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Life, Love, and Hegemony on Daytime TV: A Critical Analysis of Three Popular Soap Operas

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The University of Southern Mississippi

LIFE, LOVE, AND HEGEMONY ON DAYTIME TV: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS OF THREE POPULAR SOAP OPERAS

by

Elizabeth Ann Worden

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2013

ABSTRACT

LIFE, LOVE AND HEGEMONY ON DAYTIME TV: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THREE POPULAR SOAP OPERAS

by Elizabeth Ann Worden

August 2013

This study examined the worlds of three popular soap operas: *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Young and the Restless*. Someone who has not watched the three soap operas examined for this study might think that soap operas are all alike. Yet this study has demonstrated how different they really are. These soap operas are created by different teams of writers, producers, and editors—different real authors. *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Young and the Restless* are really distinct and different from each other in a number of ways. These programs depict different classes of people with different personal goals and rules for behavior; they differ in loyalty to family and differ in attitudes about wealth and power.

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
Audience Analysis and Soap Operas	
Older Adult Characters on Soap Operas	
Soap Operas and Prime Time Television Compared	
History of the Soap Opera	
Melodrama	
Reality	
Soap Opera and Feminism	
Characteristics of the Soap Opera	
Cultural Mythology and Soap Operas	
Themes in Soap Operas	
Mass Media Theory	
Fan Sites	
III. METHODOLOGY.....	55
Process of Analysis	
<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	
<i>General Hospital</i>	
<i>Young and the Restless</i>	
Definitions	
IV. <i>DAYS OF OUR LIVES: MIDDLE CLASS LOVE AND WAR</i>	61
General Discussion of <i>Days of Our Lives</i> and Semiotic Analysis	
Readings of Prominent Families and Major Characters	
Analysis of Episode Shown May 3, 2012	
Camera Technique in Soap Operas	
Camera Shot Analysis	
Narrative Analysis	
Narrative Analysis of Episode Broadcast May 3, 2012	
Themes	
Older Adult Characters	
Discussion	

V.	<i>GENERAL HOSPITAL: LOVE AND WAR IN THE ER</i>	105
	General Discussion of <i>General Hospital</i> and Semiotic Analysis	
	Readings of Prominent Families and Major Characters	
	Analysis of Episode Broadcast June 7, 2012	
	Camera Technique in <i>General Hospital</i>	
	Narrative Analysis of Episode Broadcast June 7, 2012	
	Themes	
	Older Adult Characters	
	Discussion	
VI.	<i>YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS: MILLIONAIRES IN LOVE AND WAR</i>	145
	General Discussion and Semiotic Analysis	
	Readings of Prominent Families and Major Characters	
	Narrative Analysis of Episode Broadcast May 30, 2012	
	Camera Technique in Soap Operas	
	Camera Shot Analysis	
	Narrative Analysis	
	Narrative Analysis of Episode Broadcast May 30, 2012	
	Themes	
	Older Adult Characters	
	Discussion	
VII.	CONCLUSION.....	175
VIII.	REFERENCES.....	186

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The soap opera is a popular form of television entertainment that offers the viewer a glimpse of American life. Soap operas present the viewer with a circle of socially involved individuals who struggle with and against each other for love and financial gain. Soap operas are very polarizing. Those who watch soap operas will defend their viewing pleasure while those who dislike them will denigrate the genre for the wanton lust and greed of its characters and the implausible storylines.

Indeed, this genre seems to swing from a celebration of the trivial moments of life that many may cherish to the hysteria of unlikely crises points that throw the lives of almost all characters in a soap opera into the stewpot. Excesses of character and plot have caused many people to proclaim that soap operas are low brow television fare for the lower class, uneducated, and/or bored females. As Hobson (2003) explains, “The soap opera is a form which is revered by fans, [while being] reviled by some critics” (p. xi). Many people think soap operas are not worthy of serious study. Ford, De Kosnik, and Harrington (2011) report on the negative attitude that many in American society have toward soap viewers: they are “unproductive and powerless, as housewives enraptured and captured by the weepy melodrama supplied by daytime dramas during the same hours of the day that more powerful members of American society (adult men and women employed outside of the home) are at their most productive” (p. 9).

Why are soap operas important? Is it because they are on television? If that is so, then why is television so important? According to Livingstone (1998), television has great importance in society. She explains her views on television in this way:

Television has come to dominate the hours in our day, the organisation of

our living rooms, the topics of our conversations, our conceptions of pleasure, the things to which we look forward, the way we amuse and occupy our children, and the way we discover the world we live in. Many also argue that television has come to dominate what we think, how we think, and what we think about. (Livingstone, 1998, p. 4)

As Newcomb (1974) observed, “The claim has been made that television constitutes ‘the American people’s most important source of ideas ... [and that] it has influenced our outlook on the world and our political decisions’” (Cassata, Anderson, & Skill, 1983, p. 37). Furthermore, Newcomb (1974) writes that “some communicologists” credit television with having the same institutional power in society as “church, family, and school” (Cassata & Skill, 1983, p. 37).

Fiske and Hartley (1978) compared television and print narratives in the following way:

The written word (and particularly the printed word) works through and so promotes consistency, narrative development from cause to effect, universality and abstraction, clarity, and a single tone of voice. Television, on the other hand, is ephemeral, episodic, specific, concrete and dramatic in mode. Its meanings are arrived at by contrasts and by the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory signs and its ‘logic’ is oral and visual. (p. 15)

Fiske and Hartley (1978) further explain that “television is a characteristic product of modern industrial society” (p. 14). Livingstone (1990) writes about seeing television as text: “To use the metaphor of the text in relation to television is to emphasise that programmes are structured, culturally-located, symbolic products to be

understood only in relation to readers and which, together with readers, generate meanings” (p. 6).

Television is a powerful and influential mass medium. According to Palmore, Branch, and Harris (2005a), “The majority of research on images of the aged in the media has focused on television” (p. 316). According to Brownell and Mundorf (2001), “This is because TV plays a predominant role in influencing people’s attitudes toward aging” (p. 316). In addition, some researchers write that negative portrayals of older adults are not limited to television; they exist in the print medium as well (Miller, Leyell, & Mazachek, 2004; Nussbaum & Robinson, 1984; Smith, 1998).

Many researchers view the impact of television as being greater than the impact of other forms of media (Lett, DiPietro, & Johnson, 2004; Morgan & Shanahan, 1997; Shrum, 1996; Signorielli & Morgan, 2001). Deets (1993), former executive director of The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), writes that “television strongly influences our view of reality [...] television portrays older Americans in a negative light—plagued with stereotypes, myths and misconceptions” (Smith, 1998, p. 42).

Cassata and Skill (1983) report on the importance of television in American society:

At the 1974 Media and Aging Conference sponsored by the Gerontological Society, the issue of current images of old people on television was identified as the number one priority for research investigation (Woodruff & Birren, 1975). As quoted in the section entitled, “Public Attitude and Use of the Media for Promotion of Mental Health” of the Report to the President from the President’s Commission on Mental Health, Hausman (1977) stated: “There is probably no

more powerful influence in shaping public perception than the entertainment programs of network television.” (pp. 38-39)

Such statements reflect the apparent growing concern by some private and political entities that public perception of older Americans can be a sociopolitical force that affects their interests.

Mass media produce and sell images of people and groups of people in society. Television teaches new things and reinforces old ideas. Representations create reality for viewers. Television shows us what we are like and/or how we should be. What is on television dictates personal reality for many people (Lett et al., 2004).

Moreover, some researchers have explained that portrayals of minority individuals are stereotypical and not realistic (Lett et al., 2004; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Entman, 1994). Television viewers learn about groups in society, both majority and minority; and what they see on television influences attitudes and opinions (Dixon & Linz, 2000, social/ethnic/professional groups in society; Chory-Assad & Tamborini, 2001, physicians; Rossler & Brosius, 2001, social relationships; Diefenbach & West, 2001, violence; Gerbner, 1996; Lett et al., 2004). Surely, the same can be assumed for older adults as a subgroup of society.

Representations of older adults in soap operas, the subject of this study, are a good choice for serious inquiry because soap operas are a pervasive part of our culture and a daily mainstay for many American viewers. Although most soap opera viewers are older women, “[s]ome men, like women, are faithful viewers of television soap operas” (Frisby, 2002, p. 56). According to Nielsen statistics, 30% of viewers of soap operas are male (Hayward, 1997, p. 507).

It would be hard to imagine a person growing up in America who did not see a soap opera or hear about a storyline from a soap opera by ten years of age. These series feed the human need for stories much as literature does. Soaps present the ups and downs of the lives of fictional characters in real time. Viewers may spend a lifetime with their favorite characters and storylines. Due to long tenure on their respective shows, many actors age along with their fans.

Harrington and Brothers (2011) sum up viewers aging with their characters in this manner:

An underappreciated feature of the soap genre is viewer's ability to grow up and grow older alongside the fictional characters and communities depicted on-screen. Due to their potential longevity, soaps become a touchstone or through-line to viewers' personal lives, where their own milestones and memories are referenced according to story events of the time and generations of family members share the pleasures of a commonly consumed text. No other form of popular entertainment offers quite the possibility of engagement over the life course. (p. 313)

Soap fans love their shows because of the connections they make between their own lives and the lives of their favorite characters. The things that happen on soaps could happen to them, hence the fear and trepidation when a character falls victim to hubris. If a similar circumstance could not envelop the viewer, there would be no suspense. Soap operas are the product of many people's toil: writers, editors, cameramen, actors, et cetera. Their efforts create cultural artifacts that reveal our highest ambitions and greatest failures; they also reflect our daily preoccupations and obsessions.

But there is a new problem on the horizon for soap actors as well as fans. Soap operas are getting cancelled at an alarming rate; they are being replaced with cooking

shows and talk shows which are cheaper to produce than are soap operas. These cancellations have, ultimately, been blamed on falling ratings. Ratings for soap operas have dropped 20% since 1999 (Rice, 2011, paragraph 1). In order to boost ratings, ABC tried using famous people such as country music performers, like Billy Currington, and Spice Girl Mel B to advertise their storylines in 2008 (Steinberg, 2008, paragraph 1).

Studying a soap opera from a textual approach is difficult partly because of the lack of closure. Brunsdon (1990) claims that soap operas have no text that can be studied since soap opera stories have no clear and definite ending. According to Mumford (1995), Robert C. Allen (1985), television critic and researcher, agrees with the notion "that such a text can never be defined with any certainty" and "that there is something about soap opera's narrative form that removes it from the realm of traditional aesthetic objects, making it impossible to describe it as a 'text' in a meaningful way" (p. 27).

Mumford (1995) further explains:

Even if we accept the possibility of locating a specific television text, we cannot watch a complete soap opera, says Allen, so it is therefore impossible to define it as a text. Significantly, this conclusion is based not only on the predicted lack of series closure—viewers expectations that an individual program will go on further--but on the assumption that a particular program's origins are also inaccessible. (p. 27)

Mumford (1995) argues:

This presumed lack of closure is seen not simply as a defining characteristic of the soap opera narrative, but as a major source of women's pleasure in the genre, and it figures prominently in assessments of the programs' ideological function. Such critical unanimity, however, obscures the important ways in which soap operas do

offer opportunities for closure and it, therefore, actually limits our ability to understand how the genre operates ideologically. (p. 68)

Male dominated dramas like those in prime time demand a traditional linear structure with a clear and decisive ending according to Livingstone (1998). There are other problems involved in studying soap operas as well.

Mumford (1995) asserts:

The sheer volume of episodes of an individual television soap opera—the fact that some programs have been broadcast five days a week since the early 1950s—makes it hard for a critic to describe, much less recapture, a program's broadcast history. In contrast, even the longest-running situation comedy or drama, aired only once a week, can more easily be reviewed in its entirety. (p. 27)

This study examined areas of focus, such as families/major characters, along with themes and representations of older adults. Study of these media images is important because people's attitudes, over time, are affected by portrayals of people on television (cultivation theory), and these attitudes can affect behavior. Major ideas of this study: families/characters, episode analysis, narrative analysis, themes, and older adult characters.

For this qualitative study, I examined hegemony on *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Young and the Restless*. These series episodes were taped in 2012. After thirty episodes were recorded for examination, the researcher continued to watch all three soap operas almost daily and incorporated some events and characters from more recent episodes.

Families/characters, themes, representations of older adults, as well as episode analysis and narrative analysis were used to arrive at the meanings of the soap operas chosen for study. Semiotics and narrative analysis, in particular, were the theoretical tools used in the readings of these series. An episode of each series under study was analyzed using the methodology of a study of *Hill Street Blues* by Deming (1985) as a model. Also studied was how themes affect the lives of soap opera characters on *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Young and the Restless*. In depth analysis probed the power structure and class associations that create society on these soap operas.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review considers previous studies of soap operas, including audience analysis, the influence of television and cultivation theory, older adults on television, uses and gratifications theory, narrative and the soap opera, the history of the soap opera, characteristics of the soap opera, and semiotics and mythologies, along with a comparison of older adults on soap operas and prime time dramas.

Audience Analysis and Soap Operas

Audience analysis allows the researcher to examine viewers and interpretation of media products. Decoding and various readings of the text also come into play. Anderson (1987) states that the method of decoding television is a way to “constitute and maintain our social realities” (p. 164). This is what soap viewers do; their own realities live side by side with the realities of their soap characters’ lives. Decoding must take place for the program to be enjoyed and consumed.

Decoding is a complicated process made a little less so by the characteristic of repetition in soaps. Ang (1991) writes that decoding is part of the process of watching television. Decoding soap operas requires remembering what happened before, sometimes years before. Repetition helps jog the memory. Many times a character in a soap opera will gossip to everyone she sees in order to pass on something that just happened, recount something pertinent that happened in the past, or make a connection between two events in a meaningful way. In soap operas, events connect people, and people connect events.

Scodari (2004) writes that it is accepted by political economists that capitalist media producers create a product that perpetuates the acceptance of unequal power

relationships in society (Garnham, 1995; Kellner, 1992). Scodari (2004) writes, “According to this view, the power to direct meaning rests primarily with cultural producers for whom any commitment to diversity and free speech halts at the doorstep of their own class interests” (Scodari, 2004, p. xiv).

Alexander, Cousens, and Lewis (2004) claim that “[s]oaps also offer excellent opportunities for the investigation of ideological messages and values” (p. 3).

Alexander et al. (2004) define ideology in this way:

A set of views, ideas and beliefs, which are held by an individual or shared by a group. Dominant ideology is the system of views, ideas and beliefs, which

appears to be most widely supported by influential institutions like the media.

The views of those who do not support the dominant ideological consensus are likely to be marginalized. Because dominant ideology is so widely supported and reinforced, it quite often appears to be invisible or simply ‘common-sense’. (p.

87).

Morley (1992) claims that the traditional view of television audiences is that members sit passively receiving the message being imparted to them. Morley (1992) states:

“According to choice, these (always other) people were turned into zombies, transfixed by bourgeois ideology or filled with consumerist desires” (p. 18). This was the magic

bullet or hypodermic needle view of audiences that originated in the early days of mass media in the early 1900s. We realize now that this view is inaccurate. We now, says

Morley (1992), recognize that audience members are involved in a wide range of

readings of the dominant ideology in the programming they are consuming, whether dominant, negotiated, or oppositional.

Morley (1992) writes that texts are multifaceted works whose interpretation is not fixed by the producer. In other words, no producer of a text or media product can insure that the viewer will receive and decode exactly the message that was sent. Audiences have to make sense out of what they see and hear based on their own experiences and what they know about the world around them.

Alexander et al. (2004) write about soap opera realism using the term verisimilitude, which they explicate like this; “Literally this term means ‘truth-like’. It is used in soap opera to mean the appearance of being real or true or being similar to real life” (p. 88).

Morley (1981) studied audiences and published his conclusions in *Nationwide*, a publication of audience research; he found that Hall’s claim that social class determined one’s interpretation of any media product was too simplistic and just not accurate (Morley, 1981). As per Morley (1981), interpretation is more complex than Hall’s encoding/decoding model.

Hall (1980) writes that there are too many groups and institutions in society for any theory to ever fully cover them and all of the textual possibilities; also their interests are often in conflict with one another, and these conflicts often cannot ever be resolved. Such a situation complicates efforts to explain the process of encoding and decoding, according to Hall (1980). Morley (1981), furthermore, claimed that there will always be tension involved in the field of cultural studies where the study of television is concerned. Therefore, as per these media scholars, the examination of television is difficult and problematic because of its far reaching involvements with so many cultural and social entities.

Harrington and Brothers (2011) write, “As in many other media markets, the target audience for daytime soap operas is viewers eighteen to forty-nine years old, with those younger than eighteen considered desirable as future long-term viewers, but those fifty and over considered (by implication) undesirable” (p. 300). They further explain that the aging national population created an aging audience for soaps (Harrington & Brothers, 2011).

Ahrens (2004) explains that “advertisers routinely pay more for programs that deliver younger audiences” (p. 301). Moreover, Harrington and Brothers (2011) state:

Older adults are undesirable because they are believed to be too brand loyal (not easily influenced by advertising), to have less disposable income than younger viewers, to be low-volume consumers (buying for small households), to be easier to target than younger viewers (less elusive translates to less desirable), and to be un-hip by definition, thus negatively impacting a company’s reputation. (pp. 300-301)

Other researchers who have studied older consumers include Lee (1997), Riggs (1998), Russell (1997), Tedeschi (2006), Turow (1997), and Wolfe and Snyder (2003).

Harrington and Brothers (2011) claim that older adults are seen by advertisers as not having much money and “being mindless consumers whose viewership is seen as a negative as their heavy viewership is seen as a sign of abnormalacy” (p. 313). This negative view of older viewers reflects society’s view that older adults are worth less than younger adults and children. Harrington and Brothers (2011) continue to explain that “older adults are under-theorized and under-studied compared to other age groups” as well as having “long been marginalized by most media marketers” (p. 302).

In addition, Harrington and Brothers (2011) claim that older adults are seen to be passive, mindless consumers whose viewership represents a disconnect from the world; they are supposed to watch television because they are lonely and have defective social lives (p. 302). According to Harrington and Brothers (2011) only three percent of the characters on soaps are older, a situation which makes older adults very underrepresented (p. 302). These authors also contend that older characters in soaps appear to be there “as sounding boards for younger characters” (Harrington & Brothers, 2011, p. 304). According to Riggs (1998), elders’ viewing patterns are seen as “the catatonic absorption of meaningless fog” (p. 172). This is a contrast to the actual picture of many seniors as healthy and active.

Ford et al. (2011) report that soap opera audiences often make sense of their stories together in groups bound by kinship or friendship. It is not uncommon for mothers and daughters to watch soap operas together and discuss the latest events in their favorite characters’ lives. Many times one of the watchers will remember better than the others what happened in the past that is affecting the current crisis they are watching. Soap fans explicate the situation as they enjoy the story. Only by knowing the past can one fully understand the present.

Ford et al. (2011) even suggest that there is a ritualistic element to the way these fans view their shows: having a regularly scheduled time at night to watch *Soapnet* to catch up, having certain people there to watch with you who share your enthusiasm, and finding ways to “minimize distractions” so that the experience can be complete and fulfilling (p. 5). What results, write Ford et al. (2011), is “ritualistic, intergenerational, and decades-long consumption” of a media product that produces great pleasure for many people (p. 5).

Mumford (1995) explains the different types of television viewers and the various kinds of experiences one can have watching soap operas, depending on one's level of expertise. Mumford states there is the incompetent viewer ("one who has never watched a soap", p. 5). Mumford (1995) describes the opposite of the incompetent viewer as being the expert "who has a long history with the genre as a whole and with one or more individual shows" (p. 5). Mumford (1995) further explains this:

The incompetent viewer, who knows nothing of the soap opera conventions or history, will understand little of an episode, and because of its self-referential, nonlinear structure, may not even be able to make sense of it in the most superficial way. An expert, on the other hand, will bring a wealth of historical memory and detailed information to the viewing experience, and therefore will, if she watches attentively, understand nearly everything she sees: the characters, their motivations, the relationships among them, and thus the background and potential consequences of particular narrative developments. (p. 5)

Therefore, the more one watches soap operas, the more one will be able to enjoy them.

Older Adult Characters on Soap Operas

Harrington and Brothers (2011) classify older adult characters on soaps as being age 65 and older. Harrington and Brothers (2011) claim that older actors are often refused a contract and made to become recurring characters; they then function as ghosts of their former selves brought back to interact with younger characters.

Cassata and Irwin (1997) report that older actors and the characters they play are often used less and less in storylines until they disappear completely from the soap opera.

Mares and Woodward (2006) claim that research has shown older adults to be the group in society that watches the most television because this group has more leisure time.

Harrington and Brothers (2011) found that “[o]lder viewers (fifty plus) are more likely to express both an aversion to seeing more storylines about later life (many times because they are dealing with these issues in their own lives) and a desire to see such storylines told within the context of the family” (p. 312). Harrington and Brothers (2011), through this study, also found that participants are interested in storylines that connect multiple generations together in meaningful ways.

Soap Operas and Prime Time Television Compared

Television dramas and soap operas are similar in many ways. They have a beginning, a middle, characters who speak and act within a certain context, and settings for those actions. Porter (1979) writes about the soap opera’s lack of closure:

Its [soap opera’s] purpose clearly is to never end and its beginnings are always lost sight of. If then, as Aristotle so reasonably claimed, drama is the imitation of a human action that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, soap opera belongs to a separate genus that is entirely composed of an indefinitely expandable middle. (p. 89)

Soap operas have other characteristics that set them apart from other types of televised dramas. Livingstone (1990) explains that “viewers are engaged in ‘parasocial interaction’ (as if engaging with real people), they participate without passive identification, they blur boundaries between viewing and living by endless ‘what happened then’ discussions and by bringing their everyday experience to judge the drama” (p. 2). Horton and Wohl (1956) write that “the parasocial interaction can be looked at as an equivalent of a chat with neighbors one is fond of” (as quoted in Livingstone, 1998, p. 59). Livingstone (1990) further contends that no one message exists in a soap opera narrative but, instead, that there is a “cacophony of voices, of

colluders and eavesdroppers, of bystanders and involved protagonists with their own histories and perspectives” (p. 2).

Another difference between female-dominated drama (daytime) and male-dominated drama (primetime) is the issue of the protagonist or leading character. Traditionally, works of art are about the life and problems of a central character all throughout the television show, film, novel, et cetera. This is not true with female dramas like soap operas. Soaps feature strong female characters in a number unrivaled in prime time dramas (Livingstone, 1998).

Livingstone (1998) draws a connection between matriarchy and nonlinear stories with multifaceted viewpoints and storylines (p. 3). Livingstone (1998) further explains in this way:

Firstly, mythic narratives centre upon a single agent (the ‘hero’). The essence of soap opera, however, is the absence of a central figure. Instead, the drama involves a cluster of interrelated characters who, at different times, come to the fore or retreat to the background. (p. 62)

Cassata and Skill (1983) further analyzed the differences between soap operas and prime time dramas in the following ways: because of their daily narratives, soap operas have a “luxury of time for the development of multidimensional characters and storylines, soap operas present layers of complex stories that alternate between the edge of compelling drama and the quieter, more mundane moments of life, all of which entice the viewer to engage in an interactive relationship” (p. xv). Cassata and Skill (1983) further define the differences with this commentary on prime time dramas: “Prime time, on the other hand, must depend upon unrelenting action and conflict, having little time for the development of subtlety and nuance, thus placing the viewer in the position of

being an onlooker rather than an active participant” (pp. xv-xvi). As Porter writes (1979), “Soap time is for and of pleasure, the time of consumption, of a collectivized and commercially induced American Dream” (p. 96).

Comstock and Newcomb (1983) have written about the importance of soap operas on television. Comstock and Newcomb (1983) report, “Soap operas express fundamental human relationships in a realistic manner without conscious repetition” and “[t]he soap opera is unique to the mass media, and the medium of television has enlarged its social significance” (p. xxv).

Ford et al. (2011) claim that many people see women’s media and men’s traditional media and their viewers in very different ways: Men thinking about and discussing prime time serials is seen as the “voluntary tinkering or problem-solving of hobbyists: an active intellectual, masculine, and mature form of participation” (p. 9). Ford et al. (2011) explain the negative view of women watching women’s programming: “In contrast, speculating on the intricacies of soap opera plots still connotes addiction, surrendering one’s will to the television in a passive, mindless, feminine, and child-like form of consumption” (p. 9). Moreover, Ford et al. (2011) contend that many avid soap fans view their shows as puzzles to be solved or games to be won.

Harrington and Brothers (2011) write that “the longstanding marginalization of older adults/characters throughout the entertainment industry is ‘merely’ a reflection of larger societal age-based stereotyping and discrimination” (p. 313).

Researchers have examined representations of older adults on prime time television with mixed findings (Arnoff, 1974; Cassata & Skill, 1983; Cassata, Skill, & Boadu, 1978; Comstock, 1972; Gerbner, 1972; Head, 1954; Northcott, 1975; Peterson,

1973). Most of these studies were quantitative, and results ranged from positive to negative for portrayals of older adults on prime time television, depending on the study.

Some research has “found older persons to be portrayed as being more emotionally stable and healthier, physically, than their younger cohorts” (Cassata & Skill, 1983, p. 38). Peterson (1973) discovered “a positive correlation between the representation of older people on television and their numbers in the actual population” with “older men” being “represented in greater number than older women” (Cassata & Skill, 1983, p. 38). Some researchers have found representations of older adults on television to be mostly favorable (Cassata & Skill, 1983; Cassata et al., 1978; Petersen, 1973).

Arnoff (1974) found older people on “television programs” to be “generally associated with failure, evil, and unhappiness” and “also reported a positive linear relationship between the increasing age of a television character and the ‘bad guy’ role” (Cassata & Skill, 1983, p. 8). In a study of three years of “dramatic television content” in 1954, Smythe discovered “heroes who were identified with younger, attractive people, while villains were representative of an older generation with more social power, but physically and sexually on the wane” (as quoted in Cassata & Skill, 1983, p. 38).

Gerbner (1972) found that older characters “in television dramatic content” were “more likely to be killed than younger people” (Cassata & Skill, 1983, p. 38). Some researchers have found that negative myths about age and aging on television are believed by many people (Comstock, 1972; Head, 1954; Northcott, 1975).

Signorielli (2004) conducted a research study of the portrayal of older adults in prime-time network programs between 1993 and 2002 and found that older adults were

under represented. Lauzen and Dozier (2005) examined prime-time television programs from the 2002-2003 season. They discovered that, although 18% of Americans were age 60 and older in 2002 and 2003, only 4% of the major characters in prime-time television programs represented this age group (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005).

Older adults are often treated differently in media. Signorielli (2004) found:

More women between the ages of 50 and 64 were classified as elderly rather than middle-aged. The age distribution of minority men resembles that of white women, while minority women are typically cast in younger age groups. The world of work on television is one of diminished options for the elderly.

Television celebrates youth while it neglects and negates the elderly. (p. 279)

Hatch (2005) found that older adult females are more likely to be portrayed as a negative stereotype (p. 19). In television programs, older women are also portrayed as being less successful than older males (Hatch, 2005, p. 9). Lauzen and Dozier (2005) concluded that “up to age 60, leadership and occupational power increased with age” with “middle-aged males” being “more likely to play leadership roles and wield occupational power than their female counterparts” in media representations of older individuals (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005, p. 241).

A content analysis of humor related to media representations of older adults on television was conducted by Palmore (1971). Palmore (1971) observed “that over half the jokes reflected a negative view of aging, and that those dealing with physical ability or appearance, age concealment, old maids, and mental ability were the most negative” (Cassata & Skill, 1983, p. 38).

Deets (1993) claims that media representations of older adults lead the viewer to believe that members of this age group are sick most of the time (Smith, 1998). Deets

(1993) also states that television has misled the public into viewing older adults in society in a negative light. Deets (1993) claims, “[T]oday's television viewer is led to believe that most older Americans are alike, institutionalized, in poor health and inactive, are senile, constipated, or incontinent, and are either extremely poor or very wealthy” (as quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 134). Such negative stereotypes may not be true and, in fact, may misrepresent the life experiences of many older Americans.

Dychtwald and Flower (1988) explains that most older adults are not ill regardless of how they are portrayed on television and that disease and aging are often seen together in the case of older adult characters on television. Smith (1998) explains that most older adults are not sick all the time. Furthermore, Smith (1998) calls for a more accurate depiction of today's older adult population in the media.

Because of the many ways that older adults are described on television (the “many names we have for aging”), language is an important force to examine for what those descriptions tell us about stereotypes of older people according to Smith (1998, p. 42). Words create reality and that reality can be changed if the words, such as those used to describe the elderly, are changed.

Smith (1998) concludes that “[p]redominant aging stereotypes in programming tend to lead viewers to accept a number of myths about older adults” (p. 43). Deets (1993), on the subject of myths in society that relate to older adults, claims that representations of older adults that are biased and negative can create a harmful type of social mythology about age and aging. Viewers can start to believe these harmful stereotypes.

Deets (1993) writes:

That's the frightening thing about the myths. It's bad enough that they can influence public policy and employment policy. What's more frightening is that we can begin to believe them. (as quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 134)

Cassata and Skill (1983) have examined the social importance of the issue of aging and the aged in a society obsessed with youth. They wrote that in light “of the ever-increasing interest and attention focused on the older person in America today, there exists a need for a greater understanding of the attitudes and perceptions that the media and people in general hold toward them” (p. 38). Older Americans need emotional and social support from other age groups.

Lauzen and Dozier (2005) found in their study of one hundred films in 2002 that most of the primary male characters in these films were in their 30s and 40s while the primary female characters were in their 20s and 30s. Secondly, Lauzen and Dozier (2005) found that media representations of older male and female characters differed. Lauzen and Dozier (2005) write that males were shown as being powerful through middle age while middle aged women were shown as being powerless and without goals (p. 437). Hatch (2005) concluded, “Whether, and how, older women and men are portrayed represents one measure of how ageism and sexism are embedded in the social fabric” (p. 19).

One could even say, due to the poor and powerless picture of older adult females in the media, that these representations are putting such women in a lower socioeconomic class than their male counterparts. Class affects one’s ability to have a voice in American society. People from the higher classes have more earning power and social power. Portraying older adult females as being in a lower socioeconomic class because of gender

and age disadvantages them in society. Stereotypical media representations of older adult females as impoverished and powerless can only perpetuate such expectations of this demographic group. Social expectations can limit one's future possibilities.

Few can deny the influence of mass media in society today and the presence of stereotypes in such media. Characters used can be discussed not only as stereotypes but as archetypes. Archetypes are stereotypical characters that are said to have emerged in almost all cultures around the world independently. According to Joseph Campbell (1988), these common character types are shared by humanity because they accomplish tasks or fulfill roles that are necessary for tribal cultural success.

Alexander et al. (2004) defined an archetype as “[a]n original template for a common character type, such as ‘hero’, ‘villain’, ‘fool’, ‘lover’, etc.” (p. 85). Common archetypes on soap operas include heroes, villains, lovers, good mothers, bad mothers, good fathers, and bad fathers. On hospital melodramas one could even include the shaman archetype or medicine man which could be the good doctor characters. After all, they heal people of mysterious illnesses few people really understand. Archetypes are also stereotypical because they reduce a complex human being to a role they perform.

Alexander et al. (2004) report:

Branston and Stafford (2001) argue that because soaps show stories with a universal appeal about families and communities they rely heavily on ‘archetypal characters’ and use stereotypes to ensure ready accessibility to the casual viewer. Archetypal characters have existed throughout the history of the narrative form and include heroes and villains, earth mothers and prodigal sons, vamps, and victims. Stereotypes are more specific to cultural and historical trends. (p. 42)

History of the Soap Opera

Roman (2005) writes, “The daytime serial drama was a staple of radio programming that started in 1935 and reached its peak in 1940, and 9 of every 10 sponsored daytime hours were associated with this programming [soap operas]” (p. 159). There were many different soap operas on radio. “Programs like *The Romance of Helen Trent*, which started in 1933 and ran for 27 years; *Ma Perkins* (1933); *Back Stage Wife*; *Our Gal Sunday*, which began in 1937 and ran for 22 years; and *Guiding Light* offered listeners an escape from the drudgery of their daily routines” (p. 159).

