "normal." It is the

norm of middle-classness against which participants seem to measure characters by whether and how much they deviate from that norm. While there were several comments that working-class characters were accurate to class and that their class was more visible, the converse was not stated with regard to upper-class characters. The characters whose class is visible are those that are not making it, those who are not succeeding. Jhally and Lewis (1992) have made a strong case for the individual achievement orientation of most television fare. It would seem that the participants read a failure to achieve as indicative of one's class—of being working-class!

Those who highlighted the difference in attitudes between the two shows tended to have labeled working-class characters as "lower class." They had been quite critical of the rudeness, laziness and cynicism of the characters in the working-class shows, especially *Roseanne*, in comparison to those of the middle-class shows they discussed. The working-class participants who cited different attitudes tended to be focussed more on their perceived dysfunctional depiction of family life, rather than on perceived laziness or cynicism. In a few cases the poor family values were noted as the cause of children having no ambition to higher education, rather than the lack of resources to pay tuition.

The difference in family status resonated with many of the participants. All of the designated working-class shows were domestic family sitcoms, while few of the designated middle-class shows were family oriented. The existence of dependent family members was therefore an obvious difference between most of the shows being compared by the participants. In many cases it was noted that this had an impact on the financial resources of the show's characters. As students, the participants are more likely to relate

to characters who are just starting out in their life, free of familial responsibilities and still

upwardly mobile.

When basing the comparison primarily on issues of money or finances, there was

a noticeable class difference among the participants. Working-class participants tended to

note the struggle with money for characters from *Grace Under Fire*, *Roseanne*, and *The*

Simpsons. Middle-class participants tended to frame money problems in opposite terms.

They would note that characters were middle-class because money is not a problem for

them, they can afford luxuries and do not have to worry about money. Those who

discussed the money problems for Grace, Roseanne and the Simpson family tended to

relate to those struggles, to understand what it was like to worry about which bill to pay

since there was not enough money to cover them all in a particular month.

The indicators that were used to ascribe class to the various characters were more

or less traditional status indicators such as occupation, income, education, dress and

housing. There is evidence that participants, like the subjects of Livingstone and

Mangan's research have a fairly "diffuse and consumption related perception" of class

(Livingstone and Mangan 1996:50). The problem of money was noted from both sides.

Working-class participants saw the problem of money in terms of not having money and

resources to fulfill the desire for a middle-class lifestyle, that is, after all assumed to be

everyone's desire. Middle-class participants noted that one mark of middle-classness was

not having money troubles, not having to worry about money, having eluded the problem

of money.

The impact of class and gender on reading television is varied and complex. In

226

some instances gendered framings are more likely than class framings. When reading

gender, women are far more likely than men to use gendered framings. Participants who

are themselves working-class seem more likely to read the inequality between classes on

television. Those who do not notice class differences on television, tend to normalize

middle-classness, and equate attributes like a normative family status as an indication of

middle-classness. It has been suggested that television is a class leveller (Neale and

Krutnik 1990; Press 1991; Fiske 1994; Douglas 1995) and there are relatively few

representations of the working class on television (Butsch 1992). There are consequences

of this classlessness in television culture. It makes invisible the barriers to inequality and

makes it harder to connect class structures to racial and gender inequality. It fuels an

obsession with individual achievement; it fuels the "American Dream." Some

participants were quite critical of characters from *Roseanne* because of their rudeness,

laziness and lack of initiative. One middle-class woman was critical of their lack of

ambition and initiative to get themselves out of their poor financial situation, as though

pulling themselves up by their bootstraps is all that is needed .

> **But then, the fact that they want to stay, they don't seem to be doing
> very much to try to change that...they just sort of accept it (M♀387)**

It seems evident that the myth of classlessness affects how some viewers see class, on

television and off. It is astounding that the above-quoted participant seems to believe that

the Connor family are poor because they have accepted it, otherwise they'd be middle-

class like everyone else.

In their study, Jhally and Lewis (1992) noted that characters like Roseanne

become noticeable because they defy the norm. As Douglas (1995) points out, Roseanne

is working class, loud mouthed, overweight and feminist; she defies the norm. The norm

on television is decidedly middle class. Kellner (1995) refers to *Roseanne* and *The*

Simpsons as examples of what has come to be called "loser television." While previous

television programmes depicted the wealthy or the middle class, these shows appeal to the

disaffected youth (*Beevis and Butthead*) or the disaffected housewife/mother (*Roseanne*):

"A large television audience is attracted to programmes that articulate their own sense of

frustration and anger in experiencing downward mobility and a sense of no future"

(Kellner 1995:149). Susan Douglas (1995) noted that Roseanne revealed the hypocrisy of

the traditional image of motherhood, in both her stand up comedy and on her sitcom. This

revelation resonated with the working-class female participants, but generally annoyed

most male participants and many female, middle-class participants. For those who

identify with the characters depicted on *Roseanne*, their class and gendered framings

seem to converge, while male viewers react negatively to the feminist overtones and

middle-class women see the show primarily through a class frame.

Conclusion

Television is embedded in the problematic of everyday life and isolating certain factors as specifically determinant of viewership is impossible (Ang 1996: 68). The activity of viewing television cannot be readily separated from the many other things going on around it, nor can it be easily disentangled from its broader social context. The everyday lives of university students are structured around classes, meals, homework, sleep and leisure activities; in some cases a part-time job also provides structured activity. Their modes of viewing revealed the ways that participants incorporate TV viewing within the variety of obligations in the context of their everyday. Gauntlett and Hill (1999) argue that "television is at the very least a catalyst for forms of organization of time and space—or, to be more emphatic, often a primary determining factor in how households organize their internal geography and everyday timetables" (38). As discussed above, the participants often organized viewing to coincide with meal time or breaks from their studies and classes. Many of the respondents in Gauntlett and Hill's study also recorded that meal times were deliberately planned to coincide with some feature of the TV schedule.

We can see from the responses of the research participants that much of the TV content they see is lacking in diversity on a number of axes. Messages about class and gender that the participants seem to generate from their viewing are rather narrow and predominantly reinforce dominant ideologies. At the same time there is evidence of the multi-vocality of TV texts and a variety of decodings at the moment of reception and afterward. That being said, it is not possible to isolate particular decodings as determined

by specific factors. There appear to be tendencies toward class-based or gendered reading

positions that are consistent with participants' own class or gender in some cases.

The meanings that participants generate from their viewing are organized around

power. The texts are necessarily open enough to generate large audiences and this allows

for a diversity of possible decodings, but there are limits. The readings of class indicated

a common sense understanding of middle-classness as normal and average and anything

else as aberrant among a significant number of the participants. The readings of gender

indicated elements of simultaneous acceptance and rejection among women reading

women on TV. Readings of class and gender that are consistent with dominant ideologies

were common among the participants, but there was evidence of "oppositional" reading

strategies. Most of the female participants exhibited what Liebes and Katz call a moral

type of opposition to the images of women on TV. Women accepted the ideal images of

women, using a referential (hot) framing, but at the same time argued with these images

as impossible for them to live up to. There was also evidence of a ludic oppositional

strategy or ironic reading among some participants in relation to particular TV texts. For

example, many participants indicated this kind of ludic reading strategy when discussing

their reading of *Melrose Place* and other soap opera.

These data revealed that participants engage in a variety of modes of viewing

television. Viewers are not restricted to the mode of the glance, but rather land

somewhere along a continuum from the glance to the gaze. Some general patterns

connected to class and gender are evident, but some modes are more individual and not

easily connected to such aggregate characteristics. Modes of viewing seemed connected

largely to the social context of viewing in a public common room where other activities

occurred along with TV viewing. What is clear is that there is a range of modes of

viewing and they have obvious connections to the social situation in which viewing

occurs.

The basic glance/gaze continuum is an heuristic tool to underscore the variety of

modes of viewing. This and other research has found enough variation that a continuum

seems the best way to conceptualize viewing practices. The present research found a

series of points of oscillation along the glance/gaze continuum. These points of

oscillation are **social or solitary, at school or at home and** whether viewing is the

primary activity or among activities. It is conceivable, even likely, that other research

would identify other points of oscillation. Much depends on the social situation of

viewing. In the case of the present research there was much in students' viewing practices

that was tied to their particular everyday situation, in contrast to viewing within a family

household.

The tendency of students to view in large groups revealed another continuum with

casual viewing at one end and ritualized viewing at the other. The continuum of

ritualized/casual viewing was seen to be contingent upon three factors: **away from home,**

type of programme and competition with other activities. Not all, but many of the

group viewing situations, such as watching *Party of Five*, *ER*, or *Melrose Place* tended to

be ritualized in one way or another. Some ritual viewings replicated a cinematic viewing

situation, some were more participatory; these more closely emulated attendance at

sporting events where spectator cheering or booing is common. So both the solitary or

social situation and the type of programme were salient to whether or not viewing was

ritualized. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that at times the domestic reception

of mass media can be ritualistic (67). They argue that watching TV or consuming other

media in the domestic sphere can have elements of ceremony. It seems that in the context

of larger group viewing as the norm that some of the experiences of cinema spectatorship

where some of the rules of behaviour are fairly circumscribed were common among these

research participants.

     Although the ritualized viewing situations tended to involve mainly female

viewers and to focus on programmes more often named as favourites among the female

viewers, there was little clear evidence in these data of specifically gendered viewing

practices. There was some agreement with Morley's findings that men talk less about TV

than women and that men are more likely to say they prefer to view in silence. The three

male participants who commented upon their desire to watch TV alone and in silence also

had in common the experience of viewing in their family home in the more traditional

domestic viewing context rather than living in student housing like the rest of the

participants. The context of their viewing is likely to be at least as relevant to their

preference for viewing in silence as their gender. Most of the participants in this research

had few opportunities to view in silence given the context of viewing in a common TV

room. Generally, there was little that was very clearly or necessarily associated with

gender in the viewing practices that the participants brought to viewing. Gauntlett and

Hill (1999) suggest that previous research that argued for and found evidence of gender

polarized tastes and behaviours of viewing have become outdated. Their findings:

"generally indicate that the sexes are somewhat less divided than they apparently were in previous decades" (245). Morley (2000) accepts that there have been changes since his early work on gender and domestic viewing practices, but is "less convinced by the argument that the very idea of gendered differences in programme tastes is now outdated" (95). He argues that in a number of cultural and geographical contexts researchers are still finding that gender remains an important determinant in what is viewed (Morley 2000:96). In the present research there did appear to be several programmes that were more commonly viewed by the female than the male participants. However, in the context of shared common room TV viewing the power over what is viewed is much more diffuse than would be expected in a family household. It is therefore to be expected that the kind of gender dynamics that occurred around control of and planning for TV viewing which Morley and others have found would not be evident in the contemporary context of large group viewing in a common TV room. There were few disputes over what to watch and there was always the option of moving to another floor's common room or even to the main lounge to view on the Hall's big screen TV.

It is clear that there are some broad patterns of viewership within this sample. These patterns can help to offer some clues to unlock the complexities of television viewing. A gendered framing is evident when participants are reading women on television. Women on TV were read as being stereotypically beautiful by general North American standards. Female participants responded to these as restrictive, negative and limiting, and at the same time resisted them and protested the impossibility of measuring up to such ideals. Male participants indicated that images of women on TV are unrealistic

and that they do not have expectations of meeting such women in their actual lives. TV

women were seen to be fuel for fantasy (for heterosexual men), ideal women for an ideal

world of the imagination. One male participant expressed concern that his girlfriend was

worried that she did not measure up to the women of *Baywatch*. His girlfriend was of

slender build, but not at all approximating the voluptuous lifeguards of *Baywatch*. It is

telling that he saw this as a strange desire in her and could not see that his desire for

watching such women was connected to her concern that she did not measure up. He did

not see himself as part of that process for her. It may also be that he made these

comments in order to show the female interviewer that he was conscious of the negative

repercussions of stereotypes. The implication is that what may be a common framing

among male viewers has a potentially negative, if unintended, impact on the self-image of

women in their lives. The complex relationship between media content and its market

which is differentiated by gendered social experiences is worth exploring further in future

research. One area of future research that is sparked by this finding is an investigation

into male and female uses of media in fantasy and the role of fantasy in one's

expectations for intimate relations.

