On Experiencing the Commercial Interruption

and Understanding Commercial Sponsorship's Effects

on Television

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of

Saybrook Institute

San Francisco

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Beverly Conger Sonoda

March, 1988

Acknowledgments

First, I should like to thank the 26 participants
in the study, whose interviews and questionnaires
furnished the data that led to the findings of this
research project. Also, thanks to those who were
interviewed during the preliminary phases of the work.
The time and cooperation of all these people are
greatly appreciated.

The members of my doctoral committee have been
exceptionally helpful, offering suggestions,
encouragement, thought, and time. My present Chair,
Debra White, PhD, whose participation has been
extremely constructive and beneficial, suggested
including in the sample the two age groups, in order
that lifelong exposure to television might be
contrasted with growing up before television came on
the scene. Roger Snyder, PhD, my previous Chair,
encouraged me in my selection of the experience of the
commercial interruption as the focus of the research,
shared with me his background in phenomenological
psychology, and offered encouragement and valuable
ideas throughout. Stanley Krippner, PhD, has given
valuable suggestions and advice, and has been
consistently heartening and ready to foster progress

of the project. All have given pertinent criticism when needed.

I also want to express my gratitude to Jürgen Kremer, PhD, who, as Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs, offered me consistency, encouragement, and firm nudges when appropriate, as well as constructive suggestions for the proposal and for completing the project.

Completion of this work would not have been possible without the moral support and inspiration of my friends. Among them are Donna and Gary Coopersmith, who have given consistent encouragement and moral support; Elaine Ghisla, who gave her interest and support in whatever I was doing; and Vera Bogoslovski, who offered solace and comfort, homemade soup and bread when these were needed. Also Virginia Bogoslovski, whose calm and pleasant presence was sustaining. Tanya B. Rabbitt has been consistent in giving whatever help might be needed at any time. She read the proposal, and offered excellent ideas.

The Kraushaar family has given more than anyone could reasonably expect. Alan Kraushaar, PhD, has discussed sympathetically with me problems along the way, and has given salutory suggestions whenever asked. Judith R. Kraushaar, M. Ed., has been helpful

iv

Abstract

Twenty-six adult viewers of commercial television (13 women and 13 men) were interviewed concerning their experience of the commercial interruption and their behavior during the presentation of commercials. They were then asked to complete a questionnaire about their viewing habits and preferences and about their understanding of certain aspects of the business of television. The sample consisted of 4 subgroups. Six females and 6 males had reached adulthood before beginning to watch television; 7 females and 7 males had grown up watching television.

Interviews were transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis, resulting in the formulation of seven main content categories, within which 51 specific subcategories emerged. These subcategories reflected participants' feelings, thoughts, and behavior regarding commercial interruptions.

Analysis of the interviews showed general acceptance of current ways of television programming and commercial interruption. More than two-thirds of the respondents indicated they experienced no particular feelings or thoughts at the moment of

interruption. Extreme feelings were rarely expressed. However, some respondents did voice negative feelings about interruptions and about the manipulativeness of their being presented at moments of high tension in programs.

Some differences between subgroups were apparent. More of those participants who had grown up before beginning to watch television denied feelings about interruptions, while some younger respondents described the interruption as a "relief". More men than women voiced accepting or positive themes about commercial interruptions.

Analysis of the questionnaires indicated that the type of program being viewed did not affect participants' responses to commercial interruptions. However, half of them said that their degree of involvement in the program did affect their response. Few respondents indicated awareness that advertisers influence or censor television programming.

Results suggested that many television viewers accept unquestioningly commercial television's way of presenting programming and its oft repeated statement that the programs are "brought to you by" the advertisers. Findings also suggested that many people

may have little understanding of the pervasive

influence of advertisers over values espoused,

ignored, or disdained through the television agenda.

Table of Contents

Chapter

LIST OF TABLES

Table   Page

List of Figures

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The first part of this chapter presents a general
introduction to the subject area, setting the
background for the writer's interest in the problem to
be investigated. Then the problem is stated, followed
by an account of the theoretical background for the
study, drawing from phenomenological psychology and
from critical studies of television and its effects
upon our society and culture.

A brief historical perspective is offered,
followed by a section about the previous neglect of
the problem addressed by this study. The succeeding
sections deal with definition of terms, a statement of
the research questions that are the focus of this
investigation, and the limits of the study, including
both limitations and delimitations. The assumptions
underlying the research are then delineated. Finally,

1

there is a brief summary of the chapter.

Television has been a prominent part of life in the United States for over 40 years. Ninety-eight per cent of households in the United States have at least one television set, and the sets are turned on for an average of 7.1 hours per day (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1987, p. 531).

Parents and educators worry, privately and publicly, about effects upon children, both because of what children see on television, and because of what they are not doing during the long hours of watching. Commentators upon social problems view with alarm the effects on families: they, too, are concerned about content, as well as about loss of communication among family members who are "glued to the set", and are thus not talking with each other, not sharing their experiences of the day, nor their concerns about the future, nor, for that matter, anything at all, except perhaps the snack foods they are consuming while watching together.

Although the technology had been available several years earlier, television was not introduced to the people of the United States until shortly after World War II. An extremely powerful marketing tool,

television served to stimulate buying of consumer
goods, which had again become plentiful after the
war's end, when many women went home from the war
industries, and thousands of men returned from the
armed services to civilian life, ready to work in
peacetime pursuits (Barnouw, 1975).

Marketing had become a major function of
broadcasting as early as 1922, when the first
commercial message was aired on radio. That
commercial, for a housing development, was a huge
success, and was followed soon by other advertising
messages. Although serious opposition was voiced
against using this promising new medium of
communication for what were then widely considered
such crass purposes, and hopeful statements were made
about how radio would become the people's university,
advertising won out as the primary purpose of
commercially "sponsored" programs.

Therefore, when television arrived on the scene,
advertising was well established and ready for the new
medium. We are told, "This program is brought to you
by the makers of Orangy Orgies." In fact, you are
being brought to Orangy Orgies by the program--or so
hopes the sponsor. So hopes the advertising agency.

And so hopes the network, which is being paid handsomely for those brief moments of air time. Indeed, expenditures for network advertising for the year 1985 totalled $8.3 billion (U.S. Bureau of Census 1987, p. 538). On commercial television, the purpose of the program is to sell products.

Moreover, the number of different products sold on one program has been increasing markedly, with the advent of shorter and more numerous commercials. Commercials arrive in series--called "strings" in the trade. The length of a string, and the position of a particular commercial within a string are of concern to the sellers of products.

Television and its effects have been studied so much by psychologists, sociologists, educators, and others that a mountain of research has accumulated over the years. In large part, the research deals with effects of the content of television programs upon the attitudes and behavior of people, particularly children. Major studies have been conducted by government-sponsored commissions, for example, National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (see, e.g., Baker, R. K. & Ball, S.J., 1969); Surgeon General's Scientific

Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior
(see, e.g., Murray, J.P., Rubinstein, E. A. &
Comstock, G. A., 1972), appointed to study effects of
television fare upon society. To report their
findings would require more space than is possible in
this dissertation. The reader is directed to the
reports cited.

Statement of the Problem

One problem area that had not been studied in
this plethora of work is the individual's experience
of the commercial interruption. It is the experience
of and immediate response to the commercial
interruption that is the principal subject of this
investigation.

It is clear that the experience of the commercial
interruption--that moment when the continuity of the
program is broken by the onset of a series of
commercials--is both widespread and frequent.
Carefully situated in relation to program content for
the purpose of maximizing attention, commercials
frequently occur at moments of dramatic intensity,
involving suspense, tragedy, or emotional involvement
(Barnouw, 1978, p. 58; Goldsen, 1977, pp. 7-8). In

fact, the purpose of the program is to deliver the maximum audience to the commercials (Goldsen, 1977, pp. 6, 7). This fact, basic to the television industry, is not acknowledged to the viewing audience.

Theoretical Background

Drawing from theoretical work in phenomenology, I have come to ask the present research question out of my own lived experience. In this instance, the relevant lived experience is, of course, that of the commercial interruption: the experience of that moment of abrupt change of focus, of content, and often of affect that occurs when the program is broken by the beginning of a series of commercials.

In my own experience, the commercial interruption has been especially excruciating in either of two situations. One of them is during a serious discussion of one of the grave problems that beset our planet and its inhabitants. Another is during one of those rare occasions when serious music is performed on commercial television. This second kind of interruption is hardest to bear when the commercial is one that includes its own sort of music. The contiguity of the two produces a painful moment for

me--a moment in which I am inclined to say something like, "How could they do that!"--or something stronger.

Although the present study is not concerned with a universal human experience, and is not, therefore, according to some authorities, a phenomenological study, still it has borrowed substantially from the phenomenological tradition. Indeed, I hold at least some of the values of the phenomenological point of view to be extremely important, such as the primacy of human experience and the need for obtaining first-hand descriptions by individuals of their own lived experience.

We learn from phenomenological psychologists to value the lived experience, to take human experience as a starting place, as the ground from which psychological inquiry grows. As stated by Giorgi (1984), "We would describe the pre-scientific lifeworld experiences that motivate the establishment of a science of psychology as 'protopsychological'" (p. 17). As a way of approaching the understanding of human experience, an early step is careful description by individual persons of their own experience.

But how do we decide what human experience and

behavior may become the subject of psychological inquiry? Giorgi (1984) offers the following statement of what kinds of events may arouse psychological interest:

> What then are the kinds of events that we might term protopsychological? From my own experience I would say that psychological curiosity is sparked by the following kinds of concrete everyday events: Why does a stranger shoot and kill John Lennon, a man whom he obviously admires? Why does a man who has heart trouble and is advised by his doctor to keep a strict regimen continue to drink, overeat, smoke and keep late hours? Why does a student who by all objective standards is bright and gifted sit alone in his room and depressedly brood because he experiences himself a failure? Why does someone love Picasso and Mozart but hate Cézanne and Brahms? These are examples of concrete or protopsychological events that spontaneously precipitate psychological interest. But how can we describe the theoretical interest that will help us make

more precise what is common to such diverse events? Let us begin with the traditional terms and say that we are interested in how people experience and behave in their world. Clearly, that is too broad, for all social sciences are interested in human behavior and experience. More specificity is needed. What is common to all the examples cited above is that the situations offer some opacity, some non-transparence. Something about them stands out, yet in non-obvious ways. (p. 18)

There is something difficult to grasp--certainly non-transparent--about the phenomenon of millions of people putting themselves voluntarily into the position of having their thoughts and feelings abruptly cut off every few minutes--having their train of thought, and in some cases of drama, their emotions, abruptly switched off as the program contents are replaced by bids to buy various products.

What are the viewers experiencing, day after day, night after night? Often the commercials are a marked departure from the tone of the program, though

this is by no means always true. Though this
phenomenon is non-transparent to me, it has become
standard behavior over the past forty years, and is
apparently less puzzling to those who have been doing
it all their lives than to those who were adults
before television entered the cultural scene.

Television: Medium and Epistemology

As has been ably pointed out by Postman (1985),
in his eloquent book, television has become the
paradigm for communication in our time. As he
indicates, the media that dominate the culture
determine our epistemology--determine what we take to
be knowledge, how we go about truth-telling, what
passes for truth in our culture.

Postman points out that television, as a
medium--at least as it functions in the United
States--presents information in small, unconnected
chunks--contextless, disjointed, often trivial. What
is presented is offered as entertainment, regardless
of its import, gravity, or significance to the human
condition. Moreover, news items of vastly various
import are offered in the same tone, with the same
smiling absence of involvement, and with commercials

interspersed--again, without regard to content.

In effect, we have been trained to be uncritical, unthinking, unquestioning television watchers. And, beyond that, we have taken the television format and show business mentality into other areas of our life. Everything is expected to be entertaining.

Moreover, people do not expect to pay sustained attention to anything. Robert MacNeil (1983) asks, "Is television shortening our attention span?" In this incisive paper, delivered at New York University, MacNeil makes some important points relevant to this discussion.

> Programmers live in constant fear of losing
> anyone's attention--anyone's, the dull or the
> bright, the lazy or the energetic. The safest
> technique to guarantee that mass attention is to
> keep everything brief, not to strain the
> attention of anyone but instead to provide
> constant stimulation through variety, novelty,
> action, and movement. You are required, in much
> popular television fare, to pay attention to no
> concept, no situation, no scene, no character,
> and no problem for more than a few seconds at a

time. In brief, television operates on the
short attention span. (p. 2)

MacNeil (1983) comments also on the fragmentary nature
of televised news.

I question how much of television's nightly news
effort is really absorbable and understandable.
I think the technique fights coherence. I think
it tends to make things ultimately boring and
dismissable (unless they are accompanied by
horrifying pictures) because almost anything is
boring and dismissable if you know almost
nothing about it. (p. 3)

Regarding the attention span, MacNeil (1983) states,

I believe that the short attention span is not
only inefficient communication, but also it is
decivilizing. Part of the process of civilizing
a young person, surely, lies in trying to
lengthen his attention span, one of the basic
tools of human intelligence. (p. 3)

In summary, then, television has profoundly
influenced our ways of thinking and feeling--of
conceptualizing our lives. We accept without
indignation--even without question--the presentation
of inane commercials, often shouted at us, immediately

following reports of events of grave import to us all. Such events are reported to us in bursts a few seconds long, accorded the same treatment as the day's stock market activity, the weather, and the scores of the weekend's football games. Further, it appears that we accept without question such incredibly brief and superficial reports of important events as if they were as labelled: "the news".

Moreover, we increasingly require that everything in our lives be entertaining. A minor though striking example of this trend, on television itself, is a course on writing recently presented on public television, for college credit. The course was presented as a situation comedy, with regular characters who appeared in each "episode"--each of whom had certain idiosyncrasies and could be counted on to behave in particular ways. Some content was presented, but the whole series was heavily weighted with "show business".

Unfortunately, the increasing tendency for everything to be entertaining is not restricted to television. Teachers report (Mankiewicz & Swerdlow, 1978; Postman, 1985) that students expect to be entertained, and do not expect to be required to pay sustained attention to any one topic.

Historical Perspective

Seen in the light of history, broadcasting has been a presence in human life only during a brief span of years. Yet it has had a tremendous impact, not only in the United States, but throughout nearly the entire world (Mosco & Wasko, 1984; Schiller, 1969). The continually shifting sounds and sights of radio and television represent a profound difference in pace of change from the quiet vistas of countryside, jungle, or town that were our habitat over many centuries.

In former times, prior to the past 65 years or so (in the United States), our dividing of time was related in general to what we were doing, although there has been some arbitrary regulation from without, such as the school bell or the factory whistle. Even these external impositions have been recent, relative to the span of human history.

When you compare, for example, the dividing of personal time of a 17th-century farmer or shoemaker with that of a contemporary television viewer, in terms of rate of changes in subject matter to be given attention, the contrast is striking. Over many centuries, then, our consciousness has been accustomed

to a slower rate of change than has been imposed upon us by recent technological changes, including broadcasting, and, in the United States, by the commercial interruption.

A Neglected Problem

Perhaps the experience of the commercial interruption had not been studied previously for the reasons brought out by writers such as Postman (1985), who have pointed out the tremendous effects of the medium upon how we perceive and structure the world. We have become passive consumers of television, and do not question how we experience its format, or what it presents to us.

Also, the phenomenon of interruption has received very little attention in psychology. The only body of work on effects of interruption has been the Zeigarnik tradition, originating in Kurt Lewin's laboratory in Berlin in the 1920s, and continuing, though with a small number of studies, into the 1950s. This stream of work has treated questions about interrupted tasks, and came out of the Lewinian concept of "intention", as a kind of tension that would persist until the task at hand was finished. (Indeed, the advertising people

seem to count on such a tension in their programming:
They place the commercials within the program in the
hope that people will stay through one set of
commercials to see more program and, of course, the
next string of commercials.)

Since the experience of the commercial
interruption had not been studied before, the present
research was a preliminary investigation.

Definition of Terms

Any technical terms that occur in the text will
be defined at the time of their occurrence--as, for
example, in the review of the literature. There are
two common terms that will be used with an uncommonly
narrow meaning in this work. Those terms are
"commercial interruption" and "commercial break".
They will be used to refer to the exact moment of
interruption--the moment when the television program
is interrupted by the onset of the commercials. (In
common usage, these terms often refer to the whole
period during which the commercial messages are
presented, or, sometimes, to the commercial messages
themselves.)

Research Questions

The main focus of this investigation was the experience of the viewer of commercial television at the moment of commercial interruption--that moment when program content is replaced by the beginning of a series of commercial messages. The principal research questions were as follows: As indicated by depth interviews, (a) What are the feelings of the viewer at the moment of interruption? (b) What are the thoughts of the viewer at the moment of interruption? and (c) What is the behavior of the viewer at the moment of interruption?

Additional questions are found in the Post-interview Questionnaire (Appendix B). The most central of these are Question 19, dealing with awareness of effects of commercial sponsorship on television programming, and Question 20, regarding knowledge of who pays for commercial television programs.

Limits of the Study

Limitations

The research was conducted on a small scale. The sample--necessarily a small one--included only

English-speaking persons. The respondents were
current residents of the United States, habitual
viewers of commercial television, who were willing to
give about two hours of their time to the study.
Because of limited resources, there was not an
opportunity to obtain a random sample of a particular
population. The informants were adults, because a
degree of maturity is needed to articulate thoughts
and feelings about the subject under study.

The study was not longitudinal. Each informant
was interviewed just once, and one questionnaire was
completed by each, just after the interview.

One possible limitation, which needed to be
guarded against, was researcher bias. Wertz (1984,
pp. 39-42) offers methods for guarding against
contamination of research results by biases of the
investigator. An important method is the bracketing
and suspending of preconceptions (p. 42). In order to
bracket and suspend preconceptions, it is necessary to
become clearly aware of what they are. In this
section I shall spell out the major relevant
preconceptions, biases, or assumptions that I had
become aware of holding:

(a) Frequently repeated experiences would be likely to generate and strengthen general expectations. Thus, the experience of continual interruption of television programs might lead to a generalized expectation of many interruptions in the flow of life's processes, particularly for persons who have grown up in the presence of television.

(b) There is something wrenching about having one's train of thought and feelings interrupted frequently and for reasons having no intrinsic human value, and, indeed, for the purpose of selling material goods to the viewer;

(c) The disruptiveness of continual interruption would be likely to cause heavy viewers of commercial television to develop an insensitivity as a protective mechanism against such disruptions; and

(d) The development of such insensitivity by millions of persons would probably have effects upon the societies of which they are members.

It should be noted that the above-stated assumptions, though they underlie my interest in the area, were not expected necessarily to receive confirmatory or disconfirmatory evidence in the course

of this study.

Having made explicit these preconceptions or biases, I was better prepared to guard against the danger of injecting them, blatantly or subtly, into the interview process. Biases beyond the awareness of the investigator, or only vaguely formulated, are clearly more dangerous to the task of learning what the informants have to say than biases known and made explicit. First, the latter could be consciously and deliberately held in check. And secondly, in the event that they should impinge on the interview process, they could be recognized while listening to the tapes or reading the transcribed interviews.

It is, of course, possible that some of my informants may hold biases similar to mine. But it would be evident from the tapes and transcripts, assuming the interviews were conducted carefully and non-directively (Wertz, 1984, p. 40), that the ideas and feelings voiced in each interview were the informant's and were not in any way suggested by the researcher.

Delimitations

The research was, as indicated above, an

exploratory study, not a hypothesis-testing experiment. Since its purpose was to learn about the experience of the informants, questions in the interview were broad and open-ended.

The analysis of the interview data was mainly qualitative, with counting of recurring themes emerging from the analysis. Some of the data obtained by the questionnaire lent themselves to simple quantitative analysis. Most of the data generated met requirements for only the ordinal scale at most (except for simple counting).

Assumptions

I made the following assumptions about the generation of data: (a) that, for this type of study, the depth interview (Kessler, 1984; Stevick 1971; Wertz, 1984) is the method of choice, because it offers the optimal opportunity for informants to explore freely their experience: attitudes, beliefs, feelings, thoughts; (b) that, given adequate rapport with the interviewer, adults can and will describe their experience with fair accuracy (though probably not with precision); (c) that the direction of the interview by the interviewer must be kept to the

minimum necessary (Wertz, 1984 p.40) to stay on the subject, but may include whatever probing is needed to achieve clarity and depth.

Regarding analysis of data, I made the following assumptions: (a) that qualitative analysis of the interview data (Kessler, 1984; Wertz, 1984) is best suited to learning most from what is offered by the informants. I assumed that forms and meanings to be found would emerge from the interview protocols; and (b) that quantitative analysis of the interview data would for the most part be inappropriate, because (1) there was no way to pre-design the analysis to make room for what might be discovered in the interviews; and (2) there was no way before beginning the inquiry to determine commensurability of units, or indeed, to pre-define what might emerge as units.

I held the following assumptions regarding delimitation of the study: (a) that exploratory work is the most promising way to go about approaching a relatively untouched area of study; and (b) that careful, thorough interviews with a small sample of viewers of commercial television would generate a meaningful body of material regarding the experience of the commercial interruption.

These, then, were the principal assumptions with which I approached the research.

Summary

Chapter One has introduced the subject area and presented general background as well as theoretical background for the research. The chapter has also included a brief historical perspective, and a note about previous neglect of the research problem. Definition of terms, statement of the research questions, limitations of the study, and assumptions underlying the research complete the chapter.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, pertinent psychological
literature regarding interruption and timing, as well
as literature about television will be reviewed.
First, the psychological work on interruption will be
explored. Then works concerning the history of
television as well as commentary about television and
its effects upon our society will be examined. The
final section of the chapter will review selected
studies of the effectiveness of commercials, conducted
from the point of view of advertisers.

Interruption

The Lewin, Zeigarnik Tradition

I have found no significant body of psychological
research about interruption except that line of

inquiry that began in Kurt Lewin's laboratory in Berlin in the 1920s. The best known study in that tradition is the one carried out by Zeigarnik in 1927. Her work brought the term "Zeigarnik effect" into psychology, and set off a series of studies, critiques, and reviews in Europe and in the United States, that continued through at least three decades (e.g., Alper, 1946, 1952, 1957; Atkinson, 1953; Caron and Wallach, 1957; Glixman, 1948; Harrower, 1932; Lewis and Franklin, 1944; Ovsiankina, 1928; Pachauri, 1935; Rosenzweig, 1943; Sanford, 1946).

