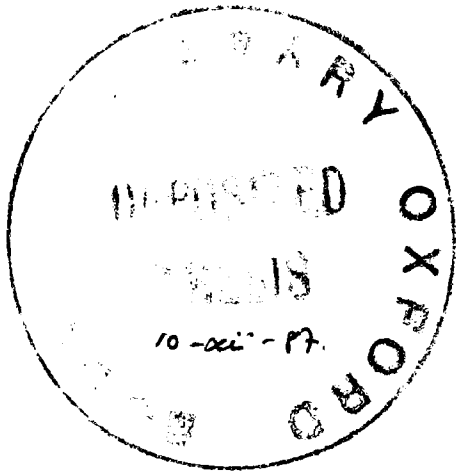


**SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE AND PROGRAMME STRUCTURE IN REPRESENTATIONS
OF TELEVISION CHARACTERS**



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For Peter, Angela and Rodney

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SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE AND PROGRAMME STRUCTURE IN REPRESENTATIONS OF TELEVISION CHARACTERS

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ABSTRACT

It was argued that the social psychology of person perception, mass communications and cultural studies can be related to viewers' representations of television characters. Mass communications needs to incorporate viewers' interpretations and programme structure. Social cognition could satisfy the former need and cultural studies the latter.

A literature review showed little research on viewers' interpretations of television programmes. There is a considerable body of research on person perception, gender stereotypes, the effects of viewing and programme structure.

A study of viewers' accounts of viewing soap opera showed that they become involved with the characters and find the programmes realistic. Soap opera plays an important role in their lives.

Viewers' representations of soap opera characters were examined using multidimensional scaling. This revealed stable, replicable character representations for Dallas, Coronation Street and EastEnders. The representations were compared with the oppositions which structure the programmes, Implicit Personality Theory and Gender Schema Theory.

Dallas characters were represented by themes of morality and power/activity. Power was correlated with gender, with some counter-stereotypic females.

Coronation Street characters were organised around morality/potency, gender (matriarchal) and approach to life. This related to person prototypes and contrasted with interaction patterns between characters.

EastEnders characters were represented by themes of morality/power, gender and approach to life/centrality. Free descriptions validated the attribute ratings and showed further features of the representation.

No socio-structural group differences in representation were found.

Viewers' character representations were a constructive integration of programme structure and social knowledge. The application of abstract knowledge to a structured domain was discussed.

Textual analysis of a narrative identified the 'role of the reader' and textual openness. This was related to stereotypes, narrative expectancies, myth and character representation.

Distinct types of divergence in viewers' interpretations of narrative were discovered. Further, a narrative containing two readings was interpreted in four distinct ways by viewers, depending on their perceived relationships with characters.

The conclusions and limitations of the research were discussed. Implications for person perception, stereotyping and textual analysis were examined. A taxonomy of factors relating to the interpretation and representation of television drama was presented.

LONG ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 sets out the main arguments of the thesis. These arguments draw together issues from three research domains through empirical investigation of viewers' representations of television characters. These domains are the social psychology of person perception, mass communication research and cultural studies. It was argued that traditional mass communications needs a greater understanding both of viewers' interpretations of television programmes and of the structured or textual nature of programmes. It was proposed that social cognition can be used to study viewers' interpretation or representation of characters in drama through the application of person perception and gender stereotyping theories to the media domain. However, these theories need further testing on everyday, naturally acquired knowledge, of which character knowledge is an example. Research within cultural studies on television as a form of popular culture provides the theory of programmes as structured texts needed by traditional approaches and may itself be integrated with social cognition through the study of the 'role of the reader'. Television soap operas were selected as a suitable forum for examining these issues because people watch them over many years, becoming involved with the characters. They provide partially open texts with a substantial interpretative role for the viewer.

Chapter 2 reviewed the main literatures relevant to these arguments. This showed some of the problems faced by traditional mass communications research. It also showed that considerable research has been conducted on people's social knowledge of others, on the use of multidimensional scaling to discover this knowledge

and on the role of gender in person perception. Cultural studies has conducted many structural analyses of media texts. The problems with these literatures were discussed. However, very little research has examined viewers' interpretations or the role of the reader in television programmes, although various researchers are becoming interested in these issues and in the relations between viewers' interpretations and programme structure. In particular, a little researched issue upon which much theory has concentrated is that of the balance between constructive or active versus receptive or passive programme interpretation. Recently, various researchers have focussed on the soap opera as an ideal domain for pursuing current issues in mass communications and cultural studies.

Chapter 3 provided general empirical support for the importance of these arguments, by examining 52 regular viewers' explanations for watching soap opera. This study used open-ended responses and content analysis. The categories of explanations most used by viewers were, in descending importance, escapism, realism, relationship with characters, critical response, problem-solving, role in viewer's life, emotional experience and entertainment. It was concluded that viewers often become personally involved with the characters and events, thus justifying the application of person perception theory to the media. Viewers found soap opera, especially British programmes, highly realistic and showed a moderate degree of critical distance. Given the enormous popularity of soap opera, the moral and didactic aims of the producers, and the seriousness with which viewers approach the genre, the interaction between viewer and text requires further investigation.

Chapters 4 to 7 contain the main body of research on character

representation by regular soap opera viewers. It focussed on the nature and stability of these representations, the degree of consensus among groups of viewers, and the relationships between the representations, person knowledge and programme structure. Each study used multidimensional scaling (usually based on sorting data) and semantic differential ratings of personality traits. The representations obtained were compared with literary analyses of the oppositional structure of the specific programme being represented or of the genre of soap opera. They were also compared with the dimensions of Implicit Personality Theory and Gender Schema Theory, as major theories of person perception and representation.

Chapter 4 studied viewers' representations of the characters in Dallas. Stable, replicable, multidimensional representations were revealed which were organised around themes of morality and power/activity. Power was correlated with gender (feminine=submissive, masculine=dominant), with certain counter-stereotypic exceptions among the female characters. In a follow-up study, the characters were shown to serve as functional equivalents in order that the major themes were upheld when the characters were changed. No differences in representation as a function of age, sex or nationality of viewers were found in this or subsequent studies.

A sequence of studies in Chapter 5 examined viewers' representation of Coronation Street characters. A three-dimensional structure was discovered which was organised around themes of morality/potency, gender (matriarchal), and approach to life. This representation was shown to relate not only to the dimensions of person perception, with certain exceptions, but

also to prototypic knowledge of person or character types. The representation was shown to contrast with a representation of the actual interaction frequencies between the characters. This suggested that similarity in personality is not a function of interaction frequency but rather that the narratives pair characters who are perceived as opposite to each other on a dimension, thereby generating conflict and interest.

Chapter 6 studied viewers' representation of the characters in EastEnders. These studies followed the pattern of Chapters 4 and 5. As this representation was found to be similar to that of Coronation Street, it was suggested that the British and American soap operas are represented rather differently. EastEnders characters were found to be represented on themes of morality/power, gender and approach to life/centrality. Finally, this chapter examined viewers' free descriptions of the characters and contrasted these with the explicit and a priori attribute ratings which had been used hitherto. These free descriptions validated the attribute ratings, and showed additional aspects of the character representation. These explained and filled out certain questions raised about the relationships between themes (for example, showing that viewers use matriarchal rather than traditional conceptions of gender, and why morality and potency are related in representations of British soap opera, so that good=weak and bad=strong). The findings also demonstrated the recognition of some personality inconsistencies.

Chapter 7 drew together comparisons over the three programmes studied, and showed that viewers' character representations are a constructive integration of programme structure and social knowledge about other people in everyday life. Thus in some respects, the

representations mirrored text structure and abstract person knowledge was overridden. Conversely, some aspects of text structure were ignored in the representations. The centrality of morality, gender and power in all three programmes suggested a general representation for soap opera. It was argued that this conclusion could be more productively subsumed into a theory of the instantiation of abstract knowledge on application to a particular, structured domain. For social cognition, this demands a theory of constructive processes which are themselves modified when the domain being represented has its own organisational structure. For cultural studies, this demands a recognition of the differences between ordinary and literary critical interpretations and an appreciation of the role of the viewer when analysing the structure of media texts. The product of this interaction between viewers' constructions and programme structure was argued to be the mediator of any television effects.

A textual analysis of a soap opera narrative was conducted in Chapter 8 in order to identify the 'role of the reader' in the structure of the text and its connections with the social cognition of stereotypes, expectancies and narrative understanding. The relations between soap opera and myth were explored, as were those between the movements of the central characters along narrative oppositions and the character representation discovered in Chapter 5. The text was found to be open during the course of the narrative, encouraging several alternative interpretations of events, but a preferred reading emerged towards the end to guide viewers towards a conventional interpretation. Thematic analysis revealed repeated references to viewers' cultural and mythic

knowledge, so that the role of the viewer in the completion of meaning demanded that viewers continually recall, and thereby potentially reinforce, conventional knowledge.

Chapter 9 developed several of these points through an investigation of divergence in the interpretation of specific narratives. An open-ended study revealed a number of qualitatively distinct ways in which viewers diverge from each other (for example, in character evaluation, inference, complexity of interpretation and the use of social rhetoric). This was followed by a detailed investigation of viewers' interpretations of one narrative. This showed that the interpretation of character and of narrative is inextricably related, for viewers use their knowledge of characters to create coherent and consistent meanings for the events they perceive. The narrative selected contained at least two alternative readings. Four interpretive positions, each representing a unique version of the same narrative, were found to be adopted by different viewers. These related closely to the two alternative readings made available to them by the structure of the programme: two interpretative positions corresponded to the main two alternatives present in the text and two represented intermediate or negotiated positions. Membership of the divergent groupings of viewers was accounted for by the psychological relationships which the viewers experience with the central characters of the narrative. These relationships concerned the processes of identification, evaluation and recognition, and these affected the perspectives which the viewers take upon the events portrayed. The variables of age and sex of viewer were of little explanatory value.

Finally, Chapter 10 presented the conclusions of the thesis.

Its limitations and the methodological selections made (qualitative versus quantitative) were discussed. The roles of morality, gender and power in representations of soap opera, together with their implications for theories of person perception, stereotyping and textual analysis were examined. Also considered were the relation between characterisation and narrative, the issue of divergence in interpretation, the experience of viewing soap opera, and the more general implications for social psychology's conception of 'information'. Finally, a taxonomy of factors was presented which either have been or may yet be shown to be influential in the interpretation and representation of television drama. This expresses the complexity and variety of relationships between the viewer and the text in the construction of meaning.

C O N T E N T S

Page

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ABSTRACT

LONG ABSTRACT

CHAPTER ONE

SOCIAL PERCEPTION AND POPULAR CULTURE: THEORETICAL ISSUES

1.1.	Overview of the thesis: Issues, aims and methods	1
1.2.	Mass communications and social cognition	6
1.2.1.	Changing conceptions of television effects	6
1.2.2.	The importance of interpretation	9
1.2.3.	Examples of interpretation in 'effects' research	10
1.2.4.	Character interpretation	13
1.3.	Semantic representation and social cognition	14
1.3.1.	What is social cognition?	14
1.3.2.	Problems with social cognition	16
1.3.3.	The spatial metaphor for semantic representation	17
1.3.4.	Multidimensional scaling	19
1.4.	Person perception theory	23
1.4.1.	Person perception as a branch of social cognition	23
1.4.2.	Research designs	24
1.4.3.	Person perception and semantic representations	25
1.4.4.	Categorical theories of person perception	28
1.4.5.	Theories of gender schemata	29
1.5.	Cultural studies and the role of the viewer	30
1.5.1.	Contrast with traditional semantics	31
1.5.2.	An alternative semantics	32
1.5.3.	Textuality and openness	35
1.5.4.	Empirical research in cultural studies	40
1.5.5.	Convergence between traditional and critical approaches	41
1.6.	The genre of soap opera	43
1.6.1.	Background	43
1.6.2.	Soap opera: definition, history, audience	43
1.6.3.	Soap opera as myth	47
1.6.4.	Stereotyping and character portrayal	48
1.6.5.	Openness and closure in soap opera texts	49
1.6.6.	Viewing and personal involvement	50

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIAL PERCEPTION AND POPULAR CULTURE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1.	Introduction	53
2.2.	Traditional mass communications research	53
2.2.1.	Introduction	53
2.2.2.	The experimental approach to television effects	54
2.2.3.	Television as a 'cultivator' of social reality beliefs	55
2.2.4.	Viewers' relationships with television characters	56

2.3.	Semantic representations and social cognition	59
2.3.1.	Developments in social psychology	60
2.3.2.	Developments in mass communications	62
2.4.	Person perception theory	66
2.4.1.	Implicit Personality Theory	66
2.4.2.	Gender Schema Theory	70
2.5.	Cultural studies and the role of the viewer	71
2.5.1.	Textual analyses	71
2.5.2.	Empirical studies on viewers	74
2.5.3.	The relation between texts and viewers	76
2.6.	The genre of soap opera	80
2.6.1.	Content analyses of soap opera	81
2.6.2.	Uses and gratifications	82
2.6.3.	The consequences of viewing soap opera	84
2.7.	Summary	85

CHAPTER THREE

WHY PEOPLE WATCH SOAP OPERA: THE EXPLANATIONS OF BRITISH VIEWERS

3.1.	Introduction	89
3.2.	Method	93
3.2.1.	Subjects	93
3.2.2.	Questionnaire	93
3.3.	Results	93
3.3.1.	Coding Units	93
3.3.2.	Coding Scheme	93
3.3.3.	Coding Procedure	94
3.4.	Discussion	98
3.4.1.	Methodological observations	98
3.4.2.	Categories of explanation for viewing soap opera	99
3.4.3.	Soap opera as entertainment and escapism	99
3.4.4.	Soap opera realism	101
3.4.5.	Characters as extension of real-world social networks	103
3.4.6.	Soap opera as an educational medium	104
3.4.7.	Emotional experience	105
3.4.8.	Soap opera as part of daily life	106
3.4.9.	Critical distance from soap opera	107
3.4.10.	Comparison between British and American soap operas	110
3.4.11.	Relation to other research	111
3.5.	Summary	112

CHAPTER FOUR

VIEWERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHARACTERS IN DALLAS

4.1.	Introduction	114
4.2.	Study I: The implicit semantic space for DALLAS characters	120
4.2.1.	Method	120
4.2.1.1.	Questionnaire and procedure	120
4.2.1.2.	Subjects	121
4.2.2.	Results	121

4.3.	Study II: A replication	126
4.3.1.	Introduction	126
4.3.2.	Method	126
4.3.2.1.	Materials and procedure	126
4.3.2.2.	Subjects	127
4.3.3.	Results	127
4.3.4.	Discussion of Studies I and II	128
4.4.	Study III: Implicit and explicit judgments of characters	130
4.4.1.	Introduction	130
4.4.2.	Method	131
4.4.2.1.	Questionnaire and procedure	131
4.4.2.2.	Subjects	132
4.4.3.	Results	132
4.4.4.	Discussion	136
4.5.	Study IV: What changes when the characters change?	142
4.5.1.	Introduction	142
4.5.2.	Method	144
4.5.2.1.	Subjects	144
4.5.2.2.	Characters	144
4.5.2.3.	Questionnaire	145
4.5.3.	Results	145
4.5.4.	Discussion	149
4.6.	Summary	152

CHAPTER FIVE

VIEWS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHARACTERS IN CORONATION STREET

5.1.	Introduction	154
5.2.	Study I: Viewers' representation of characters	159
5.2.1.	Introduction	159
5.2.2.	Method	159
5.2.2.1.	Materials and Procedure	159
5.2.2.2.	Subjects	160
5.2.3.	Results	162
5.2.4.	Analysis of group differences	164
5.2.5.	Discussion	166
5.3.	Study II: Projection of properties on the representation	168
5.3.1.	Introduction	168
5.3.2.	Method	170
5.3.2.1.	Questionnaire and procedure	170
5.3.2.2.	Subjects	170
5.3.3.	Results	171
5.3.4.	Discussion	173
5.4.	Study III: The representation of social roles	177
5.4.1.	Introduction	177
5.4.2.	Method	178
5.4.2.1.	Subjects	178
5.4.2.2.	Social roles	179
5.4.2.3.	Questionnaire	179
5.4.3.	Results	179
5.4.4.	Discussion	182
5.5.	Study IV: Comparison with CORONATION STREET representation	183

5.5.1.	Method	183
5.5.1.1.	Subjects	183
5.5.1.2.	Questionnaire	183
5.5.2.	Results	184
5.5.3.	Discussion	186
5.6.	Study V: Interactions among CORONATION STREET characters	187
5.6.1.	Introduction	187
5.6.2.	Method	188
5.6.2.1.	Sample	188
5.6.2.2.	Interaction coding	189
5.6.2.3.	Procedure	189
5.6.2.4.	Reliability	189
5.6.3.	Results	190
5.6.4.	Discussion	193
5.7.	Summary	196

CHAPTER SIX

VIEWS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHARACTERS IN EASTENDERS

6.1.	Introduction	199
6.2.	Study I: Viewers' representation of characters	204
6.2.1.	Introduction	204
6.2.2.	Method	204
6.2.2.1.	Subjects	204
6.2.2.2.	Questionnaire	205
6.2.3.	Results	206
6.2.4.	Discussion	210
6.3.	Study II: Projection of properties on the representation	212
6.3.1.	Introduction	212
6.3.2.	Method	213
6.3.2.1.	Subjects	213
6.3.2.2.	Questionnaire	214
6.3.3.	Results	215
6.3.4.	Discussion of Studies I and II	216
6.4.	Study III: Free descriptions of EASTENDERS characters	219
6.4.1.	Introduction	219
6.4.2.	Analysis of free descriptions	220
6.4.2.1.	Representativeness of subsample	220
6.4.2.2.	Coding of free descriptions	221
6.4.2.3.	Cluster analysis of character representation	221
6.4.2.4.	Free descriptions of character clusters	222
6.4.3.	Discussion	226
6.4.3.1.	Comparison of Moral and Immoral clusters	226
6.4.3.2.	Comparison of Masculine and Feminine clusters	231
6.4.3.3.	The Youth cluster	236
6.4.3.4.	Conclusions for ratings versus free descriptions	239
6.4.3.5.	Consistency in character description	243
6.5.	Summary	246

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPARISONS BETWEEN REPRESENTATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CAUSALITY AND THE APPLICATION OF SCHEMATA

7.1.	Introduction	248
7.2.	Causal inferences from the character representations	249
7.3.	Comparison between viewers' representations of programmes	255
7.3.1.	Comparison of property significances	255
7.3.2.	Analysis	258
7.3.3.	Comparison of relations between properties	262
7.3.4.	Comparison of relations between themes	264
7.4.	A general representation of soap opera characters?	265
7.5.	Rosenberg's Multidimensional Evaluative Model	267
7.6.	Schema instantiation in structured media domains	270

CHAPTER EIGHT

AN ANALYSIS OF A SOAP OPERA NARRATIVE

8.1.	Introduction	275
8.2.	Aims of the analysis	276
8.3.	The semiotic method	277
8.3.1.	Narrative analysis	280
8.3.2.	Thematic analysis	281
8.4.	Analysis of a CORONATION STREET narrative	283
8.4.1.	Selection of materials	283
8.4.2.	Chronological or narrative analysis	285
8.4.2.1.	Background conditions	285
8.4.2.2.	Pollution I: Community sees pollution 'in the mind'	287
8.4.2.3.	Pollution II: Hero sees pollution 'in the mind'	289
8.4.2.4.	Pollution III: Pollution 'in the flesh'	291
8.4.2.5.	Guilt	293
8.4.2.6.	Purification	297
8.4.2.7.	Redemption	302
8.4.3.	Thematic analysis	304
8.4.3.1.	Background conditions	304
8.4.3.2.	Eternal triangle narrative	305
8.5.	Discussion	314
8.6.	Summary	317

CHAPTER NINE

DIVERGENT INTERPRETATIONS OF TELEVISION DRAMA

9.1.	Text structure, characterisation and methodology	321
9.2.	Study I: An open-ended study of narrative interpretation	324
9.2.1.	Introduction	324
9.2.2.	Method	325
9.2.2.1.	Subjects	325
9.2.2.2.	The recall task	325

9.2.3.	Results	326
9.2.4.	Discussion	326
9.2.4.1.	General observations	326
9.2.4.2.	Divergence in character evaluation and narrative focus	328
9.2.4.3.	Divergence in evaluation of a personality trait	330
9.2.4.4.	Divergence in interpreting a single event	330
9.2.4.5.	The balance between consensus and divergence	330
9.2.4.6.	Complexity of interpretation and social rhetoric	331
9.2.4.7.	Divergence due to inaccurate comprehension or recall	331
9.2.4.8.	Divergence in degree of critical distance	332
9.2.4.9.	Divergence in inferences made	333
9.2.4.10.	Divergence in the attribution of motivation	333
9.2.4.11.	Divergence due to different degrees of involvement	334
9.2.5.	Summary	334
9.3.	Study II: A quantitative study of narrative interpretation	336
9.3.1.	Introduction	336
9.3.2.	Method	340
9.3.2.1.	Subjects	340
9.3.2.2.	The narrative	340
9.3.2.3.	The questionnaire	342
9.3.3.	Results	345
9.3.3.1.	Cluster analysis of viewers	345
9.3.3.2.	Descriptive ANOVAs: interpretations by viewer cluster	347
9.3.3.3.	Detailed comparisons among viewer clusters	351
9.3.3.4.	Comparisons between clusters on external factors	353
9.3.4.	Discussion	358
9.4.	Summary	366
CHAPTER TEN		
CONCLUSIONS		
10.1.	The main issues of the thesis	368
10.2.	Methodology	369
10.3.	The nature of viewers' representations of characters	371
10.3.1.	Gender	372
10.3.2.	Morality	374
10.3.3.	Potency	374
10.4.	Divergence in interpretation of characters and narrative	375
10.5.	The stability of the representations	377
10.6.	Limitations of the present research	378
10.7.	Theoretical Implications	380
10.7.1.	Social knowledge, text structure, the role of the reader	380
10.7.2.	The relationship between characterisation and narrative	386
10.7.3.	The application of person perception theory to the media	387
10.7.4.	Social life as text	388
10.7.5.	Texts and the role of the reader	390
10.7.6.	The role of interpretation in mass communication	390
10.7.7.	The experience of viewing soap opera	391
REFERENCES		393

CHAPTER ONE

SOCIAL PERCEPTION AND POPULAR CULTURE:

THEORETICAL ISSUES

1.1. Overview of the thesis: Issues, aims and methods

This thesis will examine the interpretations and representations which viewers construct in order to understand characters in television drama. The research stems from the conjunction of three research domains: the psychology of mass communications, the social cognition of person perception, and cultural studies. The study of viewers' representations of television characters provides a concrete issue to pursue some of the theoretical and empirical issues at the heart of each of these domains. It will be argued that the integration of the three domains over a common empirical issue will advance the current developments in each domain for, in important respects, each needs the other.

While overlaps in theoretical debates provide the major justification for the present work, it is also the case that very little is known of how viewers represent television characters. While we know that in everyday life people argue about what they see on television, become fond of certain fictional characters, admire some and dislike others, the cognitive or representational aspects of the viewers' relationship with characters in drama have not been much addressed in the academic literature. Thus the study of character representation is also of interest because viewers' relationships with and reactions to television characters constitute

a significant area of everyday experience.

Television characters were selected as the domain of study in this thesis for the following reasons. They are the mediators of various television effects, such as role modelling, identification, imitation and para-social interaction. They are also the objects of gender stereotyping and counterstereotyping. Their lives provide a symbolic extension of the viewers' social reality. Finally, they carry the main themes of a drama and personify its messages. Characters are thus central to the experience of and potential effects of viewing television drama.

Most people spend several hours each day watching television, probably as much as they talk to family or friends, read or go out for entertainment. Television is thus a major part of people's lives and a major source of influence concerning what people think, what they think about and, more generally, how they understand the world about them. Television provides the viewers with "pictures of the world, the definitions of the situation and problems, the explanations, alternative remedies and solutions which are made available to us" (Halloran, 1970, p.53).

Research on the social psychology of television has a long and wide-ranging history. This thesis focusses on one area within this broader literature, namely regular viewers' cognitive representations of well-known characters in television soap operas. These representations are built up by the viewers over years of watching the lives of the same characters. They contain, therefore, an intriguing combination of programme structure, personal knowledge and interests, and social knowledge or stereotypes. These representations will be studied in relation to the following

questions.

- (1) What is the nature of character representations, i.e. what are their dominant organising themes and how do these themes interrelate?
- (2) How consensual or divergent are these representations over viewers?
- (3) How stable are the representations?
- (4) How closely do the structure and major dimensions of the representations mirror the structure of the transmitted programme?
- (5) How far have viewers made their own sense of the characters by interpreting programme information according to their general person schemata or stereotypic knowledge?

These questions will be addressed using questionnaire methods and multidimensional scaling techniques to discover the nature of character representations and test hypotheses concerning their structure. Several further studies will be conducted. One of these provides a background context for psychological research on viewers of soap opera, examining why people watch soap opera and how important the characters are to the viewers. Three studies follow up the research on character representation, pursuing the issues of interpretative divergence, the relation between character representation and the interpretation of narrative, and the nature of the role of the viewer inscribed in the text. To some extent, each chapter contains relatively self-contained research. These variously pursue the major issues addressed by the thesis which are outlined in this chapter. The thesis begins by presenting the theoretical framework and arguments for the research and reviewing the relevant literature. It continues with research on viewers' experiences of viewing soap opera. The main studies on character representation are then presented. These are followed by several

studies which develop issues raised by the research, ending with the general conclusions of the thesis.

Before proceeding, let me briefly point out what this thesis is not. It is not a study of the effects of viewing television drama, although the results should be relevant to this issue. It does not study people while they are actually viewing, but rather studies their general and long-term knowledge of programmes. It uses no experimental programme materials, sacrificing experimental control in order to study knowledge derived from people's normal viewing of everyday programmes as transmitted on national television. Finally, because of practical limitations rather than design, the viewing samples are too small for socio-demographic representativeness and sub-division.

This chapter will now discuss how the three research literatures, traditional mass communications, social perception, and cultural studies, are integrated around the issue of character representation. For clarity, this chapter and the next are both structured around five main theoretical arguments. These will be discussed in this chapter, and the empirical literature relevant to each will be reviewed in Chapter Two. The five arguments are as follows:

- (1) Traditional mass communications research on the psychology of television and its effects needs a greater understanding of the social cognition of viewers and a more complex conception of the textual structure of programmes;
- (2) The social cognition of semantic representations provides a theoretical and methodological basis for the study of viewers' representations and interpretations;

- (3) The theory of person perception is the domain of social cognition most suited to the study of representations of television characters and provides a theory of viewers' resources for constructing meaningful representations of characters from the texts transmitted. However, this theory itself needs further testing on everyday knowledge.
- (4) Cultural studies research on television as a form of popular culture needs a greater understanding of the interpretations which viewers make of programmes and a methodology with which to pursue this issue;
- (5) The television genre of soap opera provides an ideal domain for the study of these questions;

These five arguments can be integrated as follows. Research on the effects of television has been hindered by its neglect of the social cognition of viewing. The constructive activity of the viewer complicates the relationship between content and effect. To study the structure of the programmes is often to neglect the psychology of the viewer, and conversely, to study the effects of viewing is often to neglect the structure of the programme. How then should mass communications research study social cognition, and how should it conceive of television programmes?

The premise of an active viewer leads one to expect that viewers' representations would diverge from a passive rendering of programme content. Research on the social cognition of semantic representation suggests cognitive resources or knowledge structures which may determine this divergence in viewers' interpretations of television. In particular, research on person perception should suggest cognitive determinants of viewers' representations of

characters. While person perception theory can aid study of viewers' interpretations of characters, it can itself be studied through its application to this new domain. Person perception research is increasingly concerned with the study of people's understanding of more complex, structured, everyday social phenomena. Television provides an excellent domain for such study.

Cultural studies, an inter-disciplinary alternative to the traditional approach, has focussed primarily on programmes as texts and on television's socio-economic role in society. This literature became drawn into the present project as the traditional conception of the programme was felt to be inadequate and a more complex literary or semiotic approach was needed. One cannot study people's representations of characters if one is working with an inadequate conception of the thing that is being represented. However, cultural studies has recently recognised its need for a more complex and empirical conception of the viewer. Thus in addition to drawing on the theoretical resources of cultural studies, research on character representation can also aid cultural studies' move towards the empirical study of the interpretative role of the viewer.

1.2. Mass Communications and Social Cognition

1.2.1. Changing conceptions of television effects

Recent mass communications research on the effects of television has emphasised changes in the conception of 'effects' and a move towards the study of social cognition as a mediator between programme content and effect, arguing that research is needed on viewers' cognitive involvement with television texts. Since the 1960's, researchers have been moving away from a conception of

television effects as the behavioural, immediate, and direct consequences of viewing specific programme contents after a single exposure. 'Effects' now refer more broadly to the influence of television programming taken as a whole, in the context of other sources of influence, on the viewers' symbolic construction of social reality. For example, by likening television to religion as a 'centralised system of storytelling', Gerbner argues that:

the heart of the analogy of television and religion, and the similarity of their social functions, lies in the continual repetition of patterns (myths, ideologies, 'facts', relationships, etc.), which serve to define the world and legitimise the social order. The stories of the dramatic world need not present credible accounts of what things are in order to perform the more critical function of demonstrating how things work. The illumination of the invisible relationships of life and society has always been the principal function of storytelling. Television today serves that function, telling most of the stories to most of the people most of the time (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986, p.18)

Television's effects are conceived as symbolic, gradual, general and pervasive, affecting people's frameworks for thinking as well as the content of their thoughts. Thus media effects concern not only behaviour, but also cognitions, emotions, social interactions, and attitudes. In reviewing recent traditions in media research, Katz (1980) argues that they have various things in common:

(1) The definition of reality: all are concerned with the ways in which the media constrain cognitive and perceptual organisation. They share a belief (2) in the persuasive powers of the media, although of the more subtle and insidious kinds than have previously been studied: thus influence may be exerted through the imposition of salient concerns, cognitive styles and frames of reference. (p.133).

Together with this change in views on what is affected, views

of how television affects its viewers are changing. The tabular rasa assumption allowed for the simplest and strongest conception of effects, in which viewing induces new information or behaviours into the passively receptive individual. If the viewers' long-term social knowledge and their constructive interpretation of new information are recognised, the possibility of strong and uncomplicated effects is reduced.

Television is most likely to affect viewers in this strong sense when it constitutes the sole source of new information. This occurs, for example, for programmes about cable and satellite technology or the disease Aids. McCombs & Gilbert (1986) have shown that the agenda-setting function of the news is greater for those issues for which the viewers have no alternative sources of information. However, many programmes deal with familiar events in which viewers are experienced, for example, gender, morality and politics. Further, programmes often do not provide specific information so much as examples of ways of thinking and acting in everyday life, as is generally the case in drama.

Television effects may occur in many other ways. Firstly, programmes can reinforce viewers' prior beliefs by showing characters who embody those beliefs being rewarded in comparison to those who embody the opposite (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982; Kreizenbeck, 1983). Secondly, television can increase the salience of ideas or ways of thinking with which the viewer is already familiar. Thus repetition in programmes may produce increased availability of those ideas in the viewer. Thirdly, television can prioritise issues through 'agenda-setting'. Here television tells the viewer not what to think but what to think about (McCombs &

Gilbert, 1986). Finally, television may play a restructuring role for viewers' cognitions. In other words, through their narrative requirements for consistency, coherence, and redundancy (Silverstone, 1981), programmes may organise people's ideas and ways of thinking in specific, often oversimplified ways, creating dichotomies, associations, and harmonies not previously present in the viewer.

1.2.2. The importance of interpretation

The study of interpretative aspects of viewing may help to explain the often disappointing and inconclusive research on television effects. This argument is being put with increasing force by a number of eminent media researchers to help formulate a more general integrative theory of media effects (Katz, 1978) in a field typically driven by a 'problem-orientation' (Roberts & Bachen, 1981). Roberts and Bachen consider both early and recent research on mass communication effects to be "a pot-pourri, a borrowing area, lacking in unifying theory, a collection of suburbs in search of a city" (p.308-9). Reeves, Chaffee and Tims (1982), among others, argue for social cognition as this 'city', the way forward for effects research. Similarly, Roberts and Bachen (1981) argue that:

"the basic link between media content and human social behaviour is forged in the interaction between information transmitted by the media on the one hand and human information processing on the other ... differences in response may derive from variations in how similar messages are interpreted by different people or by similar people under differing conditions" (p.318).

For television to have any effects on its viewers, whether behavioural, attitudinal or cognitive, programmes must first be perceived and comprehended by the viewers. This process may be

conscious or unconscious, but it should be studied before the problem-driven questions of function and effects are further considered. When interpreting a programme, viewers use not only the information in the programme but also their past experience with the programme, its genre, and their own personal experience with the social phenomena portrayed in the programme (e.g. institutions, relationships, myths, and explanations). Furthermore, they integrate these different sources in coherent and complex ways. In sum, a programme's effects must depend on the ways in which viewers' representations of the programme are a transformation of the original. This is a key point in the present argument, and will be further elaborated later.

Durkin (1985a) points out the common fallacy of assuming that a knowledge of television content permits inferences about effects. Although it is well documented that the content of television is heavily biased quantitatively with respect to gender, race, class, violence, life events and much else besides, "frequency of message has yet to be demonstrated to be isomorphic with viewers' receptive processes" (p.203). A cognitive theory of viewers' interpretation of programmes is needed: what do they find salient, how far are they selective, how do they integrate 'new' programme information with 'old' social knowledge, how do they differentiate among messages, how perceptive are they of underlying messages, and so forth.

1.2.3. Examples of interpretation in 'effects' research

A study by Tan (1979) illustrates the often implicit role of interpretation in effects research. He showed fifteen television advertisements for beauty products to adolescent girls while a control group saw fifteen advertisements unrelated to beauty themes.

Subsequently, the experimental condition rated beauty as more important for 'popularity with men' and as slightly more 'personally desirable' than the control group. To understand these effects, we need to know whether the experimental group now consider women to be more powerful ('beautiful women can twist men around their little finger') or do they now think less well of women, seeing men powerful and critical, and women as peripheral sex objects. Similarly, Berkowitz and Rogers (1986) have recently shown that people must define an act as aggressive before it can affect them as aggressive.

A similar analysis may be applied to cultivation research, in which the hypothesis is tested that the more people watch television, the more they believe the 'television reality' revealed by content analysis. This assumes that content analysis reveals all the potentially effective messages of the text and that all viewers can 'do' with this content is take it or leave it. However, people use heuristics to estimate environmental frequencies (cued by knowledge-based assessments of availability, salience and typicality) instead of objectively assessing observable frequency distributions (Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky, 1982). Thus the clear biases in manifest programme content may not be mirrored in the viewers' own representations of the programme.

Greater problems arise for latent content. For example, Noble (1975) argues that war films and Westerns are enjoyed more for their portrayal of kindness, loyalty and cooperation than for their aggressive content. Because content analysis is typically motivated by a public agenda of social problems, notably violence, commonly only the violent aspects of programmes are coded. Similarly, only

beliefs concerning violence in the viewers may be measured. Thus, cultivation research may be asking the wrong questions. A war film may increase effects related to violence (tolerance of aggression, fear of crime, pleasure in violence) or instead it may increase effects related to cooperation (need for comradeship, importance of loyalty, rejection of individualism). Further, a null result, which is common in the literature, may mask the fact that both effects occur but cancel each other out. Alternatively, the effects may be different for different subgroups in the sample. The interpretations which viewers make of programmes mediate the potential effects of those programmes, and thus attention must be given to viewers' interpretations when studying effects.

Many of these issues - of complexity and latency of texts, of varieties of audience interpretations, and of problems of measurement - are minimised when studying the questions concerning clear-cut and manifest aspects of programmes, such as whether the repeated portrayal of violence increases people's tolerance for violence. While this research is important, for the more subtle and yet also more common aspects of texts, the above problems are magnified. For issues of morality, value systems, gender or political power, for example, television drama contains many diverse messages. It is often difficult to specify what these are or whether the apparent diversity or ambiguity masks an underlying consensus. Certainly content analysis, designed to measure manifest and quantifiable content (Krippendorff, 1982), has difficulty in revealing these more complex and connotative meanings. To a similar extent, people's responses to such portrayals are more difficult to separate from their general social knowledge than are, say, their

estimations of crime statistics. As judgments concerning gender roles, morality or values are more important to people in their everyday lives, the contribution of television will be heavily integrated with their everyday social knowledge and less easily measured independently.

1.2.4. Character interpretation

Characters in television drama typically present a range of personality traits, each of which must be inferred from their interactions with other characters. Characters are used by the writers to personify narrative themes. They are usually rather ambiguous so as to appeal to a wide range of viewers and to give the viewer the pleasure of working out for themselves what is happening and what the characters are like. As viewers come to a programme equipped with a considerable knowledge of other people, interpretative strategies and experience in television literacy, there are many degrees of freedom for the character interpretation. It is with their representation of a character that the viewer may identify, engage in para-social interaction, or enter into a role modelling or imitative relationship.

For example, how do viewers interpret the character played by Joan Collins in Dynasty? Alexis Carrington is a glamorous, powerful and evil woman in her late forties. There are few attractive women on television of that age, so she may increase the self-esteem of older viewers. Or is she too successful, rich and fortunate for an ordinary viewer to feel that Alexis Carrington has anything to do with her? Thus the character may be represented as a splendid role model for middle-aged viewers, as an unobtainable ideal which simply depresses and reduces self-esteem, or as pure fiction, nothing to do

with the viewer's opinion of middle-aged women or of herself. Similar consequences of interpretation attach to narrative. If a viewer focusses on J.R.'s repeated success in Dallas, despite his evil methods, that viewer might conclude that 'might is right'. But if the viewer focusses instead on J.R.'s occasional moments of self-doubt and unhappiness, she might instead conclude that 'money can't buy happiness'.

Such questions hinge on three central issues: the problem of determining which conclusions the programme itself advocates, if any; the divergence in viewers' interpretations of programmes; and the degree of power which viewers have to create their own meanings. All these issues require more systematic study and will be pursued in this thesis.

1.3. Semantic representation and social cognition

This section elaborates the argument that the social cognition of semantic representation provides a basis for studying viewers' representations and interpretations of television programmes.

1.3.1. What is social cognition?

Social cognition has become a dominant research concern of current cognitive, social and developmental psychology (Forgas, 1981, Fiske & Taylor, 1984). It studies the ways in which people understand their social world and divides its study into research into representations and research into processes. Deriving in part from symbolic interactionism, it assumes that the symbolic realities in which people live are real for them and therefore real in their consequences, and should be studied in preference (or in relation) to an objective reality. The second origin of social cognition is

cognitive constructivism, beginning with Bruner's new Look in the 1950's (Bruner, Goodnow & Austin, 1956) which itself originated in the Gestalt psychologists' concern with meaning as the active creation of a coherent and emergent whole from incomplete stimulus information (Kohler, 1930).

The study of semantic representations concerns people's knowledge of their social world, of people and events. It assumes that the social world is too complex and varied for adaptive action in combination with veridical and passive perception. Therefore people must be highly selective. Furthermore, information does not come ready packaged for use, and so must be constructively and purposively organised. This organisation is governed by principles of consistency, coherence, parsimony, and usefulness, principles which together generate meaningful and adaptive representations of knowledge. Thus people construct organised and abstract summaries of their past experiences which serve to frame their understanding of new experiences: they provide the lens through which incoming information is interpreted. Socio-cognitive processes then apply these representations to new experiences through processes of interpretation, recall, memorial organisation and restructuring.

This active constructive conception of the individual emphasises top-down rather than bottom-up processes (Bobrow & Norman, 1975; Neisser, 1976), so that meaning is held to derive from the imposition of semantic representations as frameworks for making sense of novelty rather than from the passive reception of stimulus information. Thus people abstract from their everyday experiences, organise these experiences into generalisable representations, and thereby create their own versions of a social world which is

inherently open to interpretation.

Various structures are proposed for these semantic representations: frame, script, schema, stereotype, prototype, and so forth, of which schema is frequently used as a generic term (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Mandler, 1984; Schank & Abelson, 1977). People face a basic trade-off in the construction of these representations between generality and parsimony, which argues for a few representations at a high level of abstraction, and specificity and richness of detail, which argues for representations tailored to each domain of social perception.

1.3.2. Problems with social cognition

Social cognition tends to overemphasise the top-down nature of understanding and neglect the bottom-up processes. Thus one is often left with the feeling that people can make any sense they choose of an experience with no constraints imposed by the inherent structure of the stimulus. How do the top-down and bottom-up processes interact?

There is also inadequate explanation of the existence of consensus in representation. In other words, social cognition neglects the social context and produces overly individualistic accounts of cognition which cannot account for consensual representations. There are two possible explanations of consensus which require consideration: social pressures may influence perceptual processes (Farr & Moscovici, 1984); and/or the structure of the stimulus may have a determining role in perception (Rosch & Lloyd, 1978).

Social cognition is still at an early stage of development. Being an experimental enterprise, its strategy is to explain the

complex by breaking down phenomena into their constituent parts (or processes) and then studying artificial simulations of each part in the laboratory. Thus we know something of people's understanding of simple scenario descriptions of others and of short folk tales (Mandler, 1984), but almost nothing of their understanding of their family or of a television programme. It may be that when the individual parts are reconstructed we may find emergent properties of the whole social perceptual process still unstudied.

1.3.3. The spatial metaphor for semantic representation

The study of semantic representations frequently draws upon the spatial metaphor of meaning. This is premised upon two ideas: meaning lies in the differences between semantic units; and semantic relations are fruitfully conceptualised by analogy to physical relations. The first idea is common to structuralist and semiotic theory as well as to psychology, and the present research deliberately exploits this commonality. Both semiotics and socio-cognitive psychology hold that meaning lies in the similarities and differences between signs, rather than in the referential relations between signs and their corresponding real-world entities. The spatial metaphor exploits this concern with structural interrelations between signs, and centres on the use of spatial distance to model conceptual distance, on oppositions between concepts as key forms of structure, on continua or dimensions along which meanings vary, and on the belief in common underlying structure beneath apparent diversity.

Thus, to make sense of otherwise disorganised sets of objects, we group things together, recognise opposites, match and compare things on different dimensions, and so forth. The Gestalt theorists

noted how proximity gave the subjective impression of similarity, how we spontaneously organise objects into coherent structures, and argued that principles of similarity and difference are basic to psychological meaning (Kohler, 1930).

Social cognition and semiotics study these similar semantic phenomena in very different ways. Semioticians use conceptual analysis to reveal the underlying structures while psychologists use statistical techniques, typically multidimensional scaling or factor analysis, to reveal the common structures underlying a variety of domains of representation. For example, Dyer, Geraghty, Jordan, Lovell, Paterson, and Stewart (1981), in their analysis of the programme Coronation Street, say that "our method of analysis examines the oppositions operative in the serial. This approach, which owes much to Levi-Strauss (1976), seeks to uncover the concealed structures of the text within its cultural framework" (p.84). Similarly, in drawing parallels between the Royal Family and the Ewings of Dallas, Coward writes: "These conflicts and problems are expressed through a series of oppositions in the narrative. It is the function of the characters to carry one or other of the terms in the opposition" (1984, p.165).

On the other hand, Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum (1957) use the semantic differential to study the semantics of personality attributes, among other things: "the semantic differential is proposed as an index of certain aspects of meaning, particularly conotative aspects" (p.273). The application of multidimensional scaling to the study of semantic knowledge representations will be pursued below. Here I wish to establish the parallels between semiotic and psychological concepts of meaning which, while they may

differ in other respects, are similar in their emphasis on difference and on the spatial metaphor. Consider the following quotations, one from a founder of social psychology, and the other from a major influence on cultural studies:

"What it means to 'make order': usually it means to make the factor of proximity coincide with the factor of similarity; we tend to put similar things together" (Heider, 1979, p.21)

On what 'table', according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? What is this coherence - which, as is immediately apparent, is neither determined by an a priori and necessary concatenation, nor imposed on us by immediately perceptible contents? ... A 'system of elements' - a definition of the segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown ... - is indispensable for the establishment of even the simplest form of order. (Foucault, 1970, preface, xvii - xx).

1.3.4. Multidimensional scaling

Multidimensional scaling (Kruskal & Wish, 1978; Schiffman, Reynolds & Young, 1981) transforms distances or proximities between a set of objects into a spatial map in multidimensional space which represents the proximities in terms of Euclidean distance. In the same way that the distances between the cities in Britain are most economically and meaningfully represented on a map, conceptual relations between objects of psychological interest (e.g. people, emotions, traits) can be represented as a spatial map of semantic knowledge. The map, or semantic representation, can be described in terms of orthogonal linear dimensions (e.g. for cities, the dimensions are North/South and East/West, for animal names, they are size and ferocity, Henley, 1969). These dimensions have basic cognitive significance for the domain. All objects in the domain have coordinate values on each dimension, and the relations between the objects can be calculated in Euclidean distance. Additional

properties of an multidimensional scaling space, as with a map, are: indication of densely or sparsely populated areas; indication of structural relations between objects other than dimensional ones (e.g. clustering, circumplex); can test hypotheses concerning number, salience, and identity of dimensions of knowledge organisation.

The advantages of multidimensional scaling as a model of social knowledge are: the economical summary of much information; reveals hidden structure in the data not easily discernable from the proximities matrix; provides quantitative descriptive data for further analysis; the model is fitted to the data rather than forcing data to fit a pre-existing model; meaningful data reduction; produces a useable model which can be read for a variety of purposes; produces a representation open to various processing theories; may be used both as a discovery method or for hypothesis testing.

Most important, multidimensional scaling is a technique which adopts the implicit spatial metaphor with which we commonly discuss semantic relationships. These are otherwise difficult to discuss and difficult for a researcher to discover. In recent years, multidimensional scaling has been used in social psychology, cognitive psychology, and market research. Shoben (1983) discusses many examples of the use of multidimensional scaling in cognition, both in discovering people's representations of different domains and in showing the use of these representations as knowledge structures guiding cognitive processing. In social psychology, Jones (1983) argues thus:

A common assumption of social psychological theories is that interpersonal behaviour is

mediated by structured cognitive representations of self and others ... [and] that both individual adjustment and group effectiveness depend on some degree of consensus and stability in conceptions of these domains. (p.451).

Forgas (1979) argues for scaling as a discovery method in social psychology, for its many advantages of sensitivity, implicitness, and meaningfulness make it "an excellent alternative to the qualitative journalistic, descriptive methodologies currently being advocated by some critics" (p. 254).

The relation between multidimensional scaling, the spatial metaphor and the role of social knowledge in person perception can be seen thus:

In making these [multidimensional scaling] judgments, the judge may consider the entire complex of demographic, behavioural, and personality cues that he or she deems relevant for judging pairs of individuals. For each pair judged, it is assumed that a social comparison process is evoked, essentially similar to the process typically evoked in actual social situations ... the observed set of interpersonal similarity relations generated by a particular judge contains a wealth of relevant information about that judge's construal of self and significant others (Jones, 1983, p.435)

In the present research, just such representations of other people will be obtained, using multidimensional scaling. Jones' approach to person perception is here simply translated into the media domain, to study viewers' representations of television characters.

In the present research, only the most basic and straightforward method of scaling was used, the one which makes the fewest assumptions and which is most naturally or readily applicable to psychological representations. This is the classical, unweighted, symmetric, single matrix multidimensional scaling model

(see Schiffman et al, 1981, for a taxonomy of common scaling techniques).

Mathematically, multidimensional scaling is very complex, rarely if ever done without a computer and will not be discussed here. However, there are certain points to be made about the scaling spaces which the method produces:

1. The data are assumed to contain an underlying structure. If they do not, the solution will contain excessive error, as measured by the stress value.
2. The data must not show triangular inequality (i.e. distance AB + distance AC must be equal to or exceed distance BC). If this assumption is broken, the solution will contain stress.
3. The resultant space is constant under the basic transformations of rotation, reflection, and translation.
4. Most procedures produce a metric, Euclidean space, whether from metric or non-metric proximities data.
5. Unlike factor analysis, the spaces between objects is meaningful. Thus unless the object sample is equal to the total possible population, empty areas of space are as meaningful as occupied areas.
6. Typically, although not necessarily, multidimensional scaling differs from factor analysis in that the proximities are direct subjective responses to pairs of objects in multidimensional scaling, while in factor analysis they are indirectly calculated from ratings of each object on a set of variables.
7. Because of this, multidimensional scaling can be used to produce a stable solution with fewer subjects than are typically needed for factor analysis.

1.4. Person Perception Theory

1.4.1. Person perception as a branch of social cognition

The literature on person perception within social psychology covers a broad range of issues, from impression formation, attribution theory, personal construct theory, and personality theory, and all these issues are being currently re-worked under the rubric of social cognition (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Schneider, Hastorf & Ellsworth, 1979). All of these are concerned with the ways in which ordinary people understand and represent the actions and personalities of others. Implicit Personality Theory is the term given to people's everyday understandings of others as embodied in abstract, semantic representations (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986; Bruner & Tagiuri, 1954; Osgood et al, 1957; Rosenberg & Sedlack, 1972). This group of theories has a central place in psychology and is integrated with the study of representations of other domains, such as emotion terms (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) or values (Schwartz, in preparation). Although not commonly considered as Implicit Personality Theories, theories concerned with gender perceptions will also be considered because of the widely acknowledged centrality of gender in people's understanding of others (Bem, 1984; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Markus, 1977). In particular, Bem's Gender Schema Theory, an influential socio-cognitive version of gender stereotype theories, will be examined.

These theories of person perception can be considered as theories of the socio-cognitive resources available to viewers in their interpretation of television characters. The argument that viewers contribute to the construction of textual meaning, especially for complex and open texts (see later), depends for its

development on a body of research which specifies the social knowledge of the viewer. Little has been said on this question, beyond the recognition of a need for a theory of common sense or social experience. It is thus proposed here that person perception theory may provide a literature on what people know of others, how they organise this knowledge and how they apply it.

1.4.2. Research Designs

However, while person perception theories have generated a large body of research, they do not constitute a complete and certain body of knowledge. Most research has used artificial, controlled stimulus materials, partly because it is difficult to study real world knowledge other than in an idiographic fashion: researchers in Implicit Personality Theory have opted for generality, sacrificing the ecological validity of the idiographic approach (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Unfortunately, the more one controls the materials, the less the subject is likely to meet with those materials in ordinary situations, the less complex they can be, and the less they can connect with the subjects' values or interests. However, idiographic research, though more naturalistic, has difficulties in generalising, because each person uses different terms and applies these terms to different target persons (e.g. friends or family). Thus results are usually ambiguous: individual differences in person representations may be due either to cognitive differences or to actual target differences.

The mass media, and especially soap opera, provide an interesting opportunity for the ecologically valid and yet generalised study of person perception. They present reasonably realistic characters with whom viewers become involved in

para-social relationships and for whom they presumably construct long-term, complex cognitive representations. Yet at the same time, all the viewers know the same characters and all are exposed to the same materials, permitting comparisons and generalisations. In the present research, person perception theory specifies the person knowledge available as a resource to the active viewer, and the study of television character representation provides a naturalistic domain for testing the application of person perception theory.

1.4.3. Person perception and semantic representations

Implicit Personality Theory (Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979) holds that people organize their knowledge of others according to particular, abstract themes. They draw inferences about personality from perceived correlations in behavior by building up a taxonomic semantic space consisting of a few, usually orthogonal, dimensions. Person perception and social inference proceed by identifying a few durable traits in a target person and using this information to locate them in the semantic space. Further inferences and expectations concerning the target are then made without requiring too much additional information.

Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) present the original formulation of the semantic differential model for social meanings, together with a broad range of research which supports the model. In a series of studies on the perceived similarities between large sets of trait terms (e.g. from a Thesaurus), Osgood et al repeatedly show that certain themes recur. Trait terms were found to be organised around the dimensions of evaluation, potency, and activity. This basic framework could be modified for different subjects or different domains by introducing fourth and fifth

dimensions with different contents. They argue that the semantic space is multidimensional, constructed from differentially weighted dimensions (e.g. evaluation is twice as important as the other two), that the meanings of trait terms are thus componential, based on the combination of their coordinates on the dimensions of the space, and that the dimensions of evaluation, potency, and activity are stable across domains and individuals. "Considering the variety of scales, concepts, subjects, and methods of collecting data that have been employed in this series of analyses, the regularity with which this factorial picture repeats itself is impressive" (Osgood et al, 1957, p.73).

Under certain circumstances, the semantic space is modified. Most commonly, the dimensions of potency and activity coalesce to form a 'dynamism' dimension, particularly when using concepts from the socio-political sphere. "It is as if things in this frame of reference that are 'strong' are also necessarily 'active' while things that are 'weak' are also necessarily 'passive'" (p.74).

Although Osgood et al discussed in detail many issues of measurement, reliability, sampling, application, and semantic theory, they were nonetheless aware that their model was still preliminary and that a number of questions remain. These concern especially the exhaustiveness of the evaluation/potency/activity dimensions, the issue of concept-scale interaction (i.e. different scales may become salient for different concept domains), and the question of relations between scales (orthogonality or semantic relatedness). Osgood et al consider the semantic differential especially relevant to communications research.

Most often the researcher will be interested in the significances derived from messages by receivers,

i.e. effect studies ... because, if our general model is correct, upon such semantic effects depend the overt behaviors and decisions of audiences" (p.274).

Rosenberg (1977) discusses the use of naturalistic versus experimental materials in person perception research. Rosenberg & Sedlak (1972) suggested that the semantic differential model of implicit personality theory fits the data well only if a priori rating scales are used to construct the representations, and doubts also exist about the applicability of the model to individuals. Nonetheless, Rosenberg argues that:

the focus on individuals does not mean that I have abandoned the search for universals in implicit personality theory ... this search takes two forms. One is in the nature of the structures themselves, and is exemplified by the search for a general representation of implicit personality theory. The second is in the content that different individuals share in their conception of people. (Rosenberg, 1977, p.185).

Ashmore, Del Boca, and Wohlers (1986) integrate research on gender stereotypes and Implicit Personality Theory. They are motivated to do this because "research on gender stereotypes has been instrument-driven and there has been a paucity of conceptual elaboration" (p.88) beyond a broad 'sociocultural orientation' to research which maintains that "sex stereotypes are part of a society's non-material culture ... [and] they influence perception of self and others" (p.82). Ashmore and Del Boca (1979) define gender stereotypes as "the structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes of women and men" (p.222). Stereotyping research can be integrated with Implicit Personality Theory, for:

sex stereotypes - and, by extension, beliefs about ethnic groups and other social categories - are but one aspect of an individual's overall cognitive scheme for making sense out of other people (i.e., one aspect of the individual's 'implicit

personality theory'). (Ashmore, 1981, p.40).

1.4.4. Categorical theories of person perception

While person perception theories or Implicit Personality Theories typically examine semantic themes underlying descriptive personality or trait terms, an alternative body of research has instead conceived of a more concrete memorial representation, originating with the hierarchical prototype model of Rosch in cognitive psychology (Rosch & Lloyd, 1978), and followed by the social psychological work of Cantor and Mischel (1979). This research is typically concerned with the common types of people represented at the 'basic' or most used and useful level of abstraction. It supposes that people's diverse experiences of others are understood by reference to a hierarchical taxonomy of person prototypes (Deaux, Winton, Crowley & Lewis, 1985). These prototypes are each concretely specified in a detailed and coherent fashion, in contrast to the abstract, dimensional view of Implicit Personality Theory. While people clearly have more detailed representations of others than coordinates on basic dimensions, the prototype model provides little indication of how prototypes are organised so as to be easily accessed, permit inferences, or generate expectancies. Hierarchical or vertical relations have been considered to some extent, but little is said about the nature of relations between prototypes at, say, the basic level.

To fill this gap, Ashmore and Del Boca (1986) suggest and provide evidence for an integrated viewpoint in which the basic level personality types or roles may be interrelated horizontally according to the dimensions of person perception theory (see also Smith and Medin, 1981). Here then is a theory of person memory

combining the idea of concrete and elaborated, culturally well-established prototypes with the idea of abstract, organising semantic themes. For the present research, we can go beyond the postulation that viewers use the dimensions of Implicit Personality Theory to interpret characters and suggest further that they recognise in the characters certain person prototypes. Having identified these, they can then locate the characters in their general person memory framework according to the basic dimensions of Implicit Personality Theory.

1.4.5. Theories of Gender Schemata

Bem (1984) argues that "no other dichotomy in human experience appears to have as many entities linked to it as does the distinction between female and male" (p.11). The importance of the male/female difference, expressed culturally through the concepts of masculine and feminine (Oakley, 1972) is central to Western culture. It manifests itself in linguistic structure (Spender, 1980), child-rearing practices (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), social institutions from the family to the labour structure (Cambridge Women's Studies Group, 1981), and, as a consequence, in patterns of thought and understanding (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986). In this context, Bem aims to provide "an explicit account of why sex comes to have cognitive primacy over other social categories" (Bem, 1984, p.11). From a social-cognitive perspective, Bem proposes Gender Schema Theory thus:

A schema is a cognitive structure, a network of associations that organises and guides an individual's perception ... schematic information processing entails a readiness to sort information into categories on the basis of some particular dimension, despite the existence of other dimensions that could serve equally well in this regard. Gender schematic processing in particular

thus involves spontaneously sorting persons, attributes and behaviours into masculine and feminine categories or 'equivalence classes' regardless of their differences on a variety of dimensions unrelated to gender. (Bem, 1984, p.11-12).

Similar research has also been conducted by Markus (1977), also using traditional cognitive paradigms to reveal the importance of gender and gender identity in processing social information. Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson and Rosenkrantz (1972) have suggested that 'masculine' and 'feminine' are opposed concepts, so that the more people conceive of themselves or others as masculine, the less they perceive the same target to have feminine qualities. Moreover, for Broverman et al, femininity was found to be equated with warmth and expressiveness while masculinity was associated with independence and instrumentality. Ashmore and Del Boca, as discussed above, found masculine and feminine to map onto powerful and submissive respectively. However, Bem (1974, 1981, 1984) proposes that masculine and feminine are not opposed at all, but rather are independent of each other. Thus Bem provides evidence that people can conceive of individuals, including themselves, who are both highly masculine and highly feminine (i.e. androgynous), or who are low on both dimensions, in addition to traditionally masculine or feminine conceptions. This debate appears unresolved as yet, and depends in part on differences in methodology rather than substance. Nonetheless, the importance of gender as a cognitive as well as a socio-structural distinction is beyond question.

1.5. Cultural Studies and the Role of the Viewer

Cultural studies represents the combined application of literary criticism, semiotics, and Marxist sociology to popular

culture (Berger, 1981; Fiske & Hartley, 1978; Rowland & Watkins, 1984). It is central to this thesis for two reasons. First, it offers a more complex and fruitful view of the programme as text than is typically assumed, although rarely specified, by the traditional social science approach to mass communications. Second, cultural studies is increasingly concerned about the interpretations which viewers make of programmes, rather than simply making expert interpretations or speculating about the viewers.

1.5.1. Contrast with traditional semantics

The traditional approach to mass communications generally makes the following implicit assumptions about the nature of the television programme, and consequently, about the process of comprehension. Cultural studies can best be understood here as a critique of the traditional approach.

- (1) The text has a unitary and objectively knowable meaning manifest to any observer.
- (2) The comprehension of the viewer is an essentially passive and context-independent process of absorption (or failure to absorb) the 'information' available.
- (3) The text is viewed as either a commentary upon reality ("reporting") or as an alternative to reality ("fantasy"), but not as a constituent part of symbolic reality (although see Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986).
- (4) Textual meaning is referential.
- (5) Because texts are seen as transparent and unique in meaning, little attention is paid to the text in 'effects' studies, and even content analytic studies mainly consider those aspects of a text which are denotational, singular in meaning, and quantifiable.

The above assumptions are problematic for various reasons and have come under considerable attack (Carey, 1985; Dyer, 1982; Morley, 1980). In general, psychologists have only limited ways of specifying what these apparently obvious meanings of programmes are. Content analysis will reveal, for example, the number of guns in a programme, and simple recall paradigms will determine whether children can correctly recall who was shot. But such approaches do not begin to deal with complex understandings, specify latent meanings of moral or social significance or recognise how the portrayal of violence generates messages of law, order, power and authority (Tuchman, 1979, 1981). Moreover, the role of genre and narrative structure are usually ignored (Dubrow, 1982). Yet these provide the interpretative context for denotational events, rendering overt violence ironic or humorous while rendering the overtly innocuous into more sinister events. A content analyst and a behavioural psychologist would have problems with a Hitchcock film!

While constructivist psychologists recognise that people generate meanings and that their interpretations differ according to their own prior knowledge, this approach poses problems for traditional mass communications research because most effects paradigms are based on simple match/mismatch testing between text and viewers' understanding.

1.5.2. An alternative semantics

Because of their concern with programme complexity and viewers' involvement in interpretation, researchers in cultural studies are becoming interested in a semiotic approach to meaning construction (e.g. Berger, 1981, Fiske & Hartley, 1978). In

proposing a semiotic model of mass communication, Fry and Fry (1986) argue that

it is necessary to adopt an orientation that places total power neither in the media text (as has been implicit in some semiotic textual analyses) nor in the interpretive capacities of the audience member (a position that has been often implicit in the uses and gratifications approach). Thus a semiotic model must address the question of the relative power of both the text and audience in determining the meaning of media texts. (p.444).

Such an approach rejects entirely the concept of 'information', and is concerned to specify the dialectic inter-dependencies between programmes, cultural repertoires, and individual understandings, in the production and recycling of social meanings.

Barthes (1973) makes use of and develops the distinction between denotation and connotation, arguing that sign relations can be analysed at two levels of abstraction - the literal or 'objective' level (denotation) and the connotative level in which emotions, cultural values, and intersubjective associations direct our interpretations. Connotation operates via two important realms of cultural experience, the mythological and the ideological (Fiske, 1982). These are hierarchically related insofar as ideology, the fundamental cultural system of beliefs and practices through which meanings are reproduced, is the source of connotative meanings and myths. These latter are discrete and specific representations of ideological meanings. Or as Fiske puts it:

Signs give myths and values concrete form and in so doing both endorse them and make them public. In using the signs we maintain and give life to the ideology, but we are also formed by that ideology, and by our response to ideological signs. (Fiske, 1982, p.150-1).

In contrast with the semantic assumptions of the traditional

approach, the position of cultural studies until recently could be rather crudely summarised as follows.

- (1) The text has multiple meanings on different levels of abstraction ("unlimited semiosis", Eco, 1979). Texts may be analysed on a variety of levels, the denotational, the connotational, the ideological.
- (2) The process of reading is passive, because contexts of production and reading are generally assumed to be the same. The total potential of the text is not generally comprehended by any one reader, but may be articulated by a text analyst.
- (3) The text is both produced by and contributes to the reality of the reader. It has meaning only insofar as it is a part of the culture and on being read becomes as much part of reality as any other communicative act.
- (4) Meaning is not simply referential but is a function of the structural relations between the textual signs both included in and omitted from the text.
- (5) Any analysis of textual meaning depends heavily upon understanding the context of production, particularly in terms of its values, conventional practices, and ideology.

The new trends in television research, both for the traditional approach and for cultural studies, involve radically rethinking the second assumption of each approach as sketched above. Within the traditional approach recent trends propose and elaborate ways in which the viewer is active in the sense of constructing meaning in his/her environment, in this case the text, through the flexible application of a variety of interpretative schemata, cognitive heuristics, and the like (e.g. Reeves et al, 1982). This

has two important consequences: the simple notion of 'information ' (needed for an 'information processing' approach) can no longer be maintained; and the viewers' personal and sociocultural understandings and interpretative practices are centrally implicated in the comprehension process.

On the other hand, recent trends in cultural studies and semiotics (e.g. Hall et al, 1980) have challenged the view of the text as a fixed, crystalline structure, and thus acknowledge the constructive contribution of the viewer to the generation of textual meaning. The next step, taken most notably by Eco (1979), is to propose that the text is originally constructed with the reader in mind. As a communicative act, the text cannot make sense independently of an interpreting reader, and the analyst's role now is to elucidate the 'model reader' presumed by the text, and to determine where and how the model reader (and, ideally, the actual reader) is required to contribute in order for the text to hold together. As should now be apparent, the traditional and cultural studies approach to both television texts and the importance of viewers interpretations are converging.

1.5.3. Textuality and openness

The work of Eco (1979) in developing the concepts of the open text and the model reader represent a significant development in semiotic theory. His approach to recent trends in semiotics and cultural studies is especially appropriate to this thesis because firstly he applies his ideas to popular culture, in both theory and practice, and secondly he writes with an awareness of psychological issues and cognitive processes. His view of the relation between text and reader will be described here as it provides a basic

theoretical strand underlying this thesis. Eco's work forms one version of reception aesthetics (Hohendahl, 1974; Holub, 1984), or as it is called in America, reader-response theory (Suleiman & Crossman, 1980). Developing within literary criticism and semiotics, these approaches to texts begin with recognising the dual problems of unlimited semiosis and divergent readings: in both theory and practice, one cannot specify a unique, fixed and bounded meaning which lies inherently 'in' a text.

Eco argues that the production of a text demands that the author envisage the reader during the generation of the text.

The author thus has to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model reader) supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the same expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. (Eco, 1979, p.7.)

In this way, texts can represent communicative strategies.

The existence of various codes and subcodes, the variety of sociocultural circumstances in which a message is emitted (where the codes of the addressee can be different from those of the sender), and the rate of initiative displayed by the addressee in making presuppositions and abductions – all result in making a message ... an empty form to which various possible senses can be attributed. (Eco, 1979, p.5).

However, the reader is affected by the reading just as she affects the textual meaning through the constructive process of reading.

A well-organised text on the one hand presupposes a model of competence coming, so to speak, from outside the text, but on the other hand works to build up, by merely textual means, such a competence. (Eco, 1979, p.8).

The model reader of a text can be discovered by analysing textual codes, use of stereotyped overcoding, co-reference, rhetoric, inference, frames, genre and so forth, all of which comprise textual strategies or conventions by which the reader is

invited to interpose her cultural competence into the interpretative process in order to make sense of the text. Eco distinguishes between virtual and realised texts: the virtual text is unread, awaiting completion; the realised text is the product of the reading of the virtual text by a real, socially located reader.

Finally, Eco distinguishes between open and closed texts. He exemplifies these through the analysis of Joyce's Ulysses and Fleming's James Bond novels respectively, although notes that most texts fall somewhere in between, having both open and closed aspects. Open texts envisage a variety of interpretations or textual realisations. Moreover, they deliberately manipulate the interrelations between these different readings, thereby creating irony, allegory, satire and so forth. Closed texts, on the other hand, aim for a particular and specific reading:

They apparently aim at pulling the reader along a predetermined path, carefully displaying their effects so as to arouse pity or fear, excitement or depression at the due place and at the right moment. Every step of the 'story' elicits just the expectation that its further course will satisfy. (Eco, 1979, p.8).