Research, and a glance at the television listings for any given prime time viewing

evening, shows that there are relatively few depictions of working-class life on television.

Butsch (1992) found that this paucity of working-class representations had been the case

for a span of four decades, and things have not changed much since he collected his data

on television sitcoms (Bettie 1995; Signorielli and Kahlenberg 2001). When arranging to

discuss programmes that depicted working-class characters during my individual

interviews, I only found five shows that were on the air and likely to be familiar to the

participants. These mere five shows compare to thirteen programmes which depicted

middle-class characters and were among those familiar to the participants. The television

world is one where being middle class is the norm. The belief that middle class = normal

was evident in comments that participants made when we discussed class on TV during

the individual interviews. Bound up with this sense of normal middle-classness was the

ideal of the nuclear family. Even when Ellis published the first edition of <u>Visible Fictions</u>

he noted that while nuclear families were assumed by broadcast TV, they were already

the minority in the UK and the same is true in North America. So we have a situation

where the televisually constructed norm is one that is entirely at odds with the normal

everyday lives of most actual TV viewers. The association of normal or average with

middle-classness has a rather startling relationship to how viewers read class on

television. The research participants commented that working-class shows were "accurate

to their class" or made class "more obvious" whereas middle-class shows were taken to

be class-less, merely average or normal. This process whereby dominant groups are

represented as the unstated norm has been noted by other media researchers (see Jhally

and Lewis 1992 and *Tough Guise*, directed by Jhally, 1999). This appears to be evidence

of what Barthes (1984) termed ex-nomination. Barthes (1984) argues that "bourgeois

norms are experienced as the evident laws of a natural order—the further the bourgeois

class propagates its representations, the more naturalized they become" (127). Barthes is

theorizing this phenomenon whereby bourgeois norms, tastes, and values become

normalized in a way that removes any identification with class privileges and disparities.

The class character of the worldview and lifestyle enjoyed by the "haves" becomes universalized in a way that elides their class character and relativity. It appears that this is the same process being demonstrated by several of the research participants. The implication is that these norms, values, evaluative criteria, tastes, lifestyles etc. are unproblematic—normal

It is evident that class and gender are terrains of struggle in the process of viewership as elsewhere. The findings indicate that particularly among the women there is a fairly rigid pattern of congruity of gendered reading positions with participant's own gender, but there is also evidence of resistance to such meaning-making processes. There is also a pattern of conformity to the notion of a middle-class norm that governs readings of class on TV and notions of class more generally (off screen). However, some participants, especially those who are themselves working-class, demonstrated some resistance to that reading of middle class=normal. Participant's affinity with class and gender norms is not consistent and clearly some read outside of that, but many do conform. Perhaps this can be attributed to the common symbolic environment of television and cultivation effects at least in broad areas like class and gender relations. It is clear, however, that this common symbolic environment does not define the viewing of all the participants. There was one middle-class participant, a student of women's studies, who often discussed the lack of diversity of representations on TV as well as the structural inequalities based on both class and gender in society. It is clear that her course of study at university had exposed her to a variety of critical perspectives on class and gender relations and that these had an impact on her viewing.

236

The reliance on the notion of a middle-class norm is strong among the participants

and such a view has serious consequences. First, "class" has become a visible indication

of not making it in our society. Perhaps we have come so far from a recognition of class

as denoting relations of economic inequality; we have begun to move beyond even status-

based conceptualizations of class and instead class has become the term for the "have-

nots" who cannot disguise their status—who cannot afford "classlessness." Basically,

many of the participants indicated that if TV characters, and by extension people in real

life, are visibly of a class, then they must be working class. Those who are middle class

or upper class are noted as lacking visible signs of "class." There is a clear stigma that

attaches to being visibly of a class. This might keep people from identifying with and or

acting with their class in struggles for social change. Second, the belief that middle-

classness is the norm fuels the obsession with individual achievement; it facilitates a kind

of 'blaming the victim' for not being normal. From this point of view, which was evident

in some of the middle-class responses to *Roseanne* and *The Simpsons*, everyone is making

it and achieving, unless they are not trying. Finally, this view of middle-class as the norm

creates an illusory sense of equality. The institutional and structural barriers to equality

become invisible when people embrace the dominant ideology of equality of opportunity.

It is due to their belief in equality of opportunity that some middle-class participants

criticized the characters on *Roseanne* and *The Simpsons* for not working to get themselves

out of their poverty and for not prioritizing post-secondary education for their children as

a possible avenue towards this goal. It would seem that in the view of these participants

access to post-secondary education and therefore social mobility is merely a function of

having motivation and prioritizing of finances. According to a 1999 report of the Pan-

Canadian Education Indicators Program there is a gap between university participation

rates among different socio-economic groups in Canada[27]. The fact that there are

demonstrated inequities in access to post-secondary education is inconceivable to these

participants; they do not see structural inequalities; they 'blame the victim.'

The way that participants talk about viewing is quite revealing. There is a stigma

attached to TV viewing that is evident in the way they talk about how much TV they

watch and whether they are regular or occasional viewers. Many of the participants seem

to define viewing as non-activity. They may acknowledge TV as used for background or

when there is nothing else to do, but not as something they are doing as a primary

activity. This stigma of TV viewing is quite incongruous with the ubiquity of TV in our

culture. Basically, everyone watches some TV, most people find themselves talking

about TV characters, programmes or events at some point in their day and yet it is an

activity that participants struggle to construct as non-activity. Middle-class female

participants worked the hardest to frame TV viewing as something they do not have time

for—as a waste of their time. Working-class participants did not exhibit as much of this

fear of the stigma of TV viewing. It is likely that in their experience TV represented an

inexpensive form of entertainment and a source of information. Participants still revealed

much about their viewing practices and were not shy about discussing television, but

when asked specifically about how much they view, they were at pains to downplay TV,

especially as a primary activity. TV may be ubiquitous in our culture, but so is the stigma

---

[27] Findings of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Programme 1999, accessed July 21, 2000, [on-line] http://www.cmec.ca/stats/pceip/1999/Indicatorsite/english/pages/page28e.html

attached to watching too much, or watching instead of doing more productive activities.

This stigma is most evident when participants are asked to quantify their viewing and

seem to underestimate the amount of time they view as a kind of defense against being

seen as a lazy couch potato. It may also be that this response is heightened among this

age group who may feel some concern to undermine the general sense that as students (or

young people), they are frivolous and unproductive. People appear to be quite willing to

talk about TV programmes or sports events they watched on TV, but seem a bit more

defensive about discussion of the amount of time they spend watching TV. Morley also

found in his study that middle-class participants tried to minimize the amount of time

spent viewing when they were interviewed. More recently there has been greater attention

to the question of the moral dimension of broadcasting and its consumption (see Gauntlett

and Hill 1999; Alasuutari et al 1999) emerging as part of the current turn in

conceptualizations of audiences and audience research.

There are essentially three chief findings of this research. First, there is a common

conceptualization among the research participants of working-classness as something

visible or notable, while middle-classness and the nuclear family are defined as normal,

despite not being the reality for a majority of actually situated viewers. This ex-

nomination successfully articulates as average and unproblematic the norms of those who

are "haves" and removes any identification with class differences and privileges. Second,

and related, is that working-class participants have a better developed and clearer

understanding of structural class inequality than middle-class participants. It seems likely

that many of the working-class participants have life experiences that are unlike TV and

are aware of the gap between their experience and TV lifestyles. Nevertheless, they express a desire to achieve a middle-class lifestyle as depicted on TV. Third, women reading women on TV were seen to both accept and reject these messages. There was an indication of both pressure to conform and protest against such impossible ideals of femininity. Men, on the other hand appear to accept ideal gender depictions on TV as unrealistic and unattainable and merely the province of fantasy.

I believe that these data have offered some clues about the relationship between class, gender and television viewing, but I have to agree with Ang (1996) that the conditions affecting viewing are multiple and contingent and our understandings always partial and provisional. It cannot be said that one's class determines their viewing or that their gender does. Both class and gender are terrains of struggle that are intersected with others. Which aspect of these axes of power is more salient in a given viewing situation is difficult to isolate in the flurry of activity that is the everyday—the context of television viewing. However, the findings of this research do offer some valuable insights that contribute to further research on television viewing.

In North American society the media are part of an inequitable and highly stratified socio-political landscape. The concentration of media ownership into only a handful of corporations globally means that the majority of media content is influenced by that same handful of corporations and their particular interests. That is, much of media content comes from basically one perspective of corporate media power. Flow culture, such as TV programmes, is governed by a predominantly corporate, profit-seeking motive. Content that is not expected to generate large enough audiences with desired

demographic characteristics, and thereby big enough profits, is not likely to be put in

circulation. In recent years there has been an increase in specialty channels available on

TV via digital cable and satellite services. These channels, and the services that provide

them, are primarily owned by the same handful of media conglomerates that own the

other major media outlets. Canwest Global not only owns the largest TV network and

chain of newspapers in Canada, but also a large number of specialty channels that are

available on digital cable and satellite services.[28] The Walt Disney Company owns,

among other media and entertainment holdings: TV production studios and distribution

networks, movie production studios, ABC TV network, and all or part (part ownership

noted in brackets) of the following cable specialty channels that are mainly available in

the USA: The Disney Channel; Toon Disney; ESPN Inc. (80 percent), includes ESPN;

ESPN 2; ESPN News; ESPN Now; ESPN Extreme; Classic Sports Network (with

AT&T); A&E Television (37.5 percent); The History Channel (with Hearst and GE);

Lifetime Television (50 percent); and E!Entertainment (34.4 percent).[29] It does appear

that the TV audience is becoming more fragmented, but they are being sold by the same

media conglomerates to the same advertisers, just in smaller, more demographically

defined packages. The goal may now be to tap into a niche audience, but the overall goal

remains the same—to achieve a large audience (although now splintered into specialty

niches) that is perceived as demographically desirable to advertisers.

In addition to the plethora of new specialty channels serving niche segments of the

---

[28] CanWest Global Communications Corp. provides full information about all its media holdings on its corporate web site at http://www.canwestglobal.com/
[29] Based on information made available by Media Awareness Network on their website: http://www.mediachannel.org/ownership/granville.shtml#disney

audience, new digital technologies have facilitated affordable services like Tivo in the

USA and the UK which allow viewers to play programming executive in their own home.

Users of such digital video recording devices and services are still limited to the same TV

programmes available via antenna, cable, digital cable or satellite services, but they get to

record and watch whenever they please. In addition to creating a tailor-made TV

schedule the viewer can also pause and manipulate live TV including invoking an instant

reply whenever they choose. Bell Expresvu in Canada now offers a comparable Personal

Video Recorder (PVR) that is available for use with their satellite systems and Rogers

Cable also offers a PVR to its digital cable subscribers, at further expense of course. In

addition Video on Demand has become available to Canadians in the form of Rogers on

Demand service to their digital cable subscribers. Such services offer the ability to select

from a library of about 1000 movies and have access to them throughout a 24-hour period

with the same functionality as one gets from a VCR or DVD player. These new

technologies are likely to alter viewing practices in the future and will open up many

valuable lines of inquiry for audience research. It is important to note however that such

user controlled devices are relatively expensive, available only to satellite[30] and digital

cable subscribers,[31] and only provide users a choice from among programming made

available by the same handful of giant media conglomerates that own and control

---

[30] The penetration rate for satellite (this includes only subscribers to legal satellite television) has grown substantially in the past five years. In the fall of 2001, 15% of Canadian households reported that they were subscribers to satellite television, compared with only 3% in 1997. From Statistics Canada The Daily Dec. 2, 2002 accessed on-line http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/021202/d021202a.htm

[31] In August of 2001, Statistics Canada estimated about 812,000 digital cable subscribers in Canada. From The Daily Sept. 12, 2002 accessed on-line http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/020912/d020912a.htm

entertainment media in the current context.

