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Mourning News: Grief, Memory, and Television Viewership of 9/11

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M.A., Emory University, 2007
M.A., University of California, Irvine, 1998
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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

Mourning News: Grief, Memory, and Television Viewership of 9/11

News footage of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon building were broadcast widely across network and cable television programming. This dissertation explores in detail how a small group of seventeen participants viewed that news, both on September 11 and in the week immediately following the attack. Using in-depth interview responses, it contributes to a larger body of scholarship that seeks to understand what it is viewers actually *do* while watching news television during a national crisis. Qualitative in methodology, this dissertation is interdisciplinary in its approach, combining seminal works in cultural studies, ritual studies, and television studies to illuminate connections between the social construction of meaning, memory, and television viewing. Additionally, it offers an historical analysis of how interviewees viewed a number of significant American crises in order to provide a foundation for understanding the complex processes involved in becoming an active interpreter of the news. I argue against scholarly work that tends to depict news viewers as passive and unreflective consumers, helplessly viewing hours of televised images on September 11. On the contrary, for this study's interviewees, the reasons for watching were manifold, and reflect neither a mindless nor compulsive urge to consume news on 9/11, but rather an intentional effort to employ an everyday practice during an extraordinary event. I conclude that, although it is an ordinary practice, for the subjects of this study, news viewing was also a complicated ritual that both enabled and constrained them in their quest for meaning about the crisis at hand. Ultimately, their hours of news viewing on 9/11 served not only as an important emotional signifier of their grief, fear, and anger about the event itself and the way the major news networks chose to cover it, but also served to greatly influence their reflections of that difficult day years later. Arising from interviewees' personal experiences watching television on 9/11, this dissertation expands on contemporary theories of mourning, news viewing, and national crises by reconsidering the role of ordinary rituals during extraordinary events.

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INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, the sky appeared to be exploding. Although the terrorist attack was limited to the upper East coast, sentiments of deep fear, chaos, and disbelief emerged all over America as millions watched television coverage of planes crashing into the World Trade Center, wreckage from another downed plane in Pennsylvania, and an entire side of the Pentagon destroyed by yet a fourth plane. As events of the day unfolded, people continued to watch news coverage of images depicting unimaginable destruction. Indeed, the relentless stream of images from that day haunted the American imagination. News television assaulted viewers with nonstop coverage of a confusing horror story about one of the worst catastrophes in American history based on scale, number of deaths, and multiple locations of violence. It seemed impossible to escape the sights and sounds of people fleeing, weeping, and looking on in horror at the destruction unfolding around them. For hours most Americans continued to watch television even though little updated news was released and the same terrible images were shown repeatedly.

They streamed into the relatively safe, private sphere of people's homes, heightening a wide range of emotions including fear, grief, and anger. Yet in spite of how difficult and terrible the news was many continued to watch coverage of September 11 all day, and for several days after the attack. Explaining the near inability to turn off or away from the television extends beyond a public fascination with abomination.[1] Some might turn to Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (that which is most feared appears in actual reality) to capture some of the reactions, but this does not sufficiently

[1] See Claire Kahane, "Uncanny Sights: The Anticipation of the Abomination," in *Trauma at Home after 9/11*, ed. Judith Greenberg, 107-116 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2003).

explain why people continued to watch even when the images made them sick, and even when they were sick of the images.[2] Indeed, evoking the uncanny tends to obscure just as much as it reveals.

In part, it seems people watched televised news coverage of September 11 so closely because it offered a gripping and compelling narrative in the form of sacred story that seemed to emerge before the dust and debris of the Twin Towers had even settled. In this story, which focused almost solely on the Twin Towers and the people who died in them, those killed were cast as heroes, rather than victims; their deaths interpreted as sacrificial, rather than in vain; and their lives framed as being offered up for the protection of the nation, rather than extinguished for no reason. The Twin Towers have become representative of the violence and tragedy that happened that day, understood as the central locus of death, destruction, and suffering with cultural, religious implications for the life of the nation such as those of redemption and sacrifice. It was a sacred story shaped by the media. Indeed, I would argue that for some, the sacred qualities of the story were so powerful because of the journalistic authority carefully cultivated by members of the media who acted as mediators and interpreters between the viewer and the catastrophe. Yet this is also a story that ordinary Americans[3] have constructed for themselves both in spite of news television and because of it.

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[2] See Mike Davis, *Dead Cities, and Other Tales* (New York: New Press, 2002), "Watching the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsing on thousands of victims, a friend's child blurted out: 'But this isn't real the way real things are real.' Exactly. Nor does it feel real the way real things do. There is a proper name, of course, for this eerie sensation of reality invaded by fantasy. 'An uncanny effect,' wrote Freud, 'is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us," 6.

[3] For the purpose of this dissertation I understand ordinary Americans to be those who did not lose anyone on September 11 and had only indirect connection to the three attack sites. Ordinary Americans are being defined as people, of which there were millions throughout the U.S., who watched the events of September 11 unfold on news television. Finally, they do not have be actual citizens of the U.S. or even American in

Ordinary Americans were granted a degree of both visibility and status as consumers of a wide range of September 11-themed memorabilia that could be found for sale on eBay seemingly before the day had even ended[4], as well as consumer goods such as Kenneth Cole apparel, American flags, and Budweiser Beer, that were strategically linked by corporate advertisers to the events of September 11 in that they conveyed messages of sympathy and mourning, while encouraging people to buy their goods.[5] Additionally, they were perceived by media companies as a receptive and eager audience ready and willing to absorb a range of September 11 based television from the nonstop news to the many made-for-TV specials.[6] However, the very ordinariness of their position, particularly in relation or comparison to others, such as the families of those who died, marked their experience of that day as unimportant and irrelevant - in short, a non-experience. As those who primarily viewed the attack on the news, their thought sentimentts were perceived as less important when compared to those who experienced the events first or even second-hand. While recognizing that there are profound qualitative differences between the kinds of experiences that occurred on and soon after September 11, this dissertation seeks to position ordinary peoples' memories and experiences in a manner that demonstrates their relevancy and importance, especially

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nationality, rather the term ordinary American loosely refers to those who were living in the States at the time of the attack.

[4] See Mick Broderick and Mark Gibson, "Mourning, Monomyth and Memorabilia: Consumer Logics of Collecting 9/11," in *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity*, ed. by Dana Heller, 200-220 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[5] See Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[6] See Lynn Spigel, "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11," in *The Selling of 9/11*, 119-154; see also Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1996) in which she writes, "The active audience is both subject and object of postmodern consumer culture," 12.

with the hope of more fully understanding the impact of this national tragedy on others besides victims, survivors, and the families of both.

More specifically, this dissertation which is carefully built upon responses gleaned from one-on-one, in depth interviews, examines how a small group of seventeen individuals used news television on September 11 to makes sense of a violent catastrophic event that for each of them, involved a profound sense of rupture and dislocation. The interview instrument, data collection procedures, and participants' backgrounds are all discussed in detail in the upcoming methodology section. For now, I argue that the kinds of questions that emerged during the attacks for interviewees -What was happening to this country? Would something happen to me or to my family? Was my community going to be attacked next? - reflected both a collective and personal sense of dislocation, as well as a troubling uncertainty about the status of their safety.

Although watching repetitive news images of September 11 directly contributed to this sense of dislocation, in the past watching news television during a national tragedy had often served to symbolically and literally anchor and orient them in space and time, as well as give them a focus in their quest for stability. While they might have experienced feelings of anguish, a sense that the entire nation was watching helped ease the fear they were alone and that the world was falling apart. This logic directly contributed to the reason why so many interview participants turned to the news on September 11. However, as they continued to view the news throughout the day many began to feel that the news, contrary to earlier episodes, was swiftly becoming a key source of their emotional anxiety.

This dissertation investigates the compelling and intellectually rich connections that can be established between grief, memory, and news viewing. It is also concerned with further understanding September 11 by focusing on a small group of individuals' recollections of their news viewing along with other aspects of that difficult day. At its core, it seeks to demonstrate the complexity of news viewing, using ritual theory to shed light on what has been a relatively little understood practice. In particular, I explain how ritualized news viewing operated for interview participants during September 11 by exploring their television viewing history starting with the pleasure certain TV shows gave them, particularly in their younger years, to their own parents' news viewing practices. I then interpret the significance of their present news viewing as well as their memories of watching several different nationally televised tragedies from the past, leading eventually to an analysis of their interpretation of the news they viewed both on September 11 and for one week after.

My research is concerned with the relationship between everyday life practices, such as watching television and extraordinary, spectacular events, such as September 11. I am interested in how extraordinary events organize everyday practices and how everyday practices can become potential resources for mediating and even managing extraordinary events.[7] News viewing is an ordinary practice embedded in the fabric of everyday life, taken for granted, and understood as a normal, unspectacular aspect of many people's daily routines. Not all news viewing is ritualized, however. Some viewing can be understood as one in a set of rituals that help make up people's day-to-day activities. Moreover, certain segments of the news are viewed more purposefully and attentively than others, making them more ritually significant compared to the less

[7] See Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

attentive viewing that can also occur within the same sitting. It is the attentive and ongoing news viewing that takes place during a national tragedy that more often than not adds a different dimension to the practice whereby people's viewing becomes more formal and elaborate - in short, ritualized. All other daily activities temporarily cease as people turn towards the news with intense focus and purpose. However, on September 11 what began as a ritual employed in an effort to negotiate a tragic and violent catastrophe became, as the day wore on, one that caused participants a great deal of anxiety and social uncertainty. And yet, many continued to engage in this ritual activity for hours and in some instances, days on end.

This may have been to the fact that although fairly little updated information was available throughout the day, people often managed to use what information was put forth by the news as way to understand what was happening. While news television constructed and produced the terms for interpreting September 11, viewers tended to use these terms in order to establish their own interpretive frameworks for sorting through what was a series of confusing and frightening events. In other words, just as news coverage of September 11 served to organize and direct participants, so too did they engage the news as a means of constructing a sense of social and personal stability in the midst of great chaos. News television both enabled and constrained viewers in a number of significant ways. However, it was also a medium that created and encouraged a sense of psychical isolation, even for those who watched with others, trapping them in a spiral of painful images that made it difficult for some to escape from unless they turned off the TV--and yet, most hesitated to do so.

While I argue that news viewing is a ritual, one that provides a much needed feeling of being informed especially during a crisis or catastrophe, it is also a practice that in the context of September 11caused tension and exaggerated anxiety and other uncertainties, leaving people in some instances feeling more afraid than comforted. Therefore, I also present the reasons why this ritual was unable to meet a number of challenges posed both by a new type of catastrophe and a new approach to the way TV news reported on it. There are two central goals to this dissertation: first, to better explain how ritual operates in relation to news viewing during a national catastrophe - how this practice actually operates for people; and second, how an explanation of people's interpretation of the news viewing they did can further illuminate scholarly understandings of national catastrophes and crises and their impact on ordinary Americans.

Literature Review

This dissertation contributes to several distinct areas of scholarly literature. First, it contributes to work being done in the area of American television studies with a particular focus on the news, as it relates to audience viewing strategies and content reception. Second, it deepens an understanding of ritual studies by focusing on the importance of ritual television viewing during violent or tragic times. Third, it adds to scholarship being done in several disciplines such as sociology and cultural studies regarding the relationship between social memory, television viewing, and personal biography. Finally, it is at the forefront of work emerging on September 11, 2001. In addition, this dissertation is unique for its in-depth engagement with what I see as distinctly American expressions of grief and mourning practices in a television studies

context. Surprisingly little work has been done synthesizing these two particular topics, grief and television viewing in America, in an effort to better understand how people interpret and respond to significant national tragedies. What research has been produced tends to overemphasize the effects of news television on audiences.[8]

TELEVISION STUDIES

Of tremendous importance to this dissertation is Ron Lembo's seminal work exploring what constitutes viewing culture.[9] Viewing culture is both how and what people view on television, as well as the culture viewers create for themselves. Using both ethnographic techniques and interviews, Lembo's work reveals that the interpretations people make when involved with television are too numerous, momentary, or even superficial to exhibit a consistency in terms of their racial, class, gender, or sexual identities, writing, "What I found much more interesting was the simple fact that people establish continuities, not that they make identity-based contestations of normative power."[10] In particular, his category discrete use, which defines television viewing as a distinct activity, occurring regularly in the time spent away from work, helps establish what he refers to as a "continuity of self". In other words, it is the practice of watching shows day in and day out, week after week, and month after month that helps create stability and cohesiveness, eventually becoming an integral part of how people see

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[8] See Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett, "'America under Attack': Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11," in *Media Representations of September 11*, eds. Franki Y. Bailey et al., 85-101 (Connecticut: Praeger Publishing, 2003); Barbie Zelizer*, Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, The Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); Fritz Breithaupt, "Rituals of Trauma: How the Media Fabricated September 11," in *Media Representations*, 67-82; Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, and Catastrophe," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Mellencamp, 222-239 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Barry Glasner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

[9] *Thinking Through Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[10] Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*, 234.

themselves and their own actions in everyday life.[11] "It is through discrete use that people constitute themselves as productive individuals, and in doing so simultaneously constitute to themselves within the broader framework of American Individualism."[12]

Additionally, Lembo's concept of mindfulness is extremely useful for investigating people's understandings of September 11 news coverage, particularly on that day and in the week that followed. A mindful approach to viewing means for those Lembo interviewed an orientation towards television in a manner they feel stimulates their minds intellectually and emotionally.[13] He writes, "In distinguishing thoughts they have at home from whatever thoughts and feelings they might have carried over from work, these people are in effect creating a mindful space that enables them to anticipate their own imaginative involvement with television…"[14] This of course is in direct contrast to the way television viewing has often been criticized as mindless activity[15] with viewers stereotyped as "couch potatoes".[16] Moreover, Lembo highlights the ways people create a sense of place through and with television, countering the argument put forth by Joshua Meyrowitz that television and other media mediums invade space, leaving no discernable or distinct social spheres.[17]

Although Lembo notes that viewing is a ritual for people, unfortunately at no point in his work does he define exactly what he means by this, claiming only that

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*, 232.
[13] Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*, 132.
[14] Ibid.
[15] See Theodore Adorno, "How to Look at Television," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, eds. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, 474-488 (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Viking, 1985); Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).
[16] See Jason Mittell, *Television and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) whose work discusses the problem with using this term to describe television viewers.
[17] *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

television viewing is a transition ritual that helps make up people's move from work to home.[18] He does discuss what he calls the "turn to television ritual," yet this ritual appears to be connected for the most part to the transition ritual he speaks of. Moreover, the people he interviews never make explicit how their actual viewing is sometimes focused in a ritual manner.[19] Additionally, Lembo's work focuses primarily on television shows in general. There is no particular emphasis on any one particular genre, and the news, or the "reality of the day's events" that the news purports to cover, is virtually ignored. Without a doubt, this dissertation builds directly on his work, but it seeks to address what has been left out of an otherwise rich, highly informative discussion about people's experiences and interpretation of their own TV viewing.

Here I explore what it means to view the news ritually with a particular focus on what this ritual means to the very people that employ it especially in the context of a national tragedy. In other words, what happens when an ordinary practice, such as news viewing, becomes suffused with ritual meaning when violence and tragedy occur? Moreover, I am concerned with understanding the kinds of social relationships and exchanges that occurred particularly as people viewed news coverage of September 11, and how these relationships can impact and affect people's understanding of that day. Once again, Lembo's work is seminal for thinking through the way meaning is both constructed and exchanged between people about what it is they are viewing. He writes, "Virtually all research perspectives acknowledge (even if they do not focus on it) that

[18] Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*, 124.
[19] Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*, 125.

what people do with one another can mediate the power of television in important ways, in some cases amplifying it and in other cases deflecting and qualifying it."[20]

Andrea Press's work is also highly relevant to this dissertation.[21] Press in contrast to Lembo argues that the hegemonic ways television operates are frequently gender-specific for middle-class women and that television's power works in more class specific ways for working-class women, writing, "Women's reception of television is affected by both their position as women in our society and their membership in social and class and age groups."[22] Both Lembo and Press, however, question the idea that television operates in a purely oppressive and capitalistic mode. [23] While my dissertation focuses less on the specifics of gender, it does address the influence of class and generational differences and similarities with regards to how people interpret both news and non news TV shows. Moreover, I examine how or even if other aspects of their identity are affected by their viewing, be it televised catastrophes or their favorite sitcoms.

Press's work examines competing and relational themes: hegemony and resistance, gender and class, and media production and viewer consumption. Again, like Lembo, she concludes that the hegemonic powers of television are complicated and often mediated so that both conformity and resistance occur at once. The thoughtful and even poignant responses from the women she interviewed reveals how meaningful, yet upsetting television viewing can sometimes be for them. As with Lembo work, there is a lack of detailed discussion about ritual even though there is an emphasis on television

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[20] Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*, 119.
[21] *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).
[22] Press, *Women Watching Television*, 176-177.
[23] Todd Gitlin, "Prime-Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment," *Social Problems* 26/3 (1979): 251-266.

viewing as a ritual activity. Nevertheless, her research has laid the groundwork for my own as I look for the possible connections between identity construction, and television viewing during both ordinary and extraordinary times.

The work of Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder is also highly relevant to my own. They argue that contrary to the belief that viewers only pay casual and intermittent attention to news stories, television news is in fact an "educator without peer" and that it very much shapes American perceptions of political life.[24] Their work is essential for understanding how television news powerfully influences which problems viewers regard as most serious. This is achieved partly through what Iyengar and Kinder call priming, "calling attention to some matters while ignoring others."[25] Priming often sets the standards by which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are judged by American viewers.

Iyengar and Kinder do not ignore or merely theorize the existence of a television audience as demonstrated by their methodology in which they seek information directly from viewers themselves. Indeed, the audience is seminal to how they structure their argument about the influence and power of news television. However, there is a lack of emphasis on how audiences counteract, resist, or ignore agendas set by the news. While audiences are not as powerful or as persuasive as those who produce the news, it seems doubtful that they are not without their own understanding of the news or what constitutes the news. In fact it would seem based on Iyengar and Kinder's own experiences as viewers themselves that audiences potentially construct an understanding of the news shaped both by the agenda of news television and their own logic of the

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[24] *News that Matters: Television and American Public Opinion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).
[25] Iyengar and Kinder, *News that Matters*, 63.

world formed by everyday interactions with their communities, families, coworkers, as well as based on a sense of who they understand themselves to be. My work seeks to determine exactly how television viewers approach the news, which I argue is based on some of the factors mentioned in addition to their own and their parents' news viewing history. Did television news direct people's understanding of the events of September 11 or did people use the news as one interpretive strategy among many to make sense of what was happening that day?

Similar to Iyengar and Kinder's research on agenda setting and priming, Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett's work examines how CNN's framing of September 11 constructed an agenda for responding to the attack that contained a number of key words, images, sources of information, sentences, and thematic elements that in the end created a powerful dominant frame – that a U.S. military-led international war would be the only meaningful solution to prevent more terrorist attacks.[26] Reynolds and Barnett's work focuses on the context of breaking news and how it differs from planned daily news or even routine breaking news, such as police chases or serious fires, because it subsumes all other news and because, "All of a news organization's resources are devoted to coverage of significant event."[27]

According to Reynolds and Barnett, CNN's particular framing of September 11 contributed to a sense that for some individuals there were limited, narrow options for them to participate in a discussion about that day. They write:

> We do not mean to suggest that CNN was conspiring with officials to create this frame. Rather we believe this frame came about because several forces were in operation. First…the frame that CNN presented was consistent with dominant American Ideology. Second, journalists' individual ideological frames of

[26] See "America under Attack: CNN's Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11," 91.
[27] Reynolds and Barnett, "America under Attack," 87.

> reference, which fit the dominant ideology of American political culture, reinforced this. Third, extra-media influences such as CNN's sources or even CNN's function as part of a media conglomerate impacted the network's perspective.[28]

While their work on CNN certainly highlights ways in which the media was complicit in narrowing, rather than broadening, a meaningful discourse about America's response to the events of September 11, it remains unclear what options did remain for ordinary Americans to frame both the attack itself and news television coverage of it although it seems unlikely that there were not competing discourses about the meaning of that day, regardless of how narrow or limited strategies were for public expression. Therefore, a key goal of this dissertation to examine how some people chose to frame September 11. Because as the weeks turned into months, many in this country continued to struggle with how to interpret what had happened. This struggle could be seen in both formal and informal public forums in which fierce sometimes contentious debates took place, especially with regards to how to memorialize the attack, along with what going to war in Afghanistan and then Iraq has meant to different segments of people.

RITUAL STUDIES

A great deal of this dissertation is concerned with presenting a deeper understanding about ritual operates in relation to both news and non news viewing. In order to more thoroughly explain the connection, I both borrow and expand on work done on ritual by anthropologists, religious scholars, and sociologists. Two dimensions of ritual in particular are examined. The first dimension centers on how rituals are embodied and practiced during times of societal duress. The second dimension focuses

[28] Reynolds and Barnett, "America under Attack," 101.

on the particularities of ritualized viewing, as well as other rituals that form in relation to the television during a national catastrophe or crisis.

Catherine Albanese's work in American religious history on American sacred stories is of interest for this dissertation because these stories are ritually told and retold though television and I would add, through news television in particular. According to Albanese, such stories are creeds in a narrative form. She writes, "In the public culture of the United States, such narratives unite the many by providing a common fund of meaning for all to share. In other words, these American stories give people a system of beliefs regarding their place as part of one people however loosely defined."[29] This creed is produced or to use Albanese's wording it, "carried by" television, film, and popular literature and embodied by entertainers and popular heroes.

It appears that the ritual narration of the 9/11 sacred story involves a similar plot structure put forth by Albanese, beginning with trouble in paradise and ending with eventual redemption for a hard-pressed community. "The story turns on a wholesome innocent society invaded from outside by overwhelming evil. Members of the society are caught off guard and unable to defend themselves because of circumstances."[30] Suddenly a powerful stranger or outsider comes and rescues the community wanting nothing in return and eventually leaving, the community then continues its peaceful existence. This was almost the exact storyline evoked and ritually retold again and again particularly by news television in relation to September 11, with firefighters and emergency service workers starring in the role of the rescuer and an emphasis placed on stories about strangers helping strangers that day. However, there were some striking key differences.

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[29] *America: Religions and Religion*, Third Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 469.
[30] Ibid.

One significant difference was the way in which a peaceful existence did not ensue for Muslims and Arab-Americans, who regardless of the efforts they made (as well the lengths they were forced to go) to prove their citizenship, loyalty, and even love of the U.S., were nevertheless immediately targeted, suspected, and persecuted by formal institutions like the Federal Bureau of Investigation and informally by neighbors or co-workers. In the context of this discussion, they have been forced into the role of evil doer, remade into an enemy that must be vanquished at all costs so paradise can be restored.

Ritual is, according to Paul Connerton, is a performative language. He writes, "A liturgy is an ordering of speech acts which occur when and only when these utterances are performed. If there is no performance, there is no ritual." [31] Thus the telling and retelling of the 9/11 story by the media was in fact a ritual practice designed to reinforce certain creeds about America and Americans with regards to certain ideals about their innocence and their exceptionalism. The actual events of September 11, however, strayed from the sacred story plot in spite of news media's efforts to present a redemptive ending. If this particular sacred story failed to give people a world that still made sense, which ritual narratives did they create or choose to evoke instead? This dissertation investigates the kinds of narratives interviewees ended up creating around September 11, closely reviewing how their stories were both similar and where the diverged from the one put forth by the news.

Jonathan Z. Smith's work is also critical to this dissertation for its discussion regarding the relationship between orientation, place, ritual, and the emergence of

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[31] *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 58.

meaning.[32] According to Smith, ritual is first and foremost a mode of paying attention and a process of marking interest with place as a critical component of ritual.[33] Issues of place and ritual are highly useful for discussions about the location of the television(s) in people's home, as well as the kinds of ritual activities that emerge from and in association with viewing. In addition, Smith's approach to ritual opens up the possibility of thinking through how television usage contributes both to the formation of place and the confluence of place and television in the construction of a wide range of issues central to this dissertation from memory and identity, to individual biography and social relationships, to the identification of the sacred and the process of meaning making.

Moreover, Smith's use of Allan Gussow's work is particularly relevant for unpacking how place can be affected by images of violence and tragedy as presented by news. Smith quotes Gussow, who writes, "The catalyst that converts any physical location – any environment if you will – into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is a piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings."[34] This dissertation maps the types of feelings that emerged in people's home-place during September 11 and explores how ritual news viewing both contained and encouraged a range of emotions on that day and in the week that followed.

Catherine Bell's work is also critical to the ways I address the relationship between what I see are the kinds rituals that take place in the domestic sphere and news consumption. Bell notes, "What counts as ritual can rarely be pinned down in general since ritual practices constantly play off a field of action in which they emerge, whether that field involves other ritualized activities, ordinary action deemed by contrast to be

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[32] *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).
[33] Smith, *To Take Place*, 103.
[34] Smith, *To Take Place*, 30.

spontaneous and practical, or both at the same time."[35] It is her emphasis on the exchange between categories of ordinary action and ritualized activities that are pertinent for understanding and exploring how something as ordinary as news viewing can be described as a ritual practice.

Some would argue that it is only habit or routine, not ritual when many in this country come home, fix dinner, or get ready for bed, often all the while watching the news. However, turning on and watching the television is a practice that while not inherently invested with deep meaning, nevertheless takes on a deeper significance with urgent, focused, and formal dimensions during tragic times. Moreover, it is by watching news coverage of catastrophes that people turn an everyday practice into a ritualized experience often with the hope of bringing some kind of order to the day, time, and sense of self in the midst of great chaos. When and where people watch television speaks to the myriad of ways they perceive the symbolic and literal structure of their home environments. Additionally, and of great importance to this dissertation, ritualized viewing of news television can be understood as a strategy for making meaning and acting purposefully within the context of one's home in times of great duress.

Finally Robert Wuthnow's work is important for understanding how ritual television viewing can connect people and communities both imaginatively and literally.[36] According to Wuthnow, ritual is not a type of social activity that can be set apart from the rest of the world for special investigation, noting instead that, "Ritual is a dimension of all social activity."[37] Applying this understanding of ritual to the television

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[35] *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 141.
[36] See *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
[37] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 101.

miniseries *Holocaust*, which aired in April 1978, he notes that more than 120 million Americans watched the nine-and-half-hour adaptation of Gerald Green's best-selling novel with the same title. Viewing the miniseries, according to Wuthnow, became a public ritual. Not just because millions of Americans watched, but because it moved them emotionally, influenced their attitudes, and involved them in discussions about both the European Holocaust and the miniseries in their classrooms, among family members, and at places of worship and work. Again Wuthnow notes, "In these respects, the program took on importance well beyond that of an ordinary television series…*Holocaust* was a ritual event dramatizing the evils of social and moral chaos."[38]

A fascinating and critical aspect of his analysis centers on how themes of evil and chaos were especially meaningful to people who perceived disorder in their own society.[39] In other words, for some, *Holocaust* symbolized both contemporary chaos and was a reminder of historic evil. In relation to this dissertation, Wuthnow's work is useful for understanding and contextualizing ritual news viewing of September 11. Moreover, his discussion exploring cultural attitudes held among the multitudes who viewed *Holocaust* can help further an understanding about some of the attitudes some people held about the attack. Before the September 11terrorist attack happened, an already difficult social and political time had been unfolding. For example, in 2000 a painful election process and outcome had left the nation divided over the legitimacy of the president and deeply concerned about same-party nepotism. Additionally, an overtly public display of abuse of power, highlighted by the Supreme Court's decision in favor of the Bush Campaign to uphold the Florida vote recount, left many in this country

[38] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 127.
[39] The viewing of this television miniseries was extensively studied.

questioning the moral order of this nation. It was in the midst of this political and social turmoil that September 11 happened, effectively shaping and contextualizing how the events highlighted above were perceived. The Bush Administration's response to the terrorist attack, which included going to war with Afghanistan and Iraq, were understood by a number of people I interviewed, as a continuation of unfair and unethical practices already in place.

Returning to again Wuthnow, he notes how viewing *Holocaust* was more meaningful to those who were already troubled by contemporary threats to the moral order, noting that this finding is consistent with the argument put forth by those who work in the Durkheimian tradition in which ritual appears to be a response to crisis or uncertainties. Therefore, another goal of this dissertation is to understand the different ways the events of September 11 were meaningful to people who experienced them primarily through ritualized viewing of news television and against the backdrop of the social and political discontent.

CULTURAL STUDIES

While the impact of television on viewers has been well documented by scholars in areas of media studies, media sociology, and cultural studies,[40] little attention has been paid to how people construct an understanding of national tragedies and form memories

[40] See Ben Badikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) where he argues that the concentrated control of the media over the last 25 years by corporations has had an adverse effect on what the public knows is going on in their worlds, on the quality of reporting and journalism in general, and on the stability of democracy in a supposedly free and open society. See also Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspaper* (New York: Basic Books, 1978) presents a rich history of journalism in America and is highly useful for his discussion on objectivity, which according to Schudson "is a practice rather than a belief. It is a strategic ritual, which journalists use to defend themselves against mistakes and criticism. Barbie Zelizer's book *Covering the Body* offers an insightful look into the formation of a journalistic community and the construction of journalistic authority. Zelizer persuasively argues that journalists enact their authority as a narrative craft, embodied in narrative forms.

of them through television usage.[41] While television viewing often helps people construct and even map their personal biographies, this dimension of viewing has been largely overlooked but for wonderful work done by Ien Ang,[42] C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby[43] in particular. However, exploring the connections between biography and memory of certain events can lead to a deeper, more nuanced knowledge about how Americans negotiate and possibly even mourn when confronted with death, tragedy, and violence in the context of news viewing.

One of the main goals of this dissertation is to examine the complex, nuanced way people interpreted the news on September 11. In order to achieve this it is necessary to think about the ways they use television – both news and non news – during ordinary times. A good deal of work on the different way media culture is used by individuals in their everyday lives has been conducted by sociologists looking particularly at the role that music plays in people's lives.[44] The work of Tia DeNora is critical to this dissertation for her discussion about the ways people use music to construct a sense of biography. With regards to television viewing, I argue that certain shows can act as a powerful aide memoire similar to how people use music in their everyday life in that TV

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[41] Mary Ann Doane's work "Information, Catastrophe, and Crisis" in *Logics of Television* discusses how both television and photographs concern themselves with the death, but television deals not with the weight of the dead past, but with the potential trauma and explosiveness of the present, 222. While her work is both fascinating and useful, Doan never systematically examines how viewers read, negotiate, and engage with catastrophic coverage. Moreover, the confidence of her (and other's) argument that television annihilates memory because of the stress on the "nowness" of the discourse remains solely speculative in nature as she never considers, much less asks viewers (or herself as a viewer) how they make meaning of catastrophes.

[42] See *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[43] "A Life Course Perspective on Fandom," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13/5 (2010): 429-450; See also *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Meaning Making in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

[44] See Tia Denora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William G. Roy and Timothy J. Dowd, "What is Sociological about Music?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 183-203; David Hesmondhalgh, "Audiences and Everyday Aesthetics: Talking about Good and Bad Music," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10/4 (2007): 507-527.

shows were part of the aesthetic environment in which "it was once playing, in which the past, now an artefact of memory and its constitution, was once a present."[45] Additionally, DeNora discusses how self-reflexivity can be seen in relation to music's role as building material for self-identity. She writes:

> The 'projection' of biography is by no means the only basis for the construction of self-identity. Equally significant is a form of 'introjection', a presentation of the self to self, the ability to mobilize and hold on to a coherent image of 'who one knows one is'. And this involves the social and cultural activity of remembering, the turning over of past experiences, for the cultivation of self-accountable imageries of the self.[46]

Like music, television shows were often consciously used to structure people's individual and collective identity, help them recall and revisit the past, and encourage them to feel certain ways.[47] In the context of TV viewing, this dissertation explores how recalling theme music, specific characters, and story-lines offers a legitimate and meaningful way of producing a personal biography of people's lives, a means of remembering who they were at earlier times in their lives, and a fun way of identifying themselves as members of particular generation. More specifically, news television is a technology that helps summon people's connection to and identification with past historical events.

Memory scholars discuss how memory and history are vulnerable to the fast pace of life and the acceleration of media images[48]; however, recalling television shows is a practical way that people use to anchor themselves in the swirl of the past. While television has not traditionally been thought of as an object that sustains or even creates

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[45] DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 67.
[46] DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 62-63.
[47] See Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History* (New York: Verso, 2005).
[48] See Richard Terdiman, *Past Present: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997-2000).

memories, in fact it has been actively critiqued for doing the opposite.[49] While television does not contain memories in the same manner as a photograph, certain shows can speak to the social relationships and settings of both the past and present as people constantly make and remake a sense of who we were, and who we have become. This reflects the way in which memories are always "interpenetrated" by collective influences which fill in gaps and ascribe significance to lived experiences.[50]

The rather complex issue of memory and identity in relation to television viewing can be addressed more broadly using a framework put forth by John Bodnar in his discussion of how public memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions. He writes:

> Official culture relies on 'dogmatic formalism' and the restatement of reality in ideal rather than in complex or ambiguous terms. It presents the past on an abstract basis of timelessness and sacredness." Vernacular culture, on the other hand, represents a whole array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of whole. They can even clash with one another…But normally vernacular expressions convey what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like. Its very existence threatens the sacred and timeless quality of official expression.[51]

Bodnar also notes that public memory is produced from a political discussion that is not so much about specific economic and moral problems, but rather fundamental issues about the entire existence of society. He continues, "Public memory is a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or a society understand both its present and past, and by implication its future."[52] His categories of official and vernacular expressions of public memory are useful in framing my own research. I have already

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[49] See Stephen Heath, "Representing Television," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp, 279, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Mary Ann Doan, "Information, Crisis, and Catastrophe," in *Logics of Television*, 226-227.
[50] Anderson, "History TV," 21.
[51] *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 14.
[52] Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 15.

argued that watching television can be understood as a strategy for producing memory and recalling one's past. I would also add that vernacular expressions of public memory in particular are articulated not only through television's news programming content, but also by interpretations made by viewers themselves. Interpretations put forth by viewers may express competing sentiments and offer a different understanding of how their interpretation of September 11 from those presented by news television.

In this regard Kristin Ann Hass's book is also valuable for her work on citizen participation in constructing public memory, and making private memories public.[53] Writing specifically about items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. she notes, "These things also demonstrate a new impulse in the making of American public memory – the abiding desire on the part of so very many visitors to the Wall to speak, publicly and privately to the problematic memory of this war."[54] In spite of how difficult it often is to make sense of, and come to terms with the past, particularly contentious and painful events, Hass's work sheds light on the impulse to do so.

Hass offers a rich discussion about the restless memory of the Vietnam War and I argue that somewhat similarly, the memory of September 11 also has a restless quality. The restless nature of the terrorist attack has been due in large part to the ways it continues to haunt the American imagination and to the fact that there is no one specific place for people to go and express sentiments, mourn losses, bring their memories, and sustain collective conversations about what September 11 has meant to them. This is vastly different from the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, where the "impulse" to make personal memories of difficult public grief has been expressed through various gifts

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[53] See *Carried to the Wall*: *American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[54] Hass, *Carried to the Wall*, 1.

people leave at the Wall. This impulse, as noted by Hass, is one way of trying to negotiate meaning and construct an understanding about difficult, often violent events.

This dissertation examines how expressions of grief and mourning potentially operate for people within the context of mass media, most particularly news television. I argue that the impulse to watch the news on September 11 was not a mindless or even necessarily helpless one, but was rather suffused with great purpose. While the Wall was completed in 1982 seven years after the Vietnam War, Hass's discussion about the complex act of leaving gifts at the Wall may also understood as somewhat similar to the act of turning to news television September 11. In both instances, though divergent historical events, separated by more than thirty years, an expression of grief and a willingness to share in the collective sorrow and pain was being shared by ordinary Americans.

Viewing the news was a ritual people employed to help them recognize and confront the magnitude of the attack. It was one that allowed those nowhere near the attack sites to vicariously, visually experience certain albeit limited aspects of 9/11. However, it was a complicated and even conflicted ritual because while it allowed people to feel that they were doing something, it also made them feel helpless. Ritually viewing repetitive images of planes crashing and buildings falling was also confusing at times because it involved a simultaneous confrontation with and a denial of death.

Barbie Zelizer's article discusses the representation of 9/11 deaths in the public sphere,[55] highlighting how people often do not come to terms with death in American life in general. Specifically, she examines the images of people as they jumped to their

[55] "The Voice of the Visual in Memory," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips, 157-186 (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004).

deaths from the Twin Towers, which news agencies quickly replaced with images of buildings collapsing. "The buildings," she writes, "took on a central role in visualizing the tragedy for a grieving public…played over and over again on television, in newspapers and other venues of visual display."[56] However, an intense media focus on the falling buildings prolonged what Zelizer refers to as the subjunctive (what if those people did not die) response. The subjunctive response, she argues, has real consequences for how we remember tragic events, writing, "For it may seem that memory rests not only upon the boundaries of the familiar but upon the boundaries of the impossible."[57]

Zelizer's work raises interesting questions in relation to Gary Laderman's studies in the history of death, in which he discusses the importance of the last look at the dead body in contemporary American burial and mourning practices as a way of restoring a sense of order in the chaotic, messy context of death and as a critical means of closure and finality.[58] However, this feeling of closure is usually achieved when the gaze is focused on a restored, rested, and 'natural' appearing body.[59] In the case of September 11, there was virtually no televised coverage (released to the public) of dead, dismembered, or charred bodies—as previously mentioned, images of bodies about to die were pulled off air. The near total absence of bodies has kept both the dead of Twin Towers and television viewers themselves in a kind of liminal state where they are stranded, unable to either mourn or move past their experience of that day.[60]

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[56] Zelizer, "Voice of the Visual," 176.
[57] Zelizer, "Voice of the Visual," 185.
[58] *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[59] Laderman, "Introduction: 1963," *Rest in Peace*, xli.
[60] See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1997).

This sense of liminality, for most of the people I interviewed, had the effect of disrupting or even halting grief, as well as influencing the kinds of memories they possess about that day. Moreover, bodies can become symbolically dangerous when they have not been properly contained and managed before burial, thus in some sense, imagining the state of missing bodies is more terrifying than viewing actual dead bodies. This imagining has much to do with why some remain in a state of psychical immobility, unable to come to terms with certain aspects of September 11 years later.

SELECTED WORKS ON SEPTEMBER 11

September 11, 2001 remains an enormously complicated event, one that has yet to be fully unpacked even as the ten year anniversary fast approaches. Although politicians, scholars, military leaders, and health professionals have asserted their understanding of that day, the fact remains that there has been relatively little concrete understanding, particularly in proportion to the amount of speculation and theorization about how a catastrophe of this magnitude has made an impact ordinary Americans. However, since 2002 work conducted by social scientists (sociologists and economists in particular) and oral historians have added much needed depth and insight both to the events of that day and their effects. Outcomes from the attack such as job loss, dislocation, and a terrible sense of anxiety have been experienced by many, and have had a tremendous impact on both individuals and communities. But not all communities have experienced the impact in the same manner.[61] For example, Monisha Das Gupta's work exploring an immigrant and predominantly Muslim workforce of cab drivers during and immediately after September 11 reveals how low-income South Asian and Muslim drivers did not feel

[61] See Margaret M. Chin, "Moving On: Chinese Garment Workers After 9/11," in *Wounded City: The Social Impact of 9/11*, ed. Nancy Foner, 184-207 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005).

drawn into a community of sufferers even though Das Gupta writes, "they responded with a sense of unity, purpose, and service as survivors of disasters often do."[62] Similarly, Jennifer L. Bryan's research explores how Muslims and Arab-Americans pushed to the margins by increasing systematic discrimination and social suspicion sometimes draw upon a more disciplined and in some sense, more conservative practice of their religion as a response to harsh and often punishing measures levied against them after September 11.[63] These two works in particular reinforce comments made by Mike Davis who writes, "The real burden of the new urban fear – the part that is not hallucinatory or hyperbolized – is borne by those who fit the profile of white anxiety: Arab and Muslim Americans, but also anyone else with usual head covering, Middle Eastern passport, or unpopular beliefs about Israel."[64]

While the focus of this dissertation is not on marginalized communities, it takes into consideration how ordinary people interpreted, experienced, and responded to September 11 and tries to provide a more complicated picture that disrupts any notion that all middle class Americans felt the same way [or something along these lines]. The repercussions of the terrorist attack on their lives have in no way been as severe as for the people Das Gupta and Bryan spoke with. However, as previously mentioned, contentious often fierce public discussions and debates about the attack as well as the proper response it, have left little room for some to voice their thoughts and opinions. Moreover, a number of people I spoke with implicitly seemed to feel their experience of that day deserved neither recognition nor mention because it was in no way comparable

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[62] "Of Hardship and Hostility: The Impact of 9/11 on New York City Taxi Drivers," in *Wounded City*, 234.
[63] "Constructing the 'True Islam' in Hostile Times: The Impact of 9/11 on Arab Muslims in Jersey City," in *Wounded City, 133-162*.
[64] Davis, *Dead Cities*, 15.

to others. This dissertation argues otherwise, focusing on what I see as the critical importance of understanding a range of experiences in the context of national tragedy.

A number of experiences have been recorded by oral historians trained by Columbia University's Oral History Research Office whose staff along with volunteers, were sent out just three weeks after September 11 to conduct interviews from inhabitants of New York City.[65] Similarly, the New York Fire Department (FDNY) also conducted interviews with members of all ranks from the Department.[66] Finally, retired firefighter Dennis Smith conducted interviews with firefighters about their memories and their involvement on 9/11.[67] The work of both oral historians and others mentioned above reveal the necessity of getting at how people produce an understanding of themselves and their communities in relation to catastrophic events, particularly as a way of thinking through the specifics of impact and reaction. While this dissertation continues in the oral history tradition of collecting narratives as a way of exploring such specifics, there is a particular emphasis on interpretation and analysis. In other words, in addition to collecting narratives, I believe it is also important to methodically and critically examine them. The interviews I conducted and analyzed are one more step in piecing together a more thorough understanding of how ordinary Americans experienced September 11.

Methodology and Interview Sample

A qualitative approach is used in this study to counter certain intellectual claims, as well as to foster a better scholarly understanding about how people interpret their own

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[65] In 2007 roughly 90-100 of the interviews had been transcribed and were available for public use at Columbia University's Library. See Oral History Research Office, *Columbia.edu*, accessed February 14, 20011, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/oral.

[66] See "The Sept. 11 Records," The New York Times, *NYTimes.com* accessed, February 14, 2011, http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/html/nyregion/20050812_WTC_GRAPHIC/met_WTC_histories_full_01.html.

[67] *Report from Ground Zero: The Story of the Rescue Efforts at the World Trade Center* (New York: Viking, 2002).

news viewing of the September 11 attack. Additionally, while ethnographic and survey-based research on American television audience behavior and television consumption strategies have grown over the years, interview research still remains relatively limited in comparison. In particular, very little research has been conducted using interviews to examine how actual people[68] (rather than theorized masses) use, interpret, and make sense of the news during a national crisis. Accordingly, the arguments developed in this dissertation draw upon a series of interview questions about television viewing in the past and present, in daily life and during extraordinary times, and finally both on September 11 and during the week following the attack. In other words, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were employed as a means of exploring the details of both everyday viewing experiences and extraordinary viewing ones. Moreover, a particular value has been placed on the interpretation and uses of TV viewing, both news and non news, as constructed by viewers themselves. For example, what words did they choose to describe their experiences and memories of television viewing? Finally, how did they incorporate or reject news television on September 11? Again, I make use of people's interview responses to structure the dissertation itself, paying close attention to emerging patterns and themes in their narratives.

INTERVIEW ITEMS

Five discrete but interrelated areas were explored through in-depth interview questions and were as follows: 1) *family media history*; 2) *personal media history*; 3)

[68] See Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991). Ang's work explores the how television institutions create a definition and understanding of a viewing audience in order to gain a better understanding of which shows will be a success, garner the highest ratings, and to ensure an audience commodity can be delivered to advertisers. However, how real people watch and understand TV (engage in the everyday practice of watching television) is often vastly different and far more complicated than the aggregate, quantifiable model that has been created by television executives.

news viewing; 4) *news viewing September 11*; and 5) *news viewing after September 11*. In all a total of thirty-nine questions were asked. Out of that total, eleven consisted of basic demographic information that included questions such as: age, education, ethnicity, and occupation.[69] The primary goal of the interview instrument was to gain an overall understanding of participants' television viewing history with a particular emphasis on how interviewees perceived the role of news television in both their parents' lives and their own. A secondary, but equally important goal was to gather as much information as possible about their news viewing on September 11 and in the days immediately after.

A sample of some of the questions designed to better understand participants' recollections of their parents news viewing were: 1) How many television sets did your family own; 2) Where was the television(s) located in your house; and 3) Did someone in your home watch the news on regular/daily basis when you were growing up? Questions regarding memories of their own television history tended to focus more on the details and circumstances of non news shows they viewed, and included some of the following: 1) Please tell me about some of the shows you watched; 2) Did you have a favorite show you watched regularly?

There were also questions designed to more fully understand participants' current news viewing habits. Some of these items consisted of: 1) What guides your decision to turn on the news; 2) What do you like or dislike about the news channels you watch? A number of questions were also constructed in order to elicit memories of people's specific news viewing and overall experience of September 11. A sample of questions specifically geared toward understanding the news viewing they did that day were: 1) Did you watch news coverage of September 11; 2) How many hours of news coverage did

[69] See Appendix A of this dissertation for a complete list interview questions.

you watch that day and which channels did you watch; 3) Were there any words or images that you can recall? Finally certain questions seeking information about their viewing for one week after September 11 were as follows: 1) Did you continue to watch the coverage pertaining to September 11 after that day; and 2) Today, looking back on September 11, 2001 is there anything about the news coverage that sticks out to you? These questions in particular were designed to see if there was any change or shift in either attitude or practice regarding news television.

DATA GATHERING PROCEDURES

Using a snow ball sample technique, I began by interviewing individuals I knew personally and who had expressed a willingness to participate in this dissertation research. In turn, I asked them if they knew anyone else who would be willing to be interviewed. Most often an email address or name would be given, which was then followed by an email introduction to the research study sent out by the primary and sole interviewer, myself. However, at times an introductory email was directly sent to the person, who agreed to ask around on my behalf, sending this email off with their inquiry

PARTICIPANTS

A total of seventeen interviews were used for this dissertation. All interviews were recorded and conducted in three geographic locations determined primarily by ease of accessibility for the interviewer and were as follows: Kensington, Maryland, Atlanta, Georgia, and Damascus, Syria. The majority of interviews were recorded in Atlanta, Georgia with participants either employed or seeking an advanced degree from the same mid-size, private university, located in the Southern U.S. However, there were a few exceptions: two interviewees were students at other schools, one in the States and one

outside; another participant was in between jobs as a psychologist; and finally, a fourth individual was a scientist at a large national research organization.

Criteria for interview participants were both non-restrictive and informal, but included the following parameters: age - the person had to be at least eighteen years or older; and location - the person had to be in U.S. during September 11. Most interviews took forty minutes to complete though the longest was an hour and a half, and the shortest twenty-five minutes. Notes were taken during interview sessions and an interactive, discussion-oriented style was regularly employed throughout interviews. Interviews were then transcribed, as well as re-listened to regularly (at least several times a year). A file was created for each participant, which included a demographic information sheet, along with interview transcriptions, and extensive notes. Tapes were kept in a separate location and the names of all interview participants were changed in order to help ensure their privacy.

Interviewees were almost evenly split between men (n=8) and women (n=9). The youngest interviewee was 21 and the oldest 60. Most participants identified themselves as Caucasian, with one individual who identified herself as Chinese-American and two participants as African American. The majority of respondents were raised Christian, with denominations ranging from Catholic to Methodist. Two participants were raised Jewish and two were brought up with no religion. Most participants were well to extremely well-educated, meaning the vast majority had an M.A. degree or higher. Two participants, though they had yet to complete their B.A. degree, had taken an extensive number of undergraduate courses. One participant was only a semester shy of finishing his undergraduate degree while the other had taken so many courses she could have

easily earned the equivalent of two B.A. degrees. In addition to being so highly educated, most participants were extremely news focused, pursing the news on a regular, if not daily basis from several different sources and mediums. Those who were not interested in the news had very specific reasons for not being so, mainly that they found the news depressing and that viewing it disrupts a vision or understanding of the world they prefer to hold onto.

Chapters

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In the first I discuss the experience of non-news television viewing in the domestic realm. Here, I am particularly concerned with uncovering the details of interviewees' past viewing experiences in order to understand them in relation to the more serious news viewing they do in the present. Emphasizing these details contributes to a more comprehensive television viewing history for this group of participants, thus laying the foundation for situating and contextualizing how they make sense of and incorporate both non-news and news shows in their everyday lives and during extraordinary times. Thinking back to television shows interviewees used to watch was a process whereby they actively bridged present and past selves, and was an important way in which they tended to construct and reconstruct their personal biography. In the second chapter I address the ways in which study participants view, understand, and use the news in their everyday life. For the most part, people discussed viewing, understanding, and using the news not as definable or distinct categories, but rather as a cluster of practices and attitudes that contribute to how they identify themselves, their families, and a myriad of other social relationships. At the heart of this chapter is an inquiry into how people engage with the news. While other

scholars have critiqued the way the news often negatively influences and affects viewers, few have bothered to examine the nuances of what I am calling the ecology of news viewing.

While in the previous two chapters I establish how viewing television was a practice that helped create an environment where the concerns of everyday life were managed within the context of the home, chapter three examines what happens when an extraordinary event disrupts this space. This particular chapter is organized around two significant events: first, the ongoing crises that began with the assassination of John F. Kenney and ended with the murder of his brother Robert; second, the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. The significance of these events were largely determined by the frequency in which interviewees mentioned them when asked about the kinds of major news stories they remembered while growing up. Although the details and situational context of each set them apart from each other, they also share similar themes that center on violence, death, grief, and unexpected loss. In chapter four, I interpret the news viewing interview participants did on September 11, 2001, but with a focus on how their viewing exaggerated a sense of uncertainty about the attacks themselves, news television portrayal of them, and their own approach to news viewing. At its most basic level, this chapter is concerned with *how* interview participants viewed television news coverage on September 11. More specifically, it focuses on understanding the ritual nature of their news viewing in the context of 9/11. One of the primary goals of the chapter is to examine what was behind this viewing in an effort to shed some light on a process that has been little understood. What work that has been done on the production of the news during a national tragedy tends to overemphasize, and exaggerate, the power

and effect of the news on viewers, portraying the news as an all-powerful, oppressive force that succeeds mainly in traumatizing viewers. However, I argue that people's viewing was quite complicated, representing not so much a response to pre-existing certainties, but was a means of generating such uncertainties.

In the concluding chapter I explore the rupture interviewees understood to be happening to literal, as well as symbolic, places on September 11 and for days after the attack. An exploration of this theme reveals the lasting impact of September 11 on both the life of the nation, and on the personal lives of interview participants. Indeed, their narratives help shed light on how the attack was experienced as more than a terrifying spectacle 'witnessed' on news television, but as both a tragic catastrophe that had an immediate impact on the structure and stability of their everyday existence. I also pay close attention to the urge many experienced to voice a range of thoughts and feelings about September 11 itself, as well as on a range of policies, actions and reactions that have ensued in its aftermath. Finally, this chapter examines connections between television viewing (both news and non news) and other kinds of social activities and exchanges as a way of understanding the impact of this unique catastrophe on one small group of individuals.

Chapter One
Television in Ordinary Times: Recalling Pleasure, Place, and Family

> "Throughout history, the most prominent characterization of memory has been the idea that it has been in crises. Memory has been seen to be threatened by technology since ancient times. Indeed, Plato saw the development of writing itself as a threat to individual memory."[1] - Marita Sturken

> "Although there are periods of our existence that we might willingly cut off – although we might not be sure that we would like to relive our life in its totality – there is a kind of retrospective mirage by which a great number of us persuade ourselves that the world of today has less color and is less interesting than it was in the past, in particular our childhood and youth." [2] - Maurice Halbwachs

One way in which interviewees' young worlds was made more colorful, more interesting, and more exciting was through television. Even older participants, who recalled mainly watching shows in black and white while growing up, spoke of how these shows added a sense of warmth and happiness to their home lives. For all interview participants – young and old - their memories, when screened through beloved TV shows, were often rose-colored. Lara recalled that when she was young, every afternoon after school she usually went home and immediately turned on the television. Both she and her brother watched TV with what Lara has described as "tremendous frequency." For at least four hours a day she enjoyed a range of popular sitcoms and dramas. Her family owned two television sets: one in the family room and one in the basement and while her father usually watched in the basement (her mother did not watch much television), she and her brother would watch upstairs. Lara and her brother often took half hour turns watching their individual shows, but they would sometimes watch together, sharing a particular zeal for shows like *Cheers* and *Perfect Strangers*, which were enjoyed on a weekly basis. When asked what she liked about these types of shows,

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[1] The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 17.
[2] The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 48.

she noted that on ABC's *Perfect Strangers* for example, it was the cultural differences highlighted between the main characters. Laughing she explained, "Misunderstandings occurred and then hilarity would ensue!"

Now a graduate student in her late twenties, as she reflected back on the television she watched when she was younger she would smile, nod her head, and even occasionally clasp her hands in excitement. It was obvious from her facial expressions, hand gestures, and the occasional brief explanation of a particular show that television viewing was a deeply pleasurable activity for her. She summed up her viewing experience best when she said, "I watched television to watch television. It was something to do and it was fun!"

This chapter examines the experiences of non-news television viewing in the domestic realm. It is particularly concerned with uncovering the details of interviewees' past viewing experiences in order to understand them in relation to the more serious news viewing they do in the present, which I discuss in later chapters. Emphasizing these details contributes to a more comprehensive television viewing history for this group of participants, thus laying the foundation for situating and contextualizing how they make sense of and incorporate both non-news and news shows in their everyday lives and during extraordinary times. In particular, I borrow directly from sociologists Denise Bielby and C. Lee Harrington's fascinating work interviewing and surveying self-identified soap fans.[3] Bielby and Harrington discuss how layers of textual interpretation impact the viewing process and their work serves as a model for understanding the importance of subjectivity and pleasure as framing devices for analyzing certain kinds of

[3] *Soap fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

viewing.[4] The process of discussing old shows or narrating specific episodes interviewees found appealing should not be dismissed as frivolous nostalgia. Thinking back to gritty suspense dramas like *The Fugitive* or the comedy styling of *Alf* was a meaningful way people recalled significant familial and other social relationships, as well as a means of revisiting the social environments of their younger years. Additionally, it is a process whereby people actively bridge their present and past selves; specifically, recalling past television viewing practices and preferences is a key way people construct and reconstruct their personal biography.[5]

While a main concern of the dissertation centers on understanding what goes into the practice of viewing the news during a national tragedy or catastrophe, here I emphasize the different meanings television viewing held for participants during ordinary or 'uneventful' times. Interviewees were asked questions regarding: the number of television sets their parents owned, its location in the house, and the types of television shows they watched for fun while growing up. Growing up for most was often defined and identified by three separate, though by no means rigid, categories consisting of: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, which they tended to mark as beginning when they went to college. Harrington and Bielby's work adds to this loose definition, noting that, "Though unscripted, different life phases tend to be marked by unique developmental opportunities and our engagement with those opportunities help shape our maturation from infancy through childhood and late(r) life. Moreover, each individual's

[4] See also Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[5] See C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, "A Life Course Perspective on Fandom," *International Journal of Cultural Studies 13/5 (2010): 429-450* in which they explore a life course perspective on fandom, with an emphasis on fandom and adult development. "Understanding the life course," they write, "is about 'understanding lived through time (Fry, 2003: 271)…From this approach, based on the social sciences, they way our individual lives unfold is shaped by both internal psychological and external social processes," 430.

life course is guided by culturally and historically bound ideals of how lives 'should' unfold."[6]

This chapter is broken into three sections each one dealing with key fundamental elements that make up participants' overall, everyday viewing experience. The first section addresses people's attitudes and feelings towards a number of non news TV shows they watched. The second examines what James Lull calls the "structural" uses of television.[7] More specifically, it is concerned with remembering the ways television helped structure a sense of time and place in people's daily lives. The final section is concerned with how people understood television as shaping and influencing family relationships, as well as a sense of who they were. Delving into their memories of television shows from their youth was a crucial step towards piecing together the texture and detail of their current viewing lives and allow for a deeper understanding of how this small group of interviewees both use and interpret television.

Serious Pleasure: Memory and Television

> "Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.
> Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.
> Wouldn't you like to get away?
> Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came."[8] - Gary Portnoy and Judge Hart Angelo

> "I was a [TV] fiend growing up in the 80s and 90s: *Sesame Street*, *3-2-1 Contact*, *The Cosby Show*, *A Different World*, ABC after school specials, *Small Wonder*, *Silver Spoons*, *Webster*"[9] - Amanda

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[6] Harrington and Bielby, "A Life Course Perspective on Fandom," 431.
[7] *Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television Audiences* (London: Routledge, 1990).
[8] The epigraph for this section is drawn from "Where Everybody Knows Your Name," *Lyricsondemand.com*, accessed on October 4, 2010, http://www.lyricsondemand.com/tvthemes/cheerslyrics.html.
[9] The epigraph for this section is drawn from Interview by Leah Rosenberg, September 2009, Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

All seventeen people interviewed discussed how pleasurable it was for them to watch television when they were younger. They commonly and frequently used words such as "loved," "enjoyed," and "fun" to describe their feelings about non-news shows. Some answered the follow-up question, asking for an explanation about the kinds of shows they used to watch, with a great deal of enthusiasm. Without hesitation they went into details about the appeal of *The Muppet Show*, for example, which Robert recalled being "bonkers" about, or the silliness of Bugs Bunny's antics that another interviewee claimed he was "wild" about. Indeed, he enjoyed the Bugs Bunny cartoons so much that he remembered being extremely "annoyed" when the *Bugs Bunny Valentine's Day Special* was interrupted due to breaking news that Ronald Reagan had been shot. Regardless of the genre, whether soap operas, late night talk shows, or westerns what participants emphasized most was how pleasurable it was for them to watch television in their youth. Even the one interviewee, who claimed having neither a current nor past interest in television, could recall how much she enjoyed watching *Little House on the Prairie*, although it was framed as an extension of her love for the book series written by Laura Ingalls Wilder. For interviewees, what made their viewing experience so pleasurable was just as much as *how* they viewed, which included a temporal and spatial context as well as a social and situational one.[10]

In using the term pleasure, I evoke what religious studies scholar Julie Byrne refers to as a commonsense definition. For Byrne pleasure is "simply a person's sense of satisfying desire."[11] While desire is a complicated concept, what is most pertinent about it for the purpose of the discussion at hand is that "desire holds the place of human

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[10] David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[11] See *O God of Players: The Story of the Immaculata Mighty Macs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 5.

agency, that tangled assemblage of forces that constitute us, from the midst of which move and are moved. As desiring agents, we do not necessarily resist the institutions that form us, and neither are we reducible to them."[12] Her work emphasizes how pleasure was a surprising, yet crucial element for participants when it came to talking about a number of issues important to them as young, Catholic women basketball players during their college years and suggests that "Understanding someone's pleasure, we are clued into both the continuity and struggle between that person and the institutions that shape her."[13]

Although the people I interviewed were discussing television viewing, rather than basketball, two different activities altogether, I use Bryne's work to highlight how in addition to the act itself (viewing TV or playing basketball), the process of recalling certain activities from one's youth also gave them a deep sense of pleasure. Past work on television viewing and audience attitudes have also raised pleasure as an important and relevant sentiment[14], however, little work has been done on exploring the connection between an individual's memory, biography, and their approach to non news television viewing as means of recalling the past and a way of summoning feelings of pleasure, joy, and satisfaction, sentiments that Byrne's interviewees felt in connection to basketball and mine in relation to watching television.

When interviewees were asked to recall television shows from their youth, sentiments of pleasure were expressed bodily through a range of gestures such as smiling, chuckling, and even the occasional narrative retelling of specific episodes or shows they

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[12] Byrne, *O God of Players*, 9.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ang, *Watching Dallas*; Bielby and Harrington, *Soap Fans*; Ron Lembo *Thinking Through Television* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

liked – loved even – while growing up. For example, Louisa, a 50 year-old university lecturer and department director, in recalling how much she enjoyed along with her brothers and father viewing what she referred to as "spy stuff", smiled wistfully. With her voice raised slightly, she exclaimed, "*I Spy*, *Get Smart*, and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E* were great! I wanted to see the Bond movies, but they failed the Catholic Decency Standards."[15] When asked what it was she enjoyed about these types of shows she replied, "It was the action, the adventure, and the cute male actors!" Louisa added that even today she still likes the spy stuff and that the James Bond movies are some of the only ones she and her husband will actually watch in a theater. In addition to the attractive male leads and thrilling story lines, viewing these types of shows was also an enjoyable way for her to spend time and connect particularly with the male members of her household. Similarly, Melissa remembered liking *Gun Smoke* both because of the time she spent with her father and "The man was handsome and his son was cute! What can I say I was only nine or ten at the time!"

Generally speaking, there was nothing necessarily extraordinary about the time participants spent with their families watching television. In fact, one of the aspects of viewing together people seemed to appreciate centered on what a seemingly mindless, yet enjoyable activity it was for them. Sociologist Ron Lembo's work discusses viewing practices and typologies of television usage, which are critical for understanding how television viewers often engage in mindful and meaningful viewing strategies.[16] He writes, "When watching television, people participate in an oftentimes complex social

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[15] I believe Louisa is referring to the National Legion of Decency also known as the Catholic Legion of Decency, which was founded in 1933 under that name, to combat "objectionable" content in motion pictures. See "Roman Catholics: The Changing Legion of Decency," 1965, *Time.com*, accessed October 2, 2010, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,842279-1,00.html.

[16] See especially "Part III: Documenting the Viewing Culture," *Thinking Through Television*.

world, one in which they routine exhibit varying levels of mindful and emotional involvement with television and other people as well."[17] However, he never fully investigates what a pleasurable activity television viewing can be precisely because people are engaged in what *they* consider to be a mindless activity. In other words, for some interviewees, it was the understanding that they were doing something deeply unproductive that sometimes fueled the pleasure of their viewing.[18] Moreover, some of the pleasure they felt (sometimes a guilty-pleasure) seemed to stem from an understanding that their viewing had a passive dimension to it.[19] While some recalled viewing as a family or with a particular member as pleasant and occasionally special, no one ever defined their family viewing time as engaging or mindful, which is not to say that it was neither, as Lembo and other television scholars have demonstrated otherwise. However, mindfulness was not a typology participants consciously employed to define their non news viewing, rather they tended to emphasize the meanings certain shows in particular held for them.[20]

In terms of the 'threat' or 'danger' viewing might have had on people's productivity, Lance, along with a number of other participants, recalled how his viewing was limited to a few hours a day because his parents were concerned about him wasting

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[17] *Thinking Through Television*, 29.
[18] Janice Radway*, Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1984) for her discussion on the societal value placed on work rather than leisure time.
[19] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1996) for further discussion on the influence of Protestantism on the social, economic, and cultural attitudes of American life. Weber writes, "The real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all of distraction from the pursuit of a righteous life, 157".
[20] Patricia Palmer, *The Lively Audience: A Study of Children Around the TV set* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 132.

too much time in front of the television.[21] He added, "If I have kids I'll probably limit their viewing to two hours as well just to keep with tradition I guess." Regardless, Lance managed to take full advantage of his allotted two hours a day as his responses revealed how much he loved one show in particular repeatedly remarking that he had a *Dr. Who* "fetish," that he was a "dedicated" *Dr. Who* viewer and again that the show was one of his favorites. Scott, who is in his late forties, also mentioned having a viewing time limit, which was roughly one hour. Additionally, in his family it was unheard of to turn on the television without parental supervision. Shaking his head slightly he elaborated, "It was an active effort on my mom's part that we [Scott and his brother] not watch too much television. We went to private school and we had to wake up early and go to bed early. There was also quite a lot of homework to be done. She was less restrictive when we got into high school." Finally, Margot, a language student in her early twenties, recalled not being allowed to watch anything except programs approved by her father because viewing television took time away from her homework. In a society concerned with the Protestant ethic of hard work, watching television, even within the 'confines' of regulated and limited viewing, can be understood as a kind of quiet, but pleasurable rebellion against a relentless cultural mantra about the importance industriousness and productivity.[22] Further along in this chapter, it will become more apparent how Margot tried to resist strict parental involvement and outright control of her viewing pleasure.

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[21] Heather Hendershot, *Saturday Morning Censors: Television Regulation before the V-Chip* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). In it she writes, "This book is sympathetic to both the idea that children are culturally embedded readers of media texts and to the desire to examine how children may be affected by television's representations. Yet the book approaches children's television from a different angle, addressing how *adult* readers make meanings out of so-called children's television and how they *anticipate* child reception," 6.

[22] Ibid.

Television viewing was also understood by some as delightfully antisocial. Just as it was a way of being together and sharing time with each other, people also spoke of shows they would watch without other family members, and the sense they had of engaging in a kind of private enjoyment. Denise, a health technician in her late twenties, recalled watching "a lot" of television when she was younger, nearly five to eight hours a day. A great number of these hours were spent viewing alone indulging in such shows as *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Family Ties*, and *Silver Spoons*, shows her father, a retired military veteran, and mother would not usually watch. Several participants laughed when they recalled certain shows they watched in a manner that seemed to suggest they were too silly to be watched with others. Julia, a 33-year-old graduate student, looking faintly embarrassed, discussed watching the soap opera *Santa Barbara* but quickly added, "It was only for a brief time," explaining that she gave up on the serial when she was in high school preferring instead to watch music videos on MTV in the privacy of her bedroom.[23]

Writing about contemporary media consumption practices, sociologist Todd Gitlin comments:

> Around the time Vermeer painted *The Concert*, Blaise Pascal, who worried about the seductive power of distraction among French royalty, wrote that 'near the persons of kings there never fail to be a great number of people who see to it that amusement follows business, and who watch all the time of their leisure to supply them with delights and games, so that there is no blank in it.' In this one respect, today almost everyone – even the poor- in the rich countries resembles the king, attended by courtier of the media offering the divine right of choice."[24]

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[23] Julia's feelings of what could be interpreted as guilt over watching *Santa Barbara* fit with David Gauntlett and Annette Hill's findings that that people, "feel guilty about watching or enjoying material which they suspected was indecent or moronic; and for imposing programmes on people who were not keen to watch them, in shared spaces," *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1999), 139.

[24] See *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Sounds and Images Overwhelm Our Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 6.

Gitlin's work offers a rather limited understanding of media consumers. Concerned that people demand an unreasonable return from images, he adds, "We expect them to heighten life, to intensify and focus it by being better than real, more vivid, more stark, more *something*. We want a burst of feeling, a frisson of commiseration, a flash of delight."[25] To an extent, his work supports people's responses to interview questions about why and what they watched. However, participants had a slightly different understanding of their past viewing habits; one that extended beyond the troubling dimensions of all powerful media producers and a critique of viewers so negatively focused on how multiple facets of social life – public and private - have become an experience primarily in the presence of media.[26] Specifically, their responses highlighted how delighted they were by televisions' myriad of images. Certain images framed particular memories and experiences they had of being young and they seemed to relish recalling them. If they wanted more, it seemed based on their desire that the next episode be just as good or better as the last one. Gitlin's analysis could be interpreted as one that not only dismisses or discounts pleasure, but also somehow condemns it.

For most participants, it was less about demanding something spectacular from the images they consumed, and more about the overall experience of viewing that included the when, where, and how of their viewing; each factor influencing the pleasure they felt viewing both alone and with others. Television shows viewed by Mark, a mid-thirties library worker, such as *Buck Rogers* and *Newhart* were not just about "bursts of feeling," but rather an ongoing engagement with television throughout the years. Growing up with an artist father, who spent a great deal of time in his home studio, Mark

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Gitlin, *Media Unlimited*, 12.

watched a number of shows mainly by himself on one of the family's three television sets located throughout the house. Actually going to the length of organizing shows into specific genres, he went on to name several decades worth of his favorite shows. Talking about television, remembering what they viewed, and in Mark's case, even categorically organizing shows he used to watch, gave participants a great deal of pleasure and speaks to what a central aspect TV was in their lives. Interestingly, none of the interviewees ever mentioned watching either because they were bored or because they felt compelled to. For interviewees, pleasure seemed to condition the way they negotiated and were allowed to fit television in their daily life. To quote Lara again, who summed it up quite nicely, television watching "was fun."

In thinking further about attitudes people hold in relation to television viewing, sociologists Lembo and Andrea Press have each emphasized how the people they interviewed often characterized their viewing as having a ritual dimension to it, although neither their participants nor they themselves ever explicitly define what they mean by ritual; it is usually embedded in a larger discussion of routine and practice.[27] Therefore, in addition to their seminal work, I turn also to sociology as well as religious studies scholars because their work on what rituals are, how they emerge and how they are directed is useful for thinking through pleasurable viewing, an everyday activity that was, for interviewees, sometimes more ritually-directed or focused than other times. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow emphasizes how they can be understood "…as a set of symbolic acts. Acts are symbolic if they stand for something else; if they communicate

[27] See Andrea Press, *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

meanings rather purely practical or instrumental purposes."[28] Religious studies scholar Catherine Albanese defines rituals as including both words and acts that help strengthen, mark, and clarify exchanges between boundaries.[29] In particular, her work offers a useful way of approaching the connection between ritual and story reception. Both Wuthnow and Albanese stress the ways that rituals are not a type of social activity that "can be set off from the rest of the world for special investigation."[30] In fact, they are a dimension are of all social activities as demonstrated by Albanese's discussion of the popular 1960s science fiction television show *Star Trek* and Wuthnow's examination of audience responses to the 1978 NBC miniseries *Holocaust*.

Turning now to Albanese, partly for her focus on an ongoing TV show, rather than the singular showing of a miniseries event, I return to Wuthnow in later dissertation chapters. Albanese makes note of how *"Star Trek* functions as a religious quasi-religious movement with its huge fan base, well-attended conventions, and "merchandise galore."[31] In explaining how the show functions as a kind of sacred story she writes:

> Far from Planet Earth, they operated under a 'higher law' in which they violated rules they originally agreed to in the name of greater good as they battled vicious Romulans and evil Klingons. Duty compelled Captain Kirk to sexual renunciation, and in place of sexual fulfillment he and his crew were time and time again, committed to the task of redemption, in an idealism that sought to re-create a utopian world of the ship's bridge in the far reaches of interplanetary space."[32]

While she fails to mention a third powerful menace, the fuzzy and furiously reproducing Tribbles, which made their appearance during the show's second season, her discussion

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[28] See "Ritual and Moral Order," *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 99.
[29] See *America Religions and Religion*, Third Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999).
[30] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 101.
[31] Albanese, *America*, 469.
[32] Ibid.

helps frame the enormous appeal that certain shows, not limited to science fiction, held for a number of people I spoke with. Asking why we even bother to watch stories as they unfold on television and in the movies when there are a limited number of plots that are frequently repeatedly, Albanese writes, "We watch and listen because, through the medium of the story, we are being told *what* the world means and *how* it means…Like sacred stories, they establish a world that makes sense and gives people a feeling for their place in the scheme of things."[33] Similarly, film and television scholar Kathryn C. Montgomery notes, "television's greatest power is in its role as the central storyteller for the culture. It is the fiction programming even more than news and public affairs, that most effectively embodies and reinforces the dominant values in American society."[34]

While none of the participants discussed *Star Trek* in particular, a great number of them mentioned their love of the cartoon show *Super Friends*, as well as other cartoon characters that possessed great cunning, if not actual magical skills or extraordinary powers that helped them take on villains who made frequent appearances; rarely were these villains permanently vanquished. Part of their popularity and appeal may have been the flexibility people had in identifying with, and rooting for both hero and villain alike. In addition, I would argue that, for the people I spoke with, viewing certain shows when they were young was about the desire to participate in a sense of extraordinary or other worldly adventure and drama. At the same time, a great many of their TV shows were grounded in certain realities that could relate to even as they admired certain characters. However, superheroes did not have to possess unstoppable panache or charisma in order for people to identify with them. Robert, a psychologist in his late thirties, mentioned

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[33] Albanese, *America,* 469.
[34] *Target: Primetime, Advocacy Groups and the Struggle over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 6.

that he "loved" the clumsy antics of the main character Ralph from *The Greatest American Hero*, a kind of science fiction comedy that aired on ABC in the early eighties saying, "The Greatest American Hero presented an innovative concept - a superhero who is imperfect - he can't fly very well and he is trying to figure out how to handle himself in threatening situations. He is constantly improvising. So as a child it was an interesting concept to see this imperfect hero."

One key explanation for the great appeal of the superhero genre, for interviewees, can be understood in the context of Albanese's discussion on how fictional stories in particular establish a world that makes sense and that they are an important expression of cultural religion. She notes that in ordinary culture people find additional symbolic centers and that are a myriad of ways "people reach transcendence, using ordinary culture as a conduit into an 'other' world."[35] A good many of shows viewed by participants while in grade or middle-school, be it a wily rabbit who always outsmarted a bumbling small game hunter, or an average man turned clumsy superhero, often seemed to center on setting and keeping the balance of the world 'right'. However, they were also about imaging a world where right triumphed over evil, where characters who sometimes operating under a higher law, were called upon or even chosen to fight in an ongoing battle to keep the world safe. Again Albanese notes that certain shows, like *Star Trek*, tap into mainstream American's fundamental understanding of themselves and their world. Moreover, viewing television and film dramas is a way that many people from different backgrounds join the mainstream and in a loose way, the one religion of

[35] Albanese, *America*, 465.

America.[36] "For in the dramas are still visible the millennial themes of dominance and righteous innocence found in Puritan and revolutionary visions."[37]

In addition to the way shows appealed to their young worldview, interviewees often used television to mark the boundaries between school and leisure, productivity and idleness, cherished alone time and socializing with others. Watching television shows regularly and consistently was a way that participants unconsciously reaffirmed their role in the households as children and teenagers, and was at the same time an often conscious means of socially bonding with family members and friends. I address some of the following issues in more detail in the next section. For now, it is important to note how viewing certain shows that came on daily, weekly, and even once a year, like the annual showing of the *Wizard of Oz,* was a pleasurable ritual activity for many that provided a sense of comfort and continuity.[38] For example, Rob who is in mid twenties loved watching the NBC sitcom *Alf* which ran from 1986 to 1990 and involved the adventures of a cat-eating alien living with an average, middle-class, white family in the suburbs. It was more than just a show he turned to as part of his weekly viewing; it was a show he looked forward to with much anticipation. Alf was extraterrestrial extraordinaire in Rob's eyes and when his weekly ritual viewing of it was interrupted by a speech given by President Reagan, he remembered being "really mad!" Rob laughed as he recounted this story, but the disruption of *Alf* was a disruption not just to his routine viewing, but to a specific time and show that was set apart (from other times and shows) and considered

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[36] Albanese, *America*, 471.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Paul Nathanson, *Over the Rainbow: The Wizard of Oz as Myth of America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

special, sacred even. His expression of irritation was evidence of how Rob took pleasurable viewing quite seriously.

Bielby and Harrington's discussion about the pleasure of participating in a television fan subculture, which is also relevant here.[39] Writing specifically about soap fans they note, "Fans' pleasures become more visible as fans organize themselves and interact with the soap industry itself. This points to the central role of participants, events, sites, and practices that tie together the hidden aspects of the subculture to its more visible ones."[40] Their work is useful for thinking about how pleasure operates beyond a self-embodied sentiment and into a set of practices that help reinforce and sustain a range of relationships and identities in connection with television viewing. For example, a number of participants took take a certain degree of pleasure in sharing their personal memories of past television viewing with me regardless of the fact that several shows mentioned were before my time. Alice recalled, "…regularly watching *Winky Tink* and *Howdy Doody*. I also loved cowboy shows like *Bonanza*." When I asked her what *Winky Tink* was she laughed and said, "You know who else likes *Winky Tink* - Marty!" Still unsure about the nature of *Winky Tink* or why she and Marty enjoyed it so much, what stood out was how the importance and often the pleasure of recalling past viewing rests on the ways it can be a shared experience linking people from different generations (Marty is roughly forty years younger than Alice). Again, Harrington and Bielby emphasize this shared enjoyment of media, writing:

> Media texts and technologies help give unite cohorts, define generations and cross-generational differences, and give structure and meaning to our lives as they unfold. For example, when J.K. Rowling published the seventh and final Harry

[39] See Harrington and Bielby, *Soap Fans*, 43.
[40] Harrington and Bielby, *Soap Fans*, 45-46.

> Potter books in July 2007, critics mourned not just the end of the series but the end of a life stage.[41]

Using the term cultural memory, media, culture and communication professor Marita Sturken notes that it is produced "through objects, images, and representations. These are not technologies of memory in which memory passively resides so much as objects through which memory is shared, produced and given meaning." Indeed, the back and forth exchange discussing the central role television played in people's lives as they were growing up helps explain:

> …how the past is transformed into memory – whether individual or collective – is best described as an archeology in which the goal is not simply to uncover something that has been buried, but to discover why and how additional layers have been built on top of it. Viewed as a component of cultural memory, the past is less a sequence of events than a discursive surface readable only though layers of subsequent meanings and contexts.[42]

Finally, in addition to the fun and pleasure people took in recalling certain television shows, recalling them also led some to express a sense of nostalgia and even loss. In this way it seems that TV shows can be understood as a kind of memorial presence of the past serving different purposes "…ranging from conscious recall to unreflected reemergence, from nostalgic longing for what is lost to polemical use of the past to reshape the present."[43] In addition, these kind of emotional expressions reveal how personal and meaningful TV viewing can be for some, encouraging them to mourn or even to enter and remain in a state of melancholia. For Lara in particular, the NBC sitcom *Cheers* was closely associated with feelings about who she once was and how her life "used to be." Noting that whenever she hears the theme music to *Cheers* it makes her

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[41] Harrington and Bielby, "A Life Course Perspective on Fandom," 431.
[42] Steven Anderson, "History TV and Popular Memory," in *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media* Age, ed. by Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins (Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 23.
[43] Bal, *Acts of Memory*, vii.

feel sad and contemplative in part because she directly equates the end of the show in 1993 with the end of that particular period of her life. She further explains:

> Sometimes when I hear the theme song to *Cheers* it's everything I can do not to cry. I remember loving that show and watching it with my brother. When I was kid I would hear the theme song from the other room and come running in! I e-mailed him [her brother] a couple of weeks ago reminding him of how much we liked that song and loved *Cheers* and he wrote back saying that he could devote a whole dissertation to discussing how that song makes him feel. When the show ended, I felt like a part of my life ended as well…a part of my life when I felt happy quite often.

For Robert, his feelings of nostalgia regarding *The Muppet Show* were connected more to the actual characters themselves and how their personalities and actions appealed to, as well as reflected aspects of his own thoughts and feelings. Recalling the personalities of two Muppets in particular, he explained:

> I think the appeal of *The Muppet Show* for me was the wide range of personalities presented. Some of which have the realistic dimensions that helped the audience relate to them. I mean Kermit is a complex character trying to keep the show on track while problems keep coming up. He has sort of a fun side where he enjoys what is going on around him and then there's this melancholic side to him like when he's singing 'It's Not Easy Being Green." Even Fozzie-the-Bear struggled with trying to write funny jokes even though his jokes were typically really stupid.

Along with the obvious pleasure *The Muppet Show* gave him, his comments regarding the two characters also seemed to be about a need to witness and relate to TV characters that try their best even if they do not always succeed, and perhaps even personally importantly for Robert, the ability to laugh at, and enjoy oneself even when success does not come or come easily. The narratives of both Lara and Robert speak to a deep sense of nostalgia for the past and of missing a period in their lives that was once filled with TV characters that made their lives pleasurable. Finally, imagining their past in such a

manner may very well have reflected the stress of the present that Lara and Robert at times experience as a graduate student and a psychologist respectively.[44]

Time and Place: Experiences of Viewing

> "Television helps us bridge the gap between the public and private realms of our lives and to maintain, in our increasingly fragmented lives a feeling of connection – however precarious –with the social world, even if this connection is emotive rather than substantive."[45] - Andrea Press

In addition to the feelings of pleasure and sometimes nostalgia, the workings of both individual and collective memory in relation to TV viewing was found in a wide range of show types from sitcoms to late night variety shows which were understood by many participants as marking time in a manner similar to music.[46] Alice echoed this observation stating, "Television watching is a way of marking time. It's a like a song in the sense that shows act as place markers during the day or throughout your life." Recalling or even watching reruns of old television shows, like music, helps the past "come alive" for people and speaks to the growing popularity of cable channels such as Nick at Night or its spin off niche network TV Land, both which air a myriad of old television shows from *The Donna Reed Show* to *Mork and Mindy*.[47] In addition, there have been a number of movie remakes of popular American television shows such as *Miami Vice* (2006) and more recently the *A-Team* (2010).

Memory scholars discuss how memory and history are vulnerable to the fast pace of life and the acceleration of media images[48]; however, recalling television shows is a

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[44] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 49.
[45] The epigraph for this section is drawn from *Women Watching Television*, 17.
[46] DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*.
[47] Ibid.
[48] See Richard Terdiman, *Past Present: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997-2000).

practical way that people anchor themselves in the swirl of the past. Television has not traditionally been thought of as an object that sustains or even creates memories in fact it has been actively critiqued for doing the opposite.[49] However, television scholar Steven Anderson argues "that since its inception, American television has sustained an extremely active and nuanced engagement with the construction of history and has played a crucial role in the shaping of cultural memory."[50] Television does not 'contain' memories in the same manner as photographs,[51] but certain shows do speak to the social relationships and settings of both the past and present as we constantly make and remake a sense of who we were, and who we have become. This reflects the way in which memories are always "interpenetrated" by collective influences which fill in gaps and ascribe significance to lived experiences.[52]

Discussing television shows helped psychically locate people in the specifics of time and space. For example, a good many participants remembered not only the exact name of a number of shows, but how old they were (I was either 9 or 10; I was in high school), actual show times (every evening at 6:00 or 7:00; afternoons at around 3:00), and where they watched (living room; den). In Robert's case, television viewing was linked to a particular season. He explained, "I remember watching a lot of television in the summer. School was out and there was nothing else to do." Specific days of the week were also frequently mentioned: "I loved Saturday morning cartoons!" And "Every Sunday, I would watch *60 Minutes* with my father. It was our tradition, our time

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[49] See Stephen Heath, "Representing Television," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp, 279, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Mary Ann Doan, "Information, Crisis, and Catastrophe," in *Logics of Television*, 226-227.
[50] See Anderson, "History TV and Popular Memory," 20.
[51] See *The Familial Gaze*, ed. Marianne Hirsch (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).
[52] Anderson, "History TV and Popular Memory," 21.

together." They discussed viewing as part of their daily routine, "I would come home from school and watch a lot of cartoons."; "I went to bed earlier than my siblings because I was youngest, but they [her parents] used to let me stay up with them to watch the *A-Team* (laughter)." Even for participants who did not watch a lot of television when they were younger, such as John, a scientist in his late fifties could still recall watching cartoons in the morning before going off to school. Growing up on a dairy farm, the time spent viewing was something he enjoyed especially after a 4:00 AM wake up in order to milk the cows.

Again, television viewing was also spatially relevant for people. Participants were asked about the location of the television in their homes when they were growing up and how many television sets their parents owned. Most households owned roughly two television sets and the location of them was consistently the same - either in the living room, den-type area, or bedroom. One person remembered their family having a television set in the kitchen, but it was rarely watched because, "We liked to watch the one in the den." Another person recalled, "Our family had two television sets one in the living room and one in the kitchen though I don't ever remember it being on during dinner." Their memories about television in this capacity fit closely with the research findings of British communication and media scholars David Gauntlett and Annette Hill who note that along with being built into people's lives, television is integrated into their households both "…*physically*, as a point of focus in the arrangement of one or more rooms, but more importantly, *socially*, as a locus of the attention and interaction."[53]

Where they watched television was often part of how interviewees experienced a sense of pleasure and fun that certain shows gave them. Sturken together with

[53] See Gauntlett and Hill, *TV Living*, 35.

communication professor Lisa Cartwright discuss how an image's meaning is produced through complex social relationships that involve two critical issues, "how viewers interpret or experience the image itself and its producer and the context in which the image is seen."[54] Time and place in particular helped establish the situational context in which interviewees viewed. For example, Lara noted that in the morning her father would mainly watch shows like *The Today Show* and in the evenings he preferred news programs. He tended to do all his watching in the basement while she and her brother watched upstairs, which meant they got to watch programs their father had no interest in (and vice-a-versa), in a space that was consistently claimed for their viewing pleasure.[55] Socially, Lara recalled that this was how they enjoyed interacting with each other, bonding over programs they liked and escaping ones they did not.

Alice remembered being the first family on her block to own a television, which was placed in the living room. They enjoyed watching entertainment programs such as *The Ed Sullivan Show*, as well as the nightly news as a family. Similarly, John stressed how viewing in his household was a group activity and while it did not necessarily involve the whole family at once, it was rarely if ever, a solitary activity. His family lived in a rural area in Vermont and he explained that they would sometimes get channels from Canada, especially sports' channels. Their black and white television had an enormous antenna attached to it and was located in the living room on top of the piano.

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[54] See *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 45.

[55] This finding contradicts the argument put forth by sociologist Joshua Meyrowitz, believing that, "while there are still many private forums, electronic media – especially television – have led to the overlapping of many social spheres that were once distinct," *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5. An over emphasis on media effects is detrimental to gaining a fuller, richer, more nuanced understanding of how people use and consumer television. For Lara family and for other participants and their families, they in fact maintained fairly distinct social spheres through their choice in television viewing.

Finally, both Rob and Julia remember receiving their own television sets when they were teenagers around the time when they entered high school. Both of them spoke of watching in the solitude of their bedrooms, which meant there was a pronounced shift from television watching as a family activity, as well as an emphasis on watching shows other members had no interest in. Julia mentioned that "After I got my own TV set, we never watched television together in the same way as when there was just the one small set in the living room. Occasionally we would still gather together and watch a movie someone rented."

Social geographer Paul C. Adams argues that television itself is uniquely place-like and that it can function as social context by providing sensory communion and social congregation.[56] He writes, "My purpose is not to argue that television is a place in a conventional geographical sense, but rather to examine the many similarities between television and human made places and to shed light on the cultural geographic implications of watching television."[57] Justin, a university lecturer in his early thirties, remembers having two televisions in his house when he was younger. Located in his parent's bedroom and in the living room, watching television in their household was a consciously planned event. He was in fact the only respondent who stressed the importance of planned viewing, which ironically may have been less about what was actually watched and more about, as Adams suggests, socially congregating together as a family. His family's commitment to mapping out their viewing in advance may have also been closely linked to the idea that planned viewing was somehow not frivolous, while unplanned viewing was a waste of time. Indeed, Gauntlett and Hill found that

[56] "Television as Gathering Place," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 82/1 (1992): 117-135.
[57] Adams, "Television as Gathering Place," 117.

some of the participants in their study had particular reasons for being "fastidious" about their TV planning explaining, "The following respondent, for example, managed to ward off feelings of guilt for watching quite an amount of TV, as he was able to reassure himself that he was only watching shows which he had carefully marked in the listings in advance. As his viewing decisions were therefore documented as the products of prior research and planning, he would not feel that he was watching too much, or too casually."[58]

Like most participants now in their late twenties and early thirties, Justin enjoyed watching weekend cartoons when he was younger and was another big fan of the show *Super Friends* which aired on ABC from 1973 to 1986. However, he recalled that the television in their home was never on as background noise. Indeed, it was frowned upon to watch without plotting the show selection for the evening in advance, and even during our interview Justin expressed a sense of bafflement around unplanned watching, as well as the way some people tend to leave the television as "background noise' stating, "I just don't get it." He was one of the few participants who currently does not own a television and has no desire to ever get one. Additionally, Justin rarely watches television even when he goes over to a friend's home, and he consciously chooses to never watch the news. His current complete lack of interest in television speaks to the way he desires his home to be, which is television-free. Television for Justin in particular, seems to symbolize a kind of barrier to communication and a hindrance to social gatherings.

Religious scholar Jonathan Z. Smith's work is particularly useful for further exploring the relationship between place, ritual, and the emergence of meaning.[59]

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[58] See Gauntlett and Hill, *TV Living*, 38.
[59] Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

According to Smith, ritual is first and foremost a mode of paying attention and a process of marking interest; place is a fundamental component of ritual because it directs attention.[60] This issue of place and ritual is especially important when it comes to discussing the personal and cultural significance of both place and placement of television in people's home. In Smith's analysis, it is human beings who direct both the transformation of space into place and bring place into being.[61] Many respondents discussed how the act of turning on the television and viewing specific shows was sometimes a ritual that helped contain or encourage the emergence of certain feelings such as pleasure, nostalgia, and anxiety within the context of their home environment. More specifically, viewing was a key way that people transformed the space of say their living room into a place of enjoyment and relaxation, attitudes that may have differed if this exact space was being used, for example, to host relatives.

In terms of marking time, the weekend in particular was when television viewing took on a more pronounced ritual dimension for most participants. Indeed, the weekend for many interviewees was often when loose, unrestricted watching most often occurred. Susan, a mother of four, feels that monitoring what her children watch and how much they watch is an important part of looking after their well-being. However, on weekends she "let's them loose" and they get to watch cartoons and other shows all morning. Weekend watching for many participants had a ceremonial function to it. Sitting in front of the television after having woken up in one's pajamas, without the presence of adults monitoring what and how much television was being watched, was for a number of participants a particular kind of joyous ceremony. While it may have given their parents

[60] Smith, *To Take Place*, 103.
[61] Smith, *To Take Place*, 28.

an opportunity to sleep in, thus acting as a kind of weekend baby-sitter,[62] participants perceived this time as first and foremost 'belonging' to them.[63] Unfettered by adults, they immersed themselves in their viewing in a manner that was different from the way they did so during a typical week when homework, bedtime, or chores competed with their TV viewing. A sense of mundane, normal or regulative time was temporarily suspended[64] as they focused their viewing in a way that reflected the symbolic importance of TV during the weekend, which raises the question: what was the symbolic importance of their viewing; in other words, how can the significance of weekend viewing be interpreted?

American history professor Mark Carnes in discussing the function of ceremonies and rituals in his work on fraternal orders in the American Victorian era writes, "Odd Fellows acknowledged that once they wrapped themselves in biblical robes and fixed masks upon their faces they were indeed odd; and lawyers, shopkeepers, and industrialists understood that it was bizarre to pretend to be Old Testament patriarchs, Roman senators, or medieval knights. But this incongruousness provided much of the meaning of the ritual by conjuring a world that offered solace from real life."[65] For the people I spoke with, weekend ceremonial cartoon watching functioned to mark the boundaries between school day and non school day, but it also stressed special, set aside

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[62] See Gauntlett and Hill, *TV Living*, 28.
[63] My work reveals the ways that television is a medium that helps people distinguish and define certain roles they have occupied throughout their lives. Weekend television viewing was a means of contrasting their childhood viewing with the news viewing they did and associated more with becoming or being adults. See Meyrowitz*, No Sense of Place*, 5. Here he introduces the notion that television blurs conception of childhood and adulthood.
[64] See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 43. Here, Connerton is discussing commemorative ceremonies in particular; however, a number of his points are relevant for exploring television viewing as ceremony.
[65] *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 33.

time with and through television; a time when all other obligations were temporarily suspended and play through viewing was encouraged or at least tolerated by adults.

Immersing one's self in a world of cartoon rabbits, frustrated coyotes, and heroes wearing brightly colored tights can be interpreted a way of celebrating a sense of pleasure and perhaps even strategy for resisting the demands of everyday life. Additionally, TV viewing was a form of emotional expressiveness that helped symbolize, for participants, what was perceived to be the delightful and special condition that constituted childhood. Unlike the fraternal orders Carnes explores, celebration and refuge from the outside world happened in an entirely domestic space rather than in lodges, halls, and other architectural structures that he mentions. Whereas members of fraternal orders counted the domestic realm as one they wanted to escape from, interviewees indicated that they enjoyed their home space especially on the weekends when they got to watch their beloved cartoons. Nevertheless, both fraternal ceremonies and the pastime of watching Saturday morning cartoons function in remarkably similar ways. They can be interpreted as a response to shifting conditions impacting and influencing one's life; be it disruptions in the larger social order during the nineteenth-century, or the start of more 'serious' interaction in a world that had begun to extend beyond boundaries of the home. Ceremonies for grown men and small children alike had the potential to offer a sense of reassurance and refuge in a changing and sometimes seemingly unstable world. And perhaps even most important, while very different types of ceremonies are being compared, both offered participants what Paul Connerton stresses is an important aspect of rites, a sense of value and meaning in their lives.[66]

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[66] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 45.

The Way We Were: Family, Sociality, and Identity

> "Popular culture works its effect by drawing on deep reservoirs of shared memory."[67]
> - Tessa Morris-Suzuki

Television studies scholar Lynn Spigel discusses the ambiguous role of television in the domestic sphere examining the very 'idea' of television as it was presented by advertisers, women's magazines, and even television itself.[68] According to Spigel, popular journals approached television as a technology that simultaneously had the potential to bring the family together or tear it apart.[69] In reality, for the people I interviewed, they recalled it doing neither. For most, there was simply no lasting permanence in their approach to television because as they changed over the years, how and what they viewed did so as well.

While a number of interviewees discussed how television brought their families together, this does not imply that families were or became emotionally close just because they were spatially close, gathered if you will, around the television. Although older respondents in their 50s and 60s stressed how watching television as a family was an activity they looked back on with some fondness, others commented less on the specifics of any warm familial memories, remembering that it was simply inconceivable to watch alone. As Scott put it, "In my family you did not just go and turn on the television by yourself." On the other hand, as people got older, they often stopped watching with their families and began watching more with just their siblings or even by themselves. And

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[67] The epigraph for this section is drawn from *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History* (New York: Verso, 2005), 17.
[68] See *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
[69] See Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 65-68.

younger interview participants in their 20s rarely mentioned watching non news television with their families.

Lull's discussion of relational usage of television is the second of two critical social uses he identifies with regards to television in everyday life.[70] The first one, which was addressed in the previous section, is structural and relates specifically to television as a background noise or as a kind of regulative source especially in relation to time and activity. The relational usage of television is about the ways people use television "to facilitate communication, or as a means to open up conversation; it can also act as an affiliation or an avoidance, bringing families together and also to create conflict."[71] In other words, television usage can be quite complex in terms of the interpersonal dynamics in the home because it can be used to maintain harmony or as a tool of competition and dominance, especially when parents used it to exert dominance.[72]

People's responses about the various ways television was used in their families mentioned similar relational issues raised by Lull. In families where viewing started out primarily as a family activity, by the time participants reached high school there were significantly less restrictions on what they watched, as well as lessening of time spent together with their family watching. Regardless of the gradual shifts in viewing, for most, watching television was a meaningful and substantive way, especially when they were younger, of connecting with family members and friends. However, viewing was a not an entirely neutral or conflict-free experience. The memories people had of the shows their parents watched and the shows they themselves watched all helped produce a

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[70] See Lull, *Inside Family Viewing*, 35.
[71] See Gauntlett and Hill, *TV Living*, 6.
[72] Lull, *Inside Family Viewing*, 36.

sense of family and in some instances marked family-time, but family in connection to TV viewing at least, was not always understood as positive.

Without a doubt, ads in home magazines about the dangers and benefits of viewing, as well as ads on television about television as analyzed by Spigel influenced both conditions for viewing along with ways in which people viewed, however, watching together was also an experience that people's parents consciously chose for them. While some of this was structural, especially for older participants since they were fewer show selections when they were growing up, it also had as much to do with people's attitudes towards issues regarding family time. For example, growing up in the mountains of North Carolina, watching television was something Alice and her family did together. "In those days you had to wait until the shows came on, but when it came on it stayed on. The television was always on in our house. My mother was alone sometimes and I think she liked the sound on." Alice then went on to reminisce about watching what she called "cowboy shows" such a *Roy Rogers* and *Bonanza*. Similarly, Louisa enjoyed cowboy shows and along with her brothers also watched "spy shows". It is possible that for Louisa, watching these types of shows was a way of relating her interests in adventure and espionage stories to her father and brothers' appreciation of them. Additionally, Melissa recalled how she would watch *Little House on the Prairie* with her mother and *Gun Smoke* with her father. Her comments revealed that there was a fairly limited viewing democracy in her home and perhaps as a result, the outcome was one that actually reinforced family togetherness. "Television viewing like dinner time in my household (the one I grew up in and the one that I am parent of now) is a family time.

We watched whatever my parents (mostly my dad) wanted to watch or we didn't watch at all."

Jerry remembered that he and his sister would sometimes go with their mother to visit her friends on Saturday night.[73] "On those nights we got to stay up late and watch *Saturday Night Live*. I loved that show for its subversive humor." What is so interesting about this straight forward statement is how it captures Jerry's memories of *SNL* in relation to where he watched it (at his mother's friend's house), who he watched it with (his sister), the context in which they watched (his mother spending time with her friends), and finally, how he felt about watching it (he loved it). In a simple statement about childhood TV viewing, Jerry revealed a great deal about memories, feelings, and the state of his closest relationships at that time.

Margot recalled growing up in a regimented house where television was considered a waste of time even though her father, who worked for the New York City Transit system, would often find abandoned television sets, bring them home and repair them. Her father was especially strict, demanding that she and her younger brother do two things and two things well: study hard and help around the house. "Certain educational shows were allowed, but nothing frivolous like cartoons! For those, I went over to friend's house to watch. I loved them. I think I told my parents I was going to go study." Lying to her parents was a subtle way of resisting her father's authority and asserting herself, within limits, as well as assuaging her desire to watch "fun" television.

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[73] Meyrowitz writes in *No Sense of Place*, "In contrast to face-to-face conversation and books, for example, radio and television now made it more difficult for adults to communicate 'among themselves' because they are often 'overheard' by children," 5. However, Jerry remembered being quite enraptured by SNL. His viewing of this particular show is featured prominently in his memory of those Saturday evenings and there was no mention of being curious or even of trying to listen to what the adults around him may have been discussing.

In contrast, both Lara and Denise were allowed to watch completely unfettered by adult supervision, meaning there appeared to be no restrictions of any kind placed on their viewing. They watched daily, often for hours on end, especially after school and while they might not have been allowed to watch just anything on TV, they seemed to watch nearly everything. For Margot and Melissa what they could (or could not watch) on TV effectively helped set the tone for how leisure time was spent and social relationships were either forged or sometimes temporarily severed. While in Alice's home, as well as in the homes several of the older interviewees, like John and Louisa, television viewing was regarded as a family activity.

This was due again in part to the limited number of channels to choose from (as well as when shows were scheduled to come on), but also because viewing was understood as primarily a social activity rather than an individual pursuit. They each interpreted the television as a kind of social technology that was fit into their daily schedule first and foremost as a way of spending time together that was consistently meaningful and remembered fondly. This is not to discount how much they enjoyed certain shows, but rather to stress the sociality of their viewing. Louisa recalled that dinner was a time for her family when they talked about their day, looked up words in the dictionary, and even discussed news events. "We did not watch television during dinner. My parents felt that dinner was a time for talking. But after dinner we would watch together." John noted, "We never watched by ourselves. We had a big family so that may explain some of it, but you just didn't watch by yourself. It was a group activity."

The relational uses of television have even been discussed by scholars, who in analyzing television reflect back to social aspects of their own viewing. In his wonderful

introduction Lembo writes, "I, my family, and my friends' families – all of us enjoyed watching television. At times, we reveled in the pleasures it provided…after my sister and brother left the house, it was my mother, my stepfather, and me that constituted our family. In the simplest sense, watching television was a way for the three of us to be together – to be in the same room, at the same time, and share our experience with one another."[74] This poignant excerpt highlights the significance of how his family used television to establish and maintain familial relationships even when it seemed at times, little else tied them together as a family. Here, Lembo's discussion involves recalling a sense of who he was and how he used to be with his family and vice-a-versa, making television a meaningful and even important way in which people thought about and framed both their past selves and past familial relationships.

Certainly, for a number of participants I spoke, thinking back to television they used to watch was a way of remembering who they were and also what was going on in their lives. Before being interviewed, some had never thought back to television they used to watch like Susan, a university lecturer in her early forties, who remembered enjoying game shows, *The Wonderful World of Walt Disney* and, "Let's see…I really liked *The Partridge Family* and *The Brady Bunch*. I watched *The Partridge Family* pretty regularly. You know, I haven't thought about these shows in ages!" Though a news event, Susan noted that she was able to recall when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon because she was stuck at home with the mumps. Laughing she noted, "I remember being really bored but mother saying now you'll always remember where you were when the first man walked on the moon, which is true!" For Jerry, also in his early forties, the process of recalling certain shows such as *Sanford and Son* and *Get Smart* became

[74] Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*, 3

meshed with thinking and feeling a sense of his earlier or younger life. In particular he discussed how certain television shows made him feel while offering an analysis of what he thought they had offered him stating, "I really liked *Sandford and Son*. I grew up in Nevada and that show offered me a view of African American life, which was interesting."

It is the rich and nuanced work of sociologists and their research on music and the construction of identity that helps fill the gap in what still remains a relatively underexplored aspect of television studies. In particular, the recent work of sociologists William G. Roy and Timothy J. Dowd offers a fascinating look at how music and its meaning profoundly informs people about who they are. They write, "From ageing punk rock fans (Bennett 2006) and passionate opera connoisseurs (Benzecry 2009) to youthful dance club devotees (Thornton 1996) and bluegrass enthusiasts (Garner 2004), music both signals and helps constitute the identity of individuals and collectives."[75] Again, DeNora in discussing how self-reflexivity can be seen in relation to music's role as building material for self-identity, writes:

> The 'projection' of biography is by no means the only basis for the construction of self-identity. Equally significant is a form of 'introjection', a presentation of the self to self, the ability to mobilize and hold on to a coherent image of 'who one knows one is'. And this involves the social and cultural activity of remembering, the turning over of past experiences, for the cultivation of self-accountable imageries of the self.[76]

Based on their responses, television shows seemed to function quite similarly as interviewees recalled theme music, characters, and story lines as a way of producing a personal biography of their lives, a means of remembering who they were, and also as a way of identifying themselves as members of particular generation, many of who share

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[75] "What is Sociological about Music?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 189.
[76] DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 62-63.

similar memories and feelings about certain shows. Although of course as some television shows go into syndication or are released on DVDs, this has also allowed members from different generations to enjoy shows no longer aired even in syndication (such as Alice and Marty's enjoyment of *Winky-Tink*).[77] In particular, recounting television viewing from their youth and their commitment to specific shows helped interviewees reconstruct a sense both of themselves at a certain age, and of the relationships they held with those around them (like Lara and her brother's special connection to *Cheers*), demonstrating how people link text and context in their quest for meaning and supporting Roy and Dowd's, along with other scholars' assertion, "that meaning does not reside in the content of media goods but in the interplay between audiences and content"[78] *and* between audience members themselves.

The next chapter is concerned with the ways in which interview participants understand and use the news in their everyday life. For the most part, people discussed viewing, understanding, and using the news not as definable or distinct categories, but rather as a cluster of practices and attitudes that like non news television contribute to how they identify themselves, their families, and a myriad of other social relationships. However, at the heart of this chapter is a specific inquiry into how people engage with the news.

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[77] There are of course some fundamental differences between music and television consumption and use, but these differences are most deservedly of another article or chapter all together. For the purpose of this dissertation chapter, I choose to highlight the ways they are similar and to emphasize what I see are some foundational and useful ways of thinking through the connections between television, meaning, and identity making.

[78] Roy and Dowd, "What is Sociological about Music?" 190.

Chapter Two
Remote Closeness: Viewing, Understanding, and Using News Television

> "Demonstrators were forcibly evicted from the hearings when they began chanting anti-war slogans.
> Former Vice-President Richard Nixon says that unless there is a substantial increase in the present war effort in Vietnam, the U.S. should look forward to five more years of war.
> In a speech before the Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in New York, Nixon also said opposition to the war in this country is the greatest single weapon working against the U.S.
> That's the 7 o'clock edition of the news,
> Goodnight." [1] – Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel

In 1948 CBS launched its network's first nightly news program, *CBS Nightly News*, which consisted of fifteen minute summaries of the day's major national news events.[2] By the mid-fifties it was not uncommon during the early evening hours to find a bluish halo hovering gingerly around the television screens of the more than 14 million people throughout America who tuned into CBS, giving the short news program, according to media professor Geoffrey Baym, "a greater circulation than any single newspaper or magazine in the world."[3] Although not everyone I spoke with was a child during the 1950s, without exception and regardless of the era in which they came of age, they all had memories of their parents watching the evening news. Their recollection of the evening news was a consistent aspect of their lives at home. But a lack of attention to the details of news viewing in their home serves to highlight the degree to which news television was, in fact, an intricate though uncritically accepted part of their evening rituals. It was a ritual practice that was both situational and strategic.

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[1] The epigraph for this chapter is drawn from "The 7:00 o'clock News/Silent Night," 1966, *Sing365.com*, accessed March 27, 2010, http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/7-o%27clock-News-Silent-Night-lyrics-Simon-and-Garfunkel/113341CC7162CD5F48256896000EE44A.
[2] See *From Cronkite to Colbert: The Evolution of Broadcast News* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010), 10.
[3] Ibid.

Whether in rural Maine or New York City, the mountains of North Carolina or the desert of Las Vegas, the news in participants' households marked the beginning of domestic nighttime activities. The watching of the nightly news belonged almost solely to the realm of adult activity, but for all in the household it signaled both the start of certain kinds of evening activities, and was a means by which families and family members reconnected relationally. The turn to the evening news was a way in which their everyday lives became spatially and temporally reestablished as families gathered inside their homes to view coverage of what was happening on the 'outside'.

This chapter addresses the ways in which people in this study view, understand, and use the news in their everyday life. For the most part, people discussed viewing, understanding, and using the news not as definable or distinct categories, but rather as a cluster of practices and attitudes that contribute to how they identify themselves, their families, and a myriad of other social relationships. At the heart of this chapter is an inquiry into how people engage with the news. While other scholars have critiqued the way the news often negatively influences and affects viewers, few have bothered to examine the nuances of what I am calling the ecology of news viewing.[4] I use the term ecology in a sociological sense to refer to the conditions and circumstances in which viewing takes place, as well as the social relationships between individuals, families, and friends. I hasten to add that there is no singular viewing ecology as people, environments, and the news itself changes over time. However, I have organized this

[4] See Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience*, (New York: Routledge, 1991); Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1985).

chapter around four critical themes that contribute to an understanding of what a viewing ecology entails for the seventeen people I interviewed.

The first theme centers on the memories people have of both their parents and themselves watching the news while growing up. This is not simply an attempt to correlate their past with their current news habits, but rather a way of exploring what it meant for people to grow up with and through news television, and by extension, what it meant to inhabit their households. In order to explore this, I pay close attention to the particular circumstances of their viewing, which includes understanding their social relationships (parental, siblings, extended family members, and friends). I also continue a focus on issues of place, and specifically how ideological constructs of place such as community and nation presented by news television are reworked and reconfigured by news viewers to fit into the structure of their everyday circumstances. Moreover, through a close examination of their narratives, I demonstrate how, in the words of Jonathan Z. Smith, the "Ritual connection between people and place is recollection."[5] Through the process of recalling their parent's ritual viewing of the nightly news, they were in fact mnemonically locating themselves in their childhood home-place and revisiting their relationship with their parents and siblings. Moreover, as adults, a number of interviewees engage in the same daily viewing ritual as their parent thus connecting past familial practices with present ones.

The second and third themes are concerned with what it means to view the news seriously, as well as what constitutes serious news. I employ the theoretical constructs of American civil religion and American cultural religion to frame the relationships people's parents, and interviewees themselves maintained with particular broadcast journalists -

[5] *To Take Place: Toward a Theory of Ritual* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1987), 13.

namely Walter Cronkite and Jon Stewart. American cultural religion has to do with symbolic ways people order their life and search for meaning; it is not directly connected to organized or formalized aspects of religion, but rather with the everyday. In this vein, viewing the news is, for a number of interviewees, a significant expression of contemporary American cultural religion in part because it allows them to participate symbolically in a ritual that not only unites them with others throughout the nation, but reinforces beliefs that have about their families, communities, and their everyday existence.

Finally, I work through the different ways in which interviewees present themselves as news viewers and the narratives they employ to discuss their current news viewing practices. Here, I emphasize how viewers often feel devalued as an audience and as individual citizens when they watch certain news channels and programs and I also examine the different strategies they employ to counteract this sentiment of devaluation.

Each theme addresses the ways people stake a claim in the news they watch or refuse to watch. The nightly news presents a version of the world and viewers reinterpret, engage with, and even resist what they see on the news. Furthermore, they address news watching as a practice that means something to them, directly pertaining to notions of civic and American cultural religion, as well as reflecting a desire to be entertained. Watching the news is a ritual part of a larger process by which people imaginatively make and remake their worlds and their sense of place in it.[6]

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[6] Smith, *To Take Place*, 26-27.

Our House: The Evening News and Other Nightly Rituals

> "Could this record-breaking heat wave be the result of the dreaded Greenhouse Effect? Well, if 70-degree days in the middle of winter are the "price" of car pollution, forgive me if I keep my old Pontiac." [7] - Kent Brockman

> "Although Americans were changing and their lives had grown more privatized, they were still a melodramatic people, and they still looked to these collective [media] spectacles and dramas. That was how, in part, they continued to make sense of their world."[8] – Catherine L. Albanese

The memories people have of their parents watching the news and the role of the news in their homes centered, for the most part, on reconstructing the rhythms of their own daily lives. A key way I describe the evening news is as a kind of place holder around which almost all meaningful evening activities seemed to rotate. Susan and other participants remember the evening routine as: someone comes home from work (usually fathers), followed by eating dinner together as a family, and then watching the news together. This was especially the case before they reached high school age. It was also common for people to recall one or both of their parents coming home and almost immediately turning on the news. This turn towards the news, along family dinner time, marked their entrance back into the domestic realm and a return to the more familial zone of existence. However, turning on the news, for some participants' parents, also appeared to be about carving out some personal time after a long work day. In other instances, interviewees mentioned that it was their mothers, who, working in the home, turned on the evening news, thus signaling the start of the evening and a countdown to a returning spouse.

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[7] The epigraph for this section is drawn from "Mr. Plow," The Simpsons, 1992, Season Four, Episode 9, *Tvfanatic.com*, accessed April 3, 2010, http://www.tvfanatic.com/quotes/shows/the-simpsons/episodes/mr-plow/page_2.html.

[8] The epigraph for this section is drawn from *America: Religions and Religion*, Third Edition (Belmont: CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1999), 458.

Again, these examples are not to suggest that the practice of watching the nightly news was the most important evening event in people's households as they were growing up; although for some it was a fairly consistent and central element of their evenings. For the majority of participants, watching the news was a ritual practice that was marked in contrast to the rest of the day's practices. Smith's work on the topography of the sacred helps us think through that ways space is marked and bounded; more specifically, he discusses the particulars of what is being marked from what and why.[9] His concern is with how sacrality is renewed and reinforced through sacrifices and rituals that re-mark the *termini*, the boundaries that insulate the sacred from the profane.[10]

Interview narratives demonstrated how news viewing, in most households, was a ritual often interwoven with other evening rituals, all of which helped symbolically and imaginatively structure and separate two distinct realms; specifically, the home as inside (and sacred) and the world as outside (and profane). There was no one ritual of watching the nightly news because there were varying situations and circumstances that called for different approaches to news watching. Often a ritual embedded with other kinds of nightly practices, news watching can also be understood as a distinct ritual on its own. Additionally, there is a ritualization[11] of news viewing that will be discussed in more detail in chapters three and four that takes place during a national crisis.

I consider viewing the news each evening a ritual practice because even if people's parents were not paying close attention to the content of the news itself, they were in fact directing their attention to their television sets in manner different from the attention they gave other nightly tasks. Smith writes how the ordinary becomes sacred

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[9] *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 105.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Smith, *Ritual Theory*,74.

just by being there and notes that "Nothing is inherently sacred or profane. These are not substantive categories but rather situational or relational categories, mobile boundaries which shift according to the map being employed."[12] In other words, news viewing was a practice that helped interviewees create an environment where the concerns of everyday life were controlled within the context of the home space. This allowed parents to believe that they could obtain a sense of perfection and balance regarding certain details of their life at home. In actuality, however, their home lives may have been chaotic, disorderly, or even unmanageable at times. However, the ritual viewing of the nightly news helped foster an idealized, sacred home space often in direct contrast to what was being presented on television.

Viewers discussed the ways these realms, outside and inside, were often permeable. The boundaries between them were not fixed but rather continually at play with how they understood themselves, their families, and the world outside of their domestic space. Additionally, watching nightly news maintained a continuity of daily family life specifically by defining the boundaries between day life and night life with the news acting as a bridge between the two. People also discussed the ways in which watching the news reinforced social bonds and relationships between specific household members. For example, Lara remembers bonding with her brother over their complete lack of interest in the news and she recalled clearly her father watching the news and his television shows in the basement while they watched their shows in the living room.

The temporal regularity of the nightly news influenced certain details around viewing. This included when families would watch, as well as the order of various other

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[12] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 55.

evening activities such as eating dinner, doing homework, and going to sleep. Obviously, I am not suggesting that the nightly news simply appeared in people's households. A large and exhaustive body of scholarly work has already been written about the inception, development, and production of American news television. Without going into extensive details, I will sketch a brief history of television news in order to contextualize my discussion.

The news in its earliest manifestation from roughly the mid 1940s to late 1950s generally had a limited nighttime schedule and aired for about fifteen minutes to a half hour.[13] By 1961 news television was at its peak in terms of audience size and prestige as both a cultural form and technology, and it had greatly expanded into both day and later evening hours.[14] Baym writes, "The period that has had the greatest hold on the popular imagination and still informs our basic assumptions about what the news is, or should be, is the network age, the time frame stretching from the wide spread adoption of television in the 1950s to the rise of cable in the 1980s."[15] During those decades television was determined by the "Big Three" CBS, NBC, and ABC; however, by the 1980s emerging technologies like cable and internet expanded viewing options expanded viewing options and put an end to the dominance of the "Big Three."[16] Therefore, the age of participants influenced how they watched in terms of when the news came on, how long it was on for, and the style of news presentation they watched. Some of the older interviewees remembered that there was nothing else on except the news on most television stations starting at six o'clock and so one either watched the news or watched nothing.

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[13] Sig Mickelson, *The Decade that Shaped Television News: CBS in the 1950s* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), xiii.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert*, 9.
[16] Ibid.

However, to argue that people watched the news simply because there was nothing else on devalues the manner in which people engage with the news and ignores the ways in which the news has the capacity to transform and impact domestic space and familial time. Additionally, the seminal work of political science scholars Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder demonstrates how the news influences American public's conception of political life, and "that television news is in fact an educator virtually without peer…television news is news that matters."[17] They persuasively argue that one of the key reasons the news matters is, "Because they take part in the grand event of politics so rarely, ordinary Americans must depend on information and analysis provided by others – in modern times, upon information and analysis provided by mass media."[18]

Many of their memories about the role of the evening news in their home supports the work of Ron Lembo who discusses how those he refers to as "discrete" viewers, viewers who separate their television viewing from other activities, nevertheless also seek to integrate their television viewing with other activities.[19] Participants named a variety of activities in their households that often merged with watching the news, such as spending time and talking together, washing the dishes, as well as simply enjoying the pleasures of being home or, at the very least, not at work or school.[20] John, one of the oldest participants interviewed, remembered that television viewing was always done together as a family and tended to occur in between milking the cows, which happened in the early morning and late in the afternoon. My work, however, departs from Lembo's in

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[17] See *News that Matters: Television and American Public Opinion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1987) 2.
[18] Ibid.
[19] *Thinking Through Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 220.
[20] See Jason Mittell. "Viewing Television," in *Television and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 371-372. Mittell notes how television is often a part of larger practice of multitasking thus contradicting the idea of the passive viewer or the stereotype of the "couch potato".

two important ways. First, I focus on the specificities of viewing the news rather than television overall. Second, I demonstrate how nightly news viewing is both its own discrete ritual and one that is a part of a larger system of rituals that help contribute to the production and reproduction of a family's culture over time.[21] Finally, I emphasize how the news plays a significant role in people's memories of their childhood households, working as a kind of axis for fashioning and constructing an understanding of their past.

Their memories were, more often than not, about the mundane ordinariness of the news in terms of both watching and content. For example, a number of people recalled having feelings of pronounced boredom especially when they were in either grade or middle-school whenever their parents turned on the news. If they had any sense of nostalgia it was always in relation to watching the news (or news-type programs) with their parents. Julia, who has two other siblings, remembered watching *60 Minutes* every Sunday alone with her father; it was a way of spending special one-on-one time with him even if she was not interested in the show's content itself. Still others mentioned restrictions placed on television viewing in their home except for the news, which they were allowed to watch freely, especially during some kind of national news event (such as the Watergate hearings).

This offer of unlimited news viewing was rarely, if ever accepted, although Scott spoke of being fascinated by the Watergate hearings and remembers watching almost the entire coverage. When asked why he was so riveted, especially given that he was only nine or ten years-old at the time, he replied, "For me, the television was a part of this whole moment. There was collective sense of this is what everyone is focusing on just at

[21] See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Here, I am using the term culture put forth by anthropologist Geertz who writes, "Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their social action ,145."

that moment." Describing the Watergate break-in as "exciting" and the hearings as having an almost "soap opera" quality to them, I think what he also enjoyed was watching the hearing coverage with his parents. It was a way of spending time with both of them at once. More specifically, it was about the kind of time they shared. I would add that his engagement with the televised hearings helped mark a transition in his status from an insulated child to a more civic-minded young person engaged with, and interested in "adult" issues, just like his parents whom he recalled as being very news-focused. This exception to the rule, regulated viewing except for the news, speaks to how the social practice of news viewing was closely linked to family sociality and in turn, how this sociality was a common element of a family's culture. The details of togetherness did not necessarily mean families were consistently attentive to either each other or even to the news they watched. Instead, what people repeatedly observed was a kind of purposefully being together in the same room when the news was on.

In addition to connecting family members together, ritual viewing of the news also connected people to their communities. Again, John recalled how the local news tried to cater to the interests of the rural Vermont farming community where he grew up. He mentioned laughingly that his father was actually interviewed several times about farming matters. Similarly, Justin remembered watching news coverage of a series of arson fires, which burnt down a block of houses in the Philadelphia neighborhood where he grew up. Convinced that everyone had heard about these fires, he asked if I could remember them. Whether or not they made national headlines, his recollection highlights how the news helps place people in the context of their local communities. Both of their responses reflect an understanding of community that includes an obvious physical

locale, as well as "more direct, more total and therefore more significant relationships."[22] The fact that most people remember their parents watching the evening news for the local weather report reinforced the priority they placed on certain practicalities of every day community life. In addition to the actual weather forecast, what stood out was who delivered the report and how it was delivered, with remarks referring to the person including the "unintentionally hilarious weatherman on channel 9" or "Pat the weather girl".

The local weather report and reporter have been parodied over the years. The 1991 movie *L.A. Story* stars Steve Martin as Harris K. Telemacher the "wacky weatherman" whose job at a local television station in Los Angeles leaves him feeling directionless since day after day the weather remains virtually the same - sunny and in the mid seventies. Additionally late comedian George Carlin's "Hippy, Dippy Weatherman" sketch comments both on the absurd seriousness in which the weather is often presented and the bizarre corporate-sponsorships attached to the weather segment. Interspersed with talk of "Canadian lows and Mexican highs,"[23] Carlin's mellow hippy-dippy weatherman inhales and exhales, exchanging hot air for a little pot air as he pokes fun at the weather report, those who watch it, and even himself.

Martin and Carlin's weather characters are a mere sample of fictional characters that satirize the weather report. They mock but also seriously reflect people's simultaneous fascination and dismissal of the weather as though, in the grand hierarchy of reporting the days' events, it should not be the most important information, and yet it

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[22] Raymond Williams, "Community," Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 66.
[23] See "The Hippy Dippy Weatherman," *Georgecarlin.tv*, accessed December 11, 2010, http://georgecarlin.tv/george-carlin-videos/hippy-dippy-weatherman/.

often is to viewers. For many participants' parents, watching the weather report, more than any other segment of the news, was often the most ritually significant and focused aspect of their nightly viewing. This may have had something to do with how the weather was generally understood as non-threatening, especially in comparison to crime rates, but at the same time essential in terms of how it reveals the conditions of life outside the home, thus influencing people's decisions such as what to wear and how one's commute will be. The specificities of the weather viewing ritual speaks to a larger desire to engage the world in terms that matter, but do not overwhelm them the way other types of news stories have the potential to do.

These days, people's preoccupation with the weather need no longer be held hostage to small, contained segments on the news, nor represented solely by zany fictional characters. Cable television has a channel devoted solely to the weather and called what else, but the Weather Channel. Millions of viewers can finally come out of the weather closet and embrace their delight and alarm in tornado chasers, minute-by-minute storm tracking, and clean-up/rescue efforts after devastating natural catastrophes. One interview participant in particular, Neil, mentioned that the weather channel is what he turns on when he comes home from work and wants to unwind, noting he finds the music "soothing" and the stories "interesting."

Several people mentioned that their parents would often turn the news off after they had heard the weather report. This act of turning off the news is significant because it speaks to how people effectively controlled their nightly news viewing. Though people's parents obviously could not control either the content or time of the news, they nevertheless often made conscious decisions about *what* they would watch and *when* they

would watch. For example, in Louisa's household watching the news was a very important part of their family life together; they regularly watched and discussed the news. However, the television was never on during dinner. "Dinner time was a time for talking. We talked about our day and we talked about the news, but we did not watch it while we ate." Others made similar observations about no news or other kinds of television during dinner time. Justin remembers his father actually leaping up to turn off the news whenever Ronald Reagan made an appearance. "Ronald Regan was prohibited from either being seen or heard in my house. Really my parents watched the weather and then avoided the rest of the news." Again, these two examples illustrate some of the spoken and unspoken rules people's parents made about when the news was watched and also what kind of news was considered intolerable. The move to turn off the news highlights how parents wanted to reaffirm the boundaries between domestic and public realms. Though ultimately impossible to keep the outside world in effect *outside*, television was nevertheless understood, by people in this study, as a technological device that helped the adults in their lives maintain and manage the chaos of the world outside their homes.

In addition to the importance of the weather forecast, there were a number of participants who remembered their parents watching the news both regularly and with great attention. Amanda was one of the few people I interviewed who remembered her parents actually watching the news during dinner. Growing up in the late seventies she recalled, "For sure, I remember the evening news was on one of the major networks during dinner every night. We watched the local news and likely left it on there for the national news. My parents also watched *60 Minutes* on Sundays, watched news

programs on PBS, and listened to WPFW and Pacifica radio in the car. Also, they liked *Nightline*." Although their family did not watch during dinner, Louisa's family frequently watched the news at 6:00 PM and then again at 10:00 PM. She noted how "Discussing the news was a part of the family dialogue. I mean we really discussed the news. I was just telling my husband the other day about how I used to stay up and watch the election conventions with my dad." The two families' commitment to the news – the fact they watched the news several times an evening, read at least two newspapers, frequently listened to news radio, and talked about the news with each other regularly – all reflects a different kind of ritual viewing setting them apart from the viewing practices of other families.

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow maintains that ritual connects people through mass media. In contrast to Smith's assertions regarding how rituals mark boundaries between sacred and profane, Wuthnow suggests that ritual is not a type of social activity that can be set apart from the rest of the world for special investigation.[24] "Ritual," he writes, "is a dimension of all social activity. The study of ritual, therefore, is not distinguished by its concerns with certain types of activity, but by the perspective it brings to bear on all activity, namely, emphasis on the symbolic or expressive dimension of behavior."[25] For the families of Amanda and Louisa, their ritual viewing of the nightly news, though a social activity that was in some sense quite ordinary and an integral part of their daily life, was also one suffused with a sense of civic responsibility they took seriously and can be understood as loosely connected to certain creeds and codes of American civil religion.

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[24] See *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
[25] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 101.

Albanese writes how, "civil religion is a recent name for religious nationalism as institutionalized in a loose religious system. Its foundations were laid by the New England Puritans and later, by the patriots of the American Revolution, who linked Puritan millennial themes to Enlightenment religion and the experience and remembrance of their own deeds in the war."[26] She further notes that by the time of George Washington the creed, code, and cultus of civil religion were set in place and through them ordinary history of the county became linked to extraordinary religion. In particular, the creed proclaimed the United States as both a chosen and millennial nation while the code "emphasized patriotic behavior by citizens and government, with a view to setting example and accomplishing an American mission…Although there were many ambiguities in the meaning of creed, code, and cultus, the central affirmation was the millennial politics of making history by deeds of greatness."[27] I argue that both families tended to interpret patriotic behavior as linked to a sense of duty that involved taking a direct interest in a range of political and social concerns affecting the nation. They effectively demonstrated patriotic behavior through the ritual practice of news viewing. However, as will soon be discussed, their viewing was also informed by aspects of American religious culture.

News as Social Practice: American Religious Culture

Coined by sociologist Robert Bellah, the term American civil religion is based on a shared set of certain beliefs, values, holidays, and rituals by those living in the U.S. The New World Encyclopedia states, "These shared values and holidays are based upon, parallel to, but independent of the theological tenets of each specific denomination or

[26] Albanese, *America*, 460.
[27] Ibid.

religious belief. The notion of a civil religion originated in the United States due to its origins as a religiously diverse nation."[28] Again, in civil religion there is an emphasis on Judeo-Christian religious narratives and symbols existing alongside narratives and symbols of the state; this can be seen in official public settings such as U.S. courtrooms where the American flag and a bible are frequently both present. Although highly relevant, the dedicated news viewing of both Amanda's and Louisa's families, however, cannot be interpreted strictly along the lines of civil religion. To begin with, according to Catherine Albanese, civil religion was already declining by the 1950s[29] in spite of passionate efforts made by Bellah and religious scholar Martin E. Marty to revive its tenets in the late sixties.[30] Therefore, I would argue that while certainly rooted in civil religion, their (Amanda and Louisa's families) impulse to engage with the news also appears to also be an expression of American cultural religion. Again Albanese stresses that civil religion is only one piece of the religious territory."[31]

American cultural religion, which began roughly in late nineteenth-century after the Civil War, serves as a means of bringing together a diverse nation through certain rites that help reinforce and perpetuate ideas and beliefs about American life and culture. One key way in which it can be observed is in the American ritual calendar with its special days and holidays.[32] Another salient aspect of American cultural religion are American "sacred stories," stories that provide people with a system of beliefs that reaffirm people's place as "part of one people"; the beliefs or what Albanese labels

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[28] "American Civil Religion," *Newworldencyclopedia.org*, accessed December 12, 2010, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/American_civil_religion.
[29] James A. Mathisen, "Twenty Years after Bellah: Whatever Happened to Civil Religion?*" Sociology of Religion* 50/2 1989: 129-146.
[30] Albanese, *America*, 458; see also Robert Bellah's seminal article "Civil Religion in America," 1967, *Robertbellah*.com, accessed March 28, 2010, http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.html.
[31] Albanese, *America*, 465.
[32] Ibid.

"creeds" are transmitted through television, film, and popular literature and magazines and "embodied in both popular heroes and entertainment stars."[33] "More strongly than the teaching of any organized religion, which is heard perhaps once or twice a week, it [the creed] shapes Americans from cradle to grave."[34] A concrete example of the central role of sacred stories for interviewees was raised in chapter one of this dissertation where I discuss their reasons for repeatedly viewing television shows that involved the superhero-villain dynamic as presented on Saturday cartoon shows such as the ABC series *Super Friends*. Although they could easily predict the outcome of episodes, they were appealing in large part because they reinforced dynamics of good and evil, establishing a sense of the world that they could understand and reaffirming their place in it.

For Amanda and Louisa, their families' viewing of the news was understood as a sacred cultural ritual rather than a sacred religious one because its emphasis was more often related to this world with *no* mention of another, and it was not tied to any one particular religious tradition like Christianity or Judaism. More specifically, it allowed for the possibility that everyone in the family – adults and children alike - could symbolically participate in the life of the nation, which they valued and cherished. Their participation was essential to how they structured their identity as both citizens and Americans. Being American held for them a specific understanding of themselves as informed, politically and socially engaged, and intellectually curious about the goings on in the nation and beyond. Along this vein, their families paid close attention to news that disseminated information on what they considered serious matters.

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[33] Albanese, *America*, 468.
[34] Ibid.

What constituted serious matters varied although coverage of politics was mentioned most frequently. Politics is a broad even vague category, but for the people I interviewed, it seemed to encompass many different elements; from campaign and election coverage to stories focusing on national issues such as welfare. Serious viewing and pleasurable viewing are in many respects artificial categories that may confuse more than illuminate the intricacies of television watching. However, people usually expressed sentiments in relation to both *how* and *what* they viewed on the news that helps mark a discernable difference between the two. My own reading of these interviews suggests that serious viewing meant attentive, focused viewing on stories and images that often centered on difficult and grave events such as the Watergate scandal, the Iranian Hostage Crises, and natural catastrophes such as the eruption of Mount St. Helen.

In addition, serious viewing meant paying particular attention to certain news stories that emphasized what Albanese defines as the central affirmation of civic faith: making history by deeds of greatness.[35] For example, several respondents in their 40s and 50s mentioned watching coverage of the first man on the moon, while younger respondents in their late 20s and 30s recalled watching the space shuttle Challenger lift-off. Further complicating the category of serious viewing is the way the news has changed from when the majority of people's parents watched during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Baym, on discussing how the news has changed over the years, writes that there is an, "identity crisis in the news, a scattered profession that increasingly has become part informational resource, part circus side show, and entirely (often crassly) self-promotional. In turn it has become difficult to distinguish the informative from the distracting, the valuable from the manipulative, and indeed the real news from the

[35] Albanese, *America*, 460.

fake."[36] He further suggests that there is a misleading "conceptual opposition between real news and fake news" and that many of our assumptions about the news as either real or fake is never clear, adding that these categories tend to obscure more than they reveal.[37]

As in the case of the more casual news viewers, watching the news was also a significant way in which Amanda and Louisa's families constructed a sense of family; it meant being in each other's proximity in the same room, night after night. Where they differed from other families was the centrality of news in their lives. Viewing the news held special meaning to them that other interviewees did not necessarily share. In Amanda's case her father had been a representative of the African National Congress in the 1980s. His direct involvement with politics, and the fact they lived in a large urban city in the Northeast where news viewing is considered an integral aspect of the city's culture, contributed to the importance of the news in her parents' lives. For Louisa, some of her family's interest in the news can be understood as a direct emotional and intellectual investment they placed in the larger world around them. More specifically, serious news viewing was a practice by which her family knew, engaged with, and in some ways, ultimately understood the political domain. In addition, she experienced news coverage of some of the most significant politically turbulent events of the late 1960s and 1970s such as the Cuban Missile Crises, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy to name but a few. To have come of age when these events were the focus of the nightly news left a significant and lasting impact on Louisa and Susan, both of whom went on to become news journalists. While Louisa's family's

[36] Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert*, 4.
[37] Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert*, 6-7.

practice of nightly news viewing helped pave the way for a deep interest in the complexities of life outside of her home, it was Walter Cronkite along with David Brinkley, Chet Huntley, and Dan Rather, who guided her and others through the details of what these complexities entailed. Additionally, both interview participants of her generation and the one after expressed a deep and abiding admiration for faux news anchor and media analyst, Jon Stewart.

"And that's the way it is": Discussing the Significance of Cronkite and Stewart[38]

> "Richard Salant, while he was president of CBS News, saw the news as 'something that CBS owed to the public and to its conscience', while network president Frank Stanton argued that network news played a 'critical' function in the formation of public opinion and therefore in the 'very survival of democracy itself.'"[39] – Geoffrey Baym

The relationships some people maintained with certain television news journalists speaks to, as well as reinforces a nostalgia for the golden age of network news television, which according to former CBS news executive Sig Mickelson, was from the mid 1960s to the early 1980s based on audience size and cultural prestige.[40] While further analysis of peoples' responses to the question - was there a particular journalist, reporter, or anchorperson you remember your parents liking or disliking - reveal multiple possibilities for interpretation, it remains striking how often they discussed journalists from their

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[38] "And that's the way it is" was how Walter Cronkite signed off the nightly newscast. Baym in *From Cronkite to Colbert* comments on how network news produced a rather singular worldview that was reproduced each day and taken as common sense so that, "Cronkite could sign off every newscast by insisting that 'that's the way it is' – a remarkable claim asserting not just the accuracy of his content, but also the validity and universality of the assumptions upon which the content was based, 12-13."

[39] The epigraph for this section is drawn from *From Cronkite to Colbert*, 11.

[40] *The Decade that Shaped Television News*, xiii. Mickelson who died in 2000, the news director at CBS from 1949 to 1961. See also Felicity Barringer, "Sig Mickelson, First Director of CBS's TV News, Dies at 86," 2000, Nytimes.com, accessed April 10, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/27/business/sig-mickelson-first-director-of-cbs-s-tv-news-dies-at-86.html. Barringer writes, "Mr. Mickelson had been a local television news director at WCCO in Minneapolis during World War II. He earned his early reputation at the network news division during the 1952 political conventions. Having started out in mid-1951 with a staff of 14, he successfully introduced the concept of gavel-to-gavel television convention coverage a year later. He promoted a local Washington newscaster, Walter Cronkite, to anchor of the network's convention coverage."

parent's era of news viewing, which was generally from the decades of the mid 1950s to the 1960s, in a manner reserved more for religious figures. In particular, Walter Cronkite was cast as a holy figure who helped guide families through the wilderness of the day's events and deliver them back to the promised land (and safety) of their living rooms.

Alice remembered her parents preferring Cronkite to Hunter-Brinklely, who had their own news show around the same time period, in part because he had been on the air so long, but also because as she put it, "They had a certain amount of faith in him. They had a belief in him." If people expressed an opinion about news personalities from their parent's era of news viewing, they more often than not echoed the same thoughts and feelings as their parents. In other words, if their parents liked Walter Cronkite, they too remembered liking him. However, since their parents were not interviewed, people's narratives are in fact an interpretation of what their parents said about him. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this chapter, it is interesting to work through the different meanings an iconic news figure like Cronkite has meant to their family life in the context of news viewing.

While people's discussion of Walter Cronkite tended to frame him, along with Edward R. Murrow, as one the most important saints of news broadcasting, comedian/pundit Jon Stewart was understood as occupying a more earth-bound role, though one that was no less important (or legendary) than Cronkite's. In some ways, it seems as though Stewart was read by interviewees as a kind of politically, media-savvy Robin Hood. Instead of robbing from the rich and giving to the poor, he openly criticizes and antagonizes members of the political and media establishment with his witty air and sharp intelligence all of which can be inferred from his facial expressions, the obvious

research he and his team conduct on his guests, and his urging of the audience to be in on his interrogative interview style. Although Stewart himself claims his show is only entertainment and that he is not a journalist, for the politically liberal, highly educated, middle to upper middle-class individuals I interviewed, he was looked upon as a hero, a champion of ordinary people – that is people without any real power of their own to sway the media or politics as they see fit. The role of Jon Stewart and his cable news/entertainment show *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* will be addressed in considerable more detail in the next section; for now, I mention him in relation to Cronkite because both were construed by interviewees as not only searching for the truth, but somehow already in possession of it. They inspired a sense of devotion among the people who watched them regularly, and were also greatly admired as much for what they said/say, as for their performance, especially in contrast to others in their profession.

Other broadcast journalists, however, such as Ted Koppel and Dan Rather were mentioned along with Cronkite. One person recalled, "My parents watched Dan Rather religiously." The popularity of certain news journalists had something to do with the era in which they watched although era alone cannot explain the immense draw of Walter Cronkite. Respondents remembered their parents having a strong sense of "belief" in Cronkite, and that he was someone they could count on. People also repeatedly mentioned how Jon Stewart "has a way of bringing truth and calling it like he sees it!" Both Cronkite and Stewart attracted people who consider themselves as true believers and followers of their words. I argue in Stewart's case it is because his show offers people a sense of relief and catharsis from what they perceive to be the ongoing absurd and sensationalistic manner the news is currently produced. Whereas Cronkite seemed to

offer people a sense of reassurance and guidance in what was understood as a difficult and complicated world.

In some respects, the relationship people's parents had with Cronkite can be explained in fairly practical terms. To begin with, he was the face of *CBS News* for nineteen years. With his dark-framed glasses, his austere suit and tie, and his direct, frank gaze at the camera he exuded a formal, professional and erudite air. He had taken over the anchor position from Douglas Edward in 1962 and in less than a year, expanded the show from fifteen to thirty minutes long, giving him even more screen time on national airways. His first thirty-minute show included a much coveted interview with John F. Kennedy, whose death he would announce to the nation in a strained and sorrowful tone three years later.[41] He went on to cover a number of nationally significant events that included the Vietnam War, the flight of Apollo XI, and the Watergate scandal. Television critic Robert Llyod remarked:

> Not just a newsman; he was -- like Edward R. Murrow, who brought him to CBS and television -- as close a thing to the idea of a newsman as his age imagined. Except perhaps for Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, his high-powered NBC competition, all TV news anchors, news readers and news reporters, even the most august of them, seemed like variations on his theme, shadows of his Platonic ideal. A decade after his retirement from the anchor's chair, he was still being named the most trusted man in network news.[42]

Cronkite retired from CBS in 1981, but he continued to be quite active on television especially for PBS and the Discovery and Learning channel, where he was to host 36 documentaries over a three-year period.[43] His longevity and exposure made him more than a familiar celebrity. Moreover, his authoritative style of delivery was accepted

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[41] See Albert Auster, "Cronkite, Walter: U.S. Broadcast Journalist," *Museum.tv*, accessed April 18, 2010, http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=cronkitewal.
[42] "Walter Cronkite: And that's the way it was," *Nowpublic.com*, accessed December 12, 2010, http://www.nowpublic.com/tech-biz/walter-cronkite-americas-first-anchor-newsman-dies-92.
[43] Auster, "Cronkite, Walter".

and even welcomed without criticism from anyone I spoke with although he was criticized by others in his profession and news critics who noted:

> His refusal to take more risks in TV news coverage… Similarly, Cronkite was criticized because of his preference for short 'breaking stories' many of them originating from CBS News' Washington bureau, rather than longer 'Enterprisers,' which might deal with long range and non-Washington stories…Cronkite's demand for center stage--an average of six minutes out of the twenty-two minutes on an evening newscast focused on him--took time away from in-depth coverage of the news."[44]

Nevertheless, while other broadcast journalists over the years also appeared with a degree of regularity and employed a polished and poised style of news delivery, interviewee's primarily remembered their parents watching and commenting on Cronkite.

The appeal of Cronkite may have had to do with the way he delivered the news, as well as an aura of authenticity and authority that other newscasters were not seen as possessing. His authority was reinforced by his reappearance and delivery night after night for nearly two decades. The fact that he seemed to stay the same, while the news changed daily made it easy to understand how his image denoted a presence which was read as stable and constant. Interviewees also recalled how Cronkite's nightly news delivery was essential to how their household made sense of the news, but that he was not necessarily perceived as a family 'friend' in spite of his 'Uncle Walt' moniker. Instead, words like "king" and "legend" were evoked in discussions about him. He existed outside of the boundaries of certain kinds of relationships and yet was such a regular, ever-present fixture of people's everyday lives.

One person noted that her parents "loved and respected" him. Not unlike a holy figure, he was also seen as someone people turned to for reassurance and guidance during times of national crises. It was Cronkite who announced that John F. Kennedy had been

[44] Ibid.

shot and later that he died. Those interviewees who watched the news that day could still recall in almost exact detail the words he used to break the news of Kennedy's death to the American public; and when they heard the announcement, their relationship with Cronkite was such that they believed him even in their state of disbelief. In the days that followed Kennedy's murder, they relied on him for some semblance of continuity. For them, he was a symbol of stability especially during the chaos of Lee Harvey Oswald's murder and throughout coverage of Kennedy's funeral.

Because his voice and image were directly connected with a great many significant events spanning the 1960s through the early 80s, he can be understood as a keeper of sacred stories; stories that function to reinforce basic beliefs about what it means to be human, as well as what it means to be American during a particular place and time. One way of understanding the significance of Cronkite in the lives of many of the people I interviewed is by thinking about the role he occupied as more than one of national icon, but as a prominent and meaningful figure in American cultural religion.

In some ways, he acted as an intercessor between 'the news' and the public in a manner similar to some people's relationships with sacred figures, which are often understood as real both in experience and practice.[45] In other ways, for some he was virtually indistinguishable from the news itself. Melissa notes that "Growing up the only news that was watched was Walter Cronkite, I don't even remember now which channel that was, but if Walter did not report on it, then it wasn't news as far as my parents were concerned." Her comments reflect how Cronkite helped her parents make sense of ever-changing conditions of this world and inspired in them a sense devotion to his coverage

[45] See Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1-18.

of the news. Cronkite had just died in July 2009 before I resumed interviewing again that fall, and the timing of his death may have further influenced people's discussion about him as his life's work had been featured prominently throughout the media.

Jon Stewart is not so much the legacy of Walter Cronkite's style of news delivery, but rather Cronkite's style turned on its head. While he mimics an updated version of Cronkite's dress style (sans black-framed glasses) down to the perfectly combed-back hair, news desk, and somber set backdrop, it is a fake set designed to mimic a real one, and Stewart is an entertainer pretending to be a news anchor. However, like Cronkite, for a number of interview participants, he is the news. Indeed, his connection to Cronkite is not as far-fetched as it might first appear, because like Cronkite, he is perceived as consistently speaking and seeking the truth. And like Cronkite, he is often understood as guiding people through both everyday and extraordinary events. Unlike Cronkite, however, what Stewart is guiding people through is the banal and sensationalistic landscape of the news as it is currently produced.

Viewers Are Doin' It for Themselves

> "As early as 1986, when his company took control of NBC, General Electric's CEO Jack Welch dismissed the idea that network news was a 'public trust' to be protected from the commercial imperative. His new president of NBC, Robert Wright, insisted that he couldn't even 'understand the concept.'"[46] - G. Baym

> "Perhaps the most effective weapon for the decrease of reported crimes has been a national police initiative encouraging 911 operators to turn off their phones during lunch and after six."[47] - Jon Stewart

The process of reflecting back on revered news figures like Cronkite, Dan Rather, and Ted Koppel allowed some interviewees to voice their frustrations with the current state of news television, in which anchors, moderators, and reporters are perceived as

[46] The epigraph for this section is drawn from *From Cronkite to Colbert*, 14.
[47] The epigraph for this section is drawn from "The Daily Show Rewarding Quotes," May 17, 1999, *Thedailyshow.com*, accessed December 12, 2010, http://www.thedailyshow.com/.

putting a false spin on issues, or even outright lying. This was a perspective shared by nearly everyone although for such a small sample there was a fairly broad spectrum of different kinds of news viewership. At one end for example, there were two individuals who did not seek the news in any media format while at the other, there were three people who watched multiple news shows attentively and mindfully several hours a day. These people went so far as to proclaim themselves "news junkies" and hastened to add that they "were not your average news consumers." Most, however, fell somewhere in between, getting their news from a variety of sources and paying sporadic attention to the news even as it maintained a prominent position in their constellation of morning and evening rituals. One young woman declared that she primarily gets her news through satire as presented specifically on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*, or *The Onion*, a clever online news source for both fake and almost-real news. Regardless of the ways they engaged or, in some instances, consciously disengaged from the news (a refusal to watch), people's discussion of today's news milieu (the 24-hour news cycle, the rise of multiple online news sources, the emergence of fake new shows, etc.) helped reveal complex meanings embedded in notions of "politics," "government," and even the "truth."

As a means of organizing people's responses, I developed a simple interpretative schema, although I also attempt to address the gray areas in between, composed of those who watch the news and those who do not. The two categories serve as a heuristic device for further understanding the ecology of viewing for this particular group of people. The details of this ecology include responses that reveal people's criticism regarding the way the news is usually delivered. These criticisms will be discussed in more detail shortly.

For now, what is striking is the way many continue to watch the news even though they are fully aware that what they view will irritate, or in some instances even enrage them. In many ways, they take a certain pleasure in having their skepticism and irritation confirmed by specific news programs and I think they enjoy the sense of being 'in the right' when such shows somehow confirm their own terribleness. I begin by examining responses from people who currently watch the news not only regularly, but with great intensity.

Three participants in particular, Susan, Rob, and Louisa watch at least two hours of news a day. A number of others also watched that many hours and, in some cases, even more. For example, they would often turn on CNN or MSNBC first thing in the morning while getting ready for work and when they got home, they would immediately turn on the news again. Where the three stand out is the way they view the news: they pay careful attention to it and they ascribe a certain belief in the power of the news. While the news is sometimes background noise, more often than not, the three participants are closely following the stories, weighing in on certain issues, and interested in various outcomes. They also read at least two newspapers a day, browse a number of different online news sources, and listen to news radio.

Louisa quickly points out that she merely scans the news for articles she wants to read later and that she does not actually read the entirety of several papers a day. Nevertheless, she is an avid news consumer and when she is not reading or watching the news, she turns to news magazines like *The Economist*. Rob enjoys watching *The News Hour* on PBS because as he puts it, "they really get into the issues. They'll cover a Supreme Court decision and spend fifteen minutes talking about the decision. The other

news channels rehash the same things and they don't get into the story." While PBS is his favorite, he actually watches a number of different channels. One thing he enjoys about watching so many news sources is criticizing them. With regards to CNN, "It's all fluff news. There's no depth!" and Fox News, "I see Fox as a political tool." Susan defines herself as a "political news junkie" and mentioned also watching Fox News among several news channels, because she likes "to see the other side of things."[48] In addition, she defined her viewing of the first half hour of the *Today Show* every morning and of CNN while she is making dinner, as a ritual saying, "I always watch the first half hour of the *Today Show*. It's definitely a ritual. It's our responsibility to be informed and to get your news from a lot of different sources so if I am near a TV, I will turn it on."

For these three, watching the news is a way of staying informed, which they saw as linked to ideas of civic and personal duty, as well as a search for the truth. When I asked Susan to explain what she meant by the truth she replied:

> Because you need to be a consumer of many different types of news in order to get to the truth. Getting the facts…journalism has changed a lot and not everyone is reporting the news objectively and you need to be a critical thinker and have a lot of sources for news in order to get a close proximity to what the truth or the facts are.

In addition, it seems that their news viewing is a specific way in which they place themselves in the context of their everyday lives; it locates them in terms of time, routine, and location as indicated by Susan's preparation of dinner while she watches CNN or the way Rob starts his evenings at home by turning to the news on PBS. Moreover, I think they see it as a meaningful and intelligent way of understanding the larger world outside the spheres of their home and work life. Finally, they truly enjoy watching the news. It

[48] Several people in fact discussed why they purposefully watch news shows whose representation of social and political issues they fully disagree with.

is a form of entertainment for them, although Rob was quick to point out that there is a discernable difference between news as 'info-taintment' and 'real' news. Following the news story, critiquing the way the story is told, and even surmising what the outcome will be, is fun for them. However, it is a kind of fun that allows them to present themselves as educated, savvy, and serious viewers.

Justin and Melissa could not be more opposite from the three interviewees just discussed. Justin was the only participant in this study who watches almost no news, preferring occasionally to seek out news from CNN's website. While Melissa seemed to have little to no interest in the news even though it was frequently on when she was growing up, and her husband currently watches it every night. Her near total lack of interest is reflected in the fact that she cannot recall any news events at all from her childhood. She did tell me that she sometimes turns the news on as background noise and will pay more attention to the news during special events like elections saying, "I don't schedule my life around the news or any other show on television, if I happen to be in the room then I catch part of the news on whatever station my husband is watching." For Melissa, the news is not important to her in comparison to other activities, hobbies, and interests she turns to when she is home.

Justin actually actively dislikes the news and believes that watching it "is detrimental" to one's well-being. Occasionally he will check CNN's website or read the headlines of a newspaper in passing. If the news happens to be on television in a public space like a bar, he will watch for a little bit. However, he is adamant that the news only makes him feel depressed and overwhelmed. Interestingly, several others shared similar sentiments, but they continue to watch the news and in Neil's case, daily. The news is

complicated for Neil in that the visual presentation of the news reassures him in its sameness (the ticker down at the bottom of the screen, the graphs shown during the stock reports, and the icons used to explain the weather), but the actual content of most news stories depresses and sometimes even scares him. Another participant mentioned that she has to be in a "good enough mood" to turn on the news so it "won't utterly depress me." Finally, Jerry stated that he had a "very low opinion of the news" and will no longer watch news television, instead choosing to get his news from what he labeled, "alternative sources." Although he did not offer up any specific sites, he mentioned that the internet is where he turns to for these kinds of sources.

Their responses reveal the ways the news negatively affects them, but for both those who consider themselves news junkies and those who have an aversion to the news, the news does not simply act upon them as others have argued. Similar to the effects of music as discussed by Tia DeNora, news television's effects also come from the different ways people either orient themselves to it or dismiss it, how they interpret it, as well as the ways they place it within their personal television viewing map.[49] Their personal television viewing map consists of how they prioritize and organize their television viewing both conceptually and practice-wise. My work suggests that although people can only make viewing decisions within the field of choices presented to them, when it comes to the news they do have the power not to watch, to watch haphazardly, or to turn it off at any point during their watching. I am in partial agreement with cultural studies scholar Ien Ang who writes:

> Audiences may be active in myriad ways using and interpreting media, but it would be utterly out of perspective to cheerfully equate 'active' with 'powerful,' in the sense of 'taking control at an enduring, structural, or institutional level. It is

[49] *Music in Everyday Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61.

> a perfectly reasonable starting point to consider people's active negotiations with media texts and technologies as empowering in the context of their everyday lives…but we must not lose sight of the marginality of this power.[50]

However, her statement assumes that there are only two ways of looking at power - *'Power'* at the institutional, structural level, and *'power'* in everyday context – but she overlooks how the two realms consistently intersect. The impact of consumer advocacy groups in affecting changes in television programming, for example, are changes that have in some instances been enduring.[51] In this instance, it would appear that people are more than just "active" with their media, but that they sometimes push back when confronted with programming they dislike or disapprove of. In terms of news programming, they often tend to stop paying attention or even watching, which of course is the ultimate power a viewer can possess. There is no doubt that there are substantial limitations to audience-power, but it is a type of power nonetheless.

Audience power lies not only in how some of them frame themselves as active and engaged viewers seeking information and entertainment, but also in how a complete refusal to watch is a strategy of caring for the self. The opposite is also true. In Susan's case, for example, she is a working mother of several children. Her days are packed with activities and responsibilities and watching the news grants her some down time while stimulating her intellect with information she takes seriously, but also enjoys watching. Others are highly selective about when they watch not only in the context of scheduling and timing issues, but also in terms of how they are feeling and how they think the news

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[50] See "Culture and Communication: Toward an Ethnographic critique of Media Consumption in the Transnational Media Realm," *European Journal of Communications*, 5 (1990), 239-60.
[51] See Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target: Primetime, Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Heather Hendershot, *Saturday Morning Censors: Television Regulation before the V-Chip* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Melissa Scardaville, "Accidental Activists: Fan Activism in the Soap Opera Community," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47/7 (2005): 881-901.

will further affect their mood. While the news has certain transformative powers in terms of *making* people feel a certain way, one way they push back is by refusing to watch, making fun of what they watch, or consciously choosing other sources of news that makes them less anxious or irritated about the way the news is presented such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

The Daily Show, which began in 1996, was created by Madeline Smithberg and Liz Winstead and airs on cable's Comedy Central channel and has won fourteen primetime Emmys.[52] Comedian Jon Stewart took over as host in 1999 from Craig Kilbourne, changing the format of the show to focus more on politics and national media issues. Dressed in a conservative suit, Stewart starts the show the same way every evening, wearing a kind of mock serious look as he hunches over his desk pretending to make last minute notes. The suit, tie, and carefully groomed hair style all seem to parody a sense of efficiency and self-importance that is often displayed by newscasters. As mentioned previously, this style of dress was similar to Cronkite's and was meant to convey professionalism and reliability. Stewart's dress appearance is a purposeful mimicry of this professional presentation. However, his presentation, which is part of his 'stage' performance, is meant to go hand-in-hand with the knowledge most viewers possess, that the show is a satire and his clothes are a kind of costume. For nearly everyone I spoke with, *The Daily Show* is seen as a very important source of news and entertainment. Only one person did not like the show stating, "I don't really enjoy that kind of humor." Defined by Byam as "new political television" he goes on explain how both *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are part of "an emergent genre that draws

[52] See "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," *IMDB.com*, accessed December 12, 2010, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115147/.

equally from informational and entertainment forms…offering new ways of talking and engaging with politics."[53]

These fake news shows perform a number of specific functions. While produced as entertainment, they are in fact shows that take the presentation and distribution of public information quite seriously. The appeal of *The Daily Show* is manifold, but one that stood out for a number of people was the way the show through satire and parody criticizes, as well as openly mocks, the news and the way it is produced, reaffirming and echoing people's deep frustration with shoddy coverage, sensationalistic and fear grabbing headlines, and the general inanity of the local news in particular. As its witty host, Jon Stewart tries to hold political leaders and public figures accountable for their words and actions, making him a kind of defender of the truth and an advocate for a certain segment of the American public.[54] One respondent, Lance an avid and discerning news viewer, remarked, "He never hesitates to tell it like it is!" Former news journalists Susan and Louisa also mentioned loving the show even though it does not always fit with their schedules.

At the same time, it is a show that most consider to be very funny and as another participant, Denise explained, "I need humor in my life!" The show is unique in the way it allows viewers to participate in the interrogative joking style employed by Stewart as

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[53] Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert*, 17.

[54] Recently Stewart was lauded in *The New York Times* for his advocacy work in which he used *The Daily Show* to support a recent 2009 9/11 bill which would grant federal money to 9/11 responders. The bill threatened to languish or even disappear after a filibuster by Republicans effectively derailed attention to it. Writes Bill Carter and Brian Stelter, "That show was devoted to the bill and the comedian's effort to right what he called 'an outrageous abdication of our responsibility to those who were most heroic on 9/11.'" See "Daily Show's Role on 9/11, Echoes of Murrow," *The New York Times*, December 26, 2010, accessed January 5, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/27/business/media/27stewart.html?_r=1&src=me&ref=general. Stewart's status seems to have extended beyond a trickster or Robin Hood-type figure as Carter and Stelter's article has placed him squarely in the pantheon of great news men by equating him with one of the key broadcasting saints, Edward R. Murrow.

he and his cadre of 'correspondents' take on serious topics and important officials with gusto. Being in on the joke grants people the opportunity to feel a part of a process that they are more often than not, locked out of. Stewart's interviews and news clips are carefully set up so that the audience is often in on the joke, putting them in position of relative power as they gaze upon powerful public figures squirming, getting angry, and sometimes even lashing out at Stewart and *The Daily Show* correspondents. For a number of interviewees, viewing *The Daily Show* is a conscious strategy for counteracting sentiments of irritation and anxiety they feel about the state of contemporary news and politics and they way both are covered.

In this chapter, I have explored how some people see the news as organizing their social worlds in positive and provocative ways, as well as how others reject the news because they see it disrupting their sense of stability and overall well-being. The news is powerful, and as I mentioned before, transformative in its ability to influence how people feel and even what they do. However, through an interpretation of interview narratives, I have discerned that, within limits, people both reject and embrace the news in a myriad of ways. In the next chapter I turn my attention to how the practice of the news shifts during times of national crises and the process by which it takes on new cultural meanings for viewers. Of note is a particular kind of urgency that emerges and can be understood as a resituating of an already established ritual that enables expressions of grief and frames news viewing as a ritual act of mourning. This was particularly the case in relation to interviewees' memories of the assassinations and funeral coverage of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. I also pay attention to the ways news viewing constrains and limits the possibility of mourning, producing instead a profound

and lasting sense of melancholia expressed by other interviewees in relation to their memories of the terrifying and sudden mid-air explosion of the space shuttle Challenger.

Chapter Three

Ways of Seeing: Mourning, Melancholia, and Nationally Televised Tragedies

> "From a critical perspective it is important to identify what resources for mourning may be embedded within the operation of mass culture."[1] – Alessia Ricciardi

When asked if she could remember any particular events covered by the news while growing up, Alice without hesitation cast her mind back to November 22, 1963. Her high school biology class was in full swing and having settled into their assigned task for the day, she recalled that the school loudspeaker suddenly came on and the principal announced that President John F. Kennedy had been shot while in Dallas. He then let Walter Cronkite fill in what details were known at the time by moving the microphone closer to the television that was in the school office. Stunned, Alice and the rest of the students were then dismissed from school. Her early return home marked the beginning of a long and difficult weekend in front of the television for her and her family, as well as millions of others throughout America who were grieving the unexpected and violent death of President Kennedy.

Thirty-three years later, on January 28, 1986, Robert also recalled being at school and sitting in his sixth grade classroom. He and his classmates had gathered to watch televised coverage of the much anticipated lift off of the space shuttle Challenger. The Challenger was carrying high school teacher Sharon Christa McAuliffe, the first teacher and civilian in space. Her presence on board signaled a victory of recognition and reward for teachers nationally and Robert's teacher, like many others, eagerly wanted to share this moment with her students. Riveted equally both by the momentous event and the fact they were getting to watch television during the day (at school no less), Robert

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[1] The epigraph for this chapter is drawn from *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 8.

watched with a sense of excitement that was quickly replaced with shock and disbelief, as seconds after the shuttle launched it suddenly exploded on screen.

Although several decades apart, the two tragedies illustrate the ways in which the people I interviewed experienced both a national crisis and a major catastrophe through and with television as they were growing up.[2] I say through and with television because television did not simply transmit information regarding the two events. People recalled having a relationship with television that involved a sense of dialogue between themselves and the news they were receiving. This back and forth exchange is what helps mark their reception of the news as interactive rather than passive, as a participatory relationship with technology, rather than a medium that "penetrates" or imposes itself on their everyday life.[3] Indeed, the last chapter revealed how creatively many of the people I spoke with view, understand, and use the news. Specifically, the news was employed by interviewees and their families both as a means of maintaining social relationships and as a ritual that helped maintain the rhythm and order of their daily lives. For these folks, the turn to television during an extraordinary event made

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[2] "The **crisis**…involves a condensation of temporality. It names an event of some duration which is startling and momentous precisely because it demands resolution within a limited period of time." (emphasis mine) Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), 223. Doane notes that one key feature of a **catastrophe** (emphasis mine) temporally speaking, is that it is quick almost instantaneous. In addition, she defines it as "the failure of technology and the resulting confrontation with death," *Logics of Television*, 229.

[3] While Doane's work is both fascinating and useful especially for distinguishing categorical differences between crisis and catastrophe, she never considers how viewers negotiate, and engage with news coverage in the context of either. Moreover, the confidence of her (and other scholars such as German and Comparative Literature professor Andreas Huyssen) argument that television "annihilates" memory because of the stress on the "nowness" of the discourse remains theoretically suspect (there is a complete absence of human behavior/action either in the production or reception of the news) and speculative in nature as she never considers, much less asks viewers (or herself as a viewer) how they make meaning of catastrophes, *Logics of Television*, 222 & 227.

sense given that they were already using and figuring television in their domestic routines.

In the previous chapters, I established how news and non news viewing was a practice that helped create an environment where the concerns of everyday life were managed and contained within the confines of the home space. The effectively used to the news to maintain boundaries between the sacred realm of the home and the profane environment of the world outside. In addition, news viewing was understood by some as a civic responsibility and an critical way of expressing a concern and interest in political and social matters affecting the nation. In contrast, this chapter examines what happens when an extraordinary event disrupts sacred home space and raises several key questions: How can we understand continuous, ongoing news viewing as a ritual differing from more ordinary forms of ritual television viewership? What makes people's viewing important, even necessary during a national crisis or catastrophe?

I have arranged this chapter around several significant events: first, the ongoing crises that began with the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and ended with the murder of Robert Kennedy; second, the abrupt and searing moment associated with the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. Again, the significance of these events were largely determined by the frequency in which interviewees mentioned them when asked about the kinds of major news stories they remembered while growing up. Although the details and situational context of each set them apart from each other, they share similar themes centering on violence, death, grief, and unexpected loss. Moreover, I also chose to highlight these particular events because they help situate loss in a framework concerned with illustrating the connections between American

catastrophes, television audiences, and attitudes towards violence and tragedy, as well as collective mourning and melancholia practices.

News viewing during a national crisis can be understood as a newly emerging ritual for confronting and addressing the porous boundaries between death, loss, and grief in the twentieth-century, beginning in large part with the assassination of JFK and coverage of his funeral. Here, the particularities of the practice have much to do with how people were *choosing* to mourn through continuous, ongoing news viewing. In this capacity, mourning works not in spite of the news, but because of the ways many use the news to help them come to terms with, as well as make sense of loss. However, ongoing news viewing also contributed to a sense of lasting and some instances, profound, unending mourning. The melancholia some experienced in relation to viewing the Challenger explosion in particular raises critical questions about why people struggle in coming to terms with certain events rather than others. The answers are no doubt manifold, but this chapter suggests that it has a great deal to do both with how the event is presented and how it is in turn received, interpreted, and understood by viewers. Examining the ways in which viewers situate and experience loss and grief further illuminates the ongoing relationship this dissertation attempts to establish between ordinary Americans and their experience of historically significant events from our nation's past, demonstrating the myriad ways news viewing is a complicated modern ritual, one that also has profound implications for how events are recollected years later.

Mourning

> "One reason why Ariès's sociological chronicle of the decline of mourning in modern society strikes me as less than completely satisfying is because he pays scant attention to the displacement of the question from the sphere of ritual or sacred activity to the larger context of society in general, which now primarily consists in mass culture."[4] - Alessia Ricciardi

A prodigious amount of scholarship has been devoted to examining and working through the concepts of mourning and melancholia since these terms was first introduced together by Sigmund Freud in his article, published in 1917, "Mourning and Melancholia". Freud writes that, "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on."[5] But his work also stresses that mourning is an inner experience regarding the loss of someone through death. Although grief involves a departure from normal attitudes towards life, it is not a morbid condition requiring medical treatment, rather it is assumed that the person over a period of time will work through and overcome it.[6] "In grief we found that the ego's inhibited condition and loss of interest was fully accounted for by the absorbing work of mourning."[7] While Freud's work on mourning is both seminal and thought-provoking, this chapter is concerned more with how mourning operates within the framework of American culture. Specifically, there is a focus on how interviewee responses, which often involved a web of overlapping emotions frequently associated with mourning such as disbelief, anger, and grief, can be examined in their approach to viewing national tragedies on news television. Also of great use in this analysis is the work of late psychology and religious studies

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[4] The epigraph for this section is drawn from *The Ends of Mourning*, p. 3.
[5] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Freud: General Psychological Theory Paper*, introduction by Philip Rieff (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 164.
[6] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 165.
[7] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 167.

professor, Peter Homans. Homans defines mourning as a culturally constructed social response to the loss of an individual or an ideal,[8] noting in particular how, "mourning today occurs not only 'in' individuals but in the workings of culture as well."[9] Grief involves a range of feelings, according to Homan, such as anger, sorrow, guilt, and confusion and mourning is a ritual "that helps 'heal' the pain of grief."[10]

Homans's definition allows for a clearer understanding of how viewing news television during a national tragedy, like the murders of the Kennedy brothers and King, can be understood as a newly emerging type of mourning practice, one that corresponds to the increasing importance of television and the news in people's daily lives and that also speaks to a new way of vicariously experiencing public events. In particular, viewing televised tragedies was a meaningful and mindful [11] ritual that both restricted and encouraged certain boundaries between tragedy and interviewee. On the one hand, it was a ritual that helped them access important events occurring outside the realm of their immediate experience, eliminating some of the distance between themselves and the event. Additionally, ritualized news viewing for certain participants also took on dimensions of mourning. On the other hand, it was a ritual practice that helped symbolically contain the details of tragedy, restricting them to the confines of their television sets.

It is by exploring ritual approaches to news viewing in the domestic realm that a clearer understanding of how certain public events and grief were made both private and

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[8] Introduction to *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End*, ed. Peter Homans (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 2.
[9] Homans, *Symbolic Loss*, 1.
[10] Homans, *Symbolic Loss*, 3.
[11] See Ron Lembo, *Thinking Through Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 133.

personal for a number of people I interviewed..[12] A key way of organizing their responses regarding their memories of televised events, particularly violent and tragic ones, has been to ground them in the work of British psychologist-psychiatrist John Bowlby, who emphasizes, "The loss of attachment is loss of a social bond. That means that loss is first and foremost loss in the realms of sociality and community. And that in turn suggests that loss and mourning are – also first and foremost – about loss and in gain sociality and community."[13] In addition to examining how through their television usage participants turned public tragedies into events that were both private and personal, I also pay close attention to the awareness interviewees' possessed of knowing that others throughout the nation were also watching news coverage of the Kennedys' and King's assassination and funeral coverage.

Through their news viewing, interviewees understood themselves to be imaginatively connected to the nation, reinforcing the idea that even though they viewed these events in their living room, they understood themselves to be a part of a larger collective that was also mourning the loss of the Kennedys and King.[14] While this understanding did not always offer a sense of comfort, the idea that people were 'watching together' did seem to help participants feel they were not alone. Indeed Gary Laderman writes, "Although there are obvious grounds for comparison with Lincoln's assassination and funeral ceremonies, the presence of the media at the ceremonies, and

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[12] Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). My argument at first glance seems to be the opposite of Hass's whose work emphasizes how through the gifts and offerings left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., private citizens make their grief public. However, in many respects both Hass and I are concerned with similar issues, such as those that seem to center on how people personalize grief. I argue that through television viewing, people attempt to share it with others, even those not known to them.
[13] Homans, *Symbolic Loss*, 32. See also John Bowlby, *Attachment: Second Edition*, Attachment and Loss Series, Vol. 1, (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
[14] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

the mediated presence of Kennedy's dead body in the lives of millions of television viewers, created an instantaneous sense of common suffering on a scale never seen before."[15] Even though the social bonds participants felt that they shared with the three men had been severed, the bonds they held with others, even those they did not know, remained intact, temporarily strengthened around news coverage of their deaths and funerals.

Moreover, the passage of time has not necessarily diminished the bonds people shared with others over the loss of the three men. This is due in part to the ritual process of recollecting and retelling the details of their deaths and funerals. In particular, the practice of recalling specific narratives and images presented on television, both news and non news shows about their deaths, helps reaffirm connections (real and imaginary) established by interviewees and their families to the events themselves, as well as with others who also experienced those turbulent times. In this manner they were using television as way of reaffirming certain sacred stories[16] about each of the three men. These were stories that united many throughout the nation by providing a common fund of meaning for all to share.[17] For participants, some of the meaning rested on the hope that a more equitable and just America was a dream that could be achieved. Additionally, TV has been a means of keeping some connected to that particular time period in the nation's history, as well as a viable way of personalizing their relationships with all three men.[18]

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[15] Gary Laderman, *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), xxxi.
[16] See Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, Third Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 469.
[17] Albanese, *America*, 468.
[18] See chapter one of this dissertation where I use Albanese's discussion of sacred stories and television viewing to help frame interviewee's viewing of non news shows when they were younger.

A Long Twilight Struggle: Mourning the Kennedys and King[19]

> "The televised funeral of John Kennedy was an immediate attempt to give perspective, in ceremonial form, to the disparate mixture of shock, bewilderment, fragmentary information, and improvised protocol which flashed across the screen during those chaotic days."[20] - Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz

In 1963 a furor erupted over Jessica Mitford's book *The American Way of Death*, a scathing attack on the funeral industry. But the furor was temporarily eclipsed several months later by the public's grief over the assassination and funeral of John F. Kennedy when "the nation engaged in one of the most significant collective ceremonies in its history."[21] Kennedy's assassination and funeral did not, however, permanently overshadow ongoing discussions about Mitford's book; in fact, Laderman notes that the two historical coincidences were more connected than scholars and journalists have recognized. For example, Robert Kennedy expressed concern regarding the right decision about his brother's coffin and burial expenses, a concern directly influenced by "that girl's book."[22] While the public did not have an opportunity to gaze upon the remains of the President for the last time because he did not look "presentable," indeed it was said that he resembled a "wax dummy,"[23] millions throughout the nation, nevertheless, were able to view televised coverage of his funeral. What motivated people to pay such close and ongoing attention to the tragedy even after details of the assassination had been repeatedly presented, and even though coverage was at times

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[19] John F. Kennedy, "Presidential Inaugural Address," 1961, *bartleby.com*, accessed March 1, 2011, http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres56.html. "Now the trumpet summons us again—not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are—but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, 'rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation'—a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself."
[20] The epigraph for this section is drawn from *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992)*, 151.
[21] Laderman, *Rest in Peace*, xxxii.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Laderman, *Rest in Peace*, xxxvi.

banal and even boring?[24] For those I spoke with who could remember news coverage of John F. Kennedy's assassination and funeral it was their viewing that made mourning possible and helped render his death real. Additionally, their loss was experienced as personal even though they had never met the man or seen him in the flesh.

The individual murders of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. were received by most throughout the nation as both terrible and shocking. Collectively, however, the deaths of all three created a national mood of profound grief and anger as that era's most prominent and visible symbols of social justice and progress were killed in fairly quick succession, especially in the case of Robert Kennedy on June 6, 1968 and King on April 4 of that same year. News of each man's assassination ruptured interviewees' daily routine as they and their families suspended many normal activities, turned on their televisions, and began watching several consecutive days of news coverage.

Television coverage of John Kennedy's murder brought the difficult and shocking news from Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963, right into people's home and work places. Wilbur Schramm, professor of international communication at Stanford University writes, "The Kennedy story…was carried into more than 90 per cent of American homes by television so quickly that over half of all Americans apparently heard the news before the President was pronounced dead, only 30 minutes after the shooting."[25] Other past American presidents had been assassinated, but Kennedy was felt to be more intimately known by the public because a great deal of his presidency was

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[24] See William A. Mindak and Gerald D. Hursh, "Television's Functions on the Assassination Weekend," in *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis*, ed. Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 136.
[25] "Introduction: Communications in Crisis," *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public*, 3-4.

deliberately performed in front of news cameras. This strategy made him seem more accessible and known. Additionally, his death was made visible not because his actual murder was shown on television (this footage would not be released to the public until 1975), but because of the non-stop news coverage of both his assassination and funeral helped mark the event as urgent and momentous. Moreover, according to communication scholars Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, a new type of viewer was being produced by network television, one interested neither in commodities nor entertainment, but rather was, "finding in the television set a focus for expressions of grief."[26]

The way in which participants viewed the news of Kennedy's assassination and funeral paved the way for the way in which they and their families then viewed news coverage of the murders and funerals of Kennedy's brother Robert and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. five years later. Their recollections of the assassination of both Robert Kennedy and King were inextricably linked to an established understanding of how they and their families were already engaging news television to help them make sense of the crises at hand. This is not say that Kennedy's and King's deaths were not received as shocking and frightening, but rather that people knew to turn to the ordinary practice of television viewing in the context of an extraordinary event.

A little younger than John and Alice, Louisa did not mention JFK's assassination, recalling instead the 1968 murders of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy. She was already watching television coverage of Robert Kennedy with her family, who was preparing to give a speech at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, when he was shot by Sirhan B. Sirhan on June 5, 1968. "I remember when Bobby Kennedy was shot. I remember seeing him actually get shot. He was giving an acceptance speech and then I

[26] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*,124.

can't remember if it was a sequence of photos or footage…now I remember! The shot was actually captured in the aftermath." News coverage of the shooting began almost immediately after he was hit and according to Louisa, "Bobby's assassination played over and over." This repeated coverage of the entire sequence of events may explain why she confused seeing his actual shooting with seeing a photo of him taken in the immediate aftermath of his murder.

Similarly, she remembered how two months earlier she and her family had been "riveted" to their televisions as they watched the entire funeral coverage of Martin Luther King Jr., who was killed in Memphis by James Earl Ray on April 4. "I was sixteen years old when King and Bobby were assassinated. I remember their funerals and the famous AP photograph of King lying dead as people stood over him pointing towards the direction the shot had come from." Dayan and Katz assert that the funeral of John Kennedy served as a reference mark for King's as television "followed the casket, on a mule-drawn farm wagon, past headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in which King had his office, through black Atlanta to the Georgia state house."[27]

There were two key reason why she and her family watched the coverage of Kennedy's and King's deaths and funerals so closely. The first was a conscious awareness that a terrible history was in the making. Second, they were actively trying to construct an explanation of the unexplainable. They were searching for meaning in the midst of tremendous violence, chaos, and unexpected loss. This is why forty years after the deaths of Kennedy and King, during our interview, Louisa was still actively sorting through her memories, methodically working through the 'facts' of the 1968 news

[27] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 159.

coverage of both men's murders and funerals. It was as though if she could accurately remember the details then she would be able to graft together a more complete explanation – one that had somehow eluded her all these years.

Former Reuter's reporter turned communication professor Barbie Zelizer argues that the story of the Kennedy's assassination was in reality the story that American journalists told both to themselves and the public. Her fascinating book explores how, "journalists have established themselves as the story's authoritative spokespersons. Journalists have made the assassination story as much a tale about themselves as about the thirty-fifth president of the United States thus strengthening their position as cultural authorities concerning the events of the 'real world.'"[28] I agree with Zelier's analysis though I submit it is incomplete. While American journalists had the cultural authority to set the parameters for how the story would be told, effectively shaping collective memory, the fact remains that those interviewed also developed narratives that helped them fit certain details of Kennedy's assassination into their own individual lives. I am not claiming their narratives counter or resist the 'official' story put forth by journalists, but I would add that they acted more collaboratively than has been recognized by Zelizer in producing and reproducing people's private memories about that terrible and difficult time.

For example, those interviewees who could recall both Kennedy's and King's assassinations spoke not of their exact biological age when all three men were killed, but rather about where they were. In Alice's case, the news about JFK's assassination found its way to her as she was sitting in high school biology class in the mountains of North

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[28] *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

Carolina. John recalled finding out during his eighth grade English class diagramming sentences about heroism in rural Vermont. Alice in particular poignantly discussed the significance of JFK's life and death for her and her family. "We were staunch democratic supporters and Kennedy was the light after the Eisenhower era. We really believed he was going to bring about change. I mean he started the Peace Corps. We thought we were experiencing an American Renaissance with Kennedy and to have that snuffed out like that was really…it was hard."

Both Louisa and Alice spoke about King's and the Kennedy brothers' lifework in a manner that revealed how personal their relationships with both men felt. It was because of this imaginary, yet deeply meaningful connection to these men that their families felt a profound sense of double loss. Specifically, they mourned both what the Kennedys and King had come to symbolize, and they mourned the death of their personages. The connection to King and the Kennedy brothers was imaginary because neither Louisa nor Alice had ever met them. They knew them as most in the nation at that time knew them, through television. Schramm notes that in John F. Kennedy's case, "Television more than any of the other media, during the preceding years must have made Americans feel that they knew the Kennedys very well. To the American people the event (his assassination) was clearly a signal for grief and national mourning for a man that was as close at hand as the picture tube."[29] King was also widely photographed, traveling often with at least one or two photographers who continuously documented multiple aspects of his life for a number of different magazines and journals.[30]

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[29] Schramm, "Introduction: Communications in Crisis" in *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public,* 5.

[30] See Sharon Monteith, "The 1960s Echo On: Images of Martin Luther King Jr. as Deployed by White Writers of Contemporary Fiction", in *Media, Culture and the Modern African America Freedom Struggle*,

Yet, knowing JFK for example, solely through television did not diminish Alice's strong feelings for him. In part it was the way television coverage often presented his home life and presidency that helped make her connection to him feel genuine. However, it should be noted that television alone cannot produce personal and intimate feelings within people. In addition to television coverage of his life and untimely death, it was also the way her family spoke of Kennedy that produced such feelings. In fact both their words and feelings worked together to create an important relationship with him. As a family, they literally made a place for him in their lives by following news and other television coverage of both his presidency and home life, reading about him in newspapers and magazines. Moreover, it was the way Alice *chose* to interpret certain media coverage of his life as both meaningful and intimate.

Recalling Benedict Anderson's argument regarding nationalism and nationess, Anderson stresses how both are cultural artifacts of a particular kind. He defines the nation as an imagined political community and imagined as inherently limited and sovereign, writing, "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[31] Anderson emphasizes that what constitutes an imagined community does rest in a false/genuine dichotomy but rather in the style in which it is imagined. For Alice, the style of imagined closeness to Kennedy involved a sense that she "knew" both him and his family. She described him as

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ed. Brian Ward. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 255-272; See also Julian Bond, "The Media and the Movement: Looking Back from the Southern Front," in *Culture and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle*, 16-40.; For a comprehensive selection of photographs of King covering nearly the entire span of his life see Charles Johnson and Bob Alderman, *King: The Photobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Viking Studio, 2000).

[31] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

"handsome and young," while Jackie was seen as "elegant and poised." Alice also recalled how her family genuinely felt that they shared in significant aspects of the Kennedy's lives. For example she noted, "As silly as this sounds it [the White House] really was a kind of Camelot!" and, "When Jackie lost her baby it was just so sad."

The official news that Kennedy had died was delivered by Walter Cronkite who was in New York at CBS headquarters. Abandoning normally scheduled programs and commercials, the networks then "devoted themselves to the big story from Friday noon through Monday evening. From Friday noon until Monday evening, this was the story."[32] Both Alice and John recalled that from the moment they returned home from school, they watched television. They and their families remained "riveted" to their television sets for days on end starting with the coverage of his assassination, the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald and his subsequent murder by Jack Ruby, and ending with Kennedy's funeral procession. Similarly, Louisa also recalled her family's commitment to viewing television coverage of King's assassination, as well as his funeral. For these interviewees and their families continuous news viewing during these national tragedies seemed to be the thing to do, but why exactly?

Part of the answer might seem obvious: there was little else on television. However, this explanation alone cannot capture why participants' seemed so compelled to watch. Moreover, the fact that the murders of both Kennedys and King were critical events of national importance does not in itself sufficiently explain why neither John's, Alice's, nor Louisa's family made any move to turn off their televisions and walk away from the non-stop coverage. I argue that a key reason they continued to watch was because their focused, continuous viewing had become an index of their grief. Initially,

[32] Schramm, "Introduction: Crisis in Communication," 9-10.

viewing the news so closely and for so many consecutive hours seemed to place them in a kind of suspended state.[33] The suspended nature of this state seemed to involve the cessation of normal, daily activities and in their place, the emergence of a particularly focused, attentive viewing. Additionally, their individual domestic roles tended to temporarily cease as the entire family gathered around television effectively experiencing the news as a collective. Gradually, as their viewing continued for hours, sometimes day, it became symbolic of their grief and a ritual of mourning.

Given that ritual, as suggested by Jonathan Z. Smith, maintains it power on the fact that it is concerned with ordinary activities placed within an extraordinary context,[34] what then are some of the more concrete connections that can be made between cultural expressions of grief, mourning practices, and television news viewing? To begin with, watching television coverage of a national tragedy, such as the assassination of a major public figure, for hours (often days) on end cannot be interpreted solely as a mindless or even helpless act. Although this might have been the case for others, the people I interviewed recalled viewing a number of different American tragedies from the 1960s with a great deal of purpose, focus, and thoughtfulness . Again, they tended to watch with what Lembo has termed, "mindfulness."[35] In this manner and context, viewing had become a means of managing a painful and shocking rupture in the anticipated order of things. Interviewees did not watch TV because there was nothing else they could do, or because nothing else was on, they watched because it was an act that helped give

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[33] *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1997), 95.
[34] *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 109.
[35] Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*, "Television's power is working, it is doing these things to them, and yet, it cannot be separated, really, from the degree of mindfulness that characterizes their viewing activity. Their mindfulness is not reducible only to the workings of power, even when oppositional interpretations are included in the definition of power,"133-134.

expression to their grief. In other words, a key way in which participants attempted to manage surreal and difficult national events was to organize them around the realities of a recognizable, reliable and relatively ordinary activity – watching the news.

However, within the span of a few hours, both the location of their viewing and the viewing itself had become ritualized because it ceased to be routine evening news viewing occurring in an ordinary setting. Instead, it had become attentive viewing taking place in a temporarily altered place made sacred by people's use of it. Catherine Bell's work underscores the importance of the body in relation to ritualization. The body is essential because it is as she notes, "the circular production of a ritualized body which in turn produces ritual practices."[36] It is through her analysis that I interpret the descriptions people offered of being "glued" or "riveted" to the television. This intense act of viewing became ritualized, helping also to produce new ritual practices (in this case, those of mourning), which in turn assisted in the transformation of space from profane to sacred. Again, this transformation was a result of the *way* these rooms were being used in a ritual context, one that specifically centered on mourning. My argument is assisted by Smith, who, in offering a Durkheimian reading of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial notes that for Durkheim the "'sacred is a product of human agency, this or that is made or designated 'sacred.'"[37]

For example, after finding out JFK had been shot and then being dismissed from school, John remembered sitting in his grandmother's living room "glued" to the television. "My parents were out of town when it was all happening. We mainly just stayed in the living room watching the news and waiting for them to come home." How

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[36] *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93.
[37] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essay in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 111.

can this straightforward statement be contextualized in the argument put forth? First, there was a significant disruption in John's normal routine. Second, the living room has become a space more reminiscent of a parlor. The gathering of John's family as they watched nonstop and waited suggests an informal wake. Finally, although in John's family's case there was no physical body, the presence of one was symbolized by the television's nonstop coverage of Kennedy's assassination and funeral.

For John, Louisa, and Alice, their viewing also signaled both to themselves and to their families a recognition of their grief. Social historians Peter Stearns and Jan Lewis highlight the importance of thinking about emotion as more than an end product, but as linked to other institutions and behaviors.[38] The turn to some sort of news medium during a national event or crisis was a practice that was already an integral part of people's lives. However, not every crisis warranted ongoing and continuous television viewing. This practice was a newly emerging mode that began in the early 1960s by which participants confronted and were confronted by unanticipated nationally significant events, such as the assassination of JFK, thus revealing the need to make these types of events real and tangible, yet contained. This manner of news viewing can be interpreted as a new approach to mourning. One that is indicative of a search for more flexible ways of coming to terms particularly with unexpected loss and feelings of grief about someone known neither intimately nor personally.

Knowing a person (or understanding a significant historical event) through television represents a new kind of social relationship in the mid twentieth-century, one that is sometimes equally as important as those developed and maintained through direct,

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[38] *An Emotional History of the United States*, eds. Peter Stearns and Jan Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 2.

continuous and personal contact.[39] However, I would caution that this practice - mourning through news viewing - not be interpreted *solely* as an increasingly privatized and individualized manner of mourning.[40] In the case of mourning for JK, many throughout the nation had felt a special connection to him, a connection that was fostered in no small part by his use of the visual in presenting his work and family life. As Alice, John and Louisa mourned, they mentioned being aware that others were also watching the news and perhaps mourning because as Alice remarked, "We were a *nation* in mourning." In this way, according to rhetoric professor Judith Butler, their loss became, "condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as a community."[41]

If mourning is a process by which the past is declared resolved, finished, and dead[42] than I believe we remain a nation, not necessarily in an arrested state of mourning the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., but certainly one in which mourning has not reached its limit. This is not to argue that each individual citizen feels the burden of mourning these men. However, their collective deaths still hold a prominent place in the American imagination. This is demonstrated in American

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[39] C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, "Soap Fans' Subculture," *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), "Daytime actors know that this blending of their real personas and their fictional ones is central to the audience's viewing process. One actor told us that "fans respond to a character as they would to a real person, and then come to see the actor *as* that person. Another feels that many fans think they 'know' the character/actor because soaps come into fans' homes every day, letting viewers 'see [us] do more [emotionally] honest things than they see in real life," 50-51.

[40] "Privatization is the splitting of shared social experience into public and private dimensions of experience. It removed mourning practices from the public sector. Individualization is the conscious and intentional personalization of choices and attitudes. Gradually the burden of mourning became the responsibility of the individual," Homans, *Symbolic Loss*, 6.

[41] Afterword to *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, eds. David. L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 468.

[42] Eng and Kazanjian, *Loss*, 4.

popular culture by musical group Alien Ant Farm's and T.R. Uthco's[43] videos *The Eternal Frame* and *Media Burn*. The latter involves band members reenacting the assassination of JFK. This includes one of its male members dressed as an exact replica of Jackie Kennedy - pink suit, pillbox hat, and brown wig - as well as the use of slow motion camera work mimicking Abraham Zapruder's infamous home-movie film of that fateful car ride in Dallas.

Their work reminds us that "Photography, cinema, and television confront us with human referents whose mortality has been technologically suspended or annulled through the visual production of the perpetual simulacra of life."[44] Additionally, there is also the American punk rock group called the Dead Kennedys, who still perform, as well as U2's song "Pride (In the Name of Love)" from their 1984 album *Unforgettable Fire* about the life and death of Martin Luther King, Jr. A more recent visual example of the unfinished mourning around the death of JFK in particular was presented on AMC's hit television series *Mad Men*. Created and produced by Matthew Weiner, the show is set in the 1960s and depicts the work culture and home lives of Manhattan ad executives.[45]

During its third season, an episode entitled "The Grown Ups" centered on how each main character finds out about the assassination of John F. Kennedy.[46] Set against the backdrop of leading man Don Draper's (played by Jon Hamm) disintegrating marriage and the impending new marriage of his ad partner's spoiled daughter, Kennedy is shot and killed. Coming out of a meeting to unanswered telephones, an ad executive's

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[43] According to Video Databank, "T.R. Uthco was a San Francisco-based multi-media performance art collective that engaged in satirical critiques of the relation between mass media images and cultural myths, using irony, theatricality, and spectacle as its primary strategies." See "TR Uthco," *Videodatabank.org*, accessed August 15, 2010, http://www.vdb.org.

[44] Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning*, 13.

[45] See "Mad Men," *AMCTV.com*, accessed August 22, 2010, http://www.amctv.com.

[46] Aired November 1, 2009.

nightmare, Draper demands to know what the hell is going on only to find ad executives and secretaries alike gathered around a small black and white television. Muffled cries are heard as some of the women clutch handkerchiefs and wipe away tears; the news that Kennedy has been shot is then revealed to Draper and *Mad Men* viewers. In yet another poignant scene, ad executive Duck Phillips (Mark Moses) is at a hotel watching television with his lover Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss). The footage of Walter Cronkite announcing Kennedy's death is shown in a tight shot that then quickly bounces back to Duck's face as he looks on in quiet disbelief. Jumping up, he shakily mumbles that he has to call his kids and beelines to the telephone.

The episode reveals the ways in which Kennedy's death is still mourned and gives cultural expression to the grief that continues to linger about that time period in our nation's history. Professor of comparative literature at Northwestern Alessia Ricciardi argues most persuasively:

> …the most significant artworks of contemporary culture are not works of mourning in the Freudian sense. They do not enforce the gradual detachment of the libido or desire from the object. Instead, they function as resonant texts, textures, instances of an incipient spectropoetics, complicated webs of temporality in which memory is not only taken in, introjected, or accrued, but reworked, projected, and given back.[47]

There are countless scenes in this episode, beautifully framed and wonderfully scripted and in almost every one the television is on either in the background or front and center, giving *Mad Men* viewers the sense that they are watching the past relived. This is due not only to the actual news footage presented, but by witnessing how the show's characters, which viewers have come to know through other episodes, respond to the news coverage unfolding before them. This particular episode also produces a strange

[47] Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning*, 13.

sense of the past and present melding together because as viewers we already know many of the details of that day, and in an eerily prescient manner we also know that more assassinations will take place for the decade is over.

Melancholia

> Twenty-five years ago today was supposed to be a day of celebration. The United States had long ago won the space race with the Soviet Union. And by the time the space shuttle Challenger was set to launch in 1986, space missions seemed -well, almost routine. Christa McAuliffe, a high school teacher from Concord, New Hampshire, was chosen to be the first teacher in space on that mission. And in the days before the launch, she was asked if she was worried.
>
> Ms. CHRISTA MCAULIFFE (Former Teacher): No. No, actually not - probably because reality hasn't absolutely set in yet. But I really see the shuttle program as a safe program. You know, when we watch it go up, it's just - it's a thrill. But look at what happened in the last launch. At three seconds, a computer shut down because one of the secondary systems wasn't working. I felt really good about that, especially now. [48] - Michelle Norris

Speaking with interview participants in their late twenties and early thirties, one of the most significant catastrophes, in some instances their earliest recollection of one, was the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger in 1986. Most were at school watching the shuttle lift off on television with their classmates, and while they may not have watched either coverage of the Challenger's explosion for hours or days on end (unlike those who recalled watching the funeral coverage of both Kennedys and King) or the subsequent Presidential Commission's televised hearings in which NASA was asked to explain the explosion, the men in particular expressed sentiments closely associated with Freud's concept of melancholia. It became evident from their narratives that to this day, they were still struggling to make sense of and work through their sentiments about the explosion. Part of their struggle seemed to lay in the fact that the Challenger lift off,

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[48] The epigraph to this section is drawn from "NASA Ceremony Marks 25th Challenger Anniversary: The Two Way," January 28, 2011, All Things Considered, *Npr.org*, accessed February 22, 2011, http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=133306045.

which began as a celebration of national heritage and an expression of pride in U.S. advancement of science and technology, quickly turned into a violent and tragic event.

In thinking through their lasting reaction to the Challenger catastrophe, I turn to Freud's understanding of melancholia, which includes the notion that the past remains steadfastly alive in the present.[49] He writes, "The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition to all activity, and a lowering of the self regarding feelings."[50] Melancholia is a particular response to the loss of a loved object that has not necessarily died, but as Freud notes, "has become lost as an object of love…in yet other cases one feels justified in concluding that a loss of the kind has been experienced, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost, and may the more readily suppose that the patient too cannot consciously perceive what he has lost."[51]

In addition to my understanding of Freud's views on melancholia, I find English scholars David L. Eng's and David Kazanjian's presentation of melancholia as a condition of possibility and engagement rather than, as proposed by Freud, one of self dissatisfaction and reproach, also fitting for most interviewees. While Eng and Kazanjian concur that dissatisfaction is a salient dimension of melancholia, they add, "we find in Freud's conception of melancholia's persistent struggle with its lost objects not simply a 'grasping' and 'holding' onto a fixed notion of the past, but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains. This engagement generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as reimagining the future."[52] Here, the

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[49] Ricciardi, *Loss*, 3.
[50] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 165.
[51] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 166.
[52] Eng and Kazanjian, *Loss*, 4.

authors highlight how mourning becomes possible though melancholia's ongoing and continuous engagement with various forms of loss.[53]

Like Eng and Kazanjian, I argue that the condition of melancholia was not capaciously negative or even necessarily emotionally detrimental for interviewees. Instead, melancholia in the context of having viewed the Challenger explosion can be understood as an important filter through which participants both recognized and experienced a connection to this particular tragedy. Additionally, critical features of melancholia, particularly the unending grief and preoccupation with loss, allowed male interviewees to engage with their loss in an ongoing and meaningful, if not always comfortable or comforting, manner. In particular their dreams and fantasies about space exploration and technology and science were altered. Additionally, some of their assumptions concerning death were ruptured and an introduction to a certain type of loss emerged. Like mourning, I argue that melancholia is also a performance - a practice that for some helps keep memories of certain events relevant and by extension, that particular time in their lives as well.

For those interviewees who discussed the assassinations of both Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, Jr., while their mourning is not necessarily complete, they have come to an understanding about their loss. This can be attributed in part to the passage of time, as well as their age (both during the 1960s and at the time of the interview), but I argue that it also has to do with both the context of these events, and the manner in which they viewed them. Perhaps most importantly there was the presence (or suggestion) of a body for them to grieve over, and through their viewing, they were also able to attend the televised funerals held for all three men so were granted the

[53] Ricciardi, *Loss*, 5.

opportunity to engage in a collective process of mourning with others throughout the nation within the privacy of their homes. Those interviewees who watched news coverage of the Challenger lift off and its unexpected explosion, watched in a very different situational context from those following the coverage of the Kennedys and King. Moreover, the destruction of the Challenger almost immediately seemed to symbolize multiple losses at once. It was not that the assassinations of the Kennedys and King did not have this multiplicity of meaning, but they symbolized different kinds of losses associated more with the loss of ideals regarding the nation, the goodness of people, and the fate of the political, social landscape. The Challenger catastrophe seemed to signify for participants fairly personal, individually-held notions centered on issues of safety, security, and containment.

Melancholic Object: The Challenger Explosion

> "Media events are rituals of coming and going. The principals make ritual entries into a sacred space and if fortuned smiles on them they make ritual returns."[54] – Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz

In May 1961 John F. Kennedy asked Congress for an additional seven to nine billion dollars to advance the U.S. space program. His goal was to put a man on the moon and return him to earth before the decade was out.[55] Concerned not so much with science as with beating the Russians in the space race, Kennedy framed his argument as the triumph of democracy over communism,[56] saying:

> Those who came before us made certain that this country rode the first waves of the industrial revolutions, the first waves of modern invention, and the first wave of nuclear power, and this generation does not intend to founder in the backwash of the coming age of space. We mean to be a part of it--we mean to lead it. For the eyes of

[54] The epigraph to this section is drawn from *Media Events*, 119.
[55] Author Unknown, "JFK in History: Space Program," *JFKLibrary.org*, accessed August 19, 2010, http://www.jfklibrary.org.
[56] Ibid.

> the world now look into space, to the moon and to the planets beyond, and we have vowed that we shall not see it governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace."[57]

Although his primary goal for the program was not realized until several years after his assassination, when in 1969 Apollo 11 returned safely to earth, Kennedy's space program initiated a kind of golden age of American space exploration.[58] The various space missions and discoveries over the years seemed to have left an indelible imprint on the minds of several men I interviewed as were growing up in the late 1970s early 80s. While they may not have made an explicit or even conscious link between space exploration and the construction of a glorified national past, without a doubt space was interpreted as an exciting, albeit risky adventure that as Americans they had an emotional investment in, regardless of their young age. None of the interviewees ever imagined an explosion such as the one that destroyed the Challenger in 1986 could happen.

Viewing its destruction via live television dampened their sense of wonder and romance about space travel and left them struggling years later to make sense of the destruction they witnessed. The Challenger had become for these men a melancholic object. Homans writes, "The lost object is a symbol or rather a system of symbols and not a person. And the inner work of coming to terms with the loss of such symbols is by no means always followed by generative or creative repair or recovery, but as often by disillusionment, or disappointment, or despair."[59] The type of words they used to describe their recollection of viewing the explosion reveals a loss that has yet to be

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[57] John F. Kennedy, "Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort," 1962, *JFKLibrary.org*, accessed August 19, 2010, http://www.jfklibrary.org.
[58] See David Scott and Alexi Leonov, *Two Sides of the Moon: Our Story of the Cold War Space Race* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004) for a first-hand account of Apollo 15 commander David Scott's and cosmonaut Alexi Leonov's experience and participation in the race to land a man on the moon.
[59] Homans, *Symbolic Loss*, 20.

resolved. The most obvious and significant question is why did these men feel so emotionally distraught about the Challenger? What did its destruction symbolize to them and how did viewing it on television contribute to this condition of melancholia they seemed to possess years after the failed lift-off?

Not all interviewees, most of whom were in grade school when the explosion happened, idealized the space program or experienced pronounced feelings of loss or melancholia when the shuttle blew up. A number of women also mentioned watching news coverage of the Challenger, but its catastrophic end did not seem to affect them in the same way it affected Neil, Mark, and Robert. For example, Julia noted, "I wasn't sure that I understood what was going on. I have this image in my head of the shuttle tilting and then it explodes. I think my first awareness of the magnitude or context of a catastrophe was 9/11." Why was there such a gender difference in reaction to this event? It may have had something to do with the fact that space exploration has traditionally been primarily a male dominated/oriented field. Moreover, there seems to have been a shift in attitudes over the last twenty years (since the 1980s) in terms of encouraging young women to be more involved in both math and the sciences, which was not as present when female interview participants were in school. Today a young woman's preexisting interest in either or both is generally nurtured and supported. It may have also been that the women I spoke with simply had no concrete interest in anything space or space travel-related when they were younger. Whatever the reason, it just did not hold the same appeal and while women repeatedly mentioned viewing the explosion, they offered little to no follow-up.

The men, however, shared a number of similar feelings all which I understood to be associated with a pronounced sense of loss. Freud, in perceiving a relationship between loss and melancholia, writes, "From the analogy of grief we should have to conclude that the loss suffered by the melancholiac is that of an object; according to what he says the loss is one in himself."[60] Through their persistent struggle with loss, male interviewees also appeared to be confronting their grief about the destruction of the Challenger shuttle and all it symbolized for them. Rather than a complete inability to mourn this catastrophe, their narratives tend to reveal the ways they experienced both a sense of melancholia and mourning about it. As Judith Butler writes, "It may be that the distinction finally between mourning and melancholia does not hold, not only for the reasons that became apparent in Freud, but also because they are, inevitably, experienced in a certain configuration of simultaneity and succession."[61]

Now in their early to mid-thirties, most interviewees were then in the sixth or seventh grade, watching live television coverage of the shuttle lift-off with their classmates and teachers. So many recalled being at school that day because as mentioned previously, for first time since the inception of the space program, a teacher had been selected to be a part of the crew. Several made mention of how a television set was wheeled into their classrooms, further contributing to the excitement of the day, while others recalled watching in their school auditoriums, also a thrilling change from the day's usual routine. Their anticipation over what was to be an exciting and thrilling event was swiftly transformed into an experience of shock and disbelief as seconds after lift-off, the Challenger blew up.

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[60] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 168.
[61] Butler, Afterword to *Loss*, 472.

According to NASA officials, the explosion was due to a failed O-ring booster in the right rocket booster and the cold weather, which ultimately claimed both crew and craft.[62] However, sociologist Diane Vaughan notes that this is not the whole story, but rather the explanation that most spared NASA any direct blame.[63] While failed technology was partly at fault, she writes, "The Presidential Commission created to investigate the disaster revealed that the O-Ring problem had a well-documented history at the space agency. Earliest documentation appeared in 1977 – nearly four years before the first shuttle flight in 1981.[64] Vaughn adds that the cause of the disaster had everything to do with what she describes as the "banality of organizational life and facilitated by an environment of scarcity and competition, an unprecedented, uncertain technology, incrementalism, patterns of information, routinization, organizational and interorganizational structures, and a complex culture."[65]

While the issues Vaughn raises are not directly connected to the kinds of responses given by male interviewees, they do shed light on the serious problems that led to the Challenger's explosion. Certainly the men expressed a deep sense of disappointment in NASA, as well as an insecurity regarding the stability of space-related technology. For example, Mark recalled that "the explosion dampened my spirits. Space seemed to play a big role in the media at the time such as Star Wars, cold war, and space camp. I remember looking out the front door at the sky that day." Robert's response was even more expressive, remarking on how to this day, he could still remember in detail the

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[62] Author Unknown, "Mission Archives," *NASA.gov*, accessed August 26, 2010, http://www.nasa.gov/centers/kennedy/shuttleoperations/orbiters/challenger-info.html.
[63] *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[64] Vaughn, *Challenger Launch*, xi-xii.
[65] Vaughn, *Challenger Launch*, xiv.

events of the explosion. He added, "That was probably the most traumatic thing I had seen as a kid. I just recall watching it and then the shocking explosion. It was so unbelievable." When I asked him to explain why it felt so traumatic, he again used the word shocking and said, "I had just never seen anything like that before and it was a change in my schema of the world. How could a spacecraft built by the U.S. just explode? How could all those people die within seconds? It was hard to make sense of it because I had never seen anything like it before."

Joe Palca, science reporter for National Public Radio, in a report for NPR's *Morning Edition* about the 25th anniversary of the Challenger explosion, interviewed Bruce Lewenstein who believes that the long-term impact of the Challenger disaster may be in how it altered the way many Americans view science.[66] Palca notes, "Lewenstein is a professor of science communication at Cornell University. He says NASA had always been the good-news agency, freely sharing science news with journalists. But after Challenger, everyone at the agency clammed up - including scientists." Lewenstein notes, "People had this image that science didn't operate that way. But in fact, modern science, big science, does operate that way, and Challenger was one of the ways we discovered that -and perhaps one of the most dramatic ways we discovered that."[67] Lewenstein's comments underscore Vaughn's in-depth look at NASA's organizational structure and their attempt to side step any real responsibility for the Challenger catastrophe. In this way, Palca continues, "Lewenstein says journalists and the public

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[66] "Lessons Linger: Twenty-five Years after Challenger Explosion," January 27, 2011, Morning Edition, *NPR.org*, accessed February 22, 2011, http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=133238665.
[67] Ibid.

came to understand that big science behaved like other big institutions: sometimes making mistakes, and sometimes hiding the truth."[68]

Neil, like Mark, mentioned that he too recalled looking up at the sky after the explosion and thought it "seemed distant." He went on to say, "The Challenger explosion created all these images in my head, like about the sky." When I pressed him further it seemed that his feelings were connected both to the event itself and the way it had been reported, saying, "I can remember that certain people report things in a way that makes me feel more scared and some people report things in a way that makes me feel reassured. Sometimes knowledge itself is reassuring, but it depends on how the knowledge is conveyed that it can be really frightening." It is possible that in addition to the horror of viewing the explosion, what might have also concerned and upset Neil was the confusion, misinformation, and even cover-up that ensued in the aftermath. In other words, how the Challenger's explosion was being explained by a number of institutions like NASA, the media, and possibly even their own teachers may have further contributed to Neil's attitude about what happened that day.

Again, the context in which Neil, Robert, and Mark watched the destruction of the Challenger shuttle was quite different than how older participants watched the assassination and funeral coverage of the Kennedys and King. This was because the events themselves and the way they were approached by news television were different. One salient difference was that the Challenger lift-off began as a celebratory event that had taken on ritual dimensions, and ended as a tragedy. Specifically, it was supposed to be a ceremonial media event, one in which the public was invited to view on television by NASA, and by extension the astronauts themselves. Dayan and Katz add that these

[68] Ibid.

types of broadcast events are presented with both a sense of reverence and ceremony, writing, "The journalists who preside over them suspend their normally critical stance and treat their subject with respect, even awe."[69] Interview participants remembered having a direct and immediate experience of the preparations made by their schools for the upcoming media event. Indeed for interviewees, it seemed structured almost entirely for their benefit, with the time and space of the viewing designated as special, set apart from their normal school routine. The very space of their classrooms was transformed by the decision to wheel in a television, not typically present except for unusual and significant occasions, and the usual school activities for that time of day temporarily suspended. Additionally, a shared sense of symbolic meaning around the scheduled lift off had been cultivated well in advance of this day by their teachers, school administrators, and the media.

Moreover, the presence of a civilian on board the shuttle must have given the already much-anticipated spectacle a certain charge. McAuliffe represented the possibilities of how an ordinary high school teacher could be invited to participate in an extraordinary event, effectively becoming a part of American history. She was among the special few chosen for a glorious and exciting mission, and was about to both make and become a part of space travel history. Finally, and perhaps even most importantly to interviewees, the day was supposed to be fun and pleasurable. Any break in the daily school routine was usually welcomed and this one also centered an exciting, much-anticipated event.

The explosion of the Challenger was for most interviewees simply "unbelievable." Scott, who is older than the other three men by about fifteen years, was

[69] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 7.

in his law school cafeteria at the time and remembers walking by the television in the law school common room when the Challenger blew up. "I was in my early twenties when the Challenger exploded. When it happened, the whole place went silent. It's just…there was a sense of disbelief and shock. I had never seen a reaction like that again until 9/11. It was like, holy crap!" His words truly echoed the way male interviewees seemed to feel. This was due in part to the suddenness in which explosion occurred. While there had been difficulties with previous space missions before, such as the concern over whether the Apollo 13 crew would make it back to earth, nothing quite like the Challenger catastrophe had ever been viewed on live TV by so many at once.[70] This, along with their young age, meant that Neil, Mark, and Robert were simply unprepared to absorb or even make sense of what was happening. While Scott spoke of being shocked at the time of the event, memories of it did not seem to bother or haunt him the same way other crises did. Specifically, he did not seem to share the same feelings of loss or even melancholia the others expressed. So why did this catastrophe have such an impact on Neil and the others?

To begin with, the explosion happened so quickly that it was virtually impossible for them to rely on past ritual practices of news viewing. Moreover, their young age meant that they may not have yet developed a sense of how to approach news viewing in a manner that helped ritually confine and contain difficult and shocking news. Therefore, lacking the ability to make sense of what it was they were viewing, the event was seen as dangerously uncontained and threatening. No longer confined to the boundaries of the

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[70] Several Gemini missions experienced a number of malfunctions. In particular Gemini VIII began rolling wildly in space and Gemini X ran short of fuel though they made it back to earth without any problems. However, these missions were never shown on live television. See "Gemini: Stepping Stone to the Moon -- 40 Years Later," *Nasa.gov*, accessed September 10, 2010, http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/gemini/index.html.

television screen, the unexpected and sudden explosion was perceived as effectively contaminating the spatial environment of their classrooms, and even the sky itself. This can statement can be understood in relation to the quote at the start of this section regarding how media events are rituals of coming and going.[71] In this instance, the ritual was not completed as the craft and its crew did not come back, which may have had the affect of emotionally stranding Mark, Robert, and Neil, who recalled, among other feelings, a sense of loss and bewilderment by the mid-air explosion. Moreover, the sacred space of space itself was in essence defiled by the crew's sudden and terrible deaths, transforming it from one of adventure, excitement, and mystery, into one of destructive danger.[72]

Viewing the shuttle catastrophe for these participants broke with what I have suggested were previously established understanding of news viewing - that viewing the news often helps people make sense of catastrophes. Viewing for these three interviewees, instead, became an act of sheer helplessness. Rather than an index of their grief, it became an index of their anxiety and dislocation. Instead of managing a painful rupture in the anticipated order, viewing the news had become inextricably linked to the rupture itself. Indeed, their narratives revealed how viewing the Challenger catastrophe left them in a liminal state where they in some ways still remain, struggling to come to terms with its destruction and the death of its crew. More specifically, I would argue that viewing news coverage of the shuttle's lift off was a vicarious rite of passage for the young viewers, one in which there was a ritual separation and entry into a liminal period,

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[71] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 119.

[72] See Kenneth Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscape of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press/Austin, 2003) for a fascinating and highly useful discussion about the how landscapes are transformed both physically and symbolically by violence.

which Dayan and Katz note is a time filled with trials and teaching.[73] As interviewees watched the astronauts themselves go through the actual ritual, they (via television) went with them and were ultimately, somewhat like the Challenger crew, unable to complete the ritual, returning not to classroom in a newly assumed role (as experienced viewer or knowledgeable viewer), but rather were left in state of liminality which as the years passed, became a condition of melancholia.[74]

In other words, as witnesses to the event, male interviewees seem to traverse the same ritual stages as the crew. Again Dayan and Katz note, "If we accept the invitation to assume a ritual role, we take leave of everyday routine together with our heroes; experience the liminality of the sojourn; hold our breath awaiting, or despairing of, their return; and reposition ourselves to reassume everyday realities when the event is over."[75] However, the event ended in the worse possible way. Neil, Robert, and Mark were then left grappling with enormously complicated issues such as unexpected death, loss, and tragedy. For the three, their loss was also symbolic in that the Challenger explosion put an end to a number of their cherished ideals they held about space as adventurous and exciting, about astronauts as heroes and survivors of difficult missions, and of the stability and reliability of technology.

Unlike the deaths of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., there were no bodies in which to grieve over because those belonging to the crew had disintegrated in the air. The nation as a whole was denied critical elements often desired for one last farewell, a last look at the body and even a chance to 'touch' the casket. The deaths of the astronauts disrupted interviewees' understanding not only of what was

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[73] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 119.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 119-120.

supposed to happen that day, but perhaps also previously held assumptions of what dying meant. In some ways, the deaths of the crew members seemed to threaten a sense of Neil, Mark, and Robert's own continuity. I do not mean to suggest that they were suddenly afraid of dying (though this might have been the case) or that they metaphorically died with the crew, but the reality that there were no recoverable bodies made it difficult for them to come to terms with that day. The details of the Challenger catastrophe rendered it nearly impossible for them to move through (in a Freudian sense) the mourning process; in other words, to work through their grief.

What remains for them to this day is a sense of unease, anxiety, and unresolved grief about what happened to the Challenger. Yet for Neil, Robert, and Mark, their sense of melancholia was also evidence that though television, in their own small but real way, they experienced this catastrophe. Rather than a failure of mourning, their melancholia might allow for the possibility of their one day being able to mourn this difficult event. Regardless of whether this is achieved, in the context of this dissertation, their melancholia speaks to the often profound emotional connection and investment people have when it comes to viewing televised tragedies.

The next chapter focuses on the particular limits of news television's ability to offer any lasting sense of consolation on September 11, 2001 and in the days that followed. Its emphasis is on how repetitive news viewing was understood as a confusing choice in mourning strategy for people as they struggled with competing impulses to watch for days on end, and to escape the terrible and unrelenting news. Interviewees spoke of a growing awareness that continuous viewing was in fact directly adding to their deep sense of anxiety, anger, and grief. They expressed these sentiments not only in

relation to the actual events of September 11, but also with regards to the news coverage that took place. In particular, I use ritualization as a lens through which to interpret the news viewing interview participants did on September 11, 2001, but with a focus on how their viewing also exaggerated a sense of uncertainty about the attacks themselves, news television's portrayal of them, and their own approach to news viewing. At its most basic level, this next chapter is concerned with *how* people viewed television news coverage on September 11, presenting the experience of viewing a historically significant national catastrophe on television as described and interpreted by a small group of interviewees. More specifically, it focuses on understanding the ritual nature of their news viewing in the context of 9/11. Here, I argue that viewing, to borrow from the work of Robert Wuthnow, represented not so much a response to pre-existing certainties, but was a means of generating such uncertainties.[76]

[76] See *Meaning and Moral Order*: An Exploration in Cultural Analysis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 121.

Chapter Four
Betwixt and Between: 9/11 Television News Coverage and the Struggle to Make Meaning

> "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arranged by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."[1] - Victor Turner

Quoting American critic and essayist Wyatt Mason, cultural studies scholar Dana Heller writes, "'the destruction of the World Trade Center is the most exhaustively imaged disaster in human history.' From the moment Americans became aware that a plane crashed into the World Trade Center, television intimately directed the sense-making strategies that individuals, coworkers, and communities came to bear upon the unfolding events."[3] While news television was without a doubt intricately involved in directing sense-making strategies, the people I spoke with were not simply directed by the news, but were in fact involving themselves in a well-established ritual of turning towards the news during a national crisis in an effort to piece together information with the *help* of the news. This turn to the news, in more practical terms, meant that interviewees decided which channel to watch, choosing also when and how much television to watch.

In addition to TV news, they also turned to those around them such as family members, co-workers, and friends. Indeed, conversations participants remembered having with others were rich and varied, and tended to reveal a great deal about how members of this particular group tried to make meaning and sense of such an enormous catastrophe. Additionally, the turn to others demonstrated how they both sought and offered a sense of comfort and stability in chaotic and fearful time. Even those

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[1] The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1997), 95.
[3] See "Introduction: Selling a Commodity," in *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 7.

participants who watched news of coverage of 9/11 alone recalled immediately calling friends, family members, and other loved ones for information updates and emotional reassurance. In fact, both viewing the news in the context of a national tragedy and communicating with others by phone (and by email) can be understood as critical components belonging to a web of self-directed actions geared towards making sense of unfolding events.[4]

Any claim that on September 11 people's viewing and efforts to make meaning was directed by the news implies that they were entirely at the mercy of the news. It distorts the myriad of ways the people I spoke with tend to use (or dismiss) news information, how they determine the depth and duration of news television they wish to watch, and how they seek out other sources for information. However, interview participants had no voice in either the news coverage itself, or any official narratives regarding the attack. And yet, they perceived news professionals themselves as having only a tentative grasp on what was happening and how to report it. Separate from the fact they were witnessing an extraordinary series of events on September 11, one explanation for their ongoing, focused viewing has to do with the hope they held that the news stations would eventually relay some kind of useful, accurate information. The reasons behind why interviewees viewed the news on 9/11, in most cases for hours on end, were manifold and will be addressed in this chapter.

Viewing television coverage of nationally significant tragedies is a complicated modern ritual and for interviewees symbolized their intellectual and emotional

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[4] See Stephen P. Spitzer and Nancy S. Spitzer, "Diffusion of News of Kennedy and Oswald Deaths," in *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public*, eds. Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker, 99-111 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965) for the process by which people find out and inform each other about major news events.

involvement with the crisis in the moment. "Ritualization," according to ritual scholar Catherine Bell, "is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other usually quotidian activities."[5] It is through the ritualization of news viewing that vicarious experience was made possible, allowing interview participants to witness and absorb the significance of 9/11 albeit from a remote distance. Not all news viewing is ritual. As discussed earlier it is often situational and relies on certain social conditions to transform into something quite meaningful and more important.[6] In the second chapter, interviewees and their families understood watching the news as one ritual among many employed on a nightly basis; the third chapter demonstrated how, in the context of a national tragedy or crisis, people's news viewing becomes more focused, elaborate, and even formal, often dominating all other household activities. The assassinations of both Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, Jr. were closely connected to sentiments of grief in relation to mourning, while unresolved grief in the aftermath of the Challenger explosion was linked with a condition of melancholia. Thinking about different types of situational news viewing and positioning them within a discussion about ritual effectively enriches how news viewing can be understood as having both expressive and formal dimensions, demonstrating both its passive and performative aspects. Additionally, viewing the news can be imbued with both ordinary and extraordinary dimensions sometimes simultaneously in one sitting.

A focus on ritualization highlights how their viewing also exaggerated a sense of uncertainty about the attacks themselves, the portrayal of the attacks on the news, and

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[5] *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74.
[6] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 109.

their own approach to news viewing. At its most basic level, this chapter is concerned with *how* people viewed television news coverage on September 11, presenting the experience of viewing a historically significant national catastrophe on television as described and interpreted by a small group of interviewees. More specifically, it focuses on understanding the ritual nature of their news viewing in the context of 9/11. In particular, I argue that viewing, to borrow from the work of Robert Wuthnow, represented not so much a response to pre-existing certainties, but was a means of generating such uncertainties.[7]

Most interviewees continued to view the news even though it consisted mainly of the same endless loop of images shown repeatedly, and even though it seemed to them new information was slow to be released. Was this a blind commitment to a ritual that had ceased to be useful or make sense? What was it about this ritual in the context of September 11 that felt destabilizing for people, yet led them to remain fixed on watching the news? I argue that while their ritual viewing was a response to social uncertainty caused both by the attacks and news coverage of them, it also exaggerated particular aspects of the ritual itself, making the practice of news viewing an act that caused them both anxiety and anguish.

One of the primary goals here is to examine what was behind this viewing in an effort to shed some light on a process that has been little understood.[8] What work that has been done on the production of the news during a national tragedy tends to overemphasize the power and effect of the news on viewers, portraying the news as an

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[7] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 121.

[8] See Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, "Defining Media Events," *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). Dayan and Katz use scholarly work done on the anthropology of ceremony to help explain the process of mass communication.

all-powerful, oppressive force that succeeds mainly in traumatizing viewers.[9] Additionally, their viewing did not seem directly connected with either a fascination about the attacks or their tragic outcomes that religion scholar Edward T. Linenthal observed in relation to the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing. Linenthal notes:

> There was a kind of wide spread fascination with the experiences of those granted most favored cultural status as 'victims' and 'survivors', exposed to worlds of danger that most people did not know. There was an intense desire to 'bump up' against these worlds by touching – from a safe distance – the traumatic experiences of those immersed in the world of the bombing.[10]

Based on their interview responses, people's viewing of September 11 encompassed much more than a desire to "bump up against" trauma. Indeed, their approach to viewing was quite complex, appearing at times somewhat paradoxical because it involved a growing attitude of distrust and disdain for the news, and yet was often accompanied by an unwavering, ongoing attention to it. Nevertheless, this seeming contradiction between attitude and practice makes sense given some people's approach to the news in less extraordinary times.

As mentioned earlier, some participants regularly took a certain kind of pleasure in watching news shows they actively dislike or even news personalities they cannot stand. However, something distinct was occurring in the context of viewing televised news of the September 11 attacks. In this particular case, the schism between attitude and practice highlights how interviewees were caught between an old ritual, a new type of catastrophe, and a new approach to the way television news reported the catastrophe.

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[9] See Fritz Breithaupt, "Rituals of Trauma: How the Media Fabricated September 11," in *Media Representations of September 11*, eds. Frankie Y. Bailey, et al., 67-82 (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003); Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett, "'America Under Attack': Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11," in *Media Representations of September 1*, 85-101; Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism,* ed. Patricia Mellencamp, 222-239 (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[10] *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

As will soon be discussed in more detail, interviewees felt that reporters, anchors, and other news professionals inadvertently offered a highly visible and ongoing demonstration of their inability to gain a handle on the story. This fumbling with how to report what was happening had the effect of undermining their authority, leaving interviewees in a liminal state, what anthropologist Victor Turner has identified in his work as being "betwixt and between."

The ritual of watching the news during a national tragedy no longer held the same meanings as it previously had because along with being confronted by a new type of catastrophe, interviewees also believed the news they were watching as having no real grasp on how to either properly inform the public, present the story, or assuage their fears. The 24-hour news cycle exacerbated the three conditions because as the day and the news wore on, participants were continually reminded of how little was definitively known. In the context of September 11, ritual news viewing became ambiguous, becoming for many a confusing source of both psychological solace and a cause of deep distress. An essential part of this chapter is concerned with establishing the details of when and how people first found out about the terrorist attacks on September 11, and this is where I begin.

Finding Out: Turning Towards the News

> "This just in. You are looking at obviously a very disturbing live shot there. That is the World Trade Center, and have [sic] unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the Towers of the World Trade Center[11] ." - Carol Lin

> "I woke up and turned on the TV and that was really weird because that was when I was watching CNBC a lot in the morning and I know this is weird, but I woke up and as long

[11] The epigraph to this section is drawn from Carol Lin, Anchor, "CNN Breaking News: Terrorist Attack on the United States," *CNN.com*, September 2001, accessed January 12, 2011, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0109/11/bn.01.html.

> as the ticker was going on the bottom of the screen, than the world is basically alright. When I woke up the ticker wasn't doing its thing."[12] -Neil

All interview participants were asked where they were on September 11, and how they found out about the attack. The purpose of these questions was to gain a more precise contextual understanding about their decision to turn towards the news. Some were already watching the news as part of their morning routine when they found out that a commercial airplane had been flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. However, the fact that they continued viewing speaks to how they had come to rely on the news for information during a catastrophe, and was an indication of how certain stories and images would play an intricate role in how people remembered the attack years later.[13] In addition, a discussion of where they were when they first heard the news highlights the importance of location and place in reconstructing memories, thus providing people with both a symbolic and physical context, both of which aided them in their attempts to frame significant events that have occurred in their lifetime.[14]

In terms of physical location, interviewees were either at home or already at work. Neil was one of those at home. He recalled turning on the television first thing upon waking up, something he did every morning, and was confronted what he described as "chaos."[15] Similarly, Robert was also at home trying to finish viewing a DVD when his girlfriend called to tell him about the first plane. "I was in complete shock and turned on

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[12] The epigraph to this section is drawn from Interview by Leah Rosenberg, August 2007, Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

[13] See Keval Kumar, et al., "Construction of Memory," in *News in Public Memory: An International Study of Media Memories across Generations,* ed. Ingrid Volkmer, 211-224, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006); Steven Anderson, "History TV and Popular Memory," *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, eds. Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, 19-36 (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

[14] See Kumar, et al., *News in Public Memory*, 213-218; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis Cosner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1992).

[15] See September 11 Television Archive, *Archive.org*, September 2001, accessed January 10, 2011, http://www.archive.org/details/nbc200109110912-0954 for videos of news coverage of September 11 from all major networks (NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, BBC, Fox).

the news which was horrifying." He recalled then watching television for at least three to four consecutive hours. Later on in the interview, he repeated almost verbatim the same words, stating, "It was all a complete and total horror." Although neither Neil nor Robert explicitly made mention of this, I argue that being alone in their apartments (neither had roommates) lent a specific dimension to their memories of that day. For example, their narratives frequently conveyed a sense of being almost completely overwhelmed by what they were viewing. In contrast, those who watched in the company of others, though deeply affected, mentioned having other tasks to attend to, and other people to distract them. Additionally, Robert and Neil seemed more directly threatened by the enormity of attacks and by the collapse of the Towers. While others expressed concern for those they knew living in major U.S. cities, their comments were brief and in some instances, seemed made almost in passing. However, Rob made mention of how he was afraid that people he knew in big cities might be killed in future attacks, while Neil stated he did not like the feeling that people he knew were living in big cities. A point of interest with regard to their comments is how neither mentioned knowing anyone in either city that was actually targeted. Instead, their fears seemed based on what they imagined could or would happen to cities and people they cared about.

Scott was also at home getting ready for work when he heard about the first plane on the radio. He then rushed to turn on the television. After seeing the second plane crash, he went to work and immediately turned on the little television kept in the office. Recalling how he and his co-workers gathered around the set, he added, "We watched the rest of the buildings collapse and everything on a little bitty TV smaller than this computer screen!" The obvious contrast between the magnitude of the catastrophe and

the tiny screen made Scott laugh ruefully. Mark, who at the time was a university music instructor, was already at work when he found out about the attack from his students, but he too recalled a strange, unnerving contrast between the enormity of the attack and the size and position of the screen, which for him, exaggerated their terrifying aspects. By the time he located a television, the Twin Towers had collapsed and he remembered how the TV set was mounted above eye level so that he had to look up, which made it seem as though the massive pile of debris, which included a mountain of twisted steel, was repeatedly falling on him.

Scott went on to discuss his preferred news station, rather than the one he watched, remarking that he wished he could have watched one of his favorite newscasters, Peter Jennings instead of Dan Rather, stating, "I was for awhile very partial to the ABC crowd with Ted Koppel and Peter Jennings…and Jeff Greenfield. When they were all at ABC, those years before Peter Jennings died, that was excellent particularly for political coverage. It was a great news team and I tended to watch them a good bit." His comments emphasize how deeply personal watching the news can be especially during a national crisis. Other interview participants also mentioned wanting to hear the news from specific news professionals rather than others. For example, Neil made a similar comment remarking that although he flipped between channels, he settled mainly on CNN because, "It was kind of like you wanted to see people you normally see, people that were more familiar." Amanda too noted her preference for watching a particular channel, saying, "At home, on CNN I began watching *American Morning* with Paula Zahn. I think that summer CNN was rolling out a massive new change in the network so *American Morning* was one the new shows. For some reason, I was comforted by it,

trusted the news I was getting. It's how I started my day every day from September 12 onward." Their responses reflect an earlier discussion about the faith and trust people have in certain news professionals, underscoring how important it is to viewers that they can rely on them for information and comfort, most especially during troubling and difficult times. Even more specific, they expressed a personal preference for particular news people to break *bad* news to them.

For most, however, people they knew personally told them about the attacks, either by phone, email, or in person. They found out through romantic partners, family members, co-workers, and in Susan's case, by one of the men painting her house. Nearly everyone expressed a sense of complete disbelief at what they were being told. Some, like Louisa who found out from a co-worker she knows quite well, thought the person was not only joking, but was maybe even someone possibly pretending to be her co-worker. "I was sitting in my office and I remember Linda called me up and said, 'Do you have your TV on over there?' and I said, 'Who is this?' and she said, "The World Trade Center has just been attacked.'" Alice was also told by a co-worker that a plane had been flown into the World Trade Center while another was headed for Washington, D.C., and clearly remembered thinking the person was joking. "I really thought she was telling me a joke until I walked into the office here – classes were changing and there were a lot of people in the hall – I walked into the office and our secretary had already turned on our little TV and that's when I realized it wasn't a joke."

Two participants recalled how the person who told them seemed reluctant or even unable to describe what was happening, saying only that they should turn on the television. For example, Denise remembered her father, who woke her up before he went

off to work, did not even discuss any details saying only, "turn on the television, there's something you need to see." Lara, who was home from school for the holidays, was eating a bowl of cereal when she received a call from her grandmother, who she described as being the family alarmist, "You know like *the grandma*, but she said, 'You have to turn on your TV' and I was like alright. It was after the first plane crashed and I was getting the update that it had happened and all. You know what, I'm not sure I saw the second plane or I had been watching replays of the second plane and the thing [that] went down at the Pentagon, which no one makes a big deal about anymore, but at the time…and then I went upstairs and told my brother." Rob recalled trying to get online as soon as he found out what was happening from a co-worker, but was unable to right away. He then called his parents, who were in California and told them to turn on the television. It is striking how those who were informed or informed others by telephone supplied relatively few details. They may have been hesitant because they themselves were unsure of what they were viewing, but it may have also had to do with feeling that there were simply no words to convey what they were viewing.

There were still others who received phone calls—in one situation the caller was fairly panicked, and in another the caller relayed slightly exaggerated details. The exaggeration may have more accurately matched how the caller felt about what she was viewing. For instance, Lance received a phone call from his then girlfriend and he recalled her saying, "New York was getting bombed!" Not owning a TV at the time, he drove immediately over to her place, "arriving in time to see the second tower fall." Julia, who had just gotten back with her fiancé from a vacation to New York City, received a frantic phone message from her sister who was living on the West Coast. "I

woke up and the message was on the machine and I was like, wow what is she freaking out about? So I called her back. She was like, 'what is wrong with you people don't you know what's going on?' So I turned on the TV and they were replaying what had happened…I might not have known until later except I got the frantic call from my sister, 'turn on the news!".

Finally, both Amanda and Margot were in New York City. Amanda had just arrived at work and was settling in for the day when she noticed a number of her co-workers were in the conference room. "I walked in to see what was going on. A handful of people were in there with the TV on. They proceeded to fill me in on the first plane crash into the Towers. We thought it was a fluke, a crazy accident. Then we watched as the second one hit and then we all looked at each other in disbelief…we did not know what was going on precisely, but we knew this was not an accident and that this was not normal." She recalled as the first tower fell she and several others began to cry, noting that by this point, "Everyone crowded in the conference room. The only time people left was to try to call friends or family or if they heard their phone ring."

Margot was in attendance at Stuyvesant High School in Lower Manhattan. Stuyvesant is a public high school and is located roughly a half mile from the World Trade Center. Before her school was evacuated, she recalled actually hearing the second plane, United Flight 175, crash into the South Tower, which she noted was absolutely deafening. She and her classmates rushed to the windows and looked up, but all they could see were dark, bilious clouds of smoke. Margot laughed at how surreal it was to have been watching the attacks on television, while hearing the actual crash occur. Running back and forth between the television and classroom windows, she and the other

students attempted to figure out what was happening, but it was as though neither viewing the news nor hearing the crash could account for the magnitude of what had just happened.

For Margot, the struggle to make sense of what was unfolding through television, in spite of being so near one of the key attack sites, was due in large part to the fact that nothing like the September 11 attack had ever previously happened in U.S. One interviewee, Melissa, referenced the attack on Pearl Harbor in an attempt to frame or place September 11 in a context that made sense for her. For Margot, however, Pearl Harbor was a part of the nation's history she did not necessarily relate to. It simply held no significance in her autobiographical memory,[16] although interestingly at the start of the interview she spoke of being "obsessed" with the Holocaust, reading and thinking a great deal about it, especially when she was teenager. Nor was Melissa alive during World War II, but I suspect one of the reasons she referenced it was because both she and her husband had served in the U.S. Army where the attack on Pearl Harbor was most likely an important part of the military's collective memory. Years later Margot was still struggling to comprehend what had happened that day. During our interview Margot revealed that while several of her classmates had spoken to reporters in the aftermath of the attack, I was the first person she had spoken to on record because she did not like the special status associated with having been so close to them. She further remarked that it was not right to talk about that day casually and that it made her feel "weird" when people asked her about her experience of September 11.

In each previously mentioned example, upon finding out about the start of the attacks through a combination of communication mediums that included both television

[16] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

and word-of-mouth, interview participants immediately turned their full attention to news television. Again, in Margot's case, she actually heard the second plane as it crashed into the South Tower, but as was just discussed, she and her classmates went back and forth between the classroom windows and the television in effort to gather information, using both the news and the immediacy of their experience in an attempt to construct an understanding of the situation. In spite of their protestations about the ways news television is produced, it was the primary medium that every single participant turned to during the September 11 attack. However, this turn to the news was not out of sheer force of habit, but rather based on a well-established practice of turning to the news during a national tragedy.

While viewing the news is in itself a fairly ordinary and even mundane aspect of most people's daily existence, it becomes suffused with new meaning in the context of a catastrophe or crisis, whereby as viewing continues, it tends to get more attentive, focused, and continuous. In other words, for the participants when news viewing is ritualized, it is being watched with a great sense purpose and was frequently accompanied by a range of feelings interviewees could recall in detail years later. This type of television viewing can be interpreted as symbolizing their concern for, and involvement with a nation in crisis. Ritualized viewing for interviewees during previous crises was a fundamental way to share a common experience in the face of national tragedy, to provide a legitimate means of expressing grief and anger, and to imagine a point of closure that offers a restored sense of order. However, on September 11 ritualized news viewing took on a variety of meanings for interviewees that were different and noticeably set apart from past ritualized viewing experiences of national tragedies. What accounts

for this difference can be attributed to the attacks themselves, the crisis people perceived as happening within news television as networks struggled to get an accurate grip on the story, and the profound sense of confusion that ensued as a result.

Catastrophe, Crisis, Confusion

> "Obviously we're scrambling for information here."[17] - Katie Couric
>
> Interviewer: "If you watched television with others, can you recall the kinds of things you discussed?
>
> Amanda: "At work with my coworkers, it was just expressions of confusion and disbelief, of checking in with family and friends, of trying to figure out what we should do next, of what was going on in the city. Was it safe? Fear. Eventually, the editor-in-chief said we could leave. This felt new and things felt chaotically contained while in that conference room, watching the news on such a beautiful day."[18]

It has been reported that on September 11 people watched on average eight hours of news television, repeatedly viewing images of one the worst catastrophes in American history as the second of two commercial jetliners crashed into the World Trade Center, while another felled an entire side of the Pentagon, and a final plane plunged into field in rural Pennsylvania.[19] This finding fits with the overall amount of news television most interviewees' reported watching. However, this estimate alone cannot capture the details and nuances of the viewing people actually did, though it certainly presents an overall picture of a nation riveted to their television sets for the better part of that day.

Most interviewees, after finding out about the attack, kept the news on all day, watching in concentrated bursts until they went to bed. Others like Neil and Amanda remember literally falling asleep with the television on, having paid fairly close and consistent attention to the news for long stretches of time. Mark and Justin watched just

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[17] The epigraph to this section is drawn from Katie Couric, On NBC, *Archive.org*, September 11, 2002, accessed January 10, 2011, http://www.archive.org/details/nbc200109110912-0954.

[18] The epigraph to this section is drawn from Interview by Leah Rosenberg, September 2009, Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

[19] See Heller, "Introduction: Consuming 9/11," 7.

several hours before turning off their sets and turning instead to the internet for what they hoped would be more up-to-date and comprehensive coverage. Finally, Lance reported turning the television off after three hours because he had already had enough of the repetitious images, choosing instead to turn the news back on, "when there were new developments like when there was that weird skirmishing around Kabul," and again for, "Bush's 'Axis of Evil' speech."

The images viewed that day made interviewees feel as though the entire nation was under attack. Certain images in particular seemed associated more with the horrors of war than with an isolated, though powerful and destructive catastrophe. The sense that the country was under siege is evident in their responses to questions about viewing on September 11. Specifically, they were asked if there were any words or images they could recall from the news that day. As though reluctant or even tired of recounting certain details, a number of participants had the same initial response, replying, "Oh you know, the usual ones." After a moment of silence, they then spoke of watching continuous footage of the second plane hitting the South Tower and of the other attack sites, which included burning, collapsing buildings, the charred, smoking remains of a commercial plane in the middle of a field, and billowing clouds of smoke. All seventeen interview participants discussed the collapse of the Twin Towers. In addition to the fact their demise was repeatedly shown on every major network, their destruction seemed to symbolize for participants, more than any other event that day, the sheer force of the attack. Several people described it as an "oh shit moment," while others remarked the Towers' collapse marked the point in their news viewing in which they began to cry.

Another person spoke of how the rhythmic booming of the Towers' massive floors crashing into each other still remains lodged in his memory.

Along with footage of crashing planes and buildings, they also remembered staring in horror at people who were also staring, although not back at them but presumably towards the Towers or the Pentagon. Indeed, there was a terrible sadness some interviewees spoke of associated with watching people's facial expressions, particularly when they looked upon the faces of people scanning the missing fliers, or as Susan recalled, at the "People covered in soot and ashes and the horror on their faces!" In general any news images of people crying, fleeing, and hiding were deemed by a number of people as difficult and painful to watch. Footage of people trudging to safety, as though caught in a snow storm rather than a terrorist attack, was also described as emotionally upsetting. Interviewees frequently mentioned experiencing moments in their viewing when they felt overwhelmed both by the intensity of the actual attack, their terrifying aftermath, and repeated images of both. Robert summed this sense of being overwhelmed on multiple levels, stating:

> What was so unbelievable was the amount of news generated from that incident. It affected so many people and forever changed the U.S., if not the entire world. You can talk about the people who lost their lives in the World Trade Center, the families that were fractured, the devastation to the U.S. economy, the travel industry, and the corporations that were destroyed. There are also people who were killed on the airplanes, in the Pentagon, the firemen and policemen. So many stories to report on from securing our airports to preventing further attacks. Watching the news became almost unavoidable because it was like watching the U.S. change dramatically right before my eyes.

Further adding to the intensity of that day, along with what people were viewing on the news, was the concern some mentioned that more attacks might follow. In this context, Justin remembered "fearing for his life," while others expressed similar

sentiments, worrying also about the safety of those around them. They ordered or encouraged early dismissals at places where they worked. People's thoughts also swiftly turned to family members and friends who were in either New York City or Washington, D.C. Louisa, noting that although this was a story she heard after the fact, it had since become an integral part of that whole time period, spoke about the niece of a very good friend who was living in New York City at the time. She recalled, "She was a nurse at a hospital. They were all geared up for a huge influx of injured people and nobody came because there were no injured people. There were no survivors." She then went on to talk about her niece who was living in Brooklyn when the attack happened.

> She would have taken a subway right onto the World Trade Center tower. She had the TV on when the first plane hit and she was just across the bay from Southern Manhattan and she ran out of her apartment and ran to the waterfront and she saw the second plane fly into the second tower…she told me she went back to her apartment. She said she curled on the couch and just cried.

Denise, in answering the question regarding how many hours of television she watched on September 11, attributed her seven to eight hours of news viewing partly to the fact she had an uncle who worked at the World Trade Center, as well a large portion of her family resides in New York City. Lance recalled that his girlfriend was extremely concerned about whether her sister, who works across from the World Trade Center, had gone into work that day. Finally, Susan, who had worked on Wall Street for seven years, was very worried about friends and colleagues who were still there, adding, "I mean it was just emotionally devastating. I mean honestly I was not thinking about it from a journalism point of view at all. It was such an emotionally devastating thing. I think understanding that we were under attack – it was just so hard to process that. I just couldn't believe it. I mean it was just too much to take in those first few hours."

Though the attack itself was swift, a pronounced sense of crisis emerged and lingered for weeks after. In addition to the disruption of certain facets of daily life, along with the fear, anger, and grief that seemed to grip the entire nation, major social and financial institutions such as government offices and agencies, and even Wall Street took days, even weeks before returning to normal operation. And then the anthrax attacks occurred. Five people were killed while another seventeen took ill after opening U.S. mail laced with anthrax.[20] Robert described the anthrax attacks as "horrific" and Justin, addressing the overwhelming feeling of chaos and disorder during that time, remarked:

> It's hard to remember the exact chronology, but it feels like it was almost immediate from the point of realizing that it was a terrorist attack, the news about the anthrax attacks came out…everyone was thinking that there was going to be more attacks on other places and no one felt safe. It was almost like everyone was ready to run to the bomb shelters. People felt like their lives were in serious jeopardy.

In addition to the fear expressed by a number of participants about not knowing if more attacks were pending, there seemed to be little means of relieving or alleviating such fears due in part to a kind of cultural censorship that began on September 11 about September 11; indeed, it seemed there was an unofficial ban on any and all attempts at humor or irony.[21]

This ban was put in place by a number of media sources. For example, the *New Yorker* magazine decided against publishing any cartoons in their weekly issue following the attacks, although an ad for an expensive watch was featured inside the cover page, thus creating a strange juxtaposition to artist Art Spiegelman's somber cover drawing of the Twin Towers still standing, but as dark shadows silhouetted against a jet-black

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[20] See "Amerithrax or Anthrax Investigation," *FBI.com*, accessed December 30, 2010, http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/famous-cases/anthrax-amerithrax/amerithrax-investigation.

[21] See William R. Jones, "'People Have to Watch What They Say', What Horace, Juvenal, and 9/11 Can Tell Us about Satire and History," *Helios* 36/1 (2009): 27-53.

background.[22] Clear Channel Communications Inc., an American media conglomerate company, issued a list to their radio stations that suggested a ban on a number of songs they felt were in bad taste given the recent terrorist attack, although the logic behind the now infamous list is both confusing and unintentionally amusing.[23] However, it was television that really seemed to take the lead in quelling any signs of humor. Late Night talk show hosts faced TV cameras with grim faces and dead seriousness, while the Television Academy for Arts and Sciences and CBS decided to postpone the Emmys not once, but twice for fear of offending the public with too much glitz and glamour during such difficult and troubling times. Lynn Spigel notes how September 11 wrecked havoc not just on the television industry itself, but on television as "a whole way of life."[24] She writes, "The nonstop commercial-free coverage…contributed a sense of estrangement from ordinary life, not simply because of the unexpected nature of the attack itself, but also because television's normal routines – its everyday schedule and ritualized flow – had been disordered."[25]

The news that disrupted all regularly scheduled programs for nearly a week was perceived, most especially on the day of the attack, by the majority of interviewees as inept at delivering both accurate information and reassurance to the public. As a result, news television was seen as directly contributing to the sense of crisis and confusion on September 11. Only three interviewees - Susan, Rob, and Louisa - felt that members of news profession did the best they could in the face of such difficult and shocking events.

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[22] See also Art Spigelman's provocative graphic novel, his first one since *Maus*, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004) for the same rendering of the Twin Towers. For an excellent analysis of *In the Shadows* see Kristiann Versluys, "Art Spiegelman's In the Shadow of No Towers: 9/11 and the Representation of Trauma," *Modern Fiction Studies* 52/4 (2006): 980-1003.
[23] Cory Deitz, "The Clear Channel Banned Song List: When Bad Events Make Good Songs Seem Wrong," *radioabout.com*, accessed January 8, 2011, http://radio.about.com/library/weekly/blCCbannedsongs.htm.
[24] "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture After 9/11," in *The Selling of 9/11*, 120.
[25] Spigel, "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture After 9/11," 120-121.

In particular, Louisa, who as I mentioned in a previous dissertation chapter, had been a journalist for a number of years before going into academia, recalled specifically watching Aaron Brown on CNN and Peter Jennings on ABC, saying, "I mean you know I think the journalist in me was interested in seeing what was going on and also I have a lot of respect for Peter Jennings and also for Aaron Brown. So I think there was a professional interest there. I wanted to see how they were handling it and I guess I thought of those two [that] if there was going to be anything developing they were going to do it." The remaining interviewees, however, made numerous comments indicating how poorly they thought news television handled coverage of the attack and its aftermath.

In fact a critical element of the pervading sense of crisis that Justin and others spoke of, was greatly attributed to what they perceived as news television's near complete inability to get a handle on the story from the get go (after the first plane had crashed into the North Tower), resorting instead to hearsay and even speculation in order to maintain the illusion of, what Barbie Zelizer has referred to as, "journalistic authority". She writes, "Sandwiched between the audience and the event being reported, reporters are able to construct what *they* see as preferred and strategically important through some assumption of authority for the stories they tell (emphasis mine)."[26] According to most interviewees, however, journalists succeed primarily in appearing confused, overwhelmed and sometimes ridiculous in their efforts to report on a story they seemed to have no immediate grasp on themselves.

Indeed, during early hours of coverage on NBC, for example, there was a feeling that news anchors were casting their information net extremely wide in an attempt to

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[26] *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8.

gather any and all information, speaking with a range of people from eye witnesses to reporters, who rushed out to cover the story. In between waiting for commentators, lay and professional alike to join them on air, anchors filled time with past news stories such as the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. Katie Couric on NBC was at one point listening to someone one else off camera, whose voice can be heard saying, "hijacked," while simultaneously relaying the information to the viewing public, saying, "We are trying to get as much information, but it is trickling at a very slow pace so of course all of this is unconfirmed and speculation of a terrorist attack."[27] As Lara put it, "It was so weird because I think at that point there has never been the experience where you were seeing the images at the same time as the newscasters. They're like trying to get a handle on the story and keep their shit together...then all of sudden they're like getting it in their ear piece and they could see on their monitor while everyone else was watching."

Most interviewees reported watching CNN and MSNBC, although with few exceptions, people also tended to flip between channels. One person explicitly told me she watched both ABC and NBC noting, "We only had five channels and I certainly wasn't going to watch FOX News." When asked why they went back and forth between channels, the general response was that they were trying to find out as much information as possible. There were, however, particular images and stories that also kept them focused on certain channels. For example, Mark was fairly specific and directed about his viewing, explaining "I started to channel surf to see if anyone had different camera angles, thoughts, and conspiracy theories." Lance, who was not entirely sure which channel he watched, though he believed it was CNN, turned back to television

[27] See "NBC 9:12 am to 9:54 am," September 11 Television Archive, *Archive.org*, accessed January 10, 2011, http://www.archive.org/details/nbc200109110912-0954.

specifically to watch the airing of the tape made by Osama bin Laden, remarking, "once the bin Laden tape began to be broadcast, [I recalled] the haunting mysterious three figures sitting against the backdrop of that large expanse of rock…I remember the confusion of the anchor and the commentators about who these guys were at first." For Lance, his memory of that particular segment of the news seemed to consist of an equal fascination both with the bin Laden tape itself and the confusion it sparked among the news anchors.

Neil remembered a kind of visual equivalent of a rumor which consisted of an outline of a face appearing in smoke, exclaiming, "Do you remember this? There was an evil face in the smoke that the news would show or highlight! I think it was a taken photograph. There was this photograph they would show about the evil thing, about smoke coming out of the building." He quickly hastened to add that this image was being played on what he referred to as the "fringe media." I find his recollection of the face in the smoke both interesting and revealing. For Neil, everything was so chaotic and confusing on September 11, believing that he saw the outline of an "evil face" was no less strange than watching two commercial airplanes destroy the Twin Towers.

Finally, a number of participants, like Jerry, openly expressed a sense of frustration not only about how little was known on September 11, but about the continuing lack of information on news television in the days following, saying, "they were still trying to get to the bottom of what happened and even then it was hard to get a sense of the full impact of things…You know the full impact of the strike on the Pentagon wasn't entirely clear initially, things like that. There was just a lot of uncertainty." He went on to say that the online sources he was reading did a better job

analyzing and clarifying what had happened, noting, "I did find some alternative sources that I was reading, including some from a news commentator who writes for *The Independent* [an online United Kingdom news site] and he's a Middle East specialist. A lot of commentaries that I was finding online did a better job analyzing the political dimensions like who is Al-Qaeda and who is the Taliban that sort of thing."

This section has raised a critical question for this dissertation: why did Jerry and others, even as they sought news and information from other media sources, continue to watch news television on September 11 when their responses reveal that they often found the news overwhelming and confusing? Additionally, interviewees also spoke of the ways TV news seemed to further exacerbate a sense of national crisis through the ceaseless repetitious showing of certain images, and by what many saw as news professionals' inability to get a grip on the story. In spite of these concerns, one of the primary reasons most continued to ritually view the news was because they were hoping for answers to some fundamental questions that, in spite of their posturing, continued to elude TV news professionals.

Betwixt and Between: The Stranded Audience

> "Ritual represents not so much a response to pre-existing uncertainties in social relations but a means of generating such uncertainties. This argument has been made especially in anthropological studies of rituals involving moments of seeming chaos – what Victor Turner (1974) terms episodes of 'betwixt and between' – but is evident in moderns rituals as well."[28] - Robert Wuthnnow

The above section has demonstrated how news television is considered an important source of information for interviewees, one that they have come to rely on for answers especially during a national tragedy. Many saw the news on September 11 as letting them down as well as confirming their criticisms about the ways television news is

[28] The epigraph to this section is drawn from *Meaning and Moral Order*, 121.

produced. In particular, participants wanted to know who was behind the attacks, would more be coming, and perhaps most importantly, they wanted to know *why* this had happened.

These were questions that years later, as they looked back on September 11, they understood took time to figure out, but in the immediacy of the catastrophe, they wanted answers from the news quickly. Additionally, they saw the news as unable to assuage basic, fundamental concerns. Such concerns were interpreted by most as directly linked to their safety, if not survival. With the exception of the two interview participants, who were in New York City that day, the rest of the interviewees were not in any danger, however, at the time this was not something they could have known. Indeed, news professionals, government officials, and even those representing the military were also unsure if more attacks would follow. Jim Miklaszewski, Chief Pentagon Correspondent for NBC, reported, "Their [the Pentagon] primary concern right now is protecting the American public in the New York area against any possible further attacks by the air. They have no indication that there will be, but there is some concern that since this appeared to be such a highly coordinated attack that there may be other terrorist attacks that could be planned either in New York or elsewhere."[29] Shortly after Mikalaszewski's report, American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the West side of the Pentagon.

In many respects what interviewees wanted was impossible. Events that morning were unfolding quickly, making it very difficult for news journalists to report them in an orderly and coherent fashion. While the work of Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz focuses solely on preplanned media events that are in their words, either contests, conquests, or

[29] Jim Miklaszewski, Chief Pentagon Correspondent for NBC, *Archive.org*, September 11, 2001, accessed January 10, 2011, http://www.archive.org/details/nbc200109110912-0954.

coronations,[30] it is seminal for their approach to viewing that includes a discussion on liminality. They note that during live broadcasting moments there are liminal moments which they describe as moments when "totality and simultaneity are unbounded; organizers and broadcasters resonate together; competing channels merge into one view; viewers present themselves at the same time and in every place. All eyes are on the fixed ceremonial center."[31]

Archived CNN news footage from September 11 between 9:29am to 10:11am of Aaron Brown reporting live from New York City does not initially show Brown himself, but rather billowing smoke from the Pentagon. Brown was reporting on the two planes that had crashed into the Twin Towers, but was also listening to another reporter from CNN reporting from the Pentagon, which had just been hit. Suddenly Brown interrupted the reporter, saying it appeared as though one of the towers had suddenly disappeared. The footage then switched back to Lower Manhattan with a close up of the billowing smoke and the one remaining tower, which was partially engulfed in flames. The camera then pulls back and the viewer is left looking at the back of Brown's head as he himself looks toward the direction of the fallen tower, exclaiming:

> Wow! Jaime, Jaime I need you to stop for a minute. There has just been a huge explosion. We can see a billowing smoke that has been rising and I tell you, I can't see that second tower, but there was a cascade of sparks and fire and now it looks almost like a mushroom cloud explosion. This huge billowing smoke and the second tower…this was the second of the two towers hit and you know I cannot see behind that smoke obviously you can't either. The first tower in front has not changed and we see this extraordinary and frightening scene of this second tower now just encased in smoke. What is behind it, I cannot tell you.[32]

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[30] *Media Events*, 20.
[31] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 15.
[32] See Aaron Brown, "CNN September 11, 2001 9:29 am – 10:11 am," *archive.org*, accessed January 14, 2011, http://www.archive.org/details/cnn200109110929-1011.

In spite of the confusing array of events that were literally and figuratively collapsing into each other, participants nevertheless clung to the notion that if news commentators, reporters, and anchors could simply get a handle on the story than it would mean some aspect of the day would be rendered normal; it would serve as a sign that something was functioning in the midst of a deeply dysfunctional day. Their ritual viewing of the news on September 11 highlights, according to Jonathan Z. Smith, how "Ritual provides an occasion for reflection and rationalization on the fact that what ought to have been was not done, what ought to have taken place did not occur.[33] This explains for some participants, their continuing insistence on participating in a ritual that had begun to make limited sense at the time, especially as it also seemed to cause them a tremendous amount of anxiety. Put differently, interviewee's reliance and engagement with ritual news viewing, particularly during a national catastrophe or crisis, involved an implicit understanding that in spite of their criticisms, the news would function as they had come to expect. Dayan and Katz suggest, "In Turnerian terms, such periods are characterized by a shift from the 'indicative' definition of reality (reality as what it is) to a 'subjunctive' one (reality as what it could be or should be)."[34]

And yet, in spite of what was perceived by a number of participants as a spectacular failure on the part of news television to provide them with updated and accurate information, most continued watching for hours on end, often with intense focus and the temporary cessation of other daily activities. It is here I argue that their news viewing on September 11 was also a reflection of two notable characteristics of ritual put forth by Robert Wuthnow: first, people turn to ritual in situations of social uncertainty

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[33] *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 63.
[34] *Media Events*, 104.

caused by a social shock to the cultural system; and second, ritual *exaggerates* this uncertainty.[35]

In a moment of great social uncertainty, they turned to ritual news viewing. However, this ritual served to increase feelings of anxiety about the 9/11 attack. The practice of viewing the news in a continuous and focused manner left them in what can be understood as a semi-permanent liminal state. In this state, they had limited psychical mobility to move from a position of confusion and fear, into one of clarity and reassurance. The very ritual they normally employed to help direct them through this process of moving from one position to another was also generating the condition of uncertainty they were trying to move away from. As Dayan and Katz note, television acts like a threshold, helping audiences readjust to a world no longer characterized by the alternate reality of "antistructure."[36] In simplest terms, antistructure emerges in a liminal period and is in reference to a society that is unstructured or rudimentarily structured.[37] Turner refers to this society as communitas, a modality of social relationship rather than area of common living place.[38]

In the case of September 11, interview participants had become a stranded audience – an audience that could do very little with their viewing because of the *way* they were viewing and *what* they were viewing. Moreover, news television did not function as a threshold, like it had for those participants who, for example, viewed the Watergate hearings. Instead, its narrative repetitiveness had the effect of freezing people in a particular viewing mode. Susan, for example, recalled being unable to take her eyes

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[35] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 121.
[36] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 107.
[37] Turner, *Ritual Process*, 96.
[38] Ibid.

of the television, noting, "I was glued to television until 11:30 am until I had to take my son to a little gymnastic class at the Y and I went there and the Y was closing…so I went back home and was pretty much glued to the television for days." Amanda remembered watching television all night and into the morning. Though she fell asleep at some point, she recalled waking up to the news, which had been on CNN, saying, "Nothing else on TV mattered to me except the news on 9/11…I didn't leave the house for two days after it happened." Finally, Julia and her fiancé watched all day, remarking, "Once we turned on the TV we were pretty much glued to it all day. People were coming together and trying to figure out how this had happened that a plane had flown into a giant skyscraper, what happened. How did we know if this was accident? Was it terrorism? Was it a hijacking? At that point we didn't know."

This sense of being trapped in a state of liminality, or betwixt and between had occurred previously for interviewees in connection to ritually viewing other national tragedies. This was demonstrated previously whereby I explored older interviewee's viewing of news coverage of both Kennedys' and King's assassination and subsequent funeral coverage, and younger interviewee's viewing of the space shuttle Challenger's shocking explosion. However, ritualized news viewing of the September 11 attack appeared to render participants, in the words of Turner, "liminal entities." He writes, "Liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to the eclipse of the sun and the moon."[39] In other words, as liminal entities interviewees were static and immovable. Glued to the television for hours and hours, they seemed to lose the flow or rhythm of their daily activities. Moreover, a sense that they were perpetually moving or shifting from one state

[39] *Ritual Process*, 95.

to another ceased. Effectively they became stuck in condition that can be understood as either unfinished or incomplete.

Initially turning to the well-established ritual practice of viewing the news during a national catastrophe, they believed the news would both explicate and placate their concerns about the attack. However, due to what has been described by one participant as a "jumpiness" that characterized the way news stations were reporting it, along with the repetitive recycling of specific images, they were instead left struggling to form a coherent paradigm of the catastrophe. Instead of a ritual that lent itself to clarification and meaning making, in short a response to social uncertainty, it had become one that generated anxiety and confusion and left them in emotional and mental state that became a condition of liminality.

Yet for most interviewees, to cease participation in this ritual meant they would be profoundly disconnected from the tragedy and from the larger community,[40] who had presumably chosen to continue viewing. They would be turning away from relations imaginatively shared with others through viewing and from the principles underlying these relations, which was a commitment to the nation during dark and troubling times.[41] Wuthnow writes, "In ritual a bond is established between the person and the moral community on which she or he depends. It is in this sense that ritual reinforces the moral order. Modern society, no less than the tribal group, depends continually on this source of reinforcement."[42] This fear of breaking the bond between themselves and the larger community was yet another important reason why most participants continued to view

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[40] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
[41] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order*, 103.
[42] *Meaning and Moral Order*, 123.

the news on September 11, even though it had become a ritual that further exacerbated the chaos and fear associated with the attack.

Those who viewed news coverage of the assassinations of both Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, Jr. were granted the presence of a body, as represented by the showing of their caskets, in which to grieve over. Whereas those who recalled the Challenger explosion had none, which contributed greatly to the lingering sense of melancholia male respondents in particular seemed to experience years later. However, for the majority of interviewees, viewing the news of September 11 left them feeling stranded. Betwixt and between statuses, they were neither mourners nor those who experienced a sense of unending grief. As the days passed, most simply felt emotionally exhausted by the news, as though they had been treading water, unable to get neither here nor there.[43]

The next and final chapter will examine the rupture interviewees understood to be happening to literal, as well as symbolic, places both on September 11 and in the immediate aftermath. An exploration of these themes reveals the lasting impact of that day both on the life of the nation, and on the lives of the interview participants. Their narratives reveal details that shed light on how the attacks were experienced as more than a terrifying spectacle witnessed on news television, but as a tragic crisis that ruptured the structure of their everyday existence. I underscore people's desire to voice their thoughts and opinions as they sometimes joined and other times retreated from ongoing public discussions, not only about the attacks themselves, but about the myriad policies, actions, and reactions that ensued in their aftermath. Finally, particular attention is paid to the connection between television viewing (both news and non news) and other kinds of

[43] Turner, *Ritual Process*, 95.

social activities and exchanges as a way of understanding the impact of this unique catastrophe on this small group of individuals.

Chapter Five
Ruptured Place: Interpreting the Significance of 9/11

> One lonely night, I decide to go up onto the roof [of his apartment] and there is this intense fog and the Twin Towers [across the way] are covered with fog, the bottoms of them not the top, so it's like their floating. There's a little like cuticle sliver of moon in the sky and the foghorns are going and the boats are moving. There's this breeze and I had this brass penny whistle…I was standing there and playing it and suddenly something clicked and I was like, 'Oh those are all the bridges!' There's the Brooklyn Bridge…I'm looking at the Statue of Liberty and my grandmother came from Albania and they went to Elis Island. I could see my history there too and it hit me…this [city] is like a coral reef. You can't see the people, but looking at this beautiful structure and that fog, the air. The whole city was just breathing. I felt connected to the city on a spiritual level for the first time.[1] -Skip Sherry

The attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on September 11, both iconic structures in which a great deal of cultural significance and personal meaning have been attached, challenged the ways in which interviewees imagine, construct, and even will place into existence. The entire area of lower Manhattan, for example, seemed suddenly stripped of a myriad of elements many participants understood as contributing to or defining its place-hood and was transformed into an entirely different place – one both alien and upsetting. The billowing smoke, swirl of debris, and massive amounts of rubble, along with the constant presence of city emergency personnel, from firefighters to police officers as well as other federal and state officials, remade that area of Manhattan into what looked like a war zone.[2] If each city has its own DNA, its own feel,[3] than what happens when that DNA is either damaged or recombined as to render it unfamiliar? In

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[1] The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from WNYC Radio Lab, *Radiolab.com*, originally aired November 3, 2010, accessed November 16, 2010, http://www.radiolab.org.

[2] See Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Linenthal discusses how violence similarly transformed the physical and emotional landscape of Oklahoma City noting, "Like some science fiction story, the bombing threw the nation into a dizzying confusion of space and time. Oklahoma City became a Middle East war zone. American became Weimar Germany in its last tortured days. Or, for militia members and their sympathizers, America was like Nazi Germany. Summoned like angry apparitions from the nation's past were dark episodes that both situated the bombing in a grim history and threatened the cherished national conviction of moral progress in history," 27.

[3] Jad Abunrad and Robert Krulwich, "Cities," *Radiolab.com*, originally aired November 3, 2010, accessed November 16, 2010, http://www.radiolab.org.

addition to the physical damage done to place, the psychical understanding of place and all that it entails was also ruptured. For most participants, this included a disruption in how they experienced feelings of pleasure, sociality, and an understanding of time and other means they used to mentally place and orient themselves throughout their daily existence.

While most were already highly skeptical and critical of the way news television is produced, coverage of the events that took place on September 11 left a number of participants seriously questioning network news' reporting capabilities during a massive catastrophe. Along this vein, interviewees also recalled feeling unsettled even scared by the way the attacks were reported, leaving them with a sense that their usual experience of the news was also ruptured. As discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, the viewing many interviewees did on September 11 left them in a state of liminality. They had in effect become a stranded audience, limited in their ability to interpret and use the news to make sense September 11 as they had previously with other national tragedies. In the days following the attack, most recalled a rapidly growing disdain for how quickly the news relinquished its self-proclaimed responsibility to provide reliable, reassuring information to the public, especially during a time of national crisis, resorting instead to manufactured sensationalism and manipulative sentiments of patriotism and nationalism.[4]

Moreover, when asked to discuss their impressions of post September 11 news coverage, a number of people struggled with how to reconcile feelings of confusion and

[4] See Frederic Jameson, "The Dialects of Disaster," in Dissent from the Homeland: Essays after September 11, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia, special issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101/2 (2002): 297-304. Jameson notes that the media orchestrated display of patriotism was an extreme of what he refers to as the "soap opera structure" that Jameson claims organizes a great deal of our personal lives, 299.

grief with their now well-established sense of anger at what has been a prevailing cultural attitude - that to be American in a post September 11 nation has often meant blind, unquestioning patriotism, as well as a forced acceptance of officially sanctioned commemorative practices, many feel no real emotional or mental connection to, or even outright reject.[5] According to sociologist Barry Schwartz, "By marking events believed to be the most deserving of remembrance, commemoration becomes society's moral memory."[6] Most people I spoke with explicitly remember feeling (and still feel) directly at odds with how the media, among other social institutions, assigned such extraordinary moral significance to the attack and then tried to coerce them into feeling the same.

Using words and phrases like "disgusted", "couldn't take it anymore", and "depressing" to describe the news coverage both on September 11 and in the days following, some eventually retreated from viewing the news, purposefully focusing instead on activities meant to soothe them, such as listening to music in Mark's case. Other interviewees consciously reduced or stopped watched the news altogether. And still others, even though they expressed a sense of exhaustion about their viewing, continued to watch for hours and days on end. They seemed to feel that if they stopped watching they would "miss something" or be "out of the loop". Moreover, they did not want to turn away from what they understood to be a serious crisis affecting the entire nation and tended to frame their ongoing viewing as both a personal quest for answers, and a civic responsibility to stay informed. Their comments both here and in the next section reveal how decisions to view or not to view, as well as how long to view were

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[5] See John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-14 for a discussion about official versus vernacular memory.

[6] *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10.

connected to how they had previously approached critical news stories and was a means of arranging their viewing in response to a range of personal psychical concerns in the context of what they saw as a new kind of media crisis.

For example, Lara mentioned that her family's viewing became "shoddy" as the day went on, nevertheless, the television remained on all day and into the night, "Because," she wryly remarked, "what kind of person would you be if you weren't watching?" Eventually however, even committed September 11 news viewers like Neil, who had the television on several hours a day for at least a week, recalled how certain repeated images, especially those that have become most closely associated with attack, such as the towers collapsing, began to have a numbing affect on him, while simultaneously evoking emotions that in his words, "started becoming damaging." In general, after three or four days most retreated from such ongoing, intensive viewing. Two participants actually permanently ceased viewing news television as part of their everyday life, turning instead solely to either online news sources or fake news shows. In contrast, Julia, Rob, and Margot recalled that after days of watching the news, they became more interested and intellectually invested in the news, incorporating it into their lives in a way they previously had not. Reflection on interview participants' viewing both on and after September 11 reveal interesting patterns of news consumption that encompass something far more complicated than how Dana Heller has characterized news viewing during this time period as "a compulsive self-gorging on ritual images" in a collective quest to quell the nation's hunger for meaning after September 11.[7]

[7] See "Consuming 9/11," in *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 6.

In addition to most people's fairly scathing critique of the news coverage, interviewees also discussed a number of other significant issues many of which reveal how haunted and even distressed they still feel years after the attack. More specifically, these issues reveal the memories people have about all the things that seemed out of place, as well as all the places that were ruptured, which included for nearly everyone, the state of the nation since the attack. Though some were more vocal and specific than others, every single person I spoke with at the time of our interview, expressed deep concerns and frustrations over how they perceived the nation as languishing in a dark place because of how quickly it tried to move forward after 9/11. In particular, some mentioned that the effort to move forward seemed to be fueled by events *just* as terrifying as those that took place that day namely: two wars (to date both have been unsuccessful and the one in Afghanistan appears to have no end in sight), well-documented evidence of U.S.-run torture camps, a ruined economy, and a societal attitude of extreme prejudice and hostility towards Muslims, Middle-Easterners, and Arab Americans that has actually increased over the years even as the events of September 11 recede further into the past.[8] Just one day after September 11, the Japanese American Citizen League (JACL) based in San Francisco issued a news release expressing alarm at the almost immediate mistreatment and targeting of Arab Americans by investigative agencies and the public following the attack. Then JACL National President Floyd Mori, recalling the

[8] See and/or listen "What's It like Being Muslim in American Now," Weekend Edition. *NPR.org*, originally aired September 11, 2010, accessed November 14, 2010, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129793931; see also Monish Das Gupta, "Of Hardship and Hostility: The Impact of 9/11 on New York City Taxi Drivers," in *Wounded City: The Social Impact of 9/11*, ed. Nancy Foner, 208-241(New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005); Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, "Muslim American Mobilization," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 14/1 (2005): 7-43; Jessica Falcone, "Seeking Recognition: Patriotism, Power and Politics in Sikh American Discourse in the Immediate Aftermath of 9/11," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*15/1 (2006): 89-119.

experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II, stated, "We urge citizens not to release their anger on innocent American citizens simply because of their ethnic origin, in this case Americans of Arab ancestry. While we deplore yesterday's acts, we must also protect the rights of citizens. Let us not make the same mistakes as a nation that were made in the hysteria of WWII following the attack at Pearl Harbor."[9] One interviewee boldly stated, upon looking back at the years since September 11, that the overall goal of the 9/11terrorist attacks has succeeded quite well. She elaborated further stating:

> I think it was absolutely chilling because it worked. Our economy hasn't worked properly since, which was part of it, and I think it has turned us against our traditional values in some ways…Like respect for people's legal rights. Intolerance. Security at any cost…I mean half my journalism career was outside the country so I saw a lot of Americans in action and I always thought those horrible, obnoxious people, but I think there is a lot of Americans who really reflect a lot of the values of an open democratic society. I think we have been in retreat since then.

This chapter explores the rupture interviewees understood to be happening to literal, as well as symbolic places on September 11 and in the days immediately after. An exploration of this theme reveals the lasting impact of September 11 on both the life of the nation, and on the personal lives of interview participants. Their narratives help shed light on how the attacks were experienced as more than a terrifying spectacle witnessed on news television, but as both a tragic catastrophe that had an immediate impact on the structure and stability of their everyday existence. I also pay close attention to the urge many experienced to voice a range of thoughts and feelings about the attack itself, as well as policies, actions and reactions that ensued in its aftermath. Finally, I explore the connection between television viewing (both news and non news) and other kinds of

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[9] Japanese American Citizen League, "JACL Urges Caution in Aftermath of Attacks," *JACL Press Release* (September 12, 2001). I requested a copy of the press release directly from the JACL.

social activities and exchanges as a way of further understanding the impact of this unique catastrophe on one small group of people.

To claim that the September 11attack occupies a unique position in the pantheon of large-scale American tragedies does not automatically imply a willingness to support a now well-established discourse that has framed them as unrepresentable, ahistorical, and apolitical; all discursive practices that have had the effect of resituating the attacks so that they have been understood as an assault not just on the Twin Towers or the Pentagon, but on the entire nation, thus reinforcing cherished ideals of both American innocence and exceptionalism. In their own words, however, interviewees tended to frame the events of that day as unique. The fact that most, upon seeing live footage of the second plane hitting the South Tower, had the dreadful realization that the first plane was no accident, speaks to the growing awareness that they were 'witnessing' a unique and horrific calamity. For example, Susan referred to September 11 as a "stand alone event". She went on to explain, "I don't think there's ever been anything comparable. Because now we're in the era of 24/7 news, you couldn't get away from it unless you turned off your TV. I mean it was on every channel and nothing so devastating except maybe World War II or the Vietnam War, but remember those were on film. Those were shipped days later." While some framed their reaction as similar to how they responded to past American tragedies, such as the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, many reiterated what Louisa recalled thinking when she saw the first tower collapse, "I was in India when Rajiv Ghandi got assassinated and [had] kind of the same reaction, like no…common. It was almost more than disbelief. It was a kind of doubting. Common this can't be."

Louisa's reaction of doubting what she was seeing seems to have been a response to how utterly out of the place the attacks initially seemed. People understood them as occurring both suddenly and swiftly, coming from nowhere and thus they had no immediate means of placing them either historically or socially. Rob sums this inability to place what was happening, stating, "It was strange I knew exactly what I was seeing, but it wasn't registering. I kept thinking this just doesn't make any sense." Days after September 11, a great many things seemed out of place, misplaced, or displaced, but before a detailed discussion can occur, an explication and clarification of the two key terms which make up my interpretative framework – place and rupture – seems necessary.

Place and Rupture

> "Human beings are not placed, they bring place into being."[10] - Jonathan Z. Smith
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> "All socially constructed worlds are inherently precarious. Supported by human activity, they are constantly threatened by the human facts of self-interest and stupidity."[11] - Peter L. Berger

Conceptually, I refer to place as a physical, geographically- bounded area, as well as a symbol within a larger system of meaning that encompasses both culturally-informed and personal ways place is approached and understood. Place is also a noun used frequently as a verb to signal a metaphorical or physical gesture for either maintaining order or encountering disorder. Here I borrow directly from the work of Jonathan Z. Smith in thinking about place as an "active product of intellection rather than a passive receptacle."[12] I am particularly interested in how this intellection operates in the context

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[10] The epigraph to this section is drawn from *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 28.
[11] The epigraph to this section is drawn from *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 29.
[12] Smith, *To Take Place*, 26.

of understanding the impact of a significant catastrophic event like the 9/11 attack. Using the foundational work of philosopher Immanuel Kant and humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, Smith connects the importance of Kant's use of space and bodily orientation[13] with Tuan's differentiation between space and place. According to Tuan, "When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place."[14] In other words, space has no inherent significance, becoming place only when it is filled with familiarity and meaning.[15] This transformation is highlighted by musician Skip Sherry's (quoted at the very start of this chapter) delightful memory when he realizes a deeply personal and spiritual connection to New York City after months of feeling alienated and out of place in its bustle and energy. His relationship with the city is one that gradually shifts from confusion to one in which he experiences a sense of pleasure in recognizing what has suddenly become familiar to him about the city.[16]

In chapter one of this dissertation, I discussed how enjoyable it was for interviewees to recall the specifics of television viewing that took place in their homes. This process of recalling past viewing, influenced how they remembered their younger years – specifically the pleasure it gave them to view certain shows – as well as how it expressively helped connect them to past selves, places, and relationships. In this capacity, home was where their memories were effectively housed, as well as a physical location where they grew up. I argue that one of the key ways home-space was transformed into home-place was through television viewing. This expressed connection

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[13] Smith, *To Take Place*, 27.
[14] Smith, *To Take Place*, 28.
[15] Ibid.
[16] In an earlier part of the interview with Sherry, he described how difficult it was for him to make sense of the city because of how chaotic it seemed. He speaks in particular of how overwhelmed he felt by constant and competing noises.

between memory, feelings of nostalgia, and TV viewing helps us think about place as a unique and effective interpretive lens for understanding how it is that people can experience a sense of horror about a catastrophe 'witnessed' solely on television. It is because, as Smith suggests, people bring place into being rather than the other way around. Television can then be understood as a technology for facilitating this bringing of one place into another. Therefore, the pleasure people experience watching both news and non news shows means they can also potentially experience a sense of distress, anguish, and even anger when viewing difficult and upsetting footage, such as the televised images many recalled viewing on September 11.

For example, with the exception of two people, none of the other interviewees were in New York City, Arlington, Virginia, or Shankesville, Pennsylvania on the day of the attack. However, this did not stop people from personalizing what was happening. Why exactly? To begin with, it was New York City in particular that most people tended to turn their attention towards. This was due in part to the endless television coverage of the Twin Towers collapsing over coverage of the other attack sites, which seemed to slowly decline after the day of attack. However, it was also because the city was understood as a kind of sacred center, which people used to orient themselves socially and geographically. Specifically, their experience of New York City as place was due both to the cultural and personal meanings it held for them. Personal meaning was evidenced in the way they spoke of their connection to the city, one that was maintained through relationships with friends, family members, and colleagues. They also mentioned various times they had visited or lived in the city, while still others spoke of their desire to one day do either. Additionally, they recalled all places within the city

where they had once worked, eaten, or passed their leisure time in. Several respondents even had specific stories about the World Trade Center itself. When they viewed the second plane crashing into the South Tower their connection to, and feelings about this city-place felt ruptured. Although he does not pursue this framing in any specific or great deal, Edward T. Linenthal briefly touches upon a similar concept in connection to the Oklahoma City Bombing writing, "There was, seemingly, nowhere in the storehouse of American meaning to place the bombing, to make sense of it. It was, quite literally, 'out of place.'"[17] I also found people's recollections about New York City to fit nicely with Maurice Halbwach's wonderful discussion about place and collective memory in which he states:

> As to group members who leave these places without seeing them again, who are not involved in the process of their transformation and yet wish to deal with them: they soon create symbolic representation of these places. The image they conjure up draws its contents first, no doubt, from the places themselves (at least indirectly, if it is based on description). But symbolic reflection detaches these places from their physical environment and connects them with the beliefs of the group.[18]

For a number of people interviewed many of their beliefs about the city were informed partly by a mental pastiche of films, literary accounts, and photographs that they 'carried' around with them, believing without realizing, in certain eternal qualities of New York City. New York, for many Americans, has meant an acceptance of an enduring myth that while the city might suffer some hard knocks, it would somehow always exist. Philosophers and cultural critics Jean Baudrillard and Slovoj Zizek in their now infamous remarks about how we have all have previously imagined the city's

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[17] *Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16.

[18] *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 205.

demise, and that many have already seen familiar images of its destruction in countless action movies, do not address the phenomenological complexities of how people viewed its actual partial destruction.[19] Perhaps its destruction has been cinematically imagined and re-imagined because the constructed reality for most rested on the impossibility of such a feat. Their comments negate how the articulation of claiming such destruction seemed like an action movie can also be understood as an attempt to render the attacks more comprehensible. Truly their remarks elide how stunned, grieved and angry actual people, rather than theorized masses of cultural consumers, felt as they viewed the tragic death of thousands and the physical destruction of highly iconic and symbolically-charged landmarks. Several of the people I interviewed remember crying, and all of them recalled watching in disbelief at what seemed like making of a ruined world. Nearly ten years after the attacks, it is probably more accurate to say it was not so much a ruined world as a deeply ruptured one.

In their fascinating article exploring the reasons behind people's impulse to visit the site where the World Trade Center collapsed, which soon after the attack became known as Ground Zero, doctoral students James Trimarco and Molly Hurley Depret pose a compelling question, one highly relevant both to this chapter and to the dissertation as a whole: can television viewing of an event thousands of miles away count as "witnessing" in the same way as more traditional witnessing?[20] The authors raise this question in relation to another equally compelling question about whether it is appropriate, accurate, or even useful to think of ourselves, after the events of September 11, 2001, as a

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[19] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism, and Requiem for the Twin Towers* (London: Verso, 2002); Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002).

[20] See "Wounded Nation, Broken Time," *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity*, ed. Dana Heller (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 34.

traumatized nation,[21] writing, "media accounts, political maneuvering, and psychological studies have attempted to frame it exactly as that."[22] They also add that any attempt to deny trauma has been criticized as unpatriotic. However, Trimarco and Depret argue that trauma is not just simply a tool imposed by an "elite controlled mass media"; moreover and perhaps most importantly, they emphasize that regardless of whether the sense of national trauma was constructed through media accounts and political agendas, many throughout the United States did experience the enormity of the terrorist attack through feelings of anxiety, nightmares, and general fear.[23]

Their discussion on whether the attacks, viewed by most Americans on television, could result in an experience of national trauma raises a whole host of critical questions regarding television viewing, national tragedies, and experience. Unfortunately, the evidence the authors present, based on informal interview responses, seems insufficient. The brief narratives they submit reveal people voicing sentiments of grief, anger, and guilt, but not necessarily trauma. This is not to suggest that no one felt traumatized in the wake of the attack. For example E. Ann Kaplan, professor of media and cinema studies, has written about her interests in how both social institutions and individuals manage trauma.[24] Kaplan herself had lived through the London Blitz during World War II and was in New York City on September 11. In a review of Kaplan's book about her

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[21] The authors use the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) to define the traumatic experience as having two features, "Feature 1: The traumatized person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events involving death (either actual or threatened) or serious injury (including threats to the physical integrity of oneself or others). To be 'confronted' with traumatic events would include 'learning about the unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate'; Feature 2: The traumatized person's response to these events involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror," Ibid.
[22] Trimarco and Depret, "Wounded Nation, Broken Time," 36.
[23] Ibid.
[24] See E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

experience of that day, English professor Linda S. Kauffman writes how being in New York on 9/11 effectively, "trigged memories of that childhood terror. Kaplan uses herself as a palimpsest to describe the effects of trauma: the shattering of psychic identity, the sense of pervasive threat in everyday life, and a feeling of lack and humiliation."[25] Additionally, questionnaire data collected from college students after September 11 revealed:

> Without question, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were a significant stressor for a major segment of the American public. Several studies have shown that substantial numbers of Americans experienced significant stress reactions in the days and weeks following the attacks, even though many of those surveyed were not directly victimized, did not lose loved ones or family members, and did not even live in the geographic vicinity of the attacks.[26]

However, stress and trauma are not necessarily the same and during interviews conducted for this dissertation, with the exception of Robert, who happens to be a psychologist, most interviewees seemed almost to avoid using this term. It was as though they were conscious that it was *the* term to use in both vernacular and official discussions about the effects of September 11. Robert actually repeatedly used this term while responding to questions about his experience of September 11, but in large part, his use of words like "trauma", "traumatizing", and "traumatic" seemed more to reflect his own feelings about that day rather than offering any clear indication of national trauma. For example, when he remarks, "It was the images…that traumatized me and every American", what stands out most was how deeply upset and yes, traumatized Robert himself was by those terrifying images. It was as though for Robert, one person alone could not bear the terrible weight of viewing such a calamity. Kaufman's work

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[25] See Linda S. Kauffman, "World Trauma Center," *American Literary History* 21/3 (2009): 649.
[26] Erina L. MacGeorge, et al., "Stress, Social Support, and Health among College Students after September 11, 2001," *Journal of College Student Development* 45/6 (2004): 656.

highlights how trauma disrupts a sense of time[27] and certainly a number of interviewees discussed how strange and out of place many thing were on September 11. However, what I inferred as disrupting their sense of time, both on that day and in the days immediately after, was due in large part to how many hours they had spent viewing the new, along with the cancellation of their normal daily activities.[28]

Moreover, their avoidance of using this word was evidenced by how during the interview several made it a point to tell me no one close to them had died in the attack. One person appeared to be admitting that he had never even been to New York City and so remembered having difficulty getting a "bearing on where exactly things were happening" that day. When asking people if they would be willing to be interviewed, those who agreed almost always stated, in a somewhat confessional tone, that they were not in New York or Arlington, Virginia that day. Some explicitly added that they had had no direct experience of September 11. Still others seemed to volunteer to be interviewed precisely because they felt a direct connection to the events, such as being in New York City that day or having immediate relatives that worked at the World Trade Center, even though no such requirement was put forth as a condition for participation.

It is my interpretation that the majority of interviewees were reacting in opposition to the ongoing rhetoric of national trauma espoused by the media and government that for many, felt fabricated. However, they were often too quick to discount their experience of that day and to frame it as somehow inauthentic or even less

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[27] Kaufman, "World Trauma Center," 649.
[28] See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11," *The Drama Review* 46/1 (2003), 11. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett also writes briefly about the grassroots response to trauma in the form of spontaneous memorial that appeared throughout the city of New York, although the main crux of her fascinating article is primarily about the problems posed by documentation and the "presumed detachment associated with these activities," 39.

interesting compared to those who had had a more immediate experience of the attacks. Even the two people who were in New York City on September 11 never explicitly expressed having experienced any lasting or significant trauma,[29] although they articulated feelings of grief, confusion and fear about what was happening around them in a manner slightly more intense than their counterparts. Moreover, neither claimed having any kind of exceptional or special status because of their proximity to the attack, focusing instead on how they experienced that day in relation to those around them and offering their memories on details such as making it home as safely and swiftly as possible.

Yet to claim as a nation we were *not* traumatized by the attack is not to diminish the anguish many felt, nor to deny that people understood themselves as having had some kind of experience of 9/11. So what was their experience? In response to two specific interview questions posed - today, looking back on September 11, 2001 is there anything about the news coverage that sticks out to you; and are other thoughts you wish to share - interviewees revealed having an awareness of both places and relationships that were either disrupted or ruptured, as well as a feeling that this rupture, though not as intense as it initially was, still remains.

Rupture specifically entails a kind of psychical disruption or shift in the connection people have to places (real and imagined) and relationships (real and imagined), all of which normally offer a sense of a stability, structure, and overall ordinariness of everyday life. It was not so much a brutal blow to interviewees' psyches,

[29] I am not suggesting that they were in no way traumatized. They might have been, but they did not use this term throughout their interview and I did not get the impression they understood themselves to be traumatized.

resulting in a breakthrough in their defenses[30], it was more a feeling that things were breaking or coming apart and that they were somehow adrift. Their narratives help shape a response to the Trimarco and Depret's question about witnessing versus 'witnessing' an event, in that it seems impossible that they witnessed or experienced the events of September 11 in the same manner as those who were in close proximity to them, or those directly affected by them. Sociologist Kai Erickson, writing about the Buffalo Creek disaster, a massive American catastrophe in which an entire man-made lake (132 million gallons of "black water" consisting of coal silt and sludge) located in West Virginia broke through a dam on February 26, 1972, spoke with and reviewed thousands of pages of transcripts from people who had been directly and viscerally impacted by what they referred to as "the water."[31] Their words, according to Erikson, reflect both the individual and collective trauma of a people who had first-hand experience of "the water" as they fled for their lives, watching in helpless horror as right before them their homes were swept away, and their neighbors (known in most cases intimately) drowned or were dismembered by the flood's force.

People I interviewed lost a sense of familiarity with place, and certainly the tone and rhythm of their everyday life was ruptured, along with their sense of personal security, but unlike the survivors Erikson spoke with, they did not lose "a sense that they were fully alive."[32] To put it differently, Erikson's interviewees expressed a sense that certain components of both their interior and exterior world were deeply, if not permanently damaged. For example, their ability to feel a range of emotions was

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[30] See Kai Erickson, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1976), 146.
[31] Erickson, *Everything in Its Path*, 21-50.
[32] Erickson, *Everything in Its Path*, 146.

blunted; for many this included a will to live and rebuild their homes, as well as restore their community. While various communities were adversely affected by the events of September 11[33], a sense of the nation though ruptured, was not destroyed.

Nevertheless, interview participants for this dissertation clearly and often eloquently expressed sentiments of fear, grief and outrage both about the attacks and the media, government, and military responses to them that deserves recognition. In particular, their narratives fit with a desire to push against assertions made by representatives of the state and the media that tends to infantilize them[34] by constantly promoting the idea of American innocence[35], thus diminishing or ignoring their desire to more fully understand, not only their own experience of that day, but also the events that led up to the attack. Finally, their responses also speak to how important several of them felt it was to keep political discussions about September 11 circulating in conversations they held in person and through email, demonstrating how in their own way they have assessed and reassessed the state of, as well as the very meaning of society since the attack. One issue frequently mentioned was how the news seemed stuck on repeat, causing most to feel a great deal of anxiety and frustration they could still recall feeling years later.

Stuck on Repeat

> "The constant replaying of the planes flying into the towers and the towers falling...it began to feel extremely repetitive and thus pointless, like some kind of tragedy porn, so to speak."[36] -Amanda

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[33] See Nancy Foner, "The Social Effects of 9/11 on New York City: An Introduction," in *Wounded City: The Social Impact of 9/11*, ed. Nancy Foner, 3-27 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005).
[34] See Joan Didion, *Fixed Ideas: America since 9.11* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003).
[35] Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
[36] The epigraph to this section is drawn from Interview by Leah Rosenberg, September 2009, Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

> "In the days following the attacks, the saturation of everyday life with uniform images of the second plane crash, the firebombs, and the towers' collapse was transformed itself into the uncontested meaning of the event, foreclosing on historical awareness and seeming to preempt any questioning impulses that might have placed the attacks in a broader critical perspective."[37] - Dana Heller

One of the most significant aspects of life people mentioned as being out of place, both on September 11 and in the week or so that followed, was news television itself. To begin with, the live quality of the coverage that unnerved many. More specifically, the fact that television studios were scrambling at the same time as viewers to understand what was happening struck most interviewees as deeply upsetting and contributed to the difficulty they had in placing the attacks in context that made sense to them. Before September 11, people frequently criticized or disparaged the way the news was produced, however, they had also come to rely on a degree of predictability and banal consistency. The authoritative tone and excessive drama in which news anchors and journalists normally approached a range of news stories, though frequently dismissed or mocked, signified a kind of news-as-usual approach that most found reassuring, albeit irritating. However, on September 11 as members of the media struggled to maintain their composure and authority, it soon became apparent to interviewees how little they knew or understood. What struck Jerry was how days after the attacks, little was still known. "So much was unknown at that time. I mean there was a lot of speculation of course, but they were trying to get to the bottom of what happened and even then it was hard to get a sense of the full impact of things."

Self-described news junkies Rob and Susan felt that the news did a relatively good job covering the attacks considering their scope and complexity. Susan emphasized, and I think empathized as a previous journalist herself, how those covering

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[37] The epigraph to this section is drawn from "Introduction: Consuming 9/11," in *The Selling of 9/11*, 7.

the story were not just professionals but also human, and that they were attempting to approach the attacks "on a human level." She continued, "I mean it was horrifying and unthinkable and everyone approached it that way and for those newscasters to remain so composed, I give them a lot of credit." Rob also tended to view the media in a fairly positive light stating, "The news did a good job trying to make sense of what was going on in spite of the misinformation." However, Rob and Susan were the exception.

Most respondents were not as generous in their outlook. They recalled instead a media that for hours seemed to have no idea how to tell the story with John declaring outright, "the coverage on CNN was terrible!" In particular, it felt out of place to witness television reporters and anchors lose command of the situation and drop their posturing as experts. Effectively, they were seen as being in the same position everyone else. As Lara noted, "They didn't have a spin on it yet. I mean I'm sure there was already sort of structural spin on how it was going to be reported, but because we were watching it at the same time, you can't lip gloss that for me!" Neil noted that what made September 11 even more terrifying than the events themselves was the fact no one in the media seemed to know what was going on. He explained:

> The feeling I got was that no one knew what was going on. There was a sense that people were waiting for the story. We didn't even know what the story was. I got the sense that the people on the news were just scrambling to even cover it without even knowing how to…it was partly the tone and there was real jumpiness on the screen; it seemed to flash to different people and different things. I can recall someone would be talking and then someone would interrupt them. There was no flow in the conversation and image after image would just appear.

Lance expressed similar concerns stating, "It seemed like the 'news' was more or less paralyzed. For awhile it was definitely 'news', but no one knew how to explain it, at least for a little while. I remember that on CNN the main newscaster more or less ceded

the floor to [Larry] Eagleburger to spout whatever views he wanted to, which seemed to come a little too easily to him in light of the shocking situation. The journalist was out of league, had no resources of his own, so the appeal to the 'expert' seemed very much like a child to a parent."

It was not that participants were unable to make any sense of what was happening without news television. As was mentioned in the preceding chapter, they often turned to those around them and the internet for updates and information, but they had also previously always felt they could count on the news to help them understand and even work through a number of past national tragedies. However, as news professionals visibly struggled to get a hold of the story, interviewees remember feeling alarmed and concerned. This signaled a rupture in the normal production of the news and a break down in the process people normally underwent in their attempt to make sense of unusual or extraordinary events. Instead, both the lack of concrete news information and the repetitive images left many with the sensation of being simultaneously stuck and adrift. Additionally, those interviewees who were already at work were given leave or dismissed early, which for some served to further increase this sensation. For example, Scott, who lives by himself, emphasized how there was nowhere for him to go after he left work. Normally after work he reads at a coffee shop for several hours, but when suddenly faced with unexpected free time and with everything shut down that day, he went home, adding, "And when I got home it was like ok, what do I now?"

Interviewees keenly recalled how several hours into their viewing the news seemed stuck on repeat or stuck in one place – the place seemed to consist of a series of images that included the moment the second plane, Flight 175, crashed into South Tower,

along with the explosion and collapse of both towers. As the days progressed, the oversaturation of these images in particular left some "numb", others "depressed", and still others irritated and cynical about the news. For example, Mark noted, "The sheer repetition of images and content over and over and over again. I started to realize this was a big moment for the news stations and it started to seem cannibalistic." Amanda, who was working in New York City when the attacks happened, expressed being compelled to watch the news for hours on end noting, "After 9/11, it was mainly CNN non-stop. I barely ever turned the TV off." However, her comment at the start of this section suggests that like Mark and others, she too began to feel that watching the repetitive images was pointless and that the endless loop of certain footage had become in her words, "pornographic."

Neil commented on how it took him weeks to get the music played on CNN in connection with September 11 coverage out of his head and stated, "Whoever was choosing that music…It felt like the world-is-coming-to-an-end music." However, he also discussed his inability to turn off the news poignantly stressing, "I thought I would be less is scared if I turned off the television, but I didn't want to miss anything…It was almost like an addiction to find out more and more information. You had to have the live coverage." In contrast, Lance watched selectively purposefully choosing to decrease his news viewing after September 11. Finding himself sick of the coverage, because of the "ceaseless loop" particularly of the second tower falling again and again he added, "I think I only tuned back in for Bush's 'Axis of Evil Speech.'" He seemed particularly aghast not only about the repetition, but at the way in which some news guests were allowed to carry on in front of the cameras citing his memory of Larry Eagleburger

providing commentary live by phone and "waving a tomahawk" as a clear example of what he saw as the newsroom chaos and ineptitude that occurred immediately after the attacks.

On September 11 there was a pronounced rupture in the reliability of television news as a stable source of information during a national tragedy. Numerous aspects of the news seemed out of place, from its inability to get a handle on the story, to the misinformation and the maelstrom of chaos that ensued as networks tried to comment on an event they themselves could not yet comprehend. The disruption in the way the news was normally produced, especially during a national catastrophe, left most interviewees nervous as it seemed to signal a break down in an institution that usually presented a façade of stability and reliability during such times. Days after the attacks some continued viewing in a fairly rigorous and attentive manner, while others decreased or in rare instances, stopped viewing all together. Regardless of which viewing strategy they chose to employ, nearly everyone mentioned the negative impact the repetitious images and the recycling of the same information over and over began to have on their lives. In particular, the repetition made people feel they were stuck in the same terrible place – one where the towers were always under attack and constantly collapsing – even as they struggled to move forward.

Those who continued to watch the news did so because they held on to the hope that new information would be released and that someone would eventually tell them something reassuring and informative, aiding them in their quest to make some sense of what each interviewee has characterized as a shocking and horrifying tragedy. In what felt like to participants a painful and slow process, new information was gradually

released, but in between the trickle of information they had to sit through the same deeply upsetting images for days on end making any pleasurable and even useful aspects the news had previously provided, temporarily cease. Moreover, the practice of turning to the news during a national crisis no longer seemed to be a strategy that either helped people gather information or offered them consolation – quite the opposite – as continuous viewing left most feeling confused, distraught and depressed. During the difficult week after the attacks everyday life seemed suspended as activities that normally lent themselves to structuring and defining ordinary life suddenly seemed to make little sense.

No Ordinary Life

> "Most fundamental, on September 11, the everydayness of television itself was interrupted was suddenly disrupted by news of something completely 'alien' to the usual patterns of domestic TV viewing. The nonstop commercial-free coverage, which lasted on major broadcast networks and cable news for a full week contributed to the estrangement from ordinary life itself." [38] - Lynn Spigel

Years later during the interview, the kind of things people remembered as being out of place on September 11 and in the week that followed were subtle, but troubling. A number of details still lingered in their minds about a time period, which for some was emotionally transformative, marking not only how they struggled to make sense of what had happened, but also how they wished to move on. What struck people along with the extraordinary visual footage from the day, was how strangely *quiet* neighborhoods seemed thus rendering even the most common neighborhood noises as jarring. On the day of the attacks, they recalled most businesses closing early and how normally bustling public spaces were virtually abandoned, giving the impression that the world was

[38] The epigraph to this section is drawn from "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11," in *The Selling of 9/11*, 120- 121.

standing still. Even though most businesses reopened the next day, people felt unsettled about doing their usual errands. For example, Neil remembered how going to Whole Foods and the normalcy of buying groceries, while listening to other-worldly new age music playing over the loudspeakers in hushed tones felt odd to him.

People could also recall feeling a sense of dread or even quiet devastation while doing routine things such as reading the newspaper or turning on the television, as well as local traveling to and from work. Some of these activities seemed to fill people with a sense of frustration and they asked themselves, how could things just return to normal? How could we go about our daily lives again as though something like 9/11 had not happened? Again Neil, "The very act of going anywhere felt strange. "It felt surreal. It didn't feel normal…there was a sense that people were going about their daily activity. The normal felt very strange."

The basic framing of daily life was out of place because as interview participants indicated, the extraordinary had become the norm while the ordinary or mundane seemed strange even alien. Amanda recalled going out to dinner in New York with a friend in an attempt to reestablish a sense of enjoyment, and encountering makeshift memorials, countless fliers of missing people, and impromptu vigils. Any details of the dinner quickly took second place in her memory of that evening as she instead focused more on what it was like to be a part of a grieving landscape.

At the same time, some seemed to feel that everyday tasks were what it would take for them to feel cohesive, whole, or even just emotionally comfortable again. Everything felt so out of place that it seemed like the only thing anchoring them were the small, but necessary acts that comprised their daily routine. Julia recalled doing her

laundry on September 11 and the importance of preparing to go back to work after a brief vacation, strangely enough, to New York City the previous week. Jerry, feeling that he needed a respite from all the news recounted how he and his roommate decided to take a drive and eat some boiled peanuts. "It was kind of nice. It was very comforting and I was really glad we did that and we didn't just stay at home and watch television."

Others seemed to express a sense of relief about actually remaining at work on September 11. For example, both Alice and Louisa recalled that in between watching the news, they also spent the day cancelling events, calling people, and trying to ensure a smooth and swift exit of people off the work premises. Rob remembered that they did not close the school where he worked until three o'clock because there was nowhere for students to go until their parents were free to get them. Finally, Melissa who was at the time living in Texas and going to college, spoke of the college's refusal to cancel classes explicitly as a way "to not give into terrorism." When I asked what she thought of the decision she replied, "I believe not cancelling classes was a good idea, however, the individual professors handled it in different ways. I believe I would have had open discussions about what was going on instead of continuing with lessons and tests as some professors did; we were all too distracted to think about the subject matter at the time." Their narratives express a clear desire to balance the unknowable with the knowable, maintain a sense of order and routine in the face of chaos, and a conscious effort to keep the absolutely horrific nature of 9/11 from taking over every facet of their life.

However, as the days passed this would prove difficult to do. Interviewees yearned for the return to some kind of normalcy, but it seemed that follow up news regarding September 11 was overwhelming, dominating nearly every single aspect of

American life. Alice in particular expressed a kind of exhaustion regarding the nonstop coverage, mentioning that she just could not mourn anymore. In particular, Alice felt that it was not her place to mourn since she had not lost anyone directly, adding:

> It seemed to me that there was a certain point in time that most of us needed to put September 11 away and those people that were seriously affected by September 11, that was their time. It was their place. It was their story and it wasn't ours' anymore. You know it's like if you drive by a car wreck, it's one thing to look as you drive by, it's another thing to stop and watch the whole thing. I felt a sort of invasion of privacy of the people who were profoundly affected by this event. I felt really voyeuristic and like it was something I shouldn't be doing.

Lara too commented on how she could not bear any more news about September 11 and referenced a story headline that appeared in the faux news rag *The Onion* some weeks later that read along the lines of, "NATION RETURNS TO WORRYING ABOUT STUPID CRAP AGAIN". She noted the tension between wanting to move on and being vigilant about new updates saying, "On the one hand, everything got a little melodramatic and on the other hand there's like this constant threat on everything."

The urge to escape the news coverage did not mean that interviewees necessarily wanted to forget or pretend that nothing had happened. The struggle for a number of people lay in trying to come to terms with what had happened, as well as managing what felt like to them, September 11 pervasive reach and influence. For example, coverage of the attacks and their aftermath were on nearly every channel, even channels not normally devoted to anything but entertainment and entertainment-oriented news such as MTV. Moreover, interviewees recalled that when television programs tried to address the emotional fall out sparked by the attack, they often floundered. Amanda recalled watching a program on ABC that spoke with kids about what had happened as well as encouraged them to ask questions, but believed it was too soon, "I think Peter Jennings

hosted it…it was a good idea, but somehow it didn't suffice…people were scrambling for answers that were ultimately half-assed." Then there were televisual reminders of September 11 that in turn spawned their own events. For instance, Lara remembered feeling "choked up" while watching veteran CBS news anchorman Dan Rather, who appeared on *The Late Show* on September 18, 2001 and began weeping several times, once while citing the words to the song "American the Beautiful". She noted, "That one gets me every time. I mean that was kind of news event in itself."

Heller has referred to the entire *Late Show* broadcast as a "singular event that has come to represent an important moment in the cultural memory of 9/11."[39] She notes this is because the "catharsis performed by his guests (two of the most powerful figures in the news and entertainment corporate industry structure) signaled permission to resume 'normal activity.'"[40] Heller's interpretation of the broadcast in general, and Rather's weeping in particular was in actuality, for a number of interviewees, remembered as having the opposite effect. Indeed, the entire broadcast revealed just how far from returning to normal the nation was. Resuming normal activities just did not seem possible with Dan Rather's barely dried tear-stained face still burned in people's memories. Movie critic Stephanie Zacharek and past contributor to *Salon.com* noted that what was upsetting about Rather's performance was not that he began weeping, but the fact that his discussion of 9/11 lacked any partiality. Still, her article expressed feelings of compassion both for Rather and the nation as she stated:

> The newsroom is not, and never will be, an appropriate place for outpourings of emotion, a fact Rather is more conscious of than anyone. But at a time when people around the world are trying in vain to process the meaning of an inexplicable event, the tried-and-true newscaster's façade, maintained at all costs,

[39] Heller, "Introduction: Consuming 9/11," 22.
[40] Ibid.

> seems disingenuous at best. Rather's moments of reckoning on Letterman were something else again, a different and intensely personal kind of reporting: He has never seen anything like what he saw last week, and his refusal to pretend otherwise may have manifested itself in tears, but it was really a shout -- a voice calling out to us in the middle of what has come to seem like a vast, dark hole.[41]

While I do not disagree with Zacharek's comments, I would however add that it is equally important to pay attention to how nervous it also made many of those I interviewed when our nation's cultural and political leaders broke from their usual performance or strayed from the script. For example, Jerry remembered watching televised coverage of members of congress as they gathered on the steps of the Capitol during the afternoon of September 11 to sing and put on a show of solidarity saying, "I just remember being really scared when I saw them all standing together because you could tell they were scared and they were trying to keep it together and right at that moment I thought, oh my god, we could become a fascist state overnight."

Others also recalled feeling anxious as their nation's leaders failed to offer either reassurance or new information. Neil remembered being sensitive to the way certain news stories made him feel better, while others made him more frightened. This seemed primarily based on who was talking and how they comported themselves. For example, Colin Powell made him feel the most reassured adding, "I didn't get the feeling you were talking to a politician. Through his body language and voice it felt like he was communicating something genuine. He came across the most authentic. Something about the feeling of authenticity felt reassuring." In contrast, Alice remembers enduring the repetitive footage of September 11 in the hopes of hearing some kind of explanation and reassurance from the president of the United States about what was happening. She

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[41] "Dan Rather's Tears: Journalists Don't Cry on Camera. That Was before Last Week," *Salon.com*, accessed December 6, 2010, http://www.salon.com/entertainment/tv/feature/2001/09/18/rather.

concluded that after President George W. Bush delivered his speech, which she noted "was rather on the short side", she felt even less reassured.

Strategically using his hands to make gestures meant to imply competency, when Bush finally issued a statement that evening, he primarily succeeded in looking stunned, perhaps even the most stunned person in the nation.[42] In between rapid eye blinking, he delivered a speech that left at least two interviewees remarking specifically on how they felt un-consoled and even nervous. His hapless insistence that the country move forward seemed confusing as he never offered a concrete explanation for how this would, or could happen. In addition to what some interview participants thought was a less than stellar speech, on September 11 the American public did not even know the whereabouts of their president for at least several hours. Indeed, a concise public record of where he was throughout the day is still unavailable. On a day when a sense of nation-place was ruptured, the president had effectively succeeded in misplacing himself.

Broken Bonds of Affection

> "Tonight, we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done."[43] - George W. Bush

> "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection."[44] – Abraham Lincoln

If some events experienced by a great many can temporarily bind people together in a historic moment, than it also possible for events to temporarily break people apart.[45]

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[42] "CNN- Ex President George w. Bush's Post 9/11 Speech," *Youtube*, accessed December 7, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMiqEUBux3o.

[43] The epigraph to this section is drawn from Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, *CNN.com*, accessed December 9, 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-20/us/gen.bush.transcript_1_joint-session-national-anthem-citizens?_s=PM:US.

[44] The epigraph to this section is drawn from First Inaugural Address, May 4, 1861, *Showcase.net,* accessed November 19, 2010, http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/1inaug.htm.

[45] See Diane Vaughan, *The Challenger Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), xi.

With television news stuck on repeat and multiple facets of ordinary life suspended, interviewees also spoke of the rupture they felt between themselves and the nation as well as a weakening, if not complete break, in the bonds of sociality and communality they normally experienced with friends, neighbors, family members, and co-workers. I would also argue, though they never directly addressed the issue, that some were keenly aware of a disruption in the boundaries between the dead and the living. This boundary in particular has been profoundly disturbed as a result not only of the attacks on September 11, but in the ensuing American led invasion on not one, but two countries: Afghanistan and Iraq. Additionally, it was news television in particular that a number of interviewees perceived as a kind of well-spring from which a rhetoric of vehement revenge and righteousness, accompanied by national sentiments of dislike, distrust, and disgust for any group or country charged with being against America, have poured forth, increasing for many interviewee, their sense of concern regarding the state of the nation.

To begin with, several interviewees spoke of the broken bonds between themselves and a number of political and cultural figures understood as representing the nation. "I remember there was a cartoon and it was a screaming eagle with sharpened talons and the caption was something like a 'Get ready we're going to kick somebody's ass' mentality," said Rob with a smile that seemed to hover between exasperation and resignation. With most Americans in support of war, Justin felt at odds with this decision, stating that as soon as he stopped "fearing for his life" his first thought was, "Oh no, this will really benefit the Republicans and how right I was." He went on to add:

> I definitely did not support the invasion of Afghanistan even. Not only did it seem like a typical Republican response you know like, just carpet bombing a completely defenseless country, it just seemed like the thing to do…all you need is twenty angry people to kill thousands of Americans to invade a sovereign

> nation and how many more people than twenty are you going to convert into enemies? It seems like a bad idea in terms of homeland security.

At the time of our interview in 2007, Justin noted that he was willing to concede that "maybe" invading Afghanistan was the right thing to do. His narratives express sentiments of confusion and disbelief about both invasions, and are representative of how many I spoke with felt. A number of interviewees expressed concern that there has been little time for them to think through what had taken place on September 11, and that they have been effectively caught in a maelstrom of decisions claimed to be made in the name of securing their freedom.

Additionally, their narratives reveal how there were times when interviewees felt at serious odds with those around them, especially as they tried to express thoughts and opinions about the Bush Administration's immediate response to the 9/11 attacks, which included what was perceived by some as a swift and merciless assault on Afghanistan and Iraq. National rhetoric centering on the coming together as one nation after September 11 quickly became more myth than truth. If there ever was a moment of collective solidarity it lasted, for interviewees anyway, only a brief while. In a moving moment during our interview, Jerry discussed what he experienced as a particularly painful rupture between himself and the nation stating, "One of the things I find distressing is to see that such a large percentage of the public actually believe Saddam Hussein is somehow behind September 11. This was because of the deliberately vague wording and misleading statements by the Bush Administration and I have to say [pause], this has been the saddest period of my life. Seeing the complete collapse of the political process as a result of this just impunity with which out and out lies are foisted on the public."

Additionally, he also spoke about how shocking it was to feel that bonds between people threatened so easily to break over differences of opinion stating:

> I have seen this amazing degree of bitterness in the way people criticize each other. I remember when I was at this Christmas party and I mentioned, this was after Saddam Hussein was captured, that the timing was very convenient because it happened literally a day or so after some Bush Administration crisis. This woman who wasn't even involved in the conversation lit into me and said, 'Are you saying that they waited on purpose!' and accused me of not caring about the soldiers and all this other stuff. This was one of my work colleagues!"

He went on to describe his anger over a series of emails sent to his entire family from what he described as his "right-wring" cousin regarding the "Muslim threat." Dating someone at the time from Pakistan, Jerry took offense and was deeply upset by the hostility of the emails from someone in his own family.

In an even more extreme example demonstrating a bond broken between individuals and the larger community around them, Louisa, whose husband was in India on September 11, remembered how around midnight that evening a rock was hurled at the windshield of her parked car. This aggressive act disrupted her sense of personal safety and the idea that her home was a place of refuge during a national crisis. Moreover, there was a feeling of shock that someone would target her family. This was demonstrated by the fact that up to this point in the interview, Louisa believed that she had been watching the news for a large part of the day with her husband. Suddenly she remembered that he had in fact been overseas. At this point, the memory of the rock emerged. Close friends urged her to stay with them until her husband returned home from his trip, which she did, recalling:

> I don't know any other family of color in the neighborhood except me and my husband and the only thing we could think…I didn't think about this at the time, but I later heard about the Sikh man being killed in Arizona, but I could not fathom that someone would be doing this because of my husband…that they

> thought he was Muslim or something. I mean he is not a Muslim. He has a lot of Muslim friends, but his family is ostensibly Hindu, though they're really not anything.

Lara was someone who struggled during the interview to come to terms with the fact that shortly after September 11 she harbored thoughts and feelings that she now regards as somewhat "extreme". Throughout this segment of the interview, she verbally stumbled in trying to explain herself, such as using the word 'like' with such frequency that I chose to remove some of them in order to highlight the crux of her response. I also noticed that at times she cut herself off, or failed to complete some of her sentences, speech patterns that were not present in other parts of our interview. She states:

> I can remember talking to a friend of mine about it [the 9/11 attack] because we did the thing where you call all of your friends to talk about it…a handful of my friend were living in New York so was my brother's girlfriend so I remember even myself expressing, you know, getting really violent. I remember specifically responding to, I mean I don't know why people do this, but all the news of September [11] and sort of like a news introspective [sic] about how the world is responding and it was always some Middle Eastern country and everyone looks super happy and I remember some clip of like little kids finding out or like little kids watching a video of the planes crashing and being really excited, having parades, and throwing candy or something and then like months later I sort of had a really flip flop reaction to the whole thing.

Here, she hints at how she felt and what she spoke about with friends, however, both are never made explicit, which I interpret as part of the struggle she was undergoing to sort through old feelings and new ones, past circumstances with the present context of an interview situation, and how much to reveal versus what to conceal.

Finally, a number of interviewees discussed what I see as a rupture between the living and those who died both in the 9/11 attack. Some described the missing and the dead in the posters, fliers, and obituaries as profoundly haunting and heartbreaking. Alice expressed a sense of relief that she did not see people jumping from the towers,

while Justin discussed what he referred to as "the mystery" of people jumping out of the Twin Towers saying, "it wasn't something I wanted to research. I remember there was speculation that they knew they were going to die and they would rather have their bodies recognized on the ground then getting burned up, but maybe I am not remembering correctly…I may have actually seen it [bodies falling] on TV, I'm not sure." Both Alice and Justin's narratives point to the ways that certain kinds of death in particular disrupt the social order and threaten a sense of community continuity.[46]

The absence of recoverable bodies from the massive rubble left by the fallen towers made it difficult for many throughout the nation to come to terms with death and the significance of those particular deaths. American burial rituals have traditionally centered on the central importance of a body to bury in order for mourning rites to begin and for grieving to take place.[47] Without bodies to bury, the nation remained suspended in a disrupted and disturbed place; one where the dead have been denied the proper rituals and rites that help prepare and ensure their exit from living society.[48] If how the dead are cared for, and the practices employed for their disposal tells us much about the animating principle within a given society[49], than in the context of 9/11, what has been America's animating principle? There was a sense among some of those interviewed that the deaths of thousands, who died in the attacks, have for the most part been in vain. This feeling also extends to the two wars that ensured after September 11 waged in the

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[46] See Michael C. Kearl, *Endings: A Sociology of Death and Dying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 86.
[47] See Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Towards Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 6.
[48] Laderman, *Sacred Remains*, 2.
[49] *Sacred Remains*, 1.

name of avenging the dead, and reaffirming America's virility after it "suffered castration of national proportions" during the terrorist attack.[50]

Gary Laderman writes, "In politics the dead have been extremely powerful sources of national legitimation and sanctification. From Gettysburg to the Challenger disaster, the federal government has acted to preserve the memory of significant individuals and moments in national history."[51] His work highlights the ways in which the dead are always with the living, inhabiting both worlds of public culture and private memory.[52] The presence of the dead can be seen in the powerful and rather emotionally difficult movie, *The Messenger*. It is a movie about a wounded and angry nation where dead soldiers, though never shown, are plentiful thus making it difficult to sanctify and glorify the country's past[53] in the face of quiet, inescapable and ever-present realities about war, death, and profound loss that has blanketed the first ten years of the 21st century. Released in 2009 and directed by Oren Moverman, it tells the story of two Army men played by Ben Foster and Woody Harrelson assigned to the Army's Casualty Notification service.[54] Their job consists of delivering the news to families that their loved ones have been killed.

More gut wrenching than the scenes in which they deliver the shattering news of death to various families, are the scenes at the beginning of the movie where Captain Tony (Harrelson) runs over the rules of delivering such news to Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery (Foster), recently sent home from Iraq due to a serious eye injury. In one

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[50] Heller, "Introduction: Consuming 9/11," 13-14.
[51] Laderman, *Sacred Remains*, 6.
[52] Gary Laderman, *Scared Matters: Celebrity Worship, Sexual Ecstasies, The Living Dead and Other Signs of Religious Life in the United States* (New York: New Press, 2009), 162-163.
[53] Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2003).
[54] "The Messenger: A Film by Orem Moverman," *Themessengermovie.com*, accessed December 18, 2010, http://www.themessengermovie.com.

particularly memorable moment, Captain Tony casually salts his watermelon at a local diner and cautions Montgomery against physically touching people after relaying the news, the importance of telling only immediate family members, and of being prepared for people to react with great anger and anguish, which sometimes includes physical assault. All these rules are issued matter-of-factly, but with a fixed emphasis that there will be no deviating from them. The viewer is left to grapple with the heartbreak and powerlessness of both those who receive the terrible news and those who deliver it.

To date, for a number of those interviewed, there has not been a sense of emotional, social, or political resolve regarding the horrors of September 11. Some are still searching for ways to come to terms with an extraordinary event that has sparked endless discussions about its significance, while still others have expressed a sense of exhaustion and a desire to avoid any further discussions about it. And yet their words have directly and meaningfully contributed to a discussion in which the possibilities of learning both about and from the events of that terrible day exist. Employing an interpretive schema centering on themes of rupture and place, I argue how identities, as well as construction of, and sentiments about, place have been ruptured as a result of the attack. Although interview participants have since moved forward with their lives and their routines have returned to normal, a sense of rupture still remains. For example, the physical place where the Twin Towers once stood still is after finally, in spite of ongoing agonizing and contentious public debates, being transformed into a commemorative and commercial site. As well, the sacred center of our nation and our faith in it has been challenged. The sacred center refers to the ways in which cities like New York City and Washington, D.C. have rich symbolic meanings attached to them; their very existence are

at the center our nation's understanding of itself. Moreover, both New York City and Washington, D.C. reflect many values that Americans cherish, as well as critique namely freedom, commerce, and individualism.

Key segments from interviews conducted with seventeen people have been used to demonstrate a myriad of ways they have experienced a loss of center, ruptured place, and concern for all that has been out of order. They discussed in detail how upset they were about the repetitive images shown on every channel and seemingly at all hours, which left them feeling as though they were stuck on repeat and thus somehow stuck in a terrible psychical place where the towers continue to collapse over and over again. Just as viewing television often helped establish a sense of place and childhood, viewing also spurred a profound sense of anxiety. The specificities of viewing repeated news stories of the attack on September 11 lent a feeling that the world was not safe, and even more significant, that their own home-place was vulnerable to an outside threat.

In addition, each participant spoke of the ways ordinary life temporarily seemed to cease, stressing how television in particular reinforced the strangeness of everyday life for days on end. There was a sense that even when they tried to avoid the news, interviewees could not escape from it. Coverage of the attack and its aftermath was constant; its presence could be detected on all the channels not normally devoted to 'hard' news stories, in the delay of something as frivolous, but entertaining as the Emmy Awards, on the faces of *Late Night* talk show hosts who looked out at the audience with expressions of sorrow, and in the weeping of veteran news reporter Dan Rather. It was as though all the pleasure, even the pleasure of feeling aggravated, that some expressed

having while watching news shows or news people they actively dislike, had been sucked out of the TV screen.

Finally, participants spoke of broken or ruptured bonds between friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Some specifically recalled feeling that a personal sense of place and belonging in their own communities has at times been aggressively challenged or even threatened simply because they expressed views different from those around them, or because of perceived differences. A few also made mention of how their views tended to differ quite intensely from political and cultural figures, whose speeches, interviews, and comments they watched on television with a growing sense of alienation and alarm. Whereas certain television events, either fictional as demonstrated by Robert Wuthnow's discussion of *Holocaust*[55] or real, such as John F. Kennedy's funeral, can help bring together people across communities and generations[56], the viewing interviewees did in the days following the September 11 attack, made some feel divided from those known and those they never had met. Viewing the news of the attack had initially allowed most to feel a sense of bonding with those around them. Several expressively mentioned the sympathy and support they felt, not just from other Americans, but internationally for all September 11 victims and their families. But as the days passed, they felt those bonds rupturing as they witnessed the makings of an imagined community they did not understand, agree with, or wish to be a part of.

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[55] See *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 123-144.
[56] See Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Event: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 150-159.

Conclusion
Mourning News

> "Can't see nothin' in front of me
> Can't see nothin' coming up behind
> I make my way through this darkness
> I can't feel nothing but this chain that binds me
> Lost track of how far I've gone
> How far I've gone, how high I've climbed
> On my back's a sixty pound stone
> On my shoulder a half mile line." [1] - Bruce Springsteen

Singer/songwriter and musician Bruce Springsteen's album *The Rising* released July 2002 is filled entirely with songs that seem to express the inner workings of a man confronting emotional pain. The entire album is an expression of some of his deepest thoughts about a profound and enduring sense of rupture in the aftermath of September 11. In some respects, it appears that Springsteen was doing through his music what most interviewees for this dissertation were unable to do, at least for awhile after the attack, which was mourn. It is not clear that everyone I spoke with necessarily wanted to mourn or that they even felt they needed to. What their narratives do reflect is a group of people who have a number of unresolved thoughts and feelings about that day. The years that have passed since September 11 have allowed interviewees more to time to reflect, at least in the context of our interviews, about their experience of one the most significant American tragedies to occur in their lifetime. A number of their reflections hint at how some still remain in the shadow of lost towers, airplanes, and people.

In spite of a kind of exhaustion several mentioned having in connection to multiple aspects of 9/11, their words suggest that it was a tragedy that has been largely impossible for them ignore. Moreover, the majority of interviewees maintain lingering

[1] The epigraph to this conclusion is drawn from "The Rising," The Rising, *Brucespringsteen.net*, 2003, accessed January 18, 2011, http://www.brucespringsteen.net/songs/TheRising.html.

resentments about how badly they felt news television chose to handle coverage related to the attack and its aftermath. Even those who felt the news made a valiant effort in the face of tremendous ongoing chaos commented on what they saw as the unnecessary repetition of certain images. They also expressed concern about the misinformation that seemed to abound especially on the day of the attack.

In the days following, not just news television but all television seemed to take a turn for the weird[2] as coverage about September 11 took over nearly every network and cable channel. There also emerged an unofficial ban on humor and irony, which temporarily cut off a means of emotional release and intellectual inquiry/criticism. Finally, there was a confusing yet oppressive cultural demand that the American public mourn, along with early (some would argue premature) discussions about what kind of memorial to build for all those who had died. In the meantime, the country seemed to be gearing up for revenge in the form of a war. In addition to these issues, another key reason why it has been difficult for interviewees to come to terms with the attack and its aftermath may have to do with the absence of a material, physical site in which to gather in an effort to express a range of emotions and thoughts.

This has also meant that there has been little opportunity to create lasting communities centered on understanding a sense loss felt by a number of people I spoke with. Unlike the fixed, formal quality of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., or even the AIDS quilt, a mobile and ever-changing memorial, there has been very little to help interviewees to come together in an effort to mourn, contemplate, or simply

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[2] See Lynn Spigel, "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11," in *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy became a Tragedy*, ed. Dana Heller, 119-154 (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

just be in the presence of others.[3] Moreover, participants seemed unclear about what exactly to mourn. Was it the loss of thousands of live or the destruction of an iconic, but for some a deeply personal landmark? Was it the growing death toll from two wars that most participants felt should not have taken place to begin with? Did they even have a right or reason to mourn given how many out there that did?

E. Ann Kaplan writes in journal-entry style, "March 11 [2002] was a difficult day. It brought back vivid memories of September 11. I watched the ground zero memorial service for the families of the victims and was moved. America has learned to mourn and to respect mourning and that's a good thing."[4] Contrary to Kaplan's statement, which seems more like a wish than a reality, this dissertation suggests that America has in fact *not* learned to mourn the events of September 11. Moreover, time has demonstrated that respect is granted only to specific forms of mourning and for only a select group of mourners. For example, the mourning of a mother from Queens, New York for her son, who did not come home on September 11, was completely disregarded as she and her family had to endure harassing FBI inquiries, along with offensive media slander regarding her son because he was Muslim. It was later found out that Mohammed Salman Hamdani had died at the World Trade Center while attempting to rescue people.[5]

On a significantly less dramatic scale, interviewees have provided examples of what they feel has been either lost or disregarded as a result of September 11. They range from loss of confidence in the news during a national crisis, to a loss of civility normally

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[3] See Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[4] "A Camera and a Catastrophe: Reflections on Trauma and the Twin Towers," in *Trauma at Home after 9/11*, ed. Judith Greenberg (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2003), 102.
[5] For a fictional account of this incident see Director Mira Nair short within a longer film entitled, " 11.09.01," September 11, *imdb.org* , 2002, accessed January 24, 2011, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0328802/.

shared between friends, family members, and co-workers even in times of strife. Participants were also profoundly bothered by what they saw as a loss of choice regarding how to feel about September 11. Specifically, they expressed a sense of pressure to share similar kinds of sentiments with those around them especially in the immediate aftermath of the attack. There were also numerous instances in which they neither related to nor agreed with many national sentiments put forth by the media, politicians, and military leaders.

Interviewees were not only a stranded television audience that day, they were also stranded in the sense that their very ordinariness made it difficult for them to legitimize or validate their experience of September 11. They were not survivors of the attack, no one they knew intimately had died in them, and with the exception of two participants most were nowhere near any of the targeted sites. Instead, their experience was like millions of other Americans. They viewed the attack as it unfolded on news television. Moreover, they themselves seemed to feel their experience of that day was neither significant nor particularly important, especially in terms of discussing the impact of September 11 on their lives. This attitude was demonstrated not only by their interview responses, but also by the surprise some expressed at being asked to participate in a research project on 9/11. Still others answered the call for interviewees by immediately stating what their connection to that day was. Though extremely well-educated, politically savvy, middle to upper-middle class either professionals or graduate students, there has been relatively little room for any recognition of the subtle, but real ways the attack disrupted their lives.

This dissertation began by closely examining the pleasure television viewing brought to interviewees throughout various points in their lives, but especially before starting high school. There was a tremendous amount of light-heartedness, if not joy many experienced in the process of recalling TV shows from their past. In particular, some remembered the pleasure associated with the Saturday morning cartoon ritual, while for older interviewees it was the nightly viewing they did with their families. It has ended with a discussion about the ways both pleasure and place were ruptured on September 11. The pleasure normally associated with watching television (news or non news) was replaced by a tremendous sense of anxiety and even anger most felt every time they turned on the TV that week. As well, a feeling of stability and continuity they took for granted was ruptured, watching in horror as familiar places were transform into alien, unfamiliar ones by the terrorist attack.

The very idea that their home was a place that functioned as a physical and symbolic boundary that separated the world from themselves and their loved ones felt under attack. Certainly this was the case for Louisa, who heard a rock break the windshield of her car at midnight after a long and upsetting day. Alone in her home, she wondered if someone was specifically targeting her family. Other participants recalled feeling a profound sense of vulnerability and fear that the terrorist attack they were watching on television would also soon be directed at their own communities. In fact, this was a significant concern for nearly everyone I interviewed. Viewing the Twin Towers' collapse and all of Lower Manhattan in terrible chaos, a number of participants were afraid that their own neighborhoods, cities, and even homes might be televised next.

Just as recalling how the weekend ritual of viewing cartoons marked a time in their lives many looked back on with great fondness, recalling how they ritually viewed an unending stream of shocking images associated with September 11 signified a time of great helplessness and fear. People turned to each other, not to laugh at the antics of silly characters or to mock local or national news anchors, but with looks of disbelief on their faces. The lasting significance of September 11 for a number of people I spoke with has much to do with how an ordinary activity – television viewing –became in the context of an extraordinary event, one that left them with feelings of anger, anxiety, and fear as certain pleasures and places were disrupted and ruined right before their very eyes.

Left in the wake of this profound disruption was death. Those who died that day seemed to lurk amidst the wreckage, troubling the imaginations of a number of interviewees as they struggled to come to terms with the burden of unresolved death surrounding the attack almost ten years later. It is the particularities of death in the context of September 11 that has been so disruptive. Against their will, those in the three hijacked planes were killed while in the process of forcibly killing other people. Still others hurled to their deaths in order to avoid prolonging the inevitable suffering that awaited them, and thousands more were pulverized when the very building they were trying to escape from collapsed on top of them. In a strange and remote way, their deaths transformed all those who watched the attack on television into survivors. Obviously there were those who experienced more direct and intimate encounters with the attack. As viewers they were spared the immediacy of what must have been for others a profoundly terrifying experience, however, viewing the news was a ritual practice that positioned and affirmed their status as survivors. Survivors are sometime plagued by an

irrational and often terrible sense of guilt[6], leading me to wonder if this was one possible reason why so many interviewed tended to discount their experience of that day.

One of the most significant contributions this dissertation has made is in its approach and use of three distinct disciplines - ritual, cultural, and television studies - as a way of thinking through an enormous catastrophe like September 11. Ritual has been used as a framework in which to more thoroughly understand television news viewing, while at the same time, news viewing has been a means of attempting to better understand how ritual operates for people during both ordinary and extraordinary times. My work has also been deeply concerned with a facet of American life - television viewing – that has enriched and enlivened scholarly research on the construction of identity, biography, and personal memory. The relationship people have with television, especially the news is very complex. It is a relationship that is further complicated during a national tragedy. As this dissertation has demonstrated, the relationship interviewees had with news television that day was highly ambiguous, lending itself to feelings of frustration and anger. Yet during other national tragedies, news viewing encouraged and even enabled people to transform public grief into something private and personally meaningful to them. In some instances their grief remained unresolved as they continued to wrestle with the meaning of certain tragedies years later. Without a doubt, viewing the news for these participants has been anything but passive.

I cannot say for sure what their private memories of September 11 mean, but I have tried to bring them to the table and make them a little more public. I wanted to add their voices into the fray. To have them join ongoing discussions about September 11 that

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[6] See Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days: A Triumph of Culture Among Jewish Old People in an Urban Ghetto* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980).

have at times, seemed more like shouting matches rather than conversations. In some ways, this impulse was fueled by the fact some spoke of their experience of that day as though it was irrelevant. There was sometimes even a sense that they neither wanted nor felt their story deserved any attention. While they volunteered to be interviewed, I am not always sure they wanted to join the discussion. In some ways, this has been a project about giving voice to the reluctant. Still, I believe this dissertation presents a respectful and thoughtful analysis addressing not only why, but also how they viewed the news that day. Though small in number, this group has offered a powerful and at times poignant interpretation of their experience of September 11 and its impact on their lives.

APPENDIX A: *INTERVIEW QUESTIONS*

A. *Demographics*

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: M _____ F_____

3. Ethnicity: _____

4. Single/Married/Partnered (please circle one)

5. Highest educational level obtained: _____

6. What is your current occupation? _____

7. How long have you been at your place of work? _____

8. Please tell me a little about what your work entails?

9. Were you brought up in any particular religion?

10. Do you currently define yourself as a religious person? If yes, please describe.

11. If no, do you define yourself as a spiritual person? If yes, can you tell me a little about what spirituality means to you?

B. *Watching Television, Watching the News*

I. FAMILY MEDIA HISTORY/PAST:

1. How many television sets did your family own?

2. Where was the television(s) located in your house?

3. How often did you watch TV? How many hours a day?

4a. Did someone in your home watch the news on regular/daily basis when you were growing up?

4b. Do you remember them either liking or disliking a particular news channel? If so do you remember why?

4c. Was there a particular reporter or anchorperson you remember them either liking or disliking. If so, do you remember why?

II. PERSONAL MEDIA HISTORY/PAST:

1a. Did you watch television shows when you growing up (either as a child, teenager, or young adult)

1b. Please tell me about some of the shows you watched?

1c. Did you have a favorite show you watched regularly?

2. Do you remember your shows ever getting interrupted due to some kind of breaking news event? If so, what was the event?

3. As you were growing up, were there any events covered by the news that you can remember? Please describe in detail. For example, I remember when Reagan was shot. I saw the aftermath on television and the replay.

III. NEWS WATCHING HISTORY/ PRESENT:

1. Currently how many hours of television do you watch? How many of those hours are devoted to watching the news.

2. What guides your decision to turn on the news? For example, I typically turn on the news when I want some background noise or if there is a special event like the elections.

3. What do you like or dislike about the news channels you watch?

4. Do you (also) watch weekly news programs? For example: *Dateline* or *60 Minutes*

5. Do you watch "fake" news shows such *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*? If yes, why?

C. *Viewing September 11*

1. Please tell me what you were doing and where you were on September 11.

2. When did you first hear about what was going?

3a. Did you watch news coverage of September 11?

3b. How many hours of news coverage did you watch that day and which channels did you watch?

4. If you didn't watch the news, did you have any particular reason for not doing so?

5. Were there any words or images that you can recall?

6. If you watched television with others, can you recall the kinds of the things you all talked about?

7a. Did you continue to watch the coverage pertaining to September 11 after that day?

7b. Can you remember how much news television you were watching? For example did it increase or decrease? Stay the same?

7c. What channels or programs were you watching? Did these change as the week went on?

8. Today, looking back on September 11, 2001 is there anything about the news coverage that sticks out to you?

9. Are there any other thoughts you wish to share?

APPENDIX B: Interview Participants*

Neil. August 2007. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Justin. August 2007. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Lara. August 2007. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Julia. September 2007. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Kensington, Maryland.

John. September 2007. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Bethesda, Maryland.

Margot. November 2008. Interviewed by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Damascus, Syria.

Louisa. September 2008. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Jerry. September 2008. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Susan. September 2008. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Rob. October 2008. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Alice. October 2008. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Mark. January 2009. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Denise. January 2009. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Lance. January 2009. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Scott. January 2009. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

Melissa. June 2009. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia

Amanda. September 2009. Interview by Leah Rosenberg. Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia.

*All of the names of interview participants have been changed in order to ensure anonymity.

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