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**Compulsive television viewing: A qualitative approach**

**Priovolos, George V., Ph.D.**

**City University of New York, 1991**

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A

COMPULSIVE TELEVISION VIEWING:

A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

by

GEORGE V. PRIOVOLOS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate  
Faculty in Business in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
The City University of New York

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Business in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**ABSTRACT****COMPULSIVE TELEVISION VIEWING:****A QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

by

George V. Priovolos

Adviser: Professor Leon G. Schiffman

The primary objective of this study is to develop a detailed portrayal of compulsive television viewing in a marketing context. That is, to capture the meaning of the TV watching experience, as understood by the compulsive TV viewer.

To accomplish this, a number of research issues are investigated including: (a) How does a compulsive TV viewer watch TV? (b) What is the role of TV in a compulsive TV viewer's life? (c) What makes somebody a compulsive TV viewer? (d) What are the consequences of compulsive TV viewing?

Information was collected by means of a series of in-depth interviews with various categories of female TV viewers. Analysis of the collected material identified nine compulsive TV viewers, i.e., viewers whose viewing is dependency-induced, comprising stereotypical and uncontrollable behavior. Such viewers view TV watching as an

end-in-itself and show a single-minded commitment to TV-related activities, which is persistent over time. The remaining, noncompulsive, study participants were classified as indulgent (eight), habitual (fourteen), and impulsive (two). Their primary differences from compulsive ones are that they showed more control over their TV viewing and no long-term dependency on the medium.

Twelve themes, representing the interrelated dimensions of compulsive TV viewing experience, emerge from the study: (1) perceived stressful situational factors; (2) viewer background factors; (3) personal psychological factors; (4) personal values; (5) personal goals and aspirations; (6) viewer involvement; (7) TV-related rituals; (8) viewing with others; (9) TV characteristics and experiences; (10) perceived consequences; (11) coping, and (12) perceived meaning of compulsive TV viewing. These themes are applied in developing a model of compulsive TV viewing.

In general, study findings indicate that compulsive TV viewing is a viewer's response to stress experienced, in the case of the female compulsive TV viewers studied, as a result of the interaction between specific personal factors (e.g., low self-esteem, fear of loneliness, contradictory value system, lack of well-defined goals and aspirations) and situational factors like their extraordinary obligations deriving from their double roles at work and at home, limited financial means, and lack of opportunities for

developing satisfying interpersonal relationships.

Compulsive TV viewing may, at times, involve considerable search for information, a fair amount of planning and relatively high levels of attention. Yet, it is primarily an affect-based behavior characterized by lack of critical thinking. Findings reveal that ritualistic behavior and ritual artifacts as well as watching with others also contribute to the overall compulsive TV viewing experience.

The outcomes of compulsive TV viewing differ substantially between often positive short-run effects (e.g., stress reduction, favorable changes in mood and self-esteem, acquisition of life goals, occasional improvement of social life) and overwhelmingly negative long-run effects (social stigma, dependency, low self-worth, frustration, alienation, and questionable TV-induced values).

On the basis of these findings, the study derives several practical, theoretical and methodological conclusions, considers their implications and suggests topics for future research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals -- too numerous to list all of them in this space -- contributed one way or another to this dissertation and influenced my thinking throughout my doctoral studies. My sincere gratitude goes to all of them. I would like to acknowledge here especially the following.

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I also thank the other members of my dissertation committee for their comments and overall support: Dr. Martin Topol of Pace University, Dr. Steve Schnaars, and Dr. Gloria Thomas, both of Baruch College.

Of all the persons whom I had the opportunity to meet and benefit from during my Ph.D. studies at Baruch College,

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Finally, I owe many thanks to my colleagues, students, and friends at Iona College for "being there" in the past several years.

**Dedicated to my parents:  
Fotini and Vasilis Priovolos**

"When the difficulty of living in the world grows unbearable, one longs to move to a more comfortable place. When one realizes that wherever he might move, it will still be hard to live there, it is then that poems are born, and pictures."

Natsume Sōseki  
Kusamakura

"For if there is a sin against life, it consists perhaps not so much in despairing of life as in hoping for another life and in eluding the implacable grandeur of this life."

Albert Camus  
Summer in Algiers

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Consumers spend a large part of their daily lives engaging in activities which may be described as compulsive consumption: repeated and ritualized toothbrushing and handwashing, excessive snacking and coffee drinking, shopping binges, and fanatic radio listening or television watching.

O'Guinn and Faber (1989) have defined compulsive consumption as "a response to an uncontrollable drive or desire to obtain, use, or experience a feeling, substance, or activity that leads an individual to repetitively engage in a behavior that will ultimately cause harm to the individual and/or to others" (p. 148).

The pervasiveness of compulsive consumer behavior underscores the need for consumer research in this area. It has also been suggested that better understanding of such extreme forms of consumer behavior will enhance our understanding of its "more normal" forms (O'Guinn and Faber 1989).

Moreover, costs associated with some forms of compulsive (sometimes also referred to as excessive, addictive or fanatic) consumption may be severe and include economic hardship, psychological and even physical harm for compulsive consumers as well as others with whom they come

in contact. Thus, in addition to marketers, compulsive consumption is of concern to students of human and social behavior in general and society as a whole.

### The Problem

Traditionally, consumer and marketing research has concentrated on examining normative consumer behavior and "rational" information processing and decision making (Pollak 1960; O'Guinn and Faber 1989). Past studies of reference group influence, opinion leadership, consumer values and lifestyles, attitude-behavior consistency, perceived risk, external search and other consumer phenomena exemplify a bias in favor of studying cognitive processes and attribute maximization.

Recently, a number of articles in the marketing literature have criticized this perspective and called for the investigation of the "psychological depth, conflict, and fantasy components of everyday behavior" (Rook 1985, p. 262) and its "experiential" aspects (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

In a related development, the methodological status quo in consumer and marketing research has also come under fire. The widely-used quantitative, logical positivist approach for data collection and analysis has been described as "barely scratch(ing) the surface of consumers' real lives and jeopardiz(ing) the relevance of much consumer research"

(Rook 1985, p. 262). In its place, it has been suggested that a qualitative, phenomenological approach would be better suited to help researchers understand the, often subconscious, meaning of consumer experiences from the consumer's own frame of reference. In fact, such a phenomenological approach has started being used in recent inductive, exploratory studies of consumer rituals, impulses, and compulsive buying (Sherry 1983; Rook 1985; Rook and Hoch 1982; O'Guinn and Faber 1989).

Compulsive consumer behavior, its origins, correlates and marketing consequences have received very little attention in the marketing/consumer behavior literature. Past studies (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Faber, O'Guinn and Krych 1987; Lehmann 1987; Gridley 1987; Holbrook 1987) basically acknowledged the existence of compulsive consumption/buying, stressed the need for more research in this area and offered some anecdotal evidence describing the main characteristics of compulsive consumer phenomena. According to these studies, compulsive buying seems to be an end-in-itself, rather than a means to acquire a product, which is related to lower self-esteem, proneness to fantasy and trait-compulsivity. It is a primarily non-cognitive experience that is best captured by whole images and which usually results in loss of control, anxiety and frustration as well as extreme levels of debt, domestic discord and physical injury or exhaustion.

Surprisingly, these marketing studies of compulsive consumption made few references to the psychological literature on addictions and obsessive/compulsive disorders and, to a large extent, failed to compare its components and characteristics to those of "mainstream" consumer behavior like high involvement, brand loyalty, or habitual buying, which intuitively seem to share a number of commonalities with them.

Such comparisons with existing related concepts are necessary to properly define consumer compulsions and distinguish them from "normal" consumer behaviors. For example, is it a necessary condition for compulsive consumer behavior to take place in spite of the individual consumer's will? If so, what will be an accurate indicator of that happening? Or, how is compulsive consumption of a product (e.g., cigarettes, candy) different than routinized consumption of the same product? If the former is simply routinized consumption which occurs "excessively," at what point does something become excessive? And, what if the consumer involved, as is usually the case, does not perceive her consumption as being excessive? Finally, do normal and compulsive consumption lie on the same continuum? If so, what makes consumers cross the threshold and become compulsive? And, what will it take for them to go back to normal consumption? Are there any other intermediate stages on the same continuum?

Furthermore, published research on compulsive consumption has also neglected to examine whether all forms (manifestations) of compulsive consumption are qualitatively similar i.e., should compulsive use of hand cream be treated similarly to compulsive consumption of snacks, use of credit or dieting? Or, should, consumer compulsions be classified on the basis of their sometimes different functions or consequences?

#### Study Objectives and Importance

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a detailed portrayal of compulsive television viewing in a marketing context. More specifically, by means of a series of in-depth interviews with various categories of female compulsive TV viewers, the researcher attempts to capture the meaning of the "compulsive TV watching experience," as understood by the viewer. This includes perceptions of what are the major elements of such experiences and their consequences, the relationship of viewer and situational characteristics to compulsive TV viewing, and how compulsive viewing habits are affected and, in turn, affect relationships with others.

To the extent that very little is known to date about both compulsive marketing-related experiences and the compulsive TV experience per se, no specific hypotheses are developed a priori. In fact, one of the outcomes of this

exploratory research is to pinpoint research questions for future study. However, on the basis of preliminary conceptualizations of consumer compulsions in the literature (see chapter II), a number of very broad research issues are selected to initiate discussion of the TV experience during the depth interviews (some of these topics may be pursued more than others, and some may even be abandoned as the research program evolves -- see chapter III for more details).

Thus, the list of initial research issues includes:

(a) What is the role of TV in a compulsive viewer's life?

(b) How specifically (i.e., in what setting, with whom -- if any, and at what level of involvement) does a compulsive viewer watch TV?

(c) How does one become a compulsive viewer?

(d) What are the costs, if any, of watching TV compulsively?

(e) Does compulsive TV viewing help or inhibit relationships with others?

(f) How does it feel (both in the short- as well as the long-run) to be a compulsive TV viewer?

(g) What is the meaning of "compulsive TV viewing" to the compulsive TV viewer?

This study of compulsive TV watching has a number of important theoretical, methodological and practical impli-

cations. The major implications are briefly outlined here, while all of them are reviewed in more detail in the last chapter of this dissertation.

First, compulsive TV viewing is important as a field of study in itself. In the past few years, TV viewing has changed dramatically as a result of (a) technological innovations in TV hardware (remote control, VCR, etc.) and (b) the proliferation of alternative sources of television programming (e.g., cable, pay-per-view channels). TV viewers, with increased freedom of choice, have thus become less loyal to TV stations and programs, and more prone to "zap" (i.e., kill) TV commercials.

In-depth information about the TV viewing experience, is in increasing demand today by broadcasters, producers of TV programming, as well as advertisers, who support them, and advertising agencies acting on behalf of the latter. The various rating systems now in use (passive/active people-meters, diaries, etc.) can only provide data on the amount of viewing (more accurately, the amount of time when household members "appear" to be watching), channel and show watched, but are unable to help interested parties in understanding how and why consumers interpret specific TV realities. This dissertation, with its use of qualitative methodologies and detailed study of "hard core" compulsive television users, can provide some useful insights into the experiential aspects of TV viewing. Furthermore, compulsive

viewers are an interesting segment of the market themselves. Studying their TV-related behaviors will help marketers and other interested parties (e.g., public policy-makers) to target them via appropriate marketing/de-marketing strategies.

Second, the present study seeks to explore compulsive behavior in a marketing context, by drawing on the psychological notions of obsessions and compulsions, and going beyond the consumer behavior/marketing concepts of consumer involvement, brand loyalty, or habitual consumer behavior. Recently, marketers have started paying attention to various phenomena -- manifestations of compulsive consumer experiences -- besides excessive tobacco and alcohol consumption: chocolate eating, exercising, record collecting, and shopping in general. Understanding the nature, causes, and consequences of each individual compulsion and uncovering any existing commonalities and/or differences among them will help marketing and health practitioners as well as public policy makers to develop plans to curtail/control such compulsions.

Finally, a third contribution of the present study is the development and implementation of a qualitative research program based on a series of depth interviews, which is applied to the study of TV viewing. This methodology is best-suited for investigating experiential phenomena like TV watching and behaviors and attitudes that might otherwise go

unreported or misrepresented due to their ego-threatening nature.

So far, though, few marketing studies have been published, which outline the various steps involved in designing the collection of qualitative data (including the construction of a screener and a discussion guide for this purpose), as well as their analysis. This dissertation describes in detail all the stages of the research process and suggests ways in which similar methodologies may be designed for future marketing applications.

#### Scope and Limitations of the Study

As already mentioned, there is very little past research on compulsive consumption on which this dissertation could build. Therefore, the research reported here is designed to be exploratory, discovery-oriented without specific hypotheses to test. Yet, despite its exploratory nature, the scope of this research is focused: to study a specific compulsive experience, TV viewing, as understood and experienced by a specific class of consumers i.e., adult working females of certain sociodemographic background (age between 20 and 54 years, income of \$15,000 and more, no children at home, etc.).

The concept of compulsive TV viewing is novel to the marketing literature, while compulsive consumption in general was only defined once before (O'Guinn and Faber

1989). Given the vital role that both these concepts play in this study, their conceptualization is discussed in detail in a later section of this chapter.

Studying only one type of consumer compulsive behavior i.e., TV viewing, as opposed to comparing several different forms of compulsive behavior, has both positive and negative effects. On the negative side, it limits identification and understanding of the common and/or distinguishing characteristics among different types of consumer compulsions, which is necessary to build a general theory of marketing/consumer compulsions. On the positive side, the study of only one form of compulsive behavior in this dissertation, allows the researcher to pay fuller attention to the large number of elements present in such behavior by increasing the opportunity for respondent probing and interviewing in depth.

Choosing to study compulsive TV viewing in particular has several implications, too. Besides, its importance as a topic of inquiry in itself, the study of compulsive TV viewing offers the advantage of investigating a more socially acceptable activity compared to, for example, compulsive drinking or gambling. This makes participant recruitment and interviewing relatively easier (see chapter III). On the other hand, as a result of the pervasiveness of TV viewing in most people's lives (99% of U.S. households have at least one TV set, which stays on for an average of a

little more than 7 hours a day (Television Bureau of Advertising 1989), it is very difficult to identify and separate compulsive viewers from simply excessive/overindulging ones. Moreover, the economic cost of compulsive TV viewing is difficult to assess to the extent that, at least in the case of watching network, over the air TV, television consumption is perceived as "free" by many viewers. Usually, the vast majority of television viewers overlook the fact that watching TV entails electricity costs, costs associated with buying and maintaining the TV set and other TV equipment, various opportunity costs (e.g., devoting time to TV viewing as opposed to educational, social or occupational pursuits), as well as physical costs directly attributed to TV watching.

The choices made regarding the methodology used in this study are fully explained in chapter III of this dissertation. There are three points, though, which need to be addressed here as limitations of the research method used. First, self-reported accounts of any behavior, but especially of compulsive behavior, can never be as rich in detail and cover as many subconscious experiences as those that might have been revealed through a combination of self-report and direct observation. Second, in-depth interviews with several different age cohorts spanning a number of different stages in a family life cycle cannot properly illustrate the evolution of the TV viewing habit

during an individual's lifetime. Although, respondents are probed during the interviews to recall their past TV watching habits and make comparisons with the way they watch nowadays, longitudinal studies of compulsive behavior are needed to trace the development of compulsions more accurately.

Third, compulsive consumer behavior and compulsive TV viewing is not a female prerogative. The exclusion of male TV viewers from the scope of this study limits our general understanding of the phenomenon since male-female compulsive viewer comparisons would have helped identify more factors potentially contributing to such behavior. Moreover, it would have allowed the researcher to look into compulsive watching of other types of TV programming, typically targeting a male audience: sports, crime, horror, and other shows.

The inclusion of males in a study of compulsive TV viewing is also needed for another reason: the majority of female TV viewers interviewed in this study mentioned that they often watch TV in the company of either their husbands or boyfriends. They repeatedly referred to conflict arising as a result of their different preferences and implied that their male partners exerted a relatively high influence on their watching habits. Under these circumstances, it would have been useful if wife and husband/boyfriend were interviewed concurrently to obtain a more reliable and

complete account of their joint TV watching experiences.

To the degree that a lot of TV viewing in U.S. households is done with the participation of children, and in some instances, because of them, the insights gained from including children in the study of compulsive TV viewing would also have been very valuable. Indeed, several psychological studies of other compulsive behaviors (smoking, drugs, etc.) have identified the "impressionable" ages, childhood and adolescence, as crucial in the formation of such behavior (see chapter II).

Finally, this researcher believes that issues concerning potential researcher bias and method objectivity in qualitative research should be confronted directly and explicitly (Locke, Spriduso and Silverman 1987). The next section addresses these points in some detail.

#### Point of View Advocated

It is impossible for research to be "unbiased" and "objective" in the sense that the researcher's personal interests and values bear on the way the research problem is viewed and influence data collection and interpretation. They also provide the motivation for studying a particular problem (Bateson 1979; Glazer 1972). It has thus been suggested that such researcher bias should be recognized and stated whenever it applies (Myrdal 1969).

The rationale behind studying compulsive consumer

behavior and the specific choice of compulsive TV viewing have already been described in previous sections of this chapter and are not repeated here. On a personal level, it should be added, this researcher brings to the study a personal interest and curiosity for the subject and some familiarity with TV viewing (1-2 hours of average daily viewing of primarily news programs; subscription to TV Guide, and cable TV, ownership of more than one TV sets and VCRs). This familiarity though was not revealed during the depth interviews conducted with television viewers for the present study. In fact, knowledge of shows, characters or TV schedules was downplayed and respondents were encouraged to "educate" the interviewer on those aspects of viewing. In order to minimize any effort on the part of participants to "secondguess" the intentions/interests of the interviewer, the former were also assured at the beginning of each interview that the interviewer had no professional affiliation of any kind with the TV industry.

The personal style and background of the researcher should also be expected to have an impact on the structure of the interviews. Such characteristics as overall presence, speech patterns, and gestures can influence the whole outcome of the interview in terms of both the extent and the quality of personal information which is volunteered by the interviewees. These matters are discussed in more detail in chapter III of the dissertation.

The findings of this dissertation, as already noted, are intended for use by both marketers and non-marketers alike. Although the scope of this study is limited to one form of consumer compulsive behavior -- compulsive TV viewing, most of the issues raised have both marketing as well as general (i.e., social, psychological and policy) implications. For example, a finding on how do compulsive TV viewers compare their TV habit to reading a book can be used by marketers of TV programming or books as well as educators and public officials with an interest in promoting literacy efforts.

Furthermore, the methodology used in this study allows for in-depth probing and analysis of peoples' feelings and motivations going beyond superficial, "socially desirable" answers. It is likely that, by using it, even a researcher with a definite pro-marketing bias, will be exposed to comments, opinions and descriptions that s/he might not want to hear.

Finally, unlike other previous investigations of consumer compulsive behavior (O'Guinn and Faber 1989) or TV viewing (Cummings 1979; Mander 1978; Winn 1977), the present study tries to avoid taking a polemical stance from the beginning against the compulsive viewer or the compulsive behavior itself. This, is particularly important during the data collection stage (e.g., during the conduct of the one-on-one interviews); any such attitude on the part of the

researcher might be counterproductive hindering his/her efforts to get to know participants and their experiences in depth.

In brief, this dissertation examines a consumer/marketing-related topic but without having a pro-marketing (or, for that matter, an anti-marketing) agenda. Selection of research questions, design of methodology, interpretation and analysis of data is made with an effort to concentrate on the phenomena in question without taking into account the possible positive or negative consequences the findings of this study might have to marketers of TV fare or other interested parties.

#### Definition of Terms

Studying consumer compulsions in general can be a vast undertaking. First, this researcher has to decide how inclusive should the conceptualization of consumer compulsions be. The only available conceptualization in the marketing literature (O'Guinn and Faber) defined compulsive consumption broadly enough to encompass the consumption of time, feelings, and experiences, in addition to traditional marketplace-oriented consumption (1989, p. 148). It used two main criteria to designate such consumption as compulsive, namely, that the behavior should be repetitive and problematic for the individual.

As broad as this definition might be, though, it still

leaves out a whole class of compulsions associated with pre- or post-consumption consumer processes. For instance, Schiffman and Kanuk (1987) defined consumer behavior as "behavior that consumers display in searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products, services, and ideas which they expect will satisfy their needs" (p. 6). In this sense, a thorough definition of compulsive consumer behavior should also include compulsive search for, compulsive evaluation and disposing of products, services, and ideas. Manifestations of such consumer compulsions are rather common, e.g., frantic, endless shopping around, which rarely consummates in a purchase or unstoppable collecting or dispossessing (throwing away) of products.

With regard to defining what constitutes compulsive behavior, care should be taken to (a) incorporate in its definition all relevant dimensions of the phenomenon and (b) distinguish compulsive behavior from other related consumer behaviors. Since compulsive TV viewing is a novel concept, not defined previously in the marketing literature, a definition is presented and discussed in some detail, next.

The concept of compulsive TV consumption/viewing is defined in this study to include all aspects of consumer behavior as defined by Schiffman and Kanuk (1987), above. According to commonly used definitions of the concept of

compulsion in the psychological literature, in order to qualify as compulsive, TV viewing would have to be dependency-induced and take place outside the consumer's control and volition, be repetitive and stereotypical in nature. Compulsive TV viewing constitutes a single-minded commitment of the viewer to TV-related activities, employed as an end-in-itself to alleviate stress (tension/anxiety) aroused by uncontrollable, persistent and disturbing preoccupation with threatening or demanding images and thoughts (Peele 1985; Saltzman and Thaler 1981; Zinberg 1978).

In contrast, rituals have been defined as "expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behavior is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity" (Rook 1985, p. 252).

Thus, rituals and compulsions are both stereotypical in nature and are repeated over time but the former are more formalized, carefully ordered activities which by themselves and in the order that they appear have specific meanings. On the other hand, compulsions are uncontrollable and dependency-created. Their effects are usually more pronounced than those of consumer rituals, yet, not always harmful. Thus, as the findings of this study indicate, compulsive TV viewing may benefit some individuals, at least

in the short run, to the degree that they use their habit to overcome severe stress and channel their emotions in a relatively harmless way e.g., against a "hated" TV character. Conversely, long-term compulsive TV viewing produces higher levels of stress by itself and ultimately more harmful consequences.

On the other hand, impulsive consumer behavior has been defined to include the following five distinguishing elements: 1) a sudden and spontaneous desire to act; 2) a state of psychological disequilibrium; 3) the onset of psychological conflict and struggle; 4) a reduction in cognitive evaluation, and 5) lack of regard for the consequences of impulse buying (Rook and Hoch 1987).

O'Guinn and Faber (1989) pointed out that impulse buying differs from compulsive buying in three ways: (a) impulse buying describes an acute, as opposed to the chronic, loss of control involved in compulsive buying; (b) the consequences of impulse buying are much less severe than those of compulsive buying, and (c) impulse buying is product-specific whereas the focus of compulsive buying is on the act of buying, not a particular product.

The definition of compulsive TV viewing adopted in this study points to some additional differences between impulse and compulsive behavior. The latter, like rituals, but unlike impulsive buying, is more stereotypical in nature often involving elaborate habits. Compulsive viewers are

highly committed to their habit and, thus, more inflexible and predictable. Furthermore, compulsive consumer behavior is dependency-induced, which is not confined to loss of control, but includes "withdrawal" symptoms and an ever increasing appetite for the activity. Table I-1 provides a comparison of the basic elements of these three distinct types of consumer behavior in a summary form.

A final note is due here regarding the terminology used in this dissertation. Although compulsive TV viewing is the term used to characterize the behaviors described above, some of the existing marketing literature (e.g., Holbrook 1977; Lehmann 1977) as well as various articles published in trade or popular magazines refer to similar behaviors with names like fanatic, deeply involving, excessive, addictive TV viewing or "couch potatoism."

Even more importantly, given the phenomenological point of view adopted in this study, most compulsive TV viewers interviewed about their viewing labelled voluntarily their behavior as an "addiction" and used various words and phrases usually reserved for addictive behaviors like "hooked on," "fix," "overdose," etc. Therefore, for the remaining of this study, the terms compulsive TV viewing and addictive TV viewing are used interchangeably.

TABLE I-1

A COMPARISON OF THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF  
COMPULSIVE, IMPULSIVE AND RITUALISTIC BEHAVIOR

Type of Behavior	Basic Elements
Compulsive	Dependency-induced activity; Uncontrollable; Stereotypical; Single-minded commitment; End-in-itself; Persistent over time
Impulsive (Rook and Hoch 1987)	Spontaneous desire to act; Psychological disequilibrium; Psychological conflict; Reduction of cognitive evaluation; Lack of regard for outcomes
Ritualistic (Rook 1985)	Expressive, symbolic activity; Fixed/episodic sequence of behavior; Repeated over time; Dramatically scripted/acted out; Performed with formality, seriousness and inner intensity

### Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter II reviews the psychological literature on obsessions/compulsions as well as selected related communication studies and summarizes the marketing literature on compulsive/fanatic consumption and the related concepts of consumer involvement, habitual buying, brand loyalty, and impulse buying.

Chapter III discusses in detail the methodology used in this study including selection of participants, development of discussion guide, interview structure and material analysis.

Chapter IV presents and discusses the findings of the study; and finally, Chapter V summarizes the results, draws conclusions and offers marketing implications, and outlines areas for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of (a) the relevant psychological literature on obsessions and compulsions, (b) the relevant communication literature on TV viewing, (c) the few studies which have recently appeared in the marketing literature on compulsive/fanatic buying, and (d) selected marketing topics related to consumer compulsive behavior (i.e., impulsive and habitual buying, brand loyalty, and involvement). In addition, the main points along with the strengths and weaknesses of past studies are summarized to provide a basis for comparison with the findings of the current research.

#### Psychological Literature on Obsessions/Compulsions

Although most psychologists recognize how closely related obsessions and compulsions are and sometimes use the two terms interchangeably, the fact that obsessions take place in the mind of a person while compulsions can be directly observed has given rise to two different research traditions.

#### Obsessions

Obsessions have been given substantial attention by psychoanalysts and other psychologists in both their forms

as intrusive visual images and thoughts. Horowitz (1978), for example, defined the latter as "any thought...which (is) described by the subject as intrusive, as hard to push out of mind, or as distinctly unpleasant." A visual image, was defined as "a description implying a visual imagery experience such as "I saw" or "in my mind's eye," but not including "seeing-type" words used in a nonvisual sense such as "now I see what you mean" (p. 202). Such images can be classified, for example, according to their vividness, by context, their interaction with perceptions, and content (ibid., p. 7).

Intrusive thoughts and images tend to appear increasingly as a person loses the subjective sense of volitional control over mental processes. Clinicians, reporting on evidence collected in most cases from neurotic clients, describe some of these obsessional images as symbolized feelings of approaching danger, or other types of fear. These fears are quite common in people who are experiencing identity crises, changes or transformations.

#### When Do They Occur?

There are two schools of thought as to when obsessions -- particularly in the form of images -- occur in individuals. Supporters of the Release Theory think obsessions occur when the nervous system is in a state of relative arousal and there is not enough outside stimuli to

keep the perceptual, image-forming organs busy (West 1975). On the other hand, those -- primarily neurobiologists -- subscribing to the Purposive Theory, argue that such internally oriented thoughts serve, at times of perceptual reduction, to maintain arousal at desirable levels. In other words, whereas the former position views obsessive images and thoughts as the result of increased arousal, the latter sees them as the cause of it (Horowitz 1978, p. 138).

#### Origins of Obsessions

Three major points of view have emerged in the literature as to why do intrusive, unwanted images occur. First, obsessions have been viewed as sequels to psychic traumas; second, they have been seen as eruptive expressions of usually repressed ideas and feelings and, third, they have been thought of as means for transforming feeling states. These three different perspectives, developed at different times historically, do not seem to be mutually exclusive. Actually, the first and third explanations may be included as parts of the more general second point of view (Horowitz *ibid.*, pp. 142-7).

The first explanation revolves around what Freud called "repetition compulsion." A person, either for lack of preparation or capacity to cope with a very traumatic experience, puts it temporarily out of awareness to protect himself/herself. Later on, "repetition compulsion" asserts

itself in the sense that the individual relives over and over his/her past traumatic experience until his/her helplessness is eliminated i.e., the trauma is worked-off (Furst 1967; Arlow 1969).

On the other hand, the third point of view discussed above is particularly useful in explaining situations when a person may use, unconsciously, an obsessive image to raise his/her level of anxiety. Thus, it helps the individual to disguise/transform especially threatening feelings (Klein 1967).

Finally, the broader second perspective suggests that obsessions, like previously repressed thoughts, are suddenly released due to some disruption of the dynamic equilibrium that had kept them out of consciousness. Such a disruption can take place as a result of either increased motivation for expression of the idea/feeling or a decrease of the person's capacity to inhibit this expression (Kubie 1967; Knapp 1969).

Besides their expressive value outlined by these three perspectives, obsessions seem to have motivational and gratifying value as well (Tomkins 1962). For instance, unpleasant images can motivate one to avoid a particular situation, while pleasant, but unreal, images or thoughts can potentially increase anxiety to the point of being non-gratifying.

### Relationship Between Thoughts and Images

Freud, in his writings, noted the frequent use of visual imagery in primary process i.e., more primitive and direct thinking (1952), and, in this tradition, psychoanalysts today believe that obsessive thoughts are more likely to be first experienced as visual images (Horowitz 1978, p. 121). They assume that individuals might have much more difficulty dealing with verbal representations of certain unwanted thoughts compared to similar imaginal thinking. This, may be so, first, because emotional responses to images are often greater than those to lexical representations and, second, because censorship, in some individuals, is more difficult when thinking takes place in imaginal form.

### Obsessions and Defensive Strategies

Obsessive thinking, in both its origins and consequences, is closely linked to various defensive or coping mechanisms. For example, individuals first attempt to regulate their conscious thoughts i.e., keep obsessive material from entering their consciousness through "repression". If this fails, the individual's inhibitory system may resort next to "denial" i.e., making the objectionable content of obsessive thoughts appear as foreign, coming from outside the person.

"Suppression" occurs when obsessive thoughts -- as

noted earlier -- are only allowed to emerge as imagery but not as lexical representations. Alternatively, when there is a case of conflicting motives, "splitting" might permit some thought contents to be represented visually and others verbally.

If the obsessive image expresses dangerous impulsive motives, ideas and feelings are disguised by "displacement" or "symbolization". Clinical evidence also suggests that a lot of obsessive neurotics report occurrences of frightening images not accompanied by any corresponding emotion, a coping strategy described as "intellectualization" (Horowitz 1978).

"Reversal" occurs when a particular obsessive thought is amplified to arouse other non-threatening feelings (e.g., anger) instead of the original fear. Finally, "regression" can be used as a defensive strategy, for example, in the case of blurring the lines between fantasy and perception when the individual's objective is to make the former look more real.

### Etiology of Obsessions

A number of different viewpoints have been historically developed to provide explanations for the genesis of obsessions.

Adams (1973) provided a review of these various schools of thought which cover the whole gamut from purely biological to purely social explanations. Authors repre-

senting the various perspectives have variably attributed obsessions to genic programming (Woodruff and Pitts), early childhood sexual trauma (early Freud), repression of current aggressive instincts (late Freud), developmental disturbances and conflicts (Anna Freud), mother-child battle for autonomy and authority (Rado), or absence of parental empathy (Salzman 1978, pp. 191-207).

Henry Laughlin (1967) recognized all the above positions in an attempt to prepare a comprehensive list of predisposing factors contributing to obsessional neuroses. His eclectic approach postulated the following as partial, at least, determinants of obsessions: parental insecurity and rejection of the child, parental overambitiousness and excessive demands for child responsibility and maturity, presence of obsessive traits in parents, parental, social, or religious condemnation of negative feelings and curbs on spontaneity, familial, social, and cultural encouragement of obsessive traits, overdeveloped conscience, unresolved defiance/submission conflict, and primordial discharge of any previously blocked rage (ibid., pp. 342-3).

Obsessions seem to develop largely in response to specific familial communication patterns. Reusch, arguing this point, noted that, during early childhood, obsessive children are not granted the opportunity to develop analogic understanding or learn to react in nonverbal terms. Instead, they are forced to make logical statements that imply

memorizing external criteria, forsaking experimentation, avoiding failure at any cost, and doing things in only one -- the correct way. According to Reusch, it is precisely these learning experiences that make obsessive individuals later on prone to flooding others with messages and attempts to influence or coerce them into doing things against their will or general interest (cited in Adams, p. 37).

### Compulsions

The study of compulsions has gained popularity recently as psychologists have sought to examine excessive behaviors like drug-taking, over-eating, smoking, gambling, alcohol-drinking, etc. At the same time, beginning with works appearing in "popular" psychology publications, the scope of compulsions has been widened to include excessive running, TV viewing, working, love-making, etc. Such a broader application of the term to encompass non-pharmacological compulsive activities (frequently labeled addictions) may, in fact, help to better understand the concept by underscoring its social, cultural, and developmental determinants. Existing evidence on the effect of sociocultural, situational, individual and developmental factors on compulsive behavior is summarized below.

### Sociocultural Factors Causing Compulsive Behavior

Social-class differences in both attitudes toward and

actual compulsive behavior have consistently appeared in studies of drug or alcohol abuse and obesity. Thus, despite a general favorable attitude among lower SES subjects toward the idea of abstinence, e.g., in the case of alcohol, substantially greater actual addictive involvement was observed among them. Becker (1974) attributed this to a lesser degree of commitment to health as a value on the part of lower socioeconomic strata, while other investigators dismiss these differences as simply the result of poverty and repression (e.g., Pelton 1981).

Yates et al. (1983) discovered high concentration of anorexics and compulsive runners among middle-class female and male populations respectively, which prompted Peele to state that "(t)he broadening of an awareness of the forms of addiction may indicate that higher-SES addictions simply occur in different guises" (1985, p. 105).

Even stronger than the impact of socioeconomic background, is peer and parental influence on initiation and actual patterns of compulsive behavior (Harford and Gaines 1982; Jessor and Jessor 1977; Williams 1971). Parental influence may be directly exerted via modeling or indirectly through the value system conveyed to the child. On the other hand, peer group pressure affects the shaping of addictive behaviors in addition to providing a support system within which compulsive individuals get the opportunity to share their experiences, thoughts, etc., thus, reinforcing their

habits (Kandel 1978).

Finally, a number of studies have linked pervasiveness of compulsive phenomena and the broader cultural outlook adopted by a society. Bales's (1946) analysis, for example, pointed to three general cultural factors determining alcoholic addiction: (a) the degree to which a culture operates to bring about acute needs for adjustment, or inner tensions in its members; (b) whether cultural attitudes toward addictive involvement suggest such experiences as a means of relieving inner tensions, and (c) the degree to which a culture offers suitable substitute means of satisfaction (p. 482). Similarly, Peele (1985) stated that, in general, addiction is more likely in cultures that view a substance as an effective mood modifier and, at the same time, as dangerous and difficult to control (p. 106).

#### Situational Factors Causing Compulsive Behavior

Despite the lack of a systematic approach in identifying and describing the effects situational factors have on excessive behaviors, several such variables have been recognized in the literature as potential determinants of compulsions.

Stress as well as an individual's negative reaction to it have been found in a number of studies to cause and maintain compulsive behavior (Marlatt 1982; Leventhal and

Cleary 1980). Also, means of psychological coping with stressful situations have been shown to affect addictive involvement. For instance, lack of intimacy in one's relations with family or significant others as well as absence of support systems may lead to compulsion (Cahalan and Room 1974; Schur 1962). Other situational factors potentially affecting addictive behaviors include general lack of opportunity for rewarding, productive activities in one's surroundings (Chein 1969) and availability of addictive substances or activities (Robins et al. 1980).