The technological changes that have taken place have been accompanied by some

notable new trends in content.   There has been a noticeable trend of sexualizing TV

characters such as those depicted on *Sex and the City*, *Will and Grace*, and *Queer as Folk*

for example. It is clear that the frontiers of TV content have shifted; there are more

graphic depictions of sex and violence, more coarse language and more homosexual

characters than existed at the time the data for this research were collected. Some have

termed this phenomenon the "HBO effect" and therefore attribute more diversity, or at

least more "edginess" to the impact of specialty channels operating outside of the old

Network hegemony. As traditional broadcast networks have worked to compete with the

specialty channel fare the limits of broadcast standards have liberalized in terms of

swearing, nudity and depictions of sex and violence on prime-time network programming

in both Canada and the U.S. More and more programming forgoes the editing for content

and instead posts a warning prior to as well as at the end of each commercial break in

such programmes. Clearly the regulation of such content has been relaxed in recent years.

During the fall of 2000, for example, CTV aired the first season of the HBO hit show *The*

Sopranos without any editing for content, but in a later 10pm time slot. Subsequently,

Seasons two and three also aired on the CTV network. The "HBO effect" has meant more

than full frontal nudity and swearing during prime time viewing hours; we are also being

treated to many strong, independent female characters (*Star Trek: Voyager, Buffy the*

Vampire Slayer), lesbian and gay characters (*Queer as Folk, Will and Grace, Dawson's*

Creek), and even poor characters (*Trailer Park Boys), some of whom—Trailer Park Boys*

excepted—seem to largely defy older stereotypes. Vernon (1999) has noted thatBuffy

from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offered a well-rounded role model:

> Buffy may be styled like Britney Spears on a particularly warm day, but her
> midriff is very much her own and her whirling intensity, healthy self-irony,
> and inescapably dark undertones suggests that her main function is not
> titillation. She's a girl's girl, at once hard as nails and physically confident in a
> way that's genuinely empowering, and yet warm enough and scared enough
> not to become some kind of clumsy, shouting, mutated Spice Girl on auto
> pilot (The Guardian, [on-line] October 27, 1999).

Gauntlett (2002) observes that there have been noticeable changes in representations of

masculinity on TV as represented by: *NYPD Blue*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and *Queer*

as Folk (62-63).

In addition to evident changes in representations of gender on TV, there have been

some interesting developments in terms of class representations, though not so much in

fictional programming. It has been noted in other research that TV talk shows open up

space in public discourse for disenfranchised groups, such as members of the lower class

and working class (see Livingstone 1994; Morse 1998; and Grindstaff 2002). Although

there were probably earlier examples, it is the airing of *Survivor* on CBS in the spring of

2000 that kicked off the recent wave of so-called reality TV series. Such programmes are

another genre of TV programming where there has been a recent influx of working-class

people on the airwaves. From *Survivor* (CBS) to *Joe Millionaire (*FOX*)*, from *What not*

to Wear (TLC) to *American Chopper* (DISCOVERY*)*, working-class people are turning

up on TV in programmes outside the genres of sitcoms, crime news and TV talk shows.

There is such a wide diversity of programmes that might be called "reality TV," that it is

difficult to assess their role in the depictions of working-class people on TV. Some of

these programmes are educational (such as *Frontier House*-PBS, *1900 House*-PBS or

Surviving the Iron Age-HISTORY CHANNEL) where participants attempt to re-enact an

historical period as closely as possible. Often such programmes have social scientists and

other experts available to both offer advice and training to participants and to study them.

Many "reality" shows are simply more involved game shows (some offer monetary

prizes, newly decorated space in one's home, or simply "bragging rights" as motivation

for "contestants" to participate) than we have seen on TV in the past, such as *Fear

Factor(NBC)*, *The Amazing Race*(CBS), *Trading Spaces* or *Junkyard Wars* (both on

TLC). Certainly, one factor in the rise of such programmes is the relatively low

production budgets in comparison to traditional TV fare such as sitcoms or dramas. Not

only do reality shows not have to pay their "cast," aside from salaries for a limited

number of hosts or experts and any prize money or "activity" costs, but also such

programmes tend to have a different number of shows per series than traditional series for

which the average is 22 episodes on U.S. television (this is the case for the big four

networks as well as their little siblings such as UPN and the WB). Not only are such

programmes comparatively cheaper to produce, but also they produce good ratings value

for their low investment.[32] According to David Lieberman (2003),

> [t]he shows are particularly strong with the young-adult audience advertisers
> prize. This group grew up with MTV mini-documentaries such as *The Real
> World*, wall-to-wall coverage of sensational trials such as O.J. Simpson's and
> relationship talk shows like *The Jerry Springer Show*" (USA Today, [on-line]
> March 3, 2003).

---

[32] In the week of January 5-11, 2004 the new Donald Trump reality show, *The Apprentice* was 8th
and *Fear Factor* was 17th in the U.S. Nielsen ratings with a season rating of 20th. Ratings published by USA
today on line at: http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/nielsen.htm

In the multi-channel universe such programmes appear to be much less of a financial risk than they might have been a decade ago. The phenomenon of reality TV and what it may indicate as far as representations of subordinate groups in society is something that remains to be analyzed in a systematic way.

While it is beyond the scope of this work to delve into an analysis of reality TV, I do want to make some preliminary comments on a comparison of the home decorating show *Trading Spaces* and its original British version, *Changing Rooms*. *Changing Rooms* has been airing on the BBC in the UK for the past seven years. The show involves two sets of neighbours who each decorate a room in each other's home within a limited time period and with a limited budget. There is a host, a carpenter and each week different designers are assigned to create a design and work with the team of two neighbours to create a new room in two days. The U.S. version, *Trading Spaces* is in the middle of its fourth season on TLC. The format of *Trading Spaces*, which claims its lineage from the British original, is essentially the same except that the programme airs for a full hour instead of only 30 minutes, the carpentry duties are shared equally on a rotating basis by a male and a female carpenter, and the budget is in U.S. dollars instead of British pounds. Both programmes air on specialty channels in Canada and the USA. I have not conducted a systematic analysis of these programmes, but I would like to do so in future. Based on my own viewing experience with these programmes, they seem quite useful for comparing both depictions of and attitudes toward class and class structures in the UK and in North America. Both Press (1991) and Jhally and Lewis (1992) suggested in their analyses that in America class structures and inequities were made invisible (both in

everyday social relations and on TV screens), while in the UK such social divisions were

more evident and accepted. We need only consider the most obvious example of the soap

standard *Coronation Street* which is quite different in setting and tone from traditional

American soap productions. Further, the present research indicates that structural class

divisions are elided on much North American television programming. A comparison of

Changing Rooms and *Trading Spaces* seems to support the contention that other cultures

acknowledge class differences, while in North American cultures they are most often

elided.

The contestants on *Trading Spaces* are always referred to as "home owners"

because in almost all cases they are people who own the homes that are being renovated.

The show rarely takes place in rented spaces, although occasionally it has done so. The

dwellings of the contestant homeowners appear to be no more than 15 years old and are

usually located in an affluent suburb. The rooms they are decorating are quite spacious

and rarely are architectural flaws detected such as walls which are not plumb. In contrast

the spaces that are decorated on *Changing Rooms* are as often as not in rather old

dwellings with many challenges associated with remodeling an older structure. Further,

the participants on *Changing Rooms* are not uniform in their apparent social class

location as are the homeowners on *Trading Spaces* who all conform to the TV norm of

affluent middle-classness. Although other reality shows have had nationally specific

incarnations (such as the recent run of *Idol* programmes), these home decorator challenge

programmes offer a unique insight into the households and lifestyles of their participants.

A systematic analysis of *Trading Spaces* and *Changing Rooms* would likely result in

further insight into the matter of both class relations and depictions of class and class

norms on TV screens across cultures. It is clear that reality programmes have expanded

the opportunities for "have-nots" to be depicted on TV; further research is required to

determine whether this is an improvement or more of the same limited depictions as

found in a few sitcoms over the years, the crime news and dramas and TV talk shows.

It is likely that there have been ripples from the "HBO effect" and other changes

both in TV production and distribution and in broader social relations that deserve serious

attention and further research. It is important to investigate not only the texts and reading

positions now available to viewers, the structural changes in the broadcast TV industry,

but also the reception of actual viewers situated in their everyday contexts of viewing.

Appendix A-1 - Cover Letter to Questionnaire

June M. Madeley
McMaster University
Department of Sociology
Hamilton, ON L8S 4M4
905-523-8429

February 11, 1996

Dear Hall Resident:

I am a doctoral student in Sociology as well as being a Hall Director. Presently I am working on my thesis research. This research is on the topic of television viewership. I am interested in learning about how life experiences impact on how you view television programming.

As part of this research I am circulating a questionnaire to residents of the building. It is very short and should take less than 15 minutes to complete. You do not have to fill out this questionnaire if you do not want to. This information will be used as background material for future data gathering. If you want to participate, but feel you do not wish to answer some of the questions please feel free to do so. Simply leave any questions you do not feel comfortable answering blank.

I plan on following this questionnaire with some focus group interviews. Not everyone will be included in these groups where we will talk about television viewing. I will be asking some respondents if they can help me by participating in one of these groups. On the name tab of the questionnaire it would help if you could indicate times you might be free for this activity.

The information you provide is confidential. The name tab will only be attached to the questionnaire temporarily. Once I have arranged the focus groups I will detach this information as a way of ensuring your privacy. Only I will know the names which correspond to the questionnaires.

Please return the completed questionnaire, in the envelope provided, to room 117. Student participation is very important to my research. I thank you in advance for your participation in filling out this survey.

Sincerely,

June Madeley

Appendix A-2 - Name Tabs

1. Attached to the mail out questionnaire

****

Name_____

If Selected, best times for focus group would be: circle all that apply

Mon	5pm-7pm	7pm-9pm	9pm-11pm	10pm-11:30pm
Tues	5pm-7pm	7pm-9pm	9pm-11pm	10pm-11:30pm
Wed	5pm-7pm	7pm-9pm	9pm-11pm	10pm-11:30pm
Thu	5pm-7pm	7pm-9pm	9pm-11pm	10pm-11:30pm
Fri	5pm-7pm	7pm-9pm	9pm-11pm	10pm-11:30pm
Sat	noon-2pm	2pm-4pm	4pm-6pm	
Sun	noon-2pm	2pm-4pm	4pm-6pm	

****

2. Attached to the subsequent questionnaires provided to male participants

****

Name:_____

Phone Number:_____

Live in Residence or have lived in Residence at MAC   Yes   No

****

Appendix A-3-Questionnaire

Number_____

1) What is your age, to your closest birthday? ------yrs

2) Sex   1 female
         2 male

3) Would you say you are from an 1 upper   2 middle   3 working   4 poverty
                                  class   class   class   class

4) Thinking about your family's socioeconomic background, what would you estimate to be the total household income before taxes?
1 below $15,000   5 $45,000 to $54,999
2 $15,000 to $24,999   6 $55,000 to $64,999
3 $25,000 to $34,999   7 $65,000 to $74,999
4 $35,000 to $44,999   8 $75,000 or more

5) Do you have a part-time job? 1 yes If yes, how many hours per week? _____ hrs
                                2 no
6) What is your Father's current occupation? _____ Please describe his main duties

_____

   Does he supervise any people? 1 yes
                                 2 no
7) Was your Father's main occupation while you were growing up the same as above? 1 yes
                                                                                  2 no
   If no, what was his main occupation?_____ Please describe the main duties:

_____

   Did he supervise any people? 1 yes
                                2 no
8) What is your Mother's current occupation? _____ Please describe the main duties:

_____

   Does she supervise any people? 1 yes
                                  2 no
9) Was your Mother's main occupation while you were growing up the same as above? 1 yes
                                                                                  2 no
   If no, what was her main occupation?_____ Please describe the main duties:

