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"A DIFFERENT WAY TO PORTRAY IT": A PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCING THE [NEW] NEWLYWED GAME

by

Christopher Reed Groscurth, M.A.

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
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Department of Communication

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Christopher Reed Groscurth

# "A DIFFERENT WAY TO PORTRAY IT": A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCING THE [NEW] NEWLYWED GAME

Christopher Reed Groscurth, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2004

This study seeks to extend the body of literature which explores how culturally-situated audiences assign meaning to television texts. Specifically, this inquiry introduces and describes the audiencing behavior of several vintage television audiences. Drawing on existing cultural studies and feminist research, in-depth, semi-structured focus group interviews were used to gather viewer perceptions of the gendered discourse on two episodes of *The [New] Newlywed Game* (one from the '70s and one from the '90s). The focus group interviews were audio-taped then later transcribed verbatim. Six emergent themes: (1) *Understanding the Discourse of Power Structures*, (2) *Gendered Questions: Form and Content*, (3) *Pleasures of Conflict*, (4) *Pleasures of the Body*, (5) *Play, Pleasure, and Resistance*, and (6) *Personal Appeal* are discussed in terms of their significance and theoretical implications.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The discipline of communication holds great promise to advance our understanding of how audiences construct meaning from televised messages. The sites at which meaning is created and dispersed are complex, they occur within the medium itself, as well as among audiences. Since audience members' interactions with television are communicative events and often resemble parasocial relationships (Cohen & Metzger, 1998; Kama, 2002), they simultaneously influence and are influenced by their interactions with media (Fiske, 1998). An analysis of vintage television, from a communication perspective, has great value in terms of providing readers with an understanding of how patriarchal discourses of gender are constructed, consumed, and the meanings of which are circulated throughout the entire cultural system (Fiske, 1987).

Communication research pertaining to mass mediated messages is vast both in its methodological scope and purpose. Historically, traditional empirical research pertaining to media has focused on the effects of violence (Bandura, 1994; Gerbner & Gross, 1976), pornography (Donnerstein, 1980; Harris, 1994), and limited representation of various co-cultural groups (Gerbner & Signorelli, 1979) on viewers. These studies presuppose that media have psychological and/or behavioral effects on audiences and use descriptive means of quantifying and describing audiences in terms of normality, or that which occurs most frequently (Fiske, 1998).

However, a growing body of contemporary mass media research employs a variety of qualitative methodologies from critical and feminist perspectives (see Cooper, 2001; Dow, 2001; Orbe, 1998; Orbe & Hopson, 2001). These studies have sought to more fully understand how various texts construct and normalize matters of race, gender, and sexuality, through in-depth interpretive analyses and critiques. Although insightful, these readings only offer understanding pertaining to a very small portion (i.e., the mediated text) of the cultural system in which the texts are produced and consumed. Interestingly, there is much less research pertaining to 'audiencing' (Fiske, 1998) and individuals' perceptions of these texts (Corner, 1999). Through the use of the term *audiencing* I am referring to the cultural process whereby individuals engage with a television text and draw from their lived experiences to produce their own social identities and social relations. Ultimately, this is a pleasurable experience for viewers as they have control over the ways in which they engage with these texts, as well as the meaning that they assign to them (Fiske, 1995; 1998).

### Purpose

One way to increase and extend the trustworthiness of these critical interpretive readings is to research the consumptive audiences' perceptions of television (Dow, 1996). Based on the lived experiences of consumers, and their interpretations of contemporary texts, scholars are able to extend their readings of these texts by seeking further understanding of how others experience them and give meaning to them (Berger, 1995; Corner, 1999; Hanke, 1998b; Lindlof, 1991). As Fiske (1998) argues, the cultural system in which media production,

consumption, and economic commodification occur is a complex and elusive one. Therefore, the cultural scholar (analyst) must use those sites which are available to them for analysis (i.e., the text, the audience, and the 'visible' elements of the political economy) to theorize about those elements of the social system which are inaccessible. As such, the focus my inquiry is on the way contemporary consumers of *The [New] Newlywed Game* (as played in re-run form on the *Game Show Network*) use this particular text, and how they assign meaning to the gendered discourse that undergirds the show.

### Rationale

One well-documented topic of scholarly interest focuses on understanding the cultural signification of gendered identities, gender roles, and gender stereotypes (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Cooper, 2001; Dow, 1996, 2001; Hendriks, 2002). Gender stereotypes are a pervasive point of analysis for critical media scholars across many different genres of television including reality TV (Fishman, 1999; Geiser-Getz, 1995), soap operas (Barbatsis & Guy, 1991; Geraghty, 1991), and primetime television (Ang, 1985; Dow, 2001; Press, 1991). However, one genre which has been omitted from this dialogue is that of 'vintage television.' That is, individual shows or entire networks devoted to broadcasting re-runs of 'popular' television from past generations. Few, if any, contemporary studies have been conducted on contemporary audiences' readings of gender in 'vintage television.'

## Vintage Television

The proliferation of vintage television programming, like that which is featured on *TV Land*, *Nick at Nite*, *Soap Network*, and *Game Show Network* has grabbed the attention of the media industry (Weispfenning, 2003). For consumers, classic shows represent opportunities to engage in 'safe and reliable' (Oei, 2002; Weispfenning, 2003) interactions with images that are attractive because of their familiarity (Umstead, 2001). Recent reports indicate that post-September 11th, "viewers have taken refuge in more familiar and comforting fare" (Umstead, 2001, p. 14) offered by these shows, resulting in significant increases in ratings. Interestingly, these cultural sites offer spaces in which dominant ideological values can be recommodified and rearticulated to contemporary audiences. Weispfenning (2003) terms this cultural function of vintage entertainment as *social continuity* and posits two additional functions of reruns, that of *cross-generational informing* and informing the social *collective memory*. I agree with Weispfenning (2003) that one implication of "reruns could [be that they] also strengthen the dominant culture by reifying underlying traditional cultural values" (p. 175), through the process of informing the social collective memory.

For researchers, vintage entertainment programming lends itself as an interesting point of inquiry insofar as mediated images are made available for analysis within a different socio-cultural and temporal context than that of original episodes. As Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) state, such mediated structures create new forms of cultural space and our experiences of time. This confluence

of space and time within a contemporary cultural context is characterized by both traditional and evolving values, attitudes, and belief systems resulting in a more complex 'audiencing' experience than those of a contemporary audience reading a contemporary text (Weispfenning, 2003). With respect to vintage television texts, audiences are given a space to question what ideology is being portrayed and how, if at all, it has changed? Furthermore, it also provides media scholars with opportunities to analyze programming across generations to discern what, if any, changes have occurred over time. Such is the case with *The [New] Newlywed Game*, a regularly ran program on the Game Show Network, and the focus of this study.

#### Here Come the Newlyweds

*The Newlywed Game (TNG)* was at the pinnacle of its popularity between 1967-1971 when it aired in primetime as well as daytime slots on ABC (Schwartz, Ryan, & Wostbrock, 1995). Yet, the show's continued popularity stretched into the late 1990s with the development of *The New Newlywed Game (TNNG)*; both shows have been revived on The Game Show Network in the form of reruns, which are distributed to over 45 million homes in the U.S. ("Game Show Network," 2002). *TNG* and *TNNG*'s continued popularity is based on the strength with which the television audience identifies with the show's contestants (Delong, 1991). Interestingly, the shows' return on The Game Show Network were promoted not as traditional game shows, but as "relationship shows" (Freeman, 1996, p. 36).

With the exception of Fiske's (1994; 1995) small-scale auto-ethnographic study of viewer readings of *TNG* and Groscurth and Orbe's (2003) semiotic analysis, little critical attention has been paid to the show's significance as an influential cultural text. Some might suggest that cultural studies research on *TNG/TNNG* is difficult because the show creates a parody of sorts where female/male interaction, sex roles, and marriage are lampooned. Viewers' perceptions, therefore, are situated within the comic frame of the show (Geiser-Getz, 1995). While this may be the case in some mass media representations, I would argue that the humor contained in *TNG/TNNG* operates within a differentiation function (Meyer, 2000) – particularly in the ways that acceptable and unacceptable behaviors for women and men are dichotomized. Specifically, the questions asked of the contestants simultaneously appropriate gender roles, as well as undermine them by offering a space for resistance by the contestants. As Fiske (1995) has pointed out, the popular pleasure (i.e., humor) occurs at the site where the couples fail to live up to or reject the expected cultural norms. Those couples which conform to the societal norm earn points resulting in domestic prizes or second honeymoons, while those who resist these norms become the 'popular' winners with the studio audience and Bob Eubanks, the emcee of the show.

In this way, the false dichotomy serves to reify and normalize 'gendered behavior' whereby women and men are held to different standards as it relates to professional roles (see Steinke, 1997, 1998), and body image (Harrison, 2000; Hendriks, 2002), and socially-constructed values centered on gender. One



critical examination of these texts identifies several restrictive, oppositional representations of both masculinity and femininity on *TNG* and *TNNG* (Groscurth & Orbe, 2003). These include the oppositional coding of femininity as a sexualized body, object of sexual pleasure, financial burden, and having traditional [feminine] competencies. In comparison, masculinity is dichotomized as being non-sexualized, subject of sexual pleasure, financial asset, and having traditional [masculine] competencies. Clearly, this signification contributes to the false dichotomization of gendered identities, resulting in a very limited conceptualization of masculinity and femininity (Groscurth & Orbe, 2003).

There is unarguably a pervasive gendered discourse upon which *The [New] Newlywed Game* relies for conflict, drama, as well as humor. In part, the gendered discourse of the show is also what has spurred interest among scholars. Given the interest in this particular text among scholars, as well as in popular culture, a productive next step is to seek audience interpretations of the gendered discourse of *TNG* and *TNNG*. Ultimately, this study seeks to understand how viewers of *TNG* and *TNNG* construct meaning as it relates to relationships, gendered identities, gender roles, and gender stereotypes within a contemporary context.

Grossberg (1989) argues that 'context' is too often taken for granted and thought of as merely a backdrop in audience research. Therefore, by focusing on the when, where, and how (Grossberg, 1989) these particular socially located audience use *TNG/TNNG*, this study also seeks to foreground the importance of 'context.' That is, I wish to elucidate the increased complexity of the audiencing

experience of re-runs by drawing from the experiences of consumers. I used focus group interviews and phenomenology as means of collection, reduction, interpretation, and [re] articulation of these conscious experiences.

The following chapters will provide a review of mass media research, specifically as it relates to understanding the structural and discursive location of the audience (Erni, 1989). Furthermore, I will outline in detail the methodological process of phenomenology proposed for this study. Finally, within the concluding chapter I argue for research that addresses audience perceptions of television texts for the purpose of theoretical understanding of the audience.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Mass Media Research: An Overview

Traditionally, mass media research, has sought to understand the influential role that media have on audiences. As early as the 1920s political agents, philosophers, and scholars have sought to understand what influences the media have on audiences. For example, with the advent of new print and radio technologies, Lippmann (1922) and Dewy (1927) addressed some of the potential risks to the established social and political systems that came with mediating knowledge. Among these were the radical change and possible distortion of individuals' existing character, as well as the social "flow of information as a resource of citizenship" (Corner, 2000, p. 381).

From the 1930s to present a growing and differentiated field of empirical inquiry, that of *media effects*, continues to unfold in the social sciences (Gunther & Storey, 2003; Nathanson & Botta, 2003; Potter & Tomasello, 2003) .

Classically, this work grew out of research on media and opinion formation (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944). However, over several decades this body of mass communication research has developed into several research programs guided by models including agenda setting, spiral of silence, cultivation analysis, knowledge gap and others (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996). Uses and gratifications model will be overviewed in detail as it offers significant contributions to the present approach of audience reception (Corner, 2000).

## Uses and Gratifications

As it relates to the present study, the most pertinent of these 'classical' models of media inquiry is the uses and gratifications approach in that, it introduced an audience-focused program of research. Specifically, media scholars shifted from asking questions of what does the media do *to* the audience—whereby the focus was on the medium itself— to what do audiences do *with* the media (Corner, 1999). Rayburn (1996) states that the thrust of early uses and gratifications research was to develop typological descriptions of various audiences and identify their motives for media consumption.

Although this approach has been criticized as being atheoretical (Swanson, 1977), the exploratory nature of uses and gratifications research helped to develop empirical typologies to better understand what audiences do with the information obtained via various forms of media. In its nascent forms, this research was largely qualitative using written response methods to elicit audience responses (Rayburn, 1996); however, uses and gratifications research has a long empirically-based tradition. Current hermeneutic audience reception research can be thought of as a [methodological] legacy to early uses and gratifications approaches (see Biltereyst, 1995; Lindlof, 1991; Lindlof & Meyer, 1998; Lotz, 2000).

Perhaps the most salient assumption of uses and gratifications research relates to that of the 'active audience' (Fiske, 1998; Lindlof & Meyer, 1998). Uses and gratifications researchers have identified six functional motives between mass media and interpersonal communication: pleasure, affection, inclusion,

escape, relaxation, and control (Rubin & Rubin, 1985). The significance of this finding is directly related to the role of audience agency, as audiences *actively* seek specific outcomes (or gratifications) from their consumption of media. Interestingly, as Rubin and Rubin (1985) point out, these gratifications parallel those identified in interpersonal communication literature as being factors for which people seek personal relationships, or in this case a parasocial relationship with specific television programs.

Yet, what distinguishes the dominant paradigm of uses and gratifications media research (Allor, 1988; Corner, 1999) from that which grew out of cultural studies tradition of the Birmingham School is the assumption that media use actually satisfies these audiences' needs. Fiske (1998) argues that positivist approaches such as uses and gratifications, on the rare occasion that they do address the dominant social order, model "the differences in the social order as relatively stable and/or harmonious" (p. 372). Grossberg (1989) has characterized uses and gratification's audiences as "demographically defined individuals rather than socially and politically positioned groups, and the activity itself is drained of any ideological import: interpretation and resistance is replaced by uses and gratifications" (p. 26).

As John Fiske (1998) has stated, when uses and gratifications research omits the social order from its research agenda, subsequent policies tend toward the reactionary. In sum, it is assumed that the 'active' audience of uses and gratifications gains a sense of satisfaction (or pacification) through the media's production of relaxation, accompaniment, and control. Whereas, it is assumed

that the needs (usually for more material resources and power) of the 'active' audience of cultural studies and critical theory are not satisfied in a similar fashion. Their needs can only be satisfied through social action aimed at eradicating such inequalities and resisting hegemonic messages. Subsequently, an audience derives their satisfaction from their ability to control the terms of engagement with such media, "but there is no satisfaction of the needs generated by the inequality" (Fiske, 1998, p. 373).

This body of literature serves as a foundation for analyzing audience perceptions of the gendered discourse on *TNG* and *TNNG*. Specifically, my interests are exploratory in nature and related to the critical analysis of how audience members interpret the gendered discourse. Ultimately, such an inquiry answers the call made by Geraghty (2000) for the implementation of a research method(s) that go beyond the discourse of representation, and seeks a greater understanding how meanings are organized, understood, and used by audiences.

### Critical Media Studies

As noted previously, various critical approaches have been successful in identifying the underlying dominant [patriarchal] ideological messages in contemporary texts (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Cooper, 2001; Dow, 2001; Hendriks, 2002). However, substantially fewer inquiries have sought to understand the cultural process of audiencing such texts (Fiske, 1998). This section will offer a review of the contemporary critical media studies literature related to the gendered discourses of femininity, masculinity, and homosexuality

in various popular television texts. Furthermore, in this space I will review those efforts, rooted in the cultural studies tradition of the Birmingham School, which have sought to better understand audiences' consumption and interpretations of such gendered texts.

### Femininity on Television

Recently, interpretive approaches, drawing from feminist, rhetorical, and critical theory have been used to unmask dominant [patriarchal] ideologies in television texts. For example, Cooper (2001) examines the narrative structures of *Ally McBeal* related to femininity and masculinity; she concludes that the preferred feminine spectatorship created by the show offers a space for viewers to reject dominant patriarchal ideologies. Conversely, Shugart, Egle Wagoner, and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) offer a reading of the same text, which illustrates how third-wave feminist sensibilities are appropriated and commodified to ultimately reify the hegemonic patriarchal order. Although both analyses provide important insight, such 'readings' offer little insight as to how viewers [other than these scholars] process such ideological messages. In fact Shugart et al. (2001) explicitly state, "the problem of hegemony with respect to postmodern media is that recognizing the subversive critique is difficult" (p. 208). Based on this notion one might assume that failure to recognize the subversive critique could result in a certain 'taken for grantedness' of dominant ideological messages.

Contributing to this difficulty is the fact that these hegemonic messages manifest themselves in a variety of ideological messages or forms (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003), particularly as they relate to [idealized] female body image.

Hendriks (2002) offers an extensive review of the body image literature in her recent call for advanced theory and programmatic research. She argues that researchers should seek to better understand the relationship between media consumption and women's body satisfaction.

Similarly, Harrison (2000) has examined the relationship between idealized images of the body and eating disorders in her recent study of adolescent girls. Harrison used a variety of mediated images in her empirical study some of which came from popular television. The shows she drew from included, *Beverly Hills 90210* (see also Tursi, 1994), *Melrose Place*, *Caroline in the City*, *ER*, *Grace Under Fire*, *Ricki Lake*, *Suddenly Susan*, *Mad About You*, and *Seinfeld*. Clearly, this cross-section of television genres represented a variety of female and male body types; however, this study only examined the situation comedy, talk show, and drama on daytime and primetime television. No discourse or images were examined from the primetime game show genre. Nevertheless, Harrison's (2000) study found that there was not only sufficient evidence to suggest that these media were statistically significant in their relationship to eating disorder symptomatology in adolescent girls, but they also contributed to body dissatisfaction in younger males.

Attention to gender differences is not limited to body image in our androcentric culture (Bem, 1993; 1994). As it relates to femininity, themes of beauty (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), romantic and domestic fulfillment (Coltrane & Messineno, 2000), and victimization (of aggression and violence) (Dietz, 1998) emerge across various types of media. For example, Baker-Sperry



& Grauerhoz (2003) have analyzed the female ideal beauty across children's fairy tales. While Coltrane & Messineo (2000) provide a content analysis which describes the subtle ways in which (White) women are disproportionately portrayed as being fulfilled in romanticized domestic roles in television commercials. Finally, Dietz (1998) states that women are often underrepresented, represented as sex-objects, and/or represented as victims of (male) aggression/violence in diverse forms of media.

Despite these seemingly bleak representations of femininity on television, some scholars have given various media their due credit when more enlightened representations of women are presented (Cooper, 2001; Shugart et al., 2001; Steinke, 1998). Such a review would be remiss in overlooking these studies, which have advocated for those favorable representations of femininity. For example, Shugart et al. (2001) offer a mixed analysis of such contemporary female icons as Alanis Morissette, Kate Moss, and Calista Flockhart's character on *Ally McBeal*. Despite the overarching dominant ideological messages that these scholars read in these texts, they do offer some positive readings in each of the representations. For example, they identified the consciousness of women of exploitation and overt sexism in the lyrics of Alanis Morissette, Kate Moss's ability to blur gender lines in the androgynous Calvin Klein CK One ads, and those empowered female characters of *Ally McBeal* embracing female sexuality as powerful.