Since rituals are an important part of compulsive behaviors, ritualistic factors such as atmospherics, time, etc. should affect both origination and maintainance of compulsions. Eliminating essential rituals may even cause an addiction to lose its appeal. As expected, when nicotine was administered directly, it did not have nearly the impact that inhaled nicotine does for habitual smokers (Jarvik 1973).

#### Individual Factors Causing Compulsive Behavior

Personality may predispose people toward particular compulsive behaviors and also affect how deeply they become involved at all. Although, recently, both the general psychological and addictive literatures have seen a shift away from personality explanations of behavior (Peele 1985; Mischel 1984), it has been observed that certain types of

individuals consistently create addictions out of all their involvements (Peele 1982b).

In an attempt to relate personality and type of addiction, Kern (1984) found that individuals seeking stimulation experiences tended to use stimulant drugs whereas those with a need for suppression of incoming stimuli showed a preference for depressant drugs. Yet, a lot more empirical studies are needed to establish the hypothesized association and explain when, how, and why individuals acquire certain compulsive behaviors.

A large number of studies has tried to discern personality differences between addicted and non-addicted individuals involved in certain behaviors. For example, Robbins and Joseph (1982) found non-addicted runners using running as an escape as opposed to addicted runners who used it as an essential means of coping with stress. It seems that excessive engagement with or consumption of an experience stems from the addict's lack of self-restraint and ability to delay gratification. Such self-control abilities combined with a person's values toward moderation, postponing gratification, and avoidance of excess influence the probability that s/he will become addicted. Jessor (1979) concluded that drug use is caused by a lack of achievement and other positive social values. Actually, drug addicts -- through their involvement with addictive experiences -- try to create an alternative value system.

This system provides them with "a sense of a personal identity, ...a feeling of belonging to an in-group, ...and a means of filling the void in an otherwise empty life" (Chein et al. 1964).

On the other hand, adolescents engaging in excessive behaviors have been found to do so in an attempt to act out their anti-social feelings and express their desire for independence, autonomy or conformity (Jessor and Jessor 1977; Jessor et al. 1980). Heavy users of recreational drugs have also been shown to exhibit poorer psychological adjustment (Kilpatrick et al. 1976) along with disaffection and alienation from social institutions (Kandel 1984), deviance-proneness, and rebelliousness (Cahalan and Room 1974; Robins et al. 1980).

Finally, McClelland et al. (1972) identified heavy drinkers as having strong desires for dominance and needs for personalized power. Compulsive gamblers and other addicts have also shown pathological aggression (Roston 1961; MacAndrew 1981).

In general, addicts are known to have "difficulty in tolerating ambiguity and ambivalence" (Zinberg et al. 1978, p. 19). By focusing attention on a drug and its effects, they try to eliminate the anxiety created by their involvement in uncertain and challenging activities as well as their evaluation by dominant cultural standards (Peele 1985, p. 120). Moreover, a person's failures (partly the result of

his/her addiction) are producing "fear of failure", make him/her overly concerned with possible negative outcomes in addition to being used as excuses for both his/her continued failure and excessive behavior (Jones and Berglas 1978). Drug addiction and involvements like binge shopping, compulsive gambling, destructive love relationships, etc. are being suggested as special coping methods involving "magical solutions" (Peele 1982a). Addicted individuals, besides lacking a sense of self, are more likely to experience feelings of helplessness (Peele and Brodsky 1975) and external locus of control (Rohsenow 1983).

#### Developmental Factors Causing Compulsive Behavior

Though some research on compulsive behaviors has dealt with developmental factors in the context of examining its social or person-related determinants, very few studies have been explicitly designed to study such influences.

In general, people's reactions to, need for, and style of using a drug change as they progress through their life cycle i.e., "mature out". Cahalan and Room (1974) described alcohol abuse as another rite of passage within certain groups of working-class males in their early twenties. As previously mentioned, Jessor and associates (1975; 1977; 1980) found several psychosocial correlates of adolescent drug and alcohol abuse in their developmental longitudinal studies.

Remission from and treatment of addictions have also been linked to developmental processes. Research with ex-addicts, for instance, has shown natural remission to work in two distinct ways: either as a sudden realignment of people's values and self-image that propels them to change, or as a gradual process whereby people develop the emotional strength and environmental supports to find a new lifestyle.

A number of researchers (Waldorf 1983; Orford and Edwards 1977) traced treatment of addicted individuals back to specific developments in their lives like improvement of intimate relationships, changes in social networks, increased work opportunities, and more general factors such as maturation and realization of their present as well as ideal self.

#### Assessment of Psychological Literature

The main points of the preceding review of the psychological literature on obsessions/compulsions may be summarized as follows.

First, to a large degree, past psychological investigations have treated obsessions and compulsions separately despite claiming that the two phenomena are closely linked together. The exact nature of their relationship has yet to be established. Compulsive involvements have recently gained more popularity as research topics in conjunction with

societal concerns over various excessive/addictive behaviors. Traditional definitions of such behaviors have now been expanded to include, in addition to drug and alcohol abuse, obesity, etc., newer forms like excessive running, sexuality and binge shopping. Yet, thus far, very little research has been conducted in areas of non-pharmacological compulsions.

Second, although there is general agreement among researchers as to what constitutes an obsession or compulsion, empirical studies have been plagued by serious methodological problems. Obsessive and compulsive disorders have been measured on the basis of self-reports obtained from individuals experiencing a number of psychological and physiological disturbances. Such measures, though, seem to have low validity and reliability even when used to measure severe conditions.

On the other hand, most of past research has been done with clinical populations in the absence of control groups. As a result, the existing literature on obsessions and compulsions has suffered from a number of biases. Among these are, the overwhelming attention paid to specific severe, but rare, forms of the phenomena (e.g., cleanliness and orderliness), the popularity of the "disease state" approach, and a preoccupation with studying treatment methods at the expense of analyzing questions of when, how, and why do these experiences occur.

Third, both obsessions and compulsions are believed to serve multiple functions including mood modification, expressive, gratification, and other needs. Although some material on this is available with regard to compulsions, a lot more research is needed on the motivational aspects of both of these phenomena. Particularly important, in this regard, may be the study of the physiological component of obsessive and compulsive involvements. Specifically, future research should be designed to investigate the relationship between obsessions/compulsions and arousal and whether the latter is the cause or effect of such phenomena.

Fourth, the preceding literature review reveals little agreement among researchers on what causes obsessions and compulsions. As in other areas of psychological inquiry, there are very few eclectic studies integrating more than one perspective to analyze the etiology of the phenomena at hand. Instead, combining findings from several isolated research efforts, one may conclude that a variety of genetic, social, developmental, and personality factors influence obsessive and compulsive involvements. Further research is needed to separate influences on specific aspects of obsessions/compulsions i.e., their genesis, maintainance, and modification. By the same token, certain types of variables, including interactions of situational and personality variables, may be found to determine which type of obsession or compulsion an individual will get

involved with.

Finally, existing research shows individuals to suffer various consequences as a result of their obsessive/compulsive involvements and use a number of different responses to cope with them. Although some studies have developed lists of defensive strategies that people may use to cope with their obsessions as well as preliminary typologies of compulsive effects (e.g., biological, psychosocial, etc.), no general, systematic obsessive/compulsive outcome research has been undertaken to this point. Among others, future studies should address the questions of (a) how actual as well as anticipated outcomes affect maintenance or modification of obsessive and compulsive involvement, and (b) what types of outcomes may be expected to occur in relation to specific forms of obsessions/compulsions.

#### Review of Communication Literature on TV Viewing

Television viewing per se has been extensively discussed in the communication literature. Communication researchers have devoted most of their attention to the investigation of the uses and consequences of the medium as they relate to the psychological adjustment and social behavior of children and adolescents (e.g., Potter 1987; Desmond et al 1985; Gerbner 1981). This section briefly reviews only those communication studies dealing with issues

and research questions relevant to the subject matter of this dissertation.

A number of studies have investigated the relationship between TV viewing and self-concept/self-esteem (Stroman 1986; Korzenny and Neuendorf 1980; Gutman 1973). Finn and Gorr (1983) explored the relationships between various measures of self-esteem, shyness, loneliness, and social support and motivations for TV viewing. They found that self-esteem and social support correlated positively with the "mood-management" TV viewing motive, while shyness and loneliness correlated positively with the "social-compensation" viewing motive.

In general, the study of TV viewing motivations has been solely empirical, lacking a coherent theoretical framework. Rubin (1983) found moderately strong correlations among four widely mentioned TV viewing motives: companionship, escape, habit and pass time. On the other hand, Zillman (1982; 1985; 1988) provided empirical support for the existence of a number of physiological TV viewing motives: relaxation, entertainment and arousal.

Communication researchers have also studied different "styles" of television viewing including "ritualized," "instrumental," "selective" and "cognitive processing" TV viewing (Signorielli 1986; Rubin 1984; Collins 1981). Gantz and Eastman (1983) found that "heavier" TV viewers were more likely to use TV Guide and newspaper supplements. Heeter

(1985) reported that "habitual" viewers changed channels rather infrequently during TV watching.

Also, according to Rubin (1984), viewers engaged in "instrumental" TV viewing watched TV for informational purposes and were highly selective in terms of programming (news, documentaries or talk shows). Those engaging in "ritualistic" TV watching, on the other hand, did so out of habit or to "kill time" and were nonselective with regard to shows watched. Perse (1990) found that instrumental use of TV was characterized by higher levels of activity before exposure and involvement during exposure whereas ritualistic TV use was linked to higher selectivity before and during exposure but less involvement during exposure.

Some recent studies in the communication literature have examined the new TV environment resulting from the proliferation of remote control devices, cable TV, VCRs, etc. (Kim, Baran, and Massey 1988; Mankiewicz and Swerdlow 1978). Thus, cable subscribers were reported as watching more channels than nonsubscribers (Ainslie 1988), were more likely to use program guides (Greenberg et al 1988) and sample channels during their search for programs to watch (Heeter and Greenberg 1988). At the same time, remote control devices were likely to result in viewer watching more channels (Ainslie 1988) and more frequent channel switching during shows (Heeter and Baldwin 1988).

Until recently, communication research had largely

ignored the cognitive-affective and experiential dimensions of TV viewing (Lindlof 1982). Though, recent studies in TV show preference and viewing, suggesting that program choice is a complex process subject to, among others, spousal and group influences, have prompted researchers to pay more attention to such issues. In particular, Wand (1968) found some evidence of viewer "coercion" i.e., viewers watching a program they did not want to because another family/group member dominated the TV set. Webster and Wakshlag (1982) concluded that, although viewing in the company of others generally diminished program type loyalty, viewing with a constant group was related to higher program type loyalty than viewing with a variable group (p. 454).

Based on a cognitive-affective theory of fantasy activity, Lindlof (1982) proposed a construct of mental process during TV viewing involvement and suggested that, under certain conditions (e.g., absence of information analysis), a TV viewer "may operate in a largely fantasy mode of involvement" (p. 88). Yet, other researchers e.g., Klinger do not recognize TV viewing as a fantasy activity to the degree that "the content of (television shows) is fixed independently of the viewer's state, (and) there is no possibility that the content can drift or cycle in accordance with the subject's inner processes..." (1971, p. 311).

Chikszentmihalyi and Kubey (1981) studied one-hundred-four adult workers' affective and cognitive responses to TV

as the latter were reported at random times over the course of a normal week. TV viewing was found to be a relatively unchallenging activity requiring little cognitive investment tied to feelings of relaxation, passivity, and drowsiness. In a later study, the authors, using a similar methodology, found that the "heaviest" TV users were more irritable, tense, and sad and felt they had little control over their lives. The study also reported that the longer that this group watched TV, the more passive and less discriminating they became. They felt worse as they watched but, even more so, after they stopped watching. The reason which prompted these viewers to turn to TV, according to the authors, was to seek consolation for feeling uncomfortable during idle time (cited in Coleman 1990, p. 8).

Finally, one early attempt to study television addiction (Smith 1983) involved the development of a self-rating scale of items selected from a content analysis of descriptions of addicts in the popular literature. The measure, administered by mail to a random sample of respondents in Springfield, Massachusetts, failed to produce any TV addicts. The study, nevertheless, pointed out that although 65% of all respondents agreed that TV is addictive, the vast majority of them felt that TV addictive behavior was completely uncharacteristic of them.

In other, more recent research, a small sample of self-identified TV addicts (university students) reported

watching 21 hours of TV per week -- twice as much as their noncompulsive counterparts in the sample. Yet, the study found no difference between compulsive TV viewers and others in terms of ability to self-generate pleasant, vivid fantasies. In addition, these compulsive TV viewers were not found to be more likely to have an "addictive" personality inasmuch as "they do not eat more junk food, or smoke or drink more alcohol than other groups" (Coleman 1990, p. 8). Such TV addicts were more likely to watch TV when feeling lonely, sad, anxious or angry and used TV to distract themselves from things that bothered them (ibid.).

#### Assessment of Related Communication Literature

Overall, with the exception of a few recent attempts, communication researchers have neglected the study of compulsive TV viewing. Several communication research "traditions," which may be responsible for this omission, are summarized below.

First, communication researchers have thus far relied heavily on quantitative measures of TV viewing. As a result, they tend to classify TV viewers on the basis of amount of TV watched, most often as "light," "moderate," or "heavy." Although the latter category may include a large number of compulsive TV viewers, confusing the two categories is misleading; heavy TV viewing may result, at least temporarily, from the "lack of behavioral options in the

environment and (is) not necessarily a good indicator of television addiction" (Smith 1983, p. 6). TV viewers, in order to qualify as compulsive ones, should experience dependency symptoms (e.g., lack of control, craving, etc.), use TV watching as an end-in-itself and show evidence of single-minded commitment to the medium. It is "how" and "why" viewers watch TV, as opposed to "how much" TV they watch, that makes them compulsive. In fact, future studies in the area should investigate the exact nature of the relationship, if any, between compulsive TV viewing and amount of TV watched.

Second, past communication research has failed to develop a widely accepted definition of addictive or compulsive TV viewing. The few studies dealing with TV addicts have used self-identification as a way of selecting such viewers. Yet, as the findings of the Smith (1983) study cited above showed, people who identify themselves as addicted to TV may not pass the standard diagnostic criteria employed by psychologists to indicate compulsive behavior.

Third, as noted already in the preceding review, there have been few communication studies examining TV viewing as a cognitive-affective process within specific contexts i.e., focusing on the experiential aspects of the TV viewing phenomenon. This has led to significant gaps in understanding what is meant by the term "TV watching" (Salomon and Cohen 1978, p. 266).

Finally, many communication studies have discussed various possible, primarily adverse, effects of TV watching without any explicit effort to attribute such effects to specific styles of or motivations for TV viewing. Outcomes which would normally be expected in the case of compulsive TV viewing have been casually treated as TV viewing consequences in general, thus, further confusing the issue and downplaying the need for a systematic investigation of the most extreme, even pathological, forms of the TV viewing phenomenon.

On the other hand, the existing communication literature on TV viewing can substantially benefit future research in compulsive TV viewing. For instance, the findings of past communication studies in the area of motivations for TV viewing may be combined with existing psychological evidence on the origins of compulsive behavior. By the same token, findings in the communication literature concerning the emergence of a new TV watching environment defined by the use of recent technological innovations may be incorporated in the study of compulsive TV rituals.

#### Review of Existing Marketing Literature

With the exception of some recent studies conducted on compulsive buying, fanatic weightlifting and jazz fanaticism (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Faber, O'Guinn and Krych 1987; Lehmann 1987; Holbrook 1987), very little research has been

published addressing consumer obsessions and/or compulsions.

On the other hand, a large number of consumer studies have dealt with topics closely related to the phenomena studied here like consumer impulsive, habitual and ritualistic behavior, product involvement and brand loyalty. To the extent that this literature can provide insights into the nature and workings of consumer compulsive behavior, its main points are summarized below, following a review of the existing marketing research on compulsive consumer phenomena.

#### Fanatic and Compulsive Consumption

Pollak's seminal article on "Symptomatic Factors in Consumer Behavior" (1960), was probably the first article in the marketing literature dealing with phenomena associated with consumer non-rationality and "pathological" behavior.

Pollak, in this early article, made the point that many buying decisions are made in order to destroy, gratify hostility and aggression. They reflect feelings of generalized hopelessness and defeatism. He labelled these consumer decisions symptomatic "because they do not facilitate living but make it more burdensome for the purchaser and his associates" (p. 282). The article cited various examples of such consumer behavior or "immobilization" i.e., non-decision resulting from conflicting symptomatic and rational goals, and discussed related marketing implications.

Although Pollak never applied the terms obsessive or compulsive to the class of consumer actions he described, his discussion of the nature of symptomatic consumer behavior and its motivation share some similarities with the nature and etiology of compulsive behavior presented in this paper.

Two recent articles introduced the concept of "compulsive consumption" per se to the marketing literature (Faber, O'Guinn and Krych 1987; O'Guinn and Faber 1989). In their 1987 paper, the authors conceptualized compulsive consumption as "a type of consumer behavior which is inappropriate, typically excessive, and clearly disruptive to the lives of individuals who appear impulsively driven to consume" (p. 132).

On the basis of observations of self-help group discussions and a small pilot survey, they reported that compulsive consumption often affected people who have low self-esteem and spend much of their lives trying to please others, was suggestive of psychological dependency and was experienced as a state of being out-of-control. Moreover, according to the authors, it appeared that compulsive buying was a reaction to stress and unpleasant situations, although, in some instances, compulsive buying took place when consumers were elated. Finally, the paper identified as important characteristics of compulsive buying "(its) negative consequences and the desire and difficulty of trying to quit" (p. 133).

In their second paper on the subject, O'Guinn and Faber (1989) used five qualitative interviews and a survey of 386 self-identified problem buyers "to provide a phenomenological description" of compulsive buying. They concluded that people who bought compulsively were more likely to demonstrate psychological compulsivity, have lower self-esteem, and were more prone to fantasy. Their primary motivation was the psychological benefits they derived from buying per se (attention the compulsive buyer received, emotional lift, stimulation from retail environment, desire to please) rather than the acquisition/possession of an object itself. The authors also identified various consequences of compulsive buying including extreme levels of debt, anxiety and frustration, subjective loss of control, and domestic dissension. The paper concluded with a suggestion for future research: to develop a diagnostic instrument able to identify compulsive buyers, even those unwilling and unable to admit they have a problem (p. 156).

A small number of papers, which also appeared in the marketing literature recently, described specific instances of "fanatic" consumer behavior (Lehmann 1987; Holbrook 1987; Gridley 1987). Although, definitions of fanatic weightlifting or jazz fanaticism varied by author, the general characteristics ascribed to these behaviors fell fairly close to the notion of compulsive behavior.

Besides their usefulness in broadening the scope of

consumer compulsive behavior, these articles were full of insights, albeit, most of them cited without much empirical support and left unorganized. Among such important insights was Lehmann's analogy of a health club to a religious congregation and the development of the following typology of their members: (a) social believer (occasional attender, observer of surroundings, concerned about attire); (b) serious proponent (regular attender, functional dresser, likes to concentrate but is willing to talk during workout), and (c) fanatic (completely "into it," assumes church or club is his, uses special clothing, ignores or belittles the "non-serious").

On the other hand, Holbrook related fanaticism to "deep involvement" and the idea of the consumption experience as an end-in-itself. He discussed the role that such experiences played in shaping one's own sense of identity and concluded that fanatic consumption may be more than aberrant behavior -- it is "a way of personalizing our spaces, of tangibly symbolizing the meanings in our lives, and of humanizing, dignifying, and even consecrating the houses or apartments where we live" (p. 148).

Finally, Gridley pointed out that jazz fans, even the most fanatical, did not comprise a homogeneous group with respect to their cognitive processes, nor did their levels of processing lie along a single continuum.

### Consumer Involvement

The concept of involvement has been used to distinguish between two types of consumer behavior. High involvement behavior refers to products and purchases which are very important to the consumer, involve high perceived risk and extensive problem-solving. In fact, high involvement products serve to reinforce consumer self-image and are defined on the basis of their perceived importance to it (Harrell 1986). Low involvement behavior, on the other hand, is associated with products or purchases that are relatively unimportant, mundane, involve little perceived risk and require limited information processing (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987; Engel and Blackwell 1986).

Researchers have identified three major categories of variables that determine level of consumer involvement: (a) personal characteristics like basic consumer needs, values, goals and personality traits; (b) characteristics of the involvement object like symbolic meaning or associated perceived risk, and (c) situational characteristics e.g., time pressure or intended use. Such situational factors may, occasionally, make consumers with low personal involvement in a particular purchase, temporarily, highly involved with it (Bloch and Richins 1983).

A number of consumer studies have concluded that information processing differs depending on whether a product/purchase is highly involving or otherwise. Thus,

consumer involvement with a purchase affects his/her motivation to engage in problem-solving (Bettman and Park 1980), leads to greater perception of attribute differences, greater commitment to brand choice (Howard and Sheth 1969) and more searching time for relevant information and the right decision (Clarke and Belk 1978). Highly involved consumers have also been found to use more brand attributes and consider fewer brands during decision-making (Rothschild and Houston 1977).

In the past, consumer researchers used a variety of diverse conceptual and operational definitions of the involvement concept, making direct comparison of existing findings difficult. It has been argued that further advancement in consumer involvement research hinges on the development of appropriate operationalization for the concept (Zaichkowsky 1985). This would require researchers to define exactly what aspect of consumer involvement they intend to measure as opposed to constructing comprehensive, multidimensional, but ultimately impractical, measures (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987, p. 258).

### Brand Loyalty

In general, existing empirical findings from studies on brand loyalty appear contradictory or inconclusive. According to Jacoby and Chestnut (1978), this should be attributed to lack of agreement among researchers as to whether the

concept should be defined as a cognitive or behavioral phenomenon.

Behavioral definitions of the concept have been based on the number and pattern of successive purchases of the same brand (Cunningham 1956; Tucker 1964; Keon and Bayer 1984). On the other hand, cognitive definitions have been based on consumer attitudes, specifically his/her commitment to a particular brand. Thus, behavioral measures are likely to overestimate brand loyalty by counting as such consumer actions better classified as habits (the result of low involvement decision-making).

Existing research on the topic of brand loyalty indicates that it is product specific. Studies using the repeat purchase definition of the concept, have failed to produce a distinct profile of the brand loyal consumer on the basis of demographic or psychological characteristics (Frank et al. 1969). Nevertheless, there is empirical evidence that brand loyalty is influenced by developmental factors. Apparently, a great deal of it develops during early family life and what is learned then withstands the lapse of time (Moschis et al. 1983; Guest 1964).

It is likely that consumer brand loyalty is affected by social factors as well. For example, Stafford (1966) found that brand loyalty of individual members of an informal group of homemakers was influenced by the brand loyalty of their group leader. Such a result, though, may also depend

on the nature of the product studied i.e., its visibility, complexity and perceived risk (Ford and Ellis 1980).

### Impulsive Buying

Impulse purchases have been defined as "buying action(s) undertaken without a problem having been previously recognized or a buying intention formed prior to entering the store" (Engel and Blackwell 1982, p. 552).

A recent article, summarizing past impulse buying research, noted that, despite the apparent proliferation of this type of buying, there have been few empirical investigations of its nature and determinants which have generally produced inconclusive findings (Cobb and Hoyer 1986). To some extent, the latter may be attributed to conceptual and operational problems caused by defining impulse buying as unplanned purchases thought out in the store. In fact, not all unplanned purchases constitute impulse buying, which only applies to rather whimsical decisions made on the spur of the moment. Such "pure" impulse purchases have been found to involve automatic behavior, little cognitive processing, as well as strong emotional content (Weinberg and Gottwald 1982).

Using a series of consumer depth interviews to study the subject, Rook and Hoch (1985) concluded that impulse buying was characterized by product emanations, spontaneous urges to consume, an inner dialogue (cost-benefit analysis,

defensive strategies), and impulse persistence and power. They also argued that, for brief periods of time, impulsive buying was very involving, requiring complete attention and increased cognitive activity as conflict arises inside the consumer's mind (p. 24).

Finally, using an 8-item Impulsivity Scale developed in the same study, Rook and Hoch found that impulsive shoppers were more likely to be young, female, and enjoy shopping but less likely to structure their shopping trips i.e., they were "recreational" shoppers. Gerbing et al. (1985) also constructed a scale measuring trait impulsivity but reported generally low correlations between their instrument and general psychological impulsivity measures.

It appears that further research on consumer impulse buying should concentrate on developing and testing the psychometric properties of impulsivity instruments designed specifically for use in a consumer behavior context. Moreover, the various stages involved in impulse decision-making should be analyzed along with their situational and personal influences.

### Habitual Buying

Consumer habits have been defined as repetitive behaviors, that persist through time, have positive feelings attached to them, and are difficult to change (Mowen 1987). Habits are acquired through learning processes i.e., as a

result of classical, operant conditioning or cognitive learning and depend heavily on the social milieu the consumer lives in.

Past consumer studies found that consumer habituation developed quicker in the case of weak stimuli i.e., low involvement products, while it was difficult to form when a purchase or product involved high social risk (ibid.).

Habitual consumer behavior has been often related in the marketing literature to a particular level of learning and stage of decision making known as routinized response behavior (Howard 1977). The latter is characterized by no or little need for prepurchase information, fast decision times and occurs when consumers have substantial experience with a product category and few, simple, well-established criteria to evaluate brands. Such routinized consumer behavior requires very little cognitive capacity or conscious control since a previously learned decision plan is recalled from memory and automatically implemented (Peter and Olson 1987). In other words, in habitual behavior, affect, goals, and memory played the most significant roles while cognitive processes (e.g., brand/attribute evaluation) are limited in structure and content (Bagozzi 1986).

Marketing researchers have identified two main functions of consumer habitual behavior: (a) it serves to reduce perceived risk associated with a purchase (e.g., Roselius 1971), and (b) it simplifies consumer decision-

making, both in terms of amount and sources of information used (e.g., Kass 1982; Lehmann et al. 1982). On the other hand, it has also been suggested that repetition of the same response by the consumer, as in habitual behavior, may produce boredom and instill in him/her a desire for change e.g., try a new product.

### General Assessment of Marketing Literature

The preceding brief literature review of marketing studies in compulsive/fanatic consumption and the related concepts of consumer involvement, brand loyalty, habitual, and impulsive behavior is summarized in Table II-1. It points to several conclusions which will be discussed next.

First, past research efforts in brand loyalty, consumer involvement, impulse and habitual buying have been hampered by generally inconsistent and confusing conceptual and operational definitions. It appears that researchers are divided between using either behavioral or attitude-based definitions of these constructs. While the former are generally easier to apply in measurement, they might not properly distinguish random or coincidental consumer decision-making from purposeful commitment. Future research can circumvent such problems by employing definitions combining both behavioral and attitude-related components.

In the case of compulsive consumer behavior, a related problem may arise in distinguishing between compulsivity --

TABLE II-1  
SUMMARY OF RELATED MARKETING LITERATURE

Concept	Definition	Major Findings
Symptomatic Consumer Behavior	Consumer decisions which do not facilitate living but make it more burdensome for the purchaser and his associates	Many buying decisions made in order to destroy, gratify hostility and aggression. They reflect feelings of hopelessness and defeatism
Compulsive Consumption	Consumer behavior which is inappropriate, excessive and disruptive to the lives of those impulsively driven to consume	Affects people psychologically compulsive, prone to fantasy with low self-esteem, who constantly try to please others. Leads to dependency, loss of control, debt, anxiety and family problems
Fanatic Consumption	Repeated behavior in conflict with the person's utility function (Lehmann 1987) Deep involvement: the consumption experience is an end-in-itself (Holbrook 1987)	Typology of health club members: (a) social belongers; (b) serious proponents and (c) fanatics. Fanatic consumption is a way of personalizing space, tangibly symbolizing the meaning of life and of humanizing, dignifying and consecrating our home
Consumer Involvement	The extent to which consumers are concerned with a particular purchase decision and consider it to be important to them	High involvement is related to extensive problem-solving and high perceived risk. Level of involvement is influenced by personal, product- and situation-related variables

(Table II-1 Cont'd)

Concept	Definition	Major Findings
Brand Loyalty	Consistent preferred/purchase of one brand within a product category	Affected by developmental factors and, in the case of highly visible, complex and risky products, by social factors, too
Impulsive Buying	Buying occurring without a problem having been previously recognized or buying intention formed	Involves automatic behavior, little cognitive processing and strong emotional content. Characterized by product emanations, spontaneous urges to consume, an inner dialogue and impulse persistence and power
Habitual Buying	Repetitive behavior persisting through time, difficult to change with positive feelings attached to it	Easier to form with low involvement products. Affect, goals and memory more important than cognitive processes. May induce boredom and desire for change

a consumer predisposition to act compulsively -- and compulsive behavior. Clearly delineating the exact relationship between the two and developing distinct, appropriate measures should be one of the priorities of future studies in consumer compulsive behavior.

Second, it seems that research has identified a common process underlying consumer involvement, brand loyalty, habitual and impulsive behavior, which included motivational, perceptive, cognitive, affective as well as behavioral stages. Although the importance and order of each stage varies in each case, this common underlying process may be utilized as a theoretical framework to guide hypotheses generation and testing in future studies of the above consumer behaviors as well as consumer compulsions. The interplay between the cognitive and affective aspects of the latter is one of the important research questions examined in the present study.

Third, very little research has been done on the intervening variables, which may influence the processes leading to the behaviors reviewed above. Furthermore, when such variables have been introduced in the analysis, their inclusion has been atheoretical and random. In most cases, findings have not been significant either. Yet, two constructs in particular seem to significantly affect all of the consumer phenomena in question: (a) perceived risk of product or purchase, and (b) consumer self-perception. Since

both self-perception and perceived risk were studied at length in the past by consumer researchers, a number of theoretical propositions stemming from this literature may be linked to involvement, brand loyalty, impulsive, habitual as well as compulsive consumer behavior. Further research should test these propositions and investigate the influences of other situational (e.g., time, setting) and consumer-related (e.g., introversion, values) intervening factors.

Fourth, the few published studies of compulsive/fanatic consumer behavior, despite their contributions, have been generally methodologically weak (very small, self-selected samples, pilot surveys, lack of complete qualitative designs and unsystematic data analysis) and atheoretical. Moreover, the conceptualization of compulsive behavior has been simply transferred from psychiatry to consumer behavior instead of developing one specifically for the latter. Among the problems created by this approach are that (a) all compulsive consumer behaviors are automatically classified as abnormal and pathological, and (b) the potential continuous links that such behavior has to "normal," consumer involvement and activity are overlooked.

Finally, the preceding review of marketing literature has also shown that investigations in the areas of involvement, brand loyalty, impulsive and habitual buying have been, thus far, more practitioner- as opposed to

consumer-oriented (e.g., impulse buying seen as unplanned purchases and brand loyalty identified with three, four, or five repeat purchases of the same brand). As a result of this, neither the whole range of consumer experiences relating to these behaviors are adequately described, nor their origins and consequences properly identified.

Parting with this tradition, the present study of consumer compulsive behavior, instead, focuses on the consumer herself, takes into account her descriptions of her experiences and avoids taking a marketer's point of view i.e., evaluating behaviors on the basis of whether they are profitable or responsive to anybody's marketing plans.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section describes (a) the rationale for using qualitative interviews as the method of collecting data about compulsive television viewing; (b) the process of selecting compulsive TV viewers; (c) the development of a discussion guide and other instruments for use during the in-depth interviews; (d) the structure and format of the one-on-one interviews, and (e) the methods used for analysis and interpretation of the collected material.

#### Rationale for Using Qualitative One-on-One Interviews

##### The Philosophy of Qualitative Research

The philosophic underpinnings of the qualitative approach used in this study can be found in the philosophical traditions of phenomenology, naturalistic research and contextualism (Schutz 1967; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Miles and Huberman 1984; Glaser and Strauss 1967). They can be briefly summarized as follows:

- o Qualitative studies are used for description and in-depth understanding of specific social situations and interactions. This type of research is descriptive in the sense that its outcome is in the form of text i.e., recorded words. It is also interpretive to the extent that the

researcher must first detect and then articulate sometimes subtle regularities and patterns within the data (Locke, et al 1987).

- o The qualitative approach assumes that individuals can experience the "same" object in multiple ways depending on the context of the experience. Hence, qualitative research should be naturalistic i.e., phenomena under study should be examined as they actually exist -- in a natural setting. If not possible e.g., in the case of a depth interview conducted in a professional facility, the researcher should encourage participants to reconstruct their experiences within the natural setting where they occurred.

- o Qualitative research focuses on people's perceptions and experiences as they are revealed in the way participants express their feelings, beliefs and understanding of a phenomenon. In this sense, the qualitative approach assumes that there is no objective experience -- all experience is subjective (Bateson 1979).

- o The purpose of qualitative research is to create theories explaining the collected data/material -- not to collect data in order to test preestablished hypotheses (Buttimer 1980).

- o Finally, the qualitative paradigm is primarily concerned with the validity of data collected as opposed to quantitative approaches, which are more concerned with data reliability (Deshpande 1983).

### Qualitative versus Quantitative Research

The research purpose of this dissertation is to examine in detail compulsive TV viewing i.e., what are its main elements, how it is experienced by the viewers themselves, and why do the latter engage in it.

To understand the deep-seated roots of consumer compulsive experiences and the nature of the processes that bring them about, research should be conducted by means of probing qualitative one-on-one interviews. Quantitative methods, exclusively concerned with the static end-result of the process i.e., the amount of TV viewed by the consumer, cannot be of help here (Karger 1987).

Moreover, watching television is a social act, not only because sometimes it takes place in groups of two or more people, but also in the sense that the decision whether, what and how much to watch is considered in the context of what others think about such behaviors and people engaging in them in general. To understand how a TV viewer gets compulsively involved with a program or the act of watching, researchers need a method that will help respondents to reconstruct the whole TV viewing experience, as it takes place, through their own eyes.

Quantitative survey interviewing, if used for this purpose, will provide an incomplete and probably distorted picture of the TV viewing experience. Aware of the social

consequences that their responses have, compulsive TV viewers might, for example, inflate their reported incidence of viewing of informative programming and deflate the amount of their viewing done for entertainment or other reasons.

In contrast to this, in-depth qualitative interviews help to minimize socially desirable answers. In a comfortable and trusting environment, the respondent shares the whole experience of watching TV with the interviewer and, in doing so, reveals his/her real behavior. Even when discrepancies occur in a participant's statements, the qualitative researcher can make sense of them by looking for underlying patterns in his/her descriptions (Goldman 1962).

#### In-depth Interviews versus Focus Groups

For the purposes of this study, the one-on-one in-depth interviews offer the following advantages vis-a-vis focus groups: first, in-depth interviews provide a lot more time for pertinent questions, follow ups and adequate probing of each participant. The opportunity for longer interaction between interviewer and participant is also likely to increase rapport between them, which generally facilitates the interview process.

Second, depth interviews allow for more productive use of various time-consuming stimuli and projective techniques (e.g., pictures, descriptions). The latter are needed to bring to light the numerous, often subconscious, motives

influencing people's everyday behavior.

Third, one-on-ones are generally better for establishing an atmosphere of mutual trust between interviewer and participant to the extent that the presence of only two persons in a room allows them to direct their exclusive attention to each other.

Finally, participants in a depth interview are less likely to engage in self-monitoring and resort to socially desirable answers given the more intimate nature of the setting. The latter encourages the free flow of reminiscence and reflection and helps the "full story" to emerge.

