

2000

## "Television and Reality: Are They Different?"

Tammy L. Holmes

*Eastern Illinois University*

This research is a product of the graduate program in [Speech Communication](#) at Eastern Illinois University.

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"Television and Reality: Are They Different?"

\_\_\_\_\_  
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BY

Tammy L. Holmes

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**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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**"Television and Reality: Are They Different?"**

Tammy L. Holmes

Eastern Illinois University

**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to discover if there is any significance between the images of television viewed by people and the increase of the social construction of reality. Stephen LittleJohn (1999) states, [Social construction of reality] consists of meanings and understanding arising from communication with others. This notion known as reality that is deeply embedded in sociological thought. The objective of this topic is to explore the effects that mass media have on life and specifically how television often distorts, and does not accurately communicate the everyday lived experiences in our lives. Television often mimics reality. Television only, at best, mimics the identical replication of the image-maker who creates the mimic. It does not create reality or require individuals to believe particulars, but often does reflect what occurs in society. Television not only reflects the problems that already exist, but also questions its validity in their creation.

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**Television and Reality: Are They Different?**

Television is viewed, with its dominant presence in the last century and its continued evolution, as an agent, as to influence how the individual's perceptions are construed and oftentimes altered in human interaction. According to Lawrence W. Litchy, television is a baby-sitter, an initiator of conversations, a transmitter of culture, and a custodian of traditions, ...Television is our nightlight (Douglas & Davis, 1993). The tube's influence fluctuates wildly with socioeconomic status, viewing setting, and other variables.

In this day television, by and large, constructs our worldview; hence, most people are unaware of faults or shortcomings that the mass medium presents. Oftentimes, the majority of televised programs are edited before "airing". These edits are necessary for the programming to appear more authentic, perhaps operationally defined as "authentic" or "real". Countless hours are spent to produce perfection in order that the audience's desire for entertainment is fulfilled. In actuality, the longing for attractiveness is often appealing to the masses of viewers versus the authenticity of depicting the mundane realities of people's everyday lived experiences.

The objective of this thesis is to explore the effects that mass media have on life and, specifically, how television often distorts, and does not accurately communicate the everyday



experiences in our lives. In his book, Television and the Critical View, Horace Newcomb states, "Television, the newest and far more prevalent form of fiction, is even more profoundly influential in our lives-not in terms of the stories it tells, but more importantly, the values it portrays" (Newcomb, 1976, p.9).

Television is one of the most popular forms of media that has a global influence. Television sets are ubiquitous in households all across the world, and perhaps there are multiple television sets in each household. Viewing television is a hobby that seldom is consciously considered a favorite pastime by those who spend numerous hours with this mass medium. The Kaiser Family Foundation report states: the typical American kid spends 5 ½ hours a day consuming media (mainly TV), for kids eight years of age and older it jumps to nearly 7 hours per day (Dickinson, 1999). Television consumes a majority of the masses' spare time and its role is are questioned as an advocate for human interaction.

The problem is that television appears as manufactured, goods, so TV is not entirely a "window on the world," or a "mirror of society", television has mentored us and mirrored us (Brewster, 1999). Generally, it is not accidentally capturing reality when a camera happens to be turned on. Teams of communication workers carefully construct television. Nothing that is seen or heard on TV is left to chance. Television has

commercial interruptions and is a business. "American TV is a spirit modestly gifted, it sits at the wheel of a trillion dollar vehicle. The machine being commercial has a tendency to veer toward a ditch" (Morrow, 1992).

Its primary goal is not to entertain or inform, but to generate monetary value. Television bears different meanings in the lives of different people.

"Aside from the more obvious supposed goals of broadcasting-information, education, and entertainment-television, as we have seen, can be a distraction, a way of killing time, or avoiding conversation. It can be a source of engaging narrative, which may stimulate the related mind of the viewer; or it can be a means by which individuals compare their own identity, or self which they present to the world, with those on display" (Gauntlett & Hill, 1999, p. 130).

Since the products being bought and sold are audiences, and it is the consumers who make up the audiences, then we ought to be concerned.

### **Review of Literature**

#### Social and Political Implications:

Television has social and political implications. Although television is not necessarily real, at best a second reality; it influences our behavior in the real world. The message that television sends does not just consists of words or reflections.