In addition, Steinke (1998) offers an analysis of PBS's depiction of women scientists. She concludes that such images of successful professional women

who are able to manage such careers, their families, etc. serve as positive images for audiences, particularly young girls and women. She also argues that media play an influential role in shaping young girls' attitudes toward careers in traditionally male-dominated fields (Steinke, 1997; 1998).

In sum, there is some evidence of positive representations of femininity in the media; however, overwhelmingly those studies which have focused on women on television have found such representations to be debilitating and oppressive in nature. Whereas some scholars applaud specific characteristics of various characters/celebrities (e.g., Cooper, 2001; Shugart et al., 2001) as being pro-feminist, most often contemporary representations of femininity in the media are negative, and serve as antitheses to third-wave feminist sensibilities (Shugart et al., 2001). Therefore, the signification and reification of dominant ideologies as they relate to femininity in vintage entertainment, such as those on *TNG/TNNG* on the Game Show Network (Groscurth & Orbe, 2003), also serve the interests of the status quo in the (re)commodification of gender stereotypes to contemporary audiences.

### Masculinity on Television

In addition to the growing body of critical feminist analyses of women on television, some media scholars have attempted to further understand how restrictive representations of masculinity are manifest in popular television. Hanke (1998a) argues that masculinity (as well as femininity) should be understood as a historically specific and culturally constructed concept. That is, it should be viewed as a fluid construct which enables scholars to examine how

the coding for masculinity has changed overtime and how these codings have contributed to viewers' experiences. In addition, Hanke asserts that masculinity needs to be articulated in terms of its relationship to femininity (also see Steinman, 1992).

Although there is not similar evidence (see Harrison, 2000 as an exception) pertaining to idealized or sexualized images of men and their relationship with self-esteem and eating disorders, ideologically restrictive representations of masculinity work in a similar way (Vavrus, 2002). However, the challenge for the critical media scholar is to describe these differences and similarities in their totality, that is, how they intersect with respect to the social relations of privilege and power (Hanke, 1998a) in the larger postmodernist world of multiple masculinities and femininities (Oelsen, 2003).

Elsewhere, Hanke (1998b) has examined the role of masculinity in the specific texts of *Home Improvement* and *Coach*. Hanke asserts that these types of programs, which he terms "mock-macho" sitcoms, invite audiences to laugh at the parodic construction of 'traditional' patriarchal power and offer spaces to represent such stereotypes and hegemonic norms. Other texts such as *Thirty Something* (see Hanke, 1990) represent more progressive representations of masculinity, which possess more [traditionally] feminine characteristics. However, he warns that such modifications of the discourse surrounding masculinity should be read with caution because they do not explicitly address issues of patriarchal power or other gender inequalities.

Law and Labre (2002) offer an overview of how the ideal body type for men has been represented in popular media over the last thirty years. Specifically, their content analysis looked at the representation of masculinity in popular magazines. They concluded that the ideal body type for men has become more lean and muscular, and is beginning to rival the unattainable body type which is often blamed—in part—for increases in eating disorders among women.

Elsewhere Jeffords (1994) has explored various representations of the male figure in popular film; these include *Rambo*, *Batman*, *Robocop*, *Kindergarten Cop*, and *Terminator 2*. Often these representations are flawless, hard-bodied, hyper-masculine representations of what it means to be a man. Although some representations of masculinity promote a more feminine version of masculinity, Jeffords (1994) concludes that the majority of cinematic representations promote a stereotypical, nationalistic and militaristic versions of masculinity. She concludes that these are very dangerous forms of representation given the ideological and political ramifications associated with them.

These modifications or shifts in media discourse surrounding masculinity have been criticized as being manifestations of patriarchal power in themselves. That is, certain traditional feminine characteristics or qualities are legitimized through the representation of masculine (male) characters that possess such characteristics. For example, Vavrus (2002) illustrates how nurturance and

domesticity, traditionally feminine characteristics, are legitimized through television news treatment of stay-at-home dads.

With the emergence of feminist-inspired masculinity studies comes greater complexity in understanding the myriad of subjectivities within the socially constructed categories of masculinity and femininity (Saco, 1992). However, given our understanding of the influential role that television plays in constructing and shaping U.S. culture it is necessary to attempt to better understand how these images of masculinity are understood by audiences.

### Homosexuality in the Media

In addition to feminine and masculine studies, media scholars have focused on how [restrictive] gendered discourses manifest themselves as it relates to homosexuality. This approach illustrates how representation of homosexuality in general is heteronormative (see Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002). For example, Dow (2001) uses a case study approach to analyze the coming out discourses associated with the television show *Ellen*. Through analyzing the personal and relational aspects of coming out, Dow illustrates how heteronormative politics and power structures influence the show's depiction of lesbianism. Although the show was successful in making homosexuality visible, it does not substantiate its cultural position. Ultimately, Dow's (2001) reading explicates how the show legitimates Ellen's personal struggle of coming out, but does not legitimate homosexuality as being socially acceptable in the mainstream.

Similarly, Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) examine NBC's Emmy Award winning comedy *Will and Grace*. Battles and Hilton-Morrow illustrate how the show legitimizes the personal (heterosocial) relationships of gay characters, however, deemphasizes their connection with the larger social world (see also Kama, 2002). Moreover, they found that the show equates gayness for men as a lack of [traditional] masculinity, thereby, restricting gay 'masculinity' to the carnivalesque flamboyance of [stereotypically] queer characters. Ultimately, Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) conclude that such a representation of homosexuality invites mainstream (heterosexual) audiences to read the text within a familiar televisual frame.

As it stands, literature addressing audiences' uses and understandings of such gendered texts and hegemonic messages, as reviewed here, is relatively scant in comparison to extensive literature of textual analyses. Although several studies have used qualitative approaches to attempt to better understand how audiences' give meaning to the ideological messages in certain texts (e.g., Ang, 1985; Fiske, 1998; Press, 1991; Radway, 1984; Schaefer & Avery, 1993; Tursi, 1994), there are many that have escaped critical attention. Like Fiske (1989), I would argue that

[A] starting point for a popular analyst is to investigate what traditional critics ignore or denigrate in popular texts, and to concentrate on those texts that have either escaped critical attention altogether or have been noticed only to be denigrated (p. 106).

Therefore, additional research is needed, which seeks to understand how the untrained audience, which is not to say unintelligent viewer, decodes the ideological messages communicated via television. I turn now to a discussion of how the audience has historically been studied and theoretically conceptualized in mass media research.

### Qualitative Audience Research

The lasting emergence of qualitative methods in media audience research arguably began in the year 1980 with the appearance of David Morley's *The 'Nationwide' Audience* (1980) in Great Britain, and James Lull's (1980) essay, 'The Social Uses of Television' (Lindlof, 1991). Anderson (1998) argues that scattered studies through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s resembled "so called qualitative approaches...understood by perhaps the majority as methods that would *clean up the leftovers*" (p. 205, my emphasis). In this regard, qualitative methods were thought to be used to analyze data that was 'not of use or value' to empirical researchers.

Nevertheless, shifting from popular empirical methods and textual analysis, communication researchers began to adopt new methodologies to attempt to overcome the theoretical problem related to the elusive body known as the audience (Allor, 1988). Specifically, textual readings limited the researcher to the text itself, thereby making insightful audiences inaccessible (Fiske, 1998; Lotz, 2000). To overcome this obstacle researchers adopted ethnographic methods from anthropology, hermeneutics, and other humanistic approaches (Bird, 1992a; Lindlof, 1991; Lindlof & Meyer, 1998; Lotz, 2000).

Specifically, Lotz (2000) asserts that the rise of these methodological approaches to audience studies raised significant controversy and inspired many critical evaluations which will be covered in subsequent sections. Lotz (2000) argues, as does Geraghty (1998), that the mere act of 'doing' qualitative audience research communicates a message to the media research community. That is, such a methodological decision denotes a break from traditional [positivist] approaches to mass communication research. Furthermore, it signifies ones' political and epistemological worldview most often rooted critical and feminist paradigms, choices which are deliberately made, intentional, and explicitly stated (Lindlof, 1991; Lotz, 2000).

### Positioning the Audience

As Allor (1988) articulates, the audience exists in a multiplicity of discursive spaces (see also Ang, 1994; Erni, 1989; Moore, 1993; Nelson, 1989). This approach to the audience engenders a discussion of social locality, cultural affiliation, as well as contradictions (see Bird, 1992a; Grossberg, 1988; Morley, 1994) found throughout audience discourse. Allor (1988) argues for the use of a range of critical approaches to answer questions related to the relations among individuals, texts, practices, social organization, and social power. Allor asserts that this allows researchers to analyze such discourses without privileging their own conceptions as stable truths.

Fiske (1998) characterizes one such discursive space of the audience as being not a social category per se, but that of a social formation or a social unit. That is, his conception of an audience was that of a social unit which was formed



around a television program with a set of social interests. Fiske argues, as does Ang (1994), that this conception of the audience as a social formation allows for fluidity in terms of its formation and dissolution according to the contextual conditions. Therefore, such an audience—as will be studied here—is constituted in the mere existence of members (i.e., characterized by what they do with the text, rather than what they are in terms of social categories) who have the ability to account for the complexities and contradictions in a convoluted society.

In addition to Fiske's (1998) work on actively 'audienicing' individuals, other scholars have used those critical approaches (political economy, post-structuralist film theory, feminist criticism, cultural studies, and postmodernism) as outlined by Allor (1988) to better understand the active audience. For example, Schaefer and Avery (1993) used a two-step process of mail survey and focus group interviews to illustrate audience competencies in deconstructing the parody of conventional talk shows as evidenced by *Late Night with David Letterman*. In addition, Press (1991) used a similar approach to critically analyze women's interactions with prime-time television (see also Radway, 1984). Still others have used in-depth interviews as a means of locating audiences of specific texts (Bird, 1992b; Kama, 2002).

Yet another conceptualization of the audience is offered by Grossberg (1988). Grossberg claims that "media audiences are shifting constellations, located within varying multiple discourses which are never entirely outside of the media discourse themselves" (p. 386). This conceptualization has particular significance for researchers attempting to study audiences and locate their

use/understanding of various texts within the complex matrix of culture including class, race, gender, and a nearly endless list of other discourses (Bird, 1992a). From a theoretical standpoint the task of locating such audiences may appear to be “impossible” (Erni, 1989); however, as Bird (1992a) argues

the ever-increasing abstraction of the audience is a dangerous trend that starts to lose sight of the very real people whose constructions of reality we are discussing. Cultural studies should not risk becoming an inner circle of theorists endlessly discussing themselves and the impossibility of discussing anything else (p. 257).

Therefore, the use of a phenomenological inquiry (detailed in subsequent sections) to better understand the lived reality of audience members appears necessary, as it is most often ignored in cultural studies audience research (Bird, 1992a; Jensen, 1987).

Clearly, the present inquiry places its emphasis not on the text itself (i.e., *TNG*), but rather on the elusive body known as the audience. Specifically, this inquiry seeks to better understand how individuals of particular cultural affiliations and disparate viewing styles (Morely, 1994) give meaning to a particular text, rather than further abstracting the theoretical conceptualization of the (impossible) audience (Bird, 1992a; Erni, 1989). As Lindlof (1991) states, “qualitative [audience] research seeks to preserve the form, content, and context of social phenomena and analyze their qualities, rather than separate them from historical and institutional surroundings” (p. 24). Subsequently, this study primarily seeks to understand the phenomenon of the [socially-situated]

audiences' interaction with *TNG/TNNG*, the social construction/deconstruction of the symbolic meaning communicated by such texts, as well as identify what—if any—audience resistance to these hegemonic gender representations exists (Geraghty, 2000).

In sum, the aforementioned theoretical approaches illustrate the significance of the social positioning of the audience. Specifically, they illustrate the significance of the lived realities of the active audience in qualitative audience reception research. In this regard, I now turn to the theoretical and methodological approach proposed for this study to answer the following research questions (RQs) concerning these audiences:

RQ1: How do audiences construct meaning as it relates to gender roles/stereotypes on *TNG/TNNG* in a contemporary social context?

RQ2: How do audiences negotiate, if at all, a restrictive coding of gender roles on *TNG/TNNG*?

Specifically, I will outline the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology from ontological and epistemological perspective. I will also detail the methodological process to be implemented in this audience analysis. Within the following chapter I argue that studying the essential experiences of popular culture audiences can provide important information regarding how individuals give meaning to and use popular television texts. Particular attention will be devoted to examining how the phenomenological process, as outlined by Husserl (1931) and van Manen (1990), will be used for capta collection, reduction, thematization, and interpretation.



## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

This section will briefly outline the theoretical underpinnings related to qualitative audience research methods in order to contextualize the use of phenomenology in this inquiry. Furthermore, I will outline the specific process used for *capta* (van Manen, 1990) collection, reduction, thematization, and interpretation. The objective of this section is not only to outline *how* audiences' perceptions will be treated in this study, but also to provide grounding for my analysis in making explicit my epistemological standpoint (see Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, 2003).

#### Paradigmatic Positioning

As it relates to the development of current qualitative audience research practices, one must consider the contributions of British, U.S. and feminist cultural studies (see Bang, 1988; Lindlof, 1991; Press, 1991). Theorists closely associated with the Birmingham School (Stuart Hall, Angela McRobbie, and Paul Willis, and others) utilized the theories of Gramsci, Althusser, and Marx to develop a unique means of analyzing media content and cultural influence qualitatively (Press, 1991). By implementing ethnographic, hermeneutic, and historical methods the search began for dominant ideological messages and ideological/political resistance among oppressed groups. As a means of identifying such resistance, cultural studies researchers have implemented in-depth interviews, ethnography, participant observations, and small group discussions (Press, 1991).

One classic example of qualitative audience research is Radway's (1984) study of women's responses to romance novels. Although this study used print media as the 'stimulus' text for its analysis, methodologically speaking it is seminal to critical audience reception research. Similarly, Press's (1991) study of women watching popular television extends this critical-qualitative line of (audience-centered) inquiry across generations and socioeconomic class. Ultimately, such studies have indicated that audiences are, to varying degrees, more than capable of consciously evaluating and analyzing their own perceptions and understanding of dominant ideological messages within mediated texts. More importantly here, these studies answer a critical pragmatic question that all research must address, that is does this method of inquiry produce *useful* knowledge (Kvale, 1996)? Assuredly, the findings from these qualitative inquiries and others (e.g., Cohen, 1991; Hecht, Faulkner, Meyer, Niles, Golden, & Cutler, 2002; Tursi, 1994) indicate that the knowledge produced has much heuristic value and is quite (pragmatically) useful in terms of media literacy education.

Therefore, by offering textual readings beyond the confines of the text itself (i.e., to those texts created between audiences members and researchers), scholars can offer multivocal/dialogic (Bahktin, 1986; Pauly, 2004) readings of texts, and thereby reveal multiple layers of complexity and meaning (also see Fiske, 1986 for further discussion of applications multivocality in television research). These types of textual readings, rooted in the lived experiences of audiences, are always subjective and always reflect larger issues of how meaning is created and communicated by larger hegemonic structures of the

mass media (Berger, 1995; Geraghty, 2000). From this, researchers and educators gain a clearer sense of how these primary texts (e.g., *TNG*) organize and communicate meanings to audiences (see Geraghty, 2000). One promising method for gathering and interpreting such audience experiences is through the use of focus group interviews and phenomenological/thematic analysis of these secondary texts (e.g., Cooks & Orbe, 1993; Press, 1991; Schaefer & Avery, 1993).

### Phenomenology as a Theory and Method

The methodology adopted for this study is phenomenological analysis of focus group interviews. It has been stated that the goal of the phenomenologist is to uncover the essence of a particular person's or group's—in this case several television audiences'—lived experiences (Husserl, 1931; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). In short, phenomenology is an inductive means by which the researcher can capture the conscious lived experiences of her/his participants or participants (Orbe, 2000). This study implemented focus group interviews or group discussions (Finch & Lewis, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 1994) as a means of capta collection. In addition, the phenomenological method of hyper reflective analysis as outlined by Merleau-Ponty (1968) and van Manen (1990) will be used for capta reduction, thematization and interpretation. Within this section I will, first, offer a description of focus groups and the rationale for using them in this study. Second, I will outline the process of phenomenological analysis and hyper-reflection.

### The Nature of Focus Groups

Fontana and Frey (1994) note that group interviews, or group discussions as they have been termed elsewhere (Finch & Lewis, 2003), have traditionally been associated with market research. That is, focus groups have been used to gather consumer opinions on product preferences and characteristics.

Additionally, politicians and political parties have used focus group interviews to solicit voter reactions and perceptions of various political decisions and issues (Finch & Lewis, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 1994).

However, focus groups have been shown to be an effective means of data collection in the social sciences (Finch & Lewis, 2003; Patton, 1990). In part, this is because of the synergistic nature of the focus group. Finch and Lewis (2003) state that “a good focus group is more than the sum of its parts. The researcher harnesses the group process, encouraging the group to work together to generate more in-depth data based on interaction” (p.185) (see also Patton, 1990). Orbe (2000) adds that the value of this process is that not only do focus groups provide researchers with the opportunity to gather several individuals’ experiences at once, but they also “create a context that encourages synergistic insights unattainable during individual interviews” (p. 613).

Previous studies have illustrated the value in using focus groups discussions in the analysis of television texts (Cooks & Orbe, 1993; Watts & Orbe, 2002). Watts and Orbe (2002) address the notion of public consumption and how it influences the lived experiences of individuals and the cultural form in



their analysis of the “Whassup” Budweiser guys. Similarly, Cooks and Orbe (1993) use focus group discussions to augment their survey data as it relates to viewer perceptions of prime-time satire on “In Living Color.” Therefore, given the exploratory nature of gathering audience perceptions of this particular text, the use of focus group interviews appears to be a sound methodological choice.

### Phenomenological Analysis

A phenomenological perspective focuses on describing phenomena, specifically the participants’ life world or lived experiences in terms of its essences (Husserl, 1931; Kvale, 1996; Lanigan, 1979; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Husserl (1931) argues that any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for inquiry, as “phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). The phenomenologist focuses on the human experience of perception and consciousness which define the *essence* of one’s existence (Husserl, 1931; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Kvale (1996) adds that the aim of the phenomenological analysis of interview data is to provide a detailed description of research participants’ diverse experiences and offer an explanation of their essential meanings. Put simply, in order to understand ones’ perception of the reality of an object, the researcher is dependent on the subject or experiencing body itself (Moustakas, 1994) in all its complexity. However, in an effort to experience how others perceive and/or experience reality the researcher is faced with the challenge of putting aside their scientific foreknowledge, preconceptions, assumptions as well as judgments (Kvale, 1996; van Manen, 1990).