In her carefully controlled experiment, Zeigarnik interrupted half of the tasks given her subjects, and allowed the subjects to complete the other half. In a subsequent test of recall, she found that the subjects recalled the uncompleted tasks far more frequently than the completed ones. Her results were confirmed and refined by Harrower in 1932. Other workers in the same tradition conducted variations on the Zeigarnik experiment.

One such study was carried out by Ovsiankina in 1928. She used resumption of tasks rather than recall as the dependent variable. Ovsiankina controlled for the confounding effects of differences in complexity

and interest level of various tasks.

In the Lewinian view of motivation, a tension is set up by intent to complete a task, and the tension persists when the task is interrupted, resulting in more frequent recall (Zeigarnik, Harrower), or in more frequent resumption (Ovsiankina).

The tradition of work on uncompleted tasks continued, with various refinements. There is no need to offer further details regarding the research at this time. The interested reader is referred to a review by Prentice (1944) of the work on interrupted tasks up to 1943. Also, a later study was conducted by Sanford (1946) on age as a factor in the recall of interrupted tasks.

Interruption and Reaction Time

Outside the Zeigarnik tradition, I discovered only one study of interruption, by a French psychologist (Sollier, 1926) studying factory workers in Paris. Sollier interrupted his subjects at their work, and discovered that they took longer to stop work than to resume it after the interruption.

Differences between Earlier Work and the Present Study

The present research differs from the Lewin-Zeigarnik studies and the work of Sollier in that they are all concerned with tasks, while the present inquiry concerns the interruption of a passive kind of behavior. The viewer of television is not engaged in a task. Also, since all commercial television is interrupted by advertising, the present research does not compare completion and interruption. In these and other ways, the present research differs from the earlier studies.

It is noteworthy that interruption is a phenomenon otherwise neglected by psychological investigators, excepting certain applied psychologists whose focus is highly specific, namely, the effects of commercial interruption of television programs upon intent to purchase. Such studies are not concerned with the experience and behavior of viewers except in relation to marketing of products. Some of these market-oriented studies will be reported later in this chapter.

Timing

Theoretically, one might expect psychological studies involving timing of stimuli to be related to the present investigation. From the traditional psychology of learning, for example, the memory consolidation hypothesis (e.g., Hebb, 1949; McGaugh & Herz, 1972; Müller & Pilzecker, 1900) ought to predict that viewers would not remember well what they have seen, because of the time required for one visual stimulus to consolidate in memory before it is overtaken by the next. Anecdotally, it appears that viewers often do not recall much of the programs they have seen. However, the present research was not designed to answer that question, and it has yielded only impressions.

Television

History and Commentary

Since the material written about the history of television does not, for the most part, bear directly upon the specific problem addressed by the present study, there will not be an exhaustive review or critique of these works. However, a brief introduction to such work is being offered as

background for the present research.

The history of television in the United States has been the subject of a vast number of publications. To single out a small segment of them for discussion is difficult. However, for excellence of scholarship, breadth of scope, and superb readability, the reader is referred to the works of Erik Barnouw (1966, 1968, 1970, 1975, 1978).

Barnouw's (1975) book, Tube of Plenty, covers the entire period of television broadcasting in the United States. For richer detail, and for coverage of radio broadcasting as well, the reader is directed to Barnouw's (1966, 1968, 1970) three volumes of A History of Broadcasting in the United States. A recent book by the same author (1978), concerned with commercial sponsorship, offers relevant background for the present study.

Barnouw's (1978) coverage of early attitudes toward broadcast advertising reveals some of the enormous changes that have occurred in the intervening years. When "toll broadcasting", that is, broadcasting supported by advertising, began in 1922, great concern was expressed about the effects of advertising on the quality of programming offered by

the new medium. For example, Herbert Hoover, then
Secretary of Commerce, "was quoted as saying that it
was 'inconceivable that we should allow so great a
possibility for service...to be drowned in advertising
chatter.' In a later statement he expressed the
opinion that if a presidential message ever became
'the meat in a sandwich of two patent medicine
advertisements,' it would destroy broadcasting"
(Barnouw, 1978, p. 15).

Barnouw also cites Edgar Felix, who was an
executive at radio station WEAF at the time of the
first commercial, as writing in his 1927 broadcasting
business textbook "that a sponsor 'does not earn the
right to inflict selling propaganda in the midst of a
broadcasting entertainment any more than an agreeable
weekend guest may suddenly launch into an insurance
solicitation at Sunday dinner'" (op. cit., p. 17).

An indicator (if one were needed) of the
tremendously changed attitudes toward broadcast
advertising, even 23 years ago, is the following:
"When Hoover died on October 20, 1964, NBC broadcast a
tribute which was at once followed at its key station
by a beer commercial, a political commercial, and a
cigarette commercial. The ex-President was

triple-spotted into eternity" (Barnouw, 1975, p. 357).

Commentary: Two Worlds

Commentary about television (which frequently accompanies aspects of its history) is plentiful, to say the least. It is also varied. There are scholarly books, reflecting careful searching into sources, as well as more popular works.

One way to categorize the literature is to look at that written for the general public or some segment thereof, in contrast with that intended to be used inside the trade. There are striking differences between the two universes of literature. A major difference seems to be that the overriding goal of television--maximum selling of various goods--appears, naked and clear, in the trade journals. In literature for the rest of us, however, practically everything except that goal is considered. It is as if two different realities were being discussed in the two worlds of literature.

Commentary: Critical

The gap between the two worlds has been bridged by an increasing number of critical writers, such as

Barnouw (e.g., 1978); Gitlin (1983, 1986); Goldsen (1977); Johnson (1970); Mander (1978) and Mankiewicz and Swerdlow (1978), who have furnished the general reader with pertinent facts about the business--a notable fact being that audiences are bought and sold.

Some major implications of this fact have been stated by these and other such writers. One implication is that the purpose of the program is to assemble the maximum audience for the commercials. Another is that much more money is spent in the production of commercials than is spent on producing programs. A third is that commercial "sponsorship" exerts strong and pervasive influences upon the subject matter and quality of program material. A fourth implication is that the enormous monetary costs of producing and broadcasting the commercials are paid by all of us. They are paid by us as taxpayers, to the degree that these costs are deducted from corporate taxes as a cost of doing business. And they are paid by us as consumers, to the extent that they are not tax deductions, because the remaining costs are added to the prices of the products so expensively advertised.

An Array of Literature

A somewhat different way of organizing the
general literature is along a dimension of degree of
acceptance of the premises and values promoted by the
"industry"--the complex of broadcasters, sponsors,
advertising agencies. The literature may be arranged
from right to left, so to speak--with the far right
being what might be called, "adulatory-promotional":
writings whose function is mainly "hype"--extolling
the alleged glamor and brilliance of what is now and
has been presented on the video screen. An example of
this type is Television's Classic Commercials: The
Golden Years 1948-1958 (Diamant, 1971), in which
broadcast advertising of yesteryear is described in
glowing terms.

To the left of this group, we find works that
are, or purport to be, naively accepting of the status
quo as presented by the television broadcasters, or
that take an "objective" stance toward current
offerings on television. Examples of this group are:
Agnew and O'Brien (1958); Arlen (1980). (However,
having looked at some of the work designed for readers
inside the trade, I am skeptical about the ostensibly
naive acceptance of the values being presented to the

public.)

Next along the array, we find a group of works
that can be called "critical," in which the writers
have managed to break through the underlying
assumptions that permeate the television milieu, to
make some telling criticisms. The size of this group
has been growing rapidly in recent years, as more
writers become articulate about the shortcomings and
negative effects of television in the United States.
This group is exemplified by Berger (1976), Goldsen
(1977), Mander (1978), Postman (1985), and Winn
(1977). Included in this critical group is a smaller
group of writers whose criticism encompasses a larger
context, including an economic system in which the
primacy of profits seems to them to promote managed
news, banality and the export thereof; e.g., Bunce
(1976), Mosco & Wasko (1984), and Schiller (1969).

It is clearly not possible to categorize any one
writer or group of writers as belonging exclusively in
one niche along this array. However, some rough
determinations can be made, and the admittedly
oversimplified schema offers a way of organizing the
literature. There is considerable overlap, as might

be expected, particularly between immediately adjacent
categories.

A Singularly Relevant Work

A profoundly critical writer deserving of special
attention is Neil Postman (1985), whose book Amusing
Ourselves to Death is highly relevant to the present
research. As indicated above, he points out that
television has taken over our epistemology--our ways
of thinking, our ways of truth-telling. As Postman
states,

> There is no more disturbing consequence
> of the electronic and graphic revolution
> than this: that the world as given to us
> through television seems natural, not
> bizarre. For the loss of the sense of the
> strange is a sign of adjustment, and the
> extent to which we have adjusted is a
> measure of the extent to which we have been
> changed. Our culture's adjustment to the
> epistemology of television is by now all
> but complete; we have so thoroughly
> accepted its definitions of truth,

knowledge, and reality that irrelevance

seems to us to be filled with import, and

incoherence seems eminently sane. And if

some of our institutions seem not to fit

the template of the times, why it is they,

and not the template, that seem to us

disordered and strange. (pp. 79-80)

Postman deals with a number of attributes of

television and their effects upon us, including the

reliance, especially in television advertising, upon

images that appeal to our emotional needs, rather than

upon propositions that can be confirmed or

disconfirmed; the extreme brevity of news items; and

the juxtaposition of news items with commercials.

We have become so accustomed to its

discontinuities that we are no longer

struck dumb, as any sane person would be,

by a newscaster who having just reported

that a nuclear war is inevitable goes on to

say that he will be right back after this

word from Burger King; who says, in other

words, "Now...this." One can hardly

overestimate the damage that such

juxtapositions do to our sense of the

world as a serious place. The damage is
especially massive to youthful viewers who
depend so much on television for their
clues as to how to respond to the world.
In watching television news, they, more
than any other segment of the audience, are
drawn into an epistemology based on the
assumption that all reports of cruelty and
death are greatly exaggerated and, in any
case, not to be taken seriously or
responded to sanely. (pp. 104-105)

A major point that Postman makes is that we have
come to expect everything to be entertaining, and that
we pay little attention to events or problems, unless
they are presented in a way designed to entertain us.
"Our television set keeps us in constant communion
with the world, but it does so with a face whose
smiling countenance is unalterable. The problem is
not that television presents us with entertaining
subject matter but that all subject matter is
presented as entertaining, which is another issue
altogether" (p. 87).

And, à propos of that concern, CBS, greatly
respected for broadcast news during and after World

War II, recently placed its news department under its
entertainment section.

Postman (1985) points out that Aldous Huxley's
(1932/1946) prophetic vision in <u>Brave New World</u> seems
to be coming true. Postman's book reminds us that, in
contrast to Orwell's (1949/1982)) <u>1984</u>, in which the
society would be overcome by external oppression, what
seems to portray more accurately our society's
situation is Huxley's <u>Brave New World</u>. Postman (1985)
in the foreword to his book, draws the contrast
clearly between the two prescient works. "Orwell
warns that we will be overcome by an externally
imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big
Brother is required to deprive people of their
autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people
will come to love their oppression, to adore the
technologies that undo their capacities to think." (p.
vii)

Research Concerning Commercials

The bulk of research about commercials has been
conducted, not by academic scholars, but by people in
the advertising business, with the specific aim of
increasing sales. Indeed, the whole tenor of

advertising research differs markedly from the main
body of psychological inquiry, because of this
difference in aim. Investigations whose reason for
being is effective merchandising manifest a
single-mindedness not characteristic of work done for
more broadly searching purposes.

Within the confines of advertising research, one
line of investigation that is marginally related to my
proposed work deals with the effects of the temporal
environment of commercials upon their efficacy. For
example, the problem of "clutter" has become a crucial
one for advertisers, as the number of commercials in a
string (i.e., series) increases. This line of
research does not concern itself with the experience
of the viewer, except as that experience may affect
the viewer's buying habits.

Recall as Tolerance

One such study was conducted by Hsia (1974), and
reported as "Audience recall as tolerance toward
television commercial breaks", in Journalism
Quarterly. Six hundred seventy-two respondents were
interviewed by a research firm in New York.
Curiously, Hsia uses "recall" as interchangeable with

"tolerance". Also, his tests of recall are not
without flaws. To test recall, the respondents were
shown "story boards"--photographic reproductions taken
from programs and commercials.

> Dichotomous answers were elicited from
> respondents for all pictures and verbal
> statements shown on the story board in
> terms of whether they remembered. Then
> respondents were led back to elaborate only
> on the "no" answers, to explain, if they
> could, why they failed to recall. (p. 97)

First, to show photographs complete with dialogue
to television viewers and ask whether or not they
recall them is questionable. Pictures of housewives
using soap are so endemic to the trade, and so similar
one to another that respondents would be hard pressed
to know whether or not they remembered any particular
one.

Secondly, they were asked to explain, if they
could, why they failed to recall. While such probing
might well produce some interesting data, there is
some question about the degree to which people may
know why they remember or forget. Further, the
responses may be biased by what the respondents

perceive as answers sought by the interviewer. Hsia examined a number of variables, such as audience absence during commercials, effects of length of commercials, number of commercials in a string, differences between interruptions within and between programs. He found that 30% to 60% of viewers engaged in extra activities during the breaks. Most of these activities were delayable.

There was evidence to support the contention that the television audience tended to coordinate psycho-physiological gratification with the occurrence of commercial breaks. No conclusive evidence was found to establish supremacy of within-program commercial breaks over between-program commercial breaks. Within-program commercial breaks usually suffered less due to the audience's engaging in non-viewing activities; however, they might also elicit more audience resentment.

The medium length commercial breaks were found significantly more tolerable than either short or long breaks, with evidence

that the medium length is the optimal

length. (p. 101)

Although Hsia's study deals with viewers' responses to commercials, his results are not highly relevant to the present research, since his focus is on the effectiveness of the commercials, rather than on the experience of the viewer.

Involvement and Effectiveness

Soldow and Principe (1981) report a study of how effectiveness of commercials is related to audience involvement in the program. They conducted a relatively complex study including a questionnaire to tap involvement, video tapes of programs, and commercials of various types carefully placed relative to program content. They set forth four hypotheses, involving recall of brand names and of sales messages, attitudes towards commercials, and intent to purchase products. Their main independent variable was the degree to which the programs were involving. Their sample consisted of 87 subjects.

They found (as they had hypothesized) that commercials were less effective within more involving than within less involving environments. On the

measure "intent to buy", they reported that "Subjects most involved in the program content were least likely to buy the product" (p. 65).

While commercial effectiveness is not pertinent to the present study, some of the steps in the authors' argument are of interest. The writers state, "it would be expected that as involvement increases, less attention will be paid to the material (commercials) that separates parts of the actual program. Involvement may serve as a kind of screen, preventing any interruption from entering awareness. Further, one might experience a feeling of irritation or annoyance toward the interrupting material; one would likely become more aware of the feeling of irritation than of the specific material causing the irritation" (p. 59).

If the recommendations of these authors are followed by the industry, we should expect producers to strive for programs that involve the audience as little as possible. Indeed, as stated by Goldsen (1977),

> Television programs face a continuing
> dilemma. To hold an audience, they must evoke
> human feelings, stir human emotions, engage

human passions. Yet as soon as viewers find

their intellectual curiosity awakened, as soon

as they allow themselves to be gripped by fear

or anxiety, love or hate, terror or revulsion or

rage, as soon as they are on the way to being

overcome by laughter or engulfed by tears, the

program delivers them to the commercials....

Television programs resolve the dilemma

quite simply: they just give up any pretense of

trying to awaken consuming interest or achieve

true, dramatic depths....

People in the television business are quite

explicit in admitting that the programs aim

principally to attract audience attention

without asking for the deep investment of self

that drama which takes itself seriously--or

any serious discourse, for that matter--demands.

"We're a medicine show," they say, and indeed it

has become quite acceptable to treat the

airwaves as if they were an invisible midway.

(pp. 7-8)

Two earlier studies in the same problem area

should be mentioned. Steiner (1966) found in a survey

of television viewers that people experienced

commercials as objectionable because they interrupted
the programs--and particularly objectionable when they
interrupted interesting programs. For that survey,
the more interesting the program, the less effective
the commercial.

Closure and Effectiveness

Kennedy (1971) based his study on the concept of
closure. His view was that television watchers tend
to organize the viewing experience into whole
patterns. He saw such organization into patterns as
representing a drive for closure. Non-program
elements, such as commercials, are not well received
by viewers. As the drive for closure becomes more
intense, reception of commercials is further impaired.
Kennedy embedded commercials into two different types
of programs: a situation comedy and a suspense
thriller. He found the commercials in the situation
comedy more effective than those in the suspense
thriller.

Kennedy's notion of drive for closure has a
Gestalt flavor, and is reminiscent of the Lewinian
idea of tension toward completion.

Interest and Effectiveness: Contrasting Results

Krugman (1983) obtained results different from those of Steiner (1966) and of Soldow and Principe (1981). Krugman, for many years manager of corporate public opinion research for General Electric (GE), states,

> Without contesting viewer opinion that
> interrupting commercials are sometimes
> "objectionable," it is very questionable
> that this makes them less "effective." To
> demonstrate the falsity of this equation we
> will introduce data on attitude impact in
> types of TV programs where the commercials
> do interrupt a story versus types of
> programs where the commercial comes at a
> natural break. (p. 21)

Krugman used data from quarterly national surveys conducted by General Electric. His main concern was the impact of GE television programs upon attitude toward the company. He used a ranking of GE-sponsored shows, dividing the shows into three groups representing high, medium, and low impact. He states, " It is suggested...that when an interesting show is interrupted by an interesting commercial the momentum

of aroused interest does carry over" (p. 23).

Summary

This chapter has reviewed two general areas of literature relevant to the present research. First, psychological research concerning interruption has been delineated. Then, literature about television has been selectively surveyed, looking first at history and commentary, then at a few studies of commercial effectiveness that border on relevance to the present study.

In summary, then, although there is a vast array of literature that serves as background for the present study, there is little or no research that bears directly upon the questions that are its focus. The prior research that dealt with the viewers' experience of the commercial interruption has for its sole object the marketing of merchandise. There is, however, recent commentary, e.g., Barnouw (1975, 1978), Goldsen (1977), Mander (1978), Postman (1985), that voices concerns similar to mine.

Chapter 3

METHODS

This chapter presents the methods used in this study, both in generation and in analysis of data. It is divided into four major sections.

The opening section presents the rationale for the choice of methods used in this research, and a description of those methods. The second section describes the sample of respondents. The third section is an account of ethical considerations and of measures taken on behalf of the rights of respondents. The fourth section details the methods of treatment of the data: the first part of that section deals with treatment of the data generated in the interviews; the second part of the section describes the analysis of data from the questionnaires.

Rationale for the Choice of Methods

To learn how individuals experience some particular aspect of their lives, the most direct method is to ask them. Giorgi (1975), discussing the role of description in a phenomenological approach,

48

states,

> All approaches in sympathy with phenomenology
> agree that one must begin with naive
> description. The discipline begins when one
> has to analyze what has been described.
> Secondly, from a phenomenological perspective,
> description or language is access to the
> world of the describer. Descriptions, of
> course, can be better or worse or even
> enigmatic, but they always reveal something
> of the world of the describer, even if it is
> only the fact of an enigmatic world. The
> task of the researcher is to let the world
> of the describer, or more concretely, the
> situation as it exists for the subject,
> reveal itself through the description in an
> unbiased way. Thus it is the meaning of the
> situation as it exists for the subject that
> descriptions yield. While detailed knowledge
> concerning the criteria for better or poorer
> descriptions would be helpful, it is equally
> clear that good descriptions communicating
> the intentions of the describer do exist.
> (p. 74)

Other investigators in the phenomenological tradition (e.g., Hycner, 1982; Kessler, 1984; Stevick, 1971) also have found that depth interviews, in which direction is minimal and the interviewer follows as closely as possible the thoughts and feelings of the respondent, can produce careful descriptions of the experience of individuals. The reader interested in the use of interviews is referred to a paper by Becker (1986), in which she presents an overview of the use of interviewing in human science research.

Phenomenological methods have usually been employed to obtain descriptions of experiences that have a universality not found in the subject matter of the present study. However, the methods themselves are valuable for yielding descriptions of the feelings and thoughts of persons about experiences shared by a more limited population as well.

Careful descriptions of personal experience are, in my view, the most useful way to enter a relatively untouched area of study. Since the specific research questions of the present investigation had not been studied previously, it would have been premature to use only questionnaires or surveys, because the richness and variation of individual experience would have been missed. By asking individuals for

descriptions of their own experience we can learn
about the variation in the thoughts and feelings of
the several respondents. The depth interview is,
therefore, clearly the method of choice for exploring
new regions of research in human science.

Methods Used to Generate Data

The methods I chose for investigation of my
research questions are, first, a depth interview, and
then, a questionnaire, completed by each respondent
just after the end of the interview.

The interview, which was tape recorded, consisted
of two main segments. In the first part of the
interview, the main purposes were to establish rapport
and to stimulate the respondents to talk about their
television watching, as preparation for the main part
of the interview. The main section began by my
stating that my particular interest was in the instant
when program content was replaced by the beginning of
a series of commercials--the moment of the commercial
interruption. This second part of the interview,
then, consisted of questions and responses about the
respondents' experience of the commercial interruption
and their behavior in response to it. At the end of
the interview, the tape recorder was turned off. At

that time, I said to each respondent that we could turn it on again if something to add should come to mind. At times, the tape recorder was in fact turned on again, during the respondent's work on the questionnaire. Most often, the purpose was to record a lengthy answer to one of the questions on the questionnaire. Less frequently, the respondent would want to add something to the interview material.

I chose the depth interview as a way of obtaining careful descriptions of the experience of the commercial interruption by the experiencers. In order to learn about the experience of individuals, it is important to ask them questions about their experience, taking care not to bias the interview with one's own ideas or feelings. Thus the interviews were as unstructured as possible while still keeping the respondent on the subject at hand. The interviewer attempted to follow the thoughts and feelings of the respondents, and to probe where necessary in order to obtain a rich description of their experiences of commercial interruptions. A complete transcription of one of the interviews may be found in Appendix A.

The post-interview questionnaire was adapted for the present study from a questionnaire designed by Witty, Sizemore, Coomer, and Kinsella (1960), and used

by Witty (1962, 1963) in subsequent research. The
questionnaire in the present study had two purposes.
First, it had the function of obtaining material that
might not be available by interview without
introducing bias. Different respondents, of course,
volunteered different aspects of their television
viewing experience. For the investigator to ask
questions about areas of particular interest to her
would have changed the emphasis or focus of the
interviews. It was necessary for each respondent's
own focus to come through. Answers to questions of
special interest to the investigator could be obtained
through the questionnaire after the interview was
completed.