However, because they tend to be aimed at the average reader, closed texts (whether road signs or a Fleming novel) can give rise to unforeseen interpretations ('aberrant readings') because of the sociocultural circumstances of actual readers. Consequently, they may become indeterminate in meaning.

There are several problems with Eco's theory. Firstly, it is elitist in its simple and uncritical mapping of high and low culture onto open and closed texts. Allen (1985) has disagreed with Eco, arguing strongly that certain aspects of popular culture, especially soap opera, are fairly open in important respects: for example, soap

operas not only specify multiple viewpoints on the events portrayed, they also thrive on the interplay between these viewpoints.

There are theoretical and practical problems in distinguishing openness from indeterminacy without invoking the concept of authorial intention. For mass culture texts, authorial intention is especially hard to specify. Yet this issue is critical for the issue of power and influence. If a text intends multiple interpretations, then empirical observations of divergence among readers or viewers may indicate a powerful role for the text. If the text intends a single interpretation, the divergence indicates aberrant readings and a powerful role for the viewer. This problem cannot be resolved here, yet Eco's argument that different texts are structured so as to implicate readers in different ways is too important to put aside. At present, maybe the questions should simply concern the nature and degree of divergence in interpretations, nature of interpretations themselves, and the relation between interpretations and different kinds of texts. Complex conceptions of both viewer and text should be considered in research, and issues of power may follow later.

Thirdly, Eco often talks as if only open texts have model readers. Yet any text draws upon cultural meanings, does not (cannot) fully specify contexts, and gains its meaning from paradigmatic selections (Fiske, 1982) where the reader must supply the paradigm of selected and non-selected options at any choice point. Certainly, the model reader is less theoretically interesting the more closed the text, and as a semiotician, Eco focusses on the more interesting cases. But for a psychologist, if a highly popular television text merely requires repeated rehearsal

of stereotyped knowledge, this must be studied for its psychological consequences.

Finally, there is a problem in specifying the structure of the virtual text: if there was a problem before in specifying the 'crystalline' text, then the problem is now greater, though arguably more ultimately soluble.

Nonetheless, the possibility of a major link between studies of texts and readers is an exciting one and on their own each area of study misses important aspects of its topic or makes naive assumptions about the other. We must proceed with the ideas we have at present. From within this new trend in cultural studies, Culler argues that:

Instead of taking the proliferation of interpretations as an obstacle to knowledge, can one attempt to make it an object of knowledge, asking how it is that literary works have the meaning they do for readers? ... a proper description of a literary work must refer to the meanings it has for readers ... such a semiotics would be a theory of reading and its object would not be literary works themselves but their intelligibility: the ways in which they make sense, the ways in which readers have made sense of them. (Culler, 1981, p.48-50).

There is resistance to this move towards convergence between cultural studies and traditional mass communications. Culler himself (see also Holub, 1984) argues that "well-intentioned empirical research can miscarry" (Culler, 1981, p.52), that "there is little need to concern oneself with the design of experiments [because] there already exist more than enough interpretations with which to begin" (p.53) and that "there is every likelihood that an explicit formulation of one's own interpretive operations would have considerable general validity" (p.53). However, it is an empirical

question as to whether a middle-class male academic interprets a soap opera in the same way, and using the same knowledge and operations as a working-class housewife. Further, while many literary interpretations of high culture texts exist, this is not true for popular culture: these interpretations must be obtained empirically.

1.5.4. Empirical research in cultural studies

Notwithstanding the above doubts, many researchers have begun empirical research within cultural studies. The various reception theory concepts are too psychological and raise too many interesting empirical issues to be ignored: what are real readers' "horizons of expectations", how do they fit the schematic structures provided by texts, what differences do different sociocultural backgrounds make, do ordinary and specialist readings concur, and so on?

In semiotics, one can point to the work of, for example, Eco (1979) and Morley (1980), to see research becoming increasingly concerned with the implicit psychology underlying textual analyses:

there seem some grounds for thinking that a new and exciting phase in so-called audience research, of a quite new kind, may be opening up ... the use of the semiotic paradigm promises to dispel the lingering behaviourism which has dogged mass-media research for so long, especially in its approach to content. (Hall, 1980, p.131).

The recent empirical research will be reviewed in the next chapter. In many ways, it is necessarily exploratory, asking basic and yet unanswered questions concerning the nature of readers' and viewers' interpretations of popular culture. Using ethnographic, psychoanalytic or literary critical perspectives, several authors (e.g. Ang, 1985; Radway, 1984, 1985) are beginning to generate interesting insights into what real people 'do' with texts.

1.5.5. Convergence between traditional and critical approaches

Carey (1985) calls for a major reorientation in mass communications research, arguing that "the search for a positivist science of communications" (p.27) should be abandoned because "the central tradition of effects research has been a failure on its own terms" (p.28). His proposed alternative, cultural studies, draws "more on the vocabulary of poetry and politics and less on the vocabulary of metaphysics and determinism" (p.29) and emphasises the issues of class, ideology, and power. He justly points out that "the positivist resistance to cultural studies, beyond the ever-present desire to maintain a distinction between hard science and soft scholarship, between knowledge and opinion, is grounded in a deep political instinct" (p.32).

Schroder identifies five problems with the traditional approach which hinder convergence. He argues that the traditional approach focusses on: individual, behavioural, and short-term effects rather than long-term societal effects; on attitudinal change rather than the more common consistencies which must also be accounted for; on attitudes and opinions as individual entities rather than as part of structured belief systems; an overestimation of the importance of interpersonal relations in mediating the influence of television; and argues finally, "they are still clinging to the familiar quantitative methodology, although it appears to be unable to capture the multidimensionality and complexity of the media's symbolic structures, as well as the ambiguities and contradictions of audience experiences" (p.13).

To balance these criticisms, Schroder also discusses the need for reorientation within the critical or cultural studies approach:

the critical tradition will have to abandon its insistence on powerful media effects, and the accompanying tendency to regard the media text as a one-dimensional entity, rather than as a multiplicity of meanings to be decoded by the audience ... It has become necessary to examine how the audience actually selects, perceives, decodes, and makes sense of media texts. (p.16-17).

However:

Social scientists, on the other hand, fully self-sufficient in the gathering of empirical data and firmly grounded in sociological understandings of the media audience, need cultural studies insights in order to tackle the analysis of textual structures. (p.28).

In favour of convergence, one can additionally point to the following factors: empirical data has some independence from its methodology and so can sometimes be informative despite doubts about its methodology; the traditional approach can benefit from critical analysis of its scientific assumptions; some social psychologists are sympathetic towards a critical or interpretative approach (Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Murray, 1985; Potter, Stringer, & Wetherell, 1984); and it would be redundant for cultural studies to reinvent empirical methods and existing psychological findings about 'actual' viewers. But most important here, psychology needs cultural studies: cultural studies can provide the theory of the text for research on the psychology of mass communications. This may be extended to much else in social psychology, because it suffers generally from a simplistic conception of social stimuli: the idea of the social world as text and of social life as practice should have wider currency.

1.6. The genre of soap opera

1.6.1. Background

When the soap opera was originally selected as the genre in which to pursue this research, it was commonly considered a rather trivial, mundane phenomenon. During my research, the soap opera EastEnders began in February, 1985, and following its immediate and enormous popularity there arose a wave of interest in the genre not only from the viewers and the media, but also from a range of other professions concerned with its role in society, from teachers, the clergy, politicians and, of course, academics. Although the reasons for which soap opera had been originally selected as the domain for this research did not particularly concern its rise to prominence, it became apparent that the present research would nonetheless have a place in this new wave of interest, both popular and academic.

1.6.2. Soap opera: definition, history, audience

Soap opera has changed in form over its history, beginning with the daily American radio soap operas which served as an advertising vehicle for soap manufacturers, and resulting in a diversity of forms in different media and different countries. Although much has been written on this issue (Buckman, 1984; Cassata & Skill, 1983; Cantor & Pingree, 1983; Intintoli, 1984), this thesis adopts a pragmatic definition which follows that of the viewers. Thus the term 'soap opera' refers to a genre of programmes, typically on television, with most or all of the following features: regular and frequent transmission (often daily); aimed predominantly at female viewers; daytime or early evening rather than prime-time slot; fairly constant and large cast; continues for years, building up a faithful audience; cheap production values (except American

prime-time shows); and low prestige entertainment. Soap operas tend to concern the day-to-day activities, the minutiae of the everyday lives of characters who centre on a small community and/or a large family. It attempts simulation of real time and realistic events; several interweaving narratives whose resolutions overlap rather than coincide with episode boundaries, uses the 'cliff-hanger' to ensure continued viewing and focusses on female characters and women's concerns

The American soap operas transmitted in Britain (e.g. Dallas, Dynasty, and Falcon Crest) are prime-time, expensive, and melodramatic, while the homegrown British soap operas (e.g. Coronation Street, Crossroads, and EastEnders are early evening, cheap, and everyday in subject matter. The former concern the wealthy, the latter concern the working class poor. Nonetheless, in terms of involvement, treatment of moral and political issues, narrative structure, and viewer loyalty, the American and British soap operas are often similar.

The genre has been ridiculed for many years not only by popular opinion, but also by academics, whose distanced and often patronising stance surely hinders their understanding of soap opera viewers:

One would have to have a passion for sameness, amounting to mania if after six years of viewing Coronation Street or Hawii Five-0, one still looked forward eagerly to the next episode. (Himmelweit, Swift & Jaeger, 1980, p.96).

Allen (1985) has convincingly argued that soap operas only present a vision of endless 'sameness' to a non-viewer: to those who know the programme well, a wide range of subtle, complex and historically informed meanings are involved, and it is these which

create the interest and the experience of viewing soap opera. However, one must beware of compensating for academic elitism by excessive popularism. Certain researchers seem sometimes to lose their critical distance when empathising with viewers, attributing rather too much power and self-knowledge to the viewers.

In Britain, soap operas dominate the audience ratings, attracting massive audiences on a regular basis, and they have become the most popular genre on television. Table 1.1 shows the viewing figures for three soap operas, revealing demographic variations in audience composition. Thus Coronation Street is watched by about one third of the British population, by rather more women than men and by more older people, especially those from the lower socio-economic classes. EastEnders, watched by a little under one third of the population, is also watched by more women than men. However, EastEnders attracts a younger audience. It too is watched more by those of lower socio-economic class, although this difference is less marked than for Coronation Street. One fifth of the population watch Dallas: again, the audience contains more women than men, although the age and class differences are marginal.

Table 1.1: Viewing figures (adults over 16 years) for three soap operas, expressed as percentages of the total population: IPA Social Class by Age and Sex

Social class		ABC1			C2DE		
Age (years)		16-34	35-54	55+	16-34	35-54	55+
<u>Population</u> <u>(in millions)</u>	Total						
Total	42.305	5.746	6.144	4.359	9.015	7.681	9.360
Men	20.014	2.793	2.962	2.016	4.513	3.771	3.959
Women	22.291	2.953	3.182	2.343	4.502	3.910	5.401

CORONATION ST
(% population)

Total	33	18	21	27	28	35	56
Men	27	15	15	24	21	28	50
Women	39	22	27	30	35	42	60

EASTENDERS
(% population)

Total	29	28	26	17	33	35	27
Men	23	22	20	13	26	30	24
Women	33	33	32	20	39	40	29

DALLAS
(% population)

Total	20	18	17	16	19	20	24
Men	15	12	12	14	14	17	19
Women	24	23	22	17	24	24	28

Note 1: Figures obtained from Audience Composition Report, BARB.
Note 2: Figures are averaged over the 4 weeks ending 26/10/86 for the following time periods: Coronation Street, ITV (Monday 19.30-19.45); EastEnders, BBC1 (Tuesday 19.30-19.45); and Dallas, BBC1 (Wednesday 20.00-20.15).

1.6.3. Soap opera as myth

The popularity of soap opera appears to rest on its undemanding nature and its preoccupation with everyday human concerns. It bears a close relation to the simplified and conventionally acceptable aspects of our culture, namely myth and ideology. As with myths and folktales, soap opera and television drama generally fulfills the social functions of justification for and celebration of conventional wisdom and practice in the face of challenge or uncertainty (Allen, 1985, Dyer et al, 1981, Gerbner et al, 1986; Silverstone, 1981). The texts are organised to ensure the clarity of the message and their purpose is to explicate, to embody cultural truths, and to reveal the simple wisdom we can rely upon which underlies the superficial confusions in which we become embroiled. In this sense, soap operas are like myths and folk tales, conventional, conservative and moral.

Soap opera, like more 'serious' television drama, attempts to encompass the unpleasant and problematic aspects of our human relations. The success of individual solutions to problems is lauded to the exclusion of socio-political solutions (Dyer et al, 1981). "Unless politics are personalised, the soaps can't handle them" (Buckman, 1984, p.31). Thus, soap opera serves some of the same functions as cultural myths, connecting with basic human concerns, explaining complex social phenomena, providing categories for thought and moral precepts to live by.

1.6.4. Stereotyping and character portrayal

In a detailed consideration of the world of soap opera, Buckman (1984) concludes: "All problems on the soaps have to be personalised, and the personalities involved must conform to

stereotypes whose views reflect majority thinking" (p.146), and "Stereotypes are central to soaps, the foundation of the narrative structure which forms the basis of the genre's appeal ... Only when the liberated woman has become a stereotype herself will she be able to take her place in soap opera" (p.168). He is not proposing a conspiracy theory to brainwash the masses, but instead draws upon cognitive arguments (involving schemata and heuristics) familiar to psychologists. Thus as the genre developed:

the writers and producers ... in their rush to get something together, they grabbed at the wisdom they and their audience knew so well, because it was there, it was easy, it was something everyone could swallow without effort, because - being based on good sense - it was something they could justify, if anyone asked them. (p.24).

Yet soap opera is also involving human drama, and consequently the stereotypes are fairly subtle and not always obvious at first glance. While stereotypes are usually to be found underneath, on the surface exists the wealth of personal details that viewers find satisfying and which contribute to their view of characters as "like real people".

1.6.5. Openness and closure in soap opera texts

Having argued that soap opera serves important mythic functions in contemporary society, there are also certain respects in which soap opera deviates from mythic form, constituting what Eco (1979) would call a more open text. Firstly, mythic narratives centre upon a single agent (the 'hero'). The essence of soap opera, however, is the absence of a central figure. Instead, the drama involves a cluster of interrelated characters who, at different times, come to the fore or retreat to the background.

Secondly, the main theme of soap opera is not that of

individual quest but that of human relationships, and preferably a tangle of relationships centrally involving several characters in each story. Soap operas are not primarily concerned with universal problems whose origin and resolution are beyond human control, with external forces (personified as they might be in the figure of the villain) which require magical or superhuman strength to combat. Their concern, for which they require multiple agents, is instead with the all-too-human problems which most of us experience, and thus with what is essentially confused and contradictory. All is not always made clear, endings are not consistently happy, disagreements may endure. This argues for an indeterminate textual structure.

Thirdly, myth assumes a single perspective in which the viewers/readers, hero, other characters and story-teller all share the same understanding of, say, the goodness of the hero, the value of the quest and the wickedness of the villain. In soap opera, this is clearly not the case, and the multiple, often conflicting understandings create the interest, tension, irony, and humour.

Fourthly, closed texts are typically bounded by an identifiable and discrete beginning and ending to each story. In soap opera a problem may be hinted at and the requisite conditions for its occurrence established some time earlier than the event itself. Problems rarely arrive 'out of the blue' and narratives may also disappear with no clear resolution, merely a stalemate and a shift in textual focus. It is a specific feature of soap opera that it should emulate, albeit in selected areas, the lives of the viewers, and so it is concerned to parallel the slow, confused, erratic and often mundane development of events experienced by its

viewers in their day-to-day lives (Porter, 1982).

Jordan (1981a) argues that the conventions of closure do not clearly operate in soap operas because the conventions behind British soap opera are mixed, incorporating aspects of social realism, of the American genre of soap opera, and of romantic "women's" fiction (Buckman, 1984). Thus conventional ideology of class and gender cannot be straightforwardly upheld in soap opera. Born in the days of social consciousness and documentary realism (1960's), British soap operas, in contrast to their American counterparts, cannot be said to simply convey capitalist ideals of money, status, security, ambition, and individual gain, but instead they concern the historically more subversive values of traditional communities which are suspicious of the technological and competitive concerns of the outside world with its claims to science and its lofty disregard of folk wisdom, cooperation, and loyalty to the community. Similarly as regards gender, the conventions of soap opera, developed for a largely female audience, require strong, active women, in direct contradiction to conventional gender roles, as shown in most other television programmes (Durkin, 1985a).

In sum, soap opera is a genre which provides relatively open texts, and thus can be expected to provide a substantial role for the viewer, in that there is no single hero figure, no single perspective expressed, no discrete boundaries to the narratives. On the other hand, soap opera is closed in that it reassures us in our age-old beliefs in the power of the individual, in traditional values of stability, community, patriarchy, and resistance to change. It systematically excludes certain phenomena in its apparently general treatment of everyday concerns, and it is closed

in that conclusions may be reached about the moral superiority of one of the expressed views (usually the 'establishment' view).

1.6.6. Viewing and personal involvement

In soap opera, the variety of perspectives expressed are individually personified in the various characters. Each issue (abortion, marriage, loyalty etc.) is given an open treatment because different characters each express a different perspective on the issue (Kershaw, 1981). The viewer is presented with a range of often conflicting viewpoints, and the interest lies in their juxtaposition, in the fact that often there is no simple answer, and in the space for the viewer to interpose his or her own views on the issue.

Hobson (personal communication, 1984) discussed with viewers a particular storyline in Crossroads in which a young woman considered, discussed with others, and finally decided against having an abortion. Despite the conventional conclusion, she reports that viewers appreciated an open discussion of the issue and felt they could reach their own conclusions independently of those of the programme. In soap opera, such open discussions frequently take place in the local pub, which serves as the central meeting place of the community. Here suspicions, hints and uncertainties are transformed from private individual concerns into subject matter for public debate.

Thus openness, familiarity, and longevity all enhance viewers' personal involvement with and loyalty to a soap opera. This involvement is supported both only by the ratings, but also by research on the role that soap opera plays in viewers' lives (Rubin, 1985; Taylor & Mullan, 1986). These show that soap opera is felt to

be emotionally satisfying, thought provoking, informative, to provide social comfort and so forth. A variety of social psychological needs may thus be met. Cognitively, these needs are met differently according to the openness or closure of the text and the consequent role for the viewers in the construction of meanings.

Viewers watch soap opera for many years and become involved with the characters. Thus they build up complex character representations which should reflect the viewers' balance between programme structure and social knowledge. The characters in soap opera become real for people and thus constitute an extension of their social networks and part of their everyday lives.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIAL PERCEPTION AND POPULAR CULTURE:

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

There is a vast literature on the psychology of mass communications, on social cognition and person perception, and on cultural studies approaches to popular culture. Therefore, the present review will aim to be representative rather than exhaustive, and will describe in detail that research which either illustrates a major trend or which is especially relevant to the focus of this thesis.

2.2. Traditional mass communications research

2.2.1. Introduction

Research is often guided by a concern with particular social issues, such as violence, gender stereotyping, literacy, advertising, or pornography. Considerable research effort has concentrated on the content of television programmes, examining the discrepancies between the world portrayed on television and the world of the viewers (Durkin, 1985a; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Jones, 1984; Tuchman et al, 1978). Other researchers have examined the social functions of television, the uses to which viewers put television, and the gratifications they derive from it (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Rosengren et al, 1985). In response to contemporary political and macro-social developments, the impact of television's portrayal of such developments on the viewer has been studied

(Noelle-Neumann, 1983; McCombs & Gilbert, 1986). Others have looked at the impact of the introduction of television to a social group or society, examining whether it displaces other activities and how it gains a role in people's lives (Murray & Kippax, 1979). Finally, the effects of television have been a cause for concern in terms of behavioural, attitudinal, affective, and cognitive effects on the lives of individual viewers, especially children.

Katz (1980) identifies two basic concepts which underlie all research on the effects of mass communication, namely selectivity and interpersonal relations.

By selectivity I mean those sociopsychological processes which guide individual exposure, perception, and recall of the media and their messages. By interpersonal relations I refer to membership and conversation in social networks which intervene in the flow of mass communication. (p.119).

Through a historical survey he traces the greater or lesser role of these concepts in the alternating research balance which has broadly characterised media research. This balance swings between arguing for strong and powerful persuasive effects of the media and between the strong and powerful role of the audience in selecting or buffering these effects. Currently the research domain is turning increasingly to the study of viewers' socio-cognitive response to television. The literature on television's effects on viewers will be examined in three sections: experimental research, cultivation research, and research on viewers' relationships with specific characters.

2.2.2. The experimental approach to television effects

Experimental studies of television effects involve exposing different, randomly determined groups of subjects to different

experimental materials which are hypothesised to induce a certain type of effect in subjects in the experimental condition(s) only. The effects of this exposure are then measured and the conditions are compared. Researchers have shown, for example, that children exposed to violent programmes are slower to seek adult help when they witness violence among other children (Drabman & Thomas, 1975); that being forewarned about the events to occur in a horror film increased the degree to which subjects were frightened by the film (Cantor, Ziemke, & Sparks, 1984); that television viewing is related positively to the self-concepts of girls (Stroman, 1986); and that men who viewed a series of films showing violence against women began to have fewer negative reactions to the films and see them as less violent (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1984); see also Bryant & Zillman (1986), Durkin (1985b) and Murray & Kippax (1979) for reviews.

The experimental approach is often criticised (e.g. Noble, 1975) for the unnatural context of laboratory research, for the brevity of the programme segments whose effects are studied, and for its limited conception of effects as direct, immediate, and typically, behavioural. Nonetheless, experiments have been widely conducted to investigate the effects of television. This approach has two main advantages over non-experimental methods: random assignment of subjects into conditions precludes the problem of selective viewing under natural conditions; and control over programme exposure prior to the measurement of effects permits causal inference.

Murray and Kippax (1979) discuss the complexity of measuring television's effects experimentally because of the multiplicity of

variables which mediate, moderate or enhance the effects of viewing. They conclude that viewing has measurable and broad ranging effects on the audience, but that the relationship between content and effect is complex. Hawkins and Pingree (1983) conclude more hesitantly that the evidence for effects is weak and problematic, and Durkin (1985b) is also tentative in his review of television's effects on children's sex-role acquisition.

2.2.3. Television as a 'cultivator' of social reality beliefs

The cultural indicators project was initiated in the late 1960's by George Gerbner and has since spawned a large quantity of research. This project adopts a broad conception of television effects in deliberate contrast to the experimental research. Effects are expected to be indirect, generalised, gradual, symbolic, and integrated with other influences upon the belief systems of the viewer. The research has two major, connected aspects: message system analysis (content analysis of programmes) and cultivation analysis (measurement of viewers' endorsement of particular beliefs related to the messages revealed in programme content). Cultivation, "television's contribution to conceptions of social reality" (Gerbner et al, 1986, p.23), is held to occur if heavy viewers of television are more likely to endorse a 'television answer' to a social reality question while than are light viewers, who should favour 'real world answers' to the same question.

In its integration of the analysis of content and the measurement of effect, particularly effects measured as they occur in their natural context, this research was a major achievement, breaking down the traditional division between those who study programmes and those who study viewers. Television's potential role

as a cultivator of social reality beliefs has been studied in a wide range of domains such as violence, fear of crime, family beliefs, racial and gender stereotyping (see Hawkins & Pingree, 1983, for a recent review). It has also generated a variety of attacks, both theoretical and methodological (e.g. Gunter, 1985; Hirsch, 1980).

Cultivation appears to occur to a rather small but significant extent systematically across a wide range of social reality beliefs. However, the research contains a number of inconsistencies in findings and a sizable number of null results. Much disappointment has arisen due to the magnitude of effect discovered, as perhaps some five percent of the variance in beliefs can be accounted for by television viewing. Gerbner counsels against this disappointment:

If, as we argue, the messages are so stable, the medium is so ubiquitous, and accumulated total exposure is what counts, then almost everyone should be affected ... It is clear, then, that the cards are stacked against finding evidence of effects. Therefore the discovery of a systematic pattern of even small but pervasive differences between light and heavy viewers may indicate far-reaching consequences. (Gerbner et al, 1986, p.21).

A further problem concerns the question of causality. As the research is based on correlating amount of exposure with extent of beliefs in 'television answers', one cannot determine the direction of causality from the results. Most researchers would argue for both television effects and selective viewing as reciprocal, interacting phenomena.

2.2.4. Viewers' relationships with television characters

Although it is commonly felt that people form some kind of relationship with television characters and that through this relationship, many of television's effects are mediated, there has

been suprisingly little research on this idea. Most research was conducted in the 1960's on children, following social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1964). This research hypothesised that children would be more likely to imitate the actions of certain television characters than others. Selection of characters for imitation could depend upon whether a character is seen to be rewarded for the action (vicarious reinforcement), whether the character is seen as similar to oneself (identification) or whether one liked the character. Generally disregarded now for its over-rigid experimental methodology and its limited conception of television effects, this research did nonetheless have some, although sporadic success (Bandura & Walters, 1964; Noble, 1975).

The issue of gender-typing has generated considerable research interest in relation to theories of modelling because of the clear gender-typing of television characters (Durkin, 1985a; Livingstone & Green, 1986) and informal observation of children admiring and imitating stereotyped characters. Sprafkin and Liebert (1978) found that children identified with and paid most attention to same sex, gender-typed characters. Various other researchers have also investigated children's selection of particular characters for identification or role modelling (Eisenstock, 1984, Potkay & Potkay, 1984; Jose & Brewer, 1984; Berkowitz, 1986). That viewers selectively attend to certain characters need not imply that television has no effects (the 'viewer sees only what she wants to see' view), but that only certain messages will be effective, as a function of the viewer's interaction with the programme content. Huesman, Lagerspetz and Eron (1984) showed that the effects of viewing violent programmes were increased if the children identified

with the aggressive characters.

Noble's (1975) research on children's relationships with characters in television and film broadens our conception of these relationships by drawing upon Horton and Wohl's (1956) concept of 'para-social interaction'. This concept was originally formulated to describe viewers' relationships with television personalities (or 'personas'). Instead of viewing from the perspective of the identified character, viewers often recognise a character as an interactional participant and view from the opposite perspective. Indeed Horton and Wohl, analyse the performance of a television personality as one in which a specific role is prescribed for the viewer in a pseudo-social interaction.

Noble (1975) generalises this phenomenon from the television personality, a real person, to characters in drama who are fictional products. Nonetheless, in viewing a drama, the viewer can recognise characters as realistic and enter into the drama by occupying a stance opposite to one or more of the characters. He found that para-social interaction was more common for television than film, for the latter encourages identification, and that girls tended to play opposite (para-social interaction) dramatic characters, while boys tended to identify with characters instead. This difference is probably due to the fact that most drama involves predominantly male 'hero' figures. If viewers interact with more characters than those they actually identify with, then the influence of television through experienced relationships with characters may be more widespread.

2.3. Semantic representations and social cognition

2.3.1. Developments in social psychology

Numerous studies have shown the constructive nature of social perception in both the understanding of people, event sequences, situations, and stories. In all of these, people distort or construct their understanding of the social world in line with prior social knowledge, in order to maintain reasonably coherent, and therefore effective, memorial representations (Bond, 1972; Cantor & Mischel, 1977; Duncan, 1976; Snyder & Uranowitz, 1978; see also Hamilton, 1981 and Schneider et al, 1979, for reviews).

For example, Owens, Bower and Black (1979) showed how schematic memory phenomena (Bower, Black & Turner, 1979; Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Mandler, 1984) occur for social narratives of the kind found in soap operas. Their study used traditional memory paradigms (recall and recognition) and can be seen as an investigation into the role of the reader in interpreting texts. Subjects read a mundane behavioural description of a woman's day, in addition to background motivational frames for some conditions. Afterwards, those who had received the motivational frame had distorted their memory of the events in line with the frame, remembering relevant information better, showing thematic false intrusions and better overall memory. From this so-called 'soap opera effect', Owens et al (1979) argue that "the meaning derived from a text is not an invariant; rather it should vary with the reader's ideas about character's motivations" (p.185) and conclude that:

In understanding story book characters, we seem to use much the same methods we use when we interact with people in real settings, using the same motivational schemata to interpret or explain why people act as they do. Our ability to identify people's plans or intentions from their actions and

instigating circumstances is a social skill we learn and use often in interpersonal affairs. We use those skills when we read a narrative and identify motives, methods, and madnenses of fictional characters. That being so, we may expect all manner of variables influencing 'person perception' to have their counterparts in processes dealing with 'character understanding' in narratives, and vice versa. (p.191).

Bisanz, LaPorte, Vesonder and Voss (1978) adopt a representational, rather than a processing approach to a similar issue, namely the role of social knowledge in text interpretation.

As a story is being read, the development of the story representation is a cumulative process, with prior information influencing the way in which subsequent information is interpreted. We also assume that the reader draws upon the conceptual relations of his or her memory structure to interpret the passage. Thus the reader develops a representation that consists of the most important thematic relations that were understood during the reading of the story. (p.338)

Furthermore, they argue that: "We assume that the MDS [multidimensional scaling] solutions provide a description of the underlying thematic structure" (p.339). They conceive of a narrative as a system in which the author has structured a particular set of interrelations from a larger potential set and put these to the reader by building up a picture over time. They note that "while it generally has been assumed that communication occurs between the reader and author, there has been virtually no work aimed at determining the extent to which such communication takes place" (p.339).

They conducted two experiments using stories about nine animals. Knowing that people organise animals in a semantic space structured around size and ferocity in the abstract (Henley, 1969), their stories were organised around different themes, requiring the

representation of different similarity relations between the animals. Using both similarity sorting and reaction times as inputs to multidimensional scaling, they showed that people heavily modified their representation of the animals in line with the specific themes of the story. Thus people were shown to be receptive to the structure of the text, even when this directly conflicted with their prior, abstract knowledge of the characters.

In a later study, LaPorte & Voss (1979, see also Gliner, Goldman, and Hubert, 1983) conducted a similar study with different stories and a wider range of characters and themes. They concluded that "the scaling analysis provided an effective, valid indicator of prose representation" (p.39) and that "theoretically, the analysis indicated that comprehension was a function of the passage organisation mapping onto the existing memory structure superimposed upon and suppressing the prior conceptual structure" (p.39). It should be said that the durability and generality of this superimposition or suppression are still unknown. In many ways, these findings conflict with those cited above concerning the constructive perception of social material, and further research is needed on the balance between schematic or top-down and receptive or bottom-up processes (Bobrow & Norman, 1975; Neisser, 1976).

2.3.2. Developments in mass communications

Reeves, Chaffee and Tims (1982) argue that there have always been cognitive themes in mass communication research: for example, issues of salience, reduction of real-life complexity to simpler representations, stages of cognitive development in children's viewing, and so on. They point out that "most major advances in social psychology have at some time made their way into the

literature of mass communication" (p.292), that this is usually good for communication research, and that as many social psychologists are moving towards social cognition, mass communication researchers should follow.

Reeves et al base their approach on Wyer and Srull's (1980) information processing model which is designed specifically to deal with social information. They strongly emphasise that television programmes are viewed by individuals with their own goals, interests, knowledge, and biases, so that viewers' representations of a programme may well differ from the programme as transmitted. Only through these representations do programmes attain any permanence.

A problem with their proposals to move towards social cognition lies in their concept of 'information'. Almost the commonest concept in the paper, it receives the least attention: the television programme has simply become the 'information' of cognitive psychology. This raises three problems. First, one loses the social nature of television programmes as the programme has been decontextualised. Second, cognitive psychology to date can deal only with very simple and artificial information in its experiments and models, so the programme has become oversimplified. Third, the concept of information epitomises the assumption of most of psychology that 'out there' is clear, unambiguous and simple. In contrast, Morley devotes a book to the analysis of a programme (Brundsen and Morley, 1978) before investigating people's interpretations of the programme. There is no parallel analysis of the content and structure of social stimuli in socio-cognitive researcher's approach to people's programme (or other)

interpretations.

The recent concentration of socio-cognitive research in mass communications has centred largely on children (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs & Roberts, 1978; Murray & Kippax, 1979; Pingree et al, 1984). Stage theories of development provide an excellent opportunity to examine the consequences for interpretation of different cognitive systems.

One sequence of studies investigated developmental patterns in comprehension of television narratives (Collins, Wellman, Keniston & Westby, 1978; Collins & Wellman, 1982; List, Collins & Westby, 1983; Newcomb & Collins, 1979). Collins et al (1978) compared comprehension of jumbled and ordered programmes, showing that as children get older, they improve in their recall of central, peripheral and implicit programme content. Implicit content is recalled better if presented in the correct temporal order and if the pertinent central content is also recalled. Newcomb and Collins (1979) showed that, for young children, comprehension is improved if the socio-economic status of the characters and the children are congruent. List, Collins and Westby (1983) showed that "children higher in sex-role stereotypy remembered less role-irrelevant information than low-stereotype children" (p.1579). Taken together, this research supports the constructive nature of television interpretation, showing that children use knowledge of narrative structure, personal experience, and stereotyped social knowledge to make sense of programmes. Children see beyond the explicit content of programmes, recognising certain aspects of latent structure, especially in relation to narrative cues, and use that recognition to construct their interpretations.

Such constructive perceptions can operate so as to undermine efforts to provide children with counterstereotyped television programmes. For example, Drabman, Robertson, Patterson, Jarvie, Hammer & Cordua (1981) presented children with role-reversed films, namely with a female doctor and a male nurse. In recall testing, the children tended to reconstruct the story as containing a female nurse and a male doctor, in accordance with their general social knowledge of appropriate gender roles.

This issue of whether children take in latent messages in television programmes is pursued in relation to morality by Christenson (1986). He points out that:

It is often assumed that children learn morals and lessons from television. However, we do not know currently either the extent to which they in fact do decode programs for such messages or, if they do, the nature of the morals and lessons they construct. (p.464).

Using a fairly open-ended method of questioning children following viewing of selected programmes, Christenson showed strong age trends in the recognition of underlying prosocial moral messages. Similar findings were also obtained by Liss, Reinhardt and Fredriksen (1983), using an experimental approach. Thus it appears that younger children are fairly unaware of moral messages, while by eight or nine years, children are able to extract these messages.

Turning now to the representation of character rather than narrative, a sequence of studies by Reeves and his colleagues used multidimensional scaling to study children's representations of well known television characters. In the first study (Reeves & Greenberg, 1977), children rated the pair-wise similarities between fourteen characters and rated them on a number of a priori scales.

The representations which emerged differed very little for children of different ages, and were organised around four basic themes which were, in order of importance, humour, attractiveness (most used by girls), strength (most used by boys) and activity. Reeves and Lometti (1978) replicated these findings, showing also that the character's sex was used to differentiate characters. The attributes of attractiveness and strength predicted identification with characters in addition to being dimensions of representation, and thus have implications for the selection of role models by the children. Finally, Reeves and Garramone (1982) found that character identification predicted peer evaluation, suggesting a potential extrapolation from representations to effects.

2.4. Person perception theory

2.4.1. Implicit Personality Theory

Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) proposed that people's abstract knowledge of others is represented in a semantic space with three orthogonal dimensions: evaluation (often subdivided into intellectual and social evaluation), activity, and potency (Rosenberg & Sedlak, 1972, Ashmore & Tumia, 1980, Forgas, 1985). Although the nature and number of dimensions are disputed (Ashmore & Tumia, 1980), the pursuit of parsimony has led many person perception researchers to 'fit' the semantic spaces of various social domains to that of Osgood et al.

Forgas used multidimensional scaling to examine the dimensions along which people organised their prototypes of students, finding dimensions of academic performance, sociability and radicalism (Forgas, 1985). Unfortunately, Forgas does not discriminate between

typically male and female student types, so one cannot tell if, as with Ashmore's research (see below), there is also an implicit gender dimension. Forgas also showed how such representations are used schematically in impression formation, as, depending also on the cultural salience of the prototype, affect memory for consistent versus inconsistent information. This fits with the work of Hastie and Kumar (1979) who show that in general, a target's behaviours are better recalled if incongruent with a personality-trait impression for the target. For inference tasks, on the other hand, consistent traits or behaviours are more often inferred than are inconsistent ones (Hamilton, 1981).

Rosenberg et al (1968) scaled personality traits and found major dimensions of potency and (social) evaluation, with activity and intelligence as additional, related dimensions. Rosenberg and Sedlack (1972) and Ashmore (Ashmore & Tumia, 1980; Del Boca & Ashmore, 1980) also found similar results. All generally support Osgood's original emphasis upon evaluation, potency and activity, although gender must also be contended with and sometimes the dimensions are in fact related rather than orthogonal.

Rosenberg and Jones (1972) applied the semantic differential model to the study of an individual's implicit personality theory by examining the systematic relations between trait terms used by Theodore Dreiser in his book, A Gallery of Women (1929). Their analysis revealed four dominant themes in Dreiser's conceptions of others, namely sex of character, conformity, evaluation, and potency. While these themes made sense in view of biographical information about Dreiser's own life and the concerns central to his personality and life style, they do not fit the semantic

differential model in that certain themes were central which do not figure in the model (e.g. conformity), others were weaker than they should have been (e.g. evaluation), and the relations between themes were also contrary to predictions (e.g. potency is not orthogonal to evaluation but negatively correlated with it).

This has led Rosenberg (Rosenberg & Jones, 1972, Rosenberg, 1977) to express some doubts about the generality of Implicit Personality Theory findings, and they provide some preliminary evidence that the group findings do not always account for individual representations. However, in response to this, Van der Kloot and Kroonenberg (1982) re-examined the individual differences issue. They present evidence that supports the original theory, with some modifications in relation to individuals thus:

The inter-subject differences must be attributed to differences in response style: some subjects tended to give more extreme and/or more differentiated ratings than others ... [the] analyses did not point in the direction of qualitatively different ITP's [implicit personality theories], but rather indicated partial changes and/or chance fluctuations that were superimposed on the common structure. This finding supports the conclusion that our subjects used one common, possibly culturally shared Implicit Theory of Personality. (p.488-489)

Ashmore, Del Boca and Wohlers (1986) summarise their empirical work which integrates Implicit Personality Theory with gender stereotype theory. By asking subjects to describe people they know by sorting a set of a priori trait terms, Ashmore and his colleagues derive the following results. Multidimensional scaling showed a two-dimensional configuration, with a 'social evaluation' dimension and a potency dimension orthogonal to it. Ashmore & Tumia (1980) showed that the potency dimension roughly corresponds to an implicit

masculine/feminine dimension, thereby relating person perception research to research on gender stereotyping. Male targets were closely associated with the 'hard' pole of the potency dimension and female targets with the 'soft' pole. Thus:

beliefs about the sexes can be placed in the context of a fairly general model of person perception involving two orthogonal dimensions ... [namely] evaluation and potency ... More directly pertinent, man and male differ most radically from woman and female on the potency dimension. (Ashmore et al, 1986, p.100).

The independence of gender and evaluation seems contrary to the idea that the female stereotype is more negative than the male one (Broverman et al, 1972). This apparent contradiction is resolved thus:

if the average evaluative scale score of the descriptors in the male stereotype are compared with the average value of the female stereotype items, there is not a significant difference. However, the number of positive attributes thought to characterize men is greater than the number of socially desirable items in the female stereotype. (Ashmore et al, 1986, p.100).

Finally they raise certain further issues, for example, those areas typically omitted from gender stereotype research, such as the domain of sexuality, which clearly relates evaluation more firmly to gender: "the sexual category demonstrates a major blind spot in existing gender stereotype research" (p.102). Also, the oppositional nature of masculine and feminine does not hold for certain other aspects of stereotypes, such as occupations. More important, the bipolar structure directly contradicts the research of Bem (1974, 1981) on the orthogonal relation between masculine and feminine. Lastly, they raise the issue of masculine and feminine subtypes, and present some data on people's consensual

identification of certain subtypes of men and women (e.g. Don Juan, nurd, bitch, honey). This raises the question of how subtypes (or prototypes) relate to the overall structure described above. Ashmore et al suggest that the same bipolar dimension which distinguishes between male and female might also distinguish between the subtypes.

2.4.2. Gender Schema Theory

Many researchers (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979; Bem, 1981; Markus, 1977) propose a central role for gender stereotyping in person perception, suggesting that gender is a basic criterion by which people actively make sense of their social experience. Beliefs concerning gender-appropriate behavior have been shown to organize perceptions of television characters (Drabman et al, 1981), other people (Bem, 1984), high and low status roles (Eagly, 1983) and candidates described in newspapers (Dayhoff, 1983).

Bem (1974, 1981, 1984) shows that gender-typed individuals, namely those who strongly and spontaneously endorse the cultural definition of gender and gender difference, are especially likely to: process information about the self in terms of gender; cluster words on the basis of gender categories in preference to other relevant categories (animals, clothing etc.); make same-sex rather than cross-sex errors in recalling events i.e. confuse women with women and men with men rather than women with men; choose behaviours consistent with their own gender; feel worse after performing gender inappropriate activities; and so forth. As gender-typed individuals constitute a large proportion of the population, these results go some way towards a socio-cognitive explanation of the self-perpetuating nature of stereotypes.

Among many other researchers on the social cognition of gender, Markus (Markus, 1977; Markus, Crane, Bernstein & Siladi, 1982) has studied the relation between the self concept and the gender schema, examining how these are both implicated in processing information about the self and others, depending on how gender schematic one is. Deaux (1976) and Feather and Simon (1975) have studied the importance of gender in attributional reasoning: when people explain the actions of others, gender plays an important role in determining the attributions made concerning agency and responsibility. In this context, the gender of the subjects, target persons and targets' tasks all make a difference. On the basis of apparent differences in moral judgments of social events, Gilligan (1982) has argued for different conceptions of morality for men and women. Typically, men endorse an individualistic and competitive conception of morality while women endorse a collective and cooperative morality. This has its roots in the traditionally different social roles of men and women, and has implications for processes of attribution of causality, responsibility and personality traits. As mentioned in the previous chapter and above, current research is attempting to recognise the complexity of people's concepts of gender, both in terms of the cultural connotations of masculinity and femininity and in terms of developing typologies to break down the often too general and simple concept of the 'average' man or woman.

2.5. Cultural studies and the role of the viewer

2.5.1. Textual analyses

Dyer, Geraghty, Jordan, Lovell, Paterson & Stewart (1981) deal

with different aspects of the popular British soap opera Coronation Street, using the programme as a particular domain for the exploration of current theoretical issues relating to popular culture, namely realism, convention, ideology, production context, narrative structure, characterisation, textual determination and openness. In the chapter on Coronation Street in this thesis the particular claims of this volume with relation to the programme will be examined. Here the book will be discussed more generally.

The authors examine the relationship between the reality portrayed on the programme and the reality in which viewers actually live. They explore the probable experiences of viewers, showing how the conventional and literary devices construct a coherent whole which direct the viewer towards certain understandings: for example, the programme permits the viewer an awareness of certain contradictions (e.g. in the conception of woman) while disguising or denying others (e.g. the conception of work). The means are discussed through which Coronation Street emerges from the resolution of conflict between a) an attempt to be 'realistic', to connect with the experience of the viewer, and to be authentic, and b) the conventions of television programmes. These conventions concern narrative form (e.g. the cliff-hanger, speed of events, resolution of problems, interplay between plot and subplot, excessive interconnections between characters, nothing remaining secret), programme production (e.g. finance, schedules, deadlines, ratings), characterisation (e.g. stereotyped women, character consistency), and a general notion or myth of sources of viewer pleasure (e.g. nostalgia, conservatism, non-political focus on the emotional and psychological, balance between serious and economic,

range of contradictory positions for viewers to identify with, celebration of the working classes).

Various other researchers have also conducted in-depth analyses of particular popular cultural texts. Eco (1979) analysed the narrative structures used in Fleming's James Bond novels. He reveals fixed sequences of narrative elements which underlie all of the novels and argues that these sequences satisfy the reader through confirmation of expectations and the reassurance of familiar, predictable happenings. Beneath this, often for pragmatic rather than manipulative reasons, Eco identifies xenophobic, gender stereotyped, and moralistic messages repeatedly played out in the novels.

Wright (1975) analysed the basic themes in the Western film and shows how these relate to stylised narrative sequences, standard character roles, and traditional conclusions. Couching his textual analysis in oppositional terms, he concludes that:

In the classic Western, the good/bad opposition repeats some of the social imagery of the inside/outside dichotomy; but since it is aimed more specifically at the difference between the society and the villains, it is more explicitly concerned with values. (Wright, 1975, p.53).

He also identifies basic nice/not nice and strong/weak oppositions, both of which are repeatedly and variously related to the good/bad opposition in the narratives.

In a similar vein, Patte (1975) analyses the Good Samaritan parable, Fiske (1984) analyses Dr. Who, Silverstone (1984) analyses a television programme about transsexuals, this time drawing more upon the work of Propp (1968) and examining chronologic rather than synchronic aspects of structure, McRobbie (1983) reveals the

'romantic individualism' which underlies the adolescent girls' magazine, Jackie, and Kress (1983) examines the linguistic transformations by which ideological messages are coded into news reporting, and so forth (see also Davis & Walton, 1983; Masterman, 1984; Rowland & Watkins, 1984). Textual analyses repeatedly reveal depths of meaning not visible to a cursory or superficial glance. Informed by concepts of realism, mystification, narrative and thematic structure, myth and morality, these analyses show the multiple levels of meanings and social/ideological messages in popular culture texts.

2.5.2. Empirical studies on viewers

Hobson (1982) conducted a broad-ranging and open-ended study into viewers' experiences of the programme Crossroads. She used both interviews and observational methods while watching the programme together with regular viewers in their homes, and followed these with unstructured conversations after the programme was over. Commenting on the close relationship between viewing and programme knowledge, she says that:

it became clear through the process of study that the audience do not watch programmes as separate or individual items, nor even as types of programmes, but rather they build up an understanding of themes over a much wider range of programmes and length of time viewing. (Hobson, 1982, p.107).

She concluded that watching soap opera was part of the women's everyday lives, and Crossroads was commonly watched during household activities. Viewers were active rather than passive during viewing: they were involved in the programme not bored by it; they could be critical of the programme rather than mindlessly accepting at face value whatever was shown; and they built up complex knowledge about

the programme's history and characters. Finally, she argues that the programme served various functions for the women: it provided examples of strong women; a means of structuring their day; a topic of conversation; a time which was defined as "theirs"; and it raised important issues for them which touched on their own experiences of life.

Like Hobson, Ang (1985) focussed on a single programme, Dallas, and used an open ended methodology to examine viewers' experiences of the programme. Her analysis is based on some forty letters written in response to a magazine advertisement which requested viewers to explain their responses to Dallas. Ang's analysis of these letters is concerned with two key issues: pleasure and ideology, especially feminist ideology.

Both Hobson and Ang interpret their data in relation to research questions with illustrative excerpts from the viewers' accounts presented verbatim. Ang argues that viewers' experiences are always ambivalent and contradictory, very different from popular assumptions about the straightforward nature of soap opera viewing. She focusses on the sociocultural and psychological nature of viewers' "consumption" of Dallas, making the role of the viewer a mediator in the transmission of ideological meanings. Involvement with characters was found to be as central to the experience of viewing. Realism, not commonly associated with a glamorous American soap opera like Dallas, was found to exist not at the denotational but the connotational level of meaning. In other words, the characters are experienced as emotionally human, if not literally realistic. Viewers recognise the parallel between the 'structures of feeling' represented in the programme and as experienced in their

own lives: "this structure of feeling can be called the tragic structure of feeling; tragic because of the idea that happiness can never last for ever but, quite the contrary, is precarious" (p.46).

Much of Ang's research raises rather than solves questions. For example, does soap opera have a radical or conservative effect on viewers, or what is the relation between (and the viewers' position on) the ideology of mass culture (i.e. mass culture is bad, alienating, cheap etc.) and the populist ideology (i.e. each to their own, people's experience as primary). These questions place empirical work on soap opera in relation to theoretical debates. Unfortunately, Ang's empirical data are often only suggestive. They place issues on the research agenda, but they do not take us much further either methodologically or substantively.

2.5.3. The relation between texts and viewers

Morley's (1980) research on audience decodings of the Nationwide programme constitutes one of the few examples of empirical research which puts into practice the argument that cultural studies should analyse the audience's role in the construction of textual meaning. Morley argues that:

before messages can have 'effects' on audiences, they must be decoded. 'Effects' is thus a shorthand, and inadequate, way of marking the point where audiences differentially read and made sense of messages which have been transmitted, and act on those meanings within the context of the rest of their situation and experience" (p.11).

Morley examined the interpretations made of the popular current affairs programme, Nationwide by internally homogenous groups from a variety of class and labour positions - trade unionists, students, engineering apprentices, bank managers, and so forth. Having first analysed the programme himself (Brunsden &

Morley, 1978), he compared the groups' interpretations, examining in particular, their match or mismatch with three hypothetical interpretative frameworks or modes of text-viewer relationship, namely dominant, oppositional, and negotiated.

Morley concludes that firstly, dominant, negative, and oppositional codes are all used by viewers, although often in combination or in inconsistent ways. Secondly, social class relates to code use, although this relation is complex. Viewers thus vary in how critical or accepting they are of a television text. Much of the programme was perceived uncritically as 'obvious' or 'natural'. At other times, viewers consciously recognised textual mechanisms of 'preferring' or directing interpretation. Some viewers made very little sense of the programme, being alienated from its discourse. Others made sense of the programme but in divergent ways.

Morley discusses the problems of interpreting the interpretations and analysing a large body of unstructured interviews. Perhaps wisely, he refrains from reducing the data to quantitative categories and presents instead large sections of the material verbatim. Unfortunately, Morley does not attempt to reveal the structural relations between the individual interpretative statements that he quotes other than to point out whether they support or contradict the next quotation. Nonetheless, this is provocative research which paves the way for future studies of audience interpretation and establishes the commitment of cultural studies to issues of actual textual interpretation.

Radway (1984, 1985) studied the readers of popular romance novels, relating the women's interpretations to the texts themselves and to the readings made by literary critics. She locates her work

within semiotics and reader-response theory, being concerned with:

textual meaning as the product of a complex transaction between an inert textual structure, composed of verbal signifiers, and an actively productive reader, who constructs those signifiers as meaningful signs on the basis of previously learned interpretive procedures and cultural codes. (Radway, 1985, p.340).

She argues further that:

Different readers read differently because they belong to what are known as various interpretive communities, each of which acts upon print differently and for different purposes. (Radway, 1985, p.341).

Her interviews revealed that in many ways, the romance readers interpreted the novels according to their interests and attitudes towards language. For example, she shows how, despite the frequently weak and subservient behaviour of the heroines, the readers believed them to be strong and independent because they were explicitly described thus at the beginning of the novels. This reflects, she argues, not the stupidity of the readers, but their belief that words are selected for accuracy and that the original statements remain fixed and true: consistency is sacrificed for the belief in the factual nature of language. Together with other examples, this suggests a different form of literacy from that of literary critics.

Similarly, although the novels repeatedly used secondary foil characters to contrast with the central couple, the women refused to acknowledge their roles, perceiving only action which furthered the ideal conclusion for the hero and heroine. Radway argues that these novels show their readers how the domestic life is the way to true happiness while the women justify the time devoted to reading by believing that the novels, through their factual or historical

content, further their self-improvement.

The final project to be discussed here is the research on cross-cultural reception of Dallas in Jerusalem conducted by Katz and Liebes (Katz & Liebes, 1986; Liebes, 1984; Liebes, 1986; Liebes & Katz, 1986). Initially started to examine the notion of cultural imperialism from American programmes in other countries, this research has compared the interpretations of the same programme made by many viewers of different cultures and religions:

We are not attempting to demonstrate 'effect'; rather, we are interested in those processes that are prerequisite to possible effect, namely, understanding, interpretation, and evaluation, both explicit and implicit. (Liebes, 1984, p.46).

The study of viewers is related to the text by detailed consideration of the cultural, mythic, and moral messages and themes in Dallas. They frame the research within Newcomb and Hirsch's (1984) notion of cultural forum: television drama provides a forum for viewers' discussion and negotiation of issues of cultural, moral and personal significance, particularly those issues which are unresolved or contentious. In many ways this research provides a series of illustrations and confirmations of the points discussed under the cultural studies and soap opera sections of the previous chapter. In a later paper, Liebes and Katz (1986) attempt a more structured approach by postulating that viewers of different cultural backgrounds manifest different degrees of 'critical distance' from the text. This suggests two qualitatively different modes of interpretation, the critical and the referential, which contrast with, say, Morley's (1980) oppositional and dominant, although clearly the two distinctions have much in common. Nonetheless, as with Morley's work, there is an implicit evaluative

bias in Liebes and Katz' work in favour of the critical (or oppositional) reading, which is, rather suspiciously to be found more commonly in American than Russian Jews (or, for Morley, among the left wing rather than the right).

2.6. The genre of soap opera

There has been rather little empirical research on soap operas, especially on their effects on viewers, and almost nothing on British soap operas, despite their enormous popularity and increasing theoretical interest (although see Dyer et al, 1981; Hobson, 1982; McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972). That research which exists tends to concentrate upon a few issues, and will be reviewed below.

2.6.1. Content analyses of soap opera

Two recent books summarise a large volume of content analytic research on American daytime soap opera (Cantor & Pingree, 1983; Cassata & Skill, 1983). Much of this research concerns the demographic biases in the characters, compared with national population statistics. For example, unlike prime-time television, soap opera contains a similar number of men and women. It underrepresents children and the elderly, and overrepresents professional occupations. The characters are less likely to be of ethnic origin and more likely to be either single or divorced (i.e. available for romantic plots) than the real world population (Cassata & Skill, 1983).

Soap opera deals primarily with issues of interpersonal relations and social issues, typically centred on problems of marriage, family, medical themes, and, to a lesser extent, social

problems, romance and crime (Cantor & Pingree, 1983). Cantor and Pingree also examine gender stereotyping in soap opera, showing that they tend to maintain the status quo: the genre glorifies women committed to children rather than a career; the 'bad' characters are less sex-typed than the 'good' ones; women talk to each other within the family, while men converse as professionals; and so forth. Nonetheless, the genre is changing: the number of women portrayed in professional careers is increasing; women characters are now giving rather more advice and orders on business matters than previously; and day-time television as a whole is less stereotyped than prime-time (Cantor & Pingree, 1983).

Sutherland and Siniawsky (1982) show in a content analysis of two major American soap operas that "the soap operas analysed ... tend to punish those who violate moral standards, either socially or economically; they support the status quo" (p.73). Their results also relate to the issue of openness, suggesting that soap operas often do not contain clear and unambiguous messages:

Many of the resolutions were left open to viewers' interpretations; traditional attitude theory would suggest that the audience is most likely to perceive such situations in a manner consistent with their existing beliefs and morals, which should further support the status quo. Many of these instances tended to involve the more controversial moral issues. (p.73).

Given that viewers form para-social relationships with soap opera characters, it would be interesting also to know which characters are permitted to 'get away with it' and whether these are the more popular or central characters.

Kreizenbeck (1983) also examined the themes of morality and sexuality in American soap operas, showing how soap operas are

gradually becoming 'sexier' and yet remain prudish. He explains in part why soap operas seem old-fashioned, arguing that the television executives believe the audience to be very moral and to appreciate the 'old home truths' often no longer respected. His analysis revealed that the 'good' characters are family-oriented, non-sexual, and place their careers second, while the 'bad' characters are openly seductive, use sex as a weapon, and are frequently punished for being career-minded by unwanted pregnancy.

The soap opera, by presenting characters who flaunt the values and morals of the audience, strengthens that audience's resolve to hold onto these abused ideals ... the family is the soap source of spiritual and emotional strength. (p. 176).

In general, soap opera on daytime American television presents a disproportionate number of professional men and women in their twenties to forties who largely exhibit gender-typed behaviours and whose actions exemplify traditional moral precepts.

2.6.2. Uses and gratifications

McQuail et al (1972) define Uses and Gratifications research as follows: the research "seeks to explain, usually on the basis of the audience member's own subjective account of the media experience, just what functions a particular kind of content serves in particular circumstances" (p.142). Subsequent research in this tradition has produced various taxonomies of viewing motivations (Murray & Kippax, 1979; Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, & Roberts, 1978). However, the significance of the research for McQuail et al (1972) goes beyond viewing taxonomies to consider "certain types of relationships between the user and the communicated content that depend on the perceptions of the audience member" (McQuail et al, 1972, p.154).

For British viewers, including soap opera viewers, the modes of media-person interaction centre on the following aspects of viewing (McQuail et al, 1972): diversion (escape from the constraints of routine, escape from the burdens of problems, and emotional release), personal relationships (companionship and social utility), personal identity (personal reference, reality exploration, and value reinforcement), and surveillance (being informed about the world). More recently, American researchers have focussed more specifically on different genres, especially soap opera (Cantor & Pingree, 1983; see also Herzog, 1944 for early research on radio listeners). Typically conducted on a student population, who commonly view soap opera in America, most researchers find motives similar to those of Rubin (1985), namely, orientation (instrumental reality-exploration, seeking to ascertain how others think and act), avoidance (escapism, tension release, time-consumption), diversion (entertainment, amusement and relaxation-seeking), and social utility (interaction and social-utility). Clearly these findings overlap with those for viewing motivations in general, although surveillance is not salient for soap opera, value reinforcement and emotional release are perhaps surprisingly also not mentioned, and character identification appears to play a larger role in the experience of viewing soap opera compared to other genres (Carveth & Alexander, 1985).

Viewing motivations mediate the cultivation process of television effects. For example, Carveth & Alexander (1985) found that the viewers who watch soap opera for 'ritualistic' (i.e. mindless and habitual) rather than 'instrumental' (i.e. goal-directed and knowledge-seeking) reasons may be more vulnerable

to the genre's messages. This appears to suggest that active viewing undermines the potential effects of television on the viewer. If this is the case, then it becomes important to establish programmes, genres and viewers which involve more or less deliberate and selective interpretation. However, the cultivation approach is problematic in its assumptions about the content of programmes. It may be that ritualistic viewers interpret programmes as does content analysis, in a fairly disconnected, superficial and consensual fashion, whereas more instrumental or 'active' viewers make more individual or divergent interpretations. They may still be affected by the programme in terms of accepting its direction, its agenda, or its less overt messages, especially for programmes with multiple messages or perspectives, such as soap opera, for which it is difficult to identify 'the messages' as required by cultivation analysis.

2.6.3. The consequences of viewing soap opera

There is almost no research on the issue of viewing consequences for soap opera, and that which exists is correlational. Cantor and Pingree (1983) end their book on soap opera with a list of speculations about the possible effects of viewing, given what is known of programme content and viewing motivations.

Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes (1981) used the cultivation paradigm to examine the potential effects of watching soap opera. They found that heavy soap opera viewing was associated with distortions in estimates of social probabilities in the direction of the soap opera world. However, this result may be due in part to the fact that heavy viewers of soap opera are also heavy prime-time viewers, a factor not controlled for in their study. Pingree,

Starrett and Hawkins (1979) also found a cultivation effect for viewing soap opera, in this case showing a 'family-as-good' value system to be greater in heavy viewers. This finding was unrelated to amount of prime-time viewing (Cantor & Pingree, 1983).

Finally, Alexander (1985) correlated exposure to soap opera with endorsement of particular beliefs considered to be central to soap opera (e.g. relational fragility, the importance of talk in relationships). She obtained rather inconclusive, although suggestive, results. Alexander argues that the absence of a correlation may be due not to an absence of viewing effect but to the fact that adolescent viewers find different themes salient in soap opera (e.g. romance) from those which had been assumed. Thus the programs "create a very different set of messages for the young viewer than those initially hypothesised" (Alexander, 1985, p.p.304). Although it was reasonable to hypothesise that belief in relational fragility would be affected by viewing, nonetheless that hypothesis rested upon an assumption about how viewers' interpret soap opera. Thus more research is needed, examining the relationships between viewers' interpretations, detailed programme content, and viewing motivations and context to determine what, if any, are the consequences of viewing soap opera on social reality beliefs and behaviour.

2.7. Summary

This literature review has described in some detail a number of research projects which either support the arguments of the previous chapter, provide an empirical basis for the research to be presented in this thesis, or represent important developments in the

broader field of the present research. In addition, this review has identified general research trends and indicated research sources in the domains of mass communications, social cognition, person perception, and cultural studies, paying particular attention to research on soap opera. From this review, the following conclusions may be drawn.

1. Experimental research on the media indicates some cognitive and behavioural effects of viewing television, although use of experiments makes generalisations problematic.
2. Cultivation research shows small but persistent relationships between the amount of television viewed and viewers' social reality beliefs.
3. Viewers form relationships with characters through identification, modelling and para-social interaction, which have implications for selective attention, interpretation and effects, although little research has examined these issues.
4. Social psychological research on semantic representations shows the role of social knowledge of narrative, motives and personalities in understanding social stimuli: social knowledge is frequently imposed upon text structure, especially where the latter is ambiguous or open.
5. Little research in mass communications has investigated viewers' interpretations of programmes: these are more often presumed than studied.
6. Multidimensional scaling provides a useful method for discovering implicit structural representations of characters and narrative.
7. People's representations of narrative themes sometimes reflect appear textual structure, overriding prior general knowledge.

8. Mass communication research shows how children develop the ability to understand narrative structure and latent moral themes in programmes.
9. Constructive perception may operate to undermine attempts to influence children through counter-stereotyped programming.
10. Implicit Personality Theory proposes that people represent a variety of semantic domains using the dimensions of evaluation, potency and activity. The evidence supports this claim, although some research divides evaluation into social and intellectual evaluation, some finds a correlation between activity and potency (dynamism), and sometimes the three dimensions are not orthogonal.
11. Research paradigms in person perception rarely produce both ecologically valid and generalisable results. The media provide an ideal medium to combine these aspects of design for the study of person perception.
12. The potency dimension is often an implicit gender dimension.
13. There are various dimensions not considered by Implicit Personality Theory which may have some role in person perception.
14. Gender constitutes a basic dimension for constructing and interpreting experience. Research shows its considerable role in relation to the self-concept, attributional reasoning, morality, and person perception.
15. Textual analyses reveal the underlying structures, oppositions and narrative structure in television programmes.
16. Empirical studies on viewers within cultural studies reveal the richness of the viewing experience.
17. Research linking textual analysis to studies of viewers' interpretations reveals the frequent disjunction between texts and

readings, showing the role of the reader in using social knowledge to interpret a text.

18. Content analysis reveals soap opera to portray a biased, moralistic and often gender stereotyped view of the world.
19. People watch soap opera for a variety of reasons, typically diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance.
20. The little research which exists suggests that viewing soap opera may have some effect in influencing viewers' social reality beliefs.

CHAPTER THREE

WHY PEOPLE WATCH SOAP OPERA:

THE EXPLANATIONS OF BRITISH VIEWERS

3.1. Introduction

Researchers on British soap opera (Buckman, 1984; Brunsden, 1983; Dyer, Geraghty, Jordan, Lovell, Paterson, & Stewart, 1981; Hobson, 1982) argue forcefully that soap opera is an important aspect of popular culture, a vehicle for the messages of social realism concerning class, gender, work, morality, and the family, and that soap opera is taken very seriously by both viewers and programme makers. In many ways, this fits with the expressed intentions of those who make soap opera. In addition to, or maybe as part of, the aim of simply attracting a large audience, the producers and writers appear to have specific socialising aims with respect to contemporary social, moral, and political issues. For example, Jack Barton, former producer of Crossroads, says that "with some of the more serious social comments we've made and issues we've dealt with, in each case they were very carefully thought about and researched, and they have had positive results to the community" (quoted in Hobson, 1982, p.47). Similarly, Julia Smith, producer of EastEnders, has stated that "I've always thought that you can do an awful lot of information-giving through soap opera. One of the things we try to do with a programme is to make a lot of people ask why" (quoted in The Times, 19/2/1985). And again, Harry Kershaw, writer and director for Coronation Street says that "Coronation Street's writing teams have always offered a cross-section of

political opinion. Injected sparingly these opinions lend a reality to the programme which is missing in those serials which deliberately avoid any mention of politics" (Kershaw, 1981, p.78). Producer of Brookside, Phil Redmond has said the following of the programme: "the Grant family give us the real, kind of working class view of society ... the idea was that she [Heather Haversham] would really show us what the role of the career woman in society would be ...we're going to get back into exploring that triangle of the black economy, established management and established trade union ... and at different times you'd be getting different sides of the debate" (interviewed on The South Bank Show, 13/4/1986).

The present research is concerned with British viewers' own accounts of this domain of everyday social experience. Viewers' accounts should help us to understand why people watch soap opera, how involved they become, how analytic they are, how realistic they consider the soap opera world to be, whether the characters 'come alive' for them, whether they find the issues portrayed to be relevant to their own lives, and so forth. This study was conceived as an initial approach to these questions and an open-ended method was adopted. Viewers' freely written accounts of the experience of viewing soap opera were obtained and content analysed.

The research can be placed in the theoretical context of the study of modes of "media-person interaction" (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). The variety of modes of media-person interaction, and their associations with particular types of viewer or programme, have been considered an important mediator in the study of television effects. How active is the audience, how vulnerable do viewers make themselves to the messages of programmes, do they

generalise representations in programmes to other areas of their lives, how much do they draw upon their own experience to interpret programmes, what uses do programmes play in their lives? As Radway has argued, a study of people's interaction with the media may constitute a broader study of people's lives:

Many students of mass-produced literature ... assume that such readers choose their category because essential features of their social life create needs and demands that are somehow addressed and fulfilled by these books. If this is true, an investigation of their preferences for, and interaction with, books of a particular category may in fact amount to an investigation of the place and function of literacy in their lives. (Radway, 1985, p.342).

Some of these questions have been traditionally addressed by the literature on uses and gratifications for television viewing (Blumler & Katz, 1974, and previous chapter), and such research is continuing with vigour (Rosengren, Wenner & Palmgreen, 1985). In addition to the uses and gratifications approach to the relationship between the viewer and the programme, Liebes & Katz (1986) discriminated between those viewers who become thoroughly absorbed in the programme, accepting its parameters and those who stand at some distance from the programme, so they may act as critic as well as viewer. This distinction need not just apply to types of viewer but may also refer to two different modes of viewing thus: "the context to which viewers' statements about the programme are assigned: 'referential' (dealing with real life) and 'critical' (dealing with the story as an artistic construction)" (Liebes & Katz, 1986, p.167). This issue of critical response concerns soap opera's claims to realism and social value. How readily do viewers either distance themselves from the programme or, alternatively,

blur the distinction between, say, problem solutions offered by characters and by real-life friends, thereby incorporating what they see into how they live? To learn from or be influenced by a character's actions in drama, through such processes as identification or role modelling, one would expect the viewer to judge the character's behaviour or problem as relevant to his or her own situation. This will depend upon perceived realism of the drama, similarity to self, and moral position expressed. Similarly, Reeves & Garramone's (1982) research on whether people apply television-relevant dimensions for character perception to everyday person perception depends partly on finding that viewers accept the genre's claims to realism. Yet, in various ways, the apparent realism of soap opera is undermined by the fact that in soap opera, too much happens too fast, the solutions are highly conventional, the characters too interconnected, and so forth (Porter, 1982; Timberg, 1982).