Moustakas (1994) refers to this process as the *epoche*. According to Moustakas, “*epoche* is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (p. 33). For the researcher, an integral part of the process of understanding the perceptions and consciousness of the ‘other’ is to first acknowledge [and put aside] her/his own consciousness, biases, and overall existence within the world in which she/he is situated (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In a similar sense van Manen (1990) refers to this process as *bracketing* ones’ own experiences. Merleau-Ponty (1962) credits Husserl for this contribution, that is, through the process of self-examination transcendental subjectivity can *be* or become an intersubjectivity (see also Moustakas, 1994). Similarly, Kvale (1996) and Orbe (2000) state that the aim is not to approach the analysis with the absence of presuppositions, but rather to approach the phenomenon with a constant hyper-reflective or critical consciousness of ones’ own conjectures.

In this sense, the primary researcher must remain open to the perceptions and experiences of those being interviewed in order to capture these essences, while simultaneously examining their own subjectivities which inform their analysis. Through examining my epistemological standpoint here, as well as acknowledging my subjectivities toward *TNG/TNNG* (Groscurth & Orbe, 2003) I have begun this process of bracketing my own conjectures. That is, by bringing my own personal attitudes and values to the conscious level, I will be able to reflect on how they inform my perceptions and interpretations of emergent themes across the capta.

The process of hyper-reflection (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) involves preliminary interpretation of a phenomenon, then a re-examination of this initial interpretation (Orbe, 2000). The process of thematizing the experiences of others, 'bracketing' ones' own experiences, interpretations, and so on is the essence of the hyper-reflection. Furthermore, through this process the scholar not only adds to the rigor of the inquiry, but often times finds that those insights which were initially seen as mundane or unimportant can most acutely describe the essence of the phenomenon under examination (Orbe, 2000).

### Process

This section will outline the specific methodological process which guided the inquiry. Specifically, I will address the context of the study, selection of participants or participants, overview of the topical protocol, and the process used for the analysis of the resulting data.

#### Contextualizing the Audience

Data was collected from focus group interviews held in a classroom on the campus of Western Michigan University. The room was selected on the basis of the following criteria: availability, access to the necessary audio-visual equipment, as well as the physical arrangement of the room (Finch & Lewis, 2003). Finch and Lewis offer a thorough explanation of these criteria for focus group venue selection. Among the most important for this study is the physical arrangement of the room itself. The room itself was equipped with a large screen television. Desks were arranged in a circle with the tape recorder located unobtrusively in the center.

Part of the uniqueness of gathering the viewing experiences of individuals in this context was that it placed greater emphasis on the text itself, rather than that of a full ethnographic description whereby the presence of the researcher in the individuals' home is emphasized (see Fiske, 1998). Furthermore, this context provided an opportunity to gather many subjective experiences within one focus group interview, whereas this would not be possible if I had to go into the participants' living rooms. Finally, to further contribute to this 'welcoming' environment, refreshments including coffee, water and light snacks were served.

The episodes that were used in this study were selected from a series of 10 episodes of *TNG/TNNG* that were recorded from The Game Show Network between January 9 and February 6, 2002 . It should be noted that the text that was recorded during this time frame also resembled, in terms of form and content, an even larger body of episodes (30+ in total) which were viewed prior to and following the recording of the sample of 10 episodes. Specifically, one episode from the 1970s and one episode from the 1990s were chosen for this study based on their representative content in relation to larger text of shows. That is, both shows chosen used the same question and answer format as the other shows collected during this time frame, had the same host, and dealt with similar topical issues including the couples' sex life, physical appearance, finances, and household responsibilities.

#### Focus Group Composition

This study analyzes capta collected from 7 focus groups of audience members, which averaged approximately 90 minutes in length. Each of the

focus groups were comprised of 2-10 undergraduate students enrolled in communication courses at Western Michigan University. Most of the participants were European American between the ages of 18-20. Two African American women participated. In addition, two Chinese women and one non-traditional aged man from Liberia participated in the focus groups.

The average number of participants in each group was 7. In total 49 participants participated in this study. Interestingly, two of the mixed sex groups (A and E) consisted of men and women who were involved in romantic relationships at the time of the study. This was often influential in how they gave meaning to the text, as you will read in the next chapter.

Focus group participants were recruited for the study based on their willingness to participate. I made verbal announcements in various sections of a lower-level undergraduate course (COM 170) stating the basic purpose of the study, location, and the approximate amount of time for completion of the study. In addition, other instructors and faculty announced the study to interested students in their classes. A date and time was set at the time of the announcement. The recruitment announcement included only the information stated in the recruitment overhead (see Appendix A), and stated that students will have an opportunity to review the consent form (see Appendix B) and ask questions prior to committing to the interview. Students were offered extra course credit (5 points) for their participation.

Focus group A was comprised of a man and a woman who had been dating for over a year. This initial group served as a pilot study and served to

shape and refine the topical protocol (see Appendix C). Focus groups B and C were comprised of all men, similarly FGs D and E were comprised of all women. Finally, FGs F and G were comprised of both men and women. The rationale behind making the explicit distinction between the 'gendered' focus groups is two-fold. First, the homogeneity in terms of biological sex in groups B-D is intended to facilitate the participants' candid disclosure of experiences and insights (Finch & Lewis, 2003) on the potentially sensitive topics related to gender roles, identity, and stereotypes (see Cooks & Orbe, 1993). Second, the use of heterogeneous (i.e., specifically related to biological sex) focus groups in group A, F, and G is intended to provide deeper cross-sex insights, whereby men and women can share their perspectives on the signification of gendered identities, roles, and stereotypes.

For consistency among the six groups, as well to reduce the potential threat of my presence being a male researcher in the mixed sex and female groups, a female co-moderator participated in each of the focus groups. The co-moderator largely observed during groups B, C, and D; she then was the primary facilitator in groups E, F, and G. This conscious structure of the groups offered a unique dynamic between the participants and the co-facilitators, particularly in the homogenous groups. Our intention was to decrease the anxiety or discomfort experienced by the participants related to discussing information of a gendered and/or sexual nature with a researcher of the opposite sex.

### Topical Protocol

Based on the pilot focus group interview (FG A), which consisted of a committed dating couple (dating for over a year), I revised and refined several elements of the topical protocol (see Appendix C) for this proposed study.

Primarily the topical protocol consists of three main topics on which I am interesting in gathering participants' insights. First, following several scholars' (Finch & Lewis, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990) suggestions, the protocol inquired about general perceptions of the two episodes.

Second, the protocol addressed the more sensitive topics of the audiences' perceptions of gender roles on the two episodes of the show. This section of the protocol seeks to determine not only how audiences give meaning to the gendered discourse of the show, but also what differences—if any—audiences perceive between how the show represents men and women, as well as how the representation has changed/stayed the same over three decades. Furthermore, this section proved useful in the pilot interview, in that, it elicited responses which indicated audience members' resistance to, as well as acceptance of such stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity.

Finally, the third section of the protocol was also adapted following the pilot focus group. This section seeks to elicit the perceptions of 'normal' viewing habits of *TNG*. In the pilot focus group, insights were gathered related to masculine vs. feminine viewing habits, the value of the show from a masculine and feminine perspective, perceptions of how others view and/or value the show, as well as how audience members process the representation of gender. This

imaginative act or fantasizing (see Husserl, 1931) provides participants with an opportunity to intuit others' perceptions as a means of distinguishing their own perceptions (Descartes, 1977) and has been argued as being the strength of determining the consciousness of eidetic knowledge (Husserl, 1931).

### Capta Reduction

The aim of phenomenological reduction is to proffer a complete description of the phenomena of interest (Moustakas, 1994). van Manen (1990) adds that "phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience" (p. 79). Moustakas (1994) offers a complete description of the following steps involved in the reduction process. *Bracketing*, or putting aside any 'agenda' of the research project, in order to assure that the research process is rooted solely on the phenomenon and question; and *Horizontalizing*, which refers to treating every statement made by the participants with equal value. According to Moustakas (1994), "statements irrelevant to the topic and question as well as those that are repetitive or overlapping are deleted, leaving only the *Horizons* (the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon)" (p. 97). Finally, the primary researcher *Clusters the horizons into themes*. This process involves organizing the previously mentioned horizons into thematic descriptions of the phenomenon.

For the purpose of this study, I followed Orbe's (2000) and van Manen's (1990) recommendation for capta reduction. The focus group sessions were audio tape recorded and transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher, thus yielding a rich text for the thematization process. The focus group transcripts,



then, produced a secondary text consisting of 134 single-spaced pages. As Lanigan (1979) argues, the ultimate goal of the reduction process is to determine which elements of the capta gathered are essential and which are not.

Next, the transcripts were reviewed several times over and refined to identify preliminary themes. According to van Manen (1990), the thematization process is a way to condense and make sense of the observed phenomenon (see also Moustakas, 1994). This is an intentional process whereby the primary researcher first brackets her/his own presuppositions regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Husserl, 1931; van Manen, 1990), then determines which elements of the participant's experiences are conscious and cognitive and subsequently essential to their experience. The end result is a list of several themes that centralize the essence of their experiences without essentializing them (Orbe, 2000). After reviewing the transcripts four times over, the preliminary themes which were identified by marking them by hand on the transcripts, were reduced to six essential themes (detailed in Chapter 4).

However, as van Manen (1990) and others (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994) have posited, a "theme is always a reduction of a notion. No thematic formulation can completely unlock the deep meaning, the full mystery, the enigmatic aspects of the experiential meaning of a notion" (van Manen, 1990, p. 88). At best, the thematic reduction process could be described as an iconic tool for attempting to [re]structure experience. Thus, remaining open to the text itself (i.e., the transcripts), as well as engaging in honest constant self-reflectivity, become central to both the reduction and interpretation stage of the process (van

Manen, 1990). Finally, through hyper-reflective interpretation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), connections between these themes were drawn by the primary researcher, providing a synthesized explanation (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) of how audiences assign meaning to the gendered discourse of *TNG/TNNG*.

### Thematic Interpretation

The final step in the phenomenological process is that of thematic interpretation. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962) the objective of thematic interpretation is the emergence of a central idea regarding the connections between emergent themes. Through the process of hyper-reflection the researcher seeks to intuit the essential meaning of the phenomenon by eliminating nonessential themes (van Manen, 1990). This is done by reviewing each step in the phenomenological process to reveal the common thread which connects the emergent themes (Orbe, 2000; Orbe & King, 2000).

In sum, through the process of phenomenological reduction and hyper-reflection the primary themes provide insights regarding audience perceptions of the gendered discourse of *TNG/TNNG*. Furthermore, these themes will potentially add to the complexity of scholars' understanding of how audiences assign meaning to, use, as well as, how they resist—if at all—such pervasive ideological messages pertaining to gender in vintage entertainment.

### Conclusion

As the preceding chapters have explained, this study seeks to extend the growing body of critical media research by offering viewer perceptions of

*TNG/TNNG*. As I have noted in this proposal, several studies have addressed the topic of gendered discourse on television from a variety of critical and interpretive approaches; however, no inquiry has sought to gather and articulate viewer perceptions of gendered discourse on *TNG/TNNG* from a phenomenological perspective. The benefits of conducting this study are three fold. First, this study may contribute audience support or present new issues not addressed in other critical readings which have been conducted on this particular text (see Fiske, 1994, 1995; Groscurth & Orbe, 2003). Second, this study will potentially add to the understanding of audiencehood (Ang, 1994) and how meaning is created within a particular cultural matrix of discourses (Fiske, 1986; Grossberg, 1988, 1989). Finally, this inquiry may offer insight regarding how—if at all—audiences resist hegemonic messages related to gender, which has both heuristic and pragmatic value as it relates to future audience-centered inquiries and theoretical development.

## CHAPTER IV

### [RE] PRESENTATION OF AUDIENCING EXPERIENCE

In order to most effectively [re] present the audiencing experiences which were undertaken in each of the seven focus groups, I will follow van Manen's (1990) recommendations for hermeneutic phenomenological writing. I make the distinction between "*re*"presentation and *presentation* because any attempt to present the ideas expressed by the participants is, at best, a reification or [re] presentation of their own words. According to van Manen this process involves paying particular attention to the language and anecdotes used by the participants to describe the audiencing phenomenon.

Specifically, I will approach each thematic description with great sensitivity to accurate representation of *how* the participants described their perceptions of the phenomenon. Appropriate punctuation, emphasis, and explanation of the context in which the comments were made will be used to most effectively and artfully create a textual [re] presentation of these audiences' perceptions of *TNG/TNNG*. Ultimately, the objective of this chapter is to present the reader with a powerful phenomenological text that will allow them to "see" the deeper significance, or meaning structures of the lived experiences it describes" (van Manen, 1990, p. 122). My objective is to bring the reader as close as possible to the experiences of the audiences I have interviewed.

In order to achieve this objective, this chapter will explicate each of the six essential themes derived from the transcripts and each of their subthemes where they were needed as determined through the reduction process. I have titled

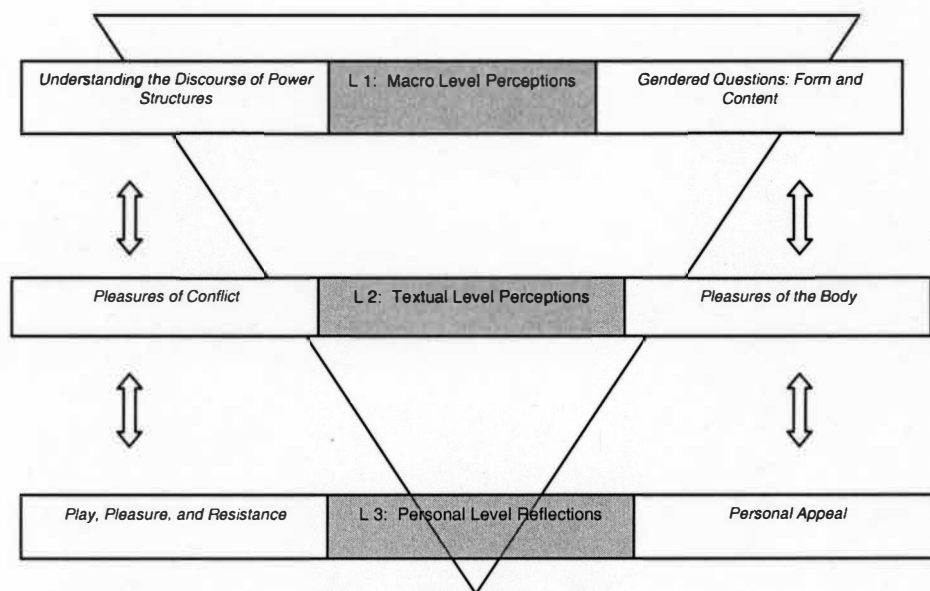
these themes: (1) *Understanding the Discourse of Power Structures*, (2) *Gendered Questions: Form and Content*, (3) *Pleasures of Conflict*, (4) *Pleasures of the Body*, (5) *Play, Pleasure, and Resistance*, and (6) *Personal Appeal*.

Textual evidence taken from the transcripts will be used to illustrate how each theme was articulated by the participants. This chapter is solely descriptive in its presentation of each emergent theme and the participants' comments. I will reserve my interpretation of each theme and the resulting connections among themes for the final chapter.

Before I describe each theme, I would like to note that the order in which the themes are [re] presented is significant to this analysis. The presentation of themes 1 and 2 represent what I regard as macro-level perceptions. Themes 3 and 4 represent textual level perceptions. And, themes 5 and 6 represent personal level reflections (See Figure 1). I will offer a complete explanation of my conceptualization of each of these perceptual levels in the following chapter as it is central to my interpretation of the interconnectedness of the six essential themes.

At this point, however, the reader must simply keep in mind that the boundaries between these macro-level perceptions, textual level perceptions, and personal reflections are fluidly defined. My objective in using this form of thematic ordering is to produce a coherent phenomenological text which moves from the 'big picture' (i.e., macro-level audience perceptions) to the personal (i.e., micro level reflective perceptions). My intention for the reader is that this thematic [re] presentation should not be read linearly, but rather should take into account

the fluidity between each of these themes and levels of perception (to be detailed in Chapter 5).



*Figure 1. Three Levels of Audience Perception.*

In the item depicted the six emergent themes, and the connections among them, are illustrated as occurring at three different levels of perception.

A cyclical reading of this sort is necessary given that the ideological, cultural assumptions inform the audiences perceptions regardless of the level at which their perceptions are made. As Fiske (1998) states each act of consumption (i.e., perception, interpretation, and/or rejection) is an act of cultural production. Therefore, those personal reflective perceptions at level 3 of Figure 1 are informed by those larger cultural perceptions at level 1. However, the constraint of creating a phenomenological text in writing limits my ability to

represent these themes in the cyclical fashion that they emerged. Rather, I am restricted to providing a linear description of the themes and offering a visual depiction and description of the interconnections between these themes (see Figure 1), which I will detail in the final chapter.

### Six Essential Themes

The remainder of this chapter will outline and offer a textual description of each of the six essential themes stated previously. Each piece of textual evidence will be demarcated by an alpha-numeric code (e.g., B7) that indicates the transcript from which the quote was taken (B) and the page on which the quote can be found (p. 7). Different initials were used in the transcription process to ensure the anonymity of the participants while acknowledging shifts between speakers. This serves as a useful reference point should a reader wish to view the transcripts in their entirety [available electronically upon request].

#### Understanding the Discourse of Power Structures

The theme of *Understanding the Discourse of Power Structures* illustrates how audiences' perceive and reflect on the gendered cultural power structure in the U.S. The reading of patriarchal power structures was appropriated through the audiences' perceptions of the form and content (to be explained in subsequent themes) of the questions posed to contestants of *TNG/TNNG*, as well as the reactions that the questions elicited from the contestants and emcee of the show. The questions that most often invited these readings by the participants were topically related to issues of how the bodies and sexual performance of men and women were represented and dichotomized (see

Groscurth & Orbe, 2003), issues of domestic responsibilities like cooking, earning money outside the home, and control over family finances, as well as the manipulation of the different threats and risks posed to men and women related to answering these types of questions on television.

Their perceptions of this discourse indicated that some readers have the ability to distinguish between societal or macro-level structures of power, and interpersonal or micro-level structures of power. First, I will present evidence related to the audiences' understanding of macro-level structures of power and how that influences the ways in which masculinity and femininity are signified on the show. Second, I will illustrate the audiences' perceptions of the micro-level or interpersonal power dynamics between the couples on the shows. I realize, however, that the differentiation between these two levels of power is relatively arbitrary since macro-level structures of power, as signified through television, have a great deal of influence over the micro-level structures (Corner, 1999). However, this differentiation appears to be productive for the description of the different layers of meaning audiences ascribed to *TNG/TNNG*.

#### *Societal (Macro) Level Power Structures*

The participants often expressed their consciousness of patriarchal power structures that operate at a larger cultural level. A primary example of this is the way in which individuals understood the nature of culturally produced stereotypes and how the show exploited these to produce popular entertainment. Some of these stereotypes pertained to the difference between how the bodies of men and women were represented. In response to a question on *TNNG*, which asked



the husbands, what type of fruit their wife reminded them of when she was naked? One female participant stated:

G2: F: I thought it was interesting that they asked the guy about the woman's body and they didn't ask the women about what they thought about their men naked. It was just kind, I don't know, women as objects I thought.