The second purpose of the questionnaire was to
gather certain factual information about the
respondents, such as age, educational level,
occupation, and number of hours per week watching
television. Such information, useful in interpreting
the interview materials, was easily obtained by
questionnaire, and was not properly a part of a depth
interview directed toward descriptions of experience.
The questionnaire used in the study can be found in
Appendix B.

The Sample of Respondents

The sample consisted of 26 English-speaking adults (13 women and 13 men) who were habitual viewers of commercial television and who were unaware of the specific focus of the study. Six of the women and six of the men had reached adulthood before beginning to watch television; the other seven men and seven women grew up watching television. These four groups will be referred to hereafter as f pre and m pre (females and males who grew up before beginning to watch television) and f post and m post (women and men who grew up watching television). Thus, in general, the respondents in the former group were older than those in the latter. It is evident that two variables are confounded in the present inquiry. In this exploratory study, age and pre- as against post-status are not distinguishable.

The participants were persons willing to donate about 2 hours of their time and to cooperate fully with the research. They were selected mainly on the basis of availability, and were therefore either persons known to me or known to someone known to me. Demographic data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Subsample		Age		Education[a]		Hours per week[b]	
	n	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean
f pre	6	53-75	65.8	12-17	14.7	17-50	31.7
m pre	6	51-71	62.5	12-20	14.5	3-35	19.2
f post	7	22-44	34.6	14-20	17.1	1-30	10.3
m post	7	21-47	35.9	14-20	17.4	1-24	11.3

[a]
Doctorates of any type were arbitrarily assigned the
value 20. Master's degrees were assigned the value
18. Admittedly, these values may generally
underestimate the number of years spent earning
graduate degrees.

[b]
'Hours per week' refers to the respondent's hours of
watching television per week.

All demographic information was obtained from the
reports of the respondents themselves, mainly from the
questionnaires completed by them after the interviews.

As may be seen in the bar graph (Figure 1),
educational level varied from high school graduation
to the doctorate. There were five people with

doctoral degrees. The degrees were Doctor of Jurisprudence, Doctor of Ministry, Ph. D. in Psychology (2), and Doctor of Psychology (Psy. D.). There were two respondents with master's degrees—one in early childhood education and one in social work.

Participants who had done some graduate work short of an advanced degree had studied accounting (1) and theology (2). People with bachelor's degrees were not asked for their major subjects.
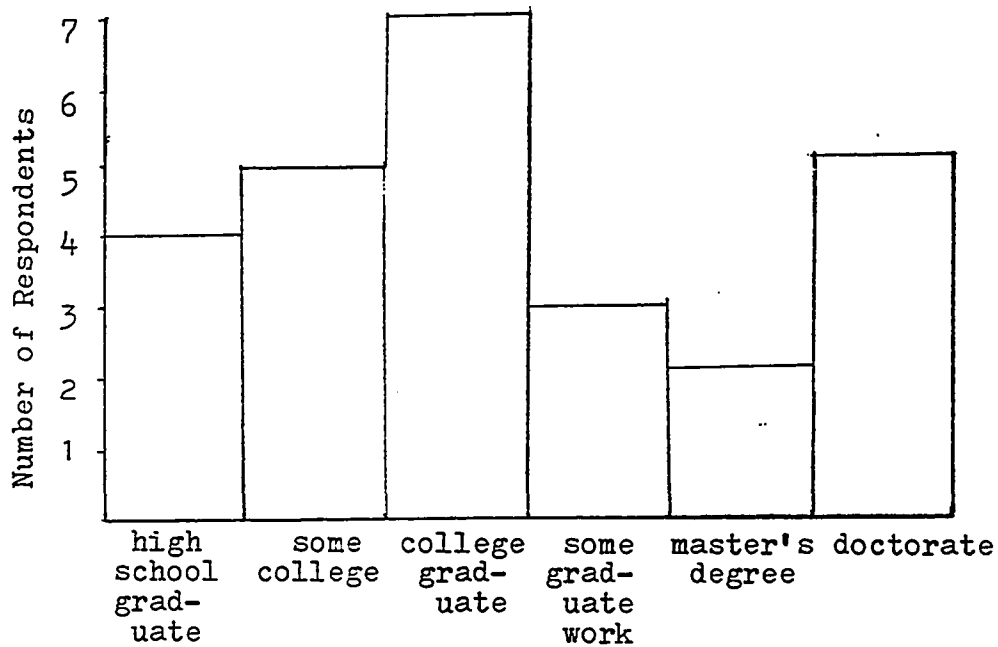
Figure 1. Educational levels of the respondents

Occupations represented in the sample were as follows: accountant (CPA), attorney, author, business owner (retail), hairdresser, homemaker, insurance salesperson, manager of rental property, mining engineer, minister, office manager, paralegal, psychologist, psychotherapist, rancher, retired person, sales representative, social worker. Figure 2 shows a categorization of the occupations of the respondents.

Since there was no reason to try to obtain a representative sample of any particular population, because generalizability was not being assumed, the criteria for participation in the study were simple and few. Any adult English-speaking resident of the United States who customarily watched commercial television and who was willing to give the time to participate in a tape-recorded interview and complete a questionnaire was eligible to be a respondent. There were, of course, limits of sample size and of subgroup size. I needed 6 men and 6 women who had reached adulthood before beginning to watch television, and 7 women and 7 men who had grown up watching television.

People were invited by word of mouth to

Number of Respondents

7
6
5
4
3
2
1

f pre   f post

m pre   m post

| own or owned busi-ness | wife of busi-ness owner | private prac-tice, self-em-ployed | em-ployed in private enter-prise | wife of em-ploye in private enter-prise | em-ployed in public, non-profit, church | wife or widow of public, non-profit, church | author |

self employed   employee

profit   non-profit
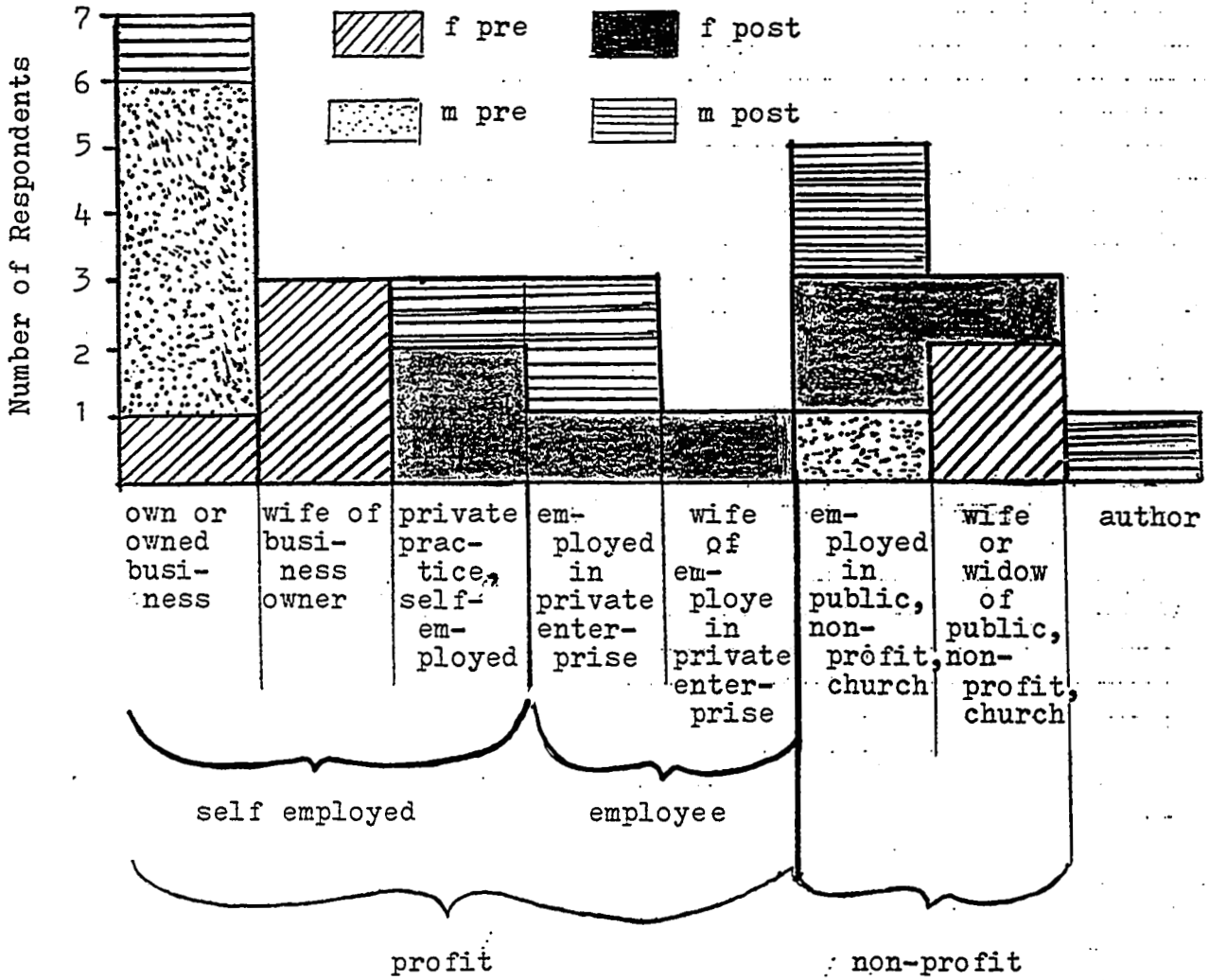
Figure 2. Occupations of respondents, categorized

participate in the study. Ten of the respondents were people I knew, either from work or other associations, whom I asked to participate. One was invited by a member of my dissertation committee, while at a meeting all three of us were attending. The other 15 were invited by the office manager at the psychological clinic where I work. The office manager and her family have lived for 11 years in the community where the study took place. She has engaged in civic activities, and knows many local people. She was thus able to call upon persons known to her, who were willing to participate.

Sessions were arranged at the participants' convenience. Thirteen of the sessions took place in my office. Three were held at the offices of respondents. Nine took place in the homes of respondents. One session was conducted on the University of California campus at Berkeley.

The length of interview and questionnaire sessions varied from about 45 minutes to two hours, depending upon how much the respondents had to say, and how succinctly they described their feelings, thoughts, and behavior at the time of the commercial interruption.

Ethical Considerations

Prospective respondents were told that the study was a requirement for a doctoral program, and that their participation would be greatly appreciated. No person was urged or persuaded to participate in the study. They were asked at what age they began watching television, and whether they watched commercial television regularly. If they were willing to volunteer, they were scheduled for the interview and questionnaire session.

Before beginning the interview, participants were asked to read the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) and to sign it if they were willing to participate. Any questions about the Consent Form were answered at that time. At the end of the session, when they had completed the questionnaire, they were thanked orally, as well as by the printed note of appreciation (Appendix D) that followed the questionnaire. That printed note also included an offer of a statement of the results of the study when available. Respondents were given a sheet of paper on which to write their name and address if they wished to have results sent to them. The focus of the study was discussed with

them at that time, if they expressed interest in
knowing more about the research. In some instances,
if the respondents showed interest, I offered titles
and authors of pertinent books that I had found
particularly helpful.

Treatment of the Data

In this section, the thematic treatment of the
interview data will be detailed first, followed by the
analysis of data from the questionnaires.

Steps performed in thematic treatment
of the interview data

This way of analyzing material from interviews is
adapted from Kessler's (1984) study of bereavement,
and modified somewhat to achieve a better fit for the
type of interviews conducted in the present study.

1. I listened with openness to the tapes of all
the interviews, making notes about intonation and
affect, especially where the respondent (R) was
talking about the topic of the research.

2. Cards bearing excerpts were made by the
following process:

a. I selected relevant excerpts from the typed
transcripts of the interviews. Criterion for

inclusion was that the R's statements pertained to the main research question. That is, they dealt with the feelings, thoughts, and behavior of the R at the time of the commercial interruption or concerning it.

Length of excerpts was determined by requirements of meaning. An excerpt is long enough to be clear (sometimes with a note on the card about the question to which the excerpt is a response). Thus, an excerpt may be a word, a phrase, or a sentence--sometimes even more than one sentence.

b. Each excerpt was then cut from a photocopy of the transcript and attached to a 5 x 8 card. The interview number and the excerpt number also appear on the card. In order to indicate the group of Rs to which each excerpt belonged, a colored stripe was made across the upper right-hand corner of each card. Four distinctly different colors were used to show whether a given excerpt came from the f pre, m pre, f post, or m post group. Thus each card bears an excerpt, an interview number, an excerpt number, and a color-coded stripe.

3. I randomly selected half of the cards (n=205) from the group of women who grew up before beginning to watch television (f pre). This batch of cards was

then designated "Group A". I then randomly selected half of the cards (n=307) from the men who grew up before starting to watch television (m pre). This batch of cards, now designated "Group B", was set aside.

a. I sorted the cards of Group A into piles based on thematic material (content). I recorded the resultant groupings, now called "categories", by writing headings based upon the themes represented in each pile, under which I noted the numbers of the cards (excerpts) that I judged to belong under each heading.

b. I reshuffled the cards comprising Group A, sorted them again, and recorded this second sort.

c. I sorted the cards comprising Group B, and recorded that sort, as in Step 3a, above.

d. The next step was to reshuffle the cards of Group B, sort them again, and record the second sort of Group B.

4. I compared the piles of cards from Group A and Group B, looking at both sorts of both groups. I recorded the themes common to the two groups. (Themes that differed were already recorded for each group.)

5. Next I placed the two sets of cards side by

side, noting recurrent patterns, in order to see if some categories could be collapsed into clusters of categories.

6. For validation, I performed again Steps 3-5, this time using the remaining half of the f pre cards (Group C) and the remaining half of the m pre cards (Group D). I determined to what degree the themes from these sorts fit into the categories established in the previous process. Where new themes emerged, I noted whether they were new because they were not present in the other samples, or whether somehow they had been unrecognized in the previous process. When the latter occurred, I amended the sort to reflect the new awareness. When the former occurred, I created new categories to contain them.

7. Steps 3-6 were repeated, using the first randomly selected halves of f post (Group E) and of m post (Group F), and then using the second randomly selected halves of f post (Group G) and of m post (Group H). (For f post, n=317, and for m post, n=342.)

8. For a check on interjudge reliability, I drew a sample of 100 cards, drawn proportionately from each of the four subgroups (f pre, m pre, f post, m post).

Each subsample was drawn randomly. The second judge was trained to judge by theme (content) by being given a statement of what is meant in this context by 'theme', and by a demonstration using a few examples from outside the sample she was to sort. She was then "tested" for understanding of the principles involved. After her work was finished, percentage of agreement was determined, as a measure of interjudge reliability. Interjudge agreement was 84%, with an additional 8 items on which agreement was extremely close, with only minor differences in wording of categories.

9. Tabulation sheets were then constructed, for two purposes.

a. The tabulation sheets were headed to reflect the groupings into which the various categories seemed to fall, according to meaning.

b. The sheets were then used to determine and display how many respondents of each subgroup had voiced each theme. Thus, for example, a sheet headed "Negative feelings toward commercials themselves" contained such themes as "offensive, tasteless", "silly, ridiculous", and "resent manipulation; they lie".

10. From the tabulation sheets, 51 themes emerged, each of which was then recorded on a 4 x 6 card, along with the total number of respondents who had voiced that theme, and a 2 x 2 table, showing how many Rs in each subgroup had voiced the theme.

11. These 51 cards provided a convenient vehicle for the next step, namely, making the tables of themes (Tables 2 through 8, in Chapter 4). These tables present both the main catagories and the themes that emerged, along with the number of respondents from each subgroup who voiced each theme.

12. Comparisons were made among the subgroups, to determine what differences existed between the gender subgroups and between pre and post subgroups. Results will be found in the discussion of Tables 2 through 8 in Chapter 4.

Analysis of Data from the Questionnaires

Demographic data from the questionnaires were tabulated, as shown in Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2. Questionnaires were then scanned to determine if there were any responses on the questionnaire of a given respondent that were unusual or original. Responses

to Questions 15, 16, 19 and 20 were examined in
detail. Question 15 asked if the type of program
being watched affected the R's response to the
commercial interruption, and Question 16 asked if the
R's degree of involvement in the program had an effect
upon the R's response to the commercial interruption.

Questions 19 and 20 were designed to tap a degree
of sophistication or of critical thinking about the
business of television; I wanted to know to what
degree this group of respondents had thought about the
issues dealt with in the two questions.

Steps in the analysis of these data were as
follows: (a) Tabulate the answers to those four
questions (Tables 9-12); (b) compare the answers with
educational level and occupation of the respondent.

Summary

In this chapter, the methods used to generate and
to analyze the data in this research have been
described.

First, the rationale for the choice of methods
was presented, followed by a description of the
methods used to generate the data.

Secondly, the sample of respondents was

described. Then a statement of ethical considerations was given, along with measures taken to protect the rights of respondents.

The final part of the chapter described the treatment of the data--first the material from the interviews and then the data from the questionnaires.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The results of the research will be detailed in
this chapter. First, the themes that emerged from the
interviews will be presented. Following presentation
of the themes, data from the questionnaires will be
described.

Themes from the Interviews

As described in Chapter 3, when the steps in
sorting the interview data had been completed,
tabulation sheets were constructed for two purposes.
First, the tabulation sheets were headed to reflect
the main meaning categories into which the various
themes seemed to fall. Secondly, the sheets were then
used to determine and display how many respondents of
each subgroup had voiced each theme.

69

The reader will recall from Chapter 3 that the sample consisted of four subgroups: women (f pre) and men (m pre) who had reached adulthood before beginning to watch television, and women (f post) and men (m post) who had grown up watching television.

Thus, for example, a sheet with the general category, "Negative feelings toward commercials themselves" contained such more specific themes as "offensive, tasteless", "silly, ridiculous", and "resent manipulation; they lie".

Seven main categories emerged:

1. Feelings and thoughts about the commercial interruption (ci).

2. Feelings toward the commercials themselves.

3. Feelings and thoughts about the timing of commercial interruptions of dramatic programs.

4. Feelings and thoughts about the timing of commmmercial interruptions of news programs.

5. Miscellaneous themes.

6. Behavior at time of commercial interruption: Remain at television set.

7. Behavior at time of commercial interruption: Leave the scene.

Within the 7 main categories, 51 specific themes emerged. Tables 2 through 8 display both the main categories and the themes that emerged, along with the number of respondents from each subgroup voicing each theme.

General Findings

Before turning to the specific findings shown in the tables, some general findings will be presented. First, I found that the respondents were generally willing to talk with me about their experience of the commercial interruption and related matters. Secondly, while the interviews did not reach the depth of feeling and self-examination that I had originally hoped for, a few respondents did seem to go through a process of discovery of thoughts and feelings during the interview. In general, however, the respondents tended to answer questions in the interview and on the questionnaire from the surface of their thinking. The nature of the topic did not, for most respondents, appear to invite depth of introspection.

Extreme feelings were rarely expressed; indeed, the most prevalent feelings and thoughts expressed acceptance of the status quo. For example, people

often referred to commercials and commercial
interruptions as a "necessary evil", "the price you
pay for watching TV", or the like. When asked about
commercial interruption of news programs, 42%
expressed acceptance of the way it is generally
done--an item of news, then a ci. And to questions
about how they experienced the ci in programs they
often watch, 69% stated they had no particular
feelings or thoughts.

Most respondents appeared to accept the
proposition, so often uttered, that programs are
"brought to you by" advertisers. During the
interviews, 54% of the respondents volunteered
explicitly that commercials pay for programs. When
asked on the questionnaire who pays for the production
of commercial television programs, 50% wrote "product;
sponsor; the ads; advertisers". During the interview,
no one volunteered that buyers of products advertised
pay for programs. On the questionnaire, only 31%
stated that consumers or buyers of products pay for
production of television programs.

It was interesting to note the variety of
behavior at ci. While 54% of the sample said that at
times they watch commercials, 62% reported that they

talk to family members during the commercials, and 65%
mentioned that they sometimes leave the scene at
commercial time. Fifty per cent mentioned going to
the kitchen for something to eat or drink--an
unsurprising finding in view of the fact that many
commercials are invitations to eat or drink.

A Note about Additive Relations

Before beginning to look at the tables
individually, the reader should be reminded that the
numbers may not meaningfully be added vertically, over
themes, because the same respondent may have voiced
several themes, and thus may be represented on several
rows of a table. The kind of theme analysis of depth
interviews used in the present study does not produce
neat, mutually exclusive totals of respondents.
Thus, a given respondent may at one time during the
interview have said that she is irritated by
commercials, and at another time that she accepts or
is used to them.

When read across any given row, however, the
numbers do, of course, represent different
respondents. We know, for example, from Table 2, that
14 respondents voiced the theme, "Commercials pay for

programs".

Discussion of Table 2.
Feelings and Thoughts about the
Commercial Interruption

Looking first at totals, without regard to subgroup, Table 2 reveals a wide variety of feelings and thoughts about the commercial interruption itself. Responses ranged from, on the positive end, viewing it as a relief from tension, or a release to do something else, if only to get up and walk around, through absence of feelings or thoughts, to the negative extreme of "hate; disgust; angry; pissed".

The table indicates, moreover, a large degree of acceptance of the status quo. Thus, 18 (69%) of the 26 respondents reported no particular feelings or thoughts at the moment of, or about, the ci. Fifteen (58%) said they expect, accept, or are used to the ci, and 14 (54%) stated explicitly that commercials pay for programs. Further, as stated above, eight participants (31%) characterized the ci as relief from the tension of watching, and seven (27%) mentioned that the ci served as a release, freeing them to engage in other activities.