The present research has the following aims. It is primarily exploratory, aiming to discover regular viewers' explanations for watching soap opera. Explanations for viewing British and American soap opera will be compared, as will the explanations of the present British viewers with those of American viewers reported in previous research. Although British viewers watch and enjoy American soap operas as well as British ones, it should be borne in mind that American soap operas, and consequently American soap opera research, involves daytime programmes not shown in Britain. It does not include those prime-time programmes such as Dallas, Dynasty, and Falcon Crest which British viewers think of as American soap operas. The remaining aims of this study concern soap opera's claim to

realism: do viewers perceive the genre as apparently intended by its producers; do viewers exhibit critical distance from the text; and do viewers regard the characters as real people and thus as an extension of their real-world social network?

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Subjects

The 52 subjects (37 female and 15 male) were obtained by advertising in a national magazine, SOAPS. They were of a range of ages (between 13 and 62, mean=21.61, st.dev.=8.55) and occupations (predominantly white collar workers). All were regular viewers of several soap operas.

3.2.2. Questionnaire

Each viewer received a blank sheet of A4 chapter headed "Why is soap opera so popular?". This question leaves open the type of soap opera and invites any reasons which viewers consider relevant.

3.3. Results

3.3.1. Coding Units

Each account was transcribed as a series of explanations for viewing. An explanation might be one word: for example, "soap opera is exciting, relaxing and very realistic" would be transcribed as three separate explanations, namely exciting, relaxing and realistic. Or one explanation may be expressed in a sentence: for example, 'watching soap opera makes me feel my own problems are not so bad after all' would be transcribed as a single explanation. The 52 viewers produced 419 explanatory units in total (mean per viewer = 8.06, st.dev. = 4.71, range = 2-27).

3.3.2. Coding Scheme

The explanations were initially sorted freely by the researcher into many low-level categories according to their perceived similarities and differences. This ensured that all categories of explanation present in the data would be included in the scheme. These were grouped together into superordinate categories. Thus a two-level category scheme (Table 3.1) was constructed with eight superordinate categories, for example, escapism, each containing a number of subordinate categories, for example, escape to a world of glamour and escape from own problems and worries.

3.3.3. Coding Procedure

Two independent coders coded all explanations independently, assigning each explanation to one of the subordinate categories in the coding scheme. Coding reliability (percentage agreement) was 81.63% (varying between 75% and 89% for the various superordinate categories).

When a viewer used the same explanation (or explanatory category) twice, these duplicates were eliminated (n=42), so that the number of explanations in each category represents the number of viewers who subscribed to that category. Any category used by fewer than three viewers was either combined meaningfully with another category or added to the miscellaneous category. The 21 miscellaneous explanations were then excluded, leaving a total of 356 coded explanations. This resulted in the figures shown in Table 3.1, where for each category are shown the number (and percentage) of viewers who mentioned that category for both superordinate and subordinate categories, as well as the reliability figures by superordinate category. The frequency of viewers who used each

subordinate category do not add up to the total for the superordinate categories as again the duplicates over subordinate categories were ignored for the superordinate category totals. The explanations were then re-examined as often viewers stated that the explanation applied only to a particular type of soap opera (British or American). The frequencies of these statements are also shown in Table 3.1. The nature and frequency of the various categories of explanation used are described and discussed in detail in the next section.

Table 3.1: Categories of viewing explanations, response frequencies, reliability scores, and relation to British or American soap operas

<u>Category (reliability in %)</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N(GB)</u>	<u>N(US)</u>
ROLE IN VIEWER'S LIFE (89.5)	21	40		
Regular programmes are part of one's routine	6	12	1	-
Regular programmes are a habit or addiction	8	15	1	-
Ongoing programmes to follow and keep up with	7	14	1	-
Social interaction /enjoyable conversation topic	11	21	-	-
ENTERTAINMENT (82.76)	18	35		
Entertaining and/or enjoyable	8	15	2	2
Humorous and/or amusing	4	8	1	2
Relaxing	7	14	-	1
Enlivens one's dull life	5	10	-	1
Interesting and Intriguing	4	8	1	2
REALISM (84.2)	46	89		
Can relate to events/situations/problems	14	27	6	1
Realistic true-to-life characters	8	15	4	-
Realistic true-to-life events/situations/problems	30	58	21	-
Concern with topical/relevant social problems	8	15	4	-
Courage to face reality, rather than avoid it	3	6	3	-
Recognise events/situations/ problems of own life	5	10	3	-
EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE (77.8)	19	37		
Sex appeal of characters	3	6	-	-
Excitement	5	10	-	-
Suspense	7	14	-	1
Experience range of emotions towards characters	8	15	-	3
Share emotional experience with characters	3	6	-	-
RELATIONSHIP WITH CHARACTERS (82.4)	32	62		
Relate to characters (understanding, sympathy)	6	12	5	-
Recognise characters (reminder of familiar people)	6	12	1	-
Identify with characters (take the part of, see oneself in, see through their eyes)	12	23	6	-
Involved with characters/parasocial interaction	8	15	1	-
Characters are real people to you	3	6	-	-
Characters are significant others (as family etc.)	7	14	1	-
One feels a part of their world	3	6	1	-
Appreciate particular (types of) characters	6	12	3	1

Table 3.1 (contd.)

<u>Category (reliability in %)</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N(GB)</u>	<u>N(US)</u>
PROBLEM-SOLVING (87.7)	22	42		
Learn about other people, how they live and cope	8	15	1	1
Think through (past or future) problems (what would you do, did you do what they did?)	7	14	2	-
Learn how to cope with (particular) problems	9	17	3	-
Find you are not alone with (particular) problem	5	10	1	-
Characters' problems make yours seem smaller	4	8	-	1
ESCAPISM (81.4)	48	92		
Escape from own life generally	26	50	1	12
Escape from own problems and worries	13	25	-	-
Escape to:				
A world of glamour (spectacle to observe & enjoy)	11	21	-	11
Enactment of own dreams, desires and fantasies	17	33	-	9
World of the wealthy ('how the other half live')	9	17	-	9
A world of fashion	5	10	-	3
CRITICAL RESPONSE (75.3)	27	52		
Quality of programmes (script, acting, production)	9	17	3	1
Appreciate diverse viewers, motives, programmes	3	6	-	-
Enjoy being critical (watch to fault, ridicule)	4	8	-	3
Realise compromise with realism to entertain	4	8	1	2
Realise genre balances needs for fantasy & realism	6	12	-	-
Appreciation of basic social/moral/human messages	4	8	1	3
Belief that programmes treat basic life issues	4	8	-	-
Belief that genre reflects/creates common culture	3	6	2	-

3.4. Discussion

3.4.1. Methodological Observations

Certain disadvantages of content analysis became apparent on dividing the texts into units, as causal interrelations between units occurred which had to be broken. For example, one viewer observed that soap opera is a good and ever present conversation topic because it is regular. Another noted that it is because one identifies with the characters that one learns how to cope with the problems that they encounter. Thus the categories of the coding scheme are often interconnected, integrating the perceived nature of soap opera with the viewers' various experiences and lifestyles. The transcription stage also involved a certain loss in the richness of elaboration and exemplification which was frequently provided. Thus, categories could also be integrated through their combined application to a specific event.

Some viewers offered more of a description of soap opera than an explanation of its popularity. These descriptions frequently concerned the realism of soap opera, particularly British programmes. The descriptions can be seen to imply explanations of soap opera's popularity, insofar as the aspects of the genre selected for description are presumably those aspects which viewers notice and favour. The abundance of phrases like 'true to life', 'down to earth', 'shows everyday reality' implies that people enjoy this, just as their descriptions of the wealth and glamour of the American soaps implicitly conveys their pleasure in such portrayals.

To overcome in part these problems, and to combine qualitative and quantitative data, the results will be discussed below in

conjunction with frequent illustrations from the viewers' verbatim responses.

3.4.2. Categories of explanation for viewing soap opera

The major categories of viewing explanation were, in order of frequency of mention, escapism (mentioned by 92.3% of respondents), realism (88.5%), relationship with characters (61.5%), critical response (51.9%), problem-solving (42.3%), role in viewer's life (40.4%), emotional experience (36.5%), and entertainment (34.6%). Each of these encompassed a number of subordinate categories. These will now be discussed in turn, considering both their content and their relation to previous research.

3.4.3. Soap opera as entertainment and escapism

The entertainment category, which one might suppose the most obvious reason for viewing, may be distinguished from that of escapism in that the former concerns the generalised quality of the viewing experience while the latter refers more specifically to the cognitive involvement of one's fantasies and desires. Moreover, while entertainment may be found in many aspects of one's life, the fantasies referred to by the escapist explanations constitute a specific contrast with the everyday life of the viewer. As researchers become concerned to elaborate the didactic and self-improving aspects of viewing, it is important that the pleasures are not neglected (Ang, 1985).

The entertainment categories in the present data mainly concerned entertainment in general and relaxation:

"Soap opera is simply great fun. It creates a whole new atmosphere is one's down and miserable life, it gives you something to entertain yourself with" V.50.

They may have been little mentioned (only one third of viewers)

because they are taken for granted. Yet there may also be an element of rejection of this category in that while all television is a form of entertainment, soap opera viewers take the genre fairly seriously, expecting personal involvement, learning experiences, and a reflection of their society, especially for British programmes. Moreover, entertainment is a rather vague term, and viewers may have attempted to go beyond stating it as an explanation and instead tried to specify the ways in which they find soap opera entertaining.

Escapism is clearly highly important but predominantly so for the American soap operas. Escapism is used to include a number of elements. Most important is the escape from everyday life, for which American soap operas are particularly good, and for providing something else to think about and become involved in. By and large, this 'something else' has two main features. Firstly, viewers obtain an entry into a world that is the rich and glamorous:

"I know for me Dallas represents everything I want, but will never be able to have" V.15.

Soap opera satisfies our fascination with how 'the other half' live:

"People are fascinated to see how the wealthy live, and American soaps give us an insight into this" V.23.

Secondly, these programmes provide a portrayal of our own dreams and fantasies, not only of wealth and glamour, but also of excitement, drama and intrigue, an outlet for fantasies little found in the rest of viewers' lives:

"You [can] have a little romance, glamour, passion, love and hate in your life" V.43.

Although the term 'escapism' is commonly reserved for programmes through which one escapes to an unreal fantasy world,

both British and American programmes do in fact remove the viewer from his or her own world. This suggests a second type of escapism in which one enters another world, more mundane and down to earth than the American one, but still importantly not one's own world. Thus as an escape from one's own problems and worries, British soap opera is also effective by providing another world to think about, despite its lack of glamour.

3.4.4. Soap opera realism

These explanations were heavily descriptive and mainly concerns British soap opera. There were numerous comments on the realism of all aspects of soap operas such as Coronation Street, EastEnders, and Brookside. Viewers also felt that one could relate to such realism, and that therefore it was involving and enjoyable:

"Soap opera ... reflects fairly accurately everyday life ... the things they discuss are relevant and topical and it's like having a chat with the neighbours, it's very personal" V.2.

An important aspect of this realism is that programmes are seen to parallel the lives of the viewers, so that similarities are apparent and appreciated and contrasts are thought-provoking.

Appreciation was expressed for the courage of British soap opera in facing reality:

"More people are watching British soap operas because they are now dealing with delicate public issues and are not afraid to delve into these problems" V.47.

and

"they [British soap operas] portray so many things which are happening in the world today and do not shrink away from real life but instead face us with the problems that do happen" V.24.

Viewers also appreciated the focus on contemporary social problems and issues which are both topical in current affairs terms and maybe also personally relevant to the viewers' own concerns:

"It [EastEnders] is very much a 'soap of the 80's' dealing with the problems that occur in everyday life such as unemployment, racism, adultery, rape, alcoholism, and drugs" V.15.

This view of the programme clearly parallels the expressed aims of the production teams as outlined in the introduction and suggests that viewers receive the programmes as intended by their makers in terms of the communication of serious social messages about everyday 'realities'. It is implicit in viewers' accounts that they approve broadly of soap opera's treatment of these issues, so that soap opera would seem to function for viewers as a source of value reinforcement (see McQuail, et al, 1972).

The apparent realism of soap opera is the subject of considerable theoretical debate. For Chesebro (1982), one of the main "communicative strategies employed on television series to convey and to reinforce selective values" (p.9) is the use of mimetic characters and plots: he shows how the portrayal of a world 'just like ours' with people 'just like us' has become the most common strategy on television in recent years. Dyer et al (1981) devote considerable attention to the social realist conventions of British soap opera, arguing that these conventions disguise or mystify the conservative and stereotyped meanings by making events appear natural so that they, and their latent meanings, are taken for granted by viewers (Barthes, 1973). In the analysis of media texts, one must clarify whether the meanings are enlightened, subversive or reactionary, and whether manifest and latent meanings are significantly discrepant. In the study of viewers, we still need to know whether viewers simply accept these meanings, or whether they reinterpret or distance themselves from the text according to their own beliefs and circumstances. It is relevant to

these debates that viewers themselves appear to applaud what they perceive as enlightened meanings presented in realistic ways, suggesting that critical distance is minimal, acceptance is high, and that viewers may be either selective or deluded in relation to textual meanings. The assessment of realism also has implications for cultivation research, suggesting that people do not perceive a major discrepancy between the soap opera world and the world in which they live.

3.4.5. Characters as extension of real-world social networks

The British programmes' emphasis on realism is related to two other categories of explanation: relationship with characters and problem-solving (see below). As television influence is probably mediated by relationships with characters, through the processes of identification, modelling, and para-social interaction, these relationships merit further study. A majority of viewers felt they could establish some relationship with the characters. This was graded from characters they could relate to through to those they could recognise in people they knew:

"I often say whilst watching a soap 'Oh doesn't she/he remind you of so and so'" V.49.

Even more involving relationships were experienced with those characters with whom they could identify, and, even more committed, with those who come to seem like real people to viewers. Several viewers commented that characters became like friends or family to them:

"I know that after a while the characters do become real people and we are concerned for their well-being just as we are our friends and colleagues" V.3.

and

"In the case of Coronation Street and Crossroads viewers have seen

characters mature from teenagers to adults in the last twenty years (Jill in Crossroads and Ken from the Street). They look upon these characters as friends" V.26.

Some viewers could not only enjoy the alternative realism of such programmes but could even feel themselves a part of that world:

"It is possible to identify with many of the characters, to see families on screen suffering traumas, going through happy times, illness, bereavement and all the situations that combine to make up life, it gives you a feeling of belonging, of not being the only one that has to face up to the everyday tensions" V.17.

3.4.6. Soap opera as an educational medium

The consequence of such involvement is often seen to allow for learning experiences. As soap opera focusses on contemporary and realistic problems, so this learning focusses on problem-solving. This could be general in nature, learning about the lives of other people who may be either like or unlike oneself and thereby feeling one's general understanding to be enriched, or could be more specific, learning about particular problems which have, are, or may yet face the viewer:

"We can relate to the situations and sometimes sort your own problems out through listening and doing what the character portrayed has done" V.14.

The deliberate enactment of a range of social and personal problems, showing the reactions of all concerned, the implications of certain decisions, the consequent effects on the characters' lives, all provide the viewers with an opportunity to think through safely and vicariously their own problems. After all, it is rare to see in such detail the often private details of particular problems in real life, as access in reality is more limited than access on screen. Thus soap opera appears to contribute towards the social knowledge required to live in the modern world.

This category appears to make the viewers feel better: when

their own problems are portrayed, they can enter a community of others who, through experiencing the same problem, can be imagined as understanding and validating the viewer's own experience:

"I think it makes you feel better knowing you're not the only one with a problem" V.8.

For problems very different from those of the viewer, viewers can take heart by having their own problems put in perspective:

"Some of the people have unbelievable problems which may make their [viewers'] troubles seem small in comparison" V.11.

One may conclude from responses in both the realism and problem-solving categories, that British soap opera is highly problem-oriented. While this is perceived by viewers as offering benefits for them, one can also see that problems are dramatically useful in creating conflict, a treatment of basic, moral issues, and a means of achieving the relevance which attracts viewers. The research supports Noble's (1975) argument that:

The important function that television has [is] in demonstrating social skills ... such as making friends, manipulating bureaucratic processes, coping with parental demands, knowing what to wear and how to dance (p.29).

Again, if viewers are learning from soap opera, more attention should be paid to what they are learning: is it just what to wear and how to make friends, or are they also learning not to have an abortion and when to leave their husband?

3.4.7. Emotional experience

There are two main aspects to the emotional aspect of viewing soap opera: the first is concerned with excitement and suspense, the second with experiencing a range of emotional reactions to the characters, some of which may be shared with the characters, entering into their lives on an emotional plane. Both introduce a

considerable degree of intensity and involvement to the viewing of specific characters and events:

"When you're watching soap operas you can experience a full range of emotions from anger and despair to sheer joy, excitement and relief" V.9.

The emotional involvement may also be sexual:

"They always have someone good looking who you can fancy and wish you could go out with" V.8.

The emotional involvement experienced on viewing soap opera in various ways underpins the other categories. It provides the 'hook' that keeps one watching, the involvement that makes one care about events and characters, and the arousal that makes one feel that the whole experience matters.

3.4.8. Soap opera as part of daily life

A further category of explanations refers to the role that viewing plays in the viewers' lives. This recognises the time commitment, the allotment of a place to soap opera in one's routine:

"After a while you watch it so much it becomes a regular thing to do. On Wednesdays you come home, have dinner, do your jobs, watch Coronation Street, wash up and then it's time for Dallas" V.43.

There is also the pleasure of having something to keep up with and follow just as one follows current affairs or family or work matters:

"People are able to relate to these [British] soap operas and like to see how their favourite characters are getting along" V.24.

For many of the other reasons provided, such as regularity, topicality, and involvement, soap operas provide a common topic of conversation among viewers:

"Soaps give you something ELSE to talk about to friends instead of the weather or the Government or sports" V.16.

This is important in relation to the social construction of reality

(Adoni & Mane, 1984; Berger & Luckman, 1967), for talking about the events portrayed may serve several functions: for demonstrating opinions, checking and exploring differences in perception or judgment, sharing experiences, demonstrating consensus or normality, cueing discussion of significant issues or providing a safe and convenient forum for such discussion. Mendelsohn and Spetnagel (1980) describe the two-fold functions of entertainment television similarly: "they [entertainment conventions] provide audiences with images of their own lives as distinct from the lives of others, and, at the same time, conventional elements assert audience's continuity of relationship with members of their society and culture" (p.24).

3.4.9. Critical distance from soap opera

Many comments were made or explanations offered which seemed to involve some level of critical stance in relation to the programmes. According to the taxonomy suggested by Liebes and Katz (1986), most of the explanations obtained in the present data fall into the referential category. These explanations accept the soap opera world as real and comment on what happens, how one feels on viewing, or on how one becomes involved with the characters. However, there is also evidence for the second, critical mode of viewing, in addition to that for the first, involved and accepting mode. Here one can include not only those explanations coded as falling into the categories of critical response (see Table 3.1), but also the many comments about the realism of the programmes. These statements appear to signify two things: firstly that viewers are able to stand back and assess the match or mismatch between the soap opera world and the world it portrays, and secondly that, as this match is overwhelmingly perceived as a good one, when actually

viewing, people may well move into the referential mode.

The types of critical, or distanced, response vary in complexity. Some explanations involve the simple evaluation of programme quality or enjoyment at laughing at the unreality of the American programmes:

"Many people like to watch them to laugh because we all know life is not really like that. However, even so, we like to get involved in their plots" V.24.

Others involve more interesting understandings of, say, the limitations on realism, in that programmes must also be entertaining:

"The British soaps are said to be more realistic, which to a point is true, but if a 'real family's' day to day life was serialised, the majority of it would be very routine and wouldn't provide much of a storyline" V.19.

This may be seen as meeting a dual need in viewers for both realism and fantasy:

"I think every 'soap' no matter how realistic (which EastEnders undoubtedly is) needs that little bit of fantasy to set it apart from the immediate realities of life. For me, the formula of mixing realism with that Dallas style excitement and suspense is what sets EastEnders apart from their other 'British' rivals" V.15.

Some viewers look beyond the flow of events and are sensitive to underlying messages in the programmes:

"These [American] soaps gloss everything from kidnapping right down to who sleeps with who, thus making it seem it's alright to do this sort of thing. When in real life it does not always happen" V.6.

and

"It [American soap opera] also shows, if you can believe it, that even with so much money people still have problems, life never runs smoothly, again it shows human relationships, just in a different standard of living. How situations arise by one person reacting to another's actions" V.21.

Others feel that viewing realistic programmes allows us to participate in a common culture. Soap opera is seen as gaining part

of its popularity from its treatment of basic life issues, or more accurately, from its agreement with viewers as to what are basic life issues:

"Most people in life are looking for happiness and contentment and it is exciting to watch make believe characters looking for the same things and usually failing to find them" V.13.

and

"I think 'soap opera' is so popular mainly because it is based on human relationships, which in some form or other interest everybody" V.21.

Although the present data were analysed for their content rather than for the form of their expression, they do contain some support for a second distinction drawn by Liebes and Katz (1986) in their discussion of modes of viewing. They analyse the register in which referential statements are made in terms of what they call 'keyings' where statements may be expressed in either realistic keyings or playful keyings ("viewers take an idea from the programme and play with it subjunctively in their minds or in interaction with others" p.158). Thus statements may be related to life by the viewers in either of these two ways. Many of the explanations were formulated realistically. This is often apparent from the illustrations (not coded) surrounding the explanations provided:

"If they [people] knew what Patricia Morrell in Sons and Daughters has been up to, they would be shocked!" V.11.

However, some, especially those in the problem-solving category, illustrated the use of playful keying. On viewing the enactment of a particular problem, viewers talk of imagining what they would do, mentally trying out and learning from the solution offered, or thinking about others they know in relation to a new viewpoint. This mode is also exemplified more lightheartedly by the escapism

category, in which viewers delight in imagining they live in such a glamorous world, that they can wear such clothes or experience such passions, and so forth.

Despite a few critical reservations, viewers appear to accept and value the 'realism' of soap opera, especially British soap opera. It seems that viewers decode the programmes much as intended by the producers, and the educative aims of the latter are not in vain. Half the viewers indicated some degree of critical distance from the programmes. The nature and consequences of this distance merits further study as critical distance from the programmes may serve to undermine acceptance of the realism of the text, may exist in harmony with an acceptance of the text, or may only operate at particular times or for particular viewers.

3.4.10. Comparison between British and American soap operas

Some of the above points can be drawn together in a comparison of viewers' responses to British and American prime-time soap operas. In brief, British and American soap operas seem to have a similar place in the routine of viewers' everyday lives, and to have similar entertainment value. They are also fairly similar in the emotional experience provided, and, interestingly, in the degree of critical response manifested. One can imagine arguments for more critical distance from either British or American soap opera. Nonetheless, no differences were observed in the present study, although certainly the issue is worth pursuing in more depth.

The major differences between British and American soap operas, in terms of the viewers' experience, concern realism, relationship with characters, and escapism. British soap operas are seen far more in terms of realism, and this in turn, permits greater

involvement in forming relationships with the characters portrayed. American soap opera is involving through its connection with the viewers' fantasies and by providing a world to escape to, so that one may leave behind the same mundane realities experienced with such fond familiarity when viewing British soap opera.

3.4.11. Relation to other research

Many aspects of the present study have been linked to previous research in the above discussion. However, comments should also be made on the explanations expected but not found in the present research, and on the comparison with uses and gratifications research. Certain reasons for viewing soap opera were absent from the present data. Although much is made of the fact that soap opera is almost the only television genre to consistently portray strong, independent, non-stereotypic female characters (e.g. Dyer et al, 1981, Buckman, 1984), no viewers commented upon this fact. It does not appear to be an explicit source of pleasure for viewers to see women thus represented. One could say that they do appreciate the 'realism' of the characters, but this begs the question that viewers' perceive the 'realistic' female characters as those same strong and independent figures that the commentators find salient.

In general, the main findings of American uses and gratifications research appear to be only partially supported by the present data with British, non-student viewers. The realism categories involved considerable description of programmes as well as viewing motivations. Together with the problem-solving categories, these relate to and extend beyond (e.g. courage to face reality, think through your own past problems) the reality-orientation or reality-exploration of Rubin (1984, 1985) and

Carveth and Alexander (1985). The categories of entertainment were relatively little mentioned, in contrast with the finding of Carveth & Alexander (1985) for which this was the most frequently mentioned in open-ended responses. Both these researchers found evidence of escapism, although possibly due to differences in the programmes viewed, different aspects of escapism were evident in the present study. Rubin's category of social utility was found under the present category of role in viewer's life, as was Carveth & Alexander's category of character identification or relationship with characters, although the importance of this latter category has not previously been apparent. As relationship with characters is most important for the British programmes, it seems that different viewing experiences, and possibly also different viewing consequences, are at issue here. The emotional quality of the experience is not often mentioned, although important here (see the emotional release category of McQuail, et al, 1972). Finally, the traditional assumption of uses and gratifications research, namely that whatever the motivation for viewing, the programme content is uncritically accepted to fulfil the appropriate function, is itself brought into question by the existence of the critical responses category.

3.5. Summary

1. Both media researchers and the producers and writers emphasise the potential moral and political socialising impact of soap opera, although they may disagree in their evaluation of this impact.
2. The present research studied the open-ended responses of British viewers who were asked to explain why they viewed soap opera.

3. A content analytic methodology was employed, with certain problems.
4. The major categories of explanation were escapism, realism, relationship with characters, critical response, problem-solving, role in viewer's life, emotional experience and entertainment.
5. Viewers generally considered the soap opera, especially British programmes, to be highly realistic and it plays an important role in their lives: they recognised the situations, felt they learnt from the problem solutions and became involved with the characters.
6. Certain viewers showed some degree of critical distance from the genre.
7. There were marked differences in responses to British and American soap opera: the former is watched more for its realism and involvement; the latter for its escapism and fantasy.
8. The findings show both similarities and differences in comparison with uses and gratifications research.
9. Given the immense popularity of soap opera, close scrutiny of the content of these programmes and the moral, political or social messages or opinions which viewers may gain from the genre is much needed.

CHAPTER FOUR

VIEWERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHARACTERS IN DALLAS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is concerned with two issues. The first questions whether there are stable and consensual representations of television programmes. If so, what are they like in terms of structure, consensus across viewers and stability? This issue relates to socio-cognitive research concerned with the discovery of 'knowledge structures' in different domains: action scripts (Bower, Black, & Turner, 1979), narrative (Lehnert, 1981), social groups (Forgas, 1985), story characters (Bisanz, LaPorte, Vesonder & Voss, 1978; Gliner, Goldman & Hubert, 1983), and so forth. Despite some differences in theoretical perspective, this research is unified in its aim to uncover the structure of the complex representations which people build up through their experience with a given domain. These representations then provide an integrated summary of past experience, guidance for inference from the known to the unknown, and a resource for the constructive interpretation of future experiences.

Secondly, the study of viewers' representations may provide a 'missing link' when looking for causal relations between programmes and behavior: they reveal what the viewers find salient, meaningful, and useful. In particular, do viewers' representations reflect primarily the programme structure or the schema-driven interpretative strategies of viewers? Representations of television programmes may be predominantly domain-specific, reflecting the

structure of the programme itself (LaPorte & Voss, 1979). Alternatively, they may be schema-driven, reflecting the viewer's more general and abstract social knowledge of real-life events and people (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979; Drabman, Robertson, Patterson, Jarvie, Hammer & Cordua, 1981; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Forgas, 1985; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). This chapter uses multidimensional scaling techniques to establish the nature of viewers' representations of the characters in Dallas. Predictions made by theories of social perception are compared with cultural studies research on programme structure so as to examine the relative importance and roles of viewer and programme determinants as reflected in the representations.

The two social psychological theories of person perception investigated in the present research were: (a) Stereotyping or Gender Schema theories and (b) Implicit Personality Theory. Parallels between the representation of television characters and real-life people allow the extension of person perception theories, for just as in everyday social experience, regular soap opera viewers immerse themselves in a particular social milieu for many years and build up a complex web of background knowledge, emotional reactions, and personal judgments (Cantor & Pingree, 1983). How far, then, do theories of real-life person perception extend to explain the perception of television characters? These theories will be contrasted with (c) a literary critical view of Dallas, to investigate the extent to which viewers' representations constitute a veridical representation of the programme.

Recent research has analyzed soap opera from a literary or semiotic point of view (Allen, 1985; Ang, 1985; Arlen, 1981; Berger,

1981; Dyer, Geraghty, Jordan, Lovell, Paterson, & Stewart, 1981; Mander, 1983). One important technique adopted is to identify the central binary oppositions around which the text is structured. This allows researchers to reduce the diversity of the programmes to a manageable number of issues. These are then related both to more general social issues and also to the narrative structure of the programme. Characters are seen as representing the poles of the various oppositions, allowing the pattern of social interactions in the narrative to be analysed as the manipulation, transformation, alignment or interaction of the central oppositions. Literary analysis of Dallas (Mander, 1983, see also Arlen, 1981) suggests that Dallas is structured around two major themes. Viewer interest is derived from the conflict between and ambiguity in these themes as they are repeatedly enacted through various characters and plots. The first theme is that of morality, closely related to the unifying symbol of the family (implying loyalty, honesty, and durability). The second theme is the morally corrupting power of organisations, business and money, which dictate that the individual can only survive in the collective. The conflict and ambivalence between these two themes is epitomised in the character of J.R. Ewing, the arch 'baddie' of the business world who nonetheless can always justify his immoral deeds as necessary to the smooth running of the family business, Ewing Oil. Hence, Dallas is concerned with "the apparent contradiction between the success of ruthless corporate room tactics and values, usually at the hands of J.R., and the human values of family life" (Mander, 1983, p.46). The moral and immoral are not, however, evenly balanced: "while Dallas does affirm the immorality of crime, the affirmation of conventional morality and

societal values is relatively shaky" (Mander, 1983, p.45).

Despite the recent increase in research identifying central themes in soap operas and in other television genres, it must be remembered that these analyses are based upon a study of the programmes independently of the viewers. Often researchers make the implicit assumption that the themes identified through textual analysis are similarly identified by ordinary viewers. Indeed if these themes are not received by viewers, however unconsciously, then their significance is much diminished. For example, Mander moves easily and almost imperceptibly from statements about the structure of the programme, such as "the writers of Dallas are able to suggest ..." or "the implicit suggestion of the show is ...", to statements about the perceptions of the viewers, such as "the impact of Dallas on the popular imagination is ..." or "Dallas puts us in contact with ...". Yet the research referred to earlier on the knowledge structure approach to constructive perception suggests that what is perceived is unlikely to correspond straightforwardly to what is presented. While the notion of true readings is a complex and problematic one, the present research assumes that critical readings are more considered, analytic, and unmotivated than viewers' readings, so that a comparison of the two reveals predominantly the constructive activities of the viewer. One purpose of the present chapter is to make explicit the distinction between structural analyses and the viewers' own interpretations by beginning to investigate empirically both viewers' interpretations and their relationship to programme structure.

Ang (1985) conducted an analysis of viewers' response to Dallas, and showed that they reported that characters fit

melodramatic roles such as that of the villain. As part of her study, Ang analysed some of the messages latent in the characters' actions, seeing them as consistent with their perceived dramatic role. For example: "J.R.'s actions tend to strengthen the tragic structure of feeling. He demonstrates that power can only be coupled with badness and immorality, while those who want to live a 'good' life are constantly bereft of power and doomed to suffer" (p.77). This concurs with Mander and Arlen, although Ang perceives less ambiguity in the opposition of morality and power.

The present research also relates to the work of two groups of researchers studying viewers' representations of television characters. Firstly, through group interviews during and after viewing Dallas, Katz and Liebes (1986) have investigated some of the ways in which programme meanings constructed by viewers differ from those implicitly assumed by content analytic and semiotic researchers: viewers edit the stories into more linear sequences; they invoke clear, unambiguous moral frameworks for actions (this point contrasts with the literary analyses of Mander, 1983, and Arlen, 1981); they negotiate between their own cultural values and those of the programme, especially when their own culture is very different from that of the programme; they may relate events in the programme to events in their own lives, retaining more or less critical distance from the programme; and so forth.

Reeves and his colleagues (Reeves & Greenberg, 1977; Reeves & Lometti, 1978) used multidimensional scaling to investigate the perceived dimensions of television characters, revealing dimensions of humour, strength, attractiveness, and activity. These findings match the predictions of Implicit Personality Theory with reasonable

success, finding equivalents of the hypothesised basic dimensions of activity, potency (strength), and evaluation (attractiveness). However, by studying a few characters from a variety of programmes, these researchers created conditions which would mask any role for programme-based determinants of viewers' representations. To some extent, each programme offers the viewer a different world which is internally coherent: this is especially true for soap opera. The present research preserves that coherence (as does that of Katz & Leibes, 1986) by studying the representation of many characters within a single programme. It thus follows structuralist principles (Hawkes, 1977) which first identify the underlying systematic inter-relations between elements (characters) in a set (programme). Only at a later stage of research (not included here), relationships between these structures may be sought. The mistake is to look for one-to-one relations between elements within different structures without understanding the role each plays within its own structure.

The present discussion has identified three alternative thematic frameworks to account for character representation in Dallas. These are: a scheme in which gender constitutes the major dimension; a three-dimensional scheme based upon evaluation, activity, and potency; and a two-dimensional scheme organised around family morality and institutional corruption. This chapter contains a sequence of four studies. The first seeks to discover viewers' implicit representation of the characters in Dallas, using multidimensional scaling. It will also investigate the existence of group differences in representation. The second study attempts to replicate the resultant representation to determine its robustness. The third exploits the parallels between narrative oppositions,

person perception dimensions, and the semantic differential method to test the applicability of cultural studies and person perception theory to viewers' character representation. The final study examines further the issue of robustness, by examining whether and how the character representation changes when, in a later series, some of the characters in Dallas are changed.

4.2. Study I: The implicit semantic space for DALLAS characters

4.2.1. Method

Data were collected so as to be entered into multidimensional scaling analysis. This analysis was particularly appropriate as an exploratory rather than a hypothesis-testing procedure was required initially to determine which underlying dimensions of character representation emerge spontaneously from subjects' judgments. Subjects judge the similarities between the characters, and the analysis makes explicit the criteria implicitly underlying their judgments. Subjects' judgments are not affected or constrained either by the theoretical assumptions of the researcher or by the task of making their underlying criteria explicit.

4.2.1.1. Questionnaire and Procedure

The 13 central characters in Dallas at the time (December to February 1984-5) were as follows: J.R. Ewing, Bobby Ewing, Pam Ewing, Jenna Wade, Sue Ellen Ewing, Miss Ellie Ewing, Ray Krebbs, Donna Krebbs, Lucy Cooper-Ewing, Cliff Barnes, Katherine Wentworth, Clayton Farlow, and Sly (J.R.'s secretary).

The 78 possible character pairs were used to make two alternative forms of the questionnaire. These were matched so that when in one form, a pair was presented in the order AB, it was

presented as BA in the other. A single random order of the 78 pairs was generated which occupied 3 pages, the order of which was counterbalanced across subjects. For each pair, the similarity of one pair member to the other was rated by subjects using a five-point rating scale defined by the expressions 'Not at all similar' and 'Very similar'.

4.2.1.2. Subjects

Subjects were 40 Dallas viewers. They were 23 females and 17 males drawn from a wide range of occupations and ages. Every attempt was made to obtain a balance of male and female subjects, but it proved difficult to obtain males. The subjects mainly watched Dallas 'regularly' (n=27), with 7 viewing 'fairly often', and 6 viewing 'sometimes'. All subjects knew all characters except for two who did not know Sly. Twenty seven subjects were British, from the Department of Experimental Psychology Subject panel and were paid for participating. The remaining 13 subjects were Canadians who volunteered through a Canadian colleague. The questionnaire was administered to the Canadian subjects in Canada about seven weeks before the British subjects (late December - early January). In Canada, Dallas is shown several weeks before it is shown in Britain, so all subjects judged the characters at a similar point in the transmission of the series.

4.2.2. Results

The similarity ratings for the 78 pair-wise comparisons of the 13 characters were entered into the INDSCAL program (Roskam, 1981). This multidimensional scaling program produces two spaces, one for the inter-relations between the stimuli (in this case the 13 characters) and one which represents individual differences between

subjects in the perception of the stimulus space. The inter-relations between the stimuli are represented by their co-ordinates on the orthogonal dimensions which organise the space. The individual differences, then, can be understood in terms of differences in the weighting which subjects attach to the dimensions in their individual version of the stimulus space.

As there were only 13 major characters in Dallas at the time of the study, all of these characters were included in the study. Kruskal and Wish (1978) argue that 13 stimuli represent the minimum number tenable for a 3-dimensional solution, although they point out that this is a matter of some dispute, so the resultant space cannot have more than three dimensions. A plot of R^2 , the proportion of variance explained or 'goodness of fit', for the INDSCAL solutions at all dimensionalities from 5 to 2, revealed only a slight 'elbow' at three dimensions. The R^2 was 55.6% for the three-dimensional solution. Thus the three-dimensional solution was selected for interpretation, with only tentative significance attached to the third dimension, bearing in mind both the number of stimuli and the moderateness of the elbow.

To investigate individual differences in perception, the subject weights were then entered into a discriminant function analysis (Nie, 1983), using four subject groups, divided according to sex and nationality (British and Canadian). The analysis revealed that these four groups could not be discriminated by the perceptual salience each accords to the three INDSCAL dimensions as none of the discriminant functions calculated was significant (Table 4.1). Only 47.50% of the cases could be correctly classified by the discriminant functions computed. It was concluded that the

variables of sex and nationality did not substantially affect the consensual character representation in terms of its main dimensions.

The error variance in an INDSCAL solution can be attributed to two sources, which cannot be easily discriminated. Error may be due to true noise in the data, or it may indicate the inappropriateness of the particular model, possibly in its treatment of individual differences. Fifty six percent variance explained was considered rather low, so that any theoretical interpretation of the relative positions of the characters in the space must be weak. As, additionally, any individual differences present in the data were not found to be explicable in terms of the measured demographic positions of the subjects, it was decided to use a different model for the data. Consequently, the original data were collapsed over subjects to calculate the mean similarity score for each pair-wise comparison of characters and these scores were entered into a classical multidimensional scaling program. If one does not or cannot give an interpretation of the subject weights in INDSCAL, then the advantage of unweighted or classical multidimensional scaling over weighted multidimensional scaling (e.g. INDSCAL) lies principally in the fact that classical multidimensional scaling is more flexible as it can be rotated to increase interpretability or to relate it to other spaces (see Study II). This difference arises because the INDSCAL stimulus space is constrained by the individual differences analysis such that its axes are uniquely determined (Kruskal and Wish, 1978).

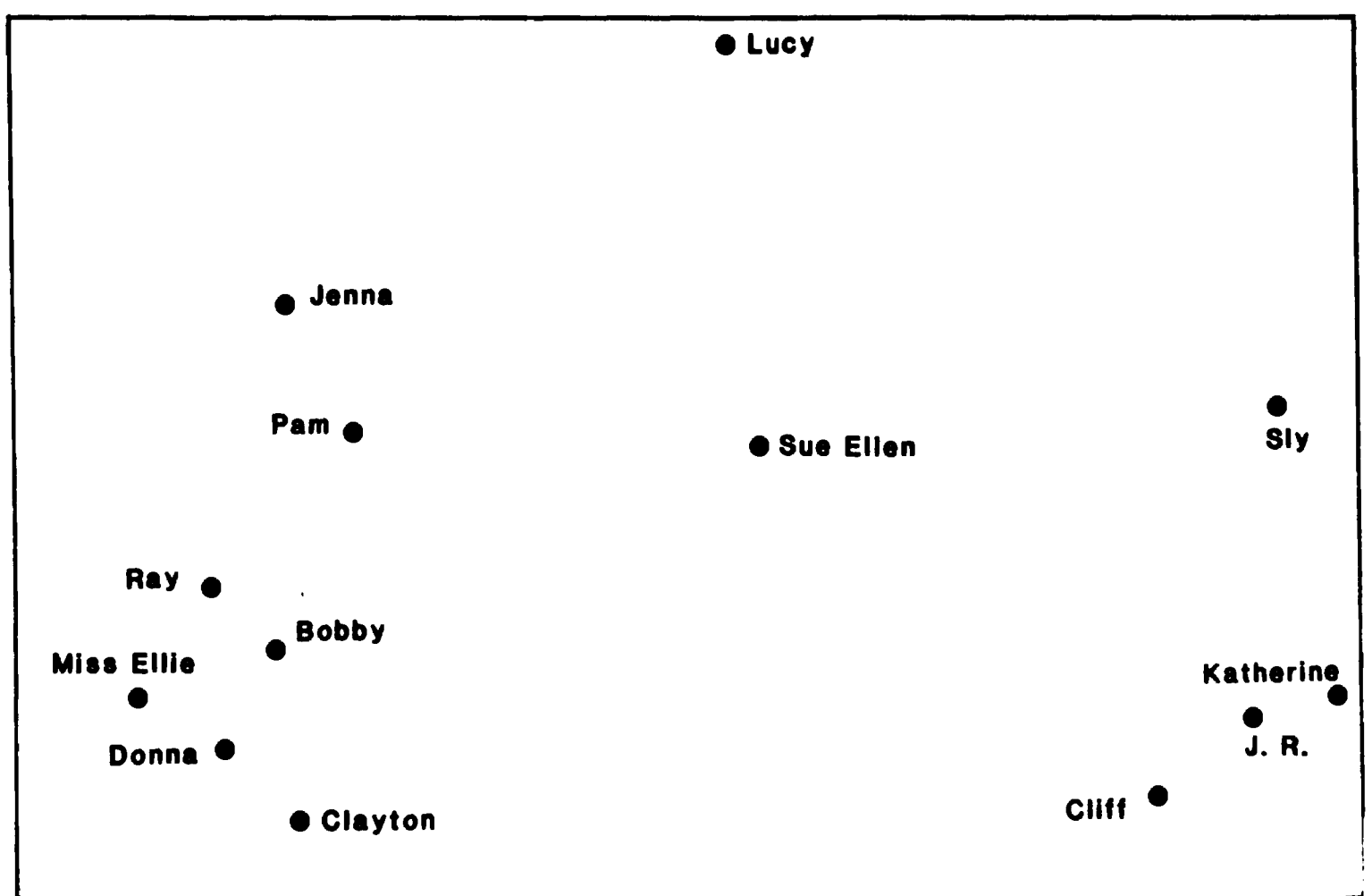
The raw data were averaged over subjects and the mean similarity score for each pair-wise comparison of characters was entered into MRSCAL (Roskam, 1981), a classical multidimensional

scaling program for metric data. Over all the pair-wise comparisons, the standard deviations varied from 0.423 to 1.248, indicating that the mean similarity scores were reasonably representative of the original data. The coefficients of alienation (the measure of stress for MRSCAL) for solutions for all dimensions from 5 to 1 were: 0.063, 0.077, 0.100, 0.136, 0.207. The 'elbow' lies at two dimensions, with a coefficient of alienation of 0.136. The conventionally accepted maximum level of coefficient of alienation is approximately 1.4 (Schiffman, Reynolds, & Young, 1981). The solution can be seen in Figure 4.1.

Table 4.1: Discriminant function analysis to test for individual differences

Discrim. Function	Eigenvalue	Canonical Correlation	Chi-Square	degrees of freedom	Probability
1	0.15179	0.36302	5.8974	9	0.7501
2	0.02137	0.14465	0.8806	4	0.9273
3	0.00367	0.06044	0.1299	1	0.7185

Figure 4.1: Two-dimensional representation for characters in DALLAS
(dimension 1=horizontal, dimension 2=vertical)



4.3. Study II: A replication

4.3.1. Introduction

To test the reproducibility of the semantic space, a replication of Study I was attempted using both a separate subject sample and a different method of data collection. There are two widely-used methods of obtaining implicit similarity data for multidimensional scaling analysis (Jones, 1983): pair-wise similarity judgments (Study I) and free sorting of characters into similar groups (Study II). A high degree of similarity between solutions produced by the two methods provides evidence of a robust representation (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). The free sorting of characters is an easier task for subjects, being both more enjoyable and less arduous. The judgments are probably more implicit and spontaneous as a result. However, this method produces somewhat less exhaustive data, as in their judgments, subjects may not mentally compare every pair of characters for similarity. The sorting method is also preferable for research with large numbers of stimuli, as is the case in the following chapters where the same method is used, although the 13 stimuli of the present chapter was not a problem for the pair-wise rating method of the previous study. The replication was carried out during June, 1985.

4.3.2. Method

4.3.2.1. Materials and Procedure

The characters used were the same as those in Study I. The character names were typed onto separate slips of paper. Each subject received the 13 slips, several paper clips, and the following instructions:

You are asked to sort the 13 characters into piles according to how they appear to you in the

programme. You may make as many piles as you want, and you can put any number of characters in each pile. If you don't think a particular character 'goes with' any other (or if you don't know who a character is), then put it on its own. Characters put into the same pile should be perceived by you as having similar personalities to each another, and as having different personalities from the characters you have put into other piles.

4.3.2.2. Subjects

The 45 subjects (36 women and 7 men) were obtained through the Oxford Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel and were paid for their participation. Demographic data on 2 subjects were missing. Subjects came from a wide range of occupations and ages. Thirty three of the subjects viewed Dallas 'regularly', 7 'fairly often', and 3 'sometimes'. Most had been watching Dallas for three years or more ($n=30$), 10 had watched for two years, and 3 for one year. Subjects knew all characters, with the exception of three subjects who did not know Sly.

4.3.3. Results

Subjects' character sortings were converted into a lower-triangular similarity matrix where each cell (i , j) in the matrix was the number of subjects who placed objects i and j together. These data were then entered into the MRSCAL program. The coefficients of alienation for solutions for all dimensions from 5 to 1 were: 0.052, 0.061, 0.093, 0.172, 0.369. Plotting these against dimensionality revealed an 'elbow' at two dimensions.

To determine whether the present solution replicates that obtained in Study I, the stimulus coordinates from both solutions were entered into a canonical correlation analysis (Schiffman et al, 1981). The results of the canonical correlation analysis were as follows: first canonical correlation = 0.993 ($p < 0.0001$); second

canonical correlation = 0.753 ($p < 0.0047$). As both correlations were highly significant, the space from Study II successfully replicated that from Study I.

4.3.4. Discussion of Studies I and II

These studies set out to discover whether viewers' implicit representation of the characters in Dallas were both consensual and robust. Converging operations point to a robust and generalisable two-dimensional solution which captures the main inter-relations with which viewers represent the characters (Figure 4.1). The low stress obtained for both spaces indicates a high degree of consensus among subjects. Multidimensional scaling methods have uncovered a stable, consensual representation, which provides an economical yet meaningful summary of information which viewers accumulate about the personalities of the characters in Dallas.

The solution can be interpreted in two ways: intuitive labelling of the dimensions by the researcher; and the projection of property ratings for the set of stimuli onto the solution to determine which of a set of properties actually fit the space (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). The second method overcomes the subjectivity of the first method, but interpretation is restricted to the particular set of properties measured, normally those of a priori theoretical interest. To maximise both the flexibility of the interpretation and the explanatory or hypothesis-testing potential of the emergent space, both methods will be used. In this discussion, the space will be interpreted by the first method, and in Study III, a set of properties will be projected onto it.

The most salient feature of the character space is the strong first dimension, which clearly separates the characters into two

distinct clusters. These correspond to the morally good or honest characters ('goodies') and the morally corrupt characters ('baddies'). Only two characters (Sue Ellen and Lucy) are therefore perceived by viewers as morally ambiguous. That power is seen to corrupt is indicated by Sly's position: in her most noticeable recent role, she joined both Cliff's and J.R.'s corrupt schemes in order to help her brother. Her basically moral aim appears less salient than her immoral acts.

The second dimension discriminates between the characters within each of the two major clusters. It separates most of the women from all the men, although the three most serious and professional of the women (Donna, Miss Ellie, and Katherine) are categorised with the men. This suggests that the salient feature of most of the women, that which discriminates them from the men, is their frivolous and pleasure- or glamour-seeking nature. The male characters are perceived as primarily business-oriented. On this dimension, Ray occupies the ambiguous position. Based on the above considerations, the two emergent dimensions were labelled morality and pleasure/business oriented. These two dimensions capture those implicit relations and contrasts between the characters which are most salient to viewers.

One might have expected that, say, morality would be associated with business and immorality with pleasure, or that immorality would be associated with dominance (Ang, 1985). The fact that these themes are orthogonal allows for a greater variety of narratives, for characters may occupy any of four, not two poles, as well as a variety of intermediate positions. One begins to see how narratives are tied to themes of characterisation, for characters

are in part a reification of their past narrative involvements. For example, in different plots, harmony in the Ewing home may be divided according to business issues, while at other times characters realign to divide according to moral issues. Conflict may occur within one theme: Jenna and Pam, who are interestingly seen as very similar characters, both competed for Bobby, and yet both had reservations about his business role. Conflict may also occur across themes: while J.R., Cliff and Katherine compete in business immorality, they are all uneasily anchored in moral domesticity by their family ties (Bobby/Miss Ellie, Pam, and Bobby/Pam respectively). Sue Ellen, linked to both J.R. and the moral Ewings, yet at ease with neither, occupies a halfway position, denied the pleasurable position of Lucy, and constitutes a source of conflict between those on whom she depends, J.R. and Miss Ellie. It would appear that while many two-character narrative combinations are harmonious (e.g. Miss Ellie and Clayton), the addition of a third character (e.g. Miss Ellie, Clayton, and J.R.) creates conflict along the dimension of difference.

4.4. Study III: Implicit and explicit judgments of characters

4.4.1. Introduction

The third study was designed to test explicitly the following candidate interpretations of the character spaces obtained in the first and second studies, operationalised as fourteen bipolar attributes or properties.

1. Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981, Bem, 1984, Markus, 1977). In order to leave open the possibility that masculinity and femininity are used independently rather than necessarily as a single bipolar

scale, the following two scales were used: (i) masculine - not masculine and (ii) feminine - not feminine.

2. Implicit Personality Theory (Ashmore & Tuma, 1980; Forgas, 1985; Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957). Osgood et al argue that the underlying dimensions of evaluation, potency, and activity are best measured through the use of at least two bipolar rating scales, as the dimensions are conceived as underlying factors rather than as factors specifically indexed by any single scale. The following scales were selected: (iii) sociable - unsociable (social evaluation); (iv) warm - cold (social evaluation); (v) intelligent - unintelligent (intellectual evaluation); (vi) rational - irrational (intellectual evaluation); (vii) dominant - submissive (potency); (viii) hard - soft (potency); (ix) active - passive (activity); (x) excitable - calm (activity).
3. Literary Analysis of Dallas (Mander, 1983). Three basic narrative themes were identified as basic to the structure and appeal of the programme Dallas: (xi) moral - immoral; (xii) believes in traditional family values - does not believe in traditional family values; (xiii) values the importance of organisational power - does not value the importance of organisational power.
4. Interpretative Analysis (see discussion of Studies I and II above). The following scale was defined based on the interpretations of the emergent dimensions: (xiv) pleasure oriented - business oriented. The related possibilities also discussed, namely morality, gender, activity, and potency, have been included already.

4.4.2. Method

4.4.2.1. Questionnaire and procedure

The ratings were presented to subjects in the form of a grid

consisting of 13 columns, labeled with the names of the characters, and with 14 rows, labeled with the rating scales, as defined above. For each rating scale, one pole corresponded to a '1' and the other corresponded to a '7'. Subjects were instructed to rate their "impression of each characters in general as they appear in the programme" on each scale.

4.4.2.2. Subjects

The 20 subjects were all viewers of Dallas who volunteered to complete the questionnaire. Most of the 13 women and 7 men were students. Most (11) had been viewing Dallas for three years or more, 5 for two years, 3 for about one year, and one did not answer. Seven viewed 'regularly', 6 'fairly often', 5 'sometimes', and two subjects omitted to answer. The subjects knew all of the characters except for 4 who did not know Sly or Katherine.

4.4.3. Results

The mean property ratings were calculated for each character by collapsing over subjects. The reliability of this averaging procedure was checked by calculating Cronbach's alpha (Nie, 1983) for each property rating over subjects (Table 4.2). These were all fairly or very high, and so the means were deemed representative of the ratings. This averaged data was then entered into the PROFIT program (Roskam, 1981), together with the stimulus configuration from Study I.

PROFIT (Chang & Carroll, 1968) is a method of fitting externally rated properties for a set of stimuli to a multidimensional scaling space for those same stimuli through the use of multiple linear regression. If the space was constructed through an implicit method, such as similarity judgments or a

sorting task, then PROFIT can be used to relate the implicit or emergent dimensions to the explicit or theoretically derived properties. It outputs each property in the form of a vector projected onto the space whose direction describes the direction in which the property increases through the space. Unlike the common alternative of correlating properties with dimensions, PROFIT does not constrain the properties to be mutually orthogonal. Kruskal & Wish (1978) point out that oblique axes may provide a better characterisation of the 'real world', even though orthogonal dimensions provide a simpler description. In PROFIT, each property is tested independently of the others, with the property serving as the predicted variable for the multiple predictors of dimension coordinates.

Table 4.2 shows the degree of fit between the fourteen rated properties and the character space, and whether or not this goodness of fit is significant. Kruskal and Wish (1978) recommend interpretation only those properties whose R^2 is significant beyond the 0.01 level.

As can be seen from Table 4.2, eight of the fourteen candidate properties were found to fit the space significantly. This means that, for eight properties, a regression line could be drawn through the character space, with minimal error, which describes a linear increase in characters' ratings on that property. The properties warm, moral, dominant, values organizational power, and hard all fitted the space very well. The properties active, pleasure/business-oriented and believes in traditional family values fitted the space moderately well. The properties projected onto the two dimensions of the space can be seen in Figure 4.2.

The first dimension corresponds extremely well to the moral property, while the second dimension corresponds to the cluster of properties labelled dominant, values organizational power, hard, active, and pleasure/business-oriented. Warm and believes in traditional family values lie at an oblique angle to the other two dimensions, but are associated with morality and opposite to the dominant/power/hard cluster. While other properties might also have fitted the space, had they been tested, they must be semantically associated with those found to fit the space, and so major areas of meaning have not been lost.

Figure 4.2: Two-dimensional representation for characters in DALLAS showing projections of significant properties (dimension 1=horizontal, dimension 2=vertical)

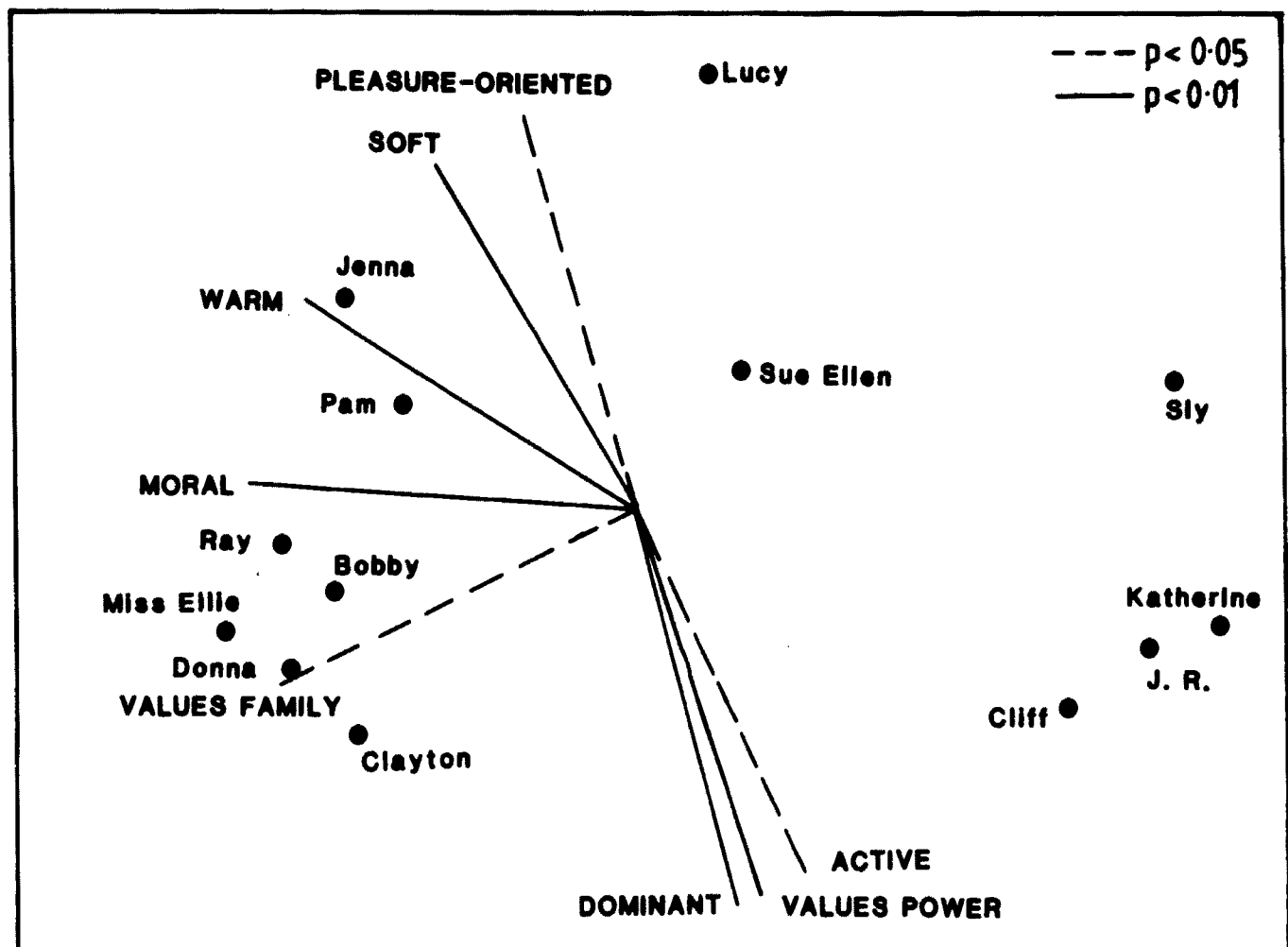


Table 4.2: Degree of fit for the Property Ratings Projected onto the Character Representation for Study I

Property	R ²	Cronbach's alpha
Masculine/Not masculine	0.312	0.9413
Feminine/Not feminine	0.361	0.9523
Sociable/Unsociable	0.384	0.6762
Warm/Cold	0.769***	0.9111
Intelligent/Unintelligent	0.439	0.9221
Rational/Irrational	0.406	0.8845
Dominant/Submissive	0.779***	0.9401
Hard/Soft	0.807***	0.9493
Active/Passive	0.511*	0.9407
Excitable/Calm	0.214	0.8683
Moral/Immoral	0.876***	0.9478
Does/Not believe in family values	0.555*	0.6974
Does/Not value organisational power	0.708**	0.8999
Pleasure/Business-oriented	0.550*	0.9440

* p<0.05
** p<0.01
*** p<0.001

4.4.4. Discussion

Studies I and II discovered, and tested the robustness of, the consensual implicit semantic representation with which regular viewers represent the characters in a popular soap opera, Dallas. No group differences were observed in character representation, as a function of viewers' sex or nationality. In Study III, a range of competing interpretations of the representation, derived from Gender Schema Theory, Implicit Personality Theory, and a literary analysis of Dallas, were tested directly. Eight properties were found to fit the representation significantly. None of the remaining six properties fitted the representations, and so cannot be said to describe the implicit themes of character representation. The eight

significant properties clustered into two groups corresponding to the two dimensions of the representation. These may be labeled morality and power, where power describes although does not replace the earlier label of pleasure/business-orientation.

Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981, Markus, 1977) predicted that gender would provide a basic theme for organising viewers' representation of characters. However, neither masculinity nor femininity fitted the implicit representation. So, although it is only women in Dallas who occupy the weaker and softer half of the space, viewers do not perceive the characters in terms of the properties, masculinity and femininity. This unexpected result may be explained by suggesting that Dallas is seen to include mainly stereotypic women (e.g. Lucy) and men (e.g. J.R.), as soap operas are commonly held to do, but it also includes a few counter-stereotypic female characters (e.g. Donna) which prevented the emergence of a general gender dimension. Even if this interpretation is granted, it is still interesting that the weaker and softer female characters were not seen as irrational, unintelligent, or excitable, as traditional conceptualisations of femininity would suggest.

The theoretical predictions of Implicit Personality Theory were partially born out by the importance of the properties warm, dominant and active. Osgood et al (1957) argue that the theme of evaluation, here indexed by sociable, warm, intelligent, and rational, is twice as important as that of activity and potency. The present data do not support this claim, and certainly they do not encourage Forgas' (1985) hope that all domains can be unified through their semantic dependence upon Osgood's original three

dimensions. Sociability was not correlated with warmth, and intellectual evaluation was irrelevant. Implicit Personality Theory not only specifies particular semantic fundamentals, it also specifies their mutual relations, namely orthogonality. Yet from Figure 2 it can be seen that activity and potency are closely correlated with each other and negatively correlated with warmth (the only significant evaluative property).

Mander's (1983) literary interpretation is supported by the present results. The major theme of morality emerged, and was related to the importance of traditional family values, although not opposed to the importance of business. The focus upon moral ambivalence, as proposed by both Mander (1983) and Arlen (1981), did not emerge, however. For example, J.R. is clearly set against the rest of his family as the unambiguous force of evil, and is not located within a moral conflict between family and organisation. These results agree with Liebes (1984) in suggesting that viewers are less sensitive to the ambiguity of good and evil, and more to their clear opposition. In this respect, the morality dimension appears more akin to Osgood et al's (1957) evaluative dimension: having identified the centrality of morality as a theme in the programme, it seems likely that viewers' use this more universal framework to disambiguate the presentation, clarifying and polarising the characters so as to evenly balance the moral against the immoral. This casts a more optimistic light upon the programme than is suggested by Mander.

It should be pointed out that the morality dimension does not resemble Osgood et al's evaluative dimension as typically conceived in the domain of real-life person perception, whatever the original

intent: for example, the traits used to operationalise the negative pole of that dimension (e.g. unpopular, irritable, boring, unintelligent, see Ashmore & Tumia, 1980) are conceptually distinct from that of immorality, and do not describe the immoral characters. The importance of morality suggests that viewers focus on what the characters do with their positive attributes (thereby linking representation of character to that of narrative): the 'baddies' use them for exploitation and deceit; the 'goodies' use them for righting wrongs and helping others. A focus on morality implies judgment of the characters' actions and also an appreciation of the narrative implications of assigning characters to a moral category. The relation in the present results between morality and the theme of valuing the family fits with one of the few pieces of research attempting to correlate viewers' beliefs with exposure to soap opera. Pingree et al (1979) found that soap opera viewing was positively correlated with a belief in traditional family values. Although the present data are restricted to Dallas, it is noteworthy that the role of traditional family values emerged as a salient theme for viewers in their interpretation of Dallas.

The present discussion of person perception theories has been cast in the traditional format of testing whether theories which predict real-life person perception also account for television character perception, in other words, testing whether perceptions reflect more the viewers' concerns or the programme structure. Comparing viewers' representations to both person perception theories and critical readings of the programme, the present results suggest that viewers' representations of soap opera characters are importantly determined by the programme structure, and yet that the

viewers' own schematic processes also have a part to play. However, it may appear more useful to regard the present data as extending theories of person perception, showing the ways in which an abstract and therefore generally applicable schema or knowledge structure is filled out and complicated to make it relevant to a unique domain. That the structure of Dallas includes a few counterstereotypic women, or that its particular reworking of the evaluative theme invokes its mythic origins by an emphasis upon morality, reveals the ways in which the particular nature of a domain modify the viewers' general interpretative strategies. The converse process, in which viewers' strategies override the themes foregrounded in the programme structure, may be observed in the clarity of the moral and immoral clusters, in the independence rather than opposition of the themes of morality/family and power/business, and in the relevance of such themes as warmth and activity. So, the present data reveal both the limitations of person perception theories as complete explanations, but also the operation of person perception strategies when viewers represent television characters.

Dallas is thus perceived as presenting the contrast between a (mainly female) world of pleasure, weakness and femininity and a (mainly male) world of organisational power and hard-headed business. The former, hedonistic world is not conceived as either more or less moral than the latter, business world, for morality is orthogonal to the potency cluster. With power split equally between the 'goodies' and the 'baddies' the fight between good and bad will be equal and endless.

The present research revealed the existence of a robust and consensual representation with which viewers organise their

knowledge of the characters in Dallas. The representation can be seen as providing a number of functions for both viewers and researchers. As previously discussed, the representation economically summarises viewers' interpretations of the programme in the form of a knowledge structure which facilitates future interpretation while also being integrated with knowledge of other social domains.

For researchers, this approach to representing viewers' knowledge may provide the following: a resource for understanding why certain correlational studies succeed or fail, for measured effects depend on interpretation; a basis for designing future media research (using paradigms of cultivation, identification, or comprehension) grounded in the actual nature of viewers' cognitions; a complex insight into the specific nature of viewers' interpretations of a programme, the distinctions and associations they make, the themes they make salient or irrelevant, and so forth; and finally, an indication of the extent to which actual interpretations of a specific domain correspond both to interpretations made of other social domains and to those interpretations which textual analysts implicitly assume that viewers make. In this last respect, the present data suggest that viewers show considerable sensitivity to the structure of programmes but that they are also schema-driven in their interpretations of characters. Naturally, these conclusions must be restricted to viewers' interpretations of Dallas, but it is hoped that the existence of a simple and systematic procedure to reveal considerable richness of interpretation will encourage the study of viewers' interpretations of other television programmes.

4.5. Study IV: What changes when the characters change?

4.5.1. Introduction

Popular interest has recently focussed upon the confusing developments in Dallas. The programme makers have taken certain liberties with the constraints of the genre in their search for the winning formula to keep Dallas competitive. In brief, a recent series ended with the dramatic death of two major characters (Bobby Ewing and Katherine Wentworth) and the leaving of another, Lucy Ewing-Cooper, through marriage. This attempt to change the show, bringing in new characters to replace the old ones, and generally opening up new narrative possibilities, backfired when the programme's ratings dropped. The entire series was then declared a dream about events which never actually happened and the next series took up where the penultimate series left off. This placed a number of demands upon the viewers' ability and memory as they had to remember the earlier series, forget all of the most recent series, and reconstruct a coherent history of what 'really' did or did not happen after all.