Another female participant commented on the differences between how men and women are represented, as well as the frequency with which women are represented in a stereotypical (sexual) manner across both episodes from the '70s and '90s.

E6: F: Um, I think that women are portrayed in a more sexual way than men are in general, ever, so. Guys aren't used to that, like seeing that. So it's more embarrassing (to have their sexual performance discussed) to them than it would be for women because women are portrayed that way all time on TV.

This comment illustrates how the difference in representation is stereotypical and how, for women, it has become natural to be sexualized. Conversely, when a man's sexual performance is discussed—most usually called into question—the result is discomfort resulting in audience pleasure.

A second stereotype which illustrates several viewers' consciousness of patriarchal structures of power related to a question from *TNNG* that naturalized cooking as a women's domestic responsibility. One participant commented,

G2:F: And I thought it was interesting how the men went first and then they asked about the woman's cooking, like just assuming that she's the one who's doing the cooking.

Interviewer: And that was in the '90s right?

F: Mm Hmm

Interviewer: Did that surprise you, they asked that question?

F: No not at all.

F2: NO (scoffing)

Interviewer: Why not?

F: Because I think women are viewed as second class citizens a lot of the time.

The participant's consciousness of the fact that the show portrays women in (stereotypical) domestic roles is evident when she stated "like just assuming that she's the one who's doing the cooking." Moreover, the lack of surprise by the two women that the show uses this tactic for providing pleasure for the viewer, and the use of the description "second class citizen" to describe how women are viewed by the status quo, illustrates a sophisticated gendered reading of the text. That is, the female consumers bring with them previous experiences that have informed their perceptions of the signification of women in domestic roles, being treated as second class citizens. Furthermore, they use these experiences to give meaning to the text that acknowledges its overt patriarchal messages.

Another woman who participated in a focus group stated that she thought that contemporary audiences of *TNG/TNNG* are much better equipped to offer critical readings of such stereotypes than were audiences of their original era.

A22: F: I think they (audiences) would see through it that it's not reality. That it's not how it really is. I don't know. I guess more now than, than back then when maybe the show first started. I mean women were more at home than they are now. I mean now women are like career women. Career- moms. Of course now they're going to. Now I think women today pick up more on it, you know the questions about being domesticated and that sort of thing? They pick up on it more.

Thus, these readings of *TNG/TNNG* illustrate that these contemporary audiences are aware of the larger structures of patriarchal power that the shows signify. Clearly, these viewers felt that they had a good sense of how and in what ways men and women were be signified and how this related to culturally-based power, as well as how perceptions of this power have changed over time.

In fact one participant, who was a woman, stated that her perception of how contemporary women view these stereotypical portrayals was one of resistance of the dominant ideological intent of the question.

F6: F: I think they (women), I mean like, I think now there's kind of like—you know like how you were saying how you're (to another participant) stubborn about cooking? I think a lot more, and probably in the '90s too, I think' a lot more women are like, "No I'm

not doing it just because it's the social, you know?" Just to break those kind of boundaries. I still don't think that they would ask "what does your husband cook?" Because I don't think that's the majority, but...

This comment illustrates that one form of resistance of the social expectation or norm is for women to overtly reject cooking as a female domestic responsibility in their own relationships. However, as the participant went on to explain, she does not believe that *TNNG* would represent men as the cooks of the family because it would not reflect 'the majority' of households. Interestingly, all of the men who participated in same sex, as well as mixed sex groups, asserted that they did the majority of the cooking in their relationships, while the women mostly expressed a lack of ability and/or desire to cook.

The gendered reading of how the dominant ideology can influence the ways in which *TNG/TNNG* portrayed men and women in stereotypical ways was not unique to female viewers. One man who participated in a focus group illustrated his understanding of how this power structure can be exploited to manipulate how men and women are represented on television.

B8: M: I think they could do what ever they wanted. Obviously, they're in control—the producer, the director or whatever—they can make it however they want. If they want the show to look like the women are more in charge they could base their questions to make the men look more weak and powerless and the women more powerful. Or they do it vice versa. Like, have more power

questions for the men I guess. Then, the editing too. I don't know how the show actually works if they actually only ask a few questions, but I could probably see they ask a bunch more then just take the best, like the ones that are most exciting.

This reading illustrates that certain consumers approach a popular text with the foreknowledge that editing is a hegemonic strategy. Specifically, that editing can and is used to manipulate representations of particular groups in shows claiming to be 'reality' television (Orbe, 1998), as well as in shows intended to resemble 'reality' like that of the game show genre (Fiske, 1987).

However, other focus group participants claimed that, although *they* were able to decode to the macro level ideological structures of power through undoing the gendered discourse of the show, *other* audiences may not have that same ability in the context of their own living rooms. One woman who participated in a focus group with her boyfriend, made the following comment about whether or not she feels other audiences would engage in a critical reading of the way the texts signifies gender roles.

A20: F: Do I think that other audiences would interpret those roles from that show? I mean if they're reading into that, I mean I don't think that it's hard to pick it up. But I don't know if other people really... I don't think it's hard to pick that up, I just don't know that people would really think about it and analyze it that way. I mean it's really one of those no brainer shows where you just kind of watch it.

In an all female focus group several participants agreed with the position of the previous woman when asked what they thought other audiences' uses of the stereotypical gender roles might be?

E11: F: Help them guess what's going to happen in the game probably.

F: Yeah. They probably don't even really notice them they just do it, instead of sit and think about it.

F: You probably wouldn't even been thinking about it if we didn't have like this group thing.

Interviewer: Really?

F: I think it just adds to the subconscious thing that you constantly see them (stereotypes).

F: Yeah. You see stereotypes so often; obviously, you think that it's right.

Based on these perceptions, the notion of context of viewing becomes critical. That is, although these participants didn't feel that other audiences would lack the critical thinking skills to evaluate the dominant gendered discourse of the show, they did feel that viewing the show in a different context (i.e., at home) might promote a less critical viewing of the show. More interestingly, was the participant's assumption that this type of uncritical viewing of stereotypes could promote an acceptance of the signified gender roles that the show relies on for entertainment. When asked if the show would still be entertaining if they did not

ask questions that positioned men and women in stereotypical roles, another female in this same group stated:

E13: F: I think it would still fun to watch if they like didn't rely on the stereotypes. I mean, some couples get it wrong still (the questions) and it would still like kind of be fun to watch their interaction. I don't know, I'd still be entertained.

Thus indicating that, for some, the reliance on stereotypical representations may not be central to the enjoyment of the show. But rather it is the voyeuristic opportunities that show like *TNG/TNNG* present that provide viewing pleasure.

The preceding descriptions illustrate how the audiences that I interviewed were able to decode the patriarchal discourse of the *TNG/TNNG* as evidenced in the form and content of the questions and the topics that were discussed on the shows. Next I will turn to address how audiences articulated their understanding of the interpersonal or micro-level structures of power.

#### *Interpersonal (Micro) Level Power Structures*

This subtheme represents the ways in which audiences gave meaning to the signification of patriarchal power as evidenced at the micro-level or interpersonal level. Based on the reactions to questions that the contestants gave, the issues that they were asked questions about, and their interaction with the emcee of the show, audiences expressed their understanding of how the dominant ideology was manifest at the interpersonal level between the couples on *TNG/TNNG*. The two salient aspects of this subtheme were related to which

spouse had more interpersonal control in the relationship and, who had control over the finances in the relationship.

The participants offered a variety of readings of how the structures of interpersonal power or control were signified within *TNG/TNNG*. When asked who seemed to be more in control over the relationships the participants had little difficulty citing specific examples of couples who clearly exemplified the patriarchal norm of male-dominated relationships, or those who did not conform to this expected norm. Several participants cited examples of men appearing to be in controlling positions in the relationship. One female participant stated:

G13: F: Maybe, they [the men] just seemed strong. Like, the women they were so passive you know like, they had energy but it wasn't like, I'm about to win you know? It was just like, oh, I hope I get this right, you know. That's how it seemed to me.

Others equated the notion of interpersonal control or dominance with respect.

For instance one female participant stated:

E8: F: Like in the '70s the guy had not so much, but a little less respect for the women as they did in the '90s. Because like I remember the one couple, like the finance one said that about financing. Then, the one couple, the guy was a little rude to her. It seemed like they were not, like they (the men) didn't respect them (the women) as much.

Another woman picked up on the nonverbal behavior of some of the husband's who exemplified dominant behavior. She stated:



Interviewer G13: It was almost like they [the women] were looking for their [husband's] acceptance or their permission to—Like the guys they were just like glaring at the girls in the '70s. Like, "Are you going to answer right?" Like, that's kind of what I got from their scary faces you know like, "What are you going to say?" They [the women] were just like, "Okay." Then like in the '90s they were like, into it. They weren't as intimidated by the men.

Interviewer: How'd the men seem dominating in the old ones?

F: They were just strong. I don't know maybe it's by the looks or something they just seemed like, strong.

Several viewers stated that there appeared to be empowering changes in terms of how women's power in the relationships seemed to change across the decades. For example, one woman in a mixed-sex focus group stated:

D11: F: Yeah, I think it is pretty equal (interpersonal power), I definitely think that the women have come a long way. They're definitely more vocal on the newer ones.

A male participant in the same group stated:

D10: G: Ahh, that one, the guy, he was saying—he had a comb over (all laugh). The Beatles lookin' fella. It seemed like his wife was, she was really intent on everything he was saying. She was more concerned about being wrong. Like, she didn't want to be wrong and make him mad or something. Then, in the new one whenever a guy

would get it wrong the wife would just go off on him. They'd just go nuts and then, in that one when they'd get it wrong (referring to the '70s) the wife wouldn't do anything.

These participants equate the wives' ability to be "more vocal" or resistant of the ideological norms on the newer episodes with an increase in their level of influence in their relationships.

Another male attributed this change to feminist and women's rights movement.

D10: G: Then, the old ones it seemed like guys were more dominant. But that was like before everything happened with the equal rights movements and all that. And now, like you can see on the new one that it (power/control) was more equally spread. In some cases they [the wives] were more powerful than the men in the relationships (he laughs).

This reading is interesting in that, not only does the participant contextualize and offer rationale for the change in the wives' behavior/representation over time; moreover, his laugh at the end of his comment signifies either that such a representation is either very unexpected or that the women appear to be getting too powerful in the relationship.

Yet, other viewers disregarded the sociological changes over time; instead they attributed the power dynamics at the interpersonal level to personal characteristics. For example two male participants in the all male focus group stated in both shows certain men seemed to give answers that would not anger their wives.

B9: M: It seemed like the men were looking for the approval of their wife. Versus, the wife was just like this is the way it is.

M: I think it's still that way too in a sense. Like with myself I'm more submissive also, like K said. And, so like, and if I were to say something, I'd feel kind of like make it look good so they (the women) weren't embarrassed but she could say anything, just like completely bash me and I like wouldn't care. She could just say how it is. But with me, if I said something kind of bad I'd be like, "Well I said this because." Because she'd probably like freak out or whatever so, I think they (women) do pull more power in that sense.

Another man in the same group interpreted that the husbands in *TNNG* had more interpersonal control in their relationships. For example,

B10: M: It seemed like all the men were like powerful at home. The one couple said "start doing." The other lady said he needs to stop yelling. And then the African American couple she's like quit nagging me. So I guess like the men outside are like powerful and more controlling or whatever. The men had the power at home, but the women wanted them to start changing.

This reading is interesting in that the participant assumed that the it was 'safe' for the women to express their concerns about the amount of work that their husbands did around the house, however, when it came to the truth the matter, the husband was still the king of his castle and didn't have to take orders from his wife, so to speak. One male participant gave a personal anecdote from his own

relationship that illustrates this private versus public negotiation of interpersonal power. He offered this lengthy explanation of how interpersonal power works both on the show and in his own relationship.

B11: M: I think it kind of depends though. Power is almost different like on the show than it is at home. Because I think at home it seemed like the guys would be yelling and not doing anything, blah, blah, blah. And ah, almost in a sense they have power. Like the woman would be telling them, "get up and redecorate the bathroom" or something like that. And he wouldn't do it, he's playing video games. But, then when they came on the show, he'd answer questions and get her upset and he'd be like "Oh, well I said this because..." and try to back track and save himself. But I think if he was at home and answered that I think he'd be like "whatever!" and just keep on watching the game or whatever. So I think uh, at home the men would be in control and have more power. But, I think when they're out in public they want to look like the good husband or something like that and look like "Oh no I love my wife, she has more power." I think it's the same for the women they want to look like they have power when they're in public, on TV, but when they're at home like they wanted to try to have power, but the men would allow it in a sense.

I think it's probably the same thing too in a sense. Out with our buddies I try to make it look like it's [power/control] a mutual

thing. Like, I don't tell her what to do, she doesn't tell me what to do, blah, blah, blah. But then—we don't live together—but if we were at home it'd be, I guess, more a sense of male dominance in a sense. I'd say...Um, I could like, I don't know more act like how I wanted and just be like, whatever about it. But when I'm in public I want to like look good and not make her look like nothing in front of my friends her friends or other people. So, I try to make it look like almost like she has more power in a sense.

Clearly the norm for this man's relationship is one structured or influenced by the norms of patriarchy. That is, male dominance manifests itself on the interpersonal level in a variety of forms. This participant cites two ways in which male dominance manifests itself. One way is by disregarding ones' wife and playing video games. The second is that of granting ones' wife the privilege of 'appearing' to have control in the relationship when in public.

The second way in which the participants illustrated their consciousness of patriarchy at the interpersonal level was by referencing a question from *TNG* which inquired about the couples' finances. On the show, several of the wives were confused when asked how much the couple had "socked away." In this case, the audiences equated relational control with control over the household finances. In short, many seemed to think that 'money was power.' For example,

E7: F: Oh, I just thought it was funny that the women didn't know what 'sock away' meant. Like they had no clue that that meant save money and they were oblivious. And, I think probably the '90s show

the women might be more aware of like the money issue than they were in the '70s. They didn't seem dumb. They just seemed clueless. I think now-a-days women would like know what that means.

Similarly, another man stated:

A3-4: I think it's a gender issue. It's an older show. It's a gender issue I think that it was very surprising for me to believe that the women did not understand what that meant. I wouldn't say now in the '90s episode if they asked that, I think they [the women] would have thought that it's "saved." But it's funny that even back then, even then men knew that it meant saved and the women didn't.

As it relates to power in the relationship, these readings of how women in the older shows interpreted or were confused by the term 'socked away' as meaning saved is significant. Given the 'money is power' assumption many viewers expressed, if one is to assume that the woman in the relationship had no idea how much the couple had 'socked away,' then it would also be fair to assume that they would not have access to the relational power that access to that money engenders.

To further illustrate this point I will draw from several participants' personal anecdotes, which address how the structures of power surrounding control over finances manifests in their parents' relationships. For example, one female participant stated:

G18 F: My dad would say stuff like that (demeaning comments about female spending) now, and my mom's in charge of all of our finances. He's always like, she just spends, and spends, and spends. But he doesn't know how much money we have. She's in charge of it.

Many of the other women in this group found humor in this story because it overturns the patriarchal expectation of male control over finances. However, another participant's story in this group was not as hopeful. She stated:

F: My dad is completely in charge. My mom doesn't even have like an ATM card to get into...

Interviewer 1: My mom gets an allowance (laughs).

F: Yeah. My mom gets \$20 a week for food when she works. When *SHE WORKS*, she gets \$20.

Interviewer 2: When she works, out of the home, or?

F: Yeah. She works at a law firm and my dad gives her \$20 a week to go buy lunch, during her lunch.

Interviewer 2: Well, doesn't she make money at the law firm?

F: Yeah, it goes right into my dad's account.

This example clearly illustrates the relational control that is engendered by financial control. The female viewers seemed to identify with the women on *TNG/TNNG* who were represented as not knowing much about their financial situation, in addition to offering personal examples of how this type of patriarchal control manifests itself in their own families. Some seemed to disregard this as normalized, while others clearly seemed frustrated by it.

Whether on the micro or macro-level the majority of these audiences seemed able to identify to some degree how patriarchal power structures were pervasive in the gendered discourse of *TNG/TNNG*. Interestingly, they were able to point to particular changes in how masculinity, femininity, and power were signified across the two shows, the result of which were relatively sophisticated readings of the text. However, none of the individuals interviewed made the connection between how larger (macro) power structures serve to inform how power is (mis)used or naturalized on the interpersonal (micro) level. The following thematic description helps to further illustrate the present theme by exploring how individuals assigned meaning to the gendered questions which the contestants were asked.

#### Gendered Questions: Form and Content

The questions that Eubanks (emcee) asks the contestants to guess how their spouse would answer are the fundamental building blocks of the show's gendered discourse. My rationale for presenting this theme second is two fold. First, I wanted to establish the participants' ability to decode the signification of larger structures of power which contextualize the questions posed in the two shows (see theme 1). These readings were sensitive to the original historical context of the show, as well as the contemporary viewing of the shows. Second, the questions although they are both informed by and reflect larger societal structures of power, they are also apart of the textual fabric of the show. In this sense the questions are both manifestations of the dominant power structure at the production end of the shows, and also the most salient textual signifier that



these audiences gave meaning to. In the following sections I will further describe how these audiences gave different meaning to the questions at the textual level or their textual level perceptions (see Figure1) of the issues provoked by the questions.

The description of this theme is intended to reflect the ways in which audiences gave meaning to the ideologically charged questions in terms of their form and content. By *form* I am referring to the type of question asked and the amount of points awarded for the question. For example some questions posed to the wives were read as being more closed or restrictive in nature. Thus, the wives' answers as well as their husband's meta-perceptions of their answers were interpreted as being more restricted (i.e., more stereotypical). By the *content* of the questions I am simply referring to the issues engendered by the questions. These included gender roles, threats to traditional femininity and masculinity, and gendered sexuality.

### *Form of the Questions*

In terms of the form of the questions nearly every group assigned meaning to the fact that the show awarded more points for the mens' answers to the questions posed to the women, than for the womens' answers to the questions posed to the men. This was indeed the case on other episodes viewed (see Groscurth & Orbe, 2003) not just the two episodes viewed in this study. Several participants made general comments like the following comment made by a woman who participated in a mixed sex focus group.

D 9: F: I thought it was interesting that the women's questions were worth more. I mean I know it's just like the second thing, but I thought it was really interesting that the women's questions were worth more.

A male participant in the same group added,

M: They get the bonus; they get the bonus question.

Other participants provided explanations for the reasons why they thought this phenomenon occurred on the show. For example one woman who participated in an all female focus group stated;

F1: F: I thought it was interesting how the guys' questions (those questions posed to the men) were only worth 5 points each and the women's (those that the men had to guess) were worth 10. It just made it seem like the women were supposed to know more about the relationship, to me.