Roman (2005) continues:

[H]usband-and-wife team William and Lee Philip Bell created the longest-running *Young and the Restless*, which is still appearing daily on the CBS network. The series, which is owned by the ad agency Young and Rubicam, celebrated the taping of its 7,000 episode on September 28, 2000. It has been a consistent number one in the daytime ratings. (p. 161)

Brown (1994) writes that the original producers of soap operas sought to create a media product that incorporated elements of women’s culture into the program. In spite of the fact that this was done to try and lure viewers for the purpose of selling products, women were pleased and interested in the soap operas which they saw as being about their own personal worlds as housewives. They made their own resistive readings of the dramas. An early soap producer, Irma Phillips, even tried to create characters that could function as friends for the viewers. (Several researchers have written about this: See Abercrombie, 1996; Lavin, 1995; Rogers & Baughman, 1995.)

Brown (1994) observed, soap operas were “designed and developed to appeal to women’s place in society” as well, “a place constructed for women in patriarchal and

capitalistic discourse” (p. 174). According to Brown (1994), this is a “space into which we [women] are supposed to fit, constructed by our culture for us even though we do not occupy it” (p. 174). In a way this is a good fit, marginalized woman working as housewives watching marginalized daytime television dramas that contain elements very important to women: family, love, and money. So women find their own pleasure in soap operas. Soap operas generate women’s dialogue and become something that all women viewers can talk about. Soap operas, with their many storylines, tell stories bit by bit. Each snippet of one storyline is followed by a snippet of another. This fits in nicely with the housewife walking in and out of the room, doing her chores.

Melodrama

Many might say that soap operas are classic melodrama. According to Brooks, the melodramatic form can be traced back to the French melodrama of the 1860’s with Pixierécourt as its founder (p. xii). Early melodrama required musical accompaniment (Brooks, 1976, p. 14). French melodrama was consumed by all classes in France while English melodrama was consumed primarily by the lower classes (Brooks, 1976, p. xii).

Brooks (1976) presents the work of Balzac as a good example of melodramatic form: “Balzac’s use of hyperbolic figures, lurid and grandiose events, masked relationships, and disguised identities, abductions, slow-acting poisons, secret societies, and mysterious parentage, and other elements from the melodramatic repertory has repeatedly been the object of critical attack, as have, still more, his forcing of narrative voice to the breathless pitch of melodrama” (p. 3). All of these characteristics of melodrama can be seen in soap operas from their creation to the present time.

As Brooks (1976) further explains:

The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. They assume primary psychic roles, father, mother, child, and express basic psychic conditions. Life tends, in this fiction, toward[s] ever more concentrated and totally expressive gestures and statements. (p. 4)

Brooks (1976) further adds this to the description of melodrama:

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

These events exist in every soap opera episode. Dark plottings are the rule in soap opera. Good people are always tormented and persecuted by mean angry people who are unhappy with their own lives. The viewer watches the cruelty with the knowledge that payback is coming. The worse the transgression the greater the fall for the mean character in the end.

There is always suspense as secrets are kept, and people are always whispering about them when a character who is directly affected by the secret walks up unnoticed by the gossiping pair. This character hears just enough to know that something is going on. When questioned, the gossipers will deny knowing anything of interest to the victim of the gossip. Brooks (1976) writes that the ultimate combat in soap operas is that between good and evil for the purpose of maintaining the accepted social order. In this way, the

status quo is supported. Modern American myths like *hard work pays off*, *beauty is only skin deep*, and *you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps* prevail.

Singer (2001) explains that melodrama in America emerged in “blood-and-thunder stage melodrama and early sensational films serials—that, while largely forgotten today, are crucial to an understanding of American popular culture in the decades around the turn of the century, and beyond” (p. 1). Singer (2001) declares, “For most of the two centuries in which melodrama has been identified as a dramatic category it has been a target of critical ridicule and derision” (p. 2). Consequently, Singer (2001) says, “Even until quite recently, one could find descriptions of melodrama evoking metaphors of disease, disfigurement, perversion, and substance abuse” (p. 2).

Mumford (1995) writes about the melodramatic structure; she reminds us that, from the 1930s to the 1950s, there were a lot of film melodramas; melodrama was just one of the many different genres of film. Today’s soap operas have changed somewhat. Moreover, Livingstone (1998) claims, “Soap opera combines conventions from the domestic novel” and “the romantic Hollywood melodrama” (p. 53).

As Singer (2001) writes of movies with female leads in the pre 1920s, these female heroines exhibited many male qualities, such as independence, self reliance, and physical strength. However, like with soap opera characters and their female dominated storylines, this portrayal “is often accompanied by the sadistic spectacle of the women’s victimization. The genre as a whole is thus animated by an oscillation between the contradictory extreme of female prowess and distress, empowerment and imperilment” (Singer, 2001, p. 222).

Singer (2001) reminds us that before there were serial queens of television land there were serial queens of the cinema (p. 221). Singer (2001) reports, these melodramas

reflected “positive changes in the social reality of women around the turn of the century” (p. 240). Some of the serials of 1910 to 1920 include “*The Adventures of Dorothy Dare*, *A Daughter of Daring*, *The Exploits of Elaine*, *The Hazards of Helen*, *Ruth of the Rockies*, *Pearl of the Army*, *A Lass of the Lumberlands*, *The Girl Spy*, *The Girl Detective*, [and] *The Perils of Our Girl Reporters*” (Singer, 2001, pp. 221-222).

According to Singer (2001), these films were made to capitalize on the popularity of serial dramas from women’s magazines “particularly of the adventure and romance-adventure stories that had been serialized in daily newspapers and women’s monthly magazines since the early 1890s and published in girls’ book series (the precursors to Nancy Drew) since around 1905” (p. 223).

Mumford (1995) explains how television adapted techniques and methods from film and other forms of media entertainment:

Television takes up melodramatic strategies, as it takes from the strategies employed by other film, stage, and literary traditions, such as the domestic novel, the mystery, vaudeville, the film musical, and so on. But rather than simply being transplanted to television, these features are adapted and transformed into specifically televisual strategies; while never wholly severed from other media, they follow a specific developmental trajectory within television. (p. 24)

Robyn Wiegman (1992) writes that melodrama, such as soap operas, use cinema editing and shooting techniques that they have borrowed from film.

Alexander et al. (2004) continue explication of melodrama in this manner:

Soap is characterized by elements of melodrama, in its focus on family issues and its use of dramatic irony, romantic plots and heightened emotionality. It also relies heavily on dramatic cliff-hangers, intense close-ups and family occasions,

such as weddings, which act as sites of conflict rather than of narrative unity or closure. Like film melodrama, TV soap opera is generally regarded as a female genre, and has been derided for its lack of seriousness and emotional triteness. However, in recent years British soap opera has been taken more seriously as a dramatic form, which combines melodrama with social realism and classic realist style. (p. 29)

Reality

The perception of reality in the media has long been a subject of discussion. Lippmann wrote of cinema creating “pseudo-environments” or a pseudo reality for its viewers; these were “[m]esmerizing likenesses of reality itself” (Ewen, 1996, p. 152). This pseudo reality is one in which youth is portrayed as the ideal. Morris and Boyle (1988) wrote, “Since the early days of film, youthful actors and actresses dominated the Hollywood scene and film writers acclaimed the glories of youth” (p. 58).

Alexander et al. (2004) explain that, while many British soap operas can be classified as social realism, the same cannot be said about soap operas in the United States. Alexander et al. (2004) write:

Their [American soap operas] trademark was a powerful combination of escapist fantasy and unadulterated glamour, luxury, greed and sex. These features proved at odds with the global recession of the 1990s and the storylines grew increasingly incredible, resulting in the loss of audiences at home and abroad. (p. 27)

Wittebols (2004) declares that “[s]uspension of stories until the next episode is a primary element in developing audience loyalty” (p. 3). Wittebols (2004) further explains, “[S]oaps reflect an everyday world in which events flow as seamlessly as possible to create an air of realism” (p. 3).

According to Storey (2009b), fans liked the show if they thought it was realistic. From this point, Storey (2009b) discusses several types of realism: empiricist realism (reflecting accurately the world in which the drama was produced), classic realism (an illusion that conceals how it was constructed and/or created, and emotional realism. Ang (1985) suggests that, while on a denotative level what happens in a show may appear unrealistic, on the connotative level, which is emotional, it may appear very realistic and possible when you consider connections, relationships, associations between actions or characters, et cetera. Perhaps soap operas are emotionally realistic to viewers in as much as what happens is in sync with what viewers know has happened before. Heavy viewers will probably see the shows as being the most emotionally realistic because they have the most knowledge about the soaps. So, the more you know, the more realistic the soap operas probably seem to be.

Reasons for the popularity of soap operas have been speculated upon by researchers like Livingstone (1998): The purpose of watching a soap opera can vary from viewer to viewer. It could be any number of things or a combination thereof. For example, as Livingstone (1998) points out: It could be the “role the soaps play in a viewer’s life” [that they give her something to organize her daily habits or routine around], “entertainment,” “realism” [problems familiar to all women], “emotional experience,” “relationship with the characters,” “problem-solving,” “escapism,” and “critical response” (pp. 56-57). They also give the viewer something she or he can become an expert in. You can become an expert at watching one soap opera or many soap operas (Mumford, 1995). This is not so different from playing video games, but the game is in the mind of the viewer in the case of the soap opera.

Soap Opera and Feminism

Many women consider soap operas to be a feminist concern since the viewers are mostly women. Feminists see representations of women as being influential in society and capable of elevating women. According to Storey (2009b), “feminism has always recognized the importance of cultural struggle within the contested landscape of popular culture” (p. 11). Television is a powerful element of popular culture; what is popular and garners high ratings stays on television while what garners poor ratings is soon cancelled.

Brunsdon (2000) investigated the intersection of feminism and soap operas and found, “The category of ‘women’s genres’ has been increasingly used since the mid-1980’s to refer to a cross-media, interdisciplinary area of textual production and study” which “can be understood to include romance fiction, women’s and girls’ magazines, television, soap opera, film, melodrama, and ‘weepies’” (p. 19). Brunsdon (2000) further defines women’s genres as media products that depict and promote “conventional feminities” which can be interpreted, generally, as traditional women’s interests (p. 19). Many researchers have written about feminism and the media (Ang, 1985; Basinger, 1993; Coward, 1984; Mann & Spigel, 1988; Modleski, 1982; Parker, 1984; Radway, 1984; Sparke, 1995; Wilson, 1985; Winship, 1987).

One can look at the 1950’s as an important time in the development of women’s lives and representations of women on television. American life had drastically changed from the pre war culture where most women were housewives and jobs for women were scarce. Men returned from World War II and married. Married couples lived in communities with other young married couples where the patriarchal traditional society Americans had enjoyed for centuries began to change and erode. Byars (1991) discusses the changes in this way:

During that decade, the social fabric of American had begun to weaken. The interconnected social institutions composing its warp and woof had never before been called into question as they were in the 1950s. As women of all ages, races, marital and maternal statuses, and socioeconomic classes flooded out of their homes and into the workplaces of American, the family structure began to change, previously sacrosanct gender roles began to alter, and struggles over the meaning of female and male become particularly evident in the cultural atmosphere. Change was imminent but not yet explicitly acknowledged. Now, with the clarity of hindsight, we can see this upheaval in progress in the cultural documents of the period; mass-media texts of the period provide evidence of a concern with the domestic sphere, participating in what Tom Schatz has characterized as ‘a radical upheaval in the nature and structure of American ideology’. (p. 8)

Representations of women on television included Lucy and Ethel on *I Love Lucy*, and the myriad of mother/wife figures on *Leave It to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, and *My Three Sons*, to name several of the most popular programs. Except for Lucy and Ethel the other television females were passive followers of their husbands. This time period was followed by the second wave of feminism.

Brunsdon (2000) explains that the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s can be seen as an attack on what is essentially feminine and that by the 1980s she and others were engaged in examining the third wave of feminism. Brunsdon (2000) became involved in a review of second wave feminism and mass media women’s genres. Some researchers engaged in serious study of romance novels (Taylor, 1989; McRobbie & McCabe, 1981; Modleski, 1982; Radford, 1986; Radway, 1984). Others studied melodrama (Cook, 1983; Gledhill, 1987; Harper, 1983; Kaplan, 1983; Mulvey, 1986).

Brown (1994) brings up a very interesting issue—how women organize things, like stories. At issue is how many women tell stories, for a start. Kalcik (1975) writes, “Women cannot tell stories and ... what they do tell are not real stories” (p. 7). Brown (1994) writes that women do tell stories, just not the way that men do. Brown (1994) claims, “Women’s stories are often circular, lacking a clear beginning, middle, or end. Thus, in dominant discourse, what women tell is not classified or recognized as stories” (p. 1). Hence, Brown (1994) concludes “women’s stories go unrecorded and unrecognized” (p. 1).

Characteristics of the Soap Opera

Comstock and Newcomb (1983) wrote that, by definition, the soap opera is a daytime program broadcast several times a week, with low production costs, as compared to prime time, and that “attracts a predominantly, if hardly wholly, adult female audience” (p. xxiii). Moreover, Comstock and Newcomb (1983) explain that a soap opera is “the continuing saga of a group of people involved with each other through lineage, passion, ambition[,] hostility, and chance” (p. xxiii). In addition, Weber, Tamborini, Lee, and Stipp (2008) claim:

Unlike anthology drama, where characters are developed quickly with narrative techniques often designed to create simple and clear dispositions, soap opera characters are more complex. Often the roles of hero and villain are easily discernable, but characters and their roles can change over time. (p. 464)

This is important because human beings are not totally good or totally evil. The complexity of the heroes and villains in soap operas more closely mirrors that of human beings in the real world; people and soap characters can and do change over time.

Soap operas have many defining characteristics that distinguish them from other types of television programming, such as reality shows, prime time dramas, and situation comedies. These differences include storylines and ways characters relate to one another. Tania Modleski (1982) explains soap operas in this way: “[w]oman as well as men frequently work outside the home, usually in professions such as law and medicine, and women are generally on a professional par with men. But most of everyone’s time is spent experiencing and discussing personal and domestic crises” (p. 447). In other words, the workplace is just a backdrop for the personal crises of characters on soap operas.

Wittebols (2004) argues, “Three subelements help define the types of themes found in soap operas: conflict and/or chaos, good and evil characters, and generally presenting a materially comfortable upper-middle-class existence” (p. 3). He adds that the cliffhanger is a tool of the serial format used to create suspense and keep people watching (Wittebols, 2004). Wittebols (2004) credits soap operas with popularizing the drama format that he claims even appears in newscasts as news producers try to create suspense in their newscasts.

Sometimes soap operas are used to teach the public about some issue in society. Nariman (1993) recounts the success of Miguel Sabido’s Entertainment-Education Television and how it has been used to promote desirable social agendas from South America to India. The situations in these programs are used to teach the viewers in a specific area how to deal with some problem they are currently encountering in their culture, some health issue like AIDS or drinking clean water. This type of programming is used for the benefit of individuals in society.

The same thing can be seen in American soap operas which have addressed social issues like AIDS, abortion, prison rape, coming out as a gay/lesbian, and other issues (“Soap praised for colon cancer storyline”, 2004, p. 6). An issue is discussed at length by many characters so all sides of the issue are presented to the viewing public. However, the only time a highly public controversial subject is covered by a soap opera is when it is made into a personal problem or struggle for a character (Buckman, 1984).

Soap opera storylines are in real time or the day-to-day present time of the audience members. Porter (1979) describes time in soap operas in this way; the “soap opera is, in effect, unique to the extent that it is the only genre in any medium whose duration year after year is coextensive with that of the calendar year” (p. 89). Therefore, as Porter (1979) points out, a soap opera presents a “parallel life” or world to that of the viewers (p. 88). In other words, the viewer will experience Christmas Eve and Christmas Day along with his or her favorite characters and their soap families the same day or in very close proximity to his/her own family celebration of the holiday.

Also important is the “sense of a future” that is created by having no “finale”; stories “seem to go on forever” (Matelski, 1999, p. 4). Soap opera fans even get a sense of the lives of the characters going on between shows because of how events are talked about. In addition, “several stories” are “presented at the same time, although in different stages” (Matelski, 1999, p. 4). From (2006) wrote this about the complex nature of the multiple storylines that run through the soap opera narrative on a daily basis:

[t]he staging of ten-twelve characters, each with their own history, means that there are always many stories taking place at once—often five or six stories in a single episode. The stories become intertwined like an arabesque ... conflicts are being solved in various ways, new characters and new conflicts appear. (p. 228)

While the characters in each storyline are specific, there are times when most of the characters who are part of different narratives come together at some sort of social event, such as a wedding, party or other social affair (Matelski, 1999). This is usually a time when a great disaster occurs: mob figures take everyone hostage and kill a beloved character or a rain or an ice storm strands everyone in a hotel and then a deadly virus infects everyone.

These crisis points that involve the merging of many different storylines are used to draw in viewers during sweep weeks. These are important times in the soaps for moving the story along and characters who have failed to become fan favorites are often killed off during these crises. Soap opera producers keep track of online chat room activity; what is said about characters, whether new or old, can play a part in that character's future on the show. If a character loses popularity, then that person may be on the chopping block soon. Some fan activity has even saved a beloved character that fell out of favor with producers and writers or brought an old favorite back.

Many people find fault with what they see as repetition in soap operas. An example of this is when one character tells another about a fact, then in another scene one of those characters tells another person and so on. Researchers who have studied soap operas can best explain this situation. As Allen (1985) explains such repetition of facts between characters may appear to be a waste of time, but, for heavy viewers who know the complex relationships of characters, "*who tells whom* is just as important as what is being told" (p. 86).

Perhaps to fully appreciate soap dramas, one must first consider syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects of the dramas. As Seiter (1987) points out, "A syntagm is an ordering of signs, a rule governed combination of signs in a sequence" (p. 27). Fiske

(1992) further explain, “A syntagm is the horizontal chain into which it is linked with others, according to agreed rules and conventions” (p. 50). Moreover, “[a] paradigm is a vertical set of units (each unit being a sign or word), from which the required one is selected” according to Fiske (1978) (p. 50).

Furthermore, Allen (1987) continues:

The syntagmatic juxtaposition of two plot lines (a scene from one following or preceding a scene from the other) arouses in the viewer the possibility of a paradigmatic connection between them. But because the connection the text makes is only a syntagmatic one, the viewer is left to imagine what sort of, if any, other connection they [the two events] might have. (p. 86)

Allen (1985) calls this “paradigmatic redundancy” (p. 86).

Allen (1985) goes on to explain that, for the heavy viewer, the possibilities are endless. The more you know about the histories of the characters the more things you can imagine that a simple conversation can lead to. Allen (1985) concludes that for people who watch infrequently, the soap opera style of conveying new information will seem redundant, and the plot lines will seem empty and meaningless.

A very interesting paradigm is how women in general are understood to approach soap operas. Winship (1987) writes about how women see their lot in life. She claims that many women see their failures as being due to personal shortcomings instead of blaming other people or conditions outside of themselves, like their husbands or the economy (Winship, 1987). Winship (1987) further claims that soap operas are ripe with characters who have fatal flaws; viewers can watch how characters handle failure. Perhaps if viewers can't avoid the same problems, they can get tips on how to handle conflicts and disasters from soap operas. Winship (1987) writes, “Problem solving is a

structuring device in soap operas” and “[t]he constant repetition of problems on soap operas is one of the genre’s most salient characteristics” (p. 43).

Another characteristic is that males in soap operas are sensitive men. These men are almost always available for long drawn out conversations with the women in their lives, whether they are lovers or just female friends. The male characters have all the time in the world to talk with female characters about their fears, hopes, and dreams. The male characters are also extremely encouraging. Male characters are always offering supportive comments and suggestions. Then, when the female characters do not take their advice, they still love and support them.

Soap opera males encourage females to talk about their problems even when women are reluctant to do so. Male soap characters often sound more like female characters than men in real life. These men are always talking about their feelings and encouraging women to do the same thing. No doubt this is a fantasy that many women enjoy watching. This also explains why many female soap fans adore their favorite male soap characters. Soap operas often have fan fests where soap fans can meet their favorite actors and have photographs taken with them. These fan fests are planned events that take place all over the country every year; they exist for the purpose of giving soap fans the chance to meet their favorite characters. Magazines like *Soap Opera Digest* and *ABC Soaps* announce such events regularly.

Kaplan (1987) observes that good families in soaps are “idealized” and the husbands and fathers are professionals whose wives, even if they are also professionals, are not shown working. Instead, women spend all of their time on soaps trying to take care of their families and looking for love (Kaplan, 1987). “Aschur (1987) concludes that there is more equality between men and women in soaps than in real life or in any other

dramatic form and that soaps ultimately function to promise the housewife, confined to her home, that ‘the life she is in can fulfill her needs’” (Kaplan, 1987, p. 227).

Livingstone (1998) writes that “narratives do not so much begin and end as weave in and out of each other, evolving from previous stories, remaining unfinished, full of the potential for future development or transformation” and “[s]oap operas thus cannot offer clear and singular solutions to the personal and moral problems portrayed” (p. 52).

Instead, these shows function as a public meeting space where multiple viewpoints on any topic are aired. This also avoids the preachiness of many prime time dramas where there is a central point the writer, director or producer are obviously trying to impart, sometimes rather heavy handedly.

Soap operas don’t make rules or declarations about anything. There are many questions but very few answers. One character gets pregnant out of wedlock and wants to get an abortion. Before she does or does not get one, every other character in her storyline will give an opinion on the affair. The pros and cons of abortion will be debated from the perspective of all sexes and age groups. What the viewer gets after watching these scenes is a very thorough examination or discussion of any issue. Topics debated in soaps in this manner include abortion, rape, euthanasia, the death penalty, divorce and its effects on children, AIDS and prejudice against AIDS victims, racism, cheating on lovers and spouses, and lying to the people that you love. Other topics include insanity and putting people in mental hospitals and in prisons.

Soap operas also rely heavily on stereotypes. Buckman (1994) explains, “[A]ll problems on soaps have to be personalized, and the personalities involved must conform to stereotypes whose views reflect majority thinking” (p. 146). Cantor and Pingree (1983) studied soaps and found that they are traditional and conservative and that

stereotypical characters were represented more positively than less stereotypical characters. Kreizenbeck (1983) found that women who followed the norms and rules of society were seen as good women, and those who used sex as a tool to get what they wanted or as a weapon to injure others were seen as bad women. However, in a soap opera, a character can go from bad to good and back to bad again over time.

Contrary to moralist views on soap operas, all of the illicit sex and underhanded tricks to make money and out scheme others do not inspire wanton depravity. Instead, researchers say these types of antics inspire exactly the opposite. Kreizenbeck (1983) explained it in this way:

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

Gilligan (1982) explains that in women's culture right and wrong are not neat categories. The rightness or wrongness of something is not measured by moral or legal laws. Gilligan (1982) and Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer (1990) state that “frequently in our culture women's moral decisions are based on relationships rather than distinctions between right and wrong. Moreover, Gilligan (1982) maintains, “The rules for dominant culture make sense for most men but not always for women; things are often not black and white in women's culture” (p. 53).

Some, like researcher Gledhill (1987), argue that the soap opera has pushed the melodrama format so far that it is actually another form because of the soap opera's use of narrative to explain "the personal" lives of characters through "a heavy reliance on stories involving: coincidence, mysteries about parentage, and the reappearance of long-lost characters" (Mumford, 1995, p. 25). Readily identifiable characteristics of soap

operas, for Mumford, (1995) include the abundant use of close-ups, an emphasis on fashion and home decoration, the fact that almost all of the show is shot indoors, and the choice by the director of a non-linear storyline; these are all stylistic choices that "serve" the genre instead of being actual characteristics or elements that define the soap opera genre says Mumford (1995, p. 42).

Gledhill (1992) claims that the "[s]oap opera constructs a feminine world of personal conversation," while Robert Allen describes the soap opera as being "in a sense, about talk" (Mumford, 1995, p. 43). According to Wittebols (2004), having the stories move on a day-to-day basis that is supposed to mirror the real life time dimension of fans causes a type of immediacy that results in feelings of intimacy for soap fans (p. 3). This is called "real time orientation" by Wittebols (2004, p. 36). Wittebols (2004) goes on to say that soap viewers are constantly comparing their lives to the lives seen on soaps and fantasizing about future story lines, in a way, trying to divine the future based on current events and what they know about the characters.

In addition, Wittebols (2004) writes, "The manner in which a soap story unfolds on screen empowers the audience by giving it an omniscient point of view. Because soaps present different characters' points of view, viewers can get into the heads of soap characters" (p. 37). "It can even be said that viewers can come to know the true thoughts and feelings of soap characters in ways they cannot with the people in their own lives. Because soaps unfold slowly and redundantly, viewers can anticipate and see how characters will react to a new plot twist" (Hobson as cited in Wittebols, 2004, pp. 37-38).

Cultural Mythology and Soap Operas

Cultural myths help to explain attitudes, beliefs and human behaviors, making something intelligible from seeming chaos (Barthes, 1957/1972; Lévi-Strauss, 1967;

Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Barthes (1957/1972) analyzed symbols for denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myth. Barthes (1957/1972) writes, “Semiotics, simply defined, is the science of signs; how they work and the ways in which we use them” (as quoted in Fiske & Hartley, 1978, p. 47). Claude Lévi-Strauss analyzed the “myths from ‘primitive’ societies” which resulted in his discovery of mythemes (Brooks, 1976, p. x).

According to Campbell (1995), “some of the functions of traditional mythology persist in today’s cultural myths” (p. 14). Moreover, some of these cultural myths appear in soap operas. Campbell (1988) claims that myths “validate a certain social order” and support the accepted reality of “bounded communities” (p. 31) that share common social norms, values, and ideology (p. 22). Campbell (1995) wrote about myth as being “stories that modern societies unwittingly create to reduce life’s contradictions and complexities” (p. 14).

Livingstone (1998) explains that “the popularity of soap opera appears to rest on the combination of an undemanding nature and a preoccupation with everyday concerns” (p. 57). They are close in function to mythology and ideology; soap opera along with television drama function as tellers of myth in our society, stories that explain the unexplainable about society and, thus, quell people’s fear of the unknown (Dyer et al., 1981; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986; Livingstone, 1998).

Spence (2005) asserts that, because soap operas are so conventional, and they use stories and story types over and over again, that soap operas “are closer to myth or fairy tales than to the modern novel” (p. 71). Spence (2005) claims, “Like myths or fairy tales, soaps simplify situations”; and “[c]haracters are more typical than unique” (p. 71). Spence (2005) also points to the predictability of the outcome in soaps as another element

that invites an allegation of extreme similarity between myths, fairy tales, and soap operas.

In other words, fans watch soap operas to see the predictable and expected. People watch soap operas to “once again [become] coparticipants in pity, sorrow, compassion, pain, condemnation, joy, or happiness” (Spence 2005, p. 71). Spence (2005) writes, “This redundancy, this repetition and regularity, can be comfortably reassuring, a sort of spiritual ballast” (Spence, 2005, p. 71). Alexander et al. (2004) comment on the type of community in soap operas. Characters are part of a close knit community where they work and live together and are related in multiple ways. Characters are either related or closely socially linked. Such close connections leads to sexual interaction, often infidelities. Soap operas also have strong patriarchal and strong matriarchal characters.

Themes in Soap Operas

Alexander et al. (2004) write about the themes in soap operas. They present the views of Stewart et al. (2001) in *Media and Meaning—An Introduction*: They include:

- Love
- Conflict
- Secrets and confidences
- Sickness and injury
- Skeletons in the cupboard
- Plans going wrong

[With] two additional important themes, [...] family feuds and family loyalty. (Alexander et al., 2004, p. 28).

Weibel is cited in Modleski (1982) as creating a list of popular soap opera themes:

the evil woman

the great sacrifice

the winning back of an estranged lover/spouse

marrying her for her money, respectability, etc.

the unwed mother

deceptions about the paternity of children

career vs. housewife

the alcoholic woman (an occasionally man). (Modleski, 1991, p. 447)

Mass Media Theory

Narrative and the Soap Opera

Narrative theory is useful because it is a formalist method for examining the structure of a drama that does not include an examination of audience effects or response (Kozloff, 1992). It also does not address the ideological concerns involved with analyzing the business interests of the producers of the drama nor does it concern itself with critical cultural theoretical issues about who is exerting power over whom and for what purpose (Kozloff, 1992).

Kozloff (1992) writes, “[N]arratives are not only the dominant type of text on television, but narrative structure is, to a large extent, the portal or grid through which even nonnarrative television must pass” (p. 69). Viewers even expect to see news stories formatted in a narrative structure. This is because people have a psychological thirst for stories.

There are different researchers and theorists who have addressed the issue of the narrative in drama, according to Kozloff (1992): Rimmon-Kenan, Seymour Chatman, Gustav Freytag, and Vladimir Propp. These individuals are just a few of the scholars

who have thought and written about the narrative. They all have different ways of delineating parts of the narrative process unique to their own ways of thinking.

Kozloff (1992) introduces the idea of characters or actants (actors) in the vein of Rimmon-Kenan's ideas (p. 69); Kozloff (1992) also proposes existents (both characters and settings) in line with Seymour Chatman's ideas (p. 75). Although we see unexpected things taking place every day, random events do not happen on television drama "where stories ... are linked by temporal succession (X occurred, then Y occurred) and/or causality (because Y occurred, Z occurred)" (Kozloff, 1992, p. 70). According to Kozloff (1992), television makes good use of the human preoccupation with establishing causation.

Now that the use of narrative theory has been discussed an examination of the use of story on television is in order. Kozloff (1992) claims, "Television is the principal storyteller in contemporary American society" (pg. 67). Horace Newcomb (1982) explicates television and its connection to story; "More than anything else, I would argue, television attests to the power of 'story' in human experience" (p. xxix). Barthes (1977) explained the importance of story in this manner:

narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting [...] stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere has not been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing ... cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature,

narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Williams, 1992, p. 35)

One can say that human beings have always shared stories and that soap operas are just a 20th century continuation of that ancient tradition. As such, one might also assume that they are part of the intellectual property of humanity. Myths or folk tales support common sense and basic human reasoning (Allen, 1985; Dyer et al., 1981; Gerbner et al., 1986; Livingstone, 1998). Soap operas are modern American myths.

Cultural Studies

A history of cultural studies would have to start with the examination of the news in Great Britain writes Morley (1992). This movement came to America and was modified by our institutions and response to the movement itself (Morley, 1992). The soap opera was one of the many topics studied really early in the ideological examination of cultural studies in Great Britain in the early 1970s and in the United States in the later 1970s and 1980s (Morley, 1992).

Morley (1992) sums up the beginning of cultural studies in this way:

If, in the British context, media studies was reinvigorated in the early 1970s by what Stuart Hall (1982) has characterized as the ‘rediscovery of ideology’, this rediscovery led, in the first instance, to a focus on the analysis of the ideological structure of news (both on television and in the press) and, more generally, to a focus on the analysis of media coverage of politics, particularly, to a focus on the analysis of media coverage of politics, particularly media coverage of explicitly controversial issues such as industrial and race relations. (p. 7)

Hobson (2003) comments on cultural studies; “Its history spans and reflects social change, artistic, and cultural development and national and international broadcasting

history” (pp. xi-xii). Hobson (2003) also discusses soap operas “as the perfect television form; it achieves and retains audiences, gains press coverage, creates controversy, brings in advertising revenue, supports a public service ethos and generates discussion, dissection, analysis and astonishment at its survival and evolution” (p. xii).

Scodari (2003) sees British cultural studies as being interested in hegemony and how texts are decoded. Scodari (2003) argues that one’s interpretation of a message is dependent upon the message itself and also the context in which one encounters the message. Furthermore, there is a great probability that the decoding will result in the dominant meaning although it can be negotiated or opposed. Power inequities must be continuously reproduced through a complex process that Gramsci (1971) labeled hegemony, whereby a consensus evolves in favor of those cultural understandings that mesh with the interests of the powerful.

Brown (1994), Fiske (1987), and Jenkins (1992) studied the problem of interpretation in American cultural studies; they observed that the individual consumer or user of media has the sole power to decide how to consume and enjoy a media product. They are free to use a product the way it was intended to be used or not to do so. This viewpoint gives the American media consumer more power than the British cultural studies view where the average person has less power to resist the hegemony’s promotion of its own agenda, however hidden or obscure (Scodari, 2003, p. xv).