#### Selection of Compulsive TV Viewers

Past studies in compulsive buying and consumption (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Faber, O'Guinn and Krych 1987) used self-identified compulsive subjects (e.g., people who had joined or had shown interest in joining self-help groups for compulsive spenders). As the authors themselves pointed out, such self-selected samples may create several problems: (a) individuals who have come to the realization that their habit is problematic and are willing to seek help are not representative of the rest of compulsive consumers who do not seek help; (b) responses of people who identify themselves as compulsive may be biased by their need for catharsis and therapy, and (c) not all self-identified compulsive consumers are necessarily "truly" compulsive

(O'Guinn and Faber 1989, p. 151).

In addition, as noted in the introduction of this dissertation, TV viewing -- even in excessive amounts and forms -- is so inseparably intertwined with the lifestyle of "average" Americans and viewed as free of economic and other costs, that it may be hard for compulsive TV viewers to identify themselves as such and seek help. In order to avoid similar problems, the present study utilized a different approach to sampling, which is described in detail next.

Identification of compulsive TV viewers in this study took place in two stages: first, an effort was made to maximize the probability of including as many compulsive TV viewers as possible among those selected to participate in the interviews. Second, compulsive TV viewers within the sample of TV viewers interviewed were identified by this researcher/interviewer on the basis of several criteria characteristics of such behavior. The various procedures used in each stage are outlined below.

#### Selection of Interview Participants

Initial selection of subjects to participate in the depth interviews was done by means of a screener questionnaire developed for this purpose. The administration of the screener and the recruitment of all respondents was conducted by phone through a professional recruiting service from an urban/suburban area on Long Island, New York.

The screener (see Appendix A of the dissertation) contained thirteen questions and was intended to (a) exclude participants with occupational affiliations to advertising/public relations/market research firms as well as television or cable employees; (b) exclude those with recent/relevant experience in similar studies; (c) obtain the desired mix of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, and (d) ensure that participants satisfy certain criteria suggesting compulsive TV viewing.

More specifically, in terms of demographic characteristics, participants were chosen to represent wide age and income ranges (20-54) years old and \$15,000 +, respectively), as well as both marital status categories (married and single/widowed/divorced). They also had to have full-time jobs but no children living in their households. These last two characteristics were intended to secure that participants were personally involved with their TV watching, since they were required to find the time to watch a substantial amount of TV daily during their limited leisure time. Furthermore, this behavior could not have been attributed to the influence of their children, usually assumed to watch many hours of daily TV themselves.

In order to qualify for participation in the study, respondents were required to (a) watch TV on a daily basis and (b) watch an average of four or more hours of TV on a typical day. The average amount of TV viewing reported by

the study's 33 participants was four hours and thirty-seven minutes per day. Unfortunately, there seems to be little agreement as to what is the average amount of TV watched on a national basis as different sources utilize varying methodologies to reach their estimates. Discrepancies exist, for example, because some sources measure amount of TV watched by household, other sources include in their count "secondary" and "tertiary" viewing (i.e, time when the set is on but the viewer in question is not paying attention to it, etc.). A recent estimate which seems to have avoided some of these problems puts the national average for full-time working females at slightly above eleven hours per week, corresponding to only one hour and thirty five minutes per day (Robinson 1990). It thus appears that, at least in quantitative terms, this study's participants were far more involved with TV watching than a comparable demographic profile of average TV viewers.

In addition, it was decided that respondents should also demonstrate their commitment to TV viewing through ownership/use of various TV-related products and services. Indeed, 88% of interview participants used a remote control device, 91% of them owned a VCR, and 94% of them owned more than one TV set -- some of them owned three to five sets. Also, 64% of study participants subscribed to cable TV, and 36% subscribed to TV Guide. The remaining either bought it occasionally or obtained the TV schedule from a Sunday

newspaper.

Those included in the sample had to have been using TV watching to control their mood and to feel that they should cut down on their TV watching. These two characteristics have previously been included in questionnaires purported to identify compulsive behavior in psychological studies of the phenomenon (Orford 1985; 1977).

Although, it would have been possible to include additional items indicative of participants' compulsive behavior, a decision was made to limit such items in the screening questionnaire to the ones outlined above on the basis of the following thinking: first, since a reliable, validated scale to measure consumer compulsions is not currently available, there was no guarantee that additional items would make any significant difference. Second, keeping the number of items explicitly addressing TV viewing as a problem to a minimum, reduced the danger of alerting potential participants to the factors on which eligibility for participation in the interviews depended on and/or the purpose of the study in general. Due to the social undesirability of being labeled "compulsive" or "addicted," such sensitization of the subjects prior to the interview might have rendered them uncooperative/useless.

Finally, the screener contained a question inquiring about the type of programs respondents had watched within the week preceding the recruiting call. This question had

several purposes: it gave subjects a stimulus to focus their thinking on events related to their TV watching preferences, camouflaged the true focus of the upcoming interviews (i.e., TV watching as a problem and, at the same time), and provided another indication of compulsive (non-discriminating) watching.

Those who qualified, were offered \$25 as an incentive to participate in the one-hour depth interview. This, combined with the fact that the subject matter had personal meaning for a large number of potential participants, contributed to the lack of significant problems in recruiting qualified subjects to participate in the interviews.

The number of in-depth interviews to be conducted was not fixed in advance. Instead, interviewing was continued until little new information was gained; that is, until "sensitizing concepts or categories seemed to be saturated" (Glaser and Strauss 1967). That point was reached after about thirty interviews. The final number of completed interviews was thirty three.

#### Identification of Compulsive TV Viewers

The second stage in the process of selecting compulsive TV viewers for this study required that the researcher identifies the compulsive TV viewers from among those who participated in the depth interviews. Such an identification

was based on their own statements in conjunction with the context in which the latter were made as well as their personal characteristics.

This approach, based on the expert judgment of the researcher, is often used in clinical studies of abnormal behaviors; yet, it may still create problems. Most notably, it relies heavily on the biases of the researcher, an issue that is often raised with regard to other aspects of qualitative research as well (e.g., data collection and analysis). As in those other cases, qualitative researchers believe that there is no way that such investigator biases can be totally eliminated. "(C)oming clean thus means the creation of awareness, not the divestiture of self (Locke, Spriduso and Silverman 1987, p. 93).

More specifically, the researcher/interviewer throughout the interviews and especially during data analysis (see section below), scrutinized respondents' statements for presence, frequency and intensity of a number of themes, which define compulsive TV viewing. These themes were derived from the psychological and marketing literature on compulsive behavior and are described next in detail.

o Viewer lack of control over her TV viewing. This might be manifested as difficulty to turn the TV off even when the viewer desired to do so (e.g., when watching was in conflict with something else that needed to be done) and in general as a difficulty to quit or change the TV habit even

when the viewer realized its negative consequences (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Smith 1983; Jellinek 1952).

- o Craving (i.e., urgent desire) for consuming ever increasing amounts of TV watching and/or TV-related activities (Orford 1985; Winn 1977).

- o Withdrawal symptoms (e.g., agony/panic/sadness and irritability) experienced as a result of being deprived of the opportunity to watch TV for prolonged periods of time as well as relapse when TV was made available once again (Orford 1985; Peele 1985; Winn 1977).

- o TV viewing as stereotypical and repetitive behavior. In other words, compulsive TV viewers had to engage in repetitive activities before/during/after their TV watching and avoid much variation in terms of shows viewed, times devoted to TV viewing, etc. (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Jarvik 1973).

- o Single-minded commitment to TV watching. This occurred when viewers were completely "into" TV viewing i.e., they were totally absorbed in the various activities related to it and planned their lives around it (Smith 1983; Holbrook 1982).

- o TV viewing as an end-in-itself. This was manifested by viewer concentration on watching TV, in general, as opposed to watching one (or more) specific program(s); it was further evidenced by indifference toward and lack of ability to distinguish among different shows, frequent

switching of "favorite" shows, etc. (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Lehmann 1987; Cheever 1967).

- o Persistence over time i.e., viewer engagement with her TV habit had to be a chronic state -- not a passing, short-lived interest (Faber, O'Guinn and Krych 1987).

- o Viewer self-perception as a TV "addict." The latter was often manifested as direct statements of admittance of being "addicted" to or "hooked" on TV, and expression of fear for being or becoming such (Peele 1985).

The above defining characteristics of compulsive TV viewing, by and large, are in agreement with the criteria used to describe such viewing by this study's respondents, as well. The latter were purposefully invited to engage in such descriptions by means of a series of questions during the interviews and at least one projective exercise (see next session and chapter on Findings).

### Development of Discussion Guide and other Instruments

#### Discussion Guide Organization and Questions

Prior to the start of the interviewing process, the researcher conducted several informal one-on-one interviews with TV viewers who voluntarily admitted to being "addicted" to TV and read scores of descriptions of different TV watching patterns and styles provided by a convenience sample of "fanatic" TV viewers. Further help in outlining

general discussion topics for the initial interviews was obtained from reading letters of TV viewers to the editor of TV Guide, which revealed some of their main concerns about programming and other TV-related issues. A sample of such letters are attached in Appendix C of the dissertation.

To facilitate in-depth interviewing, a discussion guide was developed that includes the topics to be covered during the interviews, the most important questions related to them as well as instructions for probing, use of projective techniques and other supplementary materials. The guide is not intended to be used as a survey questionnaire and is flexible regarding wording and order of questions to accommodate different discussion patterns. For example, a projective technique or a series of questions about TV commercials could be moved from the end to the beginning of the interview when interviewing unmotivated/non-talkative individuals. Not all of the topics and/or questions included in the discussion guide are asked of all participants.

As seen in the discussion guide attached in Appendix A, at the beginning of the interview, the researcher/interviewer introduces himself and explains the format and subject of the discussion. The first set of questions inquires about the respondent's background (education, employment) as well as her past and present lifestyles, including the role of TV in her life.

The purpose of such questions is threefold: they

provide valuable personal data on the respondent, which, at a later stage, may help develop a typology of compulsive TV viewers, offer information to be used as a background for interpreting a participant's general response pattern, and serve to demonstrate the interviewer's concern for participants and their answers. The latter is a strong motivating force behind their willingness to discuss their personal concerns, goals and aspirations as well as their personal past histories more freely.

A second, large, block of questions in the discussion guide is designed to aid the respondent in the reconstruction of the details of TV viewing as she experiences it herself. Such descriptions are used to discern the role, if any, of internal cues or external environmental stimuli in the viewing experience of compulsive viewers. Both of them have been suggested in the literature on addiction/compulsion to trigger and reinforce such behavior (Ludwig et al. 1977; Salzman 1981). Specific questions refer to the participants' use of TV aids (VCR, TV Guide, remote control, etc.), presence of TV rituals and experience of TV-generated fantasies.

A third set of questions is included in the discussion to uncover the role of compulsive TV watching in the viewer's relationships with significant others i.e., her friends and intimate partners (husband or boyfriend). Such topics have appeared repeatedly in the literature on addiction and are included in the interview to investigate

(a) the significance of peer pressure and support in the creation and maintainance of the TV habit, and (b) the alleged detrimental effects that compulsive TV viewing has upon a person's relationships with others.

Fourth, a couple of separate topics examine the degree of the respondent's involvement, cognitive and emotional, while watching television. During the interviews, participants are probed to reveal their involvement with specific TV programs and commercials (e.g., their "must watch" TV, liked/disliked ads, or shows they reported to have watched the previous night) in order to better understand their viewing styles and gain insight into their motivations.

Fifth, another major part of the discussion is designed to include questions about the psychological, social, physical and economic consequences of compulsive TV viewing. Past studies on addiction/compulsion have shown that its short-term consequences should be separated from long-term ones. The former may be gratifying (e.g., temporary alleviation of stress) or mildly negative (e.g., occasional lateness from work), but the latter appear to be negative and severe (e.g., high levels of stress resulting from the compulsive viewer's perceived loss of control) (Marlatt et al. 1988; O'Guinn and Faber 1989).

Since it is expected that some participants may downplay and underreport the negative consequences of their habit, besides discussing directly with them "the price of

being a TV fan," "satisfaction from TV watching" and "consequences of watching TV," the researcher/interviewer requests their own opinions on the "TV debate." Thus, participants are presented with a few arguments, which have been regularly used by people critical of TV and TV viewing, and asked to comment on them. That way, the issue of TV viewing consequences is depersonalized enough to allow respondents to reveal their true feelings about it.

The last topics included in the discussion guide are aimed at exploring viewer dependency on TV watching and her perceived loss of control. Both of them have been described in the literature as necessary conditions for excessive behaviors to qualify as addictions or compulsions (Faber et al. 1987; Peele 1985).

#### Projective Techniques and Visual Stimuli

Three projective techniques are also interspersed within the discussion guide. The first consists of presenting respondents with three cards, each of which, has written on it a description of a distinct way/style of watching TV. After reading them, respondents are asked how could each person have developed such a style and which of these styles comes closer to their own. In a second version of this exercise, instead of verbal descriptions, some participants are shown pictures of people watching TV in various situations (alone, with a pet, with a man, or in a

large group). They are then asked to describe the female TV viewer in the photo, her watching style, and identify which one of them comes closer to their own.

This exercise purports to reveal the respondent's true TV "habit" i.e., the extent to which she watches TV, her choice of programming (or lack of it), other activities she engages in during TV watching, and her TV "buddies" (if any). At the same time, this projective technique helps the participants talk about their feelings regarding all of the above circumstances. In this sense, it serves to verify and clarify other questions in the discussion guide (e.g., those under the headings "TV ritual," "role of TV in viewer's life," and "TV company").

A second exercise used in the interviews is intended to expose the participants' underlying motives for watching TV the way they do. Respondents are shown several descriptions of different TV viewing styles (representing different levels of involvement) along with photos of women typifying particular ages, incomes and lifestyles (manifested through dressing style and type of surroundings depicted in each photo). They are then asked to match statements with photos, explain what makes a person watch TV like this and try to think of real-life people they know of who fit the descriptions.

The third projective technique used is developed to provide insights into (a) the participants' degree of true

commitment to/dependency on television watching and (b) the extent to which their TV experiences are perceived as pleasant/unpleasant, active/passive, etc. It requires that respondents evaluate several new product ideas described to them in some detail (including price) and state the likelihood of buying them. For example, one such new product idea -- the "\$5.20-an-hour dream" -- is described as a way to create one's own programming. The viewer, by means of a simple phone call, could order the showing of e.g., 10 continuous "Dynasty" episodes, which she can receive the next day on a video diskette. Compulsive TV viewers, given their craving for more TV programming, are expected to like this new product idea. On the other hand, indulgent TV viewers may be less enthusiastic about it thinking they may become saturated with "too much of a good thing" (i.e., their favorite show).

Finally, in a small number of interviews, and in order to facilitate the collection of data on participant feelings toward TV programming and commercials, short sections (10 minutes) of actual TV fare, including commercials, are shown to them and their reactions and comments recorded. For the same purpose and to further help participants recall and articulate their actual TV experiences, a current copy of TV Guide and a remote control device are made available to them during the interviews. Participants are, thus, able to demonstrate to the interviewer how exactly they are using

such TV-related items at home.

### Interview Structure and Format

Thirty-three in depth one-on-one interviews were conducted for the purposes of this study using the issues and probes outlined above. All of them took place in a conference-like room of a qualitative research facility on Long Island, New York, and were professionally taped. All participants were interviewed by this researcher "in order to obtain immediate interaction with the respondents and to allow (him) to be confronted personally with respondent everyday life situations" (Pennartz 1986).

Some of the potential problems related to the format and structure of the interviews along with the ways they were dealt with in this study are explained next.

First, the discussion guide for the depth interviews was developed with the intension of making it flexible i.e., it was understood that not all of the topics included in it would necessarily be raised during each and every interview and that the order as well as phrasing of questions might change. Despite that, the researcher was still concerned about how to implement this flexibility in practice. The main question was how different should the interviews be from one respondent to another? It turned out that irrespective of the particular order in which the questions were asked, participants' answers followed certain patterns

that allowed "core" topics and a number of standard questions to be brought up "naturally."

Second, besides adapting questions to the uniqueness of each interview and participant characteristics, questions were also reworded in order to progressively elicit more and more profound information i.e., build upon previously discovered patterns in participant responses (Willems and Raush 1969).

Third, the researcher/interviewer tried hard not to fall into either of the following two "traps:" (a) the "outsider's" trap i.e., finding in participant descriptions of their TV experiences what he intended to find, and (b) the "insider's" trap i.e., becoming so much engrossed in the details of their everyday TV involvement that he would miss the broader perspective of TV viewing and any existing intra-individual commonalities (Pennartz 1986).

Fourth, another point of concern, at least during the first four to five interviews, was the researcher's own role in them. Should he pose as a "naive" interviewer, thus, inviting respondents to "educate" him about television, its programs, and how people watch them? Alternatively, he could assume an opinionated role and play the "devil's advocate" to force participants to "open up" and reveal their personal feelings and experiences.

This researcher decided that, in most cases, he should adopt the role of the unknowledgeable interviewer and

encourage respondents by means of verbal and non-verbal signals throughout the discussion to make him aware of TV-related things, explain them to him in detail, etc. To obtain elaboration/clarification of the points respondents made, the interviewer created long silent pauses after superficial answers or repeated part of the respondent's statement e.g., "I think you are telling me..." (Goldman 1962).

Fifth, it was also important that respondents did not become, to the degree that this was possible, sensitized to the interviewer's attitudes and opinions on TV-related matters and especially compulsive watching. A large number of factors including facial reactions, body movements, choice of clothing, choice of words, accent, response to questions raised about the purpose of the interview or personal views on shows, activities, etc. could have led them to try to please the interviewer with their answers or just second-guess him. Therefore, every effort was made to focus the participants' attention on the subject-matter, away from the interviewer and his reactions.

Sixth, to be able to place respondents' answers in the intended perspective and communicate better with them, respondents' own "silent language," was of interest to the research, too. The interviewer was, thus, especially attentive to observe facial reactions and body movements indicating the presence of discrepant feelings (e.g.,

reserve, irritation) contrary to the ones verbalized in response to his questions. Notes of instances when that was evident were kept along with general comments about each interviewee (dress, posture, level of attention), which helped in the interpretation and analysis of the discussion materials.

Finally, the researcher was aware throughout the interviews that the nature of in-depth interviewing and the particular subject at hand could make participants feel somewhat vulnerable and create strong emotional reactions on their part. In a small number of cases, when that became evident, it was decided that limiting probes and not pursuing a particular issue beyond that point was in the best interest of the participant and the study itself. "(Interviewers) are required to leave respondents psychologically unharmed even at risk of abandoning a relevant avenue of inquiry" (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

#### Data Analysis

Because of the high cost of transcribing all thirty-three interviews verbatim, only ten, approximately one-third of the total number completed, were transferred into manuscript form. Those ten were selected, after repeated auditions, because of their richness in information and depiction of, in nine of them, typical cases of compulsive TV viewing. On the other hand, the exceptional quality of

the remaining, untranscribed, interview tapes made analysis of discussion material directly from them relatively problem-free. Some compromise in the transcription of interview materials due to money and time constraints has also been reported in previous qualitative studies (Rubin 1979).

In qualitative research, data analysis cannot be separated from data collection -- it is an "ongoing process" (Locke et al. 1987). In this spirit, emerging concepts, themes, and relationships were discerned throughout the interviewing process by constantly comparing notes, auditioning parts of interview tapes several times and refining questions in successive interviews to follow up leads. In fact, interviews were held off, after the first eleven were conducted in late May, for approximately three months, to allow the researcher to do some initial data analysis before selecting additional respondents for study. One major outcome was the decision to include married women in addition to single respondents, given the overwhelming number of references to instances of watching with others during the initial interviews.

In order to better understand the collected data, the researcher's first-hand experience with interview participants and their backgrounds was also taken into account, to the degree that such evidence was discerned during the interviews.

More specifically, the following types of data analysis were performed to develop an in-depth understanding of TV compulsive viewers and their experiences.

#### Identification of themes

Available transcripts and untranscribed tapes were scrutinized for emerging themes in respondents' descriptions of TV viewing. Such themes were used to develop several concepts and propositions relating to compulsive TV viewing (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Pennartz 1986).

Extracting such themes from the large bank of data collected in the interviews was a time-consuming, difficult step. It required becoming "intimately" familiar with the data.

While looking for themes, Spradley (1980) suggested to look particularly into conversation topics, respondent vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, etc. Thus, this researcher found that some of the respondents were particularly cautious and/or sensitive about the terms they would use to describe their TV habit, taking exception, for example, with words/phrases like "dependency," "loss of control," "harm caused by TV," etc. The same people, though, would liberally use these terms to describe other people's watching habits. It was also interesting that respondents used various expressions to describe TV ("boob tube," "idiot box") or excessive TV viewers ("desperate," "crazy"), which

did not imply that they felt compassion/understanding towards people involved with it.

Another helpful hint in identifying themes in the data is to develop typologies or classification schemes. Such classification schemes can be drawn from the way people give meaning to objects and people in their lives (Taylor and Bogdan 1984). In the case of compulsive TV viewers such a typology was derived, for example, from the way people watched TV in the company of others: silent while the program was on, reserving their comments for commercial breaks, using exclamations or one word comments to express primarily feelings about what was going on, or engaging in protracted arguments with their TV "buddies" about how a character in a show should have behaved, etc.

Applying the above and other procedures, several themes were discovered in the data e.g., activity/passivity while viewing, watching alone/with company, serious/casual watching, TV viewing as a satisfying/frustrating experience, etc. These themes were incorporated in the discussion of this study's findings presented in the next chapter of this dissertation and are listed in Appendix B.

The next step in the data analysis was devoted to developing concepts and propositions as the analysis moved from description to interpretation. According to Taylor and Bogdan, concepts are "abstract ideas generalized from empirical facts," which are "used to illuminate...processes

and phenomena that are not readily apparent through descriptions of specific instances" (1984, p. 133). In this study, such concepts were often derived directly from words respondents used revealing the true meaning of what they described as TV experiences: for instance, many interviewees repeatedly referred to their need to turn the TV on "to keep them company." Rereading the data with this concept in mind, made it easier to understand some respondents' true program preferences and more importantly their love-hate relationship with television: they appreciated its company but they would gladly exchange it, or at least so they thought, with a human companion.

More concepts underlying the respondents' compulsive behavior were discovered when their statements were compared to their acts. For example, the concept of inertia/passivity was extracted from compulsive viewers stating repeatedly that they would have liked to do something else instead of watching TV and, yet, did not appear to ever take the initiative to engage in other activities e.g., call up a friend to go out with.

A lot of the themes, which emerged from the data appeared to be similar to each other, sometimes, making up parts of one central concept. For instance, themes like "participants' inability to describe who they were" or "what they would be five years from now," and those present in statements like "I can't imagine myself ever appearing on a

TV show," and "I'm ashamed to say it, but I don't know how to program my VCR" might be different manifestations of the same concept -- low self-esteem.

Besides concepts, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested that qualitative analysis should also develop generalizations or propositions i.e., "general statements of fact grounded in the data" (p. 134). By again looking into the list of themes developed from interview data, the researcher constructed several propositions, which are described in detail in the Findings section of this dissertation. One such proposition was, for example, that adult TV viewers defined "objectionable/improper" TV programs on the basis of the latter's suitability for viewing by young children, irrespective of whether they had children at home themselves or not.

#### Coding of data

Following the data analysis procedure suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1984), the data of this study was, in this second step, "coded" i.e., interpreted in a systematic way as follows:

First, and after all themes, typologies, concepts and propositions identified during the initial phase of data analysis were listed, they were placed in different coding categories. Some of these categories were labeled "commercials," "TV buddies-who," "TV buddies-when," "age

variance in TV viewing," etc. After repeated readings of the data, and some collapsing of some of the original categories developed, data was finally classified into twelve major coding categories (see Appendix B). Both positive and negative incidents/statements referring to the same broad dimension were included in one category, e.g., the belief that TV watching educated people as well as the belief to the contrary.

Once all the pieces of data (themes, propositions, etc.) were placed in one of the twelve coding categories, comparisons of data within each category was performed to refine the researcher's ideas.

In this stage of analysis, this researcher had to resolve two issues: first, to reconcile some apparent contradictions in the data and come up with reasonable generalizations. Many respondents, for example, said one thing but described themselves acting in ways counter to that: for instance, one respondent, answering a question about ever losing sleep to watch a TV show, stated: "No, never, I'll tape it and watch it some other time." Later on, though, she admitted herself that she had not yet learned how to operate her VCR, apart from playing back rented tapes. Often, such contradictions helped understand compulsive TV viewers better (e.g., how important it is for such people to try and keep secret, what they perceive to be embarrassing facts about their habit).

Second, the researcher had to decide how many instances or statements were needed to corroborate a conclusion. Although, Glasser and Strauss (1967) have argued that even a single piece of data may be sufficient for theory building, in this study, themes were not used for further analysis unless they were mentioned repeatedly in statements made by more than one respondent. Some potentially interesting themes referred to only once were used with caution to provide insights into other corroborated findings and should be taken up in future research.

#### Discounting data

In this phase, the researcher tried to understand the data in the context within which they were collected (Deutscher, 1973). For instance, several subconscious motives for watching television compulsively were reflected in such data as: what topics were brought up by participants themselves, what kind of participant did that, with what degree of intensity, and in what order. Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) suggested that researchers should especially compare what people say in response to interviewer questioning vis-a-vis what they volunteer on their own. In this study, compulsive TV viewers, frequently and without any solicitation, referred to their habit as an "addiction" or admitted that they were "hooked on" a show. This, in the opinion of this researcher, was a more accurate

indication of how they felt towards their TV watching than what they stated in answering direct questions about their willingness/ability to turn the TV set off or do something else instead of TV watching.

Another factor that was taken into account during data discounting was the interviewer's influence on the accounts respondents gave about their TV viewing habit. It was evident, for example, that some respondents were a lot more concerned about the impression they will make on the interviewer than others. That affected the accuracy/quality of respondents' statements particularly at the beginning of the interviews, and before they had time to adjust to the interviewer and his style.

Finally, in discounting data, it is important for the researcher to also understand his own perspectives, logic, and assumptions used in interpreting the collected data (Taylor and Bogdan 1984). In this study, such bias might have been introduced, for example, as a result of the researcher's lack of familiarity with certain categories of shows (e.g., soap operas) discussed by respondents. On the other hand, the almost complete lack of knowledge about these types of TV programs provided the researcher with an opportunity to look at the data (e.g., respondents' descriptions of their emotional reaction to such shows) without any preconceived assumptions as to what they should look like.

### Profile construction

The final step in data analysis involved the construction of profiles (i.e., descriptions of the important parts in a compulsive TV viewer's experience derived from statements made during the depth interviews). Table IV-1 describes the distilled profiles of three distinct types of compulsive TV viewers identified in this study: "Successful Copers," "Unsuccessful TV-junkies," and "Marginal Whiners." Such profiles were put together as a means of capturing and outlining stereotypical respondent feelings, views, and perspectives.

In this chapter, the research design and methodology of this dissertation were discussed in detail. First, qualitative research was contrasted to quantitative research and the rationale for using in-depth interviews was explained. Second, the process by which study participants were chosen and classified as compulsive or noncompulsive was described. Third, this section provided an in-depth analysis of the discussion guide and all the other instruments which were used during the interviews. Fourth, the exact format of the depth interviews was presented and the major decisions made by the interviewer/researcher regarding interview structure were justified. Finally, the procedure followed in analyzing the data collected during the depth interviews was also described in detail. The next

chapter first presents the findings of this research item-by-item and, then, on the basis of the latter, develops a typology of compulsive TV viewers as well as a model of compulsive TV viewing.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this research in three parts: first, the thirty-three participants of this study are classified as compulsive/noncompulsive on the basis of the criteria discussed in the Methodology chapter of the dissertation. Second, the main dimensions of the compulsive TV viewing experience that emerged from the material collected in the depth interviews are examined in detail. Finally, a model of compulsive TV viewing incorporating the basic dimensions of the phenomenon as well as their interrelationships is developed and discussed.

Presentation and discussion of findings in this chapter is focused on compulsive TV viewing, which is the subject matter of this research. Other noncompulsive forms of TV viewing are only discussed in the context of their relationship to compulsive TV viewing. For instance, in discussing the major themes/dimensions of the latter, characteristic statements made by noncompulsive respondents are used to contrast the different forms of TV viewing.

#### Compulsive versus Noncompulsive TV Viewers

As noted earlier, in chapter III of this dissertation, study participants were classified as compulsive TV viewers

to the extent that there was evidence that they satisfied all of the following criteria: (a) lack of control over their TV viewing; (b) craving for increasing amounts of TV viewing and TV-related activities; (c) withdrawal symptoms; (d) repetitive and stereotypical TV watching; (e) single-minded commitment to TV; (f) use of TV viewing as an end-in-itself; (g) persistence of TV habit over time, and (h) self-perception as TV "addicts." Nine of the thirty-three respondents in this study fulfilled the above criteria and were, therefore, classified as compulsive TV viewers.

The remaining participants were found to share some of the characteristics of compulsive TV viewers but, in general, exhibited more control over their viewing and/or showed no evidence of long-term dependency on it. They could be classified as "indulgent" TV viewers, "habitual" TV viewers, and "impulsive" ones.

More specifically, indulgent TV viewers were, in a lot of respects, like their compulsive counterparts: they had difficulty to quit or change their TV viewing, craved for more of it, and experienced certain withdrawal symptoms when they had to do without it. They also tended to watch TV in a repetitive and stereotyped manner and exemplified a certain degree of single-mindedness toward TV-related activities. What distinguished them, though, from compulsive TV viewers was that they exhibited the above characteristics in

relation to their favorite shows only. At the same time, in contrast to compulsive viewers, indulgent TV viewers (a) did not use TV watching as an end-in-itself, and (b) did not perceive themselves as TV "addicts." Moreover, their TV viewing habit tended to be less persistent over time -- the degree of their commitment to TV fluctuated in direct relation to the destiny of their favorite TV fare. Eight of the study's participants were, thus, classified as indulgent TV viewers.

On the other hand, habitual TV viewers, like their compulsive counterparts, used TV watching as an end-in-itself (i.e., they derived benefits from watching TV in general -- not specific TV programs). Also, their TV habit was repetitive and stereotypical and persisted over time. Yet, habitual TV viewers, unlike compulsive TV viewers, (a) had little if any difficulty changing their habit; (b) showed no desire for more TV; (c) experienced no withdrawal symptoms when deprived of their TV; (d) did not exhibit any signs of a "single-minded" commitment towards TV viewing, and (e) did not perceive themselves as being "addicted" to TV. On the basis of the above, fourteen study participants were classified as habitual TV viewers.

Finally, two of this study's participants were identified as impulsive TV viewers. Similarly to compulsive TV viewers, they showed craving for more TV watching, an intense, single-minded commitment to it, and tended to

engage in it in a repetitious and stereotyped fashion. Unlike, compulsive TV viewers, though, those described as impulsive (a) had no difficulty quitting/changing their behavior; (b) showed no withdrawal symptoms after stopping watching TV; (c) engaged in TV viewing over comparatively shorter periods of time; (d) did not see their viewing as an end-in-itself, and (e) did not perceived themselves as TV "addicts."

Table IV-1 shows in a summary form how each of the thirty-three respondents fared on the above defining themes of compulsive TV viewing. Respondents are classified into compulsive, indulgent, habitual and impulsive TV viewers, as outlined above. The last column of Table IV-1 shows for each study participant the amount of TV watched on an average day. When comparing compulsive and noncompulsive TV viewers on hours-per-day watched, the former seem to watch slightly more than the latter (an average of 5.4 hours/day compared to 4.5 hours/day). On the other hand, there appear to be no differences in amount of TV watched among indulgent, habitual and impulsive viewers. Due to the small size of the sample used in the present study, though, no definitive claims can be made regarding the relationship between amount of TV watched and type of TV viewer.

Table IV-2 compares selected sociodemographic characteristics among the four clusters of TV viewers who participated in the depth interviews. With the exception of

TABLE IV-1  
 CLASSIFICATION OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS  
 ACCORDING TO COMPULSIVE TV VIEWING CRITERIA

Category	Interview #	Difficulty to Quit/Change	Craving	Withdrawal Symptoms
C	2	Yes	Yes	Yes
O	10	Yes	Yes	Yes
M	15	Yes	Yes	Yes
P	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
U	19	Yes	Yes	Yes
L	27	Yes	Yes	Yes
S	1	Yes	Yes	Yes
I	32	Yes	Yes	Yes
V	30	Yes	Yes	Yes
E				
I	33	Yes	No	Yes
N	3	Yes	No	Yes
D	11	Yes	No	Yes
U	12	Yes	No	Yes
L	16	Yes	No	Yes
G	22	Yes	No	Yes
E	5	No	No	No
N	7	Yes	No	No
T				
	21	No	Yes	Yes
	23	Yes	No	Yes
	31	No	Yes	No
H	4	No	No	No
A	6	No	No	Yes
B	8	No	No	No
I	9	No	No	No
T	13	No	No	No
U	14	No	No	No
A	24	No	No	No
L	26	No	No	No
	28	No	No	No
	29	No	No	No
	25	No	No	No
IMPUL-	20	No	Yes	No
SIVE	18	No	Yes	No

TABLE IV-1 (cont'd)

Interview #	Repetitive & Stereotypical Behavior	Single-minded Commitment	End-in-itself
2	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes
15	Yes	Yes	Yes
17	Yes	Yes	Yes
19	Yes	Yes	Yes
27	Yes	Yes	Yes
1	Yes	Yes	Yes
32	Yes	Yes	Yes
30	Yes	Yes	Yes
33	Yes	Yes	No
3	Yes	Yes	No
11	Yes	Yes	No
12	Yes	Yes	No
16	Yes	Yes	No
22	Yes	Yes	No
5	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	Yes	No
21	Yes	No	Yes
23	Yes	No	Yes
31	Yes	No	Yes
4	Yes	No	Yes
6	Yes	No	Yes
8	Yes	No	Yes
9	Yes	No	Yes
13	Yes	No	Yes
14	Yes	No	Yes
24	Yes	No	No
26	Yes	No	Yes
28	Yes	No	No
29	Yes	No	No
25	Yes	No	No
20	Yes	Yes	No
18	No	Yes	No

TABLE IV-1 (cont'd)

Interview #	Persistence Over Time	Self-perception as "Addict"	Average Number of Hours Watched (weekdays)
2	Yes	Yes	7
10	Yes	Yes	6
15	Yes	Yes	6
17	Yes	Yes	4
19	Yes	Yes	5
27	Yes	Yes	6
1	Yes	No	6.5
32	Yes	No	4
30	Yes	Yes	4
33	Yes	Yes	5
3	No	No	5
11	No	No	4
12	No	No	5
16	Yes	No	4.5
22	Yes	No	4
5	Yes	No	4
7	No	No	4
21	Yes	Yes	4
23	Yes	No	6.5
31	Yes	No	5
4	Yes	No	4.5
6	Yes	No	4
8	Yes	No	4
9	Yes	No	4
13	Yes	No	5
14	Yes	No	5
24	Yes	No	4.5
26	Yes	No	4
28	Yes	No	4
29	Yes	No	4
25	Yes	No	4.5
20	No	No	4
18	No	No	5

TABLE IV-2  
 SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF  
 STUDY PARTICIPANTS

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Variable	All viewers (n=33)	Compulsive viewers (n=9)	Indulgent viewers (n=8)	Habitual viewers (n=14)	Impulsive viewers (n=2)
<hr/>					
<u>Marital Status</u>					
Married	12	4	3	4	1
Single/ Divorced/ Separated	21	5	5	10	1
 <u>Age</u>					
20-24	6	3	1	1	1
25-29	4	1	2	1	0
30-34	5	1	2	2	0
35-39	5	1	0	4	0
40-44	3	0	1	2	0
45-49	5	2	1	1	1
50-54	5	1	1	3	0
 <u>Income (000)</u>					
15-25	8	3	2	2	1
25-35	10	2	2	6	0
35-50	8	2	3	3	0
50 +	7	2	1	3	1

---

a relative preponderance of single/divorced/separated women falling in the category of habitual viewers and a similar concentration within the same category of women with incomes between \$25,000 and \$35,000, the sociodemographic characteristics examined here tend to be evenly distributed among the four types of viewers.