After we caught on to this trend, we began to ask the follow-up question, "why do you think the questions posed to the women were worth more?" By in large the consensus among the groups was that the women probably were more attuned to the mundane detail of the relationships than were the men. One female participant who participated in a mixed sex focus group stated;

D 14: F: When you're in a long drive in the car and we were talking about, we were talking about how the girl's, they want to talk they want to get to know more about their boyfriend. "So what's your

favorite color?" you know. "What did you do as a kid? What was your favorite toys as a kid?" The guy, "So what radio station do you want to listen to now?"

In a mocking manner, this woman articulated her perceptions of how men and women attune to the minor details of the relationship/their partner. Her perception is that the points awarded for a question posed to the wives might be worth less because they have some sort of gendered advantage (over the men) for guessing their husband's answer correctly.

Another female in the same group attributed this to the fact that women simply listen to detail better than men.

D14: F: Like girls are very emotional and get really dumb, but I mean you guys—I'm not saying YOU guys—but I'm just saying that seems to be the biggest problem in relationships that the guys don't listen and the guys just think that the girl's constantly nagging, nagging, nagging. That's the biggest barrier.

The second issue related to the form of the questions concerned the actual structure of the questions. That is whether the question was open-ended or forced choice. Several participants stated that the open-ended questions were very broad in scope making it hard for the men to answer. This reoccurring theme was best articulated by a woman who participated in a mixed sex focus group.

D12: F: It seemed like the womens' questions had like an ultimatum to them, like this (regarding their husbands' bothersome habit) needs

to be fixed and say if this wasn't to be fixed, you know. Who would be the next person to fill your shoes? Like the women's questions would have caused more of a problem (after the show).

M: Whereas the guys questions...

F: Were just like, what do you think about your girlfriends chest? Or, what can't your girlfriend cook? Or, anything like that.

This question begins to touch on the content of the questions. However, of more interest here is this participant's perception that the "ultimatum" created by the restrictive (forced choice) form of the questions posed to the wives, facilitated a differentiation of meaning between how the husbands and wives were represented. In this case the forced choice form represented the wives as "bitchy" and demanding. Whereas the men, through answering open ended question concerning their wife's looks and inability to cook, were portrayed as superficial. The notion of choice could also be read as a form of privilege for the husbands insofar as the wives did not share the same freedom to offer alternative answers.

A man who participated in an all male focus group commented on the difficulty of the open-ended question posed to the husbands, which queried, "What movie title best describes your mother-in-law?"

B1: M: I thought it seemed like the questions were—on the old show—were a little more open.

Interviewer: Like?

M: Like the movie title one was really tough.

This man related the open nature of the questions to the older shows, which others did not do. Based on the two episodes shown, it did appear that the episode from the 70s posed more open-ended questions to the husbands. However, in the '90s forced choice answers were most often used for both the men and the women. This signification results in a more equitable form of questions, but opens the possibility for more restrictive control on the part of the producers as it relates to the representation of masculinity and femininity. Interestingly, none of the individuals who participated were able to make this critical distinction.

### *Content of the Questions*

The *content* of the questions was the most prominent feature of *TNG/TNNG* that these audiences addressed in [un]doing the gendered discourse of the shows. Most often the content of the questions addressed issues concerning gender roles, threats to traditional femininity and masculinity, and gendered sexuality.

Several audiences commented on the explicit statement of gender roles in the text. For example one female participant stated:

E10: F: It's (the show) the typical like, women's bodies then it talks about stupid things for guys like, TV show, or like what do you think about your wife's cooking? Like the wife stays at home cooking then like the man goes out and works and she like raises the children.

The following comment was used to illustrate the previous theme; however, this comment also explains how the content of the question appropriates domestic responsibilities to women.

G2: F: And I thought it was interesting how the men went first and then they asked about the woman's cooking, like just assuming that she's the one who's doing the cooking.

Interviewer: Did that surprise you, they asked that question?

F: No not at all.

Some women interviewed rejected this reading posed by the previous participant. One woman stated;

D11: F: It's more equal. Because women aren't in their whole homemaker role. That they expect the guys to cook and clean and do all of their stuff too. It seems like back in the day you couldn't tell her that she cooked bad because that's all she did. She cooked, she cleaned, you know this is what she did. If you told her she didn't do that right you got nothing (all laugh).

Still other viewers commented on her how gender roles have changed since these shows were made *and* how they have simultaneously stayed the same. She said,

G2: F: I think everybody cooks something, so it could kind of go both ways. I didn't really see it as them just asking because their women.

F2: But they didn't ask the men.

Interviewer: Would you have a different reaction if they asked the men?

F: I would probably be more surprised if they asked the men just because generally in society you don't typically see the man cooking.

This participant rejects the presumptive (stereotypical) content of the question posed to the men regarding what dish their wives cook badly. However, she does agree that posing the same question to the men would be surprising because it does not conform to the stereotypical gender roles portrayed in vintage television.

Another female participant illustrated her personal rejection of the patriarchal norm of women as cooks in the following interaction with the interviewer.

F5: F: Well I don't know. I think it's more expected for the girl. Like in my relationship it's more expected that I cook, but he cooks more often. Because I'm stubborn.

Interviewer: Okay...my boyfriend cooks too. Well I might make the salad, but (laughs), but he cooks everything else. But, what'd you say, expected?

F: I'm more expected to cook.

Interviewer: By who?

F: By my boyfriend.

Interviewer: Okay, so you feel that he expects you to do the cooking?

F: Yeah, but I don't.

In terms of male viewers readings of these gender roles, one participant provided the following reading of the stereotypical gender roles that the content of the questions imply. He stated:,

A3: M: Well it sounds like, from my initial thought from all eight couples, that the women don't work, that all they do is spend the man's money, and the only way that they contribute to that household is through a domestic cooking and cleaning capacity. And that's the way it sounded, like that in each of them. And I got no feeling of the fact that they contribute more as a combined household [referring to income].

Conversely, his significant other had a different reading of the content of these questions, and sparked the following interaction:

A3: F: Do you feel that way because of the questions that he asked, or because of answers that they [the women] gave? Because I don't think that I would have ever interpreted that they don't necessarily work. I wouldn't have interpreted it either way. The questions that he was asking...

M: The questions that he was asking and the answers that they gave. Probably more from the questions that he was asking, just because you know she said you know, when the both women thought "socked away money" meant spent it. It made it sound like from their own answers, "Well I spent all this money." (F laughs).



Thus, for many viewers the content of the questions contained restrictive cues, those of financial asset and financial burden for both men and women respectively.

The second content-related issue that these audiences addressed related to threats to traditional masculinity and femininity. That is, the content of the questions—when exposed on national television—could pose a threat to either spouse. In addition, this theme was often equated with the couples' security in themselves and the relationship. One man who participated in a focus group articulated this notion in his comment below.

D5: M: You both have to be like pretty outgoing to want to go on national television and be like asked questions. I don't know. It could be something fun to do if you were both outgoing. I mean you definitely wouldn't be shy and go on national television and be asked some of those questions they were asked.

Some of the threats posed to the men on the show included being cheated on by their wives. One female participant stated;

D13:F: And like the woman she knows exactly which of the guy friends she would go after next, if he were to leave and—I don't know on mine, in my viewpoint because it was the later version of it, it seemed more like the women had a little more power there with the relationship. Now she's got something to hold over the guys head. You know that I'd go after Ira, you thought I was going to say Ira too, so—the questions seem a little more threatening to the guy.

F2: Yeah, like they could cause problems after the show.

The threat of being cheated on by their wives could result from not living up to the archetypical masculine image. On the episode of *TNNG* the audiences often mocked one man in particular who was timid, caring of his wife's feelings, and physically small in stature. Several male participants who participated in an all male focus group made the following comments about this man.

C3-4: M1: Like that skinny dude on the first one. (all laugh). He looked so depressed by the end of the show.

Interviewer: Well they had no points! They didn't score anything.

M2: They got everything wrong.

M3: I wonder if they're still married today?

M2: Yeah, I don't know?

M3: I'd like to see an update on all of them.

M4: She probably cheats on him.

Interviewer: She probably cheats on him?

M4: Yeah, he looks like the kind of guy that gets cheated on. (all laugh)

M3: He was really submissive. He was just submissive.

M4: He'd come home she'd be in the sack with somebody. He'd be like well this is bad (all laugh).

Clearly, male viewers assign stereotypical meaning to the mens' responses to the content of the questions, as well their failure to meet the societal expectations for masculinity.

In addition, the threat of being cheated on was also signified through the content of the questions by equating masculinity with the ability to perform sexually. For example one heterosexual couple who participated in one focus group stated:

A2: F: He's (Bob Eubanks) tapping into the insecurities of each of them.

M: Yeah.

F: So like for a woman it's jealousy, and for a man it's insecurity about his own ability

Interviewer: What kind of ability?

F & M: Sexual ability!!

The same male participant also stated that the man's ability to perform sexually was dependent on how attractive his wife was. He based this reading on the content posed to the men and women which dealt with issues of performance and the body respectively.

A3: M: I think what they're trying to do is at the same token saying that "You're (the wife) good sexually, but at the same time I can only be as good as you are desirable." I'm only as sexually turned on as you make me. And with your pear hips, you don't make me as turned on as I could

be so that's why you're judging me horizontally. That's why you're saying this, that's why you're saying that, because it's you.

For the wives on the shows the audiences most often cited content related to imperfections in their bodies and appearance as the primary threat to their femininity. For example, one opened-ended question posed to the husbands enquired, "Gentlemen what fruit does your wife's body remind you of when she's naked?" Another asked, "Sometimes I look at my wife's chest and think, 'gee...'"

One female participant stated:

A2: M: All those questions are like sexual in connotation. They go back to can a man...

F: Can he perform? And do they (the women) look the way you want them to? You know, their shape. "How would they describe themselves as a fruit?" That's tough. That's tough.

Interviewer: I know I heard a definite reaction from you on that one.

F: That and "Gee I would change...whatever, you know, her breasts. Would they be bigger, smaller", like that's definitely an insecurity for a woman.

Clearly, this viewer and others like her picked up on the threatening nature of the content of these types of questions posed to the women.

Similarly, as some of the above excerpts illustrate, the content of the questions related to sexuality equated mens' sexuality with their [in] ability to perform and womens' sexuality with the (socially expected) attractiveness of

their bodies. For example, one question posed to the women asked if my husband were a tv set in the bedroom what would need adjusting most? His vertical? His horizontal? Or his volume? However, as many participants stated this question was somewhat ambiguous, although most picked up on the sexual innuendo. One woman who participated in an all female focus group stated:

G3: F: I thought like vertical get taller and horizontal, you know, like threw on some weight and you know, (referring to volume) tone it down or—That's what I thought, but...

While another female participant stated, "I took it as completely sexual. The whole thing. I thought horizontal, the vertical, and the volume. The whole thing I thought was sexual (G3). However, she was unwilling/unable to provide an explanation of how each metaphor translated into a sexual meaning.

The point being that the content related to male sexuality was often more ambiguous than the content towards women related to body type and breast size. This is significant in a historical scope in that, it appears to be acceptable and expected to objectify women's bodies for male viewing pleasure. Indeed these audiences proved to be able to make this distinction as will be discussed in the next section.

By and large, these audiences determined that the form and content of the questions posed to the men and women on the show were clearly gendered in their form and content. With the exception of minor changes in

the form overtime (i.e., giving forced choice to both men and women) the restrictive representations were maintained. Interestingly, it appeared that these audiences had the ability to provide relatively sophisticated readings of the form and function of these gendered questions (to be discussed in subsequent sections).

### Pleasures of Conflict

Viewers tended to focus their discussion overwhelmingly on one of the main functions of the form and content of the questions on *TNG/TNNG*, the production of conflict. These viewers' readings of the conflict caused by the interplay between the emcee and the form and content of the questions, often resulted in the production of pleasure for the viewer. As Corner (1999) explains, pleasure from television can take many different forms including that which is derived from para-sociality, drama, comedy, the production of knowledge, and engaging in fantasy. The following viewer readings of conflict illustrated many of these types of pleasure.

#### *What about Bob?*

Bob Eubanks was considered by nearly all of the viewers as a pleasure producing antagonist of *TNG/TNNG*. Through his exaggeration of the couples' answers to his questions and his banter with the contestants, conflict was inevitably produced on both episodes viewed.

Viewers used similar adjectives to describe the shows' host. Among these were *hilarious, antagonist, loveable, comedic, and funny, a jerk*, and

an “a-hole.” The following insights were provided when the participants were asked, “What about Bob?”

C2: M: He’s an antagonist. I think he’s half of the show. Yeah, cuz his reaction or questions are also what makes the show interesting. He’s always got a comment for everybody no matter what they say. It’s funny. You know?

Another male participant in the same group stated:

C2: M: He kind of pushes people into their own cultural areas so that they say something that they probably wouldn’t say if they were— Like they don’t want to say anything to make themselves look stupid, but they end up doing it anyway because he’ll ask them questions on the spur of the moment and they don’t want to embarrass their husband or whatever. I think he keeps the spontaneity in the show, like he said.

Participants in a mixed sex focus group provided the following comments,

E2: F: It was funny in both of them the announcer was like really antagonistic, like he’d start. Like, one girl would be like “I guess, well a little bit this.” And he’d be like “Oh, yeah she said way this.”

M: Well like the horizontal one where he’s like, she said something “Well there aren’t any of them.” But when he came to her turn he was like “Oh, yeah she was definitely like, you have horizontal problems.”

M: They just do it to spice up the show.

The use of exaggeration by the host was often cited as a tactic to create conflict, which resulted in a 'spiced' up (i.e., more pleasurable) show.

Several women who participated in an all female focused group gave this interpretation of Bob's role.

F11: F: Like the one couple with the volume and the vertical and horizontal and she's like, "Nothings wrong." But she had to say something anyways. And then when, like, she answered it he's (Bob) like "yeah, that's way off." Or something.

Interviewer: Wait until your friends at work hear.

F: Yeah. (all laugh). And it makes him look, makes her look worse even though she really didn't say anything like that. Like, it's all fun and games, but like the couple could, like take it seriously if, it just depends on their mentality going into it.

F: It seemed like he was trying to get a bigger reaction than what they [would give him], yeah, like for the audience or something. So he could make it look more interesting. Because they really weren't saying anything wrong. I think he would just add words in there to make it look like the women were saying the wrong thing to make the other person feel bad or something.

F: Like sensationalism.

A male participant in another group stated:

B 13: M: It seemed like a lot that the host was just trying to get them mad at each other. The question that they asked are they're having



problem with the horizontal, the vertical or the volume. And the woman said I'll say horizontal because I don't know what to say. And he's like "Oh she said it's a *major* problem with the horizontal." And the guys like "What?" He always tries to get them to argue.

Other viewers provided an oppositional reading to the role Bob plays on the show. These viewers expressed their dislike for the emcee and the ways he sensationalized the contestants' answers.

A1: M: Well I definitely think that, the first thing that I think of is that Bob Eubanks is an "A-hole" and he instigates to the fact that it makes the men look bad. And the women look good.

Participants in a mixed sexed group stated:

D2: F: Oh, yeah he was totally egging them on. That's what I don't like about Bob.

Interviewer: What else do you think about Bob?

F: I think he's a jerk.

G: He's a smart ass. He's funny to watch, but I wouldn't want have him askin' me all those questions. But he's funny to watch.

Clearly the appeal of the host results in a love-hate [para-social] relationship among these viewers. Undeniably, Bob is one of the most significant elements of these shows, particularly as it relates to instigating pleasure producing conflict between the contestants. As well as the para-social conflict that often occurs between the resistive viewers who disagree with Bob's tactics.

Perhaps two of the most interesting readings, which were not expressed by the majority of the viewers interviewed, addressed Bob's role on the show. First, one man who was interviewed stated:

B14: M: I think he kind of, he almost gives a third perspective, like maybe us watching at home. Like sometimes the comments he makes are just funny and just a play off of the words they use or something. And sometimes it's maybe what we're thinking. Like, "What did he really mean when...?" And he'll actually ask it and the guy has to justify his answer.

According to this viewer Bob provides viewers with a 'voice on the inside,' which interrogates the contestants and most often results in conflict. That is, those probing questions which are usually left unasked in public, suddenly become public knowledge (pleasure of knowledge, see Corner, 1999) as a result of the host.

Second, a woman in an all female focus group stated:

G16: F: I think it's funny because people—I think because he's been on TV so long, I think people trust him and they want to tell him stuff. Like when if it was more familiar to her or him (1<sup>st</sup> place you made whoopee?), like that's all they asked, it's not that personal. You don't know anything about where it was and they're all like going into these stories about who's apartment and when it was, it's like, he didn't ask that! People want to share their stories with him.

This idea was illustrated in the text itself when Bob attempted to cajole more information from a reticent contestant by saying, "Oh, it's okay, you can tell old Uncle Bob." Audiences' familiarity with the timeless host, his conflict-producing tactics, and his exaggeration is a key element in the shows appeal over the years. Whether or not audiences love or hate Bob, clearly they get pleasure from the conflict which he instigates and consider it a major part of the appeal of *TNG/TNNG*.

### *Ambiguous and Risky Questions*

In addition to the role played by the emcee of the show, the form and content of the questions also were central to the production of pleasurable conflict for these audiences. These viewers often cited the ambiguous nature of the questions as well as the risk involved in answering these questions as devices that would produce conflict for the viewing audience. Risk was often said to encompass the possibility of "getting in trouble" with your spouse, as well as the repercussions of having family, friends, and co-workers hear your personal secrets on national television.

As it relates to the production of conflict one woman stated:

F3: F: It seemed like they designed it (the questions) to get a reaction from the wives. Because like, no matter what the guys says, it's going to—almost always—offend the woman. So it seems like they kind of put that in there for entertainment value maybe. To get a reaction out of the female, do you see what I'm saying? So anything he would say would be, like, the wrong answer.

Another male participant gave this explanation regarding the types of questions the show poses to contestants.

C16: M: The questions that no one likes to answer. That's all the questions they ask. No one asks like what's your favorite kind of dog? It's all about causing conflict because that's what everyone wants to see. They want to see the same guy getting in trouble because gets the question wrong (all laugh). I don't think they asked one question that was just, okay, no one's going to get offend.

A male participant in the same group gave this explanation of why this conflict is pleasurable to him.

C3: M: I watch it. I think it's amusing. What the couples say to each other. How they get pissed off at each other. They get all defensive. They get real defensive.

Interviewer: Like what?

M: Cooking or anything like sex. They're always are like, "You gotta be kidding me?!"

Most viewers took pleasure in the conflict that these questions provoked among the contestants. However, others took pleasure in critiquing the simplicity and predictability of the conflict that these questions provoked.

For example this female participant stated:

A8: F: I think it's irrelevant, the whole thing. All the questions that they ask are irrelevant, and I think that the reason that they ask them is to cause some sort of conflict. Because every question that they

ask, like “What fruit would your wife describe herself as?” That’s going to cause a conflict. “Where does your husband need to improve?” That’s gonna cause a conflict. “Where does she...”, “What movie, how would you describe your mother in law?” Like all of these things are going to cause some sort of issue between the two of them. I mean, I don’t see the point.

