The Colonization of Prime Time
Soaps and the Question of Pleasure

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any University.

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Abstract

The Colonization of Prime Time: Soaps and the Question of Pleasure analyzes the conversations of adult and teenage fans of Australian, British and American soap operas in order to understand how fans may deal with ideological constructions within their fanship networks, particularly with dominant notions of femininity and the family. Like women's domestic labor which is invisible in economic statistics, soap opera audiences have been similarly invisible or marginalized and stigmatized in dominant discourse by virtue of the fact that they watch soap operas. These fans, however, exist as part of a secondary oral culture which exists among women. Soaps texts are highly influenced by the oral characteristics of this culture. In addition to clarifying the oral characteristics of soaps, I have theorized that when feminine subjects, in this case soap opera fans, understand their subordinate position within a society and speak to each other with this type of knowledge, they are speaking what I have called feminine discourse.

The discursive position involved establishes boundaries for women's oral culture and legitimizes the experience of women as soap fans. In the marginalized discourse of soap opera fanship, part of the pleasure which fans experience in watching and talking about soaps is the affirmation of their subjectivity, even though their position in society is subordinate. Another aspect of pleasure in soap opera fanship is the mutual strengthening which comes from the power of talk outside of the control of dominant discourses. In addition, gossip among women has the potential for keeping women from being politically
isolated, giving them space and time to talk with each other without the constraints imposed by dominant culture. While soaps knowledge marks the boundaries of this aspect of women’s culture, laughter and irony seem to place these women in some ways outside of dominant discourse. Although feminine soap opera audiences are structured by the producers as consumers in and for the home and the patriarchal family, in these interviews they negotiate spaces for their own critical interpretations of patriarchal conventions.

The private discourse of soap opera audienceness in which these viewers of soap operas engage is further negotiated in this work with the public discourses about soap opera audiences which struggle to contain the meanings of femaleness within patriarchal culture. What I call the ideology of dependence works discursively on multiple levels to assure that women and girls conform to dominant notions of feminity in order to live comfortably in a world that is full of contradictions for women. Multiple cultural discourses reinforce the expected codes of behavior, but particular sites provide spaces where discursive containment leaks through narrative seams. This happens in soap opera texts and soap opera fandom networks partially because of the impossibility of fully containing orality. This dissertation examines both public and private, academic and less formal, written and oral discourses for evidence of discursive ruptures where meaning evades containment.
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Introduction

Questioning the Politics of Pleasure and Power
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Trash is an art. A great trashy movie will dazzle you with costumes, flesh and sets: it will make you hoot at catty, nasty lines; it will make you laugh at a preposterous plot; but still, it will make you watch. It has fun with itself. In its first night Lace II is just that, TV junk food served on silver trays, delicious. But in its second night Lace II turns stale, for trash that's left too long can start to smell. In case you missed Lace, it was the story of three girls in a Swiss boarding school - Brooke Adams, Arielle Dombase and Bess Armstrong. One of them has a no-no baby, and they all cover for her, never revealing which one was the mother. Then the baby, Phoebe Cates, grows up to be a wanton, movie star, finds the trio and utters the immortal line: 'Which one of you bitches is my mother?!' In Lace II the question is 'Which one of you bastards is my father?' (Which raises a question concerning the query in Lace III: 'Which one of these sluts is my sister?')

-- People Weekly, May 6, 1985: 9

For speculation socializes me and reassures others as to my good intentions in both meaning and morals; but in regard to my dreamed body, sets forth to them only that which the physician's speculum reveals: a de-eroticized surface which I concede to him in the wink of an eye by which I make him believe he is not an other, but has only to look at me as I myself would do if I were he- complicity of the barrier operating on the hither side of the retina, snare which captures him rather than me.

-- Julia Kristeva, "Elipsis on Dread and Specular Seduction", Wide Angle, 1980: 42

In both of the above quotations, there is a sense of female empowerment: the first because it, among other things, raises the status of "trash" (read: popular media aimed at women) to art; and the second because it implies a secretive collusion on the part of women in which, while men go about the business of controlling desire, women simply attend to another agenda: other time and other pleasure as it presents itself. The first quotation implies an acceptance, if limited, of feminine discourse into dominant hierarchial discourse; the second (among other things) implies that feminine discourse exists
outside of dominant patriarchal discourse, and that pleasure for women exists covertly in a sphere to which dominant culture is either wholly or partially oblivious. In either case oppositional discourse is acknowledged.

In this work, I will examine the nature of some of the discourse in regard to the popular articulation of desire and pleasure. From such an understanding I will deal with popular cultural forms which in some senses defy the usual conceptualization of desire and move into the notion of pleasure as empowerment for women.

The first quotation, from a popular magazine, would suggest that the trashy look is deliberate, and I would agree that it is. By the insistence on its excesses in both production values and content, a trashy program is positioned in resistance to patriarchal cultural dominance. The very naming of popular art forms like soap operas and romance novels as "trash" testifies to their cultural power while illustrating the complex linguistic and social maneuvers required to mask that power. Michele Foucault (1980) has pointed out that "discourse can be both an instrument and effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (101-2), and that the same discourse can circulate without changing from one strategy to another opposing strategy, and that contradictory discourses can exist in the same strategy. In speaking of popular media as resistive, two problems present themselves initially. One has to do with the collective and culturally controlled production of popular art. How can we claim that works generated within the production systems of, and evincing televical and publication codes of the dominant group, either
patriarchal or capitalistic, be considered resistive to dominant values? The second and related question is, how are art forms, particularly popular cultural forms, able to contribute to any type of resistance?

It seems clear that when we use the word popular, we imply that the subjects, the audiences, have some power over their own subjectivity (Fiske, 1986b). Such power is interactive between the subject and the text, but not often in conscious, deliberate ways. Stuart Hall addresses how ideology is constructed through lived experiences and the attribution of subjectivity to existing meanings and discourses in "Culture, the Media, and the Ideological Effect":

[...] social class practices and relations will embody certain characteristic values and meanings of the class, so that its culture is lived. But there is also the distinct area in which classes experience their own practice, make a certain kind of sense to it, give accounts of it and use ideas to bring to it a certain imaginary coherence -- the level of which we might call ideology proper. Its principle medium of elaboration is the practice of language and consciousness, for it is through language that meaning is given. These 'meanings' which we attribute to our relations and by means of which we grasp, in consciousness, how we live and what we practice, are not simply the theoretical and ideological projection of individuals. To 'give sense' in this way, is fundamentally to locate oneself and one's experience, one's conditions, in the already objectified ideological discourses, the sets of ready-made and preconstructed 'experiencings' displayed and arranged through language which fill
out the ideological sphere. (322)
The insertion of one's subjectivity into constructed experiences is, according to Hall, mediated by class and cultural practices. Hall's definition of culture takes into consideration ideological effects, lived experience, and what Raymond Williams (1977) calls "structures of feeling" in relation to class. It is important to add to Hall's explanation that language can also mean visual and aural codes and sign systems within which subjects construct meanings through structures of feelings known to them because, among other things, of their position as gendered persons. Certain structures of feeling are known and experienced by women or by men because each is socially constructed as a particular gender within culture. The terms "woman" and "man" exist as terms within discourse and cultural myths to be recreated by subjects according to their social and political experiences.

The psychoanalytical notion of desire involves the inability to attain something, or the search for the missing other. As Laura Mulvey argues in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (1975) visual pleasure in classical Hollywood cinema is structured on such a notion of male desire mediated by the collective unconscious. Her article offers an analysis which, because it excludes female spectatorial positions, reflects feminine frustrations in dealing with the Lacanian "unconscious structured like a language"(9). She argues that the built-in "pattern of pleasure and identification seems to impose masculinity as 'point of view'" (8-9) in classical Hollywood cinema. Film theorists, Mulvey (1981) and others (Rose, Heath, Bergstrom, Bellour, Doane) have struggled with the issue of how a female spectator places herself or becomes a subject in discourse in relation to the
psychoanalytical constructs of film form. In this work I would like to conceptualize pleasure for the feminine spectator/auditor more in social than in psychoanalytic terms. Pleasure, in this view, is not based on absence, but on satisfaction, and this type of pleasure is active rather than passive.

In order to theorize pleasure for women in this way one must substitute for and add to traditional psychoanalytic theory which seems to function, in part, to naturalize patriarchal structures. The social-psychological account of male and female personality differences delineated by Nancy Chodorow (1974) theorizes a construction of feminine personality based on patriarchal child rearing practices. She points out:

[...] in any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation to and connection with other people more than masculine personality does (In psychoanalytic terms, women are less individuated than men; they have more flexible ego boundaries). Moreover, issues of dependency are handled and experienced differently by men and women. For boys and men, both individuation and dependency issues become tied up with the sense of masculinity, or masculine identity. For girls and women, by contrast, issues of femininity or feminine identity are not problematic in the same way. The structural situation of child rearing, reinforced by female and male role training, produces those differences, which are replicated and reproduced in the sexual sociology of adult life. (44)

Chodorow's recasting of the Oedipal drama into social terms can be seen as an attempt to release psychoanalysis from the constraints of
dominant discourse which constructs narrative formations parallel with patriarchal concepts of desire. For a woman to conceptualize and experience pleasure in these terms has involved a complex realignment, on her part, with masculine perspective.

Women, in psychoanalytic discourse, have often been thought of as a problem, as the mysterious "other" whom we, the audience, cannot hope to understand. Classical Hollywood narrative film frequently "investigates" the woman. Paradoxically, when the tables are turned, when women derive their own type of pleasure from a popular narrative form, like soap opera, the process is often viewed as a problem. In terms of sexual politics, the question is, a problem for whom?

In the following chapters I shall attempt to explicate a theory of discourse and its application to the problem of pleasure for soap opera fans. The first chapter looks at critical and other hegemonic discourse relating to soap opera fans, contextualizes the evolution and use of soap operas in women's oral culture, and examines ethnographic work previously done with soap opera audiences. In the second chapter I outline the methods used to structure the ethnographic component for this study. The third chapter describes the soap opera fans and fanship manifested in this study. In the fourth chapter, I examine the discourse of these fans in relation to their own position in discourse. In the fifth chapter I look at how the fans in this study deal with soap operas in terms which contest certain dominant notions about femininity, dependence and domesticity. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the gendered discursive strategy at work in relation to the problem of pleasure for soap opera fans and the issues relevant to future research in this area.
I.

Chapter 1:

Soap Opera as a Site of Resistive Pleasure
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Since the 1930s when soap opera began on radio, it has occupied a tenuous place in both popular criticism and the lives of women. Soap opera audiences have been characterized as passive viewers who accept low-level melodramatic narratives\(^1\) as a preferred form of entertainment (Allen, 1985). Broadcast advertisers, who speak of insinuating their product into the daily lives of women in the home, make use of daytime air space to sell products. The assumption seems to be that women in the home are there for the having. It is women who had become confined to the sphere of the domestic and of particularized relationships while men occupy the expanded world of economic and political activity created by capitalism and further emphasized by patterns of suburban living which left many women isolated in their homes.

Some current feminist analysis explicates a gender subtext (Smith, 1987) to ruling relations which is predicated not only on the division of labor between men and women, but also on differential knowledges available to each. The skills and knowledges formerly possessed by the people have been replaced by external controls, but these controls are not always embedded in formal organizations and written texts. Rather they are inscribed in the possibilities of lived experience, and these possibilities are subject to various efforts to control them. Television itself is incorporated into such control systems.

If we are to be good capitalists we must be good consumers. One of the models of ideological apparatuses which work to maintain a system of high consumption is commercial television which, in effect,
packages its audiences and sells them. Commercial broadcasters want audiences who listen to them, who do what they say (Hartley, 1987); but no one has to watch television, unless, of course, they are addicted as soap opera audiences are sometimes accused of being.

Discourse which devalues soap operas and soap opera audiences is a powerful force in our society and one which soap opera fans seem to readily acknowledge. It seems to stem both from a general devaluation of mass culture of any kind and from a more specific devaluation of soap opera as a part of women's culture. The general mass culture theory which designates soaps as well as other forms of popular culture as "bad objects" (Ang, 1985a; Buckingham) comes from the cultural theory of the Frankfurt School and is summarized by Ian Ang (1985a) in the following manner:

[...] because the production of culture is subject to the laws of the capitalist economy, cultural products are degraded into commodities to make as much profit as possible on the market. The exchange value of those products is therefore essential for the producers, leading to a neglect of quality. The capitalist market economy is only interested in the production of surplus value and as such is indifferent to the specific characteristics of the goods: caring only that they are sold and consumed. Mass culture is the extreme embodiment of the subjection of culture to the economy; its most important characteristic is that it provides profit for the producers. (18)

The ideology of mass culture designates the feminine forms of mass culture like soap opera and romance novels as particularly unworthy,
placing them below more masculine forms like detective novels or television action dramas. According to Ang's (1985a) research, in relation to this, soap opera audience members can either dislike soaps and be socially rewarded by their position as recognizers of mass culture as inferior, or they can like soaps in order to make fun of them, the use of irony placing them above the object of that irony. Or they can like soap operas and at the same time, in recognition of the ideology of mass culture, both acknowledge and accept the negative evaluation of mass culture. It is also possible for viewers to reconstruct the theory of mass ideology to recast the program in question as a "good object." Additionally audiences can express a certain amount of guilt for watching or they can ambivalently both like and hate the serials. Occasionally, a fan simply pays no attention to the ideology of mass culture; however the devaluation of soap opera and soap opera audiences is obviously a problem for most of the women in Ang's study.

Until recently researchers in communication seemed to hold the same low opinion of soaps audiences as did popular critics. According to Robert Allen, researchers were "unable to fathom the appeal of soap operas" and thus regarded them as "unaesthetic (if not anti-aesthetic)" thereby "constructing a 'typical' soap opera fan who is intellectually, socially, economically, and sexually 'one of them'" (1985, 29) as opposed to "one of us." However, recent feminist criticism by Ang, Brunsdon, Feuer, Hobson, Kuhn, Modleski, and Seiter, among others, has theorized soap opera as not only legitimate but uniquely open to feminist interpretations.
Soap Opera Research and Criticism

Among feminist television critics there are several notions about how television might be constructed in terms of its women viewers, but two are particularly relevant here. One notion is that television should represent women in non-sex-role-stereotyped fashion. The other is that the pleasure women derive from television can be used by audiences in ways that are potentially political.

The social function of soap opera, in the first view, is to colonize women in the home as consumers by preying on women's loneliness and desperation at being left out of the public, productive relationships of the economy and denied recognition for the work they do in the home. As Ann Oakley (1984a) points out, the unspoken syllogism is men/women, work/non-work (25). In this context, soap operas become a vital part of the ideological construct which naturalizes "women's place" in the home. Although soap operas are popular with women from all socio-cultural positions (see, for example, Reid), they appear to so forcefully present stereotypes of both women and men that the dominant reading described above would seem to be the only one possible.

Since the 1940s, daytime soap opera in the United States has been the subject of research in the then emerging academic discipline of communication. The type of research conducted over the years has tended to fall into certain specific categories. Empirical studies have usually employed the uses and gratifications or other categorizing approaches (Herzog; Warner and Henry; Compesi; Carveth and Alexander; Buerkel-Rothfass and Mayes; Rubin, A.; Rubin and Rubin) or content analysis (Sutherland and Siniawsky; Gade; Downing; Cassata, Anderson
and Skill; Cassata, Skill, and Boadu; Greenberg and D’Alessio; Lowry, Love and Kirby; Turow; Goldsen, 1975; Hodges, Brandt and Kline; and Lowery). More rarely a symbolic interactionist approach has been taken (Fry, Alexander and Fry; Lemish). In addition, along with the "official" research, there has existed a body of descriptive work on soap opera aimed at the popular audience -- both fans and otherwise (Gilbert, LaGardia, Soares, Thurber, Higby and LaMay). Many of the content analysis studies in the above list fall into the first type of analysis mentioned earlier, that which assumes that television should represent women in certain ways. Some current theorists and researchers have acknowledged soap opera’s unique form and have attempted to describe and/or theorize soap opera reading (Allen, 1985; Ang, 1985a, 1990; Brundsdon, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1989; Buckingham; Davies; Fiske, 1987; Geraghty; Hobson, 1982; Leal and Oliver; Stern, 1978, 1982). Many of these fall into the second type of feminist criticism, that which sees women as possibly using television for their own ends.

According to this second type of feminist television criticism, the parodic or ironic use of the genre by audiences to critique the same values it seems to represent uncritically, may afford a particular type of pleasure to fans. In this view, such a reading is possible because television messages do not generate the same meanings in every case and for all viewers. Parkin (1979, 79-102) for example points to dominant, negotiated, and oppositional interpretations of a given text whereby at the moment of reading, viewers may decode the same message according to their own socio-cultural experience. The present study
seeks to highlight the specific factors in conversations among soap opera fans which point out active uses of the genre by these fans.

Theoretical Background

According to Louis Althusser (1978), Ideological State Apparatuses are seemingly unconnected social institutions like the family, religion, language, the media or the educational system. These operate as overlapping or "overdetermined" ideological influences developing in people a tendency to behave and think in socially acceptable ways. The repetition of similar perspectives over these multiple social institutions within a community of people reinforces and perpetuates the ideology of the dominant group. It follows that such ISA's as the media, particularly television with its constant accessibility (Rubin, L., 17), aim to continually convince and reconvince their subjects or audiences through various types of repetition.

Antonio Gramsci (1971) advanced the idea that ideological positions are not static but have to be accepted by people before they become part of the cultural practice of various groups and sub-groups within society. According to Gramsci, such positions can be accepted by socio-cultural groups even though the particular ideological stance in question may go against their interests. His position is that people have to be continually won and rewon to any ideological position.

The work of ideology, however, is rendered invisible because it is so overdetermined or comes from so many different sources that it seems like common sense. It seems "natural." This is the reason, in part, as Fiske and Hartley point out, that television is so hard to read:
... after all, everybody knows what it is like to watch television. Certainly; and it is television's familiarity, its centrality to our culture, that makes it so important, so fascinating, and so difficult to analyze. It is rather like the language we speak: taken for granted, but both complex and vital to an understanding of the way human beings have created their world. (16)

However, Fiske and Hartley also maintain that the television message is forced by its own constraints and internal contradictions to accord a "freedom of perception to all its viewers," (19) in other words, that television is inherently potentially polysemic or open to multiple readings.

Michele Mattelart in *Women, Media, and Crisis* (1986) describes the birth of the soap opera in the United States. According to Mattelart, Stan Sample, who worked for a then small advertising agency, adapted a newspaper serial called "The Married Life of Helen and Warren" to radio and called it "Betty and Bob." "Betty and Bob" was sponsored by Gold Medal flour, later to become General Mills. It was the first in a long line of Sample's radio serials. A few years later, one of Sample's serials, "Ma Perkins," was used to successfully plug Oxydol, a Procter and Gamble washing powder, over its competitor, Rinso. At this point, the soap opera can be said to have become entrenched in the American broadcast world. As Mattelart puts it:

'Soap opera,' the radio (and subsequently television) version of the 'lonely hearts' press, was born ... At the same time, a whole household definition of a broadcast literature reveals itself plainly, making unambiguously clear a twofold function: to
promote the sale of household products and to subsume the
housewife in her role by offering her romantic gratification.(5)
(Mattelart's emphasis)
Mattelart also quotes a Radio Luxembourg (now Radio-Television
Luxembourg) executive who explains European radio's relationship to
women as consumers, a relationship which developed in Europe only after
World War II. "Women's attitude toward radio is significant: what
they fundamentally want is somebody there ... RL will therefore fill
this space and accompany our listener with its voice, in her home, in
her everyday life"(7) (Mattelart's emphasis). As this quotation
indicates, the ideological function that soap operas are intended to
carry out fits the needs of the capitalist economy where it is
necessary for women to remain in the home and devote themselves to the
"collective restoration of labor energy" (Larguia and Dumoulin in
Mattelart 8). Women, then, become the "cement of class society" by
virtue of their gradual isolation from the world of production in the
monogamous family with its links to the system of private property.

Recent feminist scholarship concerning the relationship of
partria rchy and capitalism to the family includes the notion of the
family as a location for struggle. Heidi Hartmann (1987), for
example, argues that the family "remains a primary arena where men
exercise their patriarchal power over women's labor." (117) In her
view, the maintenance of gender-specific labor division within the
family supports both capitalism and patriarchy. In relation to the
household, the capitalist system operates in the following manner
according to Hartmann:

In a capitalist system the production of material needs takes
place largely outside households, in large-scale enterprises where the productive resources are owned by capitalists. Most people, having no productive resources of their own, have no alternative but to offer their labor power in exchange for wages. Capitalists appropriate the surplus value the workers create above and beyond the value of their wages. One of the fundamental dynamics in our society is that which flows from this production process: wage earners seek to retain as much control as possible over both the conditions and products of their labor, and capitalists, driven by competition and the needs of the accumulation process, seek to wrest control away from the workers in order to increase the amount of surplus value. With the wages they receive, people buy the commodities that they need for their survival. Once in the home these commodities are then transformed to become usable in producing and reproducing people. In our society, which is organized by patriarchy as well as by capitalism, the sexual division of labor by gender makes men primarily responsible for wage labor and women primarily responsible for household production. (114)

It appears also that it is in the state's interest to deal with families rather than kinship groups. One theory of the state's interest in promoting the family headed by male wage earners cited by Hartmann is that the state needs to undermine prior political units based on kinship. Whereas in prestate systems it is kinship groups who make fundamental political and economic decisions, state systems need to consolidate power under an authoritarian head, a growth in power which historically parallels the growth of the family.
Mattelart argues:
Everywhere, in developed and developing countries alike, women form the mainstay of the *support economy* which makes it possible for all the other activities to be carried on. A woman at home performs a fundamental role in any economy: she services the labor force each day. This economic activity, carried on by most layers of the female population, is of great importance; but the indicators by which the socio-economic position of each country is defined, and its development measured, conceal the economic value of housework. (7)

Just as women's work becomes invisible in the context of the home, women's time, Mattelart posits, is turned into both eternalized and circular time. It is into this time which women's radio and television insinuate themselves. Soap operas on daytime television are integrated into the routine of everyday life in which the women's private sphere, that of the home, is colonized for the cultivation of consumption.

Although television is a public medium, we usually watch it at home. The dichotomy often given as the basis of separate spheres of influence for females and males and for the division between work and leisure, public and private, production and reproduction is also evident in both viewing practices and ideology around soaps. As Brunsdon (1981) remarks:

The ideological problematic of soap-opera -- the frame or field in which meanings are made, in which significance is constructed narratively -- is that of 'personal life.' More particularly, personal life in its everyday realization through personal relationships. This can be understood to be constituted primarily
through the representations of romances, families and attendant rituals -- births, engagements, marriages, divorces and deaths. In Marxist terms, this is the sphere of the individual outside waged labor. In feminist terms, it is the sphere of women's 'intimate oppression.' Ideologically constructed as the feminine sphere, it is within the realm of the domestic, the personal, the private, that feminine competence is recognized. However the action of soap-opera is not restricted to familial or quasi-familial institutions but, as it were, colonises the public masculine sphere, representing it from the point of view of the personal. (34) (Brunsdon's emphasis)

Conversely, then, soaps may also be seen to colonize the public sphere by making public the domestic, a fact which potentially exposes the contradictory nature of women's pleasure.

If the function of soap opera is to colonize women in the home as consumers, soap opera then becomes a part of the ideological construct which naturalizes "women's place" in the home. Since women's position in the home and society is both disguised and trivialized, the ambiguous and paradoxical relationship of soap opera to that position is of particular interest to feminists.

With the above position in mind I have chosen to look at soap opera in the present work for several reasons. One is that in dominant discourse about television, soap opera often is seen as the lowest product of the lowest medium (television). A second reason is that soaps have been characterized by virtually all writers and critics, in both popular and academic writing, as a part of women's culture, a topic I shall return to later in this chapter. Third, the soap opera
form contains significant textual innovations which relate directly and materially to its audience's use of the genre.

By referring to soaps as a worst case, I refer to the contradictions built into the enjoyment of television soaps by women. Mattelart (1981) and Ang (1985a) point out that politically aware feminine and feminist audiences may see the soaps as a tool of capitalism but still find pleasure in them. In addition, the trivialization of soaps-watching and of soaps' audiences themselves in the popular press and popular discourse marks the audience's social as well as cultural capital as very low. Mattelart puts it this way:

What is disturbing, however, is the fact that these stories still provide pleasure for women viewers who are critically aware of how alienating they are and who have located the mechanisms through which their work is carried on. We cannot simply ignore the appeal and the pleasure (however bitter-sweet it may be when it goes hand in hand with social and political awareness) produced by these fictional products of the cultural industry. There is a problem here, and one hitherto scarcely tackled. (15)

(Mattelart's emphasis)

The discourse of pleasure for women, then, as Mattelart's comments illustrate, is overlain with a discourse which deems soaps and the pleasures in watching them as "rubbish." This puts the feminine viewer in a very uncomfortable position--one which devalues her pleasures. The irony here is that such pleasures are devalued both by feminists like Mattelart and by dominant cultural institutions. As recent studies on women and ideology (Hudson; Taylor) point out, it leaves feminine audiences with the feeling either that one can't win or that
one is in a "double bind" (Davies, 1986). The public discursive contruction of soap opera audiences seems to emphasize the contradictions in women's lives.

Feminine Discourse

This study of soap opera audiences investigates how some women and girls use soap opera fanship networks to create meanings within the context of a patriarchal and capitalistic system. In the creation of such meanings, contradictions are the norm. To describe these particular verbal and reading practices, I use the term "feminine discourse." Feminine discourse, as I define it, exists within a materially based women's culture which questions the socially and culturally constructed meanings of the word "woman" meant to contain and control the excesses, pleasures, and alternative sub-cultural meanings of "woman." In this context, women and other sub-cultural groups often understand not only the nature of their subordination, but, speak to each other out of their common knowledge of linguistic and discursive suppression. This talk among women, which acknowledges their subordinate role at the same time that it uses the cultural artifacts of dominant discourses, is what I call feminine discourse. The term discourse is here used in the sense of socially and historically produced conceptualizations often embodied in language which attempt to control or regulate the process of individual practices. Discourses, as I use the term, express an ideological point of view. Thus many discourses can exist about particular ideas. A discourse concerning soap opera audiences, for example, exists in the popular press, among broadcasters, among fans and among audiences. One
of the ways in which the concept of pleasure for women can be analyzed and investigated is by looking at the practices surrounding popular media aimed at women, particularly the discursive networks, and by looking at the uses which women make of it within their own oral traditions. As mentioned earlier such popular media are often defined as "trash" or "rubbish" in dominant discourse.

The word "trash" has a number of connotations that are relevant in the cultural analysis of feminine discourse. First, trash connotes that which ought to be discarded, a sort of instant garbage; second, it connotes cheapness, shoddiness, the overflow of the capitalist commodity system. Third, it connotes a superficial glitter designed to appeal to those whose tastes are ill-formed according to the dominant perspective, or at the very least different from those whose use of the dominant value system allows them to dismiss popular art forms as trash. Fourth, trash is excessive: it has more vulgarity, more tastelessness, more offensiveness than is necessary for its function as a cheap commodity. All of these connotations point to its uncomfortably contradictory nature: in the dominant value system which supports patriarchal discourse, trash is the disparaging way of exploiting the subordinate, of appealing cynically to vulgar tastes. In the discourse of the subordinate, however, "trash" can be used defiantly. The devalued commodity is detached from its devaluation and used positively in the subordinated culture as a source of meanings and pleasure that is formed partly in the knowledge that it is devalued by the dominant value system. For Hobson's (1982, 109-110) soap opera fans, as for Radway's (1984b, 90-91) fans of romances, part of the viewer's/reader's pleasure lies in the knowledge that men disapprove of
one's taste and the fans' defiant assertion of their right to pleasure in the face of masculine disapproval. The insistence on the right to one's own pleasure is not only an act of cultural resistance within the politics of the family in that it defies masculine power within the patriarchal family, but is also a recognition that the differences between masculine and feminine tastes can be understood in terms of a power relationship of domination and resistance. The term "trash" is so rich because it symbolizes the social struggle for power articulated in terms of cultural taste and preference.