#### Dimensionality of Compulsive TV Viewing Category

The four categories of TV viewers identified in this study i.e., compulsive, indulgent, habitual, and impulsive do not comprise perfectly homogeneous groups. As Table IV-1 indicates, not all respondents fell neatly and clearly into the preceding descriptions, deviating from the "norm" within their respective category with regard to one or two of the defining criteria. Such cases were, thus, judged on their overall pattern of characteristics and assigned to the nearest TV viewer category.

In the opinion of this researcher, the data collected in the present study suggest that differences among the preceding four categories/forms of TV watching are differences in kind -- not in degree. Compulsive, indulgent, habitual, and impulsive TV viewing do not appear to lie along a single continuum. The different defining characteristics of such a complex experience as that of compulsive TV watching seem, at least intuitively, to represent multiple dimensions; indeed, there has been

empirical evidence that some of them (e.g., those describing viewing behavior per se vis-a-vis its consequences) represent independent factors (Smith 1983, p. 95). These multiple dimensions underlying the construct of compulsive TV viewing cannot be combined into a single measure without some knowledge of their exact empirical interrelationships.

Moreover, the qualitative nature of the present study makes it difficult to obtain accurate measurements of how compulsive, indulgent, habitual, and impulsive TV viewers score on each single constituent factor of compulsive TV viewing. Table IV-1 shows whether each of these characteristics were observed during the corresponding depth interview; it does not provide any indication about the relative intensity with which respondents' possessed the said characteristic to allow for either individual or group comparisons on it.

The comparability issue can only be resolved through further research into the dimensionality of compulsive/noncompulsive TV viewing and empirical investigation of the interrelationships among these multiple dimensions. Blalock (1982), acknowledging that the move toward ordering or scoring categorical variables is subject to risks, suggested that such studies should deal with this issue in a systematic way e.g., by scoring the different categories in several different ways and examining differences in the empirical results obtained in each case (p. 115).

### Compulsive TV Viewing Themes

Analysis of compulsive TV viewers answers' provided a large number of distinct themes (three hundred and twenty-seven), which then served as a basis for developing fifty-six concepts and propositions (see Appendix B for a complete list). As already described in the Research Design and Methodology chapter of the dissertation, these concepts/propositions were then classified into twelve major categories, representing the various interrelated dimensions of the compulsive TV viewing experience; these dimensions were: (1) perceived stressful situational factors; (2) viewer background factors; (3) personal psychological factors; (4) personal values; (5) personal goals and aspirations; (6) involvement; (7) rituals; (8) viewing with others; (9) TV characteristics and experiences; (10) perceived consequences; (11) coping, and (12) perceived meaning of compulsive TV viewing.

In this section, empirical evidence on each of these themes/dimensions is examined in detail.

#### Perceived Stressful Situational Factors

One of the most consistent findings throughout the interviews had to do with the effects of environmental factors on compulsive TV viewing.

"You escape from whatever trouble you have and you laugh for an hour or whatever. You watch a

game show. You watch people win tons of money ...you sort of turn off your mind...you watch the characters and get involved in what they are doing, with the comedy or whatever, you really do escape from your own life when you watch some characters run around on TV."  
(Interview #19)

More specifically, all compulsive TV viewers gave indications of experiencing substantial amounts of stress (anxiety, tension) in their lives. Stress was the outcome of unpleasant and persistent thoughts generated by what were perceived to be threatening/demanding conditions or events in the external environment.

Thus, on the one hand, stress was related to viewer attitudes concerning their working environment and conditions, as well as the idea of holding a job in general. Many respondents stated that they had been working continuously for years and complained about having to work long daily hours, in jobs that demanded extensive contact with people with unpredictable outcomes (secretary, nurse, sales, custodian). A number of them mentioned exhaustion at the end of the day as their reason for "cocooning" in front of the TV. Their exhaustion seemed to be psychological as well as physical. Most participants also expressed feelings of resentment for having to work. They indicated repeatedly that work was not their free choice but that it was either temporary, until they would get married, or a result of the adverse economic climate of today that requires two-paycheck households. It was apparent that, in most cases, their jobs

provided them with little, if any, psychological fulfillment. For example, one respondent noted:

"I sell advertising space...I never have enough free time. I work all day, come home and there is just a couple of hours. You're exhausted. You just want to lay around and watch TV." (19)

These female compulsive viewers also appeared confused and, sometimes, angered by their dual responsibilities i.e., having a career and a full-time job in addition to being a wife/homemaker. Typically, some of their favorite shows portrayed women agonizing over their dual roles (L.A. Law, Thirtysomething, Moonlighting), while shows whose heroines "have it all" i.e., are rich and do not have to work as hard were often detested (e.g., Dynasty, Dallas or All My Children's "Erica"). To make things worse and aggravate their stress, a significant number of them felt that they were getting little, if any, understanding and support from others (friends, relatives, spouse) in their struggle.

On the other hand, compulsive TV viewers indicated that another major area of concern for them was their relationships with the opposite sex. Thus, a few unmarried participants, in response to a projective exercise, described compulsive TV viewers, like themselves, as experiencing loneliness, lacking intimacy, and longing for someone special in their lives. Others gave as their reason for watching certain programs (Cheers, General Hospital) the fact that the leading man was "cute," "handsome," or "nice" underscoring the existence of an emotional void in their

lives.

Married compulsive viewers, too, experienced stress primarily over their relationships with their husbands. In most cases, their concern was the limited time they spent together, but other problems included his lack of profitable employment and the postponement of having children. Again, their favorite shows were likely to include similar themes (working out differences and making up, saving a strained marriage, etc.).

"You know how they have divorces and trouble with their marriage, problems with sex, whatever, and I just, you know, definitely relate to it." (32)

Still another major source of anxiety for participants was their physical appearance. Many of them, particularly the younger ones, referred to their need to exercise, play sports, and showed a serious concern about dieting. They admitted their dieting plans were in imminent danger while they were watching TV ("...we got to be careful, we don't want to gain weight. But yeah, we usually eat when we watch something on TV. Yeah"). A few even showed their sensitivity about their appearance and concern about becoming overweight, indirectly, in the way they described TV characters like Roseanne ("She gives the impression her and her husband are slobs. She's so obese and you know...(I don't like that").

Watching TV in itself caused considerable amount of stress to compulsive viewers, too. Besides the impact of TV

stories on their emotional state ("I get up and scream and tell (the character) "Get out. Get out."), many respondents, as already noted, experienced stress reacting to what they felt was excessive portrayal of sex, crime and violence on TV, especially in children's shows. A few complained about newscasts that seemed to contain only "bad" news and commercials that interrupted their favorite shows or were simply "obnoxious."

Even little things associated with compulsive viewers' viewing rituals and style, when performed improperly or not performed at all, became sources of stress and anxiety. For example, the loss, misplacement or malfunctioning of important TV equipment, sudden schedule or program changes were reported as especially stressful. ("They do sometimes (take a character off a show). I'd be very disappointed and I would call...Oh, I would call the station").

Moreover, compulsive TV viewers indicated that they also experienced high levels of stress and frustration over the amount of television that they watched and the prominent role it played in their lives ("Well jeez, I should be doing something else, constructive or educational or something"). The same feelings were apparent in participants' affirmative answers to the question of whether they frequently felt that they should cut down on the amount of TV they watched, which was included in the screening questionnaire.

In contrast to compulsive TV viewers, noncompulsive

ones in general described their lives as less stressful. Yet, it appears from their statements that they, too, faced some of the same problems as their compulsive counterparts: competitive and not always rewarding work environments, dual responsibilities at home and at work, difficulties in their relationships with the opposite sex, etc. It is thus possible that, to some degree, the difference in the amount of stress experienced by these two groups can be attributed to personal characteristics of noncompulsive TV viewers. Another explanation -- maybe complementary to the first -- would be that noncompulsive TV viewers are better at coping with stressful situations. In fact, most of them indicated that they would use a wide range of activities to feel better when stressed (e.g., going out for a walk, meeting friends, reading or going to the movies). They also seem to experience a lot less stress as a result of their TV watching. For instance, a habitual TV viewer stated when probed about her reaction if her favorite program were preempted:

"...so much the better...it takes me away from the TV set altogether. I'll shut it off and move away to do something else. I'll probably call a friend to chat for a while." (4)

### Viewer Background Factors

#### Sociodemographic characteristics

The sociodemographic characteristics of compulsive TV

viewers were assessed by means of questions in the initial screener (e.g., age, income, marital status) as well as questions and direct observation during the in-depth interviews. The sample used in this research was drawn so that all of the participants were full-time working women with no children living at home but included a mixture of different age, income, occupation and marital status groups. Therefore, this study, by design, could not answer such questions as: "Are women more likely to be compulsive TV viewers than men?" "Are working viewers more likely to be compulsive than non-working ones?" or "Do women with children at home tend to be more compulsive in their TV viewing habits?" Furthermore, due to the relatively small number of compulsive TV viewers studied, no conclusive evidence can be drawn linking compulsive TV viewing with specific respondent sociodemographic characteristics. Nevertheless, judging from the material collected in this study, there were no indications that compulsive TV-viewing was associated with any sociodemographic factor with the possible exception of social class. On the other hand, a number of sociodemographic variables might influence specific TV watching "style" since not all compulsive viewers seemed to view TV in a uniform way (see, for example, section on Watching with Others later on in this chapter).

During the interview sessions, respondents were asked,

as part of their self-description, to provide information about their occupation. This information, combined with their income and level of education, provided an assessment of respondents' social status/class (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987, p. 436). It appeared that most compulsive TV viewers came from the lower-middle and lower social classes -- a finding which corroborates past research on TV use (e.g., Levy 1973; Graham 1956). Specific occupations of participants included secretarial and other clerical jobs, sales positions, lower management jobs, etc. Although, some of the younger compulsive viewers had attended college, their general level of education was at the high school or technical school level. Of course, this finding might have been the result of self-selection i.e., members of higher social classes might have been unwilling to give up their time and participate in this study for \$25.

Regarding their lifestyles and activities, probably the most important finding that emerged from the interviews was that the majority of compulsive viewers complained about their limited free-time. When asked to describe their hobbies, few of them listed such activities as playing sports, going out, shopping, etc. Yet, from their detailed descriptions of their daily activities, it became obvious that TV was -- if not their only -- probably, their primary source of recreation. That was particularly true during the week as opposed to weekends (e.g., "But I usually don't go

out during the week very much so...I don't read. That's the thing").

#### Critical Periods in Compulsive TV Life Cycles

There were a few critical periods in compulsive TV viewers' lives that appeared to be associated with discernible changes in their television watching habits. Analysis of the interview tapes revealed that most respondents went through significant changes in their TV lifestyles, with the most pronounced ones occurring (a) during adolescence; (b) upon graduating from high school/entering the work force/college; (c) when they got married; (d) after they became parents; (e) when they returned to work as soon as their children grew up, and (e) when their children left home.

Adolescence has attracted marketers' attention being the formative period in consumers' lives i.e., the time when people form company/brand preferences that will influence their consumption patterns as adults (Walsh 1985; Moschis and Moore 1983). Compulsive TV viewers' adolescence was also an important period in the development of their TV habits. Most of the respondents referred with particular affinity to the shows they used to watch during that period of their lives -- Batman, Superman, Gunsmoke, Happy Days, etc. At that time, shows like these were a focal point of their discussions with their friends and helped them in their quest

for an identity of their own (e.g., watching certain shows made them look knowledgeable and "in").

Most compulsive TV viewers would welcome re-runs of their favorite shows from the past, although some of them, wondered whether they would like them to the same degree now as adults. There was a strong perception among all of them - - not just the older ones -- that those TV shows were much better than shows on TV today; they perceived the latter as being of poor quality, "silly," "hardcore" (i.e., too explicit) and, in most cases, destined to be short-lived.

Many compulsive TV viewers admitted that they watched "a hell of a lot of TV" during adolescence. A few believed - - often contradicting their prior statements -- that they watch less TV now:

"Basically when I was a kid I watched a lot more than I watch now. I've always been a big TV watcher. But I think now I'm more selective in what I watch." (27)

A second important turning point in compulsive TV viewers' development occurred when they graduated from high school and started working or when some of them went to college. For example, in the latter case, due to the increased opportunities in college for other forms of leisure activity and their reading responsibilities, they watched few shows or no TV at all:

"Well, I think (my TV habits) only changed when I went to college. I didn't have a TV in my room for two years, so I didn't watch TV for two years. Not at all...I didn't even realize I wasn't watching it. I was into a lot

of music, a lot of people around. It's a totally different environment...I can't say I missed it. But then when I did have a TV, I automatically went back to TV...I enjoy TV. I didn't purposely not watch TV." (17)

Young unmarried compulsive TV viewers interviewed in this study expected that their TV viewing habits would change again when they will get married and, possibly, again, when they will have children. They thought that increased household demands, then, would force them to watch fewer hours of TV, although they believed they "could never just stop." Nevertheless, evidence from older TV viewers, who had been through marriage and parenthood, suggested the opposite. Marriage and young children usually meant more time spent at home, which, in turn, increased amount of TV watched. A need for diversion from the additional burdens of married life made them get more involved with TV watching, too. This trend toward more TV viewing was usually interrupted when women decided to go back to work after raising their children to an age when they could stay at home alone.

Finally, some older interviewees thought that their TV viewing hours increased even more when their children left home. They attributed that to the availability of more free time and their need to fill, what looked like an empty house, with human voices and sounds. Table IV-3 summarizes the relationship between levels of TV watching and different stages in the compulsive TV viewer life cycle.

TABLE IV-3  
COMPULSIVE TV VIEWER LIFE CYCLE

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Stage	Level of TV Involvement
Adolescence	High
Starts Work/Goes to College	Moderate to Little
Gets Married	Moderate to High
Has Young Children	High
Goes Back to Work	Moderate
Empty Nester/Solitary	High

---

### Strict Upbringing

During the interviews, a significant number of compulsive TV viewers revealed, directly or indirectly, that they came from strict family backgrounds. For example, respondents referred to how they were brought up in homes that taught them they should listen to their parents all the time or showed their annoyance at how intrusive in their lives their parents continued to be, in some cases, even after they got married. More specifically, on the issue of TV watching, a participant, referring to her mother's control over her during adolescence, stated:

"..she's not someone who's very weak and would let me watch whatever's on TV. She has her own restrictions -- she was a very strict parent." (19)

Participants, on several occasions, echoed similar sentiments when they described how they would raise their own children. They said they were likely to restrict the amount of their children's watching and especially ban certain programs containing "more adult, heavy type of issues."

### Mother-Daughter TV Relationship

Female compulsive TV viewers seemed to have created a special bond with their mothers when it came to watching TV. Several of the younger viewers revealed that they "got hooked" on their favorite soap opera or other program by their mothers. On the other hand, a number of the older

participants described how they got their daughters "addicted" to TV and how they still either watched a show together with them or talked about it on the phone:

"Well my daughter and I used to watch TV together. And we both watched the same soap opera. I got her hooked..."Days of Our Lives." Channel 4, 1-2 p.m. And she'll call me and ask if I've seen it yet...So basically we fill each other in." (27)

As pointed already while discussing the socio-demographic characteristics of this study's participants at the beginning of this chapter, no differences between compulsive and noncompulsive TV viewers on such variables as age, income, and marital status could be inferred from the present study. This is so, because of both the study's research design (requiring the inclusion of a mixture of e.g., income categories) and the relatively small number of subjects interviewed.

Some major differences among compulsive and non-compulsive respondents were observed, though, regarding other aspects of their background: first, noncompulsive TV viewers came from a wide variety of homes, most of them, without particularly strict parental guidance when it came to TV watching. Second, with few exceptions, the strong mother-daughter TV bond found among compulsive TV viewers was absent. Third, it appears that noncompulsive participants have never been "addicted" to TV at any point during their lives. Finally, many of the noncompulsive TV viewers appeared to have family members, relatives and/or

acquaintances who themselves have been "TV addicts." Based on their statements, it seems likely that this experience had made a strong impression on them and acted as a deterrent to their getting more involved with TV. One such respondent, an indulgent TV viewer herself, stated:

"My brother, my younger brother, is addicted to television. He's always been so. He'd drive my parents crazy...They had a rule. No TV after nine o'clock at night for the kids. So he'd come to my room and bribe me to let him watch a little TV...(laughs) No, I wouldn't...for his own good." (9)

#### Personal Psychological Factors

Several psychological traits appeared to relate to compulsive television viewing. The most notable among them were:

##### Low Self-esteem

The data collected in the depth interviews contained many examples of low self-esteem among compulsive TV viewers. There were not, for the most part, outright expressions of self-pity, being bad, guilty or unattractive, as O'Guinn and Faber (1989) found. Instead, they were primarily indirect expressions of self-doubt as respondents lacked a sense of identity and were defensive or apologetic about their accomplishments, lifestyles and TV watching. They referred to themselves as "illiterate" (for their inability to operate their VCR) and felt "non-existent"

(e.g., when their husbands watched their videos). The same feeling of low self-esteem was conveyed from the way compulsive TV viewers described themselves during the interviews. Most of them felt uncomfortable talking about who they were, simply stating that they were "nice" persons and rarely mentioning any professional or other personal success.

There was also evidence of external locus of control among compulsive TV viewers. On several occasions, participants described how they stayed with a show even when they disliked it, or wanted/had something else to do because they could not make themselves turn the TV off.

Respondents' negative answers to a projective exercise, which asked them to evaluate the idea of calling the station and suggesting an ending of their own for a TV show episode, corroborated their basic perception of external locus of control. The latter has also been linked to feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth in both the marketing and psychological literature (Mizerski, Golden and Kernan 1979; Weiner et al. 1972).

Furthermore, signs of low self-esteem were found in the fact that many compulsive TV viewers appeared to be frequently and, by their own admission, easily influenced by others when it came to watching a new show, expressing opinions about TV-related or general issues, or buying TV equipment. In the case of older women, their primary

influence came from their, often dominant, husband (married) or more self-assured co-workers and friends (unmarried). For younger women, major sources of such influence were their mothers and boyfriends (e.g., "(my husband)'s got me in the habit of flipping all the stations" or "A friend told me about it...And I got hooked on it").

Related to their low self-esteem and susceptibility to external influences was some compulsive TV viewers' strong need to please others. Besides their efforts to please the interviewer, which were apparent in several interviews, these respondents wanted to please those with whom they watched TV together. Thus, they tended to compromise when it came to program selection in order to satisfy the needs of their boyfriend, husband, or other company in general (more evident in the case of newlyweds or unmarried couples). Even when they opted to watch their own favorite shows on another TV, they admitted feeling guilty and afraid that they would not be liked.

All of the above observations regarding compulsive viewers i.e., their lack of a strong sense of identity, external locus of control, susceptibility to external influences, and need to please others, as well as the frequency and intensity with which such feelings emerged during the interviews, appeared to indicate a general feeling of low self-esteem among them.

### Fear of Loneliness and Alienation

The fact that compulsive TV viewers felt a fear of loneliness and alienation was manifested several times during the interviews. First, many respondents referred to their habit of constantly seeking feedback and assurances from their friends. That was stated as one of the reasons why they frequently communicated with them to talk about what they watched on TV. The study found that respondents used a network of friends, "TV buddies," for support, both psychological (e.g., admitting to each other that they cried during an episode without suffering embarrassment) and physical (e.g., borrowing a TV set when there was a problem with their own depriving them of the opportunity to watch).

"When hurricane Hugo came through. We lost all our electricity for a couple of hours...I was in the middle of watching something...I called up my friend and asked, "Did you lose your electricity? No. Good. Were you watching? Good. Now tell me what happened." (1)

Similarly, participants sought feedback from the interviewer about whether others watched television the way they did and expressed satisfaction and relief when they were told in the affirmative (e.g., "Of course, that's not what I'm supposed to say, right?" or "Is this typical, the way I feel about television?").

Furthermore, their fear of "social loneliness" (Weiss 1974), according to their own admission, prevented several of them from writing or calling a TV station to complain about their favorite show's cancellation or something else

they felt strongly about. They were afraid they would be the only ones who felt this way. The same theme was evident in the number of compulsive viewers who, during the interviews, expressed their fear that their boyfriend/husband do not "understand" their commitment to TV, in general, and/or specific shows in particular (e.g., "Maybe there's something in it that I think should be funny because everybody around me is telling me it's funny and I don't find it funny").

Probably, though, the most obvious demonstration of a fear of loneliness in the hearts and minds of compulsive TV viewers was found in their statements explaining why they needed TV in their lives. As the example below indicates, besides their fear of "social loneliness," some compulsive viewers frequently experienced what Weiss (1974) called "emotional loneliness."

"(TV) is my friend. It makes a lot of noise and it looks as though a lot of people are there. Sometimes I find that the house is so quiet...the silence is deafening...And I just immediately flick on the TV...I should probably replace that with another husband." (30)

Others, watched a show and drew lessons from the way a situation was handled on the screen or simply felt better at the thought that there were other people with similar (or worse) problems in life.

"...I had a fight with my boyfriend and it was nice to watch someone else (in Moonlighting) have a fight with their boyfriend. You know, it makes you feel that you're not alone, it happens to everyone." (1)

Viewer Lack of Discrimination and Moderation.

Compulsive TV viewers, to a larger degree than other participants, often confused titles, plots, and characters of similar programs and had difficulty identifying the correct channel on which some of their favorite programs were on. That happened even when they were able to recall many details of an episode they watched quite accurately (e.g., "What show? It was either MacGyver or the guy with the car. The black Camaro. Kid" or "Thursday night I watch the shows on...I don't know which channel it is"). Apparently, these respondents had difficulty (or did not want to bother) making inferences and fine distinctions in their minds concerning the shows that they watched.

Even more to the point, compulsive viewers, when requested to name their favorite show, looked hesitant and indecisive. Some of them, called several different shows "their most favorite" at different points during the interview. It thus appeared that compulsive TV viewers were involved with TV watching in general, as opposed to watching specific TV programs.

"Oh, this (Wiseguy) is one of my favorites. Definitely one of my most favorite shows. I also like Matlock. The lawyer...I like the show that follows his, "In the Heat of the Night." And I like the one after that, "Night Court" (27).

At the same time, compulsive viewers exhibited a lack of moderation and measure manifested in the form of an insatiable appetite/craving for consumption of TV

programming. In response to a projective exercise inquiring compulsive viewers' reaction to the idea of ordering several hours of a TV show, many respondents revealed they could not get enough of certain TV shows (e.g., "...like I said I like Cheers. I wish it was more than half an hour. I wish it was all day...(I would have watched) (a)s many (episodes) as they had").

There were also several indications during the depth interviews that compulsive TV viewers constantly experienced fear of missing something e.g., a show they had planned to watch, a few minutes of one of their favorite shows, even an informative commercial in the case of some. Thus, one respondent explained why she does not like flipping channels during commercials as follows:

"You know going back and forth...well, I guess I miss a few minutes if I keep on going back and going back to the show again...I get mad if I miss a few parts." (32)

In a lot of cases, the fear of missing something explained why compulsive viewers had more than one TV set at home:

"Sometimes a good program is on while I'm cooking, and I don't want to miss it, so I had to buy a TV for the kitchen. Then, when I go to bed at night I like to watch TV, the news, Johnny Carson, before I go to bed and I like to watch in bed. Sometimes I go to the beach and I watch at lunchtime on my little TV in the car. So I don't miss the soap opera." (1)

### Avoidance of Pain/Changes

Compulsive TV viewers showed little tolerance for pain in their private lives (e.g., loss of a husband, a loved animal, etc.) as well as in reacting to things which might appear trivial to those uninvolved with television (e.g., the loss of TV reception, the malfunction of their VCR or the misplacement of their remote control device). Even a change in the time of a show was described by such a respondent as "torture."

Moreover, a number of compulsive TV viewers stated that they preferred watching TV vis-a-vis reading a newspaper because the latter prints "mostly bad news." For the same reason, these respondents avoided TV newscasts as well.

In addition to avoiding pain, compulsive TV viewers seemed to avoid complications and change, in general. This tendency was demonstrated, for example, in their reluctance to learn how to use their VCRs to record at a later time and their admission that they often left this "dirty work" to their husbands/boyfriends. In other instances, respondents tried to avoid the complexity/uncertainty of having to choose which show to watch like the viewer who stated: "...I just go along with their program as far as what's going to come on."

In fact, the main theme of many depth interviews was that watching TV was itself an easy and instant solution to people's everyday problems -- "a quick fix." Compulsive TV

viewers, describing their watching habits, called themselves "lazy" and "spoiled" people. They often exhibited a tendency not to take action on their own, even when they stated they wanted to. When they watched TV, they seemed to be "numbed," "spellbound" by the experience, "glued" to their sets. There was also a feeling of resignation to habit in the way they described their viewing patterns and life style (e.g., "Usually I stay home. Unless someone gets me motivated and I'll get up and get out").

#### Tendency to Fantasize

Finally, compulsive viewers were found to have strong tendencies to fantasize i.e., to self-generate new sensory stimulations on the basis of what they watched on TV. Their tendency to fantasize was mostly evident in their statements referring to their favorite shows. Some of them were particularly adept at reciting whole episodes of these shows with detailed, animated descriptions of characters and plot as if they were reliving them during the interview. Others were particularly empathetic in their references to various characters with whom they identified or even the actors who played them.

In general, it was apparent from the way some respondents discussed TV shows and the characters in them that, at times, they could not distinguish between TV fare and reality. They blended their own identities into their

favorite TV stories and projected themselves into what was happening on the screen. Thus, a lot of them had nightmares after watching horror movies and some stated that they can see their own lives played out as soap operas. More on the relationship between fantasizing and compulsive TV viewing is incorporated later on in this chapter in the discussion of TV Characteristics and Experiences.

With the exception of a tendency to fantasize, which compulsive TV viewers in this study appeared to share with some of their noncompulsive counterparts (e.g., indulgent TV viewers), the two groups were markedly different with respect to their personal characteristics. Very few non-compulsive respondents, for example, indicated an aversion to pain and an attraction to "magical solutions." Many of them, in fact, attacked TV-fare for being "fake" and creating "illusions" especially in the minds of the young. Characteristically, an indulgent viewer's criticism of TV was expressed in the following statement:

"Sure, sometimes TV can be annoying because the shows are pretty bad. They are moronic. Not geared for intelligence, they don't make you think." (16)

Furthermore, noncompulsive TV viewers in general seemed not to suffer from low self-esteem or inability to discriminate (most evident in the confidence with which e.g., indulgent respondents described their choices among TV shows), and showed little fear of loneliness or alienation from others.

### Personal Values

Several values emerged from the interviews with compulsive TV viewers as particularly important to this group. A careful examination of these values showed that some of them seemed to contradict each other e.g., material comfort and caring for others or freedom of choice and conservatism. This might be interpreted as a clash between two different sets of values, "core" American values, on the one hand and, values specific to the compulsive TV viewer subculture, on the other. Alternatively, this apparent contradiction might be a manifestation of inner confusion and indecisiveness ("splitthink") on the part of these individuals, which, among other things, led to their becoming involved with the simple/straightforward world portrayed on television. The most prominent personal values characteristic of compulsive TV viewers and their habits are discussed next.

### External Conformity

Closely related to their feelings of loneliness and needs for acceptance and support, this value made compulsive TV viewers strive to conform to one set of rules and avoid distinctive behavior. That was evident from several statements of disapproval made by respondents concerning program plots or even commercial story lines/executions,

which they perceived as breaking widely accepted rules (e.g., "Chicken Soup...Lynn Redgrave and Jackie Mason are boyfriend and girlfriend, and they just don't match...she's Irish and he's Jewish, and he's very Jewish..." or "And 'Obsession' annoys me...It goes something, "You are my obsession." ...They're weird"). Some respondent efforts toward conformity were also evident when they described how frequently they would watch a particular program that they did not like because their husbands, boyfriends, or other friends wanted to watch it (e.g., "I know my friends are very into it, I don't like that too much, The Grateful Dead...And me, I'm bored...I just hung out").

#### Caring for Others

Many, but not all, compulsive TV viewers made statements revealing their sensitivity to other people's feelings while watching TV (e.g., felt "bad" when watching TV separately from their husband/friend or avoided late night watching in bed when their husbands were asleep). Such sensitivity extended to their general behavior and life philosophy (e.g., feeling obliged to answer all phone calls or making sure they would call back later or referring to their love for kids, relatives and co-workers). Although, these feelings could also be interpreted in light of respondents' desire to please and need for acceptance, these compulsive viewers' humanitarian values were also evident in

statements made about "ruthless/greedy" characters in specific TV shows (e.g., "Dallas. Those crazy things. Dynasty...A false set of values. It's turned everybody into a materialistic me-type generation").

### Conservatism

A conservative tone seemed to underlie most of the opinions expressed during the interviews concerning TV shows and their subject matter. Thus, compulsive TV viewers reflected negatively on the content of a few TV programs, which they found rampant with "adult (i.e., sexual) situations," strong language and violence. There was very little, if any, variation on that between younger and older respondents or single vis-a-vis married ones. The following excerpts illustrate this point:

"Well, the shows that you have on they are not the way they used to be when I was growing up... (T)hey are telling the girls that they should do their own thing and not what the parents tell them to do...And it's very damaging..."(2)

"You watch how in soap operas, how somebody handles adultery. And it seems to be just accepted. So that when you see it in real life, you might just accept it that way..." (2)

Interestingly, but not surprisingly given compulsive respondents' general conformity, their sentiment toward TV sex, violence and crime echoed common criticism of TV programming read in the popular press (e.g., TV Guide) and had been the subject of countless TV talk or news shows. Participants stated that they were particularly concerned

about the possible effects of such themes upon children.

"For instance I get kind of, well not really angry, but like if they have television shows like the Brinks jobs and stuff like that. Like they have to pick a lock to go in a vault and I have thought to myself that they are showing people how to rob a bank." (10)

Despite such rhetoric, though, compulsive TV viewers limited themselves to expressing outrage or discomfort and avoided committing themselves to taking specific action (e.g., not watching violent cartoons when they would babysit with kids).

#### Freedom of Choice

The right of adult consumers of television programming to choose the programs that they wish to watch without censorship from pressure groups, intervention from advertisers or others was given strong verbal support by several compulsive TV viewers, even by some who expressed reservations about the content of certain programs and were concerned about the effect of such programming on children. One such respondent, for example, stated:

"I do not like Vanessa Redgrave...Now, I do not believe it is my right to take her off the air...I will not watch anything she is in ...I don't think it's right for me to turn around and tell you that show is violent and if you watch it you're going to hell. Who am I or anybody to tell somebody what they should watch? I believe very strongly in the American way. This is a free country." (27)

### Material Comfort

Compulsive TV viewers' overwhelming belief in material comfort as a way of life manifested itself in the emphasis that they put on possessions, especially of TV-related equipment and gadgets. They often stressed that they were among the first to buy a VCR, referred with pride to the number of sets they owned or the number of functions of their remote control, even when they did not use them, and expressed interest in buying many fictitious new products presented to them during a projective exercise.

Compulsive TV viewers' materialistic outlook was also evident from statements they made about their jobs ("I just got a great increase in salary, so I like the money, it's definitely great."), and sometimes in their descriptions of their favorite shows ("(L.A. Law) lawyers, they're in great professions...make ninety thousand dollars, maybe more than that. They drive sports cars").

### TV-taught Values

Another way in which values were linked by compulsive TV viewers to TV watching was as the latter's by-product. TV-emanating values was apparently a major issue for many respondents, judging from the frequency with which it was brought up during the in-depth interviews. A number of compulsive TV viewers expressed concern about TV's influence potential particularly on children. They thought that

today's television programming taught children to be violent, engage in inappropriate and even criminal behavior and, generally, instilled in them the "wrong" set of values. Those concerns did not extend to cover adult viewers, either compulsive or not, unless the person was "sick"/"not normal" and "someone who obviously ha(d) a problem to begin with."

Participants' strong reservations about certain "adult" programming being accessible to children was also evident in their reaction to a projective exercise describing a new product, which automatically turned the TV set on anytime that someone's favorite show was scheduled to come on. Most respondents felt that would reduce the ability of parents to exercise control over what children in the house watched.

In general, noncompulsive TV viewers's statements revealed several differences among individual value systems; particularly, between those of indulgent and habitual respondents. Habitual TV viewers appeared more often to espouse conservative values and were critical of the way TV handles "sensitive" issues like contraception, adultery, nudity, etc. Also, the overall tone of their statements was less opinionated than that of indulgent viewers. Indulgent TV viewers, on the other hand, were more likely to appear "permissive" regarding what should be allowed on TV and often stated their opinions in strong and unequivocal terms.

In contrast to compulsive TV viewers, though, both noncompulsive types seemed to be more consistent in their

values, whether "conservative" or "liberal," pro- or against-TV.

#### Viewer Goals and Aspirations

In general, compulsive TV viewers were found in this study to have difficulty articulating their goals and aspirations for the future. At least partially, that was due to their inability and/or embarrassment to clearly define who they were at present -- characteristic of their low self-esteem.

More specifically, compulsive TV viewers, when probed directly or indirectly, were not able to describe what their situation will be in the near future (within the next five years). In other words, they seemed to lack well-defined "expected" self-perceptions. Such a lack of future goals and aspirations was also apparent when respondents were asked to think of their future TV habits. Despite the fact that a large number of them had stated that they were upset because they thought they watched too much TV, none of them had any specific plans to change their current viewing patterns. Characteristically, one participant admitted:

"To tell you the truth, I only think about the next day. I don't think in terms of 5 years, 10 years." (1)

This lack of planning for their future was true with regard to their career and personal life (e.g., marriage, having children, etc.), as well. Thus, some younger com-

pulsive viewers contradicted themselves during the interviews by stating, first, that they wanted to establish a career and, then, referring to their "needs" for a family and taking time-off from work. A number of times, they stated they wanted them both but, on second thought, expressed doubt if that could be possible.

Compulsive TV viewers were more elaborate (and enthusiastic) when talking about their long-term aspirations/"ideal" self. Descriptions of what they would ideally like to be, most of the time, resembled images borrowed directly from their favorite TV shows. Phenomenologists refer to consumer "projects" to include implicit and invisible goals, passions and motives that drive a particular behavior. Consumers often represent such projects visually in the form of images of "a world that would come into being...with the fulfillment of...her project" (Churchill 1986, p. 34).

Many compulsive TV viewers seemed to use their television watching in order to obtain such images or re-create them from what happened on the screen. Often, respondents' projects became evident from their statements describing their favorite shows (e.g., "I thought of myself in romantic places I would like to be there...They go to so many nice places. They go to Europe, they go to the islands. Heck, they go to Florida").

