

Literacy on Television

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how much literacy was depicted in six popular prime time situation comedies—*Community*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Modern Family*, *Parks and Recreation*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and *The Office*. The first five episodes of each program's first season were analyzed, as to the number of literacy events present and the durations of such, using a Literacy Events Checklist. Whether there were readers in evidence on the programs was examined. Whether the readers were portrayed in such a way that they, and their reading habits, might be emulated by young people was also investigated. The Literacy Events Checklists were analyzed and coded according to categories designated by the researcher. Findings indicate that literacy is depicted to a certain extent on these programs, in some programs more than in others. Readers were found in each program. A Reader Checklist was employed in order to determine common reader traits among these readers. Findings indicate that, although there are some common reader traits among the readers, they are not entirely negative. The diversity of the readers found in these programs reflects the diversity of readers in society. Recommendations for educators include sharing with students the statistics regarding the time spent reading and the time spent watching television in North America, and having students examine their own habits in this regard. This message could be brought to the community through school-wide initiatives at various levels, and the incorporation of parental involvement.

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*I would like to dedicate
this thesis
to my brilliant son, Christian.*

*You inspire me to be a good role model;
to read, to write,
and to never stop learning.*

Chapter One

Introduction

Growing up in the 1970s and 80s, with parents fascinated and delighted by the medium, I was exposed to a significant amount of television. My mother's family was among the first in her northern Ontario town to get a television in the late 1950s, and the excitement over the medium was still palpable in our home 20 years later. I loved to read, even as a child, but I enjoyed watching television nearly as much. For me, watching television was a social activity, something that I did with my family. I watched Saturday morning cartoons and after school programs with my brother and sister; I watched *M.A.S.H.* and *The Waltons* in the evening with my parents. When my siblings and I were at our grandparent's house, *The Lawrence Welk Show* was a tradition. We would marvel at the dazzling outfits and the obvious toupees of the Lawrence Welk performers as we sang and danced along to the big band music. Sometimes my grandmother would serve us "champagne" at the end of the program, which was actually a soft drink in a wine glass. I cringed about this aspect of the custom once I was a teenager, but I would always smile and clink my glass against each one lifted my way; it was the way we had always done it.

When I was a teenager and a young adult in the 1980s and the early 1990s, I looked to television as a guide for my own personal style. I was greatly influenced by those I saw on the television programs. Like many others, I wore Madonna-inspired clothing and jewellery, as seen on *Friday Night Videos*. I had my waist-length hair cut and styled into a "Rachel" as soon as I saw the hairstyle on *Friends*, and I remember feeling a sense of pride when I heard a classmate whisper "90210" to his friend as I walked into my first education class at university, wearing a baby doll dress and cowboy boots.

I had access to two channels when I was away at university in the early 1990s and a remarkably small television balanced atop my crowded bookshelf. Fortunately, I had a love of

reading to sustain me, and my frequent visits home provided me with all of the viewing time I needed. I would ask my mother to “tape” *Friends* and *Seinfeld* for me, and my two channels provided my other two favourites. *Beverly Hills 90210* prescribed my wardrobe each week, and *Saturday Night Live* was, in my opinion, at its pinnacle. It offered me a political point of view alongside various catch phrases I could employ in social situations. “I live in a van down by the river!” was one popular Chris Farley quote that all of my friends used and recognized along with his “For the love of all things holy.” Rob Schneider’s *Making Copies* skits had us elongating one another’s names by adding “o-rama” or “meister” to the ends of them, and any mention of juice would inevitably elicit the Schneider inspired question, “You like-a da juice, huh?”

From *Friends* and *Seinfeld*, I collected further phrases and manners of speaking. The word “so” appeared in my spoken sentences (“I so didn’t mean for that to happen”), as was often modelled by the characters on *Friends*, and the catch phrase “yada yada” from *Seinfeld* began to replace anything I didn’t want to explain. Many people my age knew the language. “How you doin’?” with an emphasis on the “you” had a particular “Joey from *Friends*” playboy connotation, and fans of *Seinfeld* knew what it meant to be a “close talker” or “master of your domain.” *Seinfeld* also promoted particular actions among my contemporaries. Approaching adversaries were often met with narrowed eyes and an under the breath, “Hello, Newman” before they got close enough to hear it, and anyone who emulated the dance moves of *Seinfeld*’s Elaine (portrayed by Julia-Louis Dreyfus) drew knowing gales of laughter.

I also learned about adult lifestyles different from those modelled by my parents and their friends from these programs. Most of the people I knew then, who were over the age of 30, were married, had children and lived in a house; the single apartment dwellers on many of the sitcoms opened up new possibilities to me. Through watching the various travel documentaries and history programs which aired on the two channels that my tiny television did receive, I also cultivated an interest in travel which had been ignited through novels, history books, and the

vacations I had enjoyed with my family each summer.

Television, then, had an impact on many aspects of my life. I learned and formed opinions and ways of communicating as a result of what I watched. I admired and emulated the celebrities that I saw on the programs, and I considered watching television a social activity, something that was experienced together with others, or was eventually shared with others.

That it had an impact on us is evident now when my brother and I recount particular television episodes from our childhood, reciting memorized lines in unison. *Three's Company*, *Different Strokes* and *Happy Days* were among our favourites. We remember how we felt as we watched a particular episode, how shocked or delighted we were; we remember that we kept from our younger sister the connotations of the lines, revelling in our comparative wisdom. The characters on the programs from that time period were as much a part of our lives as were the family trips, the Christmas dinners and the family pets. They are part of our shared history.

Though television was a significant part of my life growing up, it did not eclipse my love of reading. My mother, when she wasn't watching television or spending time with us, spent much of her time reading. When she was absorbed in a book, I would find a book of my own to read. Whereas television was typically a group activity for me, reading was a solitary pursuit. Though I enjoyed the time spent reading aloud with my mother when I was very young, I don't recall reading with her a great deal after I was four or five years old. Once I knew how to read, it became for me—as it was for her—an independent escape.

While Jennifer Aniston, Madonna and Tori Spelling were influencing the way I expressed myself on the outside, the characters Holden Caulfield (from Salinger, 1951), Nick Carraway (from Fitzgerald, 1925) and the stirring words of Plath and Atwood were shaping my perspective. In addition to literature, I was fascinated with history books. When the Tower of London flickered in front of me on the television screen, I already had, from countless hours spent reading about the Tudors, a clear picture in my mind of the daunting, fortified outside of the tower, and of the inside with its damp, isolated rooms. Long before I turned on the

television, I felt as if I'd already stood upon Tower Green and seen the scaffolds erected there, and listened to the hushed silence and to the final words of the "privileged" few who died within the tower walls.

My first teaching job was in a small village in Poland. I was thrilled to be going to Europe, but, besides what I knew about World War Two, I knew very little about Poland itself. I didn't speak the language well, and I had no idea what to expect. Though television presented for me grainy images of a sombre, ashen place without smiles or colour, James Michener's novel *Poland* (1983) painted for me a vivid picture of swaying fields, soaring mountains, ancient castles, curving seashores, a strong, proud culture and strength in the face of adversity. It was these vibrant images that drew me there, despite the dreary death camp footage that crackled on my television screen.

Once I begin a book that intrigues me, I am impatient to get to the end of the story. Often, once I approach the end, I'm sorry that I rushed the experience. That was never the case with television. I never felt the same sense of loss and regret once a program was finished. Whereas television presents a particular perspective in a concrete way, a book offers a person the chance to visualize the characters, the setting, and the atmosphere for themselves. My imagination has some control with literature. I enjoy that ownership and freedom.

I have found that most people, when given the opportunity, tend to idealize their own interpretations of literature. One of my favourite aspects of being an English teacher is observing my students as they view the movie version of a book we have studied in depth. Their annoyance is readily apparent if anything is left out, and their indignant response to characters different from those they had envisioned tells me that they have invested their imaginations in the story. The movie version restricts their freedom and independence of thought, and they are often eager to justify their own "correct" version.

I remember the silence after a television was turned off in my childhood home; it was palpable, almost a relief. Sometimes, as I was growing up, I needed time away from the noise,

the commercials and the static. The peaceful, enchanted hours I spent with J.D. Salinger, Fitzgerald, and the unforgettable words of Donne, Shakespeare, and Joyce far surpassed those that I spent watching television as I grew up. Sometimes I needed time away, as much as I enjoyed spending time with loved ones. Reading provided me an excuse to detach for a while, a chance to imagine and to interpret, to identify with and to judge, a chance to experience cultures, to travel, to encounter diverse people and to dream without sleeping in my silent room.

I am the product of various influences. Looking to my parents as role models, I became an avid reader and an enthusiastic television viewer. Whereas television provided social opportunities and, through celebrity role models, contributed to my language, outward style and point of view at various points in time, books strengthened my imagination and provided peace, vicarious experience, knowledge, and inspiration. Both of these, in a fine balance, contributed to my perspective, and, along with my real experiences and relationships, helped to shape my life.

When I read the statistics that compare the average time spent reading to the average time spent watching television in North America today, I fear that the fine balance for many may be slipping away. Modelling at home is one way for parents to combat this apparent trend toward television and away from reading, but are parents the only influential role models in their children's lives?

Background to the Problem

Television and the celebrities who appear on it are a dominant force in today's society. Children are passive receptors of television's influence, often on a daily basis, and many, according to startling statistics, for nearly the equivalent number of hours that they spend in school (The Nielsen Company, 2009a). Whether it is seen as a form of entertainment, as an educator, as a babysitter or as a pastime, television and the celebrities who bring it to life should be acknowledged as powerful and capable of effecting change. People's style choices, vocabulary and even their opinions seem often to be linked to that which they see on television.

The amount of time that young people spend watching television in North America far outweighs their time spent reading (Statistics Canada, 2004, 2005). Much has been written about the exact number of hours spent fixated on screens, and the negative influences stemming from this fixation, and very little about how this power, which is not going away, can be managed and used to promote better choices. Instead of focussing on the negative aspects of this one way communication, we might acknowledge the trend and perhaps use the influence of television, in particular the vast influence of celebrity role models, to promote healthy behaviours and priorities.

People have role models from a young age (Weiss, 2010), and they use these role models as a guide for their own actions (Bandura, 1977). Children's programming often has an emphasis on literacy, and most of the characters on the shows—be they human, cartoon or puppet—are seen reading, encourage reading from children and convey through activities, songs and stories the joy, pride and independence that comes with the ability to read. *Sesame Street*, *The Electric Company* and *Between the Lions* are examples of television shows whose aim, besides their assumed primary objective of making money, appears to be the promotion of reading and learning. Sadly, this emphasis on basic literacy tends to disappear as the children reach school age. In my opinion, there are few television shows for children over the age of six that explicitly focus on reading in the same way that these shows do. It seems that once a child begins to read, there is little on television which might encourage him or her to continue to do so.

I have found, in my television viewing experience, that if a character on a television sitcom is a reader, they are often portrayed as haughty or condescending, and sometimes as socially inept. Two examples of typical readers on television are the characters Frasier Crane (portrayed by Kelsey Grammar) from the show *Frasier*, and Diane Chambers (portrayed by Shelley Long) from the long running sitcom, *Cheers*. Both characters were portrayed as well read and highly educated, and both seemed to have trouble with social relationships, acting as though they were better than others, though actually feeling inferior. The knowledge that they

held and displayed to their friends was rarely upheld as necessary knowledge, and often they and their reading habits were the butt of the more “street-wise” character’s jokes. Sam Malone (portrayed by Ted Danson) was attracted to Diane, but this was a physical attraction, rather than an intellectual one. Readers can be attractive, this seemed to imply, despite their intelligence. Certainly it was not Diane’s brain that intrigued Sam Malone.

This stereotyping of readers begins very early in television for children. Often the readers in children’s shows are the quiet ones wearing glasses, or the ones with their hands constantly in the air answering the teacher’s questions. Justin Russo (portrayed by David Henrie) on the series *Wizards of Waverly Place* fits this stereotype as the studious and “nerdy” older brother of the show’s star Alex Russo (portrayed by Selena Gomez). Sometimes, as is the case with Frasier Crane and Diane Chambers, they are portrayed as “know-it-alls” who never seem to have any fun.

Bert, a puppet from the show *Sesame Street*, an influential program known for its promotion of literacy (Ball & Bogatz, 1970; Shanahan & Neuman, 1997), is, ironically, a prime example of this stereotype. He is a lacklustre character who is often portrayed reading a book entitled “Boring Stories” and telling his rambunctious friend Ernie to “be quiet” so that he can eat his oatmeal and watch his pigeons in peace. He is the bland one who is always exasperated, and who is never the instigator of jokes, but is often the butt of jokes. The message is clear with this stereotype—people (or in this case, puppets) who read too much miss out on life—they just don’t “get it.” Who would want to be like that?

Television celebrities are powerful. Rachel Green (portrayed by Jennifer Aniston) on the sitcom *Friends* was depicted as a spoiled girl, shallow but likable, pretty but unlucky in love, a typical “girl next door.” Her considerable influence was evident in a haircut she had in the early 1990s known as “The Rachel,” which was adopted worldwide by girls who wanted to be just like her. She is still a role model to many of us who cut our hair in her honour. It is not her tresses that we aspire to now, but her youthful image. My friends and I look to Jennifer

Aniston as a reminder that a woman in her 40s is still young and vibrant. We will likely continue to compare ourselves to her as the years go on. I am secure in the knowledge that this youthful beauty will always be older than I am. There is comfort in that.

Arthur Fonzarelli, The Fonz, (portrayed by Henry Winkler) of the sitcom *Happy Days* brought the notion of “cool” to a new generation of kids in the 1970s and 1980s with his magnetic charm and James Dean looks. Many emulated his cool ways, though few possessed his ability to attract women, to jump over most anything on his motorcycle or to turn on lights with a thump of his fist. Fans strove instead to be the opposite of Fonzie’s alter ego on the show, the clean cut, moral, bookish and decidedly “uncool” Richie Cunningham (portrayed by Ron Howard). With references still made to his character on a regular basis 30 years later (for example a wax figure of Arthur Fonzarelli made multiple appearances on *Late Night with Conan O’Brien* in 2009), The Fonz lives on.

Another more recent example of a television celebrity with influence is Ashton Kutcher from *That Seventies Show* who had boys all over the nation wearing trucker caps over their shaggy, grown out hair.

Thanks in part to Ashton Kutcher’s 2002 appearance on MTV sporting a John Deere tractor cap, John Deere hats have become one of the most highly sought after items, both in stores and on the internet. Since that time, hundreds of thousands of hats have been sold to trend-seekers from all over the world.

(Matkin, 2007, para. 4)

Miley Cyrus seems to realize the influence that she has over her viewers. This is apparent in an episode of her show *Hannah Montana* entitled *Welcome to the Bungle* (Peterman & Jensen, 2009). In this episode, Miley’s character Hannah claims on a talk show that she does not like carrots, which causes many of her fans to stop eating carrots. When she goes back on the talk show to retract her statement, she makes another mistake by mentioning that she does not read, but instead waits for books to be made into movies. Children all over the world hear

this and immediately seek to emulate their idol. This is a particularly telling example which makes clear that celebrities, the writers, and their networks understand the power that they hold over their viewers.

In these examples, we clearly see that television viewers can be swayed to change the way they look, the way they act, and the way they feel—en masse—through just observing a popular character.

Statement of the Problem

After shows like *Sesame Street* have addressed the basic literacy needs of preschoolers, the assumption appears to be that children can read, and so the topic need never be broached again. In the past, when characters on television shows were portrayed as readers, they were often stereotypical, to the point of being negative role models. I wondered whether this stereotype was still in evidence on television today. I also wondered whether there are readers on the programs that young people are watching in 2010. There is a significant discrepancy between the time North Americans spend reading and the time they spend watching television (Statistics Canada, 2004, 2005; The Nielsen Company, 2009a; Vandewater, Bickham, & Lee, 2006). Taking into account the influence that popular characters on television have over viewers, whether or not reading and writing is modelled on television may have an impact on the time spent reading by young viewers in North America.

The Researcher

This study is of interest to me because I am an adult educator teaching basic literacy and high school English at an adult learning centre in a prairie city in Canada. My students are diverse; most are over the age of 18, some are functionally illiterate, some have previously dropped out of high school for a myriad of reasons and are now focussed on the completion of their high school studies, and some are learning English as an additional language. Nearly all are hoping to enter secondary education and various careers after they leave our school. For some, this is a longer road than for others.