In the discourse of the critics soaps are more often called "excessive." The word "excess" has also been widely used to describe women's genres of literature, film and television within patriarchy (see, for example, Feuer, 1984). The word "excess" also has traces of the same socio-cultural struggle as the term "trash," but its emphasis is slightly different. An excessive representation is one that exaggerates the more conventional representation of an ideological value, and through exaggeration it critiques both the conventional representation and the ideological system of which it is a practical example. Thus the frequency in soap operas with which "respectable" women have experience as prostitutes is an example of excess. Because the plot takes the patriarchal conventions of representing woman as either the virgin-mother or the whore and pushes the dichotomy to excess, the soaps program implies that the only way for a woman to experience her sexuality outside of a monogamous marriage is by becoming a whore. The soap thus uses prostitution as a critique of patriarchy's control of feminine sexuality. The program performs the patriarchal function of saying that the non-monogamous woman must be a
whore, but its excessiveness allows for more meaning caused by the contradictions between the dominant and subcultural discourses. Thus the generation of meaning extends to feminine meanings of feminine sexuality and to a feminine critique of the patriarchal meanings. The meanings of prostitution in soaps are not then confined to the patriarchal meaning, but spill over into a range of feminine, resistive meanings. It is quite logical, then, that the dominant culture should characterize soaps, "women's" films, and romance novels as trash because these media forms are full of such possibilities for questioning patriarchal and other forms of dominant ideology. It is through the common understanding among women of the subordination of women and its resultant contradictions for women, acknowledged in feminine discourse, that some feminine cultural practices are given meaning by women.

Gossip and Oral Culture

Talk among women about individuals or groups in relation to cultural norms is usually called gossip. Gossip among women has been devalued in much the same way that soaps and other cultural forms valued by women are critiqued. Deborah Jones in "Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture" (1980) defines gossip in the context of women's oral culture as:

... a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives the comfort of validation. (194)
The form of gossip includes reciprocity and paralinguistic responses--the raised eyebrow, the sigh, the silence--forms that assume and articulate the shared experience of repression. The implications of such conversations, according to Jones, are contemplated, not argued, and each participant contributes her own experience to the pattern of conversation. Phylis Chesler describes women's conversations similarly: "Their theme, method and goal are non-verbal and/or non-verbalized. Facial expressions, pauses, sighs and seemingly unrelated (or non-abstract) responses to statements are crucial to such dialogue" (268).

Jones lists four functions of gossip--house-talk, scandal, bitching, and chatting. House-talk is basically women's talk about housework, husband and children--training in the female role. Scandal involves judgment about domestic morality over which women, according to Jones, have been appointed guardians. Scandal reinforces sexist moral codes which women enforce but have not created. Scandal, however, also serves a second function: it caters to women's interest in each other's lives. It provides a "cultural medium which reflects female reality, and a connection between the lives of women who have otherwise been isolated from each other" (197). Likewise, Jones maintains, it has an entertainment value "perhaps a kind of vicarious enjoyment of a range of experience beyond the small sphere to which the individual woman is restricted" (197). Bitching, the third function of gossip, is an overt expression of women's anger at their restricted role and inferior social status. Consciousness-raising in the women's movement is a political form of bitching. Chatting, the fourth function, is mutual self disclosure. It implies a trusting
relationship between the participants and serves the purpose of nurturing women.

Gossip appears to have specific discursive functions in women's culture. It validates their area of expertise (the home). It points out contradictions in institutionally expected social behaviour as opposed to actual social behaviour. It provides entertainment in the form of story-telling. It provokes a sense of intimacy. According to Patricia Spacks (1985) in her book-length study of gossip, gossip blurs "the boundaries between the personal and the widely known, it implicitly challenges the separation of realms ('home' as opposed to what lies outside it) assumed in modern times. Gossip interprets public facts in private terms..." (262). In Spack's opinion "Gossip will not be suppressed. It thrives in secret, it speaks what needs to be said." (263) (Spack's emphasis) Soap operas are modeled on the narrative structure of women's gossip, and by modeling soaps' narrative form on this oral tradition among women, soap opera producers achieve an intimate level of involvement with their audiences. I would suggest that one pleasure that women find in soaps is validation for their own kind of talk. Such talk produces, circulates and validates feminine meanings and pleasures.

Soaps can also be seen as closely connected with orality in other ways. Although primary oral cultures with no knowledge of writing probably do not exist today, secondary orality is still prevalent. According to Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy*:

It [primary orality] is primary by contrast with the 'secondary orality' of present day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other
electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print. Today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. Still, to varying degrees many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambiance, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality. (11)

Thus to say that soap opera on television is like an oral form is not to say that it is a throwback to a previous historical moment, but that it possesses the characteristics of orality which can determine not just modes of expression but thought processes as well. Written forms of expression are derived from a literate cultural set and possess a narrative form which embodies a literate thought process. The narrative form and conventions of the soap opera embody the characteristics of orally based thought and expression listed by Ong:

1. Additive rather than subordinate.
2. Aggregative rather than analytic.
3. Redundant or copious.
4. Conservative or traditionalist.
5. Close to the human lifeworld.
6. Agnostically toned.
7. Emphatic and participatory rather than objectively distanced.
8. Homeostatic.
9. Situational rather than abstract. (37-49)

Ong's list of characteristics accounts for many of the ways that soaps are criticized in dominant culture. For people trained in evaluation techniques appropriate to literate thinking, these characteristics of
orality are unacceptable. Since the feminine culture and the feminine discourse that I am describing are primarily oral, I would contend that part of the soaps' power to generate alternative meanings has to do with their structuring of a type of realism that is not characteristic of literate realist narrative conventions but speaks to a different narrative code, one based on orality.

Michael Presnell (1989) also describes oral narrative structures and links them to women's narratives:

Oral narrative structures follow an episodic development rather than a beginning-middle-end development ... oral structures follow pragmatic associations rather than an abstract schema of logical development. The climax or main point of a story might be told in the middle of the story. Episodes might be connected by their relative entertainment value to a perceived changeable audience rather than by a non-contextual, causal, temporal, or formal logical sequence. The stories might return to parts of the story already told to amplify points and fill in details which become significant only later in the story. Oral discourse presents us with a collection of episodes that circle back on one another depending on the context of interpretation. (125-126)

Presnell believes that the distinction of orality and literacy as gender differences stems from at least three factors:

(a) women's forced illiteracy and their consequent preservation of oral traditions, (b) gender specific socialization patterns within the traditional nuclear family, and (c) the subordination of women in interpersonal encounters. (126)

The foregrounding of this distinction seems to mark certain forms of
women's culture as threatening to a patriarchal hegemony which is based on literate hierarchies and structures of thinking.

Soap opera's narrative logic often hinges on intensity. The uninteresting parts are simply left out in order to talk about the parts of the story that interests the audience. The acceptance of this type of narrative by soap opera audiences may relate to the way that women structure story-telling within women's oral culture. Susan Kalcik (1975) describes a type of story she encountered in women's rap groups which she calls the kernel story. When she consulted the folklore literature, she discovered that this type of story was not officially classified as a story. She also notes the folk belief that women do not tell jokes or stories correctly, that they tell the punch line or the most important part first rather than last. This was the way the stories she noticed in rap groups, were told. Here is her description of the kernel story:

Most often a kernel story is a brief reference to the subject, the central action, or an important piece of dialogue from a longer story. In this form one might say it is a kind of potential story, especially if the details are not known to the audience. It might be clearer to call this brief reference the kernel and what develops from it the kernel story, keeping in mind, however, that many of these kernels do not develop beyond the first stage into kernel stories. Kernel stories lack a specific length, structure, climax, or point, although a woman familiar with the genre or subject may predict fairly accurately where a particular story will go. The story developed from the kernel can take on a different size and shape depending on the context in which it is
told ... Kernel stories may be developed by adding exposition and
detail or by adding nonnarrative elements such as a rationale for
telling the story; an apology; an analysis of the characters,
events, or theme; or an emotional response to the story. A story
also can be developed by stringing several kernels together to
produce an elaborate story or a unit longer than a story, such as
a serial. (7)
Soap opera audience viewing conventions seem in many ways to be like
those of the audience for the kernel story. Viewers seem to tap into
various reservoirs of emotional responses or past plot intricacies
which cause story segments to make sense on various levels. When
Kalcik notes that the discrepancy between what counts as a story and
what counts as the proper way to tell one means that "women cannot tell
stories and that what women do tell are not real stories" (7) (my
emphasis) she points up the idea that "official" knowledge or public
knowledge, and women's knowledge are sometimes different from each
other.

Soap Opera and Women's Oral Culture

Perhaps what is so shocking about the soap opera is that it does
make public the domestic and that it affirms the centrality of talking
and intimacy as positive values in women's lives. This affirmation
appears different from patriarchal hegemony, which operates in a way
that naturalizes symbolic order through the suppression of difference
and the silencing of opposition and contradiction. One expression of
this strategy is found in the naming of popular cultural forms aimed at
women as "trash." It can also be seen at work in the biblical
admonition:
Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith, so do. (Timothy 1.4)⁶

The establishment of a discourse claiming to embody the "one true word" theorizes utterance as subordinate to concept: approving only that use of language that is directed to godly and unified purposes. Unmotivated talk, that is talk which raises questions and explores possibilities rather than closing them off with answers, implicitly denies the theory of written language as the basis of official dogma. It is therefore not surprising that the presentation of "fables and endless genealogies" in contemporary soap operas meets with the same negative response as has been applied to women's oral traditions (Brown and Barwick). Soap operas deal not only with subjects which have been of particular concern to women under patriarchy like domestic matters or kinship and sexuality, but they do it in a way that does "minister questions" or acknowledges the contradictions in women's lives. The function of talk in soap opera also embodies an ethos that is characteristic of oppressed groups. Margaret Atwood (1971) expresses it thus: "From those inside or under/words gush like toothpaste." The metaphor evokes talk as the response of the subordinated to the physical force that ultimately maintains the dominant. Talk becomes a source of power, a release, and talk for the sake of talk becomes pleasurable and ultimately a means of validating one's existence. Whereas the ideal woman in patriarchal discourse is silent or silenced through her construction in dominant discourse as unproblematic -- the fulfilled housewife, the selfless mother, the innocent virgin, the
happy whore -- the woman in the soaps embodies the contradictions inherent in women's lives. In the soaps no one "truth" is ever allowed to predominate in the multiple story lines that refuse to tie things into neat, unified happy endings. "And they all lived happily ever after" is one of the basic myths challenged by soap operas.

Soap operas then are concerned with the stuff of traditional women's culture not only in the subject matter but also in their style. In particular, as I have pointed out, the importance of talk in soap opera plots indicates the basis of orality that persists in television in general and affirms the power of talk in creating and maintaining relationships. The modes of operation of conventional history and ethnography have made it difficult to confirm such a connection because so little of women's domestic culture has found its way into these writings. The dimensions of women's oral cultural networks in the past have been obscured by the emphasis in ethnographic studies on how oral traditions as texts relate to place, which is defined in terms of family and village structures. Such models of oral transmission have obscured women's connections and relationships to other women because the centering of the analysis in male-controlled property individualizes women's connections to the male-defined patriarchal family. Women's place in such a model is always indirect, defined by their relationship to the household head. The networks of women who generate and maintain women's oral culture always operate within and between households: in the gaps in traditional ethnographic analysis.

Social separation along gender lines is common, in one form or another, to most, if not all, European-based cultures. For example, in 19th century Italy, the coming together of sisters, daughters-in-law,
aunts, mothers, grandmothers, nieces, godmothers and friends was commonplace to perform such women’s work as sewing or weaving, and usually women from a number of neighboring communities would be represented in such a gathering because the women upon marriage would move to the homes of their husbands. The performance of songs, the telling of tales, the arrangement of marriages, discussion of health problems, kinship gossip and work-related hints might all form part of women’s talk on such an occasion. Yet in terms of the hierarchical model of the family as a component of the village, and ultimately of the state, this confluence of women is hardly recognized. Thus, folklorists studying the variation of European ballads had recourse to the figure of the male traveling singer as the main source of innovation and change in the tradition (see the extensive discussion of these points in Barwick). The peripherality of the concerns expressed in women’s talk to the “important” public issues of power, war and commerce led to the characterization of women’s culture as trivial and idle, if not actually evil in its distraction of thought from higher things.

Like folk culture, women’s oral culture is practiced informally outside of established institutions and is recognized, though differently characterized, by both insiders (women themselves) and outsiders (men, dominant institutions). Other strands of oral culture drawn on by soaps include, in Britain, working-class culture, and in Australia, teenage oral culture. One of the most striking features of soap operas in regard to their orality is the openness of their narrative form. In other television narratives, even when characters and some plot elements are carried on from one episode to another, the
episode tends to be defined by the presentation of one major story. Whereas traditional literary narratives have a beginning, middle and end, soap operas consist of an ever-expanding middle (Modleski, 1982 in Allen 1985, 14). The lack of a conventional introduction is compensated for by greater narrative redundancy in soap operas, i.e. the presentation of the same or similar situations in numbers of different scenes and the characters' frequent retelling of their own and others' histories.

Thus the novice viewer of soap opera will experience an episode of a soap opera very differently from the fan. The fan's long-term knowledge of the soap opera, its characters, their histories and its narrative conventions brings a depth of significance to the action that is not available to the novice, who needs the interpretations and explanations of the knowledgeable viewer in order to make sense of what is going on. The same is often true of orally transmitted narratives. For example, interpretation of the narrative significance of one particular version of a story will be quite different when it is informed by the knowledge of previously heard versions of the same or similar stories. Often readings made by inexperienced listeners or those from outside the culture will be considered ludicrous by insiders or, in this case, fans.

Traditional literary narratives, which of course also include their own set of cultural preconceptions, attempt to make the narrative self-explanatory within the limits of the piece. They also rely much more on psychological motivations to explain the narrative development. Thus, the characters' actions stem from the sort of person they are, and part of this construction of what, in dominant culture, is called a
realistic character is consistency of behavior in different situations. By contrast, soap opera characters often behave quite inconsistently, depending on their past and present relationships with other characters, and also on the actor who plays the character. There is often no direct way of comparing present and past versions of a character within the temporal process of the plot although the use of video cassette recorders is changing this (Cook, Philip et al, 223). However, part of the talk about soap operas by knowledgeable viewers turns on comparison or awareness of such contrasts between history and the present. Whereas inconsistent characterization in literary narratives is usually considered to be a fault because it may detract from the pleasure of the reader, inconsistency in soap operas is understood to be an inescapable consequence of their process of production. Similarly, in traditional oral narratives, there is little or no attempt to explain characters’ actions in psychological terms; these actions are generally functions of the plot which unfolds in accordance with generally accepted, if problematic, cultural precepts.

Many of the characteristics commonly found in both soap operas and oral traditional narratives can be related to their process of production, which in each case takes place in real time. Both narratives require that the audience’s attention be held from moment to moment, in contrast to written narrative which can be put down and taken up again, and in which the reader can backloop if necessary to retrieve forgotten or skipped information. As Robert Allen, writing about the early radio soap operas in Speaking of Soap Opera (1985), has pointed out:

In radio . . . the listener not the narrative, was the commodity
being sold; thus, closure became an obstacle to be overcome in the attempt to establish regular, habitual listenership. (138)
The same observation applies to contemporary television soap operas in which the producers and advertisers aim to reach the widest possible audience.

In live performance the performer adapts the song or tale depending on the audience’s receptiveness and responses. Soap operas have been and continue to be comparatively responsive to the interests of viewers. For example, Robert LaGuardia (1977) reports that in the 1970s "if a show had slipped half a point in the ratings shares, the poor writer would be given orders to make someone pregnant to get the numbers back up" (41). Annie Gilbert reports that networks keep track of fan mail to monitor the popularity of particular stories (which is judged most successful if the fan mail is split 50/50, but possibly changed if the reaction is mostly one way), and of particular actors, whose part in the show might be expanded if their popularity is increasing (10). Conversely, viewers might exploit this responsiveness of the producers by organizing campaigns to "rescue" popular characters perceived in danger of being killed off (Soares 23). Soap opera scripts are much more dependent on viewers' reactions than are many other television narratives. It must be pointed out that this phenomenon is most widely documented in American soaps. In Australia, where there is a much greater delay in screening, and where most daytime soap operas are of overseas origin, viewers do not generally perceive themselves as powerful in this way.

The managing of multiple story lines over long periods of time is another factor which affects narrative construction. Manuela Soares
reports that writers favor ambiguity in their story lines because it leaves more options for future development of the story (17). Irna Phillips, who wrote and produced many of the early radio and television soaps in America, maintained an ideal of live performance in many of her production practices. For example, she dictated all her scripts:

[...] (which) allows me to play the parts of all my characters and give them dialogue that sounds like real, colloquial speech. And I avoid tape recorders. I dictate to another person to get that essential human contact, that other person's reaction to my dialogue that tells me a word or phrase doesn't sound right...

(Irna Phillips, quoted in Gilbert 17).

Phillips also preferred live broadcasting of her television soap operas long after the technology was available for delayed broadcast, because she believed that taping "took the excitement out of the production" (Cantor and Pingree 60). From the early days of radio soap operas, the scripts were produced by teams of writers. The producers or advertisers had some input into the content and general principles of suitable material, the head writer would make decisions about which stories lines would be developed and how, and the dialogue would be written by teams of writers. Of course, story lines also would be potentially affected by contingent factors such as actors' illnesses or departures, viewers' responses as outlined above, and even by the stage of development of similar plots in other soap operas. The version of the script that finally goes to air is therefore constrained in quite different ways from an authored literary narrative. In the lack of an individual author and in the responsiveness to a particular set of external conditions governing the final shape of the narrative, then,
the conditions of production of a soap opera have much in common with
the formulaic processes of oral composition, in which the broad
outlines of a story passed down in oral tradition are realized in
performance in different ways depending on the performance context.

So far, I have addressed the ways in which soap opera narrative is
related to oral traditional forms in general; in this connection, I
have argued that many of the similarities are engendered by similar
processes of production that differ in significant ways from the norms
of construction of written narratives. The perpetuation of many of
these literary norms, such as narrative closure and psychological
character formation in much television drama, has been the result of
the historical evolution of these forms from literary novelistic and
dramatic forms and the prevalence of a literary aesthetic in the
producers and audiences. Soap operas, on the other hand, evolved in a
more ad hoc fashion from radio programming that was deliberately
designed to appeal to women’s domestic culture. Chatty shows with a
grandmotherly presenter alternating handy hints and product
endorsements were an early form taken by radio programming aimed at
women. Early radio soap operas in the United States incorporated
advertising into the story line, and it was only comparatively late
that advertising and narrative were segmented in the form now familiar
in television soaps. In these unofficial narratives unashamedly aimed
at drawing and holding an audience for their sponsor’s products,
producers were less likely to consider that what they were producing
was "art" and were therefore relatively free from the constraints of
literary definitions of narrative form. Furthermore, many popular
radio entertainers had been drawn from the orally based tradition of
popular theatre. For example, the vaudeville stars Amos and Andy moved from film to radio with the slump in film production caused by the Great Depression (Allen, 1985, 104). Thus radio programming drew on non-official orally based narrative forms in a number of different ways.

In arriving at their description of television as "bardic," Fiske and Hartley (1978) refer to television's capacity for a

...metonymic 'contact with others' in which all Levi-Strauss' lost storytellers, priests, wisemen or elders are restored to cultural visibility and to oral primacy: often indeed in the convincing guise of highly literate specialists, from news-readers to scientific and artistic experts. (125-6)

These oral bards, however, are nearly always men speaking in the public domain (of night-time television). Fiske and Hartley do not go on to explore the extension of their parallel in the relationship between women's oral lore of the domestic domain and the soap operas of daytime television. Daytime TV is just as sealed off by the (Australian and American) children's school hours of 9 to 3:30 from exposure to a "serious" audience as the domestic kitchen might have been isolated from the important business of the marketplace in a primary oral culture; and, paradoxically, this time period is just as free from the constraints of formal public utterance.

The following diagram delineates how soaps may be positioned in relation to literate culture as described by Fiske and Hartley, and to women's culture within an oral tradition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERACY</th>
<th>ORALITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books, newspapers, magazines, film.</td>
<td>Oral TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>bardic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>grandmotherly/ domestic/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>speaking/ singing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fiske and Hartley equate oral modes with television, and literate modes with dominant modes in our culture. They list the following oppositions between television and dominant forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral (television)</th>
<th>Literate (dominant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dramatic</td>
<td>narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>episodic</td>
<td>sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mosaic</td>
<td>linear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dynamic</td>
<td>static</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active</td>
<td>artifact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concrete</td>
<td>abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ephemeral</td>
<td>permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social</td>
<td>individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metaphorical</td>
<td>metonymic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhetorical</td>
<td>logical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialectical</td>
<td>univocal/consistent (17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They claim for television polysemic qualities which rest, in large part, on the characteristics of orality within the medium, to be found in such conventions as direct address and segmentation. My analysis suggests that it may be too simple to invest literary discourses alone with dominant perspective, and indeed in some ways the tendency to place oral and televsual forms in opposition to a dominant literacy obscures the operation of different discursive strategies within and
between those modes. I am suggesting that soaps, more than many other forms of television programming, evince parallels to oral traditions.

Although critics have sometimes posited that the audiences of soaps are working class or housewives (Davies, 1984, 1986; Mattelart, 1986), it is clear to me that soap opera viewers are not necessarily defined by class or occupation: people from all walks of life watch or otherwise come into contact with soaps. Dominant culture would have women deny their attraction to soaps because only certain "kinds" of people are attracted to them (hence their "trashy" reputation), but the pleasure of watching overcomes guilt on this score. Soaps have become integrated into women's oral culture, and women seem to construct pleasures and meanings for themselves through their association with soaps. Hobson (1982) in analyzing the results of talking with fans of the British soap *Crossroads*, concludes: "The message is not solely in the 'text' but can be changed or 'worked on' by the audience as they make their own interpretation of a program." (26) According to Hobson women talk about soaps to explore the boundaries of social possibility.

Soap Opera Characteristics

Viewers may vary somewhat as to which programs they refer to as soaps. In general, however, the daytime soaps are notable for:

1. the centrality of female characters;
2. serial form which resists narrative closure (never-endingness);
3. multiple characters and plots as well as multiple points of view;
4. use of time which parallels actual time and implies that the action continues to take place whether we watch it or not;
5. abrupt segmentation between parts without cause-and-effect relationships between segments;

6. emphasis on problem solving, and intimate conversation in which dialogue carries the weight of the plot;

7. the portrayal of many of the male characters as "sensitive" men;

8. the characterization of female characters as powerful, often in the world outside the home;

9. the home, or some other place which functions as a home (often a hospital), as the setting for the show;

10. plots which hinge on relationships between people, particularly family and romantic relationships;

11. concerns of non-dominant groups being taken seriously.

Using these characteristics as a starting point one can pick out programs which are more or less soap opera-like.

One may also make a distinction regarding soap opera and melodrama. Peter Brooks has defined melodrama as:

[...] the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, action; overt villainy, persecution of the good and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety. (11-12)

Melodrama exists in television where it often takes the form of soap opera, daytime and nighttime. In film, examples of melodrama can be found in the "woman's films" of the '30s and '40s as well as in many other early films (D.W. Griffith in particular), in Douglas Sirk's films of the 1950s and in more recent films like *The Turning Point* (1977), *An Unmarried Woman* (1978), *Terms of Endearment* (1983) or *Steel*
Magnolias (1988).

Maria LaPlace describes the melodramatic 1930s woman's film in the following way:

The woman's film is distinguished by its female protagonist, female point of view and its narrative which most often revolves around the traditional realms of women's experience: the familial, the domestic, the romantic -- those arenas where love, emotion and relationships take precedence over action and events. One of the most important aspects of the genre is the prominent place it accords to relationships between women. A central issue, then, in any investigation of the woman's film is the problem of female subjectivity, agency and desire in Hollywood cinema. A dominant argument is that masculinist discourses inevitably (re)position the woman's film for patriarchy. However, by looking at the genre as the intersection of different discourses bearing on women in the 1930s it is also possible to take into account the existence at the margins of dominant patriarchal culture of a circuit of female discourse which, although mediated by patriarchal institutions (such as publishing companies), is largely originated by and for women. This circuit, consisting of mass female audience novels and non-fiction books, stories and articles in women's magazines, and even women's associations, is a major source and context of the woman's film: the literature was often the basis for the screenplays and the circuit provided the space in which the woman's film as a genre could be approached and read by female spectators. That patriarchal institutions profit from this circuit is unquestioned; what is open to debate is how
this circuit, almost completely ignored by patriarchal scholarship, has functioned for women. Has this subordinate 'women's culture' in any way promoted discourse that is subversive to patriarchy? (139) (LaPlace's emphasis)

LaPlace argues that there is such a subversive discourse which can be perceived clearly when these texts are investigated from "historical, social, cultural and specifically female metapsychological considerations" (139) despite the fact that such films were clearly linked with consumerism (defined by LaPlace as the "ideology of fetishised commodity consumption in twentieth-century capitalism"). In these films the advertising industry played on women's desire for freedom and equality (a discourse available to women from the feminist movement of 1900 to 1920) and, according to LaPlace, on the social psychological discourse in which the concept of the "social self" tied one's identity to the reactions of others. According to Stuart Ewen, women were educated by the advertising industry to think of themselves as "things to be created competitively against other women" (in LaPlace 141) and for the gaze of others.

But, film melodrama can differ from television melodrama by virtue of the ability of its form to "contain" meanings differently. The classical Hollywood narrative can contain meanings in many different ways:

1. Through the controlling look. The gaze of the audience becomes associated with the gaze of one of the characters.

2. Through plot resolutions that literally or metaphorically contain. Since the classical Hollywood narrative has a clear beginning, middle and end, and the ending is unproblematic, the danger to
established order is contained. If it is a woman who is the
problem (as it often is) then she may die, be confined to a mental
institution, or be isolated and contained within the patriarchal
family.

3. Through the elaboration (and disguise) of stereotypes. As
Ellen Seiter (1986) and T. E. Perkins point out, stereotypes
are not simple. Neither are they necessarily unrealistic.
Because we (the audience) have been taught to identify with
characters psychologically or as individuals rather than as
representatives of a group (class, sex, race) we tend to think
that a "well rounded" character is not a stereotype, therefore
if a character is realistic (i.e. rounded) then the fact
that the character is also a stereotype is often "invisible" to us,
the audience.

Although films can "refuse" the controlling look, the unambiguous
ending, and the elaboration of stereotypes, dominant cinema seldom does
and is therefore less open to multiple readings than television
melodrama. (See Kuhn, 1982b, 1984; Kaplan, 1983; Gledhill, 1987; and
Feuer, 1984). Television, on the other hand, uses both continuing and
segmented form, it "calls" its audience as much by sound (Altman) as
look, sometimes referred to as the glance rather than the gaze (Ellis),
and often its stereotypes are more obvious, and thus easier for the
audience to relate to with a degree of distance rather than the
complete "identification" which much cinematic characterization
encourages. Soap operas are but one type of television melodrama.

