Raunch or resistance: Making meanings of Madonna, a cultural studies approach to the rock video.

Elaine Marion. Grodaes
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/3269

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.
The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

Canada
Raunch or Resistance: Making Meanings of Madonna
A Cultural Studies Approach to the Rock Video

by

Elaine Marion Grodaes

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
Through the Department of Communication Studies
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1992
The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.
ABSTRACT

Raunch or Resistance: Making Meanings of Madonna

This thesis practically applied the cultural studies approach and explored two of the components thought relevant to resistance—the text and the audience. The objective was to examine audience sophistication in its engagement with a broadcast music video in order to investigate the nature and scope of audience resistance.

A semiotic textual analysis was used to demonstrate that Madonna's *Express Yourself* video, though structured in dominance, is available for oppositional meanings about women. The semiotic analysis provided a description of the range and kinds of meanings about women the video could circulate.

Using the ethnographic interview method, the thesis explored the signifying practices of a young female audience differentiated on the basis of their exposure to and knowledge of feminist issues; how they actually interpreted the text and therefore the kinds of meanings about women they produced.

Findings showed that the reader's positioning in terms of feminism made a difference in what was perceived, interpreted and evaluated. The *Express Yourself* text was read on a number of interpretive levels (sex, love, economics/societal and gender politics) with varying degrees of consciousness (no understanding, literal understanding, individual level, group level and a gender political level of understanding). Traditional participants largely understood the video in a dominant way with patriarchal definitions of femininity and had an individual level of consciousness. Feminist participants were likely to interpret the video using an oppositional counter-patriarchal frame at the gender political level of consciousness. Feminists were much more likely to engage in resistant reading practices.

The ethnographic interview not only provided access to participants' conscious opinions but to the linguistic terms used to construct and communicate understanding. The level of consciousness and thus the level of semiotic resistance was communicated in the graduated ability to articulate the oppositional frame. Findings of this study indicate that there are different forms and levels of resistance which, in turn, would probably influence the likelihood of material resistance or political action.
DEDICATION

to my family
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Kai Hildebrandt, my thesis advisor, my mentor and my friend, for his direction, his insight, his support and his sense of humour. Without you I would never have finished this thesis and I want to express my sincere appreciation for all you’ve done.

A special thank-you goes to my committee members (little did they know how long the thesis was before agreeing to take on the project), Stuart Selby for his comments and kindness and Janice Drakich for her guidance, her encouragement and her great editing skills.

I would also like to acknowledge Amir Hassanpour and Lynn Phillips, my original committee members, for their interest and their input. Thanks also to Richard Lewis for his efforts in trying to get me on track at the beginning of the thesis.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all the people who participated in the research and special thanks to the women who took time during a busy exam schedule to participate in the interview component of my project. I really enjoyed the interviews and I hope they did too.

Thanks also to Ann Gallant, Sheila LaBelle and Lina Beaudry who were always willing to lend a helping hand and who never failed to make the day more cheerful.

Many thanks to all the grad students I had the privilege to know during my stay in Windsor who touched my life in one way or another. For their valued friendship and support, thanks also to Margaret Young, Amanda Hayne, Vasanth Louis, Lynn Nicol, Lisa Chen, Terry Moore, Kim Thorpe, Suzette Wolf, Abedin Sharif, Boxu Yang, Anita Ninan and Mike Farkas. Lisa, wait no more. I crossed the finish line and very happily resign from the “Slow-Poke Thesis Club.”
My sincere appreciation goes to Jim Kelly for being a very special friend and for always believing in me. You were my bright spot. Special thanks also to Janet Morris, my good friend and confidant, who was there for me even during the roughest times. Love to Max my cat who always knew just when to come and cuddle up next to me.

A special thank-you to Anthony Rivard who didn’t always understand the craziness but who, for the past year, has been my refuge, my strength and my love. Also a note of thanks to Glenda Laverna Smith who made me feel that I had really accomplished something.

As always, my love and appreciation to Shirley Mitchell, my long-time friend, confidant and special sister. Love ya lots.

Most of all, I would like to thank my family--Mom and Dad, Uncle Warren, Gramma and Harold, my sister Barb and yes, even my brothers, Doug and Greg--they finally quit asking me when I would be finished but never quit letting me know how much they loved me.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1--INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rock Video and Music Television</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madonna and Express Yourself</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Context</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2--THEORETICAL FRAME: RESISTANCE</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3--LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Television</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Analysis Studies</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects Studies</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual Analyses of Madonna Videos</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience Studies: Interpreting Madonna's Music Videos</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance--Other Popular Media Genres</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4--METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience Study</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Sample Selection</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Sample</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection Instrument--The Questionnaire</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire Design</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Interview Participants</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacting Participants--Participation Rate</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Sample and Interview Participants</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Demographics</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Television Habits</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Issues</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic Interview Study</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Interview</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Review of the Ethnographic Interview Method</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5--SEMIOTIC TEXTUAL ANALYSIS</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Reading Possibilities of Express Yourself</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolis as the Frame</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Economic or Societal Level</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Relationship as the Frame</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex as the Code</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Politics</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Text</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Patriarchy</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Reading of the Video</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Address</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Address</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistant Reading for a Female within Patriarchy</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6--ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW ANALYSIS</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Positioning</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Madonna</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the Express Yourself Video</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection and Interpretation</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men as Machines</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag Scene</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chain Scene</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Cat/Crawling Scene</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Gown</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Impressions</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyrics Recall and Rewriting</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex and Power</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address and Appeal</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Powerful Character</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferencing</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application to a Personal Situation</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation of Contradictory Images of Woman</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Heartless Video</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Reference to Gender Political Issues</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating the Video</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary Discussion of Typological Patterns</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7--CONCLUSION</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Study</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I: LYRICS .................................................. 199
APPENDIX II: SELECTION INSTRUMENT--QUESTIONNAIRE .. 201
APPENDIX III: ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW--TOPIC OUTLINE .. 207
REFERENCES .......................................................... 212
VITA AUCTORIS ..................................................... 221
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: MEANS SCORES--FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS ...................... 83
TABLE 2: GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS ......................................... 89
TABLE 3: MUSIC TELEVISION HABITS ....................................... 92
TABLE 4: FEMINIST ISSUES .................................................. 95
TABLE 5: OVERVIEW COMPARISON--FEMINIST AND TRADITIONAL
INTERVIEW SAMPLES ....................................................... 98
CHAPTER 1--INTRODUCTION

Since the birth of mass communication research in the 1930s and 1940s, scholars have been engaged with the question of how much influence the media have on their audiences. Over the latter half of the century, the status of the viewer in this regard has continuously shifted (Morley 1989). Although the terms of the debate have changed, the relationship between media products and the audience is still a concern today; in fact, the debate has been revitalized with the recent trend in cultural studies to reexamine "what people do to and with the media" and in particular, their focus on resistance (Moore 1990). For John Fiske (1987a), a leading popularizer whose work is often taken as exemplary of cultural studies, resistance refers to the practices, materially and ideologically, of the less powerful or the disempowered struggling against their subordination or control. Resistant meanings are meanings made by a value system that opposes or evades the dominant ideology: they are meanings that validate the social experience of the subordinate but not their subordination. (1987a, 19)

Academic research from a critical perspective recognizes that mass communication is a structured activity which is managed by an elite consensus, and that media institutions have the power to set agendas, define the boundaries of discourse (Murdock 1989), and limit access to the underclass (White 1987a). Through the use of dominant codes\(^1\) and conventions, the

\(^1\) A code is a "set of rules" or conventions that places constraints on a body of information. A code restricts what is available for meaning, the kinds of messages that can be created and "the behaviour permitted in a given system" (Wilden 1982, 25). Codes mediate relations because they operate at a higher hierarchal level. They are shared among members of a culture and are the means by which producers, texts and audiences are linked. Codes, unconsciously learned through social experience, direct how signs or combinations of signs are interpreted (Fiske 1987a).
cultural industry, for the most part, replicates and validates the dominant values and power relations played out in the patriarchal capitalist social realm. Media texts play an important role in the process of "reality maintenance" (Berger 1969) and hegemony\(^2\) by supplying one dominant vision of reality instead of another.

We tend to live inside these maps [codes] as surely as we live in the "real" world: they "think" us as much as we "think" them, and this is in itself quite "natural." All human societies reproduce themselves in this way through a process of "naturalization." It is through this process—a kind of inevitable reflex of all social life—that particular sets of social relations, particular ways of organizing the world appear to us as if they were universal and timeless. (Hebdige 1979, 14)

As a result, the process unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, marginalizes groups whose reality it does not reflect (Fiske 1989a; Murdock 1989). The media structure "our subjectivity as gendered consumers and workers" (Budd and Steinman 1989, 10) by inviting us to assume a particular ideological position in order to decode the text (Ang 1989; Kaplan 1989). Mass media provide the "cultural categories and frameworks within which members of the culture will tend to operate" (Morley 1989, 17).

However, current critical audience research in the British cultural studies tradition assigns to the audience a certain, albeit limited, degree of power in the mass communication process. This perspective posits that culture as well as social positioning, personal history, and social context, mediates perception. Audiences are conceptualized as various shifting

\(^2\) Hegemony is a concept developed by Gramsci which refers to the unbalanced struggle between dominant and subordinate facets in society to assert and maintain control over the economic, political and cultural direction of the society. It is a process where the ideologies (or way of making sense of the world) of dominant political alliances generally subvert other ideologies. Hegemony is accomplished not through direct coercion but by achieving consent and legitimation so that the hegemonic perspective is taken to be "natural" (Counihan, 1986; O'Sullivan cited in Lewis, 1990).
socio-cultural and popular formations and do not necessarily interpret media messages in the dominant way, particularly when a discrepancy exists between the audiences' direct experiences and the mediated (Liebes and Katz 1990; Fiske 1989a; Morley 1980). Texts are considered to be inherently polysemic because the connotative meanings of signs are not fixed, but are shaped through cultural convention. However, there is generally a dominant or preferred meaning (Hall 1980; Morley 1980; Fiske 1989a 1982).

Therefore, marginalized groups within society interpret polysemic media texts in terms of their own socio-cultural frameworks constructing meanings that are relevant to them within their social situation. (Fiske 1989a; Ang 1989; Steiner 1988; Morley 1980; Liebes and Katz 1990). In so doing, individuals may resist, subvert or actively evade the ideological scripts imbedded in commercial texts; in essence, they use media texts against the system that generated them (Fiske 1989a).

Further, this perspective asserts that resistance is an empowering and liberating experience (and therefore pleasurable) that may be realized in the wider political arena (Fiske 1989a 1989b). The marketplace is viewed as a horizontal struggle over semiotic meanings among dominant and subordinate facets of society to gain or extend their sphere of power in determining what will be held as "common sense" in society (Fiske 1989a; Gramsci 1971 cited in Coulihan 1986). Since the struggle for power is understood not only as material but as semiotic, the ability of individuals to interpret texts differentially and engage in resistance

---

3 Ideology does not just refer to a set of messages, values and beliefs, but to a relatively formal and articulated "system of semantic rules for coding new information" (White 1987b, 4), a way of organizing and classifying the world into a coherent discourse or 'world view' that tends to operate at the subconscious level (Williams 1976)
may frustrate the process of ideological hegemony of the dominant (Fiske 1989a). In fact, Fiske (1989a) claims semiotic struggles parallel material struggles.

Those texts that become popular from the wider range of media products provided by the cultural industry, and particularly those that generate controversy, are considered a site worthy of investigation because dissenting interpretations and possibly resistance may be found (Fiske 1989a 1989b). Because some scholars in cultural studies believe political change may well begin at the micro level, they prefer to focus their analysis here. Researchers use the ethnographic interview to study the interaction between the audience and the media text at the point of reception (Ang 1989; Seiter et al. 1989)--to locate "readings grounded in resistance to dominance" (Burns 1989, 3).

In contrast, some scholars working from a political economic position argue that cultural studies affords too much power to the audience and overestimates their sophistication in media engagement (Budd and Steinman 1989). While they concur that interpretations may vary between differently positioned groups they contend that the likelihood of resistance for the typical viewer is rare (Budd and Steinman 1989). Usually the dominant ideology overrides.

Audience resistance is difficult because the ideology promulgated by the media mirrors that of all major socializing agencies (such as the family, the church, the education system, and the state) and so embodies who we are. Prevailing power dynamics are, in part, kept in place as a result of economic realities. More often than not, marginalized groups define their world in terms of the dominant ideology, even though such representations may contradict social experience. Audiences are conceived as being "actively passive"; active in the limited sense of performing a gap-filling function that simply completes the form of the media text;
they are "active makers of form and meaning that, however, come mostly prefabricated" (Budd and Steinman 1989, 15). The typical viewer is not considered active "in the most important sense of critical consciousness and democratic control" (Budd and Steinman 1989, 15).

Political economists maintain that analysis should focus squarely on the concrete historical institutions of capitalist media practices (Budd and Steinman 1989; Murdock 1989; Allor 1988). Even if audiences were active in a critical sense, possessed the skills to engage in resistance and used them, the notion is that it makes little difference because even in their leisure audiences work to fulfil their function as a commodity to be sold to advertisers (Budd and Steinman 1989; Murdock 1978; Smythe 1977) and as consumers bent on accumulation. Even if audiences engage in resistance at one level, they accept the dominant ideology at another. As Meehan (1986) notes, oppositional elements are used in the fabrication of new program ideas to capture the widest most profitable audience. Marginalized audiences may, therefore, find something within popular culture products with which they identify because media texts often co-opt appealing subordinate values in an effort to adjust to the evolving political situation and subsume dissenting views (Carragee 1990; Fiske 1989a). For example, rock music frequently incorporates (and so plays on) the audience's feelings of rebelliousness (Habib 1991; Lewis 1990); the rock music industry capitalizes on this. However, political economists believe it is unlikely that this identification will lead to a critical analysis of the system or translate into political action; instead it encourages individuals to consume more of the same. In this sense, popular culture is a pacifier and

---

4 The audience as commodity argument is perhaps most cogent in a discussion of the 24-hour rock video channels because the distinction between advertising and programming is blurred (Aufderheide 1986; Allor 1988; Kaplan 1989).
feeds into the culture of consumerism. Essentially, in the semiotic struggle over meaning, those with the economic resources have the advantage in shaping the cultural field (Budd and Steinman 1989; Murdock 1989).

**Purpose of the Study**

This thesis will explore and practically apply current critical audience theories in an attempt to investigate and delimit the nature and scope of viewer sophistication in the form of resistance in their production of meanings of a broadcast video text. It follows cultural studies' logic and selects for study a product of mainstream popular culture. Specifically, this thesis will examine Madonna's video *Express Yourself* and an audience's interpretations of it. First, a semiotic textual analysis will be used to demonstrate that the text is polysemic, is a negotiated text structured in dominance and that the potential for the construction of alternative meanings exists5. Second, it will ascertain how this video may contribute to the production and circulation of different meanings about women. Finally, through the ethnographic interview method, the thesis will investigate and describe the ways in which female viewers produce their own meanings of women from the video.

---

5 Condit (1989) maintains that polysemy must be demonstrated and further distinguished from polyvalence. Polyvalence means that although there is agreement among audience members at the denotative level of the text, viewers who have different values with respect to an issue may interpret the same text completely differently.
Following cultural studies practice of focusing on marginalized groups, young women, a somewhat marginalized\(^6\) (or disenfranchised) group within patriarchy, and yet a fairly mainstream audience, will be the centre of this study. The objective is to understand how this target audience interprets the video, how they construct meaning, whether ascribed meanings differ between those who are aware of women's issues and those who are not, and further, to determine whether any readings can be considered resistant. If resistive readings occur, an attempt will be made to calibrate the responses to better understand the interaction between text and audience. The thesis will scrutinize the relationship between groups of individuals, who are positioned within an historical, socio-cultural, and contextual space, and the structural features in the text. Resistance will be the a focal point of the thesis and an attempt will be made to speculate on the likelihood and the conditions under which resistance occurs and in the process, further define and develop the concept.

In essence, I will ask whether the *Express Yourself* video encompasses alternative meanings regarding gender politics and, if so, will the "latent progressive potential" in the video materialize and translate into the "manifest production of subversive [or resistant] feminist readings" (Ang 1985, 120) among an audience conscious of feminist issues?

\(^6\) Women are not at the margins of society in terms of population numbers (since women make up over 50% of the population) or even necessarily in terms of the number of women portrayed in the media. I am using marginalized in the sense that women are devalued and disenfranchised in western patriarchy and are subject to inequitable treatment based on gender. (e.g. it is not necessarily the number of women that are represented in the media but how they are represented in the media which reflects their marginal status).
The Rock Video and Music Television

While music television is a relatively new social phenomenon, the genesis of music video began on January 28, 1956 with the controversial performance of *Heartbreak Hotel* by the gyrating Elvis Presley, aired on WNBC-TV's *Stage Show* (Denisoff 1988, 5-6). Some twenty-five years later satellite-delivered Music Television (MTV) was introduced (Denisoff 1988, i). Plans to launch a twenty-four-hour video music network were announced in March 1981, and the concept came to fruition when MTV aired its first rock video clip, *Video Killed the Radio Star*, in August of that year (Denisoff 1988; Doherty 1987). MTV's format proposed to appeal to "upscale adults" and teenagers who were considered a largely untapped demographic group of viewers least interested in television (Denisoff 1988). The music television industry has since flourished and holds a sizable share of the young television-viewing audience (Doherty 1987; Sun and Lull 1986; Brown and Campbell 1986; Sherman and Dominick 1986).

MTV, a "major breakthrough in music broadcasting," replaced radio as the major record promoter, resurrected the record industry, and revolutionized the "state of rock music exposure" (Denisoff 1988; Doherty 1987). With new releases selected to become hit singles, the production of a corresponding rock video as an album marketing tool is required (Brown and Campbell 1986).

The rock video, a powerful art form, wedds music, lyrics, and images for television; a media genre designed specifically to give exposure to music artists and promote record sales. It is therefore viewed as a combination of television and music (Sherman and

---

7 Approximately 85% of the MTV audience is between the ages of 14 and 35 years of age (Gardener 1983).
Dominick 1986) as well as a hybrid of drama and advertising (Fry and Fry 1987). Its often non-narrative format tends to rely more on "mood" and "emotion" than on "plot" and "continuity" as more conventional television does (Denisoff 1988). Its complex and unstructured symbolic code necessitates a high level of inferencing (Greenfield, Bruzzone, Koyamatsu, Satuloff, Nixon, Brodie and Kingsdale 1987; Blanchard-Fields, Coon and Matthews 1986) and perhaps requires greater emotional and cognitive involvement than either television or music (Larson and Kubey 1983; Rubin, Rubin, Perse, Armstrong, McHugh and Faix 1986). Three major types of videos identified are: the "performance" video which features the musical artists playing instruments or in concert, the "concept" video which is a series of images that may or may not be directly related to the lyrics, and a combination of the two (Brown and Campbell 1986; Sherman and Dominick 1986).

Rock videos, which are dominated by "special camera techniques, film imagery, and special effects" (Baxter, DeReimer, Landini, Leslie, and Singletary 1985), can be described as tight but frequently disconnected or non-sequential image fragments fashioned to dazzle and appeal to the tastes of a TV generation identified as having a short attention span (Denisoff 1988, 242). Some contend that rock video or music television adds a new dimension to the influence of television (Denisoff 1988).

Almost from its inception, music television became the target of public criticism because of concern over the negative impact of the violent, sexually explicit, and exploitative images. The National Coalition on Television Violence (1984) argued that a large percentage of rock videos were unwholesome, morally deficient, and clearly had a strong and harmful effect on young viewers for whom the programming was designed. Women's groups and feminists have also raised objections to the debasing portrayal of women in a majority of
videos and are concerned about the wider ramifications that these representations may have on society (Denisoff 1988).

At the same time, Lewis (1990) challenges the notion that only negative and sexist images are presented on MTV. She describes how female musicians have used the music video as a vehicle for feminist expression, thus creating a distinctive space for female viewers.

The emergence of female-adolescent discourse on MTV is important politically because it has provided a vehicle for girls to speak about their experiences as female adolescents. (Lewis 1990, 224)

Kaplan (1989) claims that many rock videos fall into what she categorizes as post-modernist. She argues that post-modern videos tend to fragment the binary male/female patriarchal classification because they frequently violate classic filmic codes of space and gaze (whose gaze structures the shot). Consequently, the music video format may preclude an exclusively male-directed address.

Several studies using content analyses have documented the presence of significant sexual, violent, and sexist content in rock videos (Baxter et al. 1985; Brown and Campbell 1986; Sherman and Dominick 1986; Vincent, Davis, and Boruszkowske 1987; Vincent 1989). The tacit assumption is that the impact on the audience is negative. On the other hand, through textual analysis, complex readings of music videos have been formulated (Kaplan 1989; Fiske 1989b; Lewis 1990) that articulate not only dominant ideological meanings but contradictory messages. However, to assume that readings are dictated by textual features does not account for a "dialogical relationship" between media images and lived experience and implies an asocial and ahistorical stance (Ang 1989, 98). Furthermore, to speculate that audiences examine rock videos with similar scrutiny as the academic when engaging in entertainment leaves room for question.
Despite the popularity and prevalence of music television, the assumptions and allegations of its negative impact along with claims of progressive potential, little research has been conducted to find out how rock videos are decoded or understood by an audience. "One cannot be content with abstract generalizations derived from content analysis [or textual analysis], however sophisticated" (Liebes and Katz 1989, 4). This study will examine the actual social practices of a female audience in their interpretation of a rock video.

This study should be interesting from a feminist perspective in light of the consciousness-raising activities of the feminist movement over the past twenty years and the more recent anti-feminist backlash (Faludi 1991). Feminist cultural studies theorize on female subjectivity and sexuality; how females in patriarchal society, subordinated and essentialized as man’s other, internalize and/or resist their position (Schwichtenberg 1989; Long 1989). Will women who are conscious of society’s contradictory view of women focus on the counter-hegemonic aspects in Madonna’s Express Yourself video and/or reject the text as patriarchal? My study adds to feminist cultural studies.

**Madonna and Express Yourself**

Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone, a little known performer, burst onto the music scene with her first LP, *Madonna*, in July of 1983 (Robinson 1985). Her arrival in the music world and her subsequent popularity can largely be traced to music television exposure rather than to the more traditional style of the touring musical group (Lewis 1990). When asked in an interview in 1985 how she saw her career, Madonna replied:

I want to be a symbol of something. That’s what I think when I think of conquering. It’s that you stand for something. I mean, as far as I’m concerned, Marilyn Monroe conquered the world. She stands for something. (Robinson 1985, C1)
Madonna does stand for something; the question is... what? There is no doubt that she has become "Monroe-esque" in more than one sense--by mimicking the Monroe image and by becoming what some have described as a cultural icon in contemporary society. Her worldwide popularity along with constant criticism, and the controversy she inspires, seem appropriate in light of the madonna/whore complex her iconic name intimates, and further raises the question--what does Madonna mean to her audience. What are the symbolic roles Madonna actually plays in the private lives of her audiences whose affinity to and understanding of women's issues differ?

Madonna's first LP, *Madonna*, (1983) was only the beginning of a long series of smash singles backed by creative and powerful rock videos. Her ten number one records, as of May 1990, made her the most successful active artist in contemporary music. Her success (as measured by Number one records) was only surpassed by Elvis Presley, The Beatles, and The Supremes (Anderson 1991).

Besides being a singer, songwriter, and dancer, Madonna has tried her hand as producer, film star, and broadway actress. Her face has been splashed on "enough magazine covers to wallpaper a very large room" (Robinson 1985) and she is practically an instant box office sell-out during her tours. Her uncanny sense of style has influenced the fashion industry and inspired "wannabes." Madonna is one of today's highest paid performers, pulling in thirty nine million in 1990. She has three companies to her credit: "Boy Toy," "Siren Corp." and "Slutco" (sic) (Global Television News, Dec. 11 1990).

Madonna attracts and maintains a very large and diverse following around the world. In the beginning critics speculated that this pop star was a flash in the pan (Laycock 1985). But Madonna has not only managed to sustain her appeal over the past eight years; her
popularity has continued to escalate. In a recent poll teenagers ranked her as "America's most admired woman" (Global Television News, Dec. 11 1990).

Part of her prolonged success has been credited to her ability to reinvent her image which she changes as easily as donning a new hat. She has presented herself as a "street smart girl," a "boy toy," a "pregnant teenager," "Monroe-esque," a "robo-vamp," and a deified "Hollywood siren," all characters with a "sexual edge." Her proficiency at generating publicity and controversy by "pushing the limits of our collective libido" (Browne 1990, 67) and/or "tweaking mainstream conventions about sex, religion and gender stereotypes" (Graff 1989, 10C) is widely reputed. Madonna has been characterized as both "a social crusader determined to promote change" (Portman 1991, C1) and a shrewd media manipulator whose rule flaunting is little more than a calculated commercial ploy.

Madonna is loved and revered as is evidenced by her popularity and success. At the same time she is a woman people "love to hate" (Johnson 1991). She manages to shock and offend a large segment of the viewing audience at every turn. While most agree Madonna is a media marketing genius, many also see her as power-hungry, co'd, talentless (McWilliams 1990), and a puppet of the industry; an opportunist who would go to great lengths to further her career—including selling sex by shamelessly strutting her scantily-clad stuff in order to make a buck. She has been chastised as the "embodiment of that decade's [the eighties] parallel obsession with image, acquisition and power" (Pevere 1991, C3). While Madonna is credited with her achievement of "making it" big in a male-dominated music industry (critics imply she slept her way to the top, stealing her producer's "musical knowledge and contacts" and discarding them like soiled tissues when new possibilities arose (Connelly 1984; Fissinger 1985; Skow, Booth and Worrell 1985)), she is considered an inappropriate role
model for young female adolescents because of her wanton morals and the view that her videos perpetuate negative stereotypical conceptions of women already rampant in patriarchal society.

Many other people believe Madonna to be a creative musical artist whose talent, wit, and savvy carried her to the top of a tough industry. Madonna is admired precisely because she is perceived to be in control and because she is not afraid to express herself. The power and control she represents is "easily the most politically potent message" she transmits (Pevere 1991, C3). She is respected for what some see as an evolution from "pop tart" to ever more political artist taking greater risks, unlike many artists who become popular by indulging in social subversion but who soon "learn to play it safe" (Johnson 1991, 46). As one journalist explains,

Madonna isn’t hated as a media "thing"—like Vanna White or Hulk Hogan. She’s hated for herself, and what she represents. She’s is hated on political grounds, because of the outcasts she identifies with and champions (the ones who make her rich, the real Rainbow Coalition). Above all, Madonna is hated for her eroticism. (McWilliams 1990, 7c)

Madonna’s overt sexual antics are seen by some not so much as a play for the male voyeuristic gaze but as a direct challenge to and mockery of traditional gender roles (Lewis 1990; Fiske 1989b). "She incarnates female-identified power and privilege, and speaks directly to her female fans’ needs through ’her appropriation and resignification of the standard of female representation’" (Caputi 1990, 27). Fiske sees Madonna as an exemplary popular text because she is so full of contradictions—she contains the patriarchal meanings of feminine sexuality and the resisting ones that her sexuality is hers to use as she wishes in ways that do not require masculine approval. (Fiske 1989, 124)

Furthermore, Madonna has been commended for her development as a musician. Madonna authors or co-authors most of her own material (Kaplan 1987, Lewis 1990).
Browne (1990) cautions us not underestimate her as a musical artist as he sees her as "pushing musical boundaries" and recounts her music-making range as "breathtaking." The proof, he says, is in her latest album *The Immaculate Collection* (1990), which he describes to be relentless as the woman herself. It never lets you forget for one dance-remixed second that few artists have racked up such a string of hits over such a relatively short period of time. (Browne 1990, 67)

McClary (1991) notes that few performers attain the kind of creative control Madonna has and credits her with "brave new musical procedures" that contest conventional feminine and masculine musical ideologies. She also reminds us that Madonna's music-making talents alone were recognized well before "scandalous" video images hit the market.

Most of Madonna's hits are accompanied with visually powerful music videos. There are several interesting aspects to her video style that make them appropriate for this study. First, they frequently exude the madonna/whore complex or in some respect deal with gender power dynamics. Second, her videos, though disjointed, often form a narrative complete with a beginning, middle, and end which makes them accessible for audience inferences. But one of the most prominent elements that can be traced through many of her videos is ambiguity. It is often created as a result of contradictory signs juxtaposed against one another and layered into a complex composition. Another factor that contributes to ambiguity is her "distinctively democratic attitude" to and manipulation of cultural icons and sacred symbols (Arrington 1991, 65). When asked if she was aware of the ambiguity in the video *Like a Virgin* she responded...

`Weeeeell . . . there's (sic) many meanings to it. That's what I like about everything. I like innuendo. I like irony. I like the way things can be taken on different levels. But yes, *Like a Virgin* was always absolutely ambiguous. (Deevoy 1991, 13)`
As a result of double entendre, many of Madonna’s videos would likely fall into a sexist category in most content analysis studies and yet popular cultural critics and scholars have identified liberating messages in her videos; empowering messages that they believe inspire young females and motivate them to emulate her. Can Madonna’s videos, which are mainstream industrially produced "top 40" commercial texts, be used against the system that generated them?

Madonna "is a patriarchal text shot through with skepticism" (Fiske 1989a, 124). She cannot be celebrated as a leading feminist, but she cannot be discounted as solely selling sex, either. She can be taken as a telling sign of the contradictory position within which women exist in our society and the double standard to which they are subjected. Nevertheless, it matters little whether or not Madonna does have a deeper meaning to reveal; whether or not she really is politically progressive or is out for herself and simply selling to the widest audience. It is more important for the purposes of this study to determine whether or not audiences find her political and use her mainstream industrially produced texts against the system.

*Express Yourself* was the second single on Madonna’s fifth album of original material, *Like a Prayer*, released in 1989 and reached the number one position on the music charts in June (Madonna 1992). The video was selected for this study for a number of reasons. The concept video, *Express Yourself*, is an exemplary of Madonna’s video work and makes use of all the elements mentioned previously. While it is one of her more recent videos, it has
not met with the controversy of *Like a Prayer*\(^8\) (1989), or the acclaim of *Vogue*\(^9\) (1990). Consequently it is less likely that the participants in the study will have preconceptions about the video as a result of previous media coverage. Still, *Express Yourself* was one of nine most often requested videos (MTV, August 1991). There have been few comprehensive textual analyses focusing on the *Express Yourself* video, but comparisons can be made to analyses of other Madonna videos (Kaplan 1989; Fiske 1989b; Lewis 1990; Schwichtenberg 1992). Like many of Madonna’s videos, the structural features of the *Express Yourself* video, such as ambiguity and contradiction, allow for different interpretive levels of meaning. It is a visually interesting collage of images cut at a fast pace which unite into a narrative that parallels, to some extent, the story-line of Fritz Lang’s 1927 expressionist science fiction film *Metropolis*. It reworks the wider issues dealt with in *Metropolis* and thus comments on the capitalist patriarchal society as well as gender politics. At the same time, on the surface, the video can be interpreted as a traditional narrative about relationships or as little more than a sexual conquest.

The *Express Yourself* video can be considered a chauvinistic or a potentially progressive text; it does not accommodate a single or definitive ideologically dominant position. Thus, depending on the reader’s positioning, it may be read as belonging to the

---

\(^8\) Pepsi pulled its commercial styled after the *Like a Prayer* video after public pressure from religious groups and consumers, even though the thematic content of the commercial differed. Rev. Donald Wildmon, head of the American Family Association, threatened to call for a boycott of Pepsi products (Ressner 1989, 27). Madonna received a “reported 5 million dollars” after Pepsi cancelled her one year contract, which was to include TV commercials and her sponsorship (Madonna 1992).

In 1990 Madonna won MTV’s Viewer’s Choice Award for the video *Like a Prayer* (McWilliams 1990, 1C).

dominant ideology of capitalism and patriarchy, or as critical of it (Ang 1985, 120), as raunch or as resistance.

The Context

The cultural studies approach holds that the world is a social construction, that knowledge is subjective and therefore properly situates both the text and the activity of the audience within context (Morley 1989). Because information and noise are not naturally discrete, if an event is reframed within a new context the meaning also changes; what is perceived to be information depends upon the code with which one organizes data (Watzlawick 1976). Contextualization is, therefore, a necessary component of the research project since information can only make sense within context. Context may refer to the immediate social exchange, the personal context or histories of the individuals involved and the wider social context, relevant to the topic being examined.

Since this thesis focuses on how a contradictory media representation of woman (Express Yourself) is interpreted by a female audience (differentiated by a more traditional or more feminist orientation), it should include some discussion of women in society—of patriarchal society, of feminism, and of the anti-feminist backlash. Without "careful contextualization, any given reader’s variation from other readers (or from what the analyst expects) cannot be labelled as anything but variation" (Evans 1990, 161). Providing context helps one ascertain the status of the text (as dominant, negotiated or oppositional), its potential for inspiring resistant readings, and what may be considered a resistant reading. The context or perspective one chooses as a frame will have an impact on the determination of a reading as resistant.
In Canada, we live in a patriarchal society, a society that normalizes and institutionalizes male privilege, sexually, socially and economically\textsuperscript{10}, and subordinates women under capitalism (Lewis 1990). "Patriarchy is male hierarchical ordering of society . . ." (Eisenstein 1979, 17). This becomes immediately obvious if one simply considers that almost every avenue of power (politics, academics, industry, science, religion, etc.) is dominated by men (Millet in Kramarae and Treichler 1985, 323).

Feminism, which seeks to eliminate the ideology of domination, the systematic oppression and devaluation of women, has found a voice and flourished (relatively speaking) in North America. However, partly because feminist thought can still be considered in the developmental stages, there is no monolithic conception of what the goals of feminism should be and no consensus on what strategies should be implemented to attain those goals. Several

---

\textsuperscript{10}Women’s sexuality is kept in check by a number of social constraints, one of which is the madonna/whore myth—that men want to sleep with wild aggressive women but want to marry submissive well-mannered women. Because beauty is the basis on which women are assessed and valued within patriarchy, beauty is one of the foremost fixations for women. Repeated media images (reflective of society’s values) link happiness and self-worth with thinness and appearance (Teen Magazine confuse 1992). Narrow and unrealistic conceptions of beauty keep women anxious and insecure and can negatively affect self-esteem (Wolf cited in Green 1992). Violence against women is extraordinarily high both outside and inside the domestic frame which coincides with a steady stream of violent and degrading imagery in the media (Maybury-Lewis 1992).

Both partners in the majority (62.3%) of families work outside the home, some because they want to but often because they also need to (Both Spouses 1991). Despite lip service to the contrary, women still bear the lion’s share of responsibility for both housework and child-care, regardless of whether they work outside the home as well; day care facilities are limited. Social programs to help support women are often underfunded if in place at all. Financially, women are much worse off than men, making only 61.2 cents to every man’s dollar in 1989 (Both Spouses 1991) and women constitute almost two thirds of poor adults within North America’s comparatively affluent society (Faludi 1991). Women are encouraged to go out on their own; when they do they are often criticized for neglecting children; they are made to feel inadequate if they stay at home. Women are frequently denied access and promotion opportunities, and they are castigated as cold and heartless if they reach positions of power. "In the meantime, this is still a society that encourages men to dream big and women to dream of big men" (Grunwald 1992).
strains of feminism have been identified: liberal, marxist, radical, and post-structural/social feminism, each addressing and emphasizing different aspects of oppression, each having its own understanding of human nature and therefore devising different solutions to women’s subjugation (Jagar 1983). As Kaplan very succinctly defines, liberal or bourgeois feminism [is] (women’s concern to obtain equal rights and freedoms within a capitalist system): Marxist feminism (the linking of specific female oppressions to the larger structure of capitalism and to other groups, gays minorities, the working classes, and so on): radical feminism (the designation of women as different from men and the desire to establish separate female communities to forward women’s specific needs and desires): and post structuralist feminism (the idea that we need to analyze the language order through which we learn to be what our culture calls "women," as distinct from a group called"men," as we attempt to bring about change beneficial to women. (Kaplan 1987. 216)

Feminist criticism rarely fits exclusively in one category and therefore the categories, though useful, only serve as guidelines. Further, feminist criticism falls into two philosophical positions: essentialists assert that there are "basic 'truth[s]'" about women obscured by patriarchy: "anti-essentialist view the social construction of what is woman as a process always in relation to environment without an a priori conception of femininity" (Kaplan 1987. 216-217).

While feminist thought has made inroads in changing society regarding women’s expectations, opportunities and lifestyles, objectives are still far off in the distance. The lack of a coherent vision in feminist theory may make it difficult to convince others of its worth (Rakow 1989) and therefore may inadvertently disperse support and divide women. Women in the general population are rarely exposed to the intricacies of various feminist strains. Therefore they may hear one feminist notion with which they disagree or do not fully understand and subsequently reject feminism as extreme. Often women are threatened by what they perceive they might lose by becoming feminists or are lured by what they have to
gain in the short-term by abiding with patriarchy. Their own identity, formed within and structured in relation to patriarchy, is called into question when they assess feminism.