Table 2

Feelings and Thoughts

about the Commercial Interruption (ci)

Theme	Number of Rs Voicing Theme					
	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Absence of feelings or thoughts	6	5	4	3	18	69
If more involved in program, then more annoyed at ci	3	3	5	4	15	58
Expect, accept, used to it	2	6	3	4	15	58
Commercials pay for programs	3	4	2	5	14	54
Impatient, annoyed	3	5	5	1	14	54
Denial of feelings about ci	4	5	1	3	13	50
Intrusion: mild negative feeling	4	3	2	3	12	46
Irritated	2	3	4	3	12	46
Appreciate PBS, video (no interruptions)	1	3	2	3	9	35

Table 2 (continued)

Feelings and Thoughts

about the Commercial Interruption (ci)

	Number of Rs Voicing Theme					
Theme	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Upset by commercials felt to be inappropriate	2	3	3	0	8	31
Ci as relief from tension of watching	0	1	2	5	8	31
Ci as release, opportunity to go and do other things	0	1	2	4	7	27
Ci's too frequent	2	2	2	1	7	27
Hate, disgust; angry, pissed	1	1	1	1	4	15
Let down, disappointed	0	0	1	2	3	12
Bored	0	0	1	1	2	8
Insulted	0	0	1	0	1	4

On the negative side, 15 (58%) said that their
degree of annoyance with the ci depended upon their
degree of involvement with the program: the more
involved, the more annoyed. Also, 54% described
themselves as impatient or annoyed with the commercial
break, and 46% voiced a mild negative feeling of
intrusion on their thoughts. Also, 54% said they were
irritated at the ci. Appreciation of public
broadcasting, or of videos, for their absence of ci's,
was expressed by 35%. Twenty-seven percent said ci's
were too frequent. Stronger negative emotions ("hate;
disgust; angry; pissed") were voiced by 15% of the
respondents. Fewer people said they were "let down,
disappointed", "bored", or "insulted".

Table 2: Pre and Post Compared

Looking now at differences between pre (n=12) and
post (n=14) subgroups, a few striking contrasts
emerge. While 11 (92%) of the 12 pre Rs voiced
absence of feelings or thoughts at ci, only 7 (50%) of
the 14 post Rs voiced that theme.

The figures for "denial" were similarly lopsided:
 whereas 75% of the pre respondents voiced denial,
only 29% of the post Rs did so.

A note is required here about how excerpts were sorted into the theme "Denial of feeling about ci", as distinguished from "Absence of feelings or thoughts about ci". As is evident, these choices required a greater degree of judgment than did most other sorting. First, all excerpts in a given sort that stated lack of feeling about ci were placed into one pile of cards. Then these cards were re-examined in the light of three criteria: An utterance was judged to represent "Denial of feeling about ci" when (a) it was contradicted by other parts of the interview, (b) it was contrary to general knowledge of television programming, as evidenced by statements of other respondents and by my own experience; or (c) it was called into question by the tone in which it was uttered. Usually, two of these criteria were noted.

The number of participants voicing "impatient, annoyed" was also greater among the pre subgroup: 8 (67%), compared with 6 (43%) of the post subgroup. Moreover, 5 (42%) of the pre subgroup said they were upset with commercials that were inappropriate to the context, whereas only 3 (21%) of the post subgroup voiced that concern. A greater percentage of pre's also expressed the theme, "intrusion: mild negative

feeling"--7 (58%) of the pre respondents, compared
with 5 (36%) of the post participants.

Differences in the other direction were found
with "ci as relief from tension" (8% pre, 50% post)
and "ci as release, opportunity to go and do" (8% pre,
43% post).

Thus, in general, it appears that the pre
respondents experienced the ci more negatively than
did the post Rs.

Table 2: Gender Subgroups

Looking now at differences between female and
male subgroups (including both pre and post of each
gender), the most striking differences are the
following: The men noticeably exceeded the women in
voicing four themes showing either acceptance or
positive feelings toward the ci: (a) "expect or
accept commercial interruptions": 77% of the men, 38%
of the women; (b) "commercials pay for television
programming": 69% of the men, 38% of the women; (c)
"ci as relief from the tension of watching": 46% of
the men, 15% of the women; and (d) "ci as release to
go and do other things, 38% of the men, 15% of the
women. Men also exceeded women in voicing "denial":

62% of the men, compared with 38% of the women were
judged to be voicing "denial", again showing more
acceptance or positive feeling (on the surface) toward
the ci than shown by the women.

However, more men than women voiced appreciation
for public television and videos because of their
absence of ci's: 46% of the men, 23% of the women.
More women (77%) than men (62%) voiced "absence of
feelings or thoughts".

There was little or no difference in incidence of
the remaining themes on Table 2 between the two gender
subgroups.

Discussion of Table 3.

Feelings toward the Commercials Themselves

In Table 3, the response rates were generally
lower than those in Table 2. Since the focus of the
study was on the ci, and since, accordingly, the
interviews were directed toward that focus, it is not
surprising that there were fewer comments made about
the commercials themselves than about the moment of
commercial interruption.

Of the six themes, two are positive, while four
are negative in attitude toward the content of

Table 3

Feelings toward the Commercials Themselves

Theme	Number of Rs Voicing Theme					
	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Like some commercials	3	4	2	1	10	38
Senseless, silly, stupid	2	1	2	4	9	35
Irritated, bothered if bad	4	3	1	0	8	31
Offensive; insulting; refuse to buy	3	3	2	0	8	31
Don't mind some commercials	0	3	1	3	7	27
Resent manipulation; they lie	0	0	2	3	5	19

commercials. Looking first at the two positive
themes, 38% of the sample said they like some
commercials. (While the table does not show it,
nearly all persons who mentioned liking some
commercials said they liked them because they were
funny.) Secondly, 27% said they "don't mind" some
commercials.

Of the four negative themes, the most frequent
was that commercials are "senseless, silly, stupid",
voiced by 35% of the respondents. Thirty-one percent
said they were irritated or bothered if the commercial
was a bad one, and the same percentage said they found
some commercials offensive or insulting, with some of
those individuals adding that they would refuse to buy
the product advertised because of the offensive nature
of the commercial. Five people (19%) said they resent
the manipulation they feel is attempted by the
commercials, or that they believe the commercials lie.

Table 3: Pre and Post Compared

Comparing now those people who grew up before
beginning to watch television with those who grew up
watching television, we find some noticeable
differences. While 58% of the pre respondents said

they "like some commercials", only 21% of the post
respondents voiced that theme. On the other hand,
only 25% of the pre participants said they don't mind
some commercials, while 29% of the post respondents
stated that theme.

Of the four negative themes, two were voiced by
more pre and two by more post respondents. That some
commercials are "senseless, silly, stupid" was voiced
by 3 (25%) of the older respondents, and by 6 (43%) of
the younger respondents. "Resent manipulation by
commercials; they lie" was mentioned by none of the
older group and by 5 (36%) of the younger persons.
The other two negative themes were voiced more often
by older than by younger participants. Seven (58%) of
the older individuals were irritated or bothered by
bad commercials, while only one (7%) of the younger
group stated this feeling. Similarly, half of the
older group found some commercials to be offensive or
insulting, while only 2 (14%) of the younger group
did.

Thus it appears that both positive and negative
feelings toward the commercials themselves were
voiced by both pre and post subgroups, but the
predominant content of those feelings differed between

pre and post.

Table 3: Gender Subgroups

There was no difference between female and male subgroups in the number (38%) who said they "like some commercials". The differences between the two gender subgroups were also not great with regard to the four negative themes.

However, there was a noticeable difference between women and men who "don't mind some commercials": one woman (8%), as against six men (46%) stated that theme.

These findings are congruent with the findings reported in Table 2, in which the men tended to show more acceptance of the ci than did the women.

Discussion of Table 4. Feelings and Thoughts
about the Timing of Commercial Interruptions of
Dramatic Programs

A third of the respondents expressed awareness that commercial interruptions were timed to come at dramatic spots in the program. The same number said they were aware that "suspense is built in to keep the viewer's attention". These two themes, though similar

Table 4

Feelings and Thoughts about the Timing of Commercial

Interruptions of Dramatic Programs

| | Number of Rs Voicing Theme | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
Theme	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Aware that the ci comes at dramatic spot	2	1	3	2	8	31
Aware that suspense is built in at time of ci to keep viewer's attention	2	0	3	3	8	31
Annoyed that ci comes at high point	1	1	1	2	5	19
Commercials are scheduled at convenient or innocuous times	0	0	1	4	5	19
Aware that show is paced for commercials; aware of manipulation	1	1	1	1	4	15
"Not a cliff-hanger" (denial)	0	1	1	2	4	15
Anger at manipulation	1	0	2	0	3	12

in content, are distinguishable. In the first, the emphasis is on the "dramatic spot", while in the second theme, the respondents made the point that suspense is deliberately built into the program to keep the viewer's attention on the television screen.

A smaller number (15%) said that the shows themselves were paced for the commercials. Several respondents expressed negative emotions about this: five persons (19%) were annoyed that the c_i comes at a high point in the program, and three participants (12%) reported that they were angry at being manipulated in this way.

Despite the general knowledge--exemplified by several in this sample--that commercials, especially in dramatic programs, are scheduled at moments of high emotion or suspense, five respondents (19%) said that commercials are placed at "convenient" times--some saying it must be that way, in order for the programs to keep their ratings up. Indeed, four people (15%) remarked that commercials do not come at times of suspense, saying such things as that the commercial interruption is not timed as a "cliff-hanger". These people watched dramatic shows, but denied that commercials are inserted at times of suspense.

Table 4: Pre and Post Compared
_____

People who grew up before television did not
discuss the possible purpose of the timing of ci's as
much as lifelong viewers did. Only 2 (17%) of the
older group said they were aware that suspense is
built in at time of ci to keep viewer's attention,
while 6 (43%) of the younger respondents voiced that
theme. Secondly, while no pre respondent said that
ci's come at convenient or innocuous times, 5 (36%) of
the younger participants said so. All the other
differences between the two subgroups on this table
are differences of less than 15%.

Table 4: Gender Subgroups Compared
_____

There are only two themes on which men and women
differed by more than two individuals (15%) when
discussing their feelings and thoughts about the
timing of ci's in dramatic programs. One of these
("Commercials are placed in programs at convenient or
innocuous times") is positive in tone toward the
status quo in television programming. Four (31%) of
the men voiced this theme, compared with only one (8%)

of the women. None of the men said they were angry at
being manipulated by commercial interruptions, while 3
(23%) of the women did.

Discussion of Table 5. Feelings and Thoughts
about the Timing of Commercial Interruptions
of News Programs

Of the four themes represented here, two are
favorable to or accepting of the status quo, while the
other two are somewhat critical. The most frequent
response (42%) was that the timing of ci's during news
broadcasts was satisfactory, since a news item is
finished before the commercial is presented. Four
people (15%) said they hadn't noticed the timing of
commercials during news broadcasts, and did not relate
content to timing.

The two negative themes stated that there was
"too little news and too much advertising": 4
respondents (15%); and that sometimes the commercials
were inappropriate and distasteful with respect to the
news being reported: 3 participants (12%).

Table 5

Feelings and Thoughts about the Timing of Commercial

Interruptions of News Programs

Theme	Number of Rs Voicing Theme					
	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Innocuous, satisfactory: finish item, then ci	2	6	0	3	11	42
Hasn't noticed; doesn't relate content to timing	1	2	0	1	4	15
Too little news; too much advertising	0	0	1	3	4	15
Sometimes inappropriate, distasteful	2	0	1	0	3	12

Table 5: Pre and Post Compared

Of the four themes in Table 5, pre and post
responses differed by more than 15% on only three.
The first theme, that the timing of ci's during news
programs is satisfactory, was voiced by 8 (67%) of the
older subgroup, and by only 3 (21%) of the younger
subgroup. The complaint of too little news, too much
advertising was stated by no pre respondents and by 4
(29%) of the post participants. Three (25%) of the
older group and only 1 (7%) of the younger group said
they hadn't noticed, or did not relate content to
timing.

Table 5: Gender Subgroups

There are two themes in this table on which men
and women differed by more than two individuals. One
of them is that timing of ci's during news programs is
satisfactory, voiced by 9 (69%) of the men, and by
only 2 (15%) of the women. The other is that the
timing of ci's during news programs is sometimes
inappropriate or distasteful, voiced by 3 (23%) of the
women, and by none of the men.

Again, men seem more accepting of the status quo
of television programming than do women.

Discussion of Table 6. Miscellaneous Themes

Five more themes not otherwise classifiable stood out as relevant to the focus of this study.

Six people (23% of the sample) volunteered that they are not especially involved in most television programs. They may be watching television while doing other things, such as reading or preparing dinner.

Three people (12%) volunteered that at times they have been watching programs that they did not like, whether because of much violence, or poor quality in general, when a c_i has jolted them into an awareness and into asking themselves a question such as, "What am I doing watching this junk?"

Two people volunteered that the host of "Nightline" is rude to his guests. Both of these people put considerable emphasis on the fact that the guests are often high officials or dignitaries, and frequently foreign dignitaries. Although the timing of commercial interruptions is unlikely to be under the control of the host, the respondents characterized the host as rude, probably reflecting the fact that he is the person who tells the guests that it is time for

Table 6

Miscellaneous Themes

| Theme | Number of Rs Voicing Theme | | | | | |
	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Not involved in most TV	0	3	3	0	6	23
TV stupor broken by ci	0	1	2	0	3	12
Rude to guests (officials, dignitaries) on Nightline	0	1	1	0	2	8
Control of news by advertisers; bias	0	0	0	2	2	8
Annoyance at columnists, commentators who interrupt each other on discussion programs	0	1	0	0	1	4

a ci. He is the one who, to the viewer, is doing the interrupting. The respondents wondered aloud what those people from other parts of the world must think of us (Americans), when they, as guests, have agreed to be interviewed about an important issue, and then are interrupted for something as trivial as soap or deodorant.

Further, two individuals expressed a belief that advertisers are able to control the broadcasting of news to the public, having the power to select or bias the content of what is shown.

Table 6: Pre and Post Compared

There were no differences between pre and post subgroups of more than 15% on the miscellaneous themes discussed.

Table 6: Gender Subgroups Compared

There were no differences of more than 15% between gender subgroups on Table 6.

However, the two people who voiced concern about control of news by advertisers were both men. Thus there is a difference of 15% between men and women on that theme.

Discussion of Table 7.

Behavior at Time of c_i: Remain at Television Set

While 14 respondents (54%) said they watch some
commercials, many of them also mentioned a number of
other activities they engaged in during these times,
which are incompatible with watching commercials (at
least with full attention). Well over half (62%)
reported that they often talk (usually with a spouse,
sometimes with children) during commercials. Eleven
participants (42%) said they "tune out" commercials
("mute mentally"), "think or daydream", or "flip
channels". Fewer people mentioned doing handwork,
crossword puzzles, card games, letter writing (23%),
or reported that they read during commercials (23%).

It should be borne in mind that none of these
types of behavior was reported as having occurred
uniformly--to all commercials. People reported what
they often do, or are likely to do, at commercial
time.

Table 7: Pre and Post Compared

The largest difference between the pre and post
subgroups is found with those who mentioned that they
"watch commercials". While a large majority (79%) of

Table 7

Behavior at Time of Commercial Interruption: Remain

at Television Set

Type of Behavior	Number of Rs Mentioning Type of Behavior					
	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Talk	4	5	3	4	16	62
Watch commercial	2	1	6	5	14	54
Mute mentally (tune out)	3	2	2	4	11	42
Mute mechanically	3	1	2	2	8	31
Think; daydream	1	0	3	4	8	31
Flip channels	1	2	3	2	8	31
Do handwork, crossword puzzle, card game; write letter	5	0	1	0	6	23
Read	2	2	1	1	6	23

the post subgroup said they watch some commercials,
only 3 members of the pre subgroup (25%) made the same
statement. Fifty per cent of the post group said they
"think or daydream" during commercials, whereas only
one pre respondent (8%) reported doing this. Five pre
participants mentioned doing other miscellaneous
activities, while only one person in the post group
stated this. (As will be seen in Table 8, 6 of the 7
women in the post group tended to leave the set to do
various household tasks.)

All the other differences between pre and post on
Table 7 are differences of 2 or fewer people. One of
those ("talk"), however, results in a percentage
difference of 25, because while 9 (75%) of the pre
group said they talk during commercials, only 7 of the
post group (50%) said this, thus producing a 25%
difference.

Table 7: Gender Subgroups Compared

On Table 7, the only item showing a difference of
more than two respondents is "Do handwork, crossword
puzzle, card game; write letter", which was mentioned
by 6 of the women (46% of the subgroup) and by none of
the men. Several women said that they keep items

nearby to work on during commercials, or else play
solitaire or do a crossword puzzle. Some men
mentioned keeping reading matter available, but "read"
was sorted separately.

Discussion of Table 8.

Behavior at Time of Commercial Interruption:

Leave the Scene

It is not surprising to find that the largest
number of respondents on this table mentioned leaving
the scene to do something unspecified, since that item
is more inclusive than the others. That item was
mentioned by 17 participants (65% of the sample).

When specific behaviors were mentioned, they
included the following activities: "Eating or
drinking" was reported by 13 individuals (50% of the
sample). Household tasks were the next most
frequently mentioned, by 9 people (35% of the sample).
Bathroom was a destination mentioned by 31%. Further,
12% said they sometimes turn the set off and leave,
not to return for the rest of the program.

Table 8: Pre and Post Compared

The largest difference between pre and post

Table 8

Behavior at Time of Commercial Interruption: Leave

the Scene

Type of Behavior	Number of Rs Mentioning Type of Behavior					
	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Behavior unspecified	3	3	7	4	17	65
Eat or drink	0	5	4	4	13	50
Work: household task	3	0	6	0	9	35
Bathroom	0	4	2	2	8	31
Turn TV off and leave	0	1	2	0	3	12

groups on Table 8 is on "behavior unspecified",
mentioned by 11 (79%) of the younger group and by only
6 (50%) of the older group. Viewed in the light of
the rest of the table, it appears that fewer pre's
than post's leave the scene at commercial time. On no
item in this table does the number of pre's exceed
that of post's. Only on "bathroom" are the numbers
equal. Perhaps, then, pre's do tend more to stay at
the set.

There are two more items on which the difference
between subgroups exceeds 15%--"eat or drink" and
"work--household tasks". Three more post's than pre's
mentioned each of these two items.

With regard to household tasks, more of the
younger group have children at home and/or working
spouses, while several of the older group are retired,
thus presumably having fewer household
responsibilities and more time for them.

Table 8: Gender Subgroups

The most striking difference between the gender
subgroups on Table 8 is that 9 (69%) of the women and
none of the men stated they do household tasks during
commercials. The men do not, apparently, get up and

load the dishwasher, check on the children, feed the
dog, or do other chores at commercial time, as 69% of
the women mentioned doing. Several women in the post
group stated that they plan on that time to accomplish
specific tasks.

The second largest difference between men and
women was that 9 (69%) of the men and only 4 (31%) of
the women mentioned eating or drinking during
commercial breaks. Forty-six percent of the men and
only 15% of the women mentioned going to the bathroom
during this time.

Only 3 people mentioned turning off the set and
leaving, not to return to the program. Two of these
were women.

<center>Data from the Questionnaires</center>

Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2 in Chapter 3
summarize the demographic data from the
questionnaires.

The remainder of the questionnaire asked
respondents generally about their television viewing
habits and preferences, as well as certain questions
designed to tap their understanding of how the
business of television works.

Light and Heavy Viewers

Item 6 of the questionnaire asked the respondents
to estimate the number of hours per week they usually
spent watching television, by estimating viewing time
for each day of the week, then adding. (The days of
the week were printed on the questionnaire, with a
space beside each, in order to encourage accuracy.)

The results are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

The range was from 1 to 50 hours per week. The
overall mean for the 26 respondents was 18.3 hours per
week. Means for the four subgroups were as follows:
f pre 31.8; m pre 19.2; f post 13.0; m post 11.3. The
dividing line between "light" and "heavy" viewing was
set at 20 hours per week.

A tabulation was made of light and heavy viewers
in relation to employment status and whether they
worked in or away from their homes. As may be seen in
Figure 5, 8 of the 9 people who stayed at home and
were not gainfully employed were heavy viewers, while
only 2 of the 14 respondents gainfully employed
outside the home were heavy viewers. Of the 3 persons
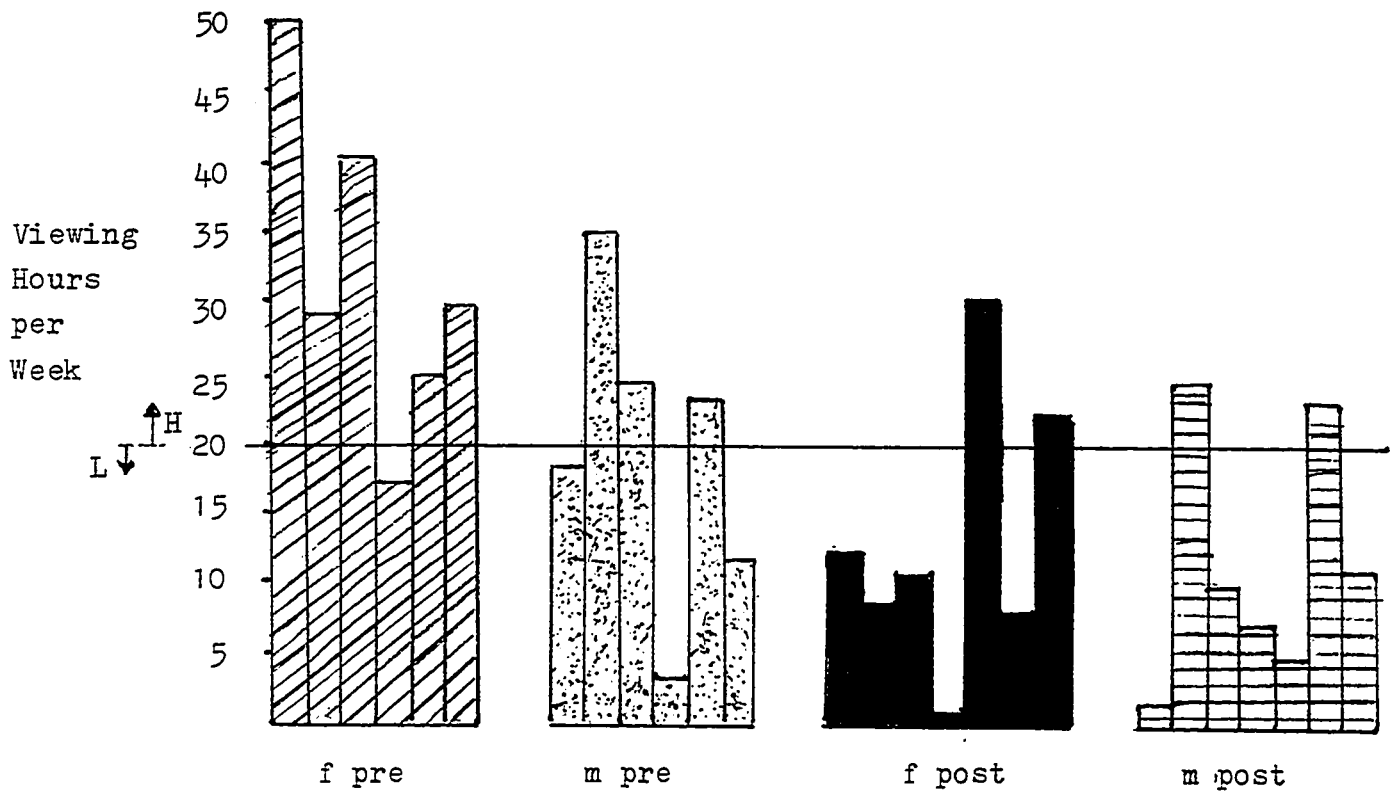whose offices were in their homes, 2 were heavy
viewers.