Before they come to my classroom, the majority of my students, regardless of their reading proficiency or intelligence, have never read a book of their own accord, and have not enjoyed those that they were “forced” to read at school in the past. I found this truly appalling at the outset of my career, but have come to look upon it as typical within the context of our adult learning centre, and as a challenge to overcome.

That the majority of my students do not read is not only evident in their lack of experience with literature, but also in their limited knowledge of current and historic events. The first time I taught a history course at my school I was shocked to discover that none of the students in my class had heard of the Holocaust, or could tell me what year World War Two had begun. When I taught World Issues that same year, I realized that very few of the students in that class had ever voted in any kind of an election. I soon learned that these were not isolated incidents, but something that was to be expected year to year. Because many of the students were older than I was when I first began to teach adults, I found this incomprehensible.

Growing up in a household with parents who read newspapers and watched news programs daily, I was always aware of current events. It was part of our daily conversation. Because my father was interested in history, I was conscious of, and naturally curious about, particular time periods and historical figures. My grandfather served in World War Two, and would often talk about his experiences. I realize now how comparatively rare this is, and how fortunate we were to be privy to a first person account. I have learned that not every adult has had access to such knowledge in their lives, beyond that seen on television and in movies, which might have fuelled further inquiry and interest. This lack of access and interest is clearly evident in my school.

Having been raised in a middle class neighbourhood in Ontario and later in Manitoba by parents who enjoyed television on a daily basis, I understand the influence of the medium, and the impact that celebrities can have on a person. As previously discussed, television has played a significant role in my life. My thoughts, actions, and language were

affected to a certain degree through my exposure to television. Now that I have a son, I am wary of this influence, and strive to limit its effect on my six year old. I feel that reading was the balancing factor in my life, and I consciously model for my son a preference for reading over television.

That is not to say that I do not appreciate the medium. Because I have a family, a teaching job, various sports and music lessons to attend and my own graduate course work to complete, I have little time to watch television. Besides *The Tudors*, which I never miss, I am somewhat “out of touch” with prime time television. There are, however, programs that I do see occasionally that I would watch if I had the time.

Before I began to think about this study, I had never consciously looked for incidences of reading and writing on television programs. As such, I was genuinely unaware going into this research whether there was reading or writing on prime time sitcoms, or whether there were characters who could be called “readers” on the programs. I decided to study prime time sitcoms due to their popularity with younger people. I hoped that the reader stereotype I perceived in television sitcoms in the 1980s and 1990s was no longer in evidence, and that there were still readers portrayed in the programs.

I understand that literacy is a broad term which encompasses multi-literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), critical literacy (Comber & Thomson, 2001; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993), situated literacies (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 2004) as well as multi-modal literacy (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Through my graduate studies I have come to understand that literacy exists in communication, and that, especially in this technologically advanced age, it goes beyond reading words from a book or writing a letter on stationery.

Reading and writing have always been important to me, and when I repeatedly hear students saying that they have never read a book to their children, and I see, as I often do, texting language in formal essays (“u” for “you”, for example), I can’t help but feel protective of

“traditional” reading and writing. By “reading,” I mean prolonged engagement with print text for a variety of purposes, and by “writing,” I refer to the conventional use of written language for a range of purposes. I realize that reading body language is a kind of literacy, and that understanding and upholding cultural traditions and even navigating one’s way in the world requires a variety of situated, critical, and multi-modal literacy skills. I understand that reading and writing in the traditional sense do not by themselves constitute “literacy.” I believe, however, that these basic skills and practices must continue to be valued and preserved in our society.

It is from this vantage point that I collected and interpreted the data in this study. With respect for the fact that literacy is much more than simply reading and writing, and with hope for the preservation and promotion of conventional reading and writing practices. My idea of a “literacy event” might differ from that of another, and my interpretation of the data may differ from that of someone with a different perspective and background.

When I read the statistics that claim that Canadians are only reading minutes a day compared to the hours of television that they watch daily (Statistics Canada, 2004, 2005), I am not shocked; I see it every day. I have come to expect that the majority of the adult students in my classes will not know a great deal about history or current events when they step into my classroom, and that many will never have voted in their lives. I have also come to expect that there will be few people in my classes who will, at the outset, openly acknowledge a love of reading. Reading has been something thrust upon many of my students in the past, a tedious chore to be avoided.

Knowing this, and knowing that my students are only a small, comparatively motivated sample of the adult population who have not finished high school in my city, I cannot help but fear for future generations. Even before celebrities, parents are their children’s primary role models (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002). If the statistics are accurate, the hours that people spend

watching television have only increased with each passing year, and will likely continue to rise. And then what will become of reading?

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of my research is to ascertain whether reading and writing are being modelled on current television sitcoms, and whether those characters who are shown reading are portrayed in such a way that they, and their reading habits, might be deemed worthy of emulation by viewers. With this purpose in mind, my research questions are as follows:

- How much reading and writing is depicted on current, popular television sitcoms?

By reading, I mean conscious, deliberate reading that goes beyond a mere glance at things like a billboard or a street sign. Is there reading in the sense of prolonged engagement with print text for a variety of purposes (for enjoyment, to find information, to learn, to escape, etc...)? By writing, I mean the conventional use of print language for a range of purposes.

- Do the celebrities on the shows that young people watch today promote literacy through their actions and/or their words?

Do the main characters, who are on the programs every week, read or write on the show? Do they talk about reading and writing in a positive way? Is it evident that they enjoy reading and writing? Do they refer to reading and writing that they have done in the past, or that they intend to do? Do they depict admiration for books, for writing, or for others who read and write?

- Are there readers on situation comedies, and, if so, are they portrayed in such a way that young people might seek to emulate them and their reading habits?

If there are readers, are they the main characters, or are they supporting characters or extras in the background? Are the characters who read popular with the other characters on the show? Do the other characters admire them? Are the readers portrayed as being physically

attractive? Are they outgoing? Are they confident? Are they fashionable, current and sophisticated or “cool?” Often the characters that viewers seek to emulate are not readers. Sam Malone (portrayed by Ted Danson) from the sitcom *Cheers* and Michael Kelso (portrayed by Ashton Kutcher) from *That Seventies Show* were two non-reading characters who were considered attractive and “cool.” In the context of their respective programs, they had no trouble attracting women, despite their limited intelligence. This, undoubtedly, led to the emulation of their actions among young male viewers. Other questions that I will address are: Do the other characters on the program value the knowledge that the reader holds? Are the readers portrayed as being “well rounded”—“street smart” as well as “book smart?”

Overview of the Other Chapters

This study focussed on the amount of literacy evident in six Prime Time situation comedies. It also examined whether there were readers on the programs, and whether these readers were portrayed in such a way that they might inspire emulation. Through a review of the literature in Chapter 2, I address the discrepancy evident between the time spent reading and the time spent watching television in North America. I also discuss the influences of television, the power of role models and the influence of celebrities on reading motivation. Chapter 3 provides the reader with a description of the television programs studied and describes how the data were collected and analyzed. In Chapter 4, I present the results of the study in terms of the literacy evident and the readers identified. In Chapter 5, I discuss the study results. I determine whether reading is promoted by the readers I have identified, and discuss whether these readers might inspire emulation among young viewers. I also discuss how the study findings are relevant to parents and classroom teachers, in addition to future research. Limitations of the study are also discussed.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

In this chapter I will discuss television and reading statistics, the influences of television, role models, and celebrity impact on reading motivation. For the purposes of this study, it is important to acknowledge the discrepancy between the time North Americans spend reading and the time that they spend watching television. Next, the various influences of television must be recognized. Once these have been established, I believe that an investigation of the power of role models, and especially celebrity role models in regard to reading must be made in order to acknowledge the potential impact the inclusion of reading and writing on television might have on the television viewing audience.

Television and Reading Statistics

Television is an integral part of North American life. According to a Statistics Canada survey in 2004, Canadians aged 12 to 17 watched an average of 12.9 hours of television a week. This was only somewhat less than the 14.1 hours per week that Canadian children aged 2 to 11 were watching (Statistics Canada, 2004). Conversely, a Statistics Canada survey in 2005 found that Canadians over the age of 15 only read an average of 0.4 hours, or 24 minutes, a day. This amounts to less than three hours a week. This same survey reported that Canadians over 15 spent 2.1 hours a day watching television in 2005. This is a striking contrast which serves to delineate the preferred pastimes of many Canadians. In 2005, Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reported that “Four out of 10 adult Canadians, age 16 to 65—representing 9 million Canadians—struggle with low literacy” (ABC Life Literacy Canada, 2010, para. 2). This may be one consequence of the discrepancy between the time spent reading and the time spent watching television by people in Canada, after all, the more we read, the better we get at it (Stanovich, 1986). According to the International Adult Literacy Survey in 1995, people who watch television for significant lengths of time generally have a

lower literacy level (Media Awareness Network, 2010). This survey also indicated that people with higher literacy levels watched considerably less television than those with lower levels.

Similarly, The National Institute for Literacy reported in 2001 that more than 20% of adults in the United States read at or below a fifth-grade level—far below the level needed to earn a living wage (The Literacy Company, 2010). “In 2004, a National Endowment for the Arts report titled "Reading at Risk" found that only 57 percent of American adults had read a book in 2002, a four percentage point drop in a decade. The study faulted television, movies and the Internet” (Fram, 2007, para. 7). Television may, indeed, be one diversion from reading in North America. According to The Nielsen Company’s report (2009a) covering the last three months of 2008, the average American television viewer was watching more than 151 hours of television per month. This amounts to roughly 38 hours a week, or more than five hours a day. Another Nielsen Company report, which focussed on how teens use media, found that teen television viewing in the U.S. had increased by 6% since 2004 (The Nielsen Company, 2009b). Children have likely increased their viewing time as well. In 2006, children in the U.S. were reported to have spent just under two hours a day watching television (Vandewater, Bickham, & Lee, 2006). Interestingly, this study also reported that these children spent less than 15 minutes a day reading. Nine years earlier, Wigfield and Guthrie’s 1997 study found that children in grades four and five read for, on average, 10 to 15 minutes a day. It makes one wonder whether the increase in television viewing time over the past few years has led to a further decrease in reading time for young people.

The Influences of Television

Many North American children and teenagers, then, whether they are watching it alone or alongside their parents, are susceptible to the influence of television. Watching television with your children is widely recommended (Severe, n.d. ; “Watch TV with,” 2008). This is an effective way for parents to monitor what their children are watching while spending

time with them, but it may also expose children to inappropriate content, depending on what programs are chosen, and by whom. A Nielsen study of how teens use media in June 2009 found that teenagers' favourite TV shows are mostly the same as those of their parents. This was also true of favourite websites and genre preferences across media (The Nielsen Company, 2009b). Clearly, then, many teens in the U.S. are watching what their parents are watching on television.

The influence of television, according to conflicting sources, is twofold. Television, some claim, can adversely impact the lives of children, and promote eventualities ranging from childhood obesity (Robinson, 2001) to sexual promiscuity (Collins et al., 2004). It seems that many of the activities popular with children today, such as watching television, playing certain video games and even using a computer, necessitate sitting in one place. As such, it is not surprising that obesity may be a problem among children engaging in these activities for extended periods of time. In regard to sexual promiscuity, Chandra et al (2008) found a potential link between exposure to sexual content on television and the incidence of teenage pregnancy. Some assert that television can desensitize children to violence (Anderson et al., 2003). It seems that the more a person is exposed to something, whether it is overt sexual behaviour or violence, the more "normal" such actions might begin to appear.

According to The American Academy of Pediatrics' Policy Statement in 1995, frequent television viewing is also related to lower academic performance in children (Davies, 2001). This may be because the child's free time is spent watching television instead of doing homework, or, in the case where a child has a television in their bedroom, it might even be due to a lack of sleep (Roberts, 2010). Given the links between reading and school achievement (Gambrell, 2007), where television is decreasing reading time, it might also decrease a child's school performance. Children exposed to television from infancy can experience speech delay,

and know fewer words than children not exposed to television (Christakis, 2009). According to Christakis' 2009 study, fewer words are spoken by adults and children when a television is on. Television opens the floodgates to a barrage of advertising, some claim, drawing suggestible youth toward consumerism. Strasburger (2001) estimated that the average American child may view as many as 40,000 television commercials every year. I know that my son is curiously knowledgeable about new toys, movies and computer games—and where to find them—despite the limited amount of time he spends watching television.

On the other hand, television has been proven to reach out to children with little or no literacy at home with positive academic results (Ball & Bogatz, 1970). Ball and Bogatz's 1970 study found that children from low-income areas, rural areas, and from middle-class suburbs who watched the first year of *Sesame Street* benefitted from the exposure to literacy on television. It found that three year old children benefitted most from watching the show, and that the more a child watched, the greater the benefit. In a recent article, Moses (2008) found that television viewing by children, in moderate amounts, can be beneficial for reading, and that programs whose aim is the promotion of early literacy have been found to impact particular literacy skills in young children.

Educational programs for children, such as those seen on Disney Family and The Discovery Channel, for example, profess to promote family values and a love of learning. *Popular Mechanics for Kids* and *How it's Made* are two Discovery Channel programs that my son loves to watch, and that I enjoy watching alongside him. *Popular Mechanics for Kids* deals with various science topics, while *How it's Made* describes and shows how particular products are made in a factory. When a child is learning as they view, television becomes more than a distraction.

Treehouse is a channel for preschool children that advertised no commercials when it

first aired. I and many of the parents I know found this appealing and we felt comfortable allowing our young children to watch the channel. It has since incorporated a limited amount of commercials. Still, in this age where television commercials follow us to the movie theatres, a channel which offers fewer commercials is a welcome change.

Television is accessible. Other than the ability to see and to hear, passive watching requires little skill. It can offer knowledge and vicarious experience to non-readers and readers alike. Some even assert that television, because it requires various levels of problem solving, can stimulate and improve our cognitive abilities (Johnson, 2005). In his article, Johnson asserts that shows like *24* require viewers to exercise their cognitive abilities, to make inferences and to pay close attention to shifting, complex relationships. He feels that television shows today are more cognitively demanding than shows were 20 years ago, that television viewers actually need to think in order to follow a storyline.

Role Models

Whether the impact of television is positive or negative, role models on and off-screen are an important factor in shaping the behaviour of children. Dr. Amy Beth Taublieb asserts that “Children choose models for themselves as early as the preschool years...The type of models changes with the developmental level of the child” (Weiss, 2010, para. 3). A recent National Literacy Trust survey of 2176 seven to 15-year-olds found that 78% of children and young people have a role model, predominantly from within their immediate family (Clark, Osborne, & Dugdale, 2009). According to the final report of the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), “literacy development is strongly influenced in the early years by a child's family environment and the parent’s educational background” (Literacy BC, 2005, para. 5). Children tend to choose role models whom they find relevant and with whom they can compare themselves (Lockwood & Kunda, 2000). According to Bandura (1977), most human behaviour is

learned through observation and modeling. People use models as a guide for their own actions. I have noticed that my son mirrors many of my actions; those that I model consciously, as well as many that I do not. If children are admiring and emulating those whom they see most frequently and consistently, and they are exposed to as much television as studies indicate, some of their role models are likely observed through television screens.

Celebrities can have a profound effect on young people. Bush, Bush, and Martin (2004) found that athletes can have a significant influence on youth in terms of how they view themselves. They also maintained that celebrity athletes can influence young people's educational and career choices. Whereas girls may choose role models from either gender, Anderson and Cavallaro (2002) assert that boys tend to look primarily to male role models. Gibson and Cordova (1999) suggest that this may be the case because males are more likely to be portrayed in positions of power. In their study, Bricheno and Thornton (2007) found that "footballers" came second only to fathers in terms of who boys looked upon as role models. The identification of role models indicates that "youth believe that these individuals are worthy of imitation in some respect and that their attitudes or values are ones they would like to assimilate" (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 37).