The above research aimed to uncover stable socio-cognitive knowledge structures which could further research in two ways: (a) reveal the structure of viewers' representations and (b) indicate the knowledge structures which mediate the effects of viewing. The generality of these findings is called into question when major character changes are introduced in the programme. The above studies showed that viewers were fairly sensitive to the structure of the programme in their representation of characters. In other words, they did not simply project their own interests or knowledge onto the characters in a predominantly constructive fashion. If the

replacement of certain characters by others leads to changes in viewers' understanding of basic themes, then any study of the role of knowledge structures on viewing would have to re-examine the current state of viewers representations.

Character replacement may alter the balance of moral to immoral characters, or it may eliminate all weak characters, so that potency is no longer an issue, and introduce alternative or competing themes, such as intelligence or cooperation. On the other hand, the new characters may be purely cosmetic, providing new faces and new narrative possibilities, but no new underlying themes or thematic relations between characters. If this latter proves to be the case, then the above results have generality for Dallas viewers over time. The original study, then, was conducted with the original and longstanding character set, during the series which ended by dropping three characters. The present research was conducted during the following series, in which the three old characters were replaced by three new characters, to discover whether the previous findings still applied. Since the present study was conducted, the programme has reverted to the old characters, by declaring the previous series to be a dream.

The present research was based upon the idea that the characters dropped from the series were directly replaced by new characters in such a way that the underlying character representation, organized around morality and potency, would be unchanged. Thus, it seemed plausible that Jack Ewing replaced Bobby Ewing, Jamie Ewing replaced Lucy Ewing-Cooper, and Angelica de Niro replaced Katherine Wentworth in the semantic character representations. In other words, the old characters directly match

their replacements on the perceived main themes of the programme, and therefore the new characters 'take over' the oppositional similarities and contrasts with all other characters. As these oppositional similarities and contrasts between characters were studied originally in order to discover viewers' implicit conceptualisation of the characters, the continued relevance of the earlier findings in terms of themes found to be salient, assumes functional equivalence between old and new characters. This was supported by the main narratives of the new series: Jack took over from Bobby in his romance with Jenna and father-figure role to Jenna's daughter, Charlie; Jack also became a partner with J.R., replacing Bobby to some extent in the narratives, if not in power; and Angelica took over Katherine's role in trying to beat J.R. and use everybody else for her own manipulative ends. Whether these characters were psychologically equivalent for the viewers is the question addressed here.

4.5.2. Method

4.5.2.1. Subjects

The 51 subjects (36 females, 15 males) were of a wide range of ages (range = 12-54, mean = 21.69, st.dev. = 7.96) and occupations. They were obtained through a national advertisement in SOAPS magazine for volunteer subjects. All were regular viewers of Dallas: average length of time viewed = 5.314 years (range = 1-8 years, st.dev. = 2.083), and all but 8 watched every week (none watched less than every second programme).

4.5.2.2. Characters

The same 13 characters (see Study I) were included in the questionnaire, with the addition of the three new characters. The

16 characters were: Pam Ewing, Donna Krebs, Jenna Wade, Katherine Wentworth, Bobby Ewing, Sly (J.R.'s secretary), Lucy Cooper-Ewing, Ray Krebs, J.R. Ewing, Sue Ellen Ewing, Cliff Barnes, Miss Ellie Ewing, Clayton Farlow, Jamie Ewing-Barnes, Jack Ewing, and Angelica de Niro.

4.5.2.3. Questionnaire

Subjects were asked to rate the similarity between each of the three new characters and all of the other characters (3 x 15 comparisons), following these instructions:

Now think about what you know of these characters' personalities, of what types of people they are. Then for each pair of characters you are asked about on the next page, think about how similar those two characters are to each other and make your answer using the 5 point scale provided. For example, if you think that Jamie is very similar to Jenna, then circle '5' for that question. If you think they are neither similar nor different, circle '3', and so on.

4.5.3. Results

The pair-wise similarity ratings were averaged over subjects. They were then combined with the original similarity data from Study I by directly replacing the means for comparisons involving Bobby, Katherine, and Lucy with those obtained in the present study for Jack, Angelica, and Jamie respectively. This new lower triangular matrix with 13 characters was entered into the MRSCAL multidimensional scaling program (Roskam, 1981). The stress values (coefficient of alienation) for solutions obtained at all dimensionalities from 5 to 1 were: 0.06, 0.08, 0.12, 0.16, 0.24. Although the clearest 'elbow' is at two dimensions, the two-dimensional stress level is above that conventionally accepted (about 0.14-0.15, Schiffman, Reynolds, & Young, 1981). On

examination of the interpretability of the solutions obtained at all dimensionalities, the three dimensional solution was selected for interpretation. The coordinates for the 13 characters on the three dimensions can be seen in Table 4.3.

To determine whether the replacement of the three old characters with the three new characters significantly altered the overall character representation, the present solution was compared with that of Study I using canonical correlation (Schiffman, et al, 1981). Conceptually, this analysis compares the two solutions by rotating them until the dimensions of one are maximally aligned with the dimensions of the other. The correlation coefficient obtained reveals the degree to which the two spaces mirror each other. In order to match the two solutions for canonical correlation, Bobby and Jack, Katherine and Angelica, and Lucy and Jamie were treated as equivalents. So, if this is a false assumption, the two solutions will be only poorly correlated. The results of the analysis were: canonical correlation 1 = 0.9848, $F(6,16) = 26.6394$, $p = 0.0001$; canonical correlation 2 = 0.8232, $F(2,9) = 9.4598$, $p = 0.0061$. The two multidimensional scaling spaces are clearly very similar to each other. The canonical variables relate to the actual dimensions of the spaces thus: for the original space, the first canonical variable correlates mainly with the first dimension of the space ($r = 0.9748$) and the second canonical variable correlates mainly with the second dimension ($r = -0.9748$); for the space with new characters substituted, the first canonical variable correlates mainly with the first dimension ($r = 0.9945$) while the second canonical variable correlates mainly with the third dimension ($r = 0.8083$).

This indicates that the first dimension of the new space corresponds closely to the morality dimension obtained in Study I, notwithstanding the substitution of three major characters. The potency dimension obtained previously is also maintained, but as the third dimension of the new space, thus explaining the need to retain the three-dimensional solution above. The second dimension merely separates Jack and Jamie from the other characters (new versus old). The character representation with the new characters substituted has been plotted on its first and third dimensions and can be seen in Figure 4.3. This shows how the new characters are seen by viewers as replacing the old characters and also how this replacement has resulted in almost no alteration in the structural relationships between all the characters in the programme (see Figure 4.1 for comparison).

The new representation (Figure 4.3) is partly similar to that of Figure 4.1 because many of the proximities were unchanged (e.g. J. R. with Sue Ellen). Consequently, the mean similarity judgments for each of the new characters were correlated with their matched old characters. The results showed that Angelica's similarities with all other characters was significantly correlated with those of Katherine's ($r = 0.990$, $d.f. = 11$, $p = 0.0001$). Bobby's and Jack's scores were similarly correlated ($r = 0.821$, $d.f. = 11$, $p = 0.0001$). However, Jamie's scores did not correlate with Lucy's ($r = 0.388$, $d.f. = 11$, n.s.) although they did correlate with Jack's ($r = 0.636$, $d.f. = 11$, $p = 0.025$).

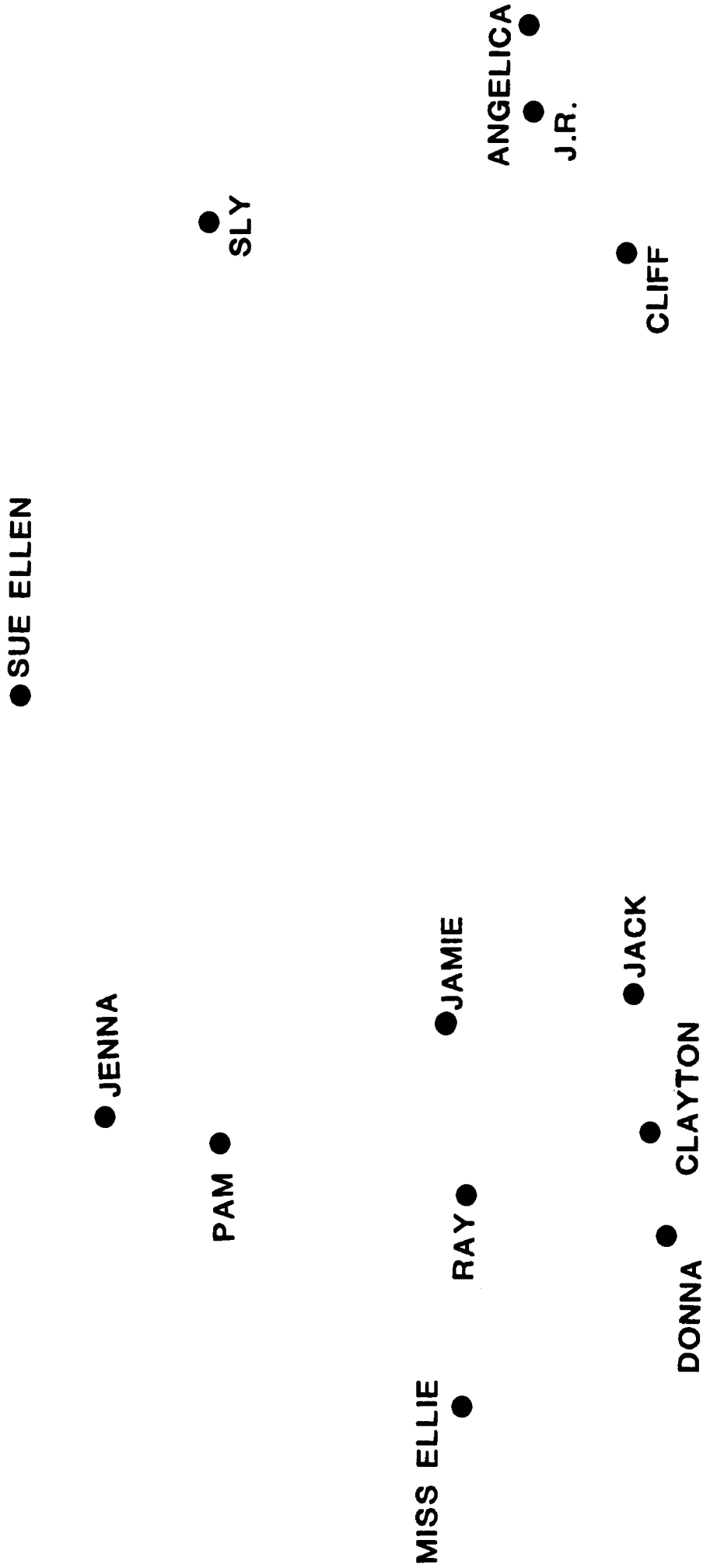


Figure 4.3: Two-dimensional representation for characters in DALLAS showing positions of the three new characters (dimension 1=horizontal, dimension 2=vertical)

Table 4.3: Coordinates of 13 characters on the dimensions of the representation

	Dim. 1	Dim. 2	Dim. 3
Sly	1.0998	-0.4376	-0.3968
Ray	-0.6783	0.4298	0.0735
Sue Ellen	0.1891	0.1560	-0.7374
Jenna	-0.5379	0.4079	-0.5870
Cliff	0.9730	-0.2382	0.3558
Donna	-0.7358	0.0804	0.4292
Clayton	-0.5573	0.5595	0.4044
Miss Ellie	-1.0344	0.0497	0.0601
Pam	-0.5848	-0.2682	-0.3792
J. R.	1.2093	0.3225	0.1932
Jack	-0.3191	-0.6473	0.3693
Jamie	-0.3717	-0.8271	0.0349
Angelica	1.3481	0.4124	0.1799

4.5.4. Discussion

The first dimension of the present character representation (Figure 4.3) is equivalent to the first, horizontal dimension of Figure 4.1, and can be clearly interpreted as a morality dimension, separating the moral or good characters from the immoral characters. Similarly, the third dimension of Figure 4.3 is equivalent to the second, vertical dimension of Figure 4.1, and can be interpreted as a potency dimension, opposing weak (and non-male) with strong, business-oriented and powerful. The second dimension of the new solution is difficult to interpret as it most clearly separates out the two new characters, Jack and Jamie (see Table 4.3). They were clearly perceived as highly similar to each other, possibly because of their sibling relationship and possibly because of their newness. Possibly more time is required for them to develop their own distinctiveness in the representation. In effect, then, the second dimension of the present representation adds little to the overall representation and should be interpreted as equivalent to the two-dimensional solution of Study I with an artefactual third

dimension. The high degree of similarity between the two solutions indicates that the new characters have not substantially altered the pattern of relationships in the programme as a whole. Certainly the structural positions occupied by Bobby and Katherine have found functional equivalents in the replacement characters of Jack and Angelica.

The representation shows that both Jack and Jamie have clearly entered the 'morality' cluster of characters, Jack being seen as more powerful than Jamie, possibly because of his maleness. Jamie's marriage to Cliff has not tainted her with his immorality in the viewers' eyes, suggesting a variety of future narratives concerning moral conflicts within the marriage. It is Sue Ellen, rather than Jamie, who has taken over Lucy's now vacant position as the ambiguously moral but weak woman, and the center of the space is now empty. Angelica provides a structural replacement for Katherine, neatly taking over her relations and conflicts with the other characters. As the only truly powerful and immoral woman in Dallas, Katherine needed replacement, in order to contrast with the moral women, provide a female balance for J.R., and even to compete with Dallas's rival, Alexis Carrington (Joan Collins) in Dynasty, for the latter has made the wicked woman an essential figure in the glamorous soaps.

We can conclude that viewers' representation of the characters has a permanence beyond the fortunes of the particular characters. Indeed, the programme makers may have implicitly used the viewers' representation in their selection of replacement characters: as Eco says (1979), the production process envisages the cultural competence of the reader. Although new faces were included, no new

character types were introduced. For this new series too, Dallas is seen to rest on the basic oppositions of Moral:Immoral, Powerful:Weak, and Male:Female. As Liebes has argued (1986), these themes are realised through certain traditional cultural mythic narratives, most notably that of rivalry between brothers (e.g. Cain and Abel). For this reason, amongst others, Jack (or Ray) could not substitute for Bobby as they lack the claims of blood which allow Bobby to truly rival J.R. for, originally, their father's favor.

The present data raise several issues concerning the nature and direction of programme change in relation to the perceptions of viewers. A programme must find a careful balance between standing still (permitting familiarity, security, and understanding) and moving on (permitting unpredictability, suspense, and character development). It is interesting that the previous character representation, partly because there were more female than male characters, provided a greater variety of female positions. The men were seen simply as either moral and powerful or immoral and powerful. However, the women occupied all four possible combinations permitted by these two oppositional themes: Donna is perceived as moral and powerful, Jenna is moral but weak, Katherine is immoral and powerful, while Sly is both immoral and weak. Beyond this, it was only female characters who occupied intermediate positions: Sue Ellen was seen as intermediate for both morality and potency, and Lucy was neither moral nor immoral, but clearly weak. The series following the dream, in which Bobby 'returned', has so far not returned Katherine, although Angelica is gone, has retained Jack in addition to Bobby, and has not returned Lucy. The programme is thus increasing its number of, and focus upon, male characters.

This is most notable in the apparent return of the patriarchal head of the family, Jock Ewing. It appears that Dallas is moving further away from the focus upon women and feminine or domestic concerns typical of soap opera proper (Cantor & Pingree, 1983) and further towards its roots in melodrama, as identified by Mander (1983), in its attempt to compete commercially with prime-time, action-adventure programmes such as Miami Vice. In principle, empirical analyses of viewers' character representations and their identification of major themes would allow the tracing of constancies and developments in television programmes. This would facilitate the charting both of the ways programmes' reflect and direct personal and social concerns.

4.6. Summary

1. Social psychological theories of person perception predict that characters would be represented on the dimensions used to represent people generally.
2. Some psychological research and literary analyses of programmes as texts predict that characters would be represented in accordance with the oppositional structure of the programme.
3. Study I discovered the spontaneous and implicit representation of the characters in Dallas from regular viewers of the programme. No differences were observed between viewers of different sex or nationality.
4. Study II successfully replicated the structure of the representation using different subjects and a different, more implicit and natural method.
5. Study III found that both social psychological and literary

approaches are partly supported: characters are represented along some, but not all, person perception dimensions, and also along the oppositions of literary analyses. In general, the dimensions or oppositions were not as predicted in their inter-relations and in their degree of ambiguity: they represent an amalgam of top-down and bottom-up influences.

6. The character representation was organised around the independent themes of morality and potency. Gender was aligned with potency, but several female characters were perceived as counter-stereotypic, and there were more varied representations of female than male characters. The positioning of the characters on these dimensions provides sources of conflict on salient dimensions as material for dramatic narratives.
7. Study IV showed that when certain central characters were replaced by new characters in the programme, two of the three new characters were perceived as functionally equivalent to the old characters: thus the character representation has permanence in its major dimensions.

CHAPTER FIVE

VIEWERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHARACTERS IN CORONATION STREET

5.1. Introduction

The programme, Coronation Street, differs from Dallas in everything but its popularity. Until EastEnders took over recently, Coronation Street has been the most consistently popular television programme in Britain. Dyer (1981) traces the history of Coronation Street back to its beginnings in the social realist tradition of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Dyer argues that Coronation Street was and still is true to the four main elements in Hoggart's influential characterisation of social realist popular culture in The Uses of Literacy (1957). The first element concerns a focus on everyday, ordinary and mundane events and interactions in real time. These unexceptional happenings are continually framed by and understood through conventional common sense - the normative assumptions, explanations and myths of the community portrayed. The second parallel between Hoggart's analysis and Coronation Street concerns the absence of actual work, despite continuous references to work and the working classes. The focus is instead upon lifestyles and value-systems, on the activities around work, usually in a domestic setting, thereby avoiding the political and contentious, and remaining on the interpersonal level. This facilitates the third parallel, a heavy focus on women: women are portrayed as strong, central, and the pivot of the working class community. Finally, both Hoggart's Uses of Literacy and Coronation Street are imbued with a sense of nostalgia for the warmth,

simplicity, and charm of the world portrayed, a world which, it is suggested, did once exist but does so no longer.

The genre of Social Realism demands that life should be presented as a narrative of personal events ... ostensibly about social problems ... the resolution of these events should always be in terms of the effect of personal interventions; that the characters should be either working class or of the classes immediately visible to the working classes ... that the settings should be commonplace and recognisable ... that the style should be such as to suggest an unmediated, unprejudiced and complete view of reality. (Jordan, 1981a, p.28).

These points about soap opera, concerning personal intervention, of strong women, of sometimes dubious claims to realism, and of underlying moral messages are echoed by many other writers on the genre, British and American (Allen, 1985; Brunsden, 1983; Buckman, 1984; Hobson, 1982; Intintoli, 1984). They seem always to have been central aspects of the genre, from its earliest days of trying to capture the working class housewife audience (the soap powder market) by appealing, not to their fantasies, already catered for by the romance genre, but to their self-respect as working class women, their isolation and need for (para)social contacts, their nostalgia, and their boredom.

The papers in Dyer et al (1981) will be given some attention here as they are the only serious attempt to date to examine the programme. The authors trace the ideals to which Coronation Street attains in terms of the recognition of the working class, of female strength and importance, both of which receive little attention on the rest of television, and in terms of the reaffirmation of common sense over the monopoly of the 'expert'. They also trace the compromises and deceptions in the programme in which realism is sacrificed for both practical reasons (Porter, 1982) and ideological

reasons. For example, Jordan (1981a) argues that, although it includes strong women characters, Coronation Street avoids challenging the normative viewer by portraying women in atypical demographic positions. If we look at the demographic positions of twenty one of the main characters (Table 5.1) we see a large number of widows (who need to be 'masculine' as they lack a husband), and two barmaids (who need to be 'masculine' to deal with the customers).

Similarly, Coronation Street, like other soap operas is concerned to treat moral and political issues in order to be topical and engage the interest and concerns of viewers. Again, some realism is in fact sacrificed in order not to offend the viewers and a balance is maintained between serious and light-hearted stories. A further point is that there are few or no 'normal' nuclear families in Coronation Street. As regards employment, there are few manual workers and a large number of self-employed workers.

Much of the skill of the programme (and of the success of the genre) can be seen in the way in which it omits what is sociologically the normative grouping of mother, father, two children, while still managing to assert that it is about just such groups. (Jordan, 1981a, p.32).

Jordan also traces some ways in which Coronation Street departs from social realism in order to accommodate some of the conventions of soap opera proper, such as stereotyping of the female characters, a focus on romance, and so forth.

As a result of their detailed analysis of both specific episodes and the overall programme structure, these authors conclude that "it is possible to see the major oppositions of Coronation Street as Inside:Outside and Male:Female" (Paterson & Stewart,

1981, p.84). Particular narratives may also be structured around specific additional oppositions which are related to these major oppositions, such as Work:No-Work. Generally, narratives are set within a class framework, so that Inside:Outside is frequently aligned with Working Class:Middle Class. The dynamics of the community life portrayed suggest that one's comfort and safety depend upon everyone being disadvantaged and poor together, so that people help each other out. The more middle class characters may then represent a threat to this cooperative coping strategy by introducing divisiveness or competition. For example, when Terry Duckworth (working class) robbed Alf Robert's (middle class) shop the community argued that it would not be 'right' for the police to be told as Terry was a local lad, 'one of us', whom they could vouch for in the future. Alf, having the faith in social institutions and the law of a middle class citizen resolved to inform the police as the 'right' thing to do. Thus the middle class strategy proved disruptive of the working class community.

Regarding the gender opposition, Lovell (1981) comments that "Coronation Street is amply supplied with the strong, middle-aged women characters which the conventions of soap opera seem to require" (p.50), these requirements deriving from the needs and pleasures of the female viewer. Because of the paucity of normative families, "the matriarchies that the programme celebrates are the matriarchies of place, not of blood relationship" (p.35). Thus Bet Lynch (and previously Annie Walker and Ena Sharples) rule the Rovers Return pub, Rita Fairclough and Mavis Riley run the corner newsagent, Vera Duckworth and Ivy Tilsley effectively dominate the factory (despite a male boss), and so forth.

By highlighting the variety of determinants which structure different programmes, Dyer et al's analyses give us a concrete understanding of the domains over which traditional person perception theories claim generality. Given Coronation Street's claim to realism and the parallels which viewers themselves perceive between their lives and those portrayed, one would certainly expect viewers to interpret the characters in Coronation Street, maybe even more than in Dallas, according to implicit personality theories. Viewers' assumptions about the everyday social world should come to the fore and be validated when interpreting a television world claiming social realism. Consequently, it is likely that viewers' interpretation of Coronation Street may well not correspond to that of Dyer et al (1981). As Lovell (1981) recognises, one cannot speculate about the ideological effects of viewing unless viewers interpret the class and gender messages in the same way as the analysts. The more one conceives of the audience (including analysts) as drawing upon its frameworks and social knowledge in the constructive interpretation of a text, the less one should expect ordinary and professional viewers to agree.

The present chapter will both broaden the research into another programme and pursue the issues thereby raised. The sequence of studies aims to (a) compare representations of Coronation Street with those of Dallas (Studies I and II); (b) follow up the question of balance between textual structure and viewers' person knowledge as competing determinants of character representation (Studies III to V).

5.2. Study I: Viewers' representation of characters

5.2.1. Introduction

The sorting task used in the previous chapter (Study II) proved simpler and more naturalistic than the pair-wise similarity task for obtaining proximities data for multidimensional scaling. In the present study, regular viewers of Coronation Street were asked to sort the characters according to perceived similarities in personality. It is expected that viewers will be found to have a consensual, low error representations of the characters. The dimensions of this representation (possibly after rotation) should be readily interpretable. A discovery approach is adopted in this study. The interpretations and relevant theories will be tested in Study II. In addition, the results will be analysed to see if different groups of viewers (by age and sex) have different representations.

5.2.2. Method

5.2.2.1. Materials and Procedure

Twenty one characters in Coronation Street, eleven women and ten men, were selected as both longstanding and central to the programme. They were as follows: Ken Barlow, Deidre Barlow, Vera Duckworth, Jack Duckworth, Terry Duckworth, Kevin Webster, Mike Baldwin, Curly Watts, Sally Waterman, Ivy Tilsley, Brian Tilsley, Gail Tilsley, Billy Walker, Emily Bishop, Mavis Riley, Rita Fairclough, Bet Lynch, Betty Turpin, Percy Sugden, Hilda Ogden, and Alf Roberts (see Table 5.1).

These character names were typed onto separate slips of paper. Each subject received the 21 slips of paper, several paper clips, and the following instructions in an envelope.

Each of the slips of paper in this envelope has the name of a Coronation Street character typed on it. You are asked to sort the 21 characters into piles according to how they appear to you in the programme. You may make as many piles as you want, and you can put any number of characters in each pile. If you don't think a particular character 'goes with' any other (or if you don't know who a character is), then put it on its own. Characters put into the same pile should be perceived by you as having similar personalities to each other, and as having different personalities from the characters you have put into other piles. Feel free to rearrange your piles until you are satisfied.

Demographic data on subject age, sex, occupation, length and frequency of viewing Coronation Street were also collected.

5.2.2.2. Subjects

The 58 subjects (47 female, 11 male) were obtained through the Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel and were paid for participating. The imbalance in the sexes was due to the difficulty of obtaining men who viewed the programme, despite efforts made to obtain male subjects. Twenty two subjects were under 30 years old, 30 were between 31 and 60, and 6 were over 60. There were 14 homemakers, 18 white collar workers, 9 professionals, 4 unskilled workers, 2 unemployed and 11 students. Fourteen subjects had watched Coronation Street for between 2 and 5 years, 20 had watched between 6 and 10 years, 6 had watched for between 10 and 20 years, and 18 had watched for longer than 20 years. Thirty one subjects claimed to watch the programme twice a week (i.e. every episode), 22 watched once or twice a week, and 5 watched less than once a week (mean = 1.68 per week). Finally, all subjects knew all the characters with the exception of 6 subjects who did not know Sally Waterman, and one each who did not know Billy Walker, Percy Sugden, and Kevin Webster.

Table 5.1: Demographic status of 21 characters in CORONATION STREET¹

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u> ²	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Marital Status</u>
Ken Barlow	47	editor of local paper	married to DB (widower)
Deidre Barlow	31	shop assistant	married to KB (divorcee)
Vera Duckworth	40's	machinist for MB	married to JD
Jack Duckworth	40's	taxi driver	married to VD
Terry Duckworth	20's	worker in abattoir	single (son of V&JD)
Kevin Webster	20's	apprentice for BT	single ³
Mike Baldwin	44	Owens a clothing factory	single ³
Curly Watts	20's	dustman	single
Sally Waterman	20's	secretary for KB	single
Ivy Tilsley	50	head machinist for MB	widow
Brian Tilsley	29	s/e ⁵ car mechanic	married to GT (son of IT)
Gail Tilsley	29	manages local cafe	married to BT
Billy Walker	48	manager & barman in RR ⁴	single
Emily Bishop	57	accountant to MB	widow
Mavis Riley	49	shop assistant to RF	single
Rita Fairclough	54	s/e newagent manager	widow
Bet Lynch	45	barmaid in RR	single
Betty Turpin	66	barmaid in RR	widow
Percy Sugden	60's	retired	single
Hilda Ogden	61	cleaner	widow
Alf Roberts	60	s/e shop manager	widower ³

Note 1: details given during running of studies I, II, & IV (1985-1986).

Note 2: actual ages obtained from Dyer et al (1981) or estimates.

Note 3: married during course of 1986.

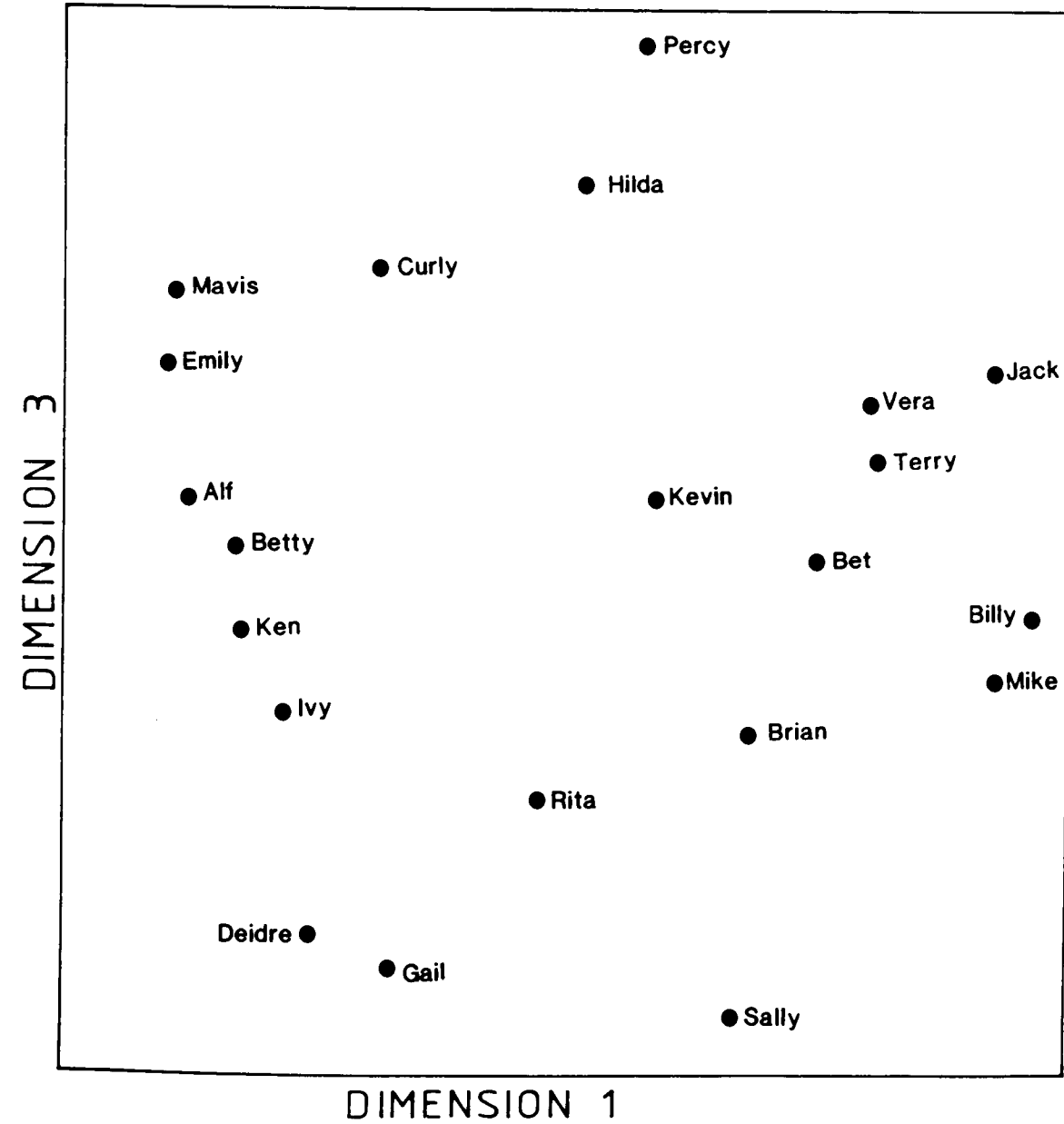
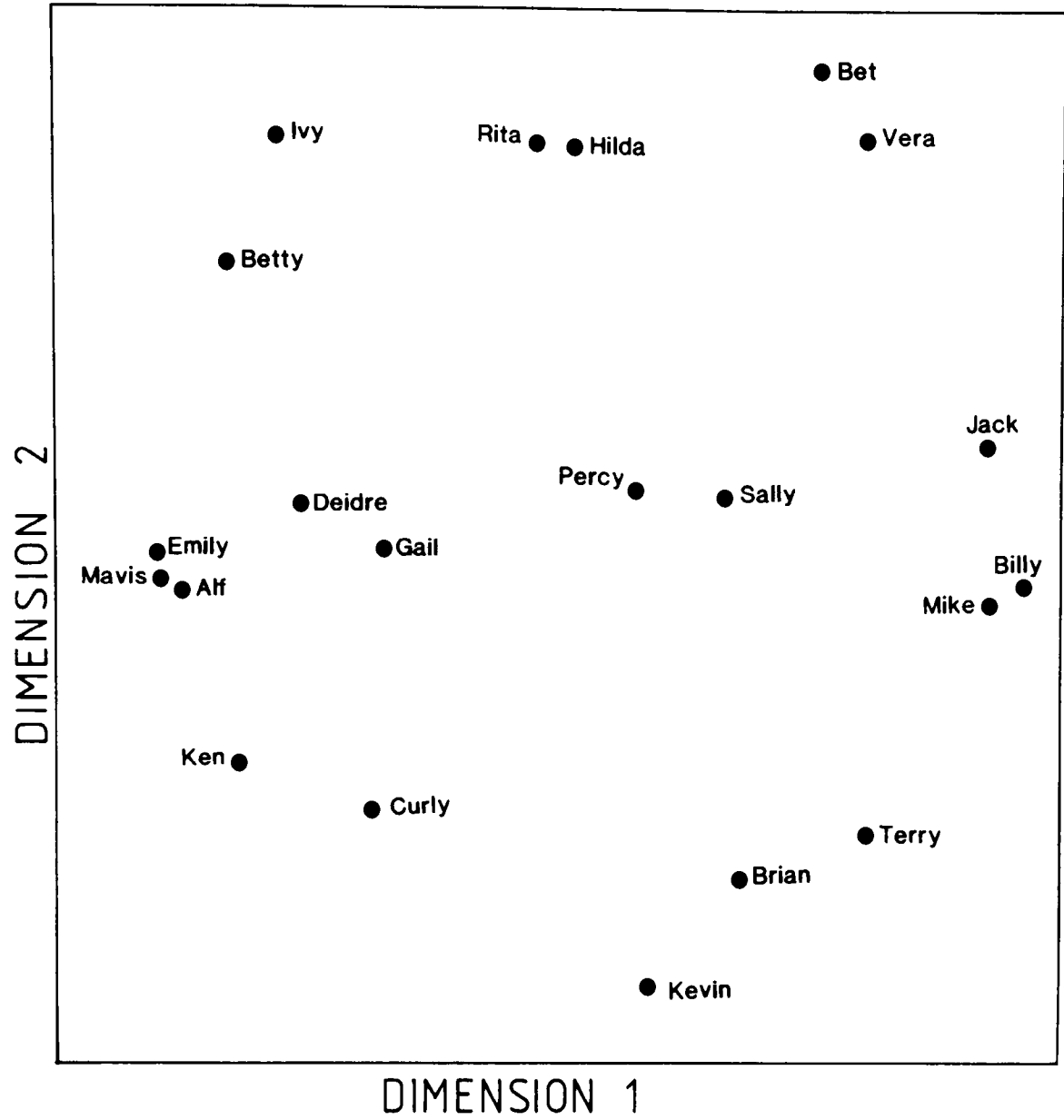
Note 4: RR = Rovers Return Public House.

Note 5: s/e = self-employed.

5.2.3. Results

Subjects' character sorts were used to construct a lower triangular data matrix with one cell for each possible character pair. Each cell contained the number of subjects who placed that particular pair of characters together. This matrix, containing perceived character proximities, was entered into the MRSCAL program for metric classical multidimensional scaling (Roskam, 1981). The resulting solutions for all dimensionalities between 5 and 1 had coefficients of alienation as follows: 0.863, 0.1018, 0.1419, 0.2605, 0.4588. The elbows lie at two and at three dimensions. As the stress is good for the three dimensional solution but poor for the two dimensional one, the three dimensional solution was selected for interpretation (see Figures 5.1 & 5.2). As it is difficult to present and interpret a three dimensional solution, two faces of the three dimensional 'cube' are presented, and they should be each interpreted in conjunction with the other.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2: Three-dimensional representation for characters in CORONATION STREET



5.2.4. Analysis of group differences

To determine whether the representation of characters obtained in Study I is a consensual representation which fits the perceptions of all subjects, group differences in representation were analysed. Additional data available concerned subjects' age and sex. These seem likely sources of group difference and consequently subjects were subdivided for reanalysis. Of the 58 subjects, only 11 were male. For a multidimensional scaling analysis, even an exploratory analysis would be unstable with fewer subjects, so the male viewers were not further subdivided. The 47 female viewers were subdivided according to age: 21 or under ($n=10$), 22 to 50 ($n=24$), and over 50 ($n=12$). The relatively small subgroup sizes necessitated treating the group sorting data as ordinal rather than interval level of measurement. The cardsorting data for the four groups were then entered separately into the MINISSA program for multidimensional scaling. For these n 's, only the 2-dimensional solutions should be considered. The stress levels for each solution ($D\text{-hat}$) were as follows: males = 0.147, females 21 or under = 0.120, females 22 to 50 = 0.164, and females over 50 = 0.150. These stress levels are somewhat high, but adequate.

To discover whether the four subgroup representations are basically in agreement, or whether each group represents the characters in a different way, or according to different dimensions, all six possible pairs of representations were entered into canonical correlation analyses. The results (Table 5.2) show that the three groups of women agree significantly with each other, all producing essentially the same representation. The male group are largely in agreement, particularly for the first dimension of the

representation, although they differ somewhat from the younger and older women on the second dimension. Overall, the representation obtained in Study I, based on the total viewer sample, provides a reasonably consensual representation over specific subgroupings of subjects. Some reservations should be made about generalising to male viewers, although clearly more male subjects would be preferable to examine further the stability of their representation.

Table 5.2: Group differences in character representation as revealed by canonical correlation

Comparison pair		Can. Corr.	F	df	P
Male/female <=21	1	0.9279	15.2772	4,34	0.0001
	2	0.2831	1.5683	1,18	0.2265
Male/female 22-50	1	0.9103	16.7244	4,34	0.0001
	2	0.5810	9.1705	1,18	0.0072
Male/female 51+	1	0.9076	13.1328	4,34	0.0001
	2	0.3522	2.5493	1,18	0.1277
Female <=21/female 22-50	1	0.9407	28.1597	4,34	0.0001
	2	0.7210	20.5310	1,18	0.0003
Female <=21/female 51+	1	0.8274	10.5144	4,34	0.0001
	2	0.6053	10.4086	1,18	0.0047
Female 22-50/female 51+	1	0.7270	8.0486	4,34	0.0001
	2	0.6636	14.1623	1,18	0.0014

5.2.5. Discussion

On visual inspection of the character representation several points can be made. Firstly, the characters are evenly spread throughout the space. This indicates that viewers see the characters in a truly multidimensional fashion, not in terms of a few discrete clusters. Consequently, most or all possible thematic positions are occupied: for each combination of dimensional or oppositional poles, there is likely to be a character who is seen to typify that particular combination of attributes.

Secondly, viewers appear to distinguish firmly between the male and female characters. The characters divide by sex in the space on either side of the top left/bottom right diagonal of the first two dimensions (Figure 5.1). There are no particular groupings by age. From a knowledge of the characters, it seems reasonable to interpret the top right/bottom left diagonal as separating the more staid and responsible characters from the more roguish characters. The other diagonal is concerned with masculinity/femininity, and dimension 3 (Figure 5.2) divides those characters who take a traditional or old-fashioned approach to life from the more modern, forward-looking characters. This latter dimension maps roughly onto age, as might be expected stereotypically (correlation between character age and coordinate on dimension 3, $r = -0.634$, $d.f. = 20$, $p = 0.005$). However, only some 40% of the variance is thus explained, and there are many exceptions. For example, Rita and Sally are both perceived to be modern in their approach to life, and yet Rita is twice Sally's age. Similarly, Curly is as traditional as Hilda and Percy, both in their sixties compared with his twenty odd years.

The representation can be interpreted initially as involving three dimensions, staid/roguish, gender, and approach to life, all of which are fully used and fully combined, with characters typifying all combinations of these themes. These interpretations, based on the author's knowledge of the characters and examination of the resultant spaces, are now put to the test along with the theoretical interpretations predicted by a more general literary analysis of the programme as well as those deriving from person perception theories.

5.3. Study II: Projection of properties on the representation

5.3.1. Introduction

Eighteen properties from six different sources were selected as candidate interpretations of the space (Table 5.3). These were discussed in the previous chapter as potential theoretical explanations for the structure of the character representation, and are used here for the same reasons. As in the DALLAS chapter, the PROFIT program (Chang & Carroll, 1968; Roskam, 1981) will be used to regress property ratings for the characters onto the character representation obtained in Study I. This will reveal which of the candidate properties actually fit, and so can be said to explain, the implicit judgments of similarity from which the space was constructed.

Table 5.3: Candidate properties tested against character representation

(a) Implicit Personality Theory

- (i) sociable - unsociable (social evaluation)
- (ii) warm - cold (social evaluation)
- (iii) intelligent - unintelligent (intellectual evaluation)
- (iv) rational - irrational (intellectual evaluation)
- (v) dominant - submissive (potency)
- (vi) hard - soft (potency)
- (vii) active - passive (activity)
- (viii) excitable - calm (activity)

(b) Gender Schema Theory

- (ix) masculine - not masculine
- (x) feminine - not feminine

(c) Properties emergent from study on Dallas

- (xi) moral - immoral

(d) Interpretation of the emergent space

- (xii) staid - not staid
- (xiii) roguish - not roguish
- (xiv) traditional approach to life - modern approach to life

(e) Cultural studies' analysis of CORONATION STREET

- (xv) working class - middle class
- (xvi) central to the community - peripheral to the community
- (xvii) sexy - not sexy
- (xviii) mature - not mature

5.3.2. Method

5.3.2.1. Questionnaire and Procedure

The same 21 characters were used as those of the previous study. A questionnaire booklet was produced in which each of the characters were rated on each of the 18 properties. The properties were listed in a single, random order, with the 18 ratings for each character occupying one page in the booklet. The pages were presented in a different random order for each subject. A seven point rating scale was placed between each pole of the properties (e.g. 1=warm, 7=cold). Subjects received the following instructions:

In this questionnaire you will be asked for your views on some of the characters in Coronation Street. For each character there are a number of questions about the kind of person that you think they are in general. Think over what you know of each character as you answer the questions about them. There are no right or wrong answers.

Demographic data on subject age, sex, occupation, length and frequency of viewing Coronation Street were also collected.

5.3.2.2. Subjects

The 21 subjects (15 female, 6 male) were obtained through the Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel and were paid for participating. Fourteen subjects were under 30 years old, and 7 were between 31 and 60. There was one homemaker, 6 white collar workers, 5 professionals, 5 unemployed people and 4 students. Six subjects had watched Coronation Street for between 2 and 5 years, 8 had watched between 6 and 10 years, 4 had watched for between 10 and 20 years, and 3 had watched for longer than 20 years. Five subjects claimed to watch the programme twice a week (i.e. every episode), 14 watched once or twice a week, and 2 watched less than once a week

(mean = 1.52 per week). Finally, all subjects knew all the characters with the exception of 2 subjects who did not know Sally Waterman, and one who did not know Billy Walker.

5.3.3. Results

The mean property ratings were calculated for each character on each property by averaging over subjects. The reliability of these mean ratings was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha for reliability over judges for each property. All alphas were satisfactorily high (see Table 5.4) and most exceeded 0.90. The averaged data were then entered into the PROFIT program, together with the stimulus configuration resulting from Study I. The program used linear multiple regression to fit the character ratings to the character representation. The degree to which each property could be fitted onto the space as a vector is shown in Table 5.4, together with the significance levels for each property. Ten of the 18 properties were highly significant ($p < 0.01$) and three were moderately significant ($p < 0.05$). Thus the properties of sociable, hard, dominant, feminine, masculine, approach to life, sexy, roguish, staid and moral were all highly relevant to the character representation, while warmth, centrality, and maturity were moderately relevant.

The character representation together with all significant properties projected onto it is shown in Figures 5.3 & 5.4. Each property should be interpreted as a vector extending in both directions, although for clarity only positive directions are shown. Each face of the three-dimensional cube should be interpreted in relation to the other, with vector length indicating the degree to which a vector fits one face relative to another.

Figures 5.3 and 5.4: Three-dimensional representation for characters in CORONATION STREET showing projections of significant properties

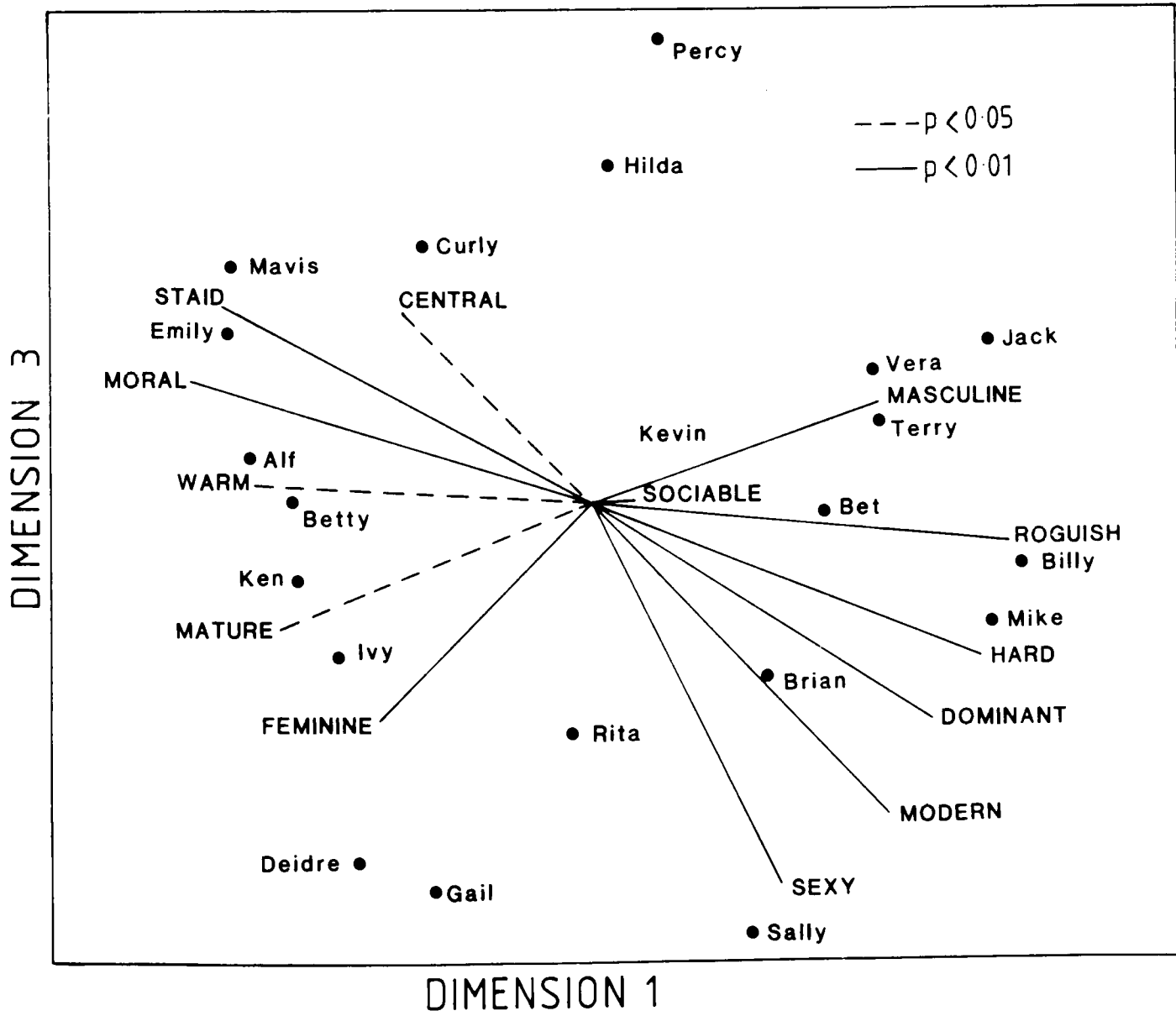
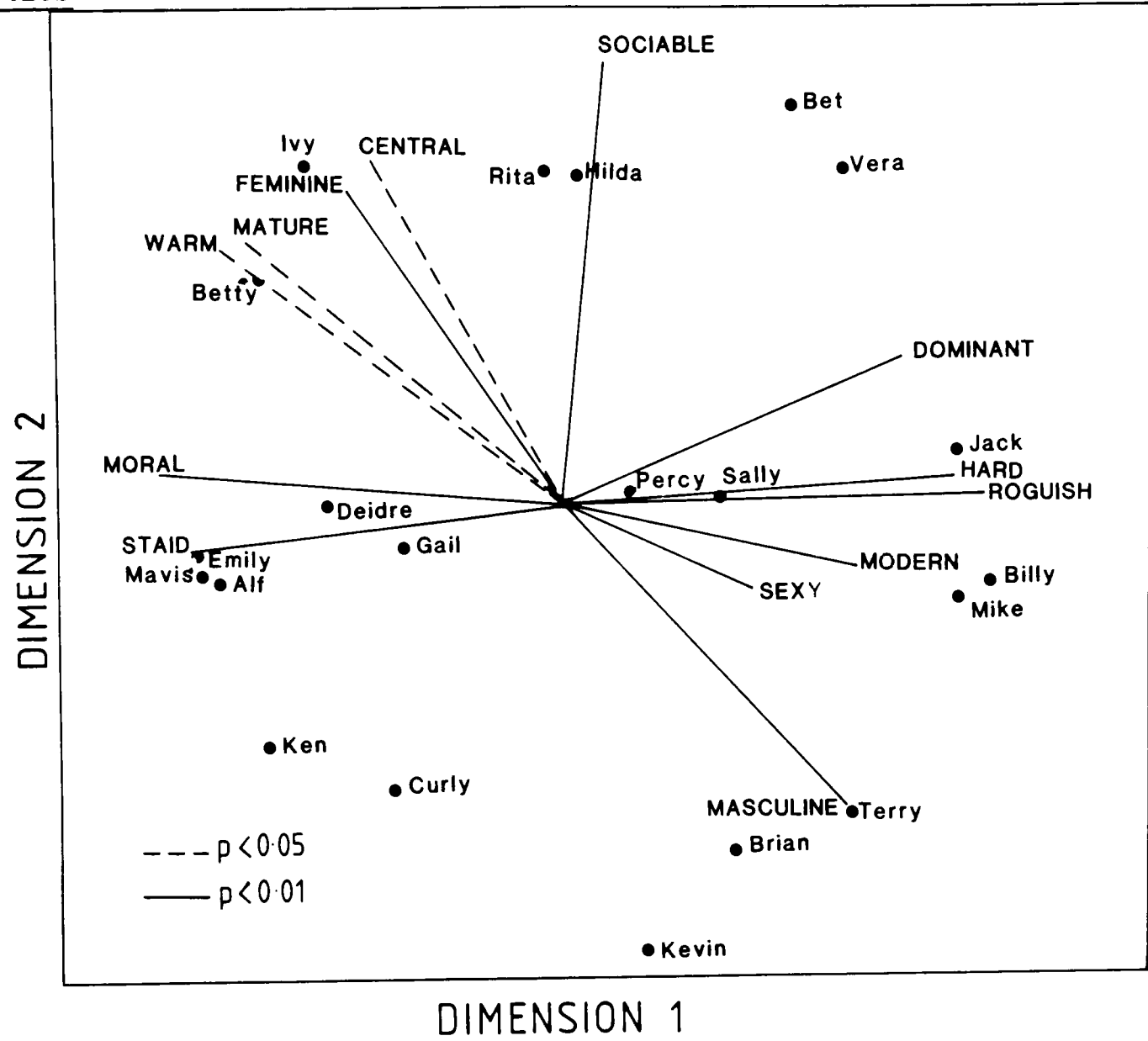


Table 5.4
Variance explained by each property (Study II) in the character representation (Study I) together with reliability levels (Cronbach's alpha) and standard deviations for each property over the 21 characters

Property	R ² (3 dims)	Cronbach's alpha	Standard deviation
Intelligent	0.276	0.9295	1.231
Rational	0.273	0.9030	1.243
Sociable	0.479**	0.8419	1.163
Warm	0.437*	0.9270	1.209
Active	0.125	0.6644	1.070
Excitable	0.262	0.8979	1.250
Hard	0.804***	0.9380	1.238
Dominant	0.582**	0.9393	1.317
Feminine	0.664***	0.9684	1.585
Masculine	0.698***	0.9590	1.386
Central to community	0.375*	0.9449	1.387
Working Class	0.314	0.9613	1.453
Approach to life	0.740***	0.9477	1.358
Mature	0.463*	0.9240	1.227
Sexy	0.628***	0.9269	1.200
Roguish	0.888***	0.9541	1.430
Staid	0.721***	0.9278	1.284
Moral	0.850***	0.9720	1.604

Note: significance levels for property fitting.
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

5.3.4. Discussion

From an examination of Figures 5.3 and 5.4, showing the character representations with their explanatory properties superimposed, it is clear that viewers focus upon three distinct, but partially interrelated themes or dimensions. These are morality/power, gender, and approach to life.

The first theme aligns morality, which should be interpreted in the low-key sense of staid versus roguish, with potency or power, in such a way that the moral pole is clearly seen as soft and submissive (e.g. Mavis, Alf) , while the immoral pole is more hard and dominant (e.g. Jack, Billy). As the morality vector is distinct from that of gender, although not quite orthogonal, this theme can

be interpreted as being fairly independent of gender.

The theme of gender has a matriarchal flavour. It relates femininity, not to passivity, irrationality, or submissiveness, as would be expected from the traditional conception of femininity, but instead to maturity, warmth, centrality to the community, and to a lesser extent, sociability (e.g. Ivy, Betty). On the other hand, masculinity is strongly related to immaturity, coldness, and a peripheral role in the community (e.g. Terry, Brian). There is some area of overlap between masculinity and femininity (e.g. Curly, Vera), but no examples of cross-gendered characters. The absence of 'masculine' women particularly would seem surprising for soap opera but for the fact that the perceived femininity has already an alternative, more powerful and matriarchal meaning.

The third theme concerns the characters' approach to life, so that traditional (e.g. Hilda, Percy) and modern approaches (e.g. Sally, Brian) are opposed and, interestingly, aligned with perceived sexiness. This suggests that many narratives are construed in terms of a conflict between traditional, nostalgic, domestic stability with the exciting and seductive challenges of a new and rapidly changing way of life.

A comparison of the actual and predicted relevance of and inter-relations between themes reveals the inadequacy of implicit personality theories in accounting for character representation. Firstly, several themes were not significantly related to the space, indicating their relative unimportance in viewers' representations (see Table 5.4). These were intellectual evaluation (intelligence and rationality) and activity (active and excitable). Further, some properties were not as strongly correlated as they 'should' have

been (e.g. sociable and warm). Yet both social evaluation (sociable and warm) and potency (dominant and hard) were important, as predicted. Thus the semantic differential dimensions of Osgood et al (1957) received mixed support overall. If morality is regarded as a type of evaluation, then the importance of this theme lends further support to the theory. However, the theory also makes predictions concerning the inter-relations between the dimensions, and here the results are contrary to predictions: morality and sociability are orthogonal, when they 'should' be positively correlated; morality and potency are strongly negatively correlated, not orthogonal. Potency and social evaluation are orthogonal, as expected.

The importance of the properties of masculine and feminine supports the strong emphasis placed upon gender by person perception theorists (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986; Bem, 1984). Yet masculine and feminine are strongly negatively correlated, suggesting, contrary to Bem's work on androgyny, that viewers do not perceive these two properties as mutually compatible, independent properties. Viewers' perceptions appear strongly stereotyped, and yet, as mentioned earlier, the gender dimension is not related to either intellectual evaluation or activity, both non-salient themes, nor with potency, a highly salient and yet orthogonal theme to gender. This contrasts with Ashmore & Tuma's (1980) finding of an association between weak/strong and feminine/masculine, and suggests that viewers are not using standard, abstract gender stereotypic knowledge to construct their understanding of characters. This cannot be because they know the characters more than they do brief scenario descriptions, as suggested by Locksley, Borgida, Brekke, and Hepburn

(1980), who argue that stereotypic knowledge is ignored for the representation of well-known people. This is because Ashmore obtained his data through subjects' descriptions of people well known to them personally. Instead the results suggest that the programme itself provides alternative conceptual frameworks, to which the viewers are receptive.

These result suggests that viewers are receptive towards or influenced by the programme structure, which thereby overrides their own stereotypic frameworks. The importance of morality similarly suggests viewers' receptiveness to the mythic functions of soap opera as forum for cultural debate. Viewers are clearly aware that the characters occupy different moral stances and find the moral narratives or messages central to the programme as an appropriate way of conceiving of the characters more generally.

Although the concept of Insider:Outsider was important to viewers, as suggested by Dyer et al (1981), it was not related to Working class:Middle class, as they had argued, but instead was related to gender: it is men who are seen to threaten the stability and security of a primarily female and domestic community, not the middle classes who threaten to disrupt a working class way of life. Further analysis is required to determine if such a view is also present in the text, although missed by Dyer et al, or whether it is entirely of the viewers' own construction. Retrospectively, narratives come to mind in which the female characters make much of the disruptive entry of men, or of their lack of understanding, subtlety, or tactical thinking when the women are planning something.

Why was class absent from in viewers' representation?

Examination of the mean ratings given to each character on a seven point scale (where 1=middle class and 7=working class) reveals that viewers certainly perceive variation among characters, from Emily (mean=2.86) to Jack (mean=6.71). Use of the scale is heavily skewed, with Emily, Mike, Alf, Ken, Mavis, and Sally being perceived as intermediate in class (means=2.86, 3.76, 4.19, 3.14, 4.33, 3.79), Percy, Curly, Gail, Billy, Deidre, Rita, and Betty being perceived as fairly working class (means=5.05, 4.81, 5.48, 4.80, 4.86, 4.86, 5.10), and with Ivy, Brian, Jack, Terry, Kevin, Vera, Hilda, and Bet being perceived as truly working class (means=6.29, 5.86, 6.71, 6.29, 6.10, 6.67, 6.90, 6.25). It is not, therefore, that viewers cannot identify the characters in terms of their social class, it is instead that they do not, when asked for their spontaneous and implicit character perceptions.

Whether this indicates that viewers have no consciousness of this message or that viewers have alternative interests or frameworks, is very difficult to resolve, and the consciousness of one's criteria required for the sorting task is minimal. It seems that viewers do not passively receive the programme as presented, but that they make their own sense of it through selective and constructive cognitions.

5.4. Study III: The representation of social roles

5.4.1. Introduction

Studies I and II examined the relevance of dimensional person perception theories to people's representation of television characters. The results indicated an interaction between cognitive determinants and programme structure in the construction of

representation. An alternative to the dimensional approach could regard the character representation as a specific instantiation of a general representation of common social roles. In this study, the previous research will be developed by examining (a) how viewers represent the inter-relations between a set of prototypes (in this case social roles), (b) whether viewers can identify Coronation Street characters in terms of these roles, and (c) whether their representation of the inter-relations between the characters takes a similar or different form compared to their representation of the inter-relations between the social roles. The social roles were selected from a variety of sources (see below) some of which have been identified as basic in the person perception literature and some of which are identified as central to television drama and myth. In respect of these latter roles, it could be said that the study is biased in favour of similarity between the representation of social roles and of Coronation Street characters. This is partly true. However, if there is no correspondence between characters and roles, no such comparison may be made. Psychologically, there is still a distinction between semantic relations between abstract social roles and semantic relations between concrete named characters: thus there is still a question about the similarity or difference between these two sets of semantic relations.

5.4.2. Method

5.4.2.1. Subjects

The 49 subjects (32 female, 17 male) were obtained through the Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel. They were of a range of ages and occupations, and they were paid a nominal fee for their participation.

5.4.2.2. Social Roles

The 16 basic level social roles were selected to represent the following overlapping sources: character types derived empirically from prototype-listing or trait-clustering paradigms (e.g. Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986), person prototypes related to gender stereotypes (Taylor, 1981); social roles typically presented by soap opera for their mythic significance (Buckman 1984, Dyer et al 1981). Sixteen roles (positive and negative, male and female) were selected in all to allow enough data for a three-dimensional solution and were as follows: mother, spinster, secretary, hardworker, overgrown schoolboy, housewife, playboy, intellectual, chauvinist, princess, barmaid, tart, boss, rogue, youth, career woman.

5.4.2.3. Questionnaire

The 16 social roles for pair-wise similarity judgments were presented in the form of a lower triangular matrix without the diagonal. The row and column elements were labelled with the 16 roles, and a five-point scale with poles marked 'not at all similar' and 'very similar' was presented above the matrix. Subjects were instructed to 'judge how similar you think one member of the pair is to the other pair member' for all of the possible pairs. An example of how to complete the questionnaire was provided.

5.4.3. Results

The similarity ratings for all role pairs were averaged to produce a single lower triangular data matrix which was entered into MRSCAL. This produced a consensual role representation with the following coefficients of alienation for the solutions at each dimensionality from 6 to 1: 0.0481, 0.0597, 0.0820, 0.1213, 0.1888, 0.3951. There is an 'elbow' at two and at three dimensions.

Because the stress at two dimensions was rather high and in order to allow maximum correspondence with the Coronation Street character space, the three dimensional solution was selected for interpretation (see Figure 5.5 & Table 5.5). Table 5.5. shows the coordinates of each social role on each of the three dimensions, and facilitates interpretation of Figure 5.5, which shows the social roles plotted on only the first two dimensions of the space (see discussion section).

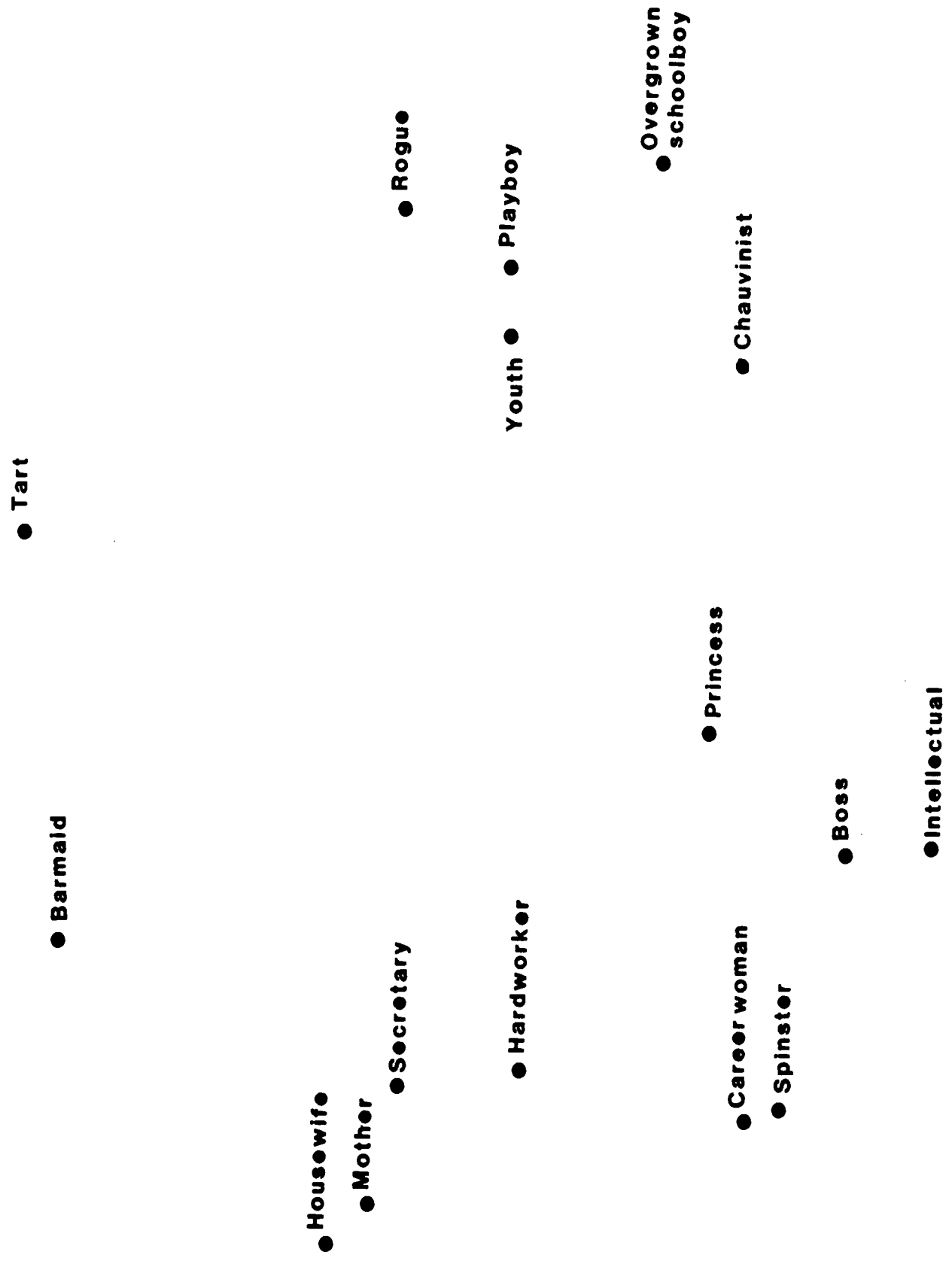


Figure 5.5: Dimensions 1 (horizontal) and 2 (vertical) of the social roles representation

Table 5.5

Coordinates of the Social Roles space (Study III) in three dimensions

Role	Dim. 1	Dim. 2	Dim. 3
Mother	-0.8564	0.3052	0.4415
Spinster	-0.6721	-0.5128	-0.6841
Secretary	-0.6296	0.256	-0.5566
Hardworker	-0.6001	0.0192	0.0864
Overgrown schoolboy	1.1366	-0.2265	-0.0571
Housewife	-0.9392	0.3837	0.2117
Playboy	0.9345	0.0713	0.2085
Intellectual	-0.1579	-0.8107	-0.3679
Chauvinist	0.7646	-0.4030	0.0821
Princess	0.0478	-0.3498	1.2344
Barmaid	-0.3782	0.9523	-0.3004
Tart	0.3976	1.0384	0.2596
Boss	-0.8123	-0.6419	0.3460
Rogue	1.0419	0.2910	-0.0803
Youth	0.7949	0.0688	-0.7613
Career woman	-0.7021	-0.4419	-0.0624

5.4.4. Discussion

The space obtained is readily interpretable. There is a basic division between the male and female roles (insofar as their gender is determinable) along the dimension one (or slightly at a diagonal from top left to bottom right). Thus the housewife and mother epitomise the feminine pole and the overgrown schoolboy and chauvinist epitomise the masculine pole. The second dimension concerns evaluation or morality, dividing the 'good' roles such as intellectual and spinster from the 'bad' roles such as rogue and tart along the vertical axis (tilted towards the bottom left/top right diagonal). The third dimension was less interpretable and seemed an artefact of the unusualness of 'princess' (see Table 5.5). The main function of this dimension is to discriminate princess from all other roles. This representation of basic social roles centring on the two themes of gender and evaluation is consistent with the

literature (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986; Osgood et al, 1957; Rosenberg et al, 1968).