Figure 3. Viewing hours per week (Self report)
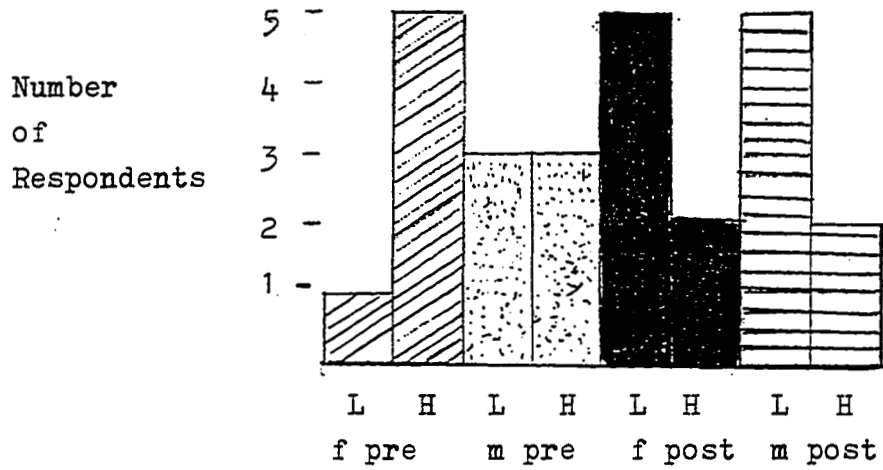Each bar represents one respondent.

Figure 4. Light (L)[a] and heavy (H)[b]

viewers (self-report)

a. Fewer than 20 hours per week.
b. 20 or more hours per week.
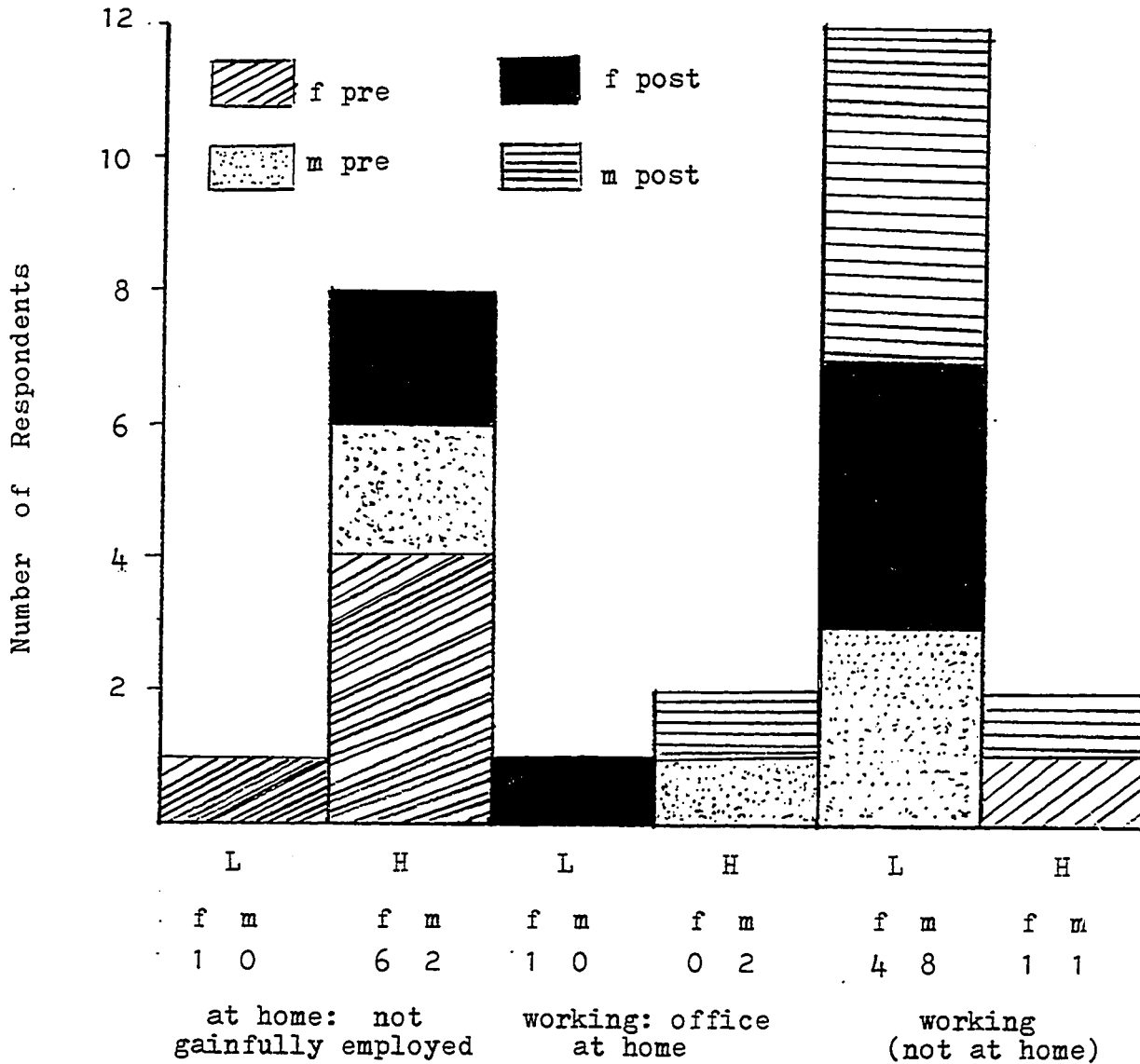
Figure 5. Light[a] and heavy[b] viewing in relation to employment status

a. Fewer than 20 hours per week.
b. 20 or more hours per week.

Four Questions of Special Interest

Of particular interest to the research are the answers given by the respondents to the following questions:

Question 15 (Does your response to the commercial break depend upon what type of program is being interrupted? Explain briefly.)

Question 16 (Does your response to the commercial break depend upon how involved or absorbed you are in the program?)

Question 19 (Do you believe that commercial sponsorship of television has other effects on programming or program content, in addition to the commercial breaks themselves? Describe briefly.)

Question 20 (In your opinion, who pays for the production of commercial television programs? Explain briefly.)

Questions 15 and 16 are of special interest because preliminary interviews and discussion about responses to the c_i suggested that the type of program being watched and the degree of involvement of the viewer would probably affect how people respond to the c_i; these questions on the questionnaire would afford an opportunity to obtain this information, if it had

not come out in the interview.

Questions 19 and 20 were designed to find out about the respondents' understanding of some of the less widely known aspects of the television business, which, it seems to me, have profound and continuing effects upon our society and culture.

Possible relationships between the experience of the commercial interruption and the issues I hoped would be tapped by Questions 19 and 20 were not clear to me when I designed the questionnaire. However, the intent of advertisers and producers of programs seemed clearly to be to present programs as if they were gifts to the viewers from the "sponsors", and to obscure the fact of commercial influence upon selection of subject matter and biases with which topics are presented. It seemed important to ask the questions, to find out whether viewers who probably would not have read extensively about the business of television might nevertheless know factual answers to these questions.

The results obtained from the above-named four questions may be found in Tables 9 through 12.

Question 15: Does your response to the commercial

break depend upon what type of program is being

interrupted? Explain briefly.

To this question, 12 respondents (46% of the

sample) said "No". Eight participants (31% of the

sample) said "Yes". Most people did not elaborate. A

glance at the table will reveal the few brief

elaborations.

Differences between pre and post subgroups were

noticeable only on "Yes", offered by 2 (17%) of the

older subgroup and by 6 (43%) of the younger subgroup.

"No" was offered by 5 older and 7 younger

participants.

Differences between gender subgroups were

negligible.

Question 16: Does your response to the commercial

break depend upon how involved or absorbed you are in

the program? Explain briefly.

As may be seen in Table 10, 12 participants (46%)

responded "Yes" to this question. Seven (27%) said

"No". Few people elaborated or qualified their

answers.

Of the "Yes" answers, 4 were from the older

subgroup, constituting 33% of that group. Eight were

Table 9

Data from Questionnaire. Answers to Question 15:

"Does your response to the commercial break depend

upon what type of program is being interrupted?

Explain briefly."

	Number of Rs Giving Answer					
Answer	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Yes	2	0	3	3	8	31
Yes, and quality of commercial	0	1	0	0	1	4
Only if intrudes on continuity of thought	0	1	0	0	1	4
Insensitivity during news bad	1	0	0	0	1	4
Somewhat; not much	1	1	0	0	2	8
Not often	1	0	0	0	1	4
No	2	3	4	3	12	46
Welcome break	1	0	0	1	2	8
Mostly watch one type of program	0	0	0	1	1	4

Table 10

Data from Questionnaire. Answers to Question 16:
"Does your response to the commercial break depend
upon how involved or absorbed you are in the program?
Explain briefly."

	Number of Rs Giving Answer					
Answer	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Yes	2	2	4	4	12	46
If sad, then silly commercial, disgusted with product	1	0	0	0	1	4
Somewhat	0	2	0	0	2	8
Minimal--not involved generally in TV	1	0	1	0	2	8
Don't think so	0	1	0	0	1	4
No	2	1	2	2	7	27
Welcome break -- to do other things	1	0	0	1	2	8
If absorbed, might stretch, relax	0	0	0	1	1	4

from the younger subgroup, making up 57% of that group. Of the "No" answers, 3 were pre, and 4 were post.

The gender subgroups showed no appreciable differences on this question. Six women and six men said "Yes"; four women and three men said "No".

Question 19: Do you believe that commercial sponsorship of television has other effects on programming or program content, in addition to the commercial breaks themselves? Describe briefly.

To this question, 18 respondents (69% of the sample) said "Yes". Only 8 participants (31% of the sample) said "No". Further, there were some elaborations of interest. These were classified according to content, as may be seen in Table 11.

Ten individuals (38% of the sample) showed recognition of the power of advertisers, to some degree. "Expected audience size as determinant of program content" was offered by 4 people (15% of the sample). Other comments, offered by one or two people each, may be seen in Table 11.

The differences between pre and post groups were

Table 11

Data from Questionnaire. Answers to Question 19:
"Do you believe that commercial sponsorship of
television has other effects on programming or program
content, in addition to the commercial breaks
themselves?   Describe briefly."

Number of Rs Giving Answer

Answer	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Yes	3	2	7	6	18	69
Recognition to some degree of power of advertisers	3	1	3	3	10	38
Advertisers pace commercials at emotional highs	0	0	2	0	2	8
Advertisers control purse strings	0	0	1	0	1	4
Targeting, e.g., toy ads to children	1	0	1	0	2	8
Programs about crime, violence and sex tend to be sponsored by well known products	1	0	0	0	1	4
Some news slanted	0	1	0	0	1	4

Table 11 continued

Data from Questionnaire. Answers to Question 19:
"Do you believe that commercial sponsorship of
television has other effects on programming or program
content, in addition to the commercial breaks
themselves? Describe briefly."

Answer	Number of Rs Giving Answer					
	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Expected audience size as determinant of program content	0	0	0	4	4	15
Disgusting commercial turns me away from product	1	0	0	0	1	4
No	3	4	0	1	8	31
Don't believe they do-- certainly hope not	1	0	0	0	1	4
Program content dictates type of commercials	0	0	0	1	1	4

notable on this question. Five (42%) of the older participants said "Yes", while 13 (93%) of the younger people said "Yes". The remaining 7 older respondents and one younger participant said "No".

Gender differences were not great. Ten women and eight men said "Yes", while three women and five men said "No".

Looking at the educational levels of the 18 respondents who answered "Yes", compared with the 8 respondents who answered "No" to Question 19, there is a slight edge for the "Yes" group. The "Yes" group has a range of 12 to 20, (high school graduation through doctorate), with a mean of 17.0; while the "No" group has a range of 12-16 (high school through college), with a mean of 13.9.

Occupationally, there is a greater range in the "Yes" group (which is clearly the larger group) than in the "No" group. The "Yes" group contains the following: 3 present business owners, 4 in private practice, 4 private enterprise employees or spouses thereof, and 7 in the public, nonprofit, church group. In the "No" group, 3 are currently in business, 4 have retired from their own businesses, and 1 is identified as an author.

Of the 18 respondents who answered "Yes", 11
(61%) were light watchers of television (fewer than 20
hours per week), and 7 (39%) were heavy viewers (20 or
more hours per week). Of the 8 persons who said "No",
3 (38%) were light viewers and 5 (62%) were heavy
viewers.

Question 20: In your opinion, who pays for the
production of commercial television programs? Explain
briefly.

As may be seen in Table 12, eight people (31%)
responded with "Consumer: buyer of product
advertised". In addition, one other person said, "the
network," but then went on to say that the networks
get money from companies that buy advertising time,
and that the companies are kept in business by the
public.

However, 13 people (50% of the sample) said that
the product, sponsor, or advertisers pay for the
production of programs. The other four respondents
offered some combination of network, producers, and
the like.

Comparing the responses of pre and post subgroups
to Question 20, the reader will note that 3 (25%) of

Table 12

Data from Questionnaire. Answers to Question 20:
"In your opinion, who pays for the production of
commercial television programs?   Explain briefly."

Answer	Number of Rs Giving Answer					
	f pre	m pre	f post	m post	Total	% of Total N
Consumer: buyer of product	2	1	3	2	8	31
Network: elaborated to the public	0	0	0	1	1	4
Product; sponsor; the ads; advertisers	4	4	4	1	13	50
Sponsor and network	0	1	0	0	1	4
Network: elaborated, but not to include consumers	0	0	0	1	1	4
Network or producer	0	0	0	1	1	4
Film company or production company	0	0	0	1	1	4

the older subgroup; and, including the respondent whose elaboration led to the buyer, 6 (43%) of the younger subgroup identified the consumers or buyers of advertised products as the ones who pay for the production of programs.

Sixty-seven percent of the older group and only 36% of the younger group wrote that advertisers pay for programs.

Among those who designated the buyers of advertised products, there was little difference between the gender subgroups. Thirty-nine percent of the women and 24% of the men said that the consumers or buyers of products pay. However, 62% of the women and only 38% of the men said it is the advertisers who pay--a difference of 24%.

(It is evident that, in the immediate sense, advertisers do pay for the production of programs. But it is also clear that the enormous costs of television advertising would not be paid without being recouped by purchases of the products promoted.)

Since some sophistication about the business of television is required to state that the "buyers of products advertised" pay for programs, I compared the educational levels of the 9 persons who gave that

response with those of the 17 who gave all other
answers, to determine if educational level might have
influenced this outcome. The range is the same for
the two groups: 12-20 (high school through doctorate).
The means differ slightly: The "buyer" group had a
mean of 17.0, compared with a mean of 15.5 for the
"all other responses" group.

Occupational category seemed also a possibly
relevant variable in determining how respondents might
answer Question 20. Of those who stated that "buyers
of products" pay for programs, two were small business
owners, three were in private practice, one was the
spouse of an employee in a large private enterprise,
two were from the public, nonprofit, church group, and
one was an author.

Of those who gave other responses to Question 20,
eight were in the small businesss group; none in
private practice; three were employees in private
enterprise; and six were in the public, nonprofit,
church group.

Comparing the responses of light and heavy
viewers to this question yielded the following
results: Six light viewers and three heavy viewers
said that the buyers of advertised products pay for

the production of programs. Of those giving all other
responses to Question 20, eight were light and nine
were heavy viewers.

Summary

This chapter has presented the results of the
study. First, the results from the interviews were
detailed, followed by the data gathered in the
questionnaire.

Five categories of themes emerged from the
interviews (presented in Tables 2 through 6). From
the interviews also emerged two categories of
behaviors at the time of the commercial
interruption--behaviors at the television set, and
those that involved leaving the vicinity of the set.
These behavioral categories may be found in Tables 7
and 8. Tables 9 through 12 display the answers given
by the respondents to Questions 15, 16, 19, and 20 of
the questionnaire.

Answers to Questions 19 and 20 were related to
educational level, to occupational category, and to a
dichotomous measure of viewing hours per week.
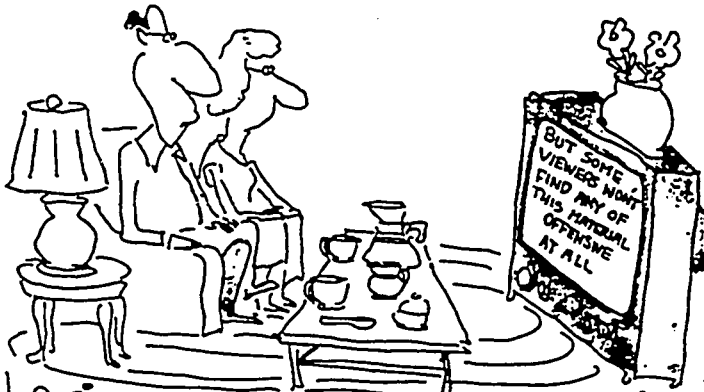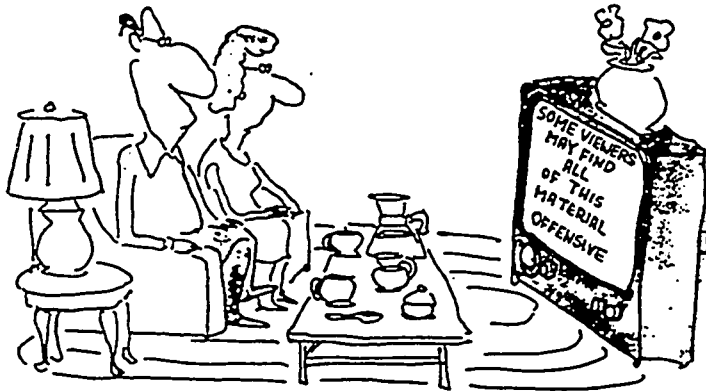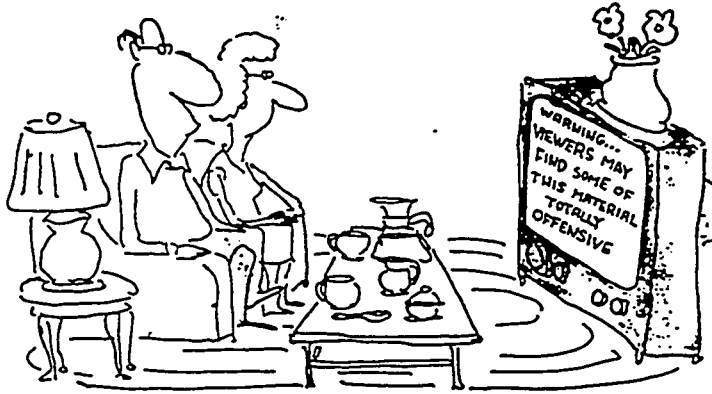
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief review of the

purpose of the study and the research questions. The

second section will present a summary of the results

of the research--the major findings, followed by

unusual or infrequently found results. In the third

part of the chapter, the results will be discussed.

Relationships will be drawn between the findings and

the original research questions, the literature cited

in Chapter 2, and other parts of the field of

psychology. Suggestions will be made about possible

implications of the findings. Their importance to

psychologists, including theorists, clinicians, and

research psychologists, will be explored.

Recommendations for further research will be offered.

The chapter ends with a concluding statement.

Purpose of the Study

The impetus for this study came out of my own responses to the commercial interruption, which included, at times, indignation, even outrage, and on other occasions, simply use of the time to do other things. Particularly in relation to dramatic programs, I had noted that commercial breaks were scheduled at moments that would, in real life, be excruciatingly tragic, or at moments of suspense, involving matters of life and death.

In the "action" (that is, violent) shows, particularly, I had observed a regularly occurring juxtaposition of tragedy with trivia. The tough detective, finding the young, blonde, dead woman on the floor of the apartment, would step over her corpse, making some comment about the murderer's modus operandi (to let us know that this is "all in a day's work" to him). Then we would be presented with "ring around the collar", stomach acid, or some other dreaded plague of contemporary society.

I wondered how others might feel. I was puzzled by the fact that millions of people seemed willing to put themselves into the position of having their thoughts and feelings interrupted every few minutes by

inane, often noisy, and frequently insulting bids to buy products that themselves were often of questionable value.

I noted also that the regularly occurring commercial breaks interspersed amid the violence seemed to add confirmation to the notion that such mayhem-filled episodes were, indeed, typical of everyday life. (A brief discussion of the prevalence of violence on television in relation to the background of this research may be found in Appendix E.)

Interviewing viewers about their experience of the commercial interruption seemed a reasonable and worthwhile project. The interviews might shed light on some of the puzzling or opaque aspects of the situation. Perhaps it would become clear to me how it is that people seem willing to be interrupted over and over, day by day, night after night. Perhaps some of their coping mechanisms would become evident.

I hoped that the respondents would be open to sharing what they felt and thought at the time of the commercial interruption. I hoped, further, that they might develop their thoughts and feelings during the interview, perhaps becoming aware of ideas and

emotions that had previously been beneath the surface of their thinking. In addition, I hoped to learn about the respondents' behavior at the time of the commercial interruption. Do they stay and watch? Do they go away and do something else? Do they mute the sound, or switch channels?

Thus my basic research question was: What do people feel, think, and do at the time of the commercial interruption? Through the interviews, I hoped to answer that question.

I had some related questions, which I included in the post-interview questionnaire. I wanted to know if the type of program or the degree of the viewer's involvement in a program might affect response to the commercial interruption. I also wanted to know about the degree of sophistication of the respondents regarding some aspects of the business of television. For these reasons, I included questions 15, 16, 19, and 20 in the questionnaire. The reader may find the questionnaire in Appendix B.