From analyzing those respondents' statements, it looked as if their aspirations were based, not so much on their own

past experiences, but the vicarious experiences they derived from watching TV. Thus, one participant said during the session:

"...something like Dynasty for instance that type of show you always wish you were a millionaire and had all those beautiful clothes and drove those incredible cars, didn't have to work. That type of thing. I don't think anybody doesn't feel that way. You definitely wish you could be in their shoes for a day or whatever." (19)

Such use of TV by compulsive viewers i.e., as inspiration for setting their goals was not without dangers. By setting their aspirations on the basis of fiction, unrealistically, they minimized their chances of ever attaining them. Those who could not reach their goals then became resentful -- often, the object of such negative feelings became the characters who served as their initial "role models" and what they represented. Thus, a number of respondents expressed resentment for the wealthy, the successful ones, as the latter were depicted in TV shows:

"Sure, (Erica) (a popular soap opera character) get(s) lots of good men and dress(es) beautifully and she still has a maid and she doesn't have to worry about anything, no problems." (32)

In turn, failure to attain their goals/projects led these compulsive TV viewers to become even more involved with TV in an effort to deny their painful reality. TV became the arena in which they fulfilled their aspirations. In this case, to paraphrase Churchill and Wertz, TV "becomes significant not in itself, with regard merely to its merits,

but rather with respect to its role in enabling the (compulsive TV viewer) to appropriate the world of (her) desires" (1985, p. 552). The following statement by a compulsive TV viewer seems to echo this sentiment:

"(Cher) does her own thing. She lives with a young boy, half her age. She wears crazy clothes. She wears tatoos and all these cut-out clothes. And she has had all kinds of plastic surgery. Go for it Cher, I think it's great. I think it's wonderful. Why not. If you've got the money and you can do it." (27)

Overall, noncompulsive TV viewers emerged during the depth interviews as being a lot more certain than compulsive ones about who they are now and/or what they will be in the foreseeable future. Even more strikingly, they rarely incorporated TV-originated ideas or images into their future plans. Instead, their dreams and desires were primary based on their relationships and, to a lesser degree, on their careers. Thus, an indulgent TV viewer responded to the question of whether she could ever imagine herself playing a part in her favorite show as follows:

"Yes, sometimes. People tell me I look like Murphy Brown...and sometimes when I watch the show I catch myself thinking 'what would I do in this situation?' But it's only for a moment and (then) I think to myself 'I'm not her and it's fine.' I have a good marriage and a good job myself." (11)

### Involvement

TV viewing has been described in the psychological and marketing literature as a low involvement, passive,

right-brain activity (Krugman 1971; 1965). To find out whether compulsive TV viewing represented low or high levels of involvement, interview material was analyzed on the amount of planning, information processing, attention, and affect associated with such watching. Results of this analysis are reported below:

### Planning

The extent of planning that compulsive TV viewers engaged in was manifested in statements like the following, referring to the way a participant used her TV Guide:

"I go through it. All the programs I want to see I circle. And, if something is really, really good, I highlight it and I check it, and I write tape, watch, tape." (1)

Other ways used by these respondents to plan ahead their TV viewing included watching a cable channel, "Preview Guide," which shows a list of the day's programs and "blurbs" about upcoming features, reading various publications that publish TV logs, looking for advertisements of TV specials on TV, the press or radio and talking to friends. Judging from respondents' answers in the depth interviews conducted, all compulsive TV viewers appeared to engage in some form of planning on what, where and when to watch.

Another characteristic of compulsive TV viewers was their commitment to carrying out their plans once they had decided on watching something (e.g., "I'll be there

definitely. Even if I'm at someone else's house I would let them know 5 o'clock, this is coming on").

Compulsive viewers, though, reported that they watched a lot more TV beyond their favorite programs, so the planning described above referred more accurately not to what to watch but what not to miss. The remaining amount of viewing that they did occurred without much planning -- out of habit or coincidentally.

#### Attention/Absorption

In general, compulsive TV viewers were relatively attentive and, at times, became totally absorbed when watching TV. The level of attention that respondents paid while watching certain shows was assessed, for example, by asking them how they would react to a phone call received in the middle of their TV watching. One typical reaction was offered by a compulsive viewer who would tell the caller:

"Oh, I'll call you back as soon as this is over. I'm in the middle (of a show) and I love it, I just want to finish it." They'll say fine. And they do it to me too." (30)

Other compulsive viewers would even be hostile to the caller for calling them at a time that they knew she's usually watching TV ("You knew not to call me now"). Their reaction would be comparably stubborn in the case of an unannounced visitor ("I guess I would have them come in but I'd continue to watch my show"). In order to avoid such interruptions, some respondents described how they will make

sure in advance to set the telephone answering machine on and keep all the items they usually need while watching in close proximity (e.g., tissues, cigarettes, ashtray, etc.).

Most respondents expressed anger when their TV viewing was interrupted by commercials, too ("Get it all over with in the beginning or the end"). However, they added that, in the case of longer shows, TV commercials provided a "needed" break. Interestingly, the vast majority of compulsive TV viewers reported watching commercials, even when they despised them.

Moreover, compulsive TV viewers did not become passive, when absorbed by the experience of TV watching, but, instead, actively attended to their favorite shows on the screen. That was, for example, the reason why a respondent preferred to watch one of her favorite shows on tape. Thus, she said, she was able to back up and look carefully at the outfits and hairstyles which people in the show wore. Another claimed that she read what happened in a soap opera synopsis, after watching it on TV, to make sure she did not miss any detail and did not forget the plot.

Level of attention, though, seemed to wane somewhat at other times depending on the time of day, type of show, and psychological or physical state of the viewer.

#### Thinking/Cognitive Processing

Compulsive TV viewers, generally, did not appear to

engage in any significant information processing, not even when their "favorite" programs were on. Despite their efforts to carefully plan their lives around their "serious" TV viewing and the attention which they paid to the screen, there seemed to be no critical thinking about the show's content (e.g., plot realism, character depth, story continuity, story message/moral, comparison to other shows).

As already noted in previous sections of this chapter, viewers who were questioned to recall and describe to the interviewer what happened in the latest episode of one of their favorite shows, did so in an accurate yet mechanical manner as if from visual memory. Moreover, participants were unable to explain in meaningful terms why they liked a particular show and often had difficulty differentiating among similar shows.

All of the above (importance of pictorial cues, little cognitive evaluation of and differentiation among shows) pointed to the presence of a low level of cognitive involvement on the part of compulsive TV viewers, even when they watched what they termed their "favorite" programs. The same low level of cognitive involvement, of course, was also characteristic of respondents' watching other than their favorite shows.

#### Affect Expression

Although compulsive TV viewing seemed to generate

little cognitive activity, it often created intense and sometimes lasting affective reactions. These respondents reported experiencing a variety of feelings as a result of watching TV including sadness, disappointment, desperation, pride, happiness, calmness, annoyance or anger:

"I'm getting very annoyed with that story line ...Yeah, I'd like to take him (a character in a soap opera) and just bop his head on the wall and say, "Hey that's exactly what you were doing, leave her alone and understand." (27)

It was obvious from respondents' statements that feelings arising from watching certain TV programs were often so strong that the compulsive viewer could not repress or control them, although, she admitted that they created embarrassment or met with disapproval by others.

"Sometimes Thirtysomething puts me in a sad mood. I've cried a few times. If my husband will watch, he goes, "You're watching that depressing show?" I'll say, "Joe that stuff is true." (32)

With regard to involvement, compulsive TV viewers appeared in this study to fall between the two extreme noncompulsive types -- habitual (low involvement) and indulgent (high involvement). The former generally did not plan their TV viewing, watched passively paying little attention to what was happening on the screen and, consequently, engaged in little thinking about it. One such habitual TV viewer described her affective state while watching in the following words:

"When I come home from work, I sit back and relax, have coffee and watch TV...there is no

this, there is no that." (25)

On the other hand, indulgent respondents seemed to spend substantial amounts of time and effort (e.g., in the case of the respondent who described how she went crazy once running from one store to another trying to find a TV Guide) planning/preparing their TV viewing. They also become totally absorbed when watching, thinking and feeling about everything that is going on.

#### Compulsive TV Viewer Rituals

Rook defined a ritual as "a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time" (1985, p. 252). Analysis of interview material revealed that compulsive TV viewing (a) was a highly ritualistic behavior itself, and (b) sometimes, constituted part of other rituals. The fact that all compulsive TV viewers described some kind of ritualized behavior associated with watching TV provided an indication of the importance of rituals in the way compulsive TV viewing was experienced.

#### TV Viewing as a Ritual

For compulsive TV viewers, daily watching had become a ritual itself. It was activity consisting of a series of events, combined in an exact, fixed sequence. Compulsive TV

viewers seemed to have some common ideas as to when and where it was appropriate to watch certain types of programs (e.g., a TV movie was good for late evening or night time watching but not for early evening/first-thing-back-from-work viewing).

The TV watching ritual was repeated with very few variations daily and served to generate certain feelings or facilitate specific behaviors each time it was enacted. For example, taping her most favorite show while watching her second most favorite show, provided a respondent with the reassurance that she will not miss any part of the former in case somebody called her on the phone during that time.

TV watching rituals reported by compulsive TV viewers included daily soap opera watching (afternoon), news/game show watching (first-thing-back-from-work), favorite drama and/or sitcom watching (prime-time, "serious" viewing), etc. There were also shows "appropriate" for viewing alone, with older relatives, friends of the same or opposite sex, children, boyfriend/husband or in a large group. Each one of those rituals consisted of a distinct string of behaviors performed by the compulsive viewer and other people (e.g., formal/informal invitation, bringing own food or beer, sitting arrangements, or talk/silence) and served various functions (e.g., developing/maintaining/strengthening social ties, providing opportunity to unwind or reflect).

This was how compulsive TV viewers described two such

TV watching rituals. First, prime-time/"serious TV mood" viewing:

"...in the winter time, ..I'll make a fire in the fireplace and sit in the family room. It's where I live. And I'll sit either on the couch or I have a nice comfortable chair that I sit in. And I watch there...(I'll get) (s)omething to drink, ...And occasionally I'll make myself popcorn. And basically I have tissues, my phone is nearby so that I don't have to go out of the room to speak to people. It's right there." (27)

Second, here is another respondent's description of a "Dynasty party:"

"When Dynasty first started we used to have Dynasty parties. I had 8 or 10 friends specifically we used to get together at someone's house from 9 to 10 and we would watch Dynasty ...I never watched it alone. Never. It was a thing we did each week...We used to watch it and make a farce of the whole thing. We made a game of the whole thing...We would keep tallies of how many times they would say (the characters') names...It was so funny." (17)

#### TV Viewing as Part of Other Rituals

Many compulsive TV viewers indicated that TV viewing was sometimes an integral part of other rituals characteristic of their lifestyles and activities. Thus, some respondents referred to watching Sunday morning TV news programs in bed having breakfast or watching the traditional football game as part of the Thanksgiving family celebration. A few described their early morning/getting-ready-for-work ritual, which included some "running-around" watching of the Weather Channel while grooming, eating, cooking, or cleaning. In this case, watching TV served not

only the obvious function of informing the compulsive TV viewer about the weather forecast but, at the same time, helped her in waking up, motivated her to get going and got her ready for business.

### TV Viewing Ritual Artifacts

The descriptions of compulsive TV watching rituals contained references to many "ritual artifacts" i.e., products that accompany or are consumed in ritual settings (Rook 1985; Douglas and Isherwood 1979). The role of TV equipment and gadgets (remote control, TV Guide, VCR) as such ritual "TV-artifacts" was evident, for example, in the following statement made by a compulsive viewer who placed particular importance in using her remote control:

"A couple of times I'd forgotten where I put the remote. But I always found it. And now it just goes in the same place every time I'm finished with it. So I know where it is." (1)

As far as compulsive TV viewers were concerned, important remote device functions included its "up" and "down" buttons for "grazing," "TV/VCR" buttons for "flipping" between tape and TV, and the "mute" button for watching (but not hearing) their TV show even when talking on the phone.

Compulsive viewers, with few exceptions, revealed no extraordinary use of videotapes, ready-made or self-taped from TV broadcasts, and when they did, they would usually tape over previous shows. Few of them owned modest, neatly

organized collections of VCR tapes -- not the ever-growing, room-filling kind described in studies of jazz fanaticism, compulsive exercising or consumer collecting habits (Holbrook 1987; Lehmann 1987; Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988).

"Most of the time I'll tape over (previously taped shows). Upon occasion, it will be a show I want to keep. For instance, one of the last shows that Magnum P.I. was on, they had Frank Sinatra. Well, I saved that tape. You wouldn't want to tape over that because that's something you want to keep...(I have) a keeper for my tapes and then I write on the label so I know what show it is." (27)

Compulsive TV viewers also reported owning more than one TV set, often three to five, but admitted to replacing them, when they became obsolete or broke down, without experiencing any significant feelings of separation or loss. The above observations, in fact, reinforce compulsive TV viewers' emphasis on the activity of TV viewing as opposed to specific shows or TV-apparatus. The latter are important only to the degree that they support TV viewing itself.

Other products such as food, drink, clothing (some respondents stated that one of the first things they did, before sitting down to watch their favorite TV shows, was to change into something "comfortable"), or furniture also seemed to be inseparable parts of the total compulsive TV viewing experience. To many such viewers, such TV-related ritual artifacts symbolized intimacy, lack of inhibition, relaxation, or reward. Finally, other items like the

telephone, answering machines and videotapes were used to facilitate interpersonal communication among the TV viewing ritual participants.

Noncompulsive participants, in many cases, described similar TV rituals, ritualistic uses for TV and made ample mention of TV-artifacts. What made the statements of compulsive TV viewers more compelling was the importance they attached to TV rituals themselves or the TV-related part of other (seemingly unrelated) rituals. Likewise, compulsive TV viewers elevated certain TV-artifacts necessary in their TV viewing to a level of "sacred" possessions, whereas the same objects were valued by noncompulsive (e.g., habitual) respondents solely for their utilitarian functions:

"I like the VCR a lot. I can see (shows) faster on the VCR. I usually fast-forward whatever I am not interested in...I like the (VCR) that comes with the TV (set). You get the best of both worlds." (4)

#### Watching With Others

A lot of compulsive TV viewers felt such a strong attachment to their TV viewing that they often felt a need to communicate their experiences with others. Such communication usually took place before or after a show, at work (e.g., "...I'd say, "wow did you see what happened last night?") or while watching TV, on the phone (e.g., "...my friend watches the same program so we discuss what we're

watching").

Furthermore, many compulsive TV viewers seemed to prefer watching TV with one or more friends, whenever possible. That way, they seemed to fulfill their need for intimacy, derive emotional support, and create and share a particular lifestyle, or simply find a sympathetic ear willing to listen to their expression of feelings.

"I think it's more enjoyable when you watch with somebody. Because if you like the program then you can talk about it or you can talk about what's going on. "Do you think this is plausible?" or "I can't stand the way this particular character is playing and if they don't cut it out I'm not going to be for him. ...It's a social type of thing." (27)

On the other hand, there were a few compulsive TV viewers who openly admitted that they would rather watch TV, and especially their favorite shows alone. Among the reasons cited for such a preference were: to avoid distraction from others who were not as committed to TV, avoid embarrassment in the case of certain shows or, more importantly, in order to be able to react freely to what was happening on the screen e.g., "to act silly."

Almost all compulsive TV viewers, on the other hand, had difficulty watching, especially their favorite programs, in the company of a large group. When they did so, they reported being unable to fully enjoy the experience. Apparently, the distractions were too many and a large group's primary goal easily shifted to socializing and away from TV, which made most compulsive TV viewers uncomfort-

able. For example, a respondent noted:

"Because if you get a group of people, then the commercials come along, that's where the distraction is. Then they want to talk. And then when the program comes back on, you're still talking, so you are going to miss this. So I'd rather watch by myself basically." (10)

#### TV Watching Decision-making

Watching with others confronted compulsive TV viewers with several decisions. Viewers had to decide how often and when they would watch television, what types of programs and/or which specific programs they would watch. They also had to agree on the "proper" TV setting and atmosphere (e.g., room in which they would watch or their level of interaction with others during a show).

Compulsive TV viewers many times found that others in their lives (husbands, boyfriends, etc.) did not always agree with them on the amount of TV watching that they should do.

"Well, there's a guy that I'm dealing with now and I've dealt with him for about a year. In the beginning he thought it was very selfish of me to not pay attention to him and always want the TV..." (10)

Frequently disagreements also arose regarding what to watch ("I like All My Children and General Hospital...And (my husband) can't watch them. He can't stand them.") and, especially, on how to watch TV (e.g., "I don't watch any commercials. I drive my husband crazy. I can flip from one station to the other during commercials").

When disagreeing with others, compulsive TV viewers reacted in a wide variety of ways. Several times, they reported instances when they clearly dominated their fellow viewer (e.g., "I think I've kind of molded him into watching what I like"). Others stressed their efforts to try to resolve TV-generated conflicts with others through mutual compromise (e.g., "...what we do is flip back and forth between (stations)...we try to work it out"). Finally, some compulsive viewers had found out that their watching preferences and habits were so different from those of others that they resorted to "parallel viewing" i.e., they watched, at least some shows, on a separate TV. Older couples, who had been together longer and therefore felt more secure about their relationship, tended to do that more often than others. For example,

"He'll be in one room and I'll be in another. ...At 7:30 he watches Entertainment. I can't take it. He watches Entertainment Tonight and I watch Wheel of Fortune. I love it...he hates it. Now don't ask me why he hates it, but I know he hates it...I go to another TV." (15)

In some cases, TV was even perceived by the intimate partner of a compulsive viewer as a competitor. In fact, a few respondents, themselves, admitted that TV had become a substitute for friends in their lives and, some, even claimed they liked TV watching more than human interaction ("I'd rather watch TV than go to my other friends just to sit around and talk").

All compulsive TV viewers seemed to be aware of the

potentially adverse effects that compulsive watching had on their relations with others but their responses differed widely as to what they should do about it. Many seemed to think (or wished) that their friends "understood" their behavior ("I know I could get boring sometimes with my saying, "Let's watch TV." But my friends understand me because they know that's how I am").

In contrast to compulsive TV viewers, noncompulsive ones appeared to encounter fewer difficulties in their relationships with others as a result of their TV viewing habits. In the case of indulgent respondents, for example, although devotion to certain TV programs was complete and uncompromising, interpersonal relationships did not have to be sacrificed because such programs were few and infrequent. On the other hand, habitual viewers could apparently engage in socializing while watching TV, thus, minimizing problems in their relationships with others.

In addition, noncompulsive viewers' statements during the depth interviews indicated that they were a lot more skilled at reaching joint decisions regarding TV watching. One indulgent participant, for instance, revealed:

"I would never allow myself and I don't think (my husband) would do it either the TV to come between me and my marriage. We both know that and so when we disagree on a show, we pretend to get angry at each other and then we kiss and make up, and watch it together. We always do." (7)

## TV Characteristics and Experiences

### TV Attributes and Emanations

Is there anything special about TV that makes people compulsive viewers? Some have argued, for example, that the combination of television's ever changing sights and (human and inhuman) sounds create a certain state of mind and eventually become addictive to the viewer (e.g., Winn 1977).

Compulsive TV viewers in this study described their watching habits in ways that indicated, most of the time, they consumed a TV experience that consisted of much more than the sum of images and sounds coming out of TV. That was the case whether these respondents were watching their favorite shows, flipping channels in search of a show or even when they watched TV while doing other things in the house (e.g., "And there are times I could be dusting or vacuuming and I like to see the expression on her (Sally Jesse Rafael) face. I'm curious to see who's she's speaking to..."). Some interaction with what was happening on the screen was taking place all those times. Moreover, judging from compulsive respondents' descriptions, it appeared that even illusory and other TV-induced altered experiences, when they occurred, were not the sole result of TV-emanated sights and sounds but instead were based on a combination of TV content, atmosphere, and viewer mood/state of mind. Probably, the only time when compulsive viewers left

themselves at the mercy of sights and sounds emanating from the machine was when they watched in bed just prior to their falling asleep (many of them would not attempt that -- they were afraid they might end up getting involved with the TV and lose sleep).

Regarding the effects of TV programming per se, compulsive viewers' perceptions of what makes it "good" were instructive. Respondents mentioned several different attributes of TV shows, which, in their opinion, contributed to program quality (e.g., relevance to their own experiences, funny, informative, instructive). Yet, further probing revealed that those were ways of justifying their liking of a show, a conclusion which they had already reached on an intuitive basis. Expressing such a gestalt-like reason for liking a show, a respondent said: "(A good show) is supposed to be reality but (at the same time) it (should) not (be)." Despite this affect-based/nonrational appeal of a few shows, though, even respondents who watched more than five hours of TV on a daily basis, did not suggest, directly or indirectly, that TV programming had any particular "addictive" qualities that will put it in the same category as alcohol, drugs, or tobacco. As discussed in other sections of this chapter, though, specific TV shows appeared to have some impact on respondents' style of watching i.e., whether they planned to watch them in advance, preferred to watch it alone or with others, etc.

### Imagery and Other Altered States of Consciousness

Some compulsive TV viewers stated that they watched TV looking to transform their rather uninteresting and mundane life experiences into something more novel and exciting. That was possible as TV took familiar situations and stories and refined, vivified and enlarged them to create in the, vicariously participating, compulsive viewer experiences of timelessness and an "out-of-body" existence while suspending logic and inhibitions.

Thus, it appeared that compulsive TV viewers selected their favorite TV shows and characters in order to be personally relevant i.e., to be able to identify with (e.g., "Sometimes my friend will say, in the old Cheers, "You are like the Diane character." And he's like what's his name. The guy behind the bar, Sam... Maybe that's why I like it"). This way, they had an opportunity to apply their imagination on TV programming to learn "what is possible" for them in the future. By describing an attractive ideal, TV also created a motivation to achieve this ideal as compulsive viewers compare it to their own (lacking) reality.

Compulsive TV viewers appeared to belong to, what Hirschman (1985) has called, the "high fantasy" segment of the market: they seemed to have a special facility at using their imagination/fantasies to project themselves in a

fictitious TV character's position and "experience" what she was experiencing on the screen ("empathy"). For example,

"I had a big fight with my boyfriend six months ago and we had split up. And there was a show that I had taped, "Duet" on channel 5. And there were about 5 episodes back to back where she split up with her boyfriend and she got upset, she started drinking heavily, she lost her business...I watched all five episodes back to back. I think I watched it like 3 or 4 nights in a row. It made me feel better. I felt, "Oh, I'm not alone. There are other people going through this rotten break up too." That made me feel better." (1)

A necessary condition for compulsive TV viewers to be able to achieve such "empathy" and fully absorb the television experience, was their acceptance of TV's magical qualities. Rook made a similar point in the use of grooming products by young adults (1985).

Specifically, in the case of compulsive TV watching, viewers appeared willing to abandon their prudence, conservatism, rationality and inhibitions, and believe, at least for the duration of a show, in TV mythology ("rags to richies," "David beats Goliath," "love till death do us part" stories, etc.). Belief in such a theme was evident, for example, in the following statement by a viewer responding to a projective exercise:

"This brings me back to Dynasty when Crystal was leaving the kitchen and they wanted her to -- I think they wanted her to be burnt up in a fire. And me personally I thought that being she played such a beautiful role, you know with Blake, I thought she should die in his arms. You know, something loving or whatever..." (10)

Noncompulsive TV viewers, when compared to compulsive

ones, seemed to seek different benefits from TV watching; they also seemed to respond differently to what television offers to them. Both indulgent and habitual TV viewers in this study preferred the tangible, direct, utilitarian benefits (e.g., passing time, obtaining information) of watching to the experiential, transcendental ones (e.g., fantasizing, escaping from reality). Many of them were also reserved in their approach to the medium, fearful of its alleged powers of seduction or their own perceived weakness to control it. By limiting the amount or the intensity of their involvement, they thus managed to avoid getting "addicted" to it. Here is how a habitual respondent described the effect of TV on viewers:

"...inertia -- that's what happens to you when you're watching. You are there, you are watching and then to change is...you know, you have to do something. You have to get up and shut the TV off...It's a lot easier to just sit there." (14)

### Perceived Consequences

Compulsive TV viewers' statements during the depth interviews revealed that their TV watching produced intense forms of imagery and other altered experiences described above and, as a result, changed their mood and improved their self-esteem/self-perception. All the above, in tandem, resulted in a temporary reduction of respondents' initial stress.

On the other hand, in the long-run, compulsive TV

viewing created psychological and social outcomes (remorseful feelings, problems in interpersonal relationships, and dependency), which had a negative impact on compulsive TV viewers. Thus, eventually all these negative outcomes, and especially dependency, made respondents experience ever higher levels of stress. Both positive (short-run) and negative (long-run) effects of compulsive TV viewing are discussed next.

#### Changes in Mood

Several studies suggested in the past that compulsions are developed as a result of a need for mood-changing (change in arousal level) (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Jacobs 1986; Yates et al. 1983; Lehmann 1987). A few compulsive TV viewers did, in fact, mention experiencing a feeling of "high" while watching TV and, an even larger number, indirectly hinted that they watched TV to provide themselves an emotional lift. The latter occurred due to the affect-ridden content of TV shows in combination with the environment in which TV viewing took place but, even more so, as a result of their own anticipation before watching their favorite shows. As the following statements by two different compulsive viewers illustrate, an emotional lift could be produced by either shows that are "pure fun," through rejoicing, or "tearjerkers," through catharsis.

"Married With Children on Sunday night...I just think it's hysterical. It's a situational come-

dy that is purely comedy for the sake of just being...fun...I like to watch TV to make me happy. For enjoyment rather than something serious." (17)

"I cry all the time on TV. All the time. Little House on the Prairie especially. I can't really explain it but there was a show on maybe two or three weeks ago by David Stevens. It was such a tearjerker..." (10)

Nevertheless, not all compulsive viewers interviewed were seeking an increase of their level of stimulation all the time by selecting affect-rich shows. Instead, their statements revealed that, at least a few of them sometimes, desired a reduction in their level of stimulation. It seemed that this was particularly in demand during weekdays immediately after coming home from work. In those instances, these respondents appeared to be experiencing sensory overload; thus, they opted for certain undemanding (in terms of thinking and feeling), passive types of programming, which they watched at a low sound volume while getting ready for the night having a quick hunger/thirst quencher.

The effect of TV programming on compulsive viewers was often accentuated by the TV environment, which they carefully constructed to create the "right TV mood." Some of the elements that appeared to produce the desired effect were common to many of them: absence of outside interruptions (achieved, for example, by watching one's favorite shows alone or not answering the phone), comfortable seating or reclining, readily available food and drink, and lack of "unfinished business" (e.g., cooking and cleaning or next

day preparation for work).

From participant statements and their reactions to projective exercises, it was also apparent that the right TV environment often required the use of quality TV equipment loaded with special effects and features (large screen, clear color picture, picture-in-picture screen, multi-function remote with built-in scanner, etc.). Such equipment (TV-artifacts), which helped create a special environment for television watching, had emotional significance to the viewer only in a small number of cases ("I have an attachment to this set...my little Sony in the kitchen"). The choice of specific TV viewing environment depended on time of the day as well as viewer mood:

"If I'm not feeling well, I'll watch the TV in my bedroom...If I'm feeling pretty good and everything is going right, you know, the day hasn't been too terrible--I'll watch in the family room." (27)

Finally, compulsive TV viewers themselves contributed to the strong impact that TV viewing had on their mood by preparing, physically as well as mentally, to enjoy their TV experience. This sometimes took the form of simply anticipating the time of the day when they would be able to relax in front of their TV after a full-day's work and watch their favorite shows. In the latter case, preparation included thinking about what will happen in the next episode and playing this guessing game with their friends. The vast majority of compulsive viewers showed a strong preference

for shows that regularly included such "cliff-hangers" in their plot (day or evening soaps, mini-series, etc.). The role that anticipation and mental preparation for a show played in creating the total TV experience and changing the compulsive viewer's affect state can be seen in the following excerpt:

"I like to be surprised. I do like movies that cut off and say continued tomorrow. Yeah I like that. At that point I don't but then I know that I'm looking forward to tomorrow at 5 o'clock to continue to watch this picture." (10)

#### Changes in Self-Esteem

Analysis of the taped interviews with compulsive TV viewers suggested that their watching was also aimed at improving their self-image and elevating their low self-esteem. Means to achieve this included specific type of TV programming watched, scheduling of programs watched, selecting appropriate setting and atmosphere for viewing, and using TV viewing to establish/improve interpersonal relations.

The majority of respondents' statements and descriptions offered evidence of their efforts to be in places "where the action is," be accepted by important others, be materially successful, intelligent and powerful. Television made the conception of such images possible and provided them with legitimacy and an appearance of realism.

More specifically, compulsive TV viewing created

illusions of power and control; some of their descriptions indicated that TV made them feel "lady for a day." There was also a sense of control/power that these viewers could -- if they chose so -- exercise through their ability to change channels and turn the TV on/off. This feeling had recently become even more profound as viewers armed themselves with remote control devices, VCRs, and cable TV -- all of which made them even more powerful (they could now slow-down/fast-forward sequences, watch more than one show at the same time by flipping stations, etc.).

Related to feelings of power and control were illusions of "sharing the good life," which TV viewing often inflicted upon compulsive viewers. Programs from soap operas and game shows to Robin Leach's "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and "Runaway with the Rich and Famous" were mentioned by many respondents as their favorite for that reason.

Furthermore, TV programs did apparently a good job at flattering viewers and making them feel intelligent. Though the not-so-subtle attempts of shopping channel salespeople were not always appreciated by respondents, feelings of subject mastery/knowledge derived from watching TV game and talk shows, even solving TV Guide's TV-oriented crossword puzzles, were evident throughout the taped sessions. For instance, one compulsive TV viewer reacting to a portion of a new game show that she was shown during the interview commented:

"I'd rather see something with more action, watching people do things like Win, Lose or Draw, or Wheel of Fortune...This is just sitting there and you know the answer...I'd rather watch something that's going to make me think ...where you learn something while you're watching the show." (19)

Compulsive TV viewing helped some viewers boost their self-esteem through its impact on interpersonal relations, as well. First, it provided them with a topic of conversation and, to the degree that they kept up-to-date with screen happenings, it offered them the opportunity to appear as TV opinion leaders ("If I like something I'll talk to my friends about it and tell them"). Second, the steadfast following of a show (and the gossip surrounding it) allowed them a feeling of belonging to the "inner circle" of a show's or star's informal fan club (e.g., "Beauty and the Beast", "Bob Newhart"). Such feelings were evident in participant statements relating to personal information/anecdotes from a star's life, in which the star was typically referred to like an "old acquaintance."

"Barbra Streisand, on the other hand, is afraid. She likes her public but she's terrified...I saw her when she first started in. What was it? She was in Funny Girl on Broadway. And I've been a fan of hers ever since...And I think they just push her aside because she's such a perfectionist and she's difficult because of it...I mean the powers that be in California. In the film industry." (27)

#### Remorseful Feelings

In the long-run, the vast majority of compulsive TV

viewers experienced a profound sense of guilt as a result of watching, what they felt was, an excessive amount of TV. A few younger, unmarried such viewers felt remorse because their viewing deprived them of doing other things in their lives e.g., reading a book, going out, etc. Older, mostly married respondents, felt guilty because their preoccupation with TV watching made them neglect the needs of significant others in their lives (husband, relatives, friends). The following are two different examples of compulsive viewers' remorse for watching TV.

"Yeah, I don't like ...I'll get mad at myself if I (am) sitting home on a Saturday and it's a nice day outside and I'm just sitting in front of the TV watching, and it's not even interesting." (17)

"...if there is a show that I'm watching, then I don't answer the phone...that really sounds bad." (2)

Similar feelings of guilt were experienced by some respondents when they described the variety of TV equipment and gadgets they purchased to satisfy their habit ("I have a little portable that I always bring with me in the car. That's how bad I am"). A few respondents also expressed guilt and regret about the probability of watching the same amount of or more TV in the future ("It's very sad but I think (five years from now) I will be doing the exact same thing"). Yet, apparently such feelings of regret were not strong enough to outweigh their conditioning to TV watching and lead them to a decision to stop/change it. Alterna-

tively, they realized the danger of compulsive TV viewing but dreaded even more dealing with other more fearful situations in their lives.

#### Impact on Interpersonal Relationships

As already noted, many compulsive TV viewers' statements revealed that, over the years, their viewing had detrimental effects on their lives as married or unmarried couples, and interpersonal relationships in general. Although a small number of them reported doing and discussing most of their TV watching with their husbands or friends and implied that TV had been good for their marriage, many more respondents described situations where TV was causing disagreements, fights, temporary separations, even threats of dissolving a relationship. Some compulsive viewers' neglect of others while watching (as in the case of the respondent who would not interrupt her viewing to talk to a friend on the phone) often contributed to their isolation and alienation from others. It also seemed that younger couples and, especially married ones, were in more danger of facing TV-related strains in their relationships than older ones.

Not surprisingly, compulsive TV watchers generally downplayed, denied or rationalized the potential disastrous consequences of their behavior. One respondent, for instance, commenting on the possibility of compulsive TV

viewing leading to a break up in a relationship, stated:

"I would hope that a relationship is stronger than that. If it's not, then it wouldn't take a television to destroy it." (17)

#### Economic Effects

For most compulsive TV viewers, television viewing was a "free good" in the sense that, at least some of the most widely watched TV channels, were available free of charge. They rarely referred to any direct or indirect economic costs associated with their TV watching and, when they did, there was relatively little regret for such expenditures. In fact, in the minds of some respondents, TV watching was established as an economical (i.e., less expensive) form of entertainment and was, thus, preferred over dining out, movie-going, dancing, etc.

Four respondents, out of a total of thirty-three, did not own a TV with a remote control device, eight did not have cable (it was not available in some New York City areas until recently) and one reported not owning more than one TV set. From their statements during the interviews and their answers to a projective exercise describing new TV-related products/services, it appeared that most compulsive TV viewers were willing to pay substantial amounts of money to better satisfy their appetite for more, and more convenient, TV fare.

The opportunity cost associated with TV viewing was not

a major concern of compulsive viewers, either. When probed to think of other activities which they were neglecting when watching TV, only a couple of respondents expressed regret for not reading any books.

One way in which the economic cost of compulsive TV viewing was felt by some of this study's participants was through its impact on their work situation and habits. For instance, in the case of one such respondent, late TV watching conflicted with her early morning work shift. She admitted that television was the cause behind her frequent lateness to work and explained that she eventually resolved the problem by changing her work shift (as opposed to adjusting her TV viewing).

"I'd wake up and turn the TV on. And I find myself running late because I'm sitting there watching TV and I should be driving to work but when I used to work at 4 in the morning, I was late a lot. And that's the main reason why I had to change my hours because I could not get to work." (10)

#### Neglect of Physiological Needs

Lehmann (1987) and Yates, Leehey and Shisslak (1983) described how compulsive weight lifters and compulsive runners continued their strenuous regimen even at the risk of causing themselves physical harm. Did a similar situation develop in the case of compulsive TV viewing?

There were no reports of TV-caused physical harm (e.g., back/neck injuries -- the "Johnny Carson" syndrome) during

the in-depth interviews conducted for this study except from a few cases of temporary loss of sleep. For example, some compulsive TV viewers described how, occasionally, they would stay up to watch a show they "shouldn't miss." One of them described the effect of TV on her sleeping patterns as follows:

"Cause you...get up the next day and you say, "why did I have to keep the television on?"  
"Yes, that has happened. And then the next night comes and you say, "I'm going to go to bed early now and I'm not going to do this."  
And you end up doing the same thing again. I have to admit that has happened." (2)

The above absence of claims of serious physical injuries due to compulsive TV viewing might have been, of course, the result of respondents' misattributing such symptoms to other causes or their reluctance to reveal them due to their embarrassing nature. Also, one could include in this category the effect that compulsive TV viewing may have on the propensity of viewers to overindulge in eating, drinking or smoking. Respondents' statements indicated the possibility of a link between such behaviors and compulsive TV viewing. However, this study could not establish whether the latter was the cause of these other behavioral excesses or all of them were the result of a compulsivity trait that these respondents possessed.