Television is not just a duplication of the real world but also a complex mixture of all of these things; so complex no one can solely control it (Guillebaud, 1992). Television inventors could not foreshadow what this medium has become in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and now at the beginning peak of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Television has provided a source of entertainment for audiences around the world, but also went on to socially transform values and norms (Life, 1999). In its initial debut television was thought of as a radio with pictures: visual radio (Life, 1999). But television was yet to become one of the most "powerful instruments of social transformation" (Life, 1999), for the current events globally. For the last forty years television has metamorphosed into a major source of information. "Television was America's great equalizer" (Life, 1999, p.52). Television has become the irreducible common denominator for every household in the United States, and the television positions itself into every plugged-in household.

"Television accelerated the process by codifying the imagery of desire (through advertising), of behavior (through classic sitcoms), of the world around us (through electronic town green, the news)" (Life, 1999, p.50).

In essence television reflects and directs us as a society.

Shanahan & Morgan (1999) suggest that television be

presented to its audience in story form. Televised information usually appears in the forms of stories. Who creates these stories and what are the determining factors in regards to the information presented to the public? The art of American storytelling is too important to be left to television. In the struggle of stories "who is the authentic American voice?" (Morrow, 1999).

The social implications of television extend into specific and/or particular behavioral patterns of its viewing audience; specific observations of televised behaviors are reverent to constructing judgements regarding social reality (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). The oral tradition of storytelling, moves and affects its audience, through a course of events that precede one another. Through the unique art of storytelling we learn about stories. However Shanahan & Morgan (1999) believe in the process of immersion in a culture, which in turn, teaches us what television programming mean and how to interpret particular meanings. Likewise, as an actual lived experience watching television, close attention must be allocated to the stories to learn how the world operates. Storytelling foremost is a form of communication, and its purpose has an "end" or "moral" that structures social meaning (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999).

Stories are often repeated and retold over numerous occasions and are reinforced as a mode of redundancy and the story becomes recycled. "Stories don't necessarily have impacts

on beliefs; they constitute the beliefs" (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). Storytelling has and continues to be a methodology in which information is transferred to a mass television audience. Storytelling is intricately apart of television, the social implication or social construction of reality amongst its varied viewing audiences. "Television does its work, but there are better ways to tell a story" (Morrow, 1992).

Not only does television construct social circumstance and condition in the life of its viewer, but increasingly effects how officials are perceived and the process of electing public officials. While parents' attitudes seem to be the greatest influence upon the political socialization of the younger children, television appeared to be the greatest influence upon the older ones (Sears & Weber, 1989).

In the 1960's John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign against Richard Nixon was one of the first instances of television's political implications upon its audience. It has been asserted that differences in the two candidates' television persona heavily influenced John F. Kennedy's election victory, but the extent of the influence has yet to be determined (Vancil & Pendell, 1987).

Television shapes constituents in ways that influence the political process, and may also affect its outcome.

"Is it desirable for viewers to become less and less interested in serious information especially about

political campaigns? For good or bad, network news programs have commanded the audience's attention, providing their interpretations of fads and events" (Greco, 2000, p.166).

According to US News & World Report, Alvin Sanoff believes that behind the White House and big business, television shapes the reality of millions of viewers by delivering them what the world beyond their screen is like (Sanoff, 1984). Television often determines the perception of the nation's leaders. "People use to find out about leadership from elders, clergy, teachers, and parents" but now with the average adult watching 2 ½ hours of television daily, it has become a primary source of information for much of our society (Sanoff, 1984).

\* Television reflects the values and ideologies of its producers. First impressions are very important as voters form initial opinions about political campaigns/candidates. A study of the 1976 U.S. presidential campaign between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford indicates that voters initial reaction to Jimmy Carter's image shaped their voting behavior. For Republican candidate Gerald Ford, initial reactions played a larger role (Oshagan, 1988).

Television has its own unique language. Through television political candidates can go over the heads of party hierarchy and communicate directly with the people who cast the ballots (Sanoff, 1984). Television often distorts candidates' positions and it is noted for dismissing important issues. Television can

be a two-edged sword however; it can catapult people into leadership and give the candidates a greater chance to fail (Sanoff, 1984).

Through all of the political implications that revolve around the mass medium television has managed to convey a story to its viewing audience. George Gerbner a well-known television critic states, in reference to political implications that television keeps poking around until a leader is "demystified and in a sense humanized" but also exposed as a person who makes a lot of mistakes (Sanoff, 1984). In the last forty years of television's medium, it has definitely shaped political campaigning of elected and desired candidates. In relational context of television's social and political implications, we learn to make sense of television and its unique narrative structure (Greco, 2000).