By citing the ambiguous and risky content of the questions, this viewer clearly draws her pleasure from providing a critique of the show, rather than from enjoying the interaction between the contestants/host themselves. By stating that she does not “see the point” after she stated that the point of the questions were “to cause some sort of conflict,” she creates an interesting contradiction. The participant appears to be saying that she does understand the function of the questions (i.e., to create conflict), but simply does not see how one could enjoy this (i.e., the conflict). Therefore, it could be argued based on the previous comment that—for this viewer—one of the pleasures of conflict is that it gives audiences a space to critique the low-brow humor produced by the show (see Fiske, 1987) through its predictable question and answer format.

The reoccurrence of this theme suggests that it is a salient factor for these audiences of *TNG/TNNG*. Furthermore, it illustrates some of the participants’ specific textual level perceptions of the show (detailed in Chapter 5). These descriptions provide strong evidence to suggest that interplay between the host and the form and content of the questions are

central elements of *TNG/TNNG* for producing conflict. Moreover this conflict or “drama” as some referred to it, is a pleasurable element of the show that attracts viewers.

In terms of Corner’s (1999) typology of pleasure, the host and the questions provided audiences with a space to engage in para-*sociality* with the host and the contestants, primarily through the *production of knowledge* about their relationships. Further, audiences appeared to enjoy the *drama* and *comedy* associated with the process of conflict production. In addition, some participants reported pleasure related to *engaging in fantasy* about whether or not they would go on the show to be subjected to similar questions from Bob. Finally, other viewers seemed to get pleasure from resisting the practices of the emcee and the form and content of the questions. This is most akin to Fiske’s (1998) notion that pleasure can be produced through the ability to control the terms upon which the individual engages with the popular text.

The next theme to be described, Pleasures of the Body, also manifested itself through the interplay between the questions and the host-contestant interaction. This textual level audience perception further elucidates the connection between the content of the questions and the conflict they produce. However, this theme is presented separately because it appeared to produce a pleasure distinct from those pleasures gained from general conflict itself.

### Pleasures of the Body

This theme emerged through its association with the types of questions asked of the contestants. However, what makes this theme unique is that the body was perceived by the participants as being explicitly gendered in term of its attractiveness, sexual appeal, as well as the codes used to interpret the appropriateness of how the body was represented and talked about. Again, due to the format of *TNG/TNNG*, all of these perceptions of the body were based on the gendered discourse created by the questions, the answers, and the interactions that the contestants on the show had with the emcee.

Participants frequently cited the body and how it was represented through the questions as a major source of conflict and entertainment. One African American woman who participated in an all female focus group commented on the 'appropriateness' of these types of questions.

G1: F: I thought the (questions in the) '90s were more inappropriate like the shape of the body, you know the pear and stuff, and, I don't know? I don't know because that's like the BODY you know?

The emphasis on the word *body* was one that was apparent in her comment. Essentially, this woman's comment illustrates that the way a woman's body was represented and talked about on *TNNG* was inappropriate because it was personal or that the body was scared in some way. This attitude came as a surprise given the exploitation of the female form in much popular media (Hendricks, 2002).

Two female participants explained how questions pertaining to the body could be used to create conflict because of their threatening nature. The following comment related to a particular question asked to the husbands on the '70s version of *TNG* (i.e., "Sometimes I look at my wife's chest and think 'gee...'").

D14: F: I think if she's self conscious about her chest, then it would be threatening.

F: And that's just expected—especially now with all the girls getting implants and everything. It's just a sensitive subject because you're constantly bombarded by huge boobs. There's no other way to say it.

Another female co-searcher also stated:

D16: F: I also think it's a lot more emotionally damaging on girls because we're just—a lot of girls are very self conscious about their bodies. For guys though, yeah, I think that is the hardest question.

Others equated the conflict-producing nature of these questions to larger social taboos. Several participants in an all male group stated,

C10: M: I think a guy's got lots more to lose than a girl does, like within his friends, than a girl does. Like if your wife gets up and says, "Yeah he's got a little cock" (all laugh) then...But if you get up there and say "my wife has little boobs," no one's going to laugh at her.

Interviewer: Why wouldn't they laugh at her?

--Because everyone already knows.



--Because it's out there.

--It's not really taboo.

Interviewer: It's not taboo to talk about boobs, but it is to talk about penis size?

Another woman in an all female focus group gave a similar response.

G5: Interviewer: Right, and why do you think that they can say straight out "What do you think about your wife's chest?", but they don't say to the wives, "What do you think about your man's crotch?"

F: I don't know. Maybe it's more, more accepted, you know what I mean? Because that's like a private area you know what I mean? I mean. Ours are like...I don't how to explain it.

Another female participant made this distinction as well.

F16: F: I think maybe for girls because they're (boobs) are right there and guys like you can't; no body knows so there's more mystery there I guess.

The idea that it is socially acceptable to discuss the need for women to improve their body for male pleasure, be it body shape or breast size, was most effectively articulated by the a female participant who participated in a female focus group.

G6: F: I don't think it makes a difference (whether or not the show asked about breast size). It's so like out there and like push up bras and pills and everything, so I don't see whether they asked about it or not. It's on TV all the time, so why not on a game show?

Another woman stated:

F16: F: And plus you see like on TV you know like perfect bodies and like model with big boobs and stuff, and that's just like what is drilled into our head everyday. So that's what people automatically think. Oh, I need big boobs.

These comments are interesting in that they legitimize the objectification of the female body (for male pleasure) in the game show genre. Furthermore, they have temporal significance in that; the question that the participants commented on was seen on *TNG* ('70s). Since that time not only has this type of representation not been quelled, but according to these viewers' perceptions there has been a proliferation of messages claiming, "You need to have bigger breasts."

The comments listed above also address the second major issue which emerged as a part of this theme. That is, the double standard which existed in how the body was represented, and the differences in the ways in which the body was gendered in terms of appearance and performance.

Several participants made comments regarding the double standard which existed in terms of how male and female bodies were talked about.

One female participant stated:

G5: F: I think the media has a lot to do with it too. Like movies, girls run around with no shirts on all the time. But you never see guys, like, without their pants on.

Another woman in the same group stated:

G2: F: I thought it was interesting that they asked the guy about the woman's body and they didn't ask the women about what they thought about their men naked. It was just kind, I don't know, women as objects I thought.

A woman in a mixed sex group had nearly an identical response,

E5: F: What I don't get is how they asked the guys about the women's breast size, but they don't ask the women about the guys you know something. But like that's not appropriate, but then it's appropriate if you asked about hers.

Based on these types of responses we began to ask the participants to engage in fanciful speculation about how they would read the show if the host were to ask the wives, "Sometimes I look at my husband's crotch and think gee..." The response was unanimous among the audiences. For instance two female viewers stated:

F6: F: It's not as acceptable.

F: Yeah, it's not something that you talk about on TV. Like you see women's breasts on TV, but do you ever see a man? No, you never do.

Two women in another all female focus group had this exchange,

G6: F: That to me, I don't know, that'd be kind of inappropriate. I would take it as, because I can joke off you know like the chest, and like the fruit and stuff, whatever. But when you get personal like that, you know, they don't, that's, I don't know.

F: Mmm. I'm thinking it's different levels. Like, chest is maybe a little inappropriate, but on a different level as say, the guy's parts or something.

This woman offered an interesting rationale for why the double standard existed between men and women's bodies.

G6: F: I don't think women really care about the crotch on a man sensually, that they'd want to talk about it on TV. Then like, women are seen as like beautiful figures, their bodies and everything, but the penis isn't something that'd you'd want to you know, talk about.

Another man stated a related explanation,

C10: M: I think what it comes down to is the way we're brought up, which comes back to nature. Girls are designed—I mean there's reasons why guys aren't as curvy. Because that's by nature, but also that's what any species—male species would notice, girls are raised to wear make up. Try and look pretty. You don't hear about guys talking about how to look pretty. They're trying to look functional. If a guy's strong you're like, "okay, he can go get the job done, he can bring home the bacon." You see a girl and if she's like, that you're like "No thank-you." You want a girl that looks pretty. The reason they ask that about girls is because girls are curvy and they're to be seen. Guys aren't.

These examples from male and female viewers illustrate that *TNG/TNNG* promotes the ideological message that women are to be viewed as objects of

sexual pleasure, whereas men are not. Rather men's bodies are signified as being producers of female sexual pleasure. However, this signification is less overt than those concerning body image. For example, several participants cited the ambiguous metaphorical question stated earlier, which equated a man's sexual performance with that of a television. These participants gave this description to illustrate this point.

G6: F1: But they asked about, I mean if you took it sexually, about how they (the men) were in the bedroom, so it's kind of just as bad (as the body questions).

F2: It's just more implied. The bedroom one was more implied, like you take it other ways. But they took the chest as just like, straight up, what you think about that? They didn't say, straight up, what do you think about your man in bed?

These examples illustrate the viewer pleasure that is derived from questions pertaining to the body. It appeared that these audiences had the ability to offer relatively sophisticated critiques regarding the ways in which the male and female bodies were signified through the discourse of the show. Furthermore, these audiences most often attributed the causes of this type of representation to the fact that it created conflict between the husbands and wives. By and large viewers read this as typical of the patriarchal system; however, when asked to comment on potentially subversive questions (e.g., "Sometimes I look at my husband's crotch and think gee..."), these participants overwhelmingly claimed that they would be inappropriate. Thus, it appeared that

identification of dominant messages concerning the body were made by these audiences, however, resistance of them was yet another issue. The following themes will address the personal level perceptions and describe the particular appeal of these gendered texts and how individuals reporting using them for their personal pleasure.

### Play, Pleasure and Resistance

This theme is one of two themes which I consider to be self-reflective or a personal level perception. The comments which substantiate this theme illustrate the ways in which the participants viewed their own use of *TNG/TNNG* to produce pleasure (Corner, 1999; Fiske, 1987). According to Fiske (1987), the concepts of *play*, *pleasure*, and *resistance* are interrelated. Fiske claims that viewers *play* a text similar to how one plays a game where “the rules are there to construct a space within which freedom and control of self are possible” (p. 230). For these audiences the rules were the culturally bound codes of meaning concerning gender roles. Viewers were observing others play a game governed by rules; however, as a spectator they had the freedom to control the meanings they gave to the questions, the contestants’ answers, and to gender and relationships more generally. This does not mean that these meanings had to be subversive or resistive of the ideology posed by *TNG/TNNG*, however, *play* allows for the possibility of resistance (Fiske, 1987). This, according to Ang (1985), Corner (1999), and Fiske (1987), is a pleasure-producing form of empowerment.

One way in which these audiences played with the texts was to use the couples' interactions as a way of predicting the success that the couples would have in their marriages. For example one male participant stated:

A14: M: But, at the same time they've had hundreds and hundreds of couples on that show, and they really were married, and they really did go on the show. And I don't know if it's the show that makes them look ridiculous or if they really are just ridiculous people. It makes me kind of go, "Man, like there are some weird couples out there, that like are..." Actually, it makes me think, "Wow there's some couples out there that aren't going to make it at all. And there's some that looks like their going to be happy."

In a mixed sex focus group two male viewers and a female viewer illustrate how the text allows for oppositional readings regarding the success of the relationship of one of the shows' couples.

E3: M1: I know my sister when she used to watch it she used to say, "Oh, those people aren't going to make it you can tell, look at them they suck on that question."

F: I mean you can kind of tell though, like the couple in the first show, like the guy who was like scared the whole time.

M2: They're not going to break up she's got too tight of a leash (all laugh). That's going to last.

Clearly the different ways these audiences played with the meanings that they ascribed to the texts were pleasurable. For some viewers reading the

cues on the show and determining that a couple was not going to make it was empowering. For others giving a different meaning (e.g., “She’s got too tight of a leash [on her husband]”), determining that the relationship would last, seemed equally as pleasurable. This comment can also be viewed as a form of resistance. The current ideological norm would dictate that if a relationship is not working, you get a divorce. However, for this viewer it was more pleasurable to offer the resistive interpretation that the wife’s control in the relationship would dictate if and when the marriage ended.

Other viewers stated that they got pleasure from the show by playing along with the couples at home. One male participant reported playing along and using the questions posed to the contestants as a thinking point to determine how well his own girlfriend knows him.

B3: M: I haven’t really watched it with like anyone that I’ve been dating. But, like a lot of questions, like, I was thinking oh I wonder how like, what my girlfriend would say to this or like something like that. I just watch by myself but ahhh....(all laugh). But ah I’m sure if you were with a girl...They make it so (the questions) oh I wonder what my girlfriend would think of.... I kind of answer it myself when I think of it, obviously, I’m sure most people do and ah. Yeah, I’m just like, I wonder –you know this is my answer—I wonder if she’d know this was my answer or if she’d be pissed off and hit me with the card or whatever?



In one of the mixed sex focus groups we had the unique dynamic of having two couples who were romantically involved. They provided us with this interesting use of the questions on the shows.

E2: Interviewer: Do you guys kind of do that (play along) like when you're watching it? Think of like what you would answer or how your significant other would answer the questions?

F1: [To her boyfriend] What did you say would be a good movie title for my mom?

M1: *The Gods Must be Crazy*. (All laugh).

Interviewer: So you guys play along.

M1: Yeah, we were playing along while the show was going on.

F2: Yeah, we were too.

In this case, playing with the text by inserting answers related to his partner's mother was pleasurable for the viewer.

Additional forms of play were clearly gendered. Male and female viewers tended to differ on how they personalized questions related to the sex appeal and the body. One woman interviewed with her male partner stated:

A12: Interviewer: Did you think, man I wonder what (her partner) would say about, if I was a fruit?

F: Yeah I did. Of course.

Interviewer: Right away?

F: Yeah.

M: I didn't think that at all.

F: Of course, and the whole thing about like the breasts, of course I think that right away. I'm wondering right away, "Oh my gosh well what's he going to say?" You know. Yeah, I totally did. Or how would I react to, because I can identify with some of the women, obviously not some of the others, you know. And, how would I react to some of the answers that their husbands gave, because maybe he [referring to her partner] would give the same type of answer, and would I feel comfortable with that or not?

This couple went on to further explain the differences between their gendered viewing styles as it related to seeing someone of the opposite sex—who they considered attractive—on television.

A25: F: I think the difference is the way men and women perceive the reactions. Like (her partner) can sit there and sit in the same room with us and watch us do it and just be like, "Whatever." But I think women watch the show and I'm like, "I hear these guys saying this chick is hot, and now I'm going to compare myself, or I think any other woman would, most women would compare themselves and say what can I do to be as sexy as her.

M: That really is interesting because she's exactly right. Because if it's me and three guys and were like, "Oh that girls hot." And (his partner) is like, "Oh, I don't think so." And we're like, "No, no, no, she's hot!" Then she's like, "Well what is it that's hot about her?"

When it's (his partner) and her three friends and they're like, "Oh that guys hot." I'm like, "Oh, okay."

Clearly the meanings given to the body and sexual attractiveness and the way this couple played with these meanings to suite their own needs exhibited a gendered viewing style.

Another female participant, who was a self-proclaimed fan of *TNG*, explained the way she used the text and why her fiancé did not participate with her in viewing *TNG/TNNG*.

F9: Interviewer: Have you ever watched it (*TNG*) with your boyfriend?

F: Yeah, he just doesn't think it's interesting. He doesn't want to watch it I guess. He'd rather watch sports and wrestling—what ever that is—WWF stuff. We're too; it's like kind of different, like what we like to watch is different. He doesn't like it. He would go downstairs and watch basketball, NBA, NFL games. So I just mosey on upstairs and watch my own shows like TLC, "While you were out", and I love the game show network so that's always on, but...we hardly watch it together. I don't think we've ever watched an episode together.

Another male participant stated:

A7: M: And to be honest I'm not really entertained by *TNG* at all. And the only once of entertainment I have is for that scrawny guy [referring to the previously discussed couple].

Interviewer: Why aren't you?

M: I think that it's very, very scripted. And I think that it...I'm a competitive person by nature, and that, no one's competitive against any other couple. And you can win by one question at the end. So it's a bunch of BS, like, even if I got the first, second, and third question right, I could still lose if someone got the 25 question right. So, as far as the scoring and the competitive nature, like, I'm not intrigued by it, but that's a personal thing by me. So, like when I'm watching it I'm like, these, these couples...I'm not intrigued by it.

These comments illustrate the gendered appeal of *TNG* as Fiske (1995) has pointed out. However, this participant offers the specific rationale that, for him, it is the show's lack of competitive scoring and competition that makes viewing the show an unpleasurable experience. Perhaps that is the reason why the female participant's husband would prefer to watch the NBA or WWF (wrestling) because of the competition involved. In this context, this male viewer seemed to take pleasure in playing with the meanings he ascribed to the point system of *TNG/TNNG*. This was evident by the redundancy of his critique as the following comment illustrates,

A9: M: Another thing with the point thing, I hate to keep bringing this up, but...another thing is that there's no difference in the degree of difficulty between the 5 point and the 25 point. Which makes it  
  
**RIDICULOUS!**

This critique was popular among several male viewers. However, it was not the rule as some of the previous comments made by male viewers suggest.

The following theme further elucidates this notion of the gendered appeal of the show. Although the theme of *Personal Appeal* is not categorically distinct from the previous theme of *Play, Pleasure, and Resistance*—in that it does engender pleasure derived from the text—it provides greater specificity regarding the appeal of the show that could not be encompassed through the explanation of the current theme.

### Personal Appeal

Since these audiences were viewing episodes of *TNG/TNNG* out of a 'normal' viewing context such as their own living room, the questions of when, where, with whom, and why viewers watch these shows emerged as an interesting point of discussion. This section will describe the ways in which viewers talked about the appeal of the shows. Specifically, I will address the participants' descriptions of what textual elements of *TNG/TNNG* engaged their viewing interest.

These valuable reflections related to the question of personal appeal are significant in that, the terms upon which audiences reported engaging with this text, as well as the meanings they gave to the text seemed dependent upon how much the shows appealed to their interest. In this context the appeal of the show seemed to occur along a continuum ranging from fascination, or being able to completely relate to the text, to mere observation or awareness of the shows existence characterized by disinterest or inability to relate to the text.

Most often audience members' perceptions illustrated that *TNG/TNNG* is/was designed to appeal to female audiences. However, several of the male viewers talked about the personal appeal of show in this context. One female participant stated:

E2: I always watch it with my roommates.

Interviewer: Are your roommates all girls or girls and boys?

F: All girls.

Interviewer: And all people about the same age?

F: I think sometimes we watch just to play along with the game.

Another female participant offered this description of a specific viewing with her roommates.

G 8: F: We watch it. We've got the gameshow network just, um, things you wouldn't think that you don't know about somebody, but when they ask it's like I didn't know that about you! Like there's one what's your favorite, your husband's favorite spice? It's like, who knows that? You like call your boyfriend and you're like what's your favorite spice? (all laugh). "I don't know you! We're not meant to be together," (Jokingly) so... Me and my room mates will watch it. And we're calling our boyfriends. Or like, me and my boyfriend will watch it and we'll play along, so...