#### Dependency

Finally, the most important consequence of compulsive

TV watching was undoubtedly the degree to which compulsive TV viewers became totally dependent on their habit in their daily lives. Most of the time, dependency was expressed as a set number of hours that they had to watch i.e., their daily TV "dose" ("It's like I have to watch between 7 or 8 hours a day") or through statements concerning how much they would be willing to pay in order to be able to watch TV ("I guess I would pay any amount of money just to have the service").

Such utterances were not figurative speech. These respondents also indicated their inability to control their urges to watch ("if there's something good on television, my other things will have to wait until a commercial or until the show is over") and sometimes gave evidence of "relapsing" after a period of non-viewing ("there were times that I was away from it for a week or two, maybe two weeks was the longest. But as soon as you get back, you know, it's like you were never gone...Then you make up for it when when you get home").

In only a few cases, compulsive TV viewers volunteered that, as far as they were concerned, they "couldn't live without watching TV," or that "they lived only to watch TV." Yet, when probed by the interviewer and in projective exercises, they admitted that they had developed some kind of dependency on television. That state of dependency was displayed in the following statement by a compulsive viewer:

"Recently, back in May, I went on vacation to Mexico. And I rented a room. No TV. And it's

supposed to be romantic but when you rest you like to be with the TV on. You know. It was awkward...a few times we'd say, "oh, I wish we could put the TV on." At 12 o'clock at night or in the morning." (32)

The wide range and complex interrelationships of compulsive TV viewing outcomes described above makes it difficult to compare them to those of noncompulsive forms of TV viewing. Yet, the material collected in this study seems to point to the following important differences in the respective consequences of these different forms of TV viewing: (a) noncompulsive TV viewing does not usually produce major (positive or negative) changes in a viewer's feelings toward oneself and/or others; (b) noncompulsive viewing rarely creates feelings of guilt or remorse about it, and (c) noncompulsive TV viewing does not generate dependency on the viewer. Thus, unlike compulsive participants who often indicated how futile it is for them to try to control their watching habits, an indulgent respondent stated regarding her favorite show:

"I don't think I'd like to miss an episode... But it has happened that they moved my favorite soap to another time slot and I couldn't watch it anymore. And, at first I thought it would be difficult for me but then I forgot about it. Now, from time to time, I'd tape it and watch it when I'm not doing something else." (22)

### Coping/Defense Mechanisms

The in-depth interviews with compulsive TV viewers also indicated that a lot of them were particularly adept at

using various defense mechanisms like rationalization, denial, projection, etc. to protect their ego all the time: during compulsive viewers' decision-making regarding whether to watch TV, or which program and when; while they were watching TV and especially in its aftermath. Some of the most frequently used ways of coping with TV viewing-related stress are detailed next.

### Rationalization

Some compulsive TV viewers, when probed during the interviews, indicated that they understood that there were alternative ways of dealing with their stress besides resorting to TV watching. For instance, since their stress stemmed from a combination of unfulfilled needs and external threats, such viewers could have tried to alleviate it by attacking the root of their problem (e.g., working at their relationships with others, taking up self-improvement lessons, or seeking professional help). Instead, they chose to avoid confronting their problem(s) and tried to escape reality by involving themselves with TV watching, often, rationalizing this choice. Respondents, for example, invoked external causes (e.g., TV availability -- "it's there, time pressure) to justify their compulsive TV watching:

"I never have enough free time. I work all day, come home and there's just a couple of hours. And you're exhausted. You just want to lay around and watch TV...But the weekends go so fast, so you never really have enough free time." (19)

Similarly, rationalizations occurred when some compulsive viewers "explained" that they watched TV for its informational value ("I think television it's a very important media for receiving information quickly"), despite having previously denied watching TV news programs, documentaries, etc. Apparently, they thought stressing the informational function of TV over its "lighter" (i.e., entertainment, escape, pastime) aspects, would better justify their unusual commitment to it.

Moreover, compulsive TV viewers often used rationalization during the interviews to justify contradictions in their statements e.g., when explaining their choice of shows or even the on-screen "behavior" of their favorite stars. For instance, a viewer, who had repeatedly renounced violence on TV, when confronted with the fact that one of her favorite shows was considered by some "too violent," stated: "The Beast in "Beauty and the Beast" tried not to be violent. And it was to help other people, if he was violent." Another respondent, first, claimed to like "everything romantic and nice" on TV and, later, stated that she would have liked to be "Alexis Carrington of Dynasty." She then tried to justify Alexis's character (and the apparent contradiction in her statements) by referring to how "vulnerable inside" and in need of protection she was.

Finally, compulsive TV viewers appeared particularly defensive when discussing the impact of TV on children,

since a lot of them had already admitted allowing or even encouraging kids to watch long hours of TV. Here's how two such respondents rationalized their position:

"If she is not watching television, as she gets older, she can be in the street and you can get into trouble in the street. So why not stay at home and watch TV?" (10)

"I think they're so bright because of TV... Sesame street was God's gift to children." (15)

#### Reaction Formation

This defense mechanism was displayed whenever compulsive TV viewers behaved or expressed feelings that were just the opposite of what they really felt. There were several such instances of a "love/hate" relationship between these viewers and a show or the act of watching TV in general, implying also the presence of confusion and anxiety in the minds of respondents.

For example, a participant who had previously admitted consistently watching or taping, for later viewing, the soap opera "Days of Our Lives," stated:

"I don't think you learn from soap operas. I just think it's like reading a trashy love story. Years ago there used to be a magazine called "Confessions" or "Love Confessions," or whatever. So that's just what it is, a trashy love story." (15)

In the same vein, some compulsive viewers called television by derogatory names like "idiot box," or "boob tube" and TV programs "chewing gum for the mind," or "worthless stuff."

### Denial

Denial was used by many compulsive TV viewers when asked directly by this interviewer to describe their TV habit: they seemed to have difficulty expressing openly what, in most cases, they feared and suspected, namely, that their TV viewing was out of control. For example,

"I'm not going to say that it's ruling my life...I think I have it in perspective. I'm not a fanatic. Maybe I'm supposed to be but I'm not a fanatic. I have it on several hours a day, there is no question about it...(If you are a fanatic) (i)t's taking the place of something else that's missing. Whereas I feel I use it as a friend." (30)

Nevertheless, even these respondents, after considerable probing and, in one or two cases, voluntarily as the interview went on, admitted being compulsive TV viewers -- something that had already become obvious from their previous statements and descriptions of their behavior and feelings.

A more subtle form of denial was presented by few compulsive TV viewers who claimed that they had been TV addicts in the past, but that, for various reasons, they were not any more. These, too, later on during the interview, would admit that they can not live without TV.

Furthermore, it seems that denial played an important role in the development of a compulsive TV viewing habit. Thus, many compulsive TV viewers stated that, in the past, they had never imagined themselves spending all this time in

front of the TV ("To tell you the truth, I just feel hooked on it. I didn't think I'd ever be somebody who'd be hooked on a soap opera"). Denying the possibility that they could succumb to the lure of TV probably impaired their ability to offer any resistance and avoid being controlled by their habit. In most cases, these respondents continued denying the extent of their watching, as evident by their consistent and serious underestimation of the amount of their daily watching.

#### Other Defense Mechanisms

Compulsive TV viewers' statements were replete with signs of other forms of psychological coping/defense mechanisms like projection (always referring to TV "addiction" as other people's problem -- not theirs), regression (crying during "tearjerker" shows or even commercials, watching horror shows only in the company of others), and withdrawal (not using their VCR to tape shows directly from TV when they had difficulty making it work). On the other hand, although many of these respondents' statements incorporated signs of aggression in a verbal form, a projective exercise referring to the use of a "plastic brick" to eliminate commercials from TV was given little support by only a handful of compulsive TV viewers.

Analysis of noncompulsive TV viewers' statements revealed that they, too, made extensive use of defense

mechanisms in relation to their TV viewing. For example, they attempted to rationalize their unusually strong commitment to their favorite shows, the latter's often "ridiculous" plot or characters, etc. Thus, an impulsive respondent tried to justify an instance when she watched the same episode of a TV series several times as follows:

"... 'Who shot J.R.' I watched it over and over. I must have seen this episode more than ten times. I know it sounds silly but it's true. ...most of it last year after I had a car accident and I spent a lot of time in the hospital, lying in bed. (I) couldn't move." (20)

Noncompulsive participants also used denial and other defensive mechanisms to cope with their fears of becoming "addicted" to TV, something to which a few of them felt they were "dangerously" close. In this, they appeared to be a lot like compulsive TV viewers.

#### Perceived Meaning of Compulsive TV Viewing

As already noted, many compulsive TV viewers repeatedly described their viewing habits as an "addiction" and saw themselves "being hooked" on TV, in general, or a show (Jesse Sally Rafael, All My Children, L.A. Law), in particular. Analysis of the taped interviews indicated that compulsive TV viewers, as a group, had a unique understanding of TV viewing as an addiction, which can be summarized as follows:

First, according to compulsive TV viewers, their TV viewing had the appearance of a strong habit i.e., it took

place without much planning and/or thinking. In some cases, they thought of themselves as being conditioned to turn the set on at particular times, or in association with other activities (e.g., "you just do it...Because no sooner than I come in the house I don't even take my coat off. I put the TV on"). Such lack of rational thinking and behavior conditioning applied to all aspects of compulsive TV viewing, as the statement below showed:

"Say you can't find your remote, I will search all over the house to find the remote before I'll go to the TV and just press the channel button. It's programmed into my mind now to just use the remote." (17)

Second, a number of compulsive TV viewers realized that they were "hooked on" TV and indicated that they had established a basis for "silent communication" with what was happening on the screen ("I just enjoy hearing and watching the program. I feel some kind of a thread that's strengthened between (Jesse Sally Rafael) and myself").

Third, some of these respondents seemed to understand compulsive TV viewing as a substitute for other, more serious activities or interests in the viewer's life, a way of coping with something the compulsive viewer was, for various reasons, unable to get. ("It's supplanting something else in their life that should be there...It's taking the place of something else that's missing").

Finally, compulsive TV viewers varied substantially when it came to assessing the impact of compulsive TV

watching on people in general: a few used the analogy of smoking or eating to describe its effects ("It precludes (TV addicts from) doing anything else...Like people who are addicted to smoking, or any other habit, eating"). Others compared watching a show to reading a fascinating, absorbing book ("You want to know what's going to happen in the next chapter"). Yet, most compulsive viewers rejected the notion that their TV viewing resembled addiction to alcohol or cocaine (e.g., "...it's an addiction...but I wouldn't call it like alcohol, or I don't feel that it would make anybody stay home and just lose their business by watching TV").

Indeed, most of the time, compulsive TV viewers' concern seemed to be more about the negative image they might project if labelled "TV addicts" than the psychological, social or physical harm they might suffer as a result of their TV habits. One respondent's statement made these points clear:

"To tell you the truth I just feel hooked on it...They say bad things about people who get hooked on soap operas. That they don't think. They're not thoughtful people. They just follow what they're being told on the shows. But I do not think of myself like that. I don't know." (2)

In general, noncompulsive respondents were in agreement with their compulsive counterparts on most of the above characterizations of compulsive TV viewing. In contrast to them, though, they were more likely to view the latter as a "disease" with very grave consequences. Characteristically, one of them -- an indulgent viewer herself -- stated:

"It is definitely a disease. I'm not trying to be fictitious. But think of the consequences...I know this old man who lives in my neighborhood and he watches TV day and night. Never leaves his room. I mean...he's sick. Isn't he?" (11)

The preceding section discussed in detail twelve "core" themes that emerged from the depth interviews, which characterize compulsive TV viewing. The next section utilizes these themes and their interrelationships in developing a model of compulsive TV viewing.

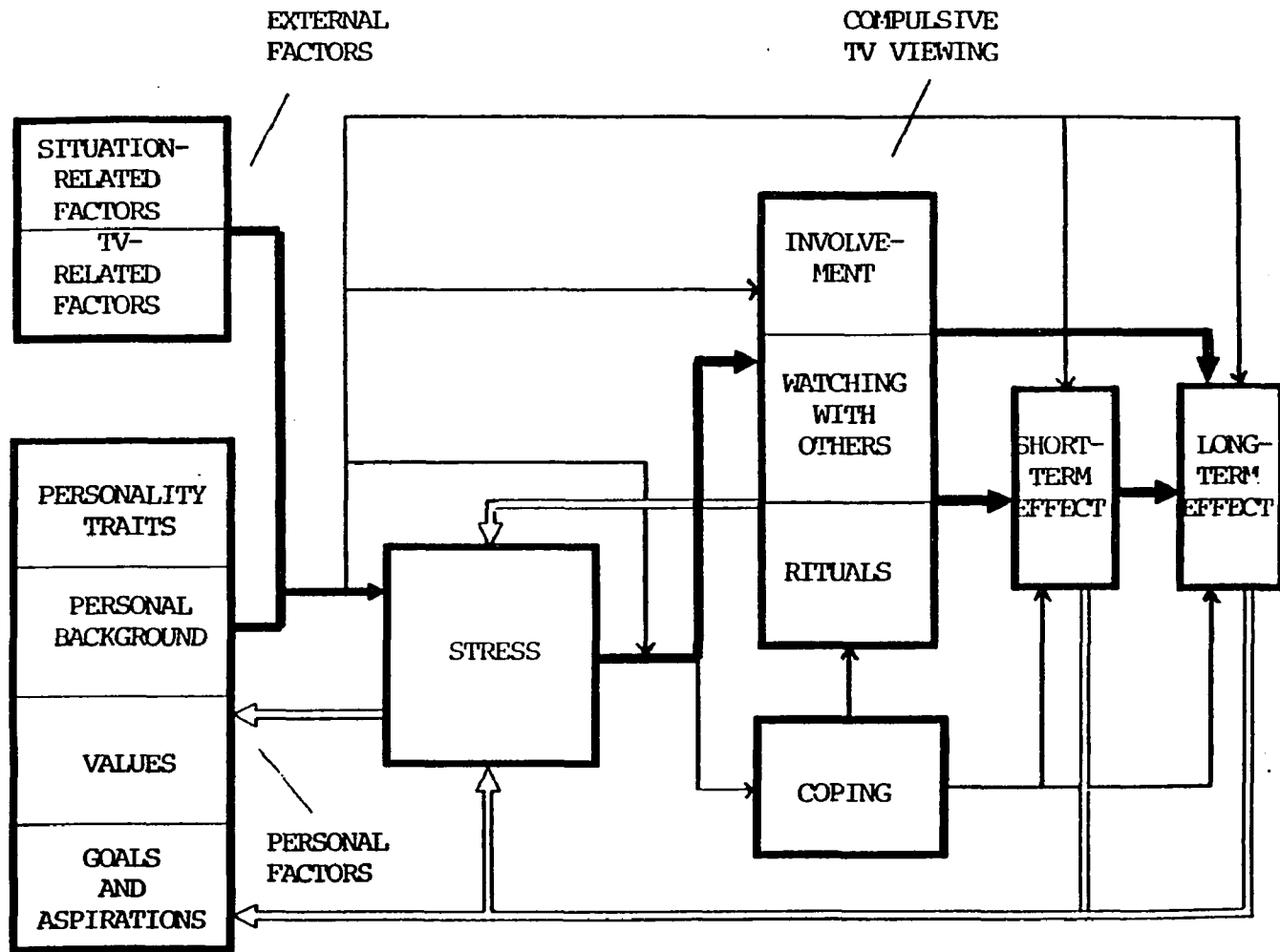
#### A Model of Compulsive TV Viewing

Compulsive TV viewing can be defined as dependency-induced activity comprised of uncontrollable, stereotypical behavior related to TV viewing. Such TV viewing is an end-in-itself, a single-minded commitment toward TV-related activities, which tends to persist over time.

In this section, the various categories of themes, which emerged from the in-depth interviews with compulsive TV viewers, are integrated into a model of compulsive TV viewing. The various factors included in the model (see Figure IV-1) are arranged into three parts: compulsive TV viewing determinants, components, and outcomes. These factors and their interrelationships are discussed next.

#### Compulsive TV Viewing Determinants

Findings of this study indicate that compulsive TV viewing is a viewer's response to anxiety and stress



A MODEL OF COMPULSIVE TV VIEWING

TABLE IV-1

Thick arrows show the main determinants of Compulsive TV Viewing and its effects; thin arrows represent other influences, and unfilled arrows show feedback loops

experienced as a result of a perceived threat/demand from her environment. The latter is produced by the interaction of external (situational) factors with personal factors like psychological traits, sociodemographics, values, as well as goals and aspirations.

#### Situation-related and TV-specific Factors

Situational factors represent events and conditions affecting the lives of individuals, which are outside their own control. For example, this study found that working women today were influenced by the extraordinary demands made upon them to fulfill their roles both at work and at home, their limited finances, inadequate free time, and lack of opportunities for developing satisfying interpersonal relationships.

In the case of other groups of compulsive TV viewers like adult males, retired males/females, or full-time homemakers, additional situational factors might emerge as influential e.g., child-raising responsibilities, career stagnation, peer-pressure, physical deterioration, etc.

Such situational factors do not only contribute, along with person-related factors, to the creation of stress and, thus, to compulsive TV viewing as a way to alleviate it; they also influence whether an individual would choose compulsive TV viewing, some other compulsive activity, or even a noncompulsive way of coping. For instance, one study

participant, who had spent many years living in Europe, referred to her very different TV watching patterns there, which she attributed to different cultural norms (TV was not generally accepted as a desirable leisure activity in Europe) and TV availability (there were only 2-3 TV stations broadcasting for only part of the day).

Furthermore, situational factors affect how compulsive TV viewers watch i.e., alone or with company, the atmosphere created and the rituals performed while watching as well as the viewer's level of involvement with the activity. For example, compulsive viewers' financial situation had a profound effect upon the amount and quality of ritual artifacts (TV gadgets, TV-related subscriptions, etc.) used by them.

Finally, situational factors may affect the consequences of compulsive TV watching, too. A respondent, for example, revealed that she suffered continuous embarrassment at work from being late due to her compulsive TV watching late at night. Once she had her shift moved from early morning to afternoon, though, the negative psychological and social consequences of her habit seemed to disappear.

On the other hand, TV-specific factors like type of programming, combination of sound and image, or TV's wide availability were found in this study to contribute little, if at all, to the initial state of anxiety/stress which led

individuals to become compulsive TV viewers. These factors were more likely, instead, to affect choosing TV viewing vis-a-vis some other coping mechanism, the way in which TV watching was experienced as well as its short- and long-term outcomes.

In the model (Figure IV-1), these influences of situational and TV-specific factors are represented by the arrows linking them, in combination with personal factors, to (a) stress, (b) the choice point between compulsive TV viewing and alternative coping, (c) compulsive TV viewing per se and its components, as well as (d) short- and long-term consequences of compulsive TV watching.

#### Person-related Factors

Situational factors interact with various personal factors to create stress and anxiety in an individual. Such personal factors include psychological traits, background characteristics, values, and goals/aspirations.

More specifically, this study found that certain conditions related to the work environment and the private lives of participants were perceived as demanding or threatening, eventually causing stress, in light of the latter's psychological characteristics: low self-esteem, fear of loneliness/alienation, lack of moderation and ability to discriminate, as well as tendencies to fantasize and avoid change/pain. Similarly, several other person-

related factors like background characteristics (SES, stage in life cycle, etc.), personal values (conformity, material comfort, conservatism, etc.), and goals/aspirations (or lack of them) contributed to the formation of such perceptions.

This list of stress-inducing personal factors may not be exhaustive. Future research with different populations of compulsive TV viewers might reveal additional person-related influences or question the importance of some of those mentioned above.

Besides contributing, in combination with situational factors, to the creation of stress, the same categories of person-related factors were found to influence how individuals responded to stress i.e., whether they resorted to compulsive TV viewing or chose an alternative way of coping. For example, respondents growing up in homes where TV viewing was restricted or occupied a prominent role in their socialization process (mother-daughter TV-based bond) were more likely to turn to TV to relieve their stress. Similarly, individuals with personalities characterized by tendencies to avoid situations likely to cause pain/discomfort (e.g., changes in their routine or lack of order in their lives) were more likely to adopt the repetitive, stereotypical and ritualistic behavior, which is part of the compulsive TV watching experience. Finally, individuals with a tendency to fantasize, were also more likely to immerse themselves in the non-threatening make-believe world of

television in order to relieve stress.

As noted in the case of situational influences, person-related factors also affect how compulsive viewers do their TV watching and the nature and severity of consequences from it. For example, it was found in this study that their apparent inability to discriminate among similar things and ideas and lack of moderation made them likely to watch long hours of TV, often, indiscriminantly.

On the other hand, the fact that they lacked well-defined future goals and aspirations added a positive dimension to the generally negative outcomes of compulsive TV viewing: the latter provided them with ideas and images around which to build their own present and expected/ideal self-identity.

In Figure IV-1, the various influences of person-related factors are represented by the arrows linking the latter, in combination with situational factors, to stress, the choice point between compulsive TV viewing and alternative coping, compulsive TV viewing and its components, as well as its short- and long-term outcomes.

### Stress and Coping

The intermediate link between all person-related and situational factors, on the one hand, and compulsive TV viewing, on the other, is a state of tension, uncomfortable levels of arousal and stress, which a lot of study parti-

participants reported experiencing.

Recent conceptual definitions of stress have referred to it as "a process that involves recognition of and response to threat or danger" (Fleming, Baum and Singer 1984, p. 939). On the other hand, coping "includes overt and covert responses to threat or danger, usually directed toward overall reduction of stress" (ibid.). Compulsive television watching was found in this study to be such a form of coping i.e., an individual's response to external perceived threats/demands, intended to reduce stress to manageable levels.

Compulsive TV viewing, though, is not the only available way of coping with stress. Alternative coping strategies may consist of other forms of compulsive behavior (e.g., alcoholism, obesity) and/or noncompulsive responses (e.g., attacking the root(s) of the stressful situation, learning to live with high levels of stress, withdrawal, denial). In fact, some respondents, during the depth interviews, alluded to using some of these alternatives, especially other forms of compulsive behavior (compulsive shopping, smoking, drinking, eating and exercising), in lieu of or in addition to compulsive TV viewing.

Analysis of the depth interview material revealed that stress and coping were also affected by the individual components of compulsive TV viewing and the latter's short- and long-term consequences. For example, compulsive TV

viewers often reported getting relieved and experiencing a reduction in stress while watching a TV show due to its emotionally-laden, soothing content. On the other hand, watching with others, and the problems created as a result of it, was sometimes a reason why compulsive TV viewers experienced stress while watching. Furthermore, some of the long-term outcomes of compulsive TV viewing (e.g., remorse as a result of realizing one's dependency on TV) induced stress and initiated coping attempts, too. Judging from respondents' statements, it appears that stress in this case was sometimes more severe than the original level that created their TV habit.

In the model (Figure IV-1), the above relationships are depicted by arrows linking, first, the interaction point between person- and situation-related factors with stress; second, stress with either compulsive TV viewing or alternative coping through the choice point (CP) and, third, compulsive TV viewing and short- as well as long-term consequences to stress (feedback loop). In fact, it is the feedback relationship from long-term consequences to stress, that helps explain the compulsive/addictive TV viewing cycle.

#### Components of Compulsive TV Viewing

This part of the model is concerned with the totality of the compulsive TV viewing experience i.e., what, when,

where, and how compulsive TV viewers watch. The findings of the present study showed that the experience of compulsive TV viewing could be described in terms of three major dimensions/components: level of involvement, watching alone/with others, and TV rituals. Each of these components will be briefly discussed next.

#### Level of Involvement

Four indicators of compulsive TV viewer involvement were analyzed in this study: amount of planning, information processing, attention, and affect associated with TV watching.

On the basis of the findings discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the level of compulsive TV viewer involvement was found to vary depending on type of program watched, other external/situational variables affecting watching (e.g., time of day, other activities performed), as well as personal viewer characteristics.

In general, compulsive TV viewing seems to be a mostly affect-rich but cognition-poor experience, which commanded relatively high levels of attention -- in some cases total absorption on the part of the viewer. It also involved some planning/preparation primarily oriented towards "not missing anything." This description belies previous assertions in the marketing and advertising literature classifying TV watching as a low-involvement activity -- it appears instead

that involvement associated with compulsive TV viewing comes closer to what Bloch and Bruce (1984) and Holbrook (1987) called "enduring involvement" and "deep involvement," respectively. It is exactly this kind of compulsive TV viewers' involvement that sets them apart from noncompulsive (habitual, indulgent, etc.) ones.

Some compulsive TV viewers' search for TV shows to watch often entailed continuous seeking and obtaining information about programs and schedules from other viewers and/or published sources (TV Guide, Soap Opera Digest). Once they identified their "favorite" shows (e.g., at the beginning of the season), these compulsive TV viewers would not want to miss anything relating to the shows' plot, characters and the associated gossip. Such a strong commitment to certain programs, though, did not usually translate into much cognitive activity; there was little, for example, critical analysis of the show's story, evaluation of show attributes, comparison with other shows, etc. Instead, there was emotional attachment to/ identification with a character in the show and/or enthusiasm for its content.

Compulsive TV viewers were found to have several such "favorite" shows per day. Nevertheless, they watched a lot of other programs besides their favorite. For example, they would "graze" i.e., use the "up/down" buttons on the remote control device to sample all TV stations received (often as

many as seventy), choose one that looks interesting and stay with it until the end. Alternatively, after finishing watching one of their favorite shows, they might keep the dial on the same channel and watch the rest of the day's/night's schedule. Such TV viewing involved little planning, fluctuating levels of attention, minimum amount of thinking and only moderate amounts of affect expression.

#### Watching with Others

The findings of this study suggest that decisions made by compulsive viewers to watch TV alone or in the company of others depends on a variety of factors: (a) type of show (favorite or not, sexually "explicit," sports, horror-movie or game show, etc.); (b) other external/situational factors like number of TV sets at home, day, time of day/night; (c) who the other(s) may be (intimate friends, parents, or children), and (d) personal characteristics of compulsive viewer. For example, some compulsive TV viewers with strong communication needs are more likely to seek out and create opportunities to watch with others. Others are more inclined to use their watching to escape the harsh reality of their lives and, therefore, more likely to prefer watching alone.

Careful analysis of the depth interview material also indicates that compulsive TV viewers would usually give the expression "watching with others" a broader meaning than that implying the physical presence of one or more persons

with them while watching TV. Thus, watching with others sometimes referred to discussing what was happening on the screen on the phone with a friend during the show or even exchanging information about a show with friends before or after watching it.

Besides providing psychological support and, thus, enhancing/facilitating the experience of watching TV, though, watching with others may also create problems for compulsive TV viewers. This study found, for example, that the latter tried to avoid watching TV in the company of more than one or two people. Large groups watching TV were apparently associated with more distractions from their favorite show and more difficulty in reaching an agreement on what and how to watch.

Disagreements, of course, arose even when compulsive viewers watched TV with only one intimate friend or their spouse, usually, as a result of different tastes for TV programming or different levels of involvement with TV in general. Compulsive TV viewers reported a variety of ways to deal with these disagreements ranging from submitting to the other person's preferences to resorting to "parallel" viewing i.e., watching their favorite show on another TV set.

#### TV-related Rituals

Rituals emerged in this study as a major component of

compulsive TV viewing. It appears that ritualistic behavior on the part of compulsive viewers helps in reducing stress by itself i.e., independently of the effects of TV viewing and its other components. Some of the rituals engaged in by compulsive TV viewers have a preventative role (e.g., setting the automatic switch-off and falling asleep was a ritual employed by a viewer to avoid staying up to watch TV beyond a certain time). Others, provided structure and meaning to otherwise mundane behavior (Rook 1985) (e.g., sitting in a particular place, wearing "TV-watching clothes" or getting the VCR ready for taping one show while watching another).

Compulsive viewers identified during the depth interviews many artifactual materials (TV-artifacts) used in their TV watching rituals and provided information about ritual script (who and when was supposed to use them). For example, one respondent would only watch television sitting either on the side of her living-room couch closer to the TV set or on the floor if they had guests occupying her favorite seat. Another, would watch late-night horror movies only lying in bed so that she can pull the blanket over her head and cover her face during the most terrifying moments of the film. She would allow no one else to watch TV with her during these times to avoid embarrassment.

Thus, rituals, like level of involvement and watching alone or with others, depended on type of show, other

external/situational variables (e.g., time of the day/night, place of watching, presence of others) as well as personal characteristics of the compulsive TV viewer.

In fact, as described above, all three major components comprising the compulsive TV viewing experience were related to each other. For some compulsive TV viewers, for instance, "serious" i.e., deeply involving TV watching meant watching alone, highly ritualistic preparation before the show but little, if any activity, during the show.

In the model (Figure IV-1), the three major components of compulsive TV viewing are identified and their interrelations shown in the form of arrows linking them with each other. The arrows connecting situation- and person-related variables to compulsive TV viewing, also mentioned while discussing other parts of the model, indicate the influences of viewer type and a wide variety of external/situational variables including type of programming on compulsive TV viewing and its components. The latter, in turn, is linked to compulsive TV viewing outcomes, which is discussed next.

#### Compulsive TV Viewing Outcomes

The present study identified a large number of outcomes of compulsive TV viewing, which were classified as either short- or long-term and, on the basis of their nature, as social, psychological, economic or physical. As far as compulsive TV viewers were concerned, the economic

and physical consequences of their habit were perceived to be only marginally significant in either the short- or the long-run.

In general, long-term outcomes of compulsive TV viewing may or may not be directly related to short-term ones; in some cases, they are simply the product of the accumulation of short-term effects over a long period of time (e.g., negative impact on social relationships). In others, short- and long-term effects are qualitatively different and may produce antithetical results (e.g., psychological effects reduce stress in the short-run but are likely to increase it in the long-run). Finally, both individual short- and long-term outcomes are interrelated among themselves (e.g., short-term changes in mood and short-term changes in self-esteem). The nature of the various outcomes of compulsive TV viewing is outlined next and presented in a summary form in Table IV-4. Also, short- and long-term outcomes are shown in the model of compulsive TV viewing (Figure IV-1) to be influenced by compulsive TV viewing and its components (arrows from the latter to the former). Finally, as already noted above, short-term effects have an impact on long-term ones and that in Figure IV-1 is shown by the arrow linking the two.

#### Short-term Social Outcomes

Immediate social effects from compulsive TV viewing

TABLE IV-4  
 COMPULSIVE TV VIEWING OUTCOMES

OUTCOMES	PERCEIVED EFFECT ON VIEWER
<u>Short-term Outcomes</u>	
Social	Positive or Negative (depending on viewer characteristics)
Psychological	Positive (stress reduction via altered consciousness; changes in mood and self-esteem)
Physical & Economic	Not significant
All Short-term Effects	Positive on personal factors (values, goals)
<u>Long-term Outcomes</u>	
Social	Negative (compulsive TV viewing stigmatized)
Psychological	Negative (stress increase due to feelings of remorse; low self-worth; alienation, and frustration as a result of dependency)
Physical & Economic	Not significant
All Long-term Effects	Negative on personal factors (personality, values)

were found in this study to vary according to viewer characteristics. Thus, for some compulsive viewers, TV viewing offered some increased opportunities for social interaction and intimacy and, at least in their view, helped them in improving interpersonal skills and dealing with demanding life situations (TV programs provided "lessons in life"). In the case of other compulsive TV viewers, conditions did not improve -- in fact, they might have deteriorated as a result of their social isolation brought about by their compulsive TV habit and the way they engage in it. Thus, spending their free time at home, watching TV mostly alone, and getting absorbed in the "make-believe" world of TV while paying no attention to their real-life problems, diminished their chances to create and maintain social relationships. The social consequences of compulsive TV viewing were also largely negative for these compulsive viewers who used television viewing as an opportunity to express their, often, negative feelings since that was likely to drive others away and accentuate their problems.

#### Short-term Psychological Outcomes

Immediate psychological effects of the compulsive TV watching experience included (a) the experience of imagery and altered consciousness; (b) changes in mood, and (c) changes in self-esteem. All of these effects, individually and collectively, resulted in a reduction of

stress, which in turn fed back in a positive way on viewer mood state and self-esteem.

More specifically, as a result of their viewing, compulsive TV viewers reported experiencing an altered or no sense of time and a feeling of "high" as well as spending significant amounts of time fantasizing on the basis of what they viewed on TV. For example, compulsive TV viewers were unable to realize time spent in front of the TV and sometimes missed meals and/or sleep being absorbed into what they were watching. Most of them, also felt "out-of-body"-like experiences by projecting themselves into situations on the TV screen, assuming new and/or multiple identities and engaging in heavy imagining/daydreaming. Such experiences, in general, helped these compulsive viewers to reduce their level of stress.

Various aspects of compulsive TV viewing helped in, temporarily, reducing or totally eliminating viewers' original stress either by elevating their mood (e.g., in the case of upbeat, funny shows) or preoccupying them with other, more manageable, feelings and problems based on non-threatening, non-personal events happening on the screen. The latter was particularly evident, for instance, when some compulsive TV viewers appeared in their statements to substitute their anger or disappointment for a real-life person in their lives with similar feelings expressed against a particular TV character.

Furthermore, through their successful dealing with stress but also through their sense of belonging to a distinct group (e.g., "60 Minutes" or "General Hospital" devotees) and the specific benefits acquired from watching a show (e.g., knowledge about relationships or information about a foreign place, arousal/excitement) some compulsive TV viewers, in the short-run, were also able to raise their self-esteem and improve their self-image.

Therefore, besides its short-term effects that usually lead to stress-reduction, compulsive TV viewing also has a positive/facilitating impact on viewers' personal characteristics. In the model (Figure IV-1), these relationships are represented by the (backward) arrows linking compulsive TV short-term outcomes and stress to person-related factors.

#### Long-term Social Outcomes

In the long-term, compulsive TV viewing produces, in most cases, strongly negative effects as other people and, especially, those in frequent and close contact with compulsive TV viewers distance themselves from them. The latter's habit is often viewed as a sickness and a personality deficiency, which makes them unattractive as friends, wives, or lovers. As almost all respondents stated in this study, compulsive TV viewing is still stigmatized by society.

### Long-term Psychological Outcomes

In general, the psychological effects from compulsive TV viewing in the long-run are particularly important and substantially different from those occurring in the short-term. They may include feelings of loneliness/alienation from mainstream TV viewers and, sometimes, society in general; feelings of remorse/shame/guilt for their compulsive TV viewing, and feelings of low self-worth and frustration for not being able to measure up to their ideal self-images and accomplish their ambitious, TV-inspired "projects." All of these negative psychological effects appear to be reinforcing each other and, collectively, lead compulsive TV viewers to experience ever higher levels of stress.

Moreover, to the degree that these individuals choose to continue using TV watching as a means of temporarily reducing their stress, they develop a "dependency" on it. The study found that compulsive TV viewers, although reluctant sometimes to face it, displayed the basic characteristics of such dependency i.e., increasing appetite for TV watching, and symptoms of relapsing after periods of not watching TV. In fact, the realization (or suspicion/fear) of compulsive TV viewers that they have developed such dependency may itself lead to more stress and, thus, perpetuate the "cycle of TV addiction."

The findings of this study suggest that not all compulsive TV viewers are affected by all the consequences described above to the same extent. For example, some of them may be more susceptible to feelings of remorse for their compulsive viewing due to their high self-monitoring and needs for acceptance. Others may be less likely to experience such feelings (or to become aware of them) as a result of their self-induced, TV-supported isolation.

Finally, as in the case of short-term effects described above, long-term effects of compulsive TV viewing and especially TV-dependency and the resulting increased stress have a direct impact on viewers' personal characteristics (e.g., personality, values). In the model (Figure IV-1), this influence is represented by the (backward) arrows from long-term outcomes and stress to person-related factors.

In sum, the preceding chapter first presented a classification of this study's participants into compulsive, indulgent, habitual, and impulsive TV viewers along with their respective characteristics. Second, it discussed the findings of this research as they emerged from the depth interviews with compulsive TV viewers. Findings were presented in the form of themes and propositions classified into twelve major categories/dimensions of compulsive TV viewing. Finally, on the basis of these findings, a model of compulsive TV viewing was developed and its various components and their interrelationships were discussed. The

next, and final, chapter of this dissertation summarizes the objectives and methodology of this study, derives a number of theoretical, methodological and policy-related conclusions, and suggests topics for future research.

## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter of the dissertation presents a summary of the objectives of the study and its methodology and discusses conclusions based on the findings. Finally, recommendations about marketing implications are made as well as some suggestions for future research.

Summary

In this section, brief summaries of the study's research objectives and scope are presented along with a look on the relevant literature. Summaries of the research design and methodology used in the study follow.

Objectives of the Study

The central objective of this study was to develop the basis for a marketing concept of compulsive behavior, and to explore the scope and nature of compulsive consumer phenomena as they manifest themselves in the case of compulsive television viewing.

More specifically the study attempted to capture the subjective meaning of the "television viewing experience" i.e., what the compulsive viewer herself believed to be the major elements of such an experience, its etiology and consequences.

The need for studying the experiential aspects of consumer behavior and employing phenomenological methodologies to discover the deep meaning of things and inner feelings of consumers toward them have been pointed out repeatedly in the literature (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Deshpande 1983; Belk 1987). A number of recent studies attempted to apply this "new" thinking to the study of impulsive, ritualistic and compulsive consumer behavior (Rook 1984; 1985; O'Guinn and Faber 1989).

In particular, the study of compulsive consumer behavior is still at an embryonic stage. Only compulsive buying of products with a potential for causing economic hardship to the individual involved has, thus far, been addressed in a small number of exploratory studies, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and self-selected samples. Although they have offered a conceptual definition of such activity and discussed some of its constituent elements, they have not been geared toward developing a comprehensive model of compulsive consumer behavior. Therefore, the nature and direction of relationships among the major factors influencing compulsive behavior have yet to be systematically outlined; relevant hypotheses have not been formulated either, restricting the ability of researchers to empirically test such relationships.

On the other hand, the study of TV viewing, as a highly

involving consumption activity occupying several hours of people's daily schedules, affecting and being affected by their social relationships, and motivated by more than a simple need for leisure, has been largely neglected by marketing researchers. Instead, both academic and industry studies have concentrated on television as an advertising vehicle with TV viewers being treated as raw numbers in TV ratings tables. No significant research effort has been conducted to date to study the unique phenomenon of compulsive television viewing and especially its experiential aspects despite references made in the popular press about its prevalence among certain socioeconomic cohorts (e.g., dual income baby boomers fatigued with conspicuous out-of-home leisure activities who turn to "cocooning" and decide to settle down in front of the TV).

Therefore, in sum, the main objective of this study was to provide insights into that particular type of compulsive consumer behavior, TV watching, and, in doing so, help future investigations of the general phenomenon of compulsive consumer experiences and action.

#### Scope of the Study

To accomplish the study's objectives above, compulsive TV viewing was analyzed and described in depth. As a result, and in the spirit of the phenomenological approach, a large number and variety of compulsive behavior elements was

discussed in detail -- a particularly important task, in the opinion of this researcher, given the lack of prior research in this area.

Besides limiting the scope of this research to the study of only one form of compulsive consumer behavior, other restrictions were also imposed in the research design of this study (e.g., sample consisting of only full-time employed females with no children at home reporting extensive TV viewership, use of TV-related apparatus, and some feeling of remorse about their viewing) in order to secure participation of as many "true" compulsive TV viewers as possible. That approach was necessary given the absence of a standardized instrument measuring compulsive consumer behavior or predisposition.

#### Related Literature

As already mentioned, there have been very few studies of compulsive consumer behavior in the marketing literature, all of them, published within the past two-three years (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Wallendorf, Belk and Sherry 1988; Faber and O'Guinn 1988; Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych 1987). Another few, small-scale studies have dealt with basically the same phenomenon under a different name -- fanatic consumer behavior (Lehmann 1987; Holbrook 1987).

Regarding the methodology used in this study, the use of the phenomenological approach and qualitative

research designs has recently been on the increase in the marketing/consumer behavior literature (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Amaize 1988; Rook 1987; Aanstoos and Barrell 1986). At the same time, several published articles have dealt with the theory and the mechanics of applying phenomenological/qualitative approaches to the study of marketing issues, though few of them focused on in-depth interviewing (Thompson 1988; Jennings 1987; Churchill 1985; Deshpande 1983; Szybillo and Berger 1979; Calder 1977).

The present study also benefited from non-marketing, primarily psychological and communication research in the area of compulsion/addiction and TV viewing, respectively, especially in identifying initial topics of discussion for the in-depth interviews (Orford 1985; Peele 1985; Salzman 1981). In addition, a significant number of non-marketing studies was used as guides in the development and execution of the research design component of this study (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979; Taylor and Bogdan 1984; Locke, Spirduso and Silverman 1987).

#### Research Design and Methodology

For the purposes of this study, thirty-three in-depth interview sessions were conducted with working female television viewers living in homes without children. The participants were recruited with the help of an independent qualitative research center from various parts of Long

Island and Queens, New York. They were selected on the basis of their answers to a telephone-administered screener purported to identify as many probable compulsive TV viewers as possible. The screener included questions pertaining to daily/weekly amount of TV watching, type of show watched, use of TV to regulate mood, feelings of remorse for watching TV, ownership of multiple sets, excessive use of TV remote device, and subscription to TV Guide and cable TV. Care was taken to secure participation of viewers representing a mixture of different ages, incomes and married/unmarried status. Respondents who chose to participate in the interviews were offered \$25 to defray their costs. After scrutinizing the collected material and, on the basis of several criteria derived from the marketing and psychological literature on the subject, nine out of the original thirty-three respondents were identified as compulsive TV viewers.

In-depth interviews were conducted by this researcher in a fully equipped professional facility and lasted for approximately one hour each. They were all audio recorded; ten of them, judged after repeated auditions to contain the richest information about compulsive viewing, were transcribed verbatim.

The structure of the in-depth interviews was flexible and evolved according to the information provided by the respondents. The core topics discussed, which were included

in a discussion guide, were based on prior marketing and non-marketing research regarding compulsive and addictive behavior. Such topics referred to compulsive TV viewers' perceptions of their viewing habits and their consequences, the role of TV in their lives and their relationships with others as well as their involvement with and dependency on television.

Respondents were also asked to describe in their own words exactly how they experienced television watching and participated in several projective exercises designed to elicit information about their deeper feelings and thoughts on the subject.

### Conclusions

This section discusses the main conclusions drawn from this study. It is divided into three parts:

(a) conclusions specifically related to compulsive TV viewing, (b) those relating to compulsive consumer behavior in general, and (c) conclusions derived from the design and implementation of a qualitative/phenomenological approach to the study of a marketing/consumer behavior topic.

#### Conclusions Related to Compulsive TV Viewing

Regarding the specific form of compulsive behavior investigated in this research i.e., compulsive TV viewing, the findings of the present study point to the following

conclusions:

1. Compulsive TV viewers watch television for most of their day/night when they are not at work. What distinguishes them though from other excessive TV viewers is (a) why they watch TV; (b) how they watch it; (c) the effects that TV watching has on them and, to a lesser degree, (d) what they watch.

2. Compulsive TV viewers have difficulty articulating their reasons for watching television the way they do; a lot of them referred to its availability -- "it's there," which probably facilitated their inclination.

It seems, though, that there are more than one type of compulsive TV viewers drawn to TV watching for different reasons: (a) TV watching offers some of them opportunities to communicate with others, get lessons in life or fill time and, thus, alleviate the stress which they experience in their everyday lives; (b) compulsive TV viewing allows others to avoid stress, at least temporarily, by escaping from their problems and "harsh" reality and, finally, (c) compulsive TV viewing offers other viewers ample convenient targets and opportunities to express, mostly negative, emotions created by stressful situations in their lives.

In the case of the specific population of compulsive TV viewers investigated in this study i.e., working females with no children at home, perceived problems included

primarily demands placed upon them to simultaneously fulfill their roles at work and at home, lack of satisfactory intimate relationships and limited free time as well as finances.

3. All compulsive viewers are "hooked on" TV watching in general -- not specific TV programming. Although, many of them in this study tended to pre-select and claimed to watch "religiously" some "favorite" shows, which they "can't miss," they would basically watch everything that is on. They often "grazed" all the channels using their remote control, tried to watch simultaneously more than one show by "flipping" channels and often stayed with one channel to watch what is on before/after their favorite show. Moreover, they tended to get bored, even with their favorite programs, after two or more seasons.

4. In general, compulsive TV viewers' involvement with TV watching was characterized by relatively high levels of attention (approaching total absorption when watching their favorite shows), moderate amounts of planning and preparation (much of it ritualistic), little or no cognitive activity during shows but substantial emotional engagement.

5. Compulsive TV viewing is closely associated with extensive performance of rituals and use of TV-related artifacts. The latter apparently makes compulsive TV viewers feel special, provides meaning to an otherwise ordinary activity and gives them a sense of security and power. Thus,

according to this study's findings, the most important "TV-artifact" is the remote control device, which allowed such viewers choice, control, and reassured them that they were not missing anything.

Surprisingly, the VCR was not used, as expected, to preserve memorable TV moments/memories but, instead, to extend the viewer's opportunity to watch more shows and avoid missing anything (e.g., their "second" or "third" favorite shows at a particular time slot, rented movies, shows broadcast at inconvenient times, repeat interesting scenes, etc). Another very important TV watching artifact was the telephone used primarily to expand the TV viewing experience by including others ("TV buddies") in it.

6. While all compulsive viewers resent distractions during their "serious" TV watching and, therefore, avoid TV watching in the company of large groups, some of them prefer to watch certain shows with an intimate other (husband, boyfriend). It appears that this group of compulsive viewers seeks to establish/improve communication and get closer to a loved one using TV as an intermediary. Nevertheless, watching with others may create friction and disagreements, too. Thus, TV viewing for some of this study's compulsive TV viewers was more likely to be solitary giving rise to needs for multiple TV sets and other TV-related equipment.

7. Finally, all compulsive TV viewers seem to experience strong feelings of guilt and shame for what they

perceive to be a strong attachment to television viewing. This and other negative psychological long-term effects (feelings of alienation, low self-worth), not only outweigh any positive short-term gains from compulsive TV viewing (stress reduction, social benefits, etc.), but, in addition, tend to create more stress and lead to a cycle of "TV-dependency." Some of the compulsive TV viewers in this study, though, tried to justify their "TV addiction" and tended to downplay/deny that their habit is causing them any major physical, social or other problems.

#### Conclusions Related to Compulsive Consumer Behavior

The in-depth study of compulsive TV viewing undertaken in this dissertation may also help in conceptualizing compulsive consumer behavior in general as well as in understanding its etiology and consequences. In fact, there are many similarities between the major themes discovered in compulsive TV viewing and those found in past studies of compulsive buying, fanatic weightlifting and jazz fanaticism (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Holbrook 1987; Lehmann 1987). On the other hand, though, there are important points made in these studies, which were not corroborated by the findings here. Both are summarized in Tables V-1 and V-2, respectively, along with the new compulsive consumer behavior themes contributed by this study (Table V-3). The latter are also outlined below in brief.

TABLE V-1

## CORROBORATED COMPULSIVE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR THEMES

- 
1. Compulsive consumer behavior is used as a means of coping with stress due to unpleasant situations
  2. Compulsive consumers suffer from low self-esteem; one goal of compulsive behavior is to bolster self-esteem
  3. Compulsive viewers exhibit tendencies to fantasize and please others
  4. The compulsive consumer activity is an end-in-itself
  5. Compulsive consumer behavior is itself highly ritualistic
  6. Compulsive consumers organize their lives around opportunities to engage in their habit
  7. Compulsive consumer behavior is noncognitive; it is better described in terms of images
  8. Compulsive consumers benefit from support groups
  9. Compulsive consumer behavior creates psychological dependency manifested as subjective loss of control
  10. Compulsive consumers deny the harmful consequences of their behavior
-

TABLE V-2

## UNCORROBORATED COMPULSIVE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR THEMES

- 
1. Compulsive consumer behavior is related to trait compulsivity
  2. Compulsive consumer behavior is a routinized response behavior
  3. Compulsive consumer behavior develops gradually from simple participation in an activity to derive specific benefits to "addiction"
  4. Compulsive consumers get little enjoyment/use from things they buy/consume
  5. Compulsive consumers look down on those who are not
  6. Compulsive consumer behavior interferes with normal life functioning
  7. Repeated failure in consumer efforts to control/modify their compulsive behavior
  8. Compulsive consumer behavior results in severely negative physical and economic consequences
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TABLE V-3  
COMPULSIVE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR THEMES  
CONTRIBUTED BY THIS STUDY

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1. Compulsive consumers have a tendency to avoid pain/change; lack of discrimination/moderation, and have a fear of loneliness/alienation
  2. Product/activity characteristics have little influence in the development of compulsive consumer behavior -- they affect, though, how it is experienced
  3. Changes in compulsive consumer behavior frequently occur during specific critical periods indicative of the presence of a compulsive consumer life cycle
  4. Compulsive consumer behavior is affected by familial environment during adolescence (mother-daughter learning process; strict upbringing)
  5. Compulsive consumers have contradictory value systems
  6. Compulsive consumers have difficulty in defining future goals and aspirations (expected self-perception)
  7. Compulsive consumer behavior, although noncognitive and affect-rich, is also characterized by relatively high levels of attention and planning/preparation
  8. Dependency of compulsive consumers, besides loss of control, also involves an ever increasing appetite/craving and withdrawal symptoms
  9. Besides the effects that consumer compulsive behavior has on the individual through its (short- and long-term) effect on stress, it also affects his/her personal characteristics (e.g., values, goals); these effects may, in the short-run, be perceived as positive by compulsive consumers
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### Compulsive Behavior Themes Contributed by this Study

1. This study discovered that compulsive consumers are characterized by lack of ability to discriminate/lack of moderation, a fear of loneliness/alienation and a tendency to avoid pain/change. The latter, in particular, through its association with perceived risk, may prove useful in better understanding and predicting decision-making by such consumers.

2. A second contribution of this study refers to the relative influence of product/activity characteristics (e.g., in the case of TV viewing, combination of sound and picture, type/duration of shows) on the development and maintenance of compulsive behavior. Thus, compared to the corresponding influence of other external/situational and person-related factors, the former's impact seems to be negligible. On the other hand, activity/product-related factors appear to affect considerably the way compulsive consumers get involved with their habit. For example, they may decide whether the compulsive experience will be shared with others, who the latter are going to be, or whether, when and how certain rituals are going to be performed.

3. Although, by design, this study could not confirm the importance of any of the commonly used personal descriptors (age, sex, income, etc.) as determinants of compulsive behavior, it nevertheless pointed to the influence of other consumer background factors. One of them, the presence of a

few critical periods in a consumer's life when s/he is more likely to adopt, modify or drop his/her compulsive behavior may have significant implications regarding the latter's origins and relationship to noncompulsive levels of involvement.

4. Another important background factor identified in this study was the impact of early familial environment upon future consumer compulsive behavior. Although this study's findings suggest that compulsive consumers were more likely to have strict upbringing and a strong "TV-relationship" with their mothers, the direction and strength of these relationships and the possibility of their interaction need further clarification.

5. The present study also suggested that compulsive behaviors may be directly associated to consumer value systems in two important ways: (a) along with other person- and situation-related factors as a determinant of such behavior and (b) as an outcome of compulsive behavior i.e., a set of values unique to a subculture like compulsive TV viewers, credit card users, stamp/art collectors, etc. Regarding the nature of compulsive consumer values, the study indicated that contradictory values may coexist in a compulsive consumer's value system ("splitthink"). This contradiction, in itself, may further contribute to stress and compulsive behavior.

6. Another conclusion of this study, which may be

useful in developing a general model of consumer compulsive behavior referred to the absence of well-defined actual and, especially, expected self-perceptions on the part of compulsive consumers. In the case of compulsive TV viewing, compulsive consumers were able to obtain, from television itself, ideas and images to help them shape their future goals and aspirations. It would be interesting to see how compulsive consumers fill this gap in the case of other forms of compulsive behavior.

7. Although, previous research in the area of compulsive consumer behavior has also concluded that such behavior was non-cognitive, the present study went into further detail and found that compulsive behavior may, at times, involve considerable search for information, a fair amount of planning/preparation as well as relatively high levels of attention. On the other hand, it is still doubtful whether the information collected ever enters the compulsive consumer's evaluation process -- it appears that critical thinking is absent from compulsive behavior throughout and evaluation takes place on the basis of affect.

8. The results of the present investigation also draw attention to "dependency" as one of the distinguishing elements of compulsive behavior and help in describing its development. Thus, besides the loss of control that compulsive consumers were found to experience over their habit, dependency also entailed various withdrawal effects

and an increasing appetite/craving for the compulsive activity (especially after periods of deprivation). These two additional parts of dependency may help in further explaining why compulsive consumers experience higher levels of stress in the long-run.

9. Although the main effects of compulsive consumer behavior are associated with the reduction (initially) or increase (eventually) of stress, the present study pointed to the existence of other long-lasting effects of such behavior on the compulsive consumer's personality, value systems, and goals. Such changes, in the short-run, may even be viewed positively by some compulsive consumers i.e., as reflecting learning, "experimentation" and "maturing."

#### Conclusions About the Qualitative Approach

As explained earlier in this dissertation, the use of a phenomenological perspective and qualitative in-depth interviews in this study of compulsive TV viewing was aiming at understanding this type of behavior from the TV viewer's point of view. The depth and authenticity of the material collected allowed the study of compulsive viewing as a process involving multiple, interrelated activities and experiences and determined by the complex interaction of several factors, many of which were discovered for the first time during this research.

The unstructured interview method, in particular,

provided an appropriate vehicle in helping the compulsive TV viewers interviewed in the study to reproduce and express their inner thoughts and feelings about the various aspects of their habit. Such insights were then used to understand their motives for engaging in such behavior. Compulsive TV viewing, besides being personally relevant and ego-involving at the individual level, is, to some extent, stigmatized at the social level. That made the job of extracting meaningful information from the study participants more difficult than what this researcher initially thought. In a lot of instances, their answers consciously and/or unconsciously were modified to be socially acceptable and reflect (perceived) societal norms. As a result, projective techniques proved to be more useful than direct questioning and were utilized more in successive interviews.

In terms of generating discussion and material for later analysis, the researcher's decision to adopt the role of the "naive" interviewer and let respondents educate him about their habit should be credited with making participants very talkative and revealing during the depth interviews.

Finally, it should be noted that conducting a qualitative study requires substantial commitments of time and effort as well as problem-solving abilities. To some degree this is due to the lack of published previous work, especially in the marketing literature, detailing the

necessary steps to implement a qualitative research program. Even without that difficulty, though, the demands posed by qualitative research remain very substantial, particularly during the stage of preparing a discussion guide as well as during the classification, analysis and interpretation of data.

### Implications

The preceding conclusions have a variety of significant implications, which are described next from the perspectives of (a) marketing practice/policy making, (b) consumer behavior theory development, and (c) research methodology application.

#### Marketing Implications

Conclusions drawn from the findings of this study, which pertain specifically to compulsive TV viewing, have important marketing implications for broadcasters and advertisers/advertising agencies, on the one hand, and public policy/mental health practitioners, on the other.

First, broadcasters should realize that compulsive TV viewers do not constitute a totally homogeneous market. In fact, they may come from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds and may even use their TV habit to accomplish different goals (e.g., to facilitate interaction with others or escape reality). To the extent that such differences

translate into clearly distinguishable TV viewing patterns and behavior, as this study often indicated, some form of segmentation may be needed in the design of marketing strategies targeting compulsive TV viewers.

Second, marketers should learn to distinguish between noncompulsive (e.g., indulgent or impulsive) TV viewers and some compulsive ones, who sometimes appear to have similar viewing habits (keen interest in particular shows and animated, emotional but thoughtless TV watching and/or extensive use of VCR/remote control, etc.). Long-term consequences in the case of compulsive TV viewers are much more dangerous and some de-marketing of TV consumption might be in order. For example, instead of taking advantage of compulsive TV viewers' propensity to "watch anything" with little critical thinking in order to "sell them" on an ever increasing number of products, services or ideas, marketers should promote more responsible viewing and television "connoisseurship." The large number of findings reported in this study concerning the various determinants and components of compulsive TV viewing (e.g., tendency to fantasize, "parallel" watching, use of remote and TV Guide, reaction to commercials) could be utilized to design effective strategies for this purpose.

Third, compulsive TV viewers appear to share a large number of common characteristics (personality traits, values, (lack of) aspirations) and eventually suffer similar

negative consequences (most importantly, dependency) as a result of their habit. Public policy and health practitioners, in particular, may use such knowledge in their efforts to design more effective therapy/control methods.

Finally, as the discussion above indicates, better measurements of TV viewing are urgently needed by all parties concerned. Such improved measurements should go beyond providing ratings and simple demographic data for viewers and include, for instance, information on degree of involvement, viewer activity while watching, networks of "TV-buddies," TV-related rituals and TV-generated moods/stress.

#### Theoretical Implications

This study's conclusions relating to general compulsive consumer behavior could serve as the basis for developing hypotheses and research questions to advance and expand the study of other consumer compulsive phenomena besides compulsive TV viewing. The proposed model of compulsive TV viewing (Figure IV-1) may be tested, as a whole or part-by-part, for its ability to fit data collected on other forms of compulsive activities. Several relationships between compulsive consumer behavior, on the one hand, and general classes of variables (e.g., personal background factors), on the other, may be examined in more detail, too. One

important area of inquiry, in this respect, would be the socialization process of compulsive consumers, especially during their early impressionable years. In addition to the impact of a strict familial environment and that of a TV-compulsive mother, other potential sources of positive or negative influence on future compulsive consumer behavior may be various types of childhood fears, deprivation, and religious/moral beliefs.

Finally, as already mentioned, further theoretical development of the concept of compulsive consumer behavior may be accomplished if some of the relationships suggested in this study are expanded to incorporate additional linkages to related, well-researched marketing/consumer behavior concepts. Such seems to be the case, for example, with the relationship between compulsive consumer behavior and tendency to avoid change discovered in this study, which may be suggestive of a more general link between the former and perceived risk.

#### Methodological Implications

In the opinion of this researcher, marketing and consumer research could benefit a lot from employing more qualitative research methodologies and tools, especially when dealing with theory discovery and complex, deeply-rooted consumer behaviors and experiences. However, before such qualitative/phenomenological approaches become as

widespread in academic research as they are in the industry (Deshpande 1983), further step-by-step documentation of the various qualitative techniques and their implementation is required.

For instance, a strong argument may be made in favor of using in-depth interviews, as opposed to focus groups, in research involving privately consumed products or potentially socially embarrassing consumer activities. Respondents apparently feel more at ease being interviewed alone under these circumstances. Nevertheless, even the privacy of an in-depth interview is sometimes not enough to allow them to "open up" and talk uninhibitedly about, for example, their experiences and behavior in intimate settings and company. In these cases, projective exercises (e.g., pictures of other people in similar circumstances) may be more helpful in eliciting relevant information than direct questioning of participants and/or the latter's personal recollections.

In addition, qualitative interviews on consumer behavior can be greatly facilitated by the use of marketing-related stimuli -- particularly new product ideas. As described in the methodology chapter of this dissertation, this researcher prepared and utilized during the depth interviews a series of fictitious product descriptions (see Appendix A), which helped in generating many valuable insights. It appears that participants are better motivated

to contribute when offered an opportunity to provide an opinion, which they think can make a change.

Finally, the role that the interviewer chooses for him/herself during the interviews is crucial in securing the gathering of sufficient amounts of meaningful data. As discussed in the previous section, assuming the role of the "naive," unknowledgeable, but interested interviewer facilitated the interview process and information generation. Such an approach is also likely to help the interviewer overcome other difficulties during the interview (e.g., unforeseen technical problems) as well as leave respondents happy about the experience and is, therefore, recommended for marketing-related studies.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

There are several areas in the study of compulsive television viewing and compulsive behavior in general which deserve further study. A number of suggestions have, in fact, been incorporated in previous sections of this dissertation e.g., in the discussion of Findings. Some additional points are briefly outlined next.

Consumer researchers should, first, concentrate their future efforts on the in-depth study of a wide variety of consumer compulsive activities by means of qualitative methodologies (especially combinations of self-reports and observation), in order to identify possible commonalities

among different forms of compulsive consumer behavior. These common elements may then be used to refine the existing conceptualization of compulsive consumer behavior and provide insights into its etiology and consequences.

At the same time, the discovery of such commonalities in different manifestations of consumer compulsive behaviors will help in the development of a diagnostic instrument to measure such behavior. Separate subscales might be needed to measure the various categories of consumer compulsive activities i.e., those specifically associated with compulsive searching, buying, consuming and collecting since some consumers might not necessarily engage in all of them.

Measuring compulsive TV viewing, in particular, will help researchers study this activity further by reliably and properly identifying all types of compulsive TV viewers and distinguishing such viewers from noncompulsive ones. The scales(s) should be able to distinguish, for example, between compulsive viewers (whose behavior exhibits all the characteristics included in the definition of compulsive TV viewing) and indulgent, impulsive, or habitual viewers (who might meet some, but not all, of the defining characteristics). Aside from its usefulness in identifying/classifying compulsive consumers, a quantitative instrument measuring compulsive consumer behavior will make possible large scale as well as longitudinal research projects aiming at hypothesis (and model) testing. The major themes and dimensions

of compulsive TV viewing discussed in this study (see Appendix B) may actually be used to develop an initial "pool" of items for such an instrument.

For marketers, the future study of compulsive TV viewing and those involved with it may focus on three different areas/opportunities: first, they need to devise appropriate marketing (de-marketing) strategies that will help them to effectively target this unique segment of the market. Second, as noted earlier in this dissertation, through the study of compulsive TV watching, marketers should be able to advance their understanding of "mainstream" TV viewers. Certain propensities, processes and experiences, which play a prominent role in compulsive consumer TV viewing like fantasizing, intense emotions and arousal, stress and coping, altered states of consciousness, deep involvement and ritualistic behaviors, are also present, to some degree, in "normal" consumer behavior. Comparing compulsive to noncompulsive viewers on these characteristics and behavior might eventually help in devising new, innovative approaches for targeting the general TV public.

Third, marketers should investigate how -- if at all -- compulsive TV viewing affects compulsive buying/consumption of other products/services. Besides, their practical implications, the findings of such research could be used to improve the conceptualization of compulsive consumer

behavior, too.

Finally, public health practitioners and public policy makers, in addition to their obvious interest in learning about the characteristics and histories of compulsive TV viewers, should also concentrate on the societal influences and consequences of compulsive TV viewing. What is, for instance, the exact impact of societal/cultural structures and institutions on compulsive TV viewing? Do particular societies implicitly encourage compulsive involvement with TV? In turn, what are the consequences of TV being used as an "electronic" family/company on society as a whole? Answers to such questions may be helpful in designing methods to moderate compulsive TV viewing and alleviate its harmful effects. The need for such "cures" appears to be more urgent in the case of the most vulnerable of compulsive television viewers -- young children.

## APPENDIX A

TELEVISION VIEWING PROJECT:IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCREENER

TV Viewing Behavior  
March 1989

George V. Priovolos  
Phone: (718) 631-2615

PARTICIPANT'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

HOME PHONE # \_\_\_\_\_ BUSINESS PHONE # \_\_\_\_\_  
RECRUITER \_\_\_\_\_

**SPEAK TO AN ADULT FEMALE MEMBER OF THE HOUSEHOLD. WHEN THAT PERSON IS LOCATED, INTRODUCE YOURSELF.**

Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_, from \_\_\_\_\_.  
We are involved in a study that deals with people's TV viewing experiences. I want to assure you that this is a research project and NOT a "sales pitch." I would like to ask you a few questions.

1. Do you or any other member of your household work for a firm in any of the following lines of business?  
(READ CHOICES)

	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>
An advertising or public relations firm-----	[ ]	[ ]-TERMINATE
A market research firm-----	[ ]	[ ]-TERMINATE
A TV or Cable TV station-----	[ ]	[ ]-TERMINATE

2a. Have you ever participated in a market research panel or discussion group?

Yes-----[ ]-ASK Q2b  
No-----[ ]-SKIP TO Q3

b. When was that research? Was it:

Within the past 6 months-----[ ]-TERMINATE  
More than 6 months ago-----[ ]

c. What topics did the panel or discussion groups deal with? \_\_\_\_\_

(NOTE: TERMINATE IF PARTICIPATION WAS ON TV-RELATED TOPICS)

3. Which of the following categories best describes your age?

Under 24-----[ ]-TERMINATE  
 25 - 29-----[ ]  
 30 - 34-----[ ] (OBTAIN  
 35 - 39-----[ ] GOOD  
 40 - 44-----[ ] MIX)  
 45 - 49-----[ ]  
 50 - 54-----[ ]  
 55 or older-----[ ]-TERMINATE

4. During an average week, how many days do you watch TV?  
 (DO NOT READ CHOICES)

Never-----[ ]-TERMINATE  
 2 days a week or less-----[ ]-TERMINATE  
 3 - 5 days a week-----[ ]-TERMINATE  
 Every day-----[ ]

5. In a typical day when you watch TV, how many hours do you watch on the average?

Number of hrs.: \_\_\_\_\_ (WRITE IN)

(TERMINATE IF LESS THAN 4 HOURS PER DAY)

6. Which of the following types of programs did you watch within the last 7 days? (DO NOT READ CHOICES)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
News-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Soap Operas-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Dramas-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Sports-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Comedies-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	GOOD
Music/dance shows-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	MIX)
Game shows-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Educational-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Full-length movies-----[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Other _____			

(THE RESPONDENTS MUST ANSWER "YES" TO A MINIMUM OF 3 CATEGORIES TO QUALIFY)

7a. Do you often use watching TV to change your mood for the better? Yes--[ ] No---[ ]

b. Do you frequently feel that you should cut down on the amount of TV you watch? Yes--[ ] No---[ ]

c. Do you often tape TV programs on videocassettes for later viewing? Yes--[ ] No---[ ]

d. Do you use your TV remote control device(s) a lot? Yes--[ ] No---[ ]

e. Do you get TV Guide every week? Yes--[ ] No---[ ]

f. Do you subscribe to cable TV at home? Yes--[ ] No---[ ]

g. Do you own more than one TV set? Yes--[ ] No---[ ]

**(THE RESPONDENT MUST ANSWER "YES" TO POINTS (a) AND (b) AND AT LEAST TWO (2) OF THE FIVE OTHER POINTS TO QUALIFY)**

8. Now, please tell me your present employment status. Are you...

Employed full-time-----[ ]  
 Employed part-time-----[ ]-TERMINATE  
 Homemaker-----[ ]-TERMINATE  
 Not presently employed-----[ ]-TERMINATE

9a. How many persons are currently living in your household?

One/myself-----[ ]  
 Two-----[ ]  
 Three or more-----[ ]-TERMINATE

b. Are there any children currently living in your household? No---[ ] Yes--[ ]-TERMINATE

**(TERMINATE IF ANSWER TO 9b IS YES)**

10. Please tell me your current status. Are you...

Married-----[ ] (OBTAIN  
 Single/divorced/separated-----[ ] MIX)

11. For classification purposes only, please tell me into which of the following categories your household's total income falls?

(READ CHOICES)

Under \$15,000-----[ ]-TERMINATE  
 Over \$15,000, but less than \$25,000---[ ]  
 Over \$25,000, but less than \$35,000---[ ] (OBTAIN  
 Over \$35,000, but less than \$50,000---[ ] MIX)  
 Over \$50,000-----[ ]

12. RECRUITER: MAKE SURE THAT POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS SPEAK ENGLISH WELL BEFORE INVITING THEM TO PARTICIPATE

13. As part of our current research we are conducting interviews with individuals such as yourself. During the interview, you will have an opportunity to give your reactions and experience about TV viewing and TV programs. The interview will last about 60-minutes. For your participation, you will receive \$25 to help defray the cost of your time and travel. We would like to invite you to participate in what should prove to be an interesting experience. Would you be available at (GIVE PERSON A CHOICE OF TIME, IF POSSIBLE). The interview will be held at (NAME OF FACILITY) which is located at (GIVE ADDRESS). Can we count on you to attend?

Yes-----[ ]-RECORD PARTICIPANT  
 INFORMATION; REPEAT DAY,  
 DATE, TIME AND GIVE  
 DIRECTIONS TO LOCATION  
 No-----[ ]-TERMINATE

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR COMPULSIVE TV VIEWING PROJECT

George V. Priovolos

Standard Draft 9/1/89

**(NOTE: NOT ALL QUESTIONS WILL BE ASKED OF EVERY RESPONDENT)**I. INTRODUCTION AND WARM UP

- Interviewer introduction
  - Explanation of interview format
  - Topic of discussion
  - Use of informatio
  - Taping, time limits, and role of interviewer
- Respondent's background
  - Name
  - Education and employment
  - How many hours do you work a day?

II. PSYCHOGRAPHICS

- How important is work for you?
  - Why?
- What are some of the things that you usually do AFTER WORK?
  - Do you feel you have ENOUGH TIME in your life to do the things you have to do and enjoy some "free" time?
    - If not, how do you deal with it?
    - How in your opinion should "free time" be different than work?
  - Do you prefer to go out for entertainment or stay at home?
  - How often do you go out for entertainment at night?
    - Would you have liked it to be more often?
  - Have you changed in this regard compared to 5 years ago?

III. HOW IMPORTANT IS TV IN RESPONDENT'S LIFE?

- Compare watching TV to going shopping, visiting a friend, meeting somebody new or reading a book.
  - Have you ever felt you don't do any of these other things as much as you should?
- If you had to compare TV to a person, who would it be? Why?

**(PROBE: friend, mother/father, friend, attractive stranger, boss, husband, teacher?)**

**(OPTIONAL)**

- How does TV compare to radio, newspapers and magazines?  
(PROBE: **quality, availability, convenience, etc.**)
  - Which is it the most important to you? Why?
  - What mood do they put you in, respectively? Why?

**IV. TV WATCHING HELPERS**

- How do you use TV Guide to plan your TV viewing? (Ask respondent to act out the way they select what to watch)
  - How long does it take you to plan your watching?
- How important is it for you to know the TV schedule?
  - Is planning your TV viewing causing you anxiety? Why?
- Do you usually stick to the plans you make to watch TV?
  - Would you like to have been more organized in your TV viewing?
- How useful is the remote device to you?
  - What would you do if you lost/misplaced it?
- How useful is the VCR to you?
  - What is the difference between watching a program directly on TV vs. watching it at a later time on tape?
    - Does it matter what program it is? Why?
  - What do you do with the shows you tape after you watch them
  - Do you have a collection of shows on tape?
    - If yes, when does a piece of TV programming become collectible?

**V. PERSONAL TV WATCHING "STYLE"**

1. I will describe to you now some "personal styles" of TV watching i.e., ways which different people have reported that they choose to watch TV. Could you tell me **WHAT IS YOUR STYLE** and how did you develop it?

(a) Keeps the set always on; uses it like radio--as a "background"; glances from time to time at screen but stays "half-busy" doing other things at the same time; glances from time to time at screen but stays "half-busy" doing other things at the same time.

(b) Chooses and watches diligently a few shows on a long time basis; makes every effort not to miss any episodes of her favorite shows; remembers plot and characters well.

(c) Reviews the evening program offerings and picks the least objectionable choices; likes to watch TV specials and current events programs.