#### Television Audiences:

✦ Audiences are active and participate in many activities while watching television, but on some level they must participate in the communication process by making sense of the images and sounds they see on television. Cultivation analysis posits that audiences who watch larger amounts of television will be more likely to think that the real world is like the world shown on television (Gauntlett & Hill, 1999). There are other levels that television relies upon, such as human awareness. This

is what is called phenomenology according to Jeffery Scheuer. In his book entitled The Sound Society, Scheuer describes phenomenology as how the objective stream of messages interacts with subjective viewers to shape our overall sense of reality, as to the audience in comparison to reading, holding a conversation, or witnessing a live event (1999).

✶The audience does not always get the same meaning that producers intend, but moreover, television questions its initial audience to become as active as possible by supplying them with critical thinking skills and understanding the media becomes a gradual process. "Television's impact on our sense of reality is an extension, on a broader scale, of its language" (Scheuer, 1999, p.92). Language acts as an agent that influences the message that is transmitted by television. Gross and Morgan (1985) explain that the more time one spends living in the world of television, the more likely one is to report conceptions of social reality that can be traced to television portrayals.

Heather Hundley depicts television's sitcom *Cheers*, "The Naturalization of Beer in *Cheers*" (1994) and health and safety risks associated with social beer drinking and how the naturalization of beer is perceived by characters, dialogue, actions, and settings. Fiske (1984) analyzes the Dr. Who program by definition of essay, he believes that in order to be popular, a television program's textual signs must evoke social or



ideological meanings which challenges a wide diversity of audience members to find the program appealing.

*Cheers* was among the top ten most watched primetime shows in the United States and in the 1990-1991 season it was "the top-rated show of the year" (Facts on File, 1991). *Cheers* received more Emmy nominations than any series and won 28 Emmys out of 111 nominations. Strate (1992) points out that *Cheers* naturalizes beer in that viewers are encouraged to think of beer not as a potentially harmful alcoholic beverage, but rather as a beverage no more dangerous than "soda pop or water". This implies that consumption of beer is not harmful, and perhaps even healthy (p.83).

Contrary to the sitcom *Cheers*, according to Richard Zoglin, "people use to think law enforcement was like *Dirty Harry* or *Miami Vice*, but shows like *Cops* let the American people see what the police are really like" (Zoglin, 1992, p.62). Unlike *Kojak* or *Miami Vice* these reality-based picture of cops are highly favorable and less romanticized. Reality based police shows such as *Hawaii 5-0*, *Cops* and *Rescue 911* present another kind of disparity between reality and appearance desensitizes the audience fear and emotion and reflects a narrow eye view of crime and the criminal system. "The fictional police dramas are sometimes more real because they give you that violent context. You get a much more subtle understanding of the character instead of just action" (Zoglin, 1992, p.6). Despite television's

unbalance, it is pervasive and its credibility still remains a question. On its mundane level, television in its sheer ubiquity and high viewership, blends almost seamlessly into our daily lives (Sheuer, 1999).

Television programming such as talk shows questions the audiences' social construction of reality. The audience of a talk show does form a critique of the traditional methods of arriving at knowledge or truth through the demand for the test of lived experiences.

The Oprah Winfrey Show turns around the tradition of rational distance by offering raw and spontaneous evidence. According to Jane Shattuc (1999) this process of "Oprahification" allows the program to create a flow between stage guests, audience guests, and the audience members that empowers the authority of the audience. The idea of an active audience versus a passive audience is confrontational in daytime talk shows. The passive audience usually leads by commercial interests and self promoted hosts. The active audience of the shows can also be a forum for social control when the audience taunts, shouts, and demands conformity of the "guest deviants" (Shuttuc, 1999). The host of a daytime talk show generalizes a particular experience into a larger social frame to capture the interest of a larger audience (Shuttuc, 1999).

Daytime talk shows demand a belief in the authenticity of lived experience as a social truth. Perhaps, this belief is what

"Oprahification" of America really is. As one Oprah audience member stated on April 14, 1994: "Don't tell me how to feel. I am my experience" (Haralovich & Rabinovitz, 1999, p. 178). In addition television's audience commonly provide companionship for some viewers. According to Gauntlett & Hill (1999), television provides company and offers an opportunity to experience emotions that members of the audience would rather not experience in the real world. Television allows some of its viewers to see the world without having to actually travel outside of their home. This constructed outside is not perceived to be as safe or as familiar as the world the viewer sees on her television screen. Actually seeing the actor/actresses on television is an important part of the relationship between the viewer and the television. "This thought seems to be more immediate and more powerful than radio" (Gauntlett & Hill, 1999, p.116).