That role models have an effect on youth is often evident in their style of dress, musical preferences, sport choices, interests and even in their vocabulary. Often, young people seek to emulate role models. Fraser and Brown (2002) suggest that one reason people seek to imitate and impersonate celebrities is based on a need to enhance their self-esteem through identification with particular values. As previously mentioned, actress Jennifer Aniston's hairstyle was widely adopted across the nation when her character Rachel on the show *Friends* got a new haircut in the nineties. Fans wanted to be like her character; well-liked among her friends, beautiful, stylish and popular. Having the same hairstyle was a step closer to having

it all. Carrington and Skelton (2002) assert that a role model today is often equated with a symbol of achievement. Perhaps it is the success of a particular celebrity, whether they are a television actor or a celebrated athlete, that is drawing youth to emulation; the hope that they may also be successful. Maybe it was Jennifer Aniston, television star making a million dollars an episode, that we aspired to emulate, not her fictional counterpart who worked at a coffee shop in the earlier *Friends* episodes. Television is abounding with stars to admire and to emulate, but, the question remains; what is being promoted?

Celebrity Impact on Reading Motivation

Celebrities can certainly draw youth to their television sets, but do they have influence in other realms? According to statistics, the discrepancy between time spent reading and the time spent watching television is vast in North America. Can celebrity role models affect the desire to read in the same way that they affect style and sport preferences? According to Towell (2001), celebrities can motivate children to read. Her Reading Motivation Inventory, through which 900 students in 41 classes were surveyed, found that 90% of primary students and 70% of middle school students would enjoy books written by or about celebrities.

Oprah Winfrey's Book Club is a good example of the successful promotion of reading on television. Oprah promotes books by new authors, classic novels and books from a variety of genres in her book club, and the viewer response is enthusiastic. "Every book that Oprah Winfrey promotes on her book club list for adults automatically becomes a bestseller" (Towell, 2001, p. 22). Many celebrities, such as Madonna, Jay Leno, John Travolta and Sarah Ferguson have written children's books. Madonna's book entitled *The English Roses* debuted at No. 1 on The New York Times' best-seller list, and, to date has sold 500 000 copies worldwide (Engel, 2009). Many comedians such as Ellen Degeneres (*The Funny Thing is...*, 2004) and Jerry Seinfeld (*Seinlanguage*, 1993) have written popular books for older audiences. Biographies,

authorized and unauthorized, are always in demand. Kitty Kelley's recent biography of Oprah Winfrey (2010) was much publicized and widely read, as were the many biographies that materialized after Michael Jackson's death.

However, the books that draw readers are not limited to those written by or about a celebrity, nor are the "celebrity suggested" books the only ones that are largely read. It seems as though it is also effective if a celebrity claims to be an avid reader, or promotes reading in general. Oprah Winfrey is a prime example of this, and there are also many examples of athletes promoting literacy. Towell (2001) mentions the successful involvement of athletes in literacy, such as champion skater and ardent reader Michelle Kwan who was involved with the American Library Association, and Shaquille O'Neal, a star basketball player who, among other literacy related endeavours, has done promotional advertisements for the National Basketball Association and the Reading is Fundamental Foundation. There are many current examples of such celebrity promotion in North America, and around the world.

One recent North American example is the WrestleMania Reading Challenge regional competition which took place in January, 2010.

More than 1,800 libraries in the United States and Canada participated in this year's WrestleMania Reading Challenge competition, sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association; and WWE, with support from Mattel, Inc. and DK Publishing. Students read 10 items during a 10-week period, then designed and submitted bookmarks with a slogan to encourage reading. (Clayton, 2010, para. 4)

Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) created this program with World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) to reach out to kids and teens who do not typically use the library and who may not read a great deal, to encourage and to empower them. The finalists

win their division's championship, a silver trophy, and sought-after ringside tickets to WrestleMania. The children cited in the article were gratified not only with the celebrity meetings, trips and winnings involved, but also with the chance to hone their literacy skills. One young winner acknowledged his hard work and expressed his elation at achieving success. "For the past two weeks, my mom has been quizzing me (on the book), he explained. I've never been to WrestleMania before, and now the first time I go I'll be ringside. I'm very excited" (Clayton, 2010, para. 22). In its efforts, WrestleMania is tapping into an important group of formerly reluctant readers and helping to build motivation and pride in literacy.

Another example of celebrities reaching out to encourage reading is The National Basketball Association's (NBA) Read to Achieve Program. Although the NBA had been working with programs like Reading Is Fundamental for a number of years, it launched its own program in 2001 "to combat some of the criticism that it was not doing enough to encourage literacy" (Harvin, 2005, para. 4). The program sends players out to read to students and to listen to students read, it develops online programs and holds essay contests. They have also been involved in the building of learning centres in various cities.

Individual basketball players have done a great deal to promote literacy as well. Jerome Williams has taken part in the program, and has co-written a book about bullying with Eric Waiters called *Triple Threat* (2005). Shaquille O'Neal has gone further in recent years to create the Real Model Foundation with his wife, Shaunie, to motivate and empower disadvantaged children by providing social and academic opportunities (Harvin, 2005, para. 22).

The NBA is not alone in its endeavours to promote literacy. Baseball stars such as Shawn Riggins and J.P. Howell of the Tampa Bay Rays, along with many of their teammates, spend time at such venues as the Orlando Public Library reading to area elementary school children. About the Orlando Public Library experience, library director Mary Ann Hodel said, "I'd love

to do it again...They are role models, so what they do the kids will mimic. Having them do very positive things, positive behaviors, like reading, I think it's wonderful for the children, that's how they learn. Baseball players are definitely adult heroes" (Ghiroli, 2008, para. 6).

The significant impact that a visit from a basketball or a baseball superstar would have on children is easy to imagine, and the benefits go far beyond giving the Sports Associations a better name. It also goes beyond the local library in the city where a team is playing. The NBA reaches outside of the United States, for example. "Basketball Without Borders operates in Africa, the Americas, as well as in Europe, with an emphasis on programs for education, youth sports and HIV/AIDS" (Harvin, 2005, para. 18). This is a clear example of celebrities using their considerable influence for good in the world.

Outreach from celebrities to young readers is happening all over the world, and the role models are not only sports stars. One good example is The Passion for Knowledge posters produced in association with the National Literacy Trust and sponsored by Renaissance Learning UK Ltd. Strictly Come Dancing judge and pop star Alesha Dixon, British rapper Kano, BAFTA winning actor and director Noel Clarke and actor Reggie Yates appeared in a poster campaign to promote reading to youth. "Celebrities who young people relate to are an extremely effective tool for motivating them to enjoy reading. Reading for pleasure supports the development of literacy skills" (National Literacy Trust, 2010, para. 3). This example illustrates that role models are influential to children worldwide, and that there are many different kinds of celebrity role models to suit every child's interest. Another example in the UK is Channel 4, which promoted its childhood literacy season with a campaign featuring celebrities who read parts from famous children's books, shared their favourite letters and also their favourite made up words. These celebrities were diverse and included news presenter Krishnan Guru-Murthy, Green Wing actor Stephen Mangan and historian David Starkey as well as actors from shows such as *The IT*

Crowd, Skins and *Hollyoaks* (Sweney, 2007). Celebrities from varied fields are likely to reach and to affect a range of children with diverse interests and goals.

Summary of this Literature Review

The review of literature concerning television and reading statistics reveals that there is a significant discrepancy between the time spent reading and the time spent watching television in North America. Studies indicate that many North American adults are lacking in literacy skills and in time spent reading. The negative influences of television are discussed, along with some positive influences. Excess viewing seems to be a factor in many of the negative influences. Studies indicate that television programs whose main aim is to promote literacy can be effective. The literature concerning role models indicates that although role models are typically found within one's family, celebrities can also have an influence on young people. People tend to emulate those with whom they can relate, and whom they admire. The examples given of celebrity involvement in literacy promotion indicate that celebrities can encourage literacy practices.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Is there reading and writing on television situation comedies? In this chapter, I will outline the procedures that I followed in order to determine whether literacy was apparent in six popular prime time situation comedies. I will further outline what I refer to as a “literacy event”, and how I gathered and analyzed the data that I collected while watching the programs.

Procedures

In order to discover whether or not reading and writing is evident on television sitcoms, I chose six popular half hour comedies that are currently on television, and I placed them into three different categories. The six sitcoms that I chose to study, and the categories under which they fell are as follows:

- Educational Setting

The Big Bang Theory: A show about two Cal-Tech physicists in their 20s who live across the hall from a blonde waitress. The show is set in Pasadena, California. It airs on CBS.

Community: A show about students at a community college in Denver, Colorado. It airs on NBC.

- Workplace Setting

The Office: Adapted from the British program of the same name, this is a show about a group of employees at a paper company called Dunder Mifflin. It is filmed as though with a single camera, and is set in Scranton, Pennsylvania. It airs on NBC.

Parks and Recreation: This is a show about the deputy director of the Parks and Recreation department in the town of Pawnee, Indiana, and her coworkers. It is filmed in a similar style to *The Office*, in a “mockumentary” format. It airs on NBC.

- Home Setting

Modern Family: Set in Los Angeles, this show, also filmed in the “mockumentary” style, follows three families—all related, but very diverse. A father with his new, younger wife and her young son are the primary family, and the two other families are his daughter and her husband and three children, and his son, his son’s partner and their adopted daughter. It airs on ABC.

How I Met Your Mother: This show is a recounting of the events which led to the main character’s meeting his children’s mother. The narration takes place in the year 2030. The story is comprised of detailed flashbacks. It airs on CBS.

All of the shows that I chose to study attract relatively young audiences, primarily the 18-49 demographic, and have enjoyed comparatively high ratings. In a full series ranking for the 2009-10 broadcast season, *The Big Bang Theory* was the most highly ranked series in the 18-49 demographic, from those that I have chosen, at fifth place out of a hundred (see Table 1). This ranking took into account ratings and share. *Parks and Recreation* was the lowest of the six that I have chosen at 63rd place. In this same ranking, *The Office*, *Modern Family*, *How I Met your Mother* and *Community* were ranked at 11th, 21st, 28th and 60th place respectively (Andreeva, 2010). *The Big Bang Theory* and *How I met Your Mother* are also known to attract the 18-34 as well as the 25-54 demographic (Horowitz, 2010; Seidman, 2009). *The Big Bang Theory* seems to be a favourite in both the U.S. and in Canada. With the exception of the weeks when the 2010 Olympics were broadcast on television, it has consistently been in the top 12 in BBM Canada’s weekly top program reports for 2009-2010 (BBM, 2010).

That the six sitcoms I chose to study fall into the 18-49 demographic is significant. The 18-49 demographic indicates that people in this age range are watching the programs. People in this age range likely include many people who are parents of children and teens. The Nielsen Company’s report on *How Teens Use Media* reported that teenagers’ favourite shows

are often the same as those of their parents (The Nielsen Company, 2009b). This suggests that many teens are watching the television shows that their parents are watching. As such, and because watching television with your children is widely recommended (Severe, n.d. ; “Watch TV with,” 2008), one can assume that many people under the age of 18 are watching these programs alongside their parents.

Table 1
Full Series Ranking for the 2009-10 Broadcast Season

Television Program: 18-49 Demographic	Ranking out of 100
Community	60th
How I Met Your Mother	28th
Modern Family	21st
Parks and Recreation	63rd
The Big Bang Theory	5th
The Office	11th

All of the programs chosen for this study are half hour long comedies which air in prime time on weeknights. With the exception of *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Office*, which have been on the air for five and six seasons respectively, all of the shows have been on the air for three years or less, and all have been renewed for the 2010-2011 season.

Data Collection

I watched the first five shows of each program’s first season on DVD in order to document how many “literacy events” were present in each episode (see below for a definition of literacy events). I chose to watch the first five shows of each program’s first season because it is in these initial shows that the characters are developed. I was able to document literacy events by

using a Literacy Events Checklist (Appendix A). This checklist helped me to determine whether there were characters who could be referred to as readers on each show. When I identified readers on the programs, I investigated whether a reader stereotype was in evidence among readers on a particular show, and among readers across the six sitcoms. I used a Reader Checklist (Appendix B) in order to compare the readers.

In order that I could fairly compare the programs, I outlined the following as literacy events, which I recorded as I watched each program, including the character who was involved.

Literacy Events

I divided the literacy events into reading events and writing events. By *reading* I mean prolonged engagement with print text for a variety of purposes, and by *writing* I mean the conventional use of written language for a range of purposes. Prolonged engagement means reading that goes beyond a glance at a watch or a glimpse of a passing sign on a bus. As such, I did not take into consideration a quick look at a billboard, but focussed on reading which was prolonged to a certain extent. I deemed it would have been impossible to accurately record every possible reading moment if I had tried to include even the briefest of reading events—those often unconscious readings of environmental print—that occur throughout a day but take perhaps only milliseconds each time. I acknowledged conventional reading of printed text, such as the reading of a book, a newspaper, an email, a text message or a map.

When it comes to texting, my use of the word “conventional” refers to the kind of writing typically seen in that medium. Texting language may not be traditional, conventional or acceptable in the context of an essay, but it is conventional in its medium—that is to say, in the context of a text message. It is also a common form of writing today. That is why I acknowledge it in this study. I am, therefore, not confining my definition merely to traditional texts like books, but rather to printed text, including modern digital texts.

When recording these events as I watched each show, I documented whether the reading or writing event was being performed by a main character who was on the show weekly, by a supporting character who has a recurring role on the program but who does not appear in every episode, by an extra in the background or by a guest star. I included the character's name where possible. Using the DVD display, I also recorded the duration of each literacy event.

Reading Events

A character (whether a main character seen weekly on the show, a supporting character with a recurring role who is not on the show every week, an extra in the background or a guest star) does one of the following things to/with/about a print text (a book, a newspaper, a magazine, a manual, a script, a map, a blackboard, a menu, a note or a letter, an email, a website, an online publication, a cell phone, a Blackberry, a computer screen or another kind of print text that would require conscious, deliberate reading of that text. Note, however, that I exclude possible reading that does not go beyond such things as an incidental, perhaps unconscious, glance at things like a billboard or a street sign):

- holds or looks at the print text as though they intend to read it.
- holds or looks at the print text as though they have been reading it.
- is seen reading or looking at the print text for an extended period of time
- describes to another character a printed text that they have been reading.
- shares with another character knowledge that they claim to have derived from reading a print text of some kind.
- mentions or recommends to another character a particular print text that they have been reading.
- mentions or recommends to another character a particular author/writer of a print text.

Writing Events

A character (whether a main character seen weekly on the show, a supporting character with a recurring role who is not on the show every week, an extra in the background or a guest star) is seen, or makes reference to

- writing or composing
- typing or
- texting

a printed text (a letter or a note, an email, a Twitter tweet), a caption to go along with a picture that is being sent to someone, a poem, a story, an article, an essay, a script, a song, an entry in a diary or a journal, an entry in an online journal or a blog, an address or a phone number, a to-do list, a grocery list, in order to vote for something—for example, texting a vote to American Idol—or another kind of print text).

Literacy Events Checklist

In order to record the literacy events that I saw in each of the five episodes of each program, I used a Literacy Events Checklist (Appendix A) as I watched each episode.

Using the DVD display, I recorded the duration of each action/event that I saw beside the appropriate reading or writing event on the checklist. To show the duration of the action, I recorded the start and end times that appeared on the DVD display. This necessitated a great deal of rewinding and fast-forwarding.

I used different coloured ink to record actions by Main Characters (red), Supporting Characters (blue), Extras (green) and Guest Stars (yellow). In some cases it was difficult to determine whether a character was a supporting character or a main character and, therefore, this required some subjective assignment to a category on my part. For example, the children in *Modern Family* are typically supporting characters, except for Gloria's son Manny, who appears to have a significant role in every episode. Since this was the case, I referred to him as a main character.

Where possible, I also wrote the name of the character performing the action. I wrote “extra” if the character was an extra in the background. If the list of print texts that I provided on the checklist did not include the text used in a particular scene, I added the name of that print text

beside the “another kind of print text” option. This happened quite frequently, though I believed at the outset that I had included most possible options.

Data Analysis

I conducted my data analysis as follows:

1. Once I had studied the first five episodes of each show’s first season and I had documented the literacy events therein as outlined in the Literacy Events Checklist, I was able to determine the number of literacy events in each episode of each program, and, ultimately, the average number of literacy events per show based on the five shows I had watched of each program. Because I recorded the duration of each literacy event, I was also able to calculate the actual number of seconds spent on literacy events per episode, and the average number of seconds per show based on the five shows I had watched of each program.

2. Through my calculations of the number of literacy events evident in each program, I was able to compare the programs to one another and recognize which of the sitcoms—the home-based, the education-based or the workplace-based—contained the most and the least literacy events overall.