Several male viewers offered their perceptions of why the show might appeal more to a female audience than for a male audience. This issue arose when the all male group was discussing a question posed by the host

of the show which asked, which of their husband's friends would the wives choose to serve as his understudy if he took ill?

C6: M: That's just a topic where you don't...Don't ask you know?

Like if my girlfriend asked me which one of my friends is hot? Do you think I'm going to flat out tell ya? Then you know every time you might be with you're friends you're going to wonder that; It just doesn't need to be brought up.

M: Girls want to know that kind of stuff. Guys don't want to know, that's what I think.

--Yeah. (several agree)

Interviewer: Why?

M2: Like for me, that's the last thing I want to know. Like, other guys and stuff. I don't want to hear about any of that! But, like girls seem to like, it's like what they want to hear. They want to know everything. It's like, eh... .

For these men the content of this question did not appeal to their interests because of the awkward feelings it could elicit between a couple. However, these men do claim that the insight generated by this type of question on the show might be more appealing to a female audience, because it is what women "want to hear." Another male viewer in this group offered this blunt interpretation of why the appeal of *TNG/TNNG*,

C7: M: You put something like that on during the day. Like it was a daytime game show. And that's where the concept of the soap

opera came from because that their advertising soap and other crap that they thought were more women's products during the daytime when they were at home and guys were at work. And they just sat and watched TV.

This comment clearly illustrates some of the participant's misperceptions that women of the original era in which *TNG* aired "just sat and watched TV." Moreover, it expresses his perceptions that the content of the show was intended to appeal to a female audience.

Another male viewer described how the show fails to appeal to his television taste.

A15: M: It's really light. I mean, even when I'm watching it I'm only taking it at so much value because I don't value it. I mean, I can't, I can only place value into things that have value, in my opinion. This is all my opinion. It's all reactions and listening. Because I'm definitely not drawn to the show by its good looks of the people. It's not like I'm watching *The Real World* or like *Temptation Island*.

The only thing I'm really looking for is reaction and Bob's questions. I mean, that's basically it.

This same viewer went on to comment that,

You don't have to use your mind at all. It's not like *Jeopardy* where you have certain values on things, and you can outwit your opponent or you know, the point systems make sense and double jeopardy and—Or *Wheel of Fortune* where you can solve the



puzzle. (Referring to *TNG*) it's not even a game, it's not even a game, it's just like a show.

Therefore, for this male viewer as well as others, the lack of competition characteristic of watching sports, wrestling, reality shows with physically attractive people, or other competitive game shows, makes *TNG* an unlikely program of choice. As another male participant put it,

C3: M: I don't know. I'd rather watch like Family Feud or something, than that. You know because you can get into it. That [The Newlywed game] you can't really...you say oh, that's funny. You laugh at them the whole time. You know it's not really interactive to the audience, you know. The viewing audience. You can *play* what is it? Thousand dollar pyramid or what ever. You know when you hit the mute button? [referring to turning off the sound and participating with the questions in a parasocial manner]. You know? You can play that! But you can't play Newlyweds with anyone. You know, you can play Family Feud too.

As mentioned earlier, however, many female viewers reported that the ability to relate to the show was a major part of the shows appeal. One woman stated:

A11: F: I just think a woman might watch it to see what the men are going to say, and to kind of compare it to situations that they're in. Well, how is he going to describe me in the bedroom, or how does he describe how I'm cooking, or how does he describe everything? And

is he right on? And, what do I think that my husband would say? Or what would my boyfriend say?

For many female viewers the primary appeal of the show is that it reflects issues which they face in their relationships, and the husbands' responses offer a candid male perspective. This is clear based on this viewer's perception that women might use these mens' answers as a point of comparison in their own relationship. This can also be interpreted from another comment that this participant made with respect to the question concerning breast size.

A11: F: Of course, and the whole thing about like the breasts, of course I think that right away. I'm wondering right away, "Oh my gosh well what's he going to say?" You know. Yeah, I totally did. Or how would I react to, because I can identify with some of the women, obviously not some of the others, you know. And, how would I react to some of the answers that their husbands gave, because maybe he [referring to her partner] would give the same type of answer, and would I feel comfortable with that or not.

A male participant claimed that part of the appeal of the show for women is that it allows them a space to fantasize about what their partners would say about them. For example,

B12: M: People love drama, they love watching other people being embarrassed and embarrassing other people. People love watching that. And when couples watch it together it could cause drama. Some people thrive off of that. Like they would love to ask

their boyfriend you know a question and they'd love to just argue with them and ask them, you know, "Why'd you answered that?"

Furthermore, this comment illustrates the male perception that the topics addressed by the show have a stronger appeal to women because they address concerns/issues that women have with men. Whereas, for male audiences the content often times is not something that they want to know about, such as how they need to improve in the bedroom, or which of their friends their wives find attractive. However, this begs the question do these viewers perceive these issues as universal or being changed over time?

An additional element of the show that the participants perceived as being appealing was its 'datedness.' Perhaps a characteristic of all vintage television is the fact that the show looks and reflects the societal norms of a different period in time. Several participants described this as an appealing element of the shows. For example, one male participant noted his perception of *TNNG* as being different from when it was originally aired.

B1: M: To me it's a little more cheesy. I used to watch it when I was a younger guy, and stuff like that. It's just a little cheesy, now that I watch it. Because I'm older I guess I should say.

A female participant stated:

E2: F: Yeah, we'd (referring to her and her roommates) just kind of make fun of them really, laugh along with them. Sometimes talk about like boyfriends and that kind of thing but...We usually make fun of the people and what they're wearing and what they look like.

Given these comments, one aspect of the appeal of *TNG/TNNG* to contemporary audiences is the 'cheesy' look of the show and the individuals on it. Others participants commented on the issues that the shows dealt with and the how society has changed as being appealing. For example one woman stated:

A 23: F: Maybe it's showing how much we've changed, how much we've progressed. I mean we can sit here and we can laugh at how women would answer these questions and not be offended, you know to the questions that the men were asking in the first place. Where now days it would be, why don't you ask me what he cooks bad?

M: It's popular now because they can relate. Because it's a comical thing now. And we look back on it going, man how different is it now than it was then? And because there's a difference that results in comical, that results in funny.

F: That's just something that I guess we're relating to more, it's more interesting to us now. I think the things that have changed are more of, like the domesticated issues and the issues of the women being the money makers [now days] as opposed to the money spenders. But I don't think the issue of the sexuality—I don't think that's gone away at all; they have just found *a different way to portray it*.

This comment presents an interesting contradiction in that the participants claim that some gendered issues addressed by the show have progressed over time

(i.e., the professional roles of women and restrictive domestic responsibilities); however, the issue of women being signified as sexual objects has not changed. It may well be that the interplay of this contradiction is in fact part of the personal appeal of the show. That is, women as well as men can simultaneously relate to how 'times have changed' for the better, while simultaneously staying the same.

The personal appeal or the attractiveness of *TNG* to audiences appears to be dependent on the degree to which an individual can relate to the topics discussed in the questions. These audiences were very candid in expressing their [dis] interest in the show based on their level of identification with the topics addressed through the questions. Based on this inquiry, female viewers reported their identification with [and subsequent pleasure from] the topics of show more than male viewers. Interestingly however, female viewers also provided [more than male viewers] subversive critiques of the debilitating ideological messages toward women communicated via the shows.

The essential phase, *a different way to portray it*, made by this participant is very significant to this inquiry. It signifies these audiences' consciousness of the contradiction between the contemporary and the historical ways in which men and women have been portrayed on television. That is, these viewers provided interpretations of the dominant ideological meanings communicated via *TNG/TNNG*; moreover, they acknowledge that the representations in contemporary relationship shows (Freeman, 1996) have not progressed, rather producers have just found a different way to portray masculinity and femininity. Often times the *new* way to portray gender roles does not reflect the lives of

women in the U.S. any more accurately than did the shows from the '50s, '60s or '70s.

Also, this phrase represents the [different] way in which I have [re] portrayed these audiences. To date few scholars have used a phenomenological approach for audience-centered research (see Watts & Orbe, 2002). Given these preceding descriptions phenomenology lends itself as a useful tool for audience research. Therefore, this contribution represents a different way to portray audience perceptions of masculinity and femininity on television in an interesting socio-temporal context (i.e., the 'it'). The concluding chapter will provide in-depth hyper-reflection on this issue, as well as the theoretical implications of this study.

The contradictions and connections between themes make it difficult to generalize about how contemporary audiences give meaning to vintage entertainment. Indeed the aim of this description is not to generalize, but rather to better understand. These contradictions illustrate the subjective uses of vintage television. Furthermore, the interplay between each of these primary themes illustrates the complexity of the viewing experience for these audiences. Therefore, I will provide a hyper-reflective interpretation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) of the connections between each of these themes in the following chapter. As stated previously, the objective of thematic interpretation is the emergence of a central idea regarding the connections between emergent themes. This is done by reviewing each step in the phenomenological process to reveal the common thread which connects the emergent themes (Orbe, 2000; Orbe & King, 2000;

van Manen, 1990). I will offer a summary of the hyper-reflective process used in my interpretation of the elements of the essential themes which serve as connective threads. In addition, the following chapter will address the limitations of this inquiry, as well as the implications that this research may have for future television studies and audience theory.

## CHAPTER V

### INTERPRETATIONS AND AUDIENCE HORIZONS

My goal in this chapter is follow van Manen's (1990) recommendation for hermeneutic phenomenological writing in order to discuss the relationship between the previously described themes. In order to do this I will re-orient my interpretation of these themes to the two RQs posed in Chapter 2, as well as discuss, in detail, the emergent model used to structure these interpretations (see Figure 1). However, my interpretation of the essential meaning of these audiences' experiences with reading the gendered discourse of *TNG/TNNG* should not be read as an endpoint (i.e., answer to the questions which I have posed). Rather, the interpretation that follows should be read as a new point of discussion and dialogue. Even as I reflect on these themes to provide a response to the RQs I find myself posing new questions, thereby illustrating the heuristic value of phenomenological inquiry in audience research.

In addition, I will provide a discussion of the limitations—some of which were overcome, some of which could not be overcome—present throughout this inquiry. I will address some of the new questions that this inquiry has inspired, and discuss the implications that they may have for future research pertaining to television studies generally, specific genre studies, as well as audience studies from a phenomenological perspective. However, this chapter will not end with definitive assertions regarding what has been described in this text. I find it hard to present a traditional conclusion because I view this inquiry as a mere starting point for using what communication scholars have learned thus far to continually



adapt to evolving audiences and television culture. Drawing from de Certeau's (1988) notion of 'landscape' (see also Hay, 1996), I close with a discussion of what might lay on the horizons for scholars of the culturally situated audience.

### Interpretations

I will use the aforementioned model (see Figure 1) to interpret the essential meaning derived from this inquiry of these audiences' perceptions. The six essential themes described in Chapter 4, which I have termed: (1) *Understanding the Discourse of Power Structures*, (2) *Gendered Questions: Form and Content*, (3) *Pleasures of Conflict*, (4) *Pleasures of the Body*, (5) *Play, Pleasure, and Resistance*, and (6) *Personal Appeal* occurred along three perceptual levels. Each of these perceptual levels is characterized by the way in which the participants' comments reflected their consciousness of how *TNG/TNNG* signified issue of gender roles and stereotypes.

### Macro-Level Perceptions

The first perceptual level, which I have identified as macro-level perceptions (see Figure 1) was constituted through the emergence of two primary themes (1) *Understanding the Discourse of Power Structures*, and (2) *Gendered Questions: Form and Content*. These themes reflect an audience consciousness of the cultural and temporal context in which these shows occurred originally, as well as the contemporary cultural context in which they were being viewed for this study. By providing relatively sophisticated readings of these texts, these audiences illustrated their awareness of, and ability to, critically decode the patriarchal discourse of the shows (RQ1).

The gendered discourse of *TNG/TNNG* is constructed by the interplay between the questions posed to the contestants, the comments made by the emcee directly to the viewing audience, and the banter between the emcee and the contestants. By providing nuanced readings of this discourse these audiences illustrated their ability to discern how macro-level power structures were signified on the shows.

Most often the participants' comments were comparative as related to the signification of femininity and masculinity or between women and men. As stated previously, the participants provided insight regarding how they ascribed meaning to the macro-level issues of 'male dominance' at the societal level, and also at the interpersonal level. To illustrate their perceptions of these issues the participants often used personal anecdotes related to their own romantic relationships, as well as reflecting on how their parents negotiated power in their relationships.

Consistent with the analysis offered by Groscurth and Orbe (2002), these audiences characterized the signification of femininity as being represented (through the form and content of the questions) as subservient, domesticated, and the spender of male-earned finances. However, many of the female participants interviewed stated that, in terms of domesticity and subservience to their husbands, women have progressed socially beyond these restrictive representations. That is, viewing *TNG/TNNG* in re-run form provides pleasure for women in that, they are appalled by some of the responses that the women were providing in the '70s and even as recent as the mid-late '90s. Furthermore,

these participants seemed to take pleasure in offering resistive readings of these texts (RQ2). As such, many female participants stated that they did not abide by some of the norms communicated via these re-runs. Most often the females' resistance was to domestic roles (i.e., cooking). Many of the women interviewed stated that they did not cook by choice or because they did know how to cook. In these cases the women *made* their (male) partners do all the cooking, or their partners simply *chose* to take on this domestic responsibility. Interestingly, many of the men interviewed stated that they enjoyed this domestic responsibility and preferred being the cook more so than their (female) partner would.

However, as it related to representing women as sexual objects, several participants did not provide such progressive readings. In fact, many of the participants felt that the sexual exploitation of the female body in popular television had gotten worse since *TNG/TNNG* originally aired. They often read the discourse of *TNG/TNNG* intertextually (see Fiske, 1987) citing contemporary examples such as *The Real World*, *Temptation Island*, and *Blind Date* to illustrate that the objectification of the female body has gotten worse since *TNG/TNNG*.

This reading is interesting in that it does allude to the fact that re-runs provide familiar and comforting fare (Umstead, 2001) to contemporary audiences. If an individual does not wish to view the objectification of female (and male) bodies on contemporary shows such as those mentioned above, they can always return to the familiar images in the form of re-runs. In this sense audiences are faced with a choice between the lesser of two evils. Quite concerning is the fact that several male viewers stated the lack of appeal for the

show for them was that it lacked the attractive individuals portrayed on contemporary dating/reality shows.

Given this conundrum, some of these participants chose to avoid the restrictive gender representations on *TNG/TNNG* by simply not watching those types of shows (RQ2). Most often these were male viewers who reported watching newer reality shows, more competitive game shows (e.g., *Family Feud*, *\$100,000 Pyramid*, *Press Your Luck*, or *Jeopardy*), or sports. While many of the female participants directly acknowledged the macro-level (hegemonic) power issues communicated by *TNG/TNNG* as a form of resistance. That is, these viewers appeared to find a sense of power over the text by being able to name the ways in which men and women were stereotyped.

### Textual Level Perceptions

The second perceptual level, which I have identified as textual level perception (see Figure 1), was constituted through the emergence of two primary themes (3) *Pleasures of Conflict*, and (4) *Pleasures of the Body*. According to Corner (1999), there are a variety of types of pleasure that can be derived from the television text. Among these are the pleasures derived from para-sociality, drama, comedy, the production of knowledge, and engaging in fantasy. In this case, most of these audiences' textual level perceptions were characterized by the conflict or drama produced through the banter between the emcee and the contestants. In addition, audiences derived much pleasure from questions related to the objectification of the female body, and male sexual performance. Clearly, there is a connection between these two textual level perceptions in that

publicly disclosing such intimate information (about their bodies/sexual performance) often resulted in conflict among the contestants for the audiences' pleasure.

These types of textual level pleasures most closely resemble Corner's (1999) pleasures of *drama* produced through the conflict generated by the contestants' disclosure of intimate information, *para-sociality*, in that audiences tended to establish a connection or dislike of certain couples and/or the host, *comedy* in that the audiences found it humorous to see the couples uncomfortably disclosing their most intimate secrets, and *fantasy*. It is the latter that is most essential to these audiences' viewing experiences. Corner (1999) states that fantasy occurs when a text invites a viewer to be stimulated by a circumstance that they are unlikely to experience in their own life. Often fantasy involves an individual projecting their own identity onto a character (contestant, or host) on a show.

In this sense *fantasy* among these audiences was not exclusively related to being stimulated by something that they would be unlikely to experience. On the contrary, these audiences would fantasize about how they would answer a question about their significant other, or how s/he would answer them, a phenomenon that could be as likely as leaning over and asking their partner, as one participant reported doing, "What is your favorite spice?" Delong (1991) states that the popularity of *TNG* was a result of the strength with which audiences identified with the show. Given the description presented here, I would argue that audiences most often identify with how the couples react to the

'over the edge' questions presented to them, and attempt to determine how their partner or how they personally would react to the same question.

Many participants reported how *they* would react if their significant other gave an answer that cast them in a negative light on the show. Others claimed that they would love to go on the show and gave examples of elaborate strategies they would develop to defeat the other couples. Another participant explained this process of fantasy through his identification with Bob Eubanks (host) in that, Bob served as his voice with the contestants on the show.

B14: M: I think he kind of, he almost gives a third perspective, like maybe us watching at home. Like sometimes the comments he makes are just funny and just a play off of the words they use or something. And sometimes it's maybe what we're thinking. Like, "what did he really mean when...." And he'll actually ask it and the guy has to justify his answer.

This is not to say that the participant fantasizes about being a game show host, but rather the fantasy occurs through his identification with the host asking the questions of the contestants that seem to push them to their maximum level of discomfort. The viewer does not have this ability on his own; however, Bob Eubanks helps some viewers to realize this fantasy of being able to further query the couples.

The fact that comedic, fantasy and dramatic pleasure are derived from the text is significant when considering my research questions. Many of these textual level perceptions were humorous to viewers because they

could identify with the issues posed to the couples. Therefore, constructing meaning related to gender roles and stereotypes (RQ1) seemed to come directly from their own experiences. Furthermore, as several female participants claimed, the process of watching other couples answer the risqué questions provides viewers with a point of comparison to determine how well they know their partner.

Paradoxically, given the explication of the previous perceptual level (macro-level perceptions), audiences members rarely resisted the restrictive coding of gender roles when viewed through a lens of pleasure. That is, when the text was being discussed as something humorous, representing something that they would like to do (talk about) with their significant other, or something that they strongly identified with (such as a being concerned about breast size) they did not offer a subversive critique of the text. Therefore, there seemed to be a contradiction between themes 3 and 4 at the textual level when the context—characterized by either humor or critique—of the discussion changed.