Television is not only a box that ranges in a variety of sizes, but it is also ideal for most because it is so easily accessible. Skornia opens in his book, Television and Society, "Radio and television not only can and do teach, but cannot help teaching. There is no longer any question of whether they teach. It is only a question of what they teach, whether intentionally or unintentionally" (Skornia, 1965, p. 143). Television has and will continue to convey ideals to its varied audiences for generations to come through the images it projects.

"Television is a subtle, continuous source for learning about the rules of life and society" (Huston, 1992, p.57-58). If an individual does not know and wonders what the answer to a question is, television often becomes the reference for the correct answer. Television captures the visual images as well as the audio sounds of people, places, things, and ideas often referred to as nouns.

"The reason for the unpredictability is that the message vehicles by television does not consist exclusively of words, reflections or pictures, a duplication of the real world, but of a complex mixture of all of these things—so complex that no one can explain it" (Guillebaud, 1992,p. 1).

Television is often argued as a mere imitation of the "real world" when it is not even a decent replica or confirmation of the lived actions experienced. The purpose of this paper is to discover if there is any significance between images on television viewed by people and the increase of the social reconstruction of reality.

Television and its wide array of influenced patterns are studied by scholars in the world of academia, through investigative research to determine its power and influence. The analysis is television's influence on society's perception of reality, but the experiment must have a formula for the analysis, such is determined by an exhaustive review of the literature.

George Gerbner is a leading researcher on the social effects of television. He makes a distinction between effect and his own theory of cultivation (Gerbner, 1997). George Gerbner explains the role the media environment plays in how individuals think about themselves and the way the world works. Gerbner provides an analytical framework to understand what is at stake in the debates about media (Gerbner, 1997).

The concept and the internalization experience of its viewers are explained by George Gerbner's "cultivation theory". Cultivation analysis is a study that posits television's independent contribution to viewer's conception of social reality (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). Stephen Littlejohn (1999) writes, [Social construction of reality] consists of meanings and understanding arising from communication with others. This notion known as reality is deeply embedded in sociological thought.

This sociological thought must be reviewed for comprehensive terms regarding social construction of reality. The analysis of everyday life is or the everyday experience that we as human beings are subjected to has a formula as well. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman (1966) in their book, The Social Construction of Reality states,

Commonsense knowledge contains a variety of instructions as to how this is to be done. Commonsense contains innumerable pre- and quasi-scientific interpretations about everyday reality, which it takes for granted. If we are to describe the reality of commonsense, we must refer to these interpretations, just as we must take account of its taken-for-granted character—but we do so within phenomenological brackets (p. 20).

According to Richard Lanigan phenomenology focuses on the conscious experience of a person relating to the lived world that he or she inhabits (Orbe, 1993). Phenomenology seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of our everyday experiences (Orbe, 1993).

Cultivation analysis investigates how reality is constructed based on television viewing; those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages of the television world (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). But according to Littlejohn reality derives from meaning and how it is communicated to others. Realities are grounded from sociological thought or as termed by Berger and Luckman (1966) the "sociology of knowledge" (p. 3).

The sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for "knowledge" in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such "knowledge". And insofar as all human "knowledge" is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted "reality" congeals for the man in the street. In other words we contend that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p.3).

Erving Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974) is reinforced by the powerful presence of television in the lives of its viewers. Goffman sees social reality not as independent of us but always

dependent upon how we view or play our own roles and understand others in the same process. Each of us "frames" whatever we see or hear in terms of our own needs or understanding. Television as we know it does not make our world. Rather, it is our world, as we perceive it, which increasingly remakes, remolds and finally destroys "TV" in its true sense, its primary origin (Douglas & Davis, 1993).

Based on the research reviewed, the following research question was generated.

**RQ:** What is the relationship between the images of television viewed by people and the social construction of reality?

### **Methodology**

#### Sample

Participants in this study were 135 (64 males, 69 females) undergraduate students at a public Midwestern university in Illinois, 69 of the participants were freshman, 7 of the participants were sophomores, 21 of the participants were juniors, and 37 of the participants were senior status students.