5.5. Study IV: Comparison with representation for CORONATION STREET

Before the two spaces can be directly compared, the correspondence between the Coronation Street characters and the social roles must be established. It will then be possible to see whether the same underlying structural relations exist between the roles and the characters in the viewers' representations.

5.5.1. Method

5.5.1.1. Subjects

The 21 subjects (15 female, 6 male) were obtained through the Department of Experimental Psychology and were paid for their participation. They were of a range of ages (mean =28.57, st.dev. =8.35) and occupations (mainly secretaries, unemployed, teachers and students), and all knew Coronation Street well. They watched the programme frequently (10 'regular', 7 'often' and 4 'sometimes') and had watched for an average of 10.29 years (st.dev. =6.98).

5.5.1.2. Questionnaire

Subjects were presented with a sheet of paper headed with the 16 social roles. These were followed by a list of the 21 Coronation Street characters down the side of the sheet, each one next to a dotted line for the subject's response. Subjects were instructed to write down any (or no) social roles by the names of each character, if they felt that the role provided a good description of that character. They could use the same role several times, or not at all, and they could list as many roles per character as they thought appropriate.

5.5.2. Results

Each character was paired with the social role most frequently listed after that character's name by the subjects. This resulted in the following pairs, where numbers in parentheses are the frequencies of subjects (out of 21) who paired the character with the role: Betty/mother (n=17), Emily/spinster (n=13), Terry/youth (n=14), Ken/intellectual (n=14), Deidre/housewife (n=16), Hilda/housewife (n=13), Billy/rogue (n=12), Gail/mother (n=12), Sally/career woman (n=11), Mike/boss (n=19), Ivy/mother (n=21), Jack/rogue (n=17), Kevin/youth (n=20), Vera/tart (n=10), Rita/career woman (n=10), Alf/hardworker (n=12), Mavis/spinster (n=21), Curly/intellectual (n=13), Percy/chauvinist (n=12), Bet/barmaid (n=16), Brian/overgrown schoolboy (11).

From this it can be seen that each character is seen fairly consensually in terms of at least one social role. In fact, all roles were used more than once, although secretary and princess were never the major role for a character. On this basis, the implicit character space obtained earlier for Coronation Street was compared with the social role space using canonical correlation. The coordinates for the matched pairs above were entered into the analysis.

The results are difficult to interpret because of the third dimension of the role space. This resulted in canonical variables projected through three dimensional space which could not be easily related back to the original dimensions of the two spaces. As the third dimension of the role space has been judged of little interpretative value, the canonical correlation analysis was re-run using the coordinates for the first two dimensions of the role space

only. This produced very similar results in terms of significance levels, as both canonical correlations were significant (in the original analysis with the three dimensional role space, the first two canonical correlations had been significant, and not the third). The results were more interpretable. The correlations between the canonical variables and the original dimensions of the two spaces (Table 5.6 to 5.8) show that the first significant canonical correlation relates the first dimension of the role space (gender) with the top left/ bottom right diagonal of the Coronation Street space (gender). The second canonical correlation shows that the second role dimension (evaluation) corresponds to the other diagonal of the Coronation Street space (roughly, morality and potency). As the morality dimension for Coronation Street is at an oblique angle to gender rather than truly at right angles, it cannot be truly equated with the evaluation dimension of the role space because the canonical correlation analysis requires orthogonal canonical variables. Despite this limitation of the analysis and also some degree of slippage or error in the comparison procedure, it seems reasonable to conclude that these two spaces are comparable in being structured primarily around the two oppositions of Good:Bad and Masculine:Feminine. The third dimension of the Coronation Street space did not relate to either of the significant canonical correlations and therefore is quite independent dimensions in the role space.

Table 5.6
Canonical correlation between Coronation Street 'similarity' space (Study I) and social role space (Study III) using matched pairs

	Can. Corr	F	df	P
1	0.8793	9.4991	6,32	0.0001
2	0.5987	4.7481	2,17	0.0230

Table 5.7
Correlations between the dimensions and the canonical variables of the Coronation Street space (Study IV)

	Can. Var. 1	Can. Var. 2
Dimension 1	0.6648	0.7058
Dimension 2	-0.6677	0.7084
Dimension 3	0.3350	0.0114

Table 5.8
Correlations between the dimensions and the canonical variables of the Role space (Study IV)

	Can. Var. 1	Can. Var. 2
Dimension 1	0.9680	0.2511
Dimension 2	-0.2125	0.9772

5.5.3. Discussion

The results indicate firstly that people conceive of the social roles in terms of gender and evaluation. This conception of evaluation is fairly abstract. From examination of the space, it seems to include some Positive:Negative comparisons, while others are Moral:Immoral, and others are Intelligent:Unintelligent. Secondly, viewers easily and consensually assign particular television characters to a person prototype. This shows that the degree of consensual representation among viewers extends beyond assigning them to particular structural inter-relations according to their specific traits to include also a representation of them as particular types of people, e.g. Ken the intellectual, Percy the chauvinist, and Alf the hardworker.

Thirdly, the structural relations perceived to connect the social roles mirror those perceived between the characters for the

main two dimensions of the Coronation Street space. These results are consistent with the proposal that viewers use a semantic memory representation based on specific, abstract relations between common person prototypes to interpret television characters such that their interpretations are framed and guided by their more general memory for people in everyday life. Thus viewers may both perceive characters as exemplifying particular dimensional positions (in contrast with other characters) or as exemplifying particular types of people like those of their everyday experience. More generally, the results appear to support a consistency-based, organised view of person memory in which understanding of television programmes is just one of many social domains to be interpreted, in contrast with a highly differentiated, domain-specific view of memory. However, further programmes should be studied in this way before firm conclusions are drawn (see Chapter 7).

5.6. Study V: Interactions among CORONATION STREET characters

5.6.1. Introduction

Considerable emphasis has been placed upon Dyer et al's (1981) analysis of Coronation Street, in the absence of any alternative analyses. As viewers seem to neglect the theme of social class in the above study, regarded as particularly important by Dyer et al, some check is required on the validity of their analysis. A full-blown content analysis to discover statistical biases in the programme is beyond the scope of this thesis, but some quantitative index of the role of class in the programme can be obtained. This index should be readily comparable to viewers' representations of the characters. As a rough index, then, of narrative emphases or

biases in the programme, a frequency analysis of the patterns of interactions among characters was conducted. This had three advantages, beyond being relatively simple to compute.

Firstly, it checks the literary or semiotic assessment of qualitatively significant interactions with a quantitative index of frequent interactions. Although contradictory results between these approaches would require a theoretical choice, a conjunction between the two would strengthen each. Secondly, the data can be used to generate a multidimensional representation of characters which is directly comparable to that of viewers' similarity judgments. Thirdly, the index of frequency is open as to the type of interaction or the reason for interaction, just as the index of perceived similarity was open to the criteria used to judge similarity of characters. The data obtained concerning frequency can be later interpreted in a similar fashion, by projecting property ratings for characters.

Following Dyer et al, it is hypothesised that class will be a major feature of character interactions in Coronation Street. As a consequence, the character representation constructed from interaction frequencies should differ substantially from that held by the viewers of the characters' personalities.

5.6.2. Method

5.6.2.1. Sample

A consecutive sample of Coronation Street was video-recorded for the three month period from August 6 to November 12, 1984 inclusive (29 consecutive episodes of 25 minutes each). Unfortunately, the episode of September 3 was half missing, due to unavoidable transmission interference. These episodes were content

analysed for the frequency of interactions between the 21 characters.

5.6.2.2. Interaction coding

Character interactions were coded for each unit of text. A unit selected was the scene, where a scene was operationalised as: the period between two cuts, where a cut involved a camera move to a changed location and/or a changed character combination (i.e. not a new camera angle upon the same characters in the same location). For each scene, the frequency of interaction was coded for each combination of characters present. An interaction was defined as: at least one verbal utterance occurring between the pair of characters (either from A to B, from B to A, or both). The number of utterances for each character pair per unit was not coded. Any interactions involving characters other than the selected twenty one main characters were not coded. These codings were then summed to produce a lower-triangular data matrix containing the frequency of interaction between each character pair over the three months.

5.6.2.3. Procedure

Two coders coded the data simultaneously and independently, with no discussion. The first one coded all the material, the second coded 5 randomly selected episodes (17% of the material). The video tapes were played to both coders at normal speed, and each was free to stop and replay the tape at any time.

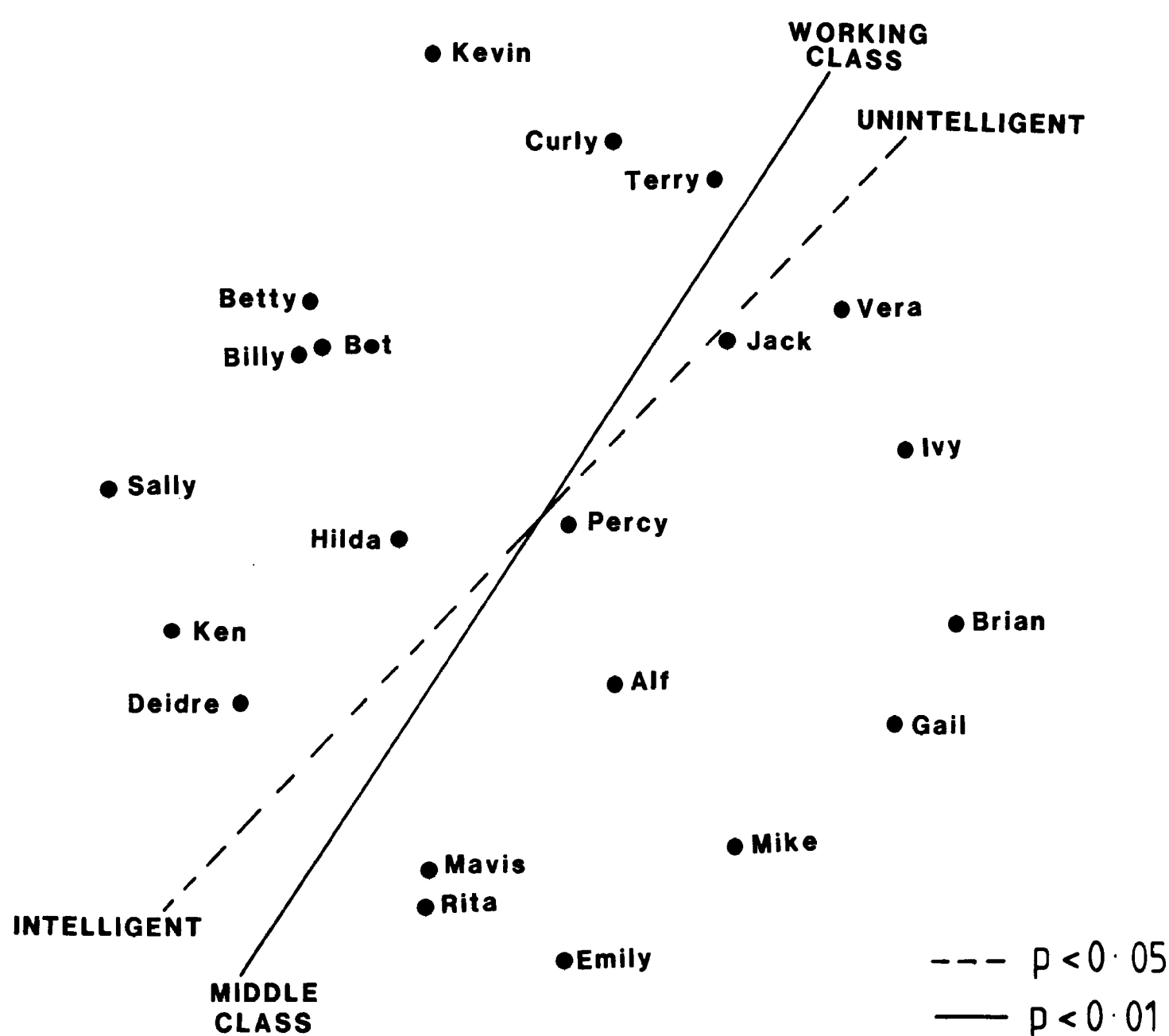
5.6.2.4. Reliability

Coding reliability was assessed by calculating the ratio of agreements to total codings made (agreements plus disagreements) for the doubly coded episodes. The reliability was 90%, which was considered satisfactory.

5.6.3. Results

The frequency matrix was entered into a multidimensional scaling program (MRSCAL) to represent the structural inter-relations between characters. The solutions at all dimensionalities from 5 to 1 dimensions produced stress levels (coefficient of alienation) as follows: 0.1412, 0.1740, 0.2226, 0.3153, 0.5080. The 'elbow' lies at two dimensions, so the two-dimensional solution was selected for further analysis (Figure 5.6). Although the coefficient of alienation (0.3153) was rather high, the solution proved readily interpretable (Kruskal & Wish, 1978).

Figure 5.6: Two-dimensional representation for characters in CORONATION STREET based on interaction frequencies and showing projected significant properties (dimension 1=horizontal, dimension 2=vertical)



The two spaces, based on viewers' character sorting and on actual interaction frequencies between characters were compared directly by entering the coordinates for the two spaces into a canonical correlation analysis. The results (Table 5.9) reveal no significant correlations between the two spaces. Thus the two spaces cannot be said to be similar in any way. In order to pursue this difference between the spaces, the property ratings obtained for each character in Study II were regressed onto the 'interaction' space using PROFIT. The variance explained in the space by each property, together with their significance levels are shown in Table 5.10. Only two properties were significant, class and intelligence. The interaction space with these two properties projected onto it is shown in Figure 5.6.

Table 5.9
Canonical correlation between Coronation Street 'similarity' space (Study I) and Coronation Street 'interaction' space (Study V)

	Can. Corr.	F	df	P
1	0.5130	0.8807	6,32	0.5201
2	0.0161	0.0022	2,17	0.9978

Table 5.10
Variance explained by properties in the 'interaction' space (Study V)

Property	R ² (2 dims)
Intelligent	0.339*
Rational	0.165
Sociable	0.021
Warm	0.031
Active	0.015
Excitable	0.279
Hard	0.107
Dominant	0.009
Feminine	0.248
Masculine	0.223
Central to community	0.044
Working Class	0.494**
Approach to life	0.081
Mature	0.275
Sexy	0.024
Roguish	0.161
Staid	0.159
Moral	0.083

Note: significance levels for property fitting.
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

5.6.4. Discussion

This character representation (Figure 5.6) reveals that character interaction frequency in Coronation Street is primarily organised around either work or family groups. These inter-relate through dual membership of certain characters. Reading clockwise from the top of the space: Kevin, Curly and Terry are the young lads who drink and work together; Terry, Jack and Vera are the Duckworth family; Vera and Ivy work together; Ivy, Brian and Gail are the Tilsley family; Mike is rather on his own - he works with Ivy and Emily and socialises with Brian, Alf or Rita in the pub; Emily is a close friend of Rita and Mavis, who work together; Ken and Deidre are married; Sally works for Ken and had an affair with Billy; Billy, Bet and Betty run the pub; and Hilda and Percy occupy central positions through their links to everybody as the Street's gossips

and busybodies, while Alf meets most people in his shop.

What is the role of social class in the structure of the programme? Much of the action in Coronation Street clearly hinges on interactions based on family and work relations. This is unsurprising and is consistent with Dyer et al's reading of the programme as centred on domesticity and work. However, there is some room for flexibility in this system through selection of friends, romances, and drinking partners. This narrative flexibility appears to be constrained by the social class position of the characters. From the statistical significance of class in the PROFIT, it appears that characters socialise or interact more with those of a similar class (although this class dimension will be produced in part by families being of similar class composition). Thus the paradigmatic selections among characters made for particular interactions seem to be systematically constrained. This supports the analysis of Dyer et al which argued that class is a central theme in the programme. The results also conflict with the viewers' representation of the characters in Study II.

Figure 5.6 shows that class is perceived to be correlated with intelligence, although not with power, centrality to the community, or warmth, as might also have been expected from Dyer et al's alignment between Coronation Street's treatment of class and Hoggart's nostalgic and subversive view of the working classes as a preferable and alternative resource of power and opinion. The present representation of characters provides us with an indication of narrative combinations and permutations among the characters by indexing their frequencies of interaction. The results underline the role of class in Coronation Street and the contrast with Study

II suggests that viewers ignore or underestimate the relevance of class in the programme structure, even though they are aware of it as a property of individual characters.

What does the disjunction between character interaction and character personality imply for the structure of narrative and for viewers' readings of the programme? One may have supposed that characters' personalities are established through their proximities to each other. For example, it may have been that Curly and Terry, through being friends, come to seem similar in viewers' perceptions, or that Ken and Deidre appear more similar because they are married. In fact, the very opposite seems to be true. Characters perceived as similar are less likely to interact (e.g. Bet and Vera or Ken and Curly) than are personality opposites. Interactions occur between personality opposites on the dimensions central to the programme. These interaction patterns are likely to be institutionalised in the narratives through work relationships or longstanding friendships, and of course these latter may lead to marital, or other family relationships, which make permanent the enactment of a particular opposition. This makes sense, as it is through the enactment of the thematic oppositions, with each pole personified by a particular character, that the narratives gain interest, involve conflict, and explore culturally important oppositions. The opposition on which a particular character pair differ is likely to be the one on which their interactions are based. For example, Mavis and Rita (friends and workmates) clash over Rita's bossiness (greater dominance), Mavis' prudishness (more staid and moral) and Rita's more modern approach to life compared to Mavis' traditional, often nostalgic viewpoint. As the main aspect of their friendship is gossip over

events in the community, their various differences are expressed through their commentary on the actions of others. Based on salient oppositions, this apparently trivial gossip ensures two alternative viewpoints on the actions elsewhere, establishing a range of perspectives for viewers.

Characters perceived as similar may serve as functional equivalents in interactions. For example, to illustrate a moral conflict, Jack may clash with either Ivy or Curly. This gives the script-writers the flexibility to select, say, Ivy (a Catholic) for a religious conflict or Curly (male) for a clash over the treatment of women and the role of courtesy. This flexibility is limited partly by the constraint of preferring within-class interactions and also by more detailed character attributes or histories established over the years (certain narratives may require married or young characters, for example). Nevertheless, it would seem that narrative interactions between the characters establish thematic difference or opposition, not perceived similarity, between characters.

5.7. Summary

Study I discovered regular viewers' implicit and spontaneous representation of characters in Coronation Street. A three-dimensional representation was found with characters evenly spread throughout the space. The results were reanalysed by subject groupings (gender and age). Few differences were found between the groups, suggesting that the representation is reasonably consensual of all subjects, although there were some indications that male subjects diverged slightly from the females.

Study II tested whether this representation could be explained by either the dimensions of Implicit Personality Theory or Gender Schema Theory or by the structural oppositions in the text as identified by literary analysis. The results indicated that the representation is a constructive integration of information in the text and social knowledge of the viewers about other people in everyday life. The three dimensions of the space were interpreted as morality/power, gender (non-traditional), and approach to life. For example, the construction of gender in a non-traditional form in the representation indicates sensitivity to the programme structure rather than consistency with more abstract person knowledge. Conversely, a neglect of the concept of class in the representation indicates that interpretation is guided here more by person knowledge than by textual structure.

Study III pursued the relevance of person knowledge to the specific domain of television characters by drawing upon person prototype theories of memory in addition to Implicit Personality Theory. It was found that people conceive of common social roles along the dimensions of evaluation and gender.

Study IV showed that viewers can consensually identify Coronation Street characters as exemplars of social role prototypes. Studies I, III, and IV were then linked by showing that viewers perceive the same structural relations to hold between social roles and television characters, namely evaluation and gender. It was concluded that a prototype approach to the representation of television characters is appropriate and could be combined with the dimensional approach of person perception theory. To the extent that viewers use their knowledge of people to interpret characters,

rather than the structure of the programme, television characters are treated as a specific instantiation of the more general and abstract domain of people in everyday life, thereby maintaining a consistent and unified perception of people, real or fictional.

Study V examined the role of class in the programme structure and found that it was a significant factor in determining narrative interactions. The representation of characters as revealed by a content analysis of character interactions was quite unrelated to the representation which viewers have of the characters. This discrepancy provided some indications of how the programmes are organised so as to be readily meaningful and engage the viewer.

CHAPTER SIX

VIEWERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHARACTERS IN EASTENDERS

6.1. Introduction

Before drawing conclusions about the relation between programme structure and viewers' knowledge, based on the previous two chapters, a further programme will be studied. The differences in salient themes found in representations of Dallas and Coronation Street are open to two competing explanations. Either all programmes differ in the themes with which viewers represent them, or alternatively, British programmes differ from American programmes, although they are similar within themselves. While ideally one should study many programmes, the study of viewers' representation of characters in a second British soap opera should help to clarify the comparisons and conclusions to be discussed in the following chapter. If EastEnders is represented on similar themes to Coronation Street, a British/American difference would be indicated. If the two British programmes are also represented differently, it would seem that viewers' representations are sensitive to programme differences and that viewers do not abstract the commonalities across programmes.

EastEnders is currently the most consistently popular programme on television in Britain, averaging audiences of some twenty million viewers per episode. This soap opera, which began in February, 1985, concerns the everyday lives of a working class community in London's East End. It contains characters who encompass a range of ages, ethnic backgrounds and occupations. Like

Coronation Street, it conforms to the genre conventions for British soap opera in the social realism tradition (Dyer et al, 1981), containing strong women, a nostalgic respect for working class community life, and a serious attempt to deal responsibly with contemporary social issues in a realistic fashion. Like Coronation Street, EastEnders differs from the American prime-time soap operas in the type of community portrayed and in attempting to mirror the everyday lives of the viewers.

There were two additional reasons for studying viewers' representations of a further soap opera. Firstly, neither the studies on Dallas or Coronation Street revealed group differences (by age, sex or nationality) in representation. While this may indicate a true absence of group differences in the major dimensions, the group similarities may instead be due to small sample sizes. In fact, statistically one would expect greater instability in group representations based on smaller groups, thereby increasing the chance of artefactual group differences. Nonetheless, before concluding that groups do not differ substantially in character representation, one more programme will be studied with rather larger sample sizes (Study I).

Secondly, the person perception literature has shown concern over the use of a priori response scales to elicit supposedly implicit and unconstrained representations. Rosenberg and his colleagues (Kim & Rosenberg, 1980; Rosenberg & Sedlack, 1972) argue that semantic representations based on trait descriptions provided by the researcher may differ from those based on subject-generated traits. Research is more likely to produce results consistent with Implicit Personality Theory when the researcher provides the traits.

This is unsurprising, as usually the traits are specifically chosen as exemplars of the underlying dimensions of evaluation, activity, and potency. People's representations of others can be reasonably well described and most conveniently studied using traits related to these three dimensions. However, this may not be the best way to discover spontaneous representations for a particular domain as these may be organised according to themes other than evaluation, potency and activity.

In general, the methods of the present research are not vulnerable to this criticism. The sorting task was deliberately employed to preclude imposition of the researcher's theoretical concerns onto subjects' responses. This method avoids both the use of a priori traits and the laborious task of deriving a character representation from free trait descriptions. Furthermore, PROFIT does not assume that the rated properties will fit the representation or constrain the properties to be orthogonal. Instead it tests for the degree and direction of fit between the implicit representation from the sorting data and the rated properties of a priori theoretical interest.

On the other hand, the semantic differential model received mixed support in the previous two chapters, in terms both of degree of fit and of predicted inter-relations between dimensions. Therefore substantially different traits from those tested may in fact have been implicitly used in the sorting task. These traits may or may not be correlated with the properties used in the rating task and PROFIT. A property which significantly fits the representation may correctly identify a dimension of the representation but only be correlated with the actual property used

by subjects (for example, the morality dimension may really be a 'happy/depressed' dimension; similarly, 'potency' may be seen positively as 'strength' or negatively as 'aggression').

To check the relation between freely used traits and rated properties, subjects were explicitly requested to describe the basis for their character sortings in the present study by providing a description of each group that they constructed. This free description task was completed after the sorting task, in order that the sorting task was unconstrained. To ask subjects to explain the basis of their sorting is arguably as problematic as to leave the sortings unexplained. The latter procedure appears to waste potentially interesting data, yet to ask people to explain what may be an implicit, holistic and non-linguistic process could invite rationalisations rather than explanations. Nevertheless, since self-reports can be informative and can be compared with the character representation, this procedure is adopted here, and subjects' explanations will not be lost.

As before, a second group of subjects rated each character on a priori traits (Study II). Any discrepancies between ratings and free descriptions will be obtained. If the free descriptions largely agree with the a priori ratings data as projected onto the character representation, then PROFIT will be supported, as will the theoretical conclusions derived from these studies. However, if there are substantial discrepancies then these must be examined. This is important, as nearly all studies on Implicit Personality Theory use some equivalent of the PROFIT method, either PROFIT itself, or correlation between properties and dimensions, or construction of a representation based on evaluation, potency and

activity ratings.

To summarise, this chapter contains a sequence of three studies which make the following predictions. Study I will examine viewers' implicit and spontaneous representation of the characters in EastEnders using the sorting task. A reasonably consensual representation of the major characters is expected among regular viewers of the programme. This consensus may exist only within viewers divided by age and sex, or may exist across all viewers. Study II tests the application of person perception theories (Implicit Personality Theory and Gender Schema Theory) to this representation, using the rating task and PROFIT. Implicit Personality Theory predicts that the representation will be organised primarily around the themes of evaluation, potency and activity. Gender Schema Theory predicts that the representation will concern gender, possibly as orthogonal dimensions of masculinity and femininity or alternatively as a bipolar masculinity-femininity dimension correlated with potency. Study III compares free descriptions of characters with property ratings on a priori scales. No specific predictions can be made about whether ratings and free descriptions converge or are discrepant in their application to the character representation. This study will also investigate whether the free descriptions provide additional, consensual character information not captured by the property ratings.

From a consideration of the themes of soap opera and the earlier studies on Coronation Street and Dallas it was also predicted that the three themes of gender, morality and potency will be central. If EastEnders is represented in a similar way to

Coronation Street, then class should be irrelevant, gender should be conceived in a non-traditional fashion, and morality should be opposed to potency and independent of gender. If the two programmes are similar, a basic difference between British and American prime-time soap operas would be indicated. If EastEnders is not particularly similar to Coronation Street then this would suggest that different programmes are differently represented by viewers and that there will be little commonality between them.

6.2. Study I: Viewers' representations of characters

6.2.1. Introduction

This study seeks to discover viewers' implicit representation of the characters in EastEnders, the structural relations which exist between them, and the major themes which viewers find salient in characters. The aims and procedure followed those developed in the chapter on Dallas (Studies I and II) and used in the chapter on Coronation Street (Study I). Multidimensional scaling of character sorting data will be used and group differences in representations (by age and sex of subjects) will be investigated.

6.2.2. Method

6.2.2.1. Subjects

The 93 subjects (29 male, 64 female) were of a range of ages (18 were 13-18 years, 47 were 19-24, 10 were 25-30, 9 were 31-40, and 9 were older than 40 years), and occupations (mainly white collar workers or students, with some housewives and some professionals). They were derived from three sources in all: undergraduate students (n=27), the department subject panel (n=33), and a sample of soap opera viewers who responded to an advertisement

in SOAP magazine (n=33). All were regular viewers of EastEnders (54 watch every episode, 20 watch most and 17 watch some episodes) who had viewed for many months (52 had viewed since the beginning of the programme in February 1985, 6 for over 12 months, 22 for 7-12 and 13 for 1-6 months). With a few exceptions, all subjects knew all characters.

6.2.2.2. Questionnaire

The following 25 characters were selected as the major characters in EastEnders (in Summer, 1986): Den Watts, Tony Carpenter, Dr. Legg, Nick Cotton, Lou Beale, Naima Jeffery, Arthur Fowler, Ian Beale, Pete Beale, Sharon Watts, Lofty Holloway, Simon Wicks, Debbie Wilkins, Pauline Fowler, Ali Osman, Andy O'Brian, Michelle Fowler, Kathy Beale, Sue Osman, Angie Watts, Kelvin Carpenter, Dot Cotton, Ethel Skinner, Saeed Jeffery, and Mary Smith.

These 25 names were each printed on a separate slip of paper and a set of names was given to each subject together with some paper clips and the following instructions:

Each of the slips of paper in this envelope has the name of an 'EastEnders' character typed on it. You are asked to sort the 25 characters into piles according to how they appear to you in the programme. You may make as many piles as you want, and you can put any number of characters in each pile. If you do not think a particular character 'goes with' any other then put it on its own. Characters put into the same pile should be perceived by you as having similar personalities to each other, and as having different personalities from the characters you have put into other piles.

In addition, the 33 subjects from the national volunteer sample were requested to explain the basis for each of their character groupings by describing or listing characteristics for each group that they had formed, including groups of one character.

A questionnaire was provided which allowed room for several lines of writing for each group description. In addition, demographic and viewing data were collected for all 93 subjects.

6.2.3. Results

The subjects' character sortings were used to construct a lower-triangular matrix of proximities, where each cell represented the number of subjects who sorted a particular pair of characters into the same group. These data were entered into the multidimensional scaling program, MINISSA (Roskam, 1981). This produced solutions with the following stress levels ($\hat{D}$) at dimensionalities from six to one: 0.0526, 0.0684, 0.1002, 0.1630, 0.2501, 0.4074. There is clearly an elbow at both two and three dimensions. As the stress at two dimensions is high, and there are enough characters to warrant a three dimensional solution, the three dimensional solution was selected for interpretation.

Although there was a shortage of male viewers, there were enough to permit a sex by age breakdown of subjects. To investigate the degree of consensus in the sorting data, the data matrix was broken down into four separate proximity matrices, one for each subject group (age by sex). These were then each entered into MINISSA and the stress levels by dimensionality can be seen in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Stress levels (D-hat) for MINISSA solutions for each group of viewers (age by sex) at each dimensionality from 6 to 1

	Number of dimensions					
	6	5	4	3	2	1
Females <= 21 (n=33)	0.0422	0.0600	0.0855	0.1371	0.2177	0.3605
Females > 21 (n=31)	0.0496	0.0679	0.1048	0.1523	0.2372	0.3885
Males <= 21 (n=16)	0.0276	0.0456	0.0670	0.1161	0.1749	0.3229
Males > 21 (n=13)	0.0280	0.0432	0.0691	0.1237	0.1842	0.3011

For each group, there are elbows at both two and three dimensions. However, the stress levels at two dimensions are fairly high, so the three-dimensional solutions were selected. Each pair (n=6) of three-dimensional spaces was entered into a canonical correlation analysis to determine whether the spaces were similar. All but one of the canonical correlations were significant, and most were highly significant, indicating that the four subject groupings are all similar to each other in their representation of the characters (Table 6.2). Thus the representation based on all 93 subjects (Figures 6.1 and 6.2) is consensual across viewers of different ages and sex.

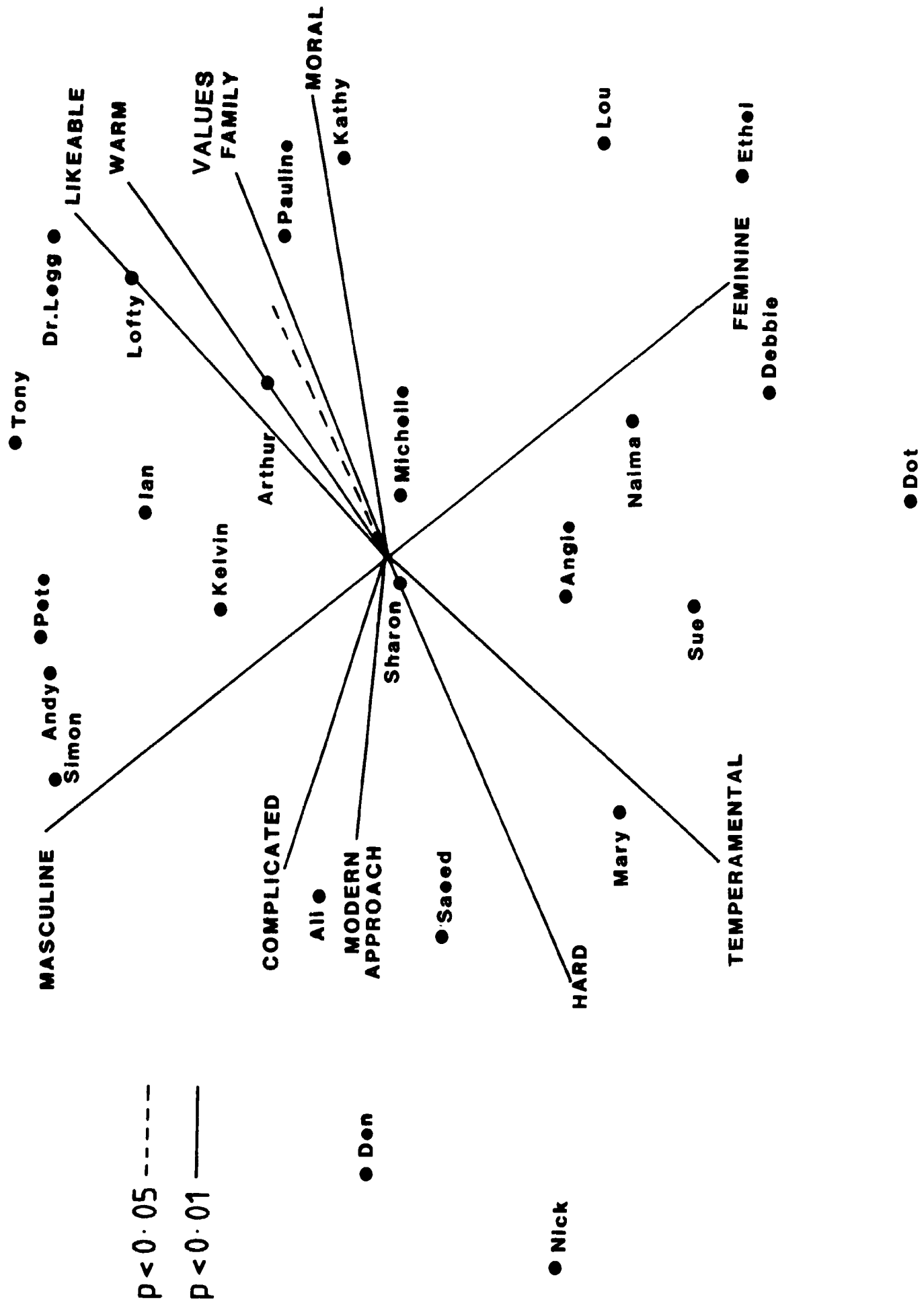


Figure 6.1: Dimensions 1 (horizontal) and 2 (vertical) of the three-dimensional representation for characters in EASTENDERS showing projected significant properties (see Study II)

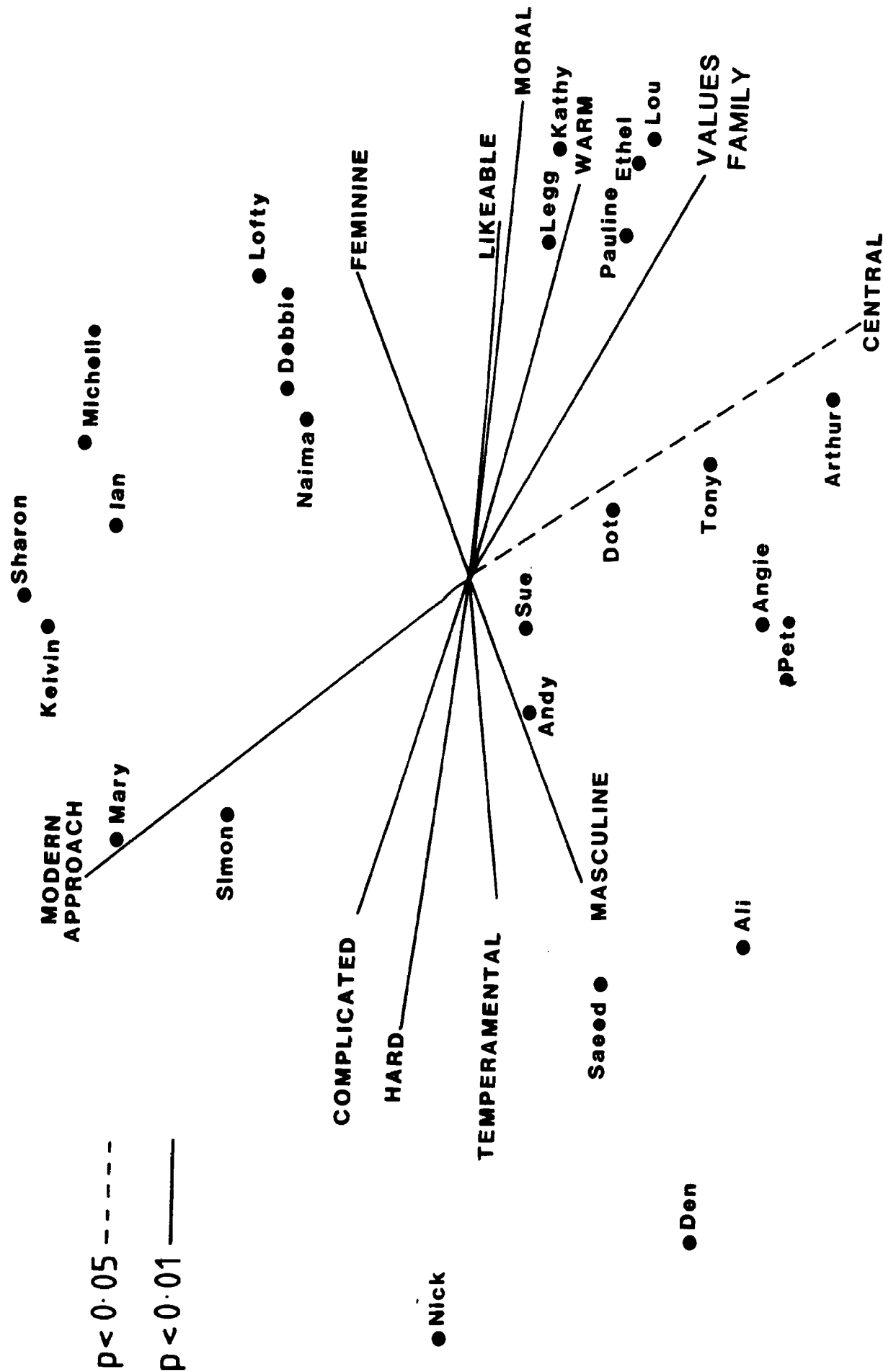


Figure 6.2: Dimensions 1 (horizontal) and 3 (vertical) of the three-dimensional representation for characters in EASTENDERS showing projected significant properties (see Study II)

6.2.4. Discussion

Studies I and II (later) were, for most subjects (see 'subjects' section of Study II), conducted consecutively in a single sitting. Thus the representation obtained for EastEnders characters in Study I was not interpreted before the selection of properties for the rating task and PROFIT. Consequently, the nature of this representation and its relation to relevant theories will be discussed after Study II.

Table 6.2: Canonical correlations for all pairs of representations

Comparison		Can.Corr.	F	d.f.	p
Young women vs.	1	0.9417	20.283	9,46.39	0.0001
Older women	2	0.7636	13.472	4,40	0.0001
	3	0.7514	27.235	1,21	0.0001
Young women vs.	1	0.8647	10.268	9,46.39	0.0001
Young men	2	0.8105	9.058	4,40	0.0001
	3	0.4443	5.166	1,21	0.0337
Young women vs.	1	0.9248	15.028	9,46.39	0.0001
Older men	2	0.7365	10.027	4,40	0.0001
	3	0.6745	17.533	1,21	0.0004
Older women vs.	1	0.9267	12.441	9,46.39	0.0001
Young men	2	0.7985	6.742	4,40	0.0003
	3	0.1241	0.329	1,21	0.5727
Older women vs.	1	0.9163	11.496	9,46.39	0.0001
Older men	2	0.6788	6.687	4,40	0.0003
	3	0.5779	10.532	1,21	0.0039
Young men vs.	1	0.8038	5.359	9,46.39	0.0001
Older men	2	0.6107	4.162	4,40	0.0065
	3	0.4525	5.408	1,21	0.0301

6.3. Study II: Projection of properties on the representation

6.3.1. Introduction

The representation derived through implicit methods in Study I will be tested against the dimensions predicted for person perception from Implicit Personality Theory and Gender Schema Theory. There have been no examinations of EastEnders to date, so no programme structure oppositions can be tested. However, a number of additional properties were tested relating to the genre of soap opera, the properties relevant to Dallas and Coronation Street, and an intuitive assessment of EastEnders itself (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3: Properties tested against character representation

<u>Source</u>	<u>Property</u> [*]
<u>Implicit Personality Theory:</u>	
Evaluation	stupid / intelligent
	cold / warm
	not likeable / likeable
	(immoral / moral)
Potency	submissive / dominant
	soft / hard
Activity	passive / active
	steady / temperamental
<u>Gender Schema theory</u>	not masculine / masculine
	not feminine / feminine
<u>Soap opera genre</u>	peripheral / central to the community
	working class / middle class
	does not value / does value the family
	traditional / modern approach to life
	immoral / moral
	not sexy / sexy
<u>Nature of EASTENDERS</u>	straightforward - complicated
	(steady - temperamental)

* Properties in parentheses have dual sources.

6.3.2. Method

6.3.2.1. Subjects

The 71 subjects (24 males, 47 females) were of a range of ages (20 were 13-18 years, 39 were 19-24, 6 were 25-30, 5 were 31-40 and

one was over 40 years) and occupations (mainly white collar workers or students). They were derived from two sources, students (n=27) and the sample of soap opera volunteers (n=44) described earlier. All of the first sample and some of the second also completed the sorting task and so were included in the sample of 93 viewers in Study I. In these cases, the sorting task was always completed first. All subjects were regular viewers of EastEnders (46 view every episode, 13 view most and 12 view some episodes) and many had viewed for many months (44 viewed from the beginning of the programme in February 1985, 2 for more than 12 months, 22 for 7-12 and 3 for 1-6 months).

6.3.2.2. Questionnaire

The rating task was presented to subjects in the form of a grid of response cells. The twenty five character names (see Study I) labelled the top of the grid and the sixteen rating scales (see Table 6.3) labelled the side. A 7 point scale headed the top of the page, positioned so that the '1' headed one pole of the scales (e.g. 'stupid') and the '7' headed the opposite pole (e.g. 'intelligent'). Subjects filled in all 25 by 16 cells using the 7 point scale. They received the following instructions:

This questionnaire asks about your views of the characters in EastEnders. Over the page you will see a grid which has the names of the main EastEnders characters across the top, and a list of personality traits down the side. You are asked to describe each of the characters in terms of each of the personality traits. Use the scale at the top of the page to make your judgment, and base each judgment on your impression of each character in general as they appear in the programme.

An example of how to fill in the grid was provided, and demographic and viewing information was obtained from each subject.

6.3.3. Results

Cronbach's alpha was calculated as a measure of reliability over subjects for each property. The results are shown in Table 6.4, and indicate very high reliability in measurement (all alphas > 0.97). This justified the subsequent use of mean ratings for each character, collapsing over subjects.

The mean property ratings for each character were entered into PROFIT (Chang & Carroll, 1968) for linear multiple regression of properties onto the three dimensional character representation. The fit between each property and the character representation is indicated by the R^2 for each property (Table 6.4). Eleven of the 16 properties significantly fitted the implicit character representation, and so can be used to interpret it. These properties were warm, hard, masculine, feminine, complicated, likeable, temperamental, values the family, approach to life (modern/traditional), and moral. Centrality was moderately significant.

Possibly certain properties did not fit the representation because there was insufficient perceived variation in that property over characters. To check this artefactual explanation the R^2 values were correlated against the property standard deviations for the same property (measured over characters not subjects). This correlation was 0.222, d.f. = 23, n.s., which means that whether a property fits the representation is not dependent on the variance perceived in that property. Thus, while viewers do perceive character variation in the insignificant properties, e.g. intelligence, these properties are not the themes which underlie the implicit representation of characters.

The character representation, the relations between properties and characters, and the relations between the properties themselves can be seen in Figures 6.1 and 6.2. These show two faces of the 3-dimensional solution and should be interpreted in relation to each other. Each significant property projected onto this representation constitutes a vector extending in two directions, that indicated (e.g. warm) and its opposite (e.g. cold).

Table 6.4:
Fit between rated properties and the character representation, showing variance explained and significance levels, reliability and standard deviation measures for each property

Property	R ² (3 D)	Cronbach's Alpha	Standard Deviation
Intelligent	0.178	0.9856	0.9296
Warm	0.697***	0.9754	1.0067
Active	0.173	0.9805	0.8187
Dominant	0.142	0.9802	0.9934
Hard	0.467**	0.9765	0.9656
Masculine	0.835***	0.9878	1.5042
Feminine	0.609***	0.9789	1.5865
Central	0.363*	0.9851	1.0174
Complicated	0.717***	0.9820	0.7815
Likeable	0.480**	0.9743	0.9721
Class	0.045	0.9811	1.1620
Temperamental	0.785***	0.9835	1.0315
Values the family	0.614***	0.9783	1.1500
Approach to life	0.613***	0.9826	1.3029
Moral	0.878***	0.9829	1.2169
Sexy	0.190	0.9855	1.4000

Note: significance levels for property fitting are
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

6.3.4. Discussion of Studies I and II

Viewers represented the twenty five main characters from EastEnders in three dimensions, with characters evenly spread throughout the space (Figures 6.1 and 6.2). This space was consensual across subjects broken down by age and sex. This

consensus is interesting because EastEnders aims to attract younger viewers. One might have expected age and sex differences in representation as a function of viewers' different interests and knowledge directing their interpretations.

The consensus in character representation allowed straightforward projection of properties in Study II onto the representation obtained in Study I. Bearing in mind that the length of a vector in two dimensions indicates the contribution of the vector to that face of the cubic representation, the three significant properties of 'complicated', 'modern' and 'central' appear characteristic of the third dimension. The first two dimensions together characterise the main face of the representation (Figure 6.1). The properties which describe this face form two clusters. The first was labelled morality/potency and the second, gender. The moral characters are family-oriented, warm, likeable and steady, in opposition to the immoral, unpopular and temperamental characters.

Although 'dominance' was insignificant, 'hard/soft' lies in opposition to that of morality, so that moral characters are represented as soft and immoral characters as hard. The alignments between these dimensions suggest that for EastEnders viewers, certain inferences and expectations are valid or appropriate. For example, if a moral character is portrayed in an argument with an immoral character, viewers may assume that the good one is more likely to be defending a family issue, be emotionally predictable, and lose the argument than the immoral character.

Masculinity and femininity are perceived as clear opposites, with no androgynous position, and as independent of Moral/Potent and

Approach to life/Centrality. Gender did not correlate with properties traditionally associated with gender, such as intelligence, activity, potency, and warmth. Thus the results support the importance of gender to Gender Schema Theory, but suggest problems for the conceptualisation of gender.

The third theme, Approach to life/Centrality affirms the importance of traditional family and community values to the soap opera world: modern characters are considered less central, looking out towards change rather than in towards the 'good old ways'. This theme is realised through the characters' ages, as only young characters (late teens and early twenties) occupy the 'modern' pole. The remaining characters (aged 30 to 80) constitute the central core of the community, and in them are invested the traditional values.

Certain properties were insignificant, including the Implicit Personality Theory properties of 'intelligent', 'active' and 'dominant', as well as the additional properties of 'sexy' and 'class'. EastEnders contains some strongly middle-class characters (Debbie, Dr. Legg) and several who are of working class origins but who own their own business (Pete, Kath, Ali, Sue, Den, Angie, Saeed, Naima), in addition to those in traditional working class occupations (Arthur, Pauline, Lou, Ethel, Dot, Nick, Lofty, Andy).

As in Coronation Street, class was not a feature of the representation, suggesting that viewers are neglecting certain aspects of the programme in favour of others: they are selective in their readings of the programmes. Morality and potency were again important, and gender is central to the British soap operas. Certain dimensions are beginning to emerge as central to the genre of soap opera, such as 'values family', 'modern/traditional approach

to life', 'centrality to the community' and 'morality' as a specific instantiation of evaluation. Before these indications are pursued, a more in-depth analysis will be made of the actual terms with which viewers freely describe the characters in EastEnders.

6.4. Study III: Free descriptions of EASTENDERS characters

6.4.1. Introduction

When people freely provide their own terms for describing others, research suggests that the descriptions differ from those obtained when subjects are constrained to use terms provided by the researcher (Rosenberg & Sedlack, 1972). This calls into question the value of a priori rating scales as tools for investigating spontaneous representations. The present analysis examines whether the property ratings used in Study II, and by implication, those used in the previous two chapters, are psychologically valid for people. Five questions will be addressed.

Firstly, to justify the use of PROFIT in discovering spontaneous representations, it should be the case that characters located at each pole of significant properties are described predominantly in trait terms identical to or consistent with that property and not in terms inconsistent with it. Secondly, free descriptions should not contain many traits which are irrelevant to or not encompassed by the a priori properties. If the descriptions do contain additional traits, one can ask whether they fall into meaningful categories.

The analysis of free descriptions, while often avoided because it is time-consuming, provides richer data than property ratings. These data provide a more complete account of the subjects' representations. Further questions have arisen concerning viewers'

character representation which can be pursued here. The third question to be asked of this data concerns the conception of masculinity and femininity underlies the separation of males and females in the character representation? Are these traits which separate males from females consistent with the traditional stereotyped conceptions of gender or alternatively with the more matriarchal conception of gender associated with soap opera?

Further, the alignment of morality and potency in British soap opera requires explanation. Do traits associated with characters at the moral/weak and immoral/hard poles of the character representation explain why these supposedly independent factors, evaluation and potency are related?

Finally, in these richer character descriptions, do viewers perceive character inconsistencies? Consistency is often assumed by rating methods (for example, a character cannot be perceived as 'strong at work' and 'weak with family' except unsatisfactorily via the midpoint of the scale). Consequently, inconsistencies may be best revealed through open-ended methods.

6.4.2. Analysis of Free Descriptions

6.4.2.1. Representativeness of subsample

For practical reasons, the free description task was only completed by a subgroup of the total sample (33 out of 93). Before these descriptions were analysed, the representativeness of this subsample was checked against the total sample. The sorting data for the subsample was separately scaled using MINISSA, providing solutions with the following stress levels ($\hat{D}$) for each dimensionality from 6 to 1: 0.0434, 0.0661, 0.0957, 0.1367, 0.2341, 0.4066. The three dimensional solution, which was both indicated by

an 'elbow' and had low stress was then compared against the representation in Study I using canonical correlation analysis. The results showed that the two representations were highly similar: canonical correlation 1=0.9679, d.f.=9,46.39, $p=0.0001$, canonical correlation 2=0.9309, d.f.=4,40, $p=0.0001$, and canonical correlation 3=0.7625, d.f.=1,21, $p=0.0001$. Thus the subsample was be considered representative of the total sample.

6.4.2.2. Coding of free descriptions

The descriptions provided by each of the 33 subjects for their own character groupings were transcribed as follows. Each description was broken down into constituent trait adjectives or phrases. These were considered descriptive of each character in the group to which they applied. A total of 221 unique adjectives or phrases were used. These were reduced to a more manageable and less redundant number by combining traits which were synonymous in meaning and by standardising grammatical form (e.g. 'ambitious' and 'wants to better herself' or 'sensible' and 'down to earth' or 'likeable' and 'nice people' were each combined). This resulted in 115 unique traits for subsequent analysis.

6.4.2.3. Cluster analysis of character representation

In order to test the validity of the a priori ratings as projected onto the representation against the free descriptions of the same characters, the free descriptions must be compared with the character representation obtained in Studies I and II. A three-dimensional PROFIT is rather difficult to interpret and is certainly difficult to relate to a further data set. Consequently, the three dimensional representation with projected vectors was first simplified using cluster analysis. The coordinates of both

characters and vectors (both poles) constituted the data for this secondary analysis, and were entered into two clustering algorithms (for mutual confirmation and because each offered different features).

The group average algorithm (Wishart, 1978) indicated that the five cluster solution was sufficient to represent the data (using the RULES procedure to determine level of clustering). The k-means analysis (Wishart, 1978), which produces an optimal, non-hierarchical solution and reallocates cluster members iteratively after each fusion, was then run until five clusters had been produced. This solution concurred with the group average solution for 91% of cases. It provides a categorical interpretation of the character representation in terms of five clusters (Table 6.5) which can be labelled thus: Youth (high on dimension 3), Immorality (low on dimension 1), Morality (high on dimension 1), Femininity (low on dimension 2), and Masculinity (high on dimension 2).

6.4.2.4. Free descriptions of character clusters

To determine the free descriptions of each cluster, the traits listed for each character were summed over subjects (n=33) and characters within each cluster. Any trait mentioned less than N times (where N is the number of characters in the cluster) was excluded, as a minimal criterion of consensus. The resultant set of traits, in rank order of mean frequency of mention, is shown in Table 6.6. The highly infrequent traits are thus omitted. The frequencies should be interpreted in relation to the N of characters (which varies across clusters).

Table 6.5: Cluster Analysis of Characters and Properties

<u>Youth</u>	<u>Immorality</u>	<u>Morality</u>
Ian	Den	Tony
Sharon	Nick	Dr Legg
Simon	Saeed	Arthur
Michelle	Mary	Lofty
Kelvin		Pauline
	Immoral	Kathy
Modern	Hard	
Peripheral	Not likeable	Moral
	Cold	Soft
	Does not value family	Likeable
<u>Femininity</u>	Complicated	Warm
	Temperamental	Value family
Lou		Straightforward
Naima		Steady
Debbie	<u>Masculinity</u>	Traditional
Sue		Central
Angie	Pete	
Dot	Ali	
Ethel	Andy	
Feminine	Masculine	
Not masculine	Not feminine	

Table 6.6: Traits assigned to each cluster of characters (no. of mentions shown in parentheses)

<u>Youth: n=5</u>	<u>Immorality: n=4</u>	<u>Morality: n=6</u>
young (31)	selfish (20)	caring (32)
ambitious (25)	uncaring (14)	hardworking (21)
independent (15)	criminal (14)	values family (19)
determined (12)	weak (13)	weak (18)
confused (12)	devious (12)	helpful (17)
have problems (12)	nasty (11)	reliable (15)
childlike (11)	loser (10)	have problems (15)
caring (11)	hard (9)	confident (14)
cheerful (9)	irresponsible (8)	kind (13)
helpful (8)	bad (8)	sensible (12)
likeable (8)	unstable (8)	boring (12)
rebellious (7)	confused (8)	honest (9)
boring (6)	dominant (6)	unstable (9)
decisive (6)	have problems (6)	frustrated (8)
kind (6)	childlike (5)	loser (8)
easygoing (6)	insecure (5)	determined (7)
confidante (5)	independent (5)	childlike (6)
selfish (5)	boring (5)	ordinary (6)
try their best (5)	young (5)	likeable (6)
moaner (5)	complex (5)	try their best (6)
happy go lucky (5)	ruthless (5)	traditional (6)
trendy (5)	ignored (4)	moral (6)
loser (5)	self-pitying (4)	happy go lucky (6)
modern (5)	fast-talking (4)	straightforward (6)
future (5)		muddle through (6)
		insecure (6)

Table 6.6 (contd.)

<u>Femininity: n=7</u>	<u>Masculinity: n=3</u>	<u>Masculinity (contd.)</u>
busybody (24)	machismo (10)	boring (3)
have problems (21)	hardworking (10)	likeable (3)
unstable (17)	caring (9)	honest (3)
helpful(16)	weak (6)	misfit (3)
dominant (14)	helpful (6)	young (3)
moaner (14)	sensible (6)	conceited (3)
confused (13)	reliable (6)	stubborn (3)
weak (12)	happy go lucky (6)	admirable (3)
determined (12)	values family (6)	
boring (12)	determined (5)	
traditional (11)	dominant (5)	
ambitious (11)	ordinary (5)	
insecure (11)	selfish (5)	
independent (10)	hot tempered (5)	
caring (10)	moral (5)	
old (10)	stereotyped (5)	
opinionated (9)	uncaring (4)	
hardworking (8)	confidante (4)	
selfish (8)	have problems (4)	
hard (8)	hard (4)	
confidante (7)	kind (4)	
intelligent (7)	easygoing (4)	
unhappy (7)	criminal (3)	
moral (7)	devious (3)	

6.4.3. Discussion

The five questions outlined in the introduction to Study III will now be examined in turn. The first two concerned the validity of the PROFIT procedure for interpreting character representations. Questions 3 to 5 concerned additional information which may be gained through free character descriptions. These questions will be examined through comparison of the immoral and moral clusters, the masculine and feminine clusters, and through investigation of the youth cluster.

To determine whether the free traits match the rated properties for the same character cluster, and whether the free descriptions contain information not encompassed by the properties, comparisons between Tables 6.5 and 6.6 are required. To facilitate the comparison, the traits for each cluster were re-classified according to the following categories: (a) traits which correspond exactly or highly to the properties in the cluster; (b) traits consistent with the properties in the cluster; (c) traits inconsistent with or opposed to the properties in the cluster; and (d) traits unrelated to the properties in the cluster. While there was a certain arbitrariness about this classification, it served the purpose of comparing properties and free descriptions for the same cluster of characters. Classifications were made intuitively by the researcher and can be checked for plausibility by the reader (Tables 6.7 to 6.10).

6.4.3.1. Comparison of Moral and Immoral clusters

If the rated properties accurately explain the character representation, then there should be few or no traits in the free descriptions for the characters which are inconsistent with the

properties, and all traits should be either the same as or consistent with those properties. Further, if the rated properties exhaustively explain the character representation, there should be few traits in the free descriptions which are semantically unrelated to the properties. From Table 6.7, it is clear that the properties explain the representation accurately but incompletely. All of the properties used in Study II (except central) were spontaneously used of the characters in the free description task, together with a number of traits which were consistent with these properties. There was only one inconsistent trait used per character cluster (weak, immoral characters and unstable, moral characters). The immoral characters are freely perceived by viewers as being similar to each other because of their immorality, hardness, unpleasantness and complicated personalities. Similarly, the moral characters are also freely perceived as rated in Study II; a combination of goodness (mainly positive interpersonal traits) and weakness.

Approximately half of the traits in the free descriptions for these two clusters were semantically unrelated to the rated properties. Some of these additional traits were similar for both of the otherwise opposed clusters and concern assessment of the characters' maturity and competence (insecure, confused, childlike, have problems, frustrated, loser). Viewers may find this a comforting view of others, as they appear to perceive a world in which everybody has problems and no-one is very clear about their role in today's complex society or confident of their powers to succeed. Whether good or bad, strong or weak, all are seen as insecure inside.

As these traits were common to both clusters of characters and

do not discriminate them, no property measuring these traits would have fitted the space; they simply provide additional character information. However, a further set of traits in the free descriptions did discriminate the characters and may be loosely summarised as traits which attribute to characters either the ability or inability to cope with these inner insecurities (Table 6.7). Viewers appear to endorse a simple psychodynamic theory of identity formation in a complex, realistic world. This is consistent with Moscovici's work on the filtration of psychoanalytic concepts into everyday thinking and person perception (Farr & Moscovici, 1984). This implicit theory integrates the traits given for each cluster thus: while everybody has problems and insecurities, those who have the inner resources to cope can be good, kind people, in contrast to those lacking such resources. "Cope" is the operative word here: these people do not resolve their problems and become strong, they merely 'muddle through' and become solid, decent citizens. Those with a tendency to self-pity, who cannot integrate or take responsibility, instead become immoral, unpopular, cold people. Social rejection and lack of connection with others makes these individuals appear, at least superficially, tough and hardened.

Although one needs to pursue this further, these additional traits appear to contradict the conclusions derived earlier concerning perceived messages in EastEnders (good is weak, bad is strong). Although morality and potency are inversely correlated, it seems that viewers do not regard power positively, for strength is seen as the superficial manifestation of an inner weakness. Similarly, the moral characters, although soft and weak, have

determination nonetheless: they may not succeed, but they try their best, and in the trying, they are redeemed. Here then, we have some tentative answers to the question asked of the free descriptions concerning the relation between morality and potency. This relation, while generally supported by these data as one of inverse correlation, seems dependent on a more complex underlying theory of personality structure than the simple dimensional view of Implicit Personality Theory.

Table 6.7: Free traits for each cluster, classified by match with rated properties in the Moral and Immoral clusters

	<u>Immorality</u>	<u>Morality</u>
Traits the same as or highly related to the properties in the cluster	bad criminal hard nasty uncaring complex unstable	moral honest weak likeable caring kind values family straightforward reliable traditional
Traits consistent with the properties in the cluster	devious selfish ruthless dominant	hardworking helpful try their best sensible
Traits inconsistent with the properties in the cluster	weak	unstable
Traits unrelated to the properties in the cluster (consensual traits concerned with inner psychological problems)	insecure childlike have problems loser boring confused young	insecure childlike have problems loser boring frustrated
(traits concerned with characters' ability to cope)		confident determined happy-go-lucky muddle through ordinary
(traits concerned with characters' inability to cope)	independent ignored irresponsible fast-talking self-pitying	

6.4.3.2. Comparison of Masculine and Feminine Clusters

Table 6.8 relates the free descriptions of the masculine and feminine characters to the rated properties of masculine and feminine. It is clear that these descriptions relate rather poorly to the properties, in contrast to results for the moral and immoral clusters. There are as many inconsistent traits (n=12) as consistent ones (n=13), only two highly related ones, and the majority of the traits bear no apparent relation to masculinity and femininity (n=29). This would pose a problem for the gender dimension of the character representation but for two considerations.

Firstly, the character representation undoubtedly separates male from female characters, and viewers rate this dimension as 'masculine' and 'feminine' when asked. Moreover, viewers not only separate men and women, but they also perceive variation along a continuum, rather than simply dichotomising the characters. Some conception of gender is being expressed.

Secondly, classification of free descriptions into the categories of consistent, inconsistent and unrelated with respect to the rated properties proved more difficult and arbitrary for the researcher than had been the case for the moral/immoral comparison. As a guide to the traditional conception of gender, Table 6.8 was constructed using the many components of masculinity (e.g. assertive, decisive, independent) and femininity (e.g. submissive, emotional, complaining) revealed by a body of research on gender stereotypes (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986).

These two points suggest that viewers make a basic distinction between masculine and feminine characters, but that they do not

conceive of gender in a traditional fashion when representing the characters in EastEnders. An alternative possibility is that viewers' free descriptions of the characters map not onto the traditional concept of gender but instead onto a matriarchal conception of gender. This fits with both the results of the Coronation Street chapter (Study II) and the literature on British soap opera (Dyer et al, 1981). To see if this would make more sense of the traits, they were re-classified according to a matriarchal conception of gender (Table 6.9).

The matriarchal conception of gender is rather ill-elaborated, especially for men, but was taken here to refer to a longstanding and pervasive, although often neglected, idea in our culture of woman as the central, strong, authoritative and maternal backbone of the community. She is partly an androgynous figure, being both strong and warm. However, she does not so much combine masculine and feminine (Bem, 1981) as fit with Gilligan's (1982) concept of collective rather than individualistic identity, a pragmatic person concerned to forge interpersonal links (Bott, 1955). The concomitant view of man is of an individualistic and immature person who is simplistic (reasoning on principled lines and neglectful of the true complexity of things), egotistical and self-satisfied. Clearly this conception of gender reverses the evaluative bias in traditional conceptions, where femininity:masculinity is aligned with neurotic:human (Broverman et al, 1972; see also critique of Bem Sex Role Inventory for the negative traits included in the definition of femininity, Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979).

Interestingly, Table 6.9 shows that this re-classification is a notable improvement on the traditional gender classification in

Table 6.8, with many of the previously unrelated traits falling into the consistent category (n=28). It seems that viewers uphold a matriarchal view of men and women in EastEnders. Yet the scheme is not perfect, for subjects moderate the evaluative bias of this view. The inconsistent feminine traits are consistently negative in evaluation while the inconsistent masculine traits are positive. Negative traits attributed to females are typical of either disparaging views of patriarchy (e.g. in the consistent category; busybody, opinionated) or attempts to undermine that conception (e.g. in the inconsistent category; selfish, unstable). Positive traits attributed to males in the inconsistent category fall into two types, both of which partly reconceptualise the 'patriarchal man'. The first redresses the power balance, restoring to the masculine characters some of their strength (e.g. dominant, determined, reliable). This explains why potency properties were not correlated with gender properties in Study II. Secondly, the male characters were attributed with some 'feminine' qualities of warmth and expressiveness traditionally denied to them. These latter traits thus undermine the traditional masculine stereotype. In all, viewers perceive the men as more expressive and the women as more powerful than tradition dictates.

Table 6.8: Free traits for each cluster, classified by match with rated properties in the Masculine and Feminine clusters

	<u>Masculine</u>	<u>Feminine</u>
Traits the same as or highly related to the properties in the cluster	machismo stereotyped	
Traits consistent with the properties in the cluster	determined dominant uncaring reliable conceited easygoing hard	moaner weak caring unstable helpful confused
Traits inconsistent with the properties in the cluster	caring weak confidante kind values family helpful	ambitious dominant hard independent intelligent determined
Traits unrelated to the properties in the cluster	have problems moral hardworking selfish boring young honest misfit happy go lucky sensible criminal devious admirable ordinary hot tempered likeable stubborn	have problems moral hardworking selfish boring old insecure opinionated confidante unhappy traditional busybody

Table 6.9: Free traits for each cluster, classified by match with rated properties in the Masculine and Feminine clusters, re-classified according to matriarchal gender

	<u>Masculine</u>	<u>Feminine</u>
Traits consistent with a matriarchal concept of gender	machismo selfish happy go lucky weak ordinary stereotyped uncaring have problems misfit young conceited stubborn easygoing	dominant helpful opinionated hard intelligent determined traditional ambitious independent old hardworking caring confidante moral busybody
Traits inconsistent with a matriarchal concept of gender	hardworking sensible reliable determined dominant admirable caring values family confidante kind	unstable moaner confused weak insecure selfish
Traits unrelated to a matriarchal concept of gender	helpful moral hard criminal devious boring likeable honest hot tempered	have problems boring unhappy

6.4.3.3. The Youth cluster

As with the gender clusters, few properties were associated with the young cluster (see Table 6.5). Yet the cluster is indeed about modern youth (see same as category in Table 6.10; young, modern, future). No traits suggested that these characters were more peripheral to the community, just as the moral characters had not been described as central. 'Centrality' then, is explanatory but implicit; it fits the representation, but is not salient to viewers.