According to Scodari (2003), Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model is useful for studying audience interpretation; “[T]he meanings (or readings) of a text” can be seen as: “dominant/preferred, negotiated, and oppositional categories” (Scodari, 2003, p. xx). Scodari (2003) summarizes the results of some audience research studies with the following reported results: middle class working women “reject the subjectivity of the

ideal mother” (Modleski, 1982; as cited in Scodari, 2003, p. xxi), and that fan web sites create a sense of camaraderie for female fans and “facilitate pleasure and resistance” (Brown, 1994 as cited in Scodari, 2003, p. xxi). Soap operas can be seen as supporting femininity and women’s identities (Blumenthal, 1997; Scodari, 2003).

Storey (2009b) explicates the construction of the concept of hegemony by Antonio Gramsci “Italian Marxist” (p. 10). Gramsci (2009) explains that hegemony means dominant groups in society use “intellectual and moral leadership” to persuade the subordinate classes to support them and follow them even though they may be led to do things that are not in their own best interests (p. 75). In this way, subordinate groups participate in their own domination without even realizing it. This is what happens when you have certain groups of people at the top of society who, generation after generation, protect and promote their interests above others so that their wealth can be perpetuated and passed down to their children who will be the next upper class that will dominate society.

Storey (2009b) explains “[t]hose using this approach [Gramsci’s] see popular culture as a site of struggle between the ‘resistance’ of subordinate groups and the forces of ‘incorporation’ operating in the interests of dominant groups ... it is a terrain of exchange and negotiation between the two [dominant hegemony and subordinate groups]: a terrain marked by resistance and incorporation” (p. 10). Storey (2009b) further explains hegemony in this way: that hegemony is never just power from above dominating those below but that there are always negotiations between the top classes and lower classes that include both resistance and incorporation (p. 81).

Semiotics

Researchers and theorists who have written about and/or developed semiotics include Roland Barthes, Ferdinand Saussure, Umberto Eco, and Charles S. Peirce. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbol systems and how they are used to interpret and/or explain the natural world.

Other components of the study of signs include manifest, latent, denotative, and connotative meanings. Signs can be divided into three groups: indexical, iconic, and symbolic. An aspects of narratology or narrative theory includes an understanding of syntagm as being “an ordering of signs” while “paradigms are classifications of signs” (Seiter, 1992, p. 46). Seiter (1992) explains, “The smallest unit of meaning in semiotics is called the sign” and “every sign is composed of a signifier, that is, the image, object, or sound itself—the part of the sign that has a material form—and the signified, the concept it represents” (p. 33).

Fiske and Hartley (1978) claim that “there are two second-order sign systems: myth is one and connotation the other” (p. 44). Fiske and Hartley (1978) use this example to explain denotation and connotation: “A general’s uniform denotes his rank (first-order sign), but connotes the respect we accord to it (second-order sign)” (p. 44). According to Fiske and Hartley (1978), “In the connotative order, signs signify values, emotions, and attitudes” (p. 44).

Barthes (1977) states that the mechanical reproduction of the photographic process is a denotative activity while how humans interfere with or influence this process is an example of connotative activity in regard to television signs. Human interference or influence can be accomplished through “camera distance/angle, focus, lighting effects, etc.” (p. 44). Therefore, as per Fiske and Hartley (1978), “Connotation is expressive, involving subjective rather than objective experience, and is essentially the way the

encoder transmits his feelings or judgment about the subject of the message” (pp. 44-45). The encoder in television is not considered to be a single individual. Rather, television programs are authored by many people: the director, writers, producers, et cetera. Sometimes even actors play a part in how a scene is filmed. So the author can be seen as an agency that the viewers do not know very much about.

According to Seiter (1987), “Barthes argued that connotation is the primary way in which the mass media communicate ideological meanings” (p. 41). Fiske and Hartley (1978) claim that myths help us organize meaning; “this third order of signification, reflects the broad principles by which a culture organizes and interprets the reality with which it has to cope” (p. 46).

Seiter (1987) further explains other components of semiotics of television as being a syntagm which is the “ordering of signs” and the paradigm which is the group or collection of more or less equal images that could be used at that spot in the ordering or signs (p. 46). Seiter (1987) uses the example of a meal to describe this situation. The order in which courses of a meal are eaten is the syntagmatic order, and the alternate possibilities of what could constitute or substitute for each course is a paradigm.

Seiter (1987) continues with the advise that “[p]aradigms are classifications of signs ... The meaning of a given syntagm derives in part from the absence of other possible paradigmatic choices” (p. 46). Furthermore, syntagmatic analysis of television is difficult said Seiter (1987) who explained this situation in this manner:

Because television in the United States is often broadcast twenty-four hours a day and because it is so discontinuous, combining many different segments of short duration, determining the beginning and end of these ‘syntagmatic chains’ presents special problems for the TV critic. Does it make sense to analyze an

individual episode apart from its place in the entire series? Can we ignore the commercial breaks when writing about the experience of watching a television program? One of the biggest differences in television programming among different countries has to do with the organization of its syntagmatic relations ... Paradigmatic associations are synchronic: we group signs together as though they had no history or temporal order. Syntagmatic relationships tend to be diachronic: they unfold in time, whether it be a matter of seconds or of years. (pp. 47-48)

Seiter (1987) explains that the paradigmatic and syntagmatic codes work together to create the meaning of television shows. She also relays that the “total sign system” is called the *langue* and the individual sign is called the *parole* (p. 49).

Although a useful tool for determining meaning, semiotics does have its drawbacks. Seiter (1987) explains this:

Semiotics was founded, then, on a static model of the sign. Some of the gravest shortcomings of semiotics as a theory are a consequence of this: it inherits the tendency to ignore change, to divorce the sign from its referent, and to exclude the sender and receiver. These characteristics limit the usefulness of semiotics in the study of television. Because television is based on weaker codes than those that govern verbal language, it is, as a system of communication, unstable; it is constantly undergoing modification and operates by conventions rather than by hand-and-fast rules. (p. 49)

In addition, two more activities have to be considered, encoding and decoding. Seiter (1987) explains that “[i]n semiotic terms, communication involves encoding and decoding. Each *parole* (instance of communication) is encoded in a particular

communication system (written Spanish, Braille, Morse code). The message is decoded by someone who is competent in that particular code” (p. 49).

Cultivation Theory

Mass media are ubiquitous and pervasive; they are around us all of the time. People learn about life and develop expectations about other people from what they see on television; this is explained by cultivation analysis. Negative stereotypes have a lot of power in society. When they are used in media entertainment programs, they can have a powerful influence on opinion formation. Fisher (1992) wrote that films create false expectations about aging due to the negative stereotypes of older adults: “These stereotypes shape our expectations of older people and what we expect to experience in our own elder years” (p. 80).

Cultivation theory tells us that people learn to think about others in society as conforming to what he or she sees in the broadcast media (Lett et al., 2004). Cultivation theory examines the influence of media over the expectations and beliefs of individuals in society. People learn from what they see in mass media.

Gerbner et al. (1978) claim that high consumption of television results in the viewer cultivating the view that life in the real world is the same as life portrayed in television programs (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1977). In addition, Gerbner et al. (1978) wrote that, because so much programming on television is violent, the heavy television user learns to think about the world around him or her as being just as dangerous as the world pictured in television programs. Television viewers who watch violent television programming may alter their behavior and avoid leaving home because of fear of being a victim of crime. This phenomenon is called the Mean World

Syndrome, and the media effects are fear, and anxiety. One can assume that another media effect is decreased happiness because of no longer feeling safe.

Tyler and Cook (1984) state that mass media also affect “societal level judgments” and influence “citizens’ views about the world” (p. 694). Many researchers have described television as the most dominate social force of all mass media (Lett et al., 2004; Morgan & Shanahan, 1997; Shrum, 1996; Signorielli & Morgan, 2001).

Palmore et al. (2005) concludes:

Although the images of aging shown on TV seem to be slowly changing, the usual image is still a negative one that portrays aging as an undesirable experience. This kind of ageism becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: aging is feared and denied so it becomes fearful and negative. (p. 316)

Fan Sites

Another aspect of the study of soap operas is the issue of fandom. Some viewers want a more participatory experience and use online resources to communicate with other fans. This increases their pleasure. Various researchers have studied online fandom sites (Baym, 1993, 1995, 2000; Blumenthal, 1997; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Hayward, 1997; Jenkins, 1992). These sites play a role in the lives of computer literate fans, which would most likely be the fans under the age of 50. These researchers investigated online activities of science fiction fans, response to programs, bulletin board content, and posting regarding soap storylines (Scodari, 2004).

Scodari (2004) reports on a study by Brown (1994) in which “Australian viewers of British, American, and Australian soaps found that interaction within fan ‘friendship networks’ (pp. 37-39) facilitates pleasure and resistance through collective acknowledgment of women’s lot under patriarchy (p. xxi). According to Scodari (2004),

Harrington and Bielby (1995) use the audience members' participation in fan networks and on soap opera web sites' bulletin boards as proof that soap fans are not just consumers but also active producers of culture. They take over interpretation through discussion and continue on the understanding of the story by one person to incorporate everyone's opinion. Soaps become a source of intergenerational bonding for familial viewers.

Facebook, YouTube, email, blogging, texting, twitter, are all part of the Zeitgeist of this age. We are the people who use the media; we know what we are doing according to uses and gratification theory. We have needs and we seek out media to fulfill those needs. If we are using new media for self fulfillment or self expression, it is because these forms of media are giving us what we want and need. The fact that earlier forms of media are being challenged or territory is being taken over by something else (for example, texting versus using a land phone line) may be more important to the theorist than the average consumer. We are in a blessed position of not being expected to know it all; we are just expected to be responsible for what we do with new media—and that is enough.

All technological changes have the power to alter or redesign “social roles, relationships, and values” (Volti, 2001, p. 18). Participatory culture plays a major role in these changes. Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc (2002) explained participatory culture as “new media technologies [...] [that] enable average citizens to participate in the archiving, annotation, appropriation, transformation, and recirculation of media content” (p. 286). “Participatory culture refers to the new style of consumerism that emerges in this environment” (Jenkins et al., 2002, p. 286). Through participatory culture, people

are working collaboratively and peer tutoring one another in ways unseen in the history of civilization. This is very beneficial for society.

Fan sites and fan clubs give fans an outlet for their thoughts and feelings about their shows. No doubt, not all viewers are super fans. There is undoubtedly a range of fan involvement. Scodari (2004) draws a distinction between audience members or viewers and fans in this way: “Fans are a subset of the audience—more knowledgeable about and loyal to the text than typical viewers” (p. xxiv).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Television is a difficult subject to research. It is ubiquitous, and its influence on viewers is hard to determine. Television also involves many intersecting elements of modern life that interact with one another in known and unknown ways. The purpose of this study is to reveal some of the meanings found in soap operas.

In an effort to examine the complexity of soap operas, various tools were employed. Narrative analysis as well as semiotics was primarily used for this study. Narratology or narrative theory seems appropriate for studying soap operas because they are essentially a narrative. Narrative theory deals with the narrative structure and how meaning is made through it. Kozloff (1992) explains that there are two parts to narrative theory: “the story, that is, ‘what happens to whom,’ and the discourse, that is, ‘how the story is told’” (p. 69). There are many different proponents of narrative theory: Freytag, Propp, Rimmon-Keenan, Todorov, and Chatman, among others (Kozloff, 1992).

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbol systems and what those signs really mean. Semiotics helps the researcher get past accepted and commonplace meanings of actions and events in the natural world for the purpose of discovering meaning that is not readily apparent. Semiotics will be used to ascertain meaning of elements, actions, representations, and portrayals of characters in the soap operas chosen for study.

This is a qualitative study. Qualitative research is suitable for subjects that are complex, have many possible viewpoints, and where an understanding of issues on many levels is the goal. Soap operas are extremely complex programs that operate on numerous levels. For this reason, qualitative analysis was chosen over quantitative.

Other researchers have used qualitative research methods in the investigation of media subjects (Arnold, Kozinets, & Handelman, 2006; Campbell, 1995; Cassata & Skill, 1983; Hill, 2010; Jones, Cunningham, & Gallagher, 2010; McAuley, Carson, & Gilmore, 2006; Neumann, Cassata, & Skill, 1983; Porter, 1987; Skill, 1982; Thompson, 2004). In addition, “qualitative studies investigate meaning-making” (Pauly, 1991, p. 2).

Carey (1989) explicates qualitative research methods this way:

A cultural science of communication... views human behavior—or more accurately human action—as text. Our task is to construct a “reading” of the text. The text itself is a sequence of symbols—speech, writing. Gestures—that contain interpretations. Our task, like that of a literary critic, is to interpret the interpretations. (p. 60)

The three soap operas chosen for this study are *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Young and the Restless*. Thirty episodes of each series recorded from April 30, 2012 to July 31, 2012 were watched and careful notes taken. Because the researcher routinely watches these three soap operas, most of the episodes from July 31, 2012 to February 6, 2013 were watched and some material from these shows is also used. There was one researcher.

Episodes were examined to determine concepts or ideas addressed and how older adult characters were represented. Families/major characters, episode analysis, narrative analysis, semiotics analysis, themes, and older adults were noted. Of particular interest are representations of older adults. Also important is how older adults relate to other characters. Are they valuable members of society, loving and caring? Do they seem to lead younger generations? Or are they evil villains? Are older characters stronger and more resilient than younger characters? Also important are class distinctions. That is, do

the characters and situations presented in each soap opera indicate inclusion in the middle or upper class? Are the representations of older adults in sync with what statistics tell us about older adults in the United States today? According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics from 2000, the majority of older adults in America live below the poverty line even though some seniors are well off (Rubin, White-Means, & Daniel, 2000).

The narrative analysis was modeled after a study by Deming (1985). Deming (1985) took a methodology created by Chatman (1978) which was then simplified. The result was a model with four major components: the real author, the implied author, the discourse (events, characters, setting, dialogue, visual information, and sound), the real audience and the implied audience. The real author is the production team that creates the media product. In the case of soap operas, it is the producer, director, writers, editors, cinematographers, et cetera. The implied author is the camera eye that roves over the scene allowing the viewer to see what it wants to show. The implied audience is the audience that is planned or hoped for by the production team. The real audience is the actual audience who watches the program.

Also important for this study is cultural mythology and whether any such mythology can be seen in soap operas. For example, two myths that Kaplan (1987) claims exist in soap operas are that most Americans are middle class and that the family is the central human source of love, respect, protection, empathy, sympathy, and nurturing.

Process of Analysis

Analysis was a step by step affair. First, a sample of soap opera episodes was recorded. Episodes were watched and notes taken by hand. Notebooks, once full, were kept in a cloth case for further study and comparison. Analysis of the episodes was done

once all of the notes had been taken for all three series. Notes were read and reread for patterns and themes. Good dialogue was marked for later use. Sometimes a character's dialogue is very revealing of motive and nature.

A scene-by-scene analysis was done. The series, the date the episode was aired, and many more pertinent bits of data were recorded for future use and analysis. Information recorded included: major players, where the action occurred, unusual clothing, and behavior of the characters. Also noted is how older characters interacted with other characters in the dramas, whether these interactions were positive or negative, whether there was conflict, and whether it was personal or business.

After the series' episodes had been watched and impressions and observations recorded, an awareness of the meaning was made from the findings. Once themes and patterns had been identified, specific scenes that represented those patterns were chosen as examples to be used in the chapters about each series. That analysis is the heart of the dissertation. In my analysis I worked to interpret the meanings of *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Young and the Restless*. Soap operas are a fluid medium in which nothing is static. Storylines and characterizations are always moving forward. There are three chapters, one for each soap opera studied. The researcher did use some of the online character history and descriptions on the network web sites for older characters.

Days of Our Lives

The Hortons, the Bradys, the Keriakises, and the DiMeras are the primary families on this soap opera. Their wars and loves have entertained audiences for decades. Victor Keriakis is an all but retired mob type figure whose presence on the program is small. More important is his wife Maggie, an adopted Horton. She plays an active role in the lives of the younger characters in Salem. Other older characters include Stefano

Dimera, Greek tycoon/crime boss and primary villain in town. Marlena Brady and John Black who are living as a couple are also older adult characters. Marlena is a psychiatrist, and John is a business owner.

General Hospital

There are several older characters on *General Hospital*. Edward Quartermaine, over 80 years of age, has been a beloved character on this series for decades. The actor who played Edward died this past fall, and his character died a month or so later instead of the series recasting the role. His daughter, Tracy Quartermaine-Zacchara, age 65 plus years, is married to mobster Anthony Zacchara. He blackmailed her into marrying him because of threatening to notify the SEC about her laundering mob money in her father's multimillion dollar company ELQ. Luke Spencer, one of the most important characters on this series, age 65, has entertained the audience for decades with his con man antics. Dr. Monica Quartermaine, 65 plus years of age, is Chief Cardiologist at General Hospital and sometimes Chief of Staff. She is a renowned physician who does not always get along with her sister-in-law Tracy Quartermaine.

Other major characters include Anthony Zacchara and Helena Cassadine. Anthony Zacchara, 70 plus years of age, is an evil mobster who has threatened to kill both of his children repeatedly. Helena Cassadine, age 80 plus years, is in constant war with Luke and the rest of the Spencer family. She is descended from Russian royalty. Helena has killed numerous characters and always uses her evil wit and money to elude capture and prosecution.

Young and the Restless

Victor Newman, in his late 60's or early 70's, is a very wealthy, powerful, and heartless man. He is always at war with everyone, including all of his children and ex-

wives. He torments everyone around him, including those who love him the most. He has an evil illegitimate son, Adam, who bursts into town one day intent on destroying dad for not being there for him when he was growing up. Adam has an MBA from Harvard.

Katherine Chancellor Murphy, owner of Chancellor Industries and part owner of Jabot Cosmetics, is a powerful woman over age 70. Her husband, Patrick Murphy, is over age 70, too. He is rich in common sense and gives his folksy wisdom and affection to all younger characters who are in need his help or advice.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, individuals age 65 and older will be considered older adults (of course, visual age will be estimated by the researcher). Age sixty-five is the lower age limit the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging established for the elderly in 1987 (Hilt & Lipschultz, 1999, p. 146). The other age groupings used for this study will be 18-29 (twenty somethings), 30-49 (thirty somethings), and 40-50 (forty somethings) because these are the age groups that were used to discover public opinion in a previous study (White, 1994).

CHAPTER IV

DAYS OF OUR LIVES: MIDDLE CLASS LOVE AND WAR

Days of Our Lives, the first series examined for this study, sparkles with wicked intelligence about the social life of Americans today. The storylines weave intermingling tales of middle class life and the woes of being a woman. Law and order are both important to the people of Salem. Conflict, whether between family members or families, is also an issue, as is loyalty. Characters in Salem reveal the best and the worst about humanity in this culture.

In this chapter I will discuss semiotic analysis and will use it to examine elements of *Days of Our Lives*. Television is an important part of the lives of soap opera watchers; it dominates our thoughts (Livingstone, 1998). Fans of *Days of Our Lives* get great enjoyment from watching how their stories progress every weekday. They also enjoy watching character development. This chapter will examine major characters and their relationships. Some characters play more important roles in the narrative than do others. The narrative will be examined by comparing *Days of Our Lives* to a famous study of *Hill Street Blues*. Readings of narratives will be done. The transcript of an episode will be provided as an example of this series. Camera shots in this episode will be discussed.

A major tool I will use to examine *Days of Our Lives* is semiotics. Fiske and Hartley (1978) have examined semiotics and television. Fiske and Hartley (1978) write about the importance of television as a meaning making system for viewers in this way:

Language is the means by which men enter into society to produce reality (one part of which is the fact of their living together in a linguistic society). Television extends this ability, and an understanding of the way television structures and

presents its picture of reality can go a long way towards helping us to understand the way in which our society works. (p. 17)

Furthermore, Fiske and Hartley (1978) continue their explanation of the power of television to influence human life when they write, “[T]elevision discourse presents us daily with a constantly updated version of social relations and cultural perceptions” (p. 18). “Its own messages respond to changes in these relations and perceptions, so that its audience is made aware of the multiple and contradictory choices available from day to day which have the potential to be selected for future ways of seeing” claim Fiske and Hartley (1978). Because mass media, such as television, are pervasive and ubiquitous, they are always influencing people’s ideas and thoughts. According to Lett et al., this influence leads to cultivation; people learn to think about others in society as conforming to what he or she sees in the broadcast media. Gerbner (1978) reported that the effects of watching television vary according to the amount of television watched. Those who watched little television were much less affected and influenced by what is on television. Fiske and Hartley (1978) explain that there is a preferred meaning in every message that “usually coincide[s]” with the viewpoint of the dominant hegemony or ruling class in the society but that other ways of seeing compete with this dominant viewpoint or preferred meaning (p. 46). Meanings can be negotiated or opposed writes Hall (1980). Anderson (1987) writes that the viewer’s social reality is supported by what is seen on television.

General Discussion of *Days of Our Lives* and Semiotic Analysis

Days of Our Lives is a long running daytime drama on NBC. The substance of this program is soap opera characters yearning for the perfect love and life. To that end they struggle against one another to fulfill their boundless wants and needs and, some might say, drown an unquenchable thirst for life. Individual characters as well as

families feud in a world where romantic love is the most important thing in life.

Families are pitted against each other for generations (Episode 4-30-2012; Episode 5-1-2012; Episode 5-9-2012; Episode 11-5-2012; Episode 11-12-2012; Episode 11-16-2012; Episode 12-6-2012; Episode 1-13-2013; Episode 1-1-2013; 1-1-2013).

But what does all of this warfare mean? One way of discerning meaning from television programs like soap operas is through semiotics. Seiter (1987) discusses semiotics as “the study of everything that can be used for communication: words, images, traffic signs, flowers, music, medical symptoms, and much more” (p. 31). Semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems. Seiter (1987) also calls semiotics a “tool for the study of culture” (p. 31). Television is an extremely powerful component of popular culture. George Gerbner called television America’s storyteller.

Seiter (1987) writes, “[E]very sign is composed of a signifier, that is, the image, object, or sound itself—the part of the sign that has a material form—and the signified, the concept it represents” (p. 31).

According to Campbell (1995),

Barthes (1957/1972) analyzed images and words on many tiers, among them denotation, connotation and myth. He described denotation as the first order of signification; in this case, the words we hear and the images we see on the television screen can be described in their most overt terms. (p. 42)

Furthermore, the second level of signification is called connotation. Campbell (1995) states that this is where ideological messages come into play.

So, with the warfare seen on *Days of Our Lives*, what can it mean? This warfare is both within families and between families. What viewers see on the screen at the denotative level is family members screaming and yelling at one another, not trusting one

another; yet, when a threat from outside of the nuclear family group arises, family members unite to fight someone from a rival family.

Perhaps soap opera characters in *Days of Our Lives* are so warlike because they basically are not happy. They are bitter, resentful, angry, and sometimes vicious. On the connotative level, perhaps this series provides a commentary on people in society today. This could be the creation of a myth, the myth of the unhappy American. Barthes (1957/1972) wrote about myths being used by people to understand aspects of life that were difficult to comprehend and accept. People in this soap opera world are angry and looking for a chance to vent their anger and frustration; they take their negative emotions out on family members until a better target arises from a rival family. Then they gang up on that person. This may sound more like life in a barrio than life in the middle class. What sets these two worlds apart is that soap opera characters usually fight with words only.

On an ideological level, this is a very negative picture of the American family and its social relationships. This picture of Americans reveals unhappiness in the land of democracy; the pursuit of prosperity and freedom of choice don't seem to be setting the background for successful lives. Could these characters be making themselves unhappy by their own aggressive actions?

Hall (1980) might remind us to consider the preferred meaning. Perhaps the preferred meaning may be that people are unhappy because they make themselves unhappy by living lives full of conflict that they, in fact, create out of their selfish pursuit of happiness. The fact that viewership is down and so many soap operas are being cancelled begs the question of whether today's soap opera audience really wants to see all

of this social warfare. Is it possible that the average audience member is happier than her favorite soap opera characters?

Viewers may negotiate meaning and see family warfare as normal, depending on their own experiences at home. Hall (1980) wrote about media consumers negotiating meaning or opposing it. Storey (2009a) writes, “Hegemony is never simply power imposed from above: it is always the result of negotiations between dominant and subordinate groups, a process marked by both ‘resistance’ and ‘incorporation’ (p. 81). So meaning making involves the process of analyzing what is seen, in this case it is the picture of American family life, and accepting all or part of it and/or making one’s own sense of what is seen in the soap opera through negotiation and resistance.

Soap opera families on *Days of Our Lives* may even be more loving and less warlike than many American families whose members consider themselves to be normal. Morley (1992) writes that we can expect a wide range of readings of media programs. Even members of the same family see things differently. Often, when recalling childhood, siblings who played together for years have totally different recollections of people and events. This explains the complexity of the perceptual process and memory.

Days of Our Lives is a soap opera that addresses many concerns in this post millennial age: family, love, loyalty, and infidelity (Episode 5-1-2012; Episode 5-2-2012; Episode 2-5-2013; Episode 1-1-2013; Episode 1-2-3013). *Days of Our Lives* seems to be the most middle class of the three soaps studied, and this will be explained in more detail later on. Soap operas offer an excellent opportunity for the investigation of ideas and beliefs write Alexander et al. (2004).

The preferred meaning, as explained by Hall (1980), that we see is a snapshot of small town life in a fictional town called Salem. This town has a bar which is owned by

the matriarch of one prominent family, the Bradys. This bar is a picture of the traditional Irish pub. The Bradys mention their Irish ancestry with great pride (Episode 5-9-2012; Episode 5-10-2012). Many scenes are set in the bar. Brady matriarch, Caroline, is a jolly elderly woman who is losing her memory due to Alzheimer's disease.

In the episode aired May 9, 2012 the townspeople assume that their family members and friends have all perished in an explosion set off by town villain and resident foreigner Stefano DiMera. Townspeople gather at Caroline's pub for an Irish wake complete with Irish music (Episode 5-9-2012). At this wake they eulogize family and friends and drink toasts to their memories (Episode 5-9-2012). They also scream and fight with one another in unguarded moments and are quieted down by others.

Unbeknownst to this crowd, their family and friends are safe and hiding from Stefano DiMera who blew up the safe house they were in without injuring any of them (Episode 5-2-2012; Episode 5-3-2012; Episode 5-4-2012; Episode 5-5-2012; Episode 5-12-2012). This soap opera cultivates expectations of group behavior (Gerbner, 1972). *Days of Our Lives* shows family, work, and friendship groups that are very strong and cohesive.

On the connotative level, one can look at the Irishness of the Brady family as being fraught with meaning and implications. Irish immigrants have made their mark on America through their work as firefighters, police officers, blue collar workers, and politicians. There are many venues of American life where this group has excelled through hard work. The Irish are, however, considered to be a clannish group who are known to stick together against other groups they feel threatened by. The Bradys are no exception. Denotatively, the Bradys represent the stereotypical Irish family group. They populate the Salem police department.

One might even see the Brady family as a stereotype. Byars (1991) reminds us that there are stereotypes in the media because they exist in real life. According to Byars (1991), “The production of stereotypes involves selecting ideologically significant personality traits common to a group of people and making those attributes seem innate; stereotypes may be held about one’s own group, and stereotypes are not necessarily pejorative” (p. 73). So we can see that viewing Irish immigrants as a special group with certain good and bad characteristics is not necessarily a bad thing. We can see this in the media frequently. Irish people are rumored to be hot headed and aggressive. The same can be said of the Bradys in Salem. Sami Brady, the show’s primary heroine, is a fiery Irish woman in her late twenties or early thirties who is known to slap people who make her angry. Her father, Ronan Brady, is police chief. She is the femme fatale who has trouble choosing which suitor she prefers at any given moment (Episode 3-8-2012).

On the ideological level, the American Irish are mythological heroes who run into burning buildings and carry out helpless victims. Media stereotypes of Irishmen include many film and television heroes. An oppositional view (Hall, 1980) can be seen in a war between immigrant groups. The Bradys represent the immigrants who are already established, and the DiMera family represents newcomers, in this case, criminals, who have invaded Salem. So the conflict between earlier arrivals and later arrivals of immigrants can be seen.

One might even say that an ideological battle between good and evil occurs in *Days of Our Lives* with the Bradys as the good guys warring against the DiMeras who are the bad guys and also Italian/Greek. The ideology of those who are already here is to try and monopolize the power structure so that they can maintain and perpetuate what they have. Hall (1980) and Barthes (1957/1972) would call this hegemony. They demonize

newcomers. This is actually how small towns in America work. You have to live there for a while before people will trust you and want to help you socially.

Karl Marx and Frederic Engels (1914) wrote about hegemony is this way:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (as quoted in Durham & Kellner, 2006, p. xiii)

The Bradys, along with the Hortons and Keriskises, are the ruling families whose ideas are accepted as correct and rightly to be held. Yet Morley (1992) writes that a viewer's interpretation of a media text is not set by the producer. This involves the decoding process (Ang, 1991). People make their own interpretations from what they see dependent upon what they know about the world around them.

Days of Our Lives is a very interesting middle class drama about ordinary people who are thrust into terrible circumstances. These people have to make the best decision possible in each situation. In this way character's actions probably mirror the lives of viewers. Maybe viewers don't live the dramatic lives of their favorite characters, but we all have to make common sense decisions. What characters choose to do is very important because of the constant comparison between viewers' experiences and expectations and characters' experiences and actions.

We also live in a multicultural society made up of immigrants. This society is duplicated in Salem as established immigrants battle against more recent arrivals. The Bradys represent the hegemony while the DiMeras embody the newcomers. The Bradys

stand for law and order and the established social structure while the DiMeras are dishonest criminals who skirt the law and profit. They outsmart the police. They have their own way of surviving, and it is often at the expense of others. This situation depicts not only the constant battle between the established immigrants and the newer arrivals but the battle between criminals and the law.

Cultural differences are apparent as Stefano has a heavy Italian accent and dark features. He appears to be non Anglo Saxon. Much prejudice has gone on and still goes on regarding suspicion of immigrants and their mistreatment. Language differences are routinely a focus when Americans look at immigrants. This series is important because it reminds viewers of the social struggle that is still going on regarding immigrants as they adapt to a new world.

Readings of Prominent Families and Major Characters

In this section I will discuss the prominent families and their contributions to the drama *Days of Our Lives*. Alliances between families are of utmost importance as are the intergenerational wars between families. Major characters are also discussed because character development is a major draw in soap operas. Soap opera characters often have flamboyant personalities. Their love affairs are legendary as are their skirmishes. Almost all major soap opera characters are terribly flawed. They are greedy, selfish, bitter, angry, jealous, pathetic, passionate, and loving. Characters usually go through the gamut of emotions regularly following intricate plot twists that cause them to question their basic loves and beliefs.

The current families featured prominently in *Days of Our Lives* include the Hortons, the Dimeras, the Bradys, and the Keriakises. The Hortons and Bradys are more middle class while the Dimeras and Keriakis families are wealthier, but they are also

dishonest mob type figures whose money can be classified as ill gotten gains. Characters on *Days of Our Lives* live in fashionable expensive homes and wear very nice clothing.

The only people shown working are the blue collar police force and some characters waiting on and bussing tables at Caroline's pub. So work, as it is represented on this soap opera, is not a very important part of life. This is far from the real life experience of many people who, whether they enjoy their work or not, have to work long hours, even two and three jobs, to survive. Maybe seeing a world where work plays so little part in people's lives is escapist fantasy for some viewers.

Deidre Hall, who plays Marlena Brady, is one of the most popular soap actresses on television. She has been on *Days of Our Lives* for decades and plays a psychiatrist. Marlena is really married to Bo Brady, but she is now living as the romantic partner of John Black. John is really married to Hope Black who is living as the romantic partner of Bo Brady. This is an arrangement that has been going on for some time, and everyone is happy with it. Both Marlena and John are older adult characters with children who are approaching middle age.

Semiotic analysis of the character of Marlena would deal with the denotative message as well as the connotative Hall (1980). On the preferred level, Marlena is a hard working psychiatrist who is never shown working; she only talks about having patients. Her occupation is in keeping with the rules of soap opera characters as cited in Modleski (1982). So the audience is meant to assume that she indeed is a physician. A negotiated meaning might be that she represents not only the perfect doctor and healer but the perfect mother to Sami and Eric and the perfect grandmother to William. She is also the perfect partner of John Black.