_____

   Did She supervise other people?   1 yes
                                     2 no
10) Did your Mother remain at home full-time while you were younger than 5yrs? 1 yes
                                                                               2 no

please turn over->

11) Did you parents live together most of the time while you were growing up? 1 yes
                                                                2 no

12) How many siblings do you have? _____ Please state their sex and age

Sibling	Sex	Age	Sibling	Sex	Age
1	_____	_____	5	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	6	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	7	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	8	_____	_____

13) What is your major?_____

14) Do you consider yourself to be a member of a minority group in Canada? 1 yes
                                                                2 no

   If Yes, which one(s)?_____

15) Do you practice some organized religion? 1 yes If yes, which one?_____
                                            2 no

16) Of what ethnic background(s) is your family?_____

17) How much TV do you watch on average (in hours per week)? _____hrs per week

18) What programmes do you watch? List them in order of preference, with 1 as most preferred:
1)_____ 5)_____ 9)_____
2)_____ 6)_____ 10)_____
3)_____ 7)_____ 11)_____
4)_____ 8)_____ 12)_____

19) During what time(s) of day do you usually watch television? Please circle all that apply.
1) 6am to noon   3) 4pm to 8pm   5) midnight to 3am
2) noon to 4pm   4) 8pm to midnight   6) 3am to 6am

20) Do you plan ahead to watch certain programmes? 1 yes   If yes, which ones?
                                                  2 no

_____ _____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____ _____

21) Do you do other activities while watching TV? 1 yes If yes, what activities?
                                                 2 no

_____

22) Do you ever talk about TV shows with your friends or family? 1 yes
                                                                2 no

   If yes, What aspects of these shows do you usually discuss? (eg character's appearances)

_____

_____

23) Are you involved in extracurricular activities? 1 yes   If yes, which one(s)?
                                                    2 no

_____

24) How much time to you spend, on average, per week on these activities? _____hours
25) How many hours per week, on average, do you study? _____hour

Appendix B-Consent Form

Number _____

Consent Form

I am a doctoral student with the Sociology Department at McMaster University. The research I am conducting is for my Phd thesis which is required for completion of my degree.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the meanings, messages and ideas emerging from television viewing. I am interested in learning about: how your life experiences impact on how you make meaning during television viewing, how involved or attentive your viewing activity is, whether you empathize, sympathize or simply identify with characters, settings and situations on television. There has been no information like this collected in Canada. I believe there is much to be learned from an audience composed of university students living in a residence Hall.

There are three stages of data collection. First, observation of television viewing. This takes place in the normal common room setting when you might normally be watching television. Second, there will be a focus group session where you and 9 others participating in the study would discuss your experiences of viewing. These sessions would last about an hour and 1/2. Third, 20 participants in the study will be asked to do an in-depth home interview on this same topic. The interview will last approximately one hour. At a later date you may be contacted for clarification of your responses or for a second, brief, interview. You will be asked a number of questions relating to the areas of study noted above. You have the prerogative to withdraw from participation in this research at any time. If you wish to leave the focus group you may do so. You may stop the tape recording any time during the home interview. All information you provide will be treated as confidential. You and other participants will be expected not to discuss what was said during the focus groups with persons not participating in your group. Your name and address will not appear on transcripts of focus groups or interviews. Numbers will be used to mask your personal identity and only as much detail as is necessary to set context will be revealed. These precautions are taken to ensure your anonymity in the event that specific portions of the information which you provide are included in the published materials resulting from this research.

I would like to share the draft report with all research participants in order to verify the analysis with your experiences and perceptions. Your input may result in changes to the final report.

Thank you for your help in this research.

By signing this form you agree to the conditions outlined above.

Signature of interviewee_____name_____

Signature of interviewer_____

Date_____

253

Appendix C-Focus group interview schedule

1. What do you like about this show?
Probes:
- is it popular among your friends?
- why do you think that is?
- how does it compare to other dramas? Which ones?
- CTV calls it the series of the decade, do you feel this is accurate? Why or why not
- What are some shows that you don't like and why?

2. Who do you think is the most important character on the show?
- [try to get at 3 characters, work on consensus in the group then **ask about each**]
- who is she/he? What do you know about him/her? [try to get at family and other connections, class, education, race, gender]
- what motivates the character, what does she/he believe in?
- does he/she get what S(he) wants? How?
- do you like him/her? What is likeable? What is not?
- compare this character with a real life person of the same profession

- 3. Is this a show about real people?
- if YES, what kind of people is it about? Are they rich, educated, happy....
- if No, How are the people in the show different from real people?
Probes:
- do you relate to any of the characters or situations?
- do you know any people like them?
- how are they similar?

4. What kinds of problems do the people on the show have?
Probes:
- Are they like the problems that you have, your family or friends have?
- If NO, how are they different?
- If YES, do they solve them in a similar way?

5. Do you think the show takes a stand or offers some kind of message or lesson?
Probes:
- are they trying to tell us something?
- are there other messages?
- can you think of similar programmes? Are their messages similar?
- what kind of stories are being told in this show, how?
- are these the kind of stories/plots you enjoy? Why or why not?
- what kind would you enjoy more?
- are you more interested in the events? Or the people?

6. What does the show say about American society?
Probes:
- How is this different from a portrayal of Canadian society?
- what is the image of America that is presented?
- what is the image of medicine/doctors?

7. If you were the writer and had to write the final episode of the season, what would happen?
Probes:
- how does this scenario fit with what's been going on in the show?
- why would these things happen?

8. How do you think people of colour and ethnic minorities are represented in the media?
Probes:
- how are they represented in the show we are focussing on?
- would it make a difference if the roles were reversed, for example if the main characters were Black?

9. Who are your favourite men/women on TV? Who are your least favourite men/women on TV?
[try to get 2 -3 for each list]
Probes:
- what is it that is likeable about them [for favourite] ?
- what is unlikeable about them [for least favourite]?

10. Would you call the women on this show feminist?

Probes:
- if YES, why? What about them makes them feminist? What does feminist mean?
- If NO, why? What about them makes them not feminist?
- what do you think about feminism?
- what do you think about gender equality?

11. Are there any other comments?

Appendix D-Edited summary of focus group session

Edited summary of Female Group 2 (8 Participants)[33]

April 9, 1996

I: to start with I want to know what kind of stuff you can think of that you liked about the show?

J: the action

K: I like the happy endings

I: is it always happy?

K: I wouldn't know cuz I don't watch the show

M: it addresses serious issues

F: the guy playing [basketball] with his Dad at the end he's cute

K: I saw the show once, and I wouldn't mind watching it again, its pretty interesting

J: touches a lot of people in a lot of different places, that's what, because it appeals to a lot of people, it kind of touches on people's emotions whether it be happy or sad or whatever, that interaction with people's emotions I think that's what attracts the viewer its not just doctors dealing with doctor's problems

M: it's really real, they're not just dolls

I: anything else, other things that you liked about it?

J: I like the conflicts too that they have, often between the characters, like its not like everyone gets along there's a lot of tension

A: character development makes you want to watch it every week

RM: I think the medical part is really neat and kind of exciting, of course we don't get to see that everyday and its neat to see their lives outside the hospital

A: the characters kind of make you want to watch it every week like you want to see if Susan gets to adopt the baby or and how Dr. Greene looses the mother, that happened in another episode, but they kind of hinted at that in this episode he had the conflict between the other Dr. when he was delivering the twins

RM: yeah I think you'd miss a lot of that too, if you'd never seen it

F: I like that there's humour in it too, it wasn't just a drama, I laughed, I cried [all laugh]

I: is it pretty popular among your friends? people you know, people on your floor?

---

[33] This summary is provided to give an example of the data gathering process. This is a verbatim transcript of selected discussion questions from a longer transcript.

J: at the beginning of the year it wasn't but I made my friends pretty happy with it [laugh] so like they need to watch it. I have to watch it so I think it's become, like you have to sit down and watch it and there's quite a few people that I recruited on my floor

I: what about people here who've never seen it before?

K: I never even saw it once

I: if it was on would you leave the room or would you stay now that you've seen it once

K: its a bad time to ask that [exams], but yeah if I don't have anything else to do I might stay and watch it, but

F: I'd stay and watch it

RM: I was going to say, I kind of have med school in the back of my head and I always get inspired after I watch it

C: actually I had the opposite, I watched it and I don't want to be a doctor now [all laugh] look at the people on it like look at their lives they're like all screwed up, doctors you think they're all rich but that one guy drives a really lousy car that won't start and they spend all this time saving these people and they never see them again kind of thing, I don't know, I just don't want to be a doctor [laugh]

I: at least not an ER doctor. So why do you think it's popular?

F: cuz that guy is cute

I: George Clooney?

F: no

A: yeah

F: yeah that's him

J: what I said before, about how F said how its got humour and sad parts like its the whole idea of it being a wide range of emotions you don't get bored watching it, like it's so much action, like it has a lot of humour.

A: you're constantly waiting for the end of the show to see if something turns out or not

RM: yeah you can't really predict the ending

F: it attracts many different people. Like just the fact that anyone can relate to some of the things going on just as I found I totally could relate to the guy and his Dad, like I have the same sort of family thing, I thought hey that's pretty cool, that's so true. And other people can relate to the adoption or they just have so many social aspects that anyone could probably relate to it and make the show seem more real

I: How do you think it compares to another Tv drama, is there another show that's something like it?

J: *Chicago Hope* sucks, I hate it [all laugh]

RM: its so...

J: its more like soap opera-y

I: so *ER* is not really soap opera like?

A: well it has the elements that make you want to watch the next day, but it's not as cheap and people aren't sleeping with everybody else, but there is still that romance thing

RM: I think I don't like the characters as much on *Chicago Hope*, they're not as real, you know

I: what are some shows that you don't like?

A: *Chicago Hope* [laughs]

J: *Star Wars*, uh *Star Trek*

I: which one

J: I don't really watch any of them, I just really hate them with a passion

RM: I don't hate them that much, I just don't...if they're on the show

J: and *Mash*

I: that was over in the early 80s

J: I know but they have repeats

I: do you remember the final episode, where you watching it?

A: I remember running from the room when it was on

I: other stuff that you don't like

A: *Family Matters* all the shows on ABC Fridays,

F: I hate that show, like *Full House*

All: ohhhhh

I: what don't you like about *Family Matters* and them?

A: they're just so annoying and trivial

I: they're all sitcoms?

A: yeah

F: they're all like with these family roles, that don't abide to society, like those three families got together and they're all really happy with each other and the only conflict they have is one's dating the hunk of the school, the other one wants to

A: and there's always a moral [all laugh]

258

I: is this like *Full House* you're talking about

F: any show

I: they're all the same?

F: yeah they're all the same and the thing is, one gets a baby in the house and then like all of a sudden ten other shows adopt a new baby and the kid grows up in like two weeks [all laugh] this week its 2 years old next week its 10! I don't understand, it's not really realistic

J: don't like 90210, [gasps from others] when it first started and for the first couple of years I religiously watched it like I do *ER*, but now I really hate it because its so 1) unrealistic, 2) melodramatic and it's very shallow I find

I: it doesn't really hold up?

J: yeah it's just like become like, before it was interesting because they were teenagers and they dealt with issues and now its more of a

RM: they're older and they're just all sleazy

A: have you seen *Malibu Shores* yet? That's supposed to be, its by Aaron Spelling and it has Tory Spelling's little brother in it, its just exactly like *90210*

I: so you think they're just starting over with the younger crowd, to draw them in

A: the same storylines are coming up

F: I can relate to *Beverly Hills* and *Melrose* and stuff like that, but I think the only reason I like it is because I don't really have to like, *ER* totally brought out all these emotions and made me think about like Oh shoot I don't want to have kids yet [all laugh] it totally made me think about all these things whereas *Melrose* and *Beverly Hills* and I guess *Malibu Shores* they don't make me think about anything, it's honestly it's an hour that you sit back and I know they try to have these moral issues and stuff, but it just doesn't work on me, and I just sit back and almost laugh at how cheesy it is and that's what I think tv is for me it's just like escape from reality, I don't need more reality

M: you know what show's like *ER*, *Party of Five*.

J: I love that show

A: that's the best

RM: I hate that show. They're some of the people from *Catwalk*

A: oh the one girl, yeah

RM: I don't know

J: its good, it makes you cry.

I: just like *ER*?

J: its like *ER* in that sense

259

M: its mixed all these emotions, sometimes its happy, sometimes its sad

J: I used to watch it, I watched it in the beginning and I wasn't crazy about it and I've been watching it again and I'm finding that the reason that I like it is because the reactions of the characters, again are really close to life, like they're not, I could see myself saying some of the things that they've said, whereas with a lot of shows it's very like it's kind of like a typical script going back and forth and this one it, I find that the script includes things that I never would have thought to write in a script but it's so true that people actually say them

M: The thing with *ER* and *Party of Five* they're so intense though, like they are melodramatic, like any ER that's like that ER would be Wow! the people that work there are just, like when I go to the ER, ok wait two hours yeah we'll get to you, none of this rush, rush, but I mean and same with *Party of Five*, like if that was my life I'd probably kill myself [laughs] that's the reality, like everything is all intensified by 100 times

RS: it's like every thing you do in a month in one day

A: I've started getting more and more people on my floor to watch the show, like the 2 hour finale of *Party of Five* there was a couple of guys sitting in there, they'll say something but then they don't get up and leave

I: are they looking for a date, or are they really watching it?

A: they're actually watching it, like they come down and they say, oh what is it and then we tell them and they don't bother to leave, but, or admit they like it

F: I remember, like *Party of Five* I said I was watching it and I told some guy I was watching it and he's like, Oh I haven't watched that since I've been at school, I really miss that show and Can I borrow the tape, maybe when I go home, like he didn't, but like I think he even came into the commons room and watched it with us, but

I: ok lets move on now, now I want to talk about characters in the show, who do you think are the most important characters in the show? In *ER*, not *Party of Five*. [all laugh]

A: Dr. Greene

F: the guy whose car didn't start

I: ok that's Peter

F: yeah

K: the one that delivered all the babies, the balding guy

I: that's Dr. Greene

RM: what's Cloe's sister's name again?

A: Susan

M: who's that head nurse?

J: I think Carter was important, cuz

M: yeah

J: he brings in some of the humour and

M: and the sex appeal

F: did you get the one, who had a fight with his Dad?

RM: what do you mean by important, exactly?

I: I don't know, I don't really want to define it but you know people who seem to be important for the plot to go on

K: who's the one who was fighting with the guy when he was delivering the baby?

A: she's only been on the show like twice

J: she's a doctor that kind of comes in and out of the scene, she's like every now and then they bring her in extra

M: what about the hobble woman?

A: hobble woman [mocking her]

M: yeah the one with the cane, she wasn't important in this show, but she

RM: but she comes and goes

I: Carrie?

F: it seems to me that there's some doctor that came in and said a mean comment I don't know if he ever comes, you know who I'm talking about? some surgeon guy

I: oh they're all covered up, who knows who they are

M: wasn't he Benton's old guy?

F: he seemed like the head guy though

I: Veuselich the guy who wrote his study?

M: yeah the one that wrote

J: he didn't look familiar to me

I: so I've got Peter, Mark, Susan, Carter and Carrie, anyone else?

J: did you have Doug in there?

I: no

M: oh yeah Doug

F: whose Doug, oh Doug, I didn't know what his name was so I thought he was already mentioned, when you said the cute young guy

I: the cute young guy is Carter

F: no he wasn't cute

RM: I don't find him cute either

I: Doug has grey hair!

A: I think Doug's hot

I: ok can we pick three that we think in this episode seemed most important?

F/J: Doug

A: Dr. Greene too

J: I'd say Greene and Carter

M: Benton, was in there too though

K: the guy at the beginning

I: the guy at the beginning is Peter Benton

K: him

I: the surgeon guy?

K: cuz he performed all the surgery

J: do you mean in this episode specifically?

I: yes

J: ok

[some disagreement about who are top three]

I: ok you can have 4, is that going to help

J: ok Greene, Carter, Benton and

F: Doug [all laugh]

I: ok then we'll start with Doug, what do you know about Doug, what kind of guy is he?

F: hot

M: hot

F: but he's got a bad relationship with his Dad

I: ok, his family life doesn't seem to have been so great

A: hates commitments, he doesn't like commitments

J: but when it comes to kids, that's his prime, that's like the whole thing with him he always puts kids at the top of the list, like the way, obviously his role as being a paediatrician, anything that causes harm or parents who abuse or anything like that Doug is the first person whose in there defending the child

M: he can be really insensitive sometimes, like with the woman on crack, he's like "yeah you'll probably get it back" I mean he criticizes he's like always from the child point of view, but he doesn't think that oh maybe she's changed

F: the fact that he gave back the tickets to his Dad, even though he wanted to go see them, it just showed that, I don't know what it showed, like I can certainly understand why he did it

I: even though he really wants them he doesn't want to take them from his Dad?

F: yeah

J: he's very closed off, I think, like he doesn't really, I think all of them are, like they don't really show their emotions a lot when they're there.

A: whenever he gets close to a woman he screws it up somehow. Like last year he screwed up I don't know how many relationships.

I: do you think he's a guy who gets what he wants?

F: um probably not, no

RS: I don't think he ever has so now he wants to

M: he seems to get what he wants

F: I don't think, he, I think from what I saw today and that he gave up something he wanted, he put his pride first

A: it's something he kind of does to himself though, like when last year, he was in a relationship with a woman, he screwed up and he went on a date with another woman, and she caught him and then his scholarship came up because he talked back to the guy who is in charge of it and he knew he was in trouble, but he just kept on pressing and pressing him. He's kind of self-destructive.

I: do you think he's likeable?

F: he's really likeable [all laugh]

M: I think all the other characters like him too

J: not liked by the authority figures

RM: I don't see him as very aggressive or anything, I don't see him challenging anyone, not like some of the other characters, who turn you off sometimes

I: can you compare him to a real life paediatrician type, good-looking doctor guy?

263

J: I don't think that real life paediatrician would necessarily be so emotional, not emotional in the sense that he like shows, but in the sense that he shows his frustrations to patients like the parents or to um co-workers, well maybe not co-workers, but more to the parents, I don't think that, I think a paediatrician would be a lot more politically correct, to use the term, like I think that is more their style that they'd be a little more screened in what they give off, I think you know what I mean [laughs]

I: ok what about Peter?

F: which one's he?

I: Peter's the doctor who got up at 4 in the morning

F: Oh cool

I: what do you know about him, what kind of stuff does he believe in

F: he's cool he, this is the first thing, this is the only thing I have on him, he puts money towards a stairmaster in his own house but doesn't put it towards his car, and will actually walk to work, like it kinda shows his priorities like he sees a stairmaster materialistically. Its something I would do, I'd put it towards a stairmaster cuz just it would make me happy, where people might judge you on your car. He didn't really seem to care, it was just something to get him to and from

M: he seemed really determined to me, like he was working out and then like walked to work and then the guy came in and it was like "what did he have for breakfast?" and he was all "ok lets go" he seemed really into it and determined and you know he knows what he wants

RS: he wouldn't give up on that one patient, he thought that he could bring that guy back and he did even though everyone else thought he couldn't

J: he's also very stubborn, very hard to change his opinion and very emotional

C: I think he's arrogant, actually

J: Absolutely

C: he thinks he's God, like a God given surgeon who can give back life from the dead and I guess that's a good thing to have in a doctor, I think he just takes it to a certain excess and his co-workers don't like it

J: I think he's arrogant

M: he's arrogant but it makes him kind of a good surgeon, cuz he's willing to you know "I can do it" and just go out and do it. But it doesn't make him a very likeable character

K: I've never seen the show before, like I saw it once, but from what I got from today he's determined, and like that's all I really got, like all he did was operate [all laugh]

F: the letter thing, that was pretty cool that he didn't make a big issue of it, like the other guy was so, like basically what his letter said if it was a good letter or a bad letter basically was a turning point of his life to this other guy, like he kinda brushed it away like it wasn't a big deal, like that shows, like I would say "Oh don't worry I gave you a great letter!" but he was like he kept it to himself so it was selfish because he could have made the other guy feel better

K: he's also made a name for himself, because the doctors were interviewing they were so impressed with the letter

I: do you think Peter gets what he wants?

M: no.

F: yep

J: absolutely, fer sure

RS: well not always

J: well in the case of relationships

M: but he doesn't even try

A: although just recently though he tried that, what's the doctor that starts with a V,

I: Veuselich

A: Veuselich ok. he screwed up that little job he had going with that guy because he actually said to him, that how patients were being treated rather than his own success. Like that time, I actually found like he put the patient before his career

RM: well

A: so he screwed up that little

RM: he only went so far, to save his career

J: I think on the whole he gets what he wants, I don't think maybe there's a lot of, in certain cases where, but I think on a whole his character has to get what he wants

I: do you think he's likeable?

RM: not one of the most likeable ones

RS: no

M: I like him

K: he strikes me as someone who I'd be...if I had to work with him, like yeah he's very

J: intimidating

K: yeah he's really intimidating

J: I think he's likeable too

F: he's respected, maybe that's the key point like I would totally respect him, but then again I respect anyone who does something for himself that they really want to get like he's cool

I: how about Mark?

K: is that the bald guy?

J: he's awesome, he's very dedicated

M: he's just a very really nice character, like I don't think he's got himself into trouble, when he does he always gets himself out of it

Rs: always see him as Goose from *Top Gun*

K: He was Goose in *Top Gun*?

J: No Way! was he really!? He was also one of the nerds in *Revenge of the Nerds*

K: was he really?

M: he's the boss and he's like the kind of boss you'd like to work for [all agree]

M: accommodating and

J: and practical and very like clear-headed

M: yeah literally [all laugh] he seems to, like authority, remember that woman pushed him away, like "I'll do it" he's just like "I can do it" which is a good quality

A: he didn't like yell and say "I can do it!" he did it by doing it instead of like getting mad and just getting everyone else upset

RM: well that was a situation because he had screwed up, a few episodes ago, and well I don't know that, anyway the baby died and that was why that woman was like "ahhh" and it was so tense and

A: he's also very neutral, like when there's conflict among the other doctor even if it's his best friend against someone who just came to the hospital he'll remain neutral and say well you know the new person does have a point, you were out of line or something like that, even though his friend will get mad at him

I: do you think he gets what he wants?

J: mmhmm

F: He seems to in a different sort of way, like just from the baby incident, like the first time he let the lady take control and the second time he like there's different types of getting your own way and he does it in a quiet manner. People might not think he's getting his own way, but he has the last laugh

M: he's probably like half and half, he probably, he's determined enough to get what he wants but he's also, he's the kind of guy you can see bad things happening I don't know why, cuz he's so nice you know, things happen to him, I don't know he seems like that kind of character

A: he has the determination to get what he wants, but he also won't take it at the expense of anybody else, like with his daughter like the whole conflict with his daughter and his ex-wife, he wants that relationship there, but he won't disrupt their lives to get it

I: ok what about Carter

J: a geek, clumsy

F: Which one is Carter?

J: the young doctor

RM: I find him very cocky

A: he's become a lot like Benton

M: no but now he's getting back

A: slowly, but surely

M: he cares, I think that's why I like when they asked him, why you want to be a surgeon...

RM: he totally used that line that was Benton's line

M: but he was thinking about it for a long time and, I think it's cuz he doesn't really know why he wants to be a surgeon

A: I think they're gonna not make him be a surgeon anymore, something happened last episode I watched, that made me think, they were out in emergency and he said, "oh this is so exciting" I remember they were doing something and emergency was really busy that night or something like that and he found it really exciting and he liked helping the people, he seemed happy doing emergency

I: that was when we finally saw the waiting room

A: yeah,

RM: it put like them having to be, not innovative, but creative, it was neat

I: so you figure he's gonna wanna stay in the ER now?

A: I don't know, all I can remember is that little, him just seeming really happy, "oh we helped people, it felt really good" I remember him saying that

M: it kinda reminds me of the time he spent with that old man that couldn't find his son, and it was just like he related to him and all that, it was just oh it was good I was crying. But he's a nice guy, like deep down, its hard to tell in this episode, like his girlfriend was pregnant, or like could be pregnant and it didn't seem like a huge thing, he's like "oh" [all cool] but he had a lot on his plate this time, like his life depended on it

I: do you think he gets what he wants?

F: hmm he's too young

K: yeah I think he's like, he's learning how to get what he wants almost like, he seems to idolize..what's his name

J: Benton

K: him, and he seems to be like he's acting like him or whatever, I think he's learning to try and get what he wants and maybe not the right way but

F: did he miss the surgery job?

I: no he's been doing surgery all year

F: it seems he may not fit into surgery because he's such a likeable character [all laugh]

RS: I think also because he's young, he doesn't know what he wants and also glorifying, if he doesn't love doing surgery that's not where he should be and so he's learning kind of thing what he should be doing

I: can you kinda relate to that?

F: yeah

I: Can I take it that you guys think he's likeable? [lots of laughter]

J: yeah

F: yeah

Rm: I think he's become unlikeable..he's really actually become an asshole these days, because he is, he seems really selfish

I: recently he became more selfish?

A: the old lady?

RM: yeah the whole thing with the older couple and well of course it's hard for him because he doesn't know how to deal with things right now and how to tell someone, old couple that his wife is terminally ill and you know he, not that he didn't have the guts to tell the guy, but he doesn't know how to go about it, yet and then it became this whole thing, remember when he went to the funeral to pay his respects but really it was just to clear his conscience and the guy put it, he said "this is my time, this is my wife this is not about you this is nothing about you" and I don't know

J: I think what they show, like just about the fact that you have to be the likeable character, I think on the whole he's a likeable character and I think he's going into a phase where he's learning and getting, you know getting bruises and whatever to learn from that and I think they're showing kind of a shift in his character, so just to keep things realistic that we all learn that way, like we all screw up, feel comfortable maybe in a position and then they show him maybe becoming unlikeable, kind of he's starting to realize and that whole thing with the last scene that in the last episode where he dealt with the patients in the waiting room like he was a kind of likeable character, he cared and had sympathy for the patients, so I think he's going back into a likeable stage

RM: I agree it was all about learning, I just think generally you know he's been in this phase [all laugh]

A: being socialized into the medical profession, they have to separate themselves from the patients and he kind of took it to an extreme earlier this year and slowly he's starting to get back to the happy medium, where you can care, but don't take it home with you

I: is this a show about real people?

J: I'd say so

I: ok what kind of people is it about? are they happy?

M: are you talking about the main characters or the people that come in? anybody?

J: I think it's a glamorous life they're trying to portray. It's very action packed I think maybe a little more so than real life, but I think its real and just the whole, cuz they show their life outside of the er, I think the whole thing about the adoption and Doug's family life, like they did show what's going on in their lives and that kind of makes it real life cuz it's all issues that people face it's not

I: it's the same kind of problems that everyone has?

J: yeah

I: can you relate to any of the people or the situations that they're in?

F: I think it was kinda neat the surprise party that they had at the end I think you can relate to your friends, you knew that they were playing a trick on her and its kind of neat

M: I caught it this time when I watched it, like I didn't realize when they were saying things like "here she comes" and then they all were quiet

F: yeah, the whole time, and I just thought it was neat, cuz I love surprises, like it's what friendship's all about, playing tricks on each other and like you know what I mean

M: that brought a lot of reality, that's kind of fun, and unexpected
RM: for me that would be a neat place to work just for that reason I mean yeah they do have a community in there

F: yeah

C: I think I can relate to Carter like with that whole interview thing I mean we're all in University we're all gonna have to go through stuff like interviews sooner or later, when you look for a job or you know whatever you want to do, you kinda relate to him, you know you want good letters of recommendation and wanting to impress all these people and then meeting all these people that are so much better qualified than you, and you're going like "oh my God" [all laugh]

I: what did you think about that interview process, you know when he was sitting there with all those people? is that what you envision as the sort of interview you might face?

M: I like when they asked him to tie that thing to see how he handles stress that was kind of neat

F: it reminded me of the [student leader] interview

I: that's the second time I've heard that

F: having all these people across from you and thinking ok cuz if I say one thing wrong I'm not gonna have this, and they're all looking at you to kind of prompt you on and you start to get flustered cuz you're not doing something right like I know we didn't have little toys but that's what you felt like [all laugh]

J: my face was like beet red

M: yeah so was mine [F, J and M had all been through student leader interviews and were selected]

RM: I've been to a group job interview where there was like 10 other people, its the scariest thing, its so scary

I: it's hard enough with one

RM: yeah and they're each pounding questions at you and

M: and they're marking

J: one thing that wouldn't necessarily be in a job interview or a real life interview, I think in a real life interview they would be more serious, and they wouldn't indicate so much that they were impressed by the letter that they got, I think they'd be a little more, I don't think they'd give him as much information as they did

I: Why do you think that happened in this?

F: because the relationship between exercise bunny [Benton] and new coming in buddy

M: oh that's true, yeah, I thought we have to hear somehow, I mean maybe if they made him leave the room and then go "oohh did you see the letter?" but it would have been the same

J: it kind of puts you on a roller coaster ride too because in the beginning of the episode they show you all these phenomenal med students who did all this research and all these wonderful things and then here comes Carter, like Oh my God I have no, like he looks very insecure and then although, and then he's screwing up with the toy, but he got this awesome letter

I: do you think Carter wasn't as good as those people? Were you kind of scared for him?

all: yeah

RM: you can feel how he felt, of course

A: I thought they were gonna make him not go into surgery

Appendix E-Field notes from an observation session

Sample of field notes from participant observation [March 20, 1996-First Floor]

NOTE: Due to hockey play offs a number of viewers decided to gather on the first floor and watch other than hockey on the Hall's big screen tv. I had randomly selected 6th floor to observe, but they decided to gather on the first floor to watch on the bigger tv screen since others had made that option available. Usually, this tv was locked up and reserved for special viewing situations for security purposes.

Beverly Hills 90210, Fox, 8pm, 1st Floor
6 viewers at the beginning, all women who were avoiding hockey on their common room Tvs. 2 more arrived at the 10 minute mark of the show.
Started with conversation over the credits, "are Val and whatshisname still doing it?"
"That's Tory Spelling's little brother!"
"Really? ....yeah you can see it,"
"Daddy had to put him in too,"
"He's got some new show,"
"He's worse, they're both awful!"
re: the character Tara, "she's gunna steal something"
2 more viewers arrive at about the 15 minute mark, still all women viewers
re: Claire's hair, "she looks like the Bride of Frankenstein!"
re: Steve, "how did he get brothers?!..I missed that episode!"
2 more viewers puled up at back row, 1 guy showed up about 24 min mark. The guy seems to have a coat on and a knapsack, waiting for someone?

During commercial: talk of babies, one young woman's sister? Just had a baby. Some troubles with breastfeeding, no milk at first. This was news to the 5 who were talking about it – disc. Of how big the baby is, was in so much pain and did not take an epidural. It was all natural childbirth. None of the young women seemed keen on going that route if it were them.

Next commercial: for Glintz- "That's the girl who was in it before," "Dylan's girlfriend!" During commercial- more discussion of the recent birth. She can't fit into jeans she wore when she was 5 months pregnant so she's been wearing PJs since the birth
The one male viewer [wearing coat and carrying knapsack mentioned previously] left at the 45 minute mark

Synopsis:
1) Tara comes to stay with Kelly; goes to party and is jealous of her doctor guy
2) Party at Brandon's, Steve's little brother gets alcohol poisoning
3) Val is jealous of Kelly when Colin finally sees her
4) Colin has to do some time, but is ok with it

Party of Five, Fox, 9pm, 1ˢᵗ Floor
5 people all women viewing at beginning of episode. 2 more came by 15 minute mark. 2 left at the 20 minute mark to get snacks at the cafeteria

not as much conversation during commercials. The only talk was for details as they came up. Rebok commercial came on before the scenes for next week's episode. Women shown power walking, stepping and having a daughter. Complaint after the commercial. "This image of the perfect women is really bugging me, you have to be superwoman now, perfect mother perfect career woman!" As they were dispersing there seemed to be general agreement with this response from the 5 other viewers.

Synopsis:
1) Charile lies to ? Says he is back with Kirsten. She calls, gets machine and catches the lie. She buys the building and tells him his lease won't be renewed!
2) Grandpa had another famly after abandoning the Salinger Mom. Bailey freaks out, Claud still wants to be friends and spend time, he says its not goodbye
3) Julia and ? are in big trouble, she won't let him in, he writes a story about them to express the magic and hope in him-Julia squashes it. She can't do it, doesn't' feel it, she leaves him on the school dance floor.

Appendix F-Class codification

Class Codification Notes

IF a respondent identifies as working class (question 3) then for the purposes of this research they are working class. NOTE that classification is difficult since sometimes Fathers occ is mc and Mothers is wc, use intuition to settle this one.

IF to question 4 (INCOME) a respondent answers 1-3 then there's a strong likelihood they can be classified as wc. Depends on whether both parents are in the home, if both work(ed) and if so at what? Did the Mother stay home when kids were little (question 10) ? If so this is an indication of mc. does the Mother work at a wc occ ? this may indicate that the family needs the money and may be categorized as wc. It is possible that answers 4-6 indicate working class too. Need to look closely at occ of parents, whether they supervised other workers, whether the student works part time (question 5) which may indicate working class.

The class category of occupation (occ) has been divided between working class (wc) and middle class (mc). **Working class** occs are generally those that require low skill level, training or education; have traditionally low wages [such that they are basically living paycheque to paycheque and that getting laid off has immediate ramifications - ie, likely little capacity to save $]; have little input into the work they do, these are jobs where the tasks are assigned by supervisors/managers and the worker has little control over how it is to be done. **Middle Class** occs are defined here by, generally high wages/ input by the worker as to how things get done; often there is a supervisory function; professional occupations fit in here; work is more mental than manual; generally requires some post-secondary education.

The Canadian classification and Dictionary of Occupations (CCDO), 1989 has been coded using the above definition of wc and mc and the questionnaires have been coded with the occupation 4 digit number. The coded CCDO can be used to classify occs on questionnaires as either mc or wc. The first occ listed is most recent the second is "while growing up" if different. See below for codes of Occs not listed in the CCDO:

wc	99= self-employed
depends	RET= retired
depends	HW =full time homemaker
depends	D =deceased
wc	UN= unemployed

Appendix G-Individual interview schedule

Individual Interview Schedule

GENERAL VIEWERSHIP

Are you a regular or an occasional viewer of TV?

When you watch TV, what shows, or type of shows do you usually watch?
-could you name a few of your favourite shows?
-what is it that you like about these shows?
-what kind of shows don't you like? What shows in particular? why do you think that is?

Where do you watch TV? in your room, common room, living room?
-(if in Residence) what about when you are at home?
-do you do other things while watching, ex: cooking, eating, homework?
-do you usually watch TV with others?
-if so do you talk about the programme? what aspects of it?

DIVERSITY

When you watch TV, are you aware of characters who are of racial or ethnic minorities?
Do you notice these characters?

What do you think about the portrayal of racial and ethnic minorities on TV? How are
they represented?
-does this seem accurate? In what ways?
-some people think that they are discriminated against when it comes to the roles they play
and the frequency with which they appear on TV, do you think this is the case or not?

What are some of the roles they play?
-what type of shows are you thinking of? Can you give examples?
-what minorities are you thinking of? Are there differences in how different groups are
portrayed on TV?

Do you identify at all with those characters? why/why not?
-(if white) do you know any people of colour? do you think they would identify with
some of these characters? why/why not?

274

GENDER

Let's talk a bit about the men on TV. What is the image of masculinity that is portrayed on TV?

-what shows or characters are you thinking of?

-How do you feel about that portrayal?

-does it seem typical? If so in what way(s)?

-do you know any men like them?

-how do they dress, what kind of work do they do?

-how do you feel about these men?

-which type of man do you identify with (if male) /prefer (if female)

Now lets talk about women on TV. What is the image of femininity that is portrayed on TV?

-what shows or characters are you thinking of?

-How do you feel about that portrayal?

-does it seem typical? If so in what way(s)?

-do you know any women like them?

-how do they dress, what kind of work do they do?

-how do you feel about these women?

-which type of woman do you identify with (if female) /prefer (if male)?

Now let's look briefly at families and role models:

Is there a TV programme that reflects the kind of family you grew up in? if so which one and in what way(s)?

-do you identify with that family or characters on that show? if so which ones and in what way(s)?

Do you think there are some good role models on TV?

 -if so who and what makes them a good role model?

 -do you want to be like them in some way, which one(s)?

Is there someone on TV that you would like to be if you could?

-if so who, and why is that?

CLASS
Chose one of these cards (WC) with a TV show that if familiar to you on it...lets talk a bit about that show
-What jobs do the characters do for a living?
-Do you see much of their workplace on the show? If so what's it like there?
-Do you know people who do that for a living? Is it like that for them? If not, how is it different?
-What about the clothes they wear?
-can you identify with these characters/this family? If so in what ways?

What do you think about the lifestyle of the characters?
 What class do you think they represent?
 What makes you think that?
 Were you thinking about:
        -what kind of house/apartment they live in?
        -what kind of work the characters do?
        -what type of clothes they wear, food they eat?
Do you think this is an accurate reflection of the class they represent? Why or why not?

Now lets look at one other show, choose one of the cards (MC) with a TV show that is familiar to you on it
-What jobs do the characters do for a living?
-Do you see much of their workplace on the show? If so what's it like there?

-Do you know people who do that for a living? Is it like that for them? If not, how is it different?
-What about the clothes they wear?
-can you identify with these characters/this family? If so in what ways?

What do you think about the lifestyle of the characters?
What class do you think they represent?
What makes you think that?
Were you thinking about:
        -what kind of house/apartment they live in?
        -what kind of work the characters do?
        -what type of clothes they wear, food they eat?
Do you think this is an accurate reflection of the class they represent? Why or why not?

How does the lifestyle of the characters in this show compare to the previous one we just talked about?

THE REALITY OF TV
Can you think of some programmes that take a stand, are trying to tell us something?
-which ones and what are they trying to tell us?
-what is their message?
-does it make you think about yourself, the world you live in?
do you buy that? why/why not?

Do you think the people and situations portrayed on TV are represented accurately?
Why/why not? And to what extent?
-which shows/characters are you thinking of here?
-do you think there are (kind of person) like that?
-are their problems the kind or problems that you have or people   you know have?
-do they solve them in the same way?
-can you identify with characters on TV? which ones? why? how?

Do you want TV to be realistic?
Why, or why not? And to what extent?
-is it more enjoyable if it seems realistic or if it isn't? Why?
-is it important that the (characters, plots etc) be plausible?
-do you like some TV that is not real? like what programme?
-why do you think you like those programmes, what is it about them?

What are some shows that you think are not realistic?
-what do you think about those?
-do you enjoy/dislike them?
-is that because of how realistic they are or for other reasons? like what?

Appendix H: Interview worksheet

1. R or O: Interview #_____

2. What shows (fav's) and what you like about them:

   shows don't like/why:

3. where: at home:
   What else:

   With others:
   talking:

4. notice minorities?
   portrayal?

   roles:

   identification:

5. image of masculinity:
   who:
   typical:
   dress:
   jobs:
   how do you feel about it:

   identify/prefer:

6. image of femininity:
   who:
   typical:
   dress:
   jobs:

   how do you feel about it:

   identify/prefer:

7. reflects your family: Interview #_____
   good role model:
   who you would like to be:

8. Show:
   jobs:
   clothes:
   identify:
   lifestyle:
   class:
   why:
Accurate:
9. Show:
   jobs:
   clothes:
   identify:
   lifestyle:
   class:
   why:
   accurate:

   compare shows:

10. take a stand:
    message:

    accurately:

    want realistic:

    more enjoyable

    Plausibility important:

    enjoy not realistic:

    not realistic shows:

    enjoy/dislike:

Other observations _____

Appendix I –Table 8

Table 8 -Class Label by Participant and Show (*Roseanne* or *The Simpsons*)

Participant	Show	Class Label
001♀M	S	upper end of lower middle
002♀M	S	pretty m/c....working middle class
037♂M	S	maybe lower...have to say middle class
212♂M	S	upper lower class...maybe lower middle
587♂W	S	maybe w/c...have to say middle class
416♀M	S	I guess middle class
533♀M	S	very middle class
378♀M	S	probably middle class
092♂M	S	everyone says m/c, that's the biggest
340♂M	S	lower middle class
139♂W	S	average middle class
260♀M	R	middle class
313♀W	R	working class
163♀W	R	the lower end of working class
057♀W	R	working class
588♂W	S	working class
600♂W	S	the are working class for sure
606♂W	S	working class
384♀M	R	working class
547♀W	R	working class
561♀W	R	low income class
387♀M	R	pretty lower class
174♂W	S	poor class
235♂M	S	lower class

Bibliography

Abercrombie, Nicholas and Brian Longhurst (1998). Audiences. London: Sage.

Alasuutari, Pertti (1992). I'm ashamed to admit but I have watched Dallas: the moral hierarchy of TV Programmes. Media, Culture and Society, 14(4), 561-82.

Alasuutari, Pertti (Ed.). (1999). Rethinking the Media Audience. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Allen, Robert C. (1983). On reading soaps. In E. Ann Kaplan (Ed.), Regarding Television (pp.97-108. USA: The American Film Institute.

Althusser, Luis (1971). Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. London: New Left Books.

Ang, Ien (1991). Desperately Seeking the Audience. London: Routledge.

Ang, Ien (1996). Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World. London: Routledge.

Armstrong, Pat and Hugh Armstrong (1984). The double ghetto : Canadian women and their segregated work (Revised Ed.). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Bacon-Smith, Camille (1992). Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Badley, Linda (2000). Scully hits the glass ceiling: postmodernism, postfeminism, posthumanism, and The X-Files. In Elyce Rae Helford (Ed.), Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television (pp. 61-90). USA: Roman and Littlefield.

Baehr, Helen and Gillian Dyer (1987). Boxed In: Women and Television. New York: Pandora.

Bagdikian, Ben H. (1997). The Media Monopoly (6th Ed.). Boston: Beacon Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail (1981). The dialogic imagination : four essays / by M. M. Bakhtin (Edited by Michael Holquist ; translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquis). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barrett, Michele (1980). Women's Oppression Today. London: RKP.

Barthes, Roland (1975). The pleasure of the text / Roland Barthes (translated by Richard Miller). New York: Hill and Wang.

Baudrillard, J. (1983) Simulations. New York: Semiotext(e).

Berg, Bruce L. (1995). Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences (2nd Ed.). Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.

Bettie, Julie (1995). Class dismissed? *Roseanne* and the changing face of working-class iconography. Social Text, 14 (1), 125-149.

Blum, Milton L. and Paul W. Foos (1985). Data Gathering: Experimental Methods Plus. New   York: Harper & Row.

Blumler, Jay G. and Elihu Katz Eds. (1974). The Uses of Mass Communication: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research. New York: Sage.

Bordo, Susan (1993). Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body. Berekely: University of California Press.

Bottomore, Tom (1991). Classes in Modern Society (2nd Ed.). London: Routledge.

Butsch, Richard (1992). Class and gender in four decades of television situation comedy: *Plus ca Change...* Critical Studies in Mass Communication 9 , 387-399.

Byars, Jackie and Eileen R. Meehan (2000). Once in a lifetime: constructing 'the working woman' through cable narrowcasting. In Horace Newcomb (Ed.), Television: The Critical View (6th Ed.) (pp. 144-168). New York: OUP.

Carter, Cynthia (1995). Nuclear family fall out. In B. Adam and S. Allan (Eds.), Theorizing Culture (pp. 186-200). London: UCL Press.

Clement, Wallace (1991). The Challenge of Class Analysis. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.

Clifton, Tim (1999). The Hollywood formula. Renaissance On line magazine, 3 (6). Retrieved June 8, 2003 http://www.renaissancemag.com/arts/movies/ default.asp?article=0699

Clover, Carol J. (1992). Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cohan, Steven & Ina Rae Hark (1992). Screening the Male. London: Routledge

Craig, Steve (1991). Images of Men and Masculinity in the Mass Media: A
    Selected Research Bibliography. Orono, Maine: University of Maine, Department
    of Journalism and Mass Communication. ERIC Document Reproduction
    Service Number ED 337 824. Retrieved December 18, 2003
    http://www.rtvf.unt.edu/people/craig/pdfs/mascbibl.PDF

Craig, Steve (1992). Men, Masculinity and the Media. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Crompton, Rosemary (1996). Consumption and class analysis. In Stephen Edgell, Kevin
    Hetherington and Alan Warde (Eds.). Consumption Matters: The Production and
    Experience of Consumption (pp.115-132). Boston: Blackwell Publishing.

Croteau, David and William Hoynes (2000). Media Society (2nd Ed.). California: Pine
    Forge Press.

Cruz, Jon and Justin Lewis (1994). Viewing, Reading Listening: Audiences and Cultural
    Reception. Boulder: Westview Press.

De Fleur, M. (1964). Occupational roles as portrayed on television. Public Opinion
    Quarterly, 28, 57-74.

Douglas, Susan (1995). Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media.
    Toronto: Random House.

Eagleton, Terry (1991). Ideology: An Introduction. London: Verso.

Elasmar, Michael, Kazumi Hasegawa and Mary Brain (1999). The portrayal of women in
    U.S. prime time television. Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 44(1),
    20-34.

Ellis, John (1992). Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, and Video (Revised Ed.).
    London: Routledge.

Ettema, James (1982). The organizational context of creativity: a case study from public
    television. In J. Ettema and D. Witney (Eds.), Individuals in Mass Media
    Organizations: Creativity and Constraint (pp.91-106). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fiske, John and John Hartley (1978). Reading Television. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.

Fiske, John (1987). Television Culture. London: Routledge.

Fiske, John (1994) Media Matters: Everyday Culture and Political Change. Minneapolis:
    University of Minnesota Press.

Foucault, Michel. (1980). Power/Knowledge. New York: Pantheon.

Gantz and Wenner (1995). Fanship and the television sports viewing experience. Sociology of Sports Journal, 12 (1), 56-74.

Gauntlett, David and Annette Hill (1999). TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life. London: Routledge.

Gauntlett, David (2002). Media, Gender and Identity. London: Routledge.

Gerbner, George, L. Gross, M. Morgan, and N. Signorielli (1994). "Growing Up with Television: the Cultivation Perspective," in J. Bryant and D. Zillman Eds., Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research (pp.17-42). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Giroux, Henry A. (2001). The Mouse that Roared. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Gitlin, Todd (1983). Inside Prime-Time. New York: Pantheon.

Gramsci, Antonio (1971). Selections From the Prison Notebooks. NY: International Publishers.

Gray, Ann (1992). Video Playtime: The Gendering of a Leisure Technology. London: Routledge.

Gray, Ann (1999). Audience and reception research in retrospect. In Pertti Alasuutari (Ed.), Rethinking the Media Audience (pp 22-37). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Grindstaff, Laura (2002) The Money Shot Trash, Class and the Making of TV Talk Shows. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gunter, Barrie (1995). Television and Gender Representation. London: John Libby.

Gursky, David and Jesper Sørensen (1998). Can class analysis be salvaged? American Journal of Sociology, 103(5), 1187-1234.

Hackett, Robert A. and Richard Bruneau with Donald Gutstein, Timothy A. Gibson and NewsWatch Canada (2000). The Missing News: Filters and Blind Spots in Canada's Press. Canada: Garamond Press/Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Hagen, Ingunn (1999). Slaves of the ratings tyranny? media images of the audience. In Pertti Alasuutari (Ed.). Rethinking the Media Audience (pp.130-150). London: Sage.

Hall. Stuart (1980). Encoding/decoding. In Stuart Hall et al. (Eds.). Culture, Media Language (pp. 128-138). London: Routledge.

Hall, Stuart (1985). The rediscovery of `ideology': return of the repressed in media studies. In Veronica Beechey and James Donald (Eds.), Subjectivity and Social Relations (pp.23-55). Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Hall, Stuart (1986). On postmodernism and articulation: an interview with Stuart Hall (Edited by Lawrence Grossberg). Journal of Communication Inquiry, 10(2), 45-60.

Hartley, John (1992). Tele-ology: Studies in Television. London: Routledge.

Henry, Frances, Carol Tator, Winston Mattis and Tim Rees (1995). The Colour of Democracy. Toronto: Harcourt Brace.

Hobson, Dorothy (1982). Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera. London: Methuen.

Hobson, Dorothy (1999). Women audiences and the workplace. In Morag Shiach (Ed.), Feminism and Cultural Studies (pp.143-153). New York: Oxford University Press.

Höijer, Birgitta (1999). To be an audience. In Pertti Alasuutari (Ed.). Rethinking the Media Audience (pp. 179-194). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

hooks, bell (1994). Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations. London: Routledge.

hooks, bell(1992). Black Looks: Race and Representation. Boston: South End Press.

Hunter, Alfred A (1981). Class Tells: On Social Inequality in Canada. Toronto: Butterworths.

Jenkins, Henry (1992). Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture. London: Routledge.

Jensen, Klaus and K. Rosengren (1990) "Five Traditions in Search of the Audience" European Journal of Communication, 5(2-3), 207-238.

Jones, Gerard (1992). Honey, I'm Home! : sitcoms, selling the American dream. New York : Grove Weidenfeld.

285

Jhally, Sut and Justin Lewis (1992). Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream. Boulder: WestView Press.

Jhally, Sut (Director). (1994). *The Killing Screens: Media and the Culture of Violence - Featuring George Gerbner* [video]. USA: Media Education Foundation.

Jhally, Sut (Director). (1999). *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity* [video]. USA: Media Education Foundation.

Kaplan, E. Ann (1983). Regarding Television: Critical Approaches-an Anthology. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, Inc.

Kaplan, E. Ann (1988). Whose imaginary? The televisual apparatus, the female body and textual strategies in select rock videos on MTV. In Deidre Pribram (Ed.), Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television (pp.132-156). New York: Verso.

Katz, Elihu (2001). Lazarsfeld's map of media effects. International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 13 (3), 270-279.

Katz, Jackson (1995). Advertising and the construction of violent white masculinity. In G. Dines and J. Humez (Eds.), Gender, race and class in media: A text reader (pp.349-358). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kilborn, Richard (1992). Television Soaps. London: Batsford

Klapper, Joseph (1960). The Effects of Mass Communication. New York: Free Press.

Kellner, Douglas (1995). Media Culture. London: Routledge

Kinder, Marsha (1991). Playing With Power: In Movies, Television, and Video Games. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Kirby, Sandra and Kate McKenna (1989). Experience, Research and Social Change: Methods from the Margins. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Krahn, Harvey J and Graham S. Lowe (1998). Work, Industry and Canadian Society (3rd Ed.). Toronto: Nelson.

Kubey, Robert and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1991). Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

286

Lazarsfeld, P.F, B. Berelson and H. Gaudet (1948). The People's Choice (2nd Ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Lazarsfeld, Paul and Robert Merton (1948). Mass communication, popular taste and organized social action. In Lymon Bryson (Ed.), The Communication of Ideas (pp. 95-118). New York: Harper & Brothers.

Lewis, Justin (1996). Telephone discussion regarding the interview schedule used for the Enlightened Racism research. February 16, 1996.

Lieberman, David (2003). Will reality bite TV networks? USA Today March 4, 2003, Retrieved June 5, 2003 http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2003-03-03-realitytv_x.htm

Liebes, Tamar and Elihu Katz (1993). The Export of Meaning: Cross Cultural Readings of Dallas. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Livingstone, David and Marshall Mangan (Eds.) (1996). Recast Dreams: Class and Gender Consciousness in Steeltown. Toronto: Garamond.

Livingstone, Sonia (1994). Watching talk: gender and engagement in the viewing of audience discussion programmes. Media, Culture and Society, 16(3), 429-447.

Luxton, Meg and Sue Findlay (1989). Is the everyday world the problematic? Reflections on Smith's method of making sense of women's experience. In Studies in Political Economy, 30, 183-196.

Luxton, Meg and June Corman (2001). Getting By in Hard Times: Gendered Labour at Home and on the Job Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

MacDonald, Myra (1995). Representing Women: Mythos of Femininity in the Popular Media. New York: Arnold and OUP.

McQuail, Denis (1993). Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction 2nd Edition. London: Sage.

Mackie, Marlene (1991). Gender Relations in Canada: Further Explorations. Toronto: Harcourt Brace.

Mandell, Nancy Ed. (1998). Feminist Issues: Race, Class and Sexuality. Scarborough: Prentice Hall Allyn & Bacon.

Manga, Julie Engel (2003). Talking Trash: The Cultural Politics of Daytime TV Talk Shows. New York: New York University Press.

Martin, Michéle (1997). Communication and Mass Media: Culture, Domination, and Opposition. Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels (1975). The German Ideology. In Collected Works (Vol. 3). NY: International Publishers.

Modleski, Tania (1984). Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women. New York: Methuen.

Modleski, Tania (1991). Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Post-Feminist" Age. New York: Routledge.

Moores, Shaun (1996). Satellite Television and Everyday Life. UK: University of Luton Press.

Morgan, Michael and Nancy Signorielli, Eds. (1990). Cultivation Analysis: New Directions in Media Effects Research. New York: Sage.

Morley, David (1986). Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure. London: Comedia.

Morley, David (1992). Television, Audiences & Cultural Studies. London: Routledge.

Morley, David (1999). To boldly go...'the third generation' of reception studies. In Pertti Alasuutari (Ed.), Rethinking the Media Audience (pp.195-206). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morley, David (2000). Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity. London: Routledge.

Morley, David and Roger Silverstone (1990). Domestic communication- technologies and meanings. Media, Culture and Society, 12 (1), 31-56.

Morse, Margaret (1998). Virtualities. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

MPAA (2003). U.S. Entertainment Industry: 2003 MPA Marketing Statistics. Available upon request from www.mpaa.org.

Mulvey, Laura (1988). Afterthoughts on 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' inspired by Duel in the Sun. In Constance Plenley (Ed.), Feminism and Film Theory (pp69-79). New York: Routledge.

Nakhaie, M. Reza (1999). Debates on Social Inequality. Canada: Harcourt Brace

Nation, The (2002). "The Big Ten" January 7, 2002. Retrieved March 13, 2002
        http://www.thenation.com/special/bigten.html

Neale, Steve and Frank Krutnik (1990). Popular Film and Television Comedy. London:
        Routledge.

Nelson, Adie and Barrie W. Robinson (1999), Gender in Canada. Scarborough: Prentice
        Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada.

Nightengale, Virginia (1996). Studying Audiences: The Shock of the Real. London:
        Routledge.

Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth (1993). The Spiral of Silence. The University of Chicago
        Press, Chicago.

Oakley, Ann (1980). Interviewing women. In Helen Roberts (Ed.), Doing Feminist
        Research (pp 30-61). London: RKP.

O'Brien, Mary (1983). The Politics of Reproduction. London: RKP.

Overbey, K. A. and Lahney Preston-Matto (2002). Staking in tongues: speech act as
        weapon in *Buffy*. In Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery (Eds.), Fighting the
        Forces: What's at Stake in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (pp73-84). USA: Rowman &
        Littlefield.

Palmgreen, Phil and Rayburn Jay D. (1985). A Comparison of Gratification Models of
        Media Satisfaction. Communication Monographs, 52(3), 334-345.

Picker, Miguel (director) (2001). *Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and
        Corporate Power* (2001) [video]. USA: Media Education Foundation.

Poster, Mark (1988). Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. California: Stanford University
        Press.

Press, Andrea L. (1989). Class and gender in the hegemonic process: class differences in
        women's perceptions of television realism and identification with television
        characters. Media, Culture and Society, 11(3), 229-251.

Press, Andrea L. (1991). Women Watching Television. Philadelphia: University of
        Pennsylvania Press.

Pullen, Kirsten (2000). I-love-Xena.com: Creating online fan communities. In David
        Gauntlett (Ed.), Web Studies: Rewiring media studies for the digital age (pp.52-
        61). New York: Arnold and OUP.

Roberts, Robin A. (2000) Science, race, and gender in *Star Trek Voyager*. In Elyce Rae Helford (Ed.), Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television (pp. 203-222). USA: Rowman & Littlfield.

Rosengren, Karl E., Werner, Lawrence A. and Philip Palmgreen (Eds.) (1985). Media Gratifications Research: Current Perspectives. Sage Publications: Beverly Hills, California.

Rowe, Kathleen (1995). Studying *Roseanne*. In Beverley Skeggs (Ed.), Feminist Cultural Theory (pp46-61). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Ruddock, Andy (2001). Understanding Audiences: Theory and Method. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Saferstein, B. (1991). "Collective Cognition and Collaborative Work: the effects of cognitive and communicative processes on the organization of television production," Discourse and Society, 3(1), 61-87.

Scheller, Johanna (1996). Angels of the ER. US Magazine. May 1996. Retrieved May 14, 2003 http://www.angelfire.com/md/shipper/CAROLandDOUGaUS96.html

Signorielli, Nancy. (1993). Television and adolescents' perceptions about work. Youth & Society, 24(3), 314-341.

Signorielli, Nancy and Aaron Bacue (1999).Recognition and respect: A content analysis of prime-time television characters across three decades. Sex Roles, 40(7/8), 527-544.

Signorielli, Nancy and Susan Kahlenberg (2001). Television's world of work in the nineties. Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 45(1), 4-22.

Silverstone, Roger and Eric Hirsch Eds. (1992). Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces. London: Routledge.

Silverstone, Roger (1994). Television and Everyday Life. London: Routledge.

Smith, Dorothy E. (1988). The Everyday World as Problematic. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Smith, Dorothy E. (1990). Introduction. Sally Hacker 'Doing it the Hard Way': Investigations of Gender and Technology. Boston: Unvin Hyman.

Smith, Tony (1993). Dialectical Social Theory and its Critics: from Hegel to Analytical Marxism and Postmodernism. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Smythe, Dallas W. (1981). Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada. New Jersey: ABLEX.

Spradley, James P. (1979). The Ethnographic Interview. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Ltd.

Steeves, Leslie H. and Marilyn Crafton Smith (1987). Class and gender in prime-time television entertainment: Observations from a socialist feminist perspective. Journal of Communication Inquiry, 11(1), 43-63.

Swingewood, A. (1977) The Myth of Mass Culture. London: Macmillan.

Tucker, Ken (1994). Orphan Hootenanny. [Review of the TV series *Party of* Five] dated September 1994. Retrieved July 8, 2002(under "archives") http://www.ew.com

Vanneman, R and C. Pampel (1977). The American perception of class and status. American Sociological Review, 42(3), 422-437.

Van Zoonen, Liesbet (1994). Feminist Media Studies. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Vernon, Polly (1999). Girls at our best. The Guardian, October 27, 1999. Retrieved September 9, 2001 http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv_and_radio/story/0,3604,258349,00.html

Wolf, Naomi (1990). The Beauty Myth. London: Chatto & Windus.

Wright, Erik Olin (1997). Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis. England: Cambridge University Press.