Additionally, the anti-feminist backlash has wreaked havoc on feminist support as gains that had been made for women continue to deteriorate (Faludi 1991). All the while, the media generally maintain that the "battle" for equality has been won. Concurrently, a barrage of media messages implicate women's equality as responsible for a whole array of societal ills as well as for making women miserable, including the "man shortage," the infertility epidemic," "burnout," "loneliness" and "stress induced disorders" (Faludi 1991).

My own background leads me to believe that an accumulation of encounters with the subtle but stinging backhand of patriarchy can lead to self-denigration and self-limiting actions. However, it can also provoke questions and inspire determination particularly when oppressive experiences begin to make sense and become coherent within a different framework—that of feminism. What is required is some connection with an alternative way of seeing that reframes and thus raises consciousness. From there beliefs are modified, developed, and strengthened as texts are reframed in a feminist code. Becoming feminist is a process and I consider myself a fairly new feminist, since I was in my late twenties

---

11 The following is my understanding of feminism. Feminism is a 'world view' that acknowledges the significance of and works toward a common humanity with a common standard of human dignity for all people (regardless of sex, race, class, sexual orientation or physical capabilities) which would serve as the basis for custom and law in order to enable full self-determination and development. It recognizes that women hold a devalued position in patriarchal systems (materially and otherwise) that cripples self-actualization by placing constraints on women on the basis of their sex. In this sense, it is a common condition among women as a class; however, it must be appreciated as context bound. Feminism necessitates a consciousness-raising process for women in particular, but it recognizes that all members of society must work together in a concerted effort to solve societal problems through the elimination of the ideology of domination. Feminism seeks to deconstruct present ideology and redefine it in terms more suitable to the goal of egalitarianism. Feminism, therefore, is a way of analysing and understanding our evolving life condition, a political
before I was exposed to feminism in a serious way. This thesis is my first academic attempt at anything regarding feminism and I consider it a form of political action.

Summary

Scholars in cultural studies think differential interpretations and resistance are conceivable because of: 1) the polysemic nature of all texts; 2) the differential social positioning and cultural competencies of the audience; and 3) the context (both immediate and historical) within which the media experience takes place. Therefore, young women with a more feminist orientation should interpret media texts somewhat differently than more traditional women.

This study will examine Madonna's video, *Express Yourself*, and interpretations of it by female students who differ with respect to their feminist consciousness. It will investigate the music television viewing practices, in a somewhat typical viewing situation, of young women situated within the context of a patriarchal society.

Theoretical claims in favour of the active audience are supported by substantial evidence.

Nonetheless, the scope and character of audience power have not yet been delimited. . . We need to begin to describe the precise range of textual polysemy and the power held by the audience in its struggle with the text and message producers. (Condit 1989, 103)

This study will explore the degree to which a female audience interprets the video *Express Yourself* oppositionally, which, in this case, means recognizing the gender power dynamics
or rejecting the text as subsumed by patriarchal elements; and to determine if resistive readings depend on the individual's exposure or access to oppositional or consciousness-raising activities or affiliations.
CHAPTER 2 - RESISTANCE

*Resistance* is a key concept in British cultural studies and particularly in John Fiske’s work, a leading popularizer of the approach (Sholle 1991). The cultural studies approach forms the theoretical framework for the thesis which specifically investigates resistance in the form of audience sophistication and semiotic power. This chapter will describe Fiske’s theory of popular culture or resistance, how he defines resistance, why and under what conditions he sees resistance as a possibility, and what kinds of resistances he envisions. It will explain why Fiske believes resistance to be an important factor in understanding popularity which he sees as the nexus between resistance and the potential for empowerment and for affecting transformative societal changes. Finally, this chapter will address some of the weaknesses in the way Fiske considers the concept resistance.

According the Fiske (1987a), resistance refers to both the ideological and the material practices of the disempowered struggling against their subordination. Thus there are "two main types" of resistance, semiotic and social, that are closely related and correspond to the "two main forms of social power" (1987a, 316). Semiotic resistance is the ability of audiences to avoid ideological assimilation in their engagement with mass-produced texts, it is the struggle to make meanings in their own best interest. Fiske focuses primarily on semiotic power and resistance in the mass-communication process because he believes that popular culture largely operates within the sphere of the semiotic power (1987a).

Fiske directs attention to variously positioned audiences and their ability to construct socially relevant meanings in their engagement with polysemic media texts. In some cases,
audiences may resist the ideological messages embedded in texts. Resistance is considered a pleasurable, potentially empowering, and emancipatory practice. Thus a degree of power is attributed to the audience. Fiske believes that evasion (or selective inattention) and resistance are the "politics of everyday life" that have the potential to lead to the transformation of the system. This transformation would be protracted "progressive" social change rather than radical change (Fiske 1989a; 1989b).

Fiske asserts that through the process of making meanings in everyday life all people participate in the ongoing process of making culture (1987a). All social action is inherently political and will work to legitimate and maintain or question and modify the status quo. However, not all members of society contribute equally to the production and circulation of meanings, because power is unevenly distributed.

Following Gramsci, Fiske's conception of power relations in society is that of hegemony where the prevailing dominant alliances are privileged in directing the economic, political, and cultural course of society. In the unbalanced struggle among a wide range of groups for semiotic validity, the dominant power-bloc, for the most part, succeeds in subverting other ideologies and in legitimating its own constructed vision of the world as "natural" (1989a; 1989b). Thus, Fiske envisions two opposing forces--the power-bloc and the people.

The power-bloc consists of a relatively unified, relatively stable alliance of social forces--economic, legal, moral, aesthetic; the people, on the other hand, is a diverse and dispersed set of social allegiances constantly formed and reformed among the formations of the subordinate. (1989b, 8)

Meanings--"all meanings of self, of social relations, all the discourses and texts" (1989b, 1)-- are therefore made in relation to the dominant structures of the social system. People's
subjectivities are structured in relation to the dominant, and power is exercised through social control rather than coercion.

Fiske maintains that culture cannot be dictated and that people experience contradictions daily (1987a, 20). Contradiction is the source of resistance or of at least negotiated meaning generation (1989a; 1989b). People interpret texts from their own socio-cultural positioning. In the process of making sense out of texts--meaning that has relevance to them--they may evade, subvert, or resist dominant ideology, particularly when the dominant ideology contradicts their personal experiences (1989a; 1989b). Resistance, then, is more likely to occur among marginalized groups.

Fiske claims that in an industrial capitalist system average people rarely produce their own "authentic" culture as was the case in folk cultures. Following de Certeau, Fiske asserts that people "make do with what they have" (1989a, 27), and because they have little access to or control over the production of texts, they are much more adept at reading strategies. They become producers of their own meanings and pleasures--the cultural economy. Therefore, he maintains that television texts should not be analyzed solely in terms of the financial economy where a text functions as a commodity, which in turn commodifies the audience to be sold to advertisers; television texts should also be analyzed in terms of cultural economy "where there are no consumers, only circulators of meaning" (1989a, 26-27). Fiske believes the project of cultural studies is to trace the link between text and audience, between the structural features in the text and decodings by audiences who are variously positioned in historical, socio-cultural, and contextual spaces (1987b, 272).

According to the cultural studies perspective, texts are considered to be inherently polysemic and become "potentials of meaning" (1987a, 15). Cultural studies conceptualize
texts as "structured polysemy" where various meanings are possible but unequally weighted. "Structures of preference" privilege society's dominant codes (1987a, 65). Meaning is not located exclusively in the text: "texts are activated or made meaningful" in their "social uses and in their relationships with other texts" (1989b, 3). Meaning is generated at the moment of reception: it is the interaction between the visual and aural signifiers of the text and the variously positioned social and historical subjects.

Fiske maintains that products of popular culture usually contain contradictory or conflicting elements which make them commercially viable but paradoxically, also make them available for different readings among dominant and subordinate facets in society (1989a). Popular texts "are structured in the tension between forces of closure (or domination) and openness (or popularity)" (1989b, 5). Within the texts that become popular, Fiske maintains there is likely "semiotic excess." Semiotic excess means that there is an abundance of meaning potential that cannot be contained or that there are "traces of competing or resisting discourses available for alternate readings" (1987a, 91). In Fiske's view, excess within a text creates "opportunities for parody, subversion or inversion" (1989b, 6)-texts that can test the bounds of convention and taste and accordingly, of social control. Fiske asserts that those texts that do not allow for flexibility in decoding are not likely the texts that will become the most popular from the wider repertoire provided by the cultural industry (1989a). This is his impetus for studying popular culture as the site of resistance. "Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interest out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interest of the dominant" (1989b, 2). When there are contradictions in the text, the audience must be active in order to make sense of them.
Heterogeneous and active audiences are conceptualized as discriminating and productive: audiences are considered discriminating because they choose some texts and not others among the wide array of commodities the cultural industry generates, and productive because they select and make use of texts that are relevant to them (1989a). Fiske maintains that people make sense out of texts; sense is not made for them. He argues that popularity eludes control since the industry never knows for sure which products will become the most popular (1989a).

Fiske (1987a; 1989a) uses the findings of several cultural studies projects to support aspects of his theory. A 1984 study by Hodge and Tripp showed that Australian school children found relevance in the television programme "Prisoner," a soap opera set in a prison for women which was unexpectedly popular among children. They found that children recognized "significant parallels" between the institutional setting and structure of the prison and their schools and "were able to articulate [the similarities] with varying degrees of explicitness" (Fiske 1987a, 68). In his 1986 study, Palmer found that children reenacted episodes of "Prisoner" electing good-natured teachers for the role of warden--the "symbol of authority" (Fiske 1987a, 69). Turnbull found that young girls identified with strong female characters fighting the system and used the programme "to produce a sense of subcultural identity and esteem for themselves" (Fiske 1987a, 69). These studies support Fiske's notions that the audience is productive and makes use of programs that have relevance to them; that audiences identify with the power relations in a text and use it to make sense of their own powerlessness.

Fiske asserts that variously positioned people will not only perceive texts differently but will put texts to use in various social situations. People also rework the meanings of
popular culture commodities by using them in many ways: "defiantly, skeptically, critically, and variously" (1989b, 3).

For Fiske, people engage in popular culture or watch television because it is pleasurable. Fiske contends that, for subordinated groups, pleasure is often oppositional because it involves resisting dominant ideology through the production of meanings that make sense of one's identity and positioning (of subordination) in relation to the dominant. Fiske explains his pleasure principle as follows:

The pleasures of play derive directly from the players' ability to exert control over rules, roles and representations - those agencies that in the social are the agencies of subjection, but in play can be agents of liberation and empowerment. Play, for the subordinate, is an active, creative, resistive response to the conditions of their subordination: it maintains their sense of subcultural difference in the face of the incorporation forces of the dominant ideology. (1987a, 236)

Fiske believes that texts are interpreted and used variously according to what relevance they have and sometimes are used to resist restrictive ideologies. Fiske considers this process to be both pleasurable and empowering. Empowerment is believed to be essential in the political process. "Resistances are not just oppositions to power, but are sources of power in their own right" (Fiske 1987, 316).

Fiske uses the results of D'acci's study (1988) of the female fans of "Cagney and Lacy" to demonstrate "the matrix of pleasure, relevance and empowerment" (Fiske 1989a, 66). The "Cagney and Lacy" programme drew "on discourses of the women's movement" (D'acci 1988, 5) for its framework. It featured two female police officers facing the trials of being women in a male-dominated occupation. Episodes often focused on issues of specific interest to women. The characterization of the women and the activities in which they engaged cut across the norms of typical representations of women. D'acci analyzed 500 fan letters sent
to the network in an attempt to save the show. Time and again viewers distinguished Cagney and Lacy from "raff shows" featuring women and referred to the "program and characters as 'real' and 'role models'" (D'acci 1988, 423). D'acci argues that women are not responding to the programme in the dominant way but as a feminist text and recognize the competing discourses of patriarchy and feminism that structure the show. Female fans enjoyed the show because it resonated with struggles in their own lives and gave them strategies and confidence in pursuing their own endeavours.

Fiske believes that hegemony is always in process, never complete and that the power-bloc continuously struggles to maintain its position as the legitimating force. Fiske uses the De Certeau's metaphor of guerilla warfare to describe the struggle for meaning or semiotic power. He envisions the market place as the site of a horizontal struggle between the opposing forces of the power-bloc and the people through the processes of excorporation and incorporation (1989a). Excorporation refers to the continuous appropriation of resources from the "commodity system" by the people who rework meanings to suit and support subordinate subcultures and pick away at the power-bloc's monopoly over meaning in a piece-meal fashion. The power-bloc responds with various tactics to combat and contain divergent meanings, one of which is incorporation. By incorporating oppositional meanings into the mainstream and dictating the social situation in which they are deemed suitable it "attempts to rob them of any oppositional meanings" (Fiske 1989a, 18) What society takes to be "common sense" slowly shifts through the processes of excorporation and incorporation.

Thus, through resistance, "the politics of everyday life," the audience has some degree of power in the mass communication process and, in turn, the potential to effect societal change in a protracted fashion (1989a; 1989b).
Even those scholars who critique Fiske's resistance theory acknowledge that the ability to think differently or, more importantly, to engage an alternative code in interpreting the media (which implies an alteration in subjectivity) may well be the first step in social change (Sholle, 1991; Condit, 1989; Ganguly, 1991; Budd, Entman and Steinman, 1990). As Benn (1990, 16) asserts, setting yourself up against authority is both pleasurable and empowering and may contain "the seed perhaps, of subversive knowledge." However, as Ganguly correctly points out,

it is precisely the degree to which the reader's activity is limited that is at stake in exploring ideological containment. It is not enough to make a passing gesture to the limits of reading practices, for this is the crux of the matter: how is reading limited, what material and discursive pressures operate to interpellate the reading subject, and under what conditions can reading be politically transformative. (1991, 133; italics mine)

Fiske can and has been taken to task on a number of weaknesses in his theoretical conception of resistance. Questions have been raised regarding various components—the range of textual polysemy, the status of the text in relation to resistant reading practices, an underestimation of ideological constraints, an overemphasis on the audience and their ability to resist, the tendency to mythologize sub-cultures and misapply the exceptional to the mainstream, an over-simplification of pleasure, an overestimation of empowerment and disagreement with the underlying conception of power (Benn 1990; Budd and Steinman 1989; Budd et al. 1990; Brundson 1989; Condit 1989; Evans 1990; Ganguly 1991; Seiter et al. 1989; Sholle 1991; Steiner 1988). But probably the central question revolves around what constitutes resistance and around the link between semiotic resistance and the activation of counter-hegemonic social movements: the connection between popular resistance and political action (Sholle 1991).
Many of the problems in Fiske's theory of popular culture (or resistance) can be traced to an inadequate consideration or explication of the nature of resistance itself, the insufficient development of the concept and therefore the inappropriate implications of various types of resistant practices. Some of the confusion has arisen as a result of the inconsistent use of the term resistance which stems from the original cultural studies model, namely Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model.

Hall (1980) identified three decoding "potentials"—preferred, negotiated, and oppositional—where the decoder may share, partly share or not share the code of the hegemonic message. All imply different levels of conscious awareness of a dominant ideology; an ideology that incorporates imaginary power relations that do not necessarily represent the decoder's interests. If the text is read in the "preferred" way, the dominant ideology is wholly reproduced. If the reading is "negotiated", the dominant ideology is privileged but only partially adopted at an abstract level and adapted or opposed in reference to a local understanding. In an oppositional reading, a text is decoded in a "globally contrary way," where the ideology is not reproduced but resisted (Hall 1980). The term resistance is frequently used interchangeably with opposition\(^{12}\) by scholars using the cultural studies frame and by its critics, although the terms are not necessarily equivalent. Resistance therefore falls prey to some of the same criticisms as opposition.

Hall has been criticized for using oppositional in two different ways and not making the distinction explicit (Streeter 1984 cited in Steiner 1988). The word oppositional or "to

\(^{12}\)Opposition also implies that the relationship is "binary, single-level, bilateral and symmetrical" when, in fact, the real relationship (between an hegemonic viewpoint and alternative "oppositional" one) is a hierarchical one in terms of power. While the term opposition may correctly point to a conflict, it makes a hierarchical relation appear to be taking place at on level—the process of symmetrization (Wilden 1982, 8).
"oppose" does imply a conscious awareness of what one sets himself or herself up against, a "detotalization" of the dominant code and a "retotalization" or reframing of an event. In one sense Hall assumes a full understanding of the dominant discourse, "to perfectly understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse" (Hall 1980, 138-139), and requires a fully conscious ideological reframing of the event using an alternate and opposing framework before a reading is considered oppositional. However, the term, oppositional, has also been used in much of cultural studies work to refer to any decoding that does not coincide with the hegemonic encoding. It becomes problematic if an oppositional reading is equated with an "aberrant" one because there are a number of logical alternatives that could account for aberrant readings (Eco 1965, cited in Fiske 1982).

Morley (1980), in his ground-breaking ethnographic study of the current affairs television programme "Nationwide," tested Hall's encoding/decoding model. He chose various groups of people that would represent dominant, negotiated, and oppositional positions in the social stratum to investigate the correlation between class position and reading practices of the programme. The study confirmed that people from different socio-economic categories interpreted programme messages differently, and some engaged in resistant practices. Morley found that readings generally corresponded with social positioning, but there were many exceptions. Morley concluded that reading practices could be better understood as a complex "set of processes--attentiveness, recognition of relevance, of comprehension, and of interpretations and response" (Morley 1981). The question remains as to whether or not these processes are performed consciously.

The inconsistency between how oppositional is defined and how it is applied is also apparent in Fiske's early work. For example, Fiske (1982, 114) describes the oppositional
decoder as the one who "recognizes the preferred reading but rejects it as false"; he continues, using Morley's "Nationwide" study as an example, to recount how black students did not even pay attention to the programme because it did not relate to their lives. Fiske considers this an oppositional reading because the programme was rejected as irrelevant. But there is no indication here that this group understood the preferred reading in the first place, which would be necessary in order to consciously reject it. This example adds to the confusion as to whether an oppositional reading (or resistant reading) is any rejection of the dominant or whether it requires a critically conscious understanding as a precondition.

Resistance, as found in other cultural studies research, does not necessarily presuppose awareness of what is being resisted. It is unlikely that romance readers are consciously aware that when they sit down to read romance novels they are resisting the patriarchal structures that require them to be selfless in their roles as wives and mothers (Radway 1984). Madonna "wannabes" may feel a sense of empowerment by mimicking the Madonna style, but it is unlikely that they consciously understand that they are challenging the conventions of patriarchy; yet they may well be (Fiske 1987b). Because the definition of resistance is imprecise, critics, like Sholle (1991), ask if analysts are transforming what is simply consciousness into resistance.

Additionally, the term resistance is regularly seen alongside terms such as secession, evasion, subversion, challenge, and rejection in much of cultural studies literature, which seem to imply slightly different kinds and levels of audience activity. Although all may be forms of resistance, they may or may not be conscious activities. This, then, appears to be the distinction between opposition and resistance: resistance covers a wider scope than opposition
because it can encompass evasive activity, the process of delineating self-identity, and semiotic challenges, whether they are done with consciousness of an oppositional code or not.

Another distinction is suggested by the Oxford Concise Dictionary. It defines 'to resist' in two applicable ways:

1. stop the course of, withstand action or effect of, prevent from reaching or penetrating, repel, abstain from . . .
2. strive against, oppose, try to impede, refuse to comply with.

The first seems to imply success in withstanding, and the second just an attempt to withstand.

This same problematic exists in the way resistance is conceived in terms of the ideological effects of the media, and the distinction is not clearly articulated within cultural studies. Therefore, some scholars look for manifest changes in the social realm before they agree that resistance is occurring because they require it to function effectively (Budd et al. 1990).

Fiske draws a parallel between semiotic and social resistances or, in other words, ideological and material struggles (1987a). Scott's (1985; 1986) research on a specific material struggle is helpful in understanding wider issues of resistance. He examined the material conflict between landowners and peasants living in a Malaysian community when a new technology, the combine harvester, was introduced into the farming equation. The less powerful, as Scott's study demonstrates, have a wide range of "ordinary weapons" at their disposal to resist the powerful—"foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on" (1985, xvi), all of which may occur at different levels of visibility, activity, organization, and consciousness. Scott divides resistance loosely into two types—"everyday" resistance that usually represents "self-help," sometimes evasive, individual, unplanned and uncoordinated acts "aimed at marginal gains," and resistant practices that are intentional, organized, planned, conscious of collective needs,
and "challenge the system of domination" (1986, 28). Scott posits that both types of resistances, though different avenues of struggle, may affect change, and consequences may sometimes be unexpected and unintended. Resistant practices may backfire, they may marginally alleviate exploitation, they may amount to a renegotiation of the limits of appropriation, they may change the course of subsequent development, and they may more rarely help bring the system down. (1986, 30)

Everyday kinds of resistances are generally more feasible since there are a number of obstacles to open collective resistance. However, Scott performs a balancing act when he asserts that the power of everyday resistance should not be underestimated, but at the same time should not be romanticized since it is "unlikely to do more than marginally affect the various forms of exploitation which peasants confront" (1986, 6). He says that by distinguishing "between various levels and forms of resistance . . . what we may actually be measuring in this enterprise is the level of repression which structures the options which are available" (Scott 1986, 28).

Fiske (1987) does appreciate that there are many forms of semiotic resistance. He makes a distinction which corresponds with Scott's two main types of material resistance—sometimes semiotic resistance has the benefit of group level consciousness, and sometimes it remains a form of individual advancement. Moreover, Fiske forwards that those who have access to oppositional codes will be more likely to engage in resistant reading practices. Fiske goes on to explain that semiotic resistance may be evasive or productive, interior or exterior, and private or collectivized, and he asserts that various forms of resistance "differ in their social visibility, in their social positioning, and in their activity" (1989b, 8). Fiske differentiates between evasive and offensive semiotic practices.
Evasion and resistance are interrelated, and neither is possible without the other: both involve the interplay of pleasure and meaning, but evasion is more pleasurable than meaningful, whereas resistance produces meanings before pleasures. (Fiske 1989b, 2).

It appears that the distinction he makes between evasion and resistance is a difference in the level of consciousness. Evasiveness is "more pleasurable than meaningful" because it just involves getting away with something (escaping) in the face of authority; Fiske (1989b, 8) says that "the least politically active are the bodily pleasures of evasion." While he believes that evasion is "experienced as empowering" he says that "it does not determine, or necessarily influence, the use to which that empowerment may be put" (1989a, 54).

Semiotic resistance, on the other hand, is not as pleasurable but it is more meaningful; it is the construction of alternative meanings and identities that give credence to one's positioning and allow individuals to "exert control over the meanings of their lives, a control that is typically denied them in their material social conditions" (Fiske 1989b, 10). However, it does not necessarily require consciousness of an alternate and oppositional code. Like evasion, semiotic resistance is also experienced as empowerment. Fiske contends that empowerment is "politically crucial": people must feel they can control some aspect of their lives in order to build confidence and self-esteem. Control over meanings is more easily achieved than control over material conditions. The feeling of empowerment or confidence that is inspired by making one's own meanings is a stepping stone for any kind of social action to take place (1989a, 1989b).

Fiske uses the example of young female adolescents' responses to Madonna to explain the political potential of empowerment. He says that Madonna fans find meanings that have broken free from the ideological binary opposition of virgin/whore. They find in her image positive feminine-centered representations of sexuality that are expressed in their constant references to
her independence, her being herself. This apparently independent, self-defining sexuality is as significant as it is only because it is working within and against patriarchy. (1989b, 104)

Empowerment for fans, Fiske argues, is linked with the feeling that they too can have some control over their own sense of self and of their sexuality. Fiske believes that young girls, by watching Madonna, find the strength to stand up to their boyfriends as well as authority figures like parents; thus personal interior fantasies of power translate into political action at least within the personal sphere (1989b, 10-11). He cautions that the power Madonna represents for young female fans should not be underestimated (1987b). Fiske believes that everyday resistances, even though they may occur at the individual level, give people self-confidence and provide the base for more formal kinds of resistances, a foundation that can be used to fuel counter-hegemonic social movements (1989b).

Some critics argue that popular culture is no more than a safety valve for the system (Streeter 1989); it lets people feel as if they are resisting, but because these resistances are limited to the interior fantasies or to the individual they do not contribute to the political realm. But Fiske defends his position by saying that what these arguments fail to take into account is the politics of everyday life that occur on the micro rather than macro level; they fail equally to account for the differences and potential connections between interior, semiotic resistances and sociopolitical ones, between meanings and behaviors, between progressiveness and radicalism, between evasive and offensive tactics. (1989b, 9)

Fiske submits that all the right conditions must exist to inspire a revolution, and that semiotic resistance would not in itself produce the conditions for a major upheaval in the social realm.

It is material historical conditions that produce radical reform; evasive and semiotic resistances can maintain a popular consciousness that can fertilize the growth of those conditions and can be ready to exploit them when they arise, but they cannot in themselves produce such conditions. (1989b, 11)
Fiske adds that "western patriarchal capitalism" has been able to prevent the necessary conditions to incite a radical movement (1989b). He thinks that semiotic resistance, like guerilla warfare, tends to continually nibble away at the power of the dominant alliances so that the system weakens and is perhaps available for "change at the structural level" (1989b, 11). Fiske uses the feminist movement as an example:

Despite many more centuries of patriarchy, women have produced and maintained a feminist movement, and individual women, in their everyday lives, constantly make guerrilla raids upon patriarchy, win small, fleeting victories, keep the enemy constantly on the alert, and gain, and sometimes hold, pieces of territory (however small) for themselves. And gradually, reluctantly, patriarchy has to change in response. (1989a, 19-20)

In fact, Fiske does not see gradual change as less desirable than radical upheaval: it is arguable that "the needs of the people are better met by progressive social change originating in evasive or interior resistance, moving to action at the micropolitical level and from there to more organized assaults on the system itself, than by radical or revolutionary change" (1989b, 12).

Fiske does appreciate that there are many forms of resistances (1987, 316), but one of the weaknesses of his theory lies in his negligence to clearly distinguish between these different kinds of resistances, to articulate which ones he is addressing in each of his discussions of various popular products, and in his inability to account for the varying degrees of social impact that different and unequal kinds of resistances are most likely to have. The major problem is that resistance of all kinds and levels appear to be equal: lining the kitty litter box with the local newspaper instead of reading it appears to be considered potentially as effective in transforming society as writing an article for the newspaper that is aimed at consciousness-raising. The result of equating various forms and levels of resistance is the trivialization and devaluation of the concept and the neutralization of the cultural studies
approach. Resistance appears to be happening everywhere all the time, and therefore, there is no need to change anything in the media. This leads Benn to charge Fiske’s work with being "perilously close to suggesting that critical inquiry isn’t necessary anymore" (1990, 16). If everyone is consistently reading media products resistantly and is able to sidestep ideological constraints, then there is no need to change or improve what is shown on television, and there is no need to teach people to read critically or how to avoid being manipulated.

Problematicizing the audience phenomenon in terms of opposition and resistance is a valuable contribution, because unlike traditional mass communication research, media practices are situated within power relations. In shifting attention away from ideology/text to the audience and reception, Fiske has perhaps moved too far toward the other extreme: an atheoretical position where audience readings are commonly considered automatically resistant (Benn 1990; Budd et al. 1989; Sholle 1991; Seiter et al. 1989). The shift threatens to confiscate the recent and hard-won gains that critical theory has made and "lends itself to easy adaptation to conservative political approaches or administrative research" (Sholle 1991, 83).

Sholle (1991) asks what the point is of describing audience activity and applauding decoding variations or even resistant readings if one stops short of linking semiotic resistance to material resistance or if resistance is limited to the private lives of individuals. As Benn stingingly puts it, "does anyone really benefit from hearing about John Fiske’s ongoing infatuation with Madonna, or from assurances that we’re all wise to mass produced fantasies?" (1990, 16). If resistant readings are the seed of change, it is imperative to refine resistance and, if possible, trace how it is initiated, how it encourages activities aimed at altering power effects, and how it evolves into transformative action or actual ideological change. Fiske
himself points out that there is a "need to think through the nature of resistance, the relationships between interior resistance (whether evasive or productive) and organized resistance at the sociopolitical level, which in itself encompasses the micro- and macropolitical levels, with their still largely unexplored interrelationships" (1989a, 189).

Fiske prefers to "align [himself] with those who propose that ideological and hegemonic theories of popular culture have overestimated the power of the determinations and underestimated that of the viewer" (1989c, 57). By choosing to place his emphasis on the subjectivity of the audience and redirect attention to the complex process of interpretation, Fiske has had a hand in rekindling the debate about the dialectics of the text/audience relationship. In so doing, he exposes the myth of a mindless mass audience proposed by the critical left and opens up new possibility for intervening "in the politics of popular culture" at the point of reception rather than in the "processes of production and representation" (1989c 74). There seems to be face validity in many aspects of his theory (however, broad strokes simplify the complex) that call for further investigation.

Because this thesis follows cultural studies logic, it, too, falls victim to the weaknesses of the approach in that it is limited to identifying and describing resistant readings and does not move beyond to link resistance to actual transformative action. However, I attempted to distinguish different kinds of readings made by the selected audience and from that, I identified different potential levels and activities of material resistance. Thus, although I do not connect semiotic resistance to material resistance directly, I tried, through inference questions that ask participants to relate the video to their own lives, to tie resistance to concrete political action, even if the connection is only a loose one.
CHAPTER 3--LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will first look at what research has been done on music television with respect to content and effects and will speculate as to what bearing that has on the Express Yourself video. The focus will be primarily on the status and representation of women within music television and rock videos. In the second part of the chapter attention will be given to some textual analyses on Madonna videos. Third, an audience study focussing on differences in decoding of Madonna videos among audiences varied by race, gender and fandom will be discussed. Finally, in the last part of the chapter consideration will be given to some studies that, although they do not address music television, shed some light on audience decodings and resistance.

Music Television

Since its introduction to the market in 1981 (Denisoff 1988) the music television industry has been immensely successful and is established as a permanent fixture in television programming (Hansen 1989; Sherman and Dominick 1986). Music television is geared to an audience between the ages of fourteen and thirty-five who were previously the demographic group least interested in television (Denisoff 1988) and in the early 1980s comprised 83 percent of music television's viewing audience (Gardemer 1983). In a 1986 study (Sun and Lull 1986) that asked over six hundred high school students in Sa. Jone whether they watch music television, 80 percent reported that they watched M\textsuperscript{T}V an average of two hours per day, with viewing times typically longer on weekends than weekdays.
Aufderheide (1986) believes that the structure and nature of rock videos inspire a feeling of "instability" that incites consumeristic tendencies in an effort to fit into the desired but distorted image that will ensure acceptance among peers—a "search to buy and belong."

Music videos are powerful, if playful, postmodern art. Their raw materials are aspects of commercial popular culture, their structures those of dreams, their premise the constant permutation of identity in a world without social relationships... Watching music videos may be diverting, but the process that music videos embody, echo, and encourage—the constant recreation of an unstable self—is a full-time job. (Aufderheide 1986, 75).

Adolescents keep watching music television and anxiously await the fulfilment it promises but never delivers (Kaplan 1989).

Sun and Lull (1986) explored the reasons that adolescents gave for viewing MTV and their opinions of music television. They found that most adolescents who watched MTV did so for information or to learn about the social world. They liked to find out about new dance moves, new fashion trends, concert information, and to watch how to play musical instruments. Some did report finding out about how to interact.

Other reasons for viewing music television included passing time, escape, or mood, social interaction, and entertainment. Music television was distinguished from regular television and was often watched when other television programs were boring or when "nothing else was on." Sun and Lull believe that entertainment or enjoyment referred to both musical and visual appreciation. Passing time was the reason most strongly endorsed by students and is the basis for Sun and Lull’s conclusion that motivational statements alone are not sufficient in explaining reasons for watching MTV.

The visual aspect of videos was found to be a major factor that precipitated music television watching. Students liked to find out what the intentions of the artists were, felt they got a new perspective on songs, and that visuals added a "whole new meaning to songs."
Others were aware that video images did not always reflect the artist's vision of a song, which were sometimes undermined by industry constraints. Some students preferred the visual dimension while others liked the audio.

Adolescents watched music television to see and hear their favourite groups or singers as well as for the exposure to new music. Reasons for liking or disliking music television were often related to the programming; the program content (new music not played on the radio), the type of music played (e.g. not enough alternative or too much heavy metal or rap), the evaluation of veejays or structure of programming (e.g. repetition). Sun and Lull conclude that adolescents know what to expect from the genre and want to see their preferred music.

Because it attracted such a young audience, very early on, music television became the object of much criticism very much like its predecessor rock music (Jones 1991) and other media forms before. Critics pointed to an alarming abundance of sex, violence, and negative portrayals of women and denounced music television as unwholesome and harmful to young viewers (National Coalition on Violence 1984; Gore 1987; Steinem 1988). Because it was such a new genre, very little research had been done to substantiate those allegations. Since that time a number of studies have been conducted to investigate the content and effect of music television.

Content Analysis Studies

Content analysis studies replace anecdotal observation, supply some quantifiable evidence for allegations, and provide an initial step in attempting to understand a medium's effect. Content analysis studies have verified that this male-oriented genre has a high degree of sexist, sexual, and violent content.
A survey of several of these studies overwhelmingly supports claims that music television is a male-dominated genre with males outnumbering females two to one (Sherman and Dominick 1986) and with anywhere from 83 percent to 96 percent of the videos on MTV show-casing white male performers either as lead characters, soloists or as band leaders (Brown and Campbell 1986; Sherman and Dominick 1986). The demographic make-up in the videos tends to mirror the make-up of industry itself since the artists most often play characters in the videos (Baxter et al. 1985; Sherman and Dominick 1986).

Marked differences in the portrayal of race and gender have been found. Whites outnumber non-whites in a ratio of more than four to one and are generally older and higher in status (Sherman and Dominick 1986). White male lead characters are most often portrayed in social situations and are more likely than others to be aggressive, hostile, and perpetrators of violence (Sherman and Dominick 1986; Brown and Campbell 1986; Baxter et al. 1985). They are less likely to be shown in domestic situations and are often alone. Contrary to stereotyping in other genres that cast black men as low-lifes often involved in violence, black men were most often engaged in pro-social behaviour and just about as likely as white males to be depicted as professionals. However, they are still more likely to be shown to engage in sexual behaviour, singing, and dancing (Brown and Campbell 1986).

Not only are there fewer women on music television (females only accounted for 10 percent of leading roles in 1986), the male orientation is also evidenced by the way women are portrayed in videos. Results support the claim that videos are highly sexist and affirm stereotypical conceptions of women as "less active, less goal-directed and less worthy of attention" (Brown and Campbell 1986, 101). Women are more likely to be singing or dancing than playing a musical instrument. They are generally presented as scantily-clad, two-
dimensional, ornamental objects and are seldom significant enough to be in the foreground. Sherman and Dominick (1986) reported that half of the women who appeared were "dressed provocatively" and were often cast as "upper class" objects of sexual desire for lower class males (e.g., Billy Joel's Uptown Girl). Women are less likely than men to be performing professional work (Brown and Campbell 1986).

White and black women are also treated differently. In general, "white women often are shown in passive and solitary activity or are shown trying to gain the attention of a man who ignores them" (Brown and Campbell 1986, 101). White women who do emerge from the background are just as likely as men to be aggressors following a predatory stereotype. The primary activities of black women are singing and dancing and they are "the least likely to be shown as either victim or perpetrator of antisocial behaviour and are the most likely to engage in pro-social and sexual behaviour" (Brown and Campbell 1986, 103).

Vincent et al. (1987) examined a sample of MTV music videos and evaluated them on a sexism scale ranging from Level I "Condescending," Level II. "Keep her place," Level III "Contradictory," to Level IV "Fully equal." Also included were other scales such as degree of male/female contact, alluring attire, violent occurrences, stereotypical male or female narratives represented, and the sex of the musicians. Of the 110 videos studied, 74 percent were found to fall into the top two sexist categories; 57 percent were coded as Level I and 17 percent at Level II on the sexism scale. Only 12 percent represented women in a position considered fully equal. Sex-role stereotyping was also found to be very much alive in music videos with 61 percent enacting traditional female narratives and 10 percent traditional male narratives. Sexist videos had significantly higher percentage of women dressed alluringly although the researchers note that "sexist video need not be sexy" (Vincent
et al. 1987. 754). No significant differences in sexism were detected between videos spotlights male or female performers in the 1985 sample.