It was probably because soaps were considered unimportant and
commercially based that these orally based narrative forms developed
and evolved in radio, and, until comparatively recently, it was only in
daytime television programming that one was able to see the
characteristic narrative conventions of soap operas. Prime time was
reserved for literary-based narratives such as adaptations of novels,
films, action dramas, or situation comedies. But the phenomenal
popularity of daytime soap operas -- which, in fact, make most of the
daytime advertising revenue for the television networks in the United
States (Cantor and Pingree) -- has fostered, in the last ten years, a
burgeoning of prime-time television shows using soap opera narrative
conventions in one way or another. They range from *Dynasty* and *Dallas*
to *Hill Street Blues*, *LA Law*, and *thirtysomething*. In Britain soaps
like *Crossroads*, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, and *Brookside*; or in
Australia *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* have usually been programmed in
the early evening in the supper time or tea time block. American
daytime soap operas, then, are one of a number of modern texts on
American, British, and Australian television that differ from dominant
narrative and discursive assumptions; however, the dominant attitudes
with which American daytime soap operas are often most concerned are
those dealing with the position of women within patriarchy, so these
soaps differ in a way that often directly involves feminine discourse.

**Reading Reception and Ethnographic Research**

Methodologically, the present study falls into an emerging category
of research about television audiences often called reception-response
or reading reception criticism. The term reception and/or response
criticism comes from a type of literary criticism theorized by the
German critics Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss in the late 1960s as
a new paradigm in literary scholarship. The work of Iser and Jauss was translated into English in the 1970s and 80s and has recently entered the critical discourse on television particularly in the work of Robert Allen and David Buckingham. Reader response criticism foregrounds the process of reading, that is the work of the audience, in generating meaning in relation to literary texts. This type of research usually involves empirical research and data collection. It is usually, to quote Ian Ang's recent analysis (1989):

[...] carried out in the form of in-depth interviews with a small number of people (and at times supplemented with some form of participant observation), [and] is now recognized by many as one of the most adequate ways to learn about the differentiated subtleties of people's engagements with television and other media. (96)

Early works of this type, and concerning popular culture and ideology, include Angela McRobbie's 1977 research on girl cultures and her analysis of the readers of the teenage magazine Jackie in 1978. Similarly, McRobbie's 1984 article in Gender and Generation, "Dance and Social Fantasy", looks at the issue of resistance for girls through popular social practices like dancing. Other articles look at teenage girls and ideology are Celia Cowie and Sue Lees' "Slags and Drags" in 1981, Shirley Pendergast and Alan Prout's "'What will I do ...?' Teenage Girls and the Construction of Motherhood" in 1980 and Ann Krisman's "Radiator Girls: The Opinions and Experiences of Working-Class Girls in An East London Comprehensive" in 1987. These last articles use conversations with teenage girls to explore how young women deal with ideological issues which bear on their construction of
self images and cultural practices.

David Morley's 1980 study, *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding*, which he called an "ethnography of reading" was the first attempt among British cultural studies critics to develop an ethnographic system of "decoding" television audience responses which took into consideration differences in interpretive activity and attempted to correlate them with economic, social and cultural categories. He showed tapes of the BBC news magazine show *Nationwide* to groups of viewers drawn from various social and economic strata. It should be noted that Morley's work, along with the other studies which I have mentioned, differs from another well established strand of audience research in media sociology usually referred to as uses and gratification or uses and effects research (see McQuail for an overview of this type of research and the earlier part of this chapter for soap opera research of this type). Uses and gratification research is quantitative rather than qualitative and addresses the topic of audiences in a general manner sometimes without relation to specific programs or genres. This type of broad view of audience use of television has been replaced, in the research projects I have mentioned, not only by research which attempts to investigate the theoretical areas which merge when meaning is made but also research which foregrounds the notion that watching television is related to social power.

Dorothy Hobson's 'Crossroads': *The Drama of a Soap Opera* (1982) looks at the production side of the British soap opera *Crossroads* using case study techniques. Hobson also conducted participant observation research with fans of the show. This study and Hobson's earlier work
on radio, "Housewives and the Mass Media," (1981) documented the use of radio and television by women within the home.

Ien Ang's 1985 study, *Watching 'Dallas': Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, investigates what happens in the process of watching *Dallas* that makes it pleasurable or unpleasurable for its viewers. Her data, in the form of letters from fans, was approached as if it were a text to be examined theoretically. The letters are seen as the discourses people produce when they account for their preferences. According to Ang, in order to do this:

They will have to call on socially available ideologies and images which channel the way in which such a television serial attains its meanings. It is by tracing these ideologies and images in the letters that we can get to know something about what experiencing pleasure (or otherwise) from *Dallas* implies for these writers--what textual characteristics of *Dallas* organize that experience and in which ideological context it acquires social and cultural meanings. (11)

She concludes that pleasure eludes rational consciousness, but that in the case of her *Dallas* viewers it was the series' emotional realism in relation to "tragic structure of feeling[s]" having to do with the (gendered) "pain" of ordinary living. Ang's research indicates that programs like *Dallas* then, can generate the pleasure of recognition for women.

In a 1988 South American study by Odina Fachel Leal and Ruben George Oliver, "Class Interpretations of a Soap Opera Narrative: The Case of the Brazilian Novella 'Summer Sun'," a comparison of group narrative interpretations by different classes led the researchers to
conclude that "the matrix of meanings of a mass media message is not to be understood in terms of the message itself but in terms of the concrete experience of the people, their life histories, their life projects, their class position and their social context." (81)
According to this research, the upper class groups evaluated soaps more critically than the working class, but the working class groups showed greater understanding of the codes involved.

Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebe's research project described in "Mutual Aid in the Decoding of Dallas: Preliminary Notes from a Cross-Cultural Study" (1985) matched 50 groups of three couples each in which an initial couple invited two others from their friendship groups to be a part of a "focus group." The groups viewed an episode from the second season of Dallas and afterward discussed it with the researchers. The focus group members were lower-middle class, had a high school education or less, and were ethnically homogenous. In the Israeli groups there were ten groups each of Israeli Arabs, new immigrants from Morocco, and kibbutz members. These "readings" were compared with 10 groups of matched Americans in Los Angeles, using recorded discussions. The research questions to be answered had to do with the manner in which various ethnic groups interpreted situations from the American-produced Dallas. According to the authors:

What seems clear from the analysis, even at this stage, is that non-Americans consider the story more real than the Americans. The non-Americans have little doubt that the story is about 'America'; the Americans are less sure and are altogether more playful in their attitudes toward the programme. (197)
This study supports the hypothesis that the process of viewing is
social and active and in some cases playful.

Andrea Press found similar discrepancies concerning class to Katz and Liebe’s discrepancies concerning nationality in her work with women who watch *Dynasty*, "Class, Gender and the Female Viewer: Women’s responses to *Dynasty*" (1990). Press interviewed American women of different classes regarding their reactions to and interpretations of the television show *Dynasty*. Working-class women responded to the female characters as primarily women, while middle-class women see them as primarily upper-class. Working-class women also see *Dynasty* as more realistic than do middle-class women. Even though the middle-class women in her study were somewhat cynical about *Dynasty*’s fantastic setting they, at the same time, related to the fact that the show dealt with issues in their own lives.

Robert Allen in *Speaking of Soap Opera* (1985) and David Buckingham in *Public Secrets* (1987) cite reader/response theory as being of crucial importance in developing further understanding in audience research. Allen, while setting the parameters for research on daytime soap opera in the United States, concludes that soap opera’s position in discourse determines its meaning. The position of soaps in both the discourse of aesthetics and social science also circumscribes the range of questions to be asked and the methods likely to be used in answering them. Allen suggests that soaps are open texts which can be related to paradigmatically, that is from many subject positions according predominantly to the effect of an act or emotion on a large number of characters whose actions do not necessarily syntagmatically advance the plot. According to Allen, the function of the soap opera character in the community is more important than what the character does, hence, to
the experienced reader, soap opera's networks of relationships among characters open up major signifying potential unreadable to the naive reader. Syntagmatically, Allen posits (after Iser), horizons of expectations (or protension) based on retrospection (or retention) of what has gone before. Hence, during various gaps in the narrative, commercials, for example, or the time between programs:

The reader inserts himself or herself into the text through these necessary gaps, filling them in part -- but only in part -- according to his or her own frames of reference.... But just as the text does not merely take over 'real-life' conventions in the construction of its world, the reader cannot simply impose his or her referential system upon the text. The process of a 'gap-filling' is regulated by the text itself. (78)

While Allen's book does not analyze specific soaps, it does theorize the nature of such an analysis and situates the institutional and cultural position of daytime soaps in the United States in the context of communications research and broadcast history.

David Buckingham's 1987 volume, Public Secrets: EastEnders and its Audience, on the other hand, looks at a specific soap opera, Britain's EastEnders, in order to specify its audience's multiple relations with this particular text. According to Buckingham:

Viewers are invited to engage in many different types of activity: recollecting past events which they have seen; imagining ones which they have not; hypothesizing about future events; testing and adapting these hypotheses in the light of new information; drawing inferences, particularly about the characters' unstated emotions and desires; and learning new facts, both about the
characters and their fictional world, and about the world at large. In all these respects, the viewer is positioned as an active participant in the process of ‘making sense’ of the text, as a partner in an ongoing debate about how it will be understood. (49)

Buckingham relates these processes to three areas -- narrative, characters, and discourse -- where he uses several methods of narrative analysis including that of Barthes and Iser. In addition, he analyses the institutional and the intertextual contexts of EastEnders' ongoing production. Buckingham also used group interviews with 60 school children between the ages of 7 and 18, all of them EastEnders fans, to discuss the following areas of audience involvement with the soap: viewing patterns, secret-telling or gossip, prediction, text construction variables both inside and outside the text, moral and ideological judgment, realism, identification with characters, and characters as representation. The interviews are not the major focus of his study but are used to add depth to his analysis of the social context of EastEnders.

Some of the research summarized here has been concerned with the resistive possibilities for audiences confronting social constructs, some is more concerned with the interpretive conventions which groups use to construct meanings from popular cultural forms and some is concerned with group comparisons. I link them together here both because of their methodology and because they all make some attempt to bridge the gap between discursive analysis and empirical research. Susan R. Suleiman in her introduction to The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation lists as many as six approaches
to audience-oriented literary criticism: rhetorical, semiotic and structuralist, phenomenological, subjective and psychoanalytic, sociological and historical, and hermeneutic. Each of these approaches implies a different discourse with differing constructions of the concept of the audience or separate ways of "speaking" the audience. My approach does not fit neatly into any of Suleiman’s categories, nor does it model itself exactly on any of the previously mentioned research. The theory is best exemplified in the work of British culturalists which assumes audiences use television and other popular forms of entertainment in a variety of ways depending on intercultural, social, class, gender, race and age variables. Implicit or explicit in all of these studies is the relationship of fanship practices to power relationship within and among the cultures and social spaces under scrutiny. Often this approach is applied to subcultural groups and looks at the way that specific groups use popular culture to resist dominant cultural conditioning. A basic assumption here is that ideological resistance is an integral part of resistance practice.
Notes for Chapter 1

1 Charlotte Brunsdon (1989) describes the meaning of soap opera from a British perspective:

The serial form has an international, multi-media history. Television serials, distinguished internationally by their viewer loyalty, have proved themselves an indispensable element in most broadcasting economies. Soap opera, in Britain, has, as a genre, a very powerful metaphorical existence, even though we have no equivalent of daytime North American soaps. To say something is soap opera is to say that, minimally, it is bad drama. Frequently, it is to say that the drama is slackly written, cheaply produced, poorly acted. Perhaps more significantly, it is to imply cliche', banality, and bathos. It is never a term of approbation. This meaning of the term 'soap opera' is imbricated with another, more general meaning. In this usage, the term 'soap opera,' with all the evaluative weighting I have described, is used metonymically to refer to television itself. Thus reference is made to a low-prestige leisure activity, engaged in thoughtlessly by those who do not have the inner resources to do anything else. (116)

2 There are many similar accounts of the birth of soap opera. Each varies slightly as to which soap was the first and who was most responsible for bringing this event about. (See Allen, 1985; Cantor and Pingree; Thurber; or Stedman, 1959, 1977.)

3 One position within feminist cultural studies holds that there is an uneven valuing of public and private issues within Marxist criticism which Leslie Roman calls "productivist logic." Roman describes productivist logic as:

[...] A logic which treats the domination of women by men as either secondary to or a consequence of the exploitation of workers (usually presumed male) in the sphere of commodity production and waged work (Hartmann, 1981; Vogel, 1983). Such a logic holds that the labor women perform in the family, such as childbearing, parenting, domestic maintenance, consumption, and the emotional servicing of family members --the so-called 'reproductive sphere' is separable from directly exploitative economic exchange relations and, hence, is outside the sphere of 'production.' (143-4)
I am arguing against such productivist logic in this chapter but, at the same time, foregrounding the issue of the invisibility of women's unpaid labor.

In practical terms, the nuclear family and its role, while having been the subject of severe critiques within the women's movement of the 1970s, can possibly be seen as a source of survival for women in the 1980s in non-socialist countries like the United States. Judith Stacey's (1987) evaluation follows:

Feminism developed a devastating critique of the stultifying, infantilizing, and exploitative effects of female domesticity on women, especially of the sort available to classes that could afford an economically dependent housewife. Although the institutions of domesticity and its male beneficiaries were the intended targets of our critique, most housewives felt themselves on the defensive. Feminist criticism helped undermine and delegitimize the flagging but still celebrated nuclear family and helped promote the newly normative double-income (with shifting personnel) middle- and working-class families. We also provided ideological support for the sharp rise of single mother families generated by the soaring divorce rates. Today fewer than 10 percent of families in the US consist of male breadwinner, a female housewife, and their dependent children....In the emerging class structure, marriage is becoming a major axis of stratification because it structures access to a second income. The married female as 'secondary' wage-earner lifts a former working-class or middle-class family into comparative affluence, while the loss or lack of access to a male income can force women and their children into poverty.

See Barrett and McIntosh (1982) for a detailed account of feminist positions regarding the family as a heterosexual and Western European entity. Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and von Werlhof discuss the ownership of women's labor in Third World countries in Women: The Last Colony (1988). The issue of the control of women's labor both inside and outside of the family is central to feminist political economy.
Other scholars who make this distinction include Chafe, Goody, Havelock, Olson, and Tanner.

The Revised Standard Version of the Bible has it, starting with verse 3:

(3) As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, (4) not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith; (5) whereas the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.

The King James Version has these sentences as 1st Timothy 1:3,4:

(3) As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

(4) Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith, so do.

Another version, Good News for Modern Man: The New Testament in Today's English, has it this way in two verses:

(3) I want you to stay in Ephesus, just as I urged you when I was on my way to Macedonia. Some people there are teaching false doctrines, and you must order them to stop.

(4) Tell them to give up those legends and those long lists of names of ancestors, because these only produce arguments; they do not serve God's plan, which is known by faith.

My thanks to Chad Skaggs for pointing out these variations.

Home is Where The Heart Is, edited by Christine Gledhill, contains an extensive bibliography on film, literary and theatre melodrama. Also see Gledhill's "Pleasurable Negotiations" in The Female Spectator and Annette Kuhn's "History of Narrative Codes" in The Cinema Book, for an overview of film narrative which includes film melodrama.
II.

Chapter 2

Method
Chapter 2

Method

The purpose of the ethnographic component of this study is to look at the discourse of soap opera fans in order to first, learn more about soap opera fandom of selected American daytime soaps and selected early evening Australian and British soap operas within and across these cultures, and secondly to analyze the discourse of soap opera fans as they talk about soap operas and the pleasures of soap opera fandom. The ethnographic data can then be compared with the hegemonically constructed discourse of soap opera fandom, what I call the imagined soap opera audience, and analyzed from a semiotic and culturalist perspective. The methods I used to study these fans are outlined below.

I interviewed 21 soap opera fans, 20 women and one man. Nine were adults and 11 were teenagers. In order to find the participants in this study I used a version of snowball sampling (Sudman; Sudman and Bradburn; Press; Stacey and Rubin, L.). In this type of sampling, one starts with a member of the desired group and then asks for recommendations of friends, neighbors or relatives to be included in the group. In this way I was able to tap into kinship and friendship groups as well as fandom groups.

In addition, I sought out mother-daughter combinations who both watched the same soap. Group 1 includes both adults and teenagers who live in the United States and are fans of the American daytime soap opera, Days of Our Lives. Group 2 consists of a British fan of the
British *Coronation Street* temporarily living in Australia. Group 3 is composed of young teenage fans of the Australian soap opera *Sons and Daughters*. Group 4 is adult Australian fans of *Days of Our Lives*. Group 5 is an extension of Group 4 to include a fan who lives in the Australian outback. Group 6 consists of college-aged Australian fans of both *Days of Our Lives* and the Australian soap *Neighbours*. The research was conducted from July, 1985, to July, 1988.

The following chart indicates age, sex, occupation, education and class status of participants in the study. I have used the term "class status" instead of the term "class" because of the difficulty in elaborating class positions for women. In general I have applied Erik Olin Wright's (1980) criteria based on exercise of significant control over the labor process of work. In addition, I have included educational level or education aspiration in the case of students as an indicator of status. A high school education or more usually indicates middle class status. I have used the person's own data rather than husband's or father's to determine class status whenever possible.
Age, Sex, Occupation, Education and Status of the Participants in the Study**

**Group I** - American Fans of *Days of Our Lives* (July, 1985)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Retired nurse</td>
<td>H.S., Nursing school</td>
<td>M***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Former teacher, accountant</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>H.S., Studying English Lit. in college</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sue’s daughter)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student/interior design</td>
<td>H.S., Studying interior decorating in college</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME (researcher)</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student/college teacher</td>
<td>MA, Studying communication in graduate school</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Student/lab assistant</td>
<td>H.S., Studying physics</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ME’s son)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Fern</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Real estate agent</td>
<td>H.S.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Laura’s cousin)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Melanie</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Horse groomer</td>
<td>H.S., Studying art in college</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Fern’s daughter)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Chris</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Below H.S. (mother and father teachers)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not present at group interview  
**All names are fictitious  
***M=middle and W=working class status

**Group II** - British Fan of *Coronation Street* (September, 1986)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Former housing authority office worker/houseworker</td>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Group III - Australian Fans of *Sons and Daughters* (October, 1986)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student/fast food server</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Sara</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fast food server</td>
<td>Left school to work</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Diane</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fast food server</td>
<td>Left school to work</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Anna</td>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student Father-truck driver</td>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *Sara, Diane and Anna are sisters.*

**Group IV - Australian Fans of *Days of Our Lives* (June, 1987)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Houseworker</td>
<td>H.S.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith (Vicki’s daughter)</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Houseworker (avocation-plays the stock market)</td>
<td>H.S., Business college</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Shopwork</td>
<td>O Levels (UK)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Houseworker/child minding</td>
<td>H.S.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie (Sharon’s daughter)</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher special education</td>
<td>B.A., B.Ed.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris (Jenny’s daughter)</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College lecturer/department chair</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Jenny</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Shop owner</td>
<td>H.S.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Present at the group interview but did not answer the questionnaire.*
Group V - Australian Fan of *Days of Our Lives* (June, 1987)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Status</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Houseworker/station (ranch) manager</td>
<td>BA, LLB</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group VI - Australian Fans of *Days of Our Lives* and *Neighbours* (November 1987)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Status</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>H.S., Studying general liberal arts</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student/waitress</td>
<td>H.S., Third year law school</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>H.S., Studying commerce, primary school</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>H.S., Second year law school</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of these 26 participants in the study, five were not interviewed. In Group I, Fern, Melanie, and Chris were not able to attend the interview session. In Group III, I excluded Anna’s part of the interview because she was not a group member and was present because her sisters were babysitting for her. In Group IV, Jenny did not complete the questionnaire because she was not a soaps fan, but was present as the mother of a fan.

The ethnographic component of this study consists of three research strategies: participant observation, unstructured interviews, and questionnaires. The participant observation segment, which was contiguous with the other segments, consisted of my becoming a fan of the American daytime soap *Days of Our Lives* which is also broadcast in
Australia, and the Australian soap opera Sons and Daughters. When Sons and Daughters was taken off the air, I became a fan of its successor, Neighbours. This often involved watching soaps with other fans, usually members of one of the ongoing groups of fans formed for this study. I kept notes on the process and have referred to them in drawing conclusions.

The interviews consisted of unstructured group discussions and, in situations where group discussion was not possible, in unstructured individual interviews. I recorded the interviews and later analyzed the material. During the interviews the conversation was allowed to flow naturally, but I asked questions freely as issues arose. Group interviews lasted two to three hours. Individual interviews (also two to three hours) were conducted by me and by one other member of one of the groups. The interview which Doris conducted was with a group participant who lived on a remote station in Western Australia whose mother (Sally) participated in Group IV. The individual interview between Doris and Rita is listed as Group V.

The interview transcriptions were then put into a computer where a software package called The Ethnograph was used to code and sort the data. There are 51 coding possibilities (Appendix A). Some of these were decided upon by what I was looking for -- that is an analysis of pleasure in the context of soap opera fanhood -- and some were decided upon in relation to the data -- that is, the directions that the conversations took suggested additional methods of analysis or points of view in looking at the data. The codes are arranged under the general headings of soaps fanhood, fanship practices, soaps knowledge, and pleasure.
The questionnaire (Appendix B) consisting of 80 items was administered at the end of the group interviews to the last three interview groups. The questions in the questionnaire were arrived at after the three initial interviews were completed. They reflect the issues that arose in the taped discussions of the American, British and Australian audience groups in the first three interviews. The questionnaires were then reviewed by a member of Group IV and modified according to her feedback. The questionnaire also included some questions brought up by recent research on soap opera.
III.

Chapter 3

Fans and Fanship
Chapter 3
Fans and Fanship

In this chapter I shall describe how the soap opera fans in this study fit into a general picture of soap opera viewership in the countries where I conducted this study. Next, a picture is given of how soap opera fanship networks operate in the contexts I observed. Lastly, I have described some of the details about how these fans watch soap operas, who they discuss their soap operas with and what they say about their viewing and oral networks.

A Hierarchy of Soaps

By the time I had completed gathering my data on soap operas in Western Australia (July 1988), the overall configuration of soap operas being broadcast there had changed considerably since I began the study (January 1986 in Australia). Let me begin by giving a picture of the serials that were being broadcast when I began.

In Western Australia the Australian-produced soaps then running were *The Sullivans* (in rerun at 6 AM, weekdays), *Prisoner* (at 10 PM on Saturdays), *A Country Practice* (8:30 - 9:30 PM Tuesdays and Thursdays) and *Sons and Daughters* (7 - 7:30 PM Monday-Thursday). The American daytime soaps available in Western Australia were *The Young and the Restless* (Noon - 1 PM, weekdays), *Days of Our Lives* (1 - 2 PM, weekdays), and *Another World* (2 - 3 PM, weekdays). The nighttime soaps were *Dallas, Dynasty, Knots' Landing* and *Falcon Crest*. All of the American soaps, plus the Australian *Prisoner* and *Sons and Daughters* were considered "trashy," while *The Sullivans* was a period piece of the
1940's, past its prime and of little interest to most people with whom I talked. *A Country Practice* was and is considered a worthwhile soap because it deals with significant social issues, particularly medical issues (see Tullock and Moran for a detailed analysis). The British soaps, *Coronation Street* (11 AM in Western Australia), *EastEnders* (6 PM), and *Brookside* (6 PM), which had begun being broadcast (or in the case of *Coronation Street*, rebroadcast) in Australia in 1986 and 1987 were considered by the people I talked with to be somewhat socially conscious. They were about working-class neighborhoods and, while not as exemplary as *A Country Practice*, they were not trashy like the American soaps or like *Crossroads*, the "American style" soap opera then broadcast in Britain but now extinct. The British soaps mentioned here each have specific regional identifications.

"Trashyness" in a soap -- at least in the English-speaking countries I looked at -- usually consists of low production values, melodramatic elements, and dubious morals. But the advent of the American prime-time soaps which combine high production values and melodrama with dubious morals has changed that definition\(^1\). Soap operas with high production values when combined with an orientation toward dealing with social issues or giving socially acceptable medical information can become respectable.

*Sons and Daughters* was replaced in 1987 with a less trashy soap, *Neighbours*. *Neighbours* deals with moral issues in a less global and closer-to-home fashion and its production values are reasonably high. More early evening and nighttime Australian-produced soap operas have been added since *Neighbours*. For example, *Home and Away*, about a group of orphans, became popular with teenagers in the early evening time
slot. The early evening British soaps broadcast in Australia are most often watched by adults, according to my information. When Neighbours was exported to Britain, it almost immediately became the most popular program in the country (1988). In the United States where 12 or more daytime soap operas are broadcast on the three major national networks on weekdays, most soaps run for one hour, but new ones often start as half-hour programs. There is little programming change among these soaps although new ones are added occasionally. Counting its radio days, Guiding Light, the longest-running American daytime soap, has been on the air for 35 years. The newest, Generation, began in 1989.

The position one occupies as a soap opera fan is, to some extent, determined by the social position of the soap opera itself. Hence in Australia Days of Our Lives fans are in a more hegemonically negative position than fans of A Country Practice, for example, which is so legitimized that the prime minister of Australia has appeared on it. (Political figures also occasionally appear on some American daytime soap operas.) Days fans and Sons and Daughters fans are roughly equal, whereas Neighbours fans are a bit more respectable than Sons and Daughters fans were. Of the Australian soaps, only Prisoner has been shown in the United States and then under a slightly different name (Prisoner: Cell Block 13) and very late at night. The British EastEnders has been shown in the United States on some public television stations either in the early evening or at 11 PM on weeknights. The American daytime soap operas were not shown in Britain during this time period although nighttime American soap operas were.
Fanship

The soap opera fans I spoke with are not members of specific fan clubs. These viewers call themselves fans, but the fanship networks in which they claim membership are less formal than groups with membership lists. They consist of social networks that operate on two levels. First, there are usually a small number of close friends or family members who are regular viewers of the same soap or soaps. These people keep each other up on what is happening in their soap opera. I call these first-order fanship groups. A second level of fanship is all people who watch the soap in question. One meets second order people in buses, at work, at school, or somewhere else in passing, finds that they watch such-and-such a soap, and discusses the current issues on that soap opera with them. Sometimes these people are never seen again. Sometimes they are acquaintances.

Soap opera fans of the first order often are in close-knit friendship groups, sometimes consisting of four or five friends who stay in close touch by telephone or in person. When one of them goes out of town, the others keep up with the soap opera for him or her. This may consist of writing letters, using a video tape recorder to tape a selection of episodes, or simply remembering the story while the person is gone and catching the traveler up when that person returns. The phenomenon is most common among women and girls but occasionally men are let into a fanship group of the first type and men often are part of a second-level soap opera network. Two males participated in this study. One was a 12-year-old in the American group who did not participate in the interview. The other was 18 at the time of the interview. These two were members of first-level fanship groups and
had become such through their girlfriends who, in each case, had left town leaving their boyfriends to keep up with their soap for them. Male viewing of daytime soaps in the United States has increased dramatically on college campuses since the advent of co-ed dormitories has thrown men into the "private" culture of women. In Australia, where soaps are produced with teenagers in mind and programmed in early evening and prime time, a great number of teenagers, girls and boys, watch them, although there is some evidence to support the idea that television plays a larger part in the lives of girls than boys in Australia (Palmer, 1986a).

In this study, I was interested in looking at fanship among girls and women rather than in comparing male and female viewership. Thus where men were a part of first-order soaps networks, I included them as participants in the study, but I did not seek out male fans. Among the fans I spoke to, although men were allowed into first-order networks for various reasons, they were never founders or instigators or even primary participants in them.

The American and Australian adult fanship groups of the American daytime soap Days of Our Lives which I observed operated similarly to each other. In both countries, videotape recorders are relied on heavily to keep fans up on their soap, a practice which has been documented in several countries as the heaviest non-seasonal use of video tape recorders (Stoessl; Cook, Philip). Although those women who are regularly at home during the day often still watch their soap at the time it is broadcast, integrating the soap into their daily activities, women who work outside of the home usually tape their soaps to be played back at another time. Working and middle class women seem
equally likely to be fans. Most of the fans in this study are middle class.