3. Through my use of different coloured ink on the Literacy Event Checklists, I was readily able to identify the kinds of characters (main characters, supporting characters, extras or guest stars) engaging in literacy events in each of the five episodes per program. Once I had calculated the total amount of literacy events in a particular episode, I then divided it into the totals completed by each group. Once I had done this for all five episodes of a program, I found an overall total, and a total for each sub-group. Through this procedure, I was able to identify whether the main characters on the shows were doing the most reading and writing, or if it was mostly supporting characters, extras or guest stars.

4. Through careful reading and re-reading of the Literacy Events Checklists, I was able

to make coded lists to determine the literacy events in evidence the most in each program, and in the six sitcoms as a whole.

5. Through the thorough reading of each program's five Literacy Event Checklists, in particular the Reading Events section, I was able to make lists of the print texts read or referred to in each program's first five shows. Through comparing and contrasting each program's list with those of the other programs, and through careful coding, I was able to determine the kinds of texts typically being read by characters on particular programs, and across sitcoms. I had imagined that I might also be able to determine from this the characters' purposes for reading, but I realized through the process that this is not always possible. It is difficult to say with certainty, for example, why a character might be reading a newspaper. It may be to be informed, for enjoyment, or for a host of other reasons.

6. Through careful reading of the Writing Events section of each program's five Literacy Event Checklists, I was able to make lists of the print texts written or referred to in each program. I then coded these lists as I compared and contrasted each program's list with the lists of the other programs. Through this process I was able to determine the kinds of writing typically being done or being referred to by the characters on particular programs, and across sitcoms.

7. Based on the characters' engagement with print texts, I was able identify readers from each of the six programs. Some readers were more obvious than others, but I eventually decided to study all of the readers I had identified because, in their diversity, they represented different kinds of readers seemingly reading for varied purposes.

Reader Checklist

Once I had determined who the "readers" were in a given program, I then analyzed whether the characters were portrayed in a stereotypical way. I determined this by completing a Reader Checklist (Appendix B) for each reader. The checklist included questions pertaining

to whether the reader was a main character, whether the reader was also a writer, as well as questions about the character him/herself, and how others seemed to perceive the character. Some of these questions included “Do the other characters on the show look up to or admire the reader for any reason? If so, is the admiration based on his or her reading habits?”, “Is the reader outgoing and friendly?”, and “Do the other characters in the program seem to value the knowledge that the reader holds?”

Once I completed a Reader Checklist for the reader or readers in evidence on each of the six programs, I was able to compare the readers to one another. I coded each completed checklist in order that I might see similarities and patterns across characters. Using this method, I was able to compare the readers within a program, as well as the readers from one program to the readers on another program. Similarities among the answers to the questions on the Reader Checklist reflected similarities among characters.

I was able to determine common reader traits when the answers to the questions on the reader checklist were answered similarly across readers. Though there was only one example of a question being answered in the same way for all of the readers, there were a few examples where most of the answers to a particular question were the same.

Summary of this Methodology Chapter

Whether or not reading and writing is portrayed on popular television sitcoms was explored through the study of the first five shows of the first season of six popular prime time sitcoms. Through the use of a detailed Literacy Events Checklist, I recorded literacy events as they occurred on each sitcom, recording durations as well as what was being done, and by whom. After I had watched and recorded the literacy events from each program, and had computed and coded the findings, I reviewed my analysis and decided to present the results under nine main headings: 1) The Programs; 2) Literacy Events and Durations; 3) Education-

Based, Workplace-Based and Home-Based Programs; 4) Kinds of Characters Engaged in Literacy Events; 5) Literacy Events in Evidence the Most Frequently on the Programs; 6) Print Texts Typically Read or Referred to on the Programs; 7) Print Texts Typically Written or Referred to on the Programs; and 8) Reader Profiles. Using the Reader Checklist, I went further to determine whether any stereotyping of readers was taking place in these television programs. I will discuss these results under the final heading; 9) Common Reader Traits. I have decided to begin with a discussion about each of the programs in turn because I think that background knowledge of each program is important in order to fully understand and appreciate the findings. I concluded that this was the best and most appropriate way to organize and present my results in Chapter 4.

Chapter Four

Results

In this chapter, findings are reported through narrative description, character quotes and in tables and charts where appropriate. The findings are organized according to the nine headings listed at the end of the previous chapter.

The Programs

I will begin with a brief discussion of each of the six programs studied. This discussion will focus on the setting, the characters and on the literacy evident in each program. I discuss the programs in alphabetical order.

Community

This is a program about students at a community college in Denver, Colorado. Jeff Winger (portrayed by Joel McHale), the main character, is a suspended lawyer who is forced to go back to college. His fellow classmates are Britta Perry (portrayed by Gillian Jacobs), a 20-something activist, Pierce Hawthorne (portrayed by Chevy Chase), an older man who has been married several times, Shirley Bennet (portrayed by Yvette Nicole Brown), a divorcee with children, Abed Nadir (portrayed by Danny Pudi), a film student, Troy Barnes (portrayed by Donald Glover), a former quarterback, and Annie Edison (portrayed by Alison Brie), a studious girl who does all of Jeff's homework for him.

In this show, all of the students, both main characters and extras, carry books a lot. Jeff is almost never seen without a book and a binder in his hand. He resembles a reader, but in reality has no intention of ever reading a book, or of learning anything. He says "If I wanted to learn something, I wouldn't have come to community college" (Harmon & Russo & Russo, 2009). He doesn't want to write, either. This is evident when he says "I'm not going to write information from a book onto a piece of paper. That's practically learning, for God's sake"

(Guest & Russo, 2009). Jeff is not the only character who appears to be a reader. Britta is seen reading in one scene, for example, but she does so in order to avoid talking to Jeff.

The main characters always meet around the same table, ostensibly as a Spanish study group. They all sit with closed books in front of them, and they rarely, if ever, speak about the Spanish work. If they do, it's only momentary.

Abed is a film student who always has his pen poised to write, but is only seen writing notes on a few occasions. Pierce claims to be able to write music, and he displays his ability to read music by playing the piano in one episode. Creative writing does not seem to impress the students in this program. In one episode, Britta's boyfriend Vaughn writes a poem and is ridiculed for it by the study group.

Troy, the former high school quarterback, is often holding or resting his hands on a book when he isn't actually reading it. He is the character most often shown reading, though only for brief periods of time. Annie is the studious one who always has her work done and is eager to participate in class. She is happy to do Jeff's homework for him, and, though she is not shown reading or writing a great deal on the program, it is implied that she does the reading and writing necessary to excel in her classes.

How I Met Your Mother

This program, situated in New York, follows the lives of five characters and is narrated by the main character, Ted, in 2030. Bob Saget provides the voice of Ted. Each show is comprised of a story that he tells his children about the time in his life before he met their mother. Ted Mosby (portrayed by Josh Radnor) is an architect and his best friends are Marshall Eriksen (portrayed by Jason Segal), a law student, and Marshall's girlfriend Lily Aldrin (portrayed by Alyson Hannigan), a kindergarten teacher. He also has a playboy friend named Barney Stinson (portrayed by Neil Patrick Harris) and a new friend, Robin Scherbatsky

(portrayed by Cobie Smulders), who is a television newscaster.

The characters spend a great deal of time in Marshall and Lily's apartment. There are stacks of books behind the couch in their living-room, newspapers on the coffee table and laptops on laps or on tables. Both Robin and Lily are seen holding newspapers, and in one episode Barney is shown reading a computer screen. Presumably he is reading his own blog, since, as he laments, none of his friends ever read it.

Marshall is a law student who seems perpetually to be writing a paper for school. When he is not writing a paper, he is talking about his plans to write one. He is proud of his ability to write long papers in a short period of time. He is often seen reading books and computer screens. In addition to actual reading or the perceived intention to read, there is the implication of reading in most of the character's jobs (architect, lawyer, kindergarten teacher, newscaster).

Modern Family

This program is about an extended family in California. The family includes the patriarch, Jay Pritchett (portrayed by Ed O'Neill), a business owner, his new, younger wife Gloria Delgado-Pritchett (portrayed by Sofia Vergara) and her son, Manny Delgado (portrayed by Rico Rodriguez). Jay's daughter Claire Dunphy (portrayed by Julie Bowen) is a stay-at-home Mom. Claire's family includes her real estate agent husband, Phil Dunphy (portrayed by Ty Burrell) and their three children, Haley (portrayed by Sarah Hyland), Alex (portrayed by Ariel Winter) and Luke (portrayed by Nolan Gould). Jay's son Mitchell Pritchett (portrayed by Jesse Tyler Ferguson), a lawyer, lives with his partner Cameron Tucker (portrayed by Eric Stonestreet) and their adopted daughter, Lily.

Jay reads newspapers on a regular basis, at home and even outside when he's supposed to be watching Manny play soccer. His wife Gloria is also seen reading a newspaper, though not as often as Jay. It seems that, because of Jay's successful business, they have

the luxury of time. Jay's daughter Claire is a busy stay-at-home Mom who is often arranging magazines in her living room. She tries to read a book in one episode, but is constantly distracted by her husband, Phil. It is understood that Mitchell, a lawyer, must read and write for his job, but he is not shown reading on the show. This is likely because we typically see him at family parties or when he is relaxing at home, as opposed to seeing him at work.

Manny, Gloria's young son, is the writer on the program. He makes reference to a song that he has written on the way to Claire's house in one episode, and he writes a love letter in another episode. Claire and Phil's oldest daughter, Haley, exchanges text messages with her musician boyfriend, Dylan. Dylan, like Manny, is also a song writer. Haley, Alex, and Luke are seen doing homework, and they refer to the reading or writing that they need to do for school. Phil, who is always trying to be a "cool" dad, makes his writing preferences known. He refers to Luke's writing in a journal as "lame," but feels that texting is "cool."

Parks and Recreation

This is a program about Leslie Knope (portrayed by Amy Poehler), the deputy director of the Parks and Recreation department in the town of Pawnee, Indiana, and her coworkers; Tom Haverford (portrayed by Aziz Ansari), a government official, Mark Brendanawicz (portrayed by Paul Schneider), a city planner, Ron Swanson (portrayed by Nick Offerman), the department head and April Ludgate (portrayed by Aubrey Plaza), an intern. Leslie has also befriended Ann Perkins (portrayed by Rashida Jones), a nurse, whose boyfriend, Andy Dwyer (portrayed by Chris Pratt), has recently fallen into a pit near their home. Leslie met Ann when she came to a town meeting to complain about the pit.

There is some work-related reading and writing on this show. Tom and Leslie work together to write a speech, Leslie reads aloud a written statement, and Mark is seen from afar reading something on his desk. Leslie reads aloud directly from the manual when doing a door-

to-door survey, and her boss Ron is shown texting and writing notes at his desk.

It would seem, however, that reading and writing is something that people often do to avoid work and one another on this program. One of the employees, Jerry, a supporting character, begins to write something busily on paper when a volunteer is asked for at a meeting. Leslie types furiously when Mark enters her office; she is angry at him and trying to avoid a conversation. April is continually reading a magazine, whether she is at her desk or out canvassing on the street. This seems to be a way to avoid both conversation and work.

Instead of writing down what Leslie is saying when asked to take dictation, Tom scribbles a wavy line with a wink to the camera. He is not the only one shirking his responsibility. Leslie, when faced with an angry town meeting crowd, reads a children's book aloud to the people gathered in order to waste time and avoid confrontation.

The Big Bang Theory

This program depicts the lives of two Cal-Tech physicists, Sheldon Cooper (portrayed by Jim Parsons) and Leonard Hofstadter (portrayed by Johnny Galecki), who are roommates. Sheldon started college at the age of eleven, and he often mentions that his IQ is higher than Leonard's. They have a neighbour across the hall named Penny (portrayed by Kaley Cuoco), who works in a restaurant and two colleagues named Howard Wolowitz (portrayed by Simon Helberg) and Raj Koothrappali (portrayed by Kunal Nayyar). Howard is an engineer who considers himself a ladies man, and Raj is a physicist who literally cannot talk to women.

There is a great deal of implied reading and writing in this program, with the characters often making reference to their various Masters and Doctoral theses. Sheldon often makes reference to articles that he has written, and also to those that he has read. Mention is also made of various theories and laws by all of the male characters. The characters make reference to spending time at a comic book store, and Leonard claims to own 2600 comic books.

The characters often spend time in Sheldon and Leonard's apartment, which has shelves full of books in the main living area and in their bedrooms. Penny also has books on shelves in her apartment. She is an unemployed actress, as well as a waitress, and she claims in one episode that she is writing a screenplay. Though Sheldon's writing is mainly academic, it is not all scholarly writing for the males on the show. Howard writes in a blog, and Leonard writes a letter to Penny. The characters are often seen reading various print texts such as menus, music, instructions and whiteboards full of equations.

The Office

This is a program about employees in a paper company called Dunder Mifflin. It is a mockumentary set in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The main characters are: Michael Scott (portrayed by Steve Carell), the manager; Dwight Schrute (portrayed by Rainn Wilson), assistant to the manager; Jim Halpert (portrayed by John Krasinski), a salesman; and Pam Beesly (portrayed by Jenna Fischer), a receptionist. There are a number of other employees on the show as well, including Ryan Howard (portrayed by B.J. Novak), Angela Martin (portrayed by Angela Kinsey), Stanley Hudson (portrayed by Leslie David Baker), Phyllis Vance (portrayed by Phyllis Smith), Meredith Palmer (portrayed by Kate Flannery), Kevin Malone (portrayed by Brian Baumgartner), Kelly Kapoor (portrayed by Mindy Kaling), and Oscar Martinez (portrayed by Oscar Nunez). Jan Levinson (portrayed by Melora Hardin) is Michael's boss. Toby Flenderson (portrayed by Paul Lieberstein) works in human resources and Darryl Philbin (portrayed by Craig Robinson) is the foreman in the warehouse. Pam's fiancé Roy Anderson (portrayed by David Denman) also works in the warehouse.

The employees are often seen typing, writing or reading a form or a computer screen for a brief moment, often at the start of a scene, but they are always interrupted, en masse, by either Michael or Dwight. Most scenes open with heads being lifted up and away from a task. Jim, in

particular, tries repeatedly to engage in the reading and writing necessary to his job, but he is always distracted by Michael or by one of Dwight's "gun shows." Pam is shown reading a book behind her desk instead of working. Michael tends to read things aloud, either to the camera or to his employees. Often he reads aloud or proudly displays to the camera something that he has written.

Writing seems to be something that the characters on the program engage in for fun, or in order to mock someone. For example, when Michael is asked to sign a form to show that he has taken a diversity workshop, he proudly writes his signature: Donald Duck. When the employees are asked to list their diseases in order that they might be covered by the insurance plan, some of them, presumably Jim and Pam, write a number of fabricated ailments, including "Count Chokulitis."

Literacy Events and Durations

In this section I will discuss the results regarding the average number of literacy events evident in each show, and the average time spent on literacy events per episode.

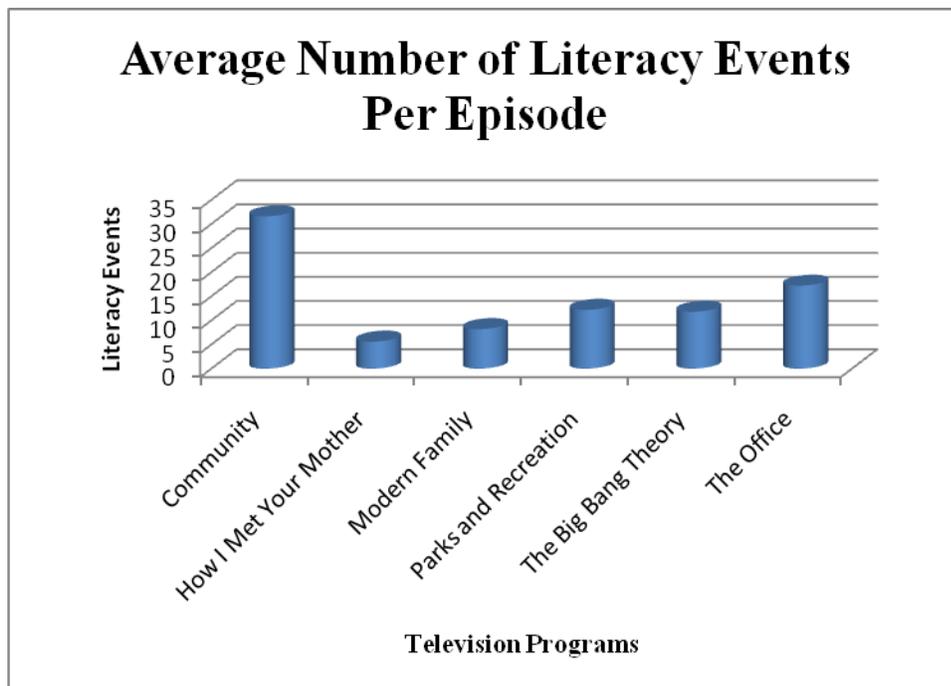
Average Number of Literacy Events

The average number of literacy events per episode ranged from the lowest average of 5.6 (*How I Met Your Mother*) to the highest average, 31.6 (*Community*). (See Table 2 and Figure 1). This is a significant discrepancy, with *Community*'s average nearly doubling the second highest average which was 17.2 literacy events per show (*The Office*).