Vincent (1989) repeated the sexism study in 1986, after heightened controversy on rock videos spurred by Tipper Gore and the Parents' Music Resource Centre in 1985 and new MTV programming strategies designed to recapture an eroding audience. Vincent found that while sexism still abounded, it had become more subtle. There was a 22 percent decline in videos coded at Level I (most sexist) on the sexism scale and a noticeable increase of Level IV videos; fully equal female representations increased for both all-male and female videos by 156% and 108% respectively. Still, male performers were more likely to have Level I videos whereas there was a 52% decline in Level I videos for female artists. Vincent attributes the change to an increase in the presence of women and heightened awareness of media portrayals of the role of women. Overwhelmingly, however, gender role depictions were still very traditional and there were actually small but nonsignificant increases in alluring attire, nudity, and violence.

Sexual acts are frequently represented in rock videos, more frequently than violent acts.) Sherman and Dominick (1986) reported that over three quarters of their sample of concept videos featured sexual imagery; on average each contained 4.78 separate sexual acts. Of the videos analyzed by Baxter et al. (1985) 60 percent included the portrayal of sexual feelings. However, sexual-oriented acts tended to be characterized by innuendo rather than explicit behavior. Sexual suggestiveness is generally communicated through alluring dress, flirtation, and light non-intimate physical contact—perhaps indicative of the targeted adolescent audience (Baxter et al. 1985; Sherman and Dominick 1986; Vincent et al. 1987). Sherman and Dominick (1986) also observed that sexual relations were predominantly (70%) traditional
and heterosexual; 25 percent intimated homosexuality and only 3 percent depicted non-traditional sexual acts such as bondage and exhibitionism. Brown and Campbell (1986) found no incidents of implied homosexuality in their sample.

Violence in rock videos was also found to be frequent, but it was also understated rather than blatant. In their analysis of 100 hours of music television, The National Coalition Against Violence (1984) reported an average of 18 episodes of violence per hour and found that 40 percent of the 518 videos sampled contained acts of violence. Baxter et al. (1985) coded violent acts in 53 percent of the sampled videos, while 34 percent of the videos in Vincent et al.'s study contained violence. Sherman and Dominick (1986) focused their attention on concept videos only and found an average of 2.86 separate acts of violence in the over half (56.6%) of the 166 surveyed videos that used violence.

Most violence took the form of hand to hand combat such as wrestling, punching, or grabbing between men and rarely included the use of weapons, murder, or sexual violence. The results of such aggression were rarely depicted. Surprisingly, only 10 percent depicted any violence toward women (Vincent et al. 1987); when women were involved in violence, they were aggressors more often than on regular television, perhaps corroborating the stereotype of the "predatory" female (Sherman and Dominick 1986). Most of the videos that contained violent acts also contained sexual imagery (Baxter et al. 1985; Sherman and Dominick 1986). It is also noteworthy that Vincent et al. (1987) found videos containing violent acts often were also rated as most sexist.

In addition to the degree of sexism, Vincent and his colleagues analyzed the themes exhibited in rock videos. One of the predominant themes was love or romance either in the context of courting someone or breaking off a relationship. Of the sampled videos 34 percent
depicted romance in one study (Vincent et al. 1987) and 47 percent in another (Brown and Campbell 1986). Dating is both frequent and viewed positively while marriage is highlighted considerably less frequently and regarded negatively. Many videos are recreational in nature and feature dancing, camaraderie, and social situations. Other major themes included social protest, anti-establishment views, and feelings or themes of alienation. Brown and Campbell (1986) found no clear theme in a quarter of their sample.

Madonna’s *Express Yourself* video is typical of video fare in many respects and unusual in others. It would likely be coded as highly sexually explicit, violent, and sexist in most content analyses, and yet it can be argued to have a female orientation.

Whereas most videos have been found to rely on flirtatious innuendo, *Express Yourself* is heavily suggestive and pushes the limit with explicit scenes. In Vincent et al.’s (1987) study only a small percentage (9.2%) of the videos suggested nudity and only 1.7 percent of the music videos surveyed included implied love-making. By comparison, *Express Yourself* is a highly sexual video with evocative scenes, alluring attire, suggestive movements, and postures, and physical contact with hugging, kissing, implied nudity, and implied intercourse.

The principal theme is that of a love relationship—of breaking off an unfulfilling relationship and beginning a new one. It therefore fits in with the predominant theme of love and sex found in most music videos. A traditional and heterosexual relationship is also the leading narrative. However, the *Express Yourself* video has also been appraised as suggestive of androgyny and homosexuality (Schwichtenberg 1992), an implied sexual orientation found in few videos (fewer than one quarter). A bondage scene is highlighted, which also makes
this video unusual as "sexually deviant" acts such a bondage were only recorded in 3 percent of videos (Sherman and Dominick 1986).

Whereas studies show that videos rarely depict sexual violence (only 10%). *Express Yourself* would likely be coded as violent both because of the bondage scene and an aggressive wrestling match between two men which is interspersed throughout the final love-making scene. Both these scenes could be interpreted as sexually violent.

It could also be classified as sexist or at least as a "contradictory" view of woman according to the sexism scale in Vincent et al.’s study (1987). A chauvinistic view of women is represented in the portrayal of women as submissive and solitary, for the most part, in traditional and sexually provocative garb, and in non-professional roles. At the same time, it relays a portrait of a powerful woman who mocks traditional gender roles and steps outside traditional boundaries for women in rock videos. Unlike women in most videos, Madonna, while alluringly dressed, is not relegated to a simple ornamental role but is the key figure.

**Effects Studies**

Content analyses studies have documented high levels of sex, violence, and sexism while effects studies have established that sexual contents or erotica are much more appealing to audiences than violent elements. Both types of studies suggest the presence of sexist images and scenarios have a damaging effect on the audience in that they lower women’s self-esteem. Moreover, rock video texts generally fulfil their role in the process of hegemony and reality maintenance by lowering women’s opinion of other women and reinforcing and priming stereotypic and patriarchal conceptions of the roles of men and women at the subconscious level.
Walker (1987) hypothesized that the strongest effects of media violence would result from regular exposure over an extended period of time. In his study, junior high school students were asked to keep a diary of their media consumption. Results showed that students who watched rock videos tended to pay attention to different genres than those who did not; they tended not to watch highly violent genres but were more likely to watch romances, comedies, and soap operas. Walker concluded that the projected effects of violence on music television were overstated and that violence on rock videos must be seen in relation to how much violence an individual is to exposed on other media. He surmised that music television viewers are attracted to it for its romantic content, not its violence.

Hansen and Hansen (1990) showed rock videos with a range of (high, moderate and low) levels of sex or violence, and a combinations of sex and violence to male and female undergraduate university students. Students were asked to evaluate the visual and musical content of a video and relay their emotional responses. Contrary to "conventional wisdom" that sex and violence sells, Hansen and Hansen found that sex sells but violence does not. Sexual content in rock videos increased appeal to audiences and had a positive emotional impact. Too much explicit sex, they cautioned, was likely to have an adverse effect.13 "Highly violent videos were rated as extremely unappealing and produced very negative emotional experiences" (Hansen and Hansen 1990). The most unappealing videos were the ones that combined high levels of both sex and violence. The results of this study lead Hansen and Hansen to question why violence is incorporated into videos at all.

13 This may account, in part for strong negative reactions to Madonna whose videos frequently exude highly explicit sexual content and in some cases violent content.
Peterson and Pfrost (1989) also found that mild erotica increased pleasurable reactions and more positive attitudes toward women among their research subjects. To investigate the influence of rock videos on attitudes of violence against women, rock videos with various combinations of eroticism and violence (nonerotic/nonviolent, erotic/nonviolent, erotic/violent, nonerotic/violent) were shown to 144 undergraduate men. These volunteers then filled out a sexual attitude scale designed to measure aggression toward women. Violent videos that were not erotic were found to elicit, in men, the most "calloused and antagonistic, though not violent, orientation toward women" (1989, 321). In contrast to Hansen and Hansen's (1990) study, videos that were both violent and erotic did not induce the most negative response. Peterson and Pfrost speculate that pleasurable feelings aroused by the erotic content may have offset the effects of mild aggression. However, the samples used in both Peterson and Pfrost's (1989) and Hansen and Hansen's (1990) studies were not necessarily representative of the general population. Perhaps young people for whom violence is appealing do not attend university.

Raper (1986) investigated the attitudinal effects of watching a negative and stereotypical video. She randomly assigned 105 undergraduate students, both male and female, to four groups of which three were exposed to a different versions of Billy Idol's *White Wedding*—a violent video, a neutral rendition of the same video, and the music alone. The fourth group served as the control. Overall, Raper found that men had more negative attitudes toward women. Although Raper did not find that men's attitudes changed after viewing the violent and sexist depiction, she found a negative effect among the women who changed their opinions of themselves and other women after the single exposure to the violent
video. Attitudinal scores for women in this group were just as negative towards women as the scores for men.

Hansen and Hansen (1988) found that research participants evaluated a video-taped social exchange between a man and woman in profoundly different ways after they had watched a rock video that portrayed stereotypical sex-roles compared to a neutral video. Variations of the following situation were shown to participants: A woman was applying for an employment position. The man who was interviewing her made sexual advances. The woman either reciprocated his sexual advances or did not and the man responded by either praising or denigrating her after she left the room. After participants watched the stereotypical music video, the woman was evaluated most positively when she responded to the sexual advances of her male interviewer. However, if the video prime was neutral, the woman was viewed most positively if she managed to deflect her prospective employer's sexual advances and still garner his praise. Whichever schemata the rock video activated was the one viewers used to appraise the subsequent interaction (Hansen and Hansen 1987). When the social exchange violated the schema primed by the rock video, participants' recall of the interaction was better; however, the interaction was appraised negatively (Hansen 1989).

Such research demonstrates that individuals organize, interpret, and appraise information based on the codes or schemas they have immediate access to, at least in the short term. Codes provide a structure for making sense of the world. Therefore, the more access and frequent exposure young women have to an oppositional code such as feminism, the more likely they will interpret a video text like Express Yourself in that context. However the almost endless repetition of messages congruous with stereotypical patriarchal codes must
also be considered. Hansen and Hansen (1988) report a further interesting finding: although participants may well recognize that a depiction was stereotypical and negative or that it is not real, they were generally not aware of the biased priming it still induced.

Not surprisingly, Greenfield et al. (1987) found that comprehension of popular rock video lyrics was extremely low among listeners and that age was a factor in understanding songs. For example the word "wilderness" in Madonna’s Like a Virgin (1985) meant "hills and trees" to fourth graders, a "literal and concrete" interpretation. A much more "metaphorical and abstract" interpretation was given by college students who thought "wilderness" referred to "rough times" and "emotional loneliness." Furthermore, listeners were more likely to pay attention to the lyrics in the chorus which are repetitive and therefore more easily discernable. Fans, of course, were much better able to recall lyrics and articulate the meaning of songs "correctly." Most importantly, Greenfield et al. found that harmful effects of lyrics (especially regarding sex) were limited by listener’s own knowledge and experience which in turn limited interpretation. What lyrics interviewees recollect should therefore give an indication of their individual frames of reference.

Rock videos have also been accused of inhibiting the capacity to imagine (Abt 1987) as well as to diminish the faculty to experience life (Wells 1984). Levy claimed that videos remove the "individual pictures in our minds" (1983). Greenfield et al. (1987) tested a group of students to find out how videos influenced imagination. They found that although participants said they preferred videos that illustrated the story of the song, this type of video was most limiting to the imagination. Students who either watched the video or just listened to the song, were asked to imagine what the next verse of the song could be and to imagine their own video for the song. A response was evaluated as imaginative if it added additional
information not existing in the song. Greenfield et al. found that video viewers were more responsive but were not able to envision more imaginative video for any of the four songs they viewed and were less able to create more imaginative verses for two of the four songs they watched. Generally video watchers tried to add visual scenes rather than verses. Further, participants were found to be very self-aware as 81 percent mentioned they felt videos inhibited their own thoughts about a song.

In a related study Greenfield et al. (1987) found that video watchers frequently gave similar and specific interpretations of a song whereas participants who only listened gave much more varied and vague interpretations. They therefore conclude that listening to a song rather than seeing it on video is far more stimulating to the imagination. As Sun and Lull’s (1986) analysis revealed, the visual aspect of videos was an important attraction for viewers because it was reported to add to the adolescents’ sense of the "meaning" of the song.

[Respondents see the images as "visual aids" or "pictorial translations" of the meaning of the various songs they represent. Some students said that videos give "more meaning" to a song than they themselves would conjure up or that the videos promote "a whole new meaning" or a "different perspective" on the meaning. (121)]

This perhaps supports the fear that rock videos pilfer the imagination with "prepackaged interpretations."

Watching rock videos may require different cognitive processes than watching other television genres. Blanchard-Fields, Coon and Matthews (1986) compared inferencing levels between adolescents and young adults for both rock music videos and a segment from a prime-time drama series, two genres distinguished by their level of "ambiguity and plot integrity." Information was coded into four levels; a report of fact-based observation (explicit material), an inference based on the segment (implicit material), an elaborate inference
They confirmed that the more complex and less structured video segments elicited a higher level of inferencing particularly among young adults. Results lead Blanchard-Fields, Coon and Matthews (1986) to the conclusion that watching rock videos involves a keen knowledge of the complex codes and structures of the genre and that it requires different and positive cognitive processes rather than simply reduce imagination. Similarly, Rubin et al. (1986) found music videos more potent than audio alone, which requires more active cognitive involvement (perhaps similar to McLuhan's (1964) understanding of a "hot" medium). Students in Sun and Lull's study (1986) said they could do other things when they listened to music, but the music television took all their attention.

**Textual Analyses of Madonna Videos**

This section will review some of the analyses of Madonna's earlier videos, and by way of example show how a semiotic textual analysis is accomplished. The *Express Yourself* video will be examined for its incorporation of the same textual devices mentioned here.

Lewis (1990) acknowledges that rock videos on the whole have a preferred address to male adolescents. Men have space and authority while women are presented primarily as the objects of male voyeurism. However, Lewis believes that within music television there is space for female address and that some videos do project lively and positive images of women. Female address occurs when "female-musician videos speak to and resonate with female cultural experiences of adolescence and gender" (Lewis 1990, 109).

Female address is achieved in two ways: through access and discovery signs. Access signs are those where women step into what is conventionally a privileged and male domain
and thereby symbolically appropriate both space and power. Discovery signs "celebrate distinctly female modes of cultural expression and experience" (Lewis 1990, 109) such as clothing and style that are generally devalued and trivialized under patriarchy.

Access signs argue for equal rights and recognition for women and girls by invoking images of sex-role reversals and gender utopias. Discovery signs, which rejoice in female forms of leisure and cultural expression, and female sources of female social bonding, attest to the value of women's culture, particularly culture as defined by female adolescents. (Lewis 1990, 110)

Fans celebrate autonomy in female stars like Madonna and the distinctively female language, dress, style, and imagery that they cultivate. For Lewis, MTV can assist in the development of a resistant culture. Lewis sees Madonna as a self-determined artist and business woman, the acknowledged author of her work and her image, and credits her with challenging gender stereotypes through her "appropriation and resignification of the standard of female representation" (Lewis 1990, 106).

In her Borderline video (1983), Madonna is seen defacing property with graffiti, dancing in the street and entering a pool hall: all specifically male activities and spaces. For Lewis, these access signs serve to accent and therefore question the typical representation of a woman on the street—"the prostitute. A second and contrasting image of woman invoked in the video is the fashion model which serves as an example of Lewis's discovery sign. Here, Madonna enacts a typical female fantasy as she poses for a fashion photographer. Further, when the model photographer tries to remove her hat she haughtily takes it back signifying her desire and ability to control her own image (Lewis 1990).

Lewis suggests that by referencing Marilyn Monroe in Material Girl (1984), Madonna comments on inequitable power relations and the "historical role of men in the careers of female culture producers" as "enforcer and guardian" (Lewis 1990, 132). Through the
obvious comparison to Monroe’s performance in *Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend* and the subtle and deliberate changes in the stage performance (such as knocking down a chorus boy), Madonna compels us to reflect backwards in time underscoring how female representations have changed and yet remained stagnant over time. The textual strategy of "two looks," the material girl (bad girl/slut) and the girl with wholesome values (nice girl/virgin), enunciates the line between image and true personality, "between star and ‘ordinary’ person." both on and off screen (Lewis 1990, 137).

In contrast to her previous "street-smart" images, Madonna plays a naive but assertive pregnant teenager in *Papa Don’t Preach* (1986). Lewis argues that the deliberately desexualized look is "extremely at odds" with a second overtly sexual image presented alternately in the video. Again, there is no question, the video attends to an issue many young female teenagers have thought about—pregnancy is a distinctly female representation. Lewis claims that the fact that Madonna stands up to her father "appeals to female-adolescent viewers’ desire to exercise more control over their bodies and lives" (Lewis 1990, 141).

*Open Your Heart* (1986), a video where Madonna performs a striptease act in a peep show, examines the male gaze and subtly exposes a repulsiveness of male voyeurism by connecting it with pornography and male sexual privilege. In the end, Madonna, dressed in a playfully androgynous fashion, escapes the clutches of a dirty old man. Because each image that Madonna creates resonates with some aspect of her own character but does not fully represent who she is, and because she constructs a new image for each new video. Lewis believes it allows Madonna "to become a critical narrator, to present the issues and problems of female representation without being completely enslaved by them" (Lewis 1990, 141).
Similarly, Fiske sees Madonna as the epitome of contradiction—accommodating patriarchal conceptions of feminine sexuality and yet shattering these images by self-assuredly indulging in her own constructions of feminine sexuality—ones that are indifferent to the expectations of men (Fiske 1989). Fiske argues that, consequently, Madonna’s self-love is not perceived as "egoistic" or "selfish" by her female fans.\(^{14}\) Instead, Madonna fans focus on her power and respond to her independence, her self-defining sexuality and her rule-breaking antics because it allows them to make their own meanings of feminine in the formation of their own identity outside patriarchy’s definition.

Fiske (1987b) describes the early commercial exploitation of the "Madonna-look" ("crucifix earrings, fingerless lace gloves, navel-exposing blouses") marketed to young girls as "a fine example of the capitalist pop industry at work" (Fiske 1987b, 271) an accurate account but insufficient for explaining Madonna’s wide appeal and ongoing popularity. Fiske attributes her accomplishment to "semiotic excess" or the ability for signs to simultaneously reference dominant ideologies and resistant ones.

Fiske delights in the semiotic ambiguity and irony of Madonna’s video texts and identifies several textual features such as excess, iconic manipulation, puns, and parody. He asserts that these textual features work to "interrogate" the dominant ideology (1987b; 1989). Just as Lewis suggests with Madonna’s textual strategy of "two looks," Fiske claims that Madonna faithfully parodies traditional binary (Madonna/whore) depictions of women and therefore challenges male hegemony.

\(^{14}\) Although Fiske states that he is doing ethnography by observing Madonna’s fans, listening to them, reading their letters sent to fanzines and watching the video fans made for Madonna’s "Make my Video" contest, and uses examples and quotes from those sources, he does not clearly specify the details of his methodology (Fiske, 1987b, 1989b).
His notion of excess is also somewhat comparable to Lewis' discovery sign. Fiske speaks of excessiveness primarily in terms of Madonna's garish clothing and style. By donning too much jewellery or too much lipstick, or wearing exaggerated cones or a bra on the outside of her clothes (all female expressions), Madonna evokes a satiric association with what is considered a tasteful presentation for women in patriarchy. Both Fiske (1989b) and Lewis (1990) draw attention to the proudly displayed dark roots of Madonna's obviously-dyed and sometimes platinum blonde hair. It thumbs its nose in the face of a masculine-subject position that perceives blondes as dumb and sexually loose. Madonna consistently wrests iconic images from their traditional connotations and puts them to use in another context. The most conspicuous is her democratic use of the crucifix "adopted from nuns' habits... worn on a barely concealed bosom or in a sexually gyrating navel" (Fiske 1989b, 103). All these transgress patriarchy's dichotomous virgin/whore conception of woman. Madonna refuses to succumb to either of the categories conceived by patriarchy and in this way defines her own sexuality. Fiske notes that while young female fans intuitively recognize this liberation they cannot elude the use the patriarchal words to describe their feelings. "She's tarty and seductive... but it looks alright when she does it... with her it's OK, it's acceptable" (Lucy, Nov. 1985 cited in Fiske 1989b, 98).

A pun is a playfully humorous or ironic use of a word that suggests different meanings; meanings that generally operate at different levels of discourse. Fiske demonstrates how various puns layered through the lyrics of Madonna's Like a Virgin (1985) can make sense in terms of "religion," "sexuality," "romantic love" and "street-wisdom"...

Thus, made it had the street-wise meaning of survived or came out on top, but also the sexual meaning of sexual conquest and, in its association with wilderness, echoes of Christ's survival and resistance of temptation. It is absent from the discourse of romantic love. Wilderness, too, is, in the
Thus, puns add the complexity and ambiguity of a text and invite readers to take part in the pleasure of recognizing the pun and choosing the meaning that best suits them. Boy Toy, one of Madonna's labels can therefore be interpreted as inverting the code of patriarchy or adhering to it. Fiske also points out some subtle puns in the lyrics of *Material Girl*.

Less obvious ones are "the boy with the cold hard cash," or "only boys that save their pennies make my rainy day" ("make" has only vestigial sexual meanings, and the homonym between "pennies" and "penis" is only faint). (Fiske 1987, 278)

As Harris (1992) notes, Barbara Bradby also focuses on puns in her psychoanalysis of the lyrics to Madonna's *Material Girl*. Her first interpretation of saving pennies is simply in the economic sense that mothers teach their children through piggy banks. Also "to save a penny" evokes its opposite "to spend a penny" which in the context of the nursery could refer to potty training and a mother expressing "approval of the boy who has learnt to pee in the appropriate situation" (cited in Harris 1992, 31). This interpretation serves to "buttress her theory that Madonna is not passive and victimized but in fact nurturing and motherly" (Harris 1992, 31).

Moreover, like Lewis, Fiske maintains Madonna's work continuously alludes to the manipulation of image and that her own body is the site of construction. Fiske's analysis of the video *Burning Up* (1983) comments on voyeurism and the power enjoyed by the possessor of the gaze. Madonna metaphorically confiscates this power with her gaze as the video progresses. A Greek statue whose eyes light up symbolizes the power men traditionally exert as voyeurs. Madonna is, at first, submissively lying on the road like a "helpless victim" as
her boyfriend speeds toward her in a car. Paradoxically, she directs her gaze straight into the camera, in effect, defying her subordinate position. By the end of the video, Madonna has taken over the driver's seat, has removed her sunglasses and she peers directly into the camera. The sunglasses have replaced her body on the road. This demonstrates Madonna's ability to have dominion over her own look which Fiske says includes "how she looks (what she looks like), how she looks (how she gazes at others, the camera in particular), and how others look at her" (Fiske 1989b, 112). In this way she makes her fans aware that they, too, can control their image and create their own identity and meanings of feminine sexuality in spite of the constraints of patriarchy.

Kaplan (1987; 1989) places Madonna video texts into what she calls a postmodern category because of the use of and subsequent violation of both texts and camera techniques from the past. She points out that Madonna's Material Girl video deviates from the conventions of the classical Hollywood film genre. Unusual camera techniques cause disorientation both in terms of address and space.

Traditionally, the gaze of the camera has, for the most part, reproduced the male gaze. The Monroe performance, Kaplan forwards, serves as an example of the typical Hollywood gaze that sets her up for "double articulation as spectacle for the male gaze" (Kaplan 1987, 239), for both the audience within and outside the film. Similarly, Material Girl begins by foregrounding a male gaze with a director previewing rushes of the female star's performance. But as the video progresses it is not clear whose gaze structures many of the shots in the video, and there are abrupt switches. For example, one of the scenes finally establishes itself in the dressing room of "Madonna I," the actress, after a close-up shot of a phone, and a hand
reaching in to pick up the receiver. The camera captures the actress speaking to a girlfriend over the phone.

As she speaks the camera behaves oddly (at least by standard Hollywood conventions), dollying back slowly to the door of her room, to reveal the poor director standing there. . . . At the moment the camera reaches him, the gaze certainly becomes his, and Madonna I is seen to be its object. (Kaplan 1987, 241)

Until the camera takes up the directors’ gaze, as Kaplan explains, there is confusion as to whose gaze it is. Furthermore Kaplan maintains that throughout the video it is not obvious whether a male or female discourse is dominant. In this respect, Kaplan is similar to Levi, who contends that the structure of music television precludes its ability to address an exclusively male audience. In fact, Kaplan claims that the confusion as to whose gaze structures the camera’s perspective serves to decentralize a male gaze. Kaplan says of Madonna—she is "neither particularly male- nor female-identified and seems mainly to be out for herself" (Kaplan 1987, 245).

Space, a concept related to gaze, is also treated in an unusual way in Material Girl, Kaplan (1987) argues. Unlike the Monroe performance, where there are only the two spaces of the stage and the theatre audience, the Madonna video constantly moves quite fluidly from space to space, again perhaps disorienting the viewer. The action begins in a screening room with two-men silhouetted in the film rushes of Madonna on the screen in the background.

The camera closes in on her face and on her seductive look first out to the camera, then sideways to the men around her. As the camera now moves into the screen, blurring the boundaries between screening room, screen, and the film set (the space of the performance that involves the story of the material girl, Madonna II, the "rehearsal" (if that is what is was) ends, and a rich lover comes onto the set with a large present for Madonna I. (Kaplan 1987, 240)

There is confusion as to whether we are still in the screening room since the projector is still whirring or whether we have entered the actual set for the performance since "we no longer
see the space around the frame, and thus the viewer is disoriented" (Kaplan 1987, 241). In this way, Kaplan demonstrates that Madonna "routinely violates" the conventions which she sets up by her reference to and intertextual use of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

However, unlike Fiske, who contends that Madonna uses parody to interrogate conventional representations of women, Kaplan (1989) sees Madonna's texts as more of a *pastiche*.

By this expression, Jameson means that whereas modernist texts often took a particular critical position vis a vis earlier textual models, ridiculing specific stances or attitudes in them or offering a sympathetic, comic perspective on them, post-modernist works tend to use *pastiche*, a mode that lacks any clear positioning toward what it shows or toward an earlier texts that are used. (Kaplan 1987, 238)

Although *Material Girl* references Marilyn Monroe playing a character whose own philosophy is that "diamonds are a girl’s best friend," Kaplan maintains that Madonna appears not to either critique or valorize this representation. Instead, she just uses it. On the visual track of Madonna's *Material Girl* there are two separate but linked stories corresponding with two polarized representations of woman. There is the gutsy, independent, and aggressive material girl (Madonna II) who only dates rich men and the actress/singer (Madonna I) who cares little of material things and at the end of the video gets together with the poor director. The connection, of course, is that the actress/singer plays the role of the material girl on stage. But the "material girl" narrative takes precedence only in terms of time and the fact that the soundtrack does not allude to a love relationship between the poor director and the actress. However, as Kaplan explains, "These discourses are not hierarchically arranged as in the usual Hollywood film, but, rather, are arranged along a horizontal axis, neither subordinated to the other" (Kaplan 1987, 243). Therefore, there can be confusion as to whether Madonna mocks by exaggeration or conforms to a stereotypical representation of woman.
Kaplan coincides with Fiske when she describes Madonna as a "far cry from the conventional 'patriarchal feminine'" (1987, 245), and attributes her popularity with young females to that.

It is perhaps Madonna's success in articulating and parading the desire to be desired in an unabashed, aggressive, gutsy manner (as against the self-abnegating urge to lose oneself in the male that is evident in the classical Hollywood film) that attracts the hordes of twelve-year-old fans that idolize her and crowd her concerts. (Kaplan 1987, 245)

Kaplan claims that young women can use strategies learned from Madonna to protest authority figures, particularly by manipulating their look because image is central to identity.

Like Kaplan, Schwichtenberg (1992, 120) also sees Madonna exercising "postmodern strategies of representation" but sees that she does so in order to disassemble the conventional boundaries and polarities of sex and gender. She claims the video text Express Yourself is more conducive to readings by "marginalized 'others' such as gay men and lesbians" (1992, 120) because Madonna makes use of "sexually loaded signifiers," referencing anything from "S/M to gay male pornography" and incorporates "political stylistics that appeal to lesbians" (1992, 122). For Schwichtenberg, Madonna is an illustration of a woman who playfully plays the part of a woman. Consequently, this post-modern positioning makes "gender and sex increasingly appear to be areas of fashion and style rather than biology and identity" (Chapkis, cited in Schwichtenberg 1992, 124).

McClary (1991) comments that most textual analyses focus on the visual aspects of Madonna videos. In contrast, McClary explores the songs of Madonna in terms of their musical signification (i.e. Open your Heart and Like a Prayer) and finds that while there is "nothing essentially feminine" (McClary 1991, 161) about her tactics, they do tend to break
with typically masculine and feminine musical procedures and therefore may have ideological implications.

Madonna’s means of negotiating for a voice in rock resemble very much the strategies of her visual constructions; that is, she evokes a whole range of conventional signifiers and then causes them to rub up against each other in ways that are open to a variety of divergent readings . . . (McClary 1991, 154)

She makes the case that masculine musical cadences (endings) generally serve to purge and contain the more feminine thematic interjections that create plot in much of music. Madonna’s music, however, offers "musical structures that promise narrative closure" but then avert that conformity.

Harris (1992) points out that Melanie Morton also claims that Madonna’s melodies thwart ideological closure by subverting established but oppressive tonal hierarchies. Express Yourself, in particular, challenges or "takes as its object the general logic and various practices of domination most prevalent in Western culture"—patriarchy, racism, and capitalism (Harris 1992, 33).

Harris (1992) charges that theory tends to drive and shape research when he says that there is a different Madonna for "virtually every theoretical stripe":

the Lacanian Madonna of Marjorie Garber, who says that the singer’s recent tendency to squeeze her crotch like a man while singing "emblematize[s] the Lacanian triad of having, being and seeming"; the Foucauldian Madonna of Charles Wells, who claims that in her videos she "is instructing us with a Foucauldian flair in the "end of women"; the Baudrillardian Madonna of Kathy (sic) Schwichtenberg who reads "Madonna’s figuration against the backdrop of Baudrillardian theory"; or the Marxist Madonna of Melanie Morton, who says that Madonna single-handedly undermines "capitalist constructions" and "rejects core bourgeois epistemes." (Harris 1992, 30-31)

He sees the recent upsurge in academic studies of popular culture and the cooptation of Madonna (as popular culture incarnate) as driven by "professional factors within the academy—specifically, by many academics’ desire to prove their social relevance" (Harris 1992, 31).
Harris claims that academics as a "marginalized" group inappropriately apply tactics of high-brow analysis to low-brow popular culture assuming a complexity that deserves scrutiny. In the process, instead of experiencing any genuine pleasure from pop culture, academics "sentimentalize" and "overinterpret" pop culture products so that Madonna's "Top 40" hits take on the potential to "radicalize the huddled masses by providing quiescent MTV viewers with a subversive forum within the mainstream itself where socially conscious performers can actively challenge reactionary patriarchal ideologies" (Harris 1992, 31).

Despite the fact that Madonna's videos would likely be coded as highly sexual, violent, and perhaps sexist in many content analyses, and despite sophisticated meanings attributed to Madonna's texts and the potential identified for resisting patriarchal ideologies, there have been few research projects to find out how actual audiences interpret Madonna.

**Audience Studies: Interpreting Madonna's Music Videos**

Brown and Schulze (1990) compared audience interpretations of two Madonna videos, *Papa Don't Preach* and *Open Your Heart*, using a quantitative survey method and demonstrated that viewers who were divided along the axes of race, gender and fandom did in fact decode the videos distinctively. Brown and Schulze attribute this to different experiential and cultural understandings—which (for the video *Papa Don't Preach*) rested on different connotations of the word *baby*. Black students regarded the video as a young woman's relationship with her father as it evolved when she became romantically involved with her boyfriend. "I'm keeping my baby" in this instance, meant she was asserting her independence as a young woman and severing ties with her father. White students tended to
interpret the video in terms of the internal conflict a young woman experiences when she finds herself unexpectedly pregnant and decides to keep her baby.

However, for the most part, readings from all groups fell well within the boundaries of what could be considered dominant, if somewhat rebellious of authority; both interpretations could be considered traditional narratives. In their concluding remarks Brown and Schulze (1990) call for "further critical interpretation" and "deeper empirical investigation," suggesting that ethnographic studies of fans and music video viewers would enable researchers to learn more about how audiences use popular media in developing their own understandings of sexuality and sexual pleasure. This study undertakes such an investigation.

**Resistance--Other Popular Media Genres**

There is ample evidence that audiences are active and do decode media texts differently, but empirical evidence of the audience's critical abilities and their ability to engage in resistant reading practices is still fairly sparse. The following studies, although they do not examine music television, specifically investigate resistance and together shed light on different kinds and levels of resistances.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Morley’s (1980) seminal research in cultural studies of audience decodings of the television programme, "Nationwide," stressed class as the parameter for decodings. He found that people from different classes decoded the current affairs programme in various ways which often fell along class lines, but that decoding distinctions were not clear-cut; he concluded that the practice of interpretation was a complex set of processes, and that Hall’s (1980) categories (preferred, negotiated and oppositional) did not
encompass the gamut of reading possibilities. He did, however, find that people who held oppositional positions in the social stratum were more likely to engage in resistant practice.

Liebes and Katz (1989; 1990) investigated the critical reading practices of "Dallas" by six culturally diverse groups of people (American Jews, Moroccan Jews, Russian Jews, kibbutz Jews, Arabs and Japanese) who were asked to watch the program and relay what the programme meant to them. Responses were analyzed in terms of the viewer’s critical abilities operationally defined into three categories: semantics, syntactics and pragmatics. The first two "relate to the viewer’s awareness of the text as a construction": semantic referred to the ability to perceive themes, messages or issues, and syntactic referred to the ability to recognize genres or formulas. Pragmatics, the third category, related "to the viewer’s awareness of the processing of the program by her or his cognitive, affective and social self" (Liebes and Katz 1989, 204-205).

Liebes and Katz found that "the forms of opposition were diverse" (1989, 218) and developed a typology to explain their findings. Viewers could be critical of the media product using different frames of involvement (referential, critical) and different modes of involvement (hot, cool). Referential referred to the circumstance where the viewer accepted the message as reality, considered aspects of the program in terms of their own real life situations and argued with it; critical meant that viewers saw a program as a "construction of an ideological message." and their pleasure was based on applying a variety of critical mechanisms to the program. Liebes and Katz defined hot statements as those "that [were] emotionally loaded, while the cool [were] more cognitive" (1990, 109). Thus their typology for oppositional readings included four forms of involvement:

The combination referential/hot may produce moral opposition to the content of the program, while critical/hot, through awareness of the manipulative
construction of the message, may produce what we have called ideological opposition. Within the cool mode, referential/cool is associated with the ludic, and critical/cool may produce aesthetic opposition. (Liebes and Katz 1990, 128)

Some viewers--like the Japanese, where "Dallas" did not become popular--did not relate to the program at all because it was incongruous with models of society they knew, and it also violated their expectations of the genre. Liebes and Katz (1989; 1990) concluded that different groups of people were more competent with some forms of critical awareness than other groups and more vulnerable in other respects.

Each cultural group found its own way to 'negotiate' with the program -- different types of readings, different forms of involvement, different mechanisms of self-defence, each with its own kind of vulnerability. We found only very few innocent minds and a variety of "villages." (Liebes and Katz 1990, v).

Viewers could accept the ideology while being critical of its aesthetics or oppose the ideology "while remaining uncritical of the construction . . . [C]ritical readings [did] not necessarily constitute a defense against ideology" (1989, 222).

Radway (1984) studied the reading practices of romance readers. She found that, although romance novels, which are structured in patriarchy, offered "womanly subtexts" that were available for readings against the grain, female readers relied "on standard cultural codes" (1984) and reproduced the dominant ideology in their interpretations. Women did identify with strong female characters and reported that they were subsequently sometimes more assertive to husbands. Most importantly, Radway found that "progressive" potential rested in the act of reading, which was itself a resistant practice since readers were aware romance novels were ridiculed by husbands and society as worthless low culture, but read them anyway. Romance readers, however, are not consciously aware that by sitting down to
read a romance novel they resist the patriarchal structures that require them to be selfless in their roles as wives and mothers.

In her study of "Dallas," Ang (1985) investigated the relationship between pleasure and ideology and focused on how the programme was received by its viewers. Letters from viewers explaining why they either liked or disliked "Dallas" formed the empirical basis of her study. Ang found the viewers who liked "Dallas" were attracted to what she terms "the tragic structure of feeling," defined as the never-ending (and thus tragic) emotional oscillations that are structured into the text. Viewers tended to pay attention to the connotative elements in the story (the symbolic emotional level such as happiness, sadness, etc.), finding them quite realistic while overlooking the more unrealistic or denotative elements in the story.