In both Australia and in the United States, the women I spoke to do not regularly read fan magazines, but do read them if they come across them in a grocery store line or at a doctor’s office, for example. Soap opera fanzines are not published by the fans themselves but are glossy magazines produced in the United States (in the case of *Days of Our Lives*) and regularly sold on newsstands and/or in grocery stores. Since the daytime soaps are broadcast in Australia sometimes as much as six years after their original production in the United States, when the magazines refer to plot twists or characters new to the program in the United States, they are sometimes ahead of the plot in Australia. The magazines are also more expensive in Australia and harder to find. Despite the time difference in story line (which also varies depending on what part of Australia one is in) the stars who play on American daytime soaps frequently make satellite-carried cameo appearances on television morning news/interview shows in Australia.

Adult fanship groups have varying degrees of formality or informality. Often they are not conceived of as a group per se, but other members may be referred to simply as someone else who watches one’s soap. In other cases, group boundaries are distinct. I was told about one group in a remote section of Western Australia which meets for a wedding breakfast every time there is a wedding on *Days of Our Lives*. In this case the women are particularly isolated from other women and use their soap network as a social network. This conjuncture of soaps network and social network is common even in urban areas where members of already formed social groups, bridge-playing groups for
example, may feel obligated to watch the group's soap in order to talk with other members of the social group about a particular soap.

Teenage soaps fanship groups in this study tended to be larger and to consist of friends rather than family. The Australian-produced early-evening soaps seemed to be watched by virtually all young teenagers in Australia. When Sons and Daughters was on the air (from 1981 to 1987), it was programmed from 7 PM to 7:30 PM Monday through Thursday for most of its run. This means that most high school-aged teenagers were either home or at friends houses or at some similar location where they could watch television when Sons and Daughters was broadcast and hence needed no one to record it for them. There was no other soap in competition during that time slot in Western Australia where these fans lived. All the high school aged teenagers I spoke with claimed that most of their friends watched Sons and Daughters. In the case of Sons and Daughters, a fanship network consists of those with whom one regularly discusses the soap.

If, however, one is a teenage fan of Days of Ours Lives, the process is a little more complicated. Most teenage fans whom I talked with reported getting interested in Days of Ours Lives when they were home from school during an illness in the days before videotape recorders were available. Some fans reported that The Young and the Restless was once broadcast in the afternoon at a time when they could watch it if they rushed immediately home after school. The American daytime soaps were taken off the air during school holidays in Western Australia at the time of this study. Hence, it is college-aged teenagers who are more likely to be fans of Days of Ours Lives both because their schedules are likely to be more flexible and because they
are more likely to be more affluent and have access to a videotape recorder. It is common in Western Australia for college students to live at home and all of the college students in this study did so.

Australian teenage Days of Ours Lives fans who participated in this study had more clearly defined fanship groups than did the fans of Sons and Daughters. Often they taped episodes of Days for each other when one member had class at the time that Days was aired (1 PM, weekdays) or had to study for exams. In all fanship groups, telephone chains were common to keep each other up on missed episodes.

Watching Soaps

This information is based on the data collected with the questionnaire which was administered to Groups 4 and 5 (Australian adult fans of Days of Ours Lives) and Group 6 (Australian teenage fans of Days of Ours Lives and Neighbours). A total of eleven people completed the questionnaire. Four of the women in Groups 4 and 5 had watched Days of Ours Lives for over 20 years, one of them "since the beginning." All except one, who was a relative newcomer at six years, had watched this soap more than 14 years. Of the teenage group the least experienced had been watching two years and the most experienced for 10 years. One teenager made the distinction between regular viewing and keeping up. She had watched for three years regularly but for five years if she counted the last two years where she watched an episode every two months or so and kept up by talking to people in between. Although each group of fans in this study was chosen because its members watched a specific soap opera, many watched other soap operas as well. These fans sometimes also watched The Young and the
Restless, Another World, Dallas, Dynasty, and/or A Country Practice. All but one of the young women in the teenage group were also fans of Neighbours while none of the adults watched Neighbours. For the two groups, The Young and the Restless was the next most popular soap opera. All of the teenagers watched Young, as they called it, and slightly over half of the adults watched it.

Some of these fans kept the television set on while working around the house or wandering in and out of the room where the television set was. Those who did this said they washed dishes, dusted, cleaned, wrote letters and ate lunch with the television set on, but particularly they ironed and ate lunch. Some specified that they kept the television set on only while they were doing other things when their soap was playing; otherwise, the set was turned off.

While sitting in front of the television set to watch TV many of them also read books, newspapers or magazines, knitted or crocheted, did other sewing or mending, or financial paperwork. A few did not do other things while sitting down watching television, but preferred to give the program all of their attention or said they did other things only during the ads. More than half of the respondents said that they liked to talk when they watched television, and they talked to anyone who was there, usually husbands, children or friends. One commented that she and her family talked while watching Days of Ours Lives, but that they looked at the television set while doing it.

All of the women who answered the questionnaire said that they talked about television with other people. Some mentioned that they talked specifically about soaps. When asked about watchings Days of Ours Lives with other people, most mentioned specific people -- mother,
husband or friend. When asked how many people they knew watched *Days of Ours Lives*, the adults listed anywhere from two to 11. All but one adult said they talked to all of the fans they knew about *Days*. The one person who didn't talked about *Days of Ours Lives* only with her mother.

The teenagers, on the other hand, listed the people they knew who watched *Days* as in the hundreds. They listed none of their family as those with whom they talked about *Days*. The teenagers in this sample considered most of their classmates to be fans of *Days* although they indicated on the questionnaire that they only "sometimes" talked about *Days of Ours Lives* with male friends.

In answer to the question, "Out of this group, [of people you know who follow *Days of Ours Lives*] how many are women and how many are men?" four respondents answered "all women," three others responded "mostly women," and another answered "about 95 percent women, five percent men". The three others listed the ratio as nine to two, nine to two and two to one in favor of women. There was no difference between adults and teenagers in this respect.

Among the adult women, soap operas were frequently talked about over the telephone, at "ladies lunches," when the family returns from work, the next day, or during the program. The teenagers sometimes said they talked about soaps all of the time or whenever they met someone else who watched. They referred to lunch breaks at their university and to talking about soaps before and after class as well as phone calls and discussions while watching the program. Of those women with children, the children who also watched soaps were all female.
When asked what they liked about soaps, the adult women gave these responses among others:

One can become involved with another person's life or lives, but be able to switch off at the flick of a switch. A time to relax completely -- switch off from the 'real' world for an hour.

4-2*

Their problems are much greater than mine -- as a rule -- also allows time for sitting down and enjoying handcrafts.

4-4

I like how they are on every weekday. I like how they are continuous and have the same characters. I like watching with my family. It is relaxing.

4-7

The sense of continuity. Their lives are running parallel to my own. It does not stand still. Things develop even if in an illogical way.

5-1

* The first number is the group number. The second is the participant's number. The same is true for all succeeding quotations from the questionnaire data.

They also mentioned such things as reliability, constancy, predictability, fantasy, continuity, excitement and relaxation. Teenagers mentioned the excitement, the clothes and the romances as well as soaps' ability to take their minds off of school work. Some distanced themselves by stressing that soaps were unintentionally funny. The teenagers seemed more inclined to view soaps as funny than
the adults and also were more likely to watch them in groups chatting about them as they watched.

When the group members read for relaxation, the adults said they read popular novels of various kinds -- mysteries, historical novels, biographies. The teenagers talked about reading everything from the classics to Mills and Boon romances. An author who came up repeatedly in both groups was Barbara Taylor Bradford, whose novels are about shrewd and powerful business women who also are matriarchs of large family clans. (See C. Kaplan for an analysis of this type of matriarchal family saga.)

When asked who controls the television set during the evening both groups indicated that various types of negotiation took place around the use of the set. Five women and one teenaged girl indicated that it was they who controlled the use of the television set in the evening and all except one person said they had control of the set during the day. Often both teenagers and adults said they were the only people home during the day. One indicated that her brother controlled the television set during the day and another indicated that if it was soaps time, then she controlled the television set. Out of both groups every home but two had a videotape recorder. Those who had one used it to record their soap when they were going to have to miss it. Some recorded soaps for other people. Of the nine people who said a specific person had introduced them to soaps, that person was either their mother, grandmother or a friend. All of the respondents to the questionnaire knew at least one friend’s favorite soap. Both adult and teenage groups were split over whether to refrain from telephoning that friend when the friend’s soap was on.
In response to the query, "Do you think soaps characters are like real people?" the answers indicate that it depends on the soap. The following responses, all from the teenage group, are examples:

Yes and no. In Neighbours, I think that they are aimed at the middle class, whereas in Days the glamorous outfits and events are aimed at dreamers.

6-8

Yes. Especially on Neighbours, but it's a bit different on daytime ones as they are quite unrealistic. Then ones like Dynasty and Dallas are so unrealistic it's ridiculous.

6-11

Or in some cases it depends on the character.

Even on the same show some are more believable than others.

For example: on Days, Alex is less believable than Melissa.

6-9

All but two of the adult fans said they did not consider the characters realistic. However, all said that they and their friends sometimes talked about the characters as if they were real.

All of the teenagers said they would sometimes act out or repeat a phrase from someone’s conversation on Days of Our Lives while only one adult said she did. Her response was quite general, "Yes, some romantic line that is ridiculous." The responses from the other adults indicated that they were not aware of this practice, while the teenagers gave several specific examples.

All respondents said people they knew made fun of soaps and the people who watch them, and most indicated that soaps and soap opera
audiences were criticized by both men and women. Some of the reported
criticism:

That they are ridiculous and you are stupid to watch them.

6-11

People must have low intelligence to watch them.

5-1

One would have to be unintelligent zombies to watch such
idiocy.

4-2

They think they are for old women who have nothing better
to do, and don’t appeal to intelligent people.

4-7

Other comments are that soaps are a waste of time, are unrealistic,
boring, bad, trite, sorry, and/or breed inactivity along with other
daytime television-watching.

To the question which read, "Some would argue that some things
that happen on soaps are not rational. Does this bother you?" all but
two people in the combined groups answered "no." Of these all of the
teenage group and three of the adults answered "yes" to the second part
of the question, "Do you think it is funny?" All respondents to the
questionnaire except one said that the irrational moments provided a
topic of conversation about the soap.

A common belief about soap opera audiences is that they work out
their own problems by comparing them with the problems presented on the
soap. Only two of the people who filled out this questionnaire said
that they did this. Neither of the two could think of an example.
Nine people said they laughed often while watching Days of Ours Lives
(five adults and all teenagers) while six said they had cried while
watching *Days*. Commenting about laughter one teenaged fan answered in
the following way:

Do you ever laugh when you are watching *Days of Ours Lives*? When?
Yes. When Chris Kosechek goes up to women and sleazily says,
‘Hello, lovely lady.’ When Liz Curtis sings at the benefit
concert. When Melissa Anderson was dancing. When Tony DiMera had
a twin cousin named Andre.
Do you ever cry? When?
Bo and Hope broke up and when Doug had a 'Heart Ache.'

6-8

Another teenaged respondent answered the first question in the
following way:

Yes, constantly. I don’t take it seriously, although I do at
times.

6-9

In response to the question which asked if she cried, she said:

Not often -- for example when Molly died on *A Country Practice*.

6-9

Molly died a lingering death on the veranda in 1985 on *A Country
Practice*, Australia’s prime-time respectable soap. Virtually everyone
watching probably cried when Molly died.

Although these fans' favorite female character varied, they always
picked a strong character, sometimes the villainess. In answer to the
question, "Why do you like her?" most of the answers indicated a
preference for strength combined with the ability to love and/or be loved.

Julie - a gutsy character

Marlena - nice, beautiful, intelligent, warm.

Gwen Davis - She is attractive, witty, vivacious, an achiever but still a warm-hearted caring person particularly where her mother is concerned.

Gwen - Seems more true to life than most. With all the hard professional self-centered portrayal, also has a kind, warm and loving center.

Liz Chandler - She is a real character.

Gwen Davis - Because she is beautiful, sexy, very humorous, intelligent, ambitious but still loves to be happy.

Julie Williams - She's a bitch -- is honest about what she wants, is beautiful, is very much in love and is loved by her husband.

Melissa Anderson - I guess because I identify most closely with her, age, clothes, looks, etc.

Anna [Brady] DiMira - Love her -- well I enjoy her character.
Anna Brady - Because she’s got so much spirit and guts in her
and she’s so rude and sarcastic to some people.

6-11

After the above question was one that read, "If you saw her on the
street tomorrow, what sort of questions would you ask her?" I wanted
to see whether people would talk to the character, or to the actor. I
got answers like:

Does she get bored with acting in the show for so long? What is
the future of the current plot?

4-2

All but one answer were in a similar vein or said they wouldn’t talk to
her at all. The one exception was:

‘Do you really love Alex, or his money?’

4-7

In general these subjects indicated that they would talk to the actor,
not the character. Seven people said that they did "love to hate" the
villain or villainess, and seven said they thought the men on soaps
were sexy. One thought of them as "nice" rather than sexy and three
named characters from the nighttime soaps when asked, "Who, currently,
is the sexiest?"

There was a variety of choices for the most tragic character, but
everyone picked a woman in answer to this question, although a few men
were second choices. Nine of the 11 people in the groups said that
they did not think there was too much talk on the soaps and most
(seven) said they enjoyed listening to the characters talk. Seven also
said that they would sometimes listen to the television set while Days
of Ours Lives was on, and then turn to look when there was an intense
moment.
In answer to the question, "Do you think the characters on Days of Ours Lives have too many problems?" and "Why do you think this is?" most people in these groups said either "yes" or "no" but both groups also acknowledged that problems are central to the genre. For example one person said:

Of course -- if they didn't, they'd have no script and no show.
No one would watch it.

6-10

While another said:

No. Problems make the plot; problems last such a long time, it's always a point of contact.

4-3

When asked if soap operas are like real life, six people said "no," three said "yes," and two said some are and some aren't. Six said that it bothered them when a character comes back after having been considered dead for a long time, while the others claimed either not to be bothered by it or said that it depends on which character we are talking about and whether they liked him or her or not.

In summary it can be seen that not all soaps fans are regarded with the same degree of disdain in social discourse. To some degree this depends on the status of their soap. Fanship groups also vary in their makeup from first-level groups, in which elaborate means of keeping up and consistent interaction concerning the soap opera in question take place among a select group of friends, to large groups of people for whom ongoing conversations about the soaps are routine, but they are not necessarily with the same people. The close-knit groups
exist among both adults and teenagers, but second-order soap opera fan relationships are more prevalent with teenagers. In Australia, if one is a teenager, one can expect virtually all of one's friends to keep up with Neighbours or Home and Away or Sons and Daughters when it occupies an early evening time slot. If the soap is moved to another time slot as Son's and Daughters was (3:30 weekdays), it is possible that teenagers will not watch it. The adults did not watch the early evening Australian soaps, but some watched other daytime soaps or British soap operas broadcast in the early evening.

Soaps fanship seems to have been handed down among women in the case of these questionnaire responses. Most of these women discussed soaps primarily with other women while they did other things. It appears to often be the case that soaps fanship functions for these groups primarily within women's culture, although many of them also discuss soaps with men and they seem to admire men who watch and keep up with soaps. Admiration for strong soap opera characters who can also be loving was consistent with these groups' preference for reading novels about matriarchs who are also business women -- women who have love, family and success.

Teenagers differed from the adults in that they frequently acted out scenes from soaps and/or imitated the voices of certain characters. Adults sometimes talked about the characters as if they were real, but most seemed unaware of the practice of acting out scenes from soaps. All of the respondents had heard negative comments about soap opera viewers. The majority of the questionnaire respondents enjoyed hating the villain (male or female) and found the men sexy, and all of the women who responded to the questionnaire picked a woman as the most
tragic character. Although most people who know soaps, talk about the characters as though they are real, in this questionnaire data there was no doubt that these were characters not people. A persistent popular notion, repeated in serious criticism about soap opera (see Cantor and Pingree) is that actors believe themselves to be in danger from fans when their character is unpopular. My study shows no indication of such behavior or thought processes on the part of these fans.

Now let us move to a more detailed analysis of what this data can tell us about the meaning of soap opera fanship.
Notes for Chapter 3

1 Charlotte Brunsdon (1987) has also noted changes in the status of soap operas in Britain as well. According to her:

The advent of the new 1980s soaps, Brookside and EastEnders, with higher budgets and determined appeals to a wider and younger audience of both sexes, has to some extent improved the public profile of soaps. Similarly, the recession chic of the American prime-time serials, Dallas and Dynasty, which have exported padded shoulder fantasy worldwide, have to some extent allowed the particular pleasures of serial viewing to be more publicly acknowledged. Still trash, soaps have, in some circles, been elevated to good trash. (147)
IV

Chapter 4

Breaking the Rules
Chapter 4

Breaking the Rules

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the hegemonic imagined discourse of soap opera fanship, while powerful and seemingly universal, neither stops people from watching soaps nor entirely succeeds in making fans feel stigmatized by their "addiction". Addictive behavior of various kinds, while characterized as a kind of failure to cope, is easily tolerated in the cultures of the women I interviewed. However, the implication of sexual pollution or deviance from sexual norms is more of a problem for women and girls who are soap opera fans.

Gender subordination almost always makes itself felt in sexual terms. In terms of the public:private opposition the above distinction is clear. Good examples of this are the terms used to signify women or girls appearances on the (public) street. Described in Celia Cowie and Sue Lee's article "Slags or Drags":

 [...] McRobbie argues that one reason the street remains taboo to women is made clear by the disparaging term 'street walker'. We would add however, that the term 'street walker' does not necessarily ban them from the street but pronounces the terms on which they can be seen on the street i.e. as girlfriend or slag. In other words the girls' appearance on the street is always constrained by their subordination. (30)

In this case it is in the street that the visible, active pleasure is to be experienced.

In the case of soap opera we have a genre of television that is in a sense private since it takes place in the home, and the women and
girls who make it public, that is take it outside 'into the street' where they discuss it as if it happened in the street become discursively very close to the equivalent of street walkers. This is a serious case of breaking both boundaries and rules. Women can be considered good (in Cowie and Lee's terms "drags") if they remain contained (married or intending to be) and follow the rules (for the cultures of femininity which are to be discussed shortly).

The Ideology of Dependence

If, as in the theories I have noted earlier, soap operas attempt to "subsume the housewife in her role by offering her romantic gratification" where she, it is assumed, will consume more and will reproduce new workers and consumers, then we must look at the ideology that supports this notion.

The ideology in question involves both economic and emotional dependence for girls and women. Both aspects work together to attempt to position women and girls growing into womanhood within the patriarchal family as it is discursively constructed. Although there are class race and ethnic differences, the elements of the dominant model of the Western 'conjugal' family (Scanzoni) are:

1. The male head of the household, the father, is the sole economic provider.

2. The female head of the household, the mother, is the homemaker, and is responsible for domestic care and the socialization of the children. She is a helpmeet to the husband providing support for him in his struggle for the family's survival.
3. The children are helpless and dependent, vulnerable and malleable. They must be nurtured full-time by the mother (or mother-surgeon) only, as emotional stability is essential.

4. The family is a private institution and within it individuals can fulfill their most important needs. This fulfillment is based on the foundation of the economic income provided by the husband (where necessary, supplemented by the state). Only then will economic and material needs for love, esteem, self-expression and fulfillment emerge within the family.

5. Healthy families produce healthy individuals, who adjust to social roles. (349)

Although one may question whether this family exists except with numerous variations and modifications, the discourse which constructs such a family is alive and well. As teenage girls and adult women make sense of themselves within a broad cultural framework which constructs families like the one outlined above, they are confronted with the ideological structures which support such a family structure; those which stress both romance and economic dependence.

Sandra Taylor in "The Tender Trap: Teenage Girls, Romantic Ideology and Schooling" (1987) examines three sets of contradictory discourses which research on cultures of femininity have pointed to. These are the domesticity/paid work conflicts concerning girls' futures; sexuality, or the "politics of reputation": what Cowie and Lees call the slags or drags conflict; and maturity issues, or the conflicting expectations for girls of their being rebellious and independent (like the boys) and while they are also expected to be "proper young ladies". The latter leads to confusion, according to
Barbara Hudson, as to what is expected of them to the extent that they sometimes feel that whatever they do is wrong. This is a good example of the double bind in which both adult and young women find themselves in the face of dominant constructions of "reality".\footnote{1}

The first discursive pattern which Taylor mentions is the conflict between filling an economic role and filling a role within the family. The maintenance of the above contradiction which is built into the definition of the family given earlier is important to the reproduction of gender relations in society (Taylor). It perpetuates the notion of public and private spheres and places women and girls in the private sphere where domestic relations are expected to be their major concern and where they remain economically dependent.

The second discursive strategy which functions to keep girls within the constraints of their expected future marital role discussed by Taylor is that which labels young women as either bad or good, 'slags' or 'drags'. Although these terms can be seen to slide between the use of such terms "as friendly joking; as bitchy abuse; as a threat or as a label" (Cowie and Lees), and to slide among the actual behaviors which merit particular labels, the discourse of the binary opposition between good and bad for women is powerful. It relates directly to a young women's marriagability, the assumption being that for teenage girls a future without marriage and the familial situation described earlier is not conceivable.

The third set of contradictory discourses mentioned by Taylor has to do with age and maturity and is closely related to the second. The mature young woman does not cause trouble, it not a "problem." She is silent as well as chaste. This discourse, along with the other two,
serves as a powerful force to regulate sexuality and put pressures on teenage girls to get and keep a boyfriend, an act which models family behavior and protects her "good" name. All three discourses feed into what Holloway (1984) has called the "to have and to hold" discourse which associates acceptable behavior with monogamous relationships. Such discourse is important in the construction of feminine subjectivity in this culture. Together these form the ideology of romance. These three discourses constitute the threat of sexual pollution. The politics of reputation, the need for "proper" (i.e. non-threatening) behavior and the discourse of domesticity (and thus financial dependence) ideologically leave young women few options.

On the other hand, the ideology of romance can be seen as a rational response to material and economic subordination (Cornell et al). When one's sources of power are limited, the ideology of romance can be particularly compelling both because it is socially rewarded and because there is sometimes little economic choice for feminine subjects. Such romantic ideology positions feminine subjectivity in such a way that girls can easily decide to opt out to the system. As Michele Mattelart (1982) points out, as long ago as 1917, Alexandra Kollontai questioned the "innocence" of romantic love stories in terms of class political issues. Mattelart herself refers to "the order of the heart" (140) as the order which organizes romantic discourses. According to Mattelart:

[...] it invalidates any form of struggle against social inequalities (the existence of which is admitted) by means of this diffuse explanation: only love can cross class barriers. Not only is the solution individual -- never collective -- it is also
linked to the miracle of love. Love comes to be a universal explanation which can resolve social contradictions through denying them ... (140)

These strategies then, are at work in cultural texts dealing with the ideology of romance and dependence.

Romance novels are a case in point. Janice Radway, in Reading the Romance (1984b), interviews forty-two romance readers to determine how they use romances. The romances favored by her readers are exemplified by Kathleen E. Woodiwiss' The Flame and the Flower. This type of romance usually features one heroine and one hero, a happy ending, a heroine who shows some assertive, independent behavior and a hero who is cruel but not extremely so. Romance novels deal, on the whole, with the seduction myth of the innocent young woman who meets her true love and at the end of the novel marries him expecting to live happily ever after.

The individual women in Radway's study often defy their husbands' wishes in order to gain the private psychological space and mental separation from their families provided by reading romances. The resistive aspect of this act, according to Radway, is that the women feel and believe that they are resisting male authority and this makes romance readers less likely to allow themselves to be mistreated or ignored within marriage. The feeling of resistance seems to come from identification with an assertive heroine and with the act of claiming uninterrupted time and space for themselves within patriarchal marriage which otherwise allows women little psychological or real space for themselves. The pleasure in this act of reading, then, is in claiming the right to solitude. The content of this solitude, the reading of
romances, can be seen to relate to feminine/masculine power relationships acknowledging women's fear of men and male law.

Organized in traditional literate narrative style, the romances preferred by Radway's group achieve narrative closure when the hero finally understands that the heroine is different from other women and "the heroine is gathered into the arms of the hero who declares his intention to protect her forever because of his desperate love and need for her" (97). Romances are also about the containment of female sexuality. In them, female sexuality is constructed as the complement to male discourse on pornography. Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries describe the need for the complicity of women in masculinized desire as follows:

Woman's complicity is a conceit fundamental to the workings of soft pornography. Without it the whole project would collapse, a tendency which is apparent in the narrative of certain hard core pornography. The assertion of masculine authority -- in the sense of power legitimated by the desire of the governed -- has given way in hard porn to the symbolic exercise of naked power. (38-9)

Power is evidenced in romance novels by violence (often in the form of rape), the threat of violence, or implied violence just as it is in pornography, but the perspective in romances is the point of view of the victim. The anger of the heroine at her own powerlessness and her victimization because of her lack of knowledge (here expressed as sexual innocence) is satisfied only in that she learns of herself in male terms. As Radway puts it:

It is ... a figurative journey to a utopian state of total receptiveness where the reader, as a result of her identification
with the heroine, feels herself the object of someone else’s attention and solicitude. Ultimately the romance permits its reader the experience of feeling cared for and the sense of having been reconstructed affectively, even if both are lived only vicariously. (97) (Radway’s emphasis)

Thus romance novels can be seen to feed into the ideology of dependence by attempting to construct feminine subjectivity in masculine terms. The silent (silenced) readers of romances may still resist by the act of reading; but, according to Radway, romance readers don’t often talk to other romance fans about their reading. Romances have often been referred to as feminine pornography (see Snitow, 1983, for example), thus reluctance to talk about them may relate to their connotations of forbidden pleasures. Soap opera audiences, on the other hand, often seem to use soaps in ways that generate pleasure for themselves in the context of a group. In addition, the narrative structure of soap opera leaves the text open for more active participation than is possible in the closed structure of the romance novel. In hegemonic discourse readers of romances, as well as viewers of soap operas, are often referred to as addicts rather than fans, thus linking the two forms discursively. Audience interest in these popular forms is thereby viewed in dominant discourse as suspect, as a problem, as a variant from the normal or as "matter out of place."

Just as romance readers are positioned by their bodies, some critics contend that soaps audiences are also positioned by their bodies. John Davies (1984) describes the target soap opera audience in the following way: "As in classic Marxist theory, they have nothing to sell but their bodies. Hence your body is your prime possession" (32).
As well as being the instrument of the economy of patriarchal capitalist success (for women, getting a man and keeping him; and, for men, succeeding in becoming rich and famous with women's bodies being one of the rewards), according to Davies the body is also the site of primal pleasures in soaps. However, I would like to point out that the body is also a site of power. In contrast to the discourse of dependence, in the discourse of sexual power on the soaps the power of the female body to create is given crucial importance.

The pregnant woman is not necessarily seen as powerless over natural events: often women in soaps see pregnancy as power over the father of the unborn child (Modleski, 1982). Women characters in soaps use their bodies to achieve their own ends. Although this idea is a common stereotype of women, the stereotype is given some interesting twists in the soaps. The Lévi-Straussian view of kinship systems (in Rubin, G.) in which marriages are a form of gift exchange where women are the gifts, is reinforced by soaps on one level while it is contradicted at other levels. As Gayle Rubin (1975) points out, kinship systems based on the exchange of women are systems where women do not have full rights over themselves or their sexuality. The social organization of sex which Rubin describes uses gender, heterosexuality, the incest taboo, and the constraining of female sexuality to reinforce its hegemonic structure. Further, Marjorie Stewart (1989) has argued that female subordination is a direct result of the separation and comodification of the reproductive power of women from the woman herself in patrilineal societies. This social organization of sexuality and reproduction seems to be in question in the soaps. It is not women but the social construction of sexuality which is seen as the
problem. Soaps pay elaborate attention to the social organization of sex suggested by Rubin; however, the power that female characters assert over the relationships in which they participate in soap operas does not support the idea of the exchange of women as passive commodities. The characters seem, however, well aware of what Lacan would call "the prices paid to enter society," (in Mulvey, 6) or the social consequences of breaking the rules. Soap opera texts hover around the boundaries of dominant rules and conventions (particularly about sex/gender systems) while never closing off the narrative options available to the viewer. As Carol Gilligan (1982) points out, masculine culture functions in relation to rules while feminine culture functions around relationships and responsibility, themes often played out in the soaps.