There are a large number of traits apparently unrelated to the characters' ages which viewers use to describe this cluster (n=21). These fall into four subcategories, defined by two oppositions: traits involving positive evaluation; traits involving mildly negative, although not immoral, evaluation; traits suggesting that these characters can make something of themselves; and traits indicating why these characters may fail. Thus the characters are seen as having within themselves both the potential to succeed and the signs of failure. These unrelated traits combine traits descriptive of characters in the other four clusters. This may explain the peripheral role of the younger characters (Table 6.5). As the characters not fully developed, they are yet to reveal themselves as adults who fall into one or another of the four dominant categories. Thus they cannot attain the importance attributed to the adults, especially the traditional and ordinary, 'just like us' characters of the moral cluster. The young characters constitute a special feature of EastEnders, being the first soap opera seriously to attempt to capture younger viewers. Possibly it is the very incoherence and "mixed up" personalities of

the younger characters which appeals to a younger audience, for they too are embroiled in their own identity crises and self-development.

Table 6.10: Free traits for the Youth cluster, classified by match with rated properties in the cluster

	<u>Youth</u>
Traits the same as or highly related to the properties in the cluster	young modern future
Traits consistent with the properties in the cluster	trendy
Traits inconsistent with the properties in the cluster	
Traits unrelated to the properties in the cluster	independent determined ambitious
(a) traits which take you ahead in life	decisive
(b) traits which hold you back in life	confused have problems childlike rebellious
(c) pleasant traits	easygoing caring cheerful helpful likeable kind confidante try their best happy-go-lucky
(d) unpleasant traits	boring selfish moaner loser

6.4.3.4. Conclusions for ratings versus free descriptions

The method used in this and previous chapters to interpret a character representation through projection of a priori property ratings has been shown to be basically sound. When compared with viewers' free trait descriptions of characters, the rated properties which described characters in the representation were supported. Thus the first question asked of these data is answered: characters located at each pole of significant properties are freely described in terms consistent with those properties and not in terms inconsistent with them. This was most true for the properties clustering around the themes of morality and potency.

This appears to contradict the findings of Rosenberg and Sedlack (1972), in which free descriptions were at variance with the use of evaluation, potency, and activity ratings. However, Rosenberg's basic finding is supported in that the results of Study II did not reveal a semantic space based on the three orthogonal properties of evaluation, potency and activity. Rosenberg's critique unfortunately confounds a criticism of semantic representations constructed from rating scales (rather than, say, a sorting task) with the question of whether ratings match free descriptions. The present sequence of studies shows that (a) the sorting task did not reveal a representation based on orthogonal properties of evaluation, potency and activity (which representations based on ratings typically do reveal), but that (b) the ratings as fitted to the character representation do match the free descriptions reasonably well.

Results were less conclusive for masculinity and femininity. The distinction between sex (i.e. biological differences between

male and female) and gender (i.e. cultural differences between masculine and feminine) is relevant here (Oakley, 1972). Viewers make a primary distinction between characters according to their sex, but they do not conceive of this distinction according to a traditional conception of gender, as proposed by psychologists.

This traditional conception (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986; Bem, 1974; Broverman et al, 1972) is typically derived empirically from many people's descriptions of men and women. However, this research is restricted in two ways. First and most important, the research is generally based on traits attributed to the 'typical' or 'average' man or woman, and is thus pitched at a high level of abstraction which makes its application to specific individuals problematic. Secondly, only traits which discriminate between the sexes are included in the gender stereotypes: for example, feminine traits must be both consensually attributed to women and consensually rejected as male attributes. Thus while they discriminate the sexes, the stereotypes may not necessarily be complete. For example, salient feminine traits may be irrelevant to masculinity, or the two stereotypes may contain certain common traits.

When the alternative conception of gender was related to the free descriptions, it became clearer why viewers discriminated between male and female characters. The perceived differences between these characters depends, by and large, on a matriarchal conception of gender. Thus the gender question is answered: differences between males and females are salient, but these differences do not represent a traditional conception of gender.

Bearing in mind the gender stereotyping literature, which

shows that people endorse different traits for males and females, the present data suggest that the programme modifies and restructures viewers' abstract conceptions of masculine and feminine when they interpret the programme. In other words, the matriarchal conception of gender in the programme (Hobson, 1982; Jordan, 1981a & b; Lovell, 1981) appears to replace viewers' preconceptions about gender with a viable alternative. This alternative is less prejudicial to femininity than that which the rest of popular culture consistently provides for the largely female audience of soap opera.

No causal claim can be made from the present data. However, socio-cognitive research suggests that traditional stereotypes provide the lens through which characters are perceived (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). In contrast, the present results suggest that 'top-down' or schema-driven processes have been overridden by the 'bottom-up' influence of programme structure. One could make the weaker claim that people have a variety of gender schemata available and that they select different schemata for different situations (e.g. assessing men and women 'in general' and assessing television characters). Or maybe people have a general schema which they instantiate differently according to the domain of application. However, these are still claims for media effects, arguing that the programme elicits, if not constructs, these alternative schemata or instantiations.

The second question asked of the free descriptions concerned the use of traits additional to those indexed by the property ratings. Viewers certainly used many traits in Study III additional to those rated in Study II. These fell into meaningful categories

as follows. Moral and immoral characters were described as having psychological problems and insecurities and the in/ability to cope with problems. The masculine and feminine (matriarchal) characters were additionally described in inconsistent traits: for men, traits of strength/determination and warmth/kindness; for women, traits of weakness and uncertainty. Young characters were described to a large extent by traits superficially unrelated to their youth. These traits, concerning interpersonal evaluation and resources to go forward/problems which hold one back, were related to the characters' identity development.

Finally, traits which were rarely mentioned or not at all used by viewers are considered. Of the multitude of traits which viewers could have used, four partially overlapping categories are of particular interest. As traits rarely used by viewers were excluded by their low frequency from Tables 6.6 to 6.10, the incidence of these four categories will be assessed briefly by returning to the 115 trait terms originally coded. Each trait listed below, with the exception of 'young' and 'dominant' and several traits under the fourth category was used by usually only one viewer for a few characters.

Traits corresponding to rated properties which were insignificant in Study II: intelligent, unintelligent, active, dominant, working class, middle class, attractive. The relative absence of these traits supports their irrelevance in the character representation.

Traits describing demographic aspects of characters: young, middle aged, old, working class, middle class, unmarried mother, ethnic, well-educated, single, career woman. The unimportance of demographic descriptions supports the emphasis in this research on

personalities.

- (3) Appearance-related traits: attractive, trendy. Fiske & Taylor (1984) review evidence that such traits are mainly used to describe unfamiliar people (or scenario descriptions in experiments). This indicates the familiarity of soap opera characters to the present viewers.
- (4) Soap opera related traits: values family, confidante, criminal, have problems, misfit, loser, seeking family, roots in East End, muddle through, fights prejudice. Although these traits reflected the genre, it was notable that characters were generally described in a way indistinguishable from real people. In other words, viewers did describe characters in terms of narrative or mythic roles, such as 'the villain' or 'the J.R. type' or 'comic relief').

6.4.3.5. Consistency in character description

The fifth question which the free descriptions addressed was that of consistency in representation. The use of rating scales to determine people's representations creates certain problems, which are often ignored as 'noise'. One interesting aspect of representations concerns the perception of inconsistent or contradictory qualities in a character. For example, if a viewer sees Angie as both strong and weak, she could not represent this on a single bipolar scale for strength. Informal scanning of the free descriptions suggested that such contradictory perceptions did exist, suggesting a complex implicit personality theory. For instance, some viewers explained their perceptions of Angie by invoking an 'inner/outer' theory of personality. While one could simply observe that sometimes she is strong and sometimes she is weak, some viewers suggested that Angie (among other characters)

appears strong on the outside, but underneath she is weak.

The original data were re-classified according to the categories of judged (by the researcher) and perceived (by the viewers) inconsistencies in the traits listed. Table 6.11 includes only those descriptions involving more than one trait, i.e. only those for which a judgment of consistency could be made.

Table 6.11: Consistency in character description tabulated against viewers' recognition of consistency

	<u>Judged trait consistency</u>		
	<u>Consistent</u>	<u>Unrelated</u>	<u>Inconsistent/ Opposites</u>
<u>Viewers' descriptions</u>			
<u>No inconsistency noted</u> e.g. traits listed or separated by 'and'	111	21	4
<u>Inconsistency noted</u> e.g. traits separated by 'but', 'yet', although', 'sometimes/other times'	1	18	16
<u>Inconsistency noted</u> and explained, e.g. using metaphor of inside/outside or surface/underneath	0	3	11
Total	112	42	31

One hundred and twelve character descriptions involved wholly consistent traits, 42 involved traits which were semantically unrelated, and 31 involved contradictory traits. This latter category accounts for a fair sized minority (17% of the descriptions). The consistent traits were clearly perceived as such by subjects and no complex personality theories or linguistic marking of contradiction were used. The frequencies in this column

are too extreme for a chi-square analysis, so only the remaining data were analysed.

A chi-square analysis comparing unrelated and inconsistent traits for the form of their description by viewers was highly significant (as were all 2 by 2 subsets of the data), chi-square = 14.93, d.f. = 2, $p < 0.001$. This reveals that: viewers did not often distinguish unrelated traits (21/42), but that opposed traits were nearly always distinguished (27/31); opposed traits were sometimes simply noted as different ($n=16$) and sometimes this difference was explained through use of an 'inside/outside' theory of personality ($n=11$); and that merely unrelated traits, while noted for their differences ($n=18$) were rarely explained ($n=3$).

Naturalistic character descriptions raise two issues for traditional implicit personality theory. First, people do sometimes represent others in apparently contradictory ways. Thus the use of bipolar dimensions is problematic, as it reduces such representations to the status of noisy data. Second, people explain such contradictions by invoking a particular conception of personality structure. This structure goes beyond the dimensional model to specify levels of personality, such that people are seen to have an inner/core and an outer/surface aspect. Although only a minority phenomenon (17% of descriptions involve contradiction and 8% involve the inner/outer metaphor), such phenomena emerged from the study of representation of complex, everyday characters. This suggests that the simple dimensional assumptions of Implicit Personality Theory may be partly supported by the artificiality of its targets. An alternative source of contradiction in personality description may arise if people endorse a personality by situation

interaction, so that they think a person is hard in some situations and soft in others. They may not necessarily believe one to be the true 'inner' self, believing instead that different situations call forth different aspects of a personality (Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981). Unfortunately, the present method of data collection asked viewers to describe a character 'in general', and thus did not index any such interactional beliefs. In the data collected, most descriptions were internally consistent, supporting the use of bipolar rating scales for the most part.

6.5. Summary

Viewers' representations of the characters in EastEnders were studied with several aims, and the conclusions may be briefly summarised.

(a) Viewers were found to represent EastEnders characters in a three-dimensional space organised around the themes of Moral/Potent, Gender, and Approach to life/Centrality.

(b) The representation for EastEnders was closer to that of Coronation Street than Dallas, as both British soap operas were seen to align morality with potency, focus on gender, and neglect class. This indicates that viewers construct representations of soap opera characters which reflect either British or American conventions, depending on the programme, and that all programmes need not be represented entirely differently. However, there were certain differences between the representations of EastEnders and Coronation Street, suggesting a role for individual programme structures, as well as genre conventions, in viewers' construction of representations.

(c) Implicit Personality Theory correctly predicted the importance of certain themes but not others. Themes were not interrelated as predicted. Gender Schema Theory correctly predicted the importance of gender, but this was not conceptualised as predicted.

(d) No differences were observed between viewers of different ages and sex in the representation of characters.

(e) On comparing the free descriptions of characters with the properties which fitted the character representation, the properties were shown to be largely accurate, although incomplete as descriptors of the character representation. Viewers used both traits consistent with the properties and additional traits in their free descriptions of characters.

(f) The free descriptions provided additional traits used by viewers, an interpretation of underlying dimensions (e.g. gender), a richer understanding of perceived inter-relations between dimensions, an indication of more complex implicit psychological theories, and an indication of the perception of trait inconsistencies.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPARISONS BETWEEN REPRESENTATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CAUSALITY AND THE APPLICATION OF SCHEMATA

7.1. Introduction

Before comparing the three character representations of Chapters 4 to 6, the aims behind these studies will be reiterated. Person perception theorists usually study people's representations of artificial targets. There are very few ways to study naturalistic and well-known targets because target familiarity must be equal over subjects. The study of television characters is particularly useful for theories of person perception. Within the psychology of mass communication, this study can contribute to an understanding of constructive interpretation of television programmes. For this latter aim, each programme can and has been examined independently. The character representations provide information about viewers' experience of the characters and their cognitions of the programmes which then mediate the effects of viewing.

For the social perception focus of the thesis, systematic comparisons across programmes are required. It is apparent from previous chapters that the application of person perception theories is not straightforward for everyday, complex targets. Similarities and differences between programmes may reflect the balance between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' determinants of representation, and may therefore reveal the extent to which abstract person schemata are applied by viewers. This chapter will first consider whether causal

inferences can be drawn to explain the origin and nature of the character representations.

7.2. Causal inferences from the character representations

Causal inferences have been implicitly suggested in discussing the three character representation chapters, especially in Chapter 5. However, the issue of causality has not yet been addressed systematically and it raises a number of problems which will now be considered.

The first and most obvious point is that the present research has not involved experimentation: viewers were not randomly assigned to watch particular programmes, programme materials were not deliberately manipulated, and dependent variables independent of previous knowledge were not measured. As emphasised in Chapter 1, this research was concerned to discover character representations, match these to prior social knowledge and textual structure, and provide a basis for future 'effects' studies.

However, the results provide correlational evidence from which causal inferences may be drawn. The three previous chapters contain three samples of viewers who each regularly watch one soap opera. From these, three character representations have been obtained and described. It has been assumed that the three samples of viewers all have the same abstract social knowledge of other people, and that the textual structures of the three programmes are different. This permits the straightforward claim that, to the extent that the three representations are structurally similar, viewers' social knowledge is influential in determining the representations, and to the extent that they are different, programme structure is

influential. Thus top-down (namely, viewers' schemata) and bottom-up (namely, textual structure) determinants of character representation are indicated. This could be modified to claim additionally, that if the representations are similar but they differ from person perception knowledge, then textual structure would appear to be influential in terms of genre rather than individual programmes.

Unfortunately, the two assumptions, of constant social knowledge and of variable texts, are problematic. First, the samples of viewers were not identical in each study. Second, if the representations are similar, this may be due to similarities between social knowledge and programme structure, so that the structure of the representation is also 'in' each of the programmes.

The first problem is apparently practical, for a within-subject design could have been used, studying the same viewers for each of the three programmes. However, this solution itself is problematic. People who regularly watch all three soap operas may not be typical of the soap opera audience as a whole. However, although they were not very different, retrospectively the three samples could have been better matched demographically. It is also problematic that each sample was self-selected as viewers of a particular programme, thus complicating causal inferences (a classic problem in mass communications research). Nonetheless, the same viewers may not be psychologically the same when watching (or recalling) different programmes: they may watch each programme with different needs, in different domestic contexts, and in relation to different social knowledge and personal experience. Thus controlling for subjects is difficult.

The second problem is clearly theoretical: how can one determine whether or not the structure of a character representation mirrors that which is 'in' the text? Increasingly, researchers in cultural studies no longer believe in unique meanings within the text. While theoretically, the arguments against unique and fixed meanings are strong, some problems remain. For example, we may debate whether Coronation Street offers a feminist or reactionary view of women, but we do not doubt that it concerns a Northern working class community, that it is rather dated, and that it is not a nature documentary. In other words, the boundaries of textual indeterminacy have not yet been adequately addressed. A further problem is similar to that faced by uses and gratifications research, namely that the greater the role given to viewers to construct their own meanings from the text, the more one must abandon the question of cause altogether. The viewer becomes all powerful, and television merely provides the raw materials. As noted earlier, this matches tendencies within socio-cognitive research to overemphasise the constructive aspects of perception, neglecting the limits placed on this process by the structure of the real world.

The present evidence does not reveal the straightforward constructive imposition of social knowledge onto text structure, and suggests a role for text structure in viewers' representations. Consequently, the structure of television texts and their power to direct interpretation should be examined further. Bearing in mind the arguments concerning openness and the role of the viewer, this power can be seen more as guiding interpretation than determining it, as fulfilling agenda-setting functions, making certain readings

easier or more salient than others, and reinforcing conventional frameworks for the majority of viewers. Thus one can seek to examine the balance of influence between viewer determinants and programme determinants. This relates to Eco's distinction between virtual and realised texts (1979) and to Hall's preferred readings (1980): texts guide, but do not wholly determine, the meanings constructed from them by viewers. This notion of dual influences, raising issues of causal balance rather than unique determination, also relates to the top-down, bottom-up debate in cognitive psychology (Bobrow & Norman, 1975; Neisser, 1976).

This still leaves the problem of how to analyse television meanings. In this thesis, a variety of methods have been used. Chapter 5 used a version of content analysis to compare textual structure with viewers' representations, Chapters 4 and 5 relied on literary readings of the programmes, and Chapter 8 will use a version of semiotic analysis to examine textual meanings. Other researchers make more use of content analysis (Cantor & Pingree, 1983; Cassata & Skill, 1983) or discourse analysis (Lerman, 1983). Each of these methods has very real problems concerning the kinds of textual structures which they can reveal and the certainty with which they can reveal them. None is exhaustive, for both qualitative and quantitative methods are more certain of what they have found, than of not having missed what is "really" there. Yet the claim that viewers' representations contain structures absent from the text requires that this latter problem, in statistical terms, type two error, is minimal.

The problem of not really knowing what is in the text can be extended to our knowledge of viewers. For we do not know all the

viewer's repertoire of social knowledge which is available when interpreting television. The issue of causality has bedevilled mass communications research throughout its history. Even the experimental approach has problems, for there are no normal, naive viewers, viewers may selectively attend to experimental materials, and we cannot conclusively know what is 'in' the experimental materials, especially once complex, connotational meanings are studied.

Yet the causality question is too important to abandon, for people spend much of their leisure time watching television. Everyone knows of anecdotes suggesting evidence for and against influence, for selective attention and for mindless absorption. Unfortunately, researchers often know more of the epistemological problems with their claims than of ways to overcome these problems. To know the initial knowledge of viewers, the content of texts, to bring these together in natural circumstances and to have adequate access to one's dependent variables, is an impossible ideal. Thus research must be pragmatic. Foregoing the experimental approach, the present research has gained the following advantages: it has studied naturally acquired knowledge of complex and lengthy television programmes, with culturally significant, although latent, meanings; it has studied programme knowledge naturally integrated with social knowledge; and it has used methods which indicate little of the researchers' concerns to viewers.

This thesis is based in previous research from social psychology and mass communications/ cultural studies. Although the contents of a text or people's minds cannot be directly known, there are theories about these contents. These theories mediate between

the materials we work with (human and otherwise) and research conclusions. To recognise the mediating role of theory is to recognise that research conclusions are fallible because theories have the following attributes: (a) they structure our perception of the domain under study; (b) they have problems of operationalisation; (c) they are usually slightly dated when applied to a new domain; and (d) there are usually competing theories, rather than a single good theory. Consequently, the present research is fallible in that: (a) certain questions were asked and not others; (b) there is a heavy dependency on the semantic differential and multidimensional scaling in operationalising the research questions; (c) there have been rapid developments in cultural studies and in social perception theory and cognitive science, making certain aspects of the selected theories slightly dated; and (d) Implicit Personality Theory, Gender Schema Theory, and certain literary analyses were selected instead of, say, categorical theories of person perception, personal construct theory, content analysis, or other literary analyses. Nonetheless, the theories selected in this research have considerable empirical support. To some extent, the study comparing free descriptions with property ratings (Study III) in Chapter 6 checked whether theory was guiding research too much. Finally, the semantic differential was used only in relation to the more implicit character sorting method, it was not used to construct the representations themselves.

In conclusion, the present research has drawn on person perception theories and cultural studies as the theoretical frames through which the issue of causality must be approached. Bearing in mind the above arguments and caveats, it is suggested that: where

the three character representations differ (jointly or individually) from theories of person perception, this may be a locus of bottom-up influence, in which textual structure (programme or genre) affects character representation. Conversely, where the character representations differ from cultural studies' readings of either the programmes represented or the genre as a whole, this may be a locus of top-down influence, in which social knowledge affects character representation.

The three character representations will now be compared and loci of possible influence will be indicated. Similarities and differences will be assessed in relation to three aspects of representation structure in turn: relevance of properties to character representations; combination of properties into themes (i.e. dimensions or oppositions); and relations between themes.

7.3. Comparison between viewers' representations of programmes

7.3.1. Comparison of property significances

Table 7.1 shows that intellectual evaluation (intelligence and rationality), activity (active, excitable, although not temperamental), and social class (working class/middle class) are irrelevant to all three character representations. Conversely, social evaluation (sociable, warm, likeable), potency (dominant, hard, values power), morality, and approach to life are generally important to representations of all three programmes studied. Notable differences between the programmes were found for the properties of gender (Dallas vs. Coronation Street and EastEnders), family values and sexy. Certain discrepancies were found which indicate specific relationships between properties and programmes,

rather than general themes (e.g. hard but not dominant was significant for EastEnders and warm but not sociable was significant for Dallas). From Table 7.1, certain conclusions may be drawn.

1. Certain implicit personality theory dimensions are irrelevant to the representation of soap opera characters.
2. Certain implicit personality theory dimensions are highly relevant to the representation of soap opera characters;
3. Implicit personality theory properties all intended to index the same underlying dimension may diverge considerably in meaning in the context of different programmes.
4. Gender schema theory is central to perceptions of some programmes and irrelevant for others.
5. Certain dimensions neglected by psychology (e.g. sexy, see Ashmore et al, 1986) or approach to life (traditional/modern) and moral are central to character representation.
6. Certain oppositions proposed as central to programme structure by cultural studies are irrelevant to viewers' character representations (e.g. class) while others are central (e.g. morality or family values).
7. Different programmes (or social perception domains) are represented using overlapping but nonetheless distinct organising themes.

Table 7.1: Comparison of the properties which significantly fit the character representations over three programmes

Property	DALLAS	CORONATION STREET	EASTENDERS
Intelligent	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Rational	n.s.	n.s.	---
Sociable	n.s.	**	---
Warm	***	*	***
Likeable	---	---	**
Dominant	***	**	n.s.
Hard	***	***	**
Values Power	**	---	---
Active	*	n.s.	n.s.
Excitable	n.s.	n.s.	---
Temperamental	---	---	***
Masculine	n.s.	***	***
Feminine	n.s.	***	***
Moral	***	***	***
Family Values	*	---	***
Roguish	---	***	---
Staid	---	***	---
Central	---	*	*
Class	---	n.s.	n.s.
Sexy	---	***	n.s.
Approach to life	---	***	***
Mature	---	*	---
Business/Pleasure-oriented	*	---	---
Complicated	---	---	***

* significant property, $p < 0.05$
** significant property, $p < 0.01$
*** significant property, $p < 0.001$
n.s. non-significant property
--- property not tested for this programme

7.3.2. Analysis

The following analysis was conducted to facilitate comparison between the representations in terms of relations between significant properties and between main themes. The PROFIT program provides details of the angles of rotation between each vector after projection which is useful for comparing vector (property) relations in three-dimensional space. Angles between vectors indicate the relations between projected properties thus: 0° = identity; 90° = orthogonality or independence; and 180° = opposition. Using angles between significant properties only (p< 0.05), Tables 7.2 to 7.4 were constructed, showing vector angles for each representation.

Table 7.2: Angles (degrees) between vectors for DALLAS

Warm								
Dominant	137							
Hard	153	15						
Values Power	140	3	13					
Active	147	10	6	7				
Moral	18	111	126	114	121			
Family Values	55	82	98	85	92	29		
Business/Pleasure	42	180	165	178	171	69	97	
	W	D	H	VP	A	M	FV	

Table 7.3: Angles (degrees) between vectors for CORONATION STREET

Sociable												
Warm	60											
Dominant	66	119										
Hard	81	137	19									
Masculine	128	161	78	59								
Feminine	50	37	86	105	162							
Moral	91	34	152	171	130	66						
Roguish	82	142	31	51	50	116	167					
Staid	101	48	166	173	115	82	15	157				
Central	43	33	108	121	140	56	52	117	59			
Sexy	99	121	44	44	76	86	134	58	141	137		
Approach	95	133	31	27	65	97	151	41	157	137	17	
Mature	60	19	106	124	173	19	47	135	62	47	102	115
	S	W	D	H	M	F	M	R	S	C	S	A

Table 7.4: Angles (degrees) between vectors for EASTENDERS

Warm											
Likeable	11										
Hard	168	161									
Temperamental	165	175	24								
Masculine	88	83	80	102							
Feminine	92	97	100	78	180						
Moral	28	34	165	141	115	65					
Family values	21	32	160	145	96	84	26				
Central	43	54	133	126	85	95	51	26			
Approach	127	115	52	67	78	102	131	147	161		
Complicated	171	170	21	10	101	79	144	154	44	57	
	W	L	H	T	M	F	M	FV	C	A	

On examining these lower triangular matrices, it is clear that certain properties are highly interrelated, forming coherent themes. These themes could be identified through further multivariate analysis (either factor analysis or cluster analysis). This was decided against for two reasons. Statistically, secondary analysis of the property projections, fitting them to a new model, would involve unsatisfactory accumulation of error: the angles between vectors already contain error from the multidimensional space; property fitting; and original measurement error. Secondly, no multivariate method is entirely appropriate: the angles represent relations between vectors rather than interpoint distances; and the aim is to reveal coherent groupings of vectors which are conceptually distinct but not necessarily orthogonal.

Consequently, for each programme the following procedure was used. All angles in Tables 7.2 to 7.4 were converted to vary between 0 and 90 degrees (e.g. $110^{\circ} \rightarrow 70^{\circ}$), as the vector pole referred to by the labels is unimportant. Now 0° = identity or opposition, 90° = orthogonality, and, for example, 45° = 50% shared variance. A criterion was then set so that pairs of vectors within 20° of each other were considered to index the same underlying theme

(Table 7.5). From these pairs, sets of properties which were highly or totally interconnected were selected as distinct representation themes (Table 7.6).

Table 7.5: Pairs of vectors within 20° of each other

<u>Dallas</u>	<u>Coronation Street</u>	<u>EastEnders</u>
hard-dominant	hard-dominant	likeable-warm
values power-dominant	masculine-warm	warm-hard
values power-hard	feminine-masculine	likeable-hard
active-dominant	moral-hard	temperamental-warm
active-hard	roguish-moral	temperamental-hard
active-values power	staid-dominant	moral-hard
business/pleasure -dominant	staid-hard	family values-hard
business/pleasure -hard	staid-moral	complicated-warm
business/pleasure -values power	approach to life-sexy	complicated-likeable
business/pleasure -active	mature-warm	complicated -temperamental
moral-warm	mature-masculine	feminine-masculine
	mature-feminine	approach to life -central

Table 7.6: Main oppositions perceived in the three programmes

<u>DALLAS</u>			
(1) Potency (Dynamism)	dominant	submissive	
	hard	soft	
	values power	does not value power	
	active	passive	
	business-oriented	pleasure-oriented	
(2) Morality	moral	immoral	
	warm	cold	
(3) Family values	values family	does not value family	
<u>CORONATION STREET</u>			
(1) Moral (Weakness)	moral	immoral	
	soft	hard	
	submissive	dominant	
	staid	not staid	
(2) Gender (Matriarchal)	masculine	not masculine	
	not feminine	feminine	
	immature	mature	
	cold	warm	
(3) Roguish	roguish	not roguish	
(4) Sociable	sociable	unsociable	
(5) Central	central	peripheral	
(6) Sexual values	modern	traditional	
	sexy	not sexy	
<u>EASTENDERS</u>			
(1) Just like us	likeable	not likeable	
	warm	cold	
	soft	hard	
	steady	temperamental	
	straightforward	complicated	
(2) Gender	masculine	not masculine	
	not feminine	feminine	
(3) Community	modern	traditional	
	peripheral	central	
(4) Morality	moral	immoral	
(5) Family values	values family	does not value family	

7.3.3. Comparison of relations between properties

From Tables 7.5 and 7.6, the following conclusions may be drawn.

In general, properties are correlated as predicted by implicit personality theory (e.g. dominant/hard, likeable/warm). They index meaningful, underlying dimensions related, if not identical, to evaluation, potency, and evaluation.

However, properties which should index the same underlying dimension according to implicit personality theory, are not always highly correlated (e.g. sociable and warm in Coronation Street).

Conversely, properties which index orthogonal properties according to implicit personality theory may be highly correlated (e.g. warm and hard in EastEnders).

Masculinity and femininity, when significant properties, are always opposed. This fits with traditional assumptions that, for example, the more masculine one is, the less feminine one must also be. The possibility of androgynous perceptions of characters (both masculine and feminine to equal degrees) is thus generally precluded.

Insofar as activity is relevant as a dimension, it creates a dynamism dimension (namely activity aligned with potency, Osgood et al, 1957). In Dallas, active, dominant and hard are aligned; in EastEnders, temperamental and hard are aligned. However, in EastEnders the dynamism dimension is also aligned with most of the evaluative properties, creating a general 'just like us' or uncertainty:familiarity dimension.

Morality is not simply an instance of the general evaluative dimension, for in Dallas it is related to warm but less so to values family; in Coronation Street it is not very related to warm or

mature and is orthogonal to sociable; in EastEnders it is correlated with, but conceptually distinct from, the evaluative dimension (likeable, warm, etc), and with family values. This supports the specific emphasis on morality (because of its relation to myth and social prescriptions) within cultural studies, and argues against its reduction to general evaluation.

Certain genre-related properties (e.g. modern or traditional approach to life) correlated with different properties in different programmes: with sexy in Coronation Street; with centrality in EastEnders. Thus in Coronation Street, the modern characters are sexy but not necessarily peripheral, while in EastEnders, the modern characters (who are also younger) are more peripheral, but not necessarily more sexy. They may also serve to qualify the meaning of other dimensions (e.g. alignment of maturity with gender in Coronation Street).

7.3.4. Comparison of relations between themes

Finally, the angles between each pair of themes were calculated by computing the average of all angles between the properties across each pair of themes (Table 7.7).

Table 7.7: Angles (in degrees) between themes for each programme

Dallas

Morality		
Potency	50	
Family Values	57	84
	M	P

Coronation Street

Morality					
Gender	62				
Sexual Values	35	70			
Sociability	79	56	83		
Centrality	61	44	43	43	
Roguishness	30	49	50	82	63
	M	G	SV	S	C

EastEnders

Just like us				
Morality	30			
Gender	82	65		
Community	54	50	82	
Family Values	27	26	84	30
	JLU	M	G	C

The main themes perceived by viewers as central to the characters differ in the three programmes studied. They differ both in their nature (Table 7.6) and in their inter-relations (Table 7.7). From both the similarities and differences, one can infer that viewers construct particular frameworks for each of the programmes which have the following features.

1. The theme of morality is differently related to potency in the three programmes: in Dallas, morality and potency are relatively independent (50°); in Coronation Street, morality and potency are part of the same theme ($< 20^{\circ}$); in EastEnders, morality and potency are related but distinct (potency is part of 'just like us' theme, at 30° from morality).
2. Gender also differs across representations of the three programmes: in Dallas, there is no gender theme (although as discussed in Chapter 4, this seems to be because the Dallas representation contains a gender dimension which is strongly undermined by the existence of three counter-stereotypic women); in Coronation Street and EastEnders, gender is important and independent of all other themes. Thus one cannot infer with any certainty about a character's morality or sociability by knowing their gender.
3. The evaluative properties in each programme tend to be loosely clustered around a central evaluative core, rather than all forming part of the core. Thus some evaluative properties are relatively distinct from the others.
4. Certain differences between the representations reflect narrative differences in the programmes. For example, 'family values' is closer to morality in EastEnders than in Dallas. In Dallas, moral ambiguities arise from the immoral characters acting immorally mainly for the sake of the family (e.g. J. R. and Cliff), whereas in EastEnders, the immoral characters tend to have unstable, incomplete or unhappy families (e.g. Den and Nick), so that family values and morality are not in conflict.

7.4. A general representation of soap opera characters?

From the above comparisons, certain commonalities emerged across the three programmes studied. Most notably, each programme centred on the same three themes, namely morality, potency and gender. A fourth theme, concerned with approach to life, was also evident in the British soap operas. Particular dimensions were consensually absent, namely social class and intellectual evaluation.

However, these generalisations require considerable qualification. Morality is certainly central to all three programmes, although it varies in meaning, from the staidness or roguishness of Coronation Street to the major clashes between good and evil in Dallas. Potency is also central, but in Dallas and EastEnders combines with activity to create a dynamism dimension. Gender is the most problematic, for in no programme did gender appear as a traditional and uniform dimension. In the British soap operas, gender received a matriarchal flavour in viewers' representations. In Dallas, although non-significant, gender was clearly present in a traditional form (the men and women were discriminated by power and activity) and yet notable counter-stereotypic characters were perceived.

The more subtle variations on this potentially general representation have already been discussed, and concern relations between properties and between themes. While the present results permit the qualified conclusion that viewers' representations of soap opera characters appear to centre on three major dimensions, the origin of the representations remain unexplained. It would seem more theoretically useful to regard each representation as an instantiation of a more general schema for person perception. This

possibility will be discussed later. First the results will be considered in relation to Rosenberg's reformulation (1977) of Osgood et al's (1957) semantic differential model.

7.5. Rosenberg's Multidimensional Evaluative Model

Because a variety of empirical studies only poorly supported the semantic differential model, Rosenberg and colleagues (Rosenberg, 1977, Kim & Rosenberg, 1980) have proposed an alternative implicit personality theory:

In this model, the only dimension assumed to be common to all individuals is an evaluative dimension. The proposed model is multidimensional, however, in that it assumes additional dimensionality resulting from a set of content areas not independent of evaluation, such as attractiveness, integrity, intelligence, maturity, sociability, and so on. The particular content areas that compose this evaluative structure vary among individuals. (Kim & Rosenberg, 1980, p.377).

This model fits the empirical data better, but this is mainly because it claims far less: it specifies only one constant dimension and says nothing of relations between evaluative and content dimensions other than that they are non-orthogonal. Thus explanatory potential has been traded for empirical support. Nonetheless, as the present results also do not fit the original model well, the results should be considered in the light of this new theory. The evidence supports the evaluative model in that each representation has strong evaluative themes, while it is potency and activity which vary in salience. Secondly, as Rosenberg predicts, evaluative properties are not always highly intercorrelated. However, certain properties appear to be fairly free of evaluative content (e.g. morality and sociability in Coronation Street or gender and 'just like us' in EastEnders). Yet, this is not a major

problem for the evaluative model, as it claims that no theme is consistently orthogonal to evaluation.

The model implicitly proposes certain consistent inter-relations among properties. For instance, Kim and Rosenberg (1980) find that potency and activity are consistently positively correlated with evaluation, thus supporting the claim that these are not independent dimensions, but are merely evaluation plus content. Their model therefore assumes that, for example, potency and activity are always positively evaluated and that their opposites are always negative. Because they used different terms (likeableness, effectiveness, and striving for evaluation, potency, and activity respectively) to operationalise these dimensions, comparisons are difficult. Nonetheless, the present data show considerable variability in the relation between activity, potency, and evaluation for the different programmes: in EastEnders, evaluation is negatively correlated with activity and potency; in Coronation Street, evaluation is negatively correlated with potency; in Dallas, evaluation is independent of activity and potency; in no case are all three positively correlated. Rosenberg's assumption, that different properties have particular evaluative associations which vary only in salience, is not supported.

A more important point concerns Rosenberg's notion of content. Little is said about the determinants of particular content dimensions or of how we might study these dimensions independently of their existence in the perceiver's representation. Without independent access, content dimensions may be dismissed as random or idiosyncratic variation of little theoretical interest. Rosenberg assumes that the content dimensions derive solely from intra-psychic

origin and does not, therefore, consider that the domain being represented may be a source of content dimensions. He thereby retains an important aspect of the original semantic differential model, namely that whatever the structure of individuals' models, these are universally applied in all domains without modification. Thus in Implicit Personality Theory research, ratings are always collapsed over the different targets. It is assumed that, for example, the same relations hold between evaluation, potency and activity when someone thinks of people at work, their family, people they know well or politicians they have never met. Certainly if one averages over dimensional alignments for these different domains, orthogonality may result. But this would be misleading in relation to different domains of person perception. While Rosenberg attacks the practice of collapsing over subjects, there is surely an equivalent argument against collapsing over target domains, as these too, may introduce additional sources of content variation. If one accepts that target domains introduce content dimensions into people's implicit personality theories, then the study of mass communications is one way of investigating the sources of these dimensions.

By pointing to individual experiences as a source of content dimensions, one makes general explanations or predictions very difficult and the social nature of perception is underestimated. By pointing to perceived domains as a source of content dimensions one invites a social theory of contexts (situations, episodes, genres). In this respect, Rosenberg's theory has much to offer, opening up the original semantic theory to a broader range and source of contents.

Kim and Rosenberg note some generality among the wide variety of content dimensions observed, as most dimensions centre on concepts of social desirability and intellectual desirability. This is a reversion to earlier research which supported the original semantic differential model (Rosenberg et al, 1968), and is partly due to all researchers using performance-oriented students as subjects. However, certain themes in the present character representations are not reducible to these two dimensions, for example, approach to life and role in the community (centrality). Interestingly, these involve representation of characters in their social context (how do they relate to or interact with others). Implicit personality theories are typically studied using targets, whether artificial or well known, out of context (e.g. your father, neighbour and college friend). In the present research, viewers rated characters in the context of others from the same domain (or programme). Thus a character's social role is included in the representation in addition to individual features of the character.

7.6. Schema instantiation in structured media domains

The imperfect application of Implicit Personality Theory to a real world, complex domain such as television characters need not be taken as lack of support for the theory. For generalised or abstract targets, the theory works reasonably well. Thus the present results can be used more constructively to complicate the theory: Implicit Personality Theory works if it is seen as identifying only one of two sets of determinants, namely those to do with the viewer. To this one must now add that the structure of the domain of application modifies, and gives a particular instantiation

to an abstract schema.

If one considers different cultural genres concerned with intelligence and power, it is apparent that these two basic themes may be differently related to each other. For example, in one context, exemplified by the adventure epic, The Lord of the Rings, intelligence is strongly positively correlated with power: the clever heroes win through over the stupid villains (epitomised by the animal-like orcs). A popular strand of stereotyping represents intelligence through the weedy bespectacled swot, who has little power in contrast to his beefy opposite, fortunate in his lack of brains. The Star Wars films exemplify a further popular theme, where intelligence is orthogonal to power: goodies and baddies are equally powerful (until the end) and both highly intelligent: a battle of wits.

If different cultural genres exemplify different inter-relations between basic themes, why has person perception theory been concerned to specify orthogonality between dimensions? After all, it is in relation to orthogonality that empirical support is weak, and this provides the rationale for Rosenberg's development of an alternative theory. One could argue that the model is parsimonious to operate in that, faced with a wide range of cultural domains, it would be maladaptive to assume any kind of inferential relation between these basic themes. While within themes, inferences are generally reasonable (e.g. if someone is likeable, they are probably also fairly attractive, sociable and warm), the main semantic themes have been related in different ways in different contexts precisely because they are culturally important. Different genres are concerned to establish different world views.

For example, the narrative structure of The Lord of the Rings is organised so that, while the reader begins with a readiness to perceive themes of intelligence and evaluation (and potency, activity and gender), he or she is, according to the semantic differential model, open in beliefs about their interrelation. The narrative must then work to draw in the reader, trying out different alignments and finally convincing the reader that one particular alignment is the most natural. In this narrative, two characters play critical roles in this process: Boromir, the least intelligent of several heroes, succumbs to evil forces and is killed; and Gollum, a wicked figure whose moments of intelligence and honesty serve to save his life (give him power), albeit temporarily. In this genre, power is a matter of life and death, but different genres use different conventions to establish their world view and convince the reader that, say, intelligence is power.

If one argues that people routinely keep in mind many possible alignments of basic themes, one must still explain when and why each is used. If instead one argues that people have abstract schemata which make certain aspects of the world salient (e.g. the content of basic cultural themes) and are open on others (e.g. relations between the themes, as represented through orthogonality), then the different contexts provide an explanation of when and why abstract schemata are differently instantiated, namely as a function of the domain structure. To elaborate this argument, a theory of social contexts and conventions is needed (genre, myth, situations etc), and a theory of influence is needed to predict when domain structure is influential or is overridden.

The present research (Tables 7.8 and 7.9) suggests the

existence of such processes, showing eight ways in which schemata may be instantiated and six ways in which programme structure may be influential. Table 7.8 also shows that the representations support claims for schema modification on application to a structured domain. There is no evidence of either sole top-down processes (imposition of schema onto programme) or sole bottom-up processes (veridical reflection of programme structure in representations): instead an interactive process is indicated. Table 7.9 shows the same phenomenon from the opposite viewpoint: in some but not all respects, representations reflect programme structure, as identified by cultural studies analysis. Again, an interaction is indicated. When and where aspects of schemata and textuality are differentially influential is a matter for future research. More theoretical development is needed to integrate fully a socio-cognitive theory of abstract schemata with a textual theory of programme structure to explore the ways in which schemata are variously instantiated. The arguments and evidence towards such theory development will be drawn together in the concluding chapter, and implications for models of the communication process will be discussed.

Table 7.8: Modification of schema structure in representations

Nature of modification	Examples from thesis findings
Apply the dimensions of evaluation, potency/gender and activity	none
Vary salience of a dimension	potency less central to <u>EastEnders</u>
Exclude a dimension	activity absent or weak intellectual evaluation absent gender absent from <u>Dallas</u>
Include an alternative dimension	sexy, approach to life centrality
Concrete instantiation of an abstract dimension	evaluation becomes morality
Alter meaning of a dimension	traditional gender becomes matriarchal gender
Alter relations between dimensions	morality aligns with potency (<u>EastEnders</u> , <u>Coronation St</u>) gender separates from potency potency aligns with activity (<u>Dallas</u>)
Reject the schema	none

Table 7.9: Modification of programme structure in representations

Aspect of structure	Examples from thesis findings
Veridical reflection of programme structure in representation	none
Programme opposition present	matriarchal gender, maturity, morality, family values, sexy centrality, values power
Programme opposition excluded	class
Relation between oppositions present	morality independent of gender (<u>Coronation Street</u>)
Resolution of ambiguity	morality clarified & polarised (<u>Dallas</u>)
Relation between oppositions altered	morality independent of potency (<u>Dallas</u>) family values distinct from moral and neither opposite of values power (<u>Dallas</u>) class and centrality not aligned (<u>Coronation Street</u>)
Representation entirely different from programme structure	none

CHAPTER EIGHT

AN ANALYSIS OF A SOAP OPERA NARRATIVE

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter, a narrative from a popular soap opera, Coronation Street, is analysed to illustrate a textual approach to television programmes which both respects the structural complexity of the whole and attempts to elucidate where the meanings depend on cultural conventions beyond the text. As discussed in Chapter 1, textual meanings depend implicitly on viewers' knowledge of cultural conventions and on their personal experiences. The present analysis should provide a forum for connecting and pursuing many of the arguments raised in this thesis. Through a specific example, this chapter aims to draw a picture of television texts which are regularly interpreted by viewers. This picture should contribute to and help substantiate the development of a psychological theory of the role of the viewer.

Interpretation of television programmes demands the use of conventional and moral frames which are reiterated, simplified, generalised, and sanctioned, even for the programme to be comprehended as coherent and meaningful. The ways in which texts implicate such knowledge are easily missed because these ways are taken for granted and minute, significant only through frequent repetition. By revealing textual structures, a semiotic approach has much to offer to psychological issues. This chapter explores this approach as one new to and potentially fruitful for social psychology. However, literary critical and semiotic forms of

textual analysis have been applied to a variety of popular culture texts, and they usually prove both revealing and provocative (e.g. Dyer et al, 1981; Eco, 1979; McRobbie, 1983; Patte, 1975; Silverstone, 1984; Wright, 1975).

The systematic analysis of narrative structure has the following uses. Firstly, it provides a general and unifying description of television drama which reveals underlying similarities and contrasts within and between genres. Secondly, it has implications for the psychological aspects of viewing. For example, chronological structure locates expectancies, character identification directs the reader's perspective, and dominant themes cue associative recall. Thirdly, it acknowledges the parallels between myth and soap opera, as in some respects, soap opera constitutes a contemporary reworking of traditional wisdom (morality, rhetoric, and cultural concerns).

In brief, the narrative to be analysed concerns a married couple, Ken and Deidre, and Ken's secretary, Sally. It is an eternal triangle, although the affair does not take place. Originally, Sally has an affair with another man, Billy, which makes Ken jealous, and Sally then turns her attentions to Ken. Deidre's suspicions and Billy's recriminations ensure that the whole thing blows over.

8.2. Aims of the analysis

The main aim is to pursue the possible convergence between social psychology and cultural studies, as discussed in Chapter 1. So far, this thesis has been mainly psychological and the implications for cultural studies were noted. This chapter is the

reverse, conducting a literary analysis of a television text, and noting the psychological implications. The analysis addresses the following issues:

1. Television programmes exemplify for social psychology the structured, or textual, nature of social stimuli in general. How might these structures be analysed and what forms do they take?
2. The role of the viewer needs elucidation. In relation to closure, does the text permit multiple interpretations or is there a preferred reading?
3. The role of the viewer also involves the completion of meaning. How and when does the interpretation of a text require social knowledge and how does this knowledge relate to stereotypes, expectancies, and myth?
4. How do oppositions structure a text and can these be related to the dimensions of character representation that were found to underlie character representation (Chapters 4 to 7)? How are characterisations constructed textually through negotiation of relevant oppositions?
5. Despite little empirical research, psychologists assume that socio-cognitive phenomena studied in the laboratory have their place in the interpretation of real texts such as television programmes. How do the concepts relating to viewers and to textuality come together?

8.3. The semiotic method

In this chapter, the present researcher will analyse a narrative, modelling the analysis on the semiotic and literary analyses carried out by researchers in cultural studies on

television programmes. In other words, the focus is upon the material available to viewers and upon what they must 'do' cognitively in order to make sense of the text. Following Silverstone (1981), the text will be analysed in two ways: the analysis of narrative or chronologic (or temporal) structure and the analysis of themes (or oppositions) or logical structure. Some of the classic analyses seek to formalise the structures of the text in order to develop a general theory of textual structure (e.g. Barthes, 1981; Eco, 1979). This approach will not be adopted here because the focus is psychological rather than formal, and because there is not yet available an analytic framework which can be straightforwardly applied to soap opera. The analysis will be relatively exploratory and loose, compared with the highly complex and detailed methods of some researchers, and essentially involves a careful examination of the text in the light of semiotic and literary concepts and frameworks. The latent structure should be thereby revealed.

The researcher thus provides a theoretical interpretation of the text. There are various problems of subjectivity inevitably involved here, as it can be argued that different researchers, just like different viewers, may make different interpretations of the same text. There are several possible responses to this criticism. Firstly, careful interpretative analysis by informed researchers is common to literary critics, historians, anthropologists and ethologists, as it provides the major practical means of in-depth and structured analysis of materials.

Secondly, although neither the video tape of the narrative nor an extensive transcript is presented here, every verbal statement

directly or indirectly concerned with the narrative are exhaustively included in the analysis to follow. Consequently, sufficient material is included for other readers to draw their own conclusions. Thirdly, the analysis is to some extent consciously selective in that particular attention is paid to the themes of gender, morality and power, as these emerged as central from viewers' own representations of the characters. It may be argued that the more formal features of the narrative (temporal order, use of stereotyped terminology, inclusions and omissions) can be more objectively noted.

As yet, a means of summarising a textual analysis has not, and possibly cannot, be developed: thus a lengthy descriptive presentation of the analysis is unavoidable. Other researchers (e.g. Morley, 1980; Patte, 1975; Silverstone, 1984) present long accounts of text plus analysis, allowing the reader to check the account. Both analyst and reader may summarise or extract salient points.

It can be briefly noted here that the main alternative to interpretative analysis is content analysis. This produces results which may be summarised succinctly and deals with issues of objectivity and generality through reliability and sampling decisions. However, content analysis makes an important sacrifice in its treatment of structural relations between units coded: it cannot adequately locate semantic units in their temporal or thematic context; it emphasises frequent over rare, but nonetheless structurally significant, events; and it assumes units are accumulative rather than structured in combination. The more content analysis includes contextual aspects of meaning, the less

amenable its results are to summary and abstraction. As a detailed knowledge of textual structures which have psychological implications was required, an interpretative analysis was attempted here.

8.3.1. Narrative analysis

The present analysis follows, with some amendments, the narrative structure for human drama proposed by Burke (1970). Because this has a few, fairly abstract structural elements, it is more readily applicable to a new genre than are the more detailed and formal frameworks of, say, Barthes (1981) and Eco (1979). Burke's framework has been adapted for television programmes by Chesebro (1982). In this scheme, four discrete, temporally ordered, 'dramatistic' stages are proposed.

1. Pollution (or contract violation, or disruption of equilibrium). Through violation of certain norms the social order is challenged and as state of intolerable disequilibrium results.
2. Guilt. In this stage, the social problem is personified and its psychological implications developed (e.g. responsibility, agency, intention, and blame). By contrast, in classic mythic narratives, the hero is a pawn, automatically attempting to re-establish equilibrium. In soap opera, the agent is located in a network of human relations where actions have consequences for others and in which attributions of responsibility are made by agents, interested others and viewers. Thus this stage is particularly relevant to soap opera, although it has no parallel in other schemes.
3. Purification. Pollution and guilt are eliminated and order is re-established. It can be argued that restitutory action in the ordinary human world of soap opera, as opposed to the

right-will-prevail world of myth, requires motivation (guilt) as well as a reason (pollution) for its enactment.

4. Redemption (or resolution). As a consequence of the individual actions of the purification stage, the status quo (either the former one or a newer and stronger one) is (re-)established.

In the enactment of the whole narrative, a cyclic process occurs whereby a socio-structural phenomenon (namely community disruption or rule-breaking) is transformed into an individual-psychological one (agency and responsibility) and then back again to the socio-structural (rules are mended and penance done), thereby revealing the personal consequences of social change and vice versa. This brings about soap opera's psychological reductionism, i.e. its assertion that social ills can be (or should be) cured by individual rather than by social or political action (Allen, 1985; Dyer et al, 1981)

8.3.2. Thematic analysis

This is the second level of narrative structuring, the level of patterned interrelationships of categories (Silverstone, 1981), as expressed through binary oppositions. The character representations in this thesis concerned general oppositions which structure the text at a high level of abstraction. However, the particular inter-relations between these oppositions (e.g. morality aligns with potency) must be established through numerous narratives in which these and different oppositions are variously manipulated. Different alignments continually tried out, and any constancies are endlessly recreated through the prioritising of certain alignments over others (e.g. through the concluding arrangement of a narrative).

The oppositions or themes operate through connotation and they gain meaning through integration with cultural myths of gender, power, and morality. They give meaning to the denotational or concrete, behavioural events of the narrative. The opposition of gender integrates with numerous binary paradigms, such as active:passive, independent:dependent, logical:emotional, dominant:submissive, warm:cold, virgin:whore, rational:neurotic, natural:cultural and inside:outside. Morality also accesses powerful cultural oppositions. These relate to mythological and biblical sources such as hero:villain, god:devil, innocence:knowledge, dull:exciting, virtue:shame, light:dark, selfish:selfless and patriot:traitor. Power relates to further oppositions of potent:impotent, supernatural:earthly, intelligence:stupidity, authoritative:dutiful, able-bodied:cripple and useful:useless.

If a narrative is structured, for example, so as to lead viewers to a traditional view of gender, then it must accomplish two things. On the chronologic level, it must first establish a happy equilibrium of traditional male/female relations. This equilibrium is then disrupted and the unhappy consequences for the community are pursued to such a pitch that the viewer longs for the original stability. On the logical or thematic level, the text must explore other possible alignments of gendered oppositions (e.g. female=powerful and male=weak or female=sexual and male=virginal) to demonstrate the disruptive or uncomfortable nature of such alignments. Again, the text must create a sense of relief and rightness when the traditional alignments are re-established. If one follows Barthes in his notion of mystification, one would argue

that such a narrative can be effective only if this ultimate goal is successfully disguised, such that the narrative appears a natural and uncontentious story of everyday happenings.

One purpose of the analysis is to reveal textual expression of connotative binary paradigms, where one pole is selected at any one time for the currently salient agent, and where the non-selected element will either be personified in another character or referred to in discussion between characters. In the chronological analysis, one function of a multiple-agent narrative is to present multiple perspectives. Multiple agents are used to represent, through personification, both signs in a paradigm, or in the case of two paradigms or oppositions, all four possible positions. The semiotic approach holds that textual meaning is not simply the sum of signs, but is generated through inter-relations between these signs, achieved through their juxtaposition in the text via character interactions. The present analysis will attempt to trace the development of and judgments concerning gender and morality as portrayed in this soap opera narrative.

8.4. Analysis of a CORONATION STREET narrative

8.4.1. Selection of materials

The episodes containing the selected narrative were videotaped in full during its transmission, and then all the scenes from each of the 13 episodes which concerned or referred to the narrative in any way were edited together to produce a continuous videotape. There were 68 scenes in all, of which 2 could not be used due to unavoidable interference from the weather. A summary of the narrative is provided at the end of the chapter (Table 8.8). An

interpretative analysis of a television programme may be more or less exhaustive. As the present aims are illustrative and exploratory, certain liberties were taken. Most notably, only the verbal transcript is analysed, although the researcher had repeatedly viewed the complete videotape.

Paradoxically, to conduct an analysis, one must specify the boundaries of the narrative even if analysis reveals its openness. A pragmatic solution was offered by the text, as Coronation Street typically does not use characters central to a major narrative for a period before and after the directly relevant events. Boundary indeterminacy emerges mainly in references to past events or in future repercussions not yet imagined.

The storyline which was analysed was selected from the soap opera Coronation Street (Granada Television) for the following reasons.

1. It was shown over the period 17 Sept. to 1 Nov. 1984, covering 13 episodes (shown twice a week), a period of average viewing figures (16 million).
2. It involves three central, well-known and long-term characters and one character (Sally Waterman) who has been present for two years.
3. Via its 'romantic' theme of an 'eternal triangle' story, in which a married man is tempted to have an affair with his secretary, it involves issues typical of soap opera.
4. The narrative structure is typical of soap opera as: (a) it involves several equally central characters in a mutual entanglement; (b) it depends more upon possibilities than actions; (c) it has neither a discrete beginning nor a tidy conclusion; (d) it moves slowly and undramatically; and (e) it provides a central role for gossip,

allowing the other characters to express their views on the events which take place. Thus the text is, via multiple perspectives and lack of narrative closure, an open text. Yet through its treatment of basic cultural themes (gender roles, sexuality, the family), it tends towards closure, preferring a conventional reading.

5. As a quick check on the unexceptional nature of the narrative, 5 regular viewers of the programme were asked, three months later, to judge the typicality of the story (in comparison with descriptions of 5 other stories shown at a similar time). All five recalled the story, assigning a median rating of 4 on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high) rating of typicality among Coronation Street narratives.

8.4.2. Chronological or narrative analysis¹

8.4.2.1. Background Conditions

- (a) Equilibrium One: the Marriage. Ken and Deidre Barlow are happily married, bringing up Tracy, Deidre's daughter by her previous marriage. For longstanding viewers this is a statement of stability and conventionality for Deidre who, at 29, has been divorced before, and has had affairs with both Billy Walker and Mike Baldwin (this latter was during her marriage to Ken). Ken, a widower, has had several affairs. He is 45, the Street's local boy made good. They are the Street's ideal couple, attractive, respectable, intelligent, and steady.
 - (b) Equilibrium Two: a Working Relationship. Ken and Sally Waterman have worked successfully together for some time. Ken is joint owner and editor, and Sally is his assistant, on the Weatherfield Recorder, the local advertising newspaper. They are accepted by the community as providing a welcome local service. Viewers have no
1. All nos. in parentheses refer to scene nos. on composite video.

information upon Sally's personal/love life.

- (c) Other Characters. Billy Walker, currently manager at the Rovers' Return pub, is the local boy gone to the bad, previously involved in shady deals and various affairs. Mike Baldwin is the outsider, tolerated for providing work, resented as a businessman. Hilda Ogden is the Street's gossip, providing cohesion to the community, Bet Lynch is the barmaid, along with Betty Turpin, at the Rovers Return Return, local meeting place for the community. Alf Roberts runs the local grocery shop, another scene of gossip.

Both equilibria, marriage and work relations, are normatively governed and respectable. They seem stable, yet the seeds of disruption are present in that (a) Ken's dual roles may conflict, and (b) Sally has not yet, contrary to the conventional treatment of unattached young women in soap opera, become 'romantically' involved.

The main plot, which disrupts both equilibria, involves the attraction that Ken and Sally come to feel for each other, their dilemma as to whether they should have an affair, the effect upon Deidre, and the interest of the community. This is soap opera's forte - providing traditional rhetoric to explain a fairly common and yet deeply problematic issue, namely desire leading to marital infidelity. The main plot is directly brought about by a subplot, in which Sally and Billy have an affair. Thus there is no abrupt start to the story as in myth or fairy tale ('Once upon a time...'). This may influence decisions about responsibility, understanding of narrative progression, and source of problems. Ken himself expresses the confusion about the origin of the narrative, indicating one view of his responsibility:

K:S² - It wasn't until you started seeing him [B] that I realised just how much I cared. (24)

and,

S:K - It's not since you found out about Billy Walker and me is it?

K:S - No, I think it predates that actually. All that did was to sharpen the, er, feeling if you like. (28)

Overlap in the two plots is created via a subdivision of the pollution stage. The first two parts of the pollution overlap with the affair between Billy and Sally, and the final part of the pollution stage replaces this affair with that of Ken and Sally. The pollution stage can be subdivided according to (a) the nature of the pollution: pollution 'in the mind' vs. 'in the flesh', and (b) public knowledge of the pollution: pollution recognised by the community vs. recognised by Ken. In this case, the public precedes the private.

8.4.2.2. Pollution I: Community sees pollution 'in the mind'

Although he is unaware of it, Ken's interest in Sally is visible to the community and viewers, producing dramatic irony. Actual adultery is unnecessary for violation of the marital bond based on trust and fidelity. Towards the end, when Ken protests:

K:D - One embrace is not an affair, for heavens' sake.

Deidre clearly expresses this view of marital violation:

D:K - It is up here, in your head. You were fancying her rotten up there. (66)

From scene (2), where Billy first asks Sally for a date, Ken's potential jealousy is signalled.

B:Bet (talking of S) - It's no good having the skirts unless you've got the pins to go with them, my sweet.

K:B - Hello, hello, subject normal. (2)

2. All quotations were transcribed directly from the video in full. The notation K:S - indicates that Ken is speaking to Sally. (B=Billy, D=Deidre, Bt=Bet, M=Mike, H=Hilda).

The scene ends on Ken's thoughtful, unhappy stare at Billy and Sally. The affair is a mere precursor to trouble, as indicated by ridiculing Billy as a romantic hero (unnecessary for viewers who know Billy's past).

Bet:B - Your date's here, poor kid.

B:Bet - Sally? But I'm supposed to be picking her up.

Bet:B - Oh, come on. She wouldn't want her mam going into shock or summat. (3)

Public recognition of Ken's interest in B/S's affair is facilitated by the affair being largely enacted in the Rovers' Return. Hilda Ogden, the gossip, first spreads the news:

H:K(talking of S) - Only that she spent last night at the Rovers' Return. (8)

Hilda also notes Ken's unconscious expression of interest to Alf:

H:A - Seemed flabbergasted, Ken, didn't he, when I told him about Sally What's-her-name and Billy Walker. (8)

Billy notices Ken's reaction in scene (9), where Ken is sullen to Billy and snubs Sally:

B:S - talking about your boss, he can hardly keep his eyes of us (10)

Even Deidre becomes aware of Ken's fascination with the affair:

D:K - I wish you'd stop staring, Ken. (10)

The disruptive consequences of pollution of the marriage are introduced.

M:D - You're a bit sensitive, aren't you? About Walker, Sally, and your Ken? (11)

Deidre attempts to make Ken see how things look:

K:D (talking of S) - Oh, I am her employer. I do have a sort of, er, paternal concern.

D:K - Yeah well, Alf's [Deidre's boss] always interested in my little problems. But that's because he fancies me. (12)

Ken is silent. Again he stares at Billy and Sally (14) in the Rovers' Return. Acting upon his 'paternal concern' he provokes

Sally by criticising Billy:

S:K - Look, Ken, I appreciate your concern for me, I really do. But I'd also appreciate it if you'd let me make my own friends and my own judgments. I mean, fair enough, tick me off for being late or whatever, but what I do out of the office is my own affair, O.K.? (16)

Ken is silent, apparently avoiding expression even to himself of his feelings for Sally. Sally, absorbed in her affair with Billy, is not interested in Ken. However, as Ken persistently expresses his views at work on Sally's affair with Billy (16, 21, 24, 27), the work equilibrium is increasingly disrupted. Ken's fascination with the affair also intrudes into his marriage. Ignoring Deidre's conversation with him, Ken hurries to the bar and interferes beyond the bounds of convention:

K:S - Look, er, don't you think this is getting a bit ridiculous?

S:K - What is?

K:S - You, hanging around here like some er-

S:K - Tart?

K:S - Don't be silly. But you are cheapening yourself, associating with someone like him [B]. You're worth much more than that, Sally. (20)

Still Ken acts despite himself, with no recognition of what is obvious to viewers. Ken vents his frustration yet again on Sally (21) and Billy (22). Deidre demands that they go on holiday (23).

8.4.2.3. Pollution II: Hero sees pollution 'in the mind'

Ken belatedly acknowledges his feelings for Sally, thereby releasing a certain tension in the viewer, who must wonder when he will be honest.

K:S - And I can't just sit back and watch you throw yourself away on the likes of Billy Walker.

S:K - Why?

K:S - Because I care about you, don't I? (24)

A new tension is now established, whereby Deidre, not Ken, is the character in the dark. The pollution increases its effect on

both marriage and work. Encounters in the office are now tense exchanges. This tension is immediately exploited in the narrative, when Deidre makes an unexpected visit to the office (25), raising the possibility that should Ken and Sally act upon their feelings, they might be interrupted:

K:D - And what are you doing here? (25)

Deidre has booked a holiday and Sally urges Ken to go so the situation can dissipate.

Sally facilitates the next stage by cooling towards Billy (26). This frees her to have an affair with Ken and leads Billy to adopt Ken's jealous position.

Ken attempts to retract, showing hostility to Sally (27) by ridiculing her 'high moral tone' concerning public affairs, considering her lax views on sexual morality.

K:S - Well, here you are, preaching your little sermons. What did I see this morning? I saw you creeping out of the Rovers' Return, having presumably spent the night with Billy Walker. (27)

Yet this is merely the prelude to Ken giving in, and in scene (28)

Ken and Sally explicitly discuss having an affair.

K:S - Oh well, if you see every move I make [an offer of lunch] as a prelude to some casual affair. I mean is that what you think this is leading to?

S:K - No!

K:S - Thank you very much.

S:K - ... Let me get this straight. Do you see me as a sure thing?

K:S - (sighs) Who knows.

S:K - ... What if I said O.K., let's have an affair, the full bit. I don't think you'd go through with it. I can't see you taking that sort of a chance ... Well, just face it, Ken. In some way I've become some kind of a challenge. Once you're on your holiday-

K:S - I'm dreading the holiday. To be quite honest, I just can't bear the thought of leaving you here.

S:K - ... Well maybe we could have some kind of a harmless association. You know, on the level of go for a drink from time to time.

K:S - Now? (28)

Not only has Deidre been deceived about Ken's reason against

the holiday ('overwork'), but she knows nothing of the developing relationship between Ken and Sally. She is ignorant of the extent to which her marriage has been violated.

In scene (29) Deidre sits alone and depressed in the Rovers' Return. Ken has forgotten his appointment with her and is having a drink with Sally. She tells Bet that she isn't looking forward to the holiday:

D:Bet - Oh it's Ken, isn't it? All wrapped up in his flipping Recorder. (29)

When Ken and Sally return to the Rovers' Return, they both lie to Deidre.

K:D - I'm sorry love, only I mean there was nothing really arranged. And, er, it just happened that I got tied up.

D:K - Bet that's what Houdini used to tell his missus. (30)

Deidre reacts cynically. But while kept in ignorance, she is powerless.

S:D - Looking forward to Corfu, I should imagine.

D:S - Well, don't know whether I am now ... Ken doesn't seem to be in the holiday mood at all.

S:D - I suppose he's worried about leaving me in charge.

D:S - Well, you do seem to be on his mind quite a lot ... Maybe it's having a daughter about your age. Brings out his paternal instincts. (30)

As Ken has just told Sally the true reason for his reluctance to go on holiday, Sally is now colluding with Ken. Again, Deidre attempts to hit back, threatened without knowing why.

8.4.2.4. Pollution III: Pollution 'in the flesh'

Having established both desire and secrecy, Ken and Sally openly express their feelings. After their illicit drink (33), they are warm and tender together. On Ken's birthday, Sally gives him a present and a card inscribed 'To Ken, love and kisses, Sally' below a red rose. Their privacy is interrupted when Billy bursts in to

discuss a holiday with Sally. He reads the card inscription and frowns.

Alf reassures Deidre (34 & 35) that Ken's reluctance to go on holiday is due to his work:

A:D - He really throws himself heart and soul into that job of his, Ken, doesn't he? ... It's all the more reason why he should be made to go. (35)

The dramatic irony continues as the community holds Ken in high regard, ignorant of his actions. This appears to contradict the earlier notion that irony resulted from the community realising pollution before Ken did. This notion may be now complicated by suggesting that irony results from the fact that it is always the audience who are 'in the know' by comparison with some of the characters. In Pollution I, they are at one with the community in their more informed knowledge. Moving through Pollution II to Pollution III, they instead become at one with Ken in his superior knowledge of events.

Deidre then challenges Ken:

D:K - You don't want us to go. That's it basically, isn't it?

K:D - Well look we are going, aren't we. So there's no point going into that.

D:K - ... Ken, tell me, will you?