Ang found the content of "Dallas" largely complicit with patriarchal hegemony, which leaves both Pamela and Sue Ellen, who represent different perspectives on the roles of women, "trapped in an all-embracing patriarchal structure" (1985, 130). The audience received pleasure from recognizing and confirming melodramatic sentiments that were congruent with dominant ideology. However, Ang says it seems "impossible to ascertain whether the pleasure of 'Dallas' . . . is intrinsically progressive or conservative, and therefore politically good or bad" (1985, 135), because the pleasure of engaging in the fantasy of fiction lies perhaps precisely in its "fictional character" and is not necessarily connected with "real life"--political consciousness or social practice. Ang concludes that it may therefore be irrelevant to "use popular fiction as a means for enhancing a critical awareness of social reality" (1987, 657). Instead, Ang believes it would be more productive (in terms of feminist cultural politics) to celebrate and legitimate the activity of watching soap operas as an
experience that women share just as men enjoy sports. In this way, popular fictive soap operas could perhaps "fulfil a subversive role" (1987, 658).

Condit (1989) showed a "Cagney and Lacey" episode that dealt with the issue of abortion to two college students who were involved in organizations active in the abortion controversy and who stood on opposite sides of the pro-life/pro-choice issue. Condit found that both viewers shared a basic understanding of the denotations of the text, but that readings were notably different. Condit attributes the variation in interpretations to different values held by viewers and therefore different evaluations of the presentation and of the characters. She asserts that resistance is largely dependent on the existence of alternative and oppositional frameworks and that resistant reading practices are found more easily among audiences that have access to counter-rhetorics. She found that dominant readings were privileged, that it took much more work to read oppositionally and that oppositional reading was actually less pleasurable. Condit points to the "need for research to assess the typicality of oppositional readings" by "comparing audiences with different access to oppositional codes on a particular topic and from studies of the relative degrees of oppositionality in typical decodings" (1989, 111). She also raises the question as to how one determines the dominant or preferred reading, arguing that in this episode the pro-choice (feminist) position was favoured.

Steiner (1988) used the "No Comment" section in Ms. Magazine as her object of analysis. "No Comment" is a section devoted to reprinted excerpts submitted to the magazine by its readers. These excerpts, from various mainstream media, were ones that readers found to be objectionable or debasing to women--"to rhetorically construct 'women' as not only different from but less than 'men'" (Steiner 1988, 2). The submissions to "No Comment" provide an example of how audiences actively decode and recode messages--creatively
deconstructing the "constructed but still polysemic text distributed by the dominant culture" (Steiner 1988, 2). Steiner views the actions of these readers to be an act of resistance as well as an identification of their social group to which they feel they belong. "Ms. readers articulate their own cultural style and identity, in part, by pointing to these examples of styles and identities they repudiate" (Steiner 1988, 2).

Steiner asserts that resistive readings, of course, do not directly affect the encoding process nor do they necessarily have an progressive transformative effect; however, she maintains the symbolic world of communities is worth investigating. She outlines a number of reasons why resistant practice is important particularly to a resistant group: it provides "minor catharsis" therapy; it gives "shape and meaning to the group experiences"; it aids in the articulation and development of an oppositional framework as well as identity; and it encourages commitment to the "oppositional vision" (Steiner 1988, 11). All of these components work to sustain and strengthen social identity and a strong commitment that would be required in the transformation of ideological systems.

Together, these studies illuminate the complexity of resistant reading practices and certainly demonstrate that there are different forms and levels of resistance which also entail different levels of consciousness of the ideological messages in texts. The act of reading includes an array of activities such as selection, interpretation, valuation, involvement, comprehension and cultural competence. The intensity and coherency of the viewer's ideology or belief system circumscribes the reading practice.

73
CHAPTER 4--METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the methodology for the thesis, describing the quantitative component, the survey questionnaire, which was used to select the young women who would participate in the ethnographic interview, the qualitative component of the thesis. The first section outlines the logic and the findings of the survey as well as the criteria for choosing interview participants. The second section of the chapter describes the rationale for and steps taken in the ethnographic interviews. This section also includes a critical review of the ethnographic method commenting on the quality of the interview data. The final segment in the chapter recounts the data analysis procedures.

Audience Study

Critical analyses frequently devote attention to textual characteristics of hegemonic mass media and their role in shaping audience interpretations, but they seldom concentrate on the signifying practices of real audience groups (Steiner 1988). Despite sophisticated readings of texts by the social science or critical community, one cannot assume that these readings reflect those of a typical viewer whose social reality differs from the academic critic (Morley 1989). Therefore, there is a need to focus on the actual audience to chart the relationship between audience decodings and their historical, social, and cultural context (Carragee 1990).

The cultural studies approach is not universalist and does not tacitly assume objectivity; responses are not independent of the social and historical context in which they
are made (Sholle 1991; Morley 1989). In contrast to traditional audience analyses, scholars working in cultural studies have emphasized the need to investigate groups of people and thus differentiate themselves from the "uses and gratification" approach, which tends to characterize individuals by their psychological attributes. As Morley notes, the uses and gratification approach "remains severely limited by its insufficiently sociological or cultural perspective, insofar as everything is reduced to the level of variations of individual psychology" (Morley 1989, 17). The uses and gratification perspective fails to consider that individuals are socially formed and have histories; it does not study the ways in which the media form and reflect cultural values or patterns of communication. Differences in interpretation should not be "just seen as expressions of different needs, uses or readings, but are connected with the way in which historical subjects are structurally positioned in relation to each other" (Ang 1989, 109). To address these concerns, scholars working from a cultural studies framework employ the ethnographic interview method to study audience reception among small numbers of people and deliberate on how audience decodings are linked to broader social categories. The ethnographic method is used to empirically investigate audience readings of cultural artifacts which is fundamentally more appropriate than just imagining or deducing what the audience’s response would be based on the text (Morley 1989).

My qualitative empirical study focusses on gender portrayals in an attempt to better understand how representations are interpreted by female audience members who differ in
their attitudes about feminism. A structured questionnaire was used to select interview participants on the basis of more or less feminist attitudes. The ethnographic interview was the method employed to investigate how the video text *Express Yourself* was used by the selected audience, what meanings they actually constructed in their interaction with the video, and whether any of the readings could be considered resistant. It attempted to tie patterns of meaning construction to both social positioning and textual characteristics.

Research Sample Selection

For both practical and contextual reasons, female students in their first year of university were the focus of this study. The practical reasons for their selection included their accessibility, their age for informed consent and their ability to provide relatively unseasoned reactions to the Madonna video, since their views would not likely, as yet, have been contaminated by their media studies. For contextual reasons, these women were selected because of their presumed familiarity with Madonna and their shared experience and sex with the researcher. They would also have been adolescents in the process of forming gender ideologies and practices when Madonna became popular in 1983. It was expected that interview sessions would be more dynamic and fruitful, if both researcher and participants were female. For female researchers, their own "status as women and [their] activation of specific patterns of gendered communication emerge as the most decisive factors for the developing interlocutions" (Seiter et al. 1989, 243).

---

15 A description of the research project, the questionnaire, and the interview topic outline were submitted and approved by the departmental ethics committee, before the actual "research involving human subjects" began (See Cattaneo, Lewis, Muldoon, Wong-Rieger and Smedick 1989).
Women may be more likely than men to identify with or find relevance in this video and to detect and offer some interpretation of the gender politics present in the text. *Express Yourself* operates on a number of interpretive levels which work interdependently and thus offers a contradictory image of woman, invoking at once a devalued perception of woman and an appealing one of strength in resisting subordination.

Most importantly, women are likely to experience inequitable treatment based on gender within patriarchal society and therefore are potential subjects for negotiated or oppositional video readings.¹⁶ And finally, these young women have grown up in the context of, first, the feminist movement, which has thrown the previously conventional expectations and roles of men and women into question, and more recently, an anti-feminist backlash. Against this background, their interpretations of Madonna should be revealing.

The selected group of women, relative to men, is a marginalized group because they are situated within patriarchy and are subject to its inequitable though "naturalized" treatment. However, these women are advantaged relative to other women, in that they attend university; they have thus far demonstrated the ambition and the ability to succeed in the educational system.

The selected sample is a purposive non-probability sample, and these women are more likely than the general population, to read this text subversively or be receptive to a possible empowering message in the video. These are bright women who have an interest in and are presently enrolled in at least one media studies class. Moreover, they may have been exposed to feminism within the university setting. This study therefore makes no claim that the

¹⁶ The expectations for the greater likelihood of resistant readings among marginalized groups was based on numerous studies.
sample is representative or that the results are, in a sampling-theoretic sense, generalizable. However, the results of this study can be used to support or refute the claim of cultural studies that audiences construct oppositional or resistant readings of popular culture media products.

**Interview Sample**

The structured questionnaire was administered to students in three sections of introductory Communication Studies classes at the University of Windsor (See Appendix III). Professors teaching the introductory communication courses were approached and permission to give the questionnaire during class time secured. In the first class, only female students were asked to fill out the questionnaire; at the request of one of the professors, a revised but parallel questionnaire was provided for male students in the other two sections. Of the 128 people who filled out the questionnaire, 81 were women and 47 were men. Factors assessed included exposure to and attitudes toward music television, extra-curricular involvement, exposure to and knowledge of feminist issues and general demographics. Based on the results, a purposive sample of sixteen women was chosen for in-depth interviews; eight who scored at the high end of a scale which indicated a feminist orientation and eight who

\[\text{17 Five questions had to be revised to make them applicable to men. For example, one of the Likert-type questions "Sometimes I get angry because, as a woman, I feel I am not free to walk or jog alone on the streets after dark" was reworded to "Sometimes I get angry because women feel they are not free to walk or jog alone on the streets after dark."}

\[\text{18 The male responses will not be analyzed extensively, since women are the focus of the study. However, the results from men's surveys will be discussed briefly in the section on the general demographics of the sample.}\]
scored in the lowest quarter of the scale indicating that they were least conscious of feminist
issues or were more traditional in their views.19

Selection Instrument--The Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire (see Appendix II) fulfilled three major objectives in the
study. Most importantly, it facilitated the selection of the interview groups primarily by their
responses to 19 Likert-type questions which formed a scale measuring a more traditional or
feminist orientation. The questionnaire also enabled comparisons between the different groups
within the study and provided general information about the sample allowing comparisons
with results of other music television studies.

Questionnaire Design

The introductory paragraph of the questionnaire was intentionally vague to avoid
sensitizing respondents to its central purpose, which was to assess feminist consciousness
(knowledge and exposure to feminism), as well as to avoid instilling any preconceptions of
the interview. Accordingly, the paragraph began with a very general account, stating that the
purpose was to find out about the students' music television viewing habits, how they felt
about music television and their attitudes toward women and society. Students were also

19 The scale was set up to measure the orientation of an individual as more traditionalist
or more feminist, not to fit into either of these categories in an objective sense and
furthermore not to fit into a specific theoretical feminist frame (i.e liberal, marxist, radical or
post-structural/socialist). The most feminist women in this sample are certainly not women
who would be considered most feminist on a wider continuum; primarily because of their age
they lack exposure and a "sophisticated" level of knowledge thus rendering strict
categorizations irrelevant. Within the sample of 81 women surveyed, the 16 women selected
are likely the most extreme in their views; 8 the most traditional and 8 the most feminist.
informed that questionnaire results would be used to select participants for a follow-up interview, that participation in the interviews would also be voluntary and that any information they provided would be kept confidential.

The survey began with questions about music television habits, including how often students watched music television, what programs they watched, with whom they watched it, how they usually decided when to watch music television and how long they watched at one sitting. The purpose was to find out how widely used this form of programming was within the group and to be able to select some interview participants who watched music television regularly and some who did not. These easy-to-answer closed-ended questions were positioned at the beginning of the questionnaire to encourage respondents to continue.

A set of open-ended questions followed asking participants for their opinion of music television, why they liked or disliked watching music television, and whether music videos gave them a clearer understanding of popular songs. Participants were also asked to list their favourite female music video recording artists, a question included specifically to identify Madonna fans. I wanted to find out if fans of Madonna were more likely to be traditional or feminist thinking, and I wanted to be able to include fans in the study to explore Fiske’s assertion that fans of Madonna are responding to her in a resistant fashion.

Next, a few questions were included about the respondent’s involvement in possibly empowering social or extra-curricular activities such as student government, volunteer work, and leisure time hobbies. Many of these questions were open-ended as indicators of whether individuals would be good interview candidates, judging by how willing they were to provide information.

80
The line of questioning then turned to the respondent's knowledge, understanding and attitudes about feminism. A set of nineteen Likert-type questions was incorporated to indicate the degree to which respondents held feminist values. The main themes were career opportunities and expectations, division of labour in household or child-rearing responsibilities, issues of sexuality, and violence against women. Other questions dealt with the influence of female figures, preferred forms of address, exposure to information about women's issues, and personal experience of sexual discrimination or harassment. These questions were positioned next to last in the questionnaire format because, while this section was crucial to the study, it was likely to be the most controversial and I wanted to avoid setting up interview expectations.

Finally, for purposes of comparison, general demographic questions such as age, parents' level of education and occupation (socio-economic status of the family), religious affiliation and devotion, political interest, ethnic background, and status in the Communication Studies program were included. The questionnaire was long, and it was anticipated that students might begin to lose interest as they neared the end. Demographic questions were placed at the end, because they are "easy" and thus achieve high completion rates. The last question asked students to indicate whether or not they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview.
The revised final questionnaire\textsuperscript{20} was introduced in the lecture periods by reading the first paragraph on the questionnaire. It was made clear that participation in the survey itself was on a voluntary basis. As expected, it took students approximately 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Selection of Interview Participants

The 19 Likert scale questions (see Table 1) tested respondents' knowledge about and identification with feminist aspirations and objectives. Together, these items were expected to form a scale measuring the degree to which respondents held feminist values. Nine Likert-type questions were recoded to reverse the values so that an average score of feminist consciousness for each participant could be constructed with 1 representing the least feminist and 7 the most feminist position. A reliability test was conducted to determine which items formed a scale to be included in calculating each participant's average "feminism" score. When both male and female responses were included, 10 of 19 items had to be eliminated in order to obtain an alpha of .7062. However, among female responses alone, only 3 of 19 items had to be dropped from the scale to reach an alpha of .7185. This is an indication that males and females responded to the questions quite differently and that responses were more reliable or more "constrained" (coherently organized) for women--most likely because they find women's issue more salient.

\textsuperscript{20} A pilot version of the questionnaire was administered to eight volunteers in a second year research methods class in Communication Studies to discover possible problems with the questionnaire design. Some improvements were made after analysis of the data and a discussion with volunteers. Revisions included repositioning questions, providing more space for open-ended responses and comments, deleting Likert scale questions that lacked variance or were invalid, clearing up ambiguous wording and generally shortening the questionnaire.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>Feminist Mean</th>
<th>Feminist SD</th>
<th>Traditional Mean</th>
<th>Traditional SD</th>
<th>All Mean</th>
<th>All SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Nowadays, men and women generally earn the same wage for doing similar jobs. (+)</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c)</strong> Affirmative action discriminates against men. (+)</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) I support affirmative action.</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>i) It is necessary to pass legislation that men and women receive the same wage for doing similar work.</strong></td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>6.82</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>a) A woman who was a homemaker during her marriage should be entitled to half of all financial resources in a divorce settlement.</strong></td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Division of Labour re: child-care responsibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) A father and mother should equally share the responsibility for child-rearing.</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td>6.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>q) When both partners work outside the home, a husband should take time off work to care for his sick child as often as his wife.</strong></td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>i) I would most likely break up with a man I loved if staying with him meant I could not pursue my career goals.</strong></td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) Even career women should set as their first priority, taking care of the home. (+)</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**a) Once hired, men and women have the same opportunity for advancement. (+)</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violence Against Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b) Sometimes I get angry because, as a woman, I feel I am not free to walk or jog alone on the streets after dark.</strong></td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**g) Women who dress sexually put themselves in a position to be sexually assaulted. (+)</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**q) When a man rapes a woman, he is usually responding to frustrated sexual desires. (+)</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>p) The shooting of 14 women by Marc Lepage at the University of Montreal is indicative of a wider problem of male violence against women.</strong></td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**q) Wife beating is most likely to happen in low income families. (+)</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**i) The feminist movement has, for the most part, achieved its goals. (+)</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Items not included in calculation of the average "Feminism" Score

**a) I would like to work for several years to establish my career before even considering marriage or having a family.** | 4.00 | 4.68 | 4.38 | 4.33 | 4.70 | 4.87 |

**c) I think it's fine for a woman to model for a swim suit calendar if she chooses. (+) | 3.63 | 3.32 | 3.00 | 2.67 | 2.75 | 1.66 |

**b) It is important for women to have places that are separate from men (i.e. all-female organizations, schools) in order to better develop so their potential.** | 4.13 | 3.41 | 3.63 | 3.75 | 3.51 | 3.59 |

Average "Feminism" Score (out of 7) | 6.20 | 6.05 | 4.37 | 4.39 | 5.22 | 4.55 |

Number in Sample | (8) | (22) | (8) | (24) | (11) | (47) |

# = with the largest range  
* = Men are significantly different from women at p<.05.  
** = Men are significantly different from women at p<.01.  
(+) = Recoded items - Values were reversed for inclusion in "Feminism Scale"
Of the three items deleted, two were anticipated to be questionable indicators of feminist values for these young women. The first dropped item asked about the necessity for women's space separate from men; agreement would tend to indicate a radical feminist perspective, unlikely to be readily found in women in this age group. The second deleted item asked respondents to establish a priority for "a career" against a relationship and family. Probably, women (like men) would like both and were not willing to explicitly put off one for the other. The wording in the third item may have made it invalid: "I think it's fine for a woman to model for a swim suit calendar if she chooses." Participants were, perhaps, responding to the phrase "if she chooses," giving most weight to the issue of women's freedom while missing the issue of patriarchal control because it is obscured by the "language of choice, the language of feminism" (Green 1992, 167).

The remaining sixteen statements were included in the calculation of an average Feminist Score for each participant. The four Likert statements that received the most feminist response among all women surveyed addressed the economic issues of pay equity and divorce entitlements as well as division of labour with respect to child care responsibility. Mid-range questions were mostly about violence against women. In contrast, the Likert scales that received the least feminist response along with the widest range had to do with

---

21 According to Jagar (1983), radical feminists seek to eliminate all the root causes of women's systematic oppression. Human biology and gender are conceived as dichotomous constructions imposed on multi-sexual beings and used as a form of domination. Sex class is considered the primary source of all other oppression and so deeply engrained as to appear natural (biological); thus radical feminists celebrate women's distinctiveness (often scorned by men) as a deconstructive measure. Since men and women do not begin at the same position in terms of power, feminists see that change would require struggle. Jagar explains that a distinctive feature of radical feminism is the belief that women's liberation can best be accomplished by separate and autonomous women's organizations and social arrangements that seek to develop women's potential, not by confronting men.
knowledge about the present status of women in the work world. These young women were more likely to be under the impression that women do earn the same as men for similar work and have the same opportunity for advancement. Hence, they were also more likely to agree that affirmative action discriminates against men and that the feminist movement has achieved its goals. This falls in line with the anti-feminist backlash that claims that feminism is no longer needed since equality has been reached in the work force. These women may not as yet have experienced the repressive inequities that the work world exposes them to.

Knowledge about reality seems to set individuals apart and play a role in promoting feminist values. Another question with a wide range of responses (though the mean was above the midpoint) was the notion that a woman does not put herself in a sexual assault position—that rape is an issue of power and not linked directly to a women’s overt sexuality. This perhaps indicates the deep-rootedness of patriarchal conceptions of sexuality.

To select participants for the ethnographic study, respondents were listed in descending order of their feminist scale scores, along with other responses thought pertinent for selection including willingness to participate in a follow-up study. The highest score for women on the feminist scale was 6.69 out of 7, the lowest 3.69. For men, 5.88 was the highest score and 3.31 the lowest.

Beginning with the highest feminism score, women in the top quarter were scrutinized for inclusion in the interview as long as they fit within the specified parameters below. The process continued until 10 women were designated as the potential interview group of most feminist women. This procedure was repeated in the bottom quarter, beginning with the respondent scoring lowest on the feminism scale, until 10 women were selected as the potential interview group with the least feminist consciousness.
The first criterion for selection was whether respondents were willing to participate in a follow-up study and listed their telephone numbers. All but 1 respondent in the most feminist quarter (20 respondents) indicated their willingness to be interviewed. However, in the least feminist quarter, only 10 of the 20 respondents reported they were willing to participate: It was therefore much more difficult to find women in the traditional group interested in participating in this research. Traditional women did not seem to want to be associated with the study, perhaps indicating the degree of negativity that the issue of feminism inspires, even though the questionnaire was intended to be unobtrusive. Of course, those who said they did not want to participate were not asked to be the interviewed.

The second criterion was that the respondents have an understanding of the concept of feminism. One non-Canadian respondent, ranked within the traditional quartile, clearly mistook the word feminist for feminine, as her response was that a feminist was a woman who wore "heavy make-up," "dressed very sexily," and was "timid." Additionally, only women who were in their first year at university and who had taken or were presently enrolled in no more than two communication courses were selected. Finally, all but one of the participants selected were between the ages of 18 to 21.22

---

22 In order to find women who met all the criteria and agreed to be interviewed, it was necessary to move down the order, from most to least feminist, through 16 respondents (which did not exhaust the quarter). On the other hand, among the least feminist respondents, it was necessary to move upward through 22 questionnaires (the full bottom quarter and into the second quarter) to find 8 suitable women.
Contacting Participants--Participation Rate

Once a list was compiled, potential interview participants were contacted by telephone, given a general and consistent account of what would transpire during the interview and were invited to take part. Each person was informed that, if interested, she and one other person who had filled out the questionnaire would meet with me at my home for about an hour and fifteen minutes. They were told that we would first discuss their opinion of rock videos in more detail, that a specific video would then be shown, and that we would talk about what this particular video meant to them.

All nine women contacted in the most feminist group agreed to take part in the interview; one of them postponed until the new year, her interview was eventually cancelled. On the other hand, in the traditional group, twelve women had to be contacted before eight would consent to the interview. Two women refused outright, another first agreed to an interview but later cancelled, and the fourth consented to the interview but did not return repeated calls to set up an interview time. The higher refusal or drop-out rate within the traditional quartile corresponding with high number of individuals in that group not willing to participate might be expected to affect the sample; however, the average feminism score for the interview sample of traditionalists is still lower than the mean for the traditional quartile as a whole. The feminist and traditional interview samples were in fact slightly more extreme on their respective ends of the scale than the entire feminist and traditional quartiles.

Description of the Sample and Interview Participants

General Demographics--Women

Over three quarters (78%) of the sample of 81 women surveyed are in the first year of their studies at the university and 85 percent have taken or are presently enrolled in one or
two communication courses (see Table 2). Most students (82%) are between the ages of 18 and 22 with the typical student being 20 years old. The highest level of education for 37.5 percent of the sample’s mothers and 36 percent of the fathers was high school. However, the median for mothers was some post-secondary training while the median for the father was high school: more men had only grade school education, perhaps reflecting Windsor’s auto industry employment with the high number of unskilled blue collar workers. Both parents had an equal amount of education for 38 percent of the sample with the remaining 62 percent split almost evenly—the mother had more education for 32 percent of the sample, the father for the other 30 percent.

Just over half the female participants (57%) grew up in a mid-sized city (mostly Windsor) and almost all (92%) are from Ontario. Only 10 percent report no religious affiliation, but the remainder is not particularly devoted, as approximately half (54%) either never pray or only pray on occasion. Over half (57%) of all the women maintained they were interested in politics. Interestingly, those with feminist values were more interested in politics than those with traditional views: almost three quarters (72%) of the women, in the most feminist quartile, reported being interested in politics while only 46 percent in the least feminist quartile did (which was lower than the women overall). Of the 31 percent that were involved in student government, just over half were students representatives and the rest was part of the executive. Seventy-five percent of the women noted their willingness to participate in a follow-up study, 28 percent of them indicating some hesitation (perhaps).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Feminist</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Quart.</td>
<td>Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yrs.</td>
<td>yrs.</td>
<td>yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3a</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3b</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother's Education higher</td>
<td>Father's Education higher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10a</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10b</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13r</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14r</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perhaps</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number in Sample</td>
<td>(8) (22) (8) (24) (81) (47)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Tri-modal
High = secondary/ high school
Post = some post-secondary education
Grad = graduate or professional degree
General Demographics--Men

While there are a few demographic differences between the men and women surveyed, most are not statistically significant:\(^21\) the students can be considered a relatively homogeneous group. The typical age for men in the sample was 22, slightly higher than the typical woman's age of 20; men also tended to be a little farther along in their university program (second year). Also reflected in the percentages was the stereotype of men being slightly more interested in politics and less likely to acknowledge a religious affiliation than women. A similar number (60%), however, reported never praying or only praying occasionally. Men's parents were a little more likely to have an equal education level, and their mothers were less likely to have more education than their fathers, perhaps signalling the importance of role models for the decision to attend university. The only statistically significant difference was that men were less likely to have worked as volunteers--60 percent compared to 78 percent of the women.

General Demographics--Interview Sample

As noted in the discussion earlier, interview participants were selected according to several specified criteria: they were all in their first year of university, enrolled in one or two communication courses and all but one between the ages of 18 to 21. They are very similar to the sample as a whole.

\(^{21}\)Since the study used a purposive and not a random sample, it is technically inappropriate to perform tests of significance. They were used solely to "flag" the more noteworthy differences, not for any kind of hypothesis testing and thus inferences beyond the sample.
Visible minorities make up one quarter of the interview sample with two in each of the feminist and traditional groups, whereas only 13 percent of the total sample including men and women are visible minorities. Both the feminist and traditional groups interviewed were slightly more interested in politics (12 of 16 or 75% compared to 57% of the women overall), to have worked as a volunteer (14 of 16 or 88% compared to 77%) and to have been involved in student government (8 of 16 or 50% compared to 21%), perhaps showing that the interview group as a whole is more active politically than the rest of the sample, which also may explain, in part, their participation in the interview.

Compared to the sample, as a whole, feminist interview participants were more likely to have had strong female role models with respect to education: three reported their mother as having a higher education level, the other five had mother and father with equal education. In contrast, the traditional group had more traditional homes with four fathers having more education than mothers, three with equal education and only one whose mother had more education.

Music Television Habits—Women

Almost one fifth (19%) of the sample of women reported never watching music television and another 45 percent said that on average they watch half an hour or less per day (see Table 3). Just over one third (37%) recorded watching music television an average of one to three hours per day. Most noted they either watch alone or with a friend. Most women (80%) do not usually watch music television for an extended period of time at one sitting (half hour or more). When asked to note how they most often decide to watch music television, almost three quarters (68%) said they turn to it when there is nothing else on, and
62 percent usually switch to music television during commercial breaks on other channels.

TABLE 3

MUSIC TELEVISION HABITS
(% unless otherwise noted)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Feminist</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samp.</td>
<td>Quart.</td>
<td>Samp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1 Have access to cable</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 Watch music tv:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 hour/day or less</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 hours/day</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 Do not watch Music TV for an extended period</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6a Watch Music TV when nothing else is on.</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6b Watch Music TV during commercial breaks</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10a Video gives clearer song idea</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9a Enjoy the radio or an album</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Madonna fans (#)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number in Sample</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half (58%) said that videos give them a clear idea of what popular songs mean, but 62 percent of the group prefer listening to an album or the radio over watching music television.

The two top music categories listed among the women were rock and pop followed by
alternative and easy listening. Altogether 15 out of 81 women (19%) listed Madonna as one of their favourite female recording artists seen on music television.

Music Television Habits--Men

Overall, the men surveyed are quite similar to women in their music television viewing habits as there were no statistically significant differences. However, they did report watching music television slightly more often than women; 45 percent watch between one and three hours per day with only four percent claiming not to watch it at all. This may give some credence to the notion that music videos are generally directed and are more appealing to young men than to women (Lewis 1990). Men are also more likely to list rap among their favourite music categories; rock, rap, pop and then alternative. Only 3 in 47 men (6%) listed Madonna among their favourite female recording artists; thus Madonna is only one third as popular among men than among women in the sample.

Music Television Habits--Interview Sample

Both the feminist and traditional interview groups were reflective of the wider sample in terms of their music television habits and the two were also similar to each other. There were two Madonna fans in each of the feminist and traditional groups.
Feminist Issues—Women

Overall, women in the sample could be considered only minimally (somewhat) feminist. Only 10 percent of the women surveyed preferred to be addressed as Ms. with another 40 percent indicating they would prefer not to use a title (see Table 4). After marriage, only five percent wished to be addressed as Ms., while almost three quarters (72%) would use Mrs. Over half (60%) would take their husband's name, and only eight percent would keep their own last name. Over one third (38%) listed a female as the most influential person in their decision to go to university with another 36 percent giving credit to both men and women. Only a little over a quarter (28%) had taken a course that dealt with women's issues but 60 percent said the feminist movement has had an impact on their lives. On average women rated themselves fairly neutral at 5.7 on a feminism scale, where 1 represented not at all feminist and 10, very feminist. In their own lives, almost half (44%) said they had experienced discrimination because they were female, and a third (33.3%) of the sample had been subjected to sexual harassment.

Young women in the sample have grown up with feminism but were only very slightly feminist in their views. They recognized that feminism opened up opportunities that would not otherwise have been available to them. Responses (average scores) to each of the individual Likert scale items would be considered slightly feminist with an aggregate feminist mean score of 5.23 out of 7. Women had the most feminist responses to Likert scales that concerned division of labour in child-rearing responsibilities and economic issues where they would reap the benefits given the condition that most women work outside the home. However, these young women are not consciously aware of the persistent inequities in the workforce despite efforts of the feminist movement, as these are the scale items reaping the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Feminist</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Quart.</td>
<td>Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16c Female Influence for University</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17a Ms.--Preferred form of address</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17b Ms.--Preferred form of address after marriage</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18 Take husband's name if married</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q20 Have taken a course re: Women's issues</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q21a Feminism had impact</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22 Feminist Rating (Mean Score out of 10)</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q24 Have experienced discrimination: Yes</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25 Have been sexually harassed: Yes</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Feminism Scale**

(1 = least feminist responses; 7 = most feminist response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Feminist Score</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism Scale-Median</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range:</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>6.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>5.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Men were asked how they thought unmarried women wished to be addressed

** Men were asked how they would like their wife to be addressed

95
least feminist responses. They are certainly aware of discrimination and sexual harassment, but many still seem to view these issues in a patriarchal manner and reduce them to bothersome sexual appeal. More subtle issues like silencing, language, and affirmative action are more difficult to grasp.

It appears that the anti-feminist backlash has taken its toll particularly with young women who have yet to experience repression or to consciously perceive inequities in the workforce. They do not appear to be conscious of the damage their individualistic values have on women as an aggregate. Of course, they do know the obvious issues as a result of feminist rhetoric. While responses indicate that they believe quite fervently in equality (particularly in the workforce—a liberal feminist ideological position), they believe that society has already changed considerably with respect to women and therefore perceive feminists to be too extreme in their views. Hence, they wish to distance themselves from them. Overall, it appears a liberal feminist ideological position is the dominant understanding among these young women.

Feminist Issues—Men

More men (20%) think that unmarried women wish to be addressed as Ms. than actually do (10%), 44 percent believe Miss is the favoured title and the rest think women probably would prefer not to use a title. Only four percent of the men think their wives should use the title Ms. after marriage. Most men (35%) would leave it to their wives to decide what her name should be after marriage while 30 percent think she should take the husband’s name. Not one specifically noted the wife should keep her own name. Fewer men (19%) than women had taken a women’s issues course. Almost one third (30%) of the men
surveyed said they knew someone personally who had been discriminated against. 15 percent fewer than the percentage of women (45%) who actually experienced discrimination. It is also noteworthy that 33 percent of the men knew someone personally who had been sexually harassed, exactly the same percentage of women who reported having been harassed.

Some of the differences between men and women in their thoughts about women’s issues are statistically significant24. Men rate themselves as less feminist than women (4.8 out of 10 against 5.7 for women). Additionally, in 9 of the 19 Likert scales measuring feminist attitudes, men’s scores were significantly lower than women’s scores. The significant differences occurred in issues of economics (i.e. affirmative action, pay equity, divorce entitlements), issues of violence against women (fear to walk after dark, women putting themselves in rape position, and the Montreal massacre) as well as their role in child-care responsibilities. In general, men were more likely to believe that the feminist movement had achieved its goals. The mean feminism score for men was 4.55 out of 7 compared to 5.23 for women, but men were also less likely to think that feminism had an impact on their lives.

Feminist Issues--Interview Sample

Interview participants were chosen from the outermost ends of the constructed scale measuring exposure and knowledge of feminism; the scale scores were meant to distinguish women with the most traditional orientation and the most feminist orientation. Both the traditional and feminist interview samples were slightly more extreme in their respective views than the quartiles from which they were chosen. The average feminism score for

24However, see footnote 23 about the merely suggestive nature of statistical significance tests with this type of sample.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>Interview Sample Feminist</th>
<th>Interview Sample Traditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEMOGRAPHICS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of university</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>First year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Communication courses</td>
<td>1 to 2 courses 1 person in 3 courses</td>
<td>1 to 2 courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>18 to 20 years old 1 person 27 years old</td>
<td>18 to 20 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minorities</td>
<td>1 West Indies 1 Chinese</td>
<td>1 Lebanese 1 Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s education</td>
<td>3 Mother more educ. 5 Equal education</td>
<td>1 Mother more educ. 3 Equal education 4 Father more educ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUSIC TELEVISION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avid music TV watchers</td>
<td>3 women</td>
<td>2 women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madonna fans</td>
<td>2 fans</td>
<td>2 fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMINIST ISSUES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Feminist Rating (1-10: 10 high)</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Feminism Score (1-7: 7 high)</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms.--Preferred form of address now</td>
<td>3 women</td>
<td>1 woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take husband’s name after marriage</td>
<td>1 woman</td>
<td>8 women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s issues course</td>
<td>4 women</td>
<td>1 woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced discrimination</td>
<td>8 women</td>
<td>1 woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually harassed</td>
<td>4 women</td>
<td>3 women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number in Sample</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
feminists was 6.20 out of 7, in contrast to 4.37 out of 7 for traditionalist (see Table 5). Asked to rate themselves on a feminism scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 represents not very feminist and 10 very feminist), the average rating was 8.8 for the feminists and 4.8 for the traditionalists. Four of eight feminists had taken a course pertaining to women's issues while only one traditionalist had, and all feminists, but only five out of eight women in the traditional group, claimed that feminism had had an impact on their lives. All eight women in the feminist group reported having experienced discrimination, but only one woman in the traditional group said she did. There was little difference in reported sexual harassment; four in the feminist and three in the traditional group. Three of eight compared to one of eight said they want to be addressed as Ms. now and two of the three feminists reported they would remain Ms. after marriage. All the traditional women, but only one of eight feminists would take their husband's name if married.

**Ethnographic Interview Study**

Several methods have been used to assess audience reception, such as people meters, diaries, focus groups, and surveys. The ethnographic interview is recognized as a particularly useful way to discover and study "differentiated subtleties of social meaning of media consumption" (Ang 1989, 96). Much of the success of the ethnographic interview depends on how adept the researcher is at probing for and checking information and at maintaining a steady discussion pace while making the interviewees feel comfortable (Spradley 1979; Williamson, Karp, Dalphin and Gray 1982; Carney 1990). A major advantage of the method is that there is less danger of imposing irrelevant categories on respondents. However, the researcher must be careful not to ask leading questions or indicate biases verbally or non-
verbally to invoke desired responses during the interview (Spradley 1979; Williamson et al. 1982; Carney 1990).

Other advantages of the ethnographic method are that the researcher has the opportunity to probe for information as he or she engages in in-depth questioning, can clear up any misunderstandings or inconsistencies, has the flexibility to redefine or rephrase questions, and can verify his or her understanding of what has been said (Williamson et al. 1982). In this way, the method will at least help access respondents' conscious opinions of what they know and select. It also supplies the linguistic terms and categories respondents use to construct their world and their own understanding of their activities (Morley, 1989).

Because there is usually a discrepancy between the researcher's social positioning and the participant's, this discrepancy has to be acknowledged as it will be at work in the interaction and will unavoidably influence the understandings and meaning produced (Seiter et al. 1989). The relationship between researcher and participant should affect how productive the interview is because participants position themselves in terms of how they perceive the interviewer just as they position themselves in terms of media texts. "We have to recognize the asymmetrical, power-laden nature of the discourse in which they are produced and, more specifically, the significance of the researchers' subjectivities therein" (Seiter et al. 1989, 242). Therefore, the researcher must downplay his or her academic role during the interview and assume the role of an interested non-initiate.