On the ideological level, she represents white upper middle class interests and hegemony in Salem. She is a member of the ruling class and, by virtue of her status as a physician, Marlana has more clout than most people in Salem. One might even say that ideologically, she is the successful business woman on the scale that feminists have been demanding for decades, a woman who made it in a man's world. The medical field is still dominated by males.

John is a business owner and good partner for Marlana. Together John and Marlana represent the perfect couple; they have a union of a type that other characters in Salem dream of. They are dominant characters who are part of the hegemony of Salem. According to Storey (2009a), "Hegemony is maintained ... by dominant groups and classes negotiating with, and making concessions to, subordinate groups and classes".

A preferred meaning might be that John epitomizes a kind, warm, and gentle loving father. On the connotative level, he represents the best that men can hope for in the way of fatherhood and marriage. On an ideological level, maybe John is the ideal father, ideal husband, and perhaps an ideal American white male.

John represents the quintessential white male with his preoccupation with making money and upholding the status quo. Actually, by some standards, John is quite boring and overly traditional. He represents the older American male who is rapidly approaching retirement. John is also a modern man in that he is with a woman who is a professional and highly successful. He is not threatened by his wife's success. He is also supposed to be the sensitive soap opera male (Brown, 1994).

On the denotative level, which is the first order of signification, Sami Brady is the quintessential beautiful Irish woman who is at times heartless and at other times loving. She is charming and personable. Sami seems to be of ordinary intelligence and has

trouble being entirely moral. She is a mother who spends more time on her sex life than raising her children. An oppositional viewpoint may be that Sami represents unquenchable sexual desire. She is the beautiful maiden and keeps that status because she doesn't bother to burden herself down with her children. She is also "the blonde" and everything that means in American society today. Her blondeness can extend to vapidness, shallowness, superficiality, and a carefree uncomplicated nature. Ideologically, she is the eternal succubus, a vamp no man can resist. According to Livingstone (1998), strong female characters like Sami are much more numerous on soap operas than in prime time dramas.

Eric Brady, Sami's twin and Marlena's only son, represents the program's religious focus since he is the Catholic priest. Good and bad take on new dimensions as Eric struggles with his sexual attraction to Nicole, his teenage sweetheart that he has recruited to be the parish secretary. He is trying to convert Nicole from town tramp to virtuous woman. Eric's functioning as a priest is his denotative stance in the first order of signification (Fiske, 1987).

Ideologically, Eric stands for religion and God. Religion is a mythical topic as most religions have mysterious origins. Fiske and Hartley (1978) write that myths were created to organize meaning. Eric being a religious cleric elevates his importance in the group of characters and may elevate his importance to viewers who may be religious. Eric takes his position in the community seriously. He provides a connection between the Brady clan and the ultimate in religious authority and morality. The Bradys run the police force through Roman Brady, Sami's father. Through the parish they also help run the spiritual life of the community. A preferred meaning is that Eric is shown struggling in his role as moral authority in a world where there are so few truly moral people in

Salem. Eric is a lone bird swimming in a whirlpool that is trying to suck him under and drown him.

Eric's character brings to mind the necessity of having religion as a component of society. This soap has the most middle class values of all of the series studied. Crime in Salem is mostly blue collar, such as theft, assault, and murder. Eric stands for the opposite of the crime and negativity on the show; he is a healer and spiritual leader for the faithful.

Another important character is William, Sami's eldest son with Lucas Horton. William recently came out as a gay man (Episode 5-16-2012; Episode 5-17-2012; Episode 5-18-2012; 6-21-2012). William struggled with his desire for Sonny who owns his own coffee shop and is a member of the prominent Keriakis family. The Keriakis family is a more recent arrival than the Irish group. Will's acceptance of his new identity took several months of soap time, and he is now a happy gay man. However, one night, when he wasn't sure if he was really gay, he slept with an old girlfriend and got her pregnant (Episode 8-24-2012). This was a "friends with benefits" scenario that did not go as planned.

On the preferred level one accepts the meaning that is most apparent (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). The meaning of Will is that he is a young gay man trying to find himself. He represents desperate youth who don't know which way to turn. Will is in that no man's land between childhood and adulthood. On the negotiated level, Will represents the new American sexuality and the friends with benefits lifestyle. Young people like Will are creating a new world with their new types of social relationships and many of them are created or aided by new technology. Will and his lover Sonny are the face of young America on this show. Fiske and Hartley (1978) write, "When a sign carries

cultural meanings rather than merely representational ones, it has moved into the second order of signification” (pp. 41-42). Ideologically, having the gay issue elevates Will’s problems, in part, because gay issues are in the media every day. Americans are well educated about the problems of gay individuals. He is part of a new world in which homosexuality is accepted. His struggle to come out was epic. In soap time, it took a long time. Will had to deal with several decades of his family. Eric, the priest, is his uncle; Eric loves Will but disapproves of his sexual choices.

More important players on this daytime drama include several members of the Dimera family. The Dimera family includes Stefano Dimera, resident Italian godfather in Salem. As a preferred viewpoint, he is just an older man who dresses in suits and seems to have good manners. Stefano is an Italian immigrant and a melodramatic villain of the first order; his behavior is extreme, and he is as spellbinding as an operatic tenor (Brooks (1976). He is, of course, a crime boss, but he is not shown hurting anyone. He just makes phone calls and bad things happen to people he doesn’t like. He is the primary villain in this series. On a connotative level, he represents the “non-white foreigner” many people in Salem distrust. This is a second order sign (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Stefano and his family represent “the other” in literature. They are non-white characters who are seen to represent darkness and evil. The hegemony of Salem is naturally suspicious of him because he is different from them.

Stefano’s children that feature prominently in this program include: Kristen (eldest child around 55 years of age, a sexpot. and spoiler of marriages), E.J. (Elvis, age 35 to 45, who was groomed by his father to take over the reins of the many illicit family businesses when Stefano passes), and Chad (a ne’er do well twenty something who gets his kicks out of bullying people because he is a large man physically). Other children

include Alexandra, beloved adult daughter and probably the only person in the world who really loved her father. She died of an inoperable brain tumor in the summer of 2012.

On the preferred level of signification or first one as per Fiske and Hartley (1978), Stefano's children are the troubled children of an outcast. They are dispensers of mayhem and are not accepted by townspeople because they are Dimeras. An oppositional reading is that they are troublesome foreigners. Ideologically, they represent the first generation born in this country to immigrant parents. They are both like their father and like the new world into which they are now thrust. Because of their evil doings, people are suspicious of them. On an ideological level, the Dimera children are like baby snakes just waiting to strike. The Dimera family is nothing but trouble, and everyone in Salem knows this.

Another prominent family is the Keriakis family. This group is less involved in storylines today than it was years ago. Victor Keriakis is a retired mobster now, but he still threatens to have people taught a lesson (Episode 5-9- 2012; Episode 8-24-2012). At least Victor is introspective. He said, "I used to think that money and power were the only things that mattered. Now, I know that it is time to be with the ones we love" (Episode 6-15-2012). He is very wealthy.

Victor Keriakis is much more traditional and typically American than Stefano, even though he is of Greek ancestry. The difference is that the Keriakises have been in America longer than the Dimeras. Victor doesn't have an accent like Stefano does. He has become a part of the melting pot while Stefano, and to a good extent, Stefano's children, have not. Victor's children are some of the leading members of Salem society. So, on the denotative level, the Keriakises are an upper middle class family that sticks together through thick and thin. On the connotative level, the Keriakises are an American

success story. They arrived, as all immigrants do, as products of other cultures and assimilated. Now they are no different from anyone else. They represent the success of the American Dream. Porter (1979) writes that soap operas present a generalized version of the American Dream.

The Hortons are a family that is still united in spirit. Important Hortons include Sami Brady, Hope Brady, Jennifer Horton, Abigail Deveraux, and Nick Fallon. The Hortons have intermarried with the Bradys, and they are both middle class families. What is important to these families mirrors middle class concerns: religion, law and order, safety, and education. Many of the Hortons are medical professionals, and they have contributed to the success of the local hospital.

This section discussed the importance of the Brady, DiMera, and Keriakis, and Horton families in *Days of Our Lives*. These families have been struggling against one another for the resources available in Salem for decades. Romances between members of these groups have usually caused more conflict than pleasure. Sami Brady's romancing of E.J. DiMera and Brady Black's and Kristen Dimera's love affair has nearly torn their families apart.

Comstock and Newcomb (1983) write that soap operas have great social significance. This makes these families influential components of a society that is enmeshed with its entertainment. These families represent different segments of American society. The Bradys are middle class while the DiMeras and the Keriakis are upper class. The DiMeras have mob money, but the Keriakis also have some ill gotten gains along with honest income. These characters are important because characterization is as important as action in soap operas, if not more important. A storyline can take months to mature. It is the characterization that attracts viewers everyday.

Analysis of Episode Shown May 3, 2012

A close reading of a single episode of *Days of Our Lives* reveals a variety of meanings. For the sake of the analysis that will follow, here is a transcribed episode that ran May 4, 2013.

This episode opens with Ian MacAllister sitting at a table in an open café area. Other than his presence, the area is deserted. Dramatic music swells as his lover, Kate, approaches. Close up of their kiss.

This scene cuts to Madison looking at divorce papers. Brady walks in. Madison and Brady are together in a medium shot. Madison declines a dinner date. She kisses Brady and tells him she is late for a budget meeting, and walks out the door.

Music swells sinisterly as Madison says, “That son of a bitch.” She walks away.

Cut to meeting of Alexandra DiMera and her brothers, E.J. and Chad. They want to know why she asked them to come to the meeting.

Cut to Safe house setting. Sinister music swells as policemen and Detective Hope Brady discuss the bomb hardwired into the security system. They can’t leave the cabin through the door or windows. Carrie sees her dad, Roman Brady, walking toward the front door of the cabin through a window. The group discusses how to alert Roman not to try to enter the door.

Start of suspenseful music as Roman Brady, the police chief, is trying to open the front door while his brother Beau yells at him to stop. But Roman can’t hear him.

“Let me in. What’s going on,” says Roman, confused and angry.

“He’ll never stop”, says Hope Brady, Roman’s brother’s ex from inside the cabin.

Those inside put a note under the door that explains the situation to Roman. Beau tells Hope that she did a good job thinking of a way to save everyone. On the note Beau tells his brother not to try and enter the building through the door or windows.

Roman reads a second note pushed under door by those inside the cabin.

Sinister music swells as those inside the cabin mill around and read Roman's note that they should not worry because the cavalry is here.

Cut to Ian and Kate sitting together at a table in an outdoor café area. This is the same area Ian was in when the program started. Madison approaches; she asks to talk to Ian alone. Kate leaves.

They talk about divorce papers, sinister music swells as the couple contemplates the end of their union.

Close up on Ian looking at her as she hands him the divorce papers. Music swells.

Cut to inside safe house/cabin. Roman talks on the cell phone to those inside after coming down from the roof. John Black and Beau talk to Roman about the bomb device. The bomb's electronic firing system is wired into the security system.

Carrie runs over to talk to her father, Roman, on the cell phone. She tells her father that she is terrified. Roman consoles his daughter. "I love you very much, and I will not let you down," he tells her. "I love you too, dad," she says as an extreme close up shows her worried baby doll face. Carrie gives the cell phone to Rafael Hernandez, a police detective.

Medium long shot of Kate and Brady zooming in to head shot

Kate tries to rattle Brady about his relationship with Madison.

An angry conversation between Madison and Ian ensues; just medium shots are taken.

Sinister moody guitar music plays.

Cut to Alexandra, Chad, and E.J. She tells them she is dying. Medium shot of both males. Close up of Alexandra until Chad becomes emotionally upset, then there is a close up on him. The camera rotates between a close shot on Chad and one on Alexandra as they are both emotionally upset. E.J. is controlling his emotions, so he is left out of the close ups here. The most emotionally upset one gets the most close ups. (This could rely on the actors themselves as some actors are better at crying on demand than are others, et cetera).

Music swells, sad piano music, notes hitting too and fro. Chad cries and hugs his sister tight while a close up locks in on his child like face.

Cut to cabin where Carrie and mom Marlena talk.

Roman is on the phone from outside of cabin. Shane Donovan ISA agent is on outside to help them disarm the bomb. Shane is confident he can tell those inside how to disarm the bomb.

Donovan tells John and Beau to tell him what they are looking at, wires and contacts, and colors. They take pictures of the wiring and send it to Donovan on the cell phone.

The music is suspenseful.

Cut to Chad, Alexandra, and E.J. Medium shots show them sitting around Alexandra's desk again. She talks about Theo her son. She wants them to help Theo grow up. She wants them to spend more time with Theo who is autistic before she dies. She asks them to look after Stefano; she tells them she truly loves their dad. She is sorry he left Kate. She tells them that Stefano is going to need his sons, all of them. She tells Chad that the family and Theo need him.

Cut to Brady and Kate in medium shots and close shots as music underscores their angry talk. The music reflects the tension in the scene.

Cut to Madison and Ian talk of divorce. She wants to know why he is being so hard on her. There are close ups on her angry face as sinister music swells.

Cut to Lexie, Chad, and E.J. Lexie wants Chad to go with her to take Theo to speech therapy. There are close shots on Chad and Lexie as music starts up again; sad guitar music plays, underscoring the crying and sadness of the two characters. He promises to rejoin the family, and E.J. welcomes him. There is a close up of the two brothers hugging.

Cut to Roman and Shane Donovan on outside of safe house/cabin and the others on the inside.

Rafe suggests they put furniture in a pile to make a blast wall. Sinister music swells as they start trying to disarm the bomb. Drums start up and the harp and cymbals.

Sinister music plays as Madison walks in to see Brady. He lets her know he knows she went to see Ian and lied about going to a budget meeting.

Music starts up, tender music, Madison is in a close up. Brady touches her face as the camera does a close up on it.

Cut to Ian MacAllister as he meets Kate again. "Are you finished with Madison?" she asks.

Cut to cabin. Hope is liaison to Donovan and gives directions. They cut wires.

Then they cut more wires at the cabin. Beau Brady cuts the wires. The group thinks they are safe. They congratulate each other.

Cut to Kate and Ian. Ian tells Kate she is the love of his life. Close up on Kate's happy face.

Cut to Brady and Madison talking about their relationship.

Cut to Kate and Ian as Kate tells him she thinks Brady is a jerk. Ian says teasingly, “Such language from a lady.” Kate apologizes and says she is having a bad day.

Ian tells her he wants to spend the rest of his life making her happy.

Cut to the cabin where a celebration is still going on about the wires being cut and the police officers and their families thinking they are safe.

Outside Roman and Donovan congratulate each other as well. Then the bomb starts ticking and those inside realize that the bomb was not disarmed. Instead, the timer was activated when the wires were cut.

The End of Episode.

This episode will be further examined after a general discussion of camera technique.

Camera Technique in Soap Operas

Anyone who has watched soap operas has probably noticed that the camera techniques used are different than those used in news programs, reality shows, documentaries, and prime time dramas. Most prime time dramas use long shots; this is something you will never see in a soap opera. A long shot can be used to establish setting at the beginning of a program. Soap operas are set in doors and, if shot outdoors, the area is still a set made to look like a town square or commons area with a few trees. Most of the shots in soap operas are medium shots from the waist up because what is filmed, mostly, is conversations.

Another researcher, Timberg (1981) has examined the camera technique in soap operas. Timberg (1981) claims that the camera is the narrator of soap operas. A characteristic of soap opera production style is close ups and extreme close ups writes Bernard Timberg (1981). Timberg (1981) further states that “[t]his shooting style is

consistent with the kind of world soap opera portrays. Timberg (1981) continues with this explanation of the shooting style in soap operas:

As a narrative ritual that centers on intense, concentrated forms of emotion, soap opera requires an intense, intimate camera style. Combined with slow truckings of the camera, and slow elegiac movements into and out of the action, this close-up camera style has the effect of bringing the viewer closer and closer to the hidden emotional secrets soap opera explores: stylized expressions of pity, jealousy, rage, self-doubt. When the camera actually enters the mind of a soap character—in dream or memory sequences—the inward movement is even slower. (p. 135)

According to Timberg (1981), this is very different from the way that news announcers are shot. “[S]oap opera ritual requires a camera style that circles its characters and brings us closer and closer to them, right up to their eyes and mouths so that we see their tears and hear their breathing” writes Timberg (1981, p. 135). The most important camera shots in soap operas are the close ups and the extreme close ups that reveal tears welling up in actor’s eyes, heavy breathing, and kissing, and other intimate expression. As a conversation is filmed, each exchange in the conversation brings the viewer closer and closer to the actor’s face. The shots may start out as medium, but they quickly and seductively move in shot by shot, increment by increment, until the viewer is close enough to kiss the actor. And who is really being made love to here? It is the viewer.

Camera Shot Analysis

This episode began with a trucking shot on Ian MacAllister, sitting at an outdoor café. Kate, his lover, appears, and they kiss. There was a close up on the kiss. The next

scene was Madison and Brady; he asks her for a dinner date, and she declines saying she has to go to a meeting when she is really going to meet with Ian over their divorce papers. All medium shots were used here.

In the scenes with Alexandra (Lexie), Chad, and E.J. there are many close ups and extreme close ups. Alexandra, a doctor, is behind her desk. Her two half brothers are sitting in front of the desk. There are medium shots until she tells them that she called them together to tell them what she wants them to do after she is dead. When she reveals that she is dying from an inoperable brain tumor, Chad begins to cry, and she hugs him. Chad is very emotional for a long period of time. The shots have a pattern that is seen over and over in this episode. When there is little tension or emotion, medium shots are used. The shots mirror the increase in tension or emotion, negative or positive. For example, as a character becomes more agitated or emotional (as the camera shots go back and forth following the conversational exchange) the camera shots get closer until they are extremely close. This usually precedes the end of a scene. There are more close ups of women than of men, and they are usually closer. In addition, *Days of Our Lives* uses the most close ups and extreme close ups of the three series examined for this study.

Timberg (1981) studied *All My Children* and *General Hospital* for a period of two years and found little variation from that already offered by Timberg (1981). I found no difference from what Timberg (1981) reported in regard to how the camera seems to circle around and move in closer and closer as the scene progresses, especially when there is a lot of emotional tension in the scene. Now that the camera angles have been discussed, the narrative analysis will begin.

Narrative Analysis

The narrative analysis of *Days of Our Lives* is done using a methodology of a study of *Hill Street Blues* as a narrative by Caren J. Deming (1985). *Hill Street Blues* was created and produced by Steven Bochco and Michael Kozoll who decided to break the rules normally associated with detective dramas (Deming 1985). This series was broadcast “in five different time periods on four different nights of the week during its first months on the air. Ratings were abysmal, but the critics were euphoric” writes Deming (1985). *Hill Street Blues* won eight Emmys and was nominated for twenty-one (Deming 1985). Deming (1985) analyzed this series “as a modernist text cast primarily as melodrama” (p. 2). Deming’s (1985) method will be extended to this present study of soap operas using one episode as a model.

Deming (1985) defines a narrative in this way:

Contemporary narratology (acknowledging a debt to Aristotle) defines narrative as a bifurcated entity in which the story is separable from its rendering. The story is the chain of events, together with characters and setting, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in chronological order. (p. 2)

The narrative is the combination of the story and how it is told, the discourse, writes Chatman (1978, p. 27). The model used by Deming (1985) draws from a model from Chatman (1978) that Deming simplified. This model is understandable in this way:

The model contains five essential elements: a real author, an implied author, the discourse, an implied audience, and a real audience. The real author constructs the narrative by arranging symbolic elements appropriate to the medium of manifestation. In television the real “author” is a group made up of the producer, the writer, the director, and their support personnel. *Hill Street Blues* also makes

use of a supervising producer, creative consultants, and (because it is shot on film) a cinematographer. (p. 2)

According to Deming (1985), it is the implied author who controls the story; it hides some things while revealing others. Deming (1985) writes, “The implied author is a controlling principle (re)constructed by the viewer from elements of discourse manifested in the medium. The implied author is more or less covert, depending on the transparency or opacity of the medium in the discourse” (pp. 2-3). Viewers are led through scenes by a force that reveals bits of story while it hides others. This can be called the camera eye or the narrator.

Moreover, Deming (1985) writes that the discourse “is a form of the narrative expression, a series of statements organized to tell a story; this include[s] events, characters, and setting” (p. 3). Deming (1985) explains that these statements include visual information, dialogue, and sound, and also that “statements are made by the real author and interpreted by the real viewer” (p. 3).

Deming (1985) further explains the meaning of the concepts implied audience and real audience:

The implied audience is a construct implicit in the demands made by the narrative in order for comprehension to occur. The real audience reconstructs and interprets the narrative from cues in the manifestation by comparing them to cultural codes and life experiences. The real audience may bear little resemblance to the implied audience, as real viewers operate independently of any role cut out for them by authors or critics. (p. 3).

Narrative Analysis of Episode Broadcast May 3, 2012

There are ten main characters and as many minor characters involved. There are four main storylines in this episode.

1. Ian MacAllister and Kate Dimera flirt and talk about their relationship.
2. Madison and Brady talk about Madison's divorce from Ian and the fact that they want to be together. Madison is concerned that Kate is now with her ex-husband Ian since Stefano DiMera threw Kate out of Casa DiMera for sleeping with Ian, one of Kate's old flames.
3. Alexandra DiMera tells her brothers she is dying from a brain tumor.
4. Many members of Salem's police force and family members are hiding in a cabin/safe house from Stefano Dimera. They can't leave. If they open the door or a window, the cabin is wired to explode.

There is no one storyline that is more prominent or important than the others. No character is more important than the others. These stories are occurring simultaneously, and the time duration is just minutes in a day, probably not over thirty or forty minutes of actual "real" time is shown on screen in the episode. So the discourse structure is that one day's episode shows less than an hour of "real lived experience" for the soap opera characters (Deming 1985).

Chatman (1978) refers to another theorist's works, as reported by Deming (1985); "[T]he characteristics of structure identified by Piaget: wholeness, transformation, and self-regulation" can be applied to narrative (p. 5). Deming (1985) points to the problem of not having a clear resolution at the end of the show. Even if a storyline ebbs it never ends. It can become glorious again in the future. There are no small storylines; some just aren't in the forefront while others are.

Deming (1985) claims that “[b]y repeatedly invoking closure without manifesting it, *Hill Street Blues* embodies a central theme of melodrama, the attempt to restore order to a chaotic world” (p. 5). Brooks (1976) states, “melodrama polarizes good and evil and demonstrates their operation as real forces in the world ... it posits good and evil as moral feelings, thus asserting that emotion is the realm of morality (p. 54).

In the study of *Hill Street Blues*, Deming (1985) found “the classically melodramatic battle between order and chaos tak[ing] place on three interactive levels: the societal level ...on the interpersonal level ...and on the personal level” (p. 6).

Deming (1985) sees disturbance on the societal level as involving actual criminal acts like violence or political corruption, and on the interpersonal level “(where evil is behavior that undermines the goals of the group), and on the personal level (where evil is insanity or less total personal disintegration, failure to cope” (p. 6).

For the *Hill Street Blues* characters, the battle between good and evil is on the streets of every town USA, the war between the police force and criminals. For *Days of Our Lives* characters, some of that type of warfare exists, but it is matched by interpersonal battles where people let their own jealousy, rage, weakness, or stupidity, get them into personal relationships that are destructive for one or both people but especially harmful to the group. The group in this case can be the family group or the extended family group like the Bradys or the Hortons or just Sami and her grown son Will fighting over her behavior. Madison and Ian fight over their divorce, and this warfare affects her relationship with Brady; Kate fights with Ian because their affair ended her marriage to Stefano DiMera. When Stefano dumped Kate, he also fired Kate and two of her children from a cosmetics company he owned. They had high paying jobs in the company.

Deming (1985) claims that characters on *Hill Street Blues* are motivated by the desire to be good (p. 6). Soap opera characters are motivated by the desire to be happy. Deming (1985) also claims that the fictional world of the series seems chaotic; the same can be said of soap operas like *Days of Our Lives*. Only an expert decoder who knows the customs and culture of soap operas could make sense of *Day of Our Lives* (Hall, 1980). Soap opera viewers have to be expert decoders. Each soap opera world has different social norms and culture. *Day of Our Lives* is no exception.

The characteristic of having to discuss good and evil and the “moral import of events explicitly” is a characteristic of melodrama according to Deming (1985, pp. 8-9). Time is part of the discourse; for Deming (1985) part of the style of a series is how the viewer is allowed to see the chronological events. In other words, a sense of chronology is accomplished “by revealing story events as they are discovered by the characters. This common storytelling convention provides chronology derived from a psychological focus” (Deming, 1985, p. 9). Things happen to soap characters sometimes quickly, but more often, very slowly, one blow at the time. This builds the emotional horror in the viewers. Some scenes are just hard to watch because they are so fraught with emotion and misery.

Soap operas always start in medias res—in the middle of something. In some ways, soap operas like *Days of Our Lives* seem to have no beginning as well as no ending because today’s story always starts in the middle of something. The world of soap operas is the world of today. Yesterday is nothing more than gossip.

For Deming (1985) at times, “nonstory material interrupts the progress of story development in varying degrees” in *Hill Street Blues*. This never happens in soap operas. Every event and character on the screen is important. The experienced soap viewer

knows this and listens very carefully to the dialogue. One quick word and then silence or one quick glimpse from the next episode, of say, a body lying on the floor, can signal a return of a character who left the show or mean that a character is leaving the show.

While the main characters in *Hill Street Blues* are essentially good people, the same cannot be said of the main characters in a soap opera like *Days of Our Lives*. Often the most despised characters are the most treasured by soap fans. It can be appealing to some people to dislike someone. It can be cathartic. Sometimes the viewer just wants to see if evil will triumph over justice one more time in the history of that particular soap opera. But more often than not, justice triumphs. Waiting for this to happen can keep a viewer tuned in for months.

Stefano Dimera, while a villain, is pathetic when he is grieving. His son E.J. is handsome and dashing except for when he lashes out at someone. There is a sadness about characters who are outcasts like the DiMeras. Other characters are always asking each other if the DiMeras are ever going to change.

Deming (1985) claims that open texts require more of the viewer to fill in the blanks. Certainly soap fans are experts at that. The real audience is the demographic of 18-49 years old. Soap operas, like other series, go for the younger audiences who have the most purchasing power and are buying for products to support more family members in the household.

Deming (1985) claims the purpose of *Hill Street Blues* was to restore “moral order out of chaos”; the purpose of *Days of Our Lives* is to keep the chaos going as a method for finding happiness. Disorder is needed for good to prevail because, out of the strife and trouble, people rise to the occasion and do what is right. The enjoyment is in the machinations of the characters, how far they will go to trump one another.

Themes

Days of Our Lives has themes around which the messages it sends out are organized. It is not this researcher's opinion that producers and writers necessarily sat down and ironed these out. Rather, much of the thematic content of this program probably arose over time and are based on what those who contributed to the series considered to be important in life. There are several major themes in *Days of Our Lives*.

The first theme to be discussed is conflict between families. *Days of Our Lives* today features interpersonal and group warfare between several families: the Dimeras, the Hortons, the Bradys, and the Keriakises. Families line up three and four generations deep for warfare with other families (Episode 4-30-2012; Episode 5-1-2012; Episode 5-2-2012; Episode 5-9-2012; Episode 5-14-2012; Episode 11-5-2012; Episode 11-12-2013; Episode 11-16-2012; Episode 12-6-2012; Episode 1-13-2013; Episode 1-1-2013; 1-1-2013). Not only are these families in constant battle, some of their members have married the enemy. However, these marriages are usually doomed to fail. Sooner or later it becomes impossible to stay loyal to one's own family while being married to the enemy.

This conflict can be seen as a metaphor for social struggle, and metaphors are a tool of semiotics that are used to establish meaning (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Warfare between different groups in society keeps people at the bottom from uniting against those at the top who are oppressing them writes Karl Marx (1914). Marxist theory demonstrates that by buying into the ideology of the hegemony, that there isn't enough for everybody, the middle classes and poor stay in conflict instead fighting against the upper classes who dominate them. Members of Salem society fight against one another

for their own perceived survival and as payback for mistreatment or threats made against their group.

The second major theme is family conflict. Multigenerational warfare within families is one of them (Episode 5-10-2012). It can be father and son, like John Black (father) and Brady Black (adult son) (Episode 1-2-2013) or a conflict between sisters, Sami and Carrie, over the same lover Rafe (Episode 5-10-2012, Episode 7-2-2012).

An example of this can be seen in the recent fist fight between John and Brady Black. John and Brady are currently fighting over an ex lover of John's who is Kristen Dimera, daughter of the mob boss Stefano Dimera.

Kristen has returned to town on her father's orders to take over his cosmetic firm. Her father's goals for Kristen are not completely apparent. Once in town, she falls back into an old war with Marlina, John's partner (Episode 1-2-2013; Episode 1-2-2013; Episode 1-3-2013; Episode 1-4-2013). Years ago Kristen, out of jealousy, tried to kill Marlina and take her place with John. Beautiful and brassy but not having lost an ounce of her sexiness over the years, Kristen seduces Brady, John's son, to get back at him for choosing Marlina over her (Episode 12-31-2012).

Upon learning of this affair between Brady and Kristen, Marlina and John are very unhappy and begin trying to control Brady and run his life (Episode 1-1-2013; Episode 1-2-2013). Confronted about the affair, Brady starts a fist fight with his dad after John calls Kristen a "manipulative bitch"; Brady slugs his father in the face, beats his ribs, and kicks him (Episode 1-2-2013). John, although older, is physically fit. John fights back but tries to get Brady to stop by saying, "Enough, son, stop." Brady, full of fury, just continues to beat his dad (Episode 1-2-2013). Both end up in the hospital, getting their wounds treated by Cameron Dimera, Kristen's younger brother (Episode 1-

3-2012). On January 28, 2013, Eric Brady, half brother of Brady, reflected on the affair between Brady Black and Kristen Dimera, "It is really just tearing the family apart." The families being torn apart here are the Bradys and the Hortons. Kristen's father Stefano asks her why she is dating that dim wit Brady. He thinks Brady is weak and stupid.

Another example of family conflict can be seen in E.J.'s tormented relationship with his mob boss father Stefano Dimera. Dimera tried to disown EJ when he read an old letter written by Alice Horton that said that he was not E.J.'s father. Later evidence proved the message in the letter wrong as DNA information was switched when E.J. was a baby. On June 1, 2012 Stefano and E.J. once again argue over their relationship. E.J. threatens to kill his dad. Stefano says, "Kill me or get the Hell out of here and don't come back" (Episode 6-1-2012).

Stefano is grieving because he used his beloved daughter Lexie as bait in a battle with a previous foe; this led to her exposure to a toxin which resulted in the growth of an inoperable brain tumor. Lexie, a doctor, died last summer. When her husband Abe threatens to kill Stefano, the old man says, "I won't put up a fight. I will never forgive myself [about Alexis dying and it being his fault] (Episode 6-1-2012). In an Episode shown May 28, 2012 E.J. calls his father the devil.

Further fighting between E.J. and his father results in E.J. promising to use everything his father taught him against his father. E.J. tells his father, "Only a really soulless bastard could do what you did to me" (Episode 5-14-2012). In May 29, 2012's episode Will threatens to never speak to his mother Sami again. Will says, "You drive me insane," to Sami. Other examples of family conflict occurred in Episode 5-16-2012; Episode 7-27-2012; Episode 8-27-2012).

All of the descriptions above elucidate the family relationships of characters on *Days of Our Lives*. Viewers may only be aware of the surface meanings of what they see. But this familial conflict symbolizes the dysfunction of the nuclear family when sexual gratification is open to any two people regardless of family history. Maybe having sex with the love of your parent's life is not something that will promote family unity. Also problematic if not feeling truly loved at home. Characters on this series are always seeking the love and approval of others they care about. They are insecure and need to be told frequently how much they are loved.

The third theme to be examined is family loyalty. "We're a family, and we can really help each other through this," said Sami when they were grieving over the presumed loss of family and friends who were really hiding until the police could solve the crime (Episode 5-10-2012). Sami is always making war on her mother Marlena and her sister Carrie (Episode May 10, 2012). Her own father, Roman Brady, says he doesn't understand her at all and doesn't like her very much. Sami and her brother Eric fight constantly over Sami's brash behavior.

Roman Brady, Sami's dad who is also the police chief, is always trying to arrest E..J. for some illegal activity. But Sami is always interfering (Episode 7-27-2012; Episode 8-21-2012; Episode 8-24-2012). E.J. talks about wanting to be a better man, and Sami talks about wanting to be a better person. Together, they are trying to be better people. When the rule of loyalty is broken, it is a very serious matter. Loyalty is the backbone of every real relationship in life and family relationships on *Days of Our Lives* (Episode 7-23-2012; Episode 26, 2012; Episode 7-27-2012; Episode 1-7-2013).

“We have to stick together no matter what,” Sami tells her mother and step-father John Black after finding out that Brady is sleeping with Kristen Dimera who was almost his step mother twenty years earlier. Sami says:

We can get him [Brady] back. We can beat this. We can beat this. We just have to present a united front. We have to trust each other. That is the most important thing. We know the truth. We’re not going to let her [Kristen] get away with it.

(Episode 1-7-2013)

Upon learning that his gay son has fathered a child with another man’s bride, Lucas tells William who is also Sami’s son, “We stick together. Man, I went to prison for you!” Lucas went to prison for William when William tried to kill E.J. Dimera, William’s step-father at the time (Episode 1-15-2013). Lucas thought he was stronger and better able to do the time in prison than his son William (Episode on 5-14- 2012; Episode 1-15-2013). Also in the Episode on May 14, 2012 Sami tells Will that family doesn’t walk out on family.

When another character attacks Sami verbally, Sami’s mother, aunts, grandmother, or cousins will defend her whether she is present in the scene or not. Some characters, like Kate Dimera, Sami’s former mother-in-law, have professed a lifelong goal of taking down “that Sami Brady” (Episode 4-30-2012). On April 30, 2012 Kate refers to her former daughter-in-law Sami as “radioactive waste”.

Some family members have stronger relationships than do others. William, Sami’s son, has a close relationship with his grandmother Marlina (Episode 3-8-2012; Episode 5-24-2012). When Will came out as a gay man, his mother did not take it well, but his grandmother Marlina was on his side (Episode 5-24-2012). She tells Will, “She [Sami] will come around when she realizes it isn’t about her parenting. But you are

living your truth” (Episode 5-24-2012). Will is often angry with his mother over unresolved childhood issues and sometimes will not talk to her (Episode 5-25-2012).

This denotative picture is of family members having devotion for each other. This appears as it should be, the American nuclear family of the 1950’s. But family is more than this today. There are families of procreation, and many other types of families, some led by gay couples. With loyalty there is always a struggle for individuality, the conflict between self interest and the importance of being a part of the group.

Ang (1991) writes that decoding is part of the process of watching television. Decoders can negotiate the presentation of the family on *Days of Our Lives*. These viewers might see the call for loyalty to the family group to be too much for them, especially if their own experience with the family does not include much togetherness. They may see family members who are more loosely tied to the group as being the smarter and better people.

A fourth and very interesting theme is parents trying to control their adult children. Many soap opera parents try to run the lives of their adult children. Most soap opera parents on this daytime series don’t believe that they have been good parents and don’t think that their children got enough love and care in childhood. They want forgiveness from their children and another chance to fix their kids’ personalities and decision making skills (Episode 5-16-2012; Episode 1-2-2013; Episode 8-27-2012; Episode 1-18-2013). So they meddle and meddle and try to control them.

Examples of this can be seen in the relationships of Sami and her eldest son William. Sami tried to talk William out of being gay. Sami’s bad choices as a mom when William was little are something he is constantly throwing in her face. He blames

her for going from man to man and not staying with Rafe (Rafael Hernandez), a stepfather he adored who is also a prominent member of the police force of Salem. Likewise, Kate refuses to stay out of her son, Lucas', life. Lucas is Sami's ex-husband who has tried to win Sami back many times. He is also William's father, and he is constantly harangued by his mother to do this or that to improve himself.

Rafael Hernandez (Rafe) has a little sister, Gabi, who he is constantly mothering. He followed her to an abortion clinic and confronted her when she came out of an inner office crying. Sami, William, and Rafe all thought she had gotten an abortion. Now that she is marrying Nick Horton, an ex con, Rafe has more to deal with. Hope, a police officer, is the much older cousin of Nick Horton's who wants to help him make wiser decisions in his life. She is constantly trying to coach and mother him.

Brady Black is constantly being badgered by his dad, John, and step-mom, Marlana, because he has made such a mess of his life so far with his drug and alcohol abuse and careless affairs (Episode 12-31-2012). John tries to save his son from his ex-lover Kristin with no success (Episode 1-2-2013). Perhaps the parents are reacting to the feeling that they themselves are out of control. By imposing order on the lives of their children they may feel that they are straightening things out. The reality is that they act as foolishly as their children. Maybe they feel guilty for not being able to control themselves.

Yet a fifth theme that can be observed on *Days of Our Lives* is law and order. Upholding the law is very important as five of the main characters are or have until recently been on the Salem police force. These characters include: Rafael Hernandez, Bo Brady (who has resigned), Hope Black, and Roman Brady. Following the rules is very important in Salem. The most evil character on this show is Stefano Dimera. He

represents “the other” or suspicious foreigner. “The other” or non Anglo is often used as a villain stereotype in American mass media.

Chad, Stefano’s youngest son, recently stood up at Nick and Gabi’s wedding and told everyone that Nick was not the father of Gabi’s baby. This announcement stopped the wedding from proceeding because the priest refused to continue. Later Sonny, Will’s gay lover, called Chad a dirty word—Dimera! He was saying in essence what can you expect from a member of the Dimera family? Victor Keriakis also said to Chad, “You’ve proved yourself to be a real Dimera!” for standing up and calling the bride Gabi a lying slut during the wedding ceremony (Episode 1-14-2013).

The problem with the legal system in Salem is that Stefano Dimera, when caught doing something illegal, can get away with it. After blowing up the safe house and nearly killing half of Salem’s most esteemed citizens, Stefano claimed that he was helping the CIA arrest an arms dealer. He was released and all charges dropped on the Episode shown on 5-21-2012. Law and order is an important subject in American society because the opposite of it is chaos. People fear chaos; if people don’t follow the rules the weak and helpless will be harmed. This soap opera’s focus on law and order as a continuing theme actually is a way that this soap opera mirrors middle class concerns. Unable to afford living in an expensive gated community, most middle class individuals depend on the police force to keep them and their families safe.

Fidelity versus infidelity is also a theme on this program. “As God is my witness, I will be with Stefano again,” said Kate to her grown daughter Billie after Stefano Dimera tossed her aside for sleeping with his enemy Ian MacAllister (Episode 8-24-2012). Characters struggle to be faithful with love interests (Episode 5-11-2012; Episode 5-14-2012; Episode 5-23-2012; Episode 6-7-2012). That characters sleep

around a lot is a well known stereotype of soap operas. The issue of fidelity is always a major concern for social groups whose members' major preoccupation is sexual gratification.

Older Adult Characters

Older adult characters on *Days of Our Lives* are of special interest to this researcher. It was established in the literature review that senior citizens not only watch more television than any other age group, they may be more vulnerable to negative portrayals of seniors because of their limited amount of input from the world. By virtue of being heavy viewers, Gerbner (1978) has established that people who watch a lot of television feel that they are watching reality. Many of them are very isolated from other people because they are not mobile enough to join in social activities. For this reason, older adults who make major contributions to storylines of this program are discussed in this section. Caroline Brady is one such outstanding older adult on this series. On the denotative level, Caroline is an attractive elderly matron and owner of the town pub. Caroline is loving and caring. She is still working at an advanced age. Other than the Alzheimer's disease she is shown as being healthy and very socially active.

Caroline is present in family life in a positive way. Her interactions with other characters are positive. She even hired Nick Horton to work in the pub when he was released from prison; Nick had been convicted of kidnapping and murdering a person in Salem everyone knew several years earlier.

From a negotiated viewpoint, Caroline is a picture of courage and self sufficiency at an advanced age. She represents the Irish family that she holds together in spite of her age and infirmity. On the ideological level, Caroline is the great mother figure. She is feisty and energetic.

Victor Keriakis is another important older adult character. A preferred reading will find Victor Keriakis to be an older character who is still attractive and involved with his family. He is always giving advice, particularly to Brady Black, his grandson, and Daniel Jonas, another grandson. Victor is shown clashing occasionally with Maggie, his wife. But they have a great relationship. Victor lives in a mansion and is very wealthy. He has the air of a man who is extremely powerful. If he suspects that a family member was wronged, he threatens to have that person taken care of. Family members always tell him that they don't want his help.

Connotatively, he is a picture of the successful white male who is retirement age. He has a beautiful redheaded wife. Even though Maggie is older, she is still glamorous, like an aging movie star from the 1950's or 1960's. Ideologically, he represents someone who is older and very bored with life. It seems that life is very boring to him. He is the ultra successful businessman whose retirement doesn't allow him to accomplish what he used to accomplish. Many people in America might wrongly assume that most older males in America are as rich and healthy as Victor. This is one way of decoding the character of Victor.

Maggie Keriakis, another important older character, still looks like a vixen. It is only in close ups that you can see her age. She is someone who, from a distance, looks twenty years younger than other women of her age group. In the episode that aired on May 14, 2012 Maggie is depicted as having just bought a spa. She is always dressed in expensive looking clothing. In that same episode, she asks her granddaughter Melanie to run the spa for her. So, on a denotative level, Maggie is an older adult character with enough disposable income to buy a business. She and her husband are some of Salem's

wealthiest and most influential people. Most elderly Americans don't have the kind of wealth that the Keriakises have.

The episode shown on May 21, 2012 has a storyline between Victor and his wife Maggie. Maggie confesses to holding something against her husband (Episode 5-21-2012). Many years earlier, Victor conspired with another woman to steal Maggie's eggs that she had saved to make future children (Episode 6-15-2012; Episode 5-21-2012). "Lillian stole my eggs!" said elderly Maggie to Victor. He explained that he only did it because he had not met Maggie yet. Victor says that he would not have done it if he knew what a wonderful person she was (Episode 6-15-2012; Episode 5-21-2012).

He has a reputation of being sort of a womanizer. Later they meet in Caroline's bar and talked once again about the eggs. Maggie refused to go home with Victor (Episode 5-21-2012). Later they make up and are still husband and wife. On a connotative level, she is an aging sex kitten who reminds the viewer of beautiful movie stars from the 1930's and 1940's. She is very old fashioned and talks in a breathy little whisper. She is very feminine and has managed to hold onto her sexual attractiveness at an older age. She is very kittenish. Ideologically, Maggie seems like someone who is dependent on those around her to keep her world upright. She seems like the weak older woman. Maggie is overly sweet much of the time. She represents weakness in women that most women are able to overcome.

Stefano Dimera is an older adult character who is Italian/Greek and a crime boss. His businesses are tainted with illegality. He often resorts to violence to get what he wants. Yet he was loved by his late daughter Alexandra and is loved by E.J. his son. It seems that Stefano took parenting seriously and tried to love and bring up his children. He is stubborn, old, and Old World. Stefano lives in Casa DiMera, a mansion.

Denotatively, Stefano is Old World in the new world. He is still tied to Italy and its ways. He is a fish out of water in Salem which is mainly populated by Anglo Americans. Connotatively, he is viciousness, cunning, and evil. Stefano is feared by everyone in Salem. Ideologically, as was discussed before, he represents the individual newly immigrated to this country who has not yet assimilated into the group.

Ian Macallister is an older adult character who presents himself as Stefano's half brother and an illegitimate son of Santo Dimera, Stefano's father. He slept with Kate DiMera and ruined her marriage to Stefano. He is an evil character who is arrested. Although he is an older character, Ian is shown as being as virile and as driven by sexual desire as any young man. Denotatively, Ian appears to be about 70 and has a British accent. He is a businessman and has the air of assurance, like he is very pleased with himself. Connotatively, he is just another foreigner in Salem who has not yet assimilated. He represents a part of the old world and not the new. Ideologically, Ian, like Stefano, is an outcast. Kate has loved both men and has made an outcast out of herself because she starts wars with people and lets everyone know about it. Kate is known as someone who can't stand most of the people in Salem. On the episode aired on May 3, 2012 Ian kisses Kate and tells her, "I love you. The best thing that ever happened to me was when you walked back into my life." Ian is shown as being very passionate yet very cruel.

John Black, another senior character, is a husband, father, and local business owner. He owns Basic Black, and his wife is Marlana, the town psychiatrist. John is a mild mannered affable type who is well liked by townspeople. John was analyzed semiotically earlier in this paper. He is just relisted here because he is one of the older adults on the series. Marlana is living as John's significant other while her husband Roman Brady is living with John's real wife Hope. She is very calm and motherly. She

tries to be a good mother and grandmother. Even though she is often critical of her daughter Sami, she is very supportive. Marlena was examined semiotically earlier in this paper. She is relisted here because this is a list of older adults on the series.

The storylines and characters all depict life somewhere in America in the present time. What does family mean? On the denotative level, families are groups of people related by blood or marriage. Connotatively, they are a social army united in defense of their group against other families who clash with them. Family loyalty is sticking together when the times are rough and even when your family member is in the wrong. Loyalty is love. Lying in defense of those you love is acceptable on *Days of Our Lives*.

All of these older adult characters play integral parts in the daily storylines. Many are sexually active, and their love lives make this series very interesting. What they have to offer is wisdom. The characters in their twenties and thirties make love and war, but the older characters seem to have a more realistic and mature grasp of what there is to lose when you lose someone you love. They aren't as quick to throw someone away. They spend more time discussing the parameters of their relationships with lovers and delineating roles and responsibilities. This seems to lead to more successful and satisfying love relationships. Younger soap opera characters continually talk about the decades long love affairs of older characters on their shows. These are the relationships that are admired and respected.

Discussion

Days of Our Lives has been a daily mainstay for many television viewers for decades. This program reiterates what is important in America today, being loyal to family and friends and trying to live life to the fullest. In this chapter, prominent families and major characters were examined using semiotic analysis. The Bradys, Hortons, and

DiMeras were discussed at length. Key findings include romantic love being the most important thing in life.

Families engage in intergenerational warfare with other families. There is also a lot of conflict between family members. This constant strife is seen as normal by the characters of *Days of Our Lives*. Middle class interests like law and order are very important as does maintaining one's social position. For example, the town tramp is constantly told by townspeople that she will always be the town tramp. The hegemony is depicted by the presence of older white males who are wealthy and powerful. Victor Keriakis and Ian MacAllister can be seen as part of the hegemony.

Other key findings include the constant battle between law and order with many major characters being on the police force. The war between good and evil includes all major characters on almost a daily basis. Even family members of policemen and policewomen engage in civilian sleuthing to help maintain order and catch criminals.

More key findings include the subject of work. It is a key finding that major characters are not shown working except for members of the police force. The only other individuals who work are minor characters like those with service jobs, such as waiters and waitresses. High level executives and the town psychiatrist are shown on the way to work, stopping and getting coffee. They are also shown meeting one another for lunch and dinner.

The focus of this series is on interpersonal relationships within the family, warfare between families, law and order, and fidelity. The tone is chaos; people are not very skilled at getting along with one another. Many major characters either work for the police force or family members do. Catching criminals is important in Salem. Family loyalty is key as families are pitted against each other for generations. Families like the

Hortons and the DiMeras are locally famous. The society produced is the result of discord in human relationships. These flawed relationships can cultivate in the heavy soap viewer an attitude toward relationships, that they are good or bad or that being troubled is normal. Perhaps break ups can seem inevitable in real life if one's soap opera characters are always breaking up.

Characters in *Days of Our Lives* are blue collar. They are members of established immigrant groups. Values on this series are middle class. Characters are involved in keeping the peace and taking care of family. Family loyalty at all costs is crucial to social functioning, and characters are religious. The heroes are policemen and women. The criminals commit blue collar crimes that are violent attacks on people or steal from others. Older adult characters include Caroline Brady who is resilient in her old age. Other older characters are full of life and as lusty as younger characters. They stand for the status quo and uphold conservative values.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL HOSPITAL: LOVE AND WAR IN THE ER

General Hospital is a soap opera that began as a melodrama about doctors and nurses who worked at General Hospital. Viewers tune in daily to see the love lives of doctors and nurses. The show has broadened its scope over the years to include not just people who work at General Hospital but people who are connected to people who work or have worked at General Hospital. The hospital is just a backdrop for the love lives of medical professionals. This series is set in Port Charles, a small town in upstate New York.

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate the readings of this series and explain its meanings. I'm going to argue that *General Hospital* is a series that promotes traditional conservative values through the older adults in the show who are not evil, that law and order are reversed from the normal order in society, and that the medical field is profiled. Also important is the group of twenty year olds who don't seem to have a clear goal or purpose in life; they just vacillate from one crisis to another.

General Hospital makes use of stereotypes. Byars (1991) writes that stereotypes are "powerful discursive forms" (p. 72). *General Hospital* is also a series in which crime flourishes and even becomes part of the mainstream of society. Sonny Corinthos is a lovable crime boss who socializes with the police chief and district attorney. One prominent attorney and former district attorney is the mother of one of Sonny's children. This series presents a picture of criminals as being attractive. Men want to be Sonny's friend, and women want to love him. He is the stereotypical ladies man with thick black wavy hair and big brown eyes. He also represents that bruised soul who was mistreated in childhood. Sonny's adult life is about making peace with his painful past. As a child,

he was beaten; he could not protect his mother from his step father Deke. She, too, was abused. Now that Sonny has power, he struggles with the impulse to abuse his power. He says many times that he does not want to be like Deke.

In this chapter I will use semiotic analysis to examine *General Hospital*, a series with many fans across the country. Fiske and Hartley (1978) write that television helps viewers to make sense of the world in which they live. These authors claim that viewers can see how social structures function by watching soap operas (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Social relationships like marriage and friendship are modeled.

Viewers must make sense of the soap opera's elements (Ang, 1991). Viewers must decode the messages and use them to help create and maintain their own social realities (Anderson, 1987). They can adopt the preferred meaning or viewpoint which is probably the most obvious viewpoint (Hall, 1980). In other words, a cowboy in a western would probably be the good guy in the white hat while the rustler in the black hat who skulks around and doesn't make eye contact is probably the bad guy. It is a safe bet that the doctors on *General Hospital* are the good guys. The nurses, most of them at least, are also good guys. A negotiated meaning might be that a nurse is dishonest in romantic relationships; she may be sleeping with two different men at the same time and not telling them what she is doing. Elizabeth Webber ruined her marriage by sleeping with her husband's half brother. When she got pregnant, Elizabeth tried to pass the baby off as her husband's. Many months and several doctored DNA tests later it was revealed that her husband was really the baby's father.

General Discussion of *General Hospital* and Semiotic Analysis

General Hospital is a long running drama on ABC. The wedding between Luke Spencer and Laura Webber took place several months before the wedding of Prince

Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in the early 1980's. Luke and Laura have been television royalty for decades. *General Hospital* recently celebrated 50 years on the air. Heather Webber, who was on the very first episode, has returned to the series in 2012 as an evil character.

This narrative is set in upstate New York. Port Charles is far enough from New York City to offer a slower paced existence. Through its port, legitimate and illegitimate money is made. It is as if any port brings the opportunity for criminality, and a criminal class exists in Port Charles as it does in many real ports on the eastern seacoast.

The docks are also a mainstay in storylines as many characters have been mugged, shot, killed, or thrown off the docks. Yet neophyte girls are always wandering into the docks for one reason or another and then needing to be saved. Sonny, who disguises his nefarious activities by pretending to be a coffee importer, has planted bombs in the warehouses to kill an enemy or an enemy has planted a bomb in Sonny's warehouses in an attempt to kill him. He even wired a car to blow up to kill his father-in-law, a Puerto Rican crime boss, but killed his pregnant wife Lily instead.

Semiotic analysis was chosen because it helps to explain social phenomena in a meaningful way. One can examine the obvious message, which is the denotative or dictionary meaning. Or one can find another meaning in the elements of this series, such as using a negotiated or ideological meaning. Soap operas are fraught with meaning. Mobsters can be good guys or bad guys, doctors can be heroes and/or jerks, and nurses can be killers or angels, et cetera. A mother like Carly Corinthos can represent just one mother who doesn't have time for her children because she is consumed with her sex life. Or one can see her as a symbol for many women her age who let their children raise themselves. On an ideological level, someone from another country might even see

Carly as the typical bad American mother who can't cook anything but frozen pizza, a shrew that cannot hope to keep a man because of her caustic personality. Carly is and has been many things on this show. Heather Webber sold her own baby for money approximately thirty five years ago, and, now that her son is a doctor, she is presented as the proud mother stereotype. Her evil activities, which include murder and baby theft, have made her son very ashamed of her.

Stuart Hall (1980) originated a way to looking at television messages through several viewpoints: dominant, negotiated or oppositional, and ideological. These viewpoints will be used to discover meaning in *General Hospital*. Also, some of the work of Fiske and Hartley (1978) will be taken in account. Fiske and Hartley (1978) have written about using semiotics to analyze television which they say is always presenting an updated version of social relationships, dress, social customs, et cetera. Fiske and Hartley (1978) write that the preferred meaning is usually the viewpoint of the hegemony or power elite. Soap operas are like life in this respect. There is a power class, people with more wealth and power than other characters. What soap operas show us is how these groups are getting along. A preferred meaning would be one that would be supportive of this power elite. But an oppositional meaning would be a viewer seeing this hegemony as bad or evil.

Seiter (1987) writes that the signifier is the physical phenomenon described by the signified or concept it represents. According to Campbell (1995), Barthes (1957/1972) explained denotation as being the first level of signification and the most obvious overt meaning, and the second level of signification is the connotative level. This connotative level is different from the denotative level because it can be opposed or a negotiated viewpoint of the denotative level can be created.

Social life in Port Charles involves many characters, some who work in the medical profession and some who do not. The characters who are not currently employed at the hospital are usually children of doctors and nurses who grew up on the show. The other characters were romantically involved with doctors or nurses in the past, but who have remained in the stable of characters because of great popularity.

Readings of Prominent Families and Major Characters

In this section I will examine the primary families around which most of the activity in this series revolves. I will also discuss primary characters within families, most of whom are beloved by fans for their beauty, romances, or villainous activities. As in other soap operas, characters regularly experience the gamut of emotions as they lead very dramatic lives with incredible plot twists: amnesia, car accidents, brain tumors, cancer, loss of mate who leaves them for another woman, et cetera (Brooks, 1976). Over the years, the main families involved in the storylines have changed. At this point, the most important families include the Quartermaines, the Spencers, the Cassadines, and the Corinthoses.

The Quartermaines are definitely on the side of “the haves.” This family includes Edward, patriarch of the family. The actor who played Edward died of old age in the fall of 2012. Afterward, the series had his character die instead of recasting him. This family is very rich because Edward owned ELQ which was named after Edward and his wife, Edward and Lila Quartermaine. This company is a megaconglomerate, and Edward and his daughter Tracy (who is an older adult) ran it with him; they were always worried about staying on the right side of the Securities and Exchange Commission. A.J. Quartermaine is a black sheep grandson. Another black sheep grandson is Jason Quartermaine Morgan, enforcer for mob kingpin Sonny Corinthos. Monica is a daughter-

in-law to Edward, and another important character is Michael Corinthos, who is Edward's beloved grandson.

Barthes (1957/1972) writes that signs are culture specific, and the social class of the Quartermaines is a sign. According to Fiske and Hartley (1978), the signs associated with television programs have an intersubjectivity. This intersubjectivity means that a sign comes to have a certain meaning because people give the sign a meaning. This process is part of a cultural membership to which all people in a culture belong. All people are familiar with the notion of "the haves" and "the have nots" in society. One could even say that the struggle between these two groups makes up much social warfare on soap operas.

Edward Quartermaine is a symbol for American wealth and greed on a connotative level. He is a man who will not hesitate to use unethical means to make a dollar even though, for the most part, he is a law abiding businessman, which is his denotative meaning. As a symbol, he stands for the Rockefellers, the Carnegies, the Vanderbilts, and whoever exists in the minds of viewers as they imagine the rich and powerful past and present.

Scions of industry have long been the subject of mythology both in America and about America around the world. American businessmen can't be beaten. America is a hot bed that breeds men like Edward Quartermaine. Documentaries on the history channel show early films of the lives of the filthy rich businessmen and their lucky families: the balls, the mansions that look like castles, the endless wealth enjoyed by wealthy Americans before the income tax was levied. Americans take great pride in business success and often overlook the dubious business practices that it takes to attain such fortunes.

General Hospital has a wonderful crew of characters. A.J. Quartermaine is a lazy trust fund baby. His aunt, Tracy, age 65 or older, helped her father run the company until his recent death at an advanced age. She is the classic rich bitch with a sharp tongue. Michael Quartermaine, a great grandson of Edward's, is Sonny Corinthos' adopted son and A.J. Quartermaine's biological son with Carly Corinthos Jax, Sonny's ex-wife. The Corinthos family includes Sonny Corinthos who is the resident crime boss of Port Charles. Sonny is volatile, has fathered children by many different women, and is a good father. He tries to be a good person except for when he is very angry and loses control. Much is made of the character of Sonny Corinthos. Sonny was physically abused in childhood by a cruel police officer step father who also beat his mother. This step dad caused Sonny to have lasting emotional problems, and his horrible childhood is used as an excuse for his becoming a crime boss. In other words, Sonny went from powerlessness to complete power over his life, except for when he is angry. While pretending to be a coffee importer, he runs illegal enterprises and commits murder whenever it is necessary. His evil actions are forgivable. Sonny is doing the best that he can all things considered.

A preferred reading reveals Sonny to be a typical crime boss. Yet a negotiated viewpoint is that Sonny is a success story: the beaten child who survived to adulthood, the poor minority who found a road to success that was accessible to someone from his impoverished background. Sonny is from Bensonhurst, a neighborhood of New York that is known for its population of poor Italian immigrants. The "made men" were the well dressed macho men with hot cars and beautiful girlfriends. Sonny wanted to succeed in the land of the free, and he did so in an unethical manner—by taking the quickest route to the top that was accessible to him. In Marxist fashion, Sonny could see

the top and wanted to be part of it and not a member of the proletariat. He took the fastest journey possible to reach the top. Now he makes the rules. In this way, Sonny also embodies the Horatio Alger myth as much as Edward Quartermaine does. He just started from a different sociodemographic background, but he succeeded on his own terms, too. It is not surprising that Sonny and Edward respect each other even though they don't seem to like one another.

Sonny resents people like Edward Quartermaine and his family. Sonny sees Edward as a representative of the hegemony that has always been against him. According to Hall (1980), the hegemony makes the rules for others to follow. For Sonny, Edward is like the police force that is always out to get him, the world that rejected him for not being good enough or educated enough to succeed legally.

Sonny many times is the heart of the show. He is shown as being a great dad who is always telling his children that there is nothing wrong with his being a mob boss. He explains often that he is just as good a man and father as anyone else. Yet he doesn't want his adopted son Michael to join him in his operation. Sonny, most of the time, is a nice enough person. He also has an extremely bad case of bipolar disorder.

The Cassadines, another leading Port Charles family, were featured more prominently some years back. But this is a family that is descended from Russian royalty, a family with murderous tendencies as well. This family ended up on its own island in Greece. Helena, the matriarch, is a vicious murderer who shot and killed her own daughter to make a point to Luke Spencer, her arch enemy (Episode 2-13-2012). Lawyer Alexis Davis is a Cassadine. A large mansion on Spoon Island outside of Port Charles is the American home of the Cassadine family. Here the Cassadine family is the Old World counterpart to the Quartermaines. In the old world, the filthy rich families

often had royal or noble backgrounds. This is the case with the Cassadines. Instead of power and prestige from earned wealth, like the Vanderbilts and Rockefellers, the Cassadine's social status and riches are passed down as a birthright. So the story of the Cassadines is also one of wealth and privilege. The Cassadine family also has a strong dose of insanity and criminality. Yet Prince Nicholas Cassadine, who has been a heartthrob for years, is a very kind person and a hero.

The Spencer family represents the middle class (Nochimson, 1992). This family, headed by Luke Spencer, can even be described as heroic (Cassata & Skill, 1983). Due to the emotional instability of Luke, this family has been in constant crisis since Luke and Laura married in the early 1980's. Luke, although brave, is a ne'er do well with a beautiful wife who just wants to live a solid middle class existence and raise their kids (Episode 5-4-2012). Luke Spencer is resourceful and uncouth. Luke is anti upper class and an antihero who does not try to succeed by becoming a reputable businessman (Episode 5-4-2012). Instead, he tries to con people like Edward Quartermaine out of their hard earned money.

Luke is a lot like Sonny Corinthos. He is a street wise type of person who represents the success of the under classes. Raised by an aunt who was a madam, Luke and his sister Bobbie worked in a brothel. Bobbie worked as a prostitute. Luke was a bouncer. So Luke is a rather hardened character who is proud of his involvement with Sonny and small time hoods who occasionally play a role on this series. Luke is a small-time con man (Nochimson, 1992). His con man antics have been his major source of financial support, and he has worked con games all over the world. Sometimes Laura went with him; at times Luke took their son Lucky to help him work the con. He doesn't target the good people of Port Charles, however, except for the Quartermaine family.

Luke's desire to beat the upper class involved his marrying Tracy Quartermaine for her money while Laura was in an asylum suffering from a debilitating illness that left her unconscious for years.

On a denotative level or first order of signification, Luke is a father who loves his children but fails to fulfill the traditional role of father. He would be considered to be a bad father by most people. He leaves for long periods of time and lets his wife care for the children on her own. He is also the husband who cannot ever live up to his promise to be faithful to his wife. It is sort of a mystery why someone like Luke became such a hit on a soap opera. He doesn't fit in as the soap opera leading male star who is exceedingly handsome and very loving and supportive.

Ideologically, Luke can be seen as personifying the hippie culture. He symbolizes the culturally gained wisdom of the 1960's social revolution. The smart hippie was considered to be a better version of human because of throwing off the chains of bondage of social expectations and repression. Hippies lived freer lives and did not feel that it was necessary to follow rules and fulfill other people's notions of how they should behave. Perhaps many viewers in the late 1970's and early 1980's, when Luke's popularity reached its zenith, agreed with much of the hippie revolution's tenets. This might explain why someone who is such a bad father and husband is so beloved by soap fans who are mostly women (Nochimson, 1992).

General Hospital shows working class people actually working in Port Charles: nurses, nurses aides, bartenders, police officers, a few waiters, and hotel clerks (Episode 5-4-2012). Also shown working are lawyers. Except for the doctors, nurses, lawyers, and a few police officers, none of these characters shown working plays any type of

meaningful role or has any personality at all. They are just there to present a complete picture of a hotel or a diner.

Some other characters are shown talking about working but not actually working. They are Maxie Jones and Lulu Spencer who talk about working for a fashion magazine, Samantha Morgan and Damien Spinelli who talk about being detectives, et cetera). The people who are wealthy but rarely if ever shown working include: Carly Corinthos Jax who has the money from the settlements of two divorces, Tracy Quartermaine, A.J. Quartermaine, Edward Quartermaine, Johnny Zacchara, and Anthony Zacchara.

Drinking is kept at a minimum except for when Sonny gets very upset because he has not taken his bipolar medication. When this happens, he gets very drunk. During these episodes, Sonny usually is shown raking a whole table of liquor decanters and glasses off a table with one arm and slamming the whole mess as far as he can.

General Hospital is a soap opera that has many interesting characters. Some are wealthy, many others are not. Most are working professionals who are never shown working. The characters' waking hours are consumed with love and social warfare. Most of the characters are females. Many female characters are in constant battles with other female characters for men. Now that this series has been examined from the viewpoint of general discussion, semiotic analysis, and major characters and prominent families, an episode will be analyzed.

Analysis of Episode Broadcast June 7, 2012

A close reading of a single episode of *General Hospital* reveals a variety of meanings. For the sake of the analysis that will follow, here is a transcribed episode that ran June 7, 2012.

This episode begins at the home of Alexis Davis, attorney. Alexis and her family are being besieged by Alexis' daughter Kristina's friends who are filming her life for a reality show called "Mob Princess." Alexis swats at the cameras and cameramen telling them to leave her home, but her daughter reminds her about the consent form Alexis and Kristina's father, Sonny Corinthos, signed to allow the filming. Kristina reminds her mother that, if they don't let the show be filmed capturing the family's most private moments, she will cut them out of her life completely and leave town for good.

Cut to Matt, brain surgeon, leaving his wedding ring on the bed by his sleeping wife Maxie and leaving the bedroom.

Cut to Olivia showing Heather's picture to the bartender and asking if she was there the night before.

Cut to Heather thanking Dante in police station for helping her son Steven Lars when he was arrested for murder. She tells him she is looking for Luke Spencer.

Cut to McBain calling the hospital from his hotel room. He asks about Sam and finds out that she lost the baby.

Cut to Sam in the hospital, holding a baby and smiling.

Cut to Tea Delgado in a hospital bed. She asks Todd to bring her baby to her. He tells her he can't do that. He tells her that baby is dead.

Cut back to Sam holding a baby.

Cut to Tea and Todd. Tea says her baby is in the nursery. He tells her the truth, that her baby is dead. She won't believe him. She is distraught. She says she hates Todd for killing her husband and her baby. Todd awakes from this dream sequence.

Sam wakes up and says that she was holding her baby in her dreams. Jason tells her she lost the baby.

Cut to Kristina and Alexis at home. Alexis tells the camera man to get the camera out of her face. Kristina says that she is angry because her mob father helped her get into Yale when she did not have good enough credentials to get in. She wants their family life filmed.

Cut to Sam and Jason in the hospital. Sam says it seemed so real when she was holding her baby in her dream. She says that John McBain was supposed to take her and the baby to the hospital.

Cut to McBain and Anna in his hotel room. He winces in pain. Anna notices and asks if he was beaten up. He replies with a shrug. He tells Anna Sam lost her baby right there in his room. McBain says that he pitched in and tried to deliver the baby because there was no time to get to the hospital. Also, the storm had knocked out cell phone coverage so he could not call for help. McBain appears to be very sad. Anna is sympathetic; he is worried about Sam. He says the baby was okay and healthy when it was born.

Cut to Jason in the room with Sam remembering seeing McBain the night before when he went looking for his wife Sam. He recalls encountering McBain at the hotel. McBain knows it was Jason's henchmen who beat him up and prevented him from going for help the night before right after Sam had her baby.

Jason says he has to tell Sam something, but his cell phone rings. It is Sam's mother Alexis.

Cut to Alexis being followed by the camera. Alexis tells Jason she will be right there and ends the call.

Kristina asks her mother who got arrested and if they caught her dad doing something illegal. Alexis tells both of her daughters that Sam, another daughter, lost the baby.

Molly shrieks, and Kristina tells the cameramen to stop filming.

Cut to Tea Delgado holding Sam's baby. Todd, the baby thief, is with her. Dr. Steven Lars walks into room. He says the baby's blood work shows a condition that may need further attention.

Cut to Dante and Heather at the police station. Heather tells Dante she is a close friend of Luke's. She mentions that no one has found the dead body of Anthony Zacchara. She tells Dante to let Luke out of jail; he did not kill Anthony.

Cut to Olivia and the bartender talking. He looks at the picture she shows him and says Heather was not in the bar the night before. Olivia approaches a drunk the bartender says did not make it home the night before and who slept in the bar.

The drunk is Spinelli. She sits down beside him. He has a hangover. "Is it tomorrow yet or is it yesterday still?" Spinelli asks. He says he is drowning his broken heart because Maxie married someone else.

Cut to Maxie waking up and finding Matt's wedding ring on the bed and a note and some flowers on the night stand by the bed.

Cut to Dante and Heather at the police station. Matt walks up and says he wants to talk to Dante, and Heather gets angry and tells Matt to take a number and wait in line for his turn to speak to Dante.

Cut to Maxie reading the note Matt left for her.

Cut to Dante telling Heather she can't see Luke. She says he should release Luke because they both know he is no killer. Matt interrupts their conversation and says he is there to confess to the murder of Lisa Niles. Dante seems surprised.

Cut to Olivia talking with Spinelli; he doesn't remember Heather being there the night before. Olivia says alright, and Spinelli says that Mac Scorpio and Felicia were there.

Olivia says that Heather took her car and went somewhere. She thought Heather was going to a bar. Olivia says she can't imagine where else Heather might have gone.

Cut to Dr. Steven Lars, Tea, and Todd discussing the baby's possible blood condition.

Cut to Kristina, Alexis, and Molly crying and talking about the death of the baby.

Kristina yells at the cameraman to turn off the camera. He refuses, and she yells at him until he turns the camera off.

Cut to Sam in the hospital room telling Jason she is not sure if she wants to see her mother and sisters yet. Sam says nothing will make her feel better.

Cut to McBain and Anna in McBain's hotel room. He tells her that Sam must have tried to make it to the hospital on her own. Anna asks him if Sonny's people beat him up. He says they weren't Sonny's men.

Cut to Jason and Sam in the hospital. He says that he could love the baby, had it lived, even though it was not his. He lets her know that he and Carly talked about the situation, and he thinks Carly helped him come to terms with everything. Sam gets very angry and says she doesn't want to hear a transcript of Jason's conversation with Carly, his best friend, and the one who knows him better than anyone else in the world.

Cut to Dr. Steven Lars telling Tea and Todd that the baby has Mediterranean anemia.

Cut to Sam and Jason. Sam says that she doesn't want to hear him defend Carly.

Alexis, Kristina, and Molly, Sam's mom and sisters, arrive. They hug her, and she begins to tell the story of the night before when she had the baby in the hotel.

Cut to Tea, Todd, and Dr. Steven Lars in Tea's hospital room. Tea says she is Puerto Rican, but the doctor says she could still have a baby with a blood disorder; it just wouldn't be as common. He says that he can do the genetic tests and find out for sure if

the baby does have this blood disorder. Todd says no. He doesn't want the baby to get the test there. He wants them to go home and get the test there.

Cut to Olivia and Spinelli in the bar. Olivia tells Spinelli that she doesn't trust Heather and that she believes Heather is up to something. Olivia tells him that Heather told her and Steven Lars that she was going to the bar to have a drink and then disappeared for awhile. She thinks Heather had something to do with another murder. Heather walks up to them.

Cut to Dante and Matt at the police station. Matt confesses to killing Lisa Niles again. Matt and Dante are joined by Maxie. Dante says he is going to file the proper paperwork and leaves.

Maxie and Matt talk. He says he remembers what happened. He keeps seeing the murder over and over in his mind. He remembers "cracking Lisa over the head" with a wrench. Matt says this violates his Hippocratic Oath as a brain surgeon. As long as they are married she doesn't have to testify against him she says. She wants him to put his wedding ring back on and leave with her like nothing ever happened.

Cut to Heather, Olivia, and Spinelli at a booth in the bar. Heather asks them what they were talking about when she walked up. They say just some movie about an axe murderer.

Heather says she was indeed there the night before.

Cut to Dr. Steven Lars, Tea, and Todd. Tea tells Todd to back off. She says that the baby's care is none of his business. He says he has a plane at the airport ready to take them home. Dr. Lars says there is no rush on the blood work. Todd says he is going to get a car and leaves the room.

Sam, Alexis, Molly, and Kristina talk. Sam tells them about her water breaking at the hotel. She expresses her frustration that the cell phone service was out. She tells them that John McBain was great and that he delivered the baby. Jason leaves the room.

Alexis asks why McBain did not take her to the hospital; she says McBain went to get the car and never returned.

Cut to Anna and McBain. Anna asks if Jason admitted that his men roughed McBain up when they saw each other the night before. McBain says he feels guilty for getting between Sam and her husband Jason when she was about to have the baby. He says that if Sam had been with her husband, she might have a live baby. Anna takes him to the hospital to get his ribs examined.

Jason tells a woman at hospital bringing Sam's lunch tray that Sam's mother and sisters are in the room visiting with her. The woman walks away and leaves the tray in the hall. Sam wants to know why her baby died. Todd Manning stands outside Sam's hospital room and tries to listen in on the conversation Sam is having with her family.

Alexis walks out of the room and asks Todd why he is standing around outside her daughter's room.

Cut to Matt and Maxie at the police station. Matt says he belongs in prison. She says she loves him.

Cut to Heather, Spinelli, and Olivia in the bar. They discuss whether she was there the night before. Heather says she is leaving to meet with Steven Lars her son at hospital. She leaves. Olivia tells Spinelli that Heather is hiding something.

Cut to Todd and Alexis outside Sam's room eyeing each other. Todd says he was just tripping over the food cart and walks away.

Cut to inside of Sam's hospital room. Molly and Sam say their good byes and Molly leaves. Kristina offers to get Sam something from the gift shop. Sam says she does not need anything and that she is happy Kristina is home from college. Kristina leaves. Jason meets Alexis outside of Sam's hospital room. He tells Alexis he is sorry about the baby. She is angry at Jason and says if he had been compassionate enough with her daughter she would have been with him the night before and made it to the hospital instead of delivering in a hotel and losing the baby.

Cut to Dante, Maxie, and Matt. Matt tells Dante he is ready to give his statement.

Cut to Olivia and Spinelli. They agree to keep secret about spying on Heather.

Heather walks up behind Todd.

Cut to Alexis and Jason. She tells him she knows that he did not want the baby and blames him for not being more loving toward Sam.

Cut to Heather and Todd. She says they need to have a little chat.

Tea is driven by Sam's room in a wheelchair. She realizes that she forgot a pamphlet in her hospital room. The nurse goes to get it and parks Tea right outside of Sam's hospital room. Sam walks out of her room and sees the baby that is actually the one she gave birth to the night before. Sam has a confused look on her face. Tea does not look at her. End of the Episode

This episode will be further examined after a discussion of camera technique observed in this episode.

Camera Technique in *General Hospital*

Camera technique in *General Hospital* stayed within the findings of Timberg (1981). This researcher found that soap operas use certain types of shots over and over and certain sequences of shots repeatedly. Soap opera style of camera technique is

different from the style of shooting reality shows, prime time dramas, news programs, and documentaries. The heart of a soap opera is the passion and emotion of the characters. Facts are much less important than the emotion portrayed by characters of a soap opera, such as *General Hospital*. So, as reported by Timberg (1981), what was observed was “slow truckings of the camera, and slow elegiac movements into and out of the action, this close-up camera style has the effect of bringing the viewer close and closer to the hidden emotional secrets soap opera explores: stylized expression of pity, jealousy, rage, self-doubt (p. 135).

When there was not much emotion involved in a scene, there were more medium shots. But when there was a confrontation, whether it be love or anger, the camera would slowly zoom in on a face, or, more likely, move closer and closer to the characters with each back and forth volley of shooting the conversation. The character with the most emotion was usually the one who got the close up right before the scene ended. This person was usually a beautiful woman.

Narrative Analysis of Episode Broadcast June 7, 2012

The narrative analysis of *General Hospital* is done using a methodology of a study of *Hill Street Blues* as a narrative by Caren J. Deming (1985). Deming (1985) finds that *Hill Street Blues* was a melodrama.

Deming (1985) used ideas of Chatman’s (1978) as a model, which she altered to suit her study. The result was five concepts that were used to examine *Hill Street Blues*: a real author, an implied author, the discourse, a real audience, and an implied audience. These terms were defined in chapter four.

Deming (1985) explains that the implied author can be seen as the camera eye that reveals media content as the story unwinds. Deming (1985) also explains that the

discourse includes characters, setting, dialogue, and events. The events unfold sequentially to tell the story. Visual information and sound are included in the concept of discourse (Deming 1985). The real author is the production team: writers, producers, cinematographers, et cetera whose efforts create the series (Deming, 1985). The real audience is the actual audience while the implied audience is the fantasy audience in the minds of the real authors (Deming, 1985). This is because it is impossible to actually know for sure who will populate the actual audience. The real author tells the story, and the real audience consumes the story (Deming 1985).

Deming (1985) further explains that the real audience reconstructs and interprets the narrative by comparing them to cultural codes and life experiences. There are eight main characters and as many minor characters. Alexis Davis is a main character and her two daughters Kristina and Molly are minor characters while her oldest daughter Sam is a major character. Sam is one of those children given up for adoption at birth who showed up as an adult, looking for her birth mother. Sam lost no time in sleeping with her mother's husband.

There are six main storylines in the episode chosen for analysis. Two of them, numbers 5 and 6, merge together at the very end of the episode as the paths of Sam and Tea cross. Tea is holding the baby that she believes to be hers, and Sam is watching Tea holding the newborn and being wheeled away in a wheelchair to an awaiting car.

1. Storyline with Alexis Davis and her two daughters, first battling against the videographers, and then visiting with her daughter Sam at the hospital
2. Olivia looking for Heather in a bar
3. Matt, Maxie, and Dante at the police station where Matt confesses to murder
4. McBain and Police Commissioner Anna Devane in McBain's hotel room

5. Todd Manning and Tea Delgado in a hospital room with Tea holding a newborn
6. Sam and Jason discussing their relationship in the hospital room where she is recovering from losing her baby

All storylines are equally important. No character is more important than the others.

These stories occur simultaneously, and the time duration is about 40 minutes in the day of the viewer and characters. This is typical of soap operas (Deming, 1985).

Deming (1985) explains that *Hill Street Blues* was a melodrama without fixed endings to its storylines. This makes the series *Hill Street Blues* like soap operas.

Porter (1979) writes that all soap operas present a picture of the American Dream. Deming (1985) declares that melodramas are really about restoring order from chaos. She found that chaos or disorder can be seen in melodrama occurring on “three interactive levels: the societal level ...on the interpersonal level ...and on the personal level” (p. 6). Crime, violence, and political corruption are societal level disorders. Evil behavior keeps society from functioning properly. With interpersonal disorder, the success of the group is sabotaged because evil undermines the goals of the group. Personal level disorder is insanity, the inability to cope with stress and surroundings, and the destruction of selfhood.

For the *Hill Street Blues* characters, the battle between good and evil is on the streets of the city, the war between the police force and criminals. For *General Hospital* the battle between the police force and the citizens of Port Charles is very real. In this sample episode, the true evil resides in Todd Manning, baby thief, liar, murderer, and all around criminal. Todd Manning has killed his twin brother and his mother.

On *General Hospital* the criminally manifested evil is not spread around among characters but put into the persona of several individuals who are supremely vicious, like Franco, Helena, Heather, and Todd. Some people would include Sonny Corinthos and his mob enforcer Jason Morgan in this group. The other characters are more or less pawns of these wicked individuals. They are the “good” people, so to speak.

On the interpersonal level, there is great dysfunction. Alexis and her daughters are in continual battle, especially Kristina who uses the threat to disown her parents if she does not always get her way. Her father is Sonny Corinthos.

In the other storylines, practically no husband and wife get along well. Most of them are in constant battle over who is going to run the relationship. Infidelity threatens the happiness of all couples. Lingering anger at finding out about misdeeds that were kept secret is always an issue. Keeping secrets that are almost always revealed in a terrible way undermines interpersonal relationships on *General Hospital*.

Sam and Jason cannot continue as man and wife because he sent his goons to beat up the one person who was trying to get his pregnant wife to the hospital. He personifies evil to Sam. Also, he did not want the baby because it was the product of rape. Jealousy, rage, weakness, and stupidity all cause trouble for characters on an interpersonal level. Disintegration of the personality and conversion to pure evil can be seen in this episode in the characters of Todd Manning and Heather Webber. They both claim to be insane yet hide their dysfunction from others most of the time.

Deming (1985) claims that characters on *Hill Street Blues* are motivated by the desire to be good (p. 6). On *General Hospital* characters who are motivated by the desire to be good people are limited to the police officers and the police commissioner. The doctors and the nurses try to be good only when they are on duty. For example, Elizabeth

Webber, while a very good nurse and very moral on the job, has no trouble sleeping with her husband's brother. This causes a split in the personality between the working self and the private self. It is as if this soap opera is saying that the only time you need to be a good person is when you are at work.

Deming (1985) also claims that the fictional world of the series *Hill Street Blues* seems chaotic; the same can be said of soap operas like *General Hospital*. Only an expert decoder who knows the customs and culture of soap operas could make sense of them (Hall 1980). Soap opera viewers have to be expert decoders. Each soap opera world has different social norms and culture. *General Hospital* is no exception.

The characteristic of having to discuss good and evil and the "moral import of events explicitly" is a characteristic of melodrama according to Deming (1985, pp. 8-9). Time is part of the discourse; for Deming (1985) part of the style of a series is how the viewer is allowed to see the chronological events. In other words, a sense of chronology is accomplished "by revealing story events as they are discovered by the characters. This common storytelling convention provides chronology derived from a psychological focus" (Deming, 1985, p. 9). As one story is reaching critical mass another is playing down on *General Hospital*. There are always two or three really strong storylines and several that are moving along more slowly. The writers make sure that storylines are built up for long periods of time before major events take place. This builds suspense. These storylines take turns and sometimes, they disappear from the soap opera entirely only to emerge again a year or two or even five years later. This is something the heavy viewer loves because he or she can remember what happened five years ago and to whom.

Deming (1985) claims that open texts require more of the viewer to fill in the blanks. Certainly soap fans are experts at that. The real audience is the demographic of 18-49 years old. Soap operas, like other series, go for the younger audiences who have the most purchasing power and are buying more products to support bigger households. Also, older viewers are seen as being too brand loyal to be persuaded to switch brands.

Deming (1985) claims the purpose of *Hill Street Blues* was to restore “moral order out of chaos”; the purpose of *General Hospital* is to reveal or to elucidate the lives of small town people who are somehow connected to the hospital. This series’ purpose is to show doctors and nurses in their leisure time making a mess of their lives. This daytime drama is about bringing the mighty down. Age, illness and death are the great levelers of the playing field. Both of these situations of life are fodder for tales from *General Hospital*.

Deming’s (1985) methodology reveals a lot about *General Hospital*. *General Hospital* is a chaotic place to live. Values are reversed in that sometimes very evil people are presented as good. Sonny Corinthos is an example of this. He is one of the good guys according to the preferred view. Law and order are important in Port Charles because a lot of crime goes on. Sonny is at the top of the ladder, so he is never punished. Only once, years and years ago, Sonny went to the prison in Pentonville for a short time. A female counterpart might be Carly Corinthos Jax who bed hopped to get a fortune in divorce settlements. Evil is personified by just a few characters: Todd Manning, Heather Webber, Franco Robert. The other characters are portrayed as being good and “part of the group”.

On the interpersonal level, characters are constantly fighting. No marriage is safe from the destructive power of lust. If the goal of *Hill Street Blues* was to restore order

out of chaos, then the goal of *General Hospital* is to show people making their own sense of the chaos they cannot rid themselves of. Chaos in *Hill Street Blues* originated on the streets with criminal acts. Chaos on *General Hospital* originates on the personal level and spreads to the interpersonal level, which spoils the success of groups and marriages, to the societal level where organizations like the police force can never apprehend criminals like Sonny Corinthos. Frustrated with their ineffectiveness, the powers that be just become his friends. Then they hide the fact that they are really friends.

Themes

There are many themes on *General Hospital*. Law and order is important as the characters experience a high level of violence in their community. The medical profession is profiled. Viewers see heroic doctors doing surgery and saving almost all of their patients. Sometimes a patient does die. The nurses are always gossiping or squabbling at the nurses' station. Family loyalty is important as is loyalty to one's social group. This series has a group of lost young people in their twenties who are still trying to find themselves and their paths in life. They talk about this quite often and don't reach any conclusions. An example of this would be Lulu Spencer Falconeri, Luke Spencer's daughter. She had worked for a fashion magazine, then got married, and then felt lost again, like she had not found her place in life. So she decided to get a job working at the police station because her husband was a police officer. She found that she was not suited for that type of work. This group is very interesting; only Lulu and Dante Falconeri are married. The other characters in this group are single and searching for a lasting meaningful romantic relationship.

Law and order will be the first theme discussed. This soap opera has several prominent themes. One is law and order. Policemen and criminals are important

elements of the plot. And it is blue collar crime (Episode 4-20-2012; Episode 4-22-2012; Episode 5-21-2012; Episode 5-22-2012; Episode 6-1-2012; Episode 6-15-2012; Episode 6-21-2012; Episode 6-25-2012; Episode 1-28-2013). The police commissioner is a very important person in Port Charles as there are always many crimes to solve, from theft to murder, especially on the water front where Sonny's illegal shipments come in.

Port Charles' police force has the relatively new addition of Sonny's illegitimate son Detective Dante Falconeri. Dante was conceived in Sonny's youth, and he never knew he had this son. Detective Falconeri tries to enforce the rules while trying to get to know his father. In many story scenarios other police officers question Dante's honesty in his approach to his job. It is very apparent that, where Dante's father Sonny is concerned, he often looks the other way.

Other important police characters include Ronny Dimestico, Anna Devane, and Mac Scorpio (Episode 5-4-2012; Episode 7-5-2012). Up until his firing a few months ago, Mac Scorpio had been police commissioner of Port Charles for over a decade. Anna Devane is now police commissioner.

On a denotative level, the police force is fulfilling the role of maintaining law and order. They also represent the hegemonic views of the white males in society that violence among the populace will not be tolerated. Only state sanctioned violence is acceptable, police force action or the death penalty. On a connotative level, violence is a symbol for disruption and chaos which is to be feared. Especially apprehensible is violence for personal financial gain.

Ideologically, the police force is also seen as a heroic band of brothers who defend the weak and protect the helpless. Policemen and police women lay their lives down for one another in the real world, and this is true in *General Hospital* as well.

Many times in this series, the police force comes to the rescue in true Western film style. The bad guys are about to kill the main characters, and the police force, even nameless characters who are policemen, appear out of nowhere to defend the main characters and prevent their certain deaths.

Secondly, the medical profession is neatly profiled. Many doctors have paraded across the stage in this melodrama. Now the doctor at the center of most of the hospital drama in this series is Patrick Drake, a brain surgeon. It isn't just the doctors who are profiled but the nurses and their lives at work. They are shown working, flirting, and waging war on each other (Episode 4-30-2012; Episode 5-10-2012; Episode 5-11-2012; Episode 6-18-2012; Episode 6-20-2012; Episode 6-29-2012; Episode 7-20-2012; Episode 8-15-2012; Episode 8-17-2012; Episode 8-23-2012; Episode 9-6-2012; Episode 9-13-2012). The warfare between doctors and nurses is usually among the females who are competing to be the love interest of a doctor. So a theme of *General Hospital* would be that it sheds a spotlight on the medical profession and the organizational culture of a hospital.

Doctors are medical professionals who work to live up to their Hippocratic Oath. Denotatively, they have many different specialties and skill levels. Some doctors are better physicians than are others. This is true on *General Hospital*. Being the best doctor in your specialty is very important on *General Hospital*. Much is made of Patrick Drake being the best brain surgeon at the hospital. So, by focusing on Patrick's gift at surgery, this program is also establishing the fact that some doctors are the opposite of Patrick, not so good. There are doctors who are probably the worst at their specialty who are also working at the hospital.

Nurses are shown to be squabbling busy bodies on a denotative level. They are never at peace as they share their innermost secrets with one another and tattle on each other. On the connotative or negotiated level, nurses are sometimes angels, seductresses, or even villains. Doctors are sometimes diabolical and undisciplined. The wide range of characters in the medical field on *General Hospital* is educational; this series probably presents a fairly accurate picture of the types of people you would encounter if you were very sick and went to the hospital for help. However, on an ideological level, the medical profession is often whitewashed as being heroic and even noble. Doctors on television can generally be said to be wonderful heroes who battle horrific almost invisible villains, germs and viruses, for the good of mankind. Doctors in the real world and known to sacrifice the comforts of rest and family life, even their love lives, for the benefit of science and mankind. The same can be said for *General Hospital's* medical professionals except that they don't neglect their love lives. They are mythological heroes who battle biological enemies with their specialized knowledge and the scientific skills that only they possess.

Family loyalty is the third theme to be examined. Although Luke Spencer often criticizes his niece Carly he is always there to help her when she needs him. Luke is also very supportive of his children, Lulu and Lucky, and even Ethan, an illegitimate son he met just a few years ago. By supportive, this researcher means that, when Luke is in town, he treats his children well and encourages them to live happy and healthy lives. Luke also visited his wife in a mental hospital for years while she was in treatment. Luke's children are also supportive of him. (Episode 5-4-2012; Episode 7-19-2012). Lulu and Lucky seem to love their father even though he was absent a good deal of their childhoods.

Edward Quartermaine was always emotionally and financially supportive of all of his children and their progeny, from his children by Lila Quartermaine, Tracy and Alan, to his children by mistress Mary Mae Ward and her children and grandchildren. Sonny's devotion to his children is a very important example of family loyalty (Episode 5-8-2012; Episode 5-9-2012; Episode 5-10-2012). Sonny loves, supports, and protects Michael Quartermaine Corinthos, Kristina Corinthos Davis, and Morgan Corinthos (Episode 5-25-2012; Episode 5-29-2012). Both Michael and Kristina are important characters. Sonny also loves and protects Dante Falconeri, his first born child by Olivia Falconeri.

Patrick Drake and his brother Matthew Drake, who is now in prison, are both brain surgeons and sons of a prominent brain surgeon Noah Drake. Noah Drake became a drunk and lost his reputation after his wife died. Half brothers Patrick and Matthew are very close (Episode 4-2-2012).

Edward Quartermaine, leader of the Quartermaine family, was CEO of his company ELQ for decades. He and his daughter, Tracy, worked at ELQ together, and she has tried to maintain his legacy (Episode 9-11-2012). Although the cherished actor, John Ingle passed away in early fall of 2012, the storyline about Edward included his death and funeral in the fall of 2012 (Episode 11-12-2010). Instead of recasting the part when actor John Ingle died, the producers allowed the character to die, also.

So family is represented as being extremely important and second only to sexual gratification on *General Hospital*. This is probably a good reflection of the hegemonic view of family in American society. This view is very traditional. Many viewers may read this family love fest differently and take a negotiated view. Such viewers may see the American family as a cesspool of festering anger, hatred, and selfishness.

The oppositional view might be that the families represented on the show are too 1950's for them. Do the families on *General Hospital* seem different from the families on 1950's television, programs like *Father Knows Best* and *My Three Sons*? Morley (1992) writes that a wide range of interpretations is possible.

These viewers would not see the families on *General Hospital* as really being loving toward one another. If one were to take an oppositional view, they might say that the whole family thing on this show is disingenuous and unreal (Hall, 1980). They might see Luke's absence in his children's lives as just what the kids deserved, demanding little brats. After all, he never really wanted to be a married man with kids hanging onto him. The day of his wedding Luke said he wasn't sure if he wanted to go through with it. He just didn't know if marriage for right for him. The oppositional viewpoint could always be that Kristina is a hateful person who reveals the fragility of family relationships on *General Hospital*, and that relationships can be broken at any time, such as when Kristina doesn't get what she wants from her parents.

On an ideological level, the American family is being deified when siblings support one another and their parents act in a loving manner toward each other and the children. But that is in accordance with how family is still seen in certain conservative circles. A negotiated viewpoint would be one that accepted some of the picture of the traditional family but refused to accept other parts of it. Such a negotiated viewpoint might see the parents needing to be loyal to each other and their kids but not expect children to be loyal to their parents.

Finally, lost young people looking for their way in life is the fourth theme. *General Hospital* has a group of young people in their 20's who are struggling to find their way in life. Lulu Spencer married Dante Falconeri only to question whether

marriage was the right path for her. Maxie Jones is another young character who has never found a permanent job or love; she seems aimless as she tries to discover her purpose in life. Damien Spinelli, computer geek and genius, loves Maxie even though she can never reciprocate because she finds him physically unappealing. Damien Spinelli waits around to catch Maxie on the rebound, the only instance in which she has any time for him as a lover. Damien is someone she tolerates and uses but does not love.

Damien can be defined on the denotative level as millennial creation, his mind filled with facts and computations like a computer. He is the quintessential computer geek and one of the most symbolic of all characters on *General Hospital*. He is fractured or splintered—the data all scattered around in his brain in such a way that makes it hard for him to form his words when he talks to another person. His tongue gets tied and twisted around, and he sputters absurdities as he tries to get his message across. His brain is a mish mosh of disjointed facts and ideas and no emotion. Other characters find him odd and often talk about him in his presence, something he has learned to ignore. His social skills are deplorable. Spinelli seems to be terrified of social interaction when he tries to communicate to someone face-to-face.

On a connotative level, Damien represents the coldness and emotional distance that is brought on by living in such a highly technological world. In the background of everyone's life is the constant whirring of computers which are purring along supporting his or her existence. Human beings are reduced to numbers, and these numbers are crunched at ever increasing speeds. All of this is done without any emotion whatsoever, yet human beings are creatures of emotion. The more computerized the world becomes, the more divorced from key emotions people will become until they are like emoticons, emoting little and on cue.

Damien's communication has suffered the most. Damien's second greatest handicap is that he cannot understand other people very well and allows himself to be used by others. Ellie Trout is Damien's girl friend. She works at the hospital lab in an emotionally unfulfilling job. Thanks to being surrounded by test tubes and dead tissue, her personality has taken on some of the characteristics of formaldehyde. She has trouble even conjuring up normal emotion in her relationship with Damien, but that is alright with him. He is used to dealing with computers. He can live with the blanks in their relationship fairly well.

Sabrina Santiago is another lost young person, a nurse in training. Her life is just one long string of crushes on older men who are not interested in her. She literally fills her days with romantic musings and silly conversations with co workers who are all aware that she won't catch her man.

Giving birth to three children hasn't helped Elizabeth Webber, a nurse on the series, find a satisfying life. She puts all of her energy into work and motherhood and never can experience a relationship that endures. Sabrina and Elizabeth deal with the void that unmarried women can still fall into, that of the unattached. Without a man at home, they are constantly searching, and their behaviors become self defeating because they seem so needy.

All of these characters have a kind of collective lost identity or lost voice which may actually be reflective of twenty somethings in the real world. But this lostness is an overwhelming dominant character trait. This void is their denotative interpretation. Two older characters who also have this dominant trait are Carly Corinthos Jax and Johnny Zacchara, both in their late 30's or early 40's. This makes these two older characters seem juvenile or younger emotionally than perhaps they should be.

An ideological reading about the danger of technology reminds one of technological determinism. There was fear even in the days of the telegraph that it would lead to teen pregnancy and societal doom. The same fear was espoused about film and radio. But perhaps no other instrument created by man has had as much impact on human life as computers. With texting and Twitter and soon facial recognition, human life will continue to change.

Law and order, the medical profession, and the lost twenty year olds are all important themes on *General Hospital*. Around these concepts storylines are born that ensnare viewers. Lawlessness is rampant and ignored. People survive by not getting in the way when people are shooting at each other and by keeping their mouths shut. Because Sonny Corinthos gives money to build new wings to the hospital he is accepted much like the local banker or successful car dealer. When his daughter could not get into Yale, Sonny pulled some strings and got her accepted. He is a very powerful man and is treated as such.

The twenty to thirty year olds make love and war and are still trying to find themselves. Most of these characters are female. There are too many choices for them in life. They could go anywhere and be anything. Sometimes a character takes a college class, but no one is getting degrees. Characters take a few college courses but never commit to any degree. They are never shown going to college, they just mention having to go to class. Kristina was going to Yale, but she dropped out when she found out that her father got her admitted. She came home to torment her family with the “Mob Princess” reality series. She forced her parents to agree to the filming by threatening to leave town and cut them out of her life forever. What kind of family love is that? Kristina is not loyal to her parents; loyalty and the lack of loyalty is another theme.

Older Adult Characters

In this section, I will discuss older adult characters and their contributions to this soap opera. These characters include Edward Quartermaine, his daughter Tracy Quartermaine, Monica Quartermaine, the mob boss Anthony Zacchara, and Helena Cassadine. All of these older adults are parents of grown children. Most of these characters have been on *General Hospital* for decades. All of these characters are wealthy and powerful, even the women. They would all be considered to be part of the hegemony of Port Charles society except for Anthony Zacchara, a crime boss from another area who was trying to move in on Sonny Corinthos' territory.

The first character to consider is Edward Quartermaine. He was a happy man who always loved his family and tried to mold every grandson into his successor even though none of them wanted to work at his company. His death left a big hole in the series. The actor John Ingle was much loved by the other actors and the fans, and his portrayal of Edward will be greatly missed by all. The denotative, connotative, and mythological interpretations of Edward have already been examined. He is just listed here because he was an older adult character.

Tracy, another older character, is the totally unhappy daughter of Edward Quartermaine. She is never shown being contented or satisfied. Tracy is negative, skeptical, and depressed. Her dialogue is critical and hateful, and her conversation always confrontational.

On the denotative level, Tracy is the quintessential rich bitch. She spars with everyone and gets along with no one. She is basically an old harpie character in her late 60's to early 70's. Her contribution to the show is storylines about her marrying

mobsters and laundering dirty money through her dad's company without him knowing about it at the time.

Tracy is someone who is used to being disliked, someone whose nasty disposition has cost her inclusion in most of life's informal groups. Yet she doesn't seem to care as long as the booze holds out. The one relationship that Tracy has cared about in past years, other than her relationship with her father, is her relationship with Luke Spencer. Although she loved Luke passionately at first, his deceitful cons and manipulations for the purpose of stealing her money ruined their relationship. He married her for her money and then fell in love with her. Their relationship ended because she could not forgive him for always finding a way to get money out of her and disappearing for long periods of time. In the end, she did not even believe that he had ever had any feeling for her. With Luke, she was sweet and not the caustic person she normally was with everyone else.

On the connotative level, Tracy represents the unhappiness that wealth can't fix. She is dysfunctional, and it seems that money may have caused some of her problems. She is also an older woman without a man. As Edward's daughter, she has enormous influence and money. She misuses her financial and social power.

Angry rich bitches are as mythical as scions of industry in American society. Television shows like *Housewives of Atlanta* and the other shows of this type celebrate the unhappiness of rich women, and the older the woman, the greater the unhappiness, usually.

Monica Quartermaine, Edward's daughter-in-law, is always at war with Tracy although they live together in the Quartermaine mansion. Their in-fighting has always been a major tradition in the Quartermaine family. Monica is a heart surgeon and

sometimes Chief of Staff of General Hospital. She plays a very small role in the series today.

Monica is a physician on a preferred level and a mother and grandmother. On an ideological level, she is the older professional woman who throws herself into her work more and more as she ages. Monica has always been more successful as a doctor than she was as a wife or mother.

Anthony Zacchara is an elderly crime boss who threatens to kill his grandson in almost every episode in which they are both featured. On a denotative level, Anthony is old school Italian Mafioso about seventy years of age; he lacks the soft edges that Sonny has. Sonny is a warm soft loving crime boss compared to Anthony who is the cement shoes type of mob boss. The only thing that Anthony loves is his plants.

Anthony Zacchara is lethal and vicious. His antics as he plays at being an old codger remind one of some of the real crime figures of the twentieth century. He dies while trying to kill his own son; Johnny has to kill his own father in order to survive. Anthony returns after his death as his own ghost to needle his son about killing him.

Helena Cassadine is the most evil person to ever appear on *General Hospital*. Although the actress who plays Helena is quite elderly and appears to be very frail, Helena still returns to wage war with Luke Spencer, a battle that started decades ago. Helena has imprisoned Luke many times. He has always outwitted Helena and escaped from her evil clutches. This villain even killed her own daughter that she despised in front of Luke.

On a preferred level, Helena is a Russian noblewoman. She is wealthy, elitist, snobbish, and cruel. She enjoys telling other people how worthless they are. Luke and Laura represent the poor and wretched masses for those in Helena's class.

On an ideological level, Helena represents old money and the old order in Europe. The order Helena represents predates World War I, when the Russian royal family fell. As she creates mayhem, she seems afraid of those not in her social class. She is well aware that she represents only a small number of families around the world who have great wealth.

Older adult characters contribute to the series by forming the backbone of society. Their children are reflections of their values. Monica and others her age built General Hospital. This hospital is supposed to be a great place to go. The older adults on this show seem to be united in their perception of right and wrong. They aren't Sonny's Corinthos' friends. Edward, Tracy, and Monica despise Sonny Corinthos and his type. Anthony doesn't like him because Sonny has territory he wants. Helena doesn't seem to care much about Sonny since she is richer and more criminally insane than anyone else on the show.

However, even though the older Quartermaines are for sobriety, Monica has had a drinking problem as has her son A.J. The older adult characters seem to have more common sense than the younger characters. The values of the older adult Quartermaines are more in sync with mainstream traditional American values than are the values of other groups. This must be a draw for the viewers. Even though their kids are a mess, they keep trying to live life to the fullest and make the best of everything.

This series shows small town life in upstate New York. Many of the young characters are very hip; their vapidness seems to be a reflection on people in their twenties. I argue that age is a focus as the young people are struggling to find their passion, and the older adults are trying to maintain the status quo. The older characters

counsel the younger ones and try to help them. That is not very different from real life. Characters on this soap opera can be seen as caring in this respect.

Discussion

This chapter examined the series *General Hospital* for meanings. Prominent families and major characters on *General Hospital* have been discussed and analyzed semiotically. This soap opera has many interesting characters to entice viewers. Luke and Laura Spencer have contributed greatly to the popularity of *General Hospital*. So has Sonny Corinthos around whom so much of this show has been focused from the middle 1990's to the present. Luke has been discussed as a representative of the hippie culture that was translated into an anti-hero character on this series. Denotative, connotative, and ideological readings were done of characters and families.

Wealth and privilege are represented in this series through the Quartermaine family. Edward Quartermaine, scion of industry, created the conservative tone for this family who has given great support to *General Hospital* through generous contributions and by sitting on various boards. Edward, in a preferred reading, can be seen as a successful businessman. The Quartermaines represent the hegemony that Sonny Corinthos and the Cassadine family struggle against for power.

Several themes were discussed. Few people are actually shown working on *General Hospital*. Doctors and nurses are shown working at the hospital some of the time. They spend more time making war on other people than doing their jobs. Those involved in social wars are mainly women, and a female nurse will engage in social warfare with a female doctor, something that might not see very often in the real world. Most characters' waking hours are filled with the pursuit of love and social warfare. There are more female characters than male. Profile of the medical field was one theme

of *General Hospital* that was explored in this study. In addition, much is made of the functioning of a hospital in this drama. Doctors call up the lab to demand results of tests. They counsel patients in the ER and in patient rooms. These doctors discuss real and fictional diseases and surgeries. This series can be seen as a teacher to some extent. The personalities of the nurses and doctors seem true to life and what you would expect to find at the local hospital on any given day or night.

Law and order are also presented as a theme. There is a real disconnect where good and evil are concerned. Mobsters can be good or bad, depending on their personalities. Sonny Corinthos is a mobster who is good most of the time. Evil resides in a few individuals who have to be incarcerated and controlled to protect everyone else. The prison at Pentonville always awaits lawbreakers who need punishment.

Mention was made of the twenty something group in *General Hospital* who is searching for a satisfying path in life. Even the only married female in this group is shown as being lost. These young people exemplify the dysfunction at the interpersonal and personal levels on *General Hospital*. Characters lack a purpose in life. Parents of adult children often try to help them, but it is no use. They can't take direction.

Older adult characters are profiled and examined for their contributions to this series. The older adult group on this series is comprised of several Quartermaine's who seem to be conservative upholders of present societal norms and values. Anthony Zacchara, evil mobster whose own son had to kill him in self defense, and Helena Cassadine, evil villainess who reign of terror on this show has lasted from the 1970's to the 2013 are two of the bad older adults who don't represent the hegemony.

The good older adult characters are on the side of law and order; these older characters demand that the laws be upheld while younger adult characters are more likely

to be mesmerized by Sonny Corinthos' mob tactics when he is the wrong doer. Younger adult characters find his wealth and power impressive. Older adult characters seem to depend little on younger adult characters.

Cultivation theory is important to a discussion of *General Hospital* because anyone who watches this series and is a heavy viewer may be influenced to think about medical professionals and young people in their 20's in a certain way. While it is impossible to know exactly what someone will think after watching any series for a long time, it has been proven by Gerbner (1978) that the viewer will be influenced.

CHAPTER VI

YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS: MILLIONAIRES IN LOVE AND WAR

Young and the Restless, the final series examined for this study, is a daytime series that functions as a class drama. The characters run the gamut from the extremely rich to lower class characters who prey on the rich. This show, set in Genoa City, Wisconsin, is about a prominent family of multimillionaires and their lives and loves. This most important family is the Newman family. The Newmans' main rival is the Abbott family. Jack Abbott is always trying to beat Victor in business and in love. The relationships between these two men and their families are profiled as are their interactions with the community.

In this chapter I will discuss semiotic analysis and will use it to examine elements of *Young and the Restless*. Television plays an important role in the lives of many Americans. Many soap opera fans plan their days around watching their favorite shows. This chapter will examine major characters and their relationships in *Young and the Restless*. The most prominent characters will be profiled. The narrative will be examined by comparing this series to a famous study of *Hill Street Blues*. Readings of the narrative will be done. The transcript of an episode will be provided as an example of this series. Camera shots in this episode will be discussed.

Semiotics is a major tool I will use for finding meaning in *Young and the Restless*. Other researchers, such as Fiske and Hartley (1978), have determined that television aids in the creation of meaning in the minds of television viewers. Soap fans' reality is influenced by what they see in their shows. Fiske and Hartley (1978) write that television is a meaning making system for viewers; this is the result of language being mixed with pictures of real life existence. Cultural messages are sent through television series, like

soap operas, about ideas of interpersonal and small group communication norms. Soap operas have shown how, over time, how they have responded to cultural changes in fashion and custom. What you see on *Young and the Restless* today is not the same thing you would have seen on this series in 1990. These shows mirror the era in which they were created. Different messages are being sent that correspond to the social reality in which people are living at the moment, a reality that is influenced by advances in technology and medical science. But the message being sent is just one part of the communication drama. As Hall (1980) writes there is a preferred meaning or viewpoint of the hegemony or ruling class. This ruling class has influence over organizations in society that have the power to create and disseminate messages: television and film producers, newspapers, magazines, et cetera. Viewers have the option to accept the preferred meaning or oppose or negotiate it as Hall (1980) explained.

General Discussion and Semiotic Analysis

Young and the Restless provides viewers with a look at the personal lives of multimillionaire businessmen in middle America. These are people who live insular lives that limit their experiences to home, the club, art galleries, and fashion shows. For safety's sake, people with great wealth socialize with each other and, sometimes, with the support staff that works in the coffee houses, bars, and restaurants they patronize. Hangers on are present in *Young and the Restless* as men and women, bartenders, waitresses, even small business owners, lovers, and ex spouses who want to benefit from being friends with the very wealthy. The lives of the characters fit in with standard melodramatic forms (Brooks, 1976; Cassata & Skill, 1983).

Semiotics is a tool for studying everything that can be broken down into a sign system and used for communication writes Seiter (1987). This includes “words, images,

traffic signs, flowers, music, medical symptoms, and much more,” according to Seiter (1987, p. 31).

Seiter (1987) also explains that culture can be studied using semiotics. Television both creates and mirrors culture in ways that are not yet totally understood. The basic components of this sign system are a sign or signifier, which is the physical part of a specific phenomenon, and the signified, which is the idea the signifier represents. An actor can be a young blonde woman as a sign and the stereotypical blonde bimbo as a signified. Tiers of signification include denotation, connotation, and myth, according to Barthes (1957/1972). Barthes (1957/1972) further noted that the denotative level includes words and images in their most obvious or apparent state of existence. Connotation is the second level of signification which is more subjective and includes ideological messages.

Readings of Prominent Families and Major Characters

Prominent families include the Newmans, the Abbotts, and the Chancellors. This daytime drama is about millionaire businessmen and their families and love lives. They are shown living differently from middle class people. On New Year’s Eve, Victor Newman and his wife Nikki are shown in formal attire with the current District Attorney Baldwin and his wife Lauren; both women are in full length formal gowns, and the men are in formal attire (Episode 1-1-2013). They are shown toasting in the New Year in Victor’s penthouse suite. Cassata and Skill (1983) write that the actors get to work with fashion designers to dress their characters in style.

The denotative reading of this scene can be that two friendly couples are just enjoying each other’s company during a popular American holiday. That is the apparent meaning. But, since Victor and Nikki represent the top 1% of the wealthy people on the

planet, this becomes a bourgeois display of power. District attorney Baldwin and his wife Lauren are currying favor with the rich and powerful. They are social climbers.

Victor Newman and his family play a prominent role in this drama as does Victor's company, Newman Enterprises, and the various friends who surround them in this town. It is not clear whether Victor is a megamillionaire or a billionaire. One daughter Abby admits to being worth 500 million (Episode 6-5-2013). Newman Enterprises plays such a dominant part in this series it is equal to a character. Newman Enterprises is just a company on the preferred level. But on the ideological level, it is equated with survival, paradise, the devil, and a grand life-stealing obsession. The concept of Newman Enterprises encompasses all of the best and worst that characters can imagine being desirable or despicable. Characters' viewpoints on Newman Enterprises change from moment to moment. One moment, Jack sees taking this company away from Victor as the ultimate challenge and greatest success he could hope for. In the next scene, Jack sees acquiring Newman Enterprises as the obsession that will kill him. The constant battle between Victor and Jack for control of Newman Enterprises and Jabot, a fashion house, is the focus of this show (Episode 5-22-2012; Episode 6-4-2012; Episode 6-11-2012; Episode 5-16-2012; Episode 5-17-2012; Episode 5-18-2012).

Jack Abbott recently made a rather acute statement about himself; he said to his son, "Kyle, you don't know anyone who has a stronger sense of self preservation than your old man. The cockroaches envy me," said Jack (Episode 12-24-2012). This dialogue was spoken as Jack was admitting his addiction to pain pills and alcohol, and his son was admonishing Jack not to kill himself. The dialogue of this series is closer to theatrical dialogue than that of the other series examined for this study; it is deep and thoughtful. Many of the lines are memorable and reveal some of the truths about life.

Nochimson (1992) reports on Jack having feminine qualities at times, perhaps without even realizing it.

Victor Newman is a ruthless and autocratic businessman. This scion of industry has been a decades long mainstay on *Young and the Restless*. Victor can be seen as both a villain and a hero (Episode 5-22-2012; Episode 6-4-2012; Episode 6-20-2012; Episode 5-22-2012; Episode 12-13 2012). Perhaps he is the perfect antihero. Victor is a complex man who is capable of much kindness as well as much cruelty. This makes him more like an actual human being than most soap opera stereotypes.

Victor Newman is a successful American businessman on a denotative level (Stuart, 1980). He is also a caring father and husband. Victor is a difficult and complicated man whose feelings for others are contaminated by his ruthless ambition and narcissism. His brashness puts people off; Victor says whatever he wants to say in spite of whom he might offend. On an ideological level, he represents capitalism and American business success on the international level. Having walked across Europe during World War II, Victor rose from penniless orphan to ultimate wealth and privilege that he created with his business acumen and hard work.

Other important characters include Nikki, Victor's wife, an ex stripper and pole dancer, who is now an aging beauty. Nikki and Victor always fight and break up only to go back together. Their two children who are fast approaching middle age are Nick and Victoria. Victor has another son, Adam. Adam is Victor's son with a blind woman who lived on a farm in the mid West. He appears on the show as a long lost son who is determined to destroy his father, the Newman family, and Newman Enterprises. Adam Newman is a graduate of Harvard; he has a master's degree in business. He is brilliant and extremely unbalanced. Adam's single minded goal of destroying his father is

destroying his own life (Episode 1-25-2013; Episode 1-29-2013). Victor has one other child, Abby, from his marriage to Jack Abbott's sister, Ashley (Episode 6-8-2012). Abby is a blonde bimbo character who represents, on the ideological level, the rich young female whose goal in life is self pampering.

Nikki Newman is the stereotypical vapid blonde whose life's preoccupation has been her quest for perfect love. No matter which man she was with, Nikki always worried about Victor. She has never been able to get Victor out of her mind. Nikki may appear to be an aging beauty, wife, and mother on the first level of signification, but on the connotative level, she represents misspent youth, lost horizons, and what too much booze can do to someone. Nikki is soft like a marshmallow. She has never been strong enough to do battle with the harsh men she chose to fall in love with. The love affair between Victor and Nikki is legendary on daytime television. When Victor finally recovered from amnesia, he hurried back to Genoa City in time to see the love of his life Nikki kneeling and crying at his grave. She was talking aloud about how she and Victor should have had one more merry-go-round together.

Adam seems like the embodiment of a bright youth just out of school and ready to take on the world. His good side is brilliant; Adam is just as talented in business as his father. Adam's dark side is wicked, and his single minded goal of destroying his father seems to work like a double-edged sword. He seems to always cut himself when he slashes at his father. On the denotative level, Adam is a very smart businessman. On the connotative level he is a metaphor for a festering wound, that of neglect by Victor in his childhood. That neglect is a hole in Adam's heart. He is nothing without it and nothing with it.

The family that opposes the Newmans is the Abbott family, which is led by Jack Abbott, a second generation Genoa City businessman. Jack is almost as ruthless and single minded as Victor (Episode 6-5-2012; Episode 6-8-2012; Episode 6-14-2012; Episode 5-17-2012). But he is a little weaker. Once at the pinnacle of success, owner of both Jabot and Newman Enterprises, Jack self destructed on prescription drugs and alcohol. He was not emotionally stable enough to hold on to victory over his nemesis, Victor Newman. Hubris overpowered Jack's talent and brilliance. Jack makes war on Victor in business and by romancing Nikki (Episode 16, 2012; Episode 5-17-2012; Episode 5-18-2012). Jack and Victor have both loved Nikki Newman and have been married to her at different times. Yet Victor is supposed to be the love of her life (Episode 5-18-2012; Episode 6-6-2012).

Jack has a son, Kyle, who dislikes him. His sisters are Ashley and Tracy, siblings he has alienated. Jack Abbott's brother Billy Abbott is married to Victor's daughter, Victoria. Victor detests this son-in-law Billy (4-8-2012). Jack competes with his sister Ashley in business. He is as ruthless in his dealings with her as he is with Victor (Episode 6-14-2012). He recently forced her out of a company they owned together, and he took over as CEO. She moved to New York and left the business behind.

Jack Abbott, on the first order of signification, is just a businessman who is in love with himself. His narcissism exceeds Victor's. Men like Jack who become great business successes are well respected. Jack inherited his companies and his power. On the connotative level, Jack represents the self destructive element in American business. He makes bids on companies and then does not have the cash on hand to make the purchase. When his bid is the winner, he has to borrow money from family members, including his niece, to complete the purchase. He is reckless and sometimes does not

think things through. Men like Jack, in the real world, bet large sums on the stock market and lose their money. Jack is a metaphor for the men who succeed in business in spite of not being cautious enough. Such men may do well for a while, but then they go out of business.

Another important group in Genoa City is the Chancellor family (Episode 5-23-2012; Episode 6-13-2012; Episode 6-19-2012; Episode 6-27-2012; Episode 7-4-2012). Kathryn Chancellor is matriarch of the Chancellor brood that includes Tucker, her long lost son she gave up at birth but who came into her life as an adult (Episode 6-12-2012; Episode 7-4-2012). Tucker's son Devon plays a minor role in the drama as well as does the man who raised Devon as his own son Neil Winters.

Kathryn is a very positive character and great friend of Victor's (Episode 4-8-2012). She gives advice to others (Episode 4-8-2012; Episode 5-16-2012). Her husband Murphy is a kind and patient soul who doesn't mind her involvement in so many other characters' lives (Episode 4-8-2012). Kathryn and Murphy have been married for three years (Episode 5-3-2012).

Kathryn's wise counsel is valued by all other major characters. She is always functioning as the show's moral compass (Episode 4-8-2012). Interested in everyone's problems, she gives advice whether it is asked for or not. She is always supportive, and often uses her own experiences to teach a lesson to younger characters. Kathryn has watched decades of Victor's and Nikki's romantic warfare; she told them in 2012, "The two of you have to stop this crap!" (Episode 5-17-2012).

An example of this is Kathryn's recent dealings with her son, Tucker. Tucker was very underhanded in his attempt to gain controlling interest of Newman Enterprises. After finding out that Victor had lost his memory and was working as a longshoreman on

the docks in Los Angeles, Tucker hired Billy Abbott, Jack's younger brother, to befriend Victor and keep an eye on him using a longshoreman's bar as the site of his interactions with Victor. Billy was supposed to keep track of Victor while Newman Enterprises' stock was dropping due to Victor's absence. Tucker planned to buy enough stock to gain controlling interest. The plan worked.

When Kathryn learned what her son had done to her old friend Victor, she shut him out of her life. To get back in his mother's good graces, Tucker had to sell the stock back to Victor. Tucker did this because he values his relationship with his mother. On the first level of signification, the denotative level, Kathryn functions as everyone's wonderful grandmother character. She is a great businesswoman, someone who can beat men at their own game. But Kathryn has a heart. She wants to know how people are feeling. Connotatively, she is the good mother figure. She actually represents something that is totally missing in American business and that is heart. In this way, Kathryn is not a realistic character at all. Someone with her caring nature would get mowed down by the Victors, Jacks, and Tuckers of the business world.

But Kathryn provides women viewers with a female counterpart to Victor and Jack. Her kind and loving personality fits in with the traditional view of women that many older women may prefer. Kathryn is a picture of the female as nurturer. Younger professional women characters are not usually this traditional on soap operas. But this character is about eighty years old. No doubt she has been a favorite for many years with older viewers.

Characters on *Young and the Restless* are shown living in lavish homes and spending time at the club where they dine and make business deals (Cassata & Skill, 1983). They also frequent the GloWorm restaurant and a pub or two where they drink

their sorrows away. They are not shown going out in the general public where they would be exposed to the middle and lower classes. They frequent establishments that are accustomed to catering to the wealthy. On the ideological level, this is the bourgeois class. Except for Victor and Jack, the characters of *Young and the Restless* live for pleasure. Victor and Jack live to work.

For Nick and Victoria work is something neither one of them wants to do. Their father Victor keeps asking them to work with him, and they keep refusing. Victor tests their loyalty to him with such requests. They may work for a short time with him, but they always quit and use caring for their children as an excuse for not wanting to work. They previously sued their father for their part of his company's profits. Victoria and Nick have trust funds to support them.

Nick is a weak, lazy person who is not working but just taking care of two kids that he drops off at school everyday before finding his lady love for sex. Victoria, his sister, is equally lazy and wants to stay at home and take care of her adopted child instead of helping her dad Victor in the business world. They always try to pass the buck to one another when their father needs help. On the preferred level, Nick and Victoria represent the ungrateful children of the very wealthy who have had everything given to them while having had nothing expected from them. Adam Newman is the only hard working offspring, but he grew up on a farm in a middle class family. The work ethic message is clear on this program; only the child raised in a middle class environment has any work ethic. From this preferred meaning, we can extrapolate that this program is showing how the work of America is being done by the middle class. Victor and Jack are shown using the office as a background for personal crises of love and war. They are rarely shown actually working. Avery Clark, the lawyer for Newman Enterprises, is shown working at

times (Episode 6-14-2012). Various underlings are shown tending bar, waiting tables, or working as security guards (Episode 12-24-2012), but these characters play minor roles.

District Attorney Michael Baldwin and his wife play important roles as does Sharon, Nick's ex wife and mother of two of his children. Also prominent is Phyllis, another ex wife of Nick's and her sister of Avery Clark. Clark is Victor's lawyer (Episode 4-8-2012; Episode 5-1-2012). These people are hangers on around the rich; they try to benefit from knowing and interacting with wealthy people. The goal for Sharon, Phyllis, and her sister Avery is dating and marrying Nick or some other wealthy man. Other hangers on type characters include Chelsea and Eden. Adam, Nick's half brother, has been married to Sharon and Chelsea. These same women keep marrying and divorcing within this small extremely wealthy group. In this way, they are themselves are becoming members of the wealthy bourgeois class. Chelsea's mother and father were former con artists who ran GloWorm, a restaurant and bar that catered to the rich of Genoa City before it burned to the ground.

As self indulgent as the adult rich are their teenaged children are worse. Nick and Sharon's daughter Sommer is a sixteen year old who uses the internet to bully poor youths who live in group homes (Episode 2-12-2013) as does Fenmore, the district attorney's son (Episode 1-25-2013; Episode 2-12-2013). One boy almost committed suicide he was so distraught from the bullying.

These are the major characters and prominent families on *Young and the Restless*. The warfare here is between the wealthy for ultimate power and success. Semiotics helps one understand that what is seen on the screen can mean different things to different viewers. If one accepts the dominant or preferred meaning, he or she might see Victor as an evil or malicious character. But a more negotiated view might be more generous with

Victor. Such success comes at a price. While he was making a fortune, maybe he didn't spend enough quality time with his children. But they have trust funds. Instead of being consumed by business interests, they are consumed with selfish desires for pleasure.

Narrative Analysis of Episode Broadcast May 30, 2012

This episode opens with Nikki and Jack sitting on a sofa with Daisy and Daniel's infant daughter, babysitting and talking about their upcoming marriage. Nikki warns Jack that Victor overheard them talking about marriage at Jack's physical therapy session. She confesses to seeing Victor walking away down the hallway when she turned around after they were talking. Jack says, "Poor Victor" in a mocking tone.

Cut to Noah, Abby, and Eden at Jack's pool, talking about Eden needing a roommate. Kyle walks up, and they talk about Ricky, someone who isn't at the party, being so creepy.

Michael and Lauren talk outside of the bar.

Inside the bar Paul, Christine, and Danny Romolotti, a rock star sit and talk at a table.

Danny says Ricky Williams visited him and asked him about Phyllis. He was pretending to be a journalist asking about Danny's career but he kept asking questions about Phyllis because he knew that she was Danny's ex wife. He tells the group that he ended the interview because of this. He asks them what they know about Ricky Williams.

Cut to Daisy and Ricky in Phyllis' apartment looking for something they can use to launch a personal attack on her morals or honesty. Ricky looks in the book shelf and in closets. Ricky finds a day planner and a psychologist's card drops out of it.

Daisy and Ricky hear the door knob turn, and they hide. Daniel enters the apartment looking for his baby's favorite pacifier that he says aloud she needs in order to sleep.

Cut to bar scene. Phyllis says Ricky is not on assignment for her magazine right now. She says that perhaps Ricky is trying to make her life hell to get even with her for firing him.

Michael and Lauren approach this group and greetings are shared all around. Christine says she is thinking about both of them. Michael says he has a meeting. Michael and Lauren split off from the group and meet with Councilwoman Phillips and another gentleman in another section of the bar. They offer Michael the district attorney position.

Cut to Abby, Kyle, Eden, and Noah. Eden says she wants Noah to be her roommate.

Cut to Nikki and Jack sitting on the sofa with the child. Jack says, "All is fair in all-out hatred" about his son Kyle disliking him.

Cut to Paul and the others at the bar. Paul says his son Ricky is too much like his insane mother. Paul says Ricky has no problem hurting those he is supposed to love. He says he hasn't put enough time into raising his son to even know him. He also says that if anyone has any contact with Ricky to let him know how his son seems to be doing.

Cut to Daniel who finds the pacifier at his mother Phyllis' apartment. He leaves. Ricky and Daisy come out of hiding. She says she has to leave and put the key back in Phyllis' purse.

Ricky tells her to make a copy of the key to Phyllis' place so they can use it again

Cut to Lauren and Michael at the bar. The councilwoman says she needs an answer before the end of the day. Michael thanks them for the offer. Lauren is impressed. She says no to the offer as Michael is saying yes.

Abby and Kyle talk around Jack's pool behind Jack's home. Abby doesn't want Eden to be Noah's roommate.

Cut to Noah and Eden in her apartment building. They run into Ricky. Eden's apartment is across the hall from Ricky's.

Cut to Daniel, Nikki, and Jack with Daisy's baby. Daniel says he and the baby need to be going home soon.

Phyllis arrives at her apartment door and can't find her key.

Cut to Eden and Noah inside her apartment. She shows him the apartment and sets some ground rules. Eden says she knows he really didn't want to move in with her. She says it works for her though. He jokes about being so big and imposing that Ricky will be afraid to go after her. Noah tells her he got a weird vibe off Ricky and tells her not to be alone with him. He says they can keep an eye on Ricky because he lives across the hall.

Cut to Ricky in his apartment. He looks at the card of Timothy Reid the psychologist. He looks at the computer screen and searches for information about Reid on the computer.

Cut to Jack's home. Nikki tells Daisy and Daniel that Lucy, the child, is a joy. Phyllis enters the room and says that she can't find her apartment key after leaving their party and that the key must still be there. Daisy pretends to help search and fakes finding the key under a chair. She hands it to Phyllis. Daniels says they should go and Phyllis, Daniel, Daisy, and baby Lucy leave.

Cut to Kyle walking into the living room where Nikki and Jack are sitting on the sofa. Nikki says she is going to start cleaning up and leaves the room. Kyle and Jack are alone together. Jack tells Kyle he is going to marry Nikki.

Cut to Michael and Lauren sitting at the bar together. She does not want him to become district attorney, and he does not understand why she feels that way. She does not want the public attention that goes with holding public office. She thinks their past histories

don't hold up to scrutiny. She is afraid of people holding grudges and making her a target.

Cut to Jack and Kyle together; Kyle looks angry. He reminds dad that Nikki is Victor's love. Kyle then brings up the subject of Nikki's alcoholism. "I love both of you. With time and a little effort we can make this work," says Jack. Kyle says he can't forget the role Nikki played in his mother's death. He tells his dad to go ahead and marry Nikki, but don't expect him to join in on the celebration.

Daisy, Daniel, and Lucy pass by the bar and see rock star Danny Romolotti, Daniel's father, sitting at a table with the group. Daisy talks Daniel into introducing her to his dad. She walks over and shows Danny his grand baby Lucy and talks with him. Danny suggests they get a table so they can have a private chat.

Paul and Christine sit and talk alone now. They talk about a possible murder that Ricky may have committed at college.

Cut to Ricky at his apartment looking up Timothy Reid.

Cut to Phyllis at her apartment. She is on the phone to Sommer. She finds something out of place on the table.

Cut to Noah and Eden talking about his moving in. Noah says he is going to give her privacy with Kyle whenever she wants it. She tells him that moving in together is not just a plan of hers to get them back together as a couple. "What happened in Paris stays in Paris," Eden tells Noah, referring to a previous affair they experienced abroad.

Cut to Kyle and Nikki in the pool area of Jack's home. Kyle talks to Nikki in a mildly hateful manner.

Cut to Nikki and Jack talking. Jack says he can be a husband to her and a father to Kyle at the same time. Nikki says Jack is being optimistic. He says they have to go shopping for that ring he promised her, and she agrees. They kiss.

Cut to Danny Romolotti, Daisy, and Daniel. She gushes about being so delighted to finally meet her husband's famous father and says she loves his music and plays it all the time.

Cut to Phyllis in her apartment. She calls Daniel and says that the minifile is in the wrong place. Could he have moved it around? He tells her that he was going through everything looking for the pacifier, and it is possible he moved things around a bit. She says that it is okay and makes a joke about being crazy. They hang up.

Cut to Michael and Lauren at the bar. Guitar music plays soulfully in the background as they discuss the district attorney position. She says she is afraid of payback from people he puts in prison. He tells her she shouldn't worry.

Cut to Ricky calling Timothy Reid; he lies about being a journalist working on a book about Phyllis Sommers. Timothy Reid tells him he is better off handling a rattlesnake than Phyllis. Reid says he never wants to hear that woman's name again. He hangs up on Ricky.

Cut to Paul and Christine at the bar. She is getting an autopsy report of the girl killed at the college and will give it to Paul who is a private investigator.

Paul gets a phone call. He tells Christine there was a fatality on the highway. It is a man who was going to meet with him and tell him about Ricky's activities at college. He asks Christine if she thinks Ricky could have killed this man. Christine says she doubts that Ricky could have played a part in this man's death.

End of the Episode

This episode will be further examined after a general discussion of camera technique.

Camera Technique in Soap Operas

Camera technique is always important in any television series. Many prime time dramas start with a long shot to establish location and setting. Soap operas don't use such shots because they are filmed indoors. A characteristic of soap opera production style is the close up and the extreme close up writes Bernard Timberg (1981). Timberg (1981) further states that "[t]his shooting style is consistent with the kind of world soap opera portrays. Soap opera camera technique is designed to capture intimate expressions of emotion, for example, a tear just starting to run out of the actor's eye.

Timberg (1981) continues with this explanation of the shooting style in soap operas: "This close-up camera style has the effect of bringing the viewer closer and closer to the hidden emotional secrets soap opera explores" (p. 135) According to Timberg (1981), this is very different from the way that news announcers are shot.

Camera Shot Analysis

In the episode examined for this study, medium shots predominated with close ups and extreme close ups being used for dramatic scenes. There was not a lot of variability from what Timberg (1981) observed. As the conversation volleyed back and forth, the camera shot would move closer and closer to the actors until the last shot in the scene was an extreme close up shot but only if there was a lot of tension or emotion in the scene. More women than men were the subjects of extreme close ups.

