INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI®

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the disjuncture between the elite and mass culture discourses and the possibility of a methodology that will allow us to talk about both at the same time. In order to begin to consider the full continuum of mass to elite culture, however, it is necessary to address two very fundamental concerns.

The first concern has to do with distinctions between elite and mass culture and their relative moral values. More specifically, this relates to the historical critique of mass culture, the over-simplified assumptions that mass culture is bad and elite culture is good – or alternatively that elite culture is bad and mass culture is good.

The second issue is the fact that the discourses of elite and mass culture have highly polarized conceptualizations of the audience and of the roles of structure and agency. The question here is how to tap into and mediate both the perspective that individuals have the capacity to act freely as rational agents and the view that every action is in some way constrained by the structural elements of the society into which the individual is socialized or acculturated.

This study employed the Sense-Making Methodology as a means of transcending the oppositions in the current literature. In keeping with the theoretical framework of the Sense-Making Methodology, analyses were guided by attention to general issues of structure, agency, and mediation.
The informant pool consisted of more than 150 upperclassmen at a large public university who conducted self-interviews regarding their experiences with both elite and mass culture. The resulting 1700 interviews were then analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach.

The study found that some of the literature of the elite and mass discourses matched up some of the time with the way respondents in this study made sense of their elite and mass culture experiences. However, overall, the highly polarized nature of the literature remains inadequate to account for the complexity and contradiction found in the data of this study. The findings revealed that an extraordinary play of forces – structure and agency as well as the hypothesized positive and negative values found in the elite and mass discourse literatures – were present together as individuals made sense of their cultural experiences.
Dedicated to my husband, Bill, and my daughter, Katherine

And to the memory of my parents
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish most of all to thank my adviser, Brenda Dervin, who has been a true mentor. It is her intellectual guidance, support, and enthusiasm that has made this dissertation possible. I will be forever grateful to her for her generosity, patience, and willingness to bear with me while I searched for my own voice in the cacophony.

Thank you also to my committee members, Joe Pilotta and Margaret Wyszomirski, for their continued support and guidance. And thanks as well to Mary Garrett for her insights and encouragement.

And finally, I am grateful to my family and friends for their ongoing steadfastness and affection during what I'm sure seemed like a never-ending process.
VITA

December 23, 1954 ........................................ Born – Toledo, Ohio

1976 ......................................................... B.M.E. summa cum laude
                                            The Ohio State University

1976 - 1978 .................................................. Music Teacher. Bay Village, Ohio

                                            The Ohio State University

1981 .......................................................... M.A. Journalism.
                                            The Ohio State University

1981 - 1982 .................................................. Public Information Specialist.
                                            Ohio Arts Council

1982 - 1985 .................................................. Promotion Manager.
                                            WOSU-AM-FM-TV

1985 - 1999 .................................................. Director, Arts Communication.
                                            The Ohio State University

1999 .......................................................... Graduate Teaching Associate.
                                            The Ohio State University

1999 - 2001 .................................................. Research Associate.
                                            The Ohio State University

2001 - present ............................................. Adjunct Faculty. Capital University
PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Communication
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................................ ii
Dedication ........................................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgments ........................................................................................... v
Vita ................................................................................................................... vi
List of Tables ................................................................................................... xiii
List of Figures .................................................................................................. xiv
Chapters:
1. Prologue .............................................................................................. 1
   Need for study ....................................................................... 2
   Overview of chapters ............................................................. 5
2. Review of elite and mass culture literatures and the philosophical
   assumptions that ground them ......................................................... 8
   Four modern concerns ............................................................. 8
      Freedom ............................................................................. 8
      Truth and knowledge ......................................................... 9
      The self .............................................................................. 10
      Morality ............................................................................. 11
   Introduction to the discourses ............................................ 12
   Elite discourse literature: Elite is good ................................. 14
      Represents valid and vital form of truth ..................... 14
      Contributes to understanding of human
      possibilities ................................................................. 21
      Contributes to democracy ........................................... 25
   Elite discourse literature: Mass is bad ................................. 28
      Dulls the mind and spirit ............................................... 29

viii
Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes ........................................ 30
Corrupts elite culture ............................................... 32
Negatively affects democracy .................................. 34
Elite discourse summary ............................................. 35
Mass discourse literature: Mass is good ....................... 35
Represents freedom of choice .................................. 36
Builds community through shared knowledge and experiences ............................................ 37
Provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression ........................................ 38
Mass discourse literature: Elite is bad ......................... 39
Creates undemocratic separation of social classes .. 39
Assumes a self-righteous stance ................................ 41
Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations ............................................... 42
Mass discourse summary ............................................. 44
Discontinuities between the two discourses ............... 44

3. Review of elite and mass culture literatures from the perspective of the audience ...................................................... 47
A brief discussion of constraints and freedoms .............. 48
Overview of the typology ........................................... 53
Audience as implied .................................................. 56
Elite is good ............................................................ 57
Mass is bad ............................................................. 57
Mass is good ........................................................... 61
Elite is bad .............................................................. 63
Criticisms of the audience-as-implied literature .......... 64
Audience as aggregate .............................................. 65
Elite is good ............................................................ 66
Mass is bad ............................................................. 69
Mass is good ........................................................... 72
Elite is bad .............................................................. 73
Criticisms of the audience-as-aggregate literature .. 74
Audience as situated interpreters .................................. 74
Elite is good ............................................................ 75
Mass is bad ............................................................. 77
Mass is good ........................................................... 80
Elite is bad .............................................................. 81
Criticisms of the audience-as-situated interpreters literature ...................................................... 84
Discussion ............................................................. 84

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
4. Research goals and methodology ...................................................... 86
   Introduction ............................................................................ 86
   Sense-Making Methodology ................................................. 87
   Approach to interviewing ...................................................... 91
   Data sources ..............................................................................94
   Data analysis ........................................................................... 96

5. Constraining and imposing capacities of elite and mass culture ... 98
   Dulls the mind and spirit ....................................................... 99
   Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes .............................................................................. 99
      Women as objects of the gaze .................................. 101
      Single product analysis: Victoria’s Secret ............. 105
      Masculine and feminine stereotypes ..................... 108
      The affirmation of masculine and negation of feminine ............................................................................. 110
      The problem with homosexuality ......................... 113
      Stereotypes of race and ethnicity ..................... 115
   Corrupts elite culture ............................................................ 117
   Negatively affects democracy .................................. 117
   Creates undemocratic separation of social classes .. 118
   Assumes self-righteous stance .................................. 120
   Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentation ........................................................................... 121
   Additional evidence ............................................................. 121
   Summary and discussion ....................................................... 124
      Dulls the mind and spirit ............................................. 124
      Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes ..................................................... 124
   Corrupts elite culture ............................................................ 125
   Negatively affects democracy .................................. 125
   Creates undemocratic separation of social classes .. 125
   Assumes self-righteous stance .................................. 126
   Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations ........................................................................... 126

6. Freeing and releasing capacities of elite and mass culture .............. 127
   Represents a valid and vital form of truth ......................... 127
      Beauty ......................................................................... 128
      Transcendence ............................................................. 129

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Typology of critiques of culture according to elite and mass discourses</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Typology of the various thrusts in the elite and mass discourses according to audience conceptualization and literature source</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Typology of audience as implied literature according to elite and mass discourses</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Typology of audience as aggregate literature according to elite and mass discourses</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Typology of audience as situated interpreters literature according to elite and mass discourses</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Data sources from four classes and including self-interviews of media events, elite and mass culture products, and cultural life-lines</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Claims of how elite and mass culture are bad and the degree to which the data support them</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Claims of how elite and mass culture are bad and the degree to which the data support them</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Sense-Making metaphor that shows how one moves across time-space, faces gaps, builds bridges, and evaluates uses of the bridges</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
As Raymond Williams once noted, “culture” is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language (Williams, 1976, p. 87). In the anthropological sense, culture refers to everything that we do in our everyday lives, and in an ethnic sense, the word culture often suggests the activities of a particular race or nation. Often, though, a more restricted use of the term is employed in a way that equates culture with the arts or with “elite” or “high” culture on one hand and the popular or “mass” or “low” culture on the other.

The study at hand focuses on the disjuncture between these two discourses of elite and mass culture and the possibility of a methodology that allows us to be able to talk about both at the same time. For our purposes here, “culture” refers not to the broad anthropological definition but rather to the narrower definition relating to products and practices that are aesthetic in nature. The term “mass culture” is being used rather than “popular culture” for two reasons, although the latter is the more often preferred in current literature. First is to make clear the historical ties between material culture and the Industrial Revolution: second is to distinguish our usage here from the use of popular to mean populist or the people’s culture. Use of the term elite culture similarly

---

1 For additional discussions of the concept of culture, see Fiske (1995), Lewis (1990), and O’Connor (1990).
requires some explanation. Although its core is the arts – literary, visual, and performing – reference to elite culture in this study also includes science and history museums. These are included because the museum field is relatively intact both professionally and in terms of scholarship and doesn’t necessarily distinguish art museums from others.

It also may be helpful to preface here that in this study communication and culture are understood as being inextricably entwined. On one hand, culture is created, maintained, and transformed through communication practices; on the other hand, communication practices are rooted in a foundation of common cultural understandings and experiences.

Need for study

The need to be able to discuss both mass and elite culture within the same framework is becoming increasingly apparent, especially within the cultural policy arena. Not only is there evidence of an ongoing blurring of the boundaries of mass and elite culture due to the borrowing of images and ideas, the cross-over of audiences, and the widespread use of technology, but also there is increasing discussion among

---

1 Typical examples here are the paintings of pop artist Andy Warhol that featured soup cans and pictures of Marilyn Monroe on one hand, and the reproduction of the Mona Lisa on postcards, t-shirts, and advertisements on the other hand.

2 Reference here is to the phenomenon of the "cultural omnivore" described by Peterson (1992) and Peterson and Kern (1996).

3 An example of this is the classical music recording industry, which one could argue transforms an elite culture product into a mass culture commodity.
cultural policy leaders of need for the conceptualization of a broadly cast economic "arts sector" that spans the for-profit and non-profit, professional and amateur, fine and popular.5

The implicit question that remains largely untouched in these discussions is the fundamental historical assumption that elite culture and mass culture are qualitatively different, that elite culture is able to tap into "something more" in the human spirit than mass culture is able to do, and that this capacity is important to retain6. This assumption has tremendous implications. The most obvious difficulty stems from the fact that even while the boundaries between mass and elite culture appear ever more porous, the two rest on entirely different economic models. While mass culture is market-based and profit-oriented, elite culture has functioned since the late nineteenth century within the nonprofit arena, which presumes the service of a larger social purpose7. It seems to me that this larger social purpose is not being fulfilled – whether because of insufficient corporate and patron funding or because of arts institutions’ inability to demonstrate their value to legislators and the public – and, as a result, elite culture often finds itself attempting to attract participation and interest by becoming more like mass culture8.

In an effort to increase its audiences, legitimacy, and support bases there is a tendency for elite culture to become more like mass culture through the use of sophisticated marketing techniques, blockbuster programming, and so forth. If elite culture does have something unique and vital to offer, as is suggested by its nonprofit

---

6 A recent report by McCarthy, Brooks, Lowell, & Zakaras (2001) begins to acknowledge this gap in the literature.
7 For a useful history of nonprofits see Hall (1987).
8 See, for example, Silva (2000).
status, then it is important not only to the arts community but to society as a whole that this trend be reversed in order to ensure those unique qualities are retained and made available to the whole of society. On the other hand, if there is no real qualitative difference between elite and mass culture, then it seems appropriate that the arts should fight for their survival in the marketplace along with mass culture products and institutions.

The paradox here is that even though the appearances and uses of elite and mass culture are rapidly converging, the discourses of elite and mass culture remain distinct from each other and largely incommensurable. Thus while the need for comparison appears to grow, the inability to actually do so remains. If we accept for now the assumption that the arts represent a public good, then we also must accept the challenge of determining how the arts community can better serve the public-at-large. This means not making elite culture more like mass culture but rather figuring out how to allow audiences – all audiences, including the so-called “disinterested” ones – to connect on their own terms with those unique and vital qualities inherent to the arts.

In order to begin to consider the full continuum of mass to elite culture, it is necessary to address two very fundamental concerns. The first concern has to do with distinctions between elite and mass culture and their relative moral values. More specifically, this relates to the historical critique of mass culture, the over-simplified assumptions that mass culture is bad and elite culture is good – or alternatively that elite culture is bad and mass culture is good (or at least okay) – and the arguably arbitrary categorizations of what falls into each camp. Unless we have a way to look at how

---

9 In all fairness, the arts community recognizes this need; but it is floundering in its attempts to provide anything of real value for the vast majority of citizens.
people understand the entire continuum of elite to mass culture in relation to their everyday lives, we will remain unable to consider the basic question of moral value.

The second issue is the fact that the discourses of elite and mass culture have different conceptualizations of the audience and of the roles of structure and agency. The question here is how to tap into and mediate both the perspective that individuals have the capacity to act freely as rational agents and the view that every action is in some way constrained by the structural elements of the society into which the individual is socialized or acculturated. At present, the research in elite and mass culture tends to approach questions of the audience from one or the other of these oppositional stances. What is needed in order to look at people’s cultural experiences in a useful way, then, is a means of bridging the existing chasm between structure and agency. One possible methodology for doing so is presented in this study.

Overview of chapters

The next two chapters offer reviews of the literature relevant to this issue. Chapter Two considers the body of work that represents the fundamentally opposed views of the elite and mass discourses. On one hand, the elite discourse says that elite culture is good because it represents a valid and vital form of truth and knowledge; it contributes to the understanding of human possibilities; and when it is part of the basic education and lives of all citizens it contributes to the robust functioning of the public sphere and true democracy.

On the other hand, according to the elite discourse, mass culture is bad because it dulls the mind and spirit, robbing people of the opportunity for self-reflection and
spiritual or emotional depth; it dehumanizes through the processes of homogenization, reification, and stereotypes; it corrupts elite culture; and it negatively affects the public sphere and true democracy.

According to the mass discourse literature, mass culture is good because it represents the basic democratic value of freedom of choice; it builds community by providing a common base for shared knowledge and experiences; and it provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression. Elite culture, on the other hand, is bad because it creates an undemocratic separation of social classes, assumes a self-righteous stance in presuming the need to civilize the masses, and maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations.

Chapter Three reviews the elite and mass culture literatures according to how they conceptualize the audience vis-à-vis structure and agency. Those literatures that fall into what I’ve called the culture-is-good category are rooted in a set of fundamental liberal assumptions that focus on free will choices of individuals. Those literatures that have what I’ve called a culture-is-bad orientation are informed by a critical set of assumptions that focus on the social structures that constrain the choices of individuals. The review shows the range of methodologies employed and the inherent difficulty in developing any kind of coherent understanding of people’s engagements with the continuum of elite to mass culture.

Chapter Four introduces the Sense-Making Methodology, an approach selected for this study because it is based on a theoretic that makes the meaning-making process
apparent, both in terms of the relationship between structure and agency and also in terms of outcome – good or bad. Also discussed are the interviewing approach, data sources, and procedure for analysis in this study.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven focus on three aspects of analysis. Chapter Five considers how structure influenced respondents’ sense-making experiences with elite and mass culture. Chapter Six looks at how agency fit into respondents’ sense-making of their experiences with elite and mass culture. And Chapter Seven offers a case study approach, addressing the responses of four different informants whose interviews offer particular insight into how individuals make sense of elite and mass culture experiences.

And finally, Chapter Eight presents a set of conclusions based on the four research questions put forth in the methodology chapter. These questions reflect the capacity of the Sense-Making Methodology to attend to issues of structure, agency, and mediation and thus to transcend the polarized set of literatures that make up the elite and mass discourses.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF ELITE AND MASS CULTURE LITERATURES AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS THAT GROUND THEM

As suggested in Chapter One, the scholarly literatures in mass and elite culture represent two very distinct discourses. In this chapter I will be reviewing the body of work that represents these fundamentally opposed views. One side of the coin, what I will refer to here as the *elite discourse,* is the view that elite culture is good and mass culture is bad. On the other side of the coin is the alternative perspective, that elite culture is bad and mass culture is good; I refer to this as the *mass discourse.*

Interestingly, both sets of arguments are rooted in the Enlightenment and representative of modernist thought, but they struggle between two rather different understandings of the nature of human beings as well as the most desirable social arrangement and how to achieve it. To introduce these arguments, the following section briefly addresses four intertwined concerns of the modern era—fundamental to understanding these two cultural views: freedom, truth and knowledge, the self, and morality.

**Four modern concerns**

*Freedom.* Heller (1999) argues that freedom is modernity's most basic value. Indeed, the elite and mass culture literatures assume that freedom is a substantive good.

\[10\] My use of the concept "modern" here refers to the era from the Enlightenment to the present.
There is, however, a subtle but fundamentally crucial distinction in whether one defines freedom as “freedom to” do something or as “freedom from” some involuntary constraint. This difference in perspective is played out in the literature that focuses on individual agency (the freedom to act) and that which focuses on social, political, and economic structures that can impede such agency (the freedom from constraints), which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Nonetheless, the Enlightenment value that freedom is highly desirable – that it is a substantive good – is a common assumption throughout the elite and mass discourses.

**Truth and knowledge.** A second fundamental Enlightenment concern, the desirability of knowledge and the search for truth, also is reflected as a common assumption throughout the elite and mass discourses. Heller (1999) suggests that this value is related to freedom because freedom not only provides the means for seeking truth and knowledge but also truth and knowledge become the means for freedom. It is freedom that is the arche, the base or foundation, of the modern era. Heller says. Yet, freedom is a paradox; it is a ground that does not ground.

*Freedom became the foundation of the modern world. It is the foundation that grounds nothing.* (Heller, 1999, p. 12, italics original)

With total freedom nothing is absolute; everything is open to scrutiny – and revision. This is the modern scientific concept of skepticism.

As with freedom, there are vital distinctions within the mass and elite culture literatures about what constitutes truth and knowledge and the means by which such determinations are made. The first distinction has to do with how one defines truth. It is perhaps useful at this point to remember that the Enlightenment ushered in an era where
metaphysical truth, or truth as espoused by the church, was questioned and ultimately replaced by a notion of truth that is logically and empirically tested\textsuperscript{11}. Thus in its most positivistic form, truth in the modern era has become very narrowly defined, referring only to so-called "objective" truth proven by means of scientific method\textsuperscript{12}. In opposition to this is the assertion that equally valid paths to truth lie in personal experience, common sense, and intuition. This issue will be discussed further below.

A second distinction is the question whether there even exists one single truth about a given phenomenon – or whether there are, rather, just different perspectives or interpretations. Because every idea is open to change (improvement), as suggested above, and because the ontological assumption of empiricism is that if we can know enough about a phenomenon we can know the truth, modern society is replete with "facts" and "data" about every aspect of life. Numerous social theorists have discussed the ramifications of such a society\textsuperscript{13}. Taken to its logical conclusion, of course, skepticism leads to the radical relativism of the most extreme post-modern discourses\textsuperscript{14}, where there is no truth, only interpretation.

The self. A third concern of the modern era – which also is closely tied to freedom – is that of the self. Once again the underlying tension is the question of to what degree human beings are autonomous essential selves fully capable of disengaged rationality and free will as opposed to being constrained or manipulated by social.

\textsuperscript{11} Useful overviews of this aspect of the Enlightenment can be found in Heller (1999) and Taylor (1989).
\textsuperscript{12} Heller (1999) notes that, ironically, in modernity, science (as well as technology, its offspring) has assumed the unquestioned authoritative position that religion once held; science has become ideological – it has become a religion.
\textsuperscript{13} For example, Giddens (1991) addresses how this orientation toward continual improvement through monitoring and evaluation actually undermines the certainty of knowledge and contributes to expert systems of control. Foucault (1991, 1979) has written eloquently on the effects of disciplinarity and governmentality, which use knowledge to control individuals.
\textsuperscript{14} In particular I am thinking of Derrida (1981, 1973).
political, economic, or other forces outside their control. Beyond that, however, the 
elite and mass culture literatures address the importance of such aspects of the self as 
argues that American individualism takes both a utilitarian form, including a deep 
desire for autonomy and self-reliance, and an expressive form, which includes the 
human need to express one's unique or essential self, the core of one's feelings, 
intuitions, and values. These two aspects of the self are not wholly compatible: they are 
represented by the spirit of competition on one hand and of benevolence and 
community on the other.

Morality. A fourth concern of the modern era that is implicit in the mass and 
elite culture discourses is the question of morality or human goodness. By this I mean a 
basic moral orientation that has to do with the relation of oneself to some thing – 
particularly the relation of oneself to other human beings. Since the concept of the 
social, by definition, concerns the relationships of selves and others, we cannot talk 
about anything social or societal without also talking about (or assuming) fundamental 
moral guidelines.

Taylor (1989) suggests that every judgement we make is a reflection of a moral 
orientation, of some sense of the good. To be a human being, a self. Taylor argues, is 
inseparