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

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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.
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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” (Croteau 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 depoliticization 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
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 televiusal 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

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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. Alasuutari (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” (Alasuutari 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 *Visible Fictions* 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 ongoing 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
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
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
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
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 programmes 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 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

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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
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 'White'" (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. 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). 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

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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 “taking an idea from the programme and playing 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Referential</th>
<th>Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hot (emotionally involved)</td>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>Ideological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool (cognitively involved)</td>
<td>Ludic</td>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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”
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” 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.
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 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

6While my own methodology is ethnographic in nature, taking the interview style, it is not ethnography per se.
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(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 biasing 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. 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

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Average Hours/Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18+</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18+</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, 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.) 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

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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).

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 focused 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, women 1 and women 2.10

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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 focused 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. Its average reported viewership in the United States was approximately 30 million per week at the time the data were collected. 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” focused 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

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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. 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.

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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

Focus Group Composition by class and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>W♀</th>
<th>W♂</th>
<th>M♀</th>
<th>M♂</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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\textsuperscript{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:\textsuperscript{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-

\textsuperscript{15}I selected numbers from a hat.

\textsuperscript{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. It is my intention to provide a brief summary of the research findings to all the participants at the conclusion of the research.

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

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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.

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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 through 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 top 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>would interview</th>
<th>no further participation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36*</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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. 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

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19 Based on General Social Survey data and reported on http://www.cmec.ca/stats/pceip/1999/Indicator/site/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 (18-24 years).

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 *Family Television* 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 may 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.\textsuperscript{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, ♂ = 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

\textsuperscript{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. They 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 (M001);**

**sometimes I read, during commercials, for school, or I eat, if that counts (M378).**

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 (W174).**

Other participants recognize that television can tear them away from some of the things they feel they should be doing instead of watching television:

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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 (Mo589);

oh yeah I'll read...yeah, I'll look up, if I hear laughter (W585).

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 (Mo340).

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, Mo340, 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.
The first point of oscillation is between 
**solitary** and **social** viewing. I have found that participants' 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
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 (Wo606).*

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. W313 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 (Wo057).*

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 Continuum](image)

- 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 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

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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. 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
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^2092).

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:

\[\text{that was kind of upsetting [laughing, embarrassed about being touched, moved by TV] it’s embarrassing (M♀ 445).}\]

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

\(^{23}\text{It is likely that male viewers engaged in ritualized viewing of sports, particularly of play-off sports, but during the time when I conducted participant observation, there were no big sports events that I witnessed the students viewing.}\)
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Show</th>
<th>♀ W</th>
<th>♂ W</th>
<th>♀ M</th>
<th>♂ M</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of Five</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seinfeld</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Improvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly Hills 90210</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin City</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mad About You</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frasier</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Young and the Restless</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Single Guy</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melrose Place</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6
Working Class TV Shows by Class/Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Show</th>
<th>♀W</th>
<th>♂M</th>
<th>♀W</th>
<th>♂M</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Simpsons</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roseanne</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Matters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married... With Children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Under Fire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 (M235);
- well, they’re beautiful, blonde, perfect bodies (M589);
- usually I would say um good-looking women (W174).

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 (W139).

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 (W587);
you see beautiful women that are sort of um well sometimes they're portrayed as not very intelligent (W\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{235});

just portraying an ideal type, if you want, of what men should be (M\textsuperscript{092});

[men on TV are portrayed as] big, strong, tough, good-looking that sort of deal (M\textsuperscript{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 (W585);

  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 (W588).

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 (M235).

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! (W573);

[women on TV are] more open sexually tend to be more assertive in relationships, usually portrayals of an equal relationship (W585);

the clothes they [women on TV] wear are quite provocative (M235);

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] (M037).

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 (W163);

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 (W057);
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 (WS561).

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 (WS560);

typical nuclear family, the macho guy has his tool show [referring to Home Improvement] and does his little grunt (WS600);

They're all macho [men on TV]. Yeah I’d say they're all macho, they're all good-looking (WS313);

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” (5♂ and 4♀):

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 nowrap;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 nowrap;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 nowrap;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 nowrap;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 nowrap;001);

the types of jobs that are there [on TV] are definitely everyday jobs that like anybody could get (M nowrap;378);

yeah I guess so [the jobs seem typical], normal jobs (M nowrap;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
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

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\(^{24}\) 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... (Md’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:  

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.

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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\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{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] (WCf!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 (W057);

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 (M384).

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 574W 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 (W547).

This kind of class conscious commentary was, with one exception noted above, confined
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” (M092). 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
"Seinfeld was a hit show, rating in the Neilsen top 10 through nearly all of its run on NBC\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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* (W6547);

*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* (M235).

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” (M567) and one working-class female participant called them “working-class to upper working-class” (W6163). 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<sup>533</sup>);

> 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<sup>235</sup>).

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] (W547)."

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 (W547)."

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 (W606)."

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 (W587).

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 (W587);

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 (W600).

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 (W585).

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” (W600).
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,3'340).

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 (M002).

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 (W363);

their home, and their clothing, the kind of attitudes they have with school, they're going to school (W057).

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” (W561), and another saw the Salingers as, “I guess the same as The Simpsons, like working class” (M002).

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” (M002). 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* (M0589).

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* (W174).

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* (W174).

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] (M6589).

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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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<th>Designation</th>
<th>M Show</th>
<th>Designation</th>
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<td>LM</td>
<td>Po5</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Simpsons more routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>547♂W</td>
<td>Roseanne</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>different priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>573♂W</td>
<td>Family Matters</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>no kids, no moral at end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>585♂W</td>
<td>Family Matters</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Seinfeld</td>
<td>high M</td>
<td>one has family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>587♂W</td>
<td>Simpsons</td>
<td>W...M</td>
<td>Seinfeld</td>
<td>L-M</td>
<td>family oriented on Sims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>589♂M</td>
<td>MwC</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Melrose</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>MwC is family oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>606♂W</td>
<td>Simpsons</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>relate b/c younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>037♂M</td>
<td>Simpsons</td>
<td>L...M</td>
<td>Single Guy</td>
<td>M+</td>
<td>Sims struggle with $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260♂M</td>
<td>Roseanne</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Spin City</td>
<td>UM</td>
<td>$ not concern on SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>313♂W</td>
<td>Roseanne</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>90210</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>R can’t pay for PSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>363♂W</td>
<td>Grace U Fire</td>
<td>M-L</td>
<td>Po5</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>G struggles for $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>416♂M</td>
<td>Simpsons</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Seinfeld</td>
<td>UM</td>
<td>Sims can’t afford stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>578♂M</td>
<td>MwC</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Y&amp;R</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>Y&amp;R is all lavish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>092♂M</td>
<td>Simpsons</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Seinfeld</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Seinfeld more fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>560♀W</td>
<td>Family Matters</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ER</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>pretty similar</td>
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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 (M384).

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 (W139);

you don't really know what class, I would say, Friends are (M533).

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
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 (M037);

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 (W0363).

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 (W0313).

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” (*M5092*), 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
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* (M387)

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 Visible Fictions 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.
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.\(^\text{27}\) 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

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. 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). 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

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28 CanWest Global Communications Corp. provides full information about all its media holdings on its corporate website at http://www.canwestglobal.com/
29 Based on information made available by Media Awareness Network on their website: http://www.mediacanchannel.org/ownership/granville.shtml#disney
241
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 Expressvu 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\textsuperscript{30} and digital cable subscribers,\textsuperscript{31} and only provide users a choice from among programming made available by the same handful of giant media conglomerates that own and control

\textsuperscript{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
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 that Buffy 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.\(^3^2\) 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]

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\(^3^2\) In the week of January 5-11, 2004 the new Donald Trump reality show, *The Apprentice* was 8\(^{th}\) and *Fear Factor* was 17\(^{th}\) in the U.S. Nielsen ratings with a season rating of 20\(^{th}\). 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

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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

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

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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 2 no

If yes, which one(s)? __________________________

24) How much time do 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

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________________________________________________________
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)

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]
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
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?
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, it's the scariest thing, it's 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 whatthisname 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

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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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>wc</th>
<th>99= self-employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>depends</td>
<td>RET= retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depends</td>
<td>HW =full time homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depends</td>
<td>D =deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wc</td>
<td>UN= unemployed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?
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 let's 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:
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*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Show</th>
<th>Class Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001♀M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>upper end of lower middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002♀M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>pretty m/c....working middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>037♂M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>maybe lower...have to say middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212♂M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>upper lower class...maybe lower middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>587♂W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>maybe w/c...have to say middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>416♂M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>I guess middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>533♂M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>very middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>378♂M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>probably middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>092♂M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>everyone says m/c, that's the biggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>340♂M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>lower middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139♂W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>average middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260♂M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>313♂W</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163♂W</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the lower end of working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>057♂W</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>588♂W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600♂W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>the are working class for sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>606♂W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>384♂M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>547♂W</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561♂W</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>low income class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>387♂M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>pretty lower class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>174♂W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>poor class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>235♂M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>lower class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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