At the same time, because the ethnographic interview method relies so heavily on the researcher who is actively and politically engaged in the production and interpretation of interview material, several problems arise. One disadvantage is that the method is open to researcher bias (Spradley 1979; Williamson et al. 1982; Carney 1990). There is an increased
possibility that the researcher's theoretical perspective and personal ideology will have an impact on both the interviewing process and the data analysis and therefore on the outcome of the study (Williamson et al. 1982). It must be recognized that the analysis of the interview data is itself a "reading" of a text (Morley 1989; Ang 1989): a text that is polysemic and therefore subject to interpretation. The lack of standardization in the ethnographic interviews as well as typically non-random sampling renders the generalizability and the reliability of the study problematic from a quantitative (sampling theory) perspective (Spradley 1979; Williamson et al. 1982; Carney 1990). However, from a qualitative perspective, this method is valid because the world view it follows posits that we can never divorce ourselves from our subjectivity and context.

The Interview

Eight interview sessions, each involving two participants and the researcher, were conducted.25 Six of the eight interviews took place over a three week period from December 3 to December 21, 1991, and the final two interviews were held during the third week in January, 1992. I had hoped that all interviews could be held within the three week time period to maintain a consistent context and to avoid the possibility that interviewees would discuss the interview with other participants. However, from discussion with participants interviewed later, I found that they did not know other students who were taking part in the interviews.

25 A pilot interview was executed with two volunteer second-year female students as a "dry-run" to provide me with some interviewing experience and to ensure I was not leading the interviewees through the interview format, the topic outline or through the language I used. The pilot interview was very successful.
The interviews were held at the researcher's home in order to simulate a discussion that viewers might ordinarily have about a music video text within a somewhat "normal" viewing situation (see Morley 1989, Seiter et al. 1989). At the same time, a controlled and consistent environment was provided. Interviewing two respondents simultaneously encouraged discussion and produced a generous amount of information while remaining manageable. A semi-structured topic outline was used which meant that while most questions were asked of all respondents there was some deviation in the selection, phrasing, and sequencing of the questions (see Appendix III). The interview sessions lasted approximately an hour to an hour and thirty minutes and were audio-taped.

At the onset of each session the study was briefly introduced by reiterating that the purpose was to learn about how people use and understand rock videos. I then described how the interview would be conducted and outlined the participants' rights as volunteers (i.e., they should feel free to refuse to answer any question they were uncomfortable with). Participants were also informed that the interview was in no way a test of any kind as there is no "correct" interpretation of the video, and that their disclosures would be kept in confidence. They were also made aware that, as the researcher, I would participate freely in the first part of the interview (see Oakley 1981) but I would refrain from commenting on the video after viewing to avoid influencing their ideas.

The interview began with general background questions about where interviewees were from, what they liked to do in their spare time, their involvement in high school and the community, and what university programme they were presently in. The primary purpose of this part of the interview was to get to know one other a little, make the respondents feel comfortable with me and with each other and to get used to being recorded. While this line
of questioning was not central to the interview it was found to be very beneficial in putting participants at ease and helped cultivate a relaxed conversational style rather than a question-answer format. The intent was to approximate a "typical" conversation and, for the most part, the strategy was quite successful. When it became time to turn over the tape, most interviewees commented that they had completely forgotten about being recorded even though they had initially felt quite uncomfortable about it.

The second part of the interview turned to questions concerning participants' attitudes about music videos and their music television habits to augment information from the structured questionnaire. It was expected that these questions would provide information about this group that could be compared to results of music video studies. This line of questioning also provided a nice transition into questions about the participants' opinions about Madonna and any ideas already formed about the Express Yourself video prior to viewing without, at least initially, cuing people to the content of the video.

Each pair then watched Madonna's Express Yourself video at least once before discussion began. Interviewees had been made aware prior to viewing that the video could be replayed if they so desired. Three interview groups requested that the video be replayed in order to better capture the meaning of the video. As the text is fast-moving and quite complex, it is difficult to focus, in one viewing, on the meanings conveyed in the video.

Determining what meanings participants constructed as a result of their interaction with the video was the primary purpose of the interview. Several questions were posed, all at once, at the beginning of the discussion. Participants were asked to relay: images they found most striking, parts of the video they particularly liked or disliked, feelings the video inspired, or any first impressions about the video. The purpose was to make participants
aware that they did not, at this point, have to have the video's meaning figured out and that they could begin with anything that came to mind to initiate the discussion. This opening showed what aspects of the video participants paid most attention to and gave a general indication of their understanding of the video. It also served to direct the line of questioning that followed. I only pursued further information about specific aspects of the video after interviewees mentioned them, to avoid prompting my own understanding of the video. If a participant referred to a particular feature or to several scenes in her opening remarks, I followed up with questions exploring why and how she had extracted the particular meaning she had.

Several questions were then asked of all participants. Responses were later used to indicate participants' inferencing levels loosely following Blanchard-Field, Coon and Matthews' (1986, 445) categories: (1) participants offered "factual detail"; (2) participants made inferences that were "closely tied" to the video content or implicitly based on the segment; (3) participants engaged in elaborate inferencing--they went substantially beyond scope of the video but inferences were logically connected; and d) participants distorted or contradicted content. For example, I asked "If you could give this video to someone who you thought should have it, to whom would you give it and why?"

After the video discussion, the participants' perspectives on feminism were briefly explored. Participants were asked if they felt their views on women and society had an impact on their interpretation of media and this usually led to a discussion about how they felt about feminism.

At the end of the interview participants were debriefed and informed that a short summary of the study would be provided to them after its completion. With time passing
quickly, most interviewees did not provide much feedback after the debriefing. Only one person was not interested in receiving a study summary and did not provide her address. After each interview, I recorded any circumstances of the interview that might have affected the study or were linked to the research question such as the relationship dynamics between participants and the tone of the interview.

Critical Review of the Ethnographic Interview Method

In order to investigate and contrast the everyday signifying practices of these two groups of young women, divided on the basis of feminist consciousness, the study followed the ethnographic interview method and set up the interview situation to simulate a realistic media viewing experience. The following section of this chapter is an evaluation of the degree of interventionism and therefore a comment on the quality of the resultant data.

a) Context: Since a realistic context is considered important (see Morley 1989; Seiter et al. 1989), the interviews took place in a student-style home, were very casual and involved the two female participants with similar views about feminism. Ideally the interview pair would have been friends captured watching music videos together in one of their homes. In fact, none of the pairs interviewed knew each other before the interview. However, the advantage of the set-up was that the context was consistent and controlled. Other measures were taken to facilitate a "natural" atmosphere including making participants comfortable and having only female participants.

b) Comfortable Atmosphere: Because the success of the method depends heavily on how comfortable the participants feel, considerable time was allotted to getting to know one another to render the situation less contrived. In most cases, the interview sessions did
transform into relaxed conversations; the artificiality of the situation only became apparent intermittently, e.g. turning over the audio tape. The last interview was the most strained and the soft-spoken women did not develop much of a rapport. A contributing factor may have been that these two participants had very specific expectations about what should happen at an interview as both were psychology students who had received credit from their department for participating in my study.

c) Researcher Positioning: As interviewer, my own positioning as a student in similar circumstances to the interviewees, except for age and programme status, added to the productiveness of the interview. I chose to participate in the getting acquainted part of the interview which helped me establish rapport and my status as a non-initiate. I was perhaps perceived as an older student doing a required project. Further, my status as a female among female participants lent itself to fruitful sessions particularly when discussing issues of sexuality, feelings about relationships, and gender politics. Having gone through the process of becoming a feminist, I felt I could relate to both the traditional and the feminist groups. As Seiter et al. (1989) suggested, "patterns of gendered communication" did emerge as an important aspect in developing the dialogue. Interviewees divulged their opinions to me as someone able to relate to their vantage point as women.

d) Interaction effects: Interviews included two participants for several reasons: to make interviewees feel comfortable (not on the spot), to simulate a real media discussion, and to allow the conversation to take off on its own without intervention from the researcher who would then be less likely to lead the interviewees. The interactive setting probably did allow individuals to get more meaning from the video than they might have done alone. It is impossible to say how different the responses would have been had the groups been paired.
differently. In general, participants seemed to feel confident about their assessments of the video and usually did not deviate much from their first impressions of the video over the course of the interaction. In fact, new and sometimes contradictory information seemed to be used and reformulated to build on their original conjectures.

e) In-depth understanding: The ethnographic interview lends itself to a more in-depth understanding because the interview situation is interactive and therefore all participants can be asked to explain, elaborate, clarify, and modify. However, because of the nature of the interviewing process itself (i.e. selective attention), actually checking or verifying understanding is quite difficult. Upon listening to and transcribing the recording, it became evident that I missed some of the subtleties of the responses, and therefore was unable to react most appropriately in some instances. Taping the interview was therefore essential because it enabled a reexamination of the interview discourse and thus promoted my understanding of what participants meant. The ethnographic interview is one of the best methodological media for accessing subtle information about social meaning.

f) Capturing the interaction and frames of reference: Certainly, taping captures subtle linguistic terms and categories respondents use to construct their world, which is essential for ethnographic analysis. For example, in response to a request to predict what happens after the video ends, some participants remarked that "he" dumped her while others thought "she" dumped him. Expressions like these serve as indicators of which character participants give power to, and therefore whether participants define their world in a traditional patriarchal manner or not.

g) Imposing categories: Following up only on those scenes or issues that participants mentioned themselves was an effective way to avoid imposing irrelevant categories on
participants. In instances where I did direct participants’ attentions, I found it was of little value because participants were not prepared to offer an interpretation if it was not something they had initially paid attention to. Certainly, the method was useful in highlighting which aspects of the video participants selected. There was also frustration if interviewees saw little in the video and consequently repeated the same answers to several different questions.

Simply by asking interviewees to elaborate on why they thought what they thought made the interview process interventionist. Most interviewees remarked that although they did discuss videos with friends, it was unlikely they would go to similar depth in their discussions. This is an indication that these interview sessions do not completely reflect the normal practices of every day video viewing since generally they are not viewed with this much attention or reflectiveness. Consequently, resistant readings are more likely to be discovered in the content of this study.

Data Analysis

Transcription

Each interview tape was played through once before transcription began. All of the interviews were transcribed except the first part of each interview which focused on the interviewees’ backgrounds and interests. This section was recorded but not transcribed since the process was such a long and tedious task (six hours for every recorded hour) and not essential for the analysis. The transcribed discourse provided the data for analysis.

Some of the data was lost during the transcription process because of technical difficulties during the interviews. Portions of the interviews were difficult to transcribe as a result of: distortion caused from the volume, at times, being set too high; two interviewees
speaking at the same time making it difficult to decipher what either said; and background
noises (i.e. clapping, finger-snapping, knee-slapping, and laughter) that masked the voices;
soft-spoken participants or the tapering off of voices at the end of sentences. However, for
the most part, pertinent interview information was transcribed.

After the transcription, each tape was played again in order to note particulars that
would not be evident from the transcription text alone such as sarcasm or emphasis only
recognizable with a change in voice tone or the use of a word that diverged from the
interviewees’ normal course of conversational language. Any mistakes made during
transcription were also edited at that point.

Analysis Procedures

Each interview was divided into logical subsections--specific video scenes and themes
that were explored through the structured questions in the interview (see Appendix III). For
example, scenes included: the scene featuring men’s bodies, the green gown scene, the shower
scene, the drug scene, the chain and collar scene, the crawling scene and the bedroom scene.
Structured questions, which investigated interviewees’ frames of reference in interpreting the
video and views on gender politics, included: perceptions of who was the most powerful
character, the video’s address, appeal, its overall message, as well as a prediction of what
would happen beyond the scope of the video and an application of the video’s message to
interviewees’ personal situations.

Because responses were situated within the interview interaction, it was difficult to
get a clear picture of each individual’s mind set. Accordingly, each participant’s responses
were extracted from the interview discourse to enable a reconstruction of a clear and coherent
understanding of her mind set. Individual interpretations were also summarized to make the information manageable. Transcribed comments for each topic (sorted into the logical categories mentioned above), together with the summarized notes, were compiled to facilitate the analysis process of searching for patterns. (For example, all comments that each woman made about the drag scene and the summary notes were collected and put together in an envelope).

Responses to a particular video segment or scene most often given among all interviewees were recorded. Then the response range was tabulated for each group; the two lists were compiled and ordered into the following coding domains: sex, love, economics/society and gender politics (see Chapter 5, the semiotic analysis of the video) and considered in terms of patriarchy and feminism. Responses were scrutinized for repeating patterns.

The responses were later gauged in terms of the following levels of consciousness: 1) no understanding; 2) a literal interpretation; 3) an interpretation at the individual level; 4) at the group level, and; 5) in terms of gender politics. Also noted were participants’ evaluations of the scenes as either positive or negative. This process facilitated the identification of subtle differences between the feminist and traditional groups as well as helped determine whether a reading could be regarded as negotiated and resistant. Additionally, the scenes that were selected most often or made the most impact (as determined by participants’ first impressions of the video) were recorded along with the scenes that lead to the most divergent readings.
CHAPTER 5--SEMIOTIC TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Cultural studies has borrowed from semiological perspectives focussing on the question of how communication works. Semiotics is an analytical tool used to decipher what a media text means through the study of signification; to understand how signs put together in a code work to elicit meaning and tap into cultural myths and ideology (Fiske 1982). The communication process is complex, and semiotics provides the framework to assist in understanding the process; to both explain what something means and why it means what it does, and, thus, why meanings generated may vary across differently situated groups.

This chapter will be devoted to a multi-levelled semiotic analysis of the video Express Yourself, discussing possible meanings of the video by examining its signs or symbols. Signs consist of two integrated and dynamic parts--the signifier which is the physical form of the sign and the signified which is the mental concept the sign invokes (Fiske, 1982). What constitutes a sign is determined by cultural convention and mediated by context. Signs, therefore, have meaning only within the terms of reference supplied by codes which the audience shares to some extent with the producers of the messages (Fiske 1987a). A semiotic analysis of the video text Express Yourself provides the link between the structural features in the text and the social system and thus explores how meanings can be made within social experience (Fiske 1989b, 98).

The major objective to be achieved through this analysis is to demonstrate that the Express Yourself video is polysemic; a text structured in dominance but that has the potential for the construction of alternative meanings exists. Second, it will address how this video
may contribute to the production and circulation of different meanings about women and what they are by describing some of the interpretative levels operating within the text. Major ideological themes or cultural myths, primarily about women, that are reproduced in the text will be identified and discussed. Textual features such as ambiguous signs or contradictory sets of signs and style elements within the video that may prompt socially progressive readings will be identified.

The semiotic analysis can be used to establish what is most likely the dominant interpretation as well as possible alternative or resistant meanings that may be constructed at the point of consumption. This is to be accomplished by scrutinizing the denotative elements in the text and loosely linking them to possible connotative meanings.

Examination of the video was, in part, based on a comprehensive shooting script in split-page format which documented the structural denotative elements in the audio-visual event including social, technical and representational codes. Social codes refer to the appearance of the characters; technical codes entail camera angle, shot composition, scale of the shot, camera movement, colour, lighting, editing pace, lyrics and sound; together they transmit the representational codes which include action, conflict, character, setting, and plot (Fiske 1987a). The shooting script provided the raw data for analyses to illustrate how the structural features of the text could function to stimulate meaning; meaning that is organized by ideological codes.

The semiotic textual analysis of the Express Yourself video was conducted to suggest the themes for the interview data analysis, to assist in the formation of relevant interview questions, and to serve as a base against which the readings or discourse of the target group under study and the signs and codes selected by different interviewees could be compared and
contrasted. Finally, it was done to help determine whether or not the ascribed meanings could be considered resistant.

**Different Reading Possibilities of *Express Yourself***

The *Express Yourself* video operates on at least four interpretive levels: a sexual level, a traditional love relationship level, an economic or societal level, and as a reflection of and comment on gender politics (denoted below as "sex," "love," "economic or societal," and "gender politics"). The intertextual backdrop for the whole performance, which holds it together, is Fritz Lang’s 1927 futuristic sci-fi movie *Metropolis*. Additionally, Madonna herself, as the bold and successful musical pop artist, is an extratextual aspect who breaks through into the text. The video has to be understood within the context of a commercial music industry, within the context of male-dominated rock video fare, and within the context of a patriarchal society.

While the various levels can be extracted for the purposes of this discussion, it must be recognized that the levels are linked and function interdependently. Because all the components are interconnected and defined by their relations to other components, every sign may best be understood contextually. If the context changes or the event is reframed, the meaning also changes, since noise and information are not intrinsically distinct (Watzlawick 1976). It is unlikely that an individual would read strictly at one level. Tendencies to focus on particular levels (codes) and the way they are valued are likely to be related to the reader’s positioning.

*Express Yourself* is intentionally ambiguous; while it privileges a dominant reading, it lends itself to resistant ones of gender politics. The levels of discourse are organized
hierarchically, but one level does not seem to be given greater emphasis than another and the
levels are offered without obvious comment or criticism. The Express Yourself video can
therefore be considered pastiche (Kaplan 1989) rather than a parody, which also contributes
to fluidity. Furthermore, each level can both be perceived and evaluated either from a
traditional or non-traditional perspective. Thus, there are many different possible reading
permutations of this polysemic text.

Metropolis as the Frame

Viewers familiar with the 1927 science fiction movie, Metropolis, will recognize that
the video Express Yourself appropriates and reworks several icons of the movie. The video
begins, as does the movie, with a montage of images that connote industrialization and the
alienation of human beings. There are shots of a metropolitan city littered with huge lighted
skyscrapers and factories, busy with trucks, trains, and airplanes. These shots are juxtaposed
against close-ups of the pumping, churning, and grinding parts of machinery heavy with
grease, and factory whistles sounding. Mechanical music accompanies and pings like a time-
clock or the clicking of cogged wheels. Machinery parts churn in time. Thus, the visual
reference to Metropolis is established very early in the video, and it continues throughout the
video.

The next series of shots centre on Madonna as she perches at the top of a building on
a large bird-like gargoyle reminiscent of the gothic-looking church in Metropolis. Smoke fills
the screen; as it clears, the camera zooms downwards onto a factory floor revealing machinery
and men milling about. The sequence of shots that follow highlight body parts of the men;
their muscular torsos, and their arms glistening in sweat as they work in sync with the
machines. Water drips down on sweaty bodies as muscles move. Some men wear miner’s head gear. This set of signs work to situate the sweat shop as "down below." Just as in the city of Metropolis, the workers live and toil beneath the city while the elite rests in the lap of luxury above.

This *above* and *below* or status motif persists throughout and is further accentuated with the use of colour or black and white. In the next scene, filmed in colour, a set of stairs leads upwards to a spacious, luxurious but somewhat sterile and empty-looking room. Interestingly, the camera zooms down from a high angle towards a woman clad in a lime-green gown peering through a large picture window overlooking the city. The camera angle, the room’s decor, and the appearance of the lone woman together suggest that while this privileged woman rests in the lap of luxury, her life is suppressed, controlled, and as empty as the room she occupies.

The distinction between *above* and *below* is also communicated through the camera angles and the setting which includes the appearance of the characters, their surroundings, and the use of stairs and elevators. (The stage/audience relationship is referenced with Madonna only slightly elevated, and these shots alternate with the camera looking directly down over the workers). The man in power is well-groomed, dressed in a fine suit, carries a gold monocle on a chain around his neck (servant of money), and is showered in a golden hue as he stands on the stairs looking over the sweat shop. He is captured with a low-angle shot signifying his power which is then followed by a black and white high-angle shot, looking

---

26 The use of colour and black and white to signify different life positions of the characters is also employed in the 1986 re-make of the *Metropolis* movie retextualized with rock music.
down on and singling out a worker clad in baggy working pants, naked torso, miner’s headlight, and black iron chain linked around his neck (slave of the elite and of industry).

Both elements from the story line and the wider issues that the movie *Metropolis* deals with are replicated to some degree in the *Express Yourself* video. *Metropolis* comments on the state of society as a result of industrialization and capitalism, and metaphorically (and perhaps unintentionally) portrays the dichotomous (virgin/whore) perception of women. By drawing on this set of signifiers and bringing it into the context of contemporary society with a few twists, the *Express Yourself* video raises the question of whether the situation today is really dramatically different from that expression.

Madonna replaces the wealthy factory owner’s son and in the video takes the form of mistress/wife who realizes her unhappy entrapment. At the same time, she also embodies the contradictory role of the strong female character, Maria. In *Metropolis*, Maria (the virgin) is a nurturing, caring person, and a natural leader who teaches the workers love, peace, understanding, and patience; patience for a saviour who will rescue them from their plight. Madonna, too, prescribes love and understanding, but unlike the virgin Maria, Madonna is not patient but takes action to break free from her domination.

In this sense, Madonna is more like the robot (bad girl, whore) Maria who, in the movie, is burned at the stake like a witch. However, Madonna is not directed and controlled as was the robot, but acts on her own accord. She, too, is a witch, as is confirmed by the black cat that she both possesses and incarnates in the video. Lightening-like flashes and wet hair and fur signify the transformation from woman to cat and back again. Both the video and the 1986 remake of *Metropolis* end with the following: "Without the heart, there can be no understanding between the body and the mind." Together, the two *Metropolis* characters,
the son and Maria, operate metaphorically as the heart that links mind and body; the key to emancipation and a more egalitarian society. Likewise, for Madonna, love or emancipation can only be realized through honest and full expression on an intellectual, emotional, and physical level. Through the use of her familiar, the black cat, she manages to emancipate both her lover and herself (at various levels) through her love and its expression.

The Economic or Societal Level

Even without recognizing the similarities between Metropolis and the Express Yourself video, the video can still be understood as representing and perhaps commenting on patriarchal capitalist society. The wealthy older man can signify all owners of production or elite men who hold privileged positions in patriarchal society. The young men symbolize the exploited who are little more than cogs in the industrial machine kept living in a condition of subsistence. Madonna’s character represents women’s condition; as a possession, as a symbol of a man’s status, and as a sexual object of desire who is lacking fulfilment and seeking to break free from domination—seeking to take her place as equal yet woman. The musicians who are stereotypically black are mere puppets of the elite to be turned on and off at a whim. They provide entertainment, a service that can be enjoyed; but they are kept segregated, at a distance. Thus, the Express Yourself video speaks to inequitable power relations within society.

Madonna shuns the wealthy factory owner for the working man, figuratively choosing a simpler value of love over material goods. She mockingly exaggerates the suited man by dressing in drag and dancing with forceful gestures, symbolically replacing him as an equal.
The video is available for a reading that either castigates money as the foundation for society or that places women on an equal footing with men in the work world.

Love Relationship as the Frame

At another level, the video addresses and offers advice about love relationships, here it is directed to women, in particular, as indicated in the video's opening words . . . "Come on girls. Do you believe in love? Cause, I've got something to say about it." The video can be understood as a pep talk to women who find themselves unsatisfied in love. Madonna encourages women to be honest and fearless in their expression (intellectually, emotionally, and physically); to reveal themselves fully to their partners and to both invite and expect their partners to do the same.

Madonna urges women to strive for the fulfilment that only this type of relationship can bring, and, failing that, to have the courage to step out in search for "real love" (since there are a lot of "real men" out there) as she does herself within the context of the video. She admonishes against believing that material wealth or security is a good enough reason to stay in a relationship and warns that love is much more than sex. The video appeals to the woman's sensibilities to respect herself.

You deserve the best in life
So if the time isn't right, then move on
Second best is never enough
You'll do much better, baby, on your own

This message is communicated primarily through the lyrics but runs parallel to the progression of action in the video. The woman in the video is, at first, depicted as discontent with her oppressive situation. She appears to be a lonely kept woman, perhaps the mistress or wife of the older character who values her as little more than a possession or a symbol of his status.
and virility. She is unsatisfied in the restrictive relationship as signified by the chain and collar. She mocks her keeper by dressing like him, complete with pin-striped power-suit and monocle, and exaggerates his self-important manly gestures. The accompanying lyrics are "Don't go for second best..." She pursues her new love in a forthright and almost defiant way to its consummation at the end of the video when the man she has singled out returns her cat to her.

This representation can be understood as a celebration of women's strength, the value they place on relationships, and their role in nurturing them. Madonna is saying that if women take a confident stance, the balance of power in a relationship will be reversed. Accordingly, the woman will either reap the benefits of a lover's change of attitude--"Then you'll know your love is real"--or relish the pleasure of knowing the decision to leave was the right one. When the former lover realizes his loss, just as the older character does when he notices the young man missing from the wrestling match, his pleas will fall on deaf ears.

Since meaning construction is not constrained to signifieds within the text but is always tied to extratextual information, this video may also be perceived as Madonna's personal comment on her own relationship with and subsequent divorce from Sean Penn.

The video can also be viewed as a traditional narrative about relationships, championing love over wealth or security, and scorning materialism while preserving patriarchal heterosexual relationships. Men are characterized as powerful, dominant, sexually potent, and working. Women are portrayed as submissive, nurturing, sexually acquiescent, and at home.
Sex as the Code

The *Express Yourself* video also operates on a sexual plane and can be conceived of as a seduction or sexual conquest very much like a sequence lay-out in a soft-porn magazine. As the video progresses, Madonna seduces both her audience and the man she singles out as an object of her desire. In the first scene, Madonna is dressed in "glam-doll" fashion with long clinging gown, dark red pouting lips, and dances alluringly beside a single phallic skyscraper seen out the background window.

Madonna soon retreats to the seclusion of her dressing room, now clothed provocatively in the black slip, garter, and nylons of the sexy naughty girl. The camera captures her in what might be a private moment exploring the sensuality of a shower; her figure outlined behind the translucent glass as her body rivets and hips gyrate in a suggestive fashion. The white skin of her face and shoulders are highlighted in soft filtered lighting. Her expression and demeanor, with suggestive gaze and inviting parted lips, is analogous to a magazine cover girl.

The audience continues to be positioned as voyeur in another set of shots, alongside the older male character in the video who is, at this point, intently inspecting a large and obviously prized music box through his gold monocle with great pleasure. Since these shots are juxtaposed against shots of Madonna now laying face down on a bed with a white sheet half covering her naked white body, it informs the viewer that Madonna, too, is a possession, a sexual possession that has been inspected and enjoyed in much the same way. She is bound with a thick black leather collar clasped around her neck and fastened to a

---

27 The large music box is glittering and golden and inside are three live musicians who are not caucasian.
heavy black chain that extends away from the bed. The chain appears to have no end. The image invokes bondage, a posture of submission and domination by another person.

She is again postured submissively in the next scene where she sensuously emulates the actions of a cat rubbing its body up against a piece of furniture. Bright lightening-like light flashes intermittently revealing Madonna in a skin-tight black body suit, perhaps signifying "heightened eroticism." She slinks slowly along the floor on all fours underneath a table with head down and half-wet hair falling forward over her face. As she arches her back and tilts her head upwards, wet strands of hair fall over her closed eyes and her lips part as she simulates an orgasmic expression. A female figure, cigarette in hand and face obscured in a shadow, looks on silently.

In the final scene Madonna is wrapped in nothing but a satin sheet, her eyes uplifted as her lover advances towards her. They embrace with fierce passion. Set against and interspersed throughout the love scene are obfuscated shots of men engaged in a serious wrestling match or fight that resembles rutting bucks during mating season. The two lovers continue to embrace and intercourse is obviously implied. All the while, the music pounds out a rhythmic beat. The chorus repeats "So if you want it right now, make him show you how. Express what he's got, oh baby, ready or not."

Gender Politics

Specific structural elements within the Express Yourself text suggest a statement about gender politics; thus the video may be interpreted as a feminist expression in either a negotiated or resistant reading. The video may be a telling representation of women's

---

This is perhaps suggestive of lesbian voyeurism which will be addressed later.

121
contradictory position. By provoking the dichotomous representation of women (Madonna/whore complex) and moving fluidly between the two polarities, Madonna may resist submission to either or to any particular and fixed definition (Lewis 1990; Fiske 1989b). She accents female experiences of gender inequality and yet valorizes the power and cultural distinctiveness of women. Most importantly, Madonna breaks rules: she constantly foregrounds conventional codes and then proceeds to violate them. In these ways, Madonna actively provokes questions about women’s role in society (Lewis 1990).

Madonna, as elsewhere, makes use of vivid historical female figures of popular culture, projecting us backward in time and forcing a reflection on binary representations of women then and now (Lewis 1990; Fiske 1989b). She impersonates female characters who are "victims of traditions in opera and pop culture that demand death as the price for sexuality" such as "Carmen and Marilyn Monroe" (McClary 1991: 155). The pattern is repeated in Express Yourself. The sexuality of the female character, Maria (virgin), in Metropolis is constrained in that she only becomes sexualized when her body has been transformed to robot (whore). Her [the robot’s] half-clothed body is set up on stage for tantalizing display. Hips sway provocatively behind her long see-through skirt, searching out the approval of an all-male audience, much as Madonna’s vacillating cartoon-like shadow of a figure does behind the translucency of the shower glass. However, in contrast to the robot who is eventually burned at the stake for her eroticism, aggressiveness, and manipulation, Madonna refuses to fall a victim to either of the polar positions patriarchy

---

39 In Metropolis, a German expressionist piece, the voyeuristic audience is represented literally with eyes filling the entire filmic screen.
offers. Her gaze in this scene destabilizes the usual power relationship that exists between male voyeur and sex object.

Not only does the video emulate a female pop culture figure, at the beginning of the video it appears to primarily address a female audience as the opening lines and content of the lyrics suggest. Furthermore, by design, it inverts the general code of standard sexist patriarchal video fare that fragments the female body for decorative purposes (Brown and Campbell 1986). This video appeals to female voyeuristic sentiments, as is evidenced by the glistening parade of attractive well-muscled men throughout the video. The camera scrutinizes and objectifies the male body as it features and emphasizes parts of bodies, and yet never once meets a male gaze head on. Typically, women with eyes downcast are set up as mere objects of sexual desire with little intrinsic meaning and are degraded by the voyeuristic gaze.

In sharp contrast, Madonna fixes her gaze and peers directly into the camera throughout the video with the exception of the one scene which functions in the video to signal her discontent. The look she maintains, almost constantly, in the rest of the video serves as an indication of her own control and thus challenges conventional power structures both within and outside of the video. As Fiske (1989) suggests, she defies what would typically be a subordinate position (even postured as a "helpless victim" in chains) through this piercing gaze.

Madonna is inclined to excess (Fiske 1987 1989) as the chain scene clearly demonstrates. Here, she is spotlighted with a thick leather collar clasped around her neck attached to a heavy and seemingly unending black chain which extends away from the bed. She is literally chained to the bed which could be interpreted as a visual pun. This powerful
and sexually violent image accents the issue of the domination of women and an outdated but persistent perception of "woman's place" within the present power structure. Madonna plays with Freudian voyeurism and fetishism, turning it back on itself; because her unnerving gaze violates the conventional codes that normally dictate this subjugated representation of woman as victim, the male voyeur may become decentred—uncomfortable with his typical positioning (Fiske 1989b; Kaplan 1989). At the same time, the address may shift to the female viewer.

The various representations or images of woman that Madonna constructs are communicated through her role-playing or the personification of the various characters within the video. The video characters are, of course, fashioned after the Metropolis characters which is itself an allegory for the ills of patriarchal capitalistic society. As McClary (1991, 150) comments.

[Madonna's] pieces—explore sometimes playfully, sometimes seriously—various ways of constituting identities that refuse stability, that remain fluid, that resist definition. . . . in her recent, controversial video 'Express Yourself' . . . she slips in and out of every subject position offered within the video's narrative context—including those of the cat, the tyrannical master of industry—refusing more than ever to deliver the security of a clear, unambiguous message or an "authentic" self.

All these representations can then conceivably be assessed in various ways (positive, negative, patriarchal, feminist) and at various levels (sexual, romantic, economic or societal, political, and allegorical), depending on the reader's positioning. The intertextuality of the set-up feeds into its complexity and accordingly the ambiguity of the message.
The drag scene Madonna enacts parodies the airs of the executive-type in the 
*Metropolis* narrative and metonymically\(^{30}\) refers to all men. *Parody* "takes the defining 
features of its object, exaggerates and mocks them, and thus mocks those who 'fall' for its 
ideological effect" (Fiske 1989b, 105). As Fiske (1989b) suggests, parody interrogates 
ideology and, in this case, patriarchy's system of meanings for men and women. By donning 
the black power suit and monocle of the elite, Madonna appropriates or steps into the male 
domain in a mockery. She interweaves gestures specific to men, such as flexing the biceps, 
pulling up the pant legs, and grabbing the crotch with gestures associated with femaleness, 
such moving her hand down her body toward her crotch\(^{31}\), and throwing back her head in 
a submissive posture. She pulls at the lapels of her suit coat to reveal a distinctive feature 
of women's culture, the bra, a lacy black bra signifying the sexy bad girl. She reveals that 
it is indeed a woman beneath the clothing who symbolically usurps power reserved for the 
male domain. This scene is exemplary of what Lewis terms as an access sign where the 
"privileged experiences of boys and men are visually appropriated (Lewis 1990, 109)" as well 
as discovery signs which exalt the particularities of women.

The video can also be interpreted as a construction of a series of images of woman 
at different historical time periods (the slut, the glamour queen, the witch, the lesbian, the 
career woman, the woman in the *Maidenform* commercial), or even different aspects of a 
single woman (strong but feminine). Nowhere is it more conspicuous that Madonna is aware 
she is playing roles than in this video—playing at and displaying different female and sexua

\(^{30}\) Metonymy occurs when an attribute or part of an object is used to signify the whole. 
The audience is supposed to fill in the blank (Fiske 1982).

\(^{31}\) This could intimate a sexual invitation in a patriarchal sense but it could also signify 
masturbation.
representations and deriding their fabrication in male hegemony. Fiske (1987b; 1989b) claims that because Madonna knowingly and cheekily constructs her image, her fans appreciate that they too can recreate and control their own identity and how others look at them. The way her female fans construct feminine sexuality is therefore their own decision to make and does not have to be constrained by patriarchy’s definition.

The camera treatment in the *Express Yourself* video is as unusual as it is in her other videos (Kaplan 1989). The initial shot places Madonna, a woman, in an elevated position sitting atop a bird-like gargoyle and Madonna directly addresses her female audience--"Come on girls." The camera moves to a factory setting and begins by treating the male workers as typical sexual objects, an address generally reserved for the video vixen. Next, we find Madonna alone in a castle-like cage (Rapunzel), elegantly dressed in a siren fashion. Although these shots allude to the classical stage/audience relationship, the camera treatment slightly deviates from Hollywood conventions (Kaplan, 1989). The camera swoops down towards her and remains stationed on an almost level footing (slightly low-level angle) through the scene. She holds a black cat in her arms and as she lets it drop the ground the camera takes up the cat’s gaze as it begins its journey down into the factory through an opening that looks like the bell of a saxophone or trumpet. This may be the first indication that Madonna is the cat, but it is perplexing for the viewer. The confusion continues. Suddenly Madonna is located on a stage-like platform situated within the factory looking down over the workers and dressed in drag. As Kaplan (1989) has pointed to in *Material Girl*, the *Express Yourself* text also violates conventional filmic rules both in terms of the camera’s gaze (whose gaze structures the shot) and space.
Express Yourself, as Schwichtenberg (1992) suggests, could almost as easily be read from a perspective of "otherness" with a "pastiche of sexual signifiers" available for both gay men, lesbians, or any other gender construction. Does the line "Come on girls" refer to girls or gays? Are the displays of muscular young men for the benefit of women or for men who prefer men? The same question can be asked of the "glam doll" scene inspired by the Hollywood siren and taken up by the gay community as an object of camp (Gross 1989). Is the older businessman singling the young man out for his own sexual purposes rather than as the centre of his hostility toward the man who would steal his sexual possession? Schwichtenberg (1992) asserts that drag parodies gender.

Her monocled and suited transformation, a parodic send-up of "the boss" and the bounds of gendered authority . . . Here Madonna's drag dance resonates with postmodern dance, which "directs attention away from any specific image of the body, and towards the process of constructing all bodies" (Dempster 1988, 48). Madonna's body, caught in the flux of destabilized identities, deconstructs gender as a "put-on," a sex toy. Madonna concludes the sequence with hand on crotch and finger pointed at the viewer. The viewer is compelled to re-read her body as the intersection of converging differences. (Schwichtenberg 1992, 124-125)

She notes that the drag scene has been appreciated approvingly as ""a dykey Madonna dancing in a man's suit [and] grabbing her crotch"" (Porkorny quoted in Schwichtenberg 1992). Madonna could perhaps be ridiculing men, simulating masturbation, or enacting androgyne.

As Fiske (1987b, 1989b) has noted for other Madonna videos, there are several style elements structured into the text that reference various levels of discourse, and the interplay may result in a resistant reading. The black cat can be used as an example of how a sign can operate metaphorically on several levels of a text at once including a comment on how women are represented in patriarchy. Other signs viewers select and to which they attribute
meaning in the video will, in turn, influence the meaning they assign to the black cat. The black cat is a powerful image that has, over time, been richly endowed with a number of connotations but almost always lands squarely in a female domain. At the technical level of the video, the cat simply performs the function of a transition from one scene to the next. However, the slinky, mysterious and instinctive cat can symbolize sexual prowess, animal magnetism and therefore works on the sexual plane. Women’s genitals have been described with cat-like metaphors. As Madonna herself proclaimed when speaking of *Express Yourself*: "Pussy rules the world" (cited in Whitelaw 1992).