Nikki and Jack sit at opposite ends of a sofa with a baby between them. Medium and close up shots are used. Wealthy characters' children meet around Jack's pool; it is a party for all ages thrown for the purpose of announcing Nikki and Jack's engagement. Medium shots are used.

As Ricky and Daisy look for evidence to cause trouble for Phyllis in her apartment, medium shots are used except for a close shot when one of the characters finds something. At these times the self satisfied look on Daisy's or Ricky's face is shown, whichever one found something. Close ups are used as they react to the doctor knob turning and hide. Daniel, Phyllis' son, returns to her apartment, and they have to hide. Ricky finds a psychologist's card in Phyllis' day planner in a closet. A close up reveals his happy face.

In a scene Lauren and her husband Michael Baldwin argue at a bar. Close ups are used when they disagree to show the anger on her face and the surprise on his. Another extreme close up is used when Nikki and Jack agree to go shopping for her wedding ring, and they kiss. An extreme close up is used on Phyllis' face when she gets home from the party and discovers that she can't find her apartment key. In addition, Danny Romolotti's disapproval of Daisy is shown in close ups. Whoever has the most intense emotion in the scene gets more close ups or closer shots. The same pattern of shooting the volley of conversation is used. Each time the speaker changes, the camera moves a little bit closer to the next speaker with the closest shot being used right before the scene ends.

Narrative Analysis

The narrative analysis of *Young and the Restless* is done using a methodology of a study of *Hill Street Blues* as a narrative by Deming (1985). Deming (1985) took a model by Chatman (1978) and altered it. She then studied an episode of *Hill Street Blues*. This model, which is used for this study, has five components or elements: a real author, an implied author, the discourse, an implied audience, and a real audience. The real author is the people who create the drama: writers, producer, director, et cetera who create the

narrative (Deming 1985). According to Deming (1985), the implied author is the camera eye. A more detailed explanation of these components can be found in chapter four.

Deming (1985) further explains the meaning of the concepts implied audience and real audience. The implied audience is an audience the real author imagines will watch the series. The real audience is the people who actually make up the audience when the program is broadcast.

Narrative Analysis of Episode Broadcast May 30, 2012

There are six main characters and as many minor characters. There are six storylines going on at once.

1. Nikki and Jack talking about the upcoming wedding as they host a party at Jack's home
2. Michael and Lauren meeting the councilwoman at bar about the district attorney position and then discussing together
3. Paul and Christine at a bar at a table talking with Danny Romolotti
4. Ricky investigating Phyllis
5. Daniel, Daisy, and baby Lucy going from Jack's party to the bar on the way home to their apartment
6. Noah, Eden, and Kyle talking about how to keep tabs on Ricky because he is so creepy they don't trust him to live on the edge of their lives

There is no one storyline that is more prominent or important than the others. No character is more important than the others. These stories are occurring simultaneously, and the time duration is just minutes in a day, probably not over thirty or forty minutes of actual "real" time is shown on screen in the episode. So the discourse structure is that

one day's episode shows less than an hour of "real lived experience" for the soap opera characters (Deming, 1985).

These storylines are going at different speeds and are in different stages of development. Most of the events that occurred in this episode are just building toward some future crisis point. But this is all necessary construction of the plot lines. All of the building blocks have to be in place for the plot structure to topple correctly.

Deming (1985) claims that "[b]y repeatedly invoking closure without manifesting it, *Hill Street Blues* embodies a central theme of melodrama, the attempt to restore order to a chaotic world" (p. 5). For Brooks (1976) melodrama is about the battle between good and evil, order and chaos. In the study of *Hill Street Blues*, Deming (1985) found "the classically melodramatic battle between order and chaos tak[ing] place on three interactive levels: the societal level ...on the interpersonal level ...and on the personal level" (p. 6). Deming (1985) sees disturbance on the societal level as involving actual criminal acts like violence or political corruption, and on the interpersonal level "(where evil is behavior that undermines the goals of the group), and on the personal level (where evil is insanity or less total personal disintegration, failure to cope)" (p. 6).

On *Young and the Restless* the battle between good and evil is fought in board rooms and on the stock market. The crime on *Young and the Restless* that is done by major characters is white collar. Only a minor character will commit a violent crime, and these are not very numerous in the world of the rich and famous. So this can be classified as political corruption and societal level dysfunction.

Interpersonal level dysfunction on *Young and the Restless* is mainly conflict within families between parents and grown children or parents and their children's spouses. Other more serious dysfunction is created by wanton sexual affairs with

anyone, including one's daughter-in-law. Victor married his daughter-in-law Sharon to get back at Nikki for marrying Jack. Nick, Victor's son, has produced children by several different women and is trying to make a nuclear family out of the bunch. The important non family interpersonal conflict is between Victor Newman and Jack Abbott. There is no one with personal disintegration except for possibly Adam at times. He starts to fall apart sometimes over lost personal relationships, but he always pulls himself back together so that he can do what he loves best—work.

Deming (1985) claims that characters on *Hill Street Blues* are motivated by the desire to be good (p. 6). Soap opera characters on *Young and the Restless* are motivated by the desire to be rich. Deming (1985) also claims that the fictional world of the *Hill Street Blues* series seems chaotic. The same can be said about *Young and the Restless*. *Young and the Restless* is portraying the upper class in American society. They don't often raise their voices. When the rich speak, people listen. There is a lot of control on the personal level in how someone addresses the chaos.

Everything that is done and not done on *Young and the Restless* is run through the lens of Victor's happiness or approval. His family, including Adam, measure most of their actions through the lens of whether Victor will approve of what the character is doing. All characters, even Jack, muse aloud about Victor's likes and dislikes and whether they should make him mad again. Many times Jack expresses great joy at the thought of making Victor angry again. It really is quite remarkable how the character of Victor has taken over so much of the discourse of the series. The character of Victor is unique to *Young and the Restless*. His counterpart does not exist on any other show. He is unique to this series.

The main characters in *Hill Street Blues* are essentially good people; the same can be said of the main characters on *Young and the Restless*. No one is really trying to be a bad person. People in general try very hard to be good people on *Young and the Restless*. Deming (1985) claims the purpose of *Hill Street Blues* was to restore “moral order out of chaos”; the purpose *Young and the Restless* is to show how the super wealthy live and love. On *Young and the Restless* many major characters have two goals: to get richer and to gain more power.

Themes

This section deals with the themes present in *Young and the Restless*. They include family conflict, conflict between families, and differences in beliefs of the older adult characters in comparison with the attitudes of younger adults. The first theme to be discussed is family conflict. Intergenerational warfare is a theme on this show. On the denotative level, family conflict on *Young and the Restless* may seem like just any family not getting along. The problem is that bringing Adam into the family is impossible because no one can forgive him for the mean things he has already done. Victor, Nikki, Victoria, and Nick don't trust him. He is a childish man whose mother deprived him of the company of his father while growing up, something he blames his father for.

Every conversation Victor has with Nick and Victoria has one pattern; the child criticizes the father and blames him for all of their problems. Victor's dating and marrying his former daughter-in-law Sharon further strains family relationships (Episode 5-21-2012; Episode 6-25-2012). Victor and Adam clash frequently over business matters as Adam is determined to destroy his father (Episode 4-8-2012). There are also times when Victoria competes with her father Victor to bid for a company her father is interested in; she does this even though Nikki, her mother, tells her not to because it

could split the family apart (Episode 4-8-2012). They already know that their father will chose business over family when pressed.

Avery and Phyllis are sisters who do not have a supportive sibling relationship. Before the divorce papers were signed, Avery was sleeping with her sister Phyllis' husband Nick. Phyllis' and Nick's daughter Sommer is making war on both of them and hopeless poor youths in group homes with her bullying tactics. She is still in high school and blames her parents for all of her problems.

There is strife in other families as well. Tucker and his mother Kathryn Chancellor are always at odds because she is a moral person, and he is not. Billy Abbott and his brother Jack are always squabbling. Billy's marriage to Victoria always causes him to have a problem supporting his ruthless brother, Jack. Billy is always in conflict with his father-in-law Victor who thinks he is spoiled and unprincipled (Episode 4-8-2012). These people don't share the same values on the denotative level. But ideologically they symbolize the destruction of society that occurs when people are too selfish to contribute to successful groups. Human beings survived because they could work in groups.

Family conflict is so common it doesn't always seem like a big problem. On *Young and the Restless* viewers get used to some characters not getting along with others. This, no doubt, is a very familiar situation for many viewers. All families have members who squabble at times. But this fighting on a connotative level means a split in the very fabric of our society. Family is where people learn how to be human. People learn how to get along with others at home or not at all. In *Young and the Restless*, with so many people fighting with siblings, fighting with parents and children, the problem is pandemic. The picture presented is that wealthy people are not happy. All that money

cannot make you happy. On an ideological level, this is probably the message that middle and lower class viewers enjoy seeing. They want to see what life is like for the rich and famous and like to see wealthy people fail and be miserable.

Conflict between families is the second theme to be considered. The Abbotts and Newmans have been enemies for two generations. John Abbott was Jack Abbott's father, a contemporary of Victor Newman's. Victor says that he respected Jack's father but that Jack is a different story. Jack is a totally ruthless businessman with a small soul. No one can really tolerate him, not even his son Kyle. In fact, Kyle chose to move in with Victor instead of staying with his own father, Jack. Victor was thrilled to be chosen over Jack by Jack's own son. Victor told Jack, "We both see you for who you really are" (Episode 4-30-2012). This conflict may look like business as usual for many viewers. On the connotative level, it may point to a rift in the fabric of American society.

Intermarriage between rival families has caused much of this warfare. Jack Abbott's brother marrying Victor's daughter, Victoria, has fanned the flames (Episode 3-8-2012). Victor hates Billy, and Billy hates Victor for being his family's mortal enemy. This causes much fighting between Victoria and her father whom she is always criticizing and ordering to leave her home. Likewise, Jack always asks Billy to be loyal to him. This is hard for Billy because he wants to support his wife who wants to support her family in this war between families.

Abby, Victor's daughter by Jack's sister Ashley, is always at odds with all other family members as she tries to be the Naked Heiress and promote herself a la Paris Hilton style. She does betray her father Victor and gives money to her uncle Jack Abbott when he comes up short at the end of the day (Episode 6-11-2012; Episode 6-13-2012). Jack

thinks nothing of asking his niece who is in her early twenties to cover his financial obligations (Episode 6-11-2012; Episode 6-13-2012).

On the ideological level, this fighting shows that greed and selfishness does not breed love in families. That same ruthlessness that makes someone a good businessman makes someone too competitive to be a good marriage partner or good parent. What children need is unconditional love. Children and spouses are not workers that you have to manage. Perhaps people in other countries see the destruction of the American family as the ultimate consequence of so much success, privilege, and money.

Another theme is the difference in beliefs about family loyalty based on age. The older characters believe in family loyalty, but the younger ones do not. Kathryn Chancellor said, "You always back up your family no matter how much they've disappointed us," to her son Tucker (Episode 1-14-2013). Victor Newman believes his family should be loyal. Jack Abbott believes family should be loyal. Younger characters are out for themselves.

On an ideological level, as families splinter and fall apart due to the high divorce rate and parents having to work long hours, there is less and less loyalty in the real world. Family members aren't spending time with one another. Families of the past lived on farms. Children worked alongside parents doing hard farm labor. But that labor led to the survival of the family physically. Fathers set an example by their own behavior toward their wives and children. Mothers took care of the family. There weren't many outside influences. Now loyalty has disappeared from many American families. This is mirrored on *Young and the Restless*.

Law and order is a theme for this soap opera, but the crime being committed is white collar crime (Episode 5-1-2012). *Young and the Restless* is populated by families

who own megamillion dollar business conglomerates (Newman Enterprises, Jabot, Beauty of Nature, Restless Style, etc.). Nothing is sacred in the business world portrayed here. The scions of business are always trying to get it all—all of the companies on the series.

Jack Abbot wants to leave Victor with nothing. Victor feels the same about Jack, and Tucker wants to get it all away from these two. The only person playing fair is Kathryn; she cares about other people. For the others business is nothing but a game to win. Their only real business worry is the Securities and Exchange Commission and how it will rule on the purchase or sale of stocks or companies. Also of great concern is the Board of Directors of each company. Characters are often worried about losing some official position within a company due to a vote of the board. Important as well is whether characters are getting insider information on company plans that might affect stock prices and purchases.

Greed is the sin of the day on *Young and the Restless*, and it has to be a theme. Being greedy is normal in Genoa City. Men are greedy without hesitation. Female characters sometimes feel sorry for whoever is losing out, whether Victor or Jack. They ask the man who is beating the other one to ease off and let the other one have something. Nikki, Victoria, Phyllis, and Avery all felt sorry for Jack when Victor was winning. When it was the other way around, they complained about how Victor would handle losing everything. In other words, the women characters on this show don't believe in destroying another person totally. In the Episode that aired May 15, 2012, Nikki said, "I am so sick and tired of seeing you guys do this to each other." The characters on *Young and the Restless* equate total destruction of a person with losing all material possessions.

Also, the women are shown as being more compassionate and empathetic in general and much less interested in business affairs. The women have the interests of society wives.

Older Adult Characters

Kathryn Chancellor is an elderly character who has been on this show for decades. She is a lovely woman in her late seventies who is the voice of reason. She owns Chancellor Industries and her son, Tucker McCall, owns his own clothing company. She is listed here because she is elderly; she was discussed earlier in this paper.

Kathryn's husband Murphy is not shown working, but his is old enough to be retired (Episode 4-8-2012). He is a kind and gentle man she met in a diner. Kathryn and Murphy celebrated their anniversary in the same diner in which they met (Episode 5-3-2012). At this anniversary Murphy said, "The best is yet to be," (Episode 5-3-2012).

Victor Newman is an elderly businessman and father of four. He is dedicated to preserving his company, and his family comes second to that. He boxes and works out to stay in shape. Victor is determined to win at all costs. He believes that he is putting his family first over business because it is their legacy. In other words, he is doing everything all for them. His family, on the other hand, feels that he neglects them by working long hours. Yet they are enjoying the fruits of his extensive labor and don't seem to have any problem with being very rich.

Victor has always loved Nikki and always will. He recently said, "I will defend her till my dying day" (Episode 4-8-2012). He also said, "No matter what happens, love never dies" (Episode 5-15-2012). Nikki loves Victor as well, but they are not above flaunting relationships with lovers in each other's faces (Episode 4-8-2012; Episode 4-

30-2012). Victor is listed here because he is elderly; he was discussed earlier in this paper.

Nikki is the elderly wife of Victor Newman. She has aged well. Nikki is a rather vapid woman whose love life is her major concern. Second in Nikki's priorities is Victor's state of health and third are the lives of her children and grandchildren. Even when she isn't with Victor she constantly talks about him to other characters. Nikki was discussed earlier in this paper; she is listed here because she is an older adult character.

Discussion

This chapter explained the importance of major families and prominent characters. It isn't just the storylines that distinguish soap operas; it is the characterizations that are crucial for drawing in viewers. The Newman, Abbott, and Chancellor families were all discussed in detail as well as what they mean on the preferred or first level of significance and the connotative or ideological level. Victor's and Jack's personal and professional battles were examined. They are both pictures of American businessmen that may seem typical on the surface or overt meaning, but symbolically they can signify the cancer of greed running rampant through a capitalist society.

A significant finding is that older adult characters are seen as being more loyal to the family while younger characters become less loyal with each generation. By the third generation little loyalty exists. This can be seen in the Newman family. Victor values loyalty above all else. His granddaughter Sommer is loyal only to herself. Family conflict was also a theme in this series. Characters are shown fighting within their families: fathers and children, husbands and wives, and siblings pitted against each other. This is personal and interpersonal dysfunction that weakens the ties of society.

Another theme, greed, plays a role here. Being greedy makes it impossible to be loyal because you will always be out for yourself. Greed causes small group dysfunction which weakens society. Human beings exist today because they could collect in groups and fight against predators and other groups of humans.

Law and order is another theme of great importance on *Young and the Restless*. Characters are afraid of rulings against them by the Securities and Exchange Commission. People who have a lot of wealth generally know more about money than the average middle class person. This is true for the families on *Young and the Restless*. Kathryn Chancellor was profiled as the only kind business person. She told other characters to shape up and live a good life. She also said the best is yet to come. Kathryn always told younger characters that they could fix the problems in their lives and find happiness.

This series presents the upper class with its interests in maintaining wealth and power as well as the people who fawn after members of this class. Hangars on and underlings who try to become friends with the wealthy for the perks that it will bring are discussed. These are usually people who work for the wealthy directly or for restaurants, bars, athletic clubs, et cetera that they frequent. These people do not go out in public and rub shoulders with the poorer members of society. This would probably not be a safe activity for them.

Young and the Restless profiles the personal and business lives of members of the upper tier of the business community in Genoa City, Wisconsin and The United States. Characters function singly and in groups in this show. Warfare can be totally personal or family against family. Sometimes it is a mere competition for some prize.

Complex family relationships emerge that are defined at almost every level by money. Victor Newman's children joined their efforts and sued their father for their rightful portion of Newman Enterprises' wealth. They won and now have trust funds. Victor constantly wants his children to help him run his company, yet his children are always fighting with him. His son Nick isn't interested in working with his father. His daughter Victoria dabbles at working but her husband and children are her major concern. The only child who wants to work with his dad is Victor's son with a blind woman who lived on a farm in Kansas. So the work ethic is shown as being something that is learned in the middle and lower classes.

A lack of loyalty, selfishness, and greed can all be seen in the lives of characters in *Young and the Restless*. They cause dysfunction on the personal, interpersonal, and societal levels. Personal dishonesty puts companies and fortunes at risk. It also puts relationships at risk. Only when people are honest can they build happy, successful relationships.

Attitudes toward the rich can be cultivated by watching *Young and the Restless*. The upper class is presented in a negative light in many ways on this series. Rich people are represented as narcissistic, self serving, greedy individuals whose devotion to self outweighs any family loyalty. The females are obsessed with love and being rich, and the males are obsessed with love, being rich, and work.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Someone who has not watched the three soap operas examined for this study might think that soap operas are all alike. Yet this study has demonstrated how different they really are. These soap operas are created by different teams of writers, producers, and editors—different real authors. *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Young and the Restless* are really distinct and different from each other in a number of ways: they depict different classes of people who have different personal goals and who have different social customs, such as dress and rules for behavior.

There is also a class difference between the portrayals of characters on these three soap operas. Characters in *Days of Our Lives* are more middle class. They are easily angered and scream and yell at one another. Characters like Nicole, Sami, E.J., and Chad do not bottle up their emotions; instead, they let them out. Women always engage in verbal warfare which includes calling each other bitches and sluts or whores face-to-face and behind each other's backs. When the opportunity arises, characters slap or slug each other, shove each other, or threaten to kill one another. Terrible jealousy is rampant between characters on this soap opera.

The next step up in class would be *General Hospital*. There are a fair number of middle class characters here, but there are also a few truly wealthy people like Edward Quartermaine and his family. Carly Jax is another extremely wealthy person who grew up in a trailer park yet married a mobster and, also, a very successful businessman. So she is extremely wealthy, owns the Metrocourt Hotel, and engages in high class living.

The next step up to the upper class would be *Young and the Restless*. All of the main characters own megaconglomerates. These characters are millionaires who hang

out at the gym and dine at the club every day and talk to each other about their companies. They frequent establishments that are accustomed to catering to the rich and don't mix with middle class and poor people by choice.

The world of work in *Days of Our Lives* is populated by people in middle class jobs. A big focus is on the work of police officers, male and female. Rich people are shown at work when they are CEOs, but are not shown doing much actual work before leaving the office for a meal or going home. Service industry workers, like waiters, are shown briefly, but they are inconsequential to the storylines except for Gabby Hernandez and Nick Horton who work at the Brady pub. John and Brady Black own Basic Black, a clothing company. The other companies that the middle class types work for are owned by Stefano DiMera, the town's mob boss. Work on *Young and the Restless* is white collar work. Major characters are business executives, CEO's, owners of companies, and their families and friends. Also shown serving the rich are service personnel who work for companies that enjoy patronage of the rich and famous, bartenders, waitresses and such.

Also, both *Days of Our Lives* and *General Hospital* have resident crime bosses that everyone has to deal with sooner or later. These crime bosses are rich and powerful. They are also feared. In *Young and the Restless* there is no crime boss. There are only CEOs, Victor, Jack, and Kathryn, who are also the owners of businesses. These characters, all older adults, are millionaires or, perhaps, even billionaires. These characters speak softly and seem to control their expressions of disgust and anger. They choose their words carefully and speak in mellow tones. They also dress better, live in more expensive homes, and have hateful spoiled children.

These soaps differ in the theme of loyalty to family. On *Days of Our Lives* family loyalty is a requirement. A lack of loyalty is shown to be a horrible thing that has to be righted. The person who is not shown being loyal to family must straighten up and mend their ways. This may be a middle class value as is the presence of religion on *Days of Our Lives*. Families of characters on *General Hospital* require less loyalty than families on *Days of Our Lives*. On *General Hospital* some parents may be loyal to their children while their children are not loyal to them. On *Young and the Restless* parents demand loyalty from their children and don't get it. On the grandchildren level, there is very little loyal to family. On this soap opera, adult children are free to support their father's greatest enemy if they so desire.

Social warfare or warfare between families is generations deep on *Days of Our Lives*. Families have been in pitched battle for decades, and this cannot change. One's birth decides which side one is on. The same can be said about *General Hospital* but only for some families and not for others. For example, the war between the Spencers and the Cassadines goes back several generations. Social warfare or war between families on *Young and the Restless* is much less important than on the other two soap operas studied because family loyalty is at a minimum. Children feel free to support their parents' mortal enemies if they so choose.

Infidelity is more important on *Days of Our Lives* and *Young and the Restless*. Victor Newman marries his son's ex-wife on *Young and the Restless*, and Brady Black has an affair with the woman his dad almost married when he was a kid on *Days of Our Lives*. Phyllis' sister Avery is sleeping with her husband before her divorce has gone through on *Young and the Restless*.

Sometimes it isn't just what is there but what is missing that is revealing. Missing from all of the soaps are patriotism or nationalism, flags, poor people, including poor elderly people, lower class people, handicapped people, and there are not many minorities. No overweight characters are on any of these melodramas while there are many overweight people in society. Many characters, particularly female ones, are played by actresses who look anorexic.

Most characters on soap operas are in their 20's, 30's, and 40's. Characters on *General Hospital* who are in their twenties and thirties are different from the same age group in other soaps. This group is a major focus of multiple storylines on *General Hospital*. They are aimless and searching for something they cannot find.

Another theme found only on *General Hospital* is the profiling of the medical profession in the hospital setting. Doctors and nurses are shown doing very little healing while flirting, having sex, and fighting over lovers.

Parents trying to run the lives of their adult children is a theme only found on *Days of Our Lives*. Adult children on this melodrama are seen as hopeless boobs who never pick the right person to have a romantic relationship with. The second major problem for adult children, according to their parents, is that they aren't capable of choosing the right job. Adult children just mess their lives up over and over and keep making the same mistakes. Parents feel that they have to save their children from their own hopeless ineptitude.

Greed is a theme only on *Young and the Restless*. Characters are motivated by lust as well, but nothing is as big a flaw in the characters as greed. They have to have it all even if it means that there will be nothing left for anyone else. It is that "old dog eat

dog” scenario. Children are even greedy when dealing with parents over money when it is the parents who made the money in the first place.

On all of the melodramas examined, women are depicted as being powerful and wealthy or being married to someone who is powerful and wealthy. Even though most major female characters are professional women, many of them are still shown as getting their wealth and power from a man and his work—an ex husband or father. In other words, when women are independently wealthy, it is because they have some man’s money.

Children are talked about but rarely seen. They are being cared for by competent nannies. Most grown children are barely tolerant of their parents. If the adult child is illegitimate, then he or she is out to destroy the parent. These children wreak havoc on the lives of parents to get revenge for being left/ignored/neglected/or just discarded.

Weddings and parties like anniversaries or birthday parties are used to bring characters from many storylines together. Most of these events become the setting for tragedies which cause major characters to question the reality that they are living.

What do these findings mean? Soap operas show American life in this time period. They present depictions of different types and ages of people going about their daily routines. Men and women are shown living their lives in a genre that encourages comparison with one’s own life. What we see is, in some part, however small, a reflection of the real world. Soap operas are entertainment. If they were not entertaining, they never would have become successful, and they became successes in the days of radio.

If a viewer were to take *Days of Our Lives* or *General Hospital* at face value, he or she might assume that every town has a crime boss. He or she might also believe that

beautiful vixens walk the earth to destroy other women's marriages and happiness. There are women out there that no man can resist. At least that is what soap operas teach us; no matter how happy we are in our relationships a beautiful woman exists who can take our place.

Soap operas are different than real life. Telling people off like they do on *Days of Our Lives* and *General Hospital* is not socially acceptable. And soap opera characters lack any real forgiveness; that is why they carry years of anger around with them. Everyone lives for pleasure and cheats on spouses in these melodramas. Little compassion or sympathy for each other and the human condition exists. People are shown as being more temperamental and much more prone to anger than most people in society. Lust, greed, dishonesty, a lack of sympathy and compassion all cause personal, interpersonal, and societal stress and dysfunction. People remarry ex spouses ad nauseum on these melodramas. This is sometimes true in real life, too. In soap operas, multigenerational family wars exist with some marriages occasionally blurring the lines between the sides.

Drug abuse can happen to any segment of society. Babies are given away only to have offspring appear as adults set on revenge for the desertion. Powerful parents who own companies and are wealthy can support grown children or help those kids find high level jobs. All of these things are common on soap operas. The two greatest goals on soap operas and in life are the pursuit of love and money. Most older adult characters are extremely wealthy and very powerful on soap operas, and this is not the case in real life.

Most characters on soap operas are in their 20's, 30's and 40's. The largest age group in America is still the aging baby boomers who are much older than 40 years of age. Soon the elderly will be the largest age group in America. A subject of interest in

this study was the portrayals of older adults in soap operas. Previous research was examined in the literature review. Findings of older adult characters differed among the studies cited. Harrington and Brothers (2011) found that only three percent of the characters on soap operas are older adults. That was borne out by this study. There are fewer older adult characters than there are characters from any other age group. Harrington and Brother (2011), furthermore, found that these characters are often sounding boards for younger characters; this is certainly true of Luke Spencer, Katherine Chancellor, Nikki Newman, Maggie Keriakis, Caroline Brady, Ian MacAllister, and Anthony Zacchara. Harrington and Brothers (2011) also discovered that older characters often are not offered a new contract and are, in essence, “let go”, and have to come back on soap operas as recurring characters who play ghosts of their former selves. This happened to the actor who played Anthony Zacchara, after his character was killed on *General Hospital*.

The soaps studied did feature strong female characters in greater numbers than can be seen in prime time television dramas as predicted by Livingstone (1998). Hatch (2005) writes that older female characters are more likely to be portrayed in a negative light. Arnoff (1974) writes that there was a connection in the soap operas he examined between age and villainy; older adults were more likely to play evil characters. This was truer for male characters than for female characters in this study. The only evil female older adult character was Helena Cassadine of *General Hospital*. The older adult male characters in this study were not just more likely to be evil characters, but they were more likely to be the most evil characters on their respective series. These men include Stefano DiMera and Ian MacAllister on *Days of Our Lives*, Anthony Zacchara on *General Hospital*, and Victor Newman and Jack Abbott on *Young and the Restless*.

Most of the older adult female characters are shown to be very kind, gentle, and supportive of other characters. The only thing that separates them from the portrayals of younger female characters is their softness; they appear emotionally frail and vulnerable. Maggie Keriakis and Caroline Beady of *Days of Our Lives* and Nikki Newman of *Young and the Restless* are examples of delicate older adult females.

These stories describe a troubled America where people are not exercising self control and are inflicting damage upon one another in the selfish pursuit of happiness. No one's relationship is safe, not even from one's sibling or parent. All of these characters are representations which are stereotypes. Only that part of their natures that would be helpful in moving the story along is depicted. So the characters are flat compared to real human beings. But these soap operas are entertaining because, as is the case with melodrama, their actions and reactions are so grandiose and exaggerated.

This study is significant for several reasons: many of the fans are such fanatics, the soap opera has a wonderful place in the history of mass media culture in America, and this genre is threatened with extinction. Why are soap operas failing? Some say that it is because there are so many daytime programs that appeal to women's interests. One can see the female melodrama in reality shows with female contestants, like *Survivor* and *Bachelorette*, and *The Housewives of New Jersey*. Others say that even prime time programs are shot in a style similar to soap operas now and that this shift in how prime time series are written and shot makes them more appealing to women. Prime time dramas focus much more on character development than they did in the 1970's and 1980's when action was the focus of television programs.

Many fans are older women. They are also dying. This has to be a factor in the lower ratings of soap operas. This genre has not been able to attract new fans to replace

the ones they are losing. As yet, no one knows exactly why younger women are not attracted to soap operas the way that their mothers and grandmothers were.

This study is significant because it was done at this pivotal time in the history of soap operas, when they are being threatened. *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Young and the Restless* have tremendous entertainment value. They give comfort to people who, for whatever reason, must stay in their homes most of the day. Retired people depend on soap operas to keep them company. Watching soap operas and trying to keep up with the many plot twists keeps older adults' minds active.

Soap operas are also educational. Viewers can learn how to handle divorce and other problems in life, how to deal with difficult people, and how to create great romantic relationships. These soap operas show what should not be done—namely lying, cheating, and keeping secrets. Women also get to watch the social behavior of the characters and get to decide which behaviors are successful and which are not.

Online fan sites give viewers the opportunity to participate in their own entertainment. There are many fan sites available, from the network site to privately authored sites. By going to chat rooms or posting messages on bulletin boards, fans can discuss events and characters. The production companies that create the soap operas play an active role in watching these sites. Fan activity has played a major role in saving some characters who, according to *Soap Opera Digest* and publications like *NBC Soaps*, *ABC Soaps*, and *CBS Soaps*, are rumored to be leaving the show. I believe that the production companies put these rumors out so that they can try and gauge the popularity of characters. Conversely, characters who don't create much interest and are not talked about on fan sites are in danger of being replaced by more charismatic actors.

The survival of the soap opera genre is questionable today. The target market for soap operas is the 18-49 year old television viewer. This age group is supposed to have the most discretionary income and be the least brand loyal. Older adults are very brand loyal and don't have the purchasing power they once did. Are soap operas reaching their target audience? Ratings would have us to believe that soap operas are garnering only the older audience of fans who have been loyal for decades. But why is this? Why is a new and younger audience not being built? I truly believe that the production companies are trying to reach the younger audience, particularly in the summer. It is a soap opera tradition that late in the spring of every year romances bloom between teenage characters. These romances are given major prominence during the summer. This is to attract the teenagers who are out of school for the summer. The problem with this, it seems to me, is that teenagers who view these summer romances are not getting hooked properly in a way that makes them into loyal soap fans. I do not know how these production companies can attract younger fans except for maybe embracing participatory culture and offering some online component that is created for young viewers. If extra scenes were available that younger fans could watch online or games that they could play, even a video game, maybe it would hook the younger audience. With a video game, maybe even more males can become soap fans. Previous research has shown that 30% of soap opera fans are male.

A question that can be raised is whether soap operas are failing to attract a younger audience because they are presenting a too traditional world with values that are out of date. It is also possible that the hegemonic viewpoint of soap operas may be that of the elderly. For example, with the twenty something year old group that seems lost on *General Hospital*, is it possible that the way these young people are being represented

reflects an older person's view of younger people, that they are frittering away their lives on nothing valuable. This viewpoint might indeed attract the older viewer because it is what he or she really thinks about younger people. This is certainly possible.

No doubt viewers' attitudes and beliefs about society and themselves are being cultivated by watching these three soap operas. *Days of Our Lives* shows the fiery Irish fighting with other groups in society, *General Hospital* shows the hospital setting as a battlefield on which skirmishes are fought everyday over love, and *Young and the Restless* teaches viewers that life in the upper class might not be as utopian as imagined

More research should be done on soap operas. Maybe further research could be done to discover whether soap opera viewers are unhappy. It would be interesting to know if heavy viewers are less happy than light viewers even though it would be difficult to establish cause and effect and blame soap operas for viewers' unhappiness.

Conversational analysis would be very interesting, especially if some component of language can be tied to class.

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