**(ALTERNATELY)**

2. I'm going to show you now some PHOTOS OF PEOPLE WATCHING TV (alone, with husband, with friends). Please tell me HOW and WHY does each person in the pictures watch TV, WHEN does she watch, and when does she avoid it?

**VI. INVOLVEMENT WITH HER FAVORITE PROGRAM**

- What is the difference between doing something and just watching it on TV? (PROBE: e.g., going to a Macy's Parade, traveling to an exotic place, or breaking up with a friend?)
- Describe your "MUST WATCH" TV.
  - What, in your opinion, makes this program (these programs) so good?
  - How long have you been watching it (them)?
  - What attracted you to it (them) in the first place?
  - Have you ever thought of stopping watching it? Why?
    - What happened then?
  - How did you react the last time your favorite show was suddenly pre-empted or delayed?
  - How well do you think will you do in a sitcom/soap-opera identification competition?
    - Would you like to participate in one?
  - Do you ever watch the same show/episode more than once?
    - How did it feel the second time around?

**VII. THE TV VIEWING RITUAL**

Let's talk now a little about the last time you watched TV:

- When was that?
- What are some of the things that you did BEFORE you sat down to watch TV...a kind of TV ROUTINE?
- How did you feel at the time?
- Did you consider doing anything else besides watching TV?
  - If yes, what and why didn't you do it?
- Do you have any specific days and times that you prefer to watch TV? Why?
- When are you in a "SERIOUS" TV MOOD?
  - Under what conditions do you watch more TV, when depressed or when feeling vigorous and optimistic?
- How early in the morning do you turn the TV on?
- How late do you stay up at night watching TV?
  - How is watching TV in the morning different than watching TV in the evening or late at night?
  - Do you change your viewing times often? When?

VIII. GROWING UP WITH TV

- Have you always been watching TV the way you do now?
  - If not, when and why did you change to your current "style"?
- Were there any restrictions/conditions on your TV viewing placed by your parents when you were an adolescent?
- Was TV better or worse back then compared to now? Why?
- Any programs that are no longer on the air, which you would have liked to see put back on TV?
  - Should they be re-runs or new episodes? Why?

XIV. TV COMPANY

- Do you have a regular "TV buddy," somebody with whom you watch TV together or discuss what you watch on TV?
  - Who is s/he?
  - What do you usually watch/discuss together?
  - Do you have similar or different preferences?

(ASK NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS ONLY IF PERSON IS MARRIED OR LIVES WITH HER BOYFRIEND AND THE LATTER IS NOT HER "TV BUDDY")

- Do you ever watch TV together with your husband/boyfriend?
  - If not, why not? (PROBE: differences in show/day/time preferences?)
- When you do, how do you choose what to watch together?
  - Does this create any conflicts?
    - If yes, how do you resolve them?
- Do you ever discuss what you watched with him?
- Are there any shows you'd rather watch alone? Why?
- Has TV been good for your marriage/relationship overall?
  - Do you ever feel like you have to compete with TV for your husband's/boyfriends's attention?
    - What do you do to "win"?
  - If it wasn't for TV, what would your husband/boyfriend do during the time that he now spends watching TV?
    - Would you have preferred him doing that?

XV. FUTURE TV CONCEPTS

I'll now show you some INDEX CARDS with descriptions of various NEW TV RELATED PRODUCTS/SERVICES, which might come out on the market in the future. I'd like you to read them and tell me how you feel about them. Would they buy them? Why? Why not?

(DESCRIPTIONS OF NEW PRODUCT IDEAS ATTACHED)

XVI. DEPENDENCY ON TV VIEWING

- Do you often watch more TV than what you've planned?
  - In what situations are you more likely to go "overboard" And watch more TV?
  - How do you feel when that happens?
- Do you ever try to think up things to do to keep yourself from watching TV?
  - What exactly do you do?
- Have you ever felt that you "can't stand" a character/show on TV but you kept watching? Why?
- What will you miss the most if you were to stop watching TV immediately? Why?
- Have you ever thought of eliminating TV from your life altogether? When?
- Has your TV set ever broken down?
  - How did you spend the time you would ordinarily have spent watching TV?
  - Did you enjoy yourself more or less then?
    - If more, did you think of not getting back to your "TV routine"?

XVII. THE PRICE OF BEING A TV FAN

Suppose that a friend of yours, whom you haven't seen for while, calls and asks if she can come right over to talk to you. Your favorite show is on then. What do you do? How do you feel?

- Can you think of any other circumstances when you had to "sacrifice" your favorite show(s)?
- Have you ever missed or had to re-schedule an important meeting because of a TV program?
- Do you have to make a particular effort to find time to watch?
  - Do you usually arrange your activities AROUND TV shows?
- Has watching TV ever caused you to lose sleep, be late for work or miss an important appointment/deadline?

XVIII. SATISFACTION FROM TV WATCHING

- Do you ever feel like there isn't anything on TV that you care to watch?
  - How often does this happen?
    - What do you do then?
- Were the old days, before cable TV and remote controls, when TV viewers had fewer choices, better or worse? Why?
- Have you ever actually written or thought of writing a letter to the station or the producers or actors of a show? Why?

XIX. CONSEQUENCES OF WATCHING TV

- What does watching TV do to your state of mind (the way you feel)?
- Is there anything that you don't like about watching as much TV as you do?
  - What do you plan to do about it?
- Do others (e.g., friends, family) know how much TV you are watching?
  - Has anybody ever criticize your viewing habits?
    - How did you react to it?
- Are there any things that you find difficult doing after several hours of TV watching? Why?
- Has it ever happened that watching TV helped you cope with a particular problem in your life? How?

XX. TV-GENERATED FANTASIES

- Do you ever find yourself thinking or fantasizing about a TV show you watched the previous day?
  - Can you recall when was the last time something like this happened?
    - What exactly did you think or fantasize about after that show?
- If you had been given a chance to come back to life as a TV character/personality, which one would you have liked to be reincarnated as? Why?
  - How would you describe that character's personality and life?
    - How does it match up to yours?
- If the characters of your favorite show were parts of your family or friends, what would have been their exact relationship to you? What would you have liked it to be?

XXI. TV FANATICS EXERCISE

Let me show you now some INDEX CARDS containing TV viewers' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEMSELVES and then some PHOTOS of different women. First, I'd like to ask you: "Which of these women would be most likely to have said a thing like this?"

**(VIEWERS' SELF-DESCRIPTIONS ATTACHED)**

- What do you think makes a person like this?
- Is there anybody that you know who is like this?
- How could they change, if they wanted to?

XXII. TV DEBATE

I'd like you now to read a couple of LETTERS that TV viewers have sent to the editor of a TV magazine. Tell me how you would have responded to those letters and the comments made in them.

(TV GUIDE LETTERS ATTACHED)

- When does TV become harmful to somebody?
  - Can you think of an example where some person you know or have heard of has been harmed in some way by watching too much TV?
    - What happened to him/her?
- How should people watch TV?
  - How much and when?

XXIII. TV COMMERCIALS

- What do you usually do when there is a commercial break?
- Which are your most/least favorite commercials? Why?
- What makes for a good commercial?
  - In your opinion, what should advertisers do to make TV commercials better?

(OPTIONAL)XXIV. REACTION TO TV SEGMENT ON VIDEO

I'll now show you a few minutes of this morning's TV programming on video. Relax and watch it the way you would have done at home.

(AFTER THE END OF THE TV SEGMENT)

- How did you like it?
- Do you remember what was the show about?
  - Have you ever watched this how before?
- Do you remember any of the commercials?
  - Have you seen them before?
- Did you like any of them?

## XV. FUTURE TV CONCEPTS

### **PRODUCT "A"--"THE RUBBER BRICK"**

Viewers fed up with commercials interrupting their favorite programming will be able to throw this rubber brick at the TV set. A transmitter inside the brick triggers a shut-off switch attached to the set's wall plug. The set will turn on again after a lapse long enough to make sure that the offending commercial has passed.

### **PRODUCT "B"--"TV WITH A MEMORY"**

For people who want never again to miss their favorite TV programs, videos, etc. The TV set is equipped with a computer continuously scanning transmitted programming. Every time the computer recognizes certain cues, which mean your favorite shows are on, it immediately turns the set on and tunes it to the right channel.

### **PRODUCT "C"--"THE \$5.20 AN HOUR DREAM"**

This is the closest one can get to having her own personal TV channel. For only \$5.20 an hour, you can create your own favorite programming drawing from extensive TV station libraries. You may want to order, for example, the showing of 10 continuous "Dynasty" episodes or all available Barbra Streisand movies, etc. Your order, which is taken over the phone, is recorded on a computer-like diskette and arrives to you within a day. You can play the disk on a Video Disk Player, available in electronic stores at \$200.

### **PRODUCT "D"--"PLAY TV DIRECTOR"**

This is an opportunity for viewers to decide themselves the plot of their favorite shows. In the end of a soap opera episode, for instance, viewers are allowed 2 hours to call the station and describe what they think should happen in the next episode. A computer tabulates viewers' suggestions and the most popular scenario is then taped and broadcast as the next installment.

XXI. TV FANATICS EXERCISE--DESCRIPTIONS OF VIEWING STYLES**CARD "A"**

"It seems that I'm watching television all the time. Except from some violent sports programming, I'll basically watch everything else!"

**CARD "B"**

"I couldn't live without it. I enjoy the shows a lot, they hold my interest so much. I think all the shows that I watch are good. They are fun to watch--interesting..."

**CARD "C"**

"I'd rather have my throat cut than not have a TV set. I love it--it moves me just like a man. I find myself watching when I shouldn't be."

**CARD "D"**

"I pretend something is wrong with the set and delay have it fixed. I do not want to be tempted to waste my time. That way, I go back to reading, I do better at work, I am easier to live with."

**CARD "E"**

"I'm afraid I am getting to be too much like the stereotypical TV addict; a wide-bottom, one-eyed moron, who does not read enough, doesn't participate in anything. I just sit and watch. You have to boot me to go out of the house on a sunny day. Sometimes, I don't even want to eat; I'm just stuck to the set."

**CARD "F"**

"I have come to depend a great deal on routine, daily viewing. What I watch is not always terribly exciting. I watch pretty much everything that happens to be on the air; I have to watch at least 7 hours a day."

**CARD "G"**

"I like watching TV a lot. But, I do not watch everything; some of these programs are a waste of time. I prefer, myself, to watch what I call "productive programming," things like documentaries, news, informative and educational programs."

XXII. TV VIEWERS' LETTERS TO EDITOR OF TV GUIDE**LETTER "A"**

"...Roseanne Barr is such a hit because, among other things, she looks like a good many American women look... There have been moments when she's looked rather tacky on the show, but then I don't wear Dior jewelry, Capezio shoes and Anne Klein clothes while I'm watching it, either. Chances are I look a little tacky, too."

**LETTER "B"**

"Thanks to the powers that be for the tabloids and tabloid TV. The snooty elite publications are not relevant to real life. Kudos to Geraldo Rivera, Maury Povich, John Walsh, et al., who have made me aware of the jungle that today's society has become."

**LETTER "C"**

"I just wanted to put in a word for my own "mood buster." I've been watching "Perfect Strangers" for only about a year now, but it almost single-handedly got me out of a depressed time in my life. It has been a source of joy and laughter. It's nice for the lonely to see a strong friendship like the one that Larry and Balki enjoy."

**LETTER "D"**

"If 'Beauty and the Beast' has had a little trouble with the ratings, it's because its writers forgot who they were writing for. The show's audience is women. We watch it for the heart and soul. The writers are giving us blood and guts. Enough already! If we want screaming and yelling and growling, we'll get it from our husbands."

**LETTER "E"**

"I remember Luke and Laura from 'General Hospital,' Sky and Raven from 'Edge of Night,' and Greg and Jenny from 'All My Children.' But no couple can come close to daytime's current hottest duo--Megan and Max (Jessica Tuck and James DePaiva) on 'One Life to Live!' The chemistry between them is fantastic."

## APPENDIX B

## COMPULSIVE TV VIEWING THEMES

Analysis of the material collected during the in-depth interviews produced 327 themes, which were then arranged into 56 concepts/propositions. Finally, the latter were classified into 12 categories representing the dimensions of Compulsive TV Viewing. Themes, concepts/propositions and dimensions are listed next in the order they were examined in the Findings section of the dissertation.

Perceived Stressful Situational Factors

- I) Resentment towards holding a job in general
1. Work is not their free choice
  2. Work is temporary -- until they get married (unmarried)
  3. Two paychecks per household needed
  4. No psychological fulfillment from current job
- II) Dual responsibilities at home and work
5. No support from others in their struggle
  6. Liking of TV shows with female characters struggling, too
  7. Disliking of TV characters who "have it all"
- III) Attitudes about working conditions
8. Working continuously for years (older)
  9. Having to work long hours
  10. Unpredictable job outcomes e.g., sales
  11. Extensive contact with people e.g., secretaries
- IV) Physical appearance
12. Exercising
  13. Dieting in general
  14. Dieting and TV-induced problems
  15. TV shows with overweight characters
- V) Relationships with opposite sex (unmarried respondents)
16. Lack of intimacy in their lives
  17. Difficulty in today's society to make friends
  18. Lack of husband
  19. Emotional void in their lives
  20. Leading men on TV: "handsome," "cute," "nice."

VI) Relationships with opposite sex (married respondents)

21. Limited time spent with husband due to schedule incompatibility
22. Postponement of having children
23. Lack of profitable employment by husband
24. TV shows portraying couples with problems working things out and saving their marriage
25. Problems in sexual relationship with husband

VII) Stress

26. Anxiety as a result of psychological exhaustion
27. Physical exhaustion

VIII) Compulsive watching TV

28. Impact of "sad" TV stories/bad news
29. Too much sex, violence on TV
30. Obnoxious TV shows/personalities
31. Loss/malfunctioning of TV equipment
32. Schedule changes
33. Excessive amount of TV watched/should cut down
34. Forced to watch something new/different
35. Role of TV in respondents' lives in general

Viewer Background Factors

IX) Critical periods in a compulsive TV viewer's life

36. TV viewing during adolescence
37. Early development of TV habits
38. Past favorite shows
39. Discussing/exchanging information about favorite shows with peers during adolescence
40. Re-runs of old favorites today
41. Old shows were "better"
42. Today's shows: poor quality, short-lived, explicit
43. Watching more TV during adolescence
44. Graduating high school -- change in attitude toward television
45. Entering college -- new responsibilities (homework)
46. Starting to work -- new responsibilities ("taking care of business")
47. Alternative forms of recreation (reading, sports)

X) Getting married -- expected impact on TV watching  
(unmarried women)

- 48. Having own children
- 49. Increased house chores
- 50. Could never stop watching TV altogether

XI) Getting married -- real impact on TV watching (married women)

- 51. Having children and TV-related behavior of mothers
- 52. More time staying at home
- 53. Increased amounts of TV watching
- 54. Returning to work -- drop on amount of TV watched
- 55. Kids old enough to stay at home alone/what age?
- 56. Could not afford babysitter
- 57. Kids grow up and leave home -- more TV watching
- 58. More time to fill
- 59. Empty house -- need for "noise"

XII) Learning TV habits from others

- 60. Mother-daughter TV relationship
- 61. Getting hooked on soaps by mother (young viewers)
- 62. Getting their daughters hooked (older viewers)
- 63. Mother-daughter phone conversations about TV now

XIII) Strict vs. lenient upbringing

- 64. "Listen to your parents" theme while young
- 65. Parents' intrusiveness into respondents' lives
- 66. Restrictions on watching TV while young
- 67. Respondents' restrictions on their own children's TV watching

XIV) General interests/hobbies

- 68. TV as the dominant recreational activity
- 69. Recreational activities on weekdays vs. weekends
- 70. Compulsive shopping as recreation/TV competition
- 71. Going out (visiting friends, dining out)

XV) Social class and compulsive TV viewing

- 72. Respondents' income/finances (present vs. future)
- 73. Occupation (present vs. aspired)
- 74. Level of education

Personal Psychological Factors

XVI) Low level of self-esteem

75. Self-doubts/lack of identity
76. Being defensive/apologetic about TV lifestyle
77. No reference to life accomplishments
78. Embarrassment for inability to work complicated TV equipment
79. Lack of attention from husband when he's watching his favorite TV programs
80. Difficulty in describing who they were now
81. External locus of control
82. Lack of will power (to change channel/turn TV off)
83. Lack of confidence to call station and suggest own ending to TV shows
84. Easily influenced by others about TV-related things
85. Easily influenced by others in their lives
86. Influence by husband primarily (married) vs. mother, friends, co-workers (unmarried viewers)
87. Efforts to please interviewer
88. Need to please those with whom they watched TV together -- compromises with boyfriend/husband
89. Feeling guilty/fear they are not liked when watching alone

XVII) Fear of loneliness/alienation

90. Constantly seeking feedback/assurances from friends
91. Psychological support by friends on TV-related matters
92. Technical support by others with TV equipment
93. Seeking reassurances from interviewer about their habit
94. Fear of "social loneliness" -- hesitation to express opinion/feeling vs. aggressive expression of them
95. Sense of lack of understanding by friends/relatives about their commitment to TV and TV shows
96. Fear of "emotional loneliness"/"house is so quiet"
97. TV as a replacement for husband/boyfriend
98. Drawing lessons from TV about relationships
99. Feeling better when knowing that others are suffering "emotional loneliness," too.

XVIII) Compulsive viewer lack of discrimination/moderation

100. Difficulty to correctly identify show titles/plots/characters/channel
101. Mechanical -- yet, accurate recall of details of latest episode
102. Indecisiveness in selecting most favorite show

- 103. Watching TV in general vs. watching specific shows
- 104. Insatiable appetite for TV viewing--"can't get enough"
- 105. Fear of missing something: show/few minutes of watching/a commercial

XIX) Avoidance of pain/complications/changes

- 106. Low tolerance for pain in their private lives
- 107. Getting easily upset over TV-related problems (bad reception/malfunction/loss of TV equipment)
- 108. Complaints about change of schedule/preemption of favorite TV show
- 109. Avoidance of unpleasant subjects/bad news on TV
- 110. Avoidance of complications e.g., operating sophisticated TV equipment
- 111. Staying with same TV channel vs. changing channels
- 112. Perception of TV watching as an easy and quick solution to problems -- "quick fix"
- 113. Becoming "spellbound/numbed" when watching TV
- 114. Tendency not to take action
- 115. Resignation to TV habit

XX) Tendency to fantasize

- 116. Empathy/identification with characters and actors
- 117. Blurring TV fare and reality/TV plots as reality
- 118. Seeing their lives "played out" as soap operas

Personal Values

XXI) Contradictory values expressed by same viewer

- 119. Compliance vs. rebellion
- 120. Private vs. public subjects
- 121. TV "wrongs" vs. TV "rights"
- 122. Resignation in life/lack of fighting spirit by compulsive viewers vs. admiration for TV "underdogs" who make it
- 123. Present orientation vs. future TV-induced dreams
- 124. Moralism (different standards for children/adults)
- 125. Lack of need for achievement vs. admiration of TV's achievers
- 126. Envy towards others with money vs. materialism
- 127. "Core" American vs. compulsive TV viewer values
- 128. "Splitthink" -- inner confusion and indecisiveness
- 129. "Real" life vs. simple/straightforward world of TV

XXII) Caring for others

- 130. Wanting to make others (husband/boyfriend) happy
- 131. Respondents express outrage but do not take action

- 131. Respecting other people's feelings while watching
- 132. Humanitarian values -- disapproval of "greedy" TV characters

#### XXIII) Conservatism

- 133. Belief in luck/fatalism
- 134. Intolerance of TV language/profanity
- 135. Conformity to one set of rules/norms of behavior/acceptance of status quo
- 136. Disapproval of TV stories breaking rules
- 137. Negative reaction to TV programming containing sex, violence, "adult" language
- 138. No difference on the above between young and old, single and married
- 139. Echoes of talk show/TV Guide discussions in viewers' criticism of TV
- 140. Effect of TV sex, violence, foul language on kids

#### XXIV) Freedom of choice

- 141. TV viewers' "rights" to watch whatever they please
- 142. Do not like censorship from special interest groups
- 143. No intervention by advertisers in show content
- 144. "This is a free country" argument

#### XXV) Material comfort

- 145. Materialism/conspicuousness of possessions
- 146. Obsession with TV-related things
- 147. Emphasis on owning as opposed to using TV gadgets
- 148. Appreciation of/interest in latest TV equipment
- 149. Bragging about ownership of TV gadgets
- 150. Intention to buy fictitious new products
- 151. Stressing the monetary aspect of one's job
- 152. Constant references to material comfort of TV characters

#### XXVI) TV-taught values

- 153. TV teaching the "wrong" values to young people
- 154. TV teaching kids how to engage in criminal behavior
- 155. No danger for adults unless they are "sick" already
- 156. Concern over ability of parents to exercise control over their children's viewing
- 157. Competing with TV when teaching morality to kids

Personal Goals and Aspirations

XXVII) Compulsive TV viewers' difficulty in articulating short-term future goals and aspirations

- 158. Lack of well-defined "expected" self-perceptions
- 159. Lack of future plans concerning their TV viewing
- 160. Lack of future planning in general
- 161. Confusion about own future as wives/mothers vs. career women vs. both (young respondents)

XXVIII) Compulsive viewers' long-term aspirations

- 162. TV enables compulsive viewers to "appropriate the world of their desires"
- 163. "Ideal self" images borrowed from TV shows
- 164. Future "projects" derived from vicarious, not first-hand, experiences
- 165. Failure to attain ideal image creates negative feelings towards TV "role models"

Involvement

XXIX) All compulsive TV viewers plan/prepare TV they should not miss

- 166. Use of TV Guide -- looks through, marks shows she wants to see
- 167. Watching a cable channel "Preview Guide" and looking for "blurbs"
- 168. Talking to friends about upcoming shows
- 169. Use of TV logs published in magazines/newspapers
- 170. Looking for advertisements of TV shows on TV/print media/radio
- 171. Strong commitment to TV plans -- making sure they are carried out
- 172. Planning not what to watch but what not to miss

XXX) Very attentive/absorbed when watching favorites

- 173. Does not want to be interrupted while watching
- 174. Will call back, instead of talking, to anybody who calls her during a show
- 175. Get mad at caller for calling during favorite show
- 176. Same reaction if someone pays them a visit during a favorite show
- 177. Using the telephone answering machine to avoid interruptions (and not miss any calls)
- 178. Keep necessities handy/close to where she watches
- 179. Commercials distract from shows/make them angry
- 180. Despite negative feelings, they still watch commercials (not to miss anything)

181. Commercials useful as "breaks" with longer shows
- XXXI) Active -- not passive -- attention during favorite shows
182. Paying attention to outfits, hairstyles, etc. of people in the show
183. Use of VCR not to miss such details
184. Reading soap synopsis after shows not to miss anything
- XXXII) Compulsive also viewers watch a lot of unplanned TV
185. Other viewing done at varying levels of attention
186. Unplanned TV viewing takes place with little thinking/moderate amount of affect
- XXXIII) No significant information processing even with "favorite" TV shows -- low level of "cognitive involvement" throughout
187. No thinking about story/message/degree of realism
188. No comparison to other shows
189. Viewer difficulty to explain why they like a show
190. Importance of pictorial cues in evaluating shows
- XXXIV) Watching TV generates intense and lasting affect
191. Embarrassing feelings could not be suppressed

#### Rituals

- XXXV) TV viewing is highly ritualistic behavior
192. Appropriate time/place to watch certain shows
193. Repetition of TV rituals daily
194. Daily soap opera watching ritual in the afternoon
195. News/game show watching ritual when back from work
196. "Serious" TV watching rituals during prime time
197. Shows requiring solitary viewing
198. Shows appropriate for viewing with older relatives
199. Shows better viewed with friends/in a large group
200. Formal/informal invitation to TV "parties"
201. Bringing own food/drink for TV parties
202. Sitting arrangement when watching in a group
203. Silence vs. small talk when watching with others
204. Shows appropriate for watching with children
205. Shows better watched with boyfriend/husband
206. TV rituals used to help develop/maintain/strengthen social relationships

## XXXVI) TV Viewing as part of other rituals

- 207. Sunday breakfast in bed/newspaper/watching TV news
- 208. Thanksgiving football game family watching ritual
- 209. Early morning/getting ready for work ritual
- 210. TV watching prepared/motivated individuals to perform other tasks/rituals

XXXVII) TV set(s), TV gadgets and equipment (remote, VCR), TV-related readings (TV Guide, Soap Opera Digest), which accompany TV viewing are TV "artifacts"

- 211. Remote control most important TV artifact for compulsive TV viewers -- provides control/power
- 212. VCR used to increase choice of shows and make sure compulsive viewer does not miss anything
- 213. No attachment to/collection of VCR tapes
- 214. Quality of TV picture/tape important
- 215. Using the remote to "graze," "flip" and "mute"
- 216. No feelings of loss when replacing TV sets
- 217. Food, drink, clothing, furniture, telephone are all part of the total TV viewing experience
- 218. TV artifacts as symbols of intimacy, reward, or relaxation

Viewing with Others

## XXXVIII) Preference of compulsive viewers to watch with others -- when, what and why

- 219. Strong attachment to TV shows/viewing creates need to communicate one's experiences with others
- 220. TV discussions at work before or after shows or, on the phone, while watching
- 221. Watching with others to derive emotional support
- 222. Watching with others to feel "intimate"
- 223. Watching with others to share a "TV-lifestyle"
- 224. Watching with others to find a sympathetic ear

## XXXIX) Preference to watch alone -- when, what and why

- 225. Watching alone to avoid distractions
- 226. Watching alone to avoid embarrassment by show content
- 227. Watching alone to be able to "act silly"
- 228. Avoidance of large groups -- unable to enjoy themselves
- 229. Large groups turn to discussions/forget TV

XL) Conflict about TV watched by compulsive viewers

- 230. Disagreements on what show to watch
- 231. Disagreements about how to watch (flip/not flip)
- 232. Dominating/being dominated by fellow viewer(s)
- 234. Mutual compromise (younger, unmarried viewers)
- 235. "Parallel" viewing/separate TVs (older couples)
- 236. TV as a competitor/replacement of human company
- 237. Think/wish others "understand" their compulsive TV viewing

TV Characteristics and Experiences

XLI) Compulsive TV viewers constantly interact with what is happening on TV

- 238. Prior to falling asleep TV viewing -- exception
- 239. When watching TV compulsive viewers experience timelessness
- 240. Compulsive viewers acquire an "out-of-body" existence when watching TV
- 241. TV helps in suspending logic and inhibitions
- 242. TV helps viewers imagine "what is possible" for them in the future
- 243. Comparisons to their own mundane life
- 244. Compulsive viewers "empathise" with TV characters ("high fantasy" group)
- 245. Nothing addictive about TV programming per se
- 246. TV programs different than alcohol/drugs/tobacco

XLII) Compulsive TV viewers evaluate shows as a "gestalt"

- 247. Accepting TV's magical qualities
- 248. Belief in TV myths e.g., "rags to richies"
- 249. "Good" TV programming is relevant to viewer experiences
- 250. "Good" TV programming is funny
- 251. "Good" TV programming is informative
- 252. "Good" TV programming is instructive

Perceived Consequences

XLIII) TV watching helps improve compulsive viewers' mood (short-run)

- 253. Experiencing a feeling of "high" from TV watching
- 254. Funny shows produce an emotional lift in viewer
- 255. Tearjerkers produce an emotional lift in viewer -- catharsis
- 256. Emotional lift as a result of the TV environment
- 257. "Right TV mood" ingredients e.g., favorite seat, no interruptions, food, drink and no worries

- 258. Emotional significance of TV set/equipment
- 259. "Right" TV environment for morning vs. night viewing, when happy vs. when sad, etc.
- 260. Emotional lift due to viewer own anticipation
- 261. Mental and physical preparation to watch
- 262. Guessing what will happen in the next episode
- 263. Enjoying "cliff-hangers"
- 264. TV viewing as a means to reduce stimulation e.g., after work

XLIV) TV viewing helps compulsive viewers' self-esteem (short-run)

- 265. Following gossip to feel closer to TV stars and the world of TV in general (show biz)
- 266. Familiarity with TV stars and their personal life
- 267. Appropriate atmosphere elevates self-esteem
- 268. Feeling "lady for a day"
- 269. Feeling in control/powerful with TV gadgets
- 270. Illusions of "sharing the good life"
- 271. Watch talk/game shows to feel clever and informed

XLV) TV viewing improves compulsive viewers' short-run interpersonal relationships

- 272. TV provides topics of conversation/makes you an opinion leader

XLVI) Compulsive TV viewing reduces stress in the short-run by improving viewer mood, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships

XLVII) Feelings of remorse for being a compulsive viewer

- 273. Compulsive viewers feel their TV watching is excessive
- 274. Feeling guilty for watching excessively
- 275. Neglecting reading, going out (young/unmarried)
- 276. Neglecting the needs of significant others (older/married)
- 277. Feeling guilty for buying TV gadgets
- 278. Feeling sad when thinking they will continue to watch as much in the future

XLVIII) Problems from compulsive TV viewing in interpersonal relationships (long-run)

- 279. Compulsive viewing causes break ups (unmarried)
- 280. Threats of separation/divorce (married)
- 281. Cause of disagreements and fights
- 282. TV viewing can be good for a marriage when husband is compulsive TV viewer, too

- 283. Neglect of others when watching -- isolation
- 284. More problems in younger couples
- 285. Compulsive viewers become defensive when talking about the negative consequences of TV viewing on relationships with others

XLIX) Compulsive viewers view TV as a "free" good

- 286. Little regret for TV-related expenditures
- 287. TV cheaper than other recreation e.g., dining out, movies
- 288. Willingness to pay more to get new TV products
- 289. Disregard of opportunity cost of watching TV
- 290. Compulsive viewing causes lateness to work
- 291. Compulsive viewers adjust work schedule -- not TV habit

L) Compulsive viewers suffer no serious physical harm

- 292. Temporary loss of sleep due to show content
- 293. Staying up late for a show they "shouldn't miss"
- 294. TV-induced indulgence in eating/drinking/smoking

LI) Compulsive TV viewers develop TV dependency

- 295. Compulsive viewers "had to watch" their daily TV "dose"
- 296. They would pay any amount of money for TV service
- 297. Inability to control TV viewing
- 298. "Relapsing" after a period without TV -- "making up" lost time

LII) Compulsive TV viewers suffer increased stress in the long-run as a result of dependency, lower self-esteem, and deterioration of interpersonal relationships

Coping

LIII) Compulsive TV viewers are particularly adept in the use of defense mechanisms

- 299. Compulsive viewing as a defense/coping mechanism in itself
- 300. Using coping before watching TV (deciding whether to watch, what and when)
- 301. Coping while watching (as a response to content)
- 302. Coping in the aftermath
- 303. Projection -- TV addiction is "other people's problem"
- 304. Regression -- when watching "tearjerker" shows
- 305. Withdrawal -- avoid the use of sophisticated TV equipment they bought)

306. Verbal but not physical aggression -- no use for "brick" to deal with TV ads

LIV) Rationalization

307. To justify watching TV (instead of confronting their stress-generating problem)  
 308. TV availability as an excuse -- "it's there"  
 309. Time pressure (to do other things)  
 310. "TV being informative" as an excuse for watching  
 311. Rationalizing contradictions in viewer statements  
 312. Rationalizing their position to let/encourage kids watch TV -- "avoid trouble in the street"

LV) Reaction formation as a coping mechanism by compulsive TV viewers

313. Love/hate relationship between viewer and TV shows/characters  
 314. Putting down favorite shows/TV viewing in general  
 315. Calling TV derogatory names ("boob tube")

LVI) Compulsive TV viewers' use of denial

316. Denying in general that their habit is out of control  
 317. Denying amount of TV watched  
 318. Admission of past addiction (compared to present)  
 319. Denying the possibility of becoming addicted to TV

Perceived Meaning of Compulsive TV Viewing

320. TV addiction as conditioning  
 321. Compulsive viewing involves no thinking  
 322. Communicating between compulsive viewers and TV characters -- some kind of "thread"  
 323. TV is a substitute for other, "more serious," activities  
 324. Effects of compulsive TV viewing are like those of compulsive smoking/eating  
 325. Compulsive viewing is like reading a fascinating book  
 326. Compulsive TV viewing is not like being addicted to drugs  
 327. Concern about negative image ("couch potatoes") -- not psychological or other harm

## APPENDIX C

A SAMPLE OF TV VIEWERS' LETTERS TO TV GUIDE MAGAZINEKeeping Tabs on Tabloid TV

Thanks to the powers that be for the tabloids and tabloid TV. The snooty elite publications are not relevant to real life. Kudos to Geraldo Rivera, Maury Povich, John Walsh, etc. who have made me more aware of the jungle that today's society has become. [In Defense of Tabloid TV." Aug. 5]

Janet Hamilton, Sonora, Cal.

Maria Shriver

I am not impressed at all by workaholics, especially ones with children. I hope Maria Shriver slows down and takes time to enjoy the baby she is expecting this fall. They grow up too fast. ["What Makes Maria Shriver Run So Fast," July 29]

Terri Kinkead, Warsaw Mo.

Tame the Beast!

If "Beauty and the Beast" has had a little trouble with the ratings, it's because its writers forgot who they were writing for ["On the Grapevine: Beauty, the Beast and the Baby," June 10]. The show's audience is women. We watch it for the heart and soul. The writers are giving us blood and guts. Enough already! If we want screaming and yelling and growling, we'll get it from our husbands.

R.M. Roberts, Sumner, Wash.

Fashion Faux Pas?

Mr. Blackwell's statement that "conservative elegance in television is back" may be true, but I'd love to know who can afford it. Roseanne Barr is such a hit because, among other things, she looks like a good many American women look...There have been moments when she's looked rather tacky on the show, but then I don't wear Dior jewelry, Capezio shoes and Anne Klein clothes while I'm watching it, either. Chances are I may look a little tacky, too. ["Mr. Blackwell's Fashion Guide: TV Stars to Watch -- and Ignore -- if You Want to Look Sharp," July 22]

Kathy Gamble, Fort Worth

Don't Worry, Be Happy

How could Dr. Brothers omit "The Wonder Years" from her list? It's the purest form of escapism on TV, and isn't that an important part of feeling good? ["Mood Busters: The Shows That'll Make You Feel Better," July 29]

Colleen Dolan, Waterbury, Conn.

Brains Before Beauty

Newswomen deserve to be taken seriously. Next time, focus a little more on credentials and a little less on cleavage. ["TV's New News Queens: How Good Are They?" Aug. 12]

Melissa Ross, Dayton, Ohio

Going To Bat For Batman

In response to Adam West's comment that his Batman was more likable than Michael Keaton's movie characterization, I say: He has bats in his belfry! Adam West may have made Batman popular as a spoof, but Michael Keaton's serious, driven portrayal of Bruce Wayne, a.k.a. Batman, takes the hero out of the comics and gives him life and a sense of realism. ["Holy Acrimony! Adam West Is a Bitter Batman," July 22]

Regenia Marracino, Lewisville, Ark.

Romeo and Juliet are Alive and Well

General Hospital's Robert Scorpio has always been a charismatic character, thanks to Tristan Roger's brilliant acting, but he hasn't had a bright star opposite him for quite some time. Well, now Katherine Delafield -- a.k.a. Edie Lehmann -- has entered his life. Lehmann is warm, witty, beautiful and a talented actress (even in her first venture!) as well as a very accomplished pianist and singer. I anticipate a very romantic yet bumpy summer for these two on GH -- one I look forward to watching throughout the coming months. ["The Hottest Love Stories on Daytime Soaps," June 24]

Nancy S. Elsworth, Columbus, Ohio

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