Participants in the first focus group were 5 (3 males, 2 females) undergraduate students at a public Midwestern university in Illinois, 3 of the participants were freshmen, 1 of the participants was a sophomore, 1 of the participant was a juniors.

Participants in the second focus group were 7(1 male, 6 females) undergraduate students at a public Midwestern University in Illinois; all 7 of the participants were freshmen.

### Procedures

Data collection procedures for all participants were similar. The author of the study randomly selected students in public speaking and intercultural courses in the Speech Communication Department. The participants were asked if they would participate in a survey. The researcher explained to the subjects that the survey was not a test and would not be graded.

For the second part of this study focus groups were conducted. Data collection procedures for all participants were similar. The author of the study asked for volunteers to participate in a focus group interviews. The researcher explained to the subjects that the survey was not a test and would not be graded.

A request was made to students in an undergraduate public speaking course, as well as an African-American Studies class at a public Mid-western University. Two separate focus groups were formed. The participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form that was developed by the researcher. Upon their



written consent a time was established for meeting between the participants and the researcher.

The protocol for the focus group interviews was as follows:

- 1.) Approximately, how much television do you watch in a week's period of time?
- 2.) What are your 3 favorite television programs that you watch?
- 3.) Do you watch daytime soap operas?
- 4.) If Yes to question # 3, name them and how often you view them (weekly).
- 5.) Are you planning to vote in the upcoming presidential election (2000)?
- 6.) Did you watch any of the recent televised presidential debates that took place in the month of October on television?
- 7.) If yes, estimate how many hours were watched (max. 6 hrs)?

### Instrumentation

**Measured Variable One.** Television was operationally defined from The Five Myths of Television Power Or Why The Medium Is Not The Message, (1993) by using Lawrence Lichty's definition. The researcher developed a semantic differential scale using eighty-six variables, measuring the images of "television".

**Measured Variable Two.** Social Construction of Reality was operationally defined using Stephen Littlejohn (1999), definition from Theories of Human Communication. The researcher developed a semantic differential scale using eighty-six variables, measuring the images of "reality".

The researcher for the focus group interviews developed seven questions. These seven questions were developed from the survey that had been administered earlier in the research. Focus group methodology is gaining considerable attention and uses a viable research tool for social scientific research (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Morgan, 1993).

### Statistical Analysis

A Factor Analysis was conducted to determine if there was any similarity between the images of television and the social construction of reality. The one hundred and thirty-five participants were grouped into two categories labeled as "television" and "reality" (135 television, 135 reality).

The tape recorded and written transcriptions of each interview provided the data for the final analysis. The interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes each and were tape recorded. The interview style was informal and conversational in order to allow the participants to describe their experiences regarding television and reality. Data from each interview were then transcribed.

### **Results**

Results of the Factor Analysis. The Factor Analysis resulted in specific variables, which loaded on "television" and "reality". The criteria for independence were .60 and .40. Regarding

television the adjectives that met this criteria were *entertaining, enjoyable, and popular*. This first cluster of adjectives can overall be described as *entertainment*. The second cluster of adjectives that met the criteria for independence were *fictional and easy* which can overall be labeled as *fantasy*.

The results of the factor analysis in reference to the reality survey, the criteria for independence was the following .60 and .40. The adjectives that were significant in the first cluster were *real, factual, literal, challenging, and thought provoking*, this group can be labeled as *objective*. The second group of adjectives that met criteria for independence was *boring and unpleasant* which can be labeled as *unpleasant*. The final group of adjectives clustered to depict reality was *discourteous, vengeful, and discriminate*, these adjectives can be labeled as *harshness*.

The results of focus group (A) interviews can be categorized as "strong" from the factor analysis semantic differential. The mean for the amount of television watched was 13 hours per week for group one. Participant's answers varied from 2, 10, 7, 35, and 5 hours of television watched per week.

Question 2 responses regarding the participants three favorite television programming. (See Table 4)

Question 3 and 4 asked if the participants watched daytime soaps and if yes which ones and how often? The following

responses were generated about daytime soaps from the participants.

"You have to watch it everyday, it's like a (regular)life."

\*"It's drama, something intense. Some people like to watch drama."

"They want to be in other people's business."

"Its phony, the acting is phony."

"I don't feel I need to watch it anymore."