The hegemonically naturalized idea, however, that characters always should and sometimes do marry for love is a dominant idea. Since women characters in soaps are often economically as well off as the men, the economic reasons for marriage are not often placed in the foreground, but both women and men in soaps have an emotional need for love, marriage and intense relationships. If soaps are seen to have a predominantly female audience, it is possible to conceive of the male characters as objects of love (objects of exchange) for the female viewers of soaps. But more likely it is what I call the "woman’s man" who replaces the lost mother for feminine audiences. The "woman’s man" can be explained by referring to Nancy Chodorow’s work again. In Chodorow’s (1978) account, when a female child leaves her mother for marriage she replaces her mother with a man. The male child gets his mother back, in a sense, in the form of another woman who is his wife.
The pleasure of being nurtured is thus retained for men but often denied to adult women, a pleasure which is supplied through the nourishing aspects of gossip or chatting in the soaps. Not all women characters in the soaps nurture each other; rather some female and some male characters are nurturing. In addition, the intimate, problem-solving relationship between audience and text makes the audience member an accomplice in such a nurturing situation. Thus the body of pleasure for women may be the body of the missing mother rather than genitally identified sexual pleasure usually described by the term desire.

Although soap operas defy being linked with all other women's genres and may offer a more open text than most, it is not the text but the audience that concerns us here. In the next section, I would like to look at one way that adult audiences use soap opera as their cultural capital in the construction of boundaries for women's culture.

The Boundaries of Pleasure

For women, "politics" is often close to home and can take place in the context of everyday life, and leisure time within the home often means television. Because women are seen by commercial interests as being the purchasing agents for a number of people within the home, usually their families, the cultivation of women as consumers for the family is looked upon as a primary activity of television advertising. Television advertising, however, is not just the commercials, but is also the process of molding audiences into appropriate consumers. As Virginia Nightingale (1990) points out, this does not mean that television caters to women's conscious needs or desires. Feminist
activists who have tried to secure more diverse images of women on television or who have tried to see that more women are employed in decision-making positions in the television establishment can attest to the fact that although women are primary purchasers, television is not always constructed with women in mind (see Loach, Baehr and Spindler-Brown, or any issue of Media Report to Women). Neither are the dynamics of the nuclear family such that women are always in control of their television sets. Television sets are often a family purchase, and once the TV set is installed in the home, television viewing is managed and negotiated among members of a household. According to some recent studies, women do not always come out ahead in such negotiations (Morley, 1986; Gray, 1987). Control of the television set seems to be a major indicator of power structures within families, and women's power within the home can be minimal.

Television programmers assume that women have control of the set during the day and that men have control in the evenings (Comstock et al). Consequently they attempt to maximize the way that women, men and children are able to relate to the flow of television as it is integrated into their lives. The proportion of time devoted to sport, news, talk shows, soap operas of various kinds, action dramas, quiz shows, mini-series or movies is an attempt to marshal audiences of various configurations into buying positions for advertisers on commercial broadcasting stations. Audiences are then "sold" to advertisers, the cost per minute of advertising time determined by audience demographics and size. In countries where the government owns television, viewers are hypothetically encouraged to be good citizens.
Where broadcasting is controlled by commercial interests, viewers are encouraged to be good consumers (Kottak).

In her study of how women use home videotape recorders, Ann Gray (1987a) discusses the way that the use of such technology confirms women's traditional lack of power to control the leisure activity of the home even though discursively they are the targeted consumers. Gray uses a system whereby women color code those pieces of technology in the home which according to the "common sense" of traditional family life are considered feminine or masculine -- pinks for those machines used exclusively by women (like irons), blue for those used by men (like power saws) and various shades of lilac for those used by both genders. According to her research:

The 'record', 'rewind' and 'play' modes are usually lilac, but the time switch is nearly always blue, with women having to depend on their male partners or their children to set the timer for them. The blueness of the timer is exceeded only by the deep indigo of the remote control switch which in all cases is held by the man. (42)

Not only is control of the technology masculine in Gray's study, but her respondents also attached a value system to the programs and films watched and rented. According to Gray:

It is the most powerful member of the household who defines this hierarchy of 'serious' and 'silly,' 'important' and 'trivial.' This leaves women and their pleasures in films downgraded, objects and subjects of fun and derision, having to consume them almost in secret. (50)
Gray found that the discourse within the home which devalues those narrative genres pleasurable to women is picked up not only by the children but also by women. However, when these same women connect with each other and form a support system around feminine pleasures, we have a different story. The women in her study often get together during the day to rent films they like, and they are devoted soaps fans, operating a "failsafe" network in which they record soaps for each other and refrain from the discussion of each soap opera episode until everyone in the group has seen it. According to Gray:

These popular texts form an important part of their friendship and association in their everyday lives and give a focus to an almost separate female culture which they can share together within the constraints of their positions as wives and mothers. (49)

The women in Gray's study recognize the contradiction between their own pleasures and the pleasures approved of by their husbands. These pleasures are also approved of in dominant discourse which naturalizes them as neutral and therefore assumed to be correct.

The boundaries that these women establish in their friendship networks constructed in relation to their fanship networks establish their alliance based on relationships of pleasure. Important to these relationships is the fact that within these alliances the pleasure in soap opera viewing is pleasure without guilt since within the group it is acceptable behavior to watch soaps. The boundaries establish for them a locus of empowerment for their own brand of pleasure. Lawrence Grossberg (1984a) constructs a similar position for rock and roll fans. He contends that pleasure for rock and roll fans exists outside of the hegemony of ruling culture and "cathects" a boundary for rock and roll
fans marked by its otherness (227). Cathecting is attaching psychic energy to an idea, a part of the body, or an object. Thus when rock and roll fans form a network of empowerment by setting up boundaries having to do with their relationship to the music, they form what Grossberg calls "affective alliances" or alliances based on feelings. It is the feelings, the emotional register, combined with the empowerment that comes from participating in/with the group of fans, that constitute pleasure. Pleasure for some feminine television fans can work in a similar way. The source of pleasure here is not only textual but is also contextual.

Such contextual pleasure can also be looked at in terms of genres of discourse. Genres of discourse are the possible of ways of speaking within specific situations, an idea originally suggested by Bakhtin/Voloshinov (1973) and reworked by Frow (1985). Elizabeth Frazer (1987) also comments on the fact that hegemonic discourses are supported in some situations where, for example, young women's conceptions of reality tell them a different story from the one conceptualized in dominant discourse. She cites as an example a study by Angela McRobbie (1977) where the young women speaking seemed to say that women do not go out to paid work, instead they do childcare and domestic work in their homes. The statement was made even though most of the members of the group had mothers who did go out to work (413). Along the same line, Shirley Pendergast and Alan Prout (1980) interviewed fifteen-year-old girls about motherhood and marriage. When they were talking informally with the girls, a body of knowledge concerning the tedium, exhaustion, loneliness and depression exhibited by mothers of young children was evident. Such knowledge was usually first-hand, gathered
from sisters with young children and the girls' own experiences babysitting and/or with primary child care of younger sisters and brothers. Yet when these young women were asked in the formal interview to agree or disagree with the statement: "It is a good life for a mother at home with a young child," they almost all agreed in accordance with the hegemonic or sentimental notion of motherhood (see Oakley, 1979). When returned, then, to the public discourse on motherhood by the formality of the questionnaire, the girls accepted the socially rewarded idea that motherhood is unproblematic.

Pendergast and Prout distinguish between these two distinct but contradictory bodies of knowledge as "illegitimate" and "legitimate." In their analysis, "illegitimate knowledge is not generalizable while legitimate knowledge is: the sentimental stereotype is so powerful that when one's own experience comes into conflict with it, it is taken that the experience is invalid" (in Frazer, 421). The young women in Pendergast and Prout's study were interviewed alone and some indicated that illegitimate knowledge was also private knowledge, i.e. they kept it to themselves. However in Frazer's study, in which girls were analyzing a story from Jackie, a British magazine marketed to teenage girls, the girls talked quite frankly (or illegitimately) in groups. According to Frazer, "such knowledge was shared among them, as it is among sociologists of the family, women in women’s studies classes, consciousness raising groups and the like" (421). Her conclusion is that "ways of talking, or 'knowledges,' or 'discourse registers' will be dropped in contexts where they are not supported" (421). Frazer's definition of discourse register is "an institutionalized, situationally specific, culturally familiar, public, way of talking"
(421) which seems to coincide with the definition of genres of discourse put forth by Frow. There are, in other words, speaking situations in which certain discourses, in this case feminine discourse, are legitimated.

The parodic or ironic use of television to critique the same values it appears to represent may afford a particular type of pleasure to fans (see Ang, 1985a; Buckingham, 1987). Grossberg (1984b), for example, refers to types of rock and roll specifically coded as masculine and to the possibility of a doubled pleasure when that specific type of rock and roll is "reappropriated" as feminine. Rock and roll is often criticized for the reproduction of hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality both in its lyrics and its patterns of consumption. Grossberg cites rockabilly, which is marketed as masculine. According to Grossberg however, women bought it, sang it, danced it and participated in its styles. He gives the example of Georgia Gibbs singing "Great Balls of Fire" which gives it new meaning but "only because something else -- its affective investment -- has been changed by the insertion of the female voice into that particular apparatus" (33). Such an insertion, because of its difference from the expected, hegemonic voice can evoke pleasure possibly because of the ironic interpretation that such a reversal suggests. Empowerment here involves the ability to see things differently. Gibbs’ song becomes an ironic joke on rockabilly’s sensitivity or lack of it.

However, many feminine pleasures, like those of girl rock and roll fans, are underground and therefore socially invisible. Like the work of the housewife ignored in official statistics, girl rockabilly singers also recorded rockabilly "although their recordings were rarely
released" (33) (Grossberg, 1984b). The reappropriation of which Grossberg speaks may be a rare event for most women since the recordings or spaces from which the feminine is spoken often do not exist. It is in the sense of struggle for a place for women to speak, and in the possibility of resistance to hegemonic gender role conditioning that becomes apparent when women do speak that the relationship of certain television genres to women's culture can be seen as potentially political. Often issues that are a problem within dominant constructions of reality are not a problem in feminine discourse as it is conceived here. Gibbs' singing of "Great Balls of Fire" is a case of feminine appropriation of a supposedly masculine song. It is not so different from the example in Gray's study where women in the home appropriate a space for themselves by claiming the right to a so-called women's genre. What makes it difficult to see these two appropriations as similar is their placement in discourse as drastically different acts, one masculine (and public), the other feminine (and private). It is the act of appropriation in the process of consuming and the subsequent use of pleasure to cathex boundaries within which ideological norms can be restructured, if only momentarily, that establishes these genres of discourse as political. Such situations are political for women in that in the process women take pleasure into their own hands. They nominate, value, and regulate their own pleasure. For adult women, the construction of boundaries within which their soaps knowledge creates bonds with other women which seem to offer them an outlet for the contextualizing of their own pleasure outside of some forms of dominant control.
As an example, I have included the following conversation between Doris and Rita, two women who have known each other since high school. Both are in their late thirties. Rita lives on a remote station in northern Western Australia. Doris, who lives in Perth, records episodes of *Days of Our Lives* and sends them to Rita. The motor to which they refer is the electrical generator which is usually turned on only in the evenings. All of the television sets on the station, which also consists of a bunkhouse and foreman’s quarters, are set up so that they must be tuned to what the television set in the main house is playing. Doris and Rita have been fans of *DOOL* since their school days. The conversation is recorded by Doris as they ride together in the station’s four-wheel drive vehicle.

Rita: I suspect we’ll have those flashbacks when Liz starts getting her memory back.

Doris: You know, I was annoyed that I missed that one.

Rita: The other one that I was very annoyed that we missed was Renee’s pronouncements to everybody as to why she hated them.

Doris: I only had that on in sound -- I didn’t have any vision on that.

Rita: I also missed it, and I would have loved to have seen Renee getting stuck into them all. I saw it in flashbacks, at the party, but after she’d done that -- just before she was murdered and after she was murdered, and the reason I liked that was you should have seen the beautiful gowns they had on -- And that was the other thing about Hope’s 18th birthday --
Doris: Clothes.
Rita: They were having a party at a restaurant in those magnificent gowns, they were all dressed in gowns. They weren’t dresses; they were gowns.
Doris: They always wear magnificent clothes.
Rita: Yeh, but, usually they’re within the realms of the --
Doris: Everyday rational. You can’t believe that they’re wearing those beautiful gowns.
Rita: But I don’t believe an eighteen-year-old girl would be dressed up in that outfit that she had on.

(Interview 5, 241-269)

The specific sources of pleasure annotated by this passage from the interview are obvious. The pleasure in seeing a favorite character "getting stuck into," or telling the others off, is one aspect. Another is the piecing together of what had happened from flashbacks, and another is the clothes. The context in which these two women speak allows them to show their pleasure in watching a display of emotions which they obviously think Renee is justified in having, or watching a display of opulence in clothing. Their mutual pleasure in admiring the clothes is not mistaken by either as necessarily a particular desire to buy them. It is like the pleasure of window-shopping when women enjoy the display without necessarily buying the goods (Bowlby). Outsiders to these conventions may not understand these built-in limitations which are automatically in place in the discourse of those inside of the discursive boundaries.

Because of the way that station life is set up around what can be done when the generator is on, Rita’s husband has been let into the
viewing network, but he has more difficulty with the discursive network than the two women. The following excerpt from another section of the interview illustrates this:

Doris: How did you get Gerald [Rita’s husband] to start watching?

Rita: Well, he had to watch it because I wanted to watch it. I wanted to watch it. If I watch it, he’s got to watch it, and I can’t watch it when he’s not there and I can’t watch it when he comes in because that’s when the news is on. The only time is after eight o’clock at night.

Doris: So in effect, you could put the video recorder on your TV in the bedroom.

Rita: Yeh, then we’d have to be in separate rooms.

Doris: Yeh, I mean, it is possible --

Rita: Yeh, but he wouldn’t like that. He’d rather watch DOOL than have me in a separate room, and then, that was how it began, and then because we wanted to find out about the murderer -- he watches it now.

Doris: Does he like it or does he make fun of it?

Rita: I reckon it’s fun -- especially the romance thing.

Doris: But he keeps following it anyway.

Rita: Oh, yeh, he wants to find out who the murderer is. There’s a couple of times we had -- do you remember those scenes when they were showing us who the murderer was and they were showing you the hand -- -- and they were crossing out the --
Rita: Yeh, we were pausing on it and having guesses as to who it was and what that was -- that's the only reason. But as I said, he'll become hooked.

... 

Rita: Gerald got into it fairly quickly - he's got his pet hate on the program. I didn't think he'd be able to follow what's going on.

Doris: I reckon all the women are the same.

Rita: It was so annoying when he first started watching -- every five minutes, he'd ask 'Who's that? What's she doing? -- and you can't possibly explain who she is. Like Kate and Julie. This is your stepmother, and then you just say, 'No, it's a stepmother', then something comes up about Addie -- and you say well 'In fact, her father was married -- Julie's mother was her husband's wife as well -- right?', and it's all ridiculous. Because it's all over by the -- it took Gerald a long time. Every time a woman came on, he'd say 'That's the one that ...', and I'd say 'No, no, that's Gwen Davy', and this is such and such.

(Interview 5, 427-453)

Gerald has trouble with both the genealogies and the conventions of soap opera. This conversation between Doris and Rita notes their own insideness or positions of knowledge in the discursive situation in which they are participating. They are the possessors of knowledge about soaps conventions which vary from narrative conventions common in
other types of stories which have a distinct ending. Those soaps conventions which are similar or the same in both masculine and feminine television programs (Fiske, 1987), like the question of finding out who the murderer is, are easy for Gerald to relate to. Another example of discursive boundaries is contained in the following excerpt from Doris and Rita’s conversation.

Doris: Do you usually watch it at one sitting, all the tapes, or do you try to save a bit for each day?
Rita: We work it out by what’s on the television. If nothing’s on, we watch DOOL. If there’s something that we can’t quite make up our minds what we particularly want to watch, we work out how much DOOL we’ve got left. If we’ve got lots of DOOL, we’ll watch DOOL. If we haven’t then we’ll watch the TV.

Doris: Save your last program?
Rita: Yeh.

Doris: How much have you got left now from what I brought up.
Rita: Oh a lot, about -- oh, not a lot actually. Probably watched two hours.

Doris: You’ve only got two more then.
Rita: But that means we’ve been watching less television. Sometimes they last, you know, a long time, because of different programs on. It also depends on -- you know, like one Saturday morning, we took the day off. We put the motor on and stayed in bed and watched DOOL -- two tapes or something, an overdose on DOOL.

Doris: Even went to the extremes of putting the motor on?
Rita: Absolutely. I feel a bit embarrassed about them. I just hope that if the others put on their video (they can watch) -- I keep hoping that they don’t realize that we’re watching DOOL.

Doris: Secretly ashamed of it all. What are you going to do while I’m gone? [She is leaving the country.]

Rita: Mum’s going to do it.

Doris: Make sure you let me know what’s happening.

(Interview 5, 241-392)

The somewhat illegitimate pleasure that Rita and her husband experience by turning the generator on on a Saturday morning and staying in bed to watch two hours of soaps is a source of some embarrassment to her since anyone else watching television on the station will also tune in to Days of Our Lives. However, since the workers on the station are overwhelmingly male, it is possible, she feels, that they will not know what they are watching since it is, after all, outside of masculine culture in general, but in particular in the Australian outback.

These excerpts from my study give a much less stratified view of male and female culture within the family than do either Morley’s (1986) or Gray’s (1987) studies. My assumption is that this may be a class issue. Both Morley and Gray used working-class audiences and, obviously, station-owners are not working class. Nevertheless in both cases the separate discursive traditions are present and the separate (and empowering) knowledges exist in each. It is the recontextualizing of these knowledges that makes women’s knowledges, in this case about
soap opera, gain in importance. The shifting discursive position of women which occurs when women assume a position of knowledge by setting up their own value system places them in a more powerful position than when they accept the values imposed by masculine discursive positions. Soaps offer women an outlet for the contextualizing of their pleasures outside of some forms of dominant control and a way of controlling the boundaries of women’s culture.

Strategies and Tactics

In the groups in this study, adults and teenagers deal with soaps differently. Adults are more likely to engage with soaps on the level of active pleasures, to take pleasure, for example, in shared memories associated with past events on the soaps. Teenagers in this study engage with the soaps in complex interpretations of narrative possibilities, particularly those based on the constructedness of either stories or characters, on various possibilities involving rule-governed behavior, and by parodying the character construction in the process of imitation.

Patricia Palmer’s study *Girls and Television* tells us a bit about the general television viewing practices of Australian teenage girls. They are, she finds, devoted and enthusiastic viewers and watch more television than boys. Girls’ viewing peaks between the ages of 13 and 15. Although two out of the five schools Palmer used in her study were co-educational, talk about television programs by girls was almost always with other girls. Girls, according to Palmer’s findings, “had a detailed knowledge of programs their friends watched and liked and the
favorite show of their group at school." (32) In fact, according to Palmer, girls often form their friendship groups based on which television programs are their favorites. Girls did not, as a rule, discuss their television involvement with parents, teachers or other adults, however, according to Palmer:

It was certainly gratifying to girls if parents viewed their programs, as long as they did not interrupt by talking or asking for translations, in the case of parents who did not speak English. (43-44)

A spirit of ownership over certain programs is usual and the young women often referred to their favorites as "my programs." Parents in this study were quite flexible about allowing television viewing of programs of which they did not approve; however, they were sometimes critical of their daughters' viewing practices. The girls reported an overwhelmingly negative perspective on most television by their teachers, but when a teacher was a television fan, these girls felt supported. As one of Palmer's group remarks:

Cheryl: My science teacher likes it, she watches all the 'Prisoner' programs and things like that. It's good to come to school and have, you know, a good conversation with the teacher. You feel you are in the right then, you know. (51)

Although Palmer concludes that girls' use of television contributes to their narrowing their future choices by the educational decisions they make during early teenage years, she also picks up on the pleasure that the girls she interviews experience talking about television:
While their talk is often intense, it is also punctuated by laughter. What girls learn from television can have serious, and negative, consequences but there is no doubt that the process of doing so affords them great enjoyment. (67)

I maintain that the laughter and enjoyment of television may be themselves appropriations of television’s strategies, but a look at specific responses to a specific program can help to clarify how the tactical process of reading takes place within a particular group of girls.

One group of teenagers with whom I spoke (16 to 18 years old - middle and working class) were longtime fans of Sons and Daughters, two of them having watched it since its inception in 1981. I had been watching it with one of the members of the group for a year. The soap itself, is not a "quality soap" but is considered by most adults to be one of the trashier soaps kids can watch. The act of watching this particular soap then put these teenagers in the position of choosing as "their" cultural capital a particularly trashy soap -- an initial act of defiance in itself and a common one among teenagers. While having many similarities with the American daytime soaps, also noted for their excessive trashiness, Sons and Daughters also has significant differences. The plots on Sons and Daughters move exceptionally fast, more so than even Dynasty and Dallas (thus counteracting the universal teenage complaint of boredom) and it emphasizes different aspects of the narrative than the American daytime soaps. This can be seen by the way the show deals with "the wedding."

The major wedding on Sons and Daughters is that of Wayne and Susan. When Wayne, the villain, and Susan (Beryl’s daughter, a good,
honest and strong young woman) are married, Wayne has kidnapped Beryl’s younger son to get Beryl to influence Susan to marry him. In addition he has framed Glen, Susan’s real love, so that Susan will think Glen has betrayed her. The wedding itself is, of course, a gathering of all of the show’s characters. It features a fist fight between Wayne and Glen and a last-minute appeal to Susan by Glen for a chance to prove his innocence. Given the chance, he is unable to do so to Susan’s satisfaction. One of the remarkable things about the wedding is that it shows less than a minute of the actual ceremony. As one of the young women in the interview group put it, there was no necessity to show it because "everyone knows what goes on at a wedding."

This is markedly different from the usual portrayal of "the wedding" on American soaps. On Days of Our Lives Roman and Marlena’s first wedding lasted three days and was quite sentimental, giving the entire "real time" text of the wedding and featuring tears on the part of the bride and many other female characters. Wayne and Susan’s wedding provides us with an example of the way that the text itself contributes to teenage resistive readings of romantic sentiment of which the wedding is the culminating symbolic act. To look at some examples of the ways that teenage girls talk about Sons and Daughters, let us turn to the recorded conversation.

The Sons and Daughters group evidenced a decided preference for strong characters or those who defied social norms.

Diana: I like the people, or the characters. They do things that people we know wouldn’t do. Sort of, we’ve been told, no I could never do that to another person, but they go right out to hurt another person’s feelings,
or something like that. And we just like to see what happens when it does happen.

(Interview 3, 51-59)

The conflicts mentioned by Taylor in relation to teenage girls being proper young ladies seem to be played out in relation to the way that not being a nice person is admired by these teenage girls. Contrary to notions of being good, their favorite characters tended to be villains.

ME: Which characters do you like?

Jan: Wayne.

ME: What is it about Wayne?

Jan: Because he is such a little devil and is like a split personality: like to his wife he is such an angel and then when she is out of the room he turns and his whole face changes. And the type of clothes he wears changes and he goes right out, you know, to hurt other people. Like he uses old family friends, like his next door neighbor Charlie and all that, for their money. She doesn't have a clue what her money's invested in but he uses her anyway.

Diana: I think he's good because he does it without anyone knowing what he's doing.

(Interview 3, 68-90)

The pleasure here seems to be enjoyment of Wayne's ability to get away with things, to use people without getting caught. Female villains are also admired, among other things, for being at the center of the action.
ME: Well, Jan said that Alison is a winner, but Caroline's not. Do you agree with that?

Diane: She doesn't play as major a role and you know, she doesn't get involved in as many activities that Alison does, type of thing. Not as adventurous type of thing. Alison gets into more trouble.

Jan: Yeh, I think it's because Alison's got more drive and more ambition to do things and she knows who to contact to get in touch with people and get about what she wants to do. Whereas Caroline just sort of fumbles her way toward it and whatever she does isn't really a big thing to the series at all ... so you know ...

Diana: She's just taking every day as it comes type of thing ... whereas Alison she plans ahead.

(Interview 3, 142-165)

Knowing how to get along in the world is obviously a high priority in these feminine fantasies, one that contrasts sharply with the statement by a 15 year old girl in Hudson's (1984) study, "Whatever we do, it's always wrong." (31) The idea of simply taking everyday as it comes, which is the fear of many educators about girls limiting their choices by early decisions on school options, is not the admired characteristic among the girls in this Sons and Daughters interview.

A clear distinction is made between characters who are portrayed by "good" actors, those who act well, and those whose moral position is that they are "good" rather than "bad", "drags" rather than "slags." In this case, however, both male and female characters are judged.
With the exception of the strong matriarch, the saintly characters are disliked, while those who exhibit socially aberrant behavior, or at least behave or act defiantly, are admired. These deviant characters are tolerated even if they are "good" in the moral sense and even if they are not good actors.

ME: I expected you to like the teenage characters.

Diane: Like Andy and Craig and ...

Jan: I like Andy, he’s good.

Diane: I don’t know, I suppose Craig -- he’s all right, but he’s such a goody goody -- he’s always doing good things for everyone, you know. I suppose in that teenager there would be a good adventurous side and that would be Andy, and there’d be the really nice side, and that would be Craig. They’ve sort of split the individual up into two characters. There’s not just one -- I suppose Ginny would be the character where she is really nice to people and adventurous.

Ginny would be the ...

ME: I’m trying to remember which one Ginny is?

Jan: She is the one who wears the really odd clothes, she puts together with the long -- sort of hair.

ME: She’s the one that’s just had that thing fall on her.

Jan: Yeh.

ME: So she’s the one that you like?

Diane: She’s all right. She doesn’t like blend in with the rest of the Sons and Daughters' characters, but she
uses her language differently. Her odd clothes make it more interesting to listen to her and everything, but that's about it.

Jan: Her character's really outstanding.
ME: What do you mean, she uses language?
Jan: Like soft spoken and everything, she doesn't care what she says, she's outgoing and ...
Diane: Loud ...

(Interview 3, 171-224)

It is clear in the above example that the manner in which the characters are constructs is clear to these viewers. The idea expressed that Craig and Andy are two sides of a single character construction is indicative of the group's awareness that the characters in soaps are constructs. Girls are able to like characters without the process of identification so clearly demanded by narratives with a single hero or heroine whose ability to be identified with is coded for the audience by their "well-roundedness." Although this type of character relationship with audiences is clearly rewarded in terms of dominant viewership, its invitation is not accepted by these teenage girls nor is it constructed into the soap itself. Andy and Craig are clearly, to the speaker, only parts of a character construction. Moreover, the power of speech, both the utterance and as language, is evident in the above excerpt from the interview. This quoted section is complex in the group members' understanding of how, for example, the codes of dress that Ginny is given affect how we code her speech ("she used her language differently. Her odd clothes make it more interesting to listen to her and everything ..."). That visual codes
and oral codes can be related is clear to these readers. In addition the power of Ginny's speech as utterance (discussed earlier in Chapter One) ("she uses language") is quite clear to this Sons and Daughters fan. That power is used by the character of Ginny to contradict what "nice" girls might be allowed to say. ("She doesn't care what she says, she's outgoing and ..." -- "Loud"). The above quotation from the Sons and Daughters group is also interesting in terms of the common myth that soaps' audiences don't know that the characters on soaps are not 'real'. Obviously these fans see the characters as constructs.