Further, the black cat connotes bad luck, haunting mysteriousness, and in its female association suggests that women are closer to nature and therefore connected to the unknown or to witchcraft. The witchcraft theme is supported with imagery like the crystal ball. The cat’s connection to witchery links the video to *Metropolis* where the manipulative robot burns at the stake. The video implies that the black cat may serve as Madonna’s familiar; Madonna may incarnate the black cat to bewitch or call the young man to her. The transformation is communicated by hot flashes as Madonna, wearing a black, skin-tight cat suit, crawls under a dining room table as a cat would. To accentuate the metaphor, Madonna laps milk from a bowl. The lightening-like flashes are often associated with the black cats and scary Halloween nights. Because the cat has been closely associated with the female gender it can also be used as a comment on gender politics. The black cat, as a symbol of the unknown, epitomizes what it is about a woman that is unattainable; her mystique and her power. Since she cannot be controlled, she demands respect.

"Puns arise when one word [or image] occurs in two or more discourses, and while the immediate context may give one priority, traces of the other(s) are always present" (Fiske
The milk Madonna laps operates as a visual pun which serves to indicate that she is literally the cat. Milk is also the baby's first food supplied by a nurturing mother (a distinctly female sign), which may simply signal a female's role as nurturer. It may symbolize the purity, strength and power of milk. Milk and honey is a metaphor for achieving success in a land of opportunity. The milk also alludes to the sexual discourse as Madonna drinks her fill. Milk here is used in a very suggestive way with Madonna again inverting the usual sexual scenario, pouring the milk over her shoulder onto her lover's face. This may also work to fragment the video’s address.

Likewise, the lyrics to *Express Yourself* are loaded with puns. One of the most obvious puns is the title itself which is repeated throughout the video. *Express yourself* refers to the physical (sexual), the emotional (love relationship), and intellectual (or own capabilities) aspects which come together under gender politics as a protest of the way females have been devalued and subjugated under patriarchy. Likewise, the lyrics:

You deserve the best in life. So if the time isn't right then move on. Second best is never enough. You'll do much better, baby, on your own.

may intimate the sexual and sexual politics, may refer to a relationship gone sour, or may be interpreted generally to mean dream big (not just of big men) and to "reach for the stars." Once again, these three interpretations may be taken as specifically directed to women. Similarly, "he just won't get it" could mean not getting sex, not getting the love of a woman (which he will later regret), simply not understanding or not understanding the female perspective, again all part of gender politics. Madonna's strategy of inverting and thus violating patriarchal codes occurs not only in the visual component of the video (i.e., men as decorative objects), but in her lyrics. She inverts the words of the patriarchal line "when he's
gone, you'll regret it" and replaces it with "And when you're gone he might regret it" which adds to the possibility of a gender political reading.

The music itself in *Express Yourself* functions as a pun in that it also references at least two discourses, the sexual and the allegorical. The song as sexual metaphor is reflected in its beat and is strengthened visually with Madonna's poignant sexual gestures (i.e., thrusting of the hips) which are timed precisely. Jones (1991, 75) points out that rock 'n' roll itself was originally castigated because of its "sexual" beat and its "adoption of African rhythms". Madonna is one of the few white performers who regularly shows up on the black music charts (Brown and Schulze 1990). Interestingly, as an industrial metaphor, the song uses the same rhythm to signal industrial machinery pumping and churning. The tinny sounding beat that opens the video amplifies the industrial theme and helps develop the *Metropolis* reference.

Madonna herself is such a strong personality and well-known for her fearless daring on screen and in business. Response to Madonna is polarized; she is hated by some and loved by others. She is admired and envied by some for her intelligence, her toughness, her determination, her lack of inhibition, and her power. As one admirer has said, by example, Madonna will

show a whole generation of little girls it's OK to be sexy and smart, to be rich and irreverent, to seek fame and fortune, to set your own rules and to speak your own mind. (Hall 1992, A9)

Her presence as Madonna can not easily be subdued so that she is just a woman playing a role on screen. Rock videos do as much to promote an image of a performer as to sell

---

32 These comments are indicative of racist sentiments in wider society; "rock 'n' roll was often called 'nigger music,' a reminder of the racial dimension of attempts at popular music censorship" (Jones 1991, 75).
records. Though her position regarding women’s issues may not be clear in her videos it may be quite clear by example. As one critic notes, the power and control she represents is itself a "politically potent message" (Pevere 1991, C3). Madonna may be viewed positively or negatively and evaluated as a slut, a collaborator, or a feminist, among others. No doubt, how Madonna is initially evaluated will have a large bearing on how one evaluates the Express Yourself text.

**Economic Text**

All the elements used in other popular Madonna videos, which have become part of her "signature," are also brought together in the Express Yourself text. Thus the "formula" is repeated--most likely because it has been successful in appealing to the widest commercial audience.

Madonna projects us backward in time by making use of historical female figures from popular culture, thereby forcing us to reflect on binary representations of women then and now (Kaplan 1989; Fiske 1989). At the same time, the "postmodern strategy" of pastiche provides an intertextual and visually exciting backdrop for the video. This not only adds to its complexity but foregrounds the use of classical patriarchal codes of the cinema. A love relationship, which provides the infrastructure for the video’s sexiness, is easily included as it is also usually part of the original plot. Madonna’s own persona as an aggressive, sexy business woman adds to the intertextual concoction. Thus, the set up is in place for the interplay of puns and metaphors that reference all or some of these levels of discourse--sex, love, economics or society, gender politics, and, of course, *Metropolis* and Madonna.
Madonna offers no overt criticism of the representation she invokes (Kaplan 1989). Her strategy is much more subtle and commercially useful. She reproduces traditional images but inverts or somehow violates the standard codes of representation. In the process, she may avoid falling into either of the polar positions the patriarchal system offers women. She dresses to excess in glam-doll (old) or video vixen (new) fashion, and yet evades the usual concomitant subordination through camera techniques and the use of her own gaze. The images she constructs contain positive characteristics that are compatible with female fantasies such as the sensuality, seductiveness, and sophistication of the Hollywood glamour queen and power, independence, and assertiveness of the pin-striped businessman.

Madonna controls her look (Fiske 1989). Her role-playing, the use of her own gaze, and the use of unusual camera techniques in terms of space and address tend to fragment her own image and her address, making her neither "particulary male or female identified" (Kaplan 1989). Madonna's intertextual concoction may disorient her viewers or may be just enough off-centre to peak their interest at the subconscious level or alternately speak to their own desires.

In this way, Madonna offers a little something for everyone without overtly disparaging any particular viewpoint (except perhaps the moralists). Her video offers itself to oppositional viewpoints and makes available various reading possibilities with regards to gender construction and representation. "Madonna, a postmodern 'product,' uses simulation strategically in ways that challenge the stable notion of gender as the edifice of sexual difference"; Express Yourself is "Madonna's deconstruction of gender boundaries" (Schwichtenberg 1992, 122).
The pattern of ambiguity as a result of multiple levels of discourse inspired by intertextuality in the postmodern style, and her continuous violation of conventional codes almost ensures that this top 40 video text would become a commercial hit. Considered in this light Madonna is a clever woman operating in the dominant capitalistic mode who co-opt subversive viewpoints or elements for her own ends. Her texts therefore may allow the audience the illusion that they are being revolutionary (perhaps an antecedent for success in rock videos), while containing them within wider ideological notions of capitalism.

Within Patriarchy

Perhaps Madonna's texts cannot be wholeheartedly embraced or valorized as feminist texts even though they reflect the contradictory position of women in patriarchy. The interdependent discourse levels may allow the viewer to recognize liberating messages in the text, while simultaneously taking in ideological messages that serve to perpetuate debilitating stereotypical conceptions of women. Although it is important to recognize Madonna's contribution, a feminist might also do well to uncover the "unconscious contradictory desires that go against the conscious interests of women who read them" (Ganguly 1991, 143). Madonna fits the narrow ideal conception of beauty in this culture--she is white, blonde, thin, and large breasted--and exaggerates this predominant image of woman by her provocative dress, heavy make-up, and submissiveness. She has achieved the glamorous look that most

Madonna's conformance becomes apparent when one contrasts her image to that of someone like Sinead O'Connor who has shaved off her hair, wears glasses, unconventional loose-fitting clothes, and heavy black shoes for some of her performances.
women brought up within western patriarchy have aspired to at some point in their lives. Some aspects of the *Express Yourself* text or of Madonna herself with her sculpted body articulate ideologically disturbing tendencies that may reinforce women’s self-denigration and self-inflicted violence.

Smoking to stay thin, risking death for thinner thighs, killing the breast as a site of sexual pleasure to make it the object of another’s pleasure (which is what silicone implants do) indicate new levels of alienation from our bodies. (Greene 1992, 167)

Constantly reaching for that virtually unattainable image of beauty leads to constant anxiety and depreciation of self-image. Identity, self-esteem, and self-worth are often tied up in physical attractiveness as influenced by patriarchal conceptions of women. The deep structure of the *Express Yourself* text therefore coincides with the dominant ideology—the wider ideological ramifications that feed into a society of women on never-ending diets and food disorders like anorexia and bulimia.

Further, Madonna subjects herself to being an "object of male desire and accessible to fetishistic patriarchal gaze" (Ganguly 1991, 145). Sex sells, as Madonna knows well. The fact is that young women are assaulted with a plethora of images of women "engaged in sexual posturing" or "high class pornographic photography" used to sell every product imaginable.

They glamorize female degradation and masochism in a way that reasserts imaginatively the power inequities that the women’s movement challenged . . . Rock video, which "set the beauty index" for young women, showing them "how to move, strip, grimace, pout, breathe, and cry out during a 'sexual' encounter," define beauty as "that which never says no," as that which is abused. (Greene 1992, 167)

Within the context of violence against women, chaining yourself to a bed is hardly a parody. Madonna makes use of and plays on women’s liberation for her own ends. It can be
considered misleading,\textsuperscript{14} for some, it may promote individualism and perhaps unconsciously perpetuate stereotypes that bring harm to women as an aggregate. Considered in this light, Madonna is material, individualistic, a commodity/product and is very clever at selling herself. There are different levels of meaning including resistant meanings within the \textit{Express Yourself} text, but when they are left open with no comment, no critique, their inclusion can perhaps be seen as more of a commercial ploy; the dominant ideology is likely to override other meanings, depending on the positioning of the reader. Madonna appears to be out for herself and makes use of subversive culture to build her career (Kaplan 1989, Henderson 1992).

There is a need for oppositional and potentially transformative images and texts. Some would argue that in creating a counter-hegemonic text, diverging from the expected codes only slightly enhances its ability to be thought-provoking by reaching a wider and more mainstream audience. Others argue that in order to deconstruct patriarchy, it must, to a certain extent, be reenacted. However, if it is reenacted, there is the risk it will be reinscribed.

\textbf{Dominant Reading of the Video}

If images and address are fragmented, the audience may feel off-centre but often the reaction is to put things back together, to synthesise into a coherent frame. Because people see what they are positioned to see, a dominant reading might be as follows: The video is enjoyable in that it is a good dance song and it is visually slick. The music provides narrative continuity to a montage of rapid edits using several close-up shots and varied use of primary

\textsuperscript{14} Because Madonna \textit{freely chooses} to offer herself as sexual object does not make Madonna a feminist or necessarily give her power, particularly if she is understood from a patriarchal perspective.
colours and black and white. The video also supplies information about fashion trends and new dance moves. Beyond this, males and females may have different dominant readings.

Male Address

The video obviously "exploit[s] the sexuality of [Madonna's] face and body" (Fiske 1989b, 96). It can be perceived as a kind of seduction or sexual conquest and makes use of some of the conventions of advertising and pornography. Madonna dances suggestively and addresses the camera invitingly in a manner much like women found in Playboy or women's magazine ads. At the beginning of the video Madonna is fully clothed and by the end, she is wrapped only in a satin sheet. She is shown in submissive postures, and bondage is implied.

It is the sexualization of the female body, the general exchange value of sexuality which, in this case, is used to sell the video or album just as it is used to sell an automobile or beer. The dominant male gaze would be one of the voyeur in which the male holds the privileged position of not only possessing the gaze, "but the power that gaze imbues" (Rutledge Shields 1990, 35). The male would most often identify with the camera and project his fantasy onto the female figure. In this sense the video falls well within the dominant patriarchal code of male chauvinism.

Female Address

Women might tend to focus more on the love relationship in the video. It can be considered a traditional patriarchal narrative of a man/woman relationship that champions love over wealth and security, a theme that is repeated in other Madonna videos. Of Material Girl,
John Fiske (1987, 276) writes "The 'true love' that triumphs is as much a part of patriarchal capitalism as the materialism it defeats." It also reinscribes patriarchal values of heterosexuality and sex within a love relationship.

The *Express Yourself* video reinscribes the childhood fairytale/fantasy of a prince someday coming to rescue the damsel somehow distressed (e.g., Cinderella), romantically sweeping her off her feet. A dominant interpretation is that this video is telling women to keep on searching for a real man or their prince (who makes them feel like royalty—"a queen on a throne") and not to settle for anything less. Real love can only be achieved through full expression. The older, wealthier man turned out to be a "frog" and not the "prince" (i.e., The Frog Prince), but the young man might be more promising. The chain scene signifies how a woman might feel in a less than satisfactory relationship. Additionally, women would likely enjoy the parade of glistening well-muscled men in the video. If they pick and choose carefully, they, too, may will be rewarded with love (milk and honey) and "live happily ever after." The dominant view reinforces chauvinist values in relationships and in how women see themselves and their role in relationships.

Women also respond to the sexualization of the female in the video. The relationship women might form with Madonna might be very much like the one they might have with magazine cover "girls" (woman as fetishized commodities) who set the standards for assessment of feminine beauty (Yanni 1990). So while men may predominately identify, as usual, with the camera, women identify with Madonna as the object of a man's desire and as an object of emulation (Rutledge Shields 1990). Success—in achieving the goal both physically and fashionably—may be measured by looking in the mirror or by the attention gained from men in public. This assessment could involve a process of self-love or self-hate.
Successful young women can gauge their own beauty by critically assessing the beauty of others, and there is a kind of pleasure in this. But it may involve self-deprecation if their own physique and image (and pocket book) pale by comparison. The result is anxiety and urgency. Since a woman’s value in patriarchy depends so heavily on her appearance, her feelings about her own attractiveness may become intermingled with feelings of security, self-worth, and acceptance (Rutledge Shields 1990). Thus, the dominant reading likely encourages women to define themselves in terms of the patriarchal system of meaning of beauty. If evaluated negatively, the video may be criticized for its overtly sexual content and viewed as inappropriate behaviour for women.

*Resistant Reading for a Female within Patriarchy*

Because people are positioned differently within the social strata, what is considered resistant for one person may not necessarily be resistant for another. However, since participants are fairly homogeneous in my sample, a resistant reading could be considered relatively fixed. For the purposes of this study, a reading will be considered resistant if the interpretation is framed at the level of gender politics. Participants may see a number of interpretive levels simultaneously, but they must be able to articulate that the video speaks to issues that are gender specific. Since this study is directed to women who either have traditional or feminist values, the reading that will be established as resistant will be female-specific and speak to the power of women. Participants might see Madonna as all powerful, not succumbing to men’s expectations, and not being afraid to show her sexuality but defining it as she chooses. Alternately, resistant readings may focus on contradictory images induced by Madonna which may be labelled and rejected as dangerous to women as an aggregate (not
in the patriarchal way which might see Madonna as slut, but in a feminist way that would see Madonna's imagery as contributing to the proliferation of negative stereotypical representations that serve to devalue women's status).
CHAPTER 6—ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

This chapter will describe how female interviewees who were differentiated on the basis of their exposure to and knowledge of feminist values interpreted Madonna’s contradictory *Express Yourself* video and explore the kinds of meanings that were generated as a result. This will entail the description of what various scenes meant to these young women, and how interpretations varied within and across each group. Patterns of interpretation that arose along the lines of having a more feminist or traditional orientation will be identified. Readings will also be compared to other textual analyses of Madonna video texts (Kaplan 1987, 1989; Fiske 1987b, 1989b; Lewis 1990; McClary 1991; Schwichtenberg 1992) to see whether video viewers notice the textual features that have been affiliated with the text’s availability for resistant reading practices. Readings that could be considered resistant will be identified and calibrated.

Interpretation of the interview discourse was based on what aspects of the video interview participants paid particular attention to, what they said those aspects meant to them, and how they evaluated the content. Also included is a discussion of participants’ consciousness levels, their levels of inferencing, the detail to which they discussed an issue, and whether those issues specifically addressed gender politics. The first section of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the participants’ positioning with respect to feminism, their music television viewing habits, and their opinions of Madonna.
Participants' Positioning

Even the most feminist and the most traditional women in this interview group would not come close to representing the extremes on this issue in society. For the most part interview participants had not yet experienced the repressive inequities to which the work world exposes women, and this knowledge is particularly persuasive and seems pivotal for promoting feminist values.

Even traditionalists in the sample are aware of the more prominent women's issues as a result of widespread and general feminist rhetoric; they realize the roles of women are changing. They reject feminism not because they do not seek equality, but because they see it already achieved as far as possible.

Lana: I'm not interested in it [feminism]. Like, I believe in women's rights and stuff like that and equality . . . but in this day and age, women are all over the work place, so it's not really [relevant].

For them, equality of the sexes is valued but can only be taken so far, since men and women are considered to be essentially different (at least in terms of physical strength).

Sharon: I'm willing to go to a certain amount and after that it just gets ridiculous . . . women should be given an equal chance to try out [for employment] . . . but when it comes right down to it, women can't compete, because they just don't have the physical strength. Some think they can, but they're just being selfish or something.

Instead, the fulfillment of being a mother and the importance of staying at home when raising children is emphasized.

Maureen: Well, it's always been the males who have been more dominant when it comes to . . . I shouldn't say the workplace . . . maybe it's just socialization . . . but I would be happy after I get married to be at home and have kids . . . because I'd rather have myself raise them than a daycare assistant or something.
The traditionalists in the sample perceive feminists as extremists and as wanting to "dominate" men rather than seeking a balance with them. Some harbour romantic but youthful and unrealistic notions about relationships.

Sharon: I like having someone to look after me . . . I like the idea of it . . . I don’t have to worry about what I’m doing and have someone that I feel safe with, that would be stronger and be able to protect me.

Most feminists in the sample had grown up in non-traditional homes; their mothers were more educated than their fathers or equally educated. Accordingly, they may have been exposed to more information about women’s issues and some knowledge about the inequitable treatment of women; several women referred to their mother’s influence on their own views about women. Women in the feminist category fervently believe in equality, particularly in the work force, and found it hard to believe that all women were not feminists. They remarked that unfortunately the word "feminism" had negative connotations because some women incorrectly perceived feminists as extremist man-haters who think they can do everything a man can (even physically), or that they don’t need men at all.

Sheila: it really bothers me but people still are under the impression that feminists want to kill men and get rid of men entirely or something or they just want to hate men all their lives . . . Like, it’s equal rights between the sexes.

For this group, feminism meant "pro-woman" and the right to equal treatment physically, socially, and economically. However, patriarchal notions of women’s sexuality are deeply rooted and most difficult to change. Furthermore, issues like silencing, language bias, and affirmative action are not fully understood even among the feminist in this sample. These young women are not conscious of the damaging effect that individualistic values have on women as an aggregate. They could only be considered "somewhat feminist" on the larger continuum of feminism.
Music Television--Opinions and Habits

Most of the young women interviewed said that they did not watch music television very often; still, on average they watch it approximately half an hour per day. Interview participants reported that they usually switched to Muchmusic, the music station, when nothing else was on "regular" television or during commercial breaks. Music television is watched sporadically, rather than for extended periods of time at one sitting. Five of the sixteen participants said they watched music television frequently and regularly; three of the five were feminist and two traditional.

Most women in the interview sample (10 of 16) felt the visual dimension of music television added to their comprehension of popular songs. All indicated that in some instances they got a clearer understanding, and in others they did not. The major reasons expressed for this opinion were that: Some types of videos lend themselves to a clearer understanding (concept videos or those with storyline) and others do not (performance videos); musical artists may not have creative control and this would affect their ability to express what they wanted to in their video (among other industry constraints); lyrics may not be well represented by the visual presentation--some videos are collages of odd images that do not appear to make any sense; some artists are more visually creative than others or may have different objectives for making the video in the first place; above all, listeners almost always have different interpretations than the song-writer because the listeners relate the songs to their own life.

Most of the interview participants felt there was a storyline to the Express Yourself video, that the lyrics were well represented visually, that Madonna is a fairly creative artist, and all participants thought Madonna had creative control. In view of their general argument
above they should have felt they obtained a clearer understanding of the song through the video. The only unanswered question was whether they could relate the song to their own--individually different--lives. Their traditional or feminist values should therefore be reflected in their interpretations.

Evaluation of Madonna

All but one of the women in the interview sample admitted that they like Madonna; two from each group (feminist and traditional) identified themselves as Madonna fans. It was evident from the interviews that definitions for what constitutes a fan varied, with some participants believing that to be a fan one must be obsessed with Madonna, dress like her and have her posters on one’s walls. Most of the interviewees, however, had mixed feelings about Madonna. Opinions were polarized: a dichotomy that corresponded to the madonna/whore complex. Generally, participants either said they liked Madonna but did not like some of the things she did, or they ‘‘d not really like Madonna but had to respect her.

Participants, both feminist and traditional, liked Madonna’s music, her dance, and choreography; they believed she was both smart and talented. They also admired her power, her personality, her boldness, the fact that she was a trend-setter and that she was so controversial. Women from the feminist group particularly admired Madonna because she was hard-working, a good performer, wrote her own material and made a strong statement in support of women. This reinforces Lewis’ (1990) conclusion that Madonna is respected by female fans because she is credited with writing her own music and lyrics. Lewis reasons that initiating collaborative efforts in composing and song-writing (which is the nature of the music industry today) affords artists with more creative control once they have an established

144
track record of popular support. She maintains that women are often perceived as industry puppets and that it is more difficult for women to participate on collaborative teams because they are often "tainted" with the "ideology of sexual favours" (68). Only the feminists in my study mentioned that they liked Madonna for her authenticity as a writer and composer.

On the other hand, traditional women were more likely to focus on Madonna's image or her attractiveness; one commented that Madonna seemed "worldly." They responded to Madonna's physical beauty in a self-conscious way, as the following quote demonstrates.

Anne: She's [Madonna] so attractive. She's kind of like Marilyn Monroe. You can't keep your eyes off her . . . She's almost unreal, you know, untouchable. Everything about her is perfect.

While captivated by Madonna, traditional women perceived her as difficult to relate to. Madonna seemed to be viewed through patriarchal eyes; women compare and possibly deprecate their own self image or attractiveness, because it can never match the dominant vision of beauty. Some traditional women were perhaps responding to this representation of what is female in a patriarchal way.

The negative characteristics attributed to Madonna and shared by some of the women in both groups were that Madonna did shocking, disgusting and vulgar things, exploited herself and sometimes seemed "out of control." Feminists added that she was out for the money. Some traditionalists mentioned that she had no talent, had an unattractive personality, and was a bad role model for children because her actions were morally unacceptable. One traditional woman made it clear that she hated what Madonna stood for--Madonna "makes me want to rawlf."

Judy: She's got a good voice but beyond that I can't stand her. She is disgusting . . . she uses all these publicity gimmicks like saying that all men should have another man's tongue in their mouth before they die . . .
promoting that kind of thing just makes me sick to my stomach. She is just very trampy. I just don’t like Madonna.

She attacked Madonna for what she views as inappropriate and immoral sexual behaviour; she saw Madonna was flaunting homosexuality and her own sexuality for the sake of publicity. These findings support Fiske’s assertion that Madonna haters find her to be an "ego-centric" media manipulator and that their hate "centres on her sexuality" which is "expressed in whorelike terms" (1987, 274). Judy uses the language of the patriarch ("tramp") to describe Madonna. Opinions of Madonna were usually well-formed prior to the interview. As both Kaplan (1987) and Fiske (1987b) had noted, extratextual knowledge about Madonna constantly breaks through and informs the readings of Madonna video texts.

Interviewees, both feminist and traditional, gave several reasons why they thought Madonna has creative control of her productions: She is considered bold, decisive, independent, confident, and in control; a person who makes her own decisions. She is a businesswoman and the "CEO" of her own company. Madonna’s unique style and attitude are relayed through her videos. Madonna has both the power and the money to be in control. She is a creative person and has the wherewithal to know or sense what will be successful; she is more talented than many directors. Her controversial videos were felt to suit the controversial image she cultivates in media reviews.

**Discussion of the *Express Yourself* Video**

Only six interview participants could not recall ever seeing Madonna’s *Express Yourself* video, two from the feminist group and four from the traditional group. Of the latter, two owned the album with the *Express Yourself* song and had heard it on many occasions. Two interviewees from each group had seen the video many times.
Semi-structured interviews do encourage authentic responses from interviewees by avoiding the imposition of irrelevant categories and by allowing all participants to seek clarification for any mis-understanding. The advantage of the method is the acquisition of rich and detailed information. The drawback is the resulting disparity in responses and, ironically, the abundance of information.

The lack of an imposed structure made it difficult to tease out patterns and to affirm, with certainty, what conclusions could and could not be made from the data. The arduous nature of the discussion process is, to some extent, responsible for the length and style of this following section.

During the interviews and in reading over the transcripts, it was, at first, difficult to determine whether the feminist and traditional groups’ interpretations were essentially similar or different. The clearly enunciated positions on either end of the spectrum were easy to detect (such as Madonna as whore or Madonna as feminist), but other subject positions showed much more subtle differences. Distinctions only became visible after a recurring pattern emerged as a result of the analysis process. With qualitative data, identifying a pattern is very much an inductive process. The video discussion will therefore begin in a descriptive style to familiarize readers with the interview discourse and to allow them to experience emerging patterns and to perhaps draw their own conclusions. This section will address similarities among all interview participants and describe the differences in participants’ interpretations of the scenes mentioned most often.

On the surface the young women enjoyed the video because of what they evaluate as an upbeat song with a good beat, great choreography, and dance moves they can imitate as well as the slick production value. The interpretations of the words "express yourself" were
largely similar, positive and empowering: "Be true to yourself." "Achieve your goals and be sure of yourself." "Be yourself," "Stand up for yourself," "Stand up for what you believe in," and "Don't conform" just because it is expected or considered proper.

Most of the interviewees imagined the video takes place in some futuristic industrial compound which includes a luxurious New York style penthouse apartment and a dark, damp, dungeon-like factory or coal mine down below. Most sensed the "above and below" motif. Some noted that the whole complex would be located in an industrial city like New York. Not surprisingly, none of the interviewees recognized the Metropolis parallel. Metropolis, the movie this video evokes, is much more obscure than many of the other iconic images, myths or cultural artifacts Madonna has resurrected and rewritten (i.e. Marilyn Monroe, the peep show, etc.). Therefore, it is less likely that the intertextual parallels would be appreciated, particularly among a young audience. However, the video stands on its own without this association; the icons that indicate industrialization generally translate into a cold, harsh and mechanical atmosphere of control whether understood on a sexual, love, or economic level.

Selection and Interpretation

After viewing the video, participants were asked for their first impressions, what they liked or disliked or what stood out in their minds about the video. The young women in both groups most often referred to three scenes: the "good-looking" men at the beginning of the video (Men as Machines), Madonna dressed in a suit (Drag scene) and Madonna chained to the bed (Chain scene). The scene with Madonna crawling along the floor (Black cat/crawling scene) was also mentioned several times, but, with one exception, only by women in the feminist group. These four scenes also prompted the largest range of interpretations. The
traditional group was a little more likely than the feminist group to speak of an early scene where Madonna was dressed in a green gown (Green gown scene).

This first open-ended question indicated what individuals had "selected" or paid attention to in the video. Only information about scenes and themes interviewees specifically mentioned was pursued to avoid imposing my own understanding of the video.

**Men as Machines**

Almost all of the women appreciated the parade of appealing young men in the video and commented, in their opening remarks, on their good looks and "sexy," "muscular" physiques. However, women in the traditional group were more likely to leave the discussion at that or to understand the men in a literal sense, referring to their actions at the beginning of the video as stylized "dancing," "working out," "working" or "showing their muscles." Among traditionalists, the scene was largely interpreted as setting up (as the object of desire) the "typical" and patriarchal stereotype of the "hard-working man" who engages in "real" physical labour, perhaps in contrast, as one interviewee noted, to "the stuffy little guy in a suit who doesn't do anything" (Joyce). The message might be to "get your man to prove to you that he is a man" or to "get yourself a 'real' man" (Brenda), someone who can give you real love, not just riches.

Brenda: I saw that [the men] and I'm, Oh yah, Madonna, you want to seek out a guy who's got muscle. Okay. I remember when I saw that too, I was thinking of, what's that lady, that just married that guy who was a construction worker. She was rich. I kind of like the thought of that, this woman marrying him. Okay, she didn't go for riches, she went for what Madonna is recommending.
This reading, positioned either within the sexual or traditional love relationship level, was supported by the lyrics "You don't need diamond rings or eighteen karat gold... What you need is a big strong hand to lift you to your higher ground."

In contrast, only two women in the feminist group remained at the literal level noting only that the men were working or working out. One feminist interpreted these same images of muscular men as symbolic of the "male dominated work-force" which she disdain:

Liz: Men having all this power and going out there working and making all the money, and she's back in the bedroom... Putting down the rules for men and women in her video... Maybe it's not the way things are but too many people still look at it that way. I mean, women still make less than men for doing the same work.

Her perception is that Madonna was both portraying and protesting the traditional roles of men and women.

A somewhat different reading—perhaps the only negotiated reading in the traditional group—was Madonna as voyeur. Instead of the usual scenario of construction workers "whistling at pretty girls walking by" (Anne), it was Madonna who looked on as they flexed and lifted to impress her; she set them up for tantalizing display. A woman in the feminist group also saw Madonna as voyeur but continued to address Madonna's power as the one in charge. She described the whole place as a "male factory," with the men working hard for the love of a strong woman like Madonna.

Only two traditional women indicated any sense of a change in gender power dynamics, but they did not (or were not able to) clearly articulate it. On the other hand, the feminist group both recognized and verbalized that Madonna used and intentionally inverted the codes of patriarchy to objectify the male body. One woman talked about the scene in terms of the music industry: men with naked torsos are appealing and sexy; an image that
sells. Usually scantily clothed women are used to sell product, "video vixens" in the case of music television. Perhaps this particular scene was so memorable to all participants, aside from its obvious sexual appeal, because the women intuitively realized that it is an image rarely seen in the twenty-four hour flow of music videos, or elsewhere in media. These sentiments were expressly voiced by only three women in the feminist group.

Carla: They're always showing women's bodies. They never show men's bodies. And she [Madonna] turned the tables around (sic), which is good, you know.

Another feminist empathized with the men because she felt the video depicted men as prisoners of the stereotypical conception that they had to be strong and have great bodies: recognizing and rejecting the objectification of men.

**Drug Scene**

The two most often mentioned aspects of the scene in which Madonna dressed in a suit were that Madonna grabbed her crotch "like Michael Jackson," and that she pulled open her suit lapels to reveal her bra. Most noted that Madonna acted very masculine during this scene.

In the traditional group, four women expressed their aversion to the scene because of the crotch grabbing. One woman referred to the whole scene as "gross," and thought Madonna included it as an attention-getter "just to kind of get everybody's goat": Madonna's point was "just to do what you want" (Christine), as she did herself. This illustrates that Madonna's video does play on rebelliousness, but this reading is not framed within gender

---

35 At the time of the interviews, Michael Jackson had just released his new video, *Dangerous*, which had raised some controversy because of the fact that he grabbed his crotch several times during the span of the video.
politics. For another traditional viewer, the scene functioned primarily on the sexual level; she found it particularly "disgusting," because Madonna was, in essence, reducing men to their usefulness for sexual pleasure.

Judy: Let him show you what he's got or whatever. It seemed that the only thing that men were useful for is, you know, is that they could have sex with her [Madonna] . . . They had genitals, oooh. That seemed to be the big thing.

Her reaction to men's bodies being flaunted rather than women's exemplifies a double standard; she seems disturbed by the fact men were being used as sexual objects but the fact that women are objectified escapes her, perhaps suggesting the naturalization of the sexual posturing of women in patriarchy. Here it was Madonna who was criticized because she was perceived as using men. Another traditional woman said that the crotch-grabbing was sexual "to attract men" and was included to inspire controversy; she did not evaluate it negatively.

Two traditional women did note the parallel between Madonna and the businessman; one thought it to be an indication that Madonna took over and was now "in charge of the men." The change in the usual power relations was evaluated negatively and not framed within a feminist level of consciousness. The other woman felt the dance style, including the crotch-grabbing, was supposed to symbolize men and viewed it more positively: Being dressed like a powerful business-type elevated Madonna's status. She perceived it as a visual depiction of the many facets of a woman, "you can still be in a suit but you can still be a woman" (Joyce).

Three traditional women liked the style of the suit Madonna was wearing. One of them noted that women wore suits to be accepted in a man's world, and thought the suit was a "cool" fashion statement. Another thought that Madonna was imitating male rock stars who grab their crotches: by flashing her breasts Madonna was initiating her own "signature."
Anne: I liked the suit . . . It was almost like she was imitating, you know, when you see men in rock videos and how they grab themselves . . . when she was flashing her breasts, I thought it was just an image. Just because she is a woman, this is what she is going to do on stage, just like men do.

This illustrates Lewis’ (1990) suggestion that female viewers recognize when female performers do things that have typically been enacted by men and validate female culture by making use of symbols that are distinctively feminine. These three traditional interviewees engage in negotiated and possibly resistant readings by seeing the drag scene specifically in terms of women’s power: an elevation in status, acceptance in a man’s world, and a female signature.

Feminists also noted the crotch-grabbing as one of the most prominent aspects of the drag scene. One commented that it was unnecessary and was most likely included for its sexual appeal. In general, feminists did not receive this scene with as much negativity as did the traditional group. Most often it was interpreted as representing something beyond crude sexual appeal.

One feminist, like one of the traditionalists, saw the scene’s function as capturing attention. But she viewed it as a positive portrayal of a strong woman: "I like images of women that have power to them . . . and I think . . . sure, why not" (Karen). She contrasted the manly gestures and crotch grabbing with the bra and "pearls" and concluded, like one of the traditionalists, that the image represented another, different aspect of woman.

Two women, a feminist and a traditionalist, understood the video as a series of different images of women. Madonna personified several roles including other characters in the video to make the point that there are many aspects (both masculine and feminine) to any one person—that a woman can be both strong and sexual. As Lewis (1990), Fiske (1989b)
and Kaplan (1989) suggest, there is recognition among some viewers that Madonna engages in at least two opposing representations of women.

Similar to some traditionalists, two feminists also pointed out Madonna's similarity to "the boss," but extended the metaphor to apply to all men. Noting that Madonna imitated men to indicate that she wants to be accepted as an equal, one commented that most men do not consider women their equals (Margaret). Because Madonna's motions were "exaggerated" and comic-like, the other saw Madonna mocking not only the man with the monocle with but all men in power positions and the powerful "image they try to put across" (Liz). This is a clear example of Fiske's (1989b) notion of parody. Liz also pointed out a double standard:

Liz: Like Michael Jackson has been doing that [grabbing his crotch] in his videos for the longest time, and no one ever gave him any flack about it. And she [Madonna] does it once, and everyone is on her back.

Laurie noted that by changing into the suit Madonna changed her status, from a woman's to a man's. Similar to one traditionalist who commented on the dress code in the work force, one feminist noted that women are no longer expected to dress in "dark ugly" power suits. She also recognized the visual pun that makes use of the cliche "Who is wearing the pants? She is the one wearing the pants" (Denise).

Carla, a feminist, recognized what Lewis defines as an 'access sign'--that wearing pants and grabbing the crotch are things that have been "restricted to men." By doing so Madonna was saying:

Carla: anything that men can do women can do. There's no problem with it... she's strong. She is in charge. She is a take-charge type of gal.

Another feminist, Sheila, also realized Madonna was depicting the double standard in the work world:
Sheila: In business, if the man is really powerful, well, you know, he is very powerful, but if a woman tries to be powerful, she's a bitch.

Overall, the young women with more feminist values had negotiated or resistant interpretations and were operating at the collective level of gender politics when interpreting the drag scene. They not only recognized society's double standards, they articulated them and expressed their aversion to the cultural myths that do injustice to women.