Questions 5, 6, and 7 surrounded political implications of television through debates televised. Some responses to the debates were as follows.

"Debates are kind of like a standoff."

"What is most effective comes from their mouth."

In reference to advertisements these responses were generated.

"They are lies."

"Its garbage."

"No effect on voting, people already know who they are voting for."

Political candidates when viewed in debates in the third party interviews.

"It's easier talking to 3<sup>rd</sup> person."

"Its publicity and hype. Its more humanistic than the candidates ability."

The results of focus group (B) interviews can be categorized as "weak" from the factor analysis semantic differential. The mean for the number of television hours viewed by the participants in focus group (B) was 2 hours. The responses were as follows: 1, 4, 5, 8, 2, 0, 1 hours of television watched per week.

Question 2 responses regarding the participants three favorite television programming. (See Table 5)

Question 3 and 4 responses to daytime soaps were as follows only one of the participants acknowledged watching daytime soaps.

"All My Children, I only watch them (soaps) when I'm not at school."

Question 5, 6, 7 in regards to advertisements and debates with political implications. Over half of the students were not registered to vote for the election.

"Advertisements talk bad about each other."

"They focus on their own positives."

"I don't like to watch fake TV, real events not with actors."

Table 1

**Television (Factor 1)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
"Entertainment" Eigenvalue= 5.56	-0.671706 -0.664879 -0.688856	Entertaining, Enjoyable, and Popular

**Television (Factor 2)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
"Fantasy" Eigenvalue= 4.72	0.645821 0.660787	Fictional Easy

Table 2

**Reality (Factor 1)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
"Objective"  Eigenvalue= 6.02	-0.686000, -0.773410 -0.642065 -0.678703 -0.691559	Real, Fact, Literal Challenging, and Thought Provoking

**Reality (Factor 2)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
"Unpleasant"  Eigenvalue= 5.48	-0.660438 -0.657600	Boring, Not Enjoyable

**Reality (Factor 3)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
"Harshness"  Eigenvalue= 4.80	0.671260 -0.624005 -0.656892	Discourteous, Vengeful, and Discriminate

Table 3

**Focus Group (A) Question 1**

Approximate # of hours of television watched (weekly)	2, 10, 7, 35, 5
---	-----------------

**Question 2 (See Table 4)**

**Questions 3 and 4**

Key Word Responses to Daytime Soaps	"like life" "drama" "phony" "intense"
-------------------------------------	--

**Questions 5, 6, and 7**

Keyword Responses about political advertisements, debates, and news stories	"standoff" "effective" "lies" "garbage" "no effect" "easier" "publicity" "hype" "humanistic"
---	--



Table 4

**Focus Group (A) Favorite Television Programming**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The View (Barbra Walters)</li> <li>2. All My Children</li> <li>3. The Simpsons</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Simpsons</li> <li>2. NBA Inside Stuff</li> <li>3. Hits from Street (BET Videos)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. MTV Countdown</li> <li>2. Cosby Show (reruns)</li> <li>3. 7<sup>th</sup> Heaven</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Simpsons</li> <li>2. The Sopranos</li> <li>3. Oz (HBO)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cosby Show (reruns)</li> <li>2. 106 &amp; Park (BET Videos)</li> <li>3. Martin (reruns)</li> </ol>	

Table 5

**Focus Group (B) Question 1**

Approximate # of hours of television watched (weekly)	1, 4, 5, 8, 2, 0, 1
---	---------------------

**Question 2 (See Table 5)**

**Questions 3 and 4**

Key Word Responses to Daytime Soaps	"only watched....when I'm not at school"
-------------------------------------	--

**Questions 5,6, and 7**

Keyword Responses about political advertisements, debates, and news stories	"bad" "focus" "positives" "fake" "real events" "actors"
---	--

Table 6

**Focus Group (B) Question 2**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Celebrity Profile</li> <li>2. 60 Minutes</li> <li>3. 20/20</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Daria (MTV)</li> <li>2. Blind Date</li> <li>3. Wedding Story</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jerry Springer</li> <li>2. Wrestling (WWF)</li> <li>3. Code Blue (TLC)</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Beverly Hills 90210 (reruns)</li> <li>2. Real World (MTV)</li> <li>3. Dawson's Creek</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dawson's Creek</li> <li>2. Friends</li> <li>3. Beverly Hills 90210 (reruns)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Behind the Music (VH1)</li> <li>2. SportsCenter</li> <li>3. Total Request Live (TRL)</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Beverly Hills 90210 (reruns)</li> <li>2. Total Request Live (TRL)</li> <li>3. Behind the Music (VH1)</li> </ol>		

### Discussion

Over one half of the participants were freshman students, which might be more influenced by television's political implications considering that most traditional freshman students have yet to participate in their first election. Oftentimes the political platforms that guide their particular voting parties are those that have been constructed by others usually parental voting influence. The political implications of "television" and "reality" are formed more as the student develops in their voting career.