Table 2
Literacy Events

Television Programs	Average # of Literacy Events Per Episode
Community	31.6
How I Met Your Mother	5.6
Modern Family	8.2
Parks and Recreation	12.2
The Big Bang Theory	11.8
The Office	17.2

Figure 1
Average Number of Literacy Events per Episode



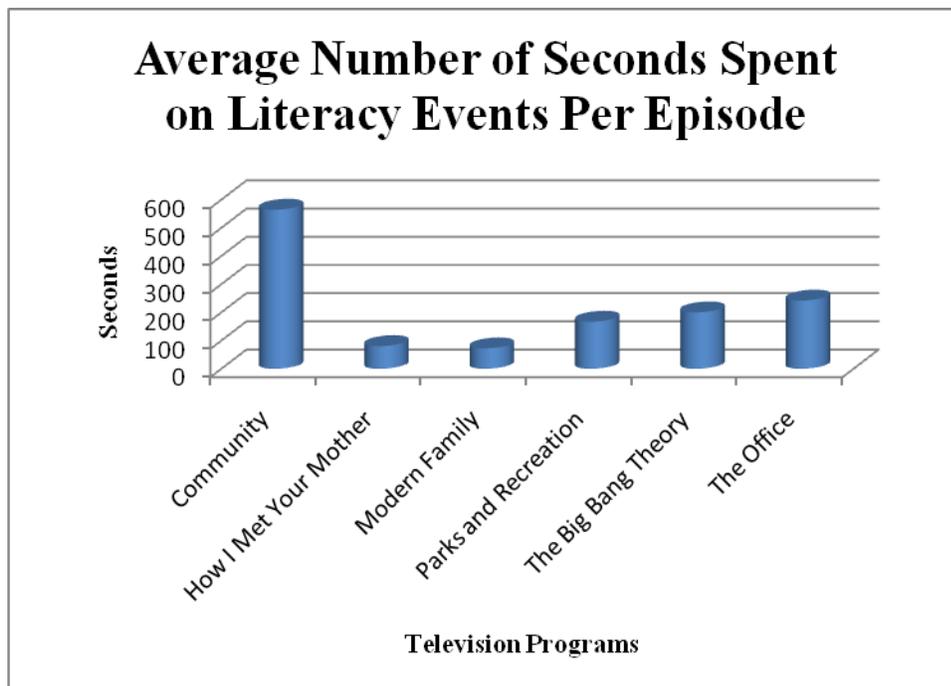
Average Number of Seconds Portraying Literacy Events

The average number of seconds during which literacy events were evident per episode ranged from the lowest average of 72.4 seconds or 1.2 minutes (*Modern Family*) to the highest which was 564.4 seconds or 9.4 minutes (*Community*). (See Table 3 and Figure 2). This is a discrepancy of over eight minutes. *The Office*, which had the second highest number of seconds per show, spent an average of 242 seconds or 4.03 minutes per episode on literacy events, less than half the time spent in *Community*. It is interesting to note that *How I Met Your Mother* ranked fifth in time spent per episode but was in sixth and last place in terms of the average number of literacy events per episode. Clearly, the length of time spent on individual literacy events was longer in the program *How I Met Your Mother* than in *Modern Family*. This is also the case with *The Big Bang Theory* and *Parks and Recreation*; *Parks and Recreation* has a slightly higher number of literacy events than *The Big Bang Theory*, but *The Big Bang Theory*'s average duration was significantly higher than that of *Parks and Recreation*. Bearing in mind that the average length of a television sitcom without the commercials is approximately 22 minutes, the time spent portraying literacy events in some of these programs is substantial.

Table 3
Literacy Event Durations

Television Program	Average # of seconds spent on literacy events per episode
Community	564.4 seconds (9.40 minutes)
How I Met Your Mother	80.4 seconds (1.34 minutes)
Modern Family	72.4 seconds (1.20 minutes)
Parks and Recreation	167 seconds (2.78 minutes)
The Big Bang Theory	200 seconds (3.33 minutes)
The Office	242 seconds (4.03 minutes)

Figure 2
Average Number of Seconds Spent on Literacy Events per Episode



That an education-based program was the leader in terms of literacy events and durations is not surprising. What is surprising is that *Community* was the show from which I had the most difficulty identifying a reader. Books are most definitely props in this show. There is a great deal of book carrying in this program. Main characters as well as extras are continually picking up, carrying, and putting down books. It is fortunate that *Community* was the last show that I watched, because the proficiency I eventually achieved with the remote was necessary when almost half of the show, on average, included literacy events. Sometimes five students on *Community* began writing in unison, but finished at different times. One of the students might then resume writing, while two others began to read what they had written. Simultaneously, a teacher would be writing on a chalkboard.

Education-Based, Workplace-Based and Home-Based Programs

Community was the leader in literacy event numbers and durations, and this is logical in that it is an education-based program. However, the second placed program was not *The Big Bang Theory*—the other education-based show—but was actually *The Office*, a workplace-based program. The home-based *Modern Family* and *How I Met Your Mother* were in fifth and sixth position with the lowest number of literacy events and durations per episode. That there is less reading and writing portrayed on the home-based programs seems to imply that people read and write typically when they are required to for work and school but a lot less when they are at home and are not “forced” to read and write. Most of the literacy events in the home-based *How I Met Your Mother*, for example, involved Marshall, the law student, and his school work. Similarly, a number of the literacy events in the home-based program *Modern Family* involve Claire and Phil’s children completing or discussing their homework from school.

Kinds of Characters Engaged in Literacy Events

I found that, in these six programs, it was the main characters that were typically engaged in literacy events (see Table 4). *Community* stands out from the others in that there are far more examples of extras involved in literacy events than is evident in the other programs. This reflects the frequency with which extras are seen holding books or reading in the background on the program.

Table 4
Kinds of Characters Engaged in Literacy Events

Television Program	Main Characters	Supporting Characters	Extras	Guest Stars	Total Events All 5 Episodes
Community	108	3	47	0	158
How I Met Your Mother	24	0	4	0	28
Modern Family	24	15	2	0	41
Parks and Recreation	52	3	2	4	61
The Big Bang Theory	54	2	3	0	59
The Office	52	31	2	1	86

When the total number of literacy events evident in all five shows of each program is taken into consideration, it is clear that, in all of the shows, the main characters are typically the ones engaged in literacy events, with supporting characters also prominent in *The Office* and *Modern Family*. This is the case in *The Office* because there is a large ensemble cast, many of whom I identified as supporting characters. The main characters in that show, who are always on the show, and about whom we know more than basic information due to their frequent sharing on camera, are Michael, Dwight, Jim, and Pam. All of the others I identified as supporting

characters. In the case of *Modern Family*, the supporting characters engaging in literacy events are Claire and Phil's children; Haley, Alex, and Luke. Haley's boyfriend Dylan is also a supporting character.

Literacy Events in Evidence the Most Frequently on the Programs

The first three events in the Reading Events section on the Literacy Events Checklist:

1. *Holds or looks at something as though he or she intends to read it,*
2. *Holds or looks at something as though he or she has been reading it, and*
3. *Is seen reading or looking at one of the following for an extended period of time were the*

most frequently used events in all but one show, *The Office*, where only the second and third event applied. The fourth reading event:

4. *Describes to another character one of the following that he or she has been reading*

was evident only in *Community*. There was one incidence of it on that program. The fifth reading event:

5. *Shares with another character knowledge that he or she claims to have derived*

from reading was portrayed relatively frequently on *The Big Bang Theory* and on *Parks and Recreation*. The sixth reading event:

6. *Mentions or recommends to another character a particular print text that he or she has*

been reading was also prevalent in *The Big Bang Theory*. One incidence of this event was also evident in both *Parks and Recreation* and *How I Met Your Mother*. Both *The Big Bang Theory* and *Parks and Recreation* also had one incidence each of reading event number seven:

7. *Mentions or recommends to another character a particular author/writer of a print text.*

How I Met Your Mother also had one incidence of this event.

In the Writing events section, writing event number one:

1. *Is seen writing or composing, or makes reference to writing or composing* was in

evidence in all six of the programs. Writing event number two:

2. *Is seen typing, or makes reference to typing* was evident in all but *The Office* and *Modern Family*. Writing event number three:

3. *Is seen texting, or makes reference to texting* was in evidence in *The Big Bang Theory* and *Modern Family*. There was also one incidence of writing event three in *Parks and Recreation*. It is interesting to note that texting, or the reading of text messages, a relatively new pastime, occurred in only the four most recent sitcoms, and was not evident in *The Office* or in *How I Met Your Mother*.

Print Texts Typically Read or Referred to on the Programs

Each of the programs included print texts appropriate to the characters and the setting. There were, however, certain texts that were evident in all, or in the majority of the programs. For example, books of various kinds were evident in all six of the programs (see Table 5). Newspapers were also evident in all six of the programs. In five of the programs a computer screen was read, and four of the programs included magazines. Only two of the programs, *Community* and *Modern Family*, included text messages as print texts that were read.

Other common print texts were apparent among the programs. Index cards were found in both *Community* and *The Office*. Printed instructions were seen in *Modern Family* and *The Big Bang Theory*. Notebooks were seen in *The Office* and *Community*. Sheet music was seen in *Community* and *The Big Bang Theory*. An agenda and a survey were evident in both *Parks and Recreation* and *The Office*.

It is interesting to note that the show with the highest number of literacy events, *Community*, has a shorter list of print texts that were read or referred to in comparison to some of the other programs. This reflects the repetition of similar texts in the show. Diverse reading, implied and otherwise, is reflected in *The Big Bang Theory*'s list.

Table 5
Print Texts Read or Referred to on Each Program

Community	How I Met Your Mother	Parks and Recreation	Modern Family	The Big Bang Theory	The Office
Textbook	Book	Children's Book	Book	Book	Book
Newspaper	Newspaper	Newspaper	Newspaper	Newspaper	Newspaper
Computer Screen	Computer Screen	Computer Screen	Computer Screen	Blackboard	Computer Screen
Text Message	Blog	Agenda	Text Message	Whiteboard	Agenda
Index Card	Magazine	Magazine	Magazine	Magazine	Index Card
Assignment Sheet	Phone Book	Speech	Instructions	Instructions	Fax
Binder	CD	Written Statement	Letter	Letter	Memo
Notebook	Trivial Pursuit Card	Interview Questions	Journal	Questionnaire	Notebook
Pamphlet		Article Quotes		Comics	Brochure
Receipt Book		Discussion Topics		Menu	Pledge Form
Sheet Music		Canvassing Guide		Sheet Music	Insurance Manual
Chalkboard		Question Sheet		Paper in the Journal of American Neuroscience	Diversity Contract Calendar
Cheat Sheet		Forms		String Theory	Forms
		Leslie's Quote		Asimov's Three Laws Of Robotics	Card
		Survey			Survey

Print Texts Typically Written or Referred to on the Programs

All of the programs incorporated the creation of print text, whether written, typed or texted. The kinds of writing varied from show to show, but there were some written print texts that were common to all or most of the programs that I studied (see Table 6). For example, characters wrote or referred to assignments for work or school in all six of the programs. Notes were made in all of the shows except *Modern Family*. Text messages were written or referred to in *Parks and Recreation*, *Modern Family*, and *The Big Bang Theory*. Cheques were written in *Community* and *The Office*. A Blog is referenced in both *The Big Bang Theory* and *How I Met Your Mother*.

Table 6
Print Texts Written or Referred to on Each Program

Community	How I Met Your Mother	Modern Family	Parks and Recreation	The Big Bang Theory	The Office
School Assignment	Paper for School	History Paper	Work Related Typing	Physics Work	Work Forms
Notes	Notes	Homework	Notes	Notes	Notes
Poem	Blog	Signature	A Speech	Blog	Signature
Text Message		Text Message	Text Message	Text Message	Party Ideas
Music		Song	Interview	Equations	Minutes
Cheque		Adoption Paperwork	Plans	Questionnaire	Cheque
Cheat Sheet		Journal	Op-Ed piece For a Journal	Screenplay	Card
Film Text			Dictation	Release Form	Score Sheet
Data from Experiment				Thesis	

Reader Profiles

I found more readers in the programs than I had expected to find when I began this study. In fact, at the outset, I wondered whether there were any readers at all on television sitcoms. The characters I encountered while watching these programs soon expanded my expectations, and my perspective. Faced with diverse television readers, I came to the realization that, just as there are many different kinds of readers in our schools, in our communities and in our world, there are many kinds of readers portrayed on television as well. That art mirrors life in this way seems logical, but I had initially expected the readers to be similar in terms of their reading habits. I worried, once I had identified the readers, whether one reader was as much of a reader as another, or if one should be considered a reader at all, when compared to the others.

Once I began to examine each reader, to explore what kind of a reader each character was, I realized that they did not all need to be avid readers, nor did they need to be reading for pleasure, or for any particular purpose in order to be deemed a reader. It is with this new, expanded perspective that I identified the following readers from each of the six programs.

Community

Troy is the main reader on this program. He is the former high school quarterback who is always touching a book, whether reading it, holding a page open or just resting his hands on it as it lays closed on the table before him. Unlike the main character, Jeff, Troy actually reads his book once in a while. He is the character most often seen reading a book. While it is never for a long period of time, the fact that he even looks at a book more than once stands out in this program where books are generally props, mere accessories that lend visual authenticity to the set.

It is interesting and refreshing that a former football quarterback is portrayed as the main

reader on this program. I identified the main readers based on their engagement with texts. In some cases, these readers are also implied readers. This is not the case with Troy. The implied reader on this program is the stereotypical overachiever Annie, but since she is not shown reading or writing a great deal, and since she does not talk about the knowledge that she apparently holds, I did not identify her as the main reader on this program. The Troy versus Annie example proves that not all sitcom readers are overachievers who like to do other people's homework.

Troy is a fun-loving individual who acts as though he is still in high school. Since those were his quarterback glory days, we can imagine why he might not want to move forward. He has a silly, immature sense of humour which was evident when the word "Asberger's" sent him into fits of giggles in the pilot episode. Clearly, he had no idea what the word actually meant, but was reacting to the first two letters. He likes to rap and dance and make up funny voices for unsuspecting people behind glass in adjoining rooms. When caught, he pretends to sleep, thinking this a foolproof plan. He and his friend Abed are the least serious of all of the characters in the program, but are, interestingly, the main reader and the main writer on the show.

How I Met Your Mother

This was the first program that I watched, and I was struck with the fact that there was a definite reader in this program: Marshall. I was surprised to find a reader at all, and to find such an avid reader was encouraging. Marshall is a law student who seems always to be working on a paper. For this purpose, he is often seen reading large books of statutes, computer screens, and articles. He is often shown reading and writing at the same time. He does not only read for school purposes, however. He makes reference to books in his everyday conversation. For example, he refers to the love struck Ted as "Gatsby" when it becomes apparent that Ted is

plotting to meet his fleeting love interest Robin again. This is an obvious reference to Jay Gatsby from the classic novel *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), and his obsession with Daisy Buchanan. There are stacks of books behind the couch in the apartment he shares with his girlfriend, Lily.