When asked why Madonna would reveal her bra by pulling at the lapels of her suit, most women in both groups thought that it was an indication that while women are strong and can accomplish the same things men can they can still be feminine. At first, the readings appeared to be very similar. The difference between the two groups only became noticeable in the way this notion was expressed which provided evidence of differing frames of reference. For example, the response from a traditional women was:

Maureen: She was trying to make herself equal . . . maybe behind women that are cold . . . there is still that feminine inside" (my emphasis).

This quotation betrays a view that women cannot really be equal to men and that career women are necessarily cold. In contrast, a feminist expressed her interpretation of the opening of the suit jacket like this.

Karen: She kind of opens it [the suit lapels] to reveal her femininity and then she kind of hides it again like it is something she has to keep covered; that she has to show this masculine image or she'll lose control . . .

Another feminist saw the opening of the lapels operating on three levels at once: a sexual level where Madonna is standing up on the stairs looking down on the workers and teasing them; at the level of the story in which Madonna mimics her keeper, and in terms of gender politics in that it was perhaps a dream sequence that represents all women who "dream of being in a power position" as Madonna must have herself (Liz).
Chain Scene

As with other scenes, there was a range of responses to the chain scene in both groups, traditional and feminist, so that the scene can be interpreted on each of four levels: sexual, love, economics/societal, or gender politics. However, the two groups evaluated each level quite differently. Since the chain image is so forcefully explicit, only one traditional woman never really noticed the chain scene.

Most of the women were uncomfortable with the scene and described it as "offensive" or "degrading." Most recognized that the chain signified something besides literal bondage—that it symbolized some kind of restriction. The term "degrading," usually part of feminist discourse, was used by four of the eight traditional women to express their feelings—traditional women may have been most disturbed by the image, because they were more likely to take it at face value. One traditionalist, who interpreted the entire video almost exclusively on a sexual level, felt this scene accentuated Madonna as the cat or signified raw animal magnetism. Similarly, the chain scene made Anne uncomfortable because she interpreted it literally as bondage and said it showed that some people, like Madonna, have warped ideas about sex. Anne and Sharon find that the scene falls in line with Madonna’s character. Anne explains that it is very typical of Madonna—"it is unlikely that a whole Madonna video would be sweet and not much to it. There is going to be raw hard core . . ." Sharon refers to the madonna/whore myth.

Sharon: It’s something I would expect out of (sic) Madonna for some reason. Maybe it is the way she perceives guys. They want someone who is very feminine, you know, in a nice gown, but then behind closed doors they want a totally wild thing.

Moreover, she believes Madonna accepts the myth; Sharon excuse Madonna speculating that it was Madonna’s experience with men. To Joyce, the chain scene meant that no matter how
hard women tried, they could not deny their sexuality; they were tied to it. Similarly, Brenda believed the chains signified entrapment in a suffocating relationship. For her, Madonna was illustrating that it could happen to anyone—if one chose a partner for the wrong reasons. However, she did not understand why Madonna would still be in chains this late in the video if she knew it was best to follow her heart. She concluded that the young man must also be "the wrong person." She adds:

Brenda: I think it [the chain scene] was kind of degrading—a woman chained... Like, even if it wasn’t a woman... anyone, to be in chains is degrading—like you’re imprisoned.

As a traditional woman, she quickly noted that her comment referred to all people and was not specifically a women’s issue. She therefore saw the chain operating at a group level, but distanced herself from any identification that it might be considered feminist. Two readings in the traditional group could be considered at least negotiated, and perhaps resistant. Christine thought the chain scene was "symbolic of being tied down and not being able to express herself as a woman," while Maureen saw Madonna chastising men for mistreating women.

Maureen: It just kind of brings to mind brutality or trying to get away from that idea that men can do whatever they want, and she [Madonna] was incorporating that into her video.

Feminists were equally disturbed by the bondage imagery. However, only two feminists used words like "degrading" or "offensive"; the rest saw the scene as symbolically representing the repression of women. One feminist thought Madonna looked pathetic: "It was like oh oh oh (shakes her finger). Put the chain on. Stay there. Like a dog." Another was also "bugged" by the chains because "she’s like a dog. You know," but Margaret also thought Madonna was breaking away from "the dominating man."
Margaret: Just to show that she is a prisoner of love, a prisoner of a man. Then she breaks free and then she has control. The man comes to her, where always women seem to come to men.

In general, the feminists were less likely to take the message literally and more apt to relate the chain to restrictions placed on women. As Karen put it:

It's very degrading that she is chained, that she is no longer this woman that is in control. She is almost reduced to being a pet, or worse, a prisoner... She [Madonna] enjoys shock value.

Tania thought the chain scene was an illustration of how men perceive women and represented Madonna "breaking away from the chains of men and the past and how men used to control her." Denise's response clearly revealed her alternative positioning.

Denise: I thought it was the whole idea of... that, in the past, women have been kind of chained to the bedroom. Basically that's where they're supposed to do everything or... that when a woman is successful they say that she got there by lying on her back...which is pretty bad.

I didn't like it very much. But I don't think it was there for us to like. I think it was there to shock us and to help empathize with the way women are treated, still a lot. I mean, we've got to fight for equal pay and equal rights and stuff like that.

She identified the myths about women she does not accept and believes that Madonna both depicted and challenged those myths.

The thick black chain attached to Madonna's collar extends away from the bed and seems to have no end. Interview participants were asked to imagine what the chain was attached to. Women responded with a variety of answers that can be identified as literal, contextual, or symbolic; literal refers to obvious answers, contextual refers to responses related to the video narrative and symbolic refers to seeing the video scene as representing reality—that the character Madonna stands for all women. Two traditional women gave literal answers; that Madonna was chained to the bed or to a ball. Two other traditional women identified the older executive type with the monocle as the one who held the chain, an
interpretation related to the story of the video. Another traditional women suspected that Madonna symbolized women who had made the wrong choices in their relationships (they were chained to "Mr. Wrong")—a traditional reading. In contrast, almost all feminist interviewees identified the person or people at the other end of the chain by (male) gender—the "male executive sitting in that office," the other men in the video, or men in general. Although some interpretations were made in reference to the video story, feminists generally saw the scene as representing the women's repression in patriarchy.

**Black Cat / Crawling Scene**

Feminists were more likely to centre their attention on the scene featuring Madonna crawling along the floor; only one traditionalist mentioned this scene in her opening remarks. When asked specifically what they thought of the black cat, one traditional woman had not noticed the black cat, and four said the cat functioned as a transition between scenes. One saw the cat operating on the sexual level, representing the mystery of animal magnetism or chemistry that brings two lovers together. The notion of the attraction was strengthened, she added, by the appearance of Madonna's large cat-like eyes that seem to beckon the young man as he held the cat in his arms. Another traditionalist responded at the love relationship level: she noted that women usually have cats as pets and she thought the cat symbolized love because it could not be influenced by wealth.

**Brenda**: Cats don’t care about material things, so it was guided by the right things. It was guided to the right guy.

Two of the women in the traditional group noticed a change in power relations.

**Sharon**: She owned the cat and then she became the cat herself and then he brought the cat back up so . . . She owned the cat and then she lost that
ownership... the guy, the worker brought the cat back up... you could say that he then had the power because he held what she once owned.

Anne: It goes back and forth... the control... who's in control. One minute she is, the next minute he is, and it goes back and forth. It's confusing, I guess.

Although both young women communicate that they are confused about what they thought the video was expressing here, they recognized something unusual about the power relations, but they were unable to articulate clearly what they meant.

Most traditional women saw the cat as a narrative tool, a visual transition. Five were puzzled by the scene where Madonna crawled cat-like on all fours; several believed Madonna mimicked or turned into the cat for sexual reasons. Perhaps this confusion demonstrates Kaplan's (1989) assertion that Madonna continuously sets up classic cinematic structures and then violates both spacial codes and codes of address which, in turn, serve to disorient the viewer. One traditionalist offered that maybe Madonna was or wanted to be the cat and that perhaps Madonna went to the worker as the cat. She remained at the literal level and did not offer an explanation why Madonna would be the cat (Lana). Another just thought it was "typical" of Madonna; "she's always got to have some kind of sexy thing in there" (Brenda). Judy, too, thought Madonna was trying to show she was the cat because "being a cat gave her an excuse to slink more." She elaborates:

Judy: Not having any inhibitions like animals. Like animals are supposed to mate and reproduce. There are no rules of conduct for animals. You can tell a cat not to jump on the couch, but other than that... I think she [Madonna] was going back to that. There were no rules of conduct, and she could do whatever she pleased.

She therefore recognized that Madonna likes to break the rules and do as she pleases. Judy strongly opposed this kind of behaviour, as we need "set rules to live by." Judy's rules
appear to be the patriarch's. Joyce also thought Madonna was imitating the "kitty" just as she imitated other characters in the video. She adds:

Joyce: She [Madonna] is being really sexy. The guys that are going to watch this are going to go: Wow! . . . Look at the curves.

Thus, Madonna crawling along the floor was primarily interpreted on the sexual plane by these women as was the milk which Madonna first laps directly from a bowl and then pours over her shoulder onto the young worker. One traditionalist seemed particularly disturbed by Madonna lapping the milk.

Sharon: It was just to prove she was a cat. Here, I am the cat . . . Watch me lick the milk! (disgusted)

The milk was also interpreted as a symbol of the attraction or bond between the two lovers by some of the traditional women.

Only one feminist's response was similar to many traditionalists: not only did the cat serve as a transition device, but the cat, as a woman's pet, supported the notion that the "lady" was lonely. The rest of the feminists' interpretations were quite different from the traditional responses. Tania thought the cat symbolized sneaky, conniving, and untrustworthy men and that Madonna was reversing the roles by becoming the cat to get back at men. This reading exemplifies Lewis' claim that "access signs argue for equal rights and recognition of women and girls by invoking images of sex-role reversals and gender utopias" (1990, 110). The black cat reminded Sheila of a mystical Egyptian symbol; she thought it represented Madonna's desire for equal treatment, which she was not able to get in the video, not even from her new lover.

Sheila: Maybe the guy [younger worker] is just a symbol of all men in this role who don't treat women with respect.
Similarly, another feminist was bothered by the black cat imagery because to her it relayed a mixed message. The cat initially illustrated that Madonna wanted to be treated "like a queen," but later on it looked to her as though "she wanted to be treated like dirt and beg for it" (Laurie).

Laurie: He comes in the room and he drops the cat and it's like ... Come here, bitch! (snaps her fingers) That's the image I got... It's symbolic of the overall view of women's role and men's role in relationships.

Feminists were not only more likely to mention the scene where Madonna crawls on the floor like a cat, but their response to this scene contrasted sharply with the traditional women's. Most feminists expressed their disgust for this scene because they interpreted it as submissiveness and found it demeaning.

Margaret: Revolting! (Laughs) I didn't like the way the woman was crawling ... 'cause it's almost like women should come to men ... look good and be subservient.

Tania: It was like ... women are delicate like a cat and graceful ... then in another way, she is crawling on the floor ... kind of like ... Please get up! It was almost like she was crawling for a man.

Karen: I think it is a degrading image because she goes from being the one with control to being almost subservient ... She is crawling in almost a begging kind of way where she is trying to be a good kitty, you know.

Liz: Eat off the floor! How do you think I'll feel? ... She is just playing the part ... that she thinks she is expected to play ... She is not doing what she said in her video. She's not expressing herself.

Similarly the milk was considered with almost as much distaste by some.

Karen: I thought it [the milk] was really offensive because the milk is like the reward, you know. It you're good then you get the life of milk and honey.

By pouring the milk over her shoulder Madonna was pouring out her troubles (Tania), "man troubles" in particular (Margaret). Most feminists saw the scene as a demeaning and
stereotypical representation of woman: Madonna either lowered herself and lost any power that she had gained up to this point, reverted to the sexual expectations as men define them or resorted to the role to get what she wanted.

Two other feminists responded to the crawling scene in a different and positive way. To them cats symbolized femininity and grace. They noted that women are always associated with cats and often have cats, while men have dogs; they referred to *The War of the Roses* as case in point. For them, milk represented "a baby’s first food," "purity," "strength," and "power." By pouring the milk over her shoulder, Madonna was showing that she had enough strength and did not need any more.

**Green Gown**

Traditionalists, more often than feminists, mentioned the scene where Madonna was "looking very feminine" in a long green gown. They appeared to respond to the attractiveness of the image and this scene also helped make sense in setting up the love relationship as unhappy. One feminist responded to the "glam doll" image, but she viewed the video as a series of different representations of women and therefore paid particular attention to various striking images. One other feminist also regarded the scene as helpful to developing the love narrative.

The excessiveness of Madonna’s red lipstick, in this scene and elsewhere, was emphasized by a couple of interviewees who said that it just would not be Madonna without the lipstick. This demonstrates that viewers do recognize that Madonna dresses to excess as Fiske (1989b) claims. Fiske believes, through her excessiveness Madonna tests the bounds of taste, taste being a form social control. Madonna
parodies, not just the stereotypes but the way in which they are made. She represents herself as one who is in control of her own image and of the process of making it. This, at the reading end of the semiotic process, allows the reader similar control over her own meanings. . . . Thus Madonna’s excessively sexual pouting and lipstick can be read to mean that she looks like that not because patriarchy determines that she should, but because she knowingly chooses to. (Fiske, 1987, 278)

However, the findings showed that while Madonna’s excessiveness “can be read” resistantly among young females, it can just as easily be understood dominantly. How excessiveness was understood and evaluated varied; Madonna may be criticized as raunchy, crude and vulgar; her antics may be explained away as "typical Madonna" pathetically searching for publicity; she may be valued as a gutsy controversial trend-setter; as presenting herself as she chooses; or as mocking conventions of taste. The viewer’s positioning determined whether Madonna’s garish style would raise questions of taste and therefore the issue of social control-that patriarchy controls women by dictating what is tasteful decoration for women (Fiske, 1989b).

The following section will describe how one can ascertain the codes participants used to interpret (or decode) the video, aside from their explicit and conscious opinions of the video. When the responses were separated (thus decontextualized), it was often initially difficult to differentiate responses into the two groups, particularly if a scene was interpreted on the same axes (sex, love, or economics/societal). The frame of reference used in interpreting the video was often revealed through subtle differences rather than explicit or direct statements. Selection of scenes, language, perception of which character held power and why, video address, and appeal as well as inferencing were often the indicators of participants’ subject positioning.
First Impressions

Participants were interviewed in pairs; consequently, it was originally feared that they might modify their positions to accommodate their partner's viewpoint, or might "update" their own understanding of the video with information provided by their partners. However, on the whole, participants, though they might soften their opinions, rarely deviated much from their original perspective over the course of the interview even when their partner disagreed. What participants found most prominent was often revealed in their initial remarks about the video; this often exposed their social positioning within patriarchy.

Among traditionalists, Sharon said that the video was entertaining because the music and beat were good. Lana focused on the good-looking men. Christine and Judy responded negatively to the sexual content or Madonna's sexual gesturing in the video, and Judy added that Madonna was exploiting herself. Maureen and Anne were put off by the "cold," "hard," "mechanical" and "raw" video which to them emphasized only the physical or sexual aspect of a relationship. Joyce took the video as visual validation that there is a sensitive side to cold career women. Brenda commented that Madonna demanded respect from men and that love is more important than riches. On the whole, these readings replicated the patriarchal gaze and were evidence that traditionalists internalize patriarchal conceptions of women: women who are overtly sexual are sluts and prostitute themselves since they should only have sex within a love relationship, and women should be nurturing. That men should respect women and that women should marry for love and not money were also considered dominant readings.

Some of the feminists' first impressions illustrated alternate ways of seeing and being (alternate subjectivities), even though their feminist frameworks are still developing. Karen
referred to the various images Madonna enacts in the video; her interpretation is that there are many sides to women. Tania said that cats are stereotypically characterized as sneaky, conniving, unpredictable, and untrainable, and therefore symbolized men because she considered men untrustworthy (a patriarchal conception of men), but saw Madonna taking over this role and therefore the power men usually hold. Margaret also noted that Madonna inverted traditional roles because in the end the man came to her, not the other way around. However, to her the bedroom scene was "slutty." Liz says the video showed by example that "women can have it all," but she added that by her pursuit of the younger man Madonna was making sure she had something to fall back on when the older man loses control, another patriarchal notion about women.

Other introductory responses considered resistant showed negative or positive evaluations of the different representations of woman that Madonna enacts. Laurie and Sheila saw contradictory messages in the text and detested that Madonna postured submissively in the chain scene; while the lyrics said "respect yourself," her actions were perceived as "groveling for a man." Carla and Denise interpreted Madonna as depicting and denouncing women's "subjugation." They remarked that Madonna was a feminist by example, as she showed women that they need not suppress their sexuality to have feminist values. Both questioned why women should have to be like men to have power.

Lyrics Recall and Rewriting

The lyrics that the women remembered were also indicative of their frame of reference. Naturally, the phrase most interviewees recalled was refrain "express yourself"; beyond that, there was a marked difference between women from the two groups. The
feminists primarily recalled and valued positively lyrics like "respect yourself," "don't go for second best," "let me show you how," and "if you do it right now." These were all chorus phrases repeated several times. One woman could not recall specific lines, but her interpretation of the lyrics was:

Carla: Don't be dependent on a man because he can cheat on you. And don't be impressed by all his gifts, because you can buy them yourself.

Some women "rewrote" the lyrics by replacing some words with others that better fit their frame of reference. For example, in the line "Let him show you how." him was replaced with me or was dropped altogether.

Margaret: Like "show you how," and she [Madonna] is doing all this stuff. Like, she is showing you how.

The line "If you want it right now" with its sexual connotation was replaced with "do it," perhaps also sexual, but more ambiguous and certainly more active:

Denise: And start doing it right now. Start expressing yourself now, before it's too late. And don't be worried about what they [men] think.

Interestingly, most traditionalists (five of eight) recalled a line like "And when he's gone, you might regret it, to think about the love he had" (italics mine). The actual lyrics are "And when you're gone, he might regret it" (italics mine). This line occurs in the last verse of the song and is repeated only twice during the video. Not one feminist mentioned this line.

The lyrics each group recalled demonstrate that individuals pay attention to what makes sense for them and evade messages they don't want to hear. As Steiner asserts "We all recode messages we contest, dislike, or do not want to hear, as we think they are intended" (1988, 3).
Sex and Power

With respect to the scene that takes place in the bedroom, some women focused on the love-making while others commented on the men fighting. Judy, a traditionalist, intensely disliked the scene because she found it the most graphic and most sexually exploitative. Three other traditionalists responded primarily on a descriptive level, noting that the men were fighting and perhaps revolting against the strict rules of the businessman. Sharon made reference to what she comprehended as submissiveness, noting that Madonna immediately "melted" to the young man without a word.

In general, feminists were more likely to address the bedroom scene than women in the traditional group. Although all their responses could be considered feminist, they were divided on whether they evaluated the scene positively or negatively. Two feminist women were disturbed by the violent images entwining the love scene. They felt it was a "dangerous" image in light of the prevalence of images depicting violence against women in the media overall. Like one of the traditional women, one feminist was agitated by Madonna's submission "like a rag doll" to the young man, but she further explicated that Madonna had reverted to stereotypical expectations and was not doing what she (Madonna) had recommended in the lyrics. Another hated the lack of respect the young man showed for Madonna when he soiled her with his dirty hands. Two of the feminists found the lovemaking scene quite acceptable; one judged the scene fluid and tasteful, the other saw Madonna as living up to her own ethics or her trademark, that women should not be afraid to reveal their sexuality.

It is interesting to examine these responses in terms of the double standard women are subjected to in patriarchy. For men, getting as far as possible toward "home base" is
positively valued as "prowess," whereas women in the same situation are perceived as whores (Wood 1984). Madonna's own perspective is as follows:

I think for the most part men have always been the aggressors sexually. Through time immemorial they've always been in control. So I think sex is equated with power in a way, and that's scary in a way. It's scary for men that women would have that power, and I think it's scary for women to have that power or to have that power and be sexy at the same time. (Madonna in McClary 1991, 152)

The explicitly sexual bedroom scene is accompanied by the lyrics "respect yourself," perhaps an attempt to bridge the madonna/whore gap and thus to transgress and challenge patriarchy's binary representations of women (Fiske 1989b). However, almost all of the interviewees believed that when Madonna slept with the man at the end of the video she was either "trampy" or "slutty" or was succumbing to men's expectations and thus forfeited her power. Only a few feminists saw Madonna as not afraid to express her own sexuality; she does have sex but it is because she chooses to. This reinforces Fiske's claim that female fans realize that, by invoking the madonna/whore complex, Madonna defines her own sexuality but also curtails his claim because only a few female viewers recognized Madonna's actions as being independent of what men think.

Address and Appeal

All the women in the traditional group believed the video was specifically addressed to women for a number of reasons: the opening sequence and the lyrics were addressed to women; the camera angle placed Madonna in an elevated position; Madonna acted powerfully, and she had a dominant and active role in the video. Extratextual knowledge informed participants that Madonna wanted other women to view her as a role model--to make women aware of stereotypes and to let them know they should not let anyone tell them what to do.
Women in the feminist group also saw the video as being addressed to women, but they gave different reasons: Madonna was aware that the majority of her fans are female and thus cleverly directed it to them; Madonna was warning women to beware of men because even independent women could be badly hurt, as she was in her own relationship with Sean Penn; women are usually the ones who refrain from expressing their needs.

Many of the reasons given by both groups support Lewis’ notion that female viewers notice videos that deviate from standard male-directed video fare, and particularly those that “resonate with [their own] female cultural experiences” (1990, 109). They realize Madonna, as a female on music television, is not treated in the usual way; because of her own experiences as a woman, Madonna can establish a relationship with them:

Tania: Because we understand her better [than men], right, because we are women. We’re women like her, right (feminist).

Maureen: It [the video] definitely attracts the attention of women . . . She is incredibly gorgeous and has everything going for her . . . even like Paula Abdul . . . There aren’t that many female singers as opposed to the male groups that maybe have the women in the videos in their bikinis, and this is a change for women, not to speak out, but to actually have a role (traditional).

There is even perhaps some suggestion in the findings of McClary’s (1991) notion that Madonna diverges from hegemonic ideological musical structures. McClary claims that musical cadences (endings), which are conventionally thought of as masculine, round off and therefore purge more feminine thematic plot interpolations. By not complying with masculine cadences Madonna breaches typically gendered musical procedures.

Sharon: Even the beat, though, is not something that a lot of guys would dance to. She seems to write her songs for women. It’s really boppy and they don’t like to dance to it. It’s funny to watch them dance to it. So I think she writes it more for women.
Female viewers thus faintly recognize that Madonna's music is different and more feminine in its style.

Feminist women also felt that men did not generally like Madonna and had heard her referred to as a "pig" perhaps because men may recognize that Madonna threatens those patriarchal institutions that would "contain" her as a whore (Fiske 1989b). Liz, a feminist, commented that, in the small home town where she grew up, the guys would not appreciate the video because of their "backward 'chain 'em to the stove'" mentality. She suspected that they would consider Madonna a "bitch" because they would empathize with the powerful guy whom she was "messing around on."

When asked to speculate to whom the video would be most appealing, both groups gave similar responses. Generally, interviewees felt the video would appeal to both sexes, but for different reasons: to men primarily for its sexual content; to women because of its message to women to be strong; because of Madonna's appeal as a powerful role model (whether it be because of an identification with her glamorous image and or an image of strength); and the sexual attraction of the hard-working men.

Karen, a feminist, felt that the video would appeal primarily to traditional woman because they would be fascinated by and envious of the "really glamorous look of the dress and blonde hair." She also thought they would find the lingerie and the thin "cartoon-like" image of the woman behind the shower screen more appealing than men would. However, she does not believe Madonna would appeal to her feminist friends. She would give the video to her "gay male friends" because they would love Madonna's "glam-doll image" as well as "the guys" in the video. This may support Schwichtenberg's (1992) claim that Madonna fragments gender and therefore appeal or in Kaplan's (1987) words, that Madonna
may not be particularly "male or female identified": my findings show that female interviewees agree that Express Yourself appeals or repels both sexes, but for different reasons and at different levels.

**Most Powerful Character**

Only one woman (in the traditional group) presumed that the elder executive type was the most powerful character. She believed he controlled everything, just as he did with the remote control in his hand. Madonna, she remarked, only had control of the men through sexual power. This reveals an internalization of patriarchal conceptions of women. Although many of the interviewees saw that the various characters have different kinds of power, the rest of the women perceived Madonna to be the most powerful character, but for a wide variety of reasons. Responses from the traditional group were quite concrete and literal. Two assumed Madonna to be in the position of power because the camera angles kept Madonna elevated throughout. Another noted that it was Madonna’s video, after all, and that she had a message to relay. One woman from each group made reference to the fact that Madonna instigated all the actions or played the pivotal role on which the plot rested.

Some feminists stated that Madonna had power both mentally and emotionally. Another saw that Madonna controlled indirectly because she exploited someone else’s attempt to exploit her on the basis of her sex. In other words, Madonna slept with someone, but did so to get what she wanted; thus, she made the best possible use of the patriarchal system by exercising the limited power that she had. Another said Madonna was potentially the most powerful if she chose to be. Carla believed Madonna was the most powerful because she was striving to improve herself. Tania saw Madonna definitely in the power position: all the men
were "working to have a woman like Madonna," but in the end it was Madonna who would
do the choosing.

Inferencing

Because speculation is unconstrained by video's reality, it was expected that a
prediction might show more evidence of respondents' codes. Participants were invited to
predict what might happen after the video ended, asked if the video reminded them of their
own lives or anyone they knew, and asked to whom they would give the video. According
to Blanchard-Fields, Coon and Matthews (1986), college students were capable of elaborate
inferencing; they had the ability to go well beyond the information provided in a video. The
scope of this study limits investigation to the discourse provided in the interview and so
cannot examine whether the respondents' own behaviours are in line with their politics.
However, the responses to these questions can communicate whether interviewees related the
video to their own lives and thus how they might be inclined to behave.

Everyone predicted that Madonna and the young man would have sex. However,
traditional women found the story more difficult to follow and therefore were less able to
imagine what would happen after the video had ended. On the whole, traditionalists were
more confused about the video. The video was less likely to remind them of anything
relevant, and therefore they were less likely to want to give the video to anyone. The four
traditional women who predicted an ending were more likely than feminists to envision a
fairy-tale kind of ending where the two lovers would live happily ever after in either a
continuing business or love relationship:
Brenda: I think maybe they break away from their chains and they get together and it’s ‘real,’ because it’s for the right reasons, so they stay together.

The older, tyrannical boss was generally thought to lose everything to the other two. Only two traditionalist interview partners believed there was no hope for a relationship between the two lovers:

Maureen: I can’t even see him sticking around for five minutes.
Anne: Or even . . . what’s her name . . . I have no clue.
Maureen: Or in this case I don’t have a clue what his name is . . . You know, I’ll pick another gut next time.

Both evaluated Madonna negatively, because they saw her as having sex for lust and not for love. "There’s no connection. It wasn’t human. It was more animal" (Anne). This corroborated the traditional view that women are allowed have sex, but only within a love relationship.

In contrast, only two feminists speculated that there might be a relationship afterwards; one qualified her answer by saying that Madonna would dominate, the other imagined that Madonna would run the company. All other women in the feminist group saw that Madonna dumps the young man or triumphs in some way.

Karen: She dumps him or he dumps her.
Sheila: She has sex with another factory worker.
Laurie: She dumps him . . . there is no bloody way she is going to let a man tell her what to do.
Margaret: That’s it. Adios . . . She throws him out--one night stand . . . because guys do that to girls, so she is going to do that to guys. Get ‘em back.

Several women saw that Madonna turned the tables and was using men for sex like men have traditionally used women. Two other feminists put Madonna’s actions in a more positive light:
Carla: She gets everything she wants. She has a career and she has a man. What more do you want? (Laughs)
Denise: I think she gets everything she wanted and if she doesn’t get it right away then she keeps on fighting for it.
Carla: She’ll get it eventually.
Denise: She’ll get it, yah. ’Cause she’s so strong--Very sure of herself--Willing to be aggressive, but is still sensitive.
Carla: That’s what a woman should be. She should be strong. She should be intelligent. But at the same time she shouldn’t be afraid to show her femininity.

Here, as elsewhere, the language interviewees used is indicative of the codes with which they decipher the text. Two traditionalist and four feminists predicted that the relationship between Madonna and the young man is not a lasting one. At first glance, it appeared as though there was little variation among these responses, but upon closer inspection the difference occurred in the language used, which expressed the frames of reference. The traditionalists who felt the two lovers would not stay together indicated that he would forget her or that he would not remember her name. In contrast, the feminists largely perceived that she would dump him, which establishes the locus of power with the woman rather than with the man as is traditionally the case.

Application to a Personal Situation

In order to get interviewees to discuss the possibility of a personal link to the video they were asked if the video reminded them of their own life or of someone they knew, and, if they could give the video to someone, who they would give it to. Most traditionalists would not give the video to anyone because "there is nothing in it I’d want to say to anyone" (Anne). They might just give it to a friend who likes Madonna, or to someone, like a disc-jockey, who could use the tape. Only two women in the traditional group affirmed that the video reminded them of someone to whom they would give the video; one to a friend who
"lets people [her ex-boyfriend] run all over her," "gets down on herself," and needs to express herself; the other noted that the video reminded her of her own life and gave her a "boost of confidence to remain with her convictions about being herself" (Brenda). Both of these responses indicate that this Madonna text gives them a feeling of empowerment, at least on the individual level.

All the feminists related the video to something or someone outside the video. Two indirectly indicated that they found the message empowering, but they explicitly pointed out that their friends already stood up for themselves so they had no need to see the video. One fairly neutral response given by a feminist (the responses was similar to most answers in the traditional group), was that the video reminded her of a friend that used to want to be like Madonna and dressed like her. Another feminist would give the video to her gay male friends but not her feminist friends. Another noteworthy response was that the video showed how women are socialized to let others dominate: like most of the others in the feminist group, she would give this video either to someone who needed to express themselves in a relationship or to a boyfriend who needed enlightening.

Margaret: I think I'd give it to my boyfriend just to prove my point . . . because I'm always harping on feminist things.

Another women in the feminist group said she would give the video to a friend she thought was much more feminist than herself. Clearly, the video was seen as a feminist expression by many of the women in the feminist group. These responses provide evidence that these feminist women would likely try to disseminate their beliefs about feminism and perhaps be more likely to put their politics into action, at least within their personal sphere.
Articulation of Contradictory Images of Woman

Many women interpreted scenes of the video simultaneously at different levels. Some remarked that many images Madonna invoked were contradictory. Madonna dramatized a traditional look, but she violated the code by acting in a non-traditional way. For example, while she is dressed in black lingerie or even as a "helpless victim" in chain and collar, she peers directly into the camera. Fiske (1989b) suggests she defies her subordinate positioning in this way. Some interviewees articulated the conflict in the images—where hardness and softness, masculinity and femininity, or whore and virgin coalesce.

Maureen: She [Madonna] is wearing the lingerie and she’s not making herself look very soft—but it’s very feminine.

However, for traditionalists Madonna’s attempt to avoid both polarities of patriarchy’s binary understanding of women was not understood as strength, but often translated into the notion that Madonna was a "cold bitch." Feminists also noticed the contradictions, but Madonna was considered either a collaborator or, for several feminists, a gutsy, independent, and yet feminine woman.

A Heartless Video

One interesting, because unexpected, theme repeatedly expressed by feminists and traditionalists alike was that the video was not about mature love. Rather, the video was thought to be mechanical and portrayed control. The factory setting, with machinery parts moving in time, may somewhat account for this perception. Consequently, traditional women thought that the lyrics and the visuals were contradictory: the lyrics were about love and relationships but the visual dimension was "harsh," "controlling," and displayed only the physical part of love. This notion also informed the traditionalists’ interpretation of the

177
ending quote: "Without the heart, there can be no understanding between the hand and the mind." In their view the quote conflicted rather than harmonized with the video. Maureen thought the phrase was "poetic" while the video was "raw." The video was understood as telling women to be cautious when giving their hearts away, but the last line contradicted this message. One feminist responded to the quote similarly.

Karen: I didn’t see anything about having a heart in that video. To me it was manipulation and lust. There was nothing about love at all, and there certainly wasn’t anything about expressing emotions. The only thing that was expressed was the hunger for power and the lust.

Liz, another feminist, believed the quote to be an afterthought to make the video seem "weightier." However, most feminists did not emphasize a contradiction between video and quote. Feminists largely interpreted the quote as telling women to pay serious attention to their own needs in a relationship and not to let themselves be carried away by emotion. At the same time, most considered the fact that Madonna sleeps with the guy at the end as giving up power and reverting to men’s expectations. This indicates that definitions of sexuality, which are tied to the "beauty myth" (Wolf cited in Greene 1992), seem the most difficult to shift into and be internalized in a feminist frame.

Direct Reference to Gender Political Issues

The interview often served as a catalyst for interviewees to talk about women’s issues, primarily for the more feminist women. Margaret viewed Madonna as a role model and complained about the lack of strong female role models for young women. She noted that any existing role models pale in comparison to the quantity and quality of available role models for men in all facets of life.
Margaret: We need more women role models. I feel. We have some, like
Madonna, but how many more [do men have], like baseball, hockey, like
things like basketball. I have two younger brothers and they have like Magic
Johnson and all these other role models and then as a girl, who did you have?
You had Barbie in hopes that one day Barbie would marry Ken. You know,
that's what you had. You had your doll.

Tania criticized men's trivialization of distinctly women's work such as child birth.

Tania: They [men] really have no idea . . . it's some big deal. Oh, you're
giving birth . . . that's no problem. You know, they don't understand. But
that's their ego . . . what they think. Oh, I'll hold your hand, honey, while
you just pop this baby out.

Many women in the feminist group and one in the traditional group mentioned the double
standard in the dress code and how women are treated in the work force. Some relayed their
own experiences at summer or part-time jobs like having to do menial tasks which did not
make use of their training. Talking about these inequitable experiences seemed to have a
cathartic and cohesive effect.

Rating the Video

Women were asked to rate the Express Yourself video. If rating the video on its
production value or technical quality alone, most women in both groups would give the
Express Yourself video a high rating. Women in the traditional group were more likely than
feminists to rate the video based on its entertainment value. For example, one traditionalist
gave the video a 3 or 4 out of 10 and noted that though the video was not "boring," it was
not "spell-binding," either; she focused on Madonna's image. Another felt the video was too
sensational, compared to "Canadian" videos, but that it related well to the lyrics. One liked
the song but did not really understand the message. The highest rating was an 8 out of 10,
because the video was "pretty good all around": the music and the dance. The lowest rating in the traditional group was given because the video was seen as sexually exploitive.

Generally, women in the feminist group gave the video a higher rating than those in the traditional group; this decision was largely based on evaluations of the video's message specifically in terms of women. Feminists who gave the video a low rating did so because they felt the message about the role of women was either not clear or not valuable. One gave it a low rating because she found the video confusing; the audience could focus on negative aspects about women, such as their submissiveness, rather than on the positive images of strength. Feminists who rated the video at 8 or 9 out of 10 felt the video was created "for the benefit of women," and that the message was communicated well within the time constraints of the video. The other high rating given was because of the visual/aural mix: "her imagery towards (sic) the music, the set, the way she uses symbolism with the cat. It's just good" (Tania).

**Summary Discussion of Typological Patterns**

Audience activity alone is not sufficient evidence of resistance; all participants had to actively engage themselves to find meaning in Express Yourself; it is a complex and loosely structured text. There is no obvious connection between the use of the Metropolis references and the lyrics. One interviewee pointed out that Madonna could get the same message across if the setting for the video were in an office instead of a factory. Part of the appeal of music television, it seems, lies in its visual dimension—perhaps in the process of making meaning out of seemingly disparate images and lyrics—new meanings as a result of combining the aural and the visual.
Most participants do intuitively recognize various textual features that academics identify as contributing to the semiotic openness of the text and thus to meanings that contradict the dominant ideology of patriarchy (such as access, discovery, excess, puns, use of opposing looks, the violation of filmic codes). However, how these textual features are interpreted depends on the audience’s positioning.

A pattern in the data emerged, both in terms of what signs and scenes the two groups selected as well as how they interpreted those scenes. Both groups had to be actively engaged in the interpretation of the video, but, for the most part, only young women who were positioned to read the text from an alternate code did so. Decoding depended on the individual’s ideology or system of meaning, whether it was traditional and patriarchal understanding of what it means to be a woman, or a feminist understanding.

Generally, interview participants related to the video on one or more of the interpretative levels contained within the video: the sexual, the love relationship, the societal or economic domain, and gender politics. Most understood that the video had a strong sexual undertone. Both groups of women, feminist and traditional, used the range of possible interpretive domains. Traditional participants, however, largely understood the video in a dominant way with patriarchal definitions of femininity. Although the traditional group did perceive the text in terms of the various domains available, they were more likely to interpret the text at a sexual level or in terms of the love relationship, since these two levels most strongly replicate patriarchy’s understanding of woman’s role. Only a few traditional women comprehended parts of the video in terms of economics. On the other hand, feminists tended to oscillate between the love relationship and its allegorical significance in terms of gender
politics. A reading at the level of gender politics incorporates a feminist perspective on sex, love and economics.