When reviewing the 1990's sitcom *Cheers*, the participants in the study at the time of the series might not have been at the particular mean of the viewing audience for this programming. Many of the participants in the survey were nearly 10-12 yrs of age when *Cheers* was one of the top rated shows. Now at best, the participants might recall the show, but not necessarily the actual individual episodes and the meaning that it projected to its audience. At this point the researcher can only rely on reruns of the sitcom in hopes the participant has had the opportunity to view this programming based on the popularity of the *Cheers* at a given time.

"Television" and "reality" are terms that are interchangeable with each other. Television permeates on the

social construction of reality to some degree or another. Its determined influence is unknown and this was not the purpose of this particular study, but rather is the influence (amount pending) consciously vivid, is television influence made keenly aware to the viewer? Television's impact on reality or the "sociology of knowledge" is integrated into cores beyond its initially targeted audience. This deep embedded sociological thought known as "reality" serves, as a resilient course for ongoing constructions to continue, enhance and expand only as the viewer allows this process to occur.

The focus group interviews aided in determining how specific participants responded to the factor analysis with the semantic differential. This helped undergird the responses that led to the results of the survey. Focus group (A) was labeled as *strong* because the responses given were adjectives that best represented the initial survey. The participants voluntarily shared their personal views and generated a discussion group among themselves. Within this group, I, as the researcher, did not have to initiate the discussion or impose on their views. The participants were interested in the subject matter and interested to listen to other responses from all participants.

Focus group (B) was labeled as *weak*, because the majority of the participants were not registered voters or, if they were, had no intentions and interest in the political process. This group consisted of traditional freshman students that are just

now able to vote in any electoral process. The group was more curious about the researcher's opinions than with the development of their own and the other participants' views.

### Conclusions

From this study, images from television do have an impact on the social construction of reality. Findings of this study indicate there is some similarity between *television* and *reality*. Regarding television the adjectives that met this criteria were *entertaining, enjoyable, and popular*. This first cluster of adjectives can overall be described as *entertainment*. The second cluster of adjectives that met the criteria for independence were *fictional* and *easy* which can overall be labeled as *fantasy*.

For the reality survey, the adjectives that were significant in the first cluster were *real, factual, literal, challenging, and thought provoking*, which this group can be labeled as *objective*. The second group of adjectives that met criteria for independence is *boring* and *unpleasant* which can be labeled as *unpleasant*. The final group of adjectives clustered to depict reality was *discourteous, vengeful, and discriminate*, these adjectives can be labeled as *harshness*.

### Limitations

There are definitely limitations to this study. One limitation was the number of subjects. The sample group was

limited to undergraduate students at public Mid-Western University in Illinois. When assessing "television" and "reality", there are more participants who can be used for this particular study.

The class status for students was a variable in the limitations. Over half of the participants were traditional freshman students, with possibly factor possibilities: the amount of time that television is watched, the intensity and the concentration that is given to television programming, and the particular programming being viewed.

### Implications

This research definitely can be further investigated with many realms of "television" and "reality". The reality based television shows such as *Hawaii 5-0*, *Hill Street Blues*, *Chips*, *Rescue 911*, and *Cops* have potential constructed violence. This type of television may present another kind of disparity between reality and appearance that desensitizes the audiences' fear and emotion and reflects a narrow view of crime and the criminal system. "Television" and "reality" studies can be advanced into violent content and the sexuality of it's content among adults and children.

For future recommendations of the study, questions must be pondered, what is real? What are the processes taken to discover

this term "reality". How is one to know what is real? What policies are to be utilized to determine if television dictates practices to what is "real" within each individual's lived experience? "Television" and "reality" can be explored beyond this present study and can be expanded into categories like enhanced realities that are socially constructed by a medium such as television.



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**Instructions:** Indicate how you feel about the referent by placing a single check along each scale. For example, if you feel that the referent is very interesting, place a check at the extreme left side of the first scale. If you feel that the referent is very boring, place a check at the extreme right side of the first scale. If you feel somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, place a check in the appropriate space.

**Television (Appendix A)**

	Very	Considerably	Somewhat	Neutral	Somewhat	Considerably	Very	
Bad	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Good
Non-Profane	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Profane
Unnecessary	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Necessary
Pleasant	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unpleasant
Non Sexist	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Sexist
Unfair	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Fair
Impartial	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Biased
Violent	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Nonviolence
Non-Racist	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Racist
Aggressive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Non-aggressive
Sensitive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Insensitive
Disrespectful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Respectful
Deep	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Shallow
Unclear	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Clear
Courteous	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Discourteous
Vengeful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Forgiving
Honest	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Dishonest
Discriminate	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Indiscriminate
Competitive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Cooperative
Global	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Local
Advantageous	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Non advantageous





**Instructions:** Indicate how you feel about the referent by placing a single check along each scale. For example, if you feel that the referent is very interesting, place a check at the extreme left side of the first scale. If you feel that the referent is very boring, place a check at the extreme right side of the first scale. If you feel somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, place a check in the appropriate space.

**Reality (Appendix B)**

	Very	Considerably	Somewhat	Neutral	Somewhat	Considerably	Very	
Bad	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Good
Non-Profane	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Profane
Unnecessary	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Necessary
Pleasant	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unpleasant
Non Sexist	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Sexist
Unfair	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Fair
Impartial	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Biased
Violent	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Nonviolence
Non-Racist	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Racist
Aggressive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Non-aggressive
Sensitive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Insensitive
Disrespectful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Respectful
Deep	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Shallow
Unclear	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Clear
Courteous	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Discourteous
Vengeful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Forgiving
Honest	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Dishonest
Discriminate	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Indiscriminate
Competitive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Cooperative
Global	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Local
Advantageous	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Non advantageous



<b>Real</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Fictional</b>
<b>Entertaining</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Boring</b>
<b>Fact</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Myth</b>
<b>Literal</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Figurative</b>
<b>Pleasant</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Unpleasant</b>
<b>Useful</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Useless</b>
<b>Boring</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Interesting</b>
<b>Addicting</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Nonaddicting</b>
<b>Entertaining</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Boring</b>
<b>Dynamic</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Static</b>
<b>Permanent</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Temporal</b>
<b>Non Informative</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Informative</b>
<b>Enjoyable</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Not enjoyable</b>
<b>Educated</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Uneducated</b>
<b>Challenging</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Easy</b>
<b>Thought provoking</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Mind numbing</b>
<b>Persuasive</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Non persuasive</b>
<b>Popular</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Unpopular</b>
<b>Necessary</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Unnecessary</b>
<b>Individual</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Group</b>
<b>Disturb</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Rigid</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Adaptable</b>
<b>Flexible</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Nonflexible</b>
<b>Spontaneous</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Rehearsed</b>
<b>Impersonal</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Personal</b>
<b>Rewarding</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Non rewarding</b>
<b>Satisfying</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Unsatisfied</b>
<b>Time consuming</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Brief</b>
<b>Intense</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Relax</b>
<b>Stupid</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Smart</b>
<b>Interactive</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Non interactive</b>
<b>Subjective</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Objective</b>
<b>Specific</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Vague</b>
<b>Random</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Structured</b>
<b>Authentic</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Attractive</b>
<b>Truthful</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<b>Idealistic</b>



(Appendix C)

Focus Group Questions (Circle Below)

MALE OR FEMALE                      FRESHMAN      SOPHMORE      JUNIOR      SENIOR

1. Approximately, how much television do you watch in a week's period of time? (Number please) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What are your 3 favorite television programs that you watch?

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you watch day time soap operas?

YES    OR    NO

4. If Yes, list them below and how often you view them (weekly).

5. Are you planning on voting in the upcoming presidential election?    YES    OR    NO

6. Did you watch any of the recent televised presidential debates that took place in the month of October on ABC?

YES    OR    NO

7. If yes, estimate how many hours (max. 6 hrs).

\_\_\_\_\_

(Appendix D)

This is a focus group interview pertaining to the topic of "television" and "reality." By signing this permission slip, you are authorizing TAMMY HOLMES to tape record this focus group interview for this thesis. Your identify will remain anonymous when the information is used in this thesis.

X \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_