Marshall is a hard working student who often mentions the school work he needs to do when he is not reading or writing, but he still has time for fun. He loves a good party, and will launch into a solo dance routine at a moment's notice, people gathering from every corner to cheer him on. He is childlike and silly at times, blurting out proclamations in an excited voice. When his girlfriend Lily mentions that perhaps they should engage in more mature pastimes, he replies "Let's do it, let's rock it, maturity style"(Harris & Fryman, 2005)! He is a large man, but he is gentle, and he is visibly relieved in one episode when a confrontation does not end in a physical altercation because, as he admits, he has never been in a fight in his life.

Modern Family

There are two main readers in this program. Time is a consideration for both of them. Jay, the successful business owner and patriarch of the family, has time to do the things that he loves. Whether he is golfing, flying his remote controlled airplanes or sitting in his hot tub, he is relaxed and unhurried. He has time to leisurely read the newspaper, and he seems to enjoy this freedom. He reads a newspaper quite often on this program, whether he is at home at the breakfast table, or in a lawn chair at a sporting event. Whether he is reading to unwind, to avoid talking to other people, or simply because he has the time to do so, it is obvious that Jay likes to read.

Jay is an introvert who is older and used to doing things a certain way. He is somewhat impatient and resistant to new ideas. He is not adept at expressing his feelings, and he does not seem comfortable with public displays of affection. He is not a "hugger." He seems to

see Manny as his second chance to be a good father. Although his adult son Mitchell seems to have a few unresolved issues with him, he seems to be loved and respected by his older children and by all of his grandchildren.

Jay's daughter Claire would love to read for pleasure, if she had the time. A busy Mom, she has little time to do anything but rearrange the magazines in her living room and hope for a moment to herself. Claire cannot even go for a run without Phil panting behind her. Although she would like some solitude, Claire is never alone. As fast as she may run, Phil and the kids are always one step behind her, needing something.

In one episode, Claire is poised to read a book; she has a rare afternoon to herself, and she is determined to open her book and escape. Unfortunately, Phil decides to stay home that day as well, and her dreams are dashed. Once it is clear that Phil is not going away, she turns and says plaintively to the camera, "I just want to read" (Walsh & Corrigan & Winer, 2009). I consider Claire a reader because, if she had the time, she would be. It is obviously something she wants to do.

Claire restricts her own freedom. She is a controlling person, used to running her home and her family's lives. Her husband Phil would gladly help her more than he does, but she does not trust him enough to relinquish control. In terms of her children, she seems to find the teen years challenging. She longs for the days when the children were younger; when she was fully respected, and had more influence.

Parks and Recreation

April is the intern in the Parks and Recreation office. She does not seem to want to be there, and she does not interact with the other characters unless she has to. She is devoid of energy or enthusiasm. Because she does not seem to care what the others think, she openly reads magazines in the office instead of working. She reads magazines at her desk, at the boardroom

table during meetings, and when she is outside, supposedly canvassing. Because of this constant engagement with magazines, she is the main reader on the show. She is not the only person reading, but she is the most devoted. That she is reading to avoid conversation and work is evident, but this does not take away the fact that she is an avid, constant reader.

April is young, and does not seem to respect those around her. She acts like a sullen teenager, and, though it is not made clear in the first five episodes, it seems as though she has attained and is keeping her position through some affiliation, certainly through something more than her own hard work.

The Big Bang Theory

Though quite different in many ways, Sheldon and Leonard have a few things in common. They share an apartment, they share friends, and they share a passion for physics. They are also both readers.

Sheldon reads books, articles, instructions, and white boards of equations. He often refers to articles he has read in various journals, to laws, to his own theses and to comic books. He is an implied reader, who also reads on the program. He reads mainly for his work as a physicist, but his knowledge of comic book heroes implies that he sometimes reads for pleasure, or has done so in the past.

Sheldon is a brilliant physicist who lacks social skills. He is a very literal, logical person who began university at the age of 11. He was often beaten up as a child, and when his pants are stolen, along with Leonard's pants, in the pilot episode, it does not seem to surprise him; it does not seem like it is the first time he has experienced a "pantsing." He does not seem to have a lot of empathy for people, he merely states the facts. He often asserts his intellectual superiority over his friends.

Sheldon is not comfortable in social situations. He often embarrasses Leonard by saying

inappropriate things or by telling people things about Leonard that he would rather not share. He is not emotional, and he does not seem to fully understand social conventions. He is not prone to physical displays of affection. He is resistant to change; he needs to sit in the same place on the couch in their apartment, and order the same meal in the same restaurant every time.

Leonard is different in many ways. He reads a great deal, but his reading is not all academic. Like Sheldon, he refers to academic magazines, theories and laws. He reads boards of equations and instructions. However, he does not just make passing reference to comics he may have read in the past. He owns 2600 comic books, and he is familiar with the specific details of each issue. He appears to be a more well-rounded reader than Sheldon. He reads letters, newspapers, and music, alongside work-related reading.

Leonard was also the subject of the other children's ridicule as a child, but he is far more social than Sheldon. He seems interested in meeting people outside of his immediate circle of friends. He is not as confident as Sheldon academically, or overly confident in general, but he is willing to take social risks. He is interested in Penny and, though he seems to think it is an impossible dream, he subtly pursues her. He understands social conventions, though he still needs help from Penny in the style department.

Leonard is a modest, likable person. He accepts others without judgment. It does not seem to bother him, for example, that Penny does not understand physics at all, or that she is bewildered by much of what he and Sheldon talk about. The fact that he lives with Sheldon proves his patient and accepting nature.

The Office

In the work atmosphere of Dunder Mifflin, it would be difficult to be a reader. Jim tries his best to do the reading that he needs to do in order to fulfill his work responsibilities. He is distracted time and time again, usually by Michael or Dwight, but he typically looks back again

at the form or the computer screen he had been reading after he has been interrupted, trying his best to focus amid constant interruption. He tries to be productive amid chaos, and he does not give up, though it appears that there is never a sustained moment of peace. For this determination and focus, I identified Jim as the main reader on *The Office*. Jim is reading because he has to, but this does not make him any less a reader. Jim reads in spite of his surroundings, and against all odds.

Jim is portrayed as a normal, quiet young man who tolerates the strange people around him. He often rolls his eyes at the antics of Michael and Dwight, and he has a fellow eye-roller in Pam. He is a patient character who likes to exasperate Dwight by molding his stapler in Jello, or building a pencil wall between Dwight's desk and his own. He is not necessarily "a man's man," in that he does not seem to know how to talk to the burly warehouse employees. He seems to prefer to talk to Pam over anyone else. They share a similar sense of humour, and they stand out as the two most normal characters.

Jim does not appear to be an athlete, but he surprises and impresses his coworkers with his basketball prowess in one episode. This shows us that there is more to Jim than we see at work. He is good at his job, but he insists that Dunder Mifflin is not his career. In the third episode entitled Health Care, he rejects the possibility of job promotion and he tells the camera "Because right now, this is a job. If I advance any higher, this would be my career. And if this were my career, I'd have to throw myself in front of a train" (Lieberstein & Whittingham, 2005).

Common Reader Traits

When I began this research, I had particular T.V. readers in mind. I thought back to Frasier Crane and Diane Chambers from *Cheers*. I looked further back in my television history and remembered Bert shushing Ernie and settling in for a peaceful afternoon of Boring Stories and pigeon watching. I thought about every "nerdy" character who had ever graced my television

screen, the science geeks with their taped glasses and pocket protectors, the librarians, ever frowning, ever vigilant as they prowled the silent rows of books. I wondered how readers had acquired such a negative reputation, and I wondered if this stereotype was still firmly in place on television.

In order to discover whether a reader stereotype still exists on television today, I used a Reader Checklist (Appendix B). I filled out a checklist for each reader that I had identified from each of the six programs. When I first conceived of this checklist, I did not know if there would be any readers to analyze. I imagined that I knew how the questions would be answered if there were readers, and I assumed that many would be answered similarly.

Interestingly, once I completed the checklists for each of the eight main readers, and I compared the checklists to one another, I found that of the nine questions posed on the checklist, only one question elicited the same response for all eight readers. Certainly there were a number of questions where a majority of the reader's checklists revealed the same answer, but it was only once that all of the answers were the same for one particular question.

1. In regard to the first question on the checklist: *Is the reader a main character?*

The response was yes for all of the readers except April from *Parks and Recreation*, who is a supporting character. This is encouraging, since the main characters are likely the ones that may have some influence over viewers.

2. In regard to the second question: *Does the reader also write on the program?*

The response was yes for all of the readers except Troy from *Community* and Jay from *Modern Family*. It seems that, overall, reading and writing are reciprocal acts, and most of the readers engaged in both activities. It can be assumed that Jay, as a business owner, must have to do some writing for work. We can also assume that Troy must engage in some writing in order to complete his studies at the community college.

3. In regard to the third question: *Is the reader popular with the other characters on the show?*

The response was yes for all of the characters, except April from *Parks and Recreation* and Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory*. April doesn't seem to talk to anyone at work, and, as such, she is not popular. Sheldon seems only to have friends because of Leonard. Howard, Raj and especially Penny seem to tolerate Sheldon for Leonard's sake rather than for their own sake. They respect Sheldon, but would not likely want to spend a great deal of one-on-one time with him without Leonard around.

4. In regard to the fourth question: *Do the other characters on the show look up to or admire the reader for any reason? If so, is the admiration based on his or her reading habits?*

The response was no for all of the readers except Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory* and Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*. Sheldon seems to be admired by the other characters in terms of his academics and scholarly achievements. He is the prodigy of the group. Marshall stands out as a scholar of sorts among his group of friends. Ted, the narrator, mentions with pride his friend Marshall's ability to write a 25 page paper in one night. Although the other characters on *The Big Bang Theory* seem to admire Leonard for other reasons, for example his relative "prowess" with women, he does not seem to be admired for his reading habits or his scholarly achievements. His male friends have made similar achievements, and Penny does not seem to be impressed about this aspect of his life. Jim from *The Office* is admired in one episode for his basketball skills and Jay from *Modern Family* seems to be admired for his ability to attract Gloria and for being a good grandfather, but neither of these characters are admired for their reading habits.

5. In regard to question 5: *Is the reader considered physically attractive and/or fashionable, current and sophisticated ("cool") by the other characters on the program?*

The response was no for half of the readers, but yes for Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*, Jim from *The Office*, Leonard from *The Big Bang Theory*, and Jay from *Modern Family*. Lily, Marshall's girlfriend, seems to find Marshall physically irresistible. Pam clearly finds Jim attractive and "cool," and Leonard is the "cool" member of his group of friends. Penny seems to find him attractive, although she may not necessarily consider him fashionable and current. Jay from *Modern Family* is attractive to his wife Gloria, and it seems to be an attraction that goes beyond his wealth. I considered including Claire on this list, because I suppose that her husband Phil finds her attractive, but it is also apparent that he does not consider her "cool" or "current," at least in comparison to himself.

6. In regard to question 6: *Is the reader outgoing and friendly?*

The response was yes for all of the readers except Jay from *Modern Family*, Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory* and April from *Parks and Recreation*. Jay is an introvert who prefers to spend time alone reading or flying his model airplanes. He has never made an effort to be friends with his son-in-law Phil, for example, and when Phil stops by to spend a day with him, Jay seems annoyed at the intrusion. Sheldon is not socially skilled, and, though he talks to Penny, Raj and Howard, he does not seem to need anyone else but Leonard. April is not friendly to the people she works with. This may not be the way she acts in every situation in her life, but in the context of this study, and in the context of the first five episodes, she appears unfriendly.

7. In regard to question 7: *Does the reader appear to be confident and self-assured?*

The response to this question was yes for all of the readers. All of the characters seem to be confident in most aspects of their lives. Leonard from *The Big Bang Theory* may not be sure that Penny is interested in him, but he subtly pursues her despite this uncertainty. Jim from *The Office* may be somewhat uncomfortable talking to the burly warehouse employees, but he still tries to talk to them. He is unsure that he can win Pam, but he does not hide his interest. April

from *Parks and Recreation* may not be friendly, but she is confident enough to do exactly as she pleases, not worrying about what people will think about her. Claire from *Modern Family* seems confident in her marriage and in her skills as a mother. In fact, she seems to think that she knows better than her husband how to do most things. Her father Jay is portrayed as a successful business owner with the confidence to pursue and win the affections of a much younger woman. Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory* is extremely confident and proud of his scholarly accomplishments and abilities. He often reminds his friends of his intellectual superiority. Troy from *Community* has the confidence necessary to perform in public, as does Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*.

8. In regard to question 8: *Do the other characters in the program seem to value the knowledge that the reader holds?*

The response to this question was no for all of the readers except Sheldon and Leonard from *The Big Bang Theory* and Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*. Since Raj and Howard work in the same physics department at the university as Sheldon and Leonard, it can be assumed that they value the physics knowledge that the two of them hold. Marshall's friends look to him as their future lawyer, and trust him for legal advice. In this way, they value the knowledge that he holds.

9. In regard to question 9: *Does the reader appear to be "well rounded" ("Street smart" as well as "book smart")?*

The response to this question was yes for all of the readers except Sheldon. Sheldon is the least "street smart" of all of the readers. He does not seem to venture out on his own very often. He needs to stick to a strict routine; sitting in the same place, eating at the same restaurants, ordering the same meals. He has never had a girlfriend. Going to a grocery store on a weekday was a new, exciting experience for him. Though he has been the victim of bullying, he does not

know how to fight. He refers to social conventions as though he has read about them, not as though he has actually experienced them.

Having said that Sheldon is the only one who is not well rounded, it should also be mentioned that some of the readers that I have identified may not actually be looked upon as “book smart.” Whereas Jay, with a knowledge of world events from reading the newspaper may be referred to in this way, and whereas Marshall, Leonard, and Sheldon may be called “book smart” due to the knowledge they hold in their respective fields of study, Jim, Claire, April, and Troy may not necessarily be viewed in this way.

Jim may have a good knowledge of his job and of the prices of paper, Claire might be well-read in a particular genre, April may have an extensive knowledge of fashion from reading fashion magazines, and Troy might know a lot about something that he likes to read about. Does this make them “book smart?” Perhaps not, but none of these people make what they read their entire life. Jim does not only know and care about paper, April is not a fashion model. Does what they read define these characters? To a certain extent, perhaps, but Sheldon’s life revolves around what he reads and what he knows to a much greater extent, to the exclusion of social knowledge and experience.

When I analyzed the completed checklists, I found that a number of common reader traits had emerged. For example, most of the readers identified in this study are main characters on the programs. Most of the readers identified in this study are also writers. A majority of the readers are popular with the other characters on the programs. More than half of the characters are portrayed as being friendly and outgoing. All of the readers identified in this study appear to be confident and self-assured. The majority of the readers were also found to be well rounded.

On the other hand, the majority of the readers in this study were not admired by the other characters for their reading habits. Only half of the readers were considered “cool” by the

other characters on their respective programs. According to the majority of responses, the other characters on the programs did not seem to value the knowledge that the readers held.

Summary of this Results Chapter in Relation to the Research Questions

Through an analysis and presentation of the data, the first research question, which asked how much literacy was depicted on popular television sitcoms, was addressed. The information necessary to answer the second and third research questions was also reported. These questions concerned the promotion of literacy. In addition to the results reported in this chapter, these will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

The findings were organized according to nine categories; 1) The Programs; 2) Literacy Events and Durations; 3) Education-Based, Workplace-Based and Home Based Programs; 4) Kinds of Characters Engaged in Literacy Events; 5) Literacy Events in Evidence the Most Frequently on the Programs; 6) Print Texts Typically Read or Referred to on the Programs; 7) Print Texts Typically Written or Referred To on the Programs; 8) Reader Profiles; and 9) Common Reader Traits. This was appropriate considering the diversity of the programs and the readers identified therein. A discussion of these findings and the responses to the second and third research questions, which asked whether the readers on the programs promote literacy through their actions and/or their words and whether young people might seek to emulate these readers in terms of their reading habits, is presented in Chapter 5.

The average number of literacy events in the six programs and the average duration per episode was revealed. The average number of literacy events ranged from the show with the fewest, *How I Met Your Mother* with an average of 5.6 literacy events per episode, to an average of 31.6 literacy events per episode in the program *Community*. The program with the lowest duration portraying literacy events (*Modern Family*) had an average of one minute and twenty seconds per episode, while the show with the highest duration, *Community*, averaged over nine

minutes an episode. Reading and writing is being depicted in all of the popular sitcoms I studied, in some more than in others.