Differences were also found in the positive or negative evaluation of the scenes. My findings demonstrate that the Express Yourself text does not simply inspire polyvalent readings but is polysemic in nature. However, differences in evaluation occurred even if the video was understood at the same level. For example, all interviewees understood that it is implied that Madonna sleeps with the young worker. However, this may be evaluated as Madonna the tramp, Madonna reverting to her expected role, or Madonna exercising her own definition of her sexuality.

The domains of sex, love, economics, and gender politics coincide, to a degree, with understanding feminist issues—women's sexual, social and economic subordination in patriarchy. Viewer comprehension, the ability to make inferences, and the degree of explicitness in verbalizing positions indicated different levels of consciousness which fell along the following continuum:

1) **no understanding**: no recognition or no understanding how a particular segment related to the rest of the video.

2) **literal interpretation**: taking what is seen at face value and describing the action in the video.

3) **individual level**: understanding in terms of an individual comment (i.e., be true to yourself), but no sensitivity to a group perspective or social movement. For example, a woman could demand equal pay for her own work but not support pay equity.

4) **group level**: interpretation is applied beyond the individual, but it is not specifically understood in terms of gender politics. This may result in equating the subordination of men and women—discrimination and reverse discrimination (e.g., bondage signifies restriction, but it is degrading to men and women alike)

5) **gender politics**: the segment is understood specifically in terms of gender politics: women are restricted, sexually, socially, and economically.
Traditional women were more likely to understand the video literally or operate at an individual level of consciousness. A negotiated reading therefore was generally limited to the sense that women should be able to do what they want to—as Madonna’s rule-breaking antics and success attested to. They occasionally interpreted segments at the group level, but rarely framed the video in terms of gender politics. A few women do have a sense that there is some change in the power dynamics of the video but have difficulty articulating it or being explicit about it as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Christine: Just because, traditionally, women have been pushed around and that . . . And she’s going to, like, she wants to change it. Maybe this way she is going to change it.
Elaine: What do you think she wants to change?
Christine: Just how society is . . . that’s what she is going to change. She just wants to be respected. She is dissatisfied with the way things are. Just the way they are. She just wants to change them.

Semiotic resistance may begin with a feeling of concern which is expressed inarticularly. With exposure to an alternate and oppositional frame, resistance may graduate to a clear identification of the dominant ideology being opposed and explication of the alternate framework that resistance nourishes.

Feminists, on the other hand, tended to interpret the video segments at the group level and most often operated at the political level of gender consciousness; thus they were more likely to engage in resistant reading practices. They sometimes did not understand or they disapproved of video segments that did not fit into a feminist frame, and they did view some scenes at the literal or individual level. Their level of consciousness was also reflected in their expression; they could clearly articulate what they took exception to and why (i.e., double standards, the Madonna/whore myth). Feminists were therefore conscious of the
dominant code and substituted an alternative oppositional code with which to construct meaning.

A reading was considered resistant if the interpretation was framed in terms of gender politics; it was considered negotiated if there was some understanding that women should be able to do anything but little understanding as to what was keeping them from being able to do so—sexually, socially, or economically. It was difficult to draw a clear defining line between what was resistant and what was not. Among negotiated and resistant responses it was possible to identify different levels of semiotic resistance or degrees of explicitness which could be calibrated as follows: (1) some feeling or vague recognition of about gender politics that makes participants uncomfortable; (2) some understanding of women’s subordination or some realization that there are changes in usual power relations in the video but an inability to clearly articulate them; (3) some ability to articulate issues that are specific to women’s position in patriarchy; (4) clear articulation of problems and their relation to gender politics; (5) ability to relate the issues to one’s own life.

Resistant readers, largely feminist, resisted the dominant ideological structures about women in the text in different ways. Some interpreted Madonna as overturning or inverting rules and applaud her subversive activities as getting back at men. They noticed that Madonna invoked ideologically opposing images of women; some pointed out that images were contradictory and were therefore confusing as some of the images were considered dangerous to women. Others reject the text as patriarchal because they saw Madonna reverting to expected stereotypical roles and consequently losing power. Some of the feminists see that Madonna depicts and at the same time challenges dominant ideas about women, such as the madonna/whore complex and double standards for men and women.
Some perceived Madonna to be resisting the patriarchal rules set out for women and defining her own rules, particularly her sexuality—while Madonna has sex, it is because she chooses to. Therefore, for feminists, Madonna’s ability to control her self-image and sexuality portrays an active image to emulate.

When participants perceived that the text supported or validated their own code, be it traditional or feminist, they found the process of interpretation pleasurable, and evaluated the text more positively. But they did not always find pleasure even when the video was perceived as replicating their own code, as the following interview interaction demonstrates:

Tania: She’s the kind of girl you have fun with and you go to bed with, but she’s not the kind of girl that you want to marry. . . . It shouldn’t be like that because women get such a bad rap for everything. Do this. Oh you’re a slut. If you don’t, then you’re a goody-two shoes.

Margaret: But then guys can go out and sleep around and everything.

Tania: But that’s cool.

Margaret: That’s cool because they’re studs . . . but if women do, like, God forbid.

Tania: Yah. It’s just not right. It will always be like that. It’s just how society is. Like, you can’t even change it. Like, it’s impossible, I think. Maybe eventually . . . maybe if more people like Madonna come out, eventually it will be.

Both feminist interviewees took exception to the Madonna/whore myth as well as the double standard to which women are subjected. However, it was clear that they also recognized that efforts for change were almost futile.

There are some implications of the study for Fiske’s conception of resistance theory. Fiske believes that young women who are fans of Madonna are responding to Madonna in a resistant fashion—by watching Madonna they realize that they can exercise some control over the meanings of their lives and this is pleasurable, empowering, and potentially
emancipatory. A resistant reading nourishes self-esteem and the empowerment to make changes in the personal sphere.

So the provocation offered by Madonna . . . to young girls to take control of the meanings of femininity produces a sense of empowerment in one of the most disempowered of social groups that may well result in political progress in their everyday lives—in their relationships with their boyfriends or parents. (Fiske 1989b, 10)

Additionally, this confidence supplies a base with which to work if the conditions are ripe for a radical social movements (Fiske 1989b).

My findings suggest that fandom is not necessarily the axis on which resistance rests. "Actively choosing to watch, listen to, and imitate her [Madonna] rather than anyone else" (Fiske 1987, 171) does not necessitate that this audience is making meanings of Madonna that escape patriarchal ideology. Two women in each group (traditional and feminist) had identified Madonna as one of their favourite female recording artists on the questionnaire and confirmed their status as fans during the interview. The two traditional fans, however, were the two least likely to understand the video, and when they did it was a dominant reading primarily in the sexual domain. They did not interpret Madonna’s rule-breaking antics or her excessiveness as testing the bounds of social control or female power that challenges authority, but rather saw Madonna as gross, vulgar, and sleazy. They rationalized their fandom by separating Madonna’s on- and off-stage life, asserting that Madonna behaviour’s is for the benefit of the camera and for publicity.

Traditional women in the sample, however, are drawn to Madonna’s power and do seem to feel empowered by the Express Yourself video. It seems more a response to Madonna the performer and successful businesswoman than an interpretation of the video, as it is uncommon to see a women who is as successful and wields as much power as Madonna
does. One traditional woman expressly voiced that the video gave her empowerment that she should stick to her own convictions, to be herself--no doubt a very important step in self-esteem, but not necessarily resistant. Agreeing that Madonna is fascinating, admiring her abilities as a successful artist, and even listening to the message to express and respect yourself can only be considered resistant in the most limited fashion.

Unfortunately, this kind of resistance and ensuing empowerment would likely serve to reinscribe patriarchy instead of challenging it. Empowerment, without consciousness and access to an oppositional frame, is less likely to translate into "effective" political action because these young women still, for the most part, define themselves in the patriarchal definition of feminine. Madonna's lyrics tell young women to express themselves--to tell their boyfriends, and the world, their needs. How will young women know what to tell "them" if they accept the maddonna/whore myth, if they believe that woman are not logical by nature, if they believe a woman's place is in the home and if they believe that their only source of control is through indirect manipulation particularly through the use of their sexuality? What does "you better treat me right" mean for the traditional woman? According to patriarchy, a woman's options for gaining power are limited and are defined by the beauty myth to include: getting in shape (aerobics classes), dying her hair blonde and an unending list of requirements (make-up, fingernails, clothing), so that she can approximate the ideal vision of woman. In the process of conforming to the beauty myth she may deprecate her own self-image and others because her definition (which parallels that of patriarchy) of what is desirable is narrow and virtually unattainable (Wolf, cited in Greene 1992).
Fiske (1989b, 11) claims that the empowerment female fans get from Madonna may result in "progressive rather than radical" political gains or at least "enlarge the space of action for the subordinate" and "effect shifts, however minute, in social power relations."

They [resistances] are tactics of the subordinate in making do within and against the system, rather than of opposing it directly; they are concerned with improving the lot of the subordinate rather than with changing the system that subordinates them. . . . At this micro level they [resistances] may well act as a constant erosive force upon the macro, weakening the system from within so that it is more amenable to change at the structural level. (Fiske 1989b, 11)

Findings of this study show that for the most part, the Express Yourself video is in fact teaching traditional women to "see themselves as men would see them" (1987b, 271). For traditional women, Madonna is an agent of patriarchal hegemony. If empowered by their reading of Madonna, even a negotiated one, traditional women will most likely misapply their energies, so that in attempting to gain power they take action that most likely further entangles and submerges them within patriarchy. Oppressive experiences are more likely to be internalized and understood as their own inadequacies, not viewed as a problem with the way women are viewed and valued in the society.

Young women, on the other hand, who have had some exposure to feminist discourse can not only feel empowered for different reasons but have the tools to begin to alter their subjectivities— to decolonize their minds. Feminist-thinking young women may still fall into the same trap as their traditional counterparts because conceptions of beauty and sexuality are deeply engrained. However, they are less likely to. They may define themselves oppositionally and get a sense of empowerment from the realization that the patriarchal society sets up unrealistic and repressive expectations for women. Even with oppositional readers who hold oppositional views resistant political action is difficult given the context of
patriarchy. However, the semiotic resistance is significant if it begins the process that moves women to material resistance—to gain control over images and break the colonizing gaze.

Material resistance may, at the beginning, be limited to internal fantasies of having power, or it may encourage discussion with others of an alternate code. It may prompt a personal change in the private life of an individual or inspire her to seek out a social movement that would give shape and meaning to her subordination. Material resistance at its most productive would include criticism of the dominant ideology and consciousness-raising of others as well as the creation of counter-hegemonic acts or texts. An accumulation of texts with counter-hegemonic messages may empower young women, but without knowledge of how to break the cycle of repression little "effective" action, which would have the most potential to transform society’s institutionalized inequitable treatment of women, will likely take place.

The ethnographic interview method facilitates a close examination of the relationship between text and audience decodings, the intersection between the structural features in the text and the audiences’ positioning. Findings show that the reader’s perspective on feminism made a difference in what was perceived, interpreted and evaluated. The text was read in terms of the various interpretive levels (sex, love, societal and gender politics), and the tendency to focus on a particular code and how it was appraised was related to the reader’s positioning. The ethnographic interview not only provides access to participants’ conscious opinions but to the linguistic terms used to construct and communicate understanding. The level of feminist consciousness and thus the level of semiotic resistance is communicated in the graduated ability to articulate the oppositional frame.
CHAPTER 7—CONCLUSION

This thesis practically applied the cultural studies approach and explored two of the components thought relevant to resistance—the text and the audience; it investigated gender portrayals in a product of mainstream popular culture, Madonna's *Express Yourself* video, and attempted to better understand how these representations were understood by women. The objective was to examine audience sophistication in its engagement with a broadcast music video in order to investigate the nature and scope of audience resistance. The use of a multi-method approach (structured survey, semiotic analysis, and ethnographic interview) facilitated an examination of the intersection between structural features of the text and audience decodings which were mediated by their historical, social, and cultural context. Findings of this study indicate that there are different forms and levels of resistance which, in turn, probably influence the likelihood of political action or material resistance.

Summary of Findings

A semiotic textual analysis was used to demonstrate that *Express Yourself* is a polysemic text. Though structured in dominance (the text portrays blatantly patriarchal images of women), this video also lends itself to oppositional meanings about women. The semiotic analysis provided a description of the range and kinds of meanings about women the video could circulate. It also provided the tools to assess what a dominant and a resistant reading would look like.
Using the ethnographic interview, the thesis explored the signifying practices of a young female audience differentiated on the basis of participants' exposure to and knowledge of feminist issues—how they actually interpreted the text and therefore the kinds of meanings about women they produced. The audience was selected to represent the most traditional and the most feminist female students one might find in first-year communication classes at the University of Windsor. The purpose of the study was to find out how young women, devalued and disempowered under patriarchy, interpreted the video; how they constructed meanings; whether ascribed meanings differed between traditional and feminist women, and whether they engaged in resistant reading practices. An attempt to calibrate resistant readings was made to better understand the link between textual features and audience positioning. The main considerations of this research were the likelihood of resistance and the conditions under which resistance was most likely to occur.

The semiotic analysis of the Express Yourself video revealed how signs, organized under particular codes, worked to elicit various meanings that could reference both dominant ideological and oppositional positions. Signs can best be understood contextually and in relation to other signs. The video operated on at least four interpretive levels: sex, love, societal/economic and gender politics. The title of the song Express Yourself (repeated in the chorus) also intimated various levels of expression (physical, emotional, and intellectual) which parallel women's sexual, social, and economic subordination under patriarchy. Taken together, the video can be understood as a comment on inequitable gender power relations in patriarchy. The Express Yourself video is fashioned after Metropolis, an earlier textual model from popular culture which is itself an allegory. The intertextual concoction is further
complicated by Madonna's own dichotomous persona. Puns and metaphors allude to all or some of the levels of discourse.

Madonna offers no overt comment or criticism of the representations or images of women she invokes. This contributes to the video's ambiguity or semiotic excess; the end result is a text which does not accommodate a single clear-cut ideologically dominant position; instead, the text is made available for oppositional readings about women.

Part of the appeal of music television lies in its visual dimension and particularly in the process of making meanings. In general, the young women in the interview sample were quite adept at interpreting the Express Yourself music video. After viewing the video only once or twice they were able to synthesize this complex text with its seemingly disparate visual and aural elements into a coherent narrative that made sense to them. Generally, participants understood that the video operated in more than one of the four interpretive domains identified in the study (sex, love, economics/societal, and gender politics) and that the narrative had a wider message. Textual features that scholars such as Fiske (1989b, 1987b), Lewis (1990), and Kaplan (1989, 1987) have identified (access and discovery signs, the use of contradictory images of women, excessiveness, parody, puns, controlling the look, and the violation of classic cinematic codes) were perceived by the viewers intuitively, but how these were then interpreted varied and depended on the social and historical positioning of the reader.

As Morley (1981) has pointed out, the act of reading includes a matrix of activities. Reading involves selection, relevance, interpretation, valuation, comprehension, involvement and cultural competence and is determined by the ideological positioning of the viewer and the intensity and coherency of those beliefs. The ethnographic interviews in this study were
useful for studying the meaning-making patterns of the audience and were particularly useful for detecting subtle differences in responses.

The *Express Yourself* text was read on a number of interpretive levels (sex, love, economics/societal, gender politics) with varying degrees of consciousness (no understanding, literal understanding, individual level, group level, and gender politics level). Participants’ extratextual knowledge about Madonna also gave form to interpretations. The ideology (patriarchy or feminism) of the viewer, both constrained and was reflected in what viewers selected, how they decoded or interpreted what they selected, and how they evaluated the video. Positioning of the participants was also revealed in their linguistic forms of expression, the inferences they made, and the issues they addressed in the interview (as a result of the interview interaction).

Evaluation of the video content depended on whether interviewees believed the text validated their own ideology or code. If it was perceived that the video fell in line with their own schemata they evaluated it positively, whether it was appreciated dominantly or oppositionally. Attention was piqued if video schemata was perceived to violate the participant’s own but it was then evaluated harshly.

There was a difference in interpretation and in the likelihood of engaging in resistant reading practices between the two groups. Young women who were rated as more traditional were more likely to interpret the video by using the codes of patriarchy, whereas those rated as more feminists were more likely to use counter-patriarchal codes and to engage in resistant reading practices. *Express Yourself* offers contradictory images of women which can be regarded as either repulsive or appealing. Interestingly, this is true for both the traditional and the feminist groups, but from disparate vantage points. Both saw that Madonna relayed an
image to be either shunned or emulated; for traditionalists this meant she was either a slut (moral opposition—raunch) or the epitome of an attractive desirable woman. For feminists, Madonna was perceived as either a collaborator, because she adds to negative stereotypical depictions that denigrate women, or as an activist for women, because she offers an appealing portrayal of strength in resisting subordination (both resistant responses).

Resistance was made possible because of the polysemic nature of the *Express Yourself* text as well as the social, cultural, and historical positioning of the participants. My study corroborated other findings that a reader’s access to an oppositional code (i.e., feminism) strongly figured into the resistance equation.

Because of the nature of this study, the findings cannot be generalized; the selected sample is not representative of the population. However, consideration can be given to the degree to which the kinds of responses found in the study represent wider patterns of interpretation. The study does not completely reflect the normal practice of viewing music television; resistant readings are more likely to occur during the interview since the process likely fosters more attentiveness and analysis in respondents than is usual during regular viewing. Furthermore, since only a small number of women in the general population are feminist, Madonna’s video *Express Yourself* can generally be said to add to the plethora of images that reinforce stereotypical images and myths about women under patriarchy (particularly about sexuality).

Moreover, those women who have access to oppositional codes would also be more likely to engage in resistant action; their level of material resistance would likely depend on their level of understanding or consciousness and the intensity of their beliefs. Those who are traditional in their views, if they do engage in resistance at all, may harbour internal
private resistances like female fantasies of power. They are less likely to move beyond this level since they lack the tools (knowledge and consciousness) to do so. Perceptions of Madonna as a strong role model may be empowering, but this is a very limited form of resistance. Young women who are still solidly immersed in the codes of patriarchy have self-limiting perceptions about how they can get power. Actions taken would therefore tend to reinscribe patriarchy and be motivated by self-advancement. Traditional women would not tend to see their actions in terms of women as a whole—they are divorced from "the larger social movement which might give meaning to "individual" wants, needs, and visions of justice" (Apple 1979, 9). If they do not succeed in gaining positions of power in patriarchal institutions they are more likely to look inward, belittle themselves and in the process lose self-esteem. Nevertheless, whatever their actions, they will have an impact on the system; even if women strive to be in powerful positions and are not feminist, their actions may still have an impact on "transforming" society, though there is no organization or specific direction to their intentions. They strive to improve their lot within the confines of patriarchy.

Those who have access to oppositional codes are more likely to engage in semiotic resistance in the first place and to recode what they see using the alternative framework. They are more likely to have a higher level of consciousness—an increased ability to identify the problems that exist for women in patriarchy and to find solutions within that oppositional vision. They are more likely to see women as a group and see their actions affecting all women; they will likely find solace in the support of women who experience similar inequities and are less likely to denigrate themselves. "As readers teach themselves strategies for reading mass mediated messages (i.e., here, from the vantage of feminism), they grow more sophisticated in discovering and denaturalizing coded references to their own symbolic
status. They may rethink old responses” (Steiner 1988, 13). The material action they take would likely have more potential for an effective and "progressive" transformative effect. They seek to improve their lot by transforming patriarchy.

According to Fiske (1987a), resistance is a practice of the less powerful in society who struggle to avert both ideological and material repression. Semiotic resistance is thought to be possible because of the polysemic nature of texts, the different social, cultural and historical positioning of audiences and the context, both immediate and historical. Fiske properly sees that variously positioned audiences, in the process of constructing socially relevant meanings, sometimes evade or resist dominant "ideological scripts" embedded in popular texts. Fiske addresses an important area and situates reading practices within power relations. Findings show that we can intervene in the "politics of popular culture" at the level of the audience rather than at the production level which seems a bleak possibility at best given the multi-national scope of image-making corporations.

While the potential for change may rest in the audience’s ability to resist, different kinds and levels of resistance must be accounted for, along with their potential for effecting transformative change, otherwise the concept becomes devalued. The cultural studies approach is neutralized when resistance is taken to be a common and widespread occurrence and too much power ascribed to the audience (who may not use it).

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The results of this study indicate that further investigation of texts is needed. A polysemic text may just be ambiguous but not readily available for oppositional meanings in a particular direction. Fiske describes a tension between the forces of ideological closure and
openness (or semiotic excess) activated through the use of various textual features (Fiske 1987a) and argues that popular texts contain contradictory ideological messages. It would be useful to investigate to what degree a text is part of the establishment or how it functions in cultural maintenance (Evans 1990). There is also a need to investigate different types of texts; texts that are more and less popular and texts with varying degrees of "openness" or "semiotic excess" and the relation to the ability to inspire different kinds and degrees of resistant decodings (Steiner 1988).

Budd et al. admit that the studies Fiske uses to support his arguments do seem to indicate that "alienated audiences .. can sometimes rewrite texts to make them cohere according to their own schemata" (1990, 178), so that audiences sometimes construct radically different interpretations. However, they believe that cultural studies "mythologize" subcultures by treating them as if they were always a "site of positive struggle." Instead they recommend that attention also be directed to the historical outcome of the resistant actions of the subversive groups (Sholle 1991). Additionally, as Hebdige has asserted, truly oppositional acts need to be differentiated from acts that primarily function to nourish and delineate self-identity of that oppositional group (Hebdige cited in Sholle 1991). Research should move beyond confirming that audiences engage in resistance and begin to link semiotic resistance with actual transformative action.

Individuals must have both access to counter-codes and the inclination to use them. The codes and rhetoric of feminism are widely available and yet many women largely reject feminism or do not wholly embrace it (Budd et al. 1990). Research should investigate the process that moves a person toward a particular alternate frame as well as the mainstream's degree of success in subverting oppositional rhetoric through incorporation. One strategy is
to study a social group over time to pinpoint the moment when a negotiated reading moves into a oppositional one and examine the conditions under which it took place (Steiner 1988). Research could explore the effect of an accumulation of texts, where and when activities begin to take form in a coherent oppositional framework, when intensity of convictions increases, and when allegiances or social groups begin to form. The objective would be to trace how resistant reading practices encourage activities that either unintentionally may alter or are specifically aimed at altering power effects and their evolution into transformative action and actual ideological change.
Don't go for second best baby
Put your love to the test you know
  you know you've got to
Make him express how he feels and maybe
Then you'll know your love is real

You don't need diamond rings or eighteen
  karat gold
Fancy cars that go very fast you know they
  never last no, no
What you need is a big strong hand to
Lift you to your higher ground
Make you feel like a queen on a throne
Make him love you til you can't come down
You'll never come down

Long stem roses are the way to your heart but
He needs to start with your head
Satin sheets are very romantic what happens
  when you're not in bed
You deserve the best in life
So if the time isn't right then move on
Second best is never enough
You'll do much better baby on your own
Baby on your own
Don't go for second best baby
Put your love to the test you know
    you know you've got to
Make him express how he feels and maybe
Then you'll know your love is real
Express yourself
You've got to make him
Express himself
Hey, hey, hey, hey
So if you want it right now
Make him show you how
Express what he's got
Oh baby ready or not

And when you're gone he might regret it
Think about the love he once had
Try to carry on
But he just won't get it
He'll be back on his knees
To express himself
You've got to make him
Express himself
Hey, hey

by WB Music Corp /Black Lion Music, Int. ASCAP
APPENDIX II

SELECTION INSTRUMENT--QUESTIONNAIRE
QUESTIONNAIRE 1991

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out about your music television viewing habits, how you feel about music television and your attitudes about women and society. The questionnaire will also be used to select individuals for a follow-up interview study about music videos. Participation in the interview will be on voluntary basis. Please be assured that all information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

Name: ____________________________
Student I.D.: _______________________

First, here are some questions about your music television viewing habits and about your opinion of music television.

1. Do you presently have or have you had access to cable TV in the last year?  
   No  Yes

2. Approximately how many hours per day during a week, on average, would you say you watch music television?  
   never  less than .5 hours per day  1.5 hours  2 hours
   1 hour  1.5 hours  2 hours
   3 hours  more than 3 hours/day

3. Do you ever watch the following music television programs? (Please indicate how often you watch each source by circling the appropriate number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Once/so.</th>
<th>Once/</th>
<th>More than</th>
<th>Every</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   Muchmusic  0 1 2 3 4 5 6
   Video Hits  0 1 2 3 4 5 6
   Rock and Talk (MTV)  0 1 2 3 4 5 6
   Jukebox (Ch.3)  0 1 2 3 4 5 6
   Good Rocking tonight (CRTC)  0 1 2 3 4 5 6
   Other?  (Please list)  

4. If you watch music television, do you usually watch it alone or together with others who live inside or outside your household? 
   alone  with roommate(s)  with friend(s)  with sibling(s)  with parent(s)  other(s): 

5. Do you often sit down specifically to watch music television for an extended period of time (30 minutes or more)?  No  Yes

6. How do you usually decide when to watch music television?  (You may check two categories. Mark the one you do most often with a 1 and the second with a 2).
   ___ I look in the TV guide or other program information sources to find out what's on (i.e. spotlights /specials).  
   ___ I know when my usual music TV program comes on.  
   ___ I turn to music video channel when there is nothing else interesting on other channels.  
   ___ I usually turn to music television during commercial breaks on other channels to see what video is on.  
   ___ I turn to music television when my favorite VJ is on.  
   ___ I just keep music television on in the background and watch videos intermittently.  
   ___ I know when my favorite kind of music is going to be featured.

7. What is/are your favorite kind(s) of music? Please list: ____________________________

1 202
6. Can you please write down a few reasons (if any) what you like or dislike about watching music television. ___Like ___Dislike

Like:

Dislike:

9. What do you enjoy doing more often - watching music television or listening to the radio or to an album?
   ___ watching music television.
   ___ listening to the radio or to a album.
   I like each equally.
   ___ I find that watching music television is a different kind of experience than listening to the radio or an album.
   Why?

10. Do you feel that watching music television helps you get a clearer idea of what popular songs mean or what the musician intended a particular song to mean? ___ No ___ Yes

   Comments:

11. Who is/are your favorite female recording artist(s) or musician(s) you have seen on music television?

   Now, I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself and your attitudes about women and society.

12. In many high schools students categorize other students into different kinds of groups like jocks, brains, rebels, metal heads, etc. When you were in high school, which group would others have thought you belonged to? (You can use your own categories)

13. Have you ever been or are you presently involved in student government? ___ No ___ Yes. In what capacity?

14. Have you ever worked as a volunteer? ___ No ___ Yes. In what capacity?

15. In what (if any) extra-curricular activities do you like to participate in your spare time?

16. Is there one person who really influenced you (like a parent, teacher, friend) to go on to university?

   [Please indicate whether the person was male or female]

17. How do you wish to be addressed by others now?
   ___ Miss ___ Ms. ___ Mrs. ___ None

   ...and if you were married?
   ___ Ms. ___ Mrs. ___ None ___ Don't plan to get married

   Why?
18. If you got married what would you most likely do? (or if you are already married)

- take your husband's last name
- keep your own last name
- hyphenate the two names
- it would depend on which name I liked the best
- my husband and I will jointly choose a name
- it depends on what my husband wants
- make up an alternative name altogether
- I don't plan to get married

19. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would like to work for several years to establish my career before even considering marriage or having a family.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowadays, men and women generally earn the same wages for doing similar jobs.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it's fine for a woman to model for a swim suit calendar if she chooses.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The feminist movement has, for the most part, achieved its goals.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As you know, affirmative action is an institutional policy designed to open up white male-dominated fields to larger numbers of women, blacks and other minority groups. So if two people are similarly qualified, affirmative action requires that the candidate from the under-represented group be hired.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative action discriminates against men.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I support affirmative action.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A father and mother should equally share the responsibility for child-rearing.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I get angry because, as a woman, I feel I am not free to walk or jog alone on the streets after dark.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would most likely break up with a man I loved if staying with him meant I could not pursue my career plans.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women who dress scantily put themselves in a position to be sexually assaulted.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for women to have places that are separate from men (i.e. all-female organisations, schools) in order to better develop to their potential.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary to pass legislation that men and women receive the same wages for doing similar work.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even career women should cut as their first priority, taking care of the home.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once hired, men and women have the same opportunity for advancement</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a man rapes a woman, he is usually responding to frustrated sexual desires.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The shooting of 14 women by Marc Lepine at the University of Montreal is indicative of a wider problem of male violence against women.

When both partners work outside the home, a husband should take time off work to care for sick child as often as his wife.

Wife battering is most likely to happen in low income families.

A woman who was a homemaker during her marriage should be entitled to half of all financial resources in a divorce settlement.

20. Have you ever attended a meeting, course or conference that dealt with women's issues? _____ Yes _____ No

21. Do you think the feminist movement has had an impact on your life? _____ No _____ Yes; In what way?

22. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not at all feminist and 10 is very feminist, where would you place yourself?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
not at all very

23a. Briefly describe what comes to mind when a woman describes herself as a feminist?

23b. What does being a feminist mean to you?

24. Do you feel you have experienced discrimination because you are female? _____ No _____ Yes _____ Don't know

25. Have you ever been put in an uncomfortable position by an employer or teacher or think you have been sexually harassed? _____ No _____ Yes _____ Don't know

Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your background for purposes of comparison:

21. In what year were you born? ________

22. What was your parents' employment when you were 15 years old?

Mother: ________________________________

Father: ________________________________

23. What was your parents' highest level of education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary/Grade School</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary/High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some post-secondary education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.A. or equivalent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
34. What is your religious affiliation?
   — Buddhist
   — Catholic
   — Hindu
   — Jewish
   — Protestant
   — None
   — Islam
   — Other: ________________________________

35. How often do you pray? (Please circle the appropriate number)
   1. Never
   2. Only occasionally
   3. At least once a month
   4. At least once a week
   5. At least once a day

36. What is your ethnic background? ________________________________

37. How interested are you in politics?
   — very interested,   — fairly interested,
   — not very, or     — not at all interested

38. Altogether, approximately how many communication studies courses have you taken? ________________________________

39. What year of your studies are you in? ________________________________

40. Where did you grow up? (What city or town have you spent the most amount of time during your life - please include province and country)
    ________________________________

41. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up study?
    — No
    — Yes
    — Perhaps

42. If you answered yes or perhaps, please list a telephone number where you can be reached: ________________________________

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME
APPENDIX III

ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW--TOPIC OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION
1. Thank interviewees for participating.
2. Describe how interview will be conducted including:
   a) a few background questions
   b) opinion of rock videos and music television habits
   c) view the video
   d) discuss what the video means and why
3. Outline rights as their participation is voluntary.
4. Explain why I will refrain from participating during video discussion.
5. Tell participants that if they are interested, I will explain what the study is about after the interview.

BACKGROUND
1. Are you in Communication Studies?
2. Do you like it so far?
3. Do you know what you hope to do? (career in the future?)
4. Are you from Windsor?
5. What do you like to do in your spare time?
6. Were you involved in student government? In what capacity?
7. Did you ever work as a volunteer?
8. In what social category would others have placed you in high school? (e.g., jock, brain, rebel, etc.)

ROCK VIDEOS
1. Do you watch a lot of music television / rock videos?
2. What do you think of music television? like or dislike it?
3. Do you usually watch it alone or with others?
4. How do you decide to watch music television?
5. Do you prefer radio or an album to music television?
6. Name a favourite video? Why do you like it?
7. Do you think music videos help you get a better understanding or clearer idea of what a song means?
8. Do you find it makes a difference if you hear a song first of see the video first? What is the difference?
9. Who is your favourite female recording artist seen on music television? Why?
MADONNA
1. What do you think of Madonna?
2. What do you like the most about her? the least?
3. Do you like her videos?
4. Do you have any of her albums?
5. Have you ever gone to a Madonna concert? How many?
6. Have you ever bought clothing that reminded you of Madonna or something that Madonna may have set the trend for?
7. Do you think Madonna has creative control of her videos?
8. Do you consider yourself a Madonna fan?
9. What is your favourite Madonna video? Why?
10. Have you ever seen the video "Express Yourself" before. If yes, approximately how many times.

VIEW 'EXPRESS YOURSELF' - Ask participants if they would like to see the video a second time.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE VIDEO

First question always asked after the video viewing:
1. Any first impressions about the video? What images from the video stick out in your mind? Did you like the video? What was your favourite part, part you disliked in the video?

After this first question, the researcher only followed up and continued to explore meanings of scenes or issues the interviewees mentioned first:

If respondent mentions the men’s bodies:
1. What are the men in the beginning of the video doing?
2. How did it make you feel?
3. If they noticed that several shots of parts of bodies are presented. How did it make you feel?
4. Who are they?

If respondent mentions the black cat:
1. Why do you think the black cat is included in the video?
2. What significance does it have?

If respondent mentions the shower scene:
1. Where is the woman?
2. What is she doing?
3. How did the scene make you feel?
4. Why is the scene included?
If respondent mentions the *drag scene*:
1. What do you think of the scene where Madonna is dressed in a suit?
2. What is it that is most notable (what stays in your mind) about this scene?
3. Why do you suppose she pulls open the lapels of the suit?
4. Why do you suppose Madonna is dressed in a suit in this scene? What is the purpose of this scene?
5. Why the monocle?

If respondent mentions the *collar and chain scene*:
1. How did you feel about the scene where Madonna is bound by the chain and the black leather collar clasped around her neck?
2. Why do you think this scene is included in the video?
3. Where do you think the chain leads to? What is she chained to?

If respondent mentions the *music box or black musicians*:
1. What was the older man doing in this scene?
2. What is he watching?
3. Why is the scene included?
4. Who is the older man?
5. What are the other men in the scene doing?

If respondent mentions the *crawling / milk and elevator scene*:
1. Why is Madonna crawling on all fours under the table?
2. Why does she lap up the milk?
3. What does the milk symbolize?
4. Why did Madonna pour the milk over her shoulder down her back which then poured onto the young man’s face? What did it mean to you?
5. Where is the young man?

If respondent mentions the *bedroom or men wrestling*:
1. What did you think of the last scene?
2. What were the men doing at the end of the video?
3. How does the scene make you feel?

If respondent mentions the video reminds her of *Metropolis*:
1. What in particular in this video reminds you of the movie "Metropolis"? Do you remember what Metropolis was about?
2. What are the similarities between the movie and the video? What are the differences? Any thematic differences?
3. Why do you think that Madonna replicated some parts of the Metropolis movie in this video?
This following list of questions were asked of most participants.

1. Where does this video take place? Describe the setting.
2. Which of the characters is the most powerful? Why?
3. Who do you think Madonna is addressing or is speaking to in this video?
4. Does this video appeal more to men or women?
5. When Madonna says you have got to express yourself - the title of the song - what does that mean to you?
6. Do you think the video was trying to tell you anything?
7. What is Madonna saying to you? Do you think the video is just promotional hype or do you think Madonna is trying to get a message across?
8. Does the video make you think about anything in your own life or someone you know?
9. What would you predict happens after the video ends?
10. What do the lyrics have to do with the visual images of the video?
11. What in particular do you remember about what the lyrics say?
12. What do you think that the last statement in quotes has to do with the video?
13. If you could give the video to someone who you thought should have it, to whom would you give it? Why?
14. Compare this video with others. How would you rate it? Why?
15. What do you think the overall message is?
16. Did you notice anything about the use of colour in the video? Why do you suppose some shots are in colour and others black and white?
FEMINISM
1. Do you think that your views about the roles of women in society have any effect on the way you interpret the media--like rock videos?

INTERVENTION--QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW
1. What did you think of this interview? Is there anything we have not discussed you think should have been? Do you have anything to add?
2. What did you think of the questionnaire?
3. Did you have any expectations about what would happen at this interview?

DEBRIEFING
1. I told interviewees that I chose some women who had a more feminist orientation and some who were more traditional in their views to find out how they would interpret the video and if there would be a difference in selection and interpretation.
2. I described some of the various levels at which the video could be interpreted--sexual, love relationship, economic/business, gender politics and Metropolis.
3. Interviewees were thanked again for participating.
4. Interviewees interested in a study summary after completion gave me their addresses.
REFERENCES


McWilliams, M. 1990. Why the rock world hates Madonna. *Detroit News,* 2 April. 1C.


VITA AUCTORIS

Elaine Grodaes was born on May 9, 1961 in Cabri, Saskatchewan. She graduated from Lacombe Composite High School in Lacombe, Alberta in 1979, and attended the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science in 1983. She enrolled in the Master of Arts Programme in Communication Studies at the University of Windsor in the fall of 1987.