This issue illustrates some of the contradictions eluded to earlier in this chapter. These audiences seemed to get pleasure both from critiquing the dominant ideology that *TNG/TNNG* perpetuates, while simultaneously identifying with its prevalence in their own lives. So much so that many participants fantasized about how much they would like to go on the show in hopes of being rewarded with the trip to Hawaii. Therefore, these audiences reported textual level perceptions which concurrently subverted

and reproduced ideological expectations concerning stereotypical gender roles. Ultimately, these insights illustrate how restrictive gender roles get reproduced through vintage television texts, as well as in the minds of many of these participants.

### Personal Level Reflections

The third perceptual level, which I have identified as personal level reflections (see Figure 1), was constituted through the emergence of two primary themes (5) *Play, Pleasure and Resistance*, and (6) *Personal Appeal*. I consider these reflective in that the audiences talked primarily about how and why the show personally did/did not appeal to them and what meanings they gave to the shows. The comments which substantiate these themes illustrate the ways in which the participants viewed their own use of *TNG/TNNG* to produce pleasure (Corner, 1999; Fiske, 1987). According to Fiske (1987), the concepts of *play*, *pleasure*, and *resistance* are interrelated. I refer to the previously mentioned insight taken from Fiske (1987), which states that viewers *play* a text similar to how one plays a game where “the rules are there to construct a space within which freedom and control of self are possible” (p. 230). For these audiences the rules were the culturally bound codes of meaning concerning gender roles.

As evident through my interpretation of the previous perceptual levels, consciousness of such issues related to patriarchal power (Level 1) over representation (Level 2) of masculinity and femininity alone does not constitute negotiation of these representations (RQ2). However, *play* allows for the possibility of resistance (Fiske, 1987) or manipulation of the text to suite the



viewers' needs. This, according to Ang (1985), Corner (1999), and Fiske (1987), is a pleasure-producing form of empowerment.

The degree to which these audiences chose to engage with the text and play with its meanings to suit their needs was most often associated with the show having personal appeal to them. Most often female participants self-identified as being fans of the show. These participants often reported watching *TNG/TNNG* on the Game Show Network when there was nothing else to do or if they were bored. They reported watching the show in a variety of situations including alone, with their significant other, and (for female viewers only) with their female roommates.

Male viewers reported having seen the show on occasion or watching it if they happened to 'flip by' it. Most often the show did not appeal to male viewers as much as it did for females, this is consistent with Fiske's (1995) reading of *TNG* that it is marketed to female viewers (see also Corner, 1999). The male's reasons for not viewing the show normally were due to its lack of competition and its overwhelming focus on relational issues between the couples. Several male participants stated that *TNG/TNNG* dealt with the kind of things that women want to know about. However, those males to whom *TNG/TNNG* did appeal, also played with the meanings of the text as discussed in the previous section, as well as resisted some of the dominant ideological representations of masculinity and femininity.

As I alluded to earlier the appeal of these shows to audiences seemed to be dependent on their level of identification with the issues presented on the

show. There were clear contradictions between these audiences ability to offer subversive critiques of the meanings they assigned to the gendered discourse of the show, and the (comedic) pleasure derived from traditional patriarchal representations of masculinity and femininity on *TNG/TNNG* (RQ2). Indeed the interplay of these tensions may contribute to the appeal of vintage entertainment to contemporary audiences.

### Interconnectedness of Themes

Given this interpretation of the emergent themes and the three perceptual levels at which they occurred, I will provide an explanation of how these perceptual levels are interconnected as a means of hyper-reflection (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The central idea that connects these six themes and three perceptual levels is *contradiction* and/or *tension*. Given these participants' descriptions of the audiencing experience, it is evident that these viewers can and do provide sophisticated readings of gender on *TNG/TNNG*. I have characterized this consciousness of how gender is represented (RQ1) and how this meaning is negotiated (RQ2), as occurring at three different perceptual levels. These audiences offered multiple interpretations of how gender was represented at the textual level (Level 2), why it was represented that way (Level 1) and whether or not the text appealed to them based on their ability to play with the meanings (Level 3). Through this process these audiences keenly articulated how these representations of gender and gender stereotypes can be simultaneously debilitating, but humorous (i.e., entertaining). The emergence of

the idea of contradiction or tension in vintage television audiencing, specifically, relates to simultaneous stability and changes in representation of gender.

Beyond the levels of perception represented in Figure 1, there are several other dimensions of this figure that need to be addressed. Specifically, I will address the structure of this figure, what it represents, as well as how the connections between these perceptual levels and individual themes are represented in the figure. Finally, I will postulate as to what theoretical significance this model may have for future vintage television audience research.

Figure 1 is structured hierarchically as signified by the inverted triangle. The triangle represents the social positioning of the audience or audience member in relation to the larger cultural forces which account for the audiencing context. At the base of this triangle are themes which reflect the first level or macro level perceptions (Level 1). As stated in Chapter 4, perceptions at this level were represented by themes which reflect larger socio-cultural issues such as discourses of power and/or sexism. Audiences often referred to these cultural issues as the cause for signifying women in domestic roles, and men as the bread winners of the family, which was evaluated negatively. Interestingly, for some viewers these forces were also viewed positively when they generated humor.

The themes which constitute the second level or textual level perceptions (Level 2) signify the tangible elements of the texts that these audiences could see and discuss. Perceptions at Level 2 often provided the impetus for discussion of Level 1 issues of societal power and privilege. Indeed these textual

level perceptions, in part, seemed to be informed by the audiences' understanding of social power as indicated by the themes at Level 1. In addition, the various ways in which conflict was produced and the ways in which the body was signified, provided the thematic structures for Level 2 perceptions. As evident in the participants' comments, conflicting interpretations of these textual elements often occurred.

At the most narrow point of the triangle is the audiences' perceptions of personal use of the texts or personal reflections (Level 1). The personal reflections made by audience members at this level often described the personal appeal (or lack thereof) of the text, and their personal uses of the text and its meanings among a wide array of other social practices.

In order to further represent the shifts between each of these perceptual levels over time, I have used block arrows to signify the continuous nature of this process. That is, the process of television production and consumption which is mediated at the point of engagement with the text is always already a power-laden process (Fiske, 1998). Given this description of audiencing *TNNG* it is evident that these audiences' consumption of gendered television texts (be them contemporary or vintage) are both informed by ideological forces and inform how and why producers will target audiences with contemporary texts. If audiences want more sex on television, then producers will give them more sex, if for nothing more than the shock value these shows provide (e.g., *Blind Date* and *Fantasy Island*). If audiences find pleasure in the hegemonic depiction of

idealized body image, then producers will give it to them (e.g., *The Swan*). There appears to be no end in sight that will abate this process.

The model presented in Figure 1 is intended to structure audience perceptions of *TNG/TNNG* as evident through the insights the participants offered. Indeed, this model *is a different way to portray* television audiences, specifically, vintage television audiences because of their unique historically privileged perspective. As one participant stated, producers are finding *different ways to portray* masculinity and femininity on television in debilitating ways. Concurrently, networks devoted to vintage television continue to thrive, resulting in an increasingly complex audiencing experience. Researchers must meet these challenges with critical scholarship and theory that addresses these changes.

Through hyper-reflection, this model has led me to several new questions regarding the frequent contradictions between each of these three perceptual levels. For example, do other vintage television audiences play with the meaning they assign to texts that depict hegemonic masculinity/femininity in order to derive personal pleasure? Are they aware of the ubiquity of cultural structures of power which influence the production of these texts? Are these interpretations pleasurable because they lend a sense of control over the text?

### Limitations

The process of this inquiry posed several limitations which I will address. Specifically, I will address the problem of locating the audience in this study and some methodological limitations. First, is the challenge of defining what

constitutes an audience. As Erni (1989), Grossberg (1988; 1989) and others (Allor, 1996; Hay, 1996) assert, the definition or production of a universal audience is not only impossible, but it is also not desirable. No doubt this poses challenges for those who claim to do audience research in terms of development of theory and conceptualization of just what constitutes an audience. That withstanding, this study looked at a specific type of audience constituted by individuals who had a willingness to come together to watch a specific television show. Some of these individuals self identified as frequent watchers of *TNG/TNNG* on the Game Show Network, some were not frequent viewers.

Therefore, the value of researching an audience which may never 'naturally' occur outside of this type of context might be called into question. Although this study provided a space for different types of viewers to express their interpretations of *TNG/TNNG* in the presence of audience members with disparate values and viewing styles, full ethnographic studies like the recent work of McDonald (2002) are critical to offering a holistic picture of the audiencing experience. Several participants explained that they thought they would not look at *TNG/TNNG* at home as they did in the focus group context. This could be read as a limitation in that I was gathering perceptions that audiences would have never had in a natural context. As one female participant stated, "It's really one of those no-brainer shows where you just kind of watch it" (A20).

Next, I deem it necessary to address some methodological limitations. The first limitation involves the presence of the facilitators in the focus groups. I approached the groups and the subsequent stages in the process of this inquiry

with the critical (double) consciousness of my own identity as that of a critical researcher as well as a fan of these shows. Without a doubt this adds to the strength of the inquiry and interpretation (van Manen, 1990). However, one limitation posed by my presence, as well as my co-facilitator, is the fact that we are relatively nascent interviewers.

To attempt to avoid this limitation my co-facilitator and I would process each focus group after the fact to discuss how we could avoid asking leading follow-up questions, and the like, as well as adding new questions to extend emerging ideas posed by the participants. Indeed this can be seen as a limitation to any interview-based study. Even the most experienced interviewer continually develops more effective means of asking questions, that they take with them into the next interview. In this sense the learning process always already poses limitations and opportunities for improvement.

An additional methodological limitation concerns the omission of commercials from the episodes which were viewed (see Fiske, 1987). Without question inclusion of these commercials would have changed the viewing experience. In fact readings of the commercials might have lent more credibility to the interpretation that these shows are marketed toward women more than men, given the interest by advertisers. However, by including the commercials into the text, the time allotted for the study would have to have been nearly doubled. Specifically, it would have taken an hour to view the two episodes of *TNG/TNNG* in addition to the time needed to conduct the interviews. Future

studies might benefit from including commercials in the text and limiting the number of texts shown to audiences.

Further, the amount time permitted for the study—in general—posed a moderate constraint on this study. Most often after 45 minutes of being interviewed the participants appeared to have exhausted their discussion of the text. However, some focus groups seemed as though they were being cut off. Therefore, by restricting the time allotted for each group we were in fact limiting the amount and depth of insight being generated by some of the groups. Although it would be excessive to ask for two hours of the participants' time, by not scheduling groups back to back we could have provided space for more discussion when deemed necessary.

An additional limitation is the fact that, with the exception of one nontraditional aged international student, only undergraduate students were interviewed. Future inquiries related to vintage entertainment might seek to gather individuals' perceptions of vintage texts who viewed the texts in their original airing as well as in a contemporary context. In addition, gathering audiences' perceptions who differ by race, ethnicity and sexuality might prove to be a productive point of analysis for understanding vintage television use across culture and generations.

Finally, there are also inherent limitations in using hermeneutic phenomenology as the tool to answer these RQs. The use of an interpretive methodology always presents the risk of false interpretations. To attempt to overcome this perception checking was used throughout the interviews, as well



as with the co-facilitator during the thematization and interpretation process. Future inquiries would benefit from incorporating member checking with focus group participants and utilizing their insights in the reduction and interpretation phases of the process (see Orbe, 2000).

### Audience Horizons

This study contributes to the body of literature which seeks to better understand how culturally situated audiences give meaning to and negotiate vintage television. The insights gathered illustrate yet another layer of complexity related to understanding the tensions engendered through the interpretation of vintage television texts. As Weispfenning (2003) has argued, re-runs represent a significant area of study. I would add that a focus on the role of audiences in the process of (re) production and consumption of vintage television is also a productive direction for audience researchers.

A better understanding of how contemporary audiences situate themselves with various genres of vintage television would add to our understanding of how cultural meaning is (re) circulated via television. Specifically, researchers should seek to extend and understand the tensions experienced by audiences regarding the pleasure produced by these vintage texts. As it relates to these tensions, productive questions to ask are what changes concerning gender, race, age, class, sexuality, religion and ability, if any, have occurred since these texts aired in their original place in history? How do viewers of various ages read these texts across generations? How do other

audiences read different vintage texts in terms of the three perceptual levels which have been identified here?

### Landscapes and Horizons

Hay (1996) offers a productive discussion of what constitutes the 'landscape' of audience research by drawing from de Certeau's (1988) notion of landscape and 'everyday life.' He refers to the significance of everyday life and its relationships with what gets placed in the foreground and background in these types of audience inquiries. That is, what types of methods of inquiry and types of knowledge become privileged (i.e., institutionalized) or foregrounded against the background or the social context of everyday life. Thus, the project of describing audience behavior in relation to a wide variety of other social practices becomes a process of mapping the landscape of audience behavior, a spatial practice constituted by change (Radway as cited in Hay, 1996).

My proposition is that not only should researchers consider the current landscape of audience behavior with all the challenges that this type of inquiry poses. Researchers must also be mindful of what lies on the horizons for audience research. Specifically, what types of changes in technology, distribution, and re-production of texts will further complicate the landscape of audiencing activity? How can different methodological approaches such as phenomenology or theoretical perspectives such as dialectical theory be used in creative ways to better understand these changes?

By maintaining a multidimensional perspective on the background as well as the foreground of social practices related to everyday life and television

consumption, scholars will be at a significant advantage when criticizing and theorizing audiencing behavior. Furthermore, scholars must stay abreast of new technologies and modes of production as a means of keeping the horizon of audience research and its landscape in perspective. This type of an approach will assist scholars in avoiding one dimensional theories or renderings of audiencing behavior. Perhaps more importantly, as Hay (1996) warns us, it will help to prevent scholars from privileging certain methods in audience-centered research, as well as privileging audience research over other forms of media analysis such as textual analysis, rhetorical criticism, and/or the political/economic aspects of media production.

### Conclusion

This study has employed a phenomenological approach to audience research. Specifically, the descriptions presented here have illustrated the complexity of audiencing experiences, as it relates to vintage television. Given their lived experiences, the participants who participated in this study have offered valuable insights regarding their conscious experience of viewing *TNG/TNNG* in a contemporary context.

Through this process these audiences have helped to illustrate the theoretical implications that this type of retrospective audiencing activity may have. Specifically, the emergent themes point to three interdependent perceptual levels of audiencing behavior. Given the proliferation of vintage television, exploring the tensions between these various levels of perception may have significant implications for researchers, students, and those interested in

the cultural consumption of vintage television. Furthermore, the use of phenomenological reduction and hermeneutic writing can be a productive method to assist scholars in the description of the landscape of qualitative audiences and the social horizons which, undoubtedly, promise perpetual change.

## Appendix A

### Recruitment Overhead

#### Need Extra Credit?

Receive 5 points extra credit for 90 minutes of your time!

Dr. Mark Orbe in the Department of Communication is looking for your help with a research project. The focus group interview will take approximately 90 minutes to complete. You'll have an opportunity to ask questions about the study as well as review and discuss the consent form with the interviewer prior to the interview. If you do not want to take part in this study, alternative extra credit opportunities are available. Focus group interviews (times & dates) will be coordinated after you have reviewed the consent document and asked questions.

Interested in learning more about participating? Come talk with me after class, all I need is your name, email address, and/or phone number to schedule a date and time. All names, email, and phone numbers **will** be kept confidential and only used for scheduling purposes.

Want more information? Take down this number: Call Dr. Orbe at 387-3132

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

H. S. I. R. B.

Approved for use for one year from this date:

## Appendix B

AUG 11 2003

## Informed Consent Form

x Mary Lagley  
HSIRB Chair

Western Michigan University  
Department of Communication

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Mark P. Orbe, Associate Professor of Communication & Diversity, Department of Communication, Western Michigan University, 269-387-3132, [Orbe@wmich.edu](mailto:Orbe@wmich.edu)

**Student Investigator:** Christopher R. Groscurth, MA student, Department of Communication, Western Michigan University, 269-387-3152, [c.groscurth@wmich.edu](mailto:c.groscurth@wmich.edu)

I agree to participate in a research project entitled, *Viewer Perceptions of Gendered Discourse on "The [New] Newlywed Game"*, which will study the perceptions of viewers regarding how the show(s) represent masculinity and femininity. This study is being conducted by Christopher R. Groscurth (MA student, Department of Communication) for his master's thesis.

My consent to participate in this project indicates that I agree to view a selection of episodes of "The Newlywed Game," and be interviewed about my perception(s) of the show. This process does not include any concrete benefits to me beyond the extra credit that I may receive at the discretion of my instructor, and will take approximately 90 minutes to complete. I can terminate the interview at any time for any reason without prejudice or penalty. My choice of participating or not participating in the study, or my refusal to answer a question or questions for any reason during the interview, will not affect my status at WMU in any way.

My identity and information collected from me shall remain confidential. In addition, my responses will be audio-taped, transcribed, and later reviewed by the investigators of this project. The audio tapes and written transcripts will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office and at no time be handled by anyone other than the investigators of this study. All materials will be retained for at least three years (as required by university policy) in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will be subsequently destroyed. In short, at no time will any of my responses be linked to me personally; instead my comments will be attributed generally to "a male/female focus group participant."

If I have any question or concerns about this study, or would like a copy of the research reports it generates, I may contact the investigators listed on the top of this form. In addition, I may also contact the Chair of Western Michigan University's Human Subjects Institutional review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice-President for Research at 269-387-8298 with any concerns I may have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. I should not participate in this interview if the corner does not show a stamped date and signature. My participation indicates that I am aware of the purpose and requirements of the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Consent Obtained by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Initials of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

My signature below indicates that I agree not to discuss, outside of this focus group, any comments made by the other participants.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Topical Protocol

The following topical protocol and hypothetical questions were created in order to facilitate discussion. Following Patton's (1990) recommendation for interviews the topical protocol outline provides direction for areas to be addressed in the interview, as well as providing hypothetical questions in the event that participants are unable to further describe their experiences. In most cases, it is anticipated that after asking a few initial questions the discussions will quickly move to address different topical areas without the need for specific follow-up questions.

#### Topical Protocol

- I. General perceptions of *TNG/TNNG*
- II. Perceptions of the gendered discourse of *TNG/TNNG*
- III. Viewing *TNG/TNNG* at home with others

#### Hypothetical Questions

1. Describe your initial reactions to *TNG*?
2. Describe your perceptions of the host (Bob Eubanks).
3. Describe the appeal of these shows. Why do people watch them?
4. What topics are discussed as they relate to men/women?
5. Do you perceive any differences between how the shows represent men vs. women?
6. Do you perceive any differences between the two shows as they relates to gender representation?
7. How might you view these shows at home (when, where, why, with whom)?

## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review E

## Appendix D

Date: January 5, 2004

To: Mark Orbe, Principal Investigator  
Christopher Groschurth, Student Investigator for thesis  
Casey DeLong, Student Investigator

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mary Lagerwey".

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 03-07-12

This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project "Viewer Perceptions of Gendered Discourse on The [New] Newlywed Game" requested in your memo received December 24, 2003 (addition of a student investigator) have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: August 11, 2004



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