Whether a program was education-based, workplace-based or home-based seemed to have an impact on the amount of literacy events in evidence. It would appear that the majority of the readers on these programs are reading and writing within a particular context, for example for work or for school, rather than for relaxation and pleasure.

I found that it is the main characters who are engaging in literacy events the most on all of the programs. This is encouraging in that it is these main characters and their actions which may ultimately be emulated by viewers.

The reading events in evidence the most were characters holding print texts as though they had been reading them or as though they intended to read them, and characters actually reading a print text. The most popular writing event evident on the six programs was writing, followed by typing and texting.

The kinds of reading and writing evident on any particular program was dependent on the context of the program, on the setting, and on the individual characters. Though some of the basic print texts like books, newspapers, and computer screens were evident in most of the programs, the majority of the programs involved print texts relevant to their particular context. This was also true of the writing evident on the programs. Typical written texts produced across programs included notes and work or school-related assignments.

I identified eight diverse main readers from the six programs. There is at least one reader on each program, with two main readers evident in *The Big Bang Theory* and in *Modern Family*. Though there is some evidence of common traits among some of the characters, the stereotype is not entirely negative, and the readers are more diverse and social than might have been expected.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how much literacy is depicted in popular television sitcoms. In this study I sought to identify readers on television, and to determine whether these characters promote literacy through their actions and their words. I sought, ultimately, to determine whether these readers are portrayed in such a way that they might inspire emulation by young viewers, in particular the emulation of their reading habits. While I believe that the first research question, which asked how much literacy was depicted on current, popular television sitcoms, was thoroughly addressed in chapter four, this chapter will more thoroughly address the last two questions which drove my research: Do the celebrities on the shows that young people watch today promote literacy through their actions and/or their words?, and, Are there readers on situation comedies, and, if so, are they portrayed in such a way that young people might seek to emulate them and their reading habits? This chapter begins with a discussion about whether reading is being promoted by the readers I have identified in this study. This is followed by a discussion about whether the readers found in these programs might inspire emulation among young viewers. A discussion of the negative reading influences and the reader stereotypes on the programs will follow. The significance of the study, including the significance of the results in relation to pedagogical practice follows. Suggestions for future research and the limitations of the study are also presented.

Is Reading Being Promoted?

It is heartening to realize that reading and writing is depicted in situation comedies on prime time television. It is encouraging to discover that there are readers on these programs, and that the majority of the readers are main characters who might have some influence on young viewers. This was a largely unexpected finding. That most of the readers are depicted as friendly

and outgoing, confident and “well rounded” is positive. Characters on television can inspire emulation, and if reading is promoted on television, perhaps it can have a positive influence on young viewers.

The question is: Are the readers that I have identified promoting literacy through their actions and through their words on the programs? It is true that there are characters reading and writing on the programs. It is also true that most of these readers are main characters. Do they love to read, or are they reading because they have to? Is reading portrayed as something enjoyable that can propel one forward, or only as a necessary chore? In order to investigate whether reading is promoted by the readers I have identified in this study, I examined the characters’ reasons for reading.

Reading For a Variety of Purposes

Readers who were depicted reading, writing and talking about what they were reading in a positive way included Sheldon and Leonard from *The Big Bang Theory* and Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*. These characters read for work, for school, and for pleasure.

The character of Leonard is proud of his comic book collection, and of his own research. He is knowledgeable outside of the physics realm. He reads music as well as boards of equations. The books in his bedroom seem to include more than just textbooks. Though it is understood that both Leonard and Sheldon read science articles for work and research purposes, Sheldon seems also to read such articles for pleasure and for social purposes. He often quotes various articles he has read, seemingly as a way to enhance conversation. He is a teacher even when outside the classroom. Sheldon is also knowledgeable about science fiction and superheroes, which suggests that he reads, or has read, more than just scholarly articles. Marshall is comfortable reading a book of statutes and writing at the same time. This implies that he engages frequently in such pursuits. He refers to himself as Ted’s future lawyer. He seems proud that he can dispense legal

advice to his friends. It is implied that he even finds time to read American classics when he is not busy writing a paper.

These characters read for a variety of purposes. They love to learn, whether to move forward in their careers, to help their friends, or to enhance conversation. They also read simply to be entertained. This is a promotion of reading in that it portrays reading as an enjoyable activity, something that can enhance a person's life. It goes further to suggest that reading is something that can, ultimately, help someone to enhance the lives of others.

Reading for Pleasure

Readers who are depicted reading mainly for pleasure include Jay and Claire from *Modern Family*. For these characters, reading is a pleasant escape.

Jay is often depicted reading a newspaper. That he enjoys doing so is clear in the frequency with which he engages in this activity. He does not seem compelled to read the paper for any external reason, such as for school or work, but seems to do so out of personal interest. In addition to reading the newspaper, it is implied that Jay reads instructions in order to build his model airplanes, another pastime that he seems to enjoy. Jay is often shown wearing comfortable track suits or lounging in a hot tub. He likes to relax, and reading seems one more way that he is able to unwind. This portrays reading, not as a daunting chore, but as a peaceful hobby. Claire, on the other hand, looks to reading as an impossible dream, something that she would love to engage in, if only there were more hours in the day. When it comes to Claire, reading is depicted as a fanciful escape. Both of these readers promote reading as an inviting, desirable pastime, something that a person can look forward to after a hectic day.

Reading to Avoid Work and Social Engagement

April from *Parks and Recreation* is escaping in a different way. For her, reading may be a way to avoid responsibility. She is often absorbed in a magazine rather than engaged in her

day-to-day duties at work. When she is reading, she is engaged, and she does not need to interact with her co-workers. In this way, she is also avoiding conversation and intimacy. She may assume that, if she appears busy, she is safe from becoming involved in the lives of others and from having others become aware of her thoughts, feelings, and experiences. She hides behind a magazine. This does not necessarily promote a love of reading, but suggests that a magazine is an acceptable shield; that reading is an alternative to work and social engagement.

Reading in Context

Jim from *The Office* and Troy from *Community* read for particular purposes. Neither of these characters is shown reading for sheer enjoyment, but rather, as part of their respective duties within a particular context.

Jim reads in order to fulfill his duties at work. He is a determined reader who is able to maintain focus amid chaos. He perseveres in his reading despite continual interruptions. He realizes that, in order to succeed, he must read and write. Despite the fact that he is dissatisfied with his job, he is determined to do it well. Troy must read in order to complete his course work at the community college. Although this is the assumed mandate of all of the students in the program, Troy is the character most frequently seen on task. Unlike his fellow student, Jeff, he is at the community college to learn. Presumably he reads in order that he might actually learn something, and become a successful graduate. This kind of reading does not necessarily promote reading except as a means to an end. In these two examples, reading is seen as a necessary task to be completed to achieve success.

Are These Readers Likely to Inspire Emulation?

In this study, I sought to determine whether the main readers on the programs might inspire emulation among young viewers, in particular the emulation of the character's reading habits. For this I have decided to examine each reader in turn as to the likelihood that a young

person might want to emulate him or her, and his or her reading habits. The following is my opinion based on the knowledge I now have of each program, and of each character.

Troy from *Community*: Troy is a fun-loving character who happens to read more than the other characters on his show. While I can imagine young viewers emulating his humour and memorizing some of his lines and actions from the show, I am not sure that a typical viewer, not watching for literacy events, would recognize that he is a reader. While it is true that he is often touching a book, and that he reads more often than the other characters on the program, I think that the fact that I was focussed on such actions made it more apparent than it might have been if I had just been watching in order to be entertained. Although it is positive that he is shown reading, and it is possible that viewers might notice this as a character trait, I do not suppose that it is the trait most evident to viewers. If he is emulated, it would more likely be due to his looks, style and sense of humour, rather than his reading habits.

Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*: For teenaged viewers, Marshall is an identifiable character, because he is portrayed as a normal young man. He is real in that he does not appear to be concerned about appearances; he is who he is, no primping or posturing. He seems intelligent and joyful at the same time, a great combination in a friend. Even though his studies are important to him, he still manages to have a good time. He has friends, a girlfriend who adores him and, when he has the chance, he loves a party. A young person watching Marshall might realize that it is possible to juggle university studies and still maintain a full, exciting life. Marshall is not classically handsome, but he is tall and is portrayed as a kind, loving boyfriend to Lily. The fact that he is somewhat “goofy” at times might serve to make him more realistic, and thus identifiable, to more young people. I imagine that Marshall is likely the subject of emulation for many young viewers, and because he is portrayed as a fun reader with a bright future, this may well include the emulation of his reading habits.

Jay from *Modern Family*: Although Jay makes reading the paper look calm and relaxing, it is unlikely, in my opinion, that many young people would start to read a paper in his honour. Young people might seek to be a successful business owner one day, and seek one day to have the kind of time that Jay seems to have in order to do the things that make them happy. Jay has freedom. I think that many people would love to spend the last years of their lives like Jay; wealthy, with a younger, attractive spouse and all the time in the world. But would most young people start to read newspapers, fly model planes, and wear track suits today because Jay does? I think it is unlikely.

Claire from *Modern Family*: Claire has it all; a beautiful home, a loving family and the freedom to focus on her family full time. Other moms might wish to emulate her lifestyle, and it is possible that some young women might look forward to a similar life. While I can imagine a woman the same age as Claire starting to run to keep in shape because she does, I find it somewhat unlikely that a teenage girl would find a woman who is her mother's age identifiable. She is an attractive woman, and it is possible that young women might emulate her style, but it is more likely that younger women would emulate her step-mother Gloria's flashy, eye catching fashion sense. In terms of her reading habits, I imagine that many busy parents can identify with her dilemma; a reader with no time to read. I am not sure, though, that many teenage girls could relate to this problem, or that this unrequited desire to read is something that begs emulation.

April from *Parks and Recreation*: April does not appear to be happy. She is sullen and unfriendly. She appears to hate her job, and to have very little interest in the people around her. She reads a great deal, but it does not appear to be for the love of reading. Since she does not talk very much, it is difficult to understand her or to identify with her. It is possible that in later episodes her character is further defined, but in the first five episodes there is not much in her character to admire or to aspire to. A young person might appreciate her fearlessness and her

conviction to do as she pleases, but I am not certain that a young person would necessarily start to read magazines in order to be more like April.

Leonard from *The Big Bang Theory*: If a young person was to choose to emulate any one character from this program, it would likely be Leonard above the other male choices. His contemporaries include Howard, a physics engineer who lives with his mother and who repulses women with inappropriate comments, Raj, a physicist who is unable to talk to women, and Sheldon, who, although brilliant, is socially inept. Leonard seems perfectly normal when compared to his friends. Although he is not completely confident in the realm, he knows how to talk to women, and he is not afraid to do so. He is fun and aware of social conventions; he cringes when Sheldon says something inappropriate. Though he is not stylish, he does wear regular clothing in comparison to Howard and Sheldon. He is capable of talking about other things than physics. He is kind and accepting. He is tolerant of Sheldon's eccentricities and Penny's oblivion. He is the most normal person in the group. He may not be "cool" by conventional standards, but he is by far the "coolest" member of his group. He would be a good role model. A young person might see that he reads comic books as well as physics books, and realize that being a scientist is not solely lab coats and experiments. A young person might see that he is smart, but modest, and realize that being intelligent is something that is attractive to women. He is an average looking person who, when compared to Sheldon, is average in his field. Because he is portrayed in a realistic way, a young person might be able to identify with Leonard. They might want to be attractive to others because they are seen as smart. This may lead to the emulation of his reading habits. A young person might think: If Leonard can be successful, so can I.

Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory*: Although some young viewers might seek to be as intelligent as Sheldon, it seems unlikely that many young people would choose to emulate

Sheldon's style or personality. He typically dresses in matched clothing that would better suit a twelve year old boy, and his lack of social skills makes him appear somewhat robotic and as though he rarely has fun. He is a literal person who rarely sees the humour in situations. The fact that he discusses super heroes, robots, and science fiction facts might make him identifiable to some young viewers, but it is unlikely that the majority of young people would be able to identify fully with a former child prodigy who started university at the age of 11. He is portrayed as exceptional in many aspects of his life. He is brilliant, outstanding in his field, and unique in many social aspects. His portrayal as someone who is vastly different from ordinary people might make him difficult to emulate.

Jim from *The Office*: Like Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*, Jim is also portrayed as a typical young man. He is hard working, but also fun-loving and sarcastic. He seems to love to antagonize Dwight in his quiet way, and his boyish good looks make him stand out in the office crowd. I imagine that young people might choose to emulate Jim above Michael, Dwight or any of the other quirky characters on the program, not only because he is among the youngest, but because he is the most normal, relatable male on the program. He seems to find the happenings around him as odd as we, the viewers, might. He reacts to the things that he sees in the office the way that we, the viewers, might and he says what we might be thinking; this makes him relatable on a broader scale. More than just young men can relate to him. Because his reading is subtle, I am not sure that someone who was not filling out a literacy checklist would make note of his perseverance such that they would work such reading habits into their own lives. They might more likely notice that he is a hard worker and seek to emulate this aspect of his character. They might also imitate his sarcastic brand of humour, since it seems to be how he captures the attention of Pam, the pretty woman in the office.

Negative Reading Influences and Reader Stereotypes on the Programs

Just because a program depicts reading does not necessarily mean that reading is generally promoted on the program. *Community* is the program that included the most literacy events of all of the programs, by a wide margin. However, the main character on the program, Jeff, is a negative reading role model. He carries books around the most of any character, but this character has absolutely no intention of ever reading a book. In the pilot episode he tries to dishonestly obtain the answers to every test that he will have in each of his chosen courses. He arranges for Annie to do all of his homework. He does not think that he needs to learn anything, and so he resists reading, writing, and learning of any kind. Jeff is a handsome leading man, he is the focus of the program, and he is a proud non-reader. Unfortunately, because he is portrayed as the “coolest,” most irreverent character on the program, he is also likely to be the character most emulated.

In *Parks and Recreation*, April is the reader. This alone is telling. Although there is some reading and writing on the show, it is often done in order to avoid people or work. Leslie also reads a children’s book aloud to kill time and avoid confrontation at a public meeting. Jerry pretends to write when a volunteer is called for at a meeting in the office. Leslie types furiously in order to evade conversation with Mark. When one character is supposed to be writing, he refuses to do so. Tom earnestly scribbles a wavy line across his paper instead of writing what Leslie is saying when he is asked to take dictation. On this program, reading and writing is not authentic. It is used rather than enjoyed.

Even on the programs with characters who seem to promote reading, there seems to be an underlying negativity associated with being a reader. For example, all of the male characters on *The Big Bang Theory* are otherwise attractive actors made to look unattractive. This is achieved through bad haircuts, thick framed glasses, tight clothing and exaggerated mannerisms.

Sheldon's speech is very precise, for example, and Raj is often slouching and looking around nervously. Does this imply that all physicists are awkward and unattractive with no sense of style? Or is the implication that smart people are unattractive?

Penny is portrayed as the opposite of the men. She is the attractive, "not-so-smart" person. She is far more street-wise than the males, but she is portrayed as being unabashedly bewildered by most of what the men talk about. She has some books on the shelves in her apartment, but she is never seen reading one. Leslie Winkle is a sometime lover of Leonard's who works at Cal-Tech. She is portrayed as Penny's alter ego; the book-smart woman. She is plain and unemotional with a bored, monotone voice. Predictably, she has a "wild side" which brings to mind the stereotype of the librarian loosening and shaking out her hair while flinging her glasses aside. *The Big Bang Theory* is not without stereotypes.

On the program *Modern Family*, where we see in Jay and Claire two examples of characters who love reading, Claire and Phil's children are somewhat stereotypical. Haley, the older, prettier daughter is more interested in her boyfriend than she is in school, while the plainer, younger daughter, Alex, is portrayed as the "smart" one with no romantic prospects. It seems that this plain or unattractive image is still a fixture on television when it comes to "book smart" characters.

Overall, readers on these six television shows are not confrontational or aggressive. They are lovers, not fighters. Jim from *The Office* boldly pursues Pam, but is visibly nervous around Pam's imposing fiancé, Roy. Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*, though large in stature, claims never to have been in a fight. Sheldon and Leonard from *The Big Bang Theory*, though apparently involved as victims in many physical confrontations, profess no fighting skills. Their lack of strength is displayed in an episode when they, together, have great physical difficulty moving a box up a staircase.