K:D - Tell you what?

D:K - Why you're so against it? Is it the expense, can we not afford it?

K:D - Oh, we can afford it. And I'll pick up the tickets. See you later, see you tonight, O.K.? (36)

Thus begin Ken's systematic denials to Deidre that violation has occurred. There is a breakdown in communication between the marriage partners. As if to set the seal on this, Ken kisses Sally in the next scene. They hold each other for a long time after, smiling and relaxed:

K:S - I didn't think I'd ever do that.

S:K - Neither did I.

K:S - I'm a married man Sally, you know that. If we did - well there's nothing in it for either of us. (37)

They are interrupted by the phone, a reminder of the external world, which together with Ken's immediate recollection of his responsibilities as a married man, heralds the next stage.

8.4.2.5. Guilt

This is the stage where personal implications of the pollution are developed and attributions of responsibility made. So, exactly what pollution has occurred: there was no adultery; can a kiss violate a marriage; is the issue the lust in Ken's mind or his deceit to Deidre? Further, what responsibility should be acknowledged and by whom: was the pollution deliberate or uncontrollable; having established a cause, is blame appropriate?

The sequential analysis will be interrupted here to list all the rhetorical explanations offered throughout the narrative. This list illustrates the extent of textual openness, revealing when and how the viewers have a role through involvement, selection of perspective, and increase in tension.

(a) H:B - ... Very little shocks me these days. You've only got to read the paper to see that the ten commandments are just a joke now ... it's just that you treat it so casual. Oh, you know what I'm talking about. I just can't get used to that. (7)

[i.e. people nowadays have no respect for the old values, so infidelity is acceptable, just something one does.]

(b) H:Bt - I've missed out all down the rotten line. Nothing's ever touched me. Not your affluent society or your permissive society ... I might as well have been dead these 15 years ... at least she [S] knows what a forbidden fruit is. (7)

[i.e. having affairs are part of living life to the full, it's a waste not to have them.]

(c) S:K - My private life is becoming an obsession with you. (24)

[i.e. people may get out of control, desire for infidelity is neurotic.]

(d) S:K - Look, Ken, if there's just that something's going wrong with your marriage. (28)

[i.e. men naturally look to other women when they go through a difficult patch in their marriage.]

(e) K:S - I suppose I'm a classic case really ... the onset of middle age. The male menopause. Y'know, you must have heard all the jargon. (28)

and,

S:K - ...Well just face it, Ken. In some way I've become some kind of challenge. (28)

and,

Bt:B - I can see how a bloke of your age would be a bit chuffed to pull a young bird like her [S]. (43)

[i.e. declining virility prompts men to need to prove their attractions.]

(f) K:S - This is all turning into some kind of daft adolescent fantasy. (28)

[i.e. the desire for an affair is a sign of immaturity, of a failure to cope with adult commitment.]

(g) B:Bt - She [S] works for him [K]. They spend all day together in a tiny little room. (45)

and,

M:D - ... You've got two people working in that newspaper office, right? Now I can't say anything about Ken because I'm not qualified, but what I can tell you about is, well, she's [S] a very attractive girl. It doesn't matter who was working in there with her, sooner or later there's bound to be talk.

D:M - Just talk? (54)

and,

K:D - Well you're right about one thing. She is there, in the office, and she's not exactly ugly. (66)

[i.e. prolonged contact with an attractive girl would arouse interest in any man.]

(h) S:K - You don't have to be an expert in human nature to know how I'll come out of this. I'll be the flipping Painted Lady of Weatherfield ... leading Billy up the garden path, and then out to wreck your marriage. (59)

S:K - We might as well be in the paper, with me cast as a slaggy bit of crumpet trying to get her hooks into somebody's husband. (62)

[i.e. for a sexy young woman, it is more exciting to catch a married man, a real challenge. Further, the community will blame the woman for any affair.]

(i) D:K - ... I lied to you, didn't I? When I had that affair with Mike Baldwin, I lied to you. So now-
K:D - So now it's my turn, is it? (60)

[i.e. infidelity by one partner breaks the contract, so infidelity by the other is a reasonable response.]

(j) S:K - I bet you told Deidre you went to bed with me ... some men like to boast, don't they? Even to their wives, Especially to their wives. (62)

[i.e. a bit of jealousy keeps the marital flame alight.]

Table 8.1: Explanations offered for adultery by a soap opera narrative

<u>explanation</u>	<u>proposer</u>	<u>causal agent</u>	<u>personal responsibility</u>
(a) no values	H	society	no
(b) living fully	H	S & K	yes
(c) obsession	S	K	no
(d) marital problem	S	D & K	yes
(e) male menopause	K, S, Bt	K/ men	no
(f) immaturity	K	K	no
(g) close contact	B,M,K,D	K	no
(h) woman seduces	S, S	S	yes
(i) tit for tat	D	D	yes
(j) jealousy	S	K	yes

The text thus provides ten explanations (Table 8.1). They are all plausible and vary in their proposed cause. Some may be compatible with some others. This reveals how different positions are personified in the various characters. Hilda, an observer,

comments on peoples's attitudes towards life. Sally, a free agent with little to lose, is free to attribute responsibility to individuals for the marriage violation. Ken systematically proposes himself as cause, but attaches no blame to his actions, drawing instead upon the rhetoric of masculinity (male pride, biological changes, animal passion) to establish the inevitability of events. Deidre, the 'victim', follows a feminine pattern of self-blame.

The variety of explanations indicates textual openness, but not all explanations are equally favoured. The two, (e) and (g), most frequently offered are also those favoured by Ken. It seems that consensus is on Ken's side in this text, despite the fact that some other explanations, which lay personal blame, such as (d) and (h) seem equally plausible. This possible 'preferred reading' will be borne in mind to see if it is substantiated as the narrative develops.

Consequences of the pollution spread as Sally breaks off her affair with Billy, and Billy starts the rumour that Ken is the cause (38).

S:B - I thought I'd better let you have this [holiday brochure] back.

B:S - Oh right. I'll go ahead and book, shall I?

S:B - Erm, well, no ... I'm sorry, but I don't want to go, I don't honestly ... I've just gone off the idea, that's all. (39)

Billy first has it out with Ken, but Ken says nothing:

B:K - ... You've been against me and Sally from the start, she's told me. What is it? An employer's concern for his staff? (39)

Deidre finally admits her suspicions and is hurt. This is conveyed to viewers by a comment sufficiently obscure to pass by Ken:

D:K - Your, er, worries about the holiday. They haven't been over money then?

K:D - (laughs) No, no, believe me.

D:K - Oh I do. Now.

K:D - Well, here's to us. (They raise their glasses) (39)

While Ken and Deidre go on holiday, implications of the pollution are elaborated. Billy's rejection leads him to spread gossip.

Bt:B (about S) - You're serious aren't you?

B:Bt - Yes, I am. I think we make a great team. In spite of the fact that Ken Barlow keeps trying to put her against me.

Bt:B - Ken? What's he want to do that for?

B:Bt - Why do you think? He's jealous. He fancies her himself.

Bt:B - Oh give over. He never looks at anybody apart from Deidre. They're rock solid them two. (43)

K's good reputation protects him, but the irony is obvious. Billy tells Sally of his suspicions:

S:B - ... I think we should call it a day ...Nobody's got hurt, so let's just leave it while it's like that.

B:S - It's all down to Ken Barlow, isn't it? ... Are you having an affair with him. Office passion? Love among the filing cabinets? (44)

Billy disbelieves Sally's denials, and reiterates his views to Bet (45), to Mike (48 & 52) and to Deidre (49). Meanwhile, Ken and Deidre return from holiday, and Ken and Sally attempt to re-establish their working relationship (46 & 50).

8.4.2.6. Purification

Restitutory action is required to restore social order. This action is undertaken in parallel by Deidre, working with the community, and Ken & Sally, working together. The nature of the restitution depends upon the perceived pollution and the judged cause. It emerges that two divergent perspectives are taken by characters in the text. Viewers may identify with one of these two positions or derive interest from the negotiation between them.

First consider Ken and Sally's line of action. They attempt to recognise and then put behind them what has happened:

S:K - What happened between us before you went away, it's just something we both forget about, O.K.?

K:S - Right. That isn't to say I didn't mean it. I was, am, very attracted to you. I mean, something's grown between us over the months and, O.K., it took me by surprise, but it was there, and it wasn't just-

S:K - a quick burst of lust. No, I didn't think it was. I know you better than that.

K:S - Any-, well, what I want to say is, another time, another place.

S:K - But as it is, you're a married man with a family and that's the way it's going to stay. Don't worry, Ken, that's the way it should stay. (50)

Ken and Sally perceive the problem as solely between them. Being an emotional attraction, they consider it beyond their control and responsibility. However, they can control the expression of that attraction and this guides their attempted restitution. This should enable them to continue their working relationship, though Sally expresses some doubts:

S:K - Supposing I just can't sit here like a lump of wood, looking at you sitting there, looking very fanciable? (67)

Ken does not see the affair as relevant to his marriage, even though the marriage was the impediment to consummation. For him, restitutory action does not include explaining to Deidre, as this would risk being blamed for what Ken believes was beyond his control. Consequently, the marital equilibrium, which for Deidre now requires mutual honesty, cannot be re-established by Ken's actions. As Deidre says later:

D:K - It wouldn't have been so bad if you'd told me this in the first place, when I asked you if there was anything going on. (66)

Thus Deidre must undertake her own restitution. She embarks on the mythological journeys of hero legends (Silverstone, 1981). She asks for help (information concerning Billy's gossip and its truth) of others in the community. However, in a departure from the mythic format, she is unsuccessful in this; a powerless figure. It

is Sally's dissatisfaction with Ken's restitutory action which finally produces Deidre's enlightenment (see later). First Deidre approaches Bet:

Bt:D - Look kid, I think I know what you're getting at, and your Auntie Bet's advice is, take no notice. You know what an evil gob he's [B] got.

D:Bt - So he has said something then, about her [S] and Ken.

Bt:D - It's just plain spite ... Everybody knows Ken around here, and everybody knows Billy. And if he wants to go broadcasting the fact that his girlfriend's ditched him to have an affair with Ken, you don't honestly think that folk would believe him, any more than I did, do you? (51)

Local confidence in Ken's character is reiterated, but Deidre is uncertain:

D:K - Ken. There's one thing we didn't talk about while we were away. Sally Waterman.

K:D - Oh? Should we have?

D:K - Depends if there's anything to talk about.

K:D - Like what?

D:K - Don't play games, Ken. I had me suspicions before we went. I suppose, like a lot of people, I'm a coward, prefer to stick me head in the sand. If you don't see it, it'll go away.

K:D - Deidre, there's nothing to go away. And whatever you thought it isn't true. We're just friends, a working relationship, that's all. (53)

Deidre again fails because of Ken's policy of denial. Deidre asks Mike, as one who will be honest because of their own past affair:

D:M - I'd rather know, Mike. I have to find out from somebody what he's [B] been saying. And there aren't many people I can ask.

M:D - ... Look, if Billy Walker gave me the time of day I'd want it checked.

D:M - So he has said summat then. (54)

The two lines of purification interact when Ken tells Sally that Deidre's questioning will make their job harder:

K:S - Look, don't worry. It's just one of those things that we've got to sit out. It'll all blow over. (55)

Again Deidre asks Ken for the truth:

D:K - ... It looks as if Billy Walker's been going around telling people that the reason he gave up with Sally was because of you.

K:D - He's lying ... there's nothing been happening between me and Sally. (56)

Ken attempts to silence the people Deidre asks help from. This reveals his own insecurity for he must feel that Deidre's quest will incriminate him. First he challenges Mike, reviving memories of Mike's past affair with Deidre:

K:M - Yeah, well I'm telling you. If you're hoping there's something for you in helping to ruin my marriage-

M:K - ... Listen mate, what you do inside or outside your marriage doesn't interest me. And as for helping you to ruin it, you don't seem to need any help. You seem to be managing that alright by yourself. (57)

When Deidre goes to plead with Billy to stop the rumours, she reveals:

D:B - Has Ken been to see you?

B:D - No, but I haven't been back all that long.

D:B - Well thank God for that ... he was going to knock your block off. (58)

Having ensured that Billy will stop gossiping (58), Deidre again asks Ken for the truth:

D:K - Ken, I'd rather, I'd rather know ... I wouldn't blame you, Ken. I could understand. I have to know. (cries)

K:D - There's nothing to know ... Why won't you believe me? (60)

D:K - It's not just the gossip, Ken. It's you. I've been through this before. I remember when Ray [her ex-husband] started playing around. I remember the silences, the little white lies.

K:D - So what are you saying, that I'm having a deep affair with Sally Waterman? (61)

Here Ken actively tries to redefine the nature of marital pollution - not only must there be an affair, it must also be 'deep'. Thus he distances his own actions from anything blameworthy. This contrasts directly with Deidre's belief that it is deceit which pollutes. Ken maintains his line of action and tries to re-establish the work equilibrium:

K:S - My feeling is that we, you and I can cope with the situation. Certainly with the situation between us ... Look, if we stop beating it to death, it will go away.

S:K - O.K. Suppose it will, where does that leave us in our situation?

K:S - It leaves us as two people who can work together. Be honest with each other. Be, if you like, now that the sex-thing has

simmered down, good mates.

S:K - There never was much sex-thing to simmer down, was there? One kiss! (62)

Ken is interrupted by his partner expecting him in a meeting, showing the working relationship to be still disrupted:

K:S - Why didn't you tell me I'd got a meeting?

S:K - Well, if you looked in your diary from time to time. (62)

This stage of purification is brought to a dramatic end when Sally rejects Ken's policy of silence, takes the matter out of Ken's hands and tells Deidre what she wants to know. Sally listens to considerable abuse from Deidre before having her say, abuse which reveals Deidre's knowledge of the 'eternal triangle':

D:S - I'll tell you what you're not going to get, Madam. And that's me on me knees begging. You are not going to get the satisfaction of coming round here all smug and doing the repentant femme fatale act. Telling the little woman you're letting him go for the kids or summat. You can stick that and no messing.

S:D - For God's sake, what's Ken said?

D:S - Oh much the same nonsense as you're giving me ...

S:D - All I ever did with Ken was kiss him, or rather he kissed me. (64)

Sally tells Ken of this conversation. Ken is forced to clear things up with Deidre, now that she knows what happened. Thus begins the redemption stage. First though, Ken explains his policy to S:

S:K - I found out that you haven't been exactly what you would call straight.

K:S - ... Look Sally, I know you believe that honesty is the best policy, but in these areas, you know, you have to be a little more circumspect ... Beware the dangers of absolute truth.

S:K - Well, Ken, what it now boils down to is that she knows the worst. Which is totally harmless.

K:S - Correction. What it now boils down to is she thinks I'm a liar. (65)

Again we see the negotiation between two readings of the marital pollution, sex or deceit. Now that Ken is forced to talk to Deidre, he recognises her reading to be one he did not consider.

8.4.2.7. Redemption

Re-establishing normative equilibria, like initial establishment before the pollution stage, is given little time in soap opera. Here, equilibrium is only partly re-established and the narrative remains incomplete.

D:K - I call it a lie, Ken. What do you call it?

K:D - It was the truth. I did not have an affair with Sally. I did not make love to her.

D:K - You did show a lot of restraint, didn't you, both of you.

K:D - Yes.

D:K - Then it was a lie. You fancied her and you said you didn't.

K:D - I never said that. I said there was nothing going on.

D:K - There was something going on, you were fancying her.

K:D - Oh, I give up. (66)

This debate continues with some acrimony, but is never resolved. The pressure to re-establish the relationship takes precedence over their need to agree, so Ken and Deidre drop rather than resolve the debate, and proceed to the redemption:

D:K - What's she [S] got that I haven't got anyway?

K:D - Not a thing ... You're beautiful. And I love you.

D:K - Yeah well, just watch it in future eh? Keep your eyes on your work.

K:D - Oh I will, believe me. (66)

Sally, meanwhile, feels that the issue is not completely resolved:

S:K - I want to hand in my notice, Ken ... I think it best if I leave ... It's all turned into such a mess, hasn't it?

K:S - Look Sally, it was a mess, it could have been worse. We're over the hump ... So let's try and put it all behind us. Try to get back to normal. I mean there's no need for any heroics on your part ... Alright?

S:K - Yeah, alright. (67)

After Sally's offered sacrifice for the return to normality, Deidre too makes her sacrifice by apologising to Ken:

D:K - I'm sorry, Ken ... (they hug) ... for making a mountain out of a molehill. I was jealous ...

K:D - Jealous eh? (he smiles)

D:K - Don't let it go to your head, sunshine.

K:D - I think it might. (they kiss) (68)

Regarding the re-establishment of equilibrium, Deidre retains her

doubts:

K:D - Well she [S] only wanted to quit, quit her job. But I persuaded her she was being silly.

D:K - Why should she want to leave?

K:D - Oh noble gesture. It's all my fault, so I'll walk out into the night.

D:K - But according to you and her, nobody's done anything wrong, so why should she feel noble ... (Deidre leaves Ken's arms) ... You can only take the blame for something if something's happened, if you've got something on your conscience. Has Sally got something on her conscience Ken?

K:D - No!

D:K - Well it sounds like it to me. It sounds very much like it. (she walks out of the room)

K:self - I don't believe it! (68)

This is the end of the narrative, illustrating the lack of clear resolution in soap opera. As in real-life, things do not always become clear, people are not, in the end, always honest with each other, and problems may remain. For soap opera, this allows for further developments which would be precluded by narrative closure. In this story, we hear some weeks later that Sally is lunching with an old boyfriend from college, and we occasionally glimpse Ken and Deidre talking or going out together - once again, to all appearances, a happy couple. Similarly, Billy's rejection is retrospectively justified by his 'going off the rails' for a period with wine, women and fast cars.

The text does not strongly favour either of the main two readings of the pollution and viewers are relatively free to make their own judgments, which have determinants beyond the text (Eco, 1979). However, insofar as Ken's actions aimed to revive confidence in his virility and spice to his marriage (explanations e and j), he has succeeded. Further, both Sally and Deidre, but not Ken, have offered some sacrifice or apology to make amends. Despite the inconclusive ending, somehow Ken has emerged better than either

Deidre or Sally. Together, these observations suggest that the 'preferred textual reading', so far as it exists, favoured Ken's perspective, as indicated also in the guilt stage. However, the analysis is still incomplete.

8.4.3. Thematic analysis

The chronologic analysis above leaves open a number of questions which can be answered by the thematic analysis. For example, why should Billy and Sally's affair spark off Ken's interest in Sally? Is Deidre regarded as victim or responsible agent? How is Sally's abrupt transition into romance managed? Why did Sally and Billy's affair not constitute pollution in its own right? How is cultural rhetoric introduced via images of masculinity and femininity? How is social approval or disapproval expressed?

8.4.3.1. Background Conditions

The two initial equilibria, marriage and work relationship, are the instantiation of two basic oppositions, male:female and employer:employee. These oppositions draw upon general cultural myths to give connotative meaning to initial character relations. Relations between the four main characters of the narrative can be expressed thus:

		gender	
		m	f
er		Ken, Billy	-
employ-		<u>Table 8.2</u>	
ee	-	Deidre, Sally	

These two oppositions are normatively conjoined, not independent (i.e. two cells of the four are blank). Thus the status difference between masculine and feminine is expressed denotatively through employment status. These characters' positions are supported by most other characters in the programme (Alf and Mike are also male employers, Bet and Hilda are also female employees). Patriarchal myths and the rhetoric of masculinity (dominant, decisive, independent) and of femininity (submissive, helpful, gentle) are implicit here because the situation fits normative schemata.

8.4.3.2. Eternal triangle narrative

When Billy and Sally begin their affair, as far as they are concerned, this leaves work and marital equilibria unaffected: it neither raises Sally's status nor challenges heterosexual norms. Yet both equilibria are in fact polluted. Hitherto, Sally has been portrayed as efficient, though not exactly prim. However in scene (1), Sally undergoes a dramatic change. She appears in turquoise mini-skirt, dramatic makeup and a low-cut tee-shirt. She flirts with Billy, dimples and laughs with men, and enters the Rovers. Everyone notices her there, and Billy asks her out. This change in Sally is effected connotatively by introducing a new opposition, sexual:nonsexual. This signals a reordering of characters and raises new dramatic possibilities (e.g. romance, jealousy). Viewers are reminded of the lack of romance hitherto between Deidre and Ken (raising again the issue of when did this narrative begin) and that cultural myths of the seven-year itch or the male menopause may be relevant. The new situation can be characterised thus:

	gender	
	m	f
+	Billy	Sally
sexual		
-	Ken	Deidre

Table 8.3

All four cells are personified in major characters. This two by two structure is simple, clear and its information is easy for viewers to bear in mind for guidance in interpretation. Sexuality, one aspect of gender, defines the new schema for organising the characters. Comments and glances by other characters both highlight the sexuality opposition and express social approval for it.

B:S - Hey gorgeous, your boss is on your trail. (2)

and:

S:B - D'you think I should dress up?

B:S - Oh no, that would be gilding the lily. You look a million dollars to me. (4)

and:

Brian Tilsley:M - Got a fantastic figure, hasn't she? (10)

Thus a third opposition can be identified, social approval:disapproval, in which disapproved sexuality is not expressed in the text. This is an area rich in mythology and numerous stereotypes concerning women can be identified:

sexual		
	+	-
	+	? virgin/angel/princess
(moral) approval		
	-	whore/ frigid bitch/
		tart/ icemaiden
		vamp/hussy

Table 8.4

There are few positive terms for sexual women (Spender, 1980), compared with men: virile, he-man, hunk, etc. Textual work is required to present Sally as sexual. By contrast, Billy's position as sexual is easily established through reference to a readily available cultural stereotype with a long tradition known to viewers:

S:M - Well I've always wanted to get into the clutches of an unscrupulous cad, haven't I? (4)

Immediately the excitement and inequitous power relations of gender are simply conveyed. Unlike with Sally's transformation, no admiration for Billy from others is needed, nor does Billy alter his appearance to establish his new position, though he does begin to preen himself and is noticeably more cocky. When describing Ken's dismay at Sally and Billy's affair, for example, Hilda comments:

H:A - ... Still I suppose in his [K's] mind, not being over-fond of Billy, it'll be a case of Beauty and the Beast. (8)

And in scene (5) Billy refers to himself as both 'gigolo' and 'man-of-the-world'. Sally and Billy's new and salient positions challenge the sexuality of both Deidre and Ken through the contrast (Table 8.3). As Table 8.4 suggests, this is not particularly important for Deidre's femininity as sexuality is not normally a

constituent of femininity, but it does pose a significant challenge to Ken, because sexuality (via myths of virility and power) is central to concepts of masculinity.

B:S - Ken Barlow? He'll be doing his press-ups.

S:B - Well you can laugh, but I wouldn't like to bump into him.

B:S - You'd get more of a thrill bumping into a lamp-post. (26)

Here then is one reason for Sally and Billy's affair to disturb Ken. A second reason draws upon the initial and normative equation of status and gender (Table 8.2). Many men need not make a clear distinction between the two. In other words, Ken feels he has a right to judge Sally not only as an employee but also as a woman: he has confused his power as an employer with those of a husband/father.

K:S - ... I also know Billy Walker, don't I. There's no future in it, believe me. Not for a girl like you.

S:K - And what kind of a girl's that?

K:S - One who deserves something better than the Billy Walker's of this world.

S:K - I think that's up to me to decide, don't you? (21)

Compare with:

D:B - I'm sure he [K] doesn't think it's [B and Sally's affair] any of his business. (38)

It also illustrates the use of stereotypes: there are distinct kinds of women in the world, akin to those exemplified by Table 8.4, and Ken's concern is that Sally is cheapening herself by displaying sexuality, thereby moving from 'angel' to 'tart', from moral to immoral. Interestingly, having confused gender and status, and thereby made clear the challenge he feels to his masculinity (in terms of both sexuality and power), Ken attempts to retract by depersonalising the talk and referring to roles not people:

K:S - Come on, I'll buy you a drink.

S:K - D'you think that's a good idea?

K:S - And what's wrong with the boss buying his staff a drink? Good industrial relations. (25)

For a man who has just confessed he cares very much for his 'staff' (24), this attempt rings hollow.

This use of their work relations to depersonalise expression of their true feelings is frequently used by Sally and Ken. For example, when Sally gives Ken a birthday card marked 'love and kisses', she says:

S:K - Be no good if I forgot boss's birthday would I? (33)

Throughout the narrative, the negotiation between gender and status is enacted, revealing the personal dis/advantages of moving between the two frameworks and blurring the distinction. As we enter Pollution II, Sally is dressed conventionally once more. The equilibrium being disrupted and the threat to Ken's masculinity posed, Sally's titillating dress is no longer necessary. That Sally's transformation was intended to disrupt is made explicit only after Ken has kissed her:

S:K - When I started seeing him [B], I wondered if it'd make you do awt. (37)

The different positions of Ken and Billy on the dominant oppositions (Table 8.3) provide the issue for debate when Sally and Ken seriously consider an affair (Pollution II), and these positions are expressed via character types:

S:K - As it happens, I don't see you as the type to have a casual affair. Which is part of the problem.

K:S - Oh I get it. I'm on a pedestal. Stodgy old Barlow, as distinct from ravers like Billy Walker. (28)

On most dimensions, Ken has the edge over Billy - he is educated, witty, handsome, honest, and local. Thus Sally ends her affair with Billy, and takes seriously her relations with Ken. Within the framework of the oppositions of gender and sexuality, the characters are re-ordered:

	gender	
	m	f
+	Ken	Sally
sexuality		
-	Billy	Deidre

Table 8.5

The marriage is polluted now because the male/female sexual pairing crosses the marriage pairing: it is this symbolic arrangement, rather than the existence of actual adultery which directs the narrative.

In the Guilt stage, where Billy begins to spread his rumours, normative values re-enter. Billy's suspicions could only challenge Deidre, Ken, and Sally if they supported social norms and feared public knowledge of their private actions. The re-introduction of consensual morality replaces any social approval for or fascination with female sexuality, and while Ken and Sally attempt to end their personal relations, Sally becomes concerned about the negative social judgments that may be made about her:

S:K - One kiss! Suprised at the filing cabinets, and suddenly I'm down as a home-wrecker. (62)

During Purification, Ken and Sally introduce a new opposition which is initially to their advantage, and which provides the framework for a normative resolution to the narrative. This new opposition, which operates in addition to those of sexuality and gender, can be called rational/emotional or mature/neurotic or adult/child. It draws upon a further aspect of gender and is clearly evaluative. This opposition is first aligned with sexuality when ordering characters so that even when the return of the

normative leads to criticism of Ken and Sally in comparison with Deidre and Billy, they can still be approved by changing the judgement criteria:

	gender	
	m	f
+	Ken	Sally
rationality		
-	Billy	Deidre

Table 8.6

Consequently, Billy's threats and gossip become the hurt pride of a little boy:

Bt:D - It's just plain spite. He [B] can't believe that a girl would actually give him his cards, 'cos maybe she just didn't fancy him. (51)
K:D - He's [B] a man of such enormous conceit that he can't accept the fact that a woman could chuck him out of her bed without there being a rival. (61)

Deidre's worries about her marriage become the neurosis of an unreasonable woman:

M:D - Hey, come on calm down. If I listened to what my girls yacked on about I'd soon be round the twist.
D:M - Well maybe I soon will be. (54)

and,

K:D - ... I mean, look, what it boils down to is this, isn't it? If I say yes, I have been having an affair with Sally , then I'm telling the truth. You'll believe that. But if I say no, I haven't, then I have to be lying ... Why won't you believe me? (60)

and,

D:K - I am not having you go into that office, sitting there with that little bitch, holding her hand, gawping at her legs.
K:D - You're being ridiculous ... ridiculous and unfair, and far too emotional.
D:K - Alright, I'll admit to emotional 'cos I am emotional. I haven't got it in me to be as laid back as you seem to be, not about this sort of thing. (61)

and,

D:K - It's a theory [D disbelieves Ken because of her own affair with M] that makes me a nutcase. (61)

S:K - I told her [D] the truth.

K:S - Oh charming! And what did she do? Hit the roof? (65)

On the other hand, Ken's refusal to admit anything has happened becomes the wise decision of a determined man:

D:K - It wouldn't have been so bad if you'd told me this in the first place ...

K:D - Wouldn't it? You'd have still gone up the wall. So, because my conscience was clear, I was diplomatic, I didn't tell you everything. What man would in his right senses? I'm not a masochist. (66)

Similarly, Sally's views and actions become those of a rational and sensible adult:

K:S - Look Sally, you've got nothing to blame yourself for, You know it. (59)

and,

S:D - ... it [the kiss with K] brought things to a head ... it resolved the situation. It meant we could discuss what had been building and come to terms with it sensibly.

D:S - How very mature! (64)

As Table 8.6 indicates a superior position for Sally over Deidre, the marital equilibrium cannot be re-established, and Ken will still be drawn to Sally instead of Deidre. The chronological analysis showed that redemption did not occur through an agreement between the marital partners. How then was it achieved? Essentially, the now disapproved opposition of sexuality is replaced by the less controversial notion of respect and love. No new opposition is needed, merely a re-arrangement of Table 8.6 such that the respect give to rational adults and not to children and neurotics may be given to Deidre and withdrawn from Sally. Hence:

gender		
	m	f
+	Ken	Deidre
rationality		
-	Billy	Sally

Table 8.7

The reversal of Deidre and Sally is achieved when Ken expresses his return to Deidre by claiming that while Sally is 'not exactly ugly', Deidre is 'beautiful' (66). This returns us to feminine myths where the princess is all things good and lacks the sexual connotations of the wicked witch. Deidre's rationality is re-established as superior to Sally's (although the conclusion undermines this):

K:S - ... we've both been a bit stupid, not least me. But Deidre is not the jealous sort, least not a psychopath like some women are.
S:K - ... But I'm still going to pack it in if she [D] goes off getting neurotic again.
K:S - She won't.
S:K - Supposing I do. (67)

This re-establishment is carefully applied only to Deidre and some women. Others are still characterised as 'pychopaths'. Later viewers learn that Sally is meeting a boyfriend of her own age - as the age difference between Ken and Sally is made salient, Sally is thereby placed in the lower status (child) category relative to Ken and Deidre.

In sum, Deidre has undergone a transformation in which the taken-for-granted drabness of wife and mother was challenged and in which she won, the princess whose superiority is finally recognised by the prince once he is no longer dazzled by the superficial finary of her rival.

The moral seems to be that rationality/maturity lies in rejecting excitement as destructive and accepting social norms of stability, respectability and conventional. Two oppositions, sexuality and rationality, were introduced to construct and negotiate different views of gender. In the final scene, these are personified in the approved characters of Ken and Deidre. While the relevance of sexuality to Deidre was rejected in favour of beauty and respect (woman on a pedestal), it remains relevant to Ken: Deidre's jealousy reassures Ken of his attractiveness (68). The final interaction reiterates the unreasonableness of women (68). The correctness of Ken's judgment and actions is ultimately granted: although Deidre and Sally both apologised, Ken need not. Despite a challenge to traditional views of gender and morality, they are ultimately legitimated. The narrative is closed in that it validates social order over change and sexual challenge. It is open in that it presents debates (pollution in mind or body, events as the responsibility of Ken or Deidre) and that these are only incompletely resolved.

8.5. Discussion

The analysis of this narrative from Coronation Street will be discussed in relation to the five issues outlined earlier.

1. The present analysis has proved useful for analysing a complex, real-world text and locating structures of psychological interest. The original mythic framework was modified in three ways: the guilt stage was added; several substages were needed to describe the pollution stage; and the narrative boundaries were clearly blurred.
2. Divergent interpretations were encouraged for most of the text,

especially in the guilt stage. Towards the end a preferred reading emerged to guide viewers to a conventional understanding.

3. Thematic analysis revealed repeated references to viewers' cultural and mythic knowledge (e.g. 'tart', 'beauty and the beast', 'the permissive society'). The text rarely filled in the details, but instead provides an organised set of cues to conventional knowledge. The role of the viewer in the completion of meaning demands that viewers continually revisit, and thereby reinforce, conventional knowledge.

Barthes (1981) argues that narratives are constructed of a series of choice points, with a paradigm of alternative possibilities at each point. Narrative tension rises during pollution, guilt, and purification, and reduces during redemption. At a lower level of abstraction, Barthes argues that tension occurs at each choice point. For example, in scene 25 (see also Billy's interruption in 33), when Deidre interrupts Ken and Sally in the office, two possibilities exist: will things look innocent, or will they be caught in incriminating circumstances? Conversely, when Ken and Sally do kiss (scene 37), the same possibilities are raised: will they be interrupted or not? As the narrative hinges on secrecy, interruption and interruptability are key tension points. The text contains only one possibility at each point and viewers' knowledge of both possibilities is required to create the perception of choice.

4. The analysis showed how thematic oppositions structure a text, give connotative meaning to the narrative actions, and explore the major concerns perceived in soap opera, namely gender, morality, and power. The employer:employee opposition is related to social class,

which viewers neglect as a descriptor of characters. Its role here is only in the initial stage. Rationality here relates to adult understanding, rather than intelligence and supports the role of maturity in the character representations. Most of the narrative involves the dimensions of the character representation (Chapter 5), gender, morality (approval), and sexuality. The narrative did not uniquely align individual characters with particular poles of an opposition: the characters move around as different connotations are explored.

The character representation of Study II in Chapter 5 showed that viewers represent Ken as very moral, fairly mature, and not very masculine, and asexual. Deidre was seen as fairly moral, mature, feminine, and sexy. Billy was seen as immoral, immature, masculine, and fairly sexy, while Sally is fairly immoral, neutral on maturity and gender, but very sexy.

Table 8.2 is fairly descriptive, representing characters' sex and occupation. It is thus continually correct, but not always relevant. Table 8.3 fits closely with the viewers' representation, except for Deidre's sexiness, and describes the situation once sexuality is introduced. It contains the seeds of discontent. Table 8.5 is clearly untenable, as Ken, Billy, and Deidre are all wrongly classified by sexuality. Thus the midpoint of the narrative represents a temporary position at variance with characters' usual nature, and creates narrative tension. Table 8.6 represents a partial resolution, reasonably reducing Billy to an immature position. Viewers will agree with this, and Billy can drop out of the picture. But Deidre is still less mature than Sally. The final arrangement, Table 8.7, reverses this problematic classification by

assigning the maturity or rationality pole to Deidre rather than Sally. Thus, equilibrium is re-established by bringing rationality/maturity to the foreground and lessening the salience of sexuality. While both Tables 8.2 and 8.6 were reasonably matched with viewers' representations of the characters, Table 8.3 is unstable because it involves negative assessments of a central, supposedly happily married couple. Table 8.7, on the other hand, reaffirms the superiority of this couple.

5. Many of the structures identified are not immediately apparent, and it is easy to read the text as obvious, unmotivated, and trivial. It is hoped that the analysis of a real world, complex text begins to show how psychological concepts of schema, cultural knowledge, and expectancy mesh with textual concepts of opposition, narrative structure, and openness/closure.

8.6. Summary

This chapter is based on an increasing compatibility between social psychological and semiotic approaches to television viewing. The area of overlap lies largely in the greater interpretative activity attributed to the viewer by both approaches. Following Silverstone (1981), the semiotic or cultural studies approach to texts has been analytically divided into two aspects, the chronologic and the thematic. When applied in practice to a soap opera narrative, some of the problems with chronologic analyses became apparent. More importantly, the analysis revealed some of the ways in which textual openness is achieved and in which the text relies on viewers' cultural knowledge. Both social psychology and semiotics are concerned with the way in which stereotypes draw upon

culturally familiar resources of myth and rhetoric. The analysis shows how stereotypes, together with other social representations, are integrated into the television text and invited as interpretative resources when viewing. Psychology can be criticised for its simplistic and concrete conception of the text. Semiotics is vulnerable in its assumptions about but ignorance of the psychology of the viewer. This analysis suggests that both can benefit from mutual convergence: a semiotic approach reveals the latent yet insistent ways in which psychological phenomena are implicated in programme structure.

Table 8.8: Scene sequence in CORONATION STREET narrative

No.	Loc.	Chars.	Events	Date
01	St	BSE	E notes number plates. S & B chat about E & flirt.	170912
02	RR	BSKD+	Gossip. As a bet, B asks S out. S agrees. K stares.	170914
03	RRb	BBt	B dresses. Bt tells him S has come for their date.	170923
04	RR	BSKDM	Gossip. M chats up S. K stares as S leaves with B.	170925
05	RR	BS	B & S return late, drunk, & go upstairs together.	170928
06	RRb	HBS	H shocked to see S with B in the morning.	190911
07	RR	HBBt	H disapproves of casual sex. Feels she's missed out.	190914
08	GS	KDHA+	H tells of B & S's affair & notes K's reaction.	190916
09	RR	BKD+	B serves K & S. K is sullen towards B.	190921
10	RR	BSKD+	Gossip. S friendly to K. D uneasy. S & B discuss K.	190923
11	GS	MD	M talks of B+S+K to D. M teases D about being edgy.	190927
12	B	KD	D talks of B+S. K feels paternal. D wonders.	240914
13	RR	BSBt+	B & S chat. Bt talks of 'older man'. Gossip.	240917
14	RR	BSKA+	K & A talk of B+S. B & S flirt. Gossip.	240926
15	RR	BSBt	Bt leaves S with B while she goes to a wedding.	240926
16	O	SK	K ticks S off. S enthuses about B. K is negative.	011012
17	RR	BSHBt	B looks haggard. Bt says S too young for B.	011013
18	RR	BBt	B & Bt chat about S. Bt says B must be attractive.	011023
19	RR	BS+	S is cheerful, calls for B for their date.	011023
20	RR	SKD	K not listening to D. K tells S she is being cheap.	011026
21	O	SK	K annoyed that S sleeps with B, she's worth more.	031013
22	RR	BK	K tells B he sees more of S than K does.	031017
23	RR	KD	D wants holiday. K, reluctant, uses work as excuse.	031017
24	O	SK	B phones S about holiday. K says he cares for S.	031023
25	O	SKD	D & S tell K he needs a holiday, he works too hard.	031027
26	St	BSK	B & S discuss their holiday. K is cool, the boss.	081011
27	O	SK	K accuses S of sexual immorality.	081015
28	O	SK	K & S discuss feelings, an affair, & go to lunch.	081021
29	RR	DBt	D tells Bt that K has stood her up. D is fed up.	081023
30	RR	SKD	K lies to D about lunch with S, 'he was working'.	081026
31	St	KH	H wishes K happy birthday, K suprised but pleased.	101012
32	RR	HB	H & B talk of B's plans for country weekend.	101013
33	O	BSK	S gives K birthday card. B enters, reads message.	101014
34	GS	DA	D tells A she wants to cancel holiday because of K.	101015
35	GS	DA	A tells D that K needs a break, as he works so hard.	101015
36	GS	KD	D asks K why he is against holiday. K says nothing.	101018
37	O	SK	K & S embrace & kiss. They agree it can't continue.	101023
38	GS	DBA	B tells D to warn K about S. D goes home to pack.	101024
39	RR	BSKD	S refuses holiday with B. D is depressed.	101027
40			K & D go on holiday.	1510--
41			B pleads with S, he is serious about her.	1510--
42	RR	SBt	S tells Bt that B won't take no for an answer.	15102-
43	RR	BBt	B tells Bt his views on K+S.	17101-
44	RRb	BS	B tells S he is serious about her. Blames K.	17102-
45	RR	BBt	B says his affair is over, blames K. Bt disagrees.	221011
46	O	SK	K returns from holiday. K & S work politely.	221013
47	RR	BBtBy	By chats to B about K+D, ignorant of B's suspicions.	221015

Table 8.8 (Contd.)

No.	Loc.	Chars.	Events	Date
48	RR	MBtB	M teases B about S. Bt warns him, but M ignores her.	221015
49	GS	BD	B tells D that he is finished with S, & blames K.	221017
50	O	SK	S ends politeness. S & K discuss the situation.	221022
51	St	DBt	D asks about B's hints. Bt says ignore B - pride.	221024
52	RR	MBBt	M teases B. B suspicious of K. M, shocked, is quiet.	221025
53	St	EDK	D asks K if problem. K says no. D tells K of gossip.	221026
54	GS	DM	D asks M if he believes B. M thinks B is jealous.	241012
55	O	SK	K & S discuss B's story, as D believes in affair.	241013
56	GS	KD	D challenges K, mentions M. K angry at M's name.	241015
57	St	KM	K insults M. M accuses K of damaging K's marriage.	241018
58	RR	BD	D begs B to stop rumours. B agrees for D's sake.	241022
59	O	SK	S angry that she will suffer, as marriage-breaker.	241024
60	O	KD	D asks if K's affair is due to her affair with M.	241026
61	B	KD	D disbelieves K's denials. K says ask S for truth.	291013
62	O	SK	K thinks it will blow over. S criticises K angrily.	291015
63	B	SD	S arrives at Barlow's. D lets her in, suprised.	291015
64	B	SD	D is hostile. S admits she & K kissed. D is angry.	291021
65	O	SK	S tells K of visit to D. S accuses K of lying to D.	291025
66	B	KD	D accuses K. K calls D beautiful, he loves her.	011112
67	O	SK	S gives notice. K says D will calm down, S can stay.	011116
68	B	KD	D apologises. K forgives. S's offer upsets D.	011126

Locations: RR(Rovers Return public house), RRb(back room of RR), GS(Alf Roberts' grocery shop), O(K Barlow's newspaper office), B(K & D Barlow's front room), St(outside on Coronation Street).

Characters: K(K Barlow), D(D Barlow), S(S Waterman), B(B Walker), H(Hilda Ogden), M(Mike Baldwin), Bt(Bet Lynch), By(Betty Turpin), A(Alf Roberts), E(Emily Bishop).

Date: day,month, part 1 or 2, scene number.

No.: edited scene number on composite video tape.

CHAPTER NINE

DIVERGENT INTERPRETATIONS OF TELEVISION DRAMA

9.1. Text structure, characterisation and methodology

Viewing can no longer be seen as the passive uptake of and response to a manifest and discrete message (Katz, 1980). Much television programming, especially soap opera, is designed to engage and involve the viewer. The more open and diverse programmes are, the better they may implicate the viewers in the construction of meaning and thus enhance their interest both cognitively and emotionally. "We begin with the observation, based on careful textual analysis, that television is dense, rich, and complex, rather than impoverished" (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1984, p.71). The question then becomes, how is this complexity understood by viewers?

With a more complex notion of both programmes and viewers, the need for a way of studying viewers' interpretations becomes more pressing. Fejes (1984) discusses how critical mass communications research has frequently neglected to study the audience at all, and Radway (1985) shows how current theorizing about texts and viewer has now foregrounded the viewer: "these theorists [from reader-response theory and reception aesthetics] sought ways to reassert the essential dependency of meaning upon the interaction between the reader and the text" (p.339).

If the viewer is cognitively involved and the programme is sufficiently open, allowing multiple interpretations, leaving sufficient ambiguity, and so forth (Eco, 1979), then we need to investigate not only the nature of viewers' interpretations, but

also the extent to which these interpretations diverge from each other. Lang and Lang (1985) argue that interpretive divergence should not be regarded simply as 'communication failures', as has typically occurred in the past, for "as long as the meanings read into the content are defined as real, they are for this group real in their consequences. They become part of the culturally enshrined symbolic environment" (p.57). We must assume neither complete consensus nor complete divergence in interpretations, but instead begin to investigate the areas of consensus and divergence.

The research conducted thus far in the thesis has focussed on people's interpretations of television characters and has generally found consensus in interpretations. Viewers of programmes involving well known characters have been found to represent the characters according to similar themes and they perceive similar relations between the characters. However, the issue of consensus should be pursued because recent empirical research within cultural studies reveals a significant and interesting degree of divergence in interpretation of the same characters or events in soap opera (Ang, 1985; Hobson, 1982; Katz & Leibes, 1985; Morley, 1980). Such findings support interactive models of communication in which the reader/viewer has an active role to play in the construction of meaning. Research showing interpretative divergence seems to contradict the findings in this thesis of consensus among viewers.

There are three issues which may resolve this contradiction. These concern differences between the present and the cultural studies research in terms of methodology, in levels of textual meaning studied, and in definitions of viewer groupings. The recent empirical work on viewers' interpretations uses a different, namely

qualitative, methodological approach from that of the research conducted here. Although their findings are often highly suggestive, one is left with doubts concerning the representativeness of the illustrations provided and the reliability of the findings. Nonetheless, qualitative methods have notable advantages in terms of sensitivity, richness, and complexity. Further research should now be seeking to examine divergence in interpretations more systematically and with a greater variety of methods for convergent validity.

Alternatively, it may be that while consensus exists in relatively abstract meanings, divergence may be found at a more concrete level. The multidimensional scaling studies presented in this thesis index fairly general and abstract representations of characters. These representations are a summary of general programme themes, as the viewers perceive them, and provide a resource for the interpretation of particular narratives. Yet, viewers' character representations need not completely determine the interpretation of particular narratives, as at this more specific and concrete level of interpretation, many other factors (e.g. the particular interests or preferences of the viewers and the specific details and history of the narrative) may operate. Thus divergence in interpretation may still exist at this lower level of analysis. This possibility will be explored in the first, pilot, study.

The third possible resolution of the contradiction between divergence and consensus in findings is that divergence in interpretation does exist, but not as a function of viewers' age or sex, as examined in the multidimensional scaling studies. In the second study, viewers' interpretations of a narrative will be

studied in some detail by dividing viewers according to their interpretations, rather than their demographic background. Any correlates of divergence, whether sociological or psychological, will be investigated independently after natural interpretative groupings of viewers, if any, have been discovered. The relatively low stress or error in the multidimensional scaling spaces obtained earlier suggests little divergence among viewers. But if this chapter reveals divergence in the instantiation of consensual, abstract character knowledge in relation to specific narratives, then determinants of divergence at this more specific level of narrative analysis may be further investigated.

9.2. Study I: An open-ended study of narrative interpretation

9.2.1. Introduction

In order first to gain some initial idea of the nature and extent of divergence in specific interpretations of character and narrative among viewers, a preliminary and open-ended investigation was conducted. Do viewers spontaneously diverge in their interpretations when specific narratives are examined in detail? If so, what types of divergence are exhibited and which aspects of the characters and narratives do they concern? Very little is known of these issues to date. This study is intended as an initial approach to the problem in order to gain some idea of the nature and range of interpretative divergence. Its aim is to construct an initial taxonomy of types of divergence.

This study should link the character representations to the qualitative research of cultural studies on the viewer by investigating, in addition to the divergence question, the role of

these representations in interpreting specific narratives. In relation to divergence, this study takes a social psychological approach, drawing in particular on the early work of Bartlett (1932) and his more recent followers (Mandler, 1984) on the ways in which memory distortions systematically create divergences among subjects. More generally, the role of the reader/viewer can be approached by identifying whether and when social knowledge in addition to character knowledge is used to make sense of the text presented.

9.2.2. Method

9.2.2.1. Subjects

The subjects were twenty seven women of a range of ages and occupations (no students) who were all regular viewers of Coronation Street. They watched, on average, 5.66 episodes out of every 8 transmitted, and have watched the programme for a mean of 11.46 years.

9.2.2.2. The recall task

The viewers were asked to recall four narratives involving the popular and central character, Rita Fairclough. No restrictions were placed on which narratives they recalled: they were simply asked to recall any narratives which they had seen at any time in the programme's history. They were each provided with sufficient blank paper and no time limit and asked to describe freely the narratives as they remembered them, including in their accounts details of what happened, how Rita and other characters reacted or felt, and what the events might reveal about Rita's character. These instructions were given to encourage viewers to reveal their own inferences and judgments and to discourage a bland, denotative or behavioural description.

9.2.3. Results

A wide range of narratives were recalled, ranging over many years, although the majority concentrated on the character's recent history. The accounts were first sorted by the narrative recalled, and then compared to see how the same narrative was recalled by different viewers. Were they consensual in their descriptions and what degree and types of divergence occurred? The results reveal something of viewers' spontaneous experience of the programme, as the memories which they recalled are presumably the most readily available and salient to them when viewing the programme and interpreting new narratives. The discussion that follows should be regarded as illustrative of the kinds of points which might be pursued in further, more systematic research.

All the accounts provided by viewers were read closely by the researcher. The following discussion results from a detailed consideration of all accounts, and those presented for illustration were selected for their representativeness of a particular point. The material is organised around categories of divergence in interpretation and these categories represent abstractions formulated on reading all the accounts and attempting to summarise main themes or trends observed within the data. In the illustrations to follow, each account is reported in full (numbers indicate the viewer, letters indicate the account recalled by that viewer).

9.2.4. Discussion

9.2.4.1. General Observations

Much attention focussed on Rita's friendship with Mavis Riley, her co-worker in the local newsagents which Rita owns and runs. As

was shown in Chapter 5, both of these women are popular, middle-aged women who are less working class than most other characters. From the multidimensional scaling space (Figures 5.3 and 5.4), one can see that viewers represent Rita and Mavis as quite different in personality on the dimensions of sociability (dimension 2), morality (dimension 1), power (dimension 1), and approach to life (dimension 3). Thus Rita is seen as more dominant, modern, and sociable than Mavis, who is in turn seen as more moral, traditional, and staid. They are fairly equivalent in femininity.

This general characterisation of the characters' personalities and, more important, of the differences between their personalities, translates neatly into the themes of the narratives in which Rita and Mavis are typically involved. Narratives which centre on their relationship often concern Rita's teasing dominance or bossiness conflicting either harmoniously or more acrimoniously with Mavis' old-fashioned and rather silly weakness and shyness. Narratives thus concern the areas of personality conflict or contrast rather than those of consonance, such as their femininity or warmth.

As will be seen from the illustrations of interpretative divergence to follow, most viewers concur on these general assessments of the characters. The dominance of Rita, for example, or the traditional morality of Mavis may be thus seen as consensual social facts. Divergence then lies in what viewers 'do' with these facts, i.e. how they divergently apply this consensual and abstract knowledge to specific narratives. For example, is Rita's dominance a positive or negative attribute, or how central to Mavis' personality is her old-fashioned outlook and what are its consequences for her actions? However, narratives contain more than

character portraits and divergence can also lie in the interpretation of additional aspects of the events portrayed, as will become clear.

9.2.4.2. Divergence in character evaluation and narrative focus

Seven viewers described the teasing relationship between Rita and Mavis, which appears to generate much narrative tension. Their foci were different, and these differences reveal underlying differences in evaluation and assessment of the two characters. They may also indicate divergent tendencies to represent different aspects of the same narrative, namely behaviours, personality, context.

Thus, 21B is straightforwardly critical of Rita as a domineering person. She hints that Rita may not acknowledge Mavis' contribution.

21B She runs the shop successfully with Mavis' help. She's domineering over Mavis.

Another viewer, 17A is also critical of Rita as someone who causes trouble for Mavis and fails to help where she might. This account focusses more on actual events and makes no inference about the characters' personalities.

17A I think Rita gives Mavis a lot of trouble in the shop, Especially when she was involved with the Musician (?). When she was not well & she got caught with the man pulling his trousers up, Rita could have helped in that situation but didn't.

In contrast, 15B focusses on personality traits. She also diverges from 21B and 17A in being highly positive about Rita, perceiving her use of her power and strength to do good and help the weaker and rather irritating Mavis.

15B Employing and befriending Mavis Riley shows that Rita is a fairly warm & sensitive person with a fair amount of patience. Mavis would perhaps not be the ideal choice in many employer's eyes !

Account 10B also reflects a positive view of Rita, emphasising more her aims in trying to change Mavis, rather than merely tolerating or compensating for Mavis' failings.

- 10B Teasing Mavis over her friendship with the potter (name not remembered) who displayed an artistic nature + eventually moved to Yorkshire. Rita's friendliness and warmth to her friends was apparent in her teasing of Mavis, but it also highlighted her more independent streak - pushing Mavis on - to do things she usually wouldn't have considered - Supportive nature.

Account 02B is similar to that of 10B: in both the 'giving trouble' of 17A is seen more innocently as 'teasing'. Rita is seen here more trivially - a light-hearted, rather insensitive person unlike the deeper, warmer view of 10B.

- 02B Constant joking with Mavis in shop, teases her about going off with men and not doing her driving - drives Mavis mad tho' Rita only does this for fun. Sometimes appears to go too far and seems a little cruel, tho' it is obvious that she means no harm and only wishes to bring Mavis out of her shell a little. She is quick-witted - gives lively answers and has a good sense of humour - tho' sometimes sarcastic.

In 09D, the viewer sides with Mavis rather than Rita, though Rita is still seen positively. This viewer seems to be identifying with the victim in this relationship. In contrast, 07D sees things from Rita's perspective. Account 07D is also the most complex, assessing Rita's motives, needs, and personality, and placing these in the context of her life events.

- 09D Mavis Riley, comes up against a lot of Rita's leg pulling, she teases Mavis so much about the men folk, (she has so much fun in her) and I feel that sometimes she takes it too far as Mavis gets very embarrassed about it all.

- 07D After the initial shock of her husband's death etc had passed, and she got over an emotional torment of remembering, she slowly slipped back into the Rita we all know and love, teasing Mavis and sending her up all the time, trying to succeed in getting her to take driving lessons and do something 'positive' in her life, making use again of the driving instructor being a 'fella' for her to try to throw her onto again. She seems to thrive on having someone to have control over in some way, exercising her authority but staying sensitive to their feelings when danger is in sight.

9.2.4.3. Divergence in evaluation of a personality trait

Eleven viewers recalled one specific event in the relationship between Rita and Mavis which together illustrate a further set of points. This narrative concerned Rita's attempts to get Mavis to learn to drive.

Account 23D provides the straightforwardly positive viewpoint, while 26B is clearly negative. Both viewers acknowledge Rita's dominance over the situation, but they make radically different assessments of Rita's use of her power.

- 23D Her decision to get Mavis Riley to drive a car was forthright and appeared natural and easy. Even when things went wrong Rita gave confidence to Mavis holding her up until she eventually saw the fruits of her endeavours when Mavis passed her test.
- 26B She finds great delight in putting Mavis Riley in difficult situations making Mavis take driving lessons against her will. She seems to become stronger talking down to and taking "the mickey" out of her.

Interestingly, only one other viewer of the eleven who remembered this narrative agreed with 26B, namely 03C.

9.2.4.4. Divergence in interpreting a single event

A comparison between 03C and 16A illustrates the diverse interpretations which can be placed on a single action (decorating the flat).

- 03C Rita badgered Mavis into learning to drive, she was devious about it by the way she had Mavis's flat decorated in exchange.
- 16A She persuaded Mavis to have driving lessons and told her that she would pay for them, and have her flat painted & decorated for her. This shows she can be very kind and generous.

9.2.4.5. The balance between consensus and divergence

The consensus among the other viewers in favour of Rita's kindness suggests limits to divergence, so that one should not expect all viewers to represent narratives wholly differently.

9.2.4.6. Complexity of interpretation and social rhetoric

Within this overall evaluative consensus, however, certain viewers offered a more complex viewpoint: 25B resolves the apparent contradiction between 23D and 26B, the positive and negative views of Rita by subordinating the negative actions to the status of a means to achieve a positive aim. In this resolution, she draws upon a general social rhetoric, the cliché that one has to be cruel to be kind, with an awareness that she was doing this as indicated by her use of quotation marks. Thus the narrative is interpreted by using a cultural framework for resolving apparent contradictions.

25B Teaching Mavis to drive.

Rita showed great determination in forcing Mavis to learn to drive mostly against her will. Even though she did force Mavis, Rita knew and understood that she had "to be cruel to be kind" to Mavis in order that she would drive.

In different ways, 15C and 04B both also complicate the simple view of Rita's altruism: 04B notes the value to Rita of her partner being able to drive, while 15C hints at a deeper psychological bond between them that benefits Rita by compensating for her lack of children. Here too, social rhetoric serves as an explanatory resource for the interpretation of particular events, allowing the viewer to go beyond the information given.

04B She encouraged Mavis to take her driving test and lent her the car and paid for the driving lessons. This was to help herself out by enabling Mavis to go to the wholesalers but also to try and get Mavis out and to give her more confidence.

15C Rita's encouraging Mavis Riley to take driving lessons and financing them could be taken as a genuine reflection of her caring for Mavis (could almost be child substitution !), and wanting her to perhaps get more out of life and become a little more independent.

9.2.4.7. Divergence due to inaccurate comprehension or recall

The other narratives which viewers recalled can be used to raise different issues about divergence in viewers' interpretations

of narrative. For example, some viewers may misunderstand what happened or misremember an event. This issue concerns the false recall of closed aspects of the text, those aspects which are sufficiently unambiguous for recall to even be assessed in terms of accuracy. Any inaccuracy is, as predicted by schema theory, integrated meaningfully into the account. For example, twelve viewers described the events following the death of Rita's husband, Len, in which it emerged that he had been having an affair at the time of his death. Most viewers recalled Rita's determination to discover who the 'other' woman was and to meet her. Two viewers recalled wrongly that the woman sought out Rita, rather than the other way around. Compare 19A and 05B:

- 19A Rita Fairclough found out her husband was having an affair, he was going to meet his friend on the night he died in a car crash, he had, had this liaison for quite a long time, and Rita was terribly upset. After Len died his friend came to see Rita and Rita felt so sorry for her, she couldn't bring herself to say what she felt, because this friend had no friends or family after her husband had died. Rita was a very kind and loyal person, who expects others to be like herself.
- 05B When Rita found her husband had been unfaithful, even though he was killed in an accident, she found out who the woman was and went to see her. After her initial anger at the woman she could understand how it happened.

Yet all agreed on the gist of the narrative, as story grammar researchers predict (Mandler, 1984), namely that Rita discovered the affair, met with the other woman, came to understand her, and thus came to terms with her own loss.

9.2.4.8. Divergence in degree of critical distance

Regarding Len's death, many viewers were very involved and moved, as it was an emotionally sensitive series of episodes. Most viewers entered the drama in their descriptions, exhibiting Liebes and Katz (1986) referential mode of viewing. For example, 15A talks

of Rita as a person, as she might of someone that she knows.

- 15A Rita's reaction to the death of her husband Len was very sensitive & very real, showing that she is an emotional person which was not always apparent in other situations. She was probably quite emotionally dependent on Len, although having a fairly strong character this again was not always evident.

Compare this with 09A, in which the viewer appeared to stand back and admire, assessing the quality of the events as fictional construction. This viewer exhibits the critical mode of viewing, but most viewers, nonetheless, recalled events within the referential mode.

- 09A At the time of her husband's sudden death Rita Fairclough, played the part of a tragic widow with feeling and dignity. She was able to show what a good actress she is

9.2.4.9. Divergence in inferences made

The events in which Rita rented Len's building yard after his death to Bill Webster also illustrate the treatment of misremembered or misunderstood information. Did Rita rent the yard to Bill, or did she sell it to him? This apparently minor point was given particular significance by 11A, who interpreted the 'fact' that she has rented the yard as evidence of Rita's kindness.

- 11A After her husband died she let (as a loan) his workshop to a chap who hadn't enough money to buy it, so as to give him an opportunity to make good, rather than sell it outright & be sure of the money.

On the other hand, 13C interpreted the 'fact' that she sold the yard as evidence of her braveness and strength of character in making a fresh start for herself.

- 13C I like the way she has made a new life for herself after Len's death, like making the decision to sell the wood yard and business to another man and lending him the money to start his own business off with.

9.2.4.10. Divergence in the attribution of motivation

In some cases, viewers agree on the events which occurred, but

disagree on the motivations which they attribute to the actors. Both 18C and 14B noted Rita's decision and actions surrounding their fostering of Sharon, but 18C saw her actions as self-motivated, and therefore saw her discussions with Len as persuasion, while 14B saw her actions as generously motivated to help Len, so that no discussions were seen as important.

- 18C Won Len over when she wanted to foster children and grew very fond of girl they had, although she was very independent herself.
- 14B When Rita knew a child would add to Len's happiness, she took in a young teenage lodger, who became a great favourite of them both, and ended up working for Len in the work-shop. They were both very upset, when the time came for her to leave them.

9.2.4.11. Divergence due to different degrees of involvement

Most viewers, however, saw the fostering as something which Rita wished for herself, although Len was seen as happy with the arrangement, if he was mentioned at all. The account given by 07B provides another testament to viewers' involvement with the events and characters, to their reference to general social knowledge in interpreting events (women's need for children), to their willingness to fill out the events with their own inferences, and to their belief that the characters grow and change as do real people, unlike cardboard or stereotyped fictions.

- 07B Her love for children came out again when a girl from a problem home was put in her and Len's care when they applied for adoption. It's understandable her maternal feeling for a baby to cuddle were there, but age was her greatest handicap which hurt her. This lady showed deep change at this stage compared to when she first appeared. I feel it helped the relationship with her husband too because he too loved Sharon and they both helped to teach an unruly girl what love was and that they trusted her even if nobody else did.

9.2.5. Summary

In summary, this study on viewers' interpretations of narratives which they viewed under natural conditions illustrates

the following points:

- (1) The interpretation of character and of narrative is inextricably related, for viewers use their knowledge of characters to create coherent and consistent meanings for the events they perceive.
- (2) Viewers diverge in their interpretations in a variety of ways: (a) evaluation of a character as generally positive or negative; (b) narrative focus in the account given (e.g. personality, behaviours); (c) complexity of the interpretation; (d) character whose perspective is taken in observing events.
- (3) There is rather more consensus than divergence in interpretation across viewers: consensus is revealed in assessments of the characters' personalities (as in the character representations) and in majority endorsement of certain interpretations over others.
- (4) Viewers are willing to draw their own inferences about the significance of events observed. These inferences concerning motivations, feelings, or intentions serve to fill out the interpretations. Often they draw upon more general mythic or culturally consensual knowledge frames concerning, for instance, rhetoric about maternal feelings, the nature of relationships, or ways of helping or influencing others.
- (5) Viewers may misremember certain aspects of a narrative, but all interpretations are nonetheless made coherent and contain the gist of the events which occurred.
- (6) Narratives are interpreted as involving conflict between characters along the themes found to be salient discriminators of those characters in earlier studies of character representation.

9.3. Study II: A quantitative study of narrative interpretation

9.3.1. Introduction

This study presents the beginnings of an empirical methodology which attempts to be both open and systematic in order to discover the nature of viewers' interpretations of television drama: if useful, it could be used in the future to study relationships between viewers and texts. In order to study interpretations which were fresh in viewers' minds and viewed under natural circumstances, a narrative was used which was current on national television at the time of the study. In contrast to or to complement the previous study and in response to the arguments of Chapter 1 concerning the convergence of traditional and critical approaches to mass communications, a quantitative approach is adopted here.

A main concern of this study is to investigate the social and psychological differences between viewers who make divergent readings of a text. Some research has found both individual and group differences in programme interpretation. Chapko and Lewis (1975) showed that high and low authoritarian viewers differently perceive and evaluate the character of Archie Bunker, the right-wing comic star of All in the Family. Morley (1980) showed that viewers make various different interpretations relative to the normative outlook of the B.B.C. because of their political beliefs, position in the labour market, or demographic status.

Newcomb and Hirsch (1984) have recommended that research should seek out social groups with very different social representations and identities and investigate the extent of their divergent interpretations. They claim that "special interest groups that focus, at times, on television provide us with readily

available resources for the study of interpretive practices" (p.68-69). This will reveal the degree to which groups may negotiate meanings and thereby mitigate against the power of television to impose its own meanings.

There are several problems with this proposal. First, it is not always easy to find appropriate social groups. Secondly, such research moves us away from studying the norm and more towards studying extreme or unusual groups. From a psychological viewpoint, this also appears a mainly sociological enterprise, discovering interpretive differences between established socio-structural groups (Newcomb & Hirsch term it 'the sociology of interpretation'). The assumption that sociological factors are sufficient determinants of interpretation implies a powerless position for the individual and that psychological factors are unimportant.

What psychological factors could affect interpretive divergence? One might expect (Eisenstock, 1984; Jose & Brewer, 1984; Noble, 1975; Potkay & Potkay, 1984) that viewers could fall into different interpretive groups according to any of a variety of factors. Potkay and Potkay (1984) provide evidence that viewers identify with a particular cartoon character according to their own perceived similarity to that character, and further that this identification is independent of character evaluation. Noble (1975) has suggested that viewers need not identify with a character in order to take their perspective when interpreting the narrative, drawing upon the concepts of 'para-social interaction' (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and recognition.

Alternatively, it may be that, despite Potkay and Potkay (1984), character evaluation does play a role in which viewers take

the perspective of liked characters against disliked characters. Regular viewers of soap opera become more involved with the characters than one might expect for cartoons. Positive evaluation of a character with whom one has identified with may become important for self-esteem reasons. Thus at least three psychological factors, namely identification, recognition, and evaluation, which serve to relate particular viewers to particular characters, may determine divergence in interpretations of a multi-character narrative. If the same events are viewed from different perspectives, with different evaluative stances and with different concerns, different interpretations of the same narrative must surely result.

This study will investigate both the nature of any divergence and some psychological and sociological correlates of divergence. As an operationalization of the latter correlates, demographic information in the form of age and sex (both particularly salient group identities in relation to the narrative selected) will be examined.

Following Eco (1979) and Fry & Fry (1986), and the previous study, it was assumed that viewers would not diverge at the level of denotation - who did what to whom - or in terms of stable personality traits, but may diverge at the connotative level of meaning: evaluations, attributions of intent, or motivation, moral judgments and future predictions. Following Hall (1980) and Morley (1980), it was predicted that groups of viewers could be classified into dominant/normative, oppositional, and negotiated interpretive positions, and further that most viewers would adopt the dominant reading.

The narrative (from Coronation Street) selected for the study concerned a father opposing the marriage of his daughter to an older man on the grounds of the fiance's previous adultery with the father's new wife. The marriage goes ahead (see method section). At least two readings were potentially available: put simply, either love triumphs over prejudice, or naivety triumphs over wisdom. The themes of the narrative, however interpreted, reflect a mythic or romantic morality, supporting the idea that soap opera functions for viewers as contemporary mythology. The themes are carried by the central characters, so that the young daughter represents love/naivety and the father represents prejudice/wisdom. The father's current wife represents an intermediate or negotiated position, trying not to take sides and to help both father and daughter.

Although not pursued here, it should be noted that if the same narrative cues two quite different interpretations, then the effects of viewing should also be different, by increasing either romantic/optimistic or pragmatic/pessimistic thinking (via the dominant or the oppositional reading respectively). In the context of the cultivation paradigm, this would lead to low correlations, often found in the literature (Hawkins & Pingree, 1983) if only one interpretation was tested.