Summary of Major Findings

Results from the Interviews

In various ways, most respondents signalled their

acceptance of the way television programming is
currently presented. For example, when asked about
their feelings and thoughts at the time of the
commercial interruption (ci), more than two-thirds of
them indicated that they had no particular feelings or
thoughts about it at all. Moreover, over half of them
said they "expect, accept, or are used to it". When
asked what they do at the ci, they said that, at least
sometimes, they watch the commercials. And 54%
volunteered that "commercials pay for programs".

However, not everyone happily accepted everything
about the ci. More than half of the respondents (Rs)
said they were impatient or annoyed with ci's, and 58%
indicated that their degree of involvement with a
program affected how they felt at the ci: if they
were more involved in the program, then they were more
irritated at the ci.

Moreover, not everyone paid close attention to
the commercials themselves. Nearly two-thirds of the
Rs said they talk during commercials, and smaller but
substantial numbers of people reported that they use
the "mute" button, or flip to other channels. More
then one-third said they "tune out" the commercials
and nearly one-third mentioned that they "think or

daydream" during commercials. Almost 25% reported
that they read while commercials are broadcast.

Substantial numbers of participants mentioned
leaving the scene at commercial time. Nearly
two-thirds mentioned, without specifying their purpose
or destination, that they leave the vicinity of the
television set. When participants did specify their
behavior during commercials, they mentioned activities
such as going and getting something to eat or drink,
using the time to work around the house, or going to
the bathroom.

Findings from the Questionnaires

The questionnaire produced some results of
interest as well. Asked if their response to the
commercial break depended upon the type of program
being interrupted, nearly half of the participants
said "No", while fewer than one-third said "Yes".
Although, for most, the type of program did not affect
their response, the degree to which they were involved
in programs did. Asked if their response to the
commercial break depends upon how involved or absorbed
they are in the program, about half answered
affirmatively, while more than one-fourth said it did

not.

When asked if they believe commercial sponsorship has effects upon programming or program content, aside from the commercials themselves, two-thirds of the participants wrote "Yes", but very few showed awareness of the immense power wielded by advertisers that has been a concern of several critical writers. (See, for example, Barnouw, 1975, 1978; Giersing, 1984; Goldsen, 1977; Mander, 1978; Mankiewicz & Swerdlow, 1978; Schiller, 1969.)

The gender differences on this question are of interest. Although a variety of responses was given by the female subgroup, some of the women did show more thought and sophistication on this issue than did most of the men. Some responses are quoted here, to show both the variety and the relative sophistication of some of them. One woman (pre) wrote, "I don't believe the commercials affect the program content--and I certainly hope not". Another (post) wrote, "If the commercial sponsors had more to gain besides money--they might be more interested in sponsoring more responsible programming--in realizing the vast impact on their viewers". This response shows some awareness or the power of the "sponsors",

and of the desirability of considering incentives
other than simply financial ones. Another (post)
woman showed some recognition of the power of
advertisers. She wrote, "Obviously in business, one
is responsive to supporters. Major sponsors would
impact content and message in supported shows--themes
in oppositon to sponsors are avoided or played down.
Also you often see name-brand food/drink items, toys
displayed in a show." Still another woman (post) took
the causal chain another step. She wrote, "I believe
that the TV sponsors do affect the shows that come
on--occasionally, by choosing not to sponsor a
controversial show, but mostly by affecting the people
who create the shows to think about whether the show
will sell". Another woman (pre) wrote also about
effects upon writers of shows. She wrote, "I'm sure
if a program couldn't find or please a sponsor, it
wouldn't be produced. The writer of the program would
need to be aware of the expectations of the sponsor as
to ideas and philosophies of the show. Perhaps
differences in these would change the program in ways
the writer hadn't intended--for good or bad."

Most of the men in the sample showed no awareness
of the power of advertisers over program content. One

man (pre) responded with a defense of advertising: "I think commercial ads are a necessary evil in any media. Good ads also serve a purpose of information." (This man, retired from his own business, formerly sponsored a local radio news program by purchasing advertising time.) One other male pre respondent wrote "Yes" to the question, but his elaboration dealt only with effects of audience size upon sponsorship and the length of time a show will remain on television.

Of the men in the younger (post) group, however, only one denied that commercial sponsorship affects programming or program content. The other 6 showed recognition of some effects of commercial sponsorship. Of the 6, 4 mentioned only audience size and ratings. The other 2 showed more understanding of the extent of commercial control. One wrote, "There was going to be a TV special on Reagan's birthday. It was cancelled after the Iran-contra episode because advertisers didn't want to be connected with Reagan. Money determines the type of controversy we see on TV." Another man wrote, "[TV] censors what is shown by business willingness to sponsor a particular program or program content".

When asked who pays for the production of commercial television programs, only 8 people (31%) designated the consumer or buyer of goods advertised. One other person did so by elaborating his answer. Half of the respondents indicated that the ads or advertisers pay for the production of programs. The other people gave answers including networks, sponsors, producers, film company.

It is not surprising that half of the sample indicated that the production of programs is paid for by advertisers. We are told, over and over, that "this program is being brought to you by the makers of" whatever. It is surprising that 35% of the respondents designated the buyers of the products advertised as those who pay. To give that answer requires some skepticism about what we are told, plus some understanding of how the business of television works. It appears that their understanding is not based upon reading. None of the 26 people in the sample mentioned having done any reading about the business of television. In view of our time spent together, and the subject matter of the interview and questionnaire, I believe that if any of them had read books about television, they would have mentioned

having done so.

Pre and Post Subgroups Compared

There were several major areas in which the older respondents (those who had grown up before starting to watch television) differed from the younger participants. Forty-two percent more of the older than of the younger group stated that they had no feelings or thoughts about the commercial interruption. "Denial" was expressed by 46% more of the older (pre) group; and 17% more pre's than posts said they "expect, accept or are used to it". The older group exceeded the younger group by 37% in saying that they like some commercials.

However, the younger group exceeded the older group by 42% in describing the commercial interruption as a relief from the tension of watching television, and by 35% in referring to it as a release to go and do other things.

Respondents who had grown up before starting to watch television (pre's) exceeded those who had grown up with television (posts) in stating that bad commercials irritated them, and that they found some commercials insulting or offensive. However, none of

the pre's voiced resentment about being manipulated by commercials, or about their deceptiveness, but 36% of the posts said they felt this way.

Other differences between pre and post groups were also found. Concerning the timing of commercials, both in dramatic programs and in news programs, there were substantial differences between pre and post, but in opposite directions. Regarding dramatic programs, 36% more posts than pre's said that commercials are scheduled at convenient or innocuous times. However, with regard to news programs, 46% more pre's than posts said that timing of commercials was satisfactory or innocuous, because an item of news is finished before the commercial break.

With regard to behavior at the commercial interruption, substantially more of the older than of the younger group said they talk during commercials, or that they do handwork, crossword puzzle, card game or write a letter. Also, more of the older group said they read at that time.

However, substantially more of the younger than of the older group said they watch commercials, or that they think or daydream during commercials. Also more posts than pre's mentioned without specifying

purpose or destination that they leave the scene at commercial time. And more of the younger than of the older respondents said they do household tasks at that time.

There are some interesting differences between the two age groups on the questionnaire. On the question about degree of involvement, 24% more of the younger than of the older group indicated that their response to the commercial break does depend upon how involved or absorbed they are in the program.

Question 19 (Do you believe that commercial sponsorship of television has other effects on programming or program content, in addition to the commercials themselves?) elicited a striking difference between the two age groups: 51% more of the younger group said "Yes" and 51% more of the older group said "No". While 29% of the younger group based their affirmative answer on the concept of audience size and ratings, still there does seem to be a greater grasp of the idea of control by advertisers on the part of the younger group.

Gender Subgroups Compared

The findings comparing men and women are

remarkably consistent throughout. Where there were
differences between the gender subgroups, more of the
men than of the women voiced positive themes, in
nearly all cases.

With regard to the commercial interruption
itself, more men than women consistently expressed
positive or accepting themes. Further, more men than
women said they don't mind some commercials.
Moreover, with regard to timing of commercial breaks,
both in dramatic and in news programs, more men than
women were accepting or positive, while more women
than men expressed negative themes.

<center>Infrequent or Unusual Findings</center>

In general, while large percentages of
respondents expressed acceptance of the status quo or
lack of feeling, some people did voice negative
feelings toward the commercial interruption, and
toward the quality of the commercials.

Nearly half of the respondents voiced feelings of
irritation or of intrusion at commercial
interruptions, and almost a third said they were upset
by commercials they felt were inappropriate in the
context. Other negative feelings toward the

commercial interruption were expressed by smaller
numbers of people.

Moreover, some participants expressed strong
negative feelings toward the commercials themselves.
More than a third said they felt many commercials were
senseless, silly, or stupid. Nearly one-third said
they find some commercials offensive or
insulting--some of those people saying they would
refuse to buy a particular product if offended by the
commercial. About one-fifth of the respondents said
either that they resent the manipulation attempted by
commercials or that commercials lie. This theme was
voiced only by people in the post group.

To avoid repetition, other unusual findings will
be reviewed in the section of the chapter where they
are discussed.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the research provide some
preliminary answers to my original questions. Of
course, this limited sample of people may not be
representative of any particular population; however,
some interesting trends emerged from the data.

When I began the research project, I hoped for an

opening exploration of this problem area. I believe
this aim has been realized. These 26 people were
willing to share with me their feelings and thoughts
about commercial interruptions, as well as an account
of their behavior at those times.

However, I found the degree of depth of the
interviews somewhat disappointing. Few people went
below or beyond the surface of their thinking. In
some respects, I should not be surprised at that
result. Television's impact, as has been pointed out
by several critical writers on the subject (e.g.,
Barnouw, 1978; Mander, 1978; Postman, 1985), is to
support the superficial, to discourage depth, to exalt
the trivial. And the impact of the commercial
interruption itself, as pointed out by Postman (1985)
is to reduce everything to a level of
meaninglessness--a level of no implications.

> The viewers also know that no matter how grave
> any fragment of news may appear (for example,
> on the day I write a Marine Corps general has
> declared that nuclear war between the
> United States and Russia is inevitable), it
> will shortly be followed by a series of
> commercials that will, in an instant, defuse

the import of the news, in fact, render it largely banal. This is a key element in the structure of a news program and all by itself refutes any claim that television news is designed as a serious form of public discourse. (p. 104)

To expect people to talk in depth about a medium that discourages depth was perhaps unrealistic.

The findings were clearly congruent with what has been written in the literature about how pervasively our society has embraced the ways of television as a way of life (e.g., Mankiewicz & Swerdlow, 1978; Postman, 1985). The degree of acceptance of the status quo was impressive. For example, 69% of the respondents said they had no particular feelings or thoughts about commercial interruptions, and 58% said they expect, accept, or are used to them. And over half volunteered during the interview that commercials pay for programs.

As one participant put it, "I figure that is just part of the deal. Really I guess I am kind of immune to advertising or indifferent toward it, because I really don't notice a whole lot of difference between whether there is advertising or there isn't

advertising. When you watch TV, you just assume that you're going to watch a certain amount of commercials, or the program wouldn't be on there."

Toward the end of the interview, the same man said, "A lot of people are always wanting something for nothing. Well, there just isn't any free lunch in this world....The least you can do to pay for good television programs is at least give them the courtesy of watching their commercials....I mean,...if people refuse—it's just like, you know, the ratings—if people refuse to watch a program, why there isn't any advertiser gonna pay anybody to put it on."

On the questionnaire, when asked if there were some aspect of the commercial break not adequately covered in the interviews, one woman wrote, "I know I have a negative feeling during most commercials. I know this was covered during the interview but I don't know the solution to my problem." (This woman had opened the subject of commercials herself early in the interview by stating, "I hate commercials".) It is noteworthy that she refers to her negative feeling during commercials as if it represented some shortcoming in herself, rather than something about the commercials that might elicit negative feelings.

This same respondent, when asked on the questionnaire if she believes commercial sponsorship of programs affects programming or program content, wrote, "I don't believe the commercials affect the program content--and I certainly hope not."

In general, then, people in the sample were not critical of television or of how it is presented. Although there were expressions of momentary irritation or annoyance, sometimes even of resentment, and some awareness of the manipulativeness of timing commercials around emotional highs or suspense, the participants generally accepted the offerings of television without much complaint.

There were some exceptions. One of the younger women clearly expressed her distress at the enormous amount of violence and cruelty she had observed, and at the apparent effects upon her young children's attitudes and behavior.

Among other strongly negative statements, she said the following about commercials themselves: "I understand the need for them on one level--the financial need. But on the other level, I just resent them. I don't like them trying to manipulate me, and I don't like them to tell me what I think. And they

do that....They try to tell me what I need to think and feel."

One of the younger men seemed, during the interview, to be searching carefully his own feelings and responses to commercial interruptions. He expressed frustration at being unable to recall particular examples. His reported feelings varied greatly, from c_i as a relief from tension, to intense anger if the commercial interruption came at a moment of suspense. He also indicated that having a c_i during suspense would lengthen that suspense, thus helping the drama. On the other hand, he said, "It's always just a relocation. It relocates me, so I have something else to feel about....Definitely in a different space. It usually breaks up the action."

Later, he said, "I am pretty numb to that feeling. It's really--you know--just take it for granted." But then, he added, "I'm pretty sensitive to having my scenery changed, and I'm pretty gentle or whatever. And I don't like to be switched off and on." He reported that his response to the c_i would depend on his mood, and on a number of other things. Speaking of drama, he said, "If I'm captured--if I'm really interested on--you know--what's gonna happen

next in the show, and then the commercial comes on,
I'm gonna lose interest in the show. For that split
second--I'm gonna anticipate what's gonna come on
next."

And later, "If I'm getting into the feeling
of--let's say they're having a fight. If I'm starting
to reflect on their anger and apply it to myself,
and--like--or relating it to an experience in my
life--If that--if that thing comes on, it's not a
good--I don't like that, when it happens....I guess
that's why I don't like television. It's
because--it's kind of--someone's directing my
consciousness or whatever. That's what it's
doing--it's totally directing it."

Thus both of these respondents have commented
upon the directing of consciousness--the telling
people what they think and feel--that has been a
concern of a number of critical writers on the subject
of television and its effects upon our society. For
example, Goldsen (1977), writing about the tremendous
power of television programmers states,

> Neither the customs and manner of those who
> produce [television programming], nor their
> intentions are the issue. It is their power

that deserves public attention and debate.
Access to television gives those who have it
and those who buy it unprecedented power and
privilege to show and tell all of us over and
over again their own views of propriety and
impropriety, to express their own attitudes and
modes of speech, beaming out lessons in their
own customs, their own values, their own
life-styles, their own slants on reality.
The rest of us have no equivalent opportunity to
show and tell ours. The result is domination of
socially shared experience that is unique in
history for its vast and simultaneous
penetration and coverage. (p. 144)

Giersing (1984) points up specifically
advertisers' influence on programs adjacent to their
commercials, when he says,

The advertisers' own direct influence
comes into play: programs must not be in
conflict with the advertising message, and they
should preferably provide for the advertisement
a supportive environment. (p. 245)

One more example, among the many that could be
cited, is offered by Mankiewicz and Swerdlow (1978),

who, in the conclusion of their book, <u>Remote Control:</u>
<u>Television and the Manipulation of American Life</u>,
wrote,

> The truth is that television programs sell more
> than cars, hair sprays, and life insurance.
> They sell a view of the world and that view, as
> Dr. George Gerbner has said, helps change our
> image of ourselves. As an example, he
> says if the television world contains more
> victims than perpetrators of violence, that
> will create a society in which most people view
> themselves as potential victims and respond to
> life more fearfully. Television programs
> increasingly--at an alarming rate of
> increase--now provide the background, rhythms,
> and assumptions by which Americans live. In
> doing so, they enter our lives in ways so deep
> as often to be unrecognizable, and often
> impossible to escape. (p. 278)

However, the two respondents cited above were
clearly exceptions. Most of the participants spoke
fairly glibly of annoyance, impatience, or irritation,
and on the other hand, of amusing commercials or of
opportunities to go and put another load into the

washing machine.

Discussion of Pre and Post Differences

Differences between the older and younger subgroups suggested that the older respondents were more likely to express extremes--either, on the one hand, that they had no particular feelings, that they expect, accept or are used to the commercial interruptions, or that they like some commercials; or on the other hand, that they were irritated by bad commercials or even that they found some commercials offensive or insulting.

The younger participants seemed to take a more pragmatic stance--seeing the commercial interruption as a relief from the tension of watching television, or as a release--freeing them to leave and do something else. (It is noteworthy that people readily admit their difficulty in leaving the set until the commercial break releases them.) Moreover, the younger group seemed to show somewhat more sophistication, in noting the manipulation and deception in commercials.

One somewhat surpising finding was that more of the older participants found the timing of commercials

in news programs satisfactory, since an item of news
is finished before a commercial break. Most of these
people had lived through an earlier era when 15-minute
radio newscasts were uninterrupted by commercials.

Discussion of Gender Differences, Sex Roles, and Identification

As noted above, the men in this sample seemed, in
general, more accepting and less critical of
commercial interruptions and of commercials themselves
than did the women. Culturally, this difference is
not surprising. Traditionally, and, to a lesser
degree, currently, men have been trained to appear
imperturbable, cool, and unflappable. Stereotyped sex
roles are still strong in our society, although the
area of overlap between male and female roles has been
increasing, particularly in the past 20 to 25 years.

Ickes (1981) writes in reference to sex roles,

The two conceptual approaches most relevant to
masculinity and femininity are those proposed
by Bakan (1966) and by Parsons and Bales (1955).
Both approaches associate masculinity and
femininity with distinct and relatively
well-defined orientations toward social

interaction. Moreover, Bakan's "masculine" and "feminine" modalities--which he calls <u>agency</u> and <u>communion</u>, respectively--appear to coincide closely with Parsons and Bales' "masculine" and "feminine" orientations--which they term <u>instrumental</u> and <u>expressive</u>. In both formulations, masculinity is defined in terms of an active, controlling, and instrumental approach to social interaction, whereas femininity is defined in terms of a more reactive, emotionally responsive, and expressive orientation. (p. 96)

Pleck (1981), in a discussion of conceptions of masculinity, states,

Men are expected to show greater emotional control and are often described as being more alienated from their feelings than women. But men appear to become angry or violent more easily--and are often rewarded for doing so. (p. 140)

Judging from the present research, the commercial interruption is not a situation in which men tend to become more than minimally angry.

Describing the traditional male role, Pleck

(1981) says,

> Men are generally expected not to be emotionally
> sensitive to others or emotionally expressive or
> self-revealing, particularly of feelings of
> vulnerability or weakness. Paradoxically, anger
> and certain other impulsive emotional
> expressions, particularly toward other males,
> are expected or tolerated. (p. 140)

Of the somewhat contrasting modern male role,
Pleck (1981) says,

> Emotionally, the modern male role strongly
> values the capacity for emotional sensitivity
> and self-expression in romantic relationships
> with women. It holds, however, that these
> emotional behaviors should occur only with
> women. Overall, maintenance of emotional
> control is a crucial role requirement.
> Anger and other traditional male impulsive
> emotional behavior are thus discouraged.
> (p. 140)

In this research, the behavioral differences
between women and men--only women leaving the scene to
do housework, or sitting and doing handwork--also seem
to fit with conventional sex roles.

Besides the sex roles, other variables may be operating which might encourage men to be less critical than women of the way television is presented. One of these might be the mechanism of identification. Because the media establishment is still mainly controlled and operated by men, it may be that men identify more with the people who make decisions about how television programs are presented than do women, and are therefore less critical. Women may be more likely to see television as just another example of a male-dominated institution, and thus "fair game" for criticism.

Thus far, I have not found any reference in the literature to this idea, and thus offer it as only my own speculation.

Discussion of Infrequent or Unusual Findings

In this section, a number of unusual findings will be briefly discussed.

About the timing of c_i's in news programs, 42% said they found it satisfactory, since an item of news is finished before the c_i. This group included all 6 of the older men. One of these men had earlier sponsored a local radio newscast by buying advertising

time for his business. During the 20 years or so
(early 1950's to early 1970's approximately) that he
sponsored the news program, he insisted that there be
only an ad at the beginning and an ad at the end—no
advertising during the presentation of the news.
Having told me about this insistence of his, he said,
"And so, you can see I have some feeling about people
who interrupt". As he indicated, however, a
fifteen-minute uninterrupted newscast "wasn't too
unusual at that time. Now it's very unusual to have a
fifteen-minute segment on radio or TV."

The "middle commercial" was the subject of
controversy somewhat earlier as well. Barnouw (1978)
writes of the relative harmony during World War II
between sponsors and news commentators.

> Raymond Swing, preparing his commentary on the
> Nazi invasion of Luxembourg, Belgium, and the
> Netherlands, was so tortured by the thought of
> a middle commercial for White Owl Cigars that
> he offered to step aside for another newsman;
> instead White Owl waived the middle commercial.
> Middle commercials were never again heard on
> the series. (p. 41)

Obviously, tremendous change has occurred since

then.

A striking finding was that some respondents relatively unconcerned about the commercial interruption were offended when other people were interrupted. Two people (one older man and one younger woman) volunteered that the host of "Nightline" is rude to his guests, who are sometimes high officials or dignitaries, from the United States or from other countries. Concern was voiced regarding what these people must think of us, when, having agreed to be interviewed, they are frequently interrupted for sales pitches. It is worthy of note that people who accept thousands of interruptions of their own train of thought are offended on behalf of government leaders, our own or others'. Or is this concern only about the image of the United States?

Three respondents spoke of "TV stupor broken by commercial interruption". They said that at times they have been watching programs they disliked because of much violence or generally poor quality, when a commercial interruption has jolted them into awareness. They then asked themselves a question such as, "What am I doing watching this junk?"

Only two people voiced concern during the

interview about control of news by advertisers, or
bias in the news. Both of these were men in the
younger group. However, on the questionnaire, one of
the older men stated he believes some news is slanted.
It is noteworthy that, despite some apparent
sophistication on the part of several women in the
sample, no woman made this observation.

<div align="center">

Possible Implications
</div>

Is it true, then, that the television way of life
has taken us over--that we have taken it as our own?
While, of course, we cannot generalize from this small
sample, still it seems legitimate to do some
speculative thinking, stimulated by the research, and
grounded in the relevant literature.

Sometimes, during the course of a research
project, changes develop in what seems to be the
relative importance of the several parts of the study.
What seemed in the planning stages to be a minor or
incidental aspect may yield findings that are at least
as important as what were originally seen as the
central questions of the research.