Significance of the Study

The television industry is apparently cognizant that celebrities can effect change in the realm of literacy, as evidenced in the use of celebrities in public service announcements and special literacy promotions. Reading with children, among other things, is promoted by NBC in its *The More You Know* spots by celebrities Tiki Barber, a *Today* Correspondent from *NBC Sports*, Christopher Meloni from *Law and Order-Special Victims Unit* and Masi Oka from the program *Heroes* (*The More You Know*, 2008). Does this promotion of reading go beyond the 15 second spots and enter into the agenda of the writers and performers of prime time television sitcoms? When I began this study, I imagined that I knew the answer to this question and I suspected the answer was a resounding “no.”

This study appears to be the first to raise the question, “How much literacy is there on television?” When I posed that question, I did not expect there to be a great deal of reading and writing on sitcoms. I suspected, in fact, that there might not be readers on the programs in 2010. I was surprised by the findings in this study. More literacy was evident in these programs than I had anticipated, and I found readers on every program that I studied. In more than one case, I found two committed readers on one program.

The readers that I discovered on these programs were diverse and were more a reflection of the varied readers in society than mirror images of one another. While some typical reader stereotypes did emerge, I found that most of the readers that I identified were social, and multi-dimensional. By this I mean that they were portrayed as being more than just a reader. Overall, these characters are portrayed not only as readers, but as diverse people with distinct personalities, ideals and lives, who read for a variety of purposes. What makes these characters similar is not simply who they are, what they read, or why they read, it is *that* they read. In my opinion, this is significant. It implies that readers are not only “them”, a distinct group

identifiable by common reader traits, but are instead diverse individuals, of both genders, varying ages, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic status, who read. They are, potentially, “us.”

A young viewer might find a reader that they could identify with among these characters. This is a positive, inclusive message for young people in our society.

That there are readers on the programs at all is significant because the inclusion of reading and writing on television sitcoms might have a positive effect on the viewing public in terms of attitudes toward, and time spent, reading. That different kinds of readers are represented is also important in that it presents reading as something that people commonly do, regardless of their situation, background, personality or interest.

According to the statistics, people in North America spend far more time watching television than they spend reading (Statistics Canada, 2004, 2005; The Nielsen Company, 2009a; Vandewater, Bickham, & Lee, 2006). If parents are watching television more than they are reading, this can have a direct effect on their children’s choices in this regard. If a parent allows his or her child to watch an average of five hours of television a day, they are, in effect, offering the child alternate role models from which to draw behaviours, language and even ideals.

Celebrities can have an effect on the behaviour of their fans. Oprah Winfrey need only mention a book on *Oprah’s Book Club* and it immediately becomes a bestseller (Towell, 2001). If North Americans are exposed to as much television as the statistics indicate, in terms of reading, it is useful if positive messages are sent via the powerful role models in this medium. The fact that the programs I have studied include reading and writing, even for just over a minute per show in some cases, and the fact that some characters seem to promote reading in their roles is interesting and potentially important. If children are not seeing reading at home, at least they might be seeing it on their television screens.

This study is meant to illuminate a phenomenon in our society. In this hectic world,

it is easy for parents to lose sight of how much time their children spend watching television. Many parents understand that they are an important influence on their children, but how many people take the time to count the number of hours that they and their children spend watching television, or the hours that they spend reading? Until a light is shone on a problem like this, it remains in the shadows. Knowledge is power.

Many parents have been influenced by television in their own lives, but fail to recognize it, or to understand the potential influence that television celebrities might have on their own children. I suppose that many well-intentioned parents do not comprehend the influence that television celebrities can have on young people, or they would not allow their children to be exposed so readily to these alternate role models for several hours a day. An awareness of this potential influence may help parents to limit television watching time in their homes, or to more carefully choose programs for their children to watch.

In terms of possible pedagogical classroom significance, this study could help to spark knowledge and create change. One way to combat the trend toward television and away from reading is to create, in our classroom communities, an awareness of the phenomenon. The problem must be acknowledged before it can be addressed. If teachers were made aware of the statistics regarding time spent reading and time spent watching television in North America, this knowledge could be well utilized in various classes, for a number of educational purposes.

A project that asked students to analyze their own viewing and reading times, or even their favourite television program in terms of the literacy present could incorporate various skills and learning outcomes in English, Math, and Social Studies classrooms. A cross-curricula, school-wide initiative could, through various projects at various levels, and through parental involvement, illuminate the phenomenon at the community level, and help to create awareness. Sometimes the first step is to look at ourselves. Making the students and the parents aware of the

discrepancy is one crucial step toward solving the problem. People are not going to stop watching television, but perhaps community awareness could help to bring about better, more informed, choices in this realm.

Many of the jokes and references on *The Big Bang Theory* necessitate at least a basic understanding of various aspects of higher learning. If you do not understand the work that goes into a Doctoral Thesis, for example, the fact that Sheldon has done more than one along with his Master's Thesis has little impact. I know that I was impressed. *The Big Bang Theory* is the most popular of all of the shows I have studied. It is ranked at 5th place out of 100 in a full series ranking for the 2009-2010 broadcast season. This may be because, with such references, they draw their audience from more than one demographic. A show like this, with humour and references at various levels, not unlike a Shakespearean play, draws viewers from different intellectual and socio-economic strata. Why not include educational references and literacy on television? It can only entice a larger, more diverse audience. It would be interesting to see whether the injection of higher level references into a show like *Community*, which is ranked at 60th place compared to *The Big Bang Theory*'s 5th place rank (see Table 1), would have an effect on its audience and ratings.

Networks are interested in financial gain. An educated, literate audience might bring more to the program and its network than an increased ability to understand the content. Advertisers are important to television networks. Those companies that advertise on network stations may have a particular demographic in mind when they choose their target audience, but their undoubted aim is people who can afford what they are selling. Literacy has an effect on earning ability (Green & Riddell, 2001; Trelease, 2001). People who can read are presumably able to attain higher levels of education, and, as a result, higher levels of employment. They are generally capable, therefore, of making more money than those with lower literacy skills. As a

result, they may have more disposable income. According to Watkins (2002), the income of a company's target audience relates directly to how well the company's product will sell.

Heightened suggestibility of the uneducated aside (Abrams, 1946), wouldn't advertisers prefer to entice viewers who can actually afford their wares?

Suggestions for Further Research

Since this study appears to be the first of its kind, there are many options for further research. This study examined situation comedies, and found that some literacy was evident in each program. Whether the program was home-based, education-based or workplace-based seemed to have an effect on the number of events evident in a given program. Is the amount of literacy events found in these comedy programs more or less than might be found in other kinds of programs? How much literacy is present in other kinds of television shows? Are there readers on other kinds of television programs?

It would be interesting to examine children's programming in terms of the literacy events present and how the readers are portrayed. This could include shows like *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverley Place*. Popular cartoon programs could also be analyzed for the same purpose. Hour-long dramas like *The Event* or *Castle* might be an interesting contrast to sitcoms. In the program *Castle*, for example, the main character works with detectives, while also writing mystery novels. The reading here is implied on two levels; reading that is done within the context of a profession, and the eventual reading of the novels; the written interpretation of the author's experience. The reading is understood in a program like this, but it would be interesting to examine such a program as to the number of literacy events present.

Canadian programs could be compared to American programs in terms of the literacy evident. Programs from other parts of the world could be compared to North American programs. How much time is spent on reading and television viewing in other countries? It

would be fascinating to examine whether the same discrepancy is evident elsewhere.

Programs from the past could be compared to the programs of today. Did Beaver Cleaver read on *Leave it to Beaver*? This kind of research could examine whether reading on television has increased or decreased over time. It would be of interest, in light of new technology, to look at the kinds of print texts commonly read on shows from the past as compared to the shows of today.

Perhaps a study could be made of the relation between high level references in programs, for example in the shows *The Big Bang Theory* and *Frasier*, and the audience. Does the potentially wider audience add to a program's ratings and popularity? The options are many, and there is much yet to be learned in this area. This study is only the beginning.

Limitations of the Study

For the purposes of this study, I took into account only particular literacy practices. I define reading here as prolonged engagement with print text for a variety of purposes. By writing, I refer to the conventional use of written language for a range of purposes. Others may have alternate definitions of reading and/or writing, particularly with today's broader definitions of multi-literacies.

Although I included computer and Blackberry based texts alongside more traditional reading texts such as books and magazines, there are other kinds of literacy that I did not take into account, such as the incidental reading of traffic signs and billboards and the like. Prolonged engagement is reading that goes beyond a glance at a clock or a glimpse of the message on a person's T-shirt. As such, I did not take such reading into account in this study.

Though I only acknowledged print reading in this study, I realize that there are many kinds of non-print reading, such as the reading of body language, animal tracks, and the weather. I know that literacy is an inclusive term which comprises critical literacy (Comber &

Thomson, 2001; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993), situated literacies (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 2004), multi-literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), and multi-modal literacy (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). I have discovered that literacy is alive in communication, and that it is more than just the reading and writing of printed materials. However, I believe that basic reading and writing practices should be upheld and encouraged in our society. Because of this, for this study I recorded only overt, conventional reading and writing practices that could be acknowledged, and possibly emulated, through a television screen.

It is important to note that this study examined prime time, half-hour long situation comedies. It is likely that a study that examined hour-long dramas such as *The Good Wife* or *Law and Order* would have different findings. Whereas there was some implied reading in the programs which I chose to study, it is likely that this implied reading would be more obvious in hour-long dramas focussed on particular professions. For example, whereas Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother* is portrayed as a law student, and whereas Mitchell from *Modern Family* is portrayed as a lawyer, we do not actually see these two characters at work in the courtroom, or talking about particular cases. The lawyers on a program like *The Good Wife* or *Law and Order* are seen in the context of their profession, and the characters display the knowledge that they hold within this context. Lawyer characters often talk about particular cases, for example, which serves to display their knowledge of past cases and their outcomes. This implies a great deal of reading. Mitchell's knowledge of law, on the other hand, is unknown because he does not refer to such knowledge in the context of his home life on the program *Modern Family*.

Concluding Comments

Television celebrities are influential. *Entertainment Weekly* has a feature called *Style Hunter* (Ram, 2010, p. 22) that provides a service to readers who are “dying” to get the outfit

they saw on a television character that week. The weekly feature provides readers with the retail and pricing information they need in order to buy the clothes, earrings, and purses they saw that week on their favourite television and movie characters. This is a testament to the fact that people want to be like the celebrities they see on screens, big and small.

I understand that it is not the aim of television sitcoms to promote literacy. A program that featured a character reading a print text for 22 minutes would not be interesting or engaging, and it would likely not last beyond the pilot. When I began this study, I had hope that literacy might be evident on the programs that young people watch, but I did not expect that there would be a significant amount. The findings of this study indicate that there is literacy on television, in some shows more than others, and that there are, indeed, readers on these programs.

The readers on these programs may have a positive effect on young viewers in terms of their attitude toward reading. Some of the characters that I deem readers on these programs are modelling positive reading behaviours, behaviours that young people may not see in their own homes. Is it enough to see your favourite character on a television show reading? Will this change a person's behaviour? The widespread emulation of Jennifer Aniston's haircut and Ashton Kutcher's trucker cap indicate that celebrities can influence the behaviour of their viewers. If Hannah Montana's habit of waiting for the movie rather than reading the book had the potential to be widely emulated, wouldn't potential emulation also ensue if she was portrayed as an avid reader? I know from personal experience that celebrities can shape a person's behaviour, style and ideas. I have the pictures of myself sporting the "Rachel" hairstyle to prove it.

Not every character on the programs that I studied is a reader, and not every character promotes reading in a positive way. What I find encouraging is that there are people reading on

television at all. Reading is important. When I realized the discrepancy between the time spent reading and the time spent watching television in North America, and I realized that the time spent watching television was increasing over time, I wondered what effect this might ultimately have on reading. That reading is depicted as a common pastime on these programs is positive, and it gives me hope. Traditional literacy is still alive, even on television.

People need to be aware of the discrepancy that exists between the time spent reading and the time spent watching television in North America. How can we address the problem if we do not acknowledge it? Celebrities are powerful role models, but parents are their children's primary role models (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002). Parents need to realize the influence that they have, and use it wisely. If we want children to read, we need to read. If we want children to spend less time watching television, and to watch programs that promote positive behaviours, parents need to be doing these things as well.

Celebrities on television can be alternate role models to our children if we allow it. In some cases, they can even be a positive influence. It is ultimately up to us, as parents, to understand the potential media influences on our children, to be positive literacy role models ourselves, and to offer our children a fine balance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Literacy Events Checklist

Literacy Events Checklist

Reading Events: Main Character/ Supporting Character/ Extra/ Guest Star

Where applicable, write the name of the character performing the act beside each action selected.

1. Holds or looks at something as though he or she intends to read it:

- a. a book
- b. a newspaper
- c. a magazine
- d. a manual
- e. a script
- f. a map
- g. a blackboard
- h. a menu
- i. a note or a letter
- j. a cell phone
- k. a Blackberry
- l. a computer screen
- m. another kind of print text _____

2. Holds or looks at something as though he or she has been reading it:

- a. a book
- b. a newspaper
- c. a magazine
- d. a manual
- e. a script
- f. a map
- g. a blackboard
- h. a menu
- i. a note or a letter
- j. a cell phone
- k. a Blackberry
- l. a computer screen
- m. another kind of print text _____

3. Is seen reading or looking at one of the following for an extended period of time:

- a. a book
- b. a newspaper
- c. a magazine

- d. a manual
- e. a script
- f. a map
- g. a blackboard
- h. a menu
- i. a note or a letter
- j. a cell phone
- k. a Blackberry
- l. a computer screen
- m. another kind of print text _____

4. Describes to another character one of the following that he or she has been reading:

- a. a book
- b. an article from a newspaper
- c. an article from a magazine
- d. a manual
- e. a script
- f. a map
- g. a message on a blackboard
- h. a menu,
- i. a note or a letter
- j. an email,
- k. a website
- l. an online publication
- m. another kind of print text _____

5. Shares with another character knowledge that he or she claims to have derived from reading:

- a. a book
- b. an article from a newspaper
- c. an article from a magazine
- d. a manual
- e. a script
- f. a map
- g. a message on a blackboard
- h. a menu,
- i. a note or a letter
- j. an email,
- k. a website
- l. an online publication
- m. another kind of print text _____

6. Mentions or recommends to another character a particular print text that he or she has been reading:

- a. a book
- b. an article from a newspaper
- c. an article from a magazine
- d. a manual
- e. a script
- f. a map
- g. a message on a blackboard
- h. a menu,
- i. a note or a letter
- j. an email,
- k. a website
- l. an online publication
- m. another kind of print text _____

7. Mentions or recommends to another character a particular author/writer of:

- a. a book
- b. a newspaper article
- c. a magazine article
- d. a manual
- e. a script
- f. a website,
- g. an online publication
- h. another kind of print text _____

Writing Events : Main Character/ Supporting Character/ Extra/ Guest Star

1. Is seen writing or composing, or makes reference to writing or composing:

- a. a letter or a note
- b. a poem, a story, an article, an essay, a script or a song
- c. an entry in a diary or a journal
- d. an address or a phone number
- e. a to-do list, a grocery list, or another kind of list
- f. another kind of print text _____

2. Is seen typing, or makes reference to typing:

- a. a letter or an note
- b. an email
- c. a poem, a story, an article, an essay, a script or a song
- d. an entry in an online journal or a blog
- e. a to-do list, a grocery list, or another kind of list
- f. another kind of print text _____

3. Is seen texting, or makes reference to texting:
 - a. an email
 - b. a tweet (Twitter)
 - c. a caption to go along with a picture that is being sent to someone
 - d. an address or a phone number (on a Blackberry, for example)
 - e. in order to vote for something (For example texting a vote to American Idol)

for another purpose _____

Appendix B: Reader Checklist

Reader Checklist

1. Is the reader a main character?
2. Does the reader also write on the program?
3. Is the reader popular with the other characters on the show?
4. Do the other characters on the show look up to or admire the reader for any reason? If so, is the admiration based on his or her reading habits?
5. Is the reader considered physically attractive and/or fashionable, current and sophisticated (“cool”) by the other characters on the program?
6. Is the reader outgoing and friendly?
7. Does the reader appear to be confident and self-assured?
8. Do the other characters in the program seem to value the knowledge that the reader holds?
9. Does the reader appear to be “well rounded” (“Street smart” as well as “book smart”)?