The following is an example of how the conversation about Sons and Daughters slips between metadiscourse about the construction of the soap's plot and storytelling or performance on the part of the speakers of the group, including the "filling in" process that brings the others up to date on the current plot:

Jan: Most of what happens is based on revenge for what someone's done to them or working around greed for money, I think, and someone else's wife.

Diane: Or husband, as Alison.

Jan: Love of money and revenge. I think it is going to be pretty, um, shall we say dramatic for a while anyway seeing as Alison is in such a critical condition at the moment in hospital.

Diane: Is she in hospital?

Jan: She's in a coma.

Diane: Well, I haven't seen it for three days.

Jan: She got stuck in the freezer with David.

Diane: Yes, I saw that bit.
Jan: Yeh, well they had no air and she went into a coma --
Diane: Oh no!
Jan: Yes and, um -- Craig's mother drew the people out into
the open and arrested them and Craig got off the hook.
Diane: Good one!
ME: All these really complicated schemes that they get
into, seems like they're always trying to get someone
off the hook and it's not ever simple. It's all
complicated. What do you think about that?
Diane: It's annoying. Like when Craig took off, it was the
most stupid thing to do. It was really annoying.
Jan: It was more like a chain, like I knew that Ginny had
planned it by the way that she just had that look on
her face and the way she would have been surprised and
shocked if he had done it.
But it's not sort of, I think the word's stereotyped,
where you sit in there and you think, oh! what's going
to happen tonight and you look at the beginning of the
program and you think, oh! yes, I can tell you what's
going to happen now -- but you can't do that because
the characters are really unpredictable because
whatever is going to happen doesn't --
(Interview 3, 499-562)

The act of storytelling, recounting complicated and unpredictable
plot structures, catching one's friends up on missed episodes is
obviously a major source of pleasure for these soaps opera fans.
Teenage girls' gossip networks and friendship systems centering around
the soaps and other television programs, as Palmer has pointed out, are often systems in which girls take the power to exclude both boys and adults. Even when boys and adults are tolerated, it is only on the girl's terms. As Palmer's interviews indicate, girls are often happy to have others watch with them as long as they don't "interrupt." This is an interesting reversal of power relationships. As de Certeau (1986) and many others (particularly Ong, 1982) have pointed out, the power to speak, control of the speech act, regulation of who may speak and under what conditions is one of the central strategies by which the dominant system maintains control. In addition the way that people think because they have accepted literate rather than oral thought processes and the hegemonic necessity to win one subordinated group to particular ideological stances which in turn support their subordination is tactically subverted by the rich oral culture that Australian girls enjoy around Sons and Daughters (or did enjoy until it was taken off the air and replaced in its 7:00 pm time slot by a more socially acceptable soap opera, Neighbours).

Often the gossip networks surrounding soap operas work in defiance of both a literate-based school system and the ideology of the family supported by the notion of romance. As Palmer (1986a) recounts about the teenage girls in her study, "Those who expressed enjoyment of school went on to talk about lunchtime or being with friends." (50) Girls often enjoy school because it is where they meet their friends and talk. They frequently ignore the regulatory systems and form counter systems in the form of gossip networks which are usually discounted or ignored in dominant structures. But it is these gossip networks that give young women (and sometimes young men) training in
understanding oral-based thought processes. The literate thought processes supported by schools and the hierarchies of cultural products taught by educational systems usually exclude soaps from the cannon of aesthetically approved (or "quality") media. The use of *Sons and Daughters* by girls is part of the process of making do with what the dominant system inadvertently provides. In addition it gives us some insight into the form that tactics may take in relation to Australian teenage soaps. Many romantic notions are challenged by the text itself and these teenage viewers consume the texts in ways that begin to distinguish power relationships centered around the non-acceptance of romantic myths. Their awareness of the narrative constructions of power relationships and the act of using this for their own pleasure indicate a willingness to challenge dominant notions of feminine dependence on traditional romantic illusions.

**Carnivalesque Laughter: A Second World**

Social practices for subordinated groups can be a mass of contradictions and soap opera fandom networks can reflect these contradictions. It is the capacity of such contradictions to provoke a carnivalesque laughter that I would like to address in this section.

Carnivalesque forms, ranging from ritual spectacles to various types of verbal expressions, have a number of common attributes, two of which are particularly pertinent here: first, they exist outside of dominant cultural practices, and second, they are based in laughter. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1965), the experience of carnival is opposed to everything ready-made and completed. The symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with a kind of "pathos" of change and renewal
-- a sense of the "gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities" (11). This consciousness produces what Bakhtin calls a "second life," a parody of extra-carnival life, "a world inside out" (11). He stresses that this parodic mode is "far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times" (11) because "folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture" (11). In the case of soap opera audiences, such world-inside-out logic can be seen in the play between the audience's knowledge of the fictional world of the soap opera and its knowledge of the world outside the soaps. Entering into the "second world" of soap-viewing thus involves the knowledge of the constraints imposed on soap operas in the "first world" of dominant culture.

Soaps' audiences often play with conversations about characters as if they existed in "real life." "Real life" is, of course, contained and articulated by dominant discursive practices, and the audience's talking about the characters as though they were real defies that conception of what constitutes reality. The extent of the viewers' willingness to entertain the fiction can be seen in the elaborate published genealogies of soaps' characters, which assign them actual dates of birth. There is an insistence on the value of such fantasy to certain groups in this intertextual practice.

Likewise, the importance of genealogies in the soaps and in women's culture in general denies the status of the official 'histories' promulgated in dominant discourse. Whereas history emphasizes orderly and unified cause-and-effect relationships, genealogies, according to Michel Foucault (1977), have an inherently uncontrollable disorder through the randomness of their development.
Although Foucault goes on to develop a broader definition of 'genealogy' not confined to kinship relations, it is easy to see that the genealogies (in the more restricted sense) are very disorderly indeed in soap operas, and knowledge of the former relationships and parentage of characters is an important element in gossip and discussions between fans and in their understanding of narrative developments. The fact that kinship on the soaps is different from the hegemonic notion of kinship operating in our culture constitutes a kind of in-joke on kinship. By contrast, more conventional narratives do not question or problematize kinship systems.

A striking element in such reading practices is laughter. Often it is laughter at the absurdity of plot construction or characters. Bakhtin characterizes canival laughter as ambivalent:

It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all of the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone including the carnival’s participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, dividing. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival. (11-12)

The laughter in soaps fanship groups has similar characteristics, particularly its ambivalence. The ability to see things both ways, as both humorous and serious, characterizes both Bakhtin’s hypothetical carnival participants and many soap opera fans. One example is the revelation of the body in soap opera narratives.
In the soaps, bodies are not "revealed" as in many other forms of representation, as individualized bodies or as objectified female bodies, the usual objects of the male gaze. In soaps, close-ups of people at the peak of emotional conflict expose an agonistic body to scrutiny in much the same way that a grotesque image reveals too much, defying dominant rules of propriety about how much emotion it is acceptable to show. As Mary Russo comments in her article "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory" such exposure may be particularly provocative for women who are always in danger of revealing too much:

Making a spectacle out of oneself seemed a specifically feminine danger. The danger was of an exposure. Men, I learned somewhat later in life, 'exposed themselves,' but that operation was quite deliberate and circumscribed. For a woman, making a spectacle out of herself had more to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries ... (213)

It is these shifting boundaries, of status, of expectation, of fortunes, of control, of reality, which soap opera audiences relate to with carnivalesque laughter. In dominant literary traditions, it is the emotional constraints and the resolved emotional conflicts that tell us everything is all right; that it is possible to live "happily ever after," as the climax or closure of the realistic narrative tradition of literature would lead us to believe.

Soap operas are not unified like many other types of television programs. Fiske (1987a) has posited that news on television is an attempt to write today's history, an attempt in Foucauldian terms to
"discipline" random events into the cause-and-effect relationships required by the dominant unified view of history. According to Fiske:

History, in this sense, is characterized by its production of the origins of events, of continuities that link events into a unified, coherent story, and by its pretense that it is revealing an extra-discursive truth rather than producing a discourse of knowledge and power. (1)

Fiske's interpretation of Foucault's position in relation to what Foucault labels genealogy is as follows:

Genealogy emphasizes events in their multiplicity and uniqueness. It does not see the contradiction between them as a mask of an underlying unity which merely awaits the historian to reveal it: rather it sees these contradictions as the pre-condition for the emergence of discourse: contradictions constitute the unruliness of events that require the emergence of the rules and power of discourse to govern them by organizing them into a truth. (2)

Thus "undisciplined" genealogy like that in the soaps becomes a part of an outlaw discursive practice, a practice which operates outside of the boundaries imposed by dominant discourse. Along with their position as utterance, or undisciplined discourse, these "endless genealogies" (of both types) may be a threat in their own right to dominant, unified discursive practices and positions.

In the group of soap opera fans I looked at there was a great sense of play. Teenagers often imitated scenes from soap operas, but adult women were just as jovial. I was not the first to note this sense of play. As I mentioned earlier, Palmer (1986a) noticed it among teenage fans when describing their television viewing experiences and
networks and Davies (1986) describes the conversations held by one of his groups of what he calls "self defined 'housewives'" as "earthy and raucous" (89) and more concerned with Days of Our Lives as a means of jogging memories in order to allow a space for the telling of anecdotes than making judgments about the quality or effectiveness of the drama itself. While the adult fans I spoke to about Days of Our Lives never mentioned imitating the characters on soaps, teenage fans of Days of Our Lives, Neighbours and the adult fan of Coronation Street seemed to recite lines or imitate accents and voice quality of soaps characters with great regularity. The younger teenage fans of Sons and Daughters never mentioned acting the part of a character, although they were aware and appreciative of voice nuances. What follows is a conversation which describes how one goes about this activity:

ME: When you meet somebody else, do you start talking about them as if they were real characters, real people?

Ellen: No, you don’t. What I do with the other fellow -- the only way, I don’t talk about them. What you do is that you talk in the accent, and you pretend to be one of the characters.

ME: You actually pretend?

Ellen: Well, no, but in conversation, you put on a, say, Bett Lynch voice, or ah, what’s her name?

ME: Different ones? It doesn’t matter? I mean do you always put on the same one?

Ellen: I mean there was a time -- I wouldn’t do it now because I’m not in that situation with other -- and
I'm not watching it now, but there was a time when I was around friends who would watch it regularly, there's Mavis Reilly who is the new old maid.

ME: She has short hair and works in the corner shop -- kind of mousy?

Ellen: You put on your Mavis voice --

ME: Well, what's the significance of who you choose?


...  

ME: Would you be talking directly about the show?

Ellen: No, you'd be talking about things in general and you'd suddenly throw in a line from Mavis.

ME: A real one like that she had said, or one that was in character.

Ellen: You'd say something in a Mavis voice. I mean there's great lines from Bett Lynch that you -- things like put-downs mainly, mainly probably put-downs to men which is why she is popular in her role as a barmaid, how she puts people down. Because I don't know whether you've seen it, but there was this barman Fred Gee, a great big fat obnoxious bloke, who really fancies himself -- you know what fancies himself means? I didn't know whether it meant the same thing in America.

ME: He was full of himself.

Ellen: Really fancies himself, thinks he's a real hit with the women, but isn't actually and is extremely
unpleasant -- and obnoxious generally. Most women find him that, and he would always get into situations when he would dress up and put on after-shave and perhaps a cravat and look absolutely ridiculous, and then he would try and get off with someone.

ME: And then Bett would come in.

Ellen: And he'd be preening in front of the mirror very pleased with himself and he'd say, 'How do I look then, Lynch?' and she'd say, "Oh, you look like a well-scrubbed pig." So you'd use that line -- or you'd just really appreciate that line.

(Interview 2, 1347-1384, 1412-1461)

As well as containing carnivalesque elements, the above quotation is an example of what I call feminine discourse. The humor is broad in the manner of carnival, but the situation is one that most women know. The discourse exists in the play between what is seen and what is said but also between opposing masculine and feminine points of view. The humor is pointed not so much at Fred Gee as at a particular version of masculinity. The fact that young women choose to imitate Bett seems to be related to the empowerment associated with her verbal superiority.

There are many varieties of this type of play. The one described in the following conversation involves The Restless Years, an Australian soap no longer on the air.

Mary: *Restless Years* language -- we used to say 'Oh, Raelene' whenever we meant really angry.

June: Oh, I was hooked on that. That was just the best show.
ME: What do you mean you had a language?

Mary: We wouldn't say 'really,' we'd say a character from The Restless Years -- we used to say "Oh, Raelene,' 'cause Raelene was one of the characters on it.

(Interview 6, 4101-4123)

The setting up of a language code articulates the boundaries of fanship in the case of The Restless Years. To participate in the language conventions, one obviously has to have a thorough knowledge of the program and, in addition, to have some insight into the games being played. The constructed language serves as an inclusionary practice for members of the group.

On a more subtle level, what people in these groups actually laughed at was also revealing. Much of it shows an acute awareness of cultural subordination. Women in these fanship networks deal with subordination through laughter in two ways: actively and reactively. Active laughter is laughter which stems from the pleasures of women's culture from chatting with other women about pleasures associated with women's strengths, from joking about the ironies of subcultural positioning. Reactive pleasures are parodies of specific ideological positions. I shall return to these two notions shortly but first let me list the general categories of laughter that I found. There was laughter at:

(1) the program itself (various absurdities of time, place, plots, characters and production values);

(2) one's own actions around soap opera viewing (generally having to do with soap opera addiction);
(3) mutual knowledge (particularly about soaps conventions and intertextuality);
(4) social comment (making fun of things that people usually take seriously);
(5) follies on the part of the producers/distributors ("they," the enemy, as opposed to "we," the fans);
(6) impersonation of characters (discussed above);
(7) jokes about one's position as soap opera audience member (direct or implied comparison with various constructions of soap opera audiences);
(8) absurdities recited deadpan (another type of enactment);
(9) making distinctions between soaps stories and stories of actual life (comparison of real life and fiction);
(10) the absurdities of subordination itself;
(11) talking as if events were real;
(12) irony (and its slippery constructions in the soaps);
(13) parodying fans (and one’s own fanship);
(14) at men (and male politics);
(15) at female power.

Some of these subgroups had as many as twelve coded examples. A few had only one example.

The stories that fans in these groups laughed at often carried suggestions of subordination. Part of the pleasure in telling these stories is the freedom within the group to speak freely, avoiding many constructed versions of femininity, parodying some and rejecting others. These aspects can for the most part be seen around the issues of women and power, and romance.
There is evidence in these interviews to suggest that female characters are judged in terms of power. That power is, in many cases, indicated by a female character’s ability both to speak and to be seen. One example of this is quoted below:

Ellen: Coronation Street is famous also because it has great bawling-out, stand-up fights between women.

ME: The first time I saw that was on Coronation Street.

Ellen: Between Ena Sharples --

ME: But she’s so old.

Ellen: Between Ena Sharples and --

ME: Annie would be too sophisticated.

Ellen: Well, no. Annie has got a good bag for that.

ME: She’s got a good mouth on her!

(Laughter.)

(Interview 2, 1653-1673)

Other examples of fans’ admiration for female power have been quoted earlier. Bett on Coronation Street, Alison on Sons and Daughters and Gwen on Days of Our Lives are all cited for their independence and acceptance of their own power by these fans. Likewise when a female character is not so strong as she could be, these fans take note of it.

Sue: How do you feel about the women?

Emma: Well, Marlena, she’s the doctor, the psychiatrist. She was at the hospital. She had her office and had patients and then she suddenly gets involved with Roman and police work. She just slipped out of
character. Now she is going back [Roman has died], of course.

Sue: Do you think she is a strong woman character?

Emma: Fairly.

Sue: That's what I feel, fairly. I'd like to see her really get stronger as a person.

Emma: She's very well liked. Seems to be very popular.

Sue: I think she's real popular, but I'd still like to see her be a little more independent or something. I don't know.

Karen: You know who is the best? Gwen. Wasn't she wonderful when she refused to lean on Larry. She has some good lines.

(Interview 1, 443-474)

The power of the word comes up with great regularity as does nonconformity on the part of female characters.

Ellen: That's definitely a lot of the pleasure in watching it. It's the way things are said.

ME: Particularly the put-down, I take it.

Ellen: The put-downs, the rudeness. It's kind of stylized rudeness.

ME: Well, the power of the women seems to have to do with their ...

Ellen: Their mouths.

(Laughter.)
In the area of amusement I have called social comment (item 4) one source of laughter is one’s actions relative to being part of the group gathered for the soap opera interview. This triggers comments (and laughter) which play on women’s knowledges and/or social assumptions about women. In the first, the assumption is that the speaker will go home and cook dinner.

Judith:  I’ve got to get home and cook my family some dinner.

Vicki:  Well, buy them fish and chips.

(Laughter)

(Interview 4, 3327-3332)

The comment about fish and chips in this quotation elicits laughter because it suggests both that the people expecting to be served can serve themselves (anyone can buy fish and chips), and that the person doing the talking, by acknowledging her position, can choose not to do it.

The second example is a comment usually made about housewives, used here to describe a man.

Sharon:  I suppose he’s been married for a while now, so he doesn’t have to do all those things.

Sally:  Very ordinary now.

Sharon:  He doesn’t keep himself up.

(Laughter)

(Interview 4, 2941-2949)
The comment that he doesn’t "keep himself up" is a direct parody of a comment often made about women after they marry. Once they have "caught" a man, then it is no longer necessary to use beauty as bait. Using the comment for a man and judging the situation as if one were using the social rules for women points out the irony of that situation.

The third example is a comment on the unrealistic expectations of beauty for women.

Sally: Isn't she lovely?
Vicki: She’s a beautiful looking girl, isn’t she?
Sally: She’s beautiful. She used to be so bad, didn’t she?
Doris: Do you think I’ll grow up to look like that?

(Laughter)

(Interview 4, 1079-1090)

The question of whether one can grow up to look "like that" (made in this case by an adult woman) is a parody of a child’s comment familiar to most women in our culture. As children, girls are sometimes allowed relative freedom from social expectations, but usually there is an awareness that at some age, they will have to pay attention to social rules. When they "grow up" they can be beautiful (and do the right thing) is the implication. The above comment takes these unspoken discursive positions, speaks them and makes them public.

Follies on the part of the producers or distributors are the subject of much humor. The one which I document here happened in Western Australia several years before these interviews.
Corie: Did you hear about the year when they lost all the episodes at channel seven?

June: Yeh.

Mary: And they printed the whole year on one page of the newspaper.

Corie: And Barry Barker got on TV and told everyone what happened.

June: How beautiful!

Mary: That would have been history.

Ada: And so they missed that whole year. They put it in the paper. It's just a page!

(Interview 6, 1423-1443)

When translated into the discourse of news (a masculine or goal-oriented discourse), a whole year on their soap opera takes up only one page of the newspaper. But for the women present, to condense a year's worth of emotional involvement into one newspaper page of plot summary seems ridiculous.

The women speaking are constantly aware of the differences in knowledge among various discourses. One of the differences which is constantly negotiated is that of time. Ironies of time are a big issue in the us/them disputes in Western Australia where television stations take the soaps off the air for three months in the summer. "They" in this case is the distributing television station rather than the producer.

Ada: And we're just at the climax, the thing we've been waiting for for the past year and a half. We're half
way through the benefit concert and they closed it off for the year!

(Laughter)

(The Interview 6, 394-400)

The phrase "We're halfway through the benefit concert" means differently to fans and non-fans. The rituals where the soaps characters all gather at the same time and "dress up" are the benefit concerts, birthdays, anniversaries, celebrations, and of course, weddings. To stop the program in the middle of one of these events is as unheard of to a soap fan as stopping a traditional narrative right before the climax. Even the hallowed institution of the soap opera Christmas is the subject of a certain amount of ridicule in this context.

June: Yeh, but I didn't even think there are orders to the people who program them about the seasons; like if you haven't seen them, they play them. Like whatever comes next.

Corie: We don't have Christmas when it's Christmas and stuff. Do you have that?

June: Oh, we have Christmas in June. I think that they have Christmas about every three months.

Ada: No, they don't.

June: They are always having it, that's why.

Ada: I've never seen Christmas.

June: Haven't you?

Ada: Well, normally it only happens once a year.

(Laughter)

(The Interview 6, 157-184)
The rules are different in the "second world" of the soaps. Program distributors (representatives of broadcasting as an institution) are, in the discourse of the fans, barely aware that they (the fans) exist. That "they" do publish a plot synopsis and announce the dropped year over television indicates a faint awareness of the existence of these fans, but the fact that the narrative structure presents other issues to the fans is foreign to these institutional representatives. This relationship is analogous to that described by Virginia Nightingale (1990) where the public statements of broadcasting representatives indicated that they were programming for women, but their actual programming choices indicated scant attention to women’s preferences. Soap opera programming may be one area where, even though women’s programming choices are not understood, they are grudgingly granted anyway. These are the gaps where feminine 'excesses' are allowed to seep through.

In addition to the content of these conversations about soap operas, there is also the matter of style. As Bakhtin has described it, carnivalesque forms are full of the "gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities." One aspect of this drollness in these soap opera conversations is the fact that plot absurdities are often recited with deadpan seriousness in the midst of other information. Such is the case in this example:

Corie: In Neighbours, they've got quite a few nondescript houses, haven't they?
...

Corie: I can't picture the houses, actually. Oh, you can picture the Robinsons' a bit, the kitchen.
June: That's the main house, isn't it? And the lounge.
Ada: I can also picture Kylie's house as well.
June: They've got those two lounges.
ME: What about the opening, you know, when they show all
the houses? Can you tell from the opening which one
is which?
Ada: I don't know which one's which. Oh yeh, I know that
the one with the thing out the front, with the
plumbing truck out the front is, with the Merc out the
front --
Mary: -- where Shane lives.
June: Is it? The other Merc? The Ramseys?
Ada: No, he's just a chauffeur. You know, Home James, that
company?
June: Has he still got that job?
Ada: No. He quit because he couldn't drive because of that
-- You know he killed that woman.
(Laughter)

(Interview 6, 3232-3276)

In this conversation it is the shift between the mundane and the
tragic, characteristic of soaps' plots and picked up in this
conversation about the plot, which provides the humor.

One of the things which makes it fun to discuss soaps characters
as if they were real is the shifts from the everyday to the absurd. It
is also the shift from soaps plot to actual events that provides part
of the tension and pleasure in these conversations. The distinctions
that one makes between soaps' story-telling and actual incidents are
sometimes funny in that there is a comparison implied by the fact that one has to clarify which is actual and which is fiction.

Corie: It's like, remember the Burnies'? The Burnies', you know they killed those five children? This is no soap: this is real life here!

(Laughter)

(Interview 6, 3336-3341)

The fragility of first- and second-world relationships is illustrated in the following quotation:

Ada: I don't know who that is.

Mary: Oh, he's a new guy.

Ada: But I've watched it.

Mary: He was at the wedding.

Ada: Whose wedding.

Mary: At Liz and Neal's.

Ada: I didn't go to Liz and Neal's wedding.

(Laughter)

Ada: I couldn't make it!

(Laughter)

Ada: I didn't watch it.

(Interview 6, 4398-4419)

It is sometimes the discursive fragility illustrated by the above interview dialogue which constitutes the implied statement in the practice of treating soaps characters and actions as if they were real. To many women real life or 'truth' can be just as absurd as soap opera
plots. The practice of treating these plots as if they were actual events points up the absurdity of those events.

From these types of comments about soap opera characters and plots one moves easily to a discussion of the absurdities of subordination -- that is, the absurdities that women encounter regularly. An example is the following discussion about the male ritual of watching the game (in this case Aussie rules football) with the boys:

Judith: I won’t believe it. They weren’t there sitting watching the football, were they? That’s different.

Rita: When they came home, he’d been out to another bloke’s place to sit and watch the football. Takes a little plate of goodies. When the game’s here -- the Eagles game’s here -- they watch the game. But every -- whenever it is -- when they are away. They go and watch it on television. And they take a plate. The wife makes the plate!

(Interview 4, 3334-3347)

The force of the social conventions is clear in this statement. It is the force of ideology at work. Women’s domestic responsibilities remain ideologically salient despite the counter discourse of the independent women. In this safe context, these women can acknowledge the force of the ideology of dependence and its manifestation in the family mystique with its invisible female laborers. According to Thomas Schatz, analysis of Hollywood genre films represent social problems which involve contradictions which can not be resolved. The working and reworking of the issues involved continues in
representative enactments of the genre because the problem is still salient. Shatz designates film genres like detective films, film noir, or gangster films as genres of order in which the return to social order is at issue. Other film genres like the screwball comedy or the musical are designated as genres of community. Soap operas seem to fit the type of analysis that Schatz suggests and the conversations among the fans support this notion. While on the one hand the soaps (and the fans) support the aspects of family living that give them comfort, the family rituals for example; on the other hand they question the notion of power within the family at every turn. While these soap opera fans continue to assume that they will live in families and continue to have romantic involvements, they also continue to parody the form as only those absorbed within the system are able to do. Thus a parody of a soap opera can become a parody of romantic notions of parenthood and the family at the same time, as is clear in the following example:

Ada: I’m naming my kids Beau and Hope.
(Laughter)
Ada: I’m not being stupid. I’m dead serious.
(Laughter)
Ada: I don’t carry around pictures in my wallet for nothing. I love them. Unreal.
Mary: Have you got their picture in there? Can I see it?
(Ada shows picture)
Mary: I think that’s great.
(Laughter)

(Interview 6, 4489-4509)
As consumers of soap operas and the products they advertise, women do participate in the process of consumption, but the extent to which women can be said to be the passive objects or "victims" of dominant discursive practices because they watch and enjoy soap operas may be limited by the women's use of these same cultural forms to affirm their own positions of subjectivity in a women's discursive tradition. Soap companies may profit financially, but from the perspective of women viewers the transaction is not completely one-sided. Soap opera fanship exists at the intersection of a number of cultural practices and can be used for various ends. Perhaps the pleasures afforded some women by the soaps is much less perverse and/or passive than we have been led to believe. Sometimes pleasure involves the resistance of the control of dominant discursive practices through the circumvention of established rules in narrative, discursive and social contexts. This breaking of the rules is a source of pleasure, and the act of taking that pleasure entails defiance of dominant reading practices which attempt to shape the construction of meaning in our culture. Because the hierarchy of dominant values is either ignored or parodied in some of the reading practices around soaps, these practices may also open the way for new ways of thinking about culture from the position of the subordinate and for an affirmation of subjecthood different from that articulated in dominant discourses.
Notes for Chapter 4

1 Recent studies in feminist psychology conclude that pre-teenage girls have a clear notion of what their values are while 16 year olds are confused and appear not to know what they knew at age 11. (Gilligan, forthcoming). I would suggest that the discursive contradictions that teenage girls face during this period can contribute to this confusion.

2 Cowie and Lees describe similar instabilities in terms of sexual discourse:

But what of the girls? In what ways is this split between decency and sexuality effected? It is certainly not a question of a straightforward fall from grace by the act of intercourse. Any girl (except perhaps middle class girls who may have some protection by their class position) is always available to the designation slag in any number of ways. Appearance is crucial: by wearing too much make-up (how do you know how much is too much?) by having your slit skirt too slit; by not combing your hair; wearing jeans to dances or high heels to school; having your trousers too tight or tops too low ...

In other words a vast range of activities and ways of appearing are ‘sexualized’ and so deemed ‘bad’. It is clearly a very narrow tightrope to walk to achieve sexual attractiveness without the taint of sexuality. (20) (Cowie and Lees’ emphasis)
V.

Chapter 5

Soaps Fanhood: A Position in Discourse
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Soaps Fanhood: A Position in Discourse

At this point, I would like to return to the issues which I outlined earlier relating to the problem of pleasure, or, to be more specific, the problem of a certain type of pleasure for women. The issue is problematic on several levels. For example, when Ien Ang (1985a) published an advertisement in a Dutch women's magazine to recruit participants for her study on Dallas fans she began with the wording:

I like watching the TV serial Dallas, but often get odd reactions to it ... (1)

Many of her respondents interpreted her inquiry to be about social reactions to their soap opera viewing and her respondents negotiated their positions as soap opera watchers in relation to social criticism of the genre. Thus one level on which women perceive their choice of pleasures is that of going against the popular aesthetic discourse about what is good to watch and what is not. Ang attributes the prevalence of this point of view to the mass culture theories of the Frankfurt school.

As Ang and others have pointed out, the application of this theory is much harder on the feminine genres -- usually specified as soap operas, romance novels, and women's melodramatic film. Feminists have also criticized these forms, in particular soap operas, because as Charlotte Brunsdon summarizes the position they are seen as "offering stereotypical and unrealistic images of women which confirm us in our subordination" (Brunsdon, 1987, 147-8). Brunsdon suggests that the above statement comes from a realist argument and that when people use
it they argue basically for their own version of realism. Furthermore, realism, in terms of soap operas especially, is not a simple concept. In her view soaps contain at least two kinds of realism, external or that which relates to the world as we (women) know it, its everydayness, and internal realism which is how we understand the dynamics of a soap opera, by knowing its characters and history -- that is from watching it.

Using the example on *Brookside* of Sheila Graham's being involved in a silk screening collective, Brunsdon points out the difficulty of arbitrating the generic conventions of the soap opera with "progressive" images of women. The position which Brunsdon is arguing against is similar to the one made about television in general -- that it *should* offer more "progressive" images of women. When we talk about realism in this sense, we are really talking about audiences -- audiences which are constructed, usually to meet institutional requirements. In fact, in countries where commercial television exists, the construction of audiences is what the television industry hinges upon.

John Hartley, in an article entitled "Invisible Fictions: Television Audiences, Paedocracy, Pleasure" (1987) has characterized the television audience as an invisible fiction. In Hartley's view audiences are discursively constructed by various institutions: the television industry, legal and political regulatory bodies, and critical agencies of various sorts, the least of which, he argues, is self-constructed audience or pressure groups. Similarly, Robert Allen, in *Speaking of Soap Operas* (1985), discusses the soap opera and its audiences in terms of the position of both in sociological, aesthetic,
and broadcast discourses and points out the absence of the discourse of the soap opera audience itself. Hartley maintains that audiences can be seen discursively as either "theoretical" or "actual." The discursively theoretical audience, for example, is described by John Ellis in *Visible Fictions* (1982). According to Ellis:

The viewer is constituted as a normal citizen. This is the position constructed for the TV viewer by the processes of broadcast TV; many viewers occupy the very position which TV addresses, even if they would never consider themselves to be such a strange being as a normal citizen. (169: In Hartley 125)

In *The 'Nationwide' Audience* (1980) David Morley, on the other hand, describes an "actual" audience which exists as an independent entity, apart from its television watching activity. Empirical research, as Hartley points out, "is based on the presumption that audiences are not merely the product of research into them, but exist prior to, apart from and beyond the activities of both television and television research" (126). Hartley argues, however, that popular television is primarily organized around pleasure and that such organization unifies the audience as well as attempts to control it. According to Hartley:

What this means in practice is that broadcasters tend not to insist on allegiances and identities that might be constructed on other sites but, on the contrary, to persuade audiences to abandon any such allegiances and identities especially those of class (rendered as 'demographics' in television, of course), ethnicity and gender. Other 'variables,' like region, age, education, family structure, even nation itself, may be
significant, but the whole point of popular television is to cut across such divisions and to reconstitute the people involved into one unified constituency: the audience. (128)

Morley (1980), argues that:

[...] individuals in different positions in the social formation defined according to structures of class, race or sex, for example, will tend to inhabit or have at their disposal different codes and subcultures. Thus social position sets parameters to the range of potential readings by structuring access to different codes. (107)

These quotations exemplify the difference between theoretical audience analysis and empirical or research-based audience analysis—both, in this case, academic discourses. Hartley views the television audience as an invisible fiction with no "real life" corollary. Nevertheless, various groups continue to struggle for control of the meaning of the audience and of meaning for that audience.

Broadcasters, according to Hartley, construct television audiences as a paedocracy or an "audience imagined as having childlike qualities and attributes" (127) since, he says:

[...] The interests of audiences and television are in principle opposed. Television as an industry needs regimented, docile, eager audiences, willing to recognize what they like in what they get; and audiences, for their part, need a relationship with television in order to exist at all as audiences, but that relationship is not organized, nor even represented very directly, in the institution. Their interests are discernible only as random; childish, unfocused desires for excess,
transgression, novelty, difference; for play, escape from categorization.\ldots\) (134)

Television, he posits, "is a system for imagining the unimaginable; for controlling the uncontrollable." (134) Morley's (1983) account designates the struggle to the moment of audienceness--to the activity of getting meaning. For Hartley, any concept of meaning is in the process of the construction of the discourse. For Morley, on the other hand, audience discourse is an issue only insofar as it affects the construction of codes by which actual audiences deal with a television product. Meaning implies a system of reasoning and logic which is inherently opposed to Hartley's paedocratic regimes of pleasure where meaning lies only in excess.

In his conceptualization of the television audience as paedocratic and encountered only as representation, Hartley cites two other ways in which the television audience is discursively constructed: it is both "orientalised" and "tribalized." Since TV audiences are rarely self-represented, they are in most cases absent which makes them subject to what Edward Said has called "orientalism," that is "disorganized communities which have never developed or won adequate means of self-representation, and which exist almost wholly within the imagination and rhetoric of those who speak in their behalf..." (in Hartley: 125). Television audiences in this view are seen as "other" in the sense that they don't represent themselves. They are also seen, according to Hartley, as preliterate, existing in tribal groups defined and governed by children (129). The image is of orality as pre-literacy. The watching of television as a family event described in Hartley's article in a quotation from a government-sponsored inquiry into British
television (1977) is an example of
this discourse:

[...] people watch and listen in the family circle, in their
homes, so that violations of the taboos of language and behavior,
which exist in every society, are witnessed by the whole family --
parents, children and grandparents -- in each other's presence.
These violations are more deeply embarrassing and upsetting than
if they had occurred in the privacy of a book, or in a club,
cinema or theatre. (In Hartley: 129)

Such a conception of the audience weighs television with the
responsibility to be morally uplifting--like a parent. Often where
there is a conceptualization of the television audience spoken of as a
unified group -- whether referred to as an invisible fiction, a
discursive construct, or as an "actual" audience -- soap opera
audiences are often omitted from the equation altogether. Daytime
soap opera audiences in the United States do not fall into the notion
of the family totem described in Hartley's example and, in Australia,
the daytime soaps are taken off the air during holidays when school
children are home, presumably to protect the children.

U.S. daytime soaps watching -- whether in the United States or
other countries -- has been seen in institutional discourses as guilty
pleasure, an excess tolerated but not talked about. The fact that
young women and young men watch them together on college campuses and
that boys and girls talk about them in mixed company is a relatively
recent phenomenon. What used to be considered guilty pleasures are now
somewhat legitimized. Academics write scholarly books on soaps, and
professors talk about them in classes.
While soaps in other English-speaking countries have been cleaned up, American daytime soaps and the "authentic" nighttime soaps like *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Knots' Landing* or *Falcon Crest* continue to cater to what Hartley's "parental" institutional discourse on audiences would consider prurient. Hartley's view is that, "broadcasters paedocratize audiences in the name of pleasure. They appeal to the playful, imaginative, fantasy, irresponsible aspects of adult behavior. They seek the common personal ground that unites diverse and often directly antagonistic groupings among a given population" (128). However, audience pleasures for daytime soap watchers are seldom discursively characterized as playful, imaginative fantasy, but rather as illicit pleasures, excessive not by virtue of their child-likeness but by virtue of their potential power, a power tinged with sexual overtones, hence their power to become "uncontrollable" or "unimaginable."

The struggle for control of the institutional construction of women as audience is also a concern for feminist television critics. Virginia Nightingale ("Women as Audiences") and Lisa Lewis ("Consumer Girl Culture ...") relate women's construction as audience to shopping culture and the development of television as a display window for both consumer goods and style. Nightingale concentrates on the construction of "woman as mum" and argues that broadcasters simply give lip service to the idea that they appeal to women on any other level than their existence as consumers. Lewis discusses the way that the American cable channel MTV (Music Television) addresses teenage girls in their capacity as consumers. In this chapter, I would like to look at both how soap opera audiences are addressed and how they construct themselves.
A major issue in terms of soap opera fanship is the concept of addiction. Addiction in popular discourse about soaps seems to indicate a lack of control. It implies that people are sucked in and once enthralled perhaps can never return to the world of the "normal citizen" where narratives have endings and life is stable. A fan puts the idea this way:

ME: Why do people say 'addicting.'

Ellen: Because it is. It's like a pleasure, I think -- a soap. It's like chocolates or something. It's like a treat. It's like a bowl of corn flakes. It's something really nice. It's not necessarily terribly good for you. It's easy spoon feeding. It doesn't demand very much of you. You enjoy it. On a certain level, it raises issues a little bit. You enjoy the jokes and the gossip and the fun.

ME: The idea of addiction then has that little twist that it's somehow not good for you.

Ellen: The only bad thing about it is that kind of moral censure that you get for watching them. And because you watch them rather than doing virtuous things, like listening to classical music or educating yourself.

(Interview 2, 447-470)

The idea of addiction in the manner this fan describes, is certainly what broadcasters want -- committed fans who tune in regularly, "who want what they get." But this fan is speaking in the abstract. When asked about her own addiction, a different perspective emerges.
ME: Would you call yourself an addict?

Ellen: No, I wouldn't. No, because I don't watch it much anymore.

ME: But when you did?

Ellen: When I did watch, I'd just say I watch Coronation Street -- which means, I suppose, that you watch it on Mondays and you watch it on Wednesdays.

ME: Because it's only on two days a week.

Ellen: And you don't ring your friends up when you know that their soap is on. Like what Richard was saying. When you're going out canvassing or you're going out door-knocking, people are always in [at the time the soaps are on], but they don't want to talk to you.

(Interview 2, 1296-1317)

The above comment shows a certain reluctance to be classified in the way she had previously described. However, further elaboration on the nature of fanship brings out less ambivalence.

ME: Is it mostly women who watch, or what?

Ellen: Oh, yes, I would think so -- I think its probably mostly women who would say, 'Yes, I'm a Coronation Street fan.' But I should think there's a high proportion of men who watch it because the women in the house are watching it. It's like Colin [her husband] would watch it because I was watching it because you are in the same room.

ME: It's early --
Ellen: They are watching it, they are equally involved in the plots, probably, but um -- perhaps they'd never admit to the same kind of sympathetic --

ME: What do you mean, sympathetic?

Ellen: Well, because of this about soaps being despised, generally. It's not something that you admit to watching much of. In England there is a certain kind of pride. Yes, I mean it is despised, but then everyone watches it, and everyone has a reason for why they watch it, and so it can also be fashionable for you to be a fan of Coronation Street.

(Interview 2, 246-279)

Several characteristics about the code of soap opera fandom (in Britain specifically, but the same seems true in the U.S. and Australia) emerge in these passages. Even though Coronation Street is relatively high in the soaps hierarchy, it seems to be linked closely with the trashy reputation enjoyed by soaps in general. In this discourse of fandom, soap operas are not good for you, but you can enjoy them anyway because you enjoy the jokes, gossip and fun. In addition they "raise issues" in a somewhat qualified way, i.e. they do have some redeeming social value. In some cases it may even be fashionable to enter the public discourse on soap opera. What seems to cause the displeasure in soaps watching is simply the moral censure that comes from watching soaps, or perhaps any kind of television, a censure that does not come from within the fandom network but from without. As Ellen elaborates further:
Ellen: The gravest thing in Britain is watching telly during the day. That’s really bad. I mean you might admit to watching soaps in the evening, but if you sit around watching them during the day, like we are at the moment, that’s really wasting your life.

(Interview 2, 280-289)

In public discourse then daytime television is the ghetto of bad television. This notion appears to coincide with the idea that women (presumed home during the day) should be kept busy. This might be called the ideology of busyness and stems from other general categories of control over women through bodily restrictions of various kinds. Social expectations and restrictions can demand unending hand sewing or elaborate food preparation or in other ways organize every waking moment in a women’s life, all of which keeps women in a contained space, in most cases in the home (Lesko). To watch television during the day means one is not getting one’s work done. One is not kept busy.

Leisure time for women is always problematic because of the expectation that they are domestic laborers in the home whether or not they work outside of the home. Clear lines between work and leisure are usually drawn with more difficulty by women than by men. For example, a fan defends her mother’s television practices in relation to the ideology of busyness in the following way:

Judith: I might tell you that Mum in her life has been a most active -- very active person, -- when you were as old as I am, you never watched anything like that in the
day. You were out there chopping wood, doing the
garden, and Mum will be 80 next year, so it's only now
that she's really starting to watch quite a lot.

(Interview 4, 2254-2262)

Judith's mother is present at this interview, hence Judith addresses
both her mother and the others present in the group in order to defend
her mother's right not to be busy. The earlier interview with Ellen
expresses the same idea but from an upper middle class point of view.
She says, "... because you watch rather than doing virtuous things,
like listening to classical music or educating yourself." In either
case one is not staying busy in the prescribed manner.

At issue here is not only what one does with one's time but also
what one does with one's body. When a woman deviates from norms of any
type, sexual deviance is imputed to her. (Lesko) As Mary Douglas notes
in her discussion of matter, matter out of place, is equal to dirt.
Women who leave their place, i.e. the position of having their lives
laid down for them, of being deferential -- are perceived as dirty, and
their uncleanness is often spoken of in terms of sexual pollution
(Lesko). This discourse of sexual pollution is a part of the discourse
which functions to control women and which, in fact, attempts to
control anything which threatens dominant hegemony. Hartley
(1984a) points out that television itself is a somewhat dirty category
in terms of the unified categories preferred by dominant culture. More
than just unruly, soap operas are thought to be sexually deviant.
According to one content analysis study (Greenberg and D'Alessio) done
in 1985 which counted the incidences of sex on several American daytime
soap operas, all of the sexual incidents listed were talked about
rather, than shown (a fact present in the tabulated statistics but not commented upon in the text of the article). Sex on the soaps, although it is presumed to be happening, is simply not shown. In fact, among regular fans, there seem to be constant disputes concerning whether or not a sexual act has actually taken place. Take, for example, the following conversation:

Corie: How about on her 18th when they made love. That was the best.
June: They did not.
Corie: They did make love.
June: No, her dad walked in.
Corie: Yeh, but after they’d made love.
Mary: No.

(Laughter)
Ada: It was after, wasn’t it?
Mary: No, it was before.
ME: I didn’t see that.
Corie: Cuz, I’ve seen so many reruns of it, you know how she remembers it? And they are honestly making love. I can guarantee you.
Ada: That must have been another time.
Mary: No, they only did it just before her dad walked in.
Ada: You know, Hope’s still a virgin.
Mary: No, she’s not.
June: She is, she is!

(Interview 6, 2038-2106)
As is evident from the quotation, these fans are having fun with the issue, in fact parading the assumption that sex is everywhere on the soaps, but the argument that the American daytime soaps contain a large amount of explicit sex is spurious. However the "to have and to hold" discourse is certainly present. Issues relating to the control of sexuality seem to be consistently made fun of by the fans I talked to, particularly the teenaged fans.

In any case, the discourse that daytime soaps and, by extention, their fans, are sexually deviant persists, which leads to some interesting speculation when we consider the fact that many daytime soap operas are produced not by the networks (Although some are. See Cantor and Pingree for lists of which are and which aren't. Days of Our Lives is a co-production.) but by advertising agencies employed by conglomerates which own food and/or household cleaning companies. If, as Hartley maintains in "Encouraging Signs" (1984a):

[...] the model of television suggests that discourse is socially produced and disciplined in ways that our sentimental attachment to the individualism of speaking only masks. Speech too is a power relation, but we need to be reminded of that fact by the "poor relation" whose productive power is greater than that of speech but whose reputation has been "scandalized" by segments of the very power bloc that operates it. Could it be that this behavior itself signifies that television is beyond the control of its controllers, that its potential for socialized sense-making is being resisted because television is not a "boob-tube," "goggle box," or any other dangerous, silly, or contemptible thing, but a
valuable weapon that is currently in the hands of those who
despise but must use it in the struggle to maintain cultural
supremacy? (139)
One may well ask: Who is in control?
That things occasionally slip out of control is acknowledged by
the fans' who refer to those in control as "they" in a reversal of the
"us:them" binary opposition which television news analysts often use.
In news analysis, producers and audience are usually constructed as
"us". A conversation among adult Australian fans illustrates an
awareness of the producers in talking about the soap and the (at least
perceived) powers of the fans to attribute meanings in this free-
flowing atmosphere. At issue here is the meaning of Julie's and Doug's
departure from the program.

Judith: Well, she's about to depart the show, isn't she? She
and Doug.

Vicki: Julie?

Doris: She and Doug got sacked.

Vicki: Oh, are they going to --? Oh.

Judith: I don't know as they got sacked. I think they sort of
-- I read about --

Vicki: Somebody said they got too old for the parts or
something.

Sally: Is that why Doug's had a heart attack, to get him out
of it?

Judith: They just exhausted them. Everybody was up in arms
when they split up and divorced, and they wanted them
to get back together, so they were the happily married
couple and nobody --
(Laughter.)

Doris: Boring!
Judith: Yes, but -- So, they've decided to --
Sally: To be interesting, we have to have a few marital
troubles.
(Laughter.)

Jenny: But they're really the heart of the story, aren't
they?
Doris: Well, no. They've decided to concentrate on the
younger people now.
Jenny: I think it might give a bit of appeal, then, really.
Sally: I think it will too.

(Interview 4, 593-650)

The reason for Doug's heart attack in this example is attributed not to
what happens in the context of the story but to what happens either in
the producers' thinking about the audience appeal of the show or to the
idea that having Julie and Doug remarry was a mistake.

Audience pressure on the producers is apparently referred to when
Judith says, "Everybody was up in arms...." The belief, which is
substantiated in some cases, that the audience influences the plot is
yet another influence on soaps narratives. It also seems to be a
characteristic of subordinated groups that belief in stable, rule-
governed behavior is not strong because the rules are so often violated
for nondominant groups. The contradictions in the lives of women are
perhaps similar to the contradictions in the construction (rather than
the content) of soaps plots. Morality and marital stability also are at issue here. Marital stability is rule-governed behavior. The constant breaking of these rules in the American daytime soaps, it seems, is one of the reasons soaps are seen as such a 'problem' in dominant discourse.

The use of the term "they" seems to be a recognition or acknowledgement of the continuous presence of an outside discourse or discourses. In soap opera there seems to be more space for the contestation of discourses. As specific soap operas take on more realistic characteristics they become less open to a discursive position that places the fans in a position of power, that is, in a position to arbitrate the discourses present. For example, *Sons and Daughters* was taken off of the air in August, 1987, after a six-year run and replaced by *Neighbours*, a different (and cleaner) kind of soap and one which some fans felt to be more "realistic," more down-to-earth, quieter, less likely to take in all the highs and lows of emotional possibilities in rapid succession or to display virtue and non-virtue with simplicity. In other words, *Neighbours* is less melodramatic than *Sons and Daughters* and therefore less controversial and more respectable in the public hierarchy of soap operas.

The production and content differences between more and less "realistic" soap operas also mean that there are some differences in the soaps knowledge required for each. For example, the "nicer" (or cleaner) a soap is, the less likely, it appears, that there will be either a villain or a villainess who represents "pure" evil -- the villain we can "love to hate." In general the characters become more "rounded," more like us and sometimes, it appears from those interview
conversations, less distant and less fun. Pleasure begins to hinge on fewer characters, and we become fans of Kylie Minogue or Peter O'Brien (the actors themselves) rather than Neighbours or Days of Our Lives.

The following interview quotation seems to support that claim.

**ME:** But now Neighbours, -- do you think it's less risque?

**Ada:** Yeh, I think it's less. I think it's a lot less.

**Corie:** But it's also families, you know, like old people, young people.

**Ada:** Yeh, it might change.

**Corie:** When the ratings get down, they try and get more sensationalized.

**Ada:** I mean nothing much happens. There's a marriage and birth and a car accident and some guy getting a job in a pub, I mean it's not very --

**Corie:** But the idea keeping a lot of people watching it is Charlene and Scott, I reckon.

(Interview 6, 2624-2647)

The closer the show comes to a literate formula, the more we seem to relate to it in the way that literate ways of thinking lead us: the more, in this case, we think in terms of individuals or couples than groups and the more we begin to think of actors as embodiments of ourselves. The soaps audiences I have looked at seem to evaluate characters both as constructs and as actors who are subject to the various constraints of their trade and their genre, rather than "identify" with a designated hero or heroine as one is thought to do in most literate narratives.

Soaps appear to have little unity. There are too many characters
and too many plots to give a unified account of, for example, what the soap is about in straightforward, linear terms. This is so much the case that sometimes, according to some fans, the soaps have to be brought back into line. This can be perceived by the audience as a mistake: perhaps the producers didn’t realize how popular a person was. Then again, perhaps the show just got away from the writers and acquired a life of its own.

The problem that "they" have in keeping all of the elements of the show under control is evident, according to these older teenage fans, even with the slick soaps (i.e. high production values and elaborate sets) like the American evening soaps.

Mary: Remember, they did that with the year, when the whole past year was a dream. I think that’s unparalleled, and to have a whole year of a soap of someone’s dream -- in *Dallas*.

Corie: It was pretty pathetic. I reckon it was because they stuffed up the story line.

Mary: Yeh, but that was such a blow, a case of the script not being written ahead, wasn’t it?

Corie: Yeh, it was just because they wanted to get Bobby back into the show. It was such a disgrace. I don’t reckon it was revolutionary: I reckon it was disgusting.

*Interview 6, 4542-4584*

Since soaps are written as they go along and are sometimes subject to the influence of audience pressures or what is going on in other soaps, these viewers may not be far wrong. Soaps do have a tendency to become
undisciplined or uncontrolled. In the case of Dallas which is produced in seasonal blocks rather than a few weeks ahead like the American daytime soaps, a major regrouping would have to fall between seasons as it did in the case of the event discussed above when Bobby Ewing was killed off one season and brought back in a later season.

Soaps themselves, then, are sometimes matter out of place, but so are soaps audiences. Soaps audiences are discursively constructed not only as female but also as housewives. As I have pointed out in Chapter One, housewives serve as invisible cement for the labor market. Housewives as audiences are just as invisible, confined ideologically to the domestic sphere while their male counterparts operate in public (or prime time). Let us look then at binary oppositions suggested by the conception of males and females as opposites. (These suggested by Carey Nelson):

male:female
dominant:submissive
active:passive
order:chaos
patriarchial:matriarchical
presence:absence
validated:excluded
success:failure
superior:inferior
primary:secondary
independent:dependent

Although soap operas, the texts, fall on the female side of the oppositions -- that is their place in discourse when compared with
texts that measure up (that is realist texts), from the point of view of any sort of association with the female characters in soaps, soaps audiences would find themselves on the male side of the equation. Women within the soaps are dominant, active, present, validated, successful, primary and the like. Although it is another dirty category, this positioning speaks, I think, a discourse of potential empowerment. It is this discourse which is activated when fans discuss addiction to soap opera among each other. As these fans remark:

Vicki: I love every moment of it.

(Laughter.)

Sally: It's a soapie. Lets face it. It must be like smoking and drinking. You know you shouldn't, but you do it.

(Interview 4, 337-342)

or the following:

Judith: You feel a bit foolish to say that you watched it. I used to feel like that but I don't any more. I think, well, so what?

(Interview 4, 30-33)

To take the discourse of empowerment a step further other fans responded thus:

June: Do you think though, if they didn't have the soaps, that people would go and do other things more constructive with their time?

Corie: What sort of people?

Ada: What's more constructive than watching the soaps?

(Laughter.)

(Interview 6, 2425-2435)
VI

Chapter 6

Conclusion:

The Politics of Interpretation
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Although it is obvious, it perhaps bears repeating that the soap opera is the quintessential version of the privatization of women's status, of energies dissipated in attempting to manipulate interpersonal relationships, of individualized response to problems that require collective effort. -- Thelma McCormack, "Male Conceptions of Female Audiences: The Case of Soap Operas" Mass Communication Yearbook, 1983: 281-2.

In McCormack's view the privatization of women is the distinguishing feature of patriarchal societies and the dependency for women that such privatization requires is embedded in the soaps in the form of "formula softcore pornography" (276). I have argued that women can understand the need for the privatization of women within patriarchy but reject the concept by refusing to be silenced, by continuing to speak and gossip about the absurdities of their subordination and by their discursive treatment of soap opera characters. Rather than unconsciously identifying with these characters, some people give them a life of their own -- that is, accept and talk about them as one would a friend, an act, it seems, of parodic pleasure.

In Chapter One, I suggest that orality and literacy have radically different ways of valuing aesthetic products. In literate culture each product is individuated, stands on its own. In the case of orality relationships with other people are valued in art as well as life. Over and over, we are told of the power that soap opera has to make us want to return again and again to a world where people and relationships seem valued despite all else.

The power of negative discourses about soap opera is illustrated by what appears to be universal knowledge on the part of fans that watching soaps is either bad or bad for you -- probably both. Closer
examination, however, may lead us to believe the opposite. The negotiations which take place with a text of this sort take place not only within and among institutions, texts or audiences but also in relation to social codes and conventions which arise out of various discourses. In this work, I have dealt primarily with two types of discourse, that involving the audience and that of some of the social relations surrounding women's position in the patriarchal family. In classical Hollywood narratives, when female sexuality is "contained," this containment is often done by placing the female character in a patriarchal marriage. To the casual observer of soap opera, it may appear that soap operas contain female characters in the same way. However, as I have pointed out earlier, this is not the case. Soaps continually problematize not only marriage but also the larger issue of kinship systems; and soaps, since they never end, seldom contain anyone. Characters are not even contained in death, since characters regularly return after they have been killed off. It may also appear to the casual observer, that soap operas create subject positions in the same way that film melodramas seem to create subject positions. However, as we have seen in the present work, it is soap opera fans who often work on the text, rather than have the text work on them. A number of kinds of pleasures which fans indulge in have been elaborated earlier, but a particular kind of pleasure for fans is negotiated with other fans in relation to prevailing ideological positions contained within cultural and social discourses.

In a general sense, ideology is knowledge assumed to be natural, the social origins of which have been suppressed. More specifically ideology is the means used by the ruling systems of power to maintain
social supremacy. Ideology manifests itself through cultural myths which are thought of by most people within the culture as 'common sense knowledge.' These cultural myths are encoded in the texts of a culture and heavily influence the way we conceive of ourselves and understand our world. This can occur through the process of interpellation in which the viewer is "hailed" by a particular work. If the viewer responds to the work either positively or negatively then that person is constructed as a subject, that is, the work means something to that individual. In this interdiscursive space a common ground can sometimes be found wherein groups in society adopt certain cultural artifacts (films, music, television shows) to use as their own. If the response to a particular work is positive then the audience either constructs something useful from the work and/or negotiates a reading.

If we look at various conceptions of audiences as products of the discourses of institutions which have some stake in defining audiences (broadcasters, advertisers, governments) and also as the products of social discourses which arbitrate various positions within social constructs relative to power (critical discourses for example), we can see that the conception of the audience is contested. Addiction is a part of the imagined code of soap opera fanship, an audience imagined, like television itself, as matter out of place. Although, as I have pointed out, explicit sex on the soaps is rare. The structuring of soaps as sexually polluted is consistent with other discourses around female sexuality and control of the body. The dichotomy of mind and body permeates the discourse on the imagined soap opera fan. The presence of the female body and its perverse pleasures functions as an
afront, a contradiction in a discourse that is intolerant of contradictions and therefore must work to conceal them. Lea Melandri describes the concealment of woman's body and woman's labor in a similar relationship to the one I have posited:

> [the] oppositions of mind to body, of rationality to matter, originate in a twofold concealment: of woman's body and of labor power. Chronologically, however, even prior to the commodity and the labor power that has produced it, the matter which was negated in its concreteness and particularly, in its 'relative plural form,' is the woman's body. (27 in de Lauretis 177)

In practice, women and girls often talk to each other about soap operas in ways that both stylistically and conceptually question patriarchal values and social and cultural positions. Examples from this study show the use of irony, parody, laughter, and tongue-in-cheek humor to describe both the soap opera content and the discursively constructed imagined audience. Other examples point to the boundary constructing aspect of soap opera fanhood. Also seen in these recorded conversations are the ways that fans deconstruct the narrative which indicates a knowledge of soap opera constructedness. These conversations show how fans slip between the metadiscourse of an understanding of the two worlds of soap opera construction, the constraints of actual production issues and the fantasy world of the soap opera itself, and the robust pleasure of acting like these characters are a part of our world. As fans play in this way with the now demystified text we are able to distinguish bonding behavior among these women which seems to be a way of connecting with other women rather than a way of keeping women isolated in their homes. Perhaps
women do buy the products advertised during the soaps programming flow, but in all of these interviews no one bothered to mention it. This is not to say that women do not consume household products but that the more important question is whether they buy the ideological assumptions and restrictions for women perpetuated along with the ideology of consumption embedded in both soap opera and television. The question may be impossible to answer in an absolute way. Clearly there are indications in these interviews that, at times, these fans have chosen to use this particular aspect of consumption to make fun of subordination and to have fun with the notions involved, rather than to revere them or to follow them blindly. Textual and other representational systems in this case are intersected by discursive strategies incompatable with dominant hegemony. Although the problems of women in the home are obvious to women who work in the home (whether or not they also engage in paid work), the discourse of soap opera fanship imposed from the outside assumes that the pleasures offered by soap opera are accepted by women in the home as some sort of 'payment' made off the books for dishonest and therefore hidden labor as opposed to the 'honest' labor done by the real laborers, the men.

The issues discussed in this work manifest themselves in discourse, and discursive changes can suggest the possibility of ideological shifts. For example if the myth of sexual pollution were shifted to the myth of sexual power, it would be possible to posit another discursive position, that of soap opera fan empowered by that position. It is possible here to shift the discourse concerning soap opera audiences to one in which soap opera fanship is not only repositioned but also used to comment on the narrative and discursive
containment of female sexuality in general. In the cultures discussed in this study, all women are controlled in some way by the discursive constructions dealing with romance, dependence, the family and sexuality. Representational systems also intersect significantly with these discourses. However, women also negotiate their positions in society in a number of ways. One of these ways is by relating to other women in the context of oral networks. Networks based on orality seem to offer people in socially subordinated roles significant spaces in which to construct subject positions for themselves. Informal oral networks usually have no official rules and develop behavior based on consensus. Although networks of soap opera fans do not all operate in the same manner, they seem to perform a similar function, providing a space for women to discuss soap opera on their own terms.

Adult soap opera networks often seem to be composed of a few very close friends or relatives who "keep up" for each other. Gatherings of these groups involve telling stories from their lives often brought to mind by events on soap operas which happened in parallel time to their remembered life histories. The teenagers in the groups I studied talked casually with "hundreds" (they claimed) of their friends about soap operas but still seemed to have particular friends who could be relied on to keep them up with their soap (or soaps). Older teenagers in these groups also engaged in imitation of soap opera characters' voices and actions and played word games involving either other fans and/or non-fans. They seemed quite happy to have other people know about their fanhood and, in fact, sometimes went to great lengths to boast about it; whereas adults, particularly professional women, were often reluctant to let other than a few close friends know that they
were soap opera fans. Younger teenagers tended to be quite analytical in their discussions about soap operas, analyzing characters and plots with an awareness of the constructive possibilities available within the scope of soap opera conventions. These younger teenagers were the most analytic of all of the groups. They seemed to enjoy the working through of structural possibilities in an almost literate way while the older teenagers I looked at seemed happiest when they were involved in broad parodies and imitation.

The conversations I recorded, in addition to the general characteristics listed above showed a great deal of contextual pleasure and a large number of incidences of laughter. The laughter I have characterized as both active, or related to women’s oral culture, or what I call reactive, that is responding to ideologies and discursive positions related to issues of social control. The analysis of laughter has been productive in relation to testing my hypothesis that soap opera networks contain a significant amount of what I call feminine discourse. Feminine discourse because of its relationship to the acknowledgment of subordination means that women and/or girls can speak to each other in the process of deconstructing hegemonic ideology which serves to keep women subordinated by naturalizing their position of powerlessness within social structures. Thus soap opera networks seem to provide women with a discursive space for their own signifying practice.

Many women have taken as cultural capital, then, a devalued form, television soap opera, and defiantly posed it in against ‘significant’ works in dominant culture. They have insisted on their right to choose and on a loyalty to certain feminine generic forms. Their decision to
watch soap opera and talk about it in the way that soap opera fans talk about their soaps gives them a signifying practice in contradiction to the practices supported by hegemonic notions of aesthetics. I characterize this cultural practice as a defiant and resistive act.

In this study I have tried to distinguish a type of discourse and using empirical means I have looked closely at some soap opera fans to determine if this type of discourse exists among them and what form it takes. I have also tried to provide an interpretation of how hegemonic ideological positioning works discursively within representational systems to stigmatize an audience and how that audience, in this case, continues to function. This study illustrates some aspects of the nature of social contradictions particularly in relation to the concepts of public and private ('legitimate' and 'perverse'). The expanded and public discourse of newspaper and other popular criticism of soap opera opposes women's more private networks, and within these private contextual spaces, safe from the stigma imposed by dominant discourse, women, despite the pressures of hegemonic characterizations, confront subordination in their own way.

The site of struggle in this case is not only highly contested but it marks what is at the crux of discursive suppression based on gender. The linking of soap opera as a genre to sexuality takes it out of the realm of logic and places it in the emotional register where it is more likely to be perceived as out of control or uncontained, as matter out of place. Despite this, younger fans seem to have succeeded in moving the discourse to other areas, like a clear analysis of the text's constructed elements or general rebellion against adults, parents and authority, and therefore have become more comfortable with making their
soap opera fanship public. The restrictions implied by the discursive idea of sexual pollution, social ostersization and the like, are not as likely to be a threat if the structure of the discourse is brought out into the open which I have attempted to do here by analyzing one site of discursive struggle.

Future studies should, as I hope this one has, question the research paradigms available and the ways that what 'counts' as knowledge is accepted, rejected or modified to fit the needs of the ideological systems involved. This study has been conducted from a culturalist, feminist perspective. The cultural studies part of the equation requires that the data be interpreted in light of its possible meaning in the social, cultural and historical contexts in which it exists. The feminist perspective may be inherent in the culturalist approach, but I use the word feminist to indicate a primary interest in patriarchal power relationships as they affect both women and girls and discursive constructions of femininity. It is only recently that feminists have had their research concerns legitimated within research paradigms. Cultural studies has provided a forum, testing ground, and interpretive community in which these socially based theories can be tested. Cultural studies research has taken on many of the concerns of feminist research, a number of which I have suggested below.

Although ethnographic interviews have been used in a number of studies involving television audiences, no systematic method of collecting and analyzing these data has been established in the field of communication. Studies using conversational analysis of interview data in media sociology often are considered to be the first stage of
research in a hierarchy that goes from exploratory to descriptive to explanatory. Exploratory research is open-ended and elicits general themes which are later more precisely studied in descriptive studies using larger samples and quantifiable measurements. Later explanatory research (considered the most scientific and therefore the most valuable) looks for relationships between variables. Most academic research in broadcasting in the United States has used this sociological model. Anthropologists, some sociologists and British culturalists, however, have accepted qualitative or naturalistic research accompanied by interpretation as an equally valid and/or superior means of investigating the world and as "legitimate" science. In this view science is more broadly conceptualized than in causation models of research. According to Pelto and Pelto in *Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry* science consists of:

> [t]he structure and the process of discovery and verification of systematic and reliable knowledge about any relatively enduring aspect of the universe, carried out by means of empirical observation and the development of concepts and propositions for interrelating and explaining such observations...science includes a large component of searching, speculating and discovering—a whole set of activities that cannot be easily codified and systematized. (22)

Science is defined differently in different academic disciplines, and, in addition, the scientific paradigm shifts periodically thereby reconstituting what is called science. As Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* points out:

> [A] paradigm determines not only which questions can be considered
but also how they can be considered: One of the things a scientific community acquires with a paradigm is a criterion for choosing problems that, while the paradigm is taken for granted, can be assumed to have solutions. To a great extent these are the only problems that the community will admit as scientific or encourage its members to undertake. Other problems, including many that had previously been standard, are rejected as metaphysical, as the concern of another discipline, or sometimes as just too problematic to be worth the time. A paradigm can, for that matter, even insulate the community from those socially important problems that are not reducible to the puzzle form, because they cannot be stated in terms of the conceptual and instrumental tools the paradigm supplies. (37)

A critique of social science research paradigms has been mounted on several fronts, but it is the current feminist critique and developing methodology with which I will deal here.

An overview of some of the problems of mainstream research is given by Maria Mies in "Towards a Methodology for Feminist Research":

The main problem that Women's Studies face on all fronts is the male bias or androcentrism that prevails in practically all disciplines, in most theoretical work done through centuries of scientific quest. This androcentrism is manifested not only in the fact that universities and research institutions are still largely male domains, but more subtly in the choice of areas of research, in research policies, theoretical concepts and particularly in research methodology. The inadequacy of predominant research methods was first painfully felt by feminist
historians, who tried to reconstruct women's history. Women's contribution to history was hardly recorded in the history books. Within a framework of science that is based on written records only, this means that their contribution does not exist as far as historical science goes. (118)

The argument here is that women are simply invisible in many aspects of scholarship and research.

In the area of soap opera research, women's voices have sometimes been silenced by the research processes itself. Even where research yields evidence contradictory to common-sense assumptions, the common-sense assumptions are held to be true as in, for example, the case of stratification data on soap opera audiences. There is no evidence to support the notion that soap viewers are either socially or emotionally deprived or that they come predominantly from the working class yet many researchers continue to assume that they do. Hence it is important, as Mies points out, that feminist researchers understand research methodology from their position in social as well as research contexts. Specifically she refers to the concept of the "double consciousness" developed by Leavitt et al which refers to the ability of subordinate groups to "develop to those who control them, at the same time as they are fully aware of the everyday reality of their oppression, a quality the superordinate groups lack" (112). The concept of the double consciousness is similar to the notion of feminine discourse which I have previously discussed. As Meis points out, in research about women, the double consciousness can be seen as an opportunity rather than an obstacle in that it may give researchers
from subordinated groups particular insights not shared by those from dominant groups.

Mies suggests the following guidelines for feminist research:

(1) The postulate of value-free research, of neutrality and indifference toward the research objects, has to be replaced by conscious partiality, which is achieved by partial identification with the research objects.

(2) The vertical relationship between researcher and 'research objects,' the view from above, must be replaced by the view from below.

(3) The contemplative, uninvolved 'spectator knowledge' must be replaced by active participation in actions, movements and struggles for women's emancipation.

(4) Participation in social action and struggles, and the integration of research into these processes, further implies that the change of the status quo becomes the starting point for a scientific quest.

(5) The research process must become a process of 'conscientization' both for the so-called 'research subjects' (social scientists) and for the 'research objects' (women as target groups). (122-127) (Emphasis Mies)

The term "conscientization" is adapted from Paulo Freire who uses conscientizugao to mean "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire in Mies 126). Mies suggests that a part of the research process involves the appropriation by women of their own subjective histories in order to develop a collective women's
consciousness analogous to class consciousness. Hence she recommends group rather than individual interviews, for example, so that women's experiences can be collectivized. Group interviews also mean that the women in the study will have the experience of a collectivized situation where they can see that their individual concerns have social causes.

Sociologist Ann Oakley has also pointed out the issue of the contradictions inherent in the traditional interviewing model in "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms." She posits that traditional methods of interviewing subordinate personal relationships to the service of a higher knowledge and that such a model coincides with the values of masculine culture. Hence in her view, when feminists use interviews in research they should be aware that:

[t]he goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewee is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (41)

Oakley concludes that the closer the social distance between interviewer and interviewee the closer the shared experiences of researcher and researched. Hobson makes similar observations in commenting on the interviews for her 1978 article "Housewives: Isolation as Oppression":

It is impossible to tell exactly how the women perceive me but I do not think they see me as too far removed from themselves. This may partly be because I have to arrange the interviews when my own son is at school and leave in time to collect him. (80-1)

These women seem to identify with Hobson in terms of their mutual
experience of motherhood in an industrial society. In feminist research closeness to the people one is observing is an asset rather than a problem. Similarly in *Membership Roles in Field Research*, Adler and Adler (1987) formally advocate that researchers practice the methods used informally by Chicago School sociological researchers and adopt membership roles in the settings they study through participant observation. In stating this position, they side with both ethnomethodologists and existential sociologists and suggest three levels of group membership--peripheral, active, and complete (31-35). Complete member-researchers, which I have been in this study, investigate their topics as full members "by either selecting groups to study in which they have prior membership or by converting to membership in these groups" (35). The researcher and the members of the group being studied determine the level of involvement in the group, not predetermined rules designed to maintain "objectivity." In addition, in quantitative research the notion of a random sample is frequently alluded to. Ethnographic studies like this one rarely, if ever, use a random sample. As Anselm Strauss has stated in *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*:

Theoretical sampling is done in order to discover categories and their properties, and to suggest interrelationships into a theory. Statistical sampling is done to obtain accurate evidence on distributions of people among the categories to be used in descriptions or verifications. Thus, in each type of research, the 'adequate sample' that we should look for (as researchers and readers of research) is very different. (63)

Field work of which the present study can be considered an example
often uses theoretical sampling. The object here is not to generalize to all examples within a category, but to test theoretical assumptions as well as discover new possibilities.

For women, there are also major problems in attempting to define class positions for use in research. Both operationally defining class and defining class for women can be at issue. As Erik Olin Wright ("Class Boundaries ...") points out, defining some workers' class position is no problem but other class positions are controversial:

All Marxists agree that manual workers directly engaged in the production of physical commodities for private capital fall into the working class. While there may be disagreement about the political and ideological significance of such workers in advanced capitalism everyone acknowledges that they are in fact workers. There is no such agreement about any other category of wage-earners. (3)

Marxian categories of class, that is class defined as "common structural positions within the social organization of production" (Wright, 1980 33) are in fact seldom used in relation to research, particularly quantitative research. Instead, occupational status or other similar criteria are usually used to define a person's position in a stratification system (Wright 33). An additional approach, the Weberian model, defines classes as groups which share common expectations, circumstances, beliefs and values measured by the distribution of goods rather than the worker's relationship to production (Parkin, 1979 3-4). A preliminary operationalization of Marxian class categories for use in research has been attempted by Wright. He argues that "contradictory locations" exist within class
positions and that, under monopoly capitalism the new middle class has features of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in relation to the production of surplus value. He proposes a formula which takes into account who and in which class, controls his or her own labor power for the production of surplus value and who does or does not control the labor power of others.

The issue of class status for women is further complicated by the fact that traditionally theorists of class have virtually denied women a position in the class system by assuming the status of women to be the same as to that of their husbands or fathers. This method of stratification designation is used because the family is the unit of equivalent evaluation in mainstream social research. The fact that women and men may not be equal either in terms of general social issues or within the family is thus obscured by the system of classification (Acker in Delphy, 1981, 115). The accepted position in mainstream research is that women have more in common with the men in their class than with the women outside of it (Press 1990b, 6). Parkin (1971) states the position:

[F]emale status certainly carries many disadvantages compared with that of males in various areas of social life including employment opportunities, property ownership, income, and so on. However, these inequalities associated with sex differences are not usefully thought of as components of stratification. This is because for the great majority of women the allocation of social and economic rewards is determined primarily by the position of their families -- and, in particular, that of the male head. Although women today share certain status attributes in common
simply by virtue of their sex, their claims over resources are not primarily determined by their own occupation but, more commonly, by that of their fathers or husbands. And if the wives and daughters of unskilled laborers have some things in common with the wives and daughters of wealthy landowners, there can be no doubt that the differences in their overall situation are far more striking and significant. Only if the disabilities attaching to female status were felt to be so great as to override differences of a class kind would it be realistic to regard sex as an important dimension of stratification. But in modern society the "vertical" placement of women in the class hierarchy, through membership of a kin group, appears to be much more salient to female self-perception and identity that the status of womanhood per se. It is perhaps for this reason that feminist political movements appear to have had relatively little appeal for the majority of women. (14-15)

Although some theorists agree with this position, most often when applied to research the reasoning behind the decision to group the women with the men is simply left unquestioned. It is accepted research practice. Feminist theorists since the 1970s have, however, disagreed with this position. Acker (1973) has argued that mother's occupation should be the criterion for class membership in the case of women. Several researchers have attacked the traditional view of class membership on historical grounds (Oakley, 1974), arguing that class differences among women are a relatively recent phenomenon.

Neither the idea of matrilineal occupational designation nor that of historical development of class differences questions the political
and ideological significance of placing women in classes because of their marital status. Some radical feminists have argued that the criteria for such placement makes social inequality between men and women invisible and that women and men should constitute separate classes. In other words, patriarchal classes supercede the commonality of industrial classes. Delphy (1981) argues that the placement of women, in some cases, in their husband’s class and, in some cases, in their father’s class and, in other cases, i.e. when they are unmarried and employed, in their own class, constitutes a double standard and one which nullifies the whole concept of stratification studies. This practice, in the case of women replaces the criterion of occupation with another criterion: marriage. Delphy holds that women "are not integrated with a description of social structure through the application of rules governing the concept of social stratification, but rather through abandoning these rules" (116). In this manner, sociology, according to Delphy, reproduces "social reality at the level of knowledge" (127). Stratification studies use the relationship of dependence to situate women within the classical systems of stratification, from which they would logically be simply excluded if they did not have an occupation. The effect "is to obscure the fact that women form part of another mode of production" (127). Delphy’s argument has similar effects to the ideas mentioned earlier in this paper: the contradictions inherent in the methodology make it difficult to theorize within the scope of existing knowledge. Her argument also points out one of the difficulties of dealing with women within the patriarchal family. The double bind of women’s position vis a vis their social and institutional relationship to men in families
surfaces and resurfaces in terms of contradictions, both analytical and ideological.

The continuum of interpretation which starts with 'grand theory' and ends with 'actual' audiences is not so easy to travel freely. However, the difficulties may be expressions of how discourse and ideology can contain meanings in ways that are difficult to circumvent. The study itself becomes a struggle rather than the easy application of rules of research which, when applied correctly, either yield, or in the case of the null hypothesis, fail to yield, scientific knowledge. I would like to see further ethnographic/theoretical studies continue to struggle with these issues. As cultural studies becomes more and more legitimated, as is happening at the moment, there is a tendency for it to lose its radical edge, to become just another category distinguished by its methodology, rather than its politics, the system 'clawing back' to further disguise its power.

In all, it is important to keep in mind, as Ien Ang (1989) has stated:

What matters is not the certainty of knowledge about audiences, but an ongoing critical and intellectual engagement with the multifarious ways in which we constitute ourselves through media consumption. (110)

It is necessary both to theorize and to question both the discursive and actual position of audiences because, among other things, in this case, 'we' are 'they'.
Appendix A

Interview Codes and Frequency of Codes
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW CODES

The codes used to classify the interview data in this study are listed below. Next to each is the research question associated with the code word. In most cases the specific code word is used (those listed A, B, C, etc.), but in some cases, the content is more general and is coded by the general category (listed 1, 2, 3).

1. Soaps Fanhood: FANHOOD, FANSHIP - What does fanhood mean to thses fans?
   A. SPFAN-FEEL: How fans feel about being soaps fans?
   B. AUDIENCE: Conception of the construction of the soaps audience?
   C. ADDICTION: What does addiction mean in this context?
   D. FANHOOD-OP: How do other people react to their fanhood?

2. Fanship Practices - VIEW PRACT, PRACTICES
   A. INTERGRATE: How are soaps intergrated into daily life?
   B. GOSSIP: How are soaps intergrated into gossip?
   C. SITUA-LIFE: Are there situations close to real life in the soaps?
   D. CODES: Are codes used to talk about soaps?
   E. FRIENDS: How do friends figure in soaps networks?
   F. MOM-DAUGHT: How are mothers and daughters involved in soaps practacies?
   G. SOAP FAMILY: Are soaps characters discussed as if they were members of the family?
   H. ACT: Do these fans act out segments of soap operas?
I. JUDGMENT: How do these fans make judgements about soap operas? This implies some distance, not simply a like or dislike.

J. LENGTH FAN: How long have some people continued their lives as fans?

3. Soaps Knowledge: SOAPS KN - What are the knowledges that people have because they are fans?

A. SK-AW PROD: What do these fans say that indicated that they are aware of production considerations?

B. SK-PREDICT: How do these fans go about predicting what will happen next?

C. CHARACTERS: What are their perceptions and expectations around the characters?

D. SK-PLOTS: How do they deal with the plots?

E. TIME: What are the issues about time within the soaps storyline?

F. TIME-SPT&A: How does soap opera time correlate with the actual time of the viewers?

G. PLACE: What is the function of place in the soaps?

H. INTEXT S: What are the intertextual references with other soaps and other television programs?

I. INTEXT N: What are the intertextual references through the newspaper?

4. Pleasure: PLEASURE - How do these conversations describe and indicate pleasure for the members of these groups?

A. LAUGH: What things did these fans laugh at in the course of these conversations?

B. STORY TELL: What were some of their stories about soaps?
C. READ.VIEW: How do they say about reading versus television viewing?

D. MEMORIES: What memories do they have about soap opera and their lives?

E. RELAX: How do they talk about watching without effort or relaxing?

F. ANTICIPATE: What are these fan’s feelings about anticipation, the search for truth, or the hermeneutic code?

G. ROMANCE: What do these fans say about romance in the soaps?

H. CLOTHES: What do these fans say about clothes on the soaps?

I. WEDDING: What do these fans say about soaps weddings?

J. VILLAIN: What do these fans say about the villains?

K. GENEALOGY: How do genealogies fit into their conversations?

L. LOOK: What are their pleasures in looking?

M. PL-PREDICT: What is the pleasure in predicting for these fans?

N. GOSSIP: How does gossip figure into soaps pleasure?

O. TALK: Is talk different from gossip in this context?

P. ORAL V TRD (traditional): Are there examples of oral narrative conventions in the conversations included here?

Q. WORK: When the topics of work, class, race, age, or the status of women come up, how are they talked about?

R. RACE

S. AGE

T. WOMEN
APPENDIX A

FREQUENCY OF CODES

FREQUENCY - List of codewords used in coding Interview 1 (American Fans of Days of Our Lives)

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Appendix B

Questionnaire
APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire - Soap Opera and Women's Culture

Name: ________________________________

Address: ________________________________

Phone Number: ________________________________

1. Which soaps do you watch? ________________________________

2. Do you keep the TV set on while you are working around the home? ________________________________

3. If so, what types of tasks do you do? ________________________________

4. Do you do other things while you are actually sitting to watch TV? Like what? ________________________________

5. Do you do any of these while watching Days of Our Lives? ________________________________

6. Do you talk to other people when you watch TV? If so, who? Is it the same if you are watching during the day as at night? ________________________________

7. Do you talk about TV with people? (brothers, sisters, friends, daughter, grandmother, etc.) ________________________________
8. Do you talk about Days of Our Lives? ____________________________

9. To whom? ______________________________________________________

10. Son(s)? _________________________________________________________

11. Daughter(s)? ____________________________________________________

12. Lover? _________________________________________________________

13. Husband? ________________________________________________________

14. Women Friend(s)? ______________________________________________

15. Men Friend(s)? _________________________________________________


17. Do you discuss Days of Our Lives with any or all of these people?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

18. Out of this group, how many are women and how many are men?

____________________________________________________________________

19. When do you usually talk about soaps? ____________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

20. Do you do most of the housework? _________________________________

21. Do you live with - ______________________________________________

Children ___________________ How many _________________________

Ages ______________ Female ____________ Male _____________

Other woman or women _____________________________________________

Man or men ______________________________________________________

22. Do your children watch soaps? Which one? _________________________

____________________________________________________________________

23. What do you like about soaps? ________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
24. What is the first soap you remember watching or listening to?

25. Who introduced you to it?

26. Did you watch it or listen to it together with this person?

27. What sort of books or magazines do you read?

28. Do you ever read soaps fan magazines?

29. Do you have a favourite series of books?

30. Who are some of your favourite authors?

31. Who are some of your favourite TV characters?

32. When a group of people is watching TV at your house at night, who controls the TV set?

33. In the day who controls the TV set?

34. Do you have a video tape recorder?

35. If so, do you record your soap when you can’t see it?

36. If this is the case, when and how do you watch your soap?

37. Do you know your friends’ favourite soap?

38. Do you refrain from telephoning her (them) when you know it is on?
39. Do you think that soaps' characters are like real people? Why? 

40. Do you ever laugh when you are watching *Days of Our Lives*? When? 

41. Do you ever cry? When? 

42. Could you sketch out a family tree for the families on *Days of Our Lives*? 

43. Do soaps' plots in general seem believable to you? 

44. Are they generally sad, funny, happy, sentimental or what other word would you use? 

45. Do the men on soaps (or some of them) seem sexy to you? 

46. Who, currently, is the sexiest? 

47. Do you have a favourite woman character on *Days of Our Lives*? If so, who? 

48. Why do you like her? 

49. If you saw her on the street tomorrow, what sort of questions would you ask her?
50. Do you and friends sometimes talk about the characters as if they were real?

51. Who do you think is the most tragic character on Days of Our Lives?

52. What events in her or his life make her/him tragic? 

53. Is there something other than the events in their lives that makes these characters tragic? If so what?

54. Who do you think is the worst villainess on the show?

55. Do you get pleasure out of hating her?

56. Do you think the characters talk too much on Days?

57. Do you enjoy listening to them talk?

58. Do you sometimes listen to the TV set when Days of Our Lives is on and turn to look when there is an intense moment?

59. Which do you like best, the intense emotional scenes (sad), the intense emotional scenes (romantic), the family togetherness scenes (like Christmas)?

60. Do you also like the other two?
61. Do you ever act out or repeat a phrase from someone's conversation on *Days of Our Lives*? If so, like what?

62. Who is your favourite male character? Why?

63. Do you think that the characters on *Days of Our Lives* have too many problems? Why do you think this?

64. Do people you know make fun of soaps and people who watch them?

65. Are they usually men? Are they usually women?

66. What is the usual criticism?

67. Are soap operas like real life or not?

68. Do all of the women in your family watch soaps?

69. Do all the women in your family watch the same soap?

70. How long have you been watching *Days of Our Lives*?

71. When you work out the possibilities of what could happen next on *Days of Our Lives*, what sorts of things do you consider?
72. Does it bother you when a character comes back after having been considered dead for a long time? Why or why not?

73. Some would argue that some things that happen on soaps are not rational.

Does this bother you? ____________________________

Do you think it is funny? __________________________

74. Does it provide a topic of conversation about the soap? _____

75. Do you compare the problems on the soaps with what you would do in your own life?

76. If so can you give an example? __________________________

77. **Profile**

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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
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<td>30-40</td>
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<td>40-50</td>
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<td>50-60</td>
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<td>Inside ___ or Outside ___ the home?</td>
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<td>60-70</td>
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<td>____________________________</td>
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<td>70-80</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-90</td>
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<td>____________________________</td>
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</table>
78. Do you spend more than 2 hours per week on other formal activities (charity work, child minding, etc.)?


Please describe.

79. Highest level of formal education reached.

80. Do you still have children at home? ____ Ages? ______

Thank you very much.
XI.

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