In this inquiry I included Questions 15, 16, 19,
and 20 in the hope of eliciting information that might

not be obtainable during the interview. Questions 19
and 20, particularly, could not have been asked during
the interview without introducing ideas that might not
previously have occurred to the respondents, thus
possibly biasing the interview.

As the study developed, Questions 19 and 20
became more clearly important as indices of the degree
of comprehension of the respondents about centrally
important aspects of the business of television and
how it seems to affect our lives.

In order for us to begin to understand what is
being presented to us on television, we need to know
that the programming is selected and controlled in the
interests of large corporations. We need to know that
the prominence of some subject matter and the absence
of other topics is planned, in order to encourage
feelings of need for products, and to promote certain
other types of feelings. To cite one example, I have
noted a great deal of emphasis on wars, warriors,
heroism in wars. On the other hand, it is extremely
rare to see anything presented on television about
peace movements, pacifists, conscientious objectors,
or nonviolence as a way of social change. When peace
activists are shown, as in a news clip, they are often

characterized as eccentric, quaint, or on the fringe of society, frequently treated with a touch of scorn or ridicule. There have been rare presentations of the work of Gandhi or of Martin Luther King, Jr. These are usually confined to public channels, and to special occasions.

It is vital for us to understand how program material is selected and with what biases it is presented. If we do not understand these basic facts about television in our country, we may believe that what is offered is a reflection of the richness and variety of actual life, rather than a careful selection from a vastly greater world of possibilities.

Moreover, it is important to know that the programs are not, as the advertisers would have us believe, generous gifts to us from them, but are paid for by us, generally without our knowledge, as purchasers of products advertised.

Some scholars of television have made strong statements about the issues of who controls and who pays. For example, George Gerbner, Dean of the Annenberg School of Communications, wrote,

Television is the new state religion run by

a private Ministry of Culture (the three

networks), offering a universal curriculum for

all people, financed by a form of hidden

taxation without representation. You pay when

you wash, not when you watch, and whether or

not you care to watch. (cited by Postman,

1985, pp. 139-140)

Responses to Questions 19 and 20, then, will be

discussed in detail; their implications, as indicated

above, are important.

Question 19 elicited a variety of responses.

Eight of the sample said they do not believe that

commercial sponsorship affects programming or program

content beyond the insertion of commercial breaks

themselves. Moreover, of the 18 respondents who

indicated that there are other effects, only a few

showed any inkling of the immense power of

advertisers.

The reader may refer to the summary of results

for some examples (pages 125-127) of the responses to

this question. They show a range of beliefs, from a

flat "No", through the issues of audience size and

ratings, and targeting, to some ideas about effects

upon writers, to statements about the building in of

emotional swings by which to time the commercial

breaks, to more general statements about what

advertisers might or might not be willing to sponsor.

With regard to Question 20, as was noted earlier,

only about one-third of the respondents identified the

buyer of advertised products as the payer. In

general, it seems that we believe what we are told.

We believe that the program is being brought to us by

the product, while, in reality, it is the intention of

the television business that we are being brought to

the product by the program.

As pointed out by Postman (1985), the regularly

occurring commercial interruptions, presented

regardless of sensitivities (except commercial

sensitivities), train viewers to accept passively,

uncritically, unquestioningly, whatever appears, in

whatever way it is offered. He refers to the

"Now...this" mode of discourse. For example, he

writes,

> In television's presentation of the "news of the
>
> day," we may see the "Now...this" mode of
>
> discourse in its boldest and most embarrassing
>
> form. For there, we are presented not only
>
> with fragmented news but news without context,

without consequences, without value, and
therefore without essential seriousness; that
is to say, news as pure entertainment. (p. 100)

Since we as viewers are well trained to expect no
seriousness, no implications, no requirements of
thought, it is not surprising that most of us do not
venture to question how the contents of programs are
selected, or who pays for them. And it is not
surprising that most of us accept the commercial
interruptions with "no particular feelings or
thoughts".

Moreover, it is not a surprise that most of the
respondents accept the commercial interruption without
question, since nearly everything on television is
presented with an atmosphere of being "in the know",
in the mainstream, the world of "beautiful people".
Television is "where it's at".

From the beginning of television, after the end
of World War II, when consumer goods again began to be
produced in large quantities, advertising on
television has been extolling the wonders of material
possessions. Mander (1978) states, "Thus, a new
vision was born that equated the good life with
consumer goods" (p. 136).

Mander adds,

Advertising and television were the dynamic duo

that would rededicate the consuming American.

Advertising's ability to create a passionate

need for what is not needed was already

established. Since economic growth and a

consumer economy had to be based upon selling

far more commodities than were needed to meet

actual needs, economic growth depended upon

advertising. (p. 136)

As long as we do not know that the form and

content of television are shaped and selected by giant

corporations, we are in trouble. Our wide-eyed

innocence is dangerous. Our ignorance of the power of

advertisers and of who they mainly are (Mander, 1978,

pp. 150-153) magnifies their influence over us

tremendously. They set the agenda of our thought.

They construct our conceptual framework.

If we know that the bulk of television

programming is serving the interests of huge

corporations such as General Electric, General Tire

and Rubber, Westinghouse (Barnouw, 1978, p. 158), as

well as oil, chemical, and drug companies that fund

"public" television (Mander, 1978, p. 151), then

perhaps we may be forewarned to expect a particular world-view within those programs.

However, if, as exemplified by the results of this research, we naively believe that advertisers do not substantially affect programming, then we view the programs as reflecting the normal way of life in this country. We may believe that news and commentary are, at most, slanted by the views of the news persons or network heads. But we have no inkling of the shaping of our world-view by the corporate sponsors.

My own critical sense about broadcasting was sharpened somewhat while I lived within reach of a listener-sponsored radio station. Although I did not agree with or listen to everything offered by that station, I did become aware of a vast range of subject matter and opinions that mainstream commercial and public broadcasting ignore.

Now, when I observe that "Washington Week in Review" is being funded by Ford and Ford AeroSpace, I find myself wondering what issues we are not hearing from that relatively superior discussion program, and how the issues we do hear may be biased. Ford AeroSpace, is, for example, heavily into high technology for the military.

In order for people to become less gullible, less complacent, less unquestioningly accepting of the status quo, more capable of defending against an agenda without real choices, they first need knowledge and understanding of the business of television. Most of the respondents in this sample were accepting of the status quo, said they believed that advertisers pay for programs, and showed little awareness of the power of advertisers, who fill the living rooms and minds of this nation with their values, their world-view.

Secondly, if viewers became more educated about how the business of television works, who controls it, and with what motivations, would they begin to insist that the law be obeyed? When channels are licensed, they are required by law to be used for the public interest. They are not, for the most part, being so used now.

The channels are being used to bring in as many dollars as possible through advertising. Is that the basis we want for deciding what is to come into our homes, occupy our time, and shape our capacity for thought?

A recent article in <u>Common Cause Magazine</u>

(Riordan, 1987) makes a related point. The article is about political art in the television age.

> Art [according to Don Desmett, director
> of the Ohio State University Art Museum], is
> much less censored than information people get
> from TV. TV's version of reality is
> "accepted as watered down and controlled by
> people who are by definition conservative,
> corporate," he says. (p. 25)

Questions need to be asked about the possible effects of pertinent information upon people's attitudes toward television and the world-view it presents. Perhaps it is time for our society to be shaken out of its TV stupor and into recognizing the tremendous influence of large corporations.

If people were educated about the business of television and the biases entailed in the business, what differences, if any, would that understanding make in their viewing habits, or in the likelihood of their protesting to the networks or advertisers?

Questions need to be asked about the effects of years of television viewing upon ability to think, to read, and to write. Such problems are discussed in some of the literature cited elsewhere in this dissertation. Postman (1985), for example, writes

about some of his students who, having grown up in the

television world of discontinuities, seem not to

understand the concept of contradiction.

Contradiction, in short, requires that

statements and events be perceived as

interrelated aspects of a continuous and coherent

context. Disappear the context, or fragment it,

and contradiction disappears. This point

is nowhere made more clear to me than

in conferences with my younger students

about their writing. "Look here," I say. "In

this paragraph you have said one thing. And

in that you have said the opposite. Which is

it to be?" They are polite, and wish to please,

but they are as baffled by the question as I

am by the response. "I know," they will say,

"but that is there and this is here." The

difference between us is that I assume "there

and "here," "now" and "then," one paragraph and

the next to be connected, to be continuous, to

be part of the same coherent world of thought.

That is the way of typographic discourse, and

typography is the universe I'm "coming from," as

they say. But they are coming from a different

universe of discourse altogether: the

"Now...this" world of television. The

fundamental assumption of that world is not

coherence but discontinuity. And in a world of

discontinuities, contradiction is useless as a

test of truth or merit, because contradiction

does not exist.

My point is that we are by now

so thoroughly adjusted to the "Now...this"

world of news--a world of fragments, where

events stand alone, stripped of any connection

to the past, or to the future, or to other

events--that all assumptions of coherence have

vanished. And so, perforce, has contradiction.

In the context of no context, so to speak, it

simply disappears. (pp. 109-110)

Perhaps it is this becoming used to living in a

world of fragmented discontinuities that eventuates in

our accepting juxtapositions such as a report on a

famine with an ad for food touted for its low caloric

content without so much as a sigh.

People, it is often said, "can get used to

anything". In sensory psychology, we speak of

adaptation. Our eyes and ears adapt, within limits,

to variations in light and in sound. In a larger sense, we as people habituate--become used to, or accepting of--more complex stimulus situations. After years of living in the world of television, with its unconnected fragments of trivial this and trivial that, we seem to have lost our sense of continuity, of coherence, of seriousness--even our need to question.

No juxtaposition, no matter how offensive, seems to call forth objection--even notice--from most of us. Since we are so habituated to the commercial interruption, and to the generally insignificant content of television programs, it is not surprising that we don't think of raising questions about how programming may be selected or biased, or who pays for it.

Relationships to the Field of Psychology

Judging from the literature, long-term exposure to television does clearly seem to change our ways of feeling and thinking. Emotion and cognition are areas of interest to psychologists, including theorists, researchers, and clinicians. Some possible lines of investigation are suggested in the following paragraphs.

Cultural anthropologists traditionally have tried to study cultures in imminent danger of extinction. We have within the American society a vanishing cultural subgroup; namely those people (generally mid-50s and older) who grew up before beginning their exposure to television. Judging from my results, in relation to some of the critical literature, the thought processes of these people may differ in important ways from those of the television generations now among us. While there were, as expected, some differences between the older and younger groups in the present sample, as may be noted on pages 142-143, no clear statements may be made from these limited results about differences that may be found in larger samples, or with longitudinal studies.

First, the sample was small, and may not be representative of any particular population. Secondly, although the two subgroups did differ markedly in age at which they began watching television, the number of years as viewers did not differ greatly between the two groups. Thirdly, a systematic study would need to include testing procedures to gauge changes in cognitive and emotional processes. Thus, problem-solving and

concept-formation tasks, as well as personality testing devices would be needed, in order to determine the degree and types of changes that may have taken place. In order to ask these questions systematically, a study would require a different design and a larger and more nearly representative sample.

Perhaps research psychologists who are students of cognitive processes could work together with cultural anthropologists to study differences in reasoning, problem-solving, and conceptualization between the rapidly disappearing group who attained adulthood before television and the younger people who grew up watching television--with its presentation of subject matter in little, unconnected fragments, its commercial interruptions, its emphasis on the superficial, and other characteristics discussed in the literature. The obvious age differences between the two groups, of course, would have to be allowed for--partialed out statistically, or dealt with in some other way.

Judging from Postman's (1985) experience with his students, as well as from other writers (MacNeil, 1983; Sohn, 1982), we should expect striking

differences in coherence, in ability to recognize

contradiction, and in other qualities of thinking.

Another line of research stimulated by this study

and related literature has to do with possible effects

of introducing some understanding of the business of

television to viewers previously naive about that

area. A representative sample of the viewing public

could be selected, and given a questionnaire, to

include some inquiries, perhaps similar to my Question

19, about effects of commercial sponsorship on

programming. Before administering the questionnaire,

a baseline would be needed, in order to determine

later what changes may have occurred in the dependent

variables, namely, attitudes, viewing habits and

behavior related to criticism of how television is

presented. The baseline would be established by

measures of television viewing habits and of related

behavior. Interviews and questionnaires, as well as

television metering devices, might be used to

establish the baseline.

After the questionnaire, workshops would be

conducted, for one experimental group, in which

pertinent information would be given, with lively

illustrative material and with opportunities for small

group discussion. A second experimental group would simply be given relevant information. A control group would be given no intermediate treatment.

Measures then would be taken, at intervals, after the "treatments", to ascertain changes in attitudes, viewing habits, and other behavior, such as letters to networks, sponsors, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), or members of Congress.

The question of desensitization is urgently in need of further study, and of dissemination of results. There are serious questions about what is happening to the sensitivities of the television generations.

Desensitization of feeling level has been demonstrated experimentally. For example, Cline, Croft, and Courrier (1973) found emotional desensitization in children who were heavy viewers of television. Moreover, one of the respondents in the present study voiced acute awareness of negative changes in her young children's attitudes and behavior subsequent to their beginning to watch violent Saturday morning cartoons. Would wider awareness of these effects help parents to make wiser decisions about how their children spend their time?

One major finding of this study is that most of the respondents said they had "no particular feelings or thoughts" about the commercial interruption. Considering this finding from the study in relation to material from the literature, it is evident that clinicians should be made aware of the kinds of emotional and cognitive changes that occur in habitual viewers of television. To have one's emotional responsiveness dulled, including one's capacity for empathy toward others in distress, is a tremendously significant change in human beings--clearly relevant to any therapeutic process.

The cognitive changes referred to in the literature--for example, deterioration of the concept of coherence and loss of any notion of context, hence of contradiction--are important to clinicians and to theorists of human cognition as well.

Other possible studies might deal with theoretical concepts from the psychology of learning and of perception. Literature about television contains references to the inability of viewers to recall what they have watched. For example, the novelist and former teacher, Jerzy Kosinski, being interviewed by Sohn (1982), speaks of the difficulties

experienced by a class of college students of media
communication, when they were asked to describe in
detail what they had seen on two hours of television.

> They claimed that the rapidity and fragmentation
> of the TV experience made it impossible to
> isolate a narrative thought-line, or to
> contemplate and analyze what they had seen, in
> terms of relative significance. (p. 354)

It appears that Kosinski was referring to a
classroom exercise, rather than to a carefully
controlled study. However, questions about recall and
recognition, as well as about comprehension of
televised material have received the attention of
experimental researchers. Since these questions are
not a main focus of this study, only a few examples
will be cited here.

Cavanaugh (1983) studied differences in age and
in verbal ability in relation to adults' comprehension
and retention of televised material. He found that
only "low verbal" older adults were consistently
poorer that their younger counterparts.

In a second study, Cavanaugh (1984) manipulated
the format of the televised material shown to younger
and to older adults. Two of the formats simulated

commercial television and public television. A third omitted commercial time altogether, and a fourth had "commercial breaks"; but at these times, the screen was blank. He found no effects due to the manipulation of format for either age group, and concluded that researchers may have a choice of equivalent formats in television research.

Drew and Grimes (1987) investigated visual and auditory recall and understanding of televised news under five stimulus conditions: audio only, video only, and low, medium, and high redundancy (congruence) across audio and video. They found greater auditory recall and story understanding in the high-redundancy condition than in the lower-redundancy conditions. Visual recall, however, was greater in the lower- than in the high-redundancy condition.

Gunter, Furnham, and Jarrett (1984) studied effects of time of day and personality differences upon free recall, cued recall, and recognition of televised news stories. Their theoretical concepts included differential changes in level of arousal between introverts and extraverts, in relation to memory consolidation and retrieval of consolidated information. They found that memory improved across

the day, and that introverts remembered more than did extraverts. Differences between them were greatest during the late afternoon session.

The reader interested in this area of inquiry may wish to consult, in addition to the research cited above, some of the following: Gunter, Jarrett, and Furnham (1983), Hayes and Kelly (1985), Owens (1985). In addition to these, several studies may be found in the reference list of Drew and Grimes (1987).

The concept of memory consolidation has been studied extensively by psychologists, beginning in 1900 with Muller and Pilzecker, continuing with Hebb (1949), McGaugh and Herz (1972), and others. In order for an experience to become a part of long-term memory, a little time is required for it to "consolidate".

The phenomenon of metacontrast or backward masking (e.g., Neisser, 1967), from the psychology of perception, might also shed light on the difficulty viewers have in recalling what they have presumably seen. The phenomenon of metacontrast consists in the masking of a just presented stimulus by a second stimulus, presented within a very brief time span after the first.

Both of these concepts seem relevant, in view of rapid pace of changes typical of television programs.

Other questions of importance to psychologists are concerned with how much of television fare is taken in without awareness, and thus without benefit of critical faculty. Some writers about television have discussed this concern. For example, Mander (1978, especially pp. 200-215) emphasizes this problem. Again, an important concern is about what is being done to us without our knowledge.

Of the results of the research, the most salient are those that demonstrate how thoroughly we have taken in the ways of television--assimilated them, made them our own, internalized them. It is rare to find anyone, lifelong viewer or older person, who even notices what is presented just after what--who is concerned about juxtapositions, of whatever sort. It is rare to find anyone who is more than mildly concerned about the fact that news is given to us in tiny, unconnected fragments.

Have we become "A nation of videots"? (Sohn, 1982).

References

Agnew, C. M., & O'Brien, N. (1958). Television advertising. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Alper, T. (1946). Memory for completed and incomplete tasks as a function of personality: An analysis of group data. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 41, 403-420.

Alper, T. (1952). The interrupted-task method in studies of selective recall: a reevaluation of some recent experiments. Psychological Review, 59, 71-88.

Alper, T. (1957). Predicting the direction of selective recall: Its relation to ego strength and n Achievement. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 55, 149-165.

Arlen, M. J. (1980). Thirty seconds. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

Atkinson, J. W. (1953). The achievement motive and recall of interrupted and completed tasks. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 48, 381-385.

Baker, R. K., & Ball, S. J. (Eds.). (1969). Violence and the media: A staff report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of

Violence. Mass media hearings, Vol. 9A.

Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Barnouw, E. (1966, 1968, 1970). A history of

broadcasting in the United States. New York:

Oxford University Press.

Barnouw, E. (1975). Tube of plenty: The evolution

of American television. New York: Oxford

University Press.

Barnouw, E. (1978). The sponsor: Notes on a modern

potentate. New York: Oxford University Press.

Becker, C. S. (1986). Interviewing in human science

research. Methods: A Journal for Human Science,

1, 101-124.

Berger, A. A. (1976). The TV-guided American.

New York: Walker.

Bunce, R. (1976). Television in the corporate

interest. New York: Praeger.

Caron, A. J., & Wallach, M. A. (1957). Recall of

interrupted tasks under stress: a phenomenon of

memory or of learning? Journal of Abnormal and

Social Psychology, 55, 372-381.

Cline, V. B., Croft, R. G., & Courrier, S. (1973).

Desensitization of children to television

violence. Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology, 27, 360-365.

Diamant, L. (1971). Television's classic commercials:
The golden years 1948-1958. New York:
Hastings House.

Giersing, M. (1984). The commercialization of
culture--perspectives and precautions.
In V. Mosco & J. Wasko (Eds.), The critical
communications review, 2: Changing patterns of
communications control (pp. 243-263). Norwood,
NJ: Ablex.

Giorgi, A. (1975). Convergence and divergence of
qualitative and quantitative methods in
psychology. In A. Giorgi, C. Fischer, & E. Murray
(Eds.), Duquesne studies in phenomenological
psychology, Vol. 2 (pp. 72-79). Pittsburgh:
Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. P. (1984). Towards a new paradigm for
psychology. In C.M. Aanstoos (Ed.), Exploring
the lived world: Readings in phenomenological
psychology (pp. 9-28). Carrollton: West
Georgia College.

Gitlin, T. (1983). Inside prime time. New York:
Pantheon.

Gitlin, T. (Ed.). (1986). Watching television:

A Pantheon guide to popular culture. New York:
Pantheon.

Glixman, A. F. (1948). An analysis of the use of the
interruption technique in experimental studies of
repression. Psychological Bulletin, 45, 491-506.

Goldsen, R. K. (1977). The show and tell machine:
How television works and works you over. New York:
Dial Press.

Harrower, M. (1932). Organization in higher mental
processes. Psychologische Forschung, 17, 56-120.

Hebb, D. O. (1949). The organization of behavior.
New York: Wiley.

Hsia, H. J. (1974). Audience recall as tolerance
toward television commercial breaks. Journalism
Quarterly, 51, 96-101.

Huxley, A. (1946). Brave new world. New York: Harper
& Row. (Original work published 1932)

Hycner, R. H. (1982). Some guidelines for the
phenomenological analysis of interview data.
Unpublished manuscript.

Ickes, W. (1981). Sex-role influences in dyadic
interaction: A theoretical model. In C. Mayo &
N. M. Henley (Eds.), Gender and nonverbal
behavior (pp. 95-128). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Janus, N. (1984). Advertising and the creation of
global markets: The role of the new communication
technologies. In V. Mosco & J. Wasko (Eds.),
The critical communications review, 2: Changing
patterns of communications control (pp. 57-70).
Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Johnson, N. (1970). How to talk back to your televison
set. New York: Bantam Books.

Kennedy, J. R. (1971). How program environment affects
TV commercials. Journal of Advertising Research,
11, 33-38.

Kessler, B. (1984). Personal ways of bereavement.
Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Saybrook
Institute, San Francisco.

Krugman, H. E. (1983). Television program interest
and commercial interruption: Are commercials on
interesting programs less effective? Journal of
Advertising Research, 23, 21-23.

Lewis, H. B., & Franklin, M. (1944). An experimental
study of the role of the ego in work. II. The
significance of task-orientation in work. Journal
of Experimental Psychology, 34, 195-215.

MacNeil, R. (1983). Is television shortening our
attention span? New York University Education

Quartérly, 14(2), 2-5.

Mander, J. (1978). Four arguments for the elimination of television. New York: Morrow Quill.

Mankiewicz, F., & Swerdlow, J. (1978). Remote control: Television and the manipulation of American life. New York: Times Books.

McGaugh, J. L., & Herz, M. J. (1972). Memory consolidation. San Francisco: Albion.

Mosco, V. & Wasko, J. (Eds.). (1984). The critical communications review, 2: Changing patterns of communications control. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Müller, G. E., & Pilzecker, A. (1900). [Experimental contributions to the understanding of memory] Zeitschrift für Psychologie, Ergänzenband I.