In summary, the present research has three aims: firstly, to discover and describe viewers' interpretations of a soap opera narrative; secondly, to develop a method for discovering these interpretations, using naturally viewed material; and thirdly, to test the following theoretical predictions. (a) Viewers should fall into three interpretative groups, romantic/optimistic,

pragmatic/pessimistic, and compromise/negotiated (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980). (b) Divergent groups should be discriminable by age and/or sex of the viewers (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1984). In particular, it is expected that younger viewers and female viewers would be more likely to adopt the romantic reading, supporting the young woman in the narrative, while older viewers and men might adopt the pessimistic reading, supporting the father's position in his conflict with his daughter. (c) Divergent groups should be discriminable by the psychological factors of identification, recognition and evaluation which influence the perspective a viewer adopts on interpreting the narrative. The present approach seeks first to discover natural divergences in interpretations and then to examine the correlates of the divergence, both sociological and psychological, rather than examining the divergences between groups of viewers constructed according to particular a priori interests.

9.3.2. Method

9.3.2.1. Subjects

The 66 subjects (42 female and 24 male) were obtained either through the Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel (n=35) or in response to a national advertisement for soap opera viewers in SOAP magazine. They were of a wide range of age and occupations. All were regular viewers of Coronation Street (average number of years viewing = 11.3, average frequency of viewing = 3 out of every 4 episodes). The average amount of the narrative selected for study which was actually viewed = 'most of it', and average amount remembered = 'most of it'. Only 2 viewers completed the questionnaire who remembered less than half of the story.

9.3.2.2. The narrative

Coronation Street has been transmitted continuously since 1960, during which time many characters have become firmly established and many emotional entanglements, the stuff of soap opera, have been played out (see Dyer, Geraghty, Jordan, Lovell, Paterson, & Stewart, 1981, for a theoretical treatment of the programme). The particular narrative studied here concerned three principal characters and one new character. In brief, Susan Barlow, the 21 year old daughter of Ken Barlow by his first marriage returns to the Street to live with her father and his new wife, Deidre Barlow. Susan begins a romance with Mike Baldwin, a local factory owner some 20 years older than her. Two problems from the past complicate matters: Ken's guilt at neglecting Susan as a child, leaving her upbringing to his ex-wife; and Deidre's adulterous affair with Mike a few years before, for which Ken can never forgive either of them. Susan and Mike pursue their affair while Ken refuses to accept it. The matter comes to a head when Susan announces her decision to marry Mike, and Ken refuses to attend the wedding. Deidre tries to support both Ken and Susan, feeling very guilty all the time. Ken and Mike come to blows, and the whole Street become variously involved. On the morning of the wedding, Susan's brother persuades Ken to attend, thereby atoning for his neglect of her childhood. He relents and gives away the bride. The story ends as the couple go on their honeymoon, and since their return, there have been no further developments.

The unfolding of the narrative took place over several months (spring and summer 1986). The questionnaire was administered while the couple were absent on honeymoon, i.e. immediately after the climax of the story and while nothing further was happening. The

story was selected because it typifies the personal, emotional, and moral concerns of soap opera, it involves well-established characters, it was a typical but lengthy story, and it could clearly be 'read' in two distinct ways. Firstly, it can be seen as a traditional romance, with true love triumphing over adversity: Ken acts out his unreasonable and unforgiving prejudices and jealousies against the man chosen by his daughter. Alternatively, it can be seen as a failed attempt by wisdom and experience (the father) to rescue his naive and innocent daughter from the manipulative grasp of an older and immoral man.

9.3.2.3. The questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into 3 parts. The first part requested demographic and viewing information. The second part was concerned with potential psychological correlates of interpretive divergence. This contained 5 point scales for ratings of identification ('how much are you at all like X'), recognition ('Think of the people you know, such as your family and friends. Do you know anybody at all like X? Who?'), evaluation ('how much do you like X'), and perspective-taking ('do you sympathise with X's viewpoint') for each of the 4 main characters in the narrative (Mike, Deidre, Ken, and Susan). Perspective-taking is seen here as a mediator for identification, recognition, and evaluation, and is thus measured as a check that those factors which correlate with divergence are in fact consistent with the perspective taken upon events.

The third part contained 30 statements relating to various aspects of narrative interpretation. Viewers were asked to agree or disagree with each of these, using a 5 point rating scale. These 30

statements covered a variety of interpretive areas on many aspects of the narrative (see Table 9.1), for example: the authenticity of the couple's love, the future of the relationship, the rights and wrongs of characters' actions. the feelings of the principal characters. The questions were based on pilot testing in which 6 regular viewers had completed an open-ended questionnaire about their interpretations of the narrative. The questions selected encompassed those areas which appeared to index divergence, as well as being central to the narrative. As the empirical investigation of divergence is a relatively new venture, little theoretical justification can be given for the areas covered beyond their relation to connotative dimensions of the narrative. The questionnaire was administered by post to viewers who had previously agreed to participate, and the viewers from the subject panel were paid a nominal fee for their participation.

Table 9.1: Thirty statements concerning narrative interpretation

- 01 Susan was right to disappoint her father for Mike's sake.
- 02 Ken acted reasonably, doing what he thought best for Susan.
- 03 Susan's behavior throughout was mature.
- 04 Ken put his feelings for Mike before his feelings for Susan.
- 05 Until he met Susan, Mike had had no desire to marry and settle down.
- 06 When Ken finally gave Susan away, he still thought he had been right to oppose the marriage.
- 07 Susan and Mike's marriage will last.
- 08 Ken was right to oppose the marriage.
- 09 Deidre was more supportive of Ken than of Mike and Susan.
- 10 Susan sees Mike more as a father-figure than as a husband.
- 11 Ken's feelings for Susan stem more from his guilt about her childhood than from love.
- 12 Mike and Susan are not right for each other.
- 13 Deidre told Ken she would support Susan for Tracy's sake, but this was just an excuse to do what she wanted.
- 14 Mike's feeling for Susan stems partly from revenge, to get back at Deidre.
- 15 Susan's youth is important to Mike: he would not love her if she were older.
- 16 Susan does not truly love Mike, she only thinks she does.
- 17 The marriage will have problems because of the age difference.
- 18 Mike thinks Susan is a better person than she really is.
- 19 After the honeymoon, Susan will not work and will have a baby.
- 20 Susan and Mike can overcome any problems they encounter.
- 21 Susan determined to marry Mike to show Ken she is an adult.
- 22 Ken acted unreasonably: he was vindictive and possessive.
- 23 Deidre was jealous of Susan marrying Mike.
- 24 Until she met Mike, Susan had had no desire to marry and settle down.
- 25 Mike sees Susan more as a mistress than as a wife.
- 26 Mike's money and success are important to Susan: she would not love him without them.
- 27 The marriage will have problems because Mike won't like being tied down.
- 28 Susan thinks that Mike is a better person than he really is.
- 29 Mike does not truly love Susan, he only thinks he does.
- 30 Deidre's behavior was weak and she could not decide what to do or who to support.

9.3.3. Results

9.3.3.1. Cluster analysis of viewers

In order to discover the emergent groupings among the viewers corresponding to divergent interpretations of the narrative, the data on viewers' agreement with the 30 interpretation statements were entered into a cluster analysis in order to cluster the viewers. They were first converted into Euclidean distance proximity measures, which calculated the proximities between all pairs of viewers based on their agreement or disagreement on the thirty statements. These proximity data were then entered into the clustering algorithm. The DENSITY procedure of the CLUSTAN package was selected (Wishart, 1978) as the recommended method for discovering natural clusters in the proximities data. The method is based on finding 'dense' points or 'modes' in the data, in which subsets of objects, in this case viewers, are highly similar. The algorithm adds in each object one at a time, with each addition either forming a new dense point or becoming attached to a previous dense point. Having assigned all objects to a cluster, the analysis can be stopped, or continued in one of two ways. If a smaller number of clusters than dense points is required, one can continue the procedure by fusing or agglomerating close clusters to reduce the number of clusters in the solution. Alternatively, one can work with the number of clusters as formed, but check the allocation of objects to clusters against the original data, using the RELOCATE algorithm of the CLUSTAN package (Wishart, 1978). This checks the solution produced against the original agreements data by an iterative comparison and modification procedure.

The aim of the present analysis was to discover the natural

clusters of viewers in the data. As the number and size of these clusters was of theoretical interest, as well as the nature of the clusters, the density procedure was run to its first stage, and then checked using the relocate procedure. Four dense points were found in the data. After relocation, these four clusters were modified iteratively until a stable solution resulted. The resultant four clusters divided the 66 viewers between them by producing two fairly dominant clusters ($n=20$ and $n=25$) and two fairly small clusters ($n=9$ and $n=12$).

To check the stability of this solution further, the data were entered into a k-means clustering algorithm, by using the RELOCATE procedure with the random start option. In this procedure, the relocation of objects to clusters is started from the random allocation of objects to a large number of clusters (in this case, ten clusters). The procedure then alternately relocates objects and then fuses clusters, thereby successively reducing the number of clusters to two. A comparison of the two solutions, the random start and the density solution, provides an index of the stability of the solutions and is recommended as standard procedure (Wishart, 1978). The comparison between the density solution and the random start solution continued to the four cluster level revealed agreement of 65.2% in allocation of objects to clusters. This is a reasonable level of agreement. However, on examination of the solutions, most of the disagreement was due to one of the clusters in the random start solution. When this was fused with another cluster, producing a 3 cluster solution, this solution was 80.3% in agreement with the density solution. Consequently, the density solution was adopted for further analysis and was considered stable.

Considerable care was taken in the use of cluster analysis for the present data in order to produce a stable, non-hierarchical solution which best represents the natural clustering of viewers. As noted above, this was because the theoretical interest in these clusters of viewers lies in the number of clusters which are found, their relative sizes, and the nature of the cluster differences in relation to narrative interpretation.

9.3.3.2. Descriptive ANOVAs: interpretations by viewer cluster

The above analysis obtained a four-cluster grouping of viewers based on their responses to 30 statements concerning narrative interpretation. To understand the nature of the cluster differences, the four clusters will be compared on each of the 30 statements (Nie, 1983). Statistically, this involves descriptive rather than predictive or explanatory use of the analysis of variance (ANOVA), comparing between-cluster mean squares with within-cluster mean squares. For this 'internal' analysis, comparing clusters based on a set of statements with cluster differences on those same statements, "the F-ratios should be used to describe differences between the variable rather than to test significance: that is, the groups are obtained empirically" (BMDP statistical software, 1983, p.466). However, significance levels for F-ratios can provide a criterion for meaningful magnitude of statement differences between clusters. As there were no predictions made about which statements are most likely to discriminate the clusters, the 0.001 level of significance was used (i.e. 5% divided by 30 comparisons) so as not to capitalise on chance. The mean agreement with each statement for each cluster is shown in Table 9.2, and the results for each of the 30 one-way independent ANOVA's are shown in Table 9.3.

Table 9.2: Mean agreement with narrative statements by cluster

Statement Number		Clus.1 n=9	Clus.2 n=20	Clus.3 n=25	Clus.4 n=12
01	mean	3.67	4.40	3.88	2.75
	st.dev.	0.71	0.68	0.83	1.22
02	mean	3.33	1.90	2.20	4.50
	st.dev.	0.87	0.64	1.08	0.67
03	mean	3.67	3.50	2.84	2.92
	st.dev.	0.71	0.83	0.75	1.16
04	mean	3.78	4.65	4.44	3.58
	st.dev.	0.83	0.49	0.58	1.31
05	mean	2.22	3.00	2.52	3.58
	st.dev.	1.20	1.30	0.96	1.31
06	mean	4.33	4.15	4.32	4.75
	st.dev.	0.50	0.67	0.90	0.45
07	mean	2.89	3.25	2.88	1.75
	st.dev.	0.78	1.07	0.78	0.97
08	mean	3.22	1.90	2.12	4.83
	st.dev.	0.83	0.72	0.93	0.58
09	mean	2.78	2.45	2.84	3.17
	st.dev.	1.20	0.76	0.99	0.92
10	mean	2.11	2.15	3.40	3.67
	st.dev.	0.93	1.04	0.87	0.98
11	mean	3.22	3.15	3.36	3.25
	st.dev.	1.20	1.09	0.76	1.22
12	mean	2.78	2.00	2.84	4.00
	st.dev.	0.67	0.56	0.85	1.13
13	mean	2.89	2.80	3.08	3.17
	st.dev.	1.05	1.15	1.00	1.03
14	mean	1.56	1.50	2.28	2.33
	st.dev.	0.73	0.61	1.14	1.15
15	mean	1.89	2.15	2.72	3.00
	st.dev.	0.78	0.88	0.94	1.28
16	mean	2.33	1.65	2.88	3.25
	st.dev.	0.87	0.59	0.93	0.97
17	mean	2.44	2.40	3.16	3.75
	st.dev.	1.13	1.05	0.90	0.97
18	mean	2.22	2.00	3.04	3.58
	st.dev.	0.67	0.73	0.73	1.00
19	mean	2.89	2.55	3.28	2.42
	st.dev.	0.60	1.19	1.02	1.16
20	mean	3.00	3.85	2.88	2.08
	st.dev.	0.71	0.59	0.88	0.90
21	mean	2.22	2.80	3.48	3.83
	st.dev.	0.83	1.15	1.01	0.72

Table 9.2 (Contd.)

Statement Number		Clus.1 n=9	Clus.2 n=20	Clus.3 n=25	Clus.4 n=12
22	mean	2.78	4.20	4.40	2.50
	st.dev.	1.20	0.77	0.58	1.38
23	mean	2.33	1.70	2.68	2.67
	st.dev.	0.87	0.47	0.95	1.07
24	mean	3.44	3.35	3.56	3.92
	st.dev.	1.13	0.93	1.04	0.79
25	mean	2.00	1.90	2.56	2.92
	st.dev.	0.87	0.79	0.96	1.08
26	mean	1.56	2.00	2.84	3.08
	st.dev.	0.53	0.79	0.85	0.90
27	mean	2.67	2.50	3.24	3.67
	st.dev.	0.87	0.89	0.88	1.30
28	mean	2.78	2.35	3.64	4.25
	st.dev.	0.97	0.93	0.81	0.97
29	mean	2.22	1.65	2.76	3.75
	st.dev.	0.67	0.49	0.72	0.62
30	mean	2.00	2.45	3.28	2.92
	st.dev.	0.71	1.05	1.06	1.24

Table 9.3: ANOVAs on agreement with statements by cluster

Statement		Sum of Squares	F _{3,62}	P
01		20.75	9.39	0.000
	error	45.69		
02		61.52	27.17	0.000
	error	46.80		
03		7.89	3.60	0.018
	error	45.28		
04		11.44	6.36	0.001
	error	37.18		
05		13.11	3.20	0.029
	error	84.71		
06		2.74	1.76	0.164
	error	32.24		
07		17.50	7.02	0.000
	error	51.53		
08		78.28	40.79	0.000
	error	39.66		

Table 9.3 (Contd.)

Statement		Sum of Squares	$F_{3,62}$	P
09		4.06	1.63	0.192
	error	51.53		
10		30.15	11.12	0.000
	error	56.11		
11		0.51	0.16	0.921
	error	64.12		
12		30.11	15.21	0.000
	error	40.92		
13		1.39	0.41	0.745
	error	69.60		
14		9.93	3.61	0.018
	error	56.93		
15		10.01	3.54	0.020
	error	58.48		
16		25.06	11.92	0.000
	error	43.44		
17		17.13	5.84	0.001
	error	60.63		
18		24.10	13.30	0.000
	error	37.43		
19		8.70	2.57	0.062
	error	69.80		
20		24.76	13.43	0.000
	error	38.11		
21		18.50	6.30	0.001
	error	60.66		
22		41.84	16.71	0.000
	error	51.76		
23		12.36	5.77	0.002
	error	44.31		
24		2.51	0.87	0.462
	error	59.85		
25		10.11	3.95	0.012
	error	52.88		
26		19.86	10.14	0.000
	error	40.50		
27		12.76	4.53	0.006
	error	58.23		
28		34.01	15.24	0.000
	error	46.12		
29		35.52	29.47	0.000
	error	24.92		
30		14.12	4.24	0.009
	error	68.91		

9.3.3.3. Detailed comparisons among viewer clusters

Table 9.3 shows that 16 of the 30 ANOVAs show significant differences between the four clusters of subjects. Before interpretation of these differences, we need to know which of the pair-wise comparisons between the four clusters contribute to these significant differences. Thus for each of the significant ANOVAs, Scheffe multiple range tests were performed. A less stringent significance level was used here, as it is the combined differences between the 6 pair-wise comparisons for each ANOVA which together produce the overall F-ratio. All those comparisons which exceed the 0.01 level of significance are shown in Table 9.4, revealing the statements upon which each pair of clusters disagrees.

Table 9.4: Scheffe multiple range tests on significant analyses of variance for narrative statements by cluster membership

Comparison between cluster 1 and cluster 2

- 1 agree more than 2 that Ken was reasonable (2)
- 1 agree more than 2 that Ken was right to oppose the marriage (8)
- 2 agree more than 1 that Ken was unreasonable (22)

Comparison between cluster 1 and cluster 3

- 3 agree more than 1 that Ken was unreasonable (22)
- 1 agree more than 3 that Ken was right to oppose the marriage (8)
- 3 agree more than 1 that Mike's money was important to Susan (26)

Comparison between cluster 1 and cluster 4

- 4 agree more than 1 that Susan sees Mike as a father-figure (10)
- 4 agree more than 1 that Susan wanted to prove she was an adult (21)
- 4 agree more than 1 that Mike's money was important to Susan (26)
- 4 agree more than 1 that Mike thinks Susan better than she is (18)
- 4 agree more than 1 that Susan thinks Mike better than he is (28)
- 4 agree more than 1 that Mike does not really love Susan (29)
- 4 agree more than 1 that Ken was right to oppose the marriage (8)

Comparison between cluster 2 and cluster 3

- 3 agree more than 2 that Mike thinks Susan better than she is (18)
- 3 agree more than 2 that Susan thinks Mike better than he is (28)
- 3 agree more than 2 that Susan does not really love Mike (16)
- 3 agree more than 2 that Mike does not really love Susan (29)
- 3 agree more than 2 that Susan sees Mike as a father-figure (10)
- 2 agree more than 3 that Susan & Mike can overcome any problems (20)

Comparison between cluster 2 and cluster 4

- 2 agree more than 4 that Ken was unreasonable (22)
- 2 agree more than 4 that Susan was right to disappoint Ken (1)
- 4 agree more than 2 that Ken was reasonable (2)
- 4 agree more than 2 that Ken was right to oppose the marriage (8)
- 4 agree more than 2 that Susan sees Mike as a father-figure (10)
- 2 agree more than 4 that Mike & Susan are right for each other (12)
- 4 agree more than 2 that the age difference will cause problems (17)
- 4 agree more than 2 that Mike's money is important to Susan (26)
- 4 agree more than 2 that Mike thinks Susan better than she is (18)
- 4 agree more than 2 that Susan thinks Mike better than he is (28)
- 4 agree more than 2 that Susan does not really love Mike (16)
- 4 agree more than 2 that Mike does not really love Susan (29)
- 2 agree more than 4 that Ken put his feelings for Mike first (4)
- 2 agree more than 4 that the marriage will last (7)
- 2 agree more than 4 that Susan & Mike can overcome any problems (20)

Comparison between cluster 3 and cluster 4

- 3 agree more than 4 that Ken was unreasonable (22)
- 4 agree more than 3 that Ken was reasonable (2)
- 3 agree more than 4 that Susan was right to disappoint Ken (1)
- 4 agree more than 3 that Ken was right to oppose the marriage (8)
- 3 agree more than 4 that Mike & Susan are right for each other (12)
- 4 agree more than 3 that Mike does not really love Susan (29)
- 3 agree more than 4 that the marriage will last (7)

9.3.3.4. Comparisons between clusters on external factors

The questions asked of viewers concerning character identification, recognition, evaluation and perspective-taking, as well as viewers' ages and sex, were all external to the cluster analysis which subdivided the viewers. Thus differences between the four clusters on these questions may be tested in the traditional, explanatory way, based on the hypotheses set out in the introduction.

Those questions with a binary dependent variable, namely recognition and sex, were tested for cluster differences using the chi-square test, and results are shown in Table 9.5. This shows that the clusters of viewers do not differ significantly in their composition of men and women. However, it appears that while clusters 2 and 3 match the expected balance of men and women (i.e. two-thirds women, as in the total sample), cluster 4 has more males than would be expected by chance, and cluster 1 is almost wholly female (chi-square comparing clusters 1 and 4 by sex = 4.86, d.f. = 1, $p < 0.05$).

On the four recognition questions, there are also no significant findings overall: viewers across different clusters do not differ in terms of which characters they recognise as being like somebody they know in real life. However, there is once more a tendency for clusters 1 and 4 to differ from each other and from the others, as viewers in cluster 1 know almost nobody like Susan or Mike and those in cluster 4 are proportionately more likely to know someone like both Susan and Mike (chi-square comparing clusters 1 and 4 by recognition for Susan = 6.48, d.f. = 1, $p < 0.025$ and for Mike = 4.07, d.f. = 1, $p < 0.05$).

Table 9.5: Chi-Square analyses for variables of sex and recognition by cluster membership

Variable	Clus.1	Clus.2	Clus.3	Clus.4	Chi-square	d.f.	P
Sex of viewer:							
Female	8	14	15	5			
Male	1	6	10	7			
					5.48	3	0.1401
Recognise Mike:							
No	7	12	15	4			
Yes	2	8	10	8			
					4.50	3	0.2124
Recognise Deidre:							
No	4	12	18	6			
Yes	5	8	7	6			
					2.91	3	0.4053
Recognise Ken:							
No	6	11	17	5			
Yes	3	9	8	7			
					2.68	3	0.4436
Recognise Susan:							
No	8	12	15	4			
Yes	1	8	10	8			
					6.61	3	0.0852

Those questions indexed by a continuous dependent variable were analysed using analyses of variance, and the results are shown in Tables 9.6 and 9.7. These show that the age of the viewers is constant across clusters, as is the length and frequency of viewing. There does appear to be a slight tendency ($p<0.1$) for the more extreme clusters, 2 and 4, to watch the programme with more regularity. Differences between the clusters cannot therefore be accounted for by these variables. Regarding the variables of identification with (or perception of self as similar to) the main characters, there is a marginal effect for Mike in which clusters 1 and 3 judge themselves as slightly more similar to Mike than do

clusters 2 and 4. The strongest effect, however, is for identification with Ken, where cluster 4 sees itself as more like Ken than do clusters 2 and 3 (significant differences, Scheffe test, $p < 0.05$).

On character evaluation, the results again concern Ken. Cluster 4 likes Ken more than do clusters 2 and 3 (significant differences, Scheffe test, $p < 0.05$), in fact they are the only viewers to like Ken at all (mean liking is greater than 3). On the question of whether different clusters view events more or less from the perspective of different characters, only Deidre was unimportant here. Clusters 2 and 3 sympathised with Mike and Susan more than did cluster 4. Further, sympathy with Susan also discriminated between clusters 1 and 4 and between clusters 2 and 3 (all significant differences, Scheffe test, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, cluster 4, and to a lesser extent, cluster 1, sympathised with Ken (cluster 4 sympathised more with Ken than did clusters 2 and 3, and cluster 1 more than cluster 2, significant differences, Scheffe test, $p < 0.05$). One might have expected cluster 1 to sympathise more with Ken than with Susan. Yet, possibly because they are mainly women, they could also see Susan's point of view, even though they did not agree with it as much as do clusters 2 and 3.

Table 9.6: Means and standard deviations for variables of age, viewing and relationship with character by cluster membership

		Clus.1 n=9	Clus.2 n=20	Clus.3 n=25	Clus.4 n=12
Age	mean	32.00	30.40	32.96	43.33
	s.d.	14.12	14.53	17.62	20.56
Years of viewing	mean	12.78	11.15	9.24	14.58
	s.d.	6.30	7.33	6.46	7.67
Frequency of viewing*					
	mean	3.44	4.30	3.84	4.33
	s.d.	1.51	0.73	0.90	0.98
Self rated as similar to:					
Deidre	mean	2.44	2.00	1.88	1.67
	s.d.	1.01	1.17	0.97	1.07
Mike	mean	1.78	1.30	1.88	1.17
	s.d.	0.97	0.73	0.97	0.39
Ken	mean	1.78	1.30	1.72	2.83
	s.d.	0.83	0.57	0.98	1.33
Susan	mean	2.56	2.05	2.04	1.83
	s.d.	1.23	1.10	1.21	1.27
Rated liking of:					
Deidre	mean	2.89	3.20	2.72	3.33
	s.d.	0.93	1.06	1.10	1.07
Mike	mean	2.67	3.10	2.92	2.25
	s.d.	0.87	1.07	1.12	1.14
Ken	mean	2.56	1.70	1.88	3.67
	s.d.	0.73	0.86	1.09	0.98
Susan	mean	3.11	3.15	2.76	2.83
	s.d.	0.93	1.23	0.97	1.27
Rated sympathy with:					
Deidre	mean	3.44	3.85	3.36	3.83
	s.d.	1.01	1.04	1.08	1.40
Mike	mean	3.11	3.75	3.16	1.92
	s.d.	0.78	0.97	1.21	0.67
Ken	mean	3.11	1.65	2.36	4.00
	s.d.	1.05	0.81	1.38	1.21
Susan	mean	4.11	4.45	3.48	2.50
	s.d.	0.60	0.60	1.05	1.31

* 1=rarely, 2=sometimes, 3=fairly often, 4=often, 5=every episode.

Table 9.7: Analyses of variance for variables of age, viewing and relationship with character by cluster membership

	Sum of Squares	F _{3,62}	P
Age	1367.33	1.60	0.1995
Error	17710.42		
Years of viewing	255.51	1.77	0.1624
Error	2985.58		
Frequency of viewing	6.54	2.31	0.0849
Error	58.45		
Self rated as similar to:			
Deidre	3.33	0.99	0.4029
Error	69.53		
Mike	6.20	3.04	0.0353
Error	42.06		
Ken	17.98	6.82	0.0005
Error	54.46		
Susan	2.82	0.66	0.5771
Error	87.80		
Rated liking of:			
Deidre	4.20	1.25	0.3011
Error	69.80		
Mike	5.93	1.70	0.1754
Error	71.89		
Ken	34.39	12.31	0.0000
Error	57.73		
Susan	2.09	0.57	0.6359
Error	75.67		
Rated sympathy with:			
Deidre	3.56	0.94	0.4266
Error	78.20		
Mike	25.34	8.32	0.0001
Error	62.92		
Ken	45.16	11.22	0.0000
Error	83.20		
Susan	31.24	11.72	0.0000
Error	55.08		

9.3.4. Discussion

The viewers in the present study were found to fall into four natural clusters according to their interpretations of the same soap opera narrative. The differences between these clusters can be understood descriptively by reference to Tables 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4 which show the narrative statements on which the four clusters diverged. The following general structure emerged: the four clusters can be ranked in terms of their relative allegiance to either Ken or to Mike and Susan. Viewers in cluster 4 are most strongly on Ken's side and against the couple, cluster 1 is less on Ken's side than is cluster 4, but more so than either cluster 2 or 3. Cluster 2 is the most against Ken and most on the side of the couple, Mike and Susan, and cluster 3 stands in between clusters 1 and 2. Hence, viewers occupy a range of interpretive positions between the pro-Ken and the pro-Mike and Susan textual positions thus: (pro-Ken)-4--1--3--2-(pro-Mike and Susan).

The four clusters are distinguishable in their interpretive positions according to two general considerations: firstly, an assessment of the rights and wrongs of Ken's opposition to the marriage and secondly, the nature of the inferences made by viewers about characters' motives and thoughts. On the issue of evaluative assessment clusters 4 and 1 are distinguished from 3 and 2, so that 4 and 1 are more likely to judge Ken as right and reasonable in his actions, while 2 and 3 think more that Susan had right on her side and that Ken was unreasonable (see Table 9.4).

However, within these two broad evaluative stances, cluster 1 is distinguished from 4 and cluster 3 from 2 by the different inferences made by the viewers. These inferences serve to 'fill

out' the narrative as presented to viewers, increasing coherence and interest. Viewers in cluster 4 make more inferences about the characters' motives and thoughts which involve criticism of Susan and Mike than do cluster 1. In particular, cluster 4 questions more whether Susan and Mike are deluded about each other, and these viewers are especially critical of Susan. They see Susan as more likely to be wanting a father-figure rather than a husband, needing to prove herself an adult to Ken, and as wanting Mike for his money. Similarly, clusters 2 and 3 diverge not so much on the rights and wrongs of the characters' actions but on their inferences about motives and thoughts behind the actions, inferences which give the actions their meaning. In particular, viewers in cluster 3 question more than do those in cluster 2 whether Susan and Mike see each other realistically and really love one another. They do not especially differ in favouring either Susan or Mike, although cluster 3 also endorses more the father-figure explanation. Cluster 2 clearly has few doubts about the sincerity and authenticity of this relationship and shows considerable faith in its future.

As would be expected from the overall continuum of interpretation from cluster 4 to cluster 2, cluster comparisons (Table 9.4) which cross the 4 and 1 versus 2 and 3 divide (i.e. 1 vs. 2, 1 vs. 3, and 3 vs. 4) concern more general evaluative divergence than differences in inferences made. The comparison between clusters 2 and 4 expresses most clearly the major differences between the viewers on both evaluative and inferential issues. Cluster 4 are both more pro-Ken and anti-Mike and Susan than are cluster 2, and they are also more critical in their inferences about the thoughts and motives of Susan and Mike,

favoring instead Ken's thoughts and motives.

This internal analysis of interpretive divergence then, reveals a range of response across four natural interpretive clusters or stances taken by viewers of the narrative. This range includes both sides of the narrative debate, as predicted from consideration of the text itself, plus two intermediate but distinct positions (1 and 3) between the two extremes (4 and 2). Interpretative divergence was best accounted for by evaluative assessment of the characters' actions and inferences concerning the motives and thoughts behind the actions. The four interpretive positions seem to fit Morley's broad scheme of dominant, oppositional, and negotiated readings in the sense that two of the positions are mutually opposed and two represent intermediate views. This range of response may be described in terms of degrees of romanticism (as epitomised by cluster 2), cynicism (epitomised by cluster 4), or realism (epitomised by any cluster, depending on the assessments of the academic reader or the future whims of the scriptwriters).

However, there are problems in assigning the clusters to these categories of dominant, oppositional and negotiated. For while the 'romantic' cluster clearly endorse a dominant romantic ideology, idealising love and predicting a 'happy ever after' ending for the characters, the cynicism/pessimism of cluster 4 does not fit the oppositional category. It represents a rejection of and distance from one dominant ideological reading, and yet it endorses another, namely the myths and rhetoric surrounding notions of the patriarchal father, of daughters as property, the alignment of age and wisdom, and the corrupting influence of an adulterous older man. Thus, the

opposed readings epitomised by clusters 2 and 4 each draw upon traditional, dominant rhetoric about gender relations, responsibilities and morality.

Morley (1981) has discussed the difficulty in defining the concept of dominant or 'preferred' reading as proposed by Hall (1980). One problem raised by the present data is that the concept of a preferred reading confounds the idea of a majority reading by the audience with the idea of an ideologically normative reading. The narrative studied here suggests that a text may contain two normative, although opposed, readings. From the present sample, a majority were found to endorse one of these readings (clusters 2 and 3 contain 45 viewers) while the other reading was endorsed by a fair-sized minority (clusters 1 and 4 contain 21 viewers). Neither reading appears critical in the political sense of oppositional or challenging the authority of the text, intended by Morley, and both are viewed referentially (Liebes & Katz, 1986). This suggests a view of the text is required in which a number of normative alternatives are encoded, so that different viewers may select different readings and yet remain within a dominant framework. It also suggests the need for a view of divergence which is not simply a function of critical distance from the text, for the text is open to a number of referential readings.

Turning now to the external correlates of cluster membership, a number of significant results were obtained which explain the four interpretive positions as follows. Cluster 4, the most pro-Ken group of viewers, contains a relatively large number of male viewers, and appears more likely to identify with Ken, evaluate Ken positively, and perceive the narrative sympathetically from Ken's

viewpoint. Clusters 2 and 3, the most anti-Ken viewers, contrast with these findings by considering themselves highly unlike Ken, although not particularly like any other character either. They also dislike Ken as a character. However, on the issue of sympathy with a character's viewpoint, these clusters strongly see events from the viewpoint of Mike and Susan, and cannot sympathise with Ken's position. Viewers in cluster 1 are in an interesting position, for while their interpretation of events is closest to that of cluster 4 and they too dislike Susan and Mike, they nonetheless sympathise with Susan, and are less critical of her in their inferences about her thoughts and motives than is cluster 4.

The sociological variables of age and sex did not discriminate among divergent interpretive positions spontaneously adopted by viewers. Even to the extent that viewers' sex was associated with a specific interpretation, this did not occur in a predictable fashion. The narrative opposed young/female (Susan) against old/male (Ken). Yet women did not especially side with Susan. The female cluster (no. 1) merely sided less strongly with Ken than did the viewers with whom they are otherwise closest (no. 4). The determinants of the observed range of responses are not simply sociological, as expected by Newcomb and Hirsch, so much as psychological. One cannot make straightforward assumptions about interpretations from a knowledge of the viewers' socio-structural position.

The three psychological factors investigated all appear to play a role in interpretive divergence. The strongest results centred on Ken, showing that response to one major character can significantly affect one's perspective on the narrative. Although

causality can only be inferred here, not demonstrated, the durability of identification, evaluation and recognition relative to the perspective taken on a single narrative suggests that viewers' relationships with the characters play some causal role in influencing interpretation.

Recognition of Susan and Mike related to the differences between clusters 1 and 4, but was otherwise relatively unimportant. This is surprising in view of Noble's (1975) evidence that recognition should be especially operative for television rather than for film and for female rather than male viewers. Admittedly, as with the other sociological and psychological variables, the response measures used were relatively crude. The emphasis in the present research was upon investigating a variety of issues rather than pursuing any one in depth, as the general investigation should precede the specific: thus conclusions should be drawn cautiously.

Identification proved an important factor, discriminating clusters along the pro-Ken to anti-Ken continuum, as a function of perceived similarity to Ken. This was clearly related to character evaluation, rather than independent of it as suggested by Potkay and Potkay (1984). Given viewers' often considerable involvement in soap opera, it certainly seems plausible that character evaluation, identification, and perspective-taking should become interrelated over time. The present data do not indicate whether liking a character leads viewers to increase their perceived similarity to that character or whether perceived similarity enhances character liking. However, they are clearly related in the present data and they were both important in determining the perspective taken by the viewers in interpreting the narrative.

As predicted, these psychological factors appear to operate by affecting the 'side' or perspective taken by viewers. The perspective-taking or sympathy variables were highly significant with respect to three of the four main characters and the means are consistent with the identification and evaluation judgments for the four clusters of viewers.

The present findings suggest that current concerns with divergence in interpretations and consequent problems for, say, inferring effects from the analysis of content, or assuming a homogeneous audience, are justified concerns which deserve further investigation. Several further empirical issues can be raised. (a) The para-social relationships which viewers experience with characters appear to generate divergence, possibly more so than the viewers' socio-structural position. Does this hold for other sociological variables, most notably class, and for other psychological variables, and does it depend upon the genre studied (compare current affairs with soap opera)? (b) Do the interpretive clusterings found here represent permanent or temporary divergences? For example, do some viewers consistently adopt a romantic view of events in all drama or even in all of their lives, while others are consistently cynical of young lovers. (c) If so, does this distinction map onto the viewers' own experiences of personal relationships? If not, how freely do viewers fluctuate, adopting different interpretive positions on different occasions?

On a theoretical level, there are certain issues to be considered concerning conceptions of the text. On a rather banal, behavioral level of textual meaning, there can be little divergence, while on a latent level of ideological meaning, say, one would

expect considerable divergence. For example, all would agree that Ken opposed the marriage of Susan and Mike, but viewers may disagree over whether the programme is saying that young women should not marry much older men or that fathers always oppose their daughter's fiancé or that the patriarchal fabric of modern society is disintegrating. This research has rather simply used the denotation/connotation distinction, and argued that divergence should be primarily expected solely on the connotative level of meaning and it is here that the reader has a role to play in inferring, judging, and 'filling in' the narrative. However, a more sophisticated analysis of texts is needed which specifically predicts which divergences should occur at which levels of abstraction.

A similar issue concerns the areas of divergence and convergence at any one level of analysis. The present research found that viewers diverge in their interpretations in relation to evaluative judgments of characters' actions (statements 1, 2, 8, 12, and 22, see Table 9.1), inferred motives (4, 16, 21, 26, and 29) and cognitions (10, 18, and 28) which lie behind the actions, and in relation to predictions about future events (7, 17, and 20). Is this a general phenomenon, are there additional areas of textual interpretation, and would different theories of textual analysis make different predictions concerning the loci of divergence? Research to date appears to make a quantitative argument for divergence, raising questions concerning the amount of divergence which occurs in viewers' interpretations rather than a qualitative argument concerning the nature and loci of divergent interpretations in relation to textual structure. Yet it is this more complex,

qualitative issue which requires attention if we are study the 'role of the viewer' empirically in his or her interactive construction of programme meaning.

9.4. Summary

Questions have been raised as to whether all viewers receive the same message from a television programme. However, there has been little systematic investigation of divergence in interpretations. The first study in this chapter demonstrated that divergence in interpretations can occur for the same soap opera narratives, and that divergence in narrative interpretation is linked to the representation of characters. The second study adopted a quantitative approach to investigate in more depth the nature and degree of divergence between viewers when interpreting a single television narrative. The narrative selected contained at least two alternative readings. Four interpretive positions, each representing a unique version of the same narrative, were found to be adopted by different viewers. These related closely to the two sides made available to them by the structure of the programme: two readings corresponded to the main two alternatives present in the text and two represented intermediate or negotiated readings. The negotiated readings were each similar in evaluation to one of the more extreme readings, but differed in inferences. Membership of the divergent groupings of viewers was accounted for by the psychological relationships which the viewers experience with the central characters of the narrative. These relationships concern the processes of identification, evaluation and recognition, as these affect the perspective which the viewers take upon the events portrayed. Sociological variables of age and sex of viewer were of

little explanatory value. Quantitative methods have proved useful in uncovering divergence in interpretations among viewers, and indicate both the relative sizes of different groupings and their relation to external variables, psychological and sociological. A number of issues and questions have been raised through this research which need to be pursued further.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSIONS

10.1. The main issues of the thesis

This thesis has studied regular viewers' representations of characters in soap opera in order to address a set of theoretical issues arising from developments within, or from the conjunction of, three research literatures, namely the psychology of mass communications, the social cognition of person perception, and cultural studies. These issues, as discussed in Chapter 1, concern: the role of social cognition and textual structure in mass communication research; the role of person knowledge in interpreting television characters, the instantiation of abstract person knowledge, and cognitive resources for completing textual meaning; and the experience of viewing partially open, popular drama. The conjoining of these three very different research literatures has involved critical assessment of the assumptions of each, both theoretical and methodological, and an examination of their aims, futures and past problems. This has revealed conceptual parallels and areas in which each domain may complement and further developments in the others. Less positively, this conjunction has also meant a certain amount of restatement, pursuing each idea across different conceptual frameworks. Interdisciplinary moves appear to be popular in social science at the moment, and a domain such as mass communications seems especially to invite interdisciplinary research. To one trained as a social psychologist, forays into sociology, literary criticism and cultural

studies have been exciting, and it is hoped that the present research has contributed both theoretically and empirically to current developments in the field. Very little research as yet has been conducted on text structure from a psychological perspective. Nor has much research to date investigated viewers' interpretations of programmes, developed methods with which to investigate interpretations, or studied long-term knowledge of the media in the context of a convergence between traditional and critical perspectives. This thesis is thus intended as a contribution to these much needed domains of research. This chapter will draw general conclusions from the empirical research in the context of the theoretical framework of the present research.

10.2. Methodology

Partly because of the exploratory nature of some of the present research and partly because the interface between social psychology and cultural studies specifically raises the issue of quantitative versus qualitative methodology, this thesis has been fairly eclectic in its choice of methods. The research in Chapters 3, 6 (Study III) and 9 (Study I) used open-ended and more or less interpretative methods. Often viewers' verbatim responses have been presented in detail, as has much of a soap opera text in Chapter 8. For social psychology and traditional mass communications research, it was felt to be important to capture and convey something of the nature of the viewing experience, especially for an undervalued and trivialised area of experience such as soap opera viewing. Additionally, this material has been useful in a number of ways which complement the quantitative approach: validating central

theoretical concepts, such as realist conventions, viewers' relationships with characters, para-social interaction and interpretative divergence; checking the use of rating methods and aiding interpretation of multidimensional scaling results (Chapter 6); and facilitating development of quantitative methods by exploring issues in an open-ended fashion (Chapter 9).

The use of quantitative methods in the present research has tried to build in an important element of discovery and implicitness, rather than confounding quantification with the imposition of a priori categories onto viewers' responses. Thus the use of attribute ratings of characters has been secondary to the more spontaneous sorting methods, simply aiding interpretation of the character representations, rather than constructing representations from those ratings. This approach has been validated in that some of the properties measured were found to be irrelevant to viewers' representations. Similarly, in Chapter 9 viewers were divided into distinct interpretative groups according to intrinsic differences in readings, rather than presuming sociological or psychological factors in divergence to be effective.

In general, the present use of multidimensional scaling has been successful in discovering and describing complex representational structures. The sorting method in particular has provided fairly naturalistic and implicit data on character representation for entry into the scaling procedures. The property fitting program proved useful for relating external character ratings to the more spontaneous character representation.

The qualitative/quantitative issue was also addressed in Chapter 5 in relation to textual analysis. Both content analysis

and a previous literary analysis showed similar results: social class was central to the organisation of the programme, Coronation Street, although the two analyses suggested somewhat different connotations of class (intelligence and centrality/warmth respectively). In the light of this methodological convergence, and the correspondence between a priori ratings and free descriptions for EastEnders characters, again with a few connotative differences, a degree of independence between findings and methods is suggested. This in turn suggests that the methodological arguments against convergence in mass communication research between traditional and critical approaches may have been overemphasised.

10.3. The nature of viewers' representations of characters

The studies in Chapters 4 to 6 discovered the structure of viewers' general representations of the characters in three different soap operas. Certain implications for their use in structuring and interpreting narrative were examined in Chapters 8 and 9. Viewers' representations of the characters were meaningfully captured by exploiting the parallels between programme themes, literary oppositions, person perception dimensions and multidimensional scaling's bipolar dimensions. All of these rest upon the spatial metaphor in their conception of semantic relations. The representations obtained contain a wealth of information about perceived interrelations between characters and organising themes, permitting comparisons between representations and between representations and theoretical predictions.

These representations will be discussed here in relation to their major themes. Each programme was found to be represented by

three basic dimensions, gender, morality and potency. In addition, themes of centrality to the community, approach to life (modern:traditional), sexuality and family values were important. The relations between and connotations of these basic themes were compared and discussed in Chapter 7 for the three programmes.

Representations of Coronation Street and EastEnders were more similar than each was to that of Dallas. This difference rested upon an alignment for the British programmes between morality and potency, while these were independent in Dallas, and a different conception of gender (see below). Nonetheless, the central focus of the genre on traditional, moral, family-oriented characters who instantiate unconventional gender relations, was upheld in viewers' representations.

10.3.1. Gender

The women in Dallas were perceived as pleasure-oriented, weak and passive, while the men were perceived as stereotypically powerful, business-oriented, dominant and active. However, the women were permitted more variation in their positions in the representation, and there were several counter-stereotypic female characters. As in the other programme representations, gender was independent of morality: thus viewers do not typically infer from a character's gender to his or her morality or vice versa. In Coronation Street and EastEnders, strong gender dimensions were found, but these differed from Dallas as they did not represent a traditional, patriarchal conception of gender. Feminine characters were represented as matriarchal, namely mature, warm, fairly central, and certainly not more passive, weak, unintelligent or temperamental than males.

These findings have certain implications for theories of gender stereotyping. Firstly, masculinity and femininity were consistently opposed, not independent, with no androgynous perceptions of characters. This does not support Bem's (1981, 1984) Gender Schema theory, with its proposed orthogonal relations between these concepts, although the findings do support the central importance of gender in person perception as proposed by all stereotyping theories. Furthermore, the results are also problematic for traditional theories of gender (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986; Broverman et al, 1972), as the connotations of masculinity and femininity were not as these theories predict. The exception to this is the Dallas representation, which despite its counter-stereotypic women, generally supports Ashmore's alignment of gender and potency. The role of gender as revealed by textual analysis (Chapter 8) was rather more traditional than viewers' perceptions. This suggests either that general personality impressions may diverge from specific narrative interpretations, for the role of gender in the text was rather subtle and implicit, or that viewers' representations are more matriarchal despite a traditional portrayal in the text (i.e. an instance of divergent reading).

Social psychology has repeatedly shown that people endorse traditional gender conceptions. Yet the present research provided no evidence to suggest that people reconstrue matriarchal or counter-stereotypic presentations so as to fit their traditional preconceptions. This contrasts with the research of Drabman et al (1981) and much of social cognitive research (Schneider et al, 1979). The reverse seems more likely, although the causality is far

from established: as in LaPorte and Voss (1979), people modify their prior knowledge in relation to textual structure.

10.3.2. Morality

The importance of morality has always been recognised more in anthropology, literary criticism and microsociology than in psychology, where it tends to be regarded as a discrete concept attained through stages by children, rather than as a pervasive dimension of everyday life. Yet the present research has shown that soap opera functions as a kind of contemporary myth for viewers, with morality as the primary theme of character representation and, implicitly, of narrative. Viewers appreciate the 'nitty gritty' morality of British soap opera, enter into the moral conflicts of both American and British soap opera characters, take sides when delicate moral dilemmas are portrayed, and feel it all to be relevant to their own lives. In the British soap operas, morality is perceived as more mundane and less polarised compared with the often angelic or evil characters in Dallas. In Dallas, all the characters have so many positive qualities that morality may be seen to lie in what the characters do with their advantages. Not simply reducible to and often uncorrelated with other evaluative dimensions, morality plays a basic organising role in character perception, and may also be important in the perception of others in everyday life.

10.3.3. Potency

The issue of power has been recognised within social psychology as a basic organising dimension for the perception of others for many years. Within cultural studies, especially in relation to American soap operas, power in organisations and

interpersonal power have been similarly considered important. The present research supports these contentions, showing potency to be a major theme in the representation of characters from all three programmes. However, the connotations of power were not always as predicted. Specifically, it has been interesting to note that, in Dallas, potency is fairly independent of morality, which was not expected by Ang (1985). She describes Dallas as a programme which perpetuates the myth of 'might is right': instead viewers allow themselves many more narrative possibilities by perceiving strength also in the 'goodies'. Similarly, potency is not aligned with gender as had been expected by gender stereotype theories (see above) except in Dallas. Finally, potency was aligned with activity in Dallas and EastEnders, thereby creating a dynamism dimension. Osgood et al (1957) report that this is common when representing political figures, but not for people known personally. Possibly soap opera characters are seen more clearly as exemplifying particular and clear-cut roles in relation to power, and their personalities are regularly translated into direct action in the narratives as with politicians. Potency was correlated with morality for the British soap operas, contrary to Implicit Personality Theory. The free descriptions of characters in EastEnders suggested that people see most of the characters as confused and insecure personalities. They see those who can cope with this insecurity as good but soft, while those who cannot cope, gain a tough but immoral exterior.

10.4. Divergence in interpretation of characters and narrative

The research in this thesis has addressed the issue of

divergence in interpretation and representation in a number of ways. Given the current theoretical debates surrounding issues of divergence, with implications for concepts of textual meaning and viewing experience, investigations of divergence have been central to the thesis. The existence of divergence has been investigated in terms of divergence between groups of viewers, between ordinary viewers and critics and between viewers' interpretations at different levels of abstraction.

First, and most simply, it was thought that viewers might represent characters along different dimensions as a function of the viewers' age, sex or nationality. The representations studied in Chapters 4 to 6 showed that, for abstract and general character representations, this was not the case, and a high degree of convergence was demonstrated between the viewers (although not between viewers and critics).

Thus viewers broadly agree on abstract themes of character representation. However, on turning to a specific analysis on one soap opera narrative (Chapter 8), it became apparent that while the narrative may, loosely, begin and end with a certain configuration of characters, the progress of the narrative invites several possible interpretations or perspectives or re-alignments between characters and oppositions, especially during what was termed the 'guilt' stage. So the divergence question can be made more complex, asking about detailed narrative interpretations for areas of openness in popular culture texts. This takes the issue of divergence beyond that of an individual or group differences question to one which depends on the interactions between viewers and a structured text. The first study in Chapter 9 approached this

notion in an exploratory fashion, identifying a variety of types of divergence in narrative interpretation. While viewers agreed on the application of the basic character representation to the characters, they diverged from each other especially in their recall of peripheral or inferred aspects of the narrative in their evaluations, complexity of interpretation, use of cultural rhetoric and narrative focus.

The following study attempted to systematise these observations for a narrative selected for its openness or availability to two readings. This showed that while, again, viewers' age and sex were relatively unimportant, viewers' experienced relationships with the characters influenced considerably their perspective on a specific narrative, their evaluation of characters, the inferences they drew to fill out the narrative, and so forth. From the present research, one can conclude that viewers do not diverge in their general representation of the characters' personalities. However, on a lower level of abstraction, that of specific narrative, the text permits a substantial role for the reader/viewer in taking sides, judging and inferring. This role is readily filled by viewers, as they use opportunity to become involved and thus diverge in their interpretations. Divergence at this level is a function not of their socio-structural position so much as their psychological relationships with the characters.

10.5. The stability of the representations

The stability of the character representations was checked in two ways in Chapter 4. Firstly, one character representation was

successfully replicated using a different method of data collection and a different viewing sample. Secondly, the permanence of the representations over character changes was demonstrated, showing that in the instance examined, new characters were seen to replace old characters on the main dimensions of the representation. The lack of group differences in representation found in all three character representation chapters can be regarded as split-sample reliability, in that when the data were split by viewers' age or sex, the resulting representations correlate highly with each other. As regards the property ratings, all Cronbach's alphas were high where tested, suggesting highly reliable ratings. While one might wish to test the stability of the representations with larger viewer samples or over longer periods of time, it was felt that in all the respects examined here, the character representations were stable and reliable.

10.6. Limitations of the present research

The research reported in this thesis has, it is hoped, been discussed throughout with an awareness of its limitations, problems and possible criticisms.

As regards sampling the viewing populations, this was conducted with reasonable but not great attention. The use of students was, by and large, avoided, and generally the viewers studied were ordinary members of the population. Those obtained through the Department of Experimental Psychology subject panel tend to over-represent housewives, the retired and the unemployed. All subjects were self-selected, and tended somewhat to over-represent the middle-classes and the young, and heavily to over-represent

women. For these reasons, all conclusions should be tempered by a consideration of the samples used.

In order to study naturally-acquired, long-term knowledge, no control was exercised over the programmes viewed, although this was always monitored at the time of the study. There has been much criticism of the use of rating scales generally. Although these were used in the present study, some attempt was made to overcome their limitations by duplicating dimensions (e.g. for potency: hard-soft and dominant-submissive), by using unipolar dimensions where doubts exist about bipolarity (e.g. masculine-not masculine and feminine-not feminine), and by subordinating the use of rating scales to more implicit measures, whether sorting data (Chapters 4, 5 & 6) or open-ended responses (Chapter 6).

Retrospectively, the causal inferences drawn from the research might have been strengthened if it had been first demonstrated that the viewers themselves endorsed Implicit Personality Theory dimensions when representing people in general. The causal arguments concerning schema instantiation in media domains might also have been clearer if more certain and developed understandings of person knowledge and textual structure had been available; this could not be helped. Indeed, the arguments concerning possible causal processes are always vulnerable in what is essentially correlational research. Nonetheless, it was felt important to attempt an examination of the conjunction of social knowledge and textual structure in the representation of television characters, for issues of both schema application and the role of the reader are central to the development of social psychology and mass communications/cultural studies. Let me say again that the present

research represents just one way of pursuing these issues and should be interpreted in the light of other current attempts and developments in the field.

10.7. Theoretical Implications

10.7.1. Social knowledge, text structure, the role of the reader

This thesis has argued, and offered evidence, for the general claim that people make use of their abstract knowledge of people when interpreting television programmes. This has several implications. Person knowledge serves as a cultural resource for making sense of new experiences, whether fact or fiction. In order for this knowledge to have a role, the structure of a television text must have particular features: texts require completion through the insertion of cultural and personal knowledge; they are open in that multiple interpretations are sometimes possible; they guide rather than determine interpretations; they have several levels of meaning; they have qualitative structures, not mere patterns of covariation; they belong to conventional genres; and so forth.

It has also been shown that people do not simply impose their social knowledge onto the text, as socio-cognitive researchers often suppose and is sometimes shown with short and highly ambiguous texts. For complex, real-world texts, people may be sensitive to textual meanings, modifying their application of prior knowledge in the light of certain aspects of the text structure, and generating a final reading which is internally coherent and meaningful. Conversely, despite certain evidence and theories suggesting that viewing is a passive receptive process in which people gain a veridical version of the transmitted programme, this thesis has

shown that in certain circumstances, people ignore, clarify or reinterpret aspects of the text in line with their own interests or knowledge. Thus both top-down and bottom-up processes appear to operate in the representation of, in this case, soap opera characters.

The validity of drawing causal conclusions from such evidence has been discussed in Chapter 7. Suffice it to say here that two, not incompatible explanations are possible. One could argue, based on the similarities between the representations of characters from three programmes, that there is a general 'soap opera' representation, probably due to generic production conventions and history, which viewers attain and then apply during viewing. A more ambitious explanation attempts to account for the differences in connotation, theme interrelation, and the themes themselves between the three representations by relating both similarities and differences to the viewer's general social knowledge and to the specificities of the text being represented. Table 10.1 attempts to summarise the factors which may operate under this general view of the interaction between social knowledge and text structure in the generation of programme readings.

This table divides numerous factors relevant to programme interpretation according to two criteria. Firstly, one can separate factors concerned with the viewers from those concerned with the text. One of the aims of this thesis has been to highlight the many parallels between theories of texts and viewers, parallels often not apparent because the two domains are typically studied by different researchers in different disciplines. In some cases, the parallels are strong (e.g. in the use of representational concepts which

depend on the spatial metaphor by both social cognition and cultural studies), sometimes they are weak, and sometimes factors have simply been listed side by side in Table 10.1 with no parallels between them.

The second dimension of organisation distinguishes between the following categories of factors: background circumstances, representational or knowledge structures, processes, instantiations, and outcomes. Instantiation (or interpretation or reading) here means the product of the processes operating on the representations in the context of the background circumstances and the interaction between viewer and text. Despite the apparent linearity of this framework, there are many feedback connections: for example, audience ratings affect future programme production; cognitive effects alter the representational resources used in future interpretation; and so on.

Of the many factors listed, some have been demonstrated or investigated in the present thesis, most particularly those concerned with representation and instantiation. Thus the thesis has shown how viewers' readings and programme-specific representations reflect their social knowledge and the virtual structure of the text. From these, one may infer the operation of constructive cognitive processes in interaction with textual mechanisms of closure. Table 10.1 aims to provide a more general context for the research presented here. It is not presented as a causal model because firstly, there are a large number of uncertainties concerning the conceptualisation of some of these factors. For example, can story grammar research be extended to complex narrative structures, can openness be distinguished in

practice from indeterminacy, and how separable are specific representations (whether of television characters or of one's family) from abstract representations of people in general?

More important, a model would be premature because more theoretical development is required to specify the causal paths between factors in order to identify the power of the viewer to create, set against the power of the text to direct, the resultant meanings. For example, when do constructive processes reconstrue text structure, when are mechanisms of closure successful in directing interpretation, how do interpretations mediate effects, and so forth? These are all issues for further research. Behind many of the factors lie general and unfortunately vague notions of cultural conventions, resources and meanings. In cultural studies, researchers with anthropological backgrounds attempt to specify the role of culture, but more specificity is needed to disentangle the relative power of viewer and text. In social psychology, the concept of social representation (Farr & Moscovici, 1984) has recently raised the issue of cultural meaning, but again theory is insufficiently advanced.

Finally, Table 10.1 also functions as a resource for the formulation of future research programmes, as each of the factors needs to be examined in the context of the others: viewers need to be studied in relation to texts; effects should be studied in relation to prior knowledge structures and in relation to the openness of a text; and so forth. Future research and theory must respect the complexity of viewers' prior knowledge and its relation to their cultural position and must respect the complexity of structured communicative texts, again in relation to their cultural position.

Table 10.1. A taxonomy of factors influencing interpretation

	Viewer	Text
<u>Background</u>	LIFE SITUATION sex, age, etc. socialisation life experiences cultural resources viewing context labour position	PRODUCTION CONTEXT economic constraints professional practices beliefs about viewers cultural resources media institution production ideology
<u>Representation</u>	SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE story grammar genre knowledge cultural conventions gender stereotypes & prejudices Implicit Personality Theory biases & heuristics (salience, relevance) myths & folk tales person prototypes conceptual repertoire & ignorances	TEXT STRUCTURE (VIRTUAL) chronologic structure genre conventions cultural conventions ideological resources & motivations binary oppositions & transformations preferred reading(s) (dominant, normative) latent meanings characterisation paradigmatic selections & omissions
<u>Process</u>	CONSTRUCTIVE (TOP-DOWN) PROCESSES need for consistency within reading & between new & old knowledge need for parsimony need for clarity need for confirmation of expectancies pleasure in novelty need for critical distance belief in objective & realistic media clash between text & own culture self-fulfilling prophecies maintain self-concept	MECHANISMS OF CLOSURE & OPENNESS make preferred reading most salient & easy mystification of production & aims deny internal contradictions realism undermines critical distance illusory, not actual, choice reiterate conventional views assume specific model reader favour one perspective definite conclusions undermine opposition pose contradictions multiple perspectives absence of hero figure challenge stereotypes indeterminate boundaries interweaving plots invite viewer's opinions

Table 10.1 (Contd.)

<u>Instantiation</u>	MODIFIED SCHEMATA (INTERPRETATION)	READING (REALISED TEXT)
	ignore schema features modify connotations alter interrelations between dimensions reify abstractions add textual features use story grammar in incomplete form alter expectancies challenge assumptions	ignore textual oppositions modify connotations alter opposition patterns complicate/simplify themes reify abstractions add viewer's themes reduce ambiguity or openness add in cultural assumptions fulfil expectancies omit cultural presumptions
<u>Outcome</u>	EFFECTS	APPRECIATION RATINGS & CRITICISM
	reinforce old knowledge introduce new ideas & frameworks alter availability & salience of ideas enhance identification selection of role models challenge old ideas set an agenda resolve doubts life style habits alter behaviours	programme & channel loyalty audience viewing statistics media & other criticism set precedent for future establish conventions & expectations reinforce professional practices

10.7.2. The relationship between characterisation and narrative

The lack of correspondence between character relations when measured by character interaction frequencies and as perceived by viewers in terms of characters' personalities provoked a consideration of the relations between character and narrative. It was argued in Chapter 5 that the narratives in soap opera are constructed around personality conflicts, so that characters of similar personalities, who do not exemplify differences on basic cultural themes of morality, gender, power, etc., would rarely interact as the centre of a plot. As Newcomb and Hirsch have said, "conflicting viewpoints of social issues are, in fact, the elements that structure most television programs" (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1984, p.64-65) and "it is the range of response, the directly contradictory readings of the medium, that cue us to its multiple meanings" (p.68). It is these conflicts arising from the choice of characters to fill narrative positions which, as was shown in Chapter 9, generate the range of response anticipated by Newcomb and Hirsch.

Further, characters of similar perceived personality serve as functional equivalents for each other (see Chapters 4 & 5). In relation to the interpretative role of the viewer, viewers may generate particular expectancies about narrative development, make predictions about the course of events, and readily identify the issues at stake, all on the basis of their more permanent knowledge of the characters involved. From the relationships between characters in the scaling representation, one can see an operationalisation of the concept of paradigm: if all characters are

potentially available for a particular narrative role, then the selection of a specific character gains its significance for the viewer through its relations to other, non-selected characters. The role of the reader was examined in the textual analysis (Chapter 8) in that viewer must follow the developing thematic contrasts or equivalences established between characters during the course of the narrative. Finally, the first study of Chapter 9 showed how narratives focus on personality conflicts rather than similarities, generating interest and a role for the viewer through the use of character information in narrative development.

10.7.3. The application of person perception theory to the media

A number of implications for Implicit Personality Theory and Gender Schema Theory concerning the relations between character representation and person knowledge have been mentioned above. These may be drawn together as follows. Television characters often constitute 'significant others' for the viewers: they are regarded as extensions of the viewers' social network, as 'real people'. As person perception theory has already been applied to political figures, whom subjects do not know personally, it should surely also apply to well-known television characters, such as those in soap opera.

Person perception theories generally predicted the dimensions along which characters were represented. This suggests that these theorists' aim of producing an abstract and generalised representation of person knowledge may be viable. It also supports a significant role for person knowledge as a resource in character interpretation. The role of this resource was suggested more forcefully when person knowledge appeared to override textual

structure in character representations.

However, person perception theories were less successful in predicting the connotations or correlates of the main dimensions and in predicting the interrelations between the dimensions themselves. The present research differs from most past research in person perception in that it studies naturally acquired, complex social knowledge for which all subjects had equivalent access to the source. It was concluded that differences between present and previous findings may not reflect problems with person perception theory per se so much as with its application or instantiation. Thus the abstract knowledge structures for person perception are not directly reflected in specific character representations because the structure of the domain (the television programme) modifies, elaborates or overrides this abstract knowledge when representing the domain.

10.7.4. Social life as text

One important implication of the present research is that the concept of 'information' becomes untenable for social psychology without considerable qualification. Considering the difficulties faced and discussed concerning the analysis of meanings in what should be a simple case (in the media, one at least has physical, bounded and superficially trivial texts), what of the rest of social stimuli which people must interpret? The very terminology of the 'stimulus' encourages oversimplification, as does content analysis, whose requirements of quantification tend to determine the meanings which may be discovered, rather than the reverse. Thus one argument of this thesis has been that psychology tends to underestimate the complexity of that-which-is-perceived, most particularly in relation

to questions of structure, levels of abstraction, surface and latent meanings, and openness or indeterminacy of meaning.

One reason why this has been the case, so that social cognition most recently has tended to overemphasise top-down over bottom-up processes, has been the move to escape the stimulus-driven orientation of Behaviourist psychology. Yet this has had the unfortunate effect of ignoring that-which-is-perceived altogether, retreating ever deeper into constructive mental activities. The challenge instead should be to recognise the complex, multi-layered and structured quality of social reality. Both social psychology and traditional mass communication research have fallen into the easy assumptions of transparent meanings 'out there', which may be readily quantified as patterns of correlation between bounded entities. Having outlined some of the problems with these assumptions and noted certain moves within both social psychology and traditional mass communications towards textual analysis, this thesis has attempted to apply both the theories and analytic methods of literary criticism and cultural studies to psychological problems: let us look first to other disciplines before painfully reinventing their histories for ourselves. It is felt that, particularly given moves within cultural studies towards psychology, that the present research was reasonably successful at least in exploring the loci of convergence and in formulating questions for future research. The concepts of paradigm, openness (in terms of both meaning completion and divergence), preferred reading, narrative chronology, and other conventional structures have been useful in the present research. Extrapolating from this research to social psychology more generally, one could argue that it is time to

move beyond the constructive versus Behaviourist dichotomy towards a truly interactive, structural and dynamic view of the relation between social knowledge and social life/texts.

10.7.5. Texts and the role of the reader

The converse of the above argument is that cultural studies, especially as it is currently developing, can benefit from a knowledge of social psychology. For a theory of people's interpretations of popular culture, one must include both the structure of the text and the social knowledge resources of the viewer. The central question is how is the role of the reader, as inscribed in the text, occupied by actual viewers? The parallels between social cognition and cultural studies in terms of structural concepts (whether of texts or knowledge resources) permit ready investigation of the relationships between the two. In this research, a quantitative approach has been taken to long-term, stable character representations and, to a lesser extent, to narrative interpretations. But it is anticipated that many other approaches may investigate related issues, filling out and elaborating the cells in Table 10.1. Social psychology has studied everyday knowledge, its use in social situations and the cognitive processes by which it is organised: this knowledge constitutes the resource with which people make sense of popular culture texts.

10.7.6. The role of interpretation in mass communication

This thesis began by arguing that the failure of many traditional research paradigms to demonstrate convincing and notable effects of television may be due in part to the theoretical neglect of viewers' interpretations. This has involved the neglect of both specific interpretations of programmes and of viewers' social

knowledge of everyday life more generally. One cannot know what contents to correlate with what beliefs, what behaviours to measure having manipulated certain contents, or which are the contents of social concern unless one first knows how people make sense of these programme contents. For this, it has also been argued here, the concept of content, like that of 'information' in social psychology (see above) must be complicated, made structural, and located in a process of meaning production and reproduction.

Chapter 9 demonstrated that in only a few of the demonstrations of divergent interpretation could the interpretations be labelled either correct or incorrect. In other words, the text contains few single, unambiguous meanings, and thus the effects of such meanings cannot be straightforwardly anticipated from the researcher's own, often implicit, assessment of the meaning 'in' the text. The researcher must recognise her own role in interpreting, selecting, and, sometimes, disparaging the text. Most important, it is the viewers' interpretations (i.e. the product of an interaction between their social knowledge and the programme structure) which mediates television effects. In relation to this latter point, this thesis has not attempted to demonstrate the role of interpretation in media effects. It has instead concentrated on the prior tasks of firstly arguing the case for interpretation in theory, and secondly demonstrating the complexity, coherence and diversity of viewers' representations which make them simply predictable neither from a knowledge of text structure nor from viewers' social knowledge.

10.7.7. The experience of viewing soap opera

Finally, a word should be said about the experience of viewing soap opera. The soap opera has been mainly used here as an

appropriate domain for the study of complex social knowledge in relation to open structured texts. Yet the present results have also shown the involvement and personal depth of experience with which regular viewers relate to soap opera. They feel themselves to learn from the programmes, to gain company, conversation topics and problem solutions, they escape from their own world and give rein to their fantasies and pleasures, they appreciate the realism of the genre and exercise critical judgment, and they become emotionally aroused by the programmes. Soap opera plays an important part in many people's everyday lives. The textual analysis revealed the complex interrelation between narratives and everyday social knowledge, and it undermined the apparent transparency and triviality of the genre, thereby helping to explain its immense popularity with viewers. Whether this experience of viewing remains compartmentalised in people's lives, or whether it merges with the rest of their social knowledge, experience, actions and interactions, contributing to the varied resources with which they make sense of their lives, all this remains an important question for the future.

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