Murray, J. P., Rubinstein, E. A., & Comstock, G. A. (Eds.). (1972). Television and social behavior. Reports and papers, Volume II: Television and social learning. A technical report to the Surgeon-General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior. National Institute of Mental Health. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

Neisser, U. (1967). Cognitive psychology. Englewood

Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Neisser, U. (1976). Cognition and reality.

San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

Orwell, G. (1982). 1984. Cutchogue, New York:

Buccaneer. (Original work published 1949)

Ovsiankina, M. (1928). [The resumption of interrupted

acts], Psychologische Forschung, 11, 302-389.

Pachauri, A. R. (1935). A study of gestalt problems

in completed and uncompleted tasks. British

Journal of Psychology, 25, 447-457.

Pleck, J. H. (1981). The myth of masculinity.

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Postman, N. (1985). Amusing ourselves to death: Public

discourse in the age of show business. New York:

Penguin.

Prentice, W. C. H. (1944). The interruption of tasks.

Psychological Review, 51, 329-340.

Riordan, T. (1987). Art imitates politics: Can

political art have an impact in the television

age? Common Cause Magazine, 13(4), 22-26.

Rosenzweig, S. (1943). An experimental study of

"repression" with special reference to

need-persistive and ego-defensive reactions to

frustration. Journal of Experimental Psychology,

<u>32</u>, 64-74.

Sanford, N. (1946). Age as a factor in recall of interrupted tasks. <u>Psychological Review</u>, <u>53</u>, 234-240.

Schiller, H. I. (1969). <u>Mass communications and American empire</u>. Boston: Beacon Press.

Sohn, D. (1982). David Sohn interviews Jerzy Kosinski: A nation of videots. In H. Newcomb (Ed.), <u>Television: The critical view</u>, 3rd ed. (pp. 351-372). New York: Oxford University Press.

Soldow G. F., & Principe, V. (1981). Response to commercials as a function of program context: Program involvement influences commercial effectiveness. <u>Journal of Advertising Research</u>, <u>21</u>, 59-65.

Sollier, P. (1926). Le temps de réaction à l'arrêt [Reaction time at arrest]. <u>Journal de Psychologie</u>, <u>23</u>, 980-1002.

Steiner, G. A. (1966). The people look at commercials: A study of audience behavior. <u>Journal of Business of the University of Chicago</u>, <u>39</u>, 272-304.

Stevick, E. L. (1971). An empirical investigation of the experience of anger. In A. Giorgi,

W. F. Fischer, & R. Von Eckartsberg (Eds.),

Duquesne studies in phenomenological psychology,

1 (pp. 133-148). Pittsburgh: Duquesne

University Press.

United States Bureau of the Census (1987).

Statistical abstracts of the United States,

107th ed., Washington, DC: Department of Commerce.

Wertz, F. J. (1984). Procedures in phenomenological

research and the question of validity. In C. M.

Aanstoos (Ed.), Exploring the lived world:

Readings in phenomenological psychology

(pp. 29-48). Carrollton: West Georgia College.

Winn, M. (1977). The plug-in drug. New York: Bantam

Books.

Witty, P. A., Sizemore, R. A., Coomer, A., & Kinsella,

P. (1960). Interest Inventory Record, U.S. Office

of Education Interest Survey. Evanston, IL:

Northwestern University School of Education.

Witty, P. (1962). Some results of twelve-year studies

of televiewing. Science Education, 46, 222-229.

Witty, P. (1963, February). Surveys of TV 1949-1961.

Paper presented to American Educational Research

Association (Sectional Meeting), Chicago.

Zeigarnik, B. (1927). [The retention of completed and

of uncompleted tasks]. _Psychologische Forschung_,
_9_, 1-86.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample Interview (f post), Transcribed

I: Okay--you said that you do watch some television?

R: Yes.

I: Uh-huh. Can you tell me some of the things that you like to watch?

R: The news. Johnny Carson, maybe one or two times a week. And, depending on our work schedule, sometimes--oh, like--the Cosby Show, or--gosh, I'm not really home much in the evenings, but--we watch um Jack and Mike-- and Moonlighting, occasionally.

I: Mhm. You said the news. Any particular channel or network that you--

R: We--I like Channel 4, out of Denver.

I: That's uh NBC, isn't it?

R: I--have no idea.

I: Yah, I think 4,5, and 8 are all NBC. Are you talking about network news, or the Denver--news broadcast out of Denver?

R: It is out of Denver. I'm not sure. But they have really good coverage of national news, which is the main reason we watch it.

I: Mhm. How old were you when you started watching TV?

R: Well, I think we always had a TV in the house,

from when I was born. Probably fairly young. Three

or four. Cartoons and that sort of thing.

I: Mhm. So you don't remember a time when there

wasn't a television in your house?

R: No.

I: And was there ever an appreciable part of your

life when you didn't watch TV at all?

R: When I was at college. (laughs) Yah.

I: Mhm. Was this at the University of X?

R: Yes.

I: So it was a matter of--you didn't really have time

to watch it?

R: Right. Plus with all of the other things going

on--Even when I was at home--TV just wasn't a

priority.

I: Mhm. Mhm. Okay--So you mostly watch Channel 4

for news, and then you watch Cosby Show, Johnny

Carson, Jack and Mike, Moonlighting. Any other shows

that occur to you that you watch from time to time?

R: We do watch other shows periodically, you

know--not on a regular basis, but. Gosh, what else do

we watch? Um-- Cheers, occasionally. And if there

are particular movies--I used to really like the old

musicals--classics from the fifties--that sort of

thing. And I got that from Mom, because she loved
those. And now that I am married, K is into
documentaries, and things like National Geographic,
which I thought were totally boring, before; but now
if I'm home and he's watching that, of course, you
know, sometimes I'll watch it with him, if it can't be
avoided. (laughs)

I: (laugh) I see. So, usually in the evenings,
you're watching with your husband.

R: Usually. Right.

I: Do you have children?

R: Not yet.

I: So it's just the two of you, usually.

R: Right.

I: Okay--are there any shows that you get especially
involved in--that you're really attentive to?

R: Uh--if there are certain shows--well, we--I try to
watch shows that might be relevant to work. For
example, if there's a particular show on mental
illness, or handicaps, or divorce--any of those types
of things, you know, then I'll especially make an
effort to watch them. Is that what you mean?

I: Well, that would certainly answer the
question--that you would be more likely to watch the

social problem kind of show--

R: Well, and to watch--yeah--to pay more attention to

it than--as opposed to some shows--you just sit back,

and--more for the entertainment and to relax. yeah.

I: Mhm. So, when you're watching something like

that, you're kinda saying to yourself that "I want to

learn what's to be learned here," or something like

that?

R: Right. Yeah.

I: Okay. Um, I'm especially interested in the moment

when the program is interrupted by the beginning of a

series of commercials. I'm interested in your feelings

at that moment, and your thoughts. Can you get next

to what that's like?

R: Sure. Usually it's, if it is a comedy or a show

that's not especially important to me, then it's kind

of irritating, but it's not really that big of a deal.

 If it's a show that I'm really involved in, or feel

is real interesting, then that very first break when

that commercial comes, it's real annoying. Now

usually they'll build up to some sort of mini-climax

right before the ad, so that it fits in. But still

it, it definitely is an interruption.

I: Mhm. Mhm. So you feel that they arrange the

program so that it's building up to a climax just
before?

R: Right.

I: Mhm. Mhm. Does the subject matter that just
precedes the commercial make a difference? Aside from
your involvement with the kind of subject matter?

R: Does it make a difference in my reaction?

I: In your response, your emotional response to the
interruption.

R: Sure.

I: Uh huh. Okay. Taking, say, a news program for
example, do you notice a response in yourself--say
there's been a news story, and then a commercial
interruption comes.

R: Depending upon the content. Usually it is, you
know, I'll find myself reacting kind of, you know,
mightily annoyed, because I feel like, here are
facts--here are real-life things that are going on,
and wanting to know more about those things. And then
an advertisement which is fairly irrelevant comes on,
and that can be kind of annoying.

I: Mhm. Mhm. Anything about the particular content
of the news story in relation to the content of the
commercial?

R: Sure. Sometimes there are, depending upon the story that's on, sometimes there are ads that are put on that are extremely inappropriate. And, obviously, there are times that advertisers and the network people structure those so that they do play upon your emotions; for example, if there is a story on about, ah, say, a child who's handicapped, then they might put an ad in, saying "give to the March of Dimes," or something like that, and that's obviously set up. But other times, and it's funny, because in instances like that where they put thought into it, and you can tell they're trying to keep it fairly consistent. Other times, you know, there will be stories or shows on particular subjects, and then ad will come on that seem very inconsistent, in fact; and it can even produce an emotional reaction that is adverse to that ad just because of the content that you've been watching.

I: Mhm. Can you think of an example of that? I know what you're talking about; I just wondered if--

R: Sure. Well, one thing that, and I remember this happening but I don't remember the content of the story beforehand, it seems to me that it was--I know what it was: it was a story about a man who was

terminally ill and his family, and the things they
were going through. And I forget the disease that he
had; it wasn't cancer, it was something else, but
anyway in the advertisements that were put on during
the course of that show, there was one for Winston, or
something, some smoking thing; this was a long time
ago and I'm surprised that it sticks out in my mind.
But that did stand out in my mind because, well, my
parents are against smoking and so I've always
associated those two things; and I remember thinking
that even though he, in the story, the man wasn't
dying because he had smoked, it was still--to me, that
connection was apparent. And I can remember also
with, uh, it seems there was some advertisement
recently for Bartles and Jaymes in the middle of a
family show. I don't know if it was Cosby show or
something like that, and uh, it just seemed
inappropriate to me, because it was a show that a lot
of children would be watching, and it seemed that was
an inappropriate time.

I: Mhm. Mhm. Okay. Some of the shows that you
watch are also comedies, right? Sit-coms?

R: Right. Sure.

I: And others are documentaries and so forth--

R: Right.

I: Do you notice any particular difference in how you respond to the commercial interruption on different kinds of shows?

R: More irritation probably with commercials during documentaries, science shows or news shows, I think, because with comedies, you know, the way--my expectation of them is just to relax and not really have to invest much in getting much out of them, so it's not as irritating. But if I'm really paying attention to them, then I would, you know, then the disruption is more apparent.

I: Mhm. Mhm. Do you notice your thoughts at the moment of the interruption? Do you say anything to yourself? We've talked mostly about feelings so far, rather than thoughts.

R: Well, I've never really thought about that much. You know, sometimes along with feeling, you know, all this is interrupting and it's disruptive. Thoughts would probably be: what's the, well, you know, like why, questioning why they would choose this particular point to put a commercial, if it's something that is particularly interesting, or it's just before the problem is about to be resolved, or that sort of

thing. At the same time that I'm feeling irritated because they chose to put a commercial in this, this particular spot, intellectually you could say, "Well, of course this is where they would put it because you're going to stay tuned and you're going to come back so you can see how it's resolved." But, it's still irritating.

I: Uh huh. So some of your thoughts have to do with the program planning and why they're doing it that way.

R: Yes.

I: And your inferences about why they did it?

R: Right.

I: Mhm. What about your behavior? What do you do at a time of commercial interruption?

R: My dishes. Right. Yeah. That's true, actually. Usually, I run around and feed N or, you know, like I'll run dishwater before the thing and do 'em on breaks, or try to get things done. Seems like there are never enough hours in the day, and so usually I don't, depending on, you know, it varies. Sometimes I'll get up and do things real quick.

I: Mhm. Mhm. N?

R: Our dog.

I: Your dog. And so you may get up and do some dishes or feed the dog or something like that.

R: Yeah.

I: Mhm. Do you have a remote control?

R: No.

I: Do you do anything to the TV at the time of commercials?

R: If there's a, like a, White House address or something that's real interesting on, we may switch real quick to catch--you know--if there's two things on we both we want to see at the same time, we may switch real quick just to see how the progress is, but you usually can't find much out that way, so we don't do that sometimes. So probably no, most of the time we don't adjust the TV very much.

I: But you're more likely to get up and do something that needs doing.

R: Right.

I: Mhm. Does your husband do that, too, or does he kind of stay put?

R: Ah, he gets up and does things sometimes, but I would say he stays put much more than I do.

I: Mhm. And you work pretty much full time, don't you? At least.

R: At least. Yeah.

I: So. Have you ever seen changes in your attitude
or your feelings about the commercial interruption
over the years that you've watched TV?

R: Yes, I think that I'm definitely more aware of
them now. I think when I was really young, the
commercials--the way that I perceived--the shows and
the commercials really weren't that much different.
You know, I can remember laying down with my brothers
and sisters in front of TV on a Saturday morning and
we would stay there from 9:00 through like 2 or 3
cartoons and not move. And, you know, the commercials
never really--they seemed almost as interesting as the
shows, because they would have on the dolls and the
little type toys and all those sorts of things. And
now, you know, the difference between the story or the
show and the advertisements is, is much more
noticeable and clear, and so I would say I probably
have a less positive reaction to commercials now than
I did when I was younger, just because then I didn't
really pay much attention to the change.

I: Mhm. When you were a child.

R: Right.

I: Uh huh. After you've become an adult, have you

noticed much change during that period? Say from--in
your feelings about the commercial interruption--from
age 18 or so?

R: I don't really think so. To be real honest with
you I can't even remember watching TV. Probably some
on Christmas break, but from when I was 18 to, you
know, a couple years ago, you know, those three years
of college just hardly any at all, and I don't--I
guess I'm not aware of any changes in that period, in
those vast number of years. (laugh)

I: Right. (laugh) So during college you didn't watch
much, and then you've only been out of college a
couple years, right?

R: Right.

I: Mhm. There haven't been a lot of years to notice
changes yet.

R: Yeah.

I: What kind of program is Jack and Mike?

R: It's, gosh, I don't know, it has elements of
comedy and also of drama or real life. He owns a
restaurant and she does a newspaper. She's a
newspaper writer and it's basically just a story about
the couple and the different experiences they have in
their career and their marriage, and that sort of
thing.

I: I see. Mhm. So it's kind of light drama, drama
with comedy.

R: Yeah. It's kind of similar to Moonlighting,
except that it's more serious than Moonlighting. They
don't have the real overt attempts to make you laugh,
you know; they deal with more serious issues.

I: Mhm. Mhm. So it's somewhat involving?

R: Yes. It can be.

I: Mhm. Mhm. Okay. Does anything else come to mind
that you haven't mentioned about your response to the
commercial interruption--either feelings, thoughts, or
behavior?

R: The only thing, the only other thing that I guess
that I would think of, is--another thing that I
know--when K and I are watching a show together, that
we'll do during the commercials, is to discuss what
has happened prior to that point in the show. In
fact, we do that quite a bit; and I, that is--I guess
it would be tuning out the commercial, because we're
not paying that much attention, but we do use that
time to say if we disagree or agree with what's
happened, and to kind of discuss those things.

I: Mhm. Kind of critique the show or--?

R: Yeah. It's kind of interesting, too, because K

used to watch a lot of TV, and I know we've had
several, um, intense discussions following a TV show
or something, and have really gotten to know each
other's thoughts and opinions, you know, through a
couple of the shows that have been on, and so we'll
share our feelings and thoughts about it during the
breaks, also.

I: Would these be dramas or documentaries, or what?

R: Both.

I: Uh huh.   They stimulated the kind of discussion
that--?

R: Right.   Because watching different shows, touching
on issues like death, dying, divorce, family
relationships, all those types of things, have
elicited discussions that we might not normally think
of.

I: Mhm.   Mhm.   So it's been a vehicle for getting to
know each other and your values and--?

R: Yeah.   I think it has.

I: Uh huh.   That's interesting.   So sometimes after a
show you'll have a special--?

R: Right.

I: Uh huh.   So sometimes do you find yourselves
disagreeing strongly about things?

R: Yes. Yeah.

I: Mhm. So it's a time to have a real discussion.

R: Uh huh. And it's a good time, you know, because, well, and like my family growing up, we didn't communicate that much about emotional or real important issues and, um, K's family really didn't, either; and so it's, it's kind of provided an opportunity for us to um, discuss differing opinions or thoughts on issues, without feeling like we have to get angry with each other because we disagree, or like we have to have the exact same viewpoint. So, it's been helpful.

I: Mhm. Mhm. Okay. I think we've about covered the interview. Um, I'd like you to do the questionnaire if you would.

R: Sure.

I: We'll turn this off now, we'll turn it on again if there's something that you want to say.

Okay, we're talking about question 20 on the questionnaire---I asked you to be a little more specific, if you would.

R: Right. For example, sometimes the connections are real apparent at the end of a show. It will say this is sponsored by Budweiser or Coca-Cola or Mattel Toys

or that type of thing. And so, you know, usually that
shows a direct connection. But also many times the,
the individuals who are involved in sponsoring the
show, even the people who are involved such as the,
the financers and that type of thing, you'll just see
individual names, so you might not make the
connection. But often you'll find that they're, their
interests are, they're business interests of
the--Let's see, I'm not expressing this very well, but
they will be involved in it. For example, if, say,
there's a show about a little boy and he comes from a
poor family and he wants to make a success of himself,
so he becomes a motorcycle racer, becomes real big,
then it--When you examine the people who sponsor the
show, you may see that one of the producers or one of
the backers has an interest in the Suzuki Company,
that type of thing, so that's the brand they will use.
That's what I was referring to.

I: Uh huh, I see, okay. Thank you. I wasn't quite
sure what you meant.

APPENDIX B

Post-interview questionnaire

Date_____   Interview #_____

1. Sex male___ female___ 2. Age___ 3. Occupation_____

4. Educational background ___high school ___college ___graduate work

5. Approximate number of years you have watched television

      a) regularly_____ b) occasionally_____

6. Currently, approximate number of hours per week you watch
    television. (In answering this question, you can be most accurate
    by thinking through each day of the week, adding the hours, then
    adding up for the week. The following spaces may help. Feel free
    to make notes to yourself while adding up. But please be sure that
    your total for the week stands out clearly.)

     Sunday_____   Monday_____   Tuesday_____   Wednesday_____

     Thursday_____   Friday_____   Saturday_____   TOTAL_____

7. Do you watch one channel more than others?   Yes____   No____

    Which channel or channels do you watch most?

8. What television programs have you watched regularly during the

    past six months or so?

9. a) What are your favorite television programs? (These may be
        current or past programs, or both.)

    b) What do you especially like about them?

10. a) Who are your favorite characters on television?

    b) What do you especially like about them?

11. a)   What are your favorite commercials on television?

b)   What do you like about them?

c)   What products do they advertise?

12. a)   What television commercials do you most dislike?

b)   State briefly what you dislike about them.

c)   What products do they advertise?

13. Currently, do you most often watch television

_____alone   _____with one or more children

_____with one other adult   _____with adult(s) and child(ren)

_____with more than one adult

Please check only one response.

14. Did you grow up in the United States? Yes_____ No_____

If not, how many years have you lived in this country? _____

15. Does your response to the commercial break depend upon what
type of program is being interrupted? Explain briefly.

16. Does your response to the commercial break depend upon how
involved or absorbed you are in the program? Explain briefly.

17. What do you usually do during commercials?

18. a) Do you have a remote control device? Yes _____ No _____
    b) Do you use it to eliminate or change loudness of commercials?
       ___ never ___ rarely ___ sometimes ___ often ___ always

19. Do you believe that commercial sponsorship of television has other effects on programming or program content, in addition to the commercial breaks themselves? Describe briefly.

20. In your opinion, who pays for the production of commercial television programs? Explain briefly.

21. If there is some aspect of the commercial break that you feel was not covered adequately in the interview, please indicate what that was.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Saybrook Institute

Doctoral Research

Informed Consent Form

I, _____, am willing to participate in
Beverly Sonoda's research on how people experience certain aspects of television programs.

I understand that I will be interviewed and asked to complete a questionnaire, and that the interview will be tape recorded for later analysis. I am willing to give two to three hours of my time to make the study possible.

I understand that I may, if I wish, withdraw from participation at any time.

I understand that identifying information will not appear on the tapes, transcribed interviews, or questionnaires. A number system will be used in the analysis. In this way there is no danger of invasion of privacy; no statement can be traced back to a particular person.

I understand that my participation is making this research possible, in order that human attitudes, feelings, and thoughts may be better comprehended.

I understand that I will be furnished a statement of the results of the research on its completion, if I request it, and furnish the researcher with my address.

I understand that Saybrook Institute will not provide compensation or long term medical care for physical injuries directly incurred through participation in research activities under its sponsorship.

Witness_____   Signed_____

                                    Date_____

APPENDIX D

Note of Appreciation

Thank you very much for your cooperation in this study. Without the help of people who, like you, are willing to give their time, their opinions and ideas, the research could not be accomplished. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results and conclusions of the study, please write your name and address on a separate sheet of paper, which I will give you.

APPENDIX E

A Brief Note on Televised Violence

in Relation to the Background for this Research

While preparing for this research, I was amazed
by the prevalence of violence in the lives portrayed
on the video screen, and by the presentation of such
violence as if it were the normal, everyday way of
living--and worthy of admiration and emulation as
well. As pointed out by Mankiewicz and Swerdlow
(1978), Goldsen (1977), and others, violence is not
the sole province of "the bad guys". Heroes are at
least as violent as are miscreants. Mankiewicz and
Swerdlow (1978) state:

> In almost all the programs with a violent
> content--particularly those involving police
> or friendly private detectives--peaceful options
> such as patience, understanding, compassion, or
> due process of law are not very important--and
> often impatiently dismissed--so long as the
> right side ends up winning. Good guys, in
> fact, use violence--the same kind of
> violence--more often than the bad guys, and the
> unquestioning, implicit approval that greets
> their actions teaches a powerful lesson. The

staff of the National Commission on the Causes

and Prevention of Violence concluded in 1968

that from television "the overall impression

is that violence, employed as a means of

conflict resolution or acquisition of personal

goals, is a predominant characteristic of

life." (p. 44)

And, indeed, the regular and frequent commercial

breaks seem to tell us that the violence is as much a

part of day-to-day existence as is tooth decay, a

vitamin deficiency, or the drinking of beer. I

wondered if other people felt that way.

A myriad of studies had been conducted regarding

violence on television. It seemed important to look

at a different aspect of the medium--one that had not

been previously studied. Indeed, some people I

interviewed before beginning the study regarded the

commercial interruption as itself an example of

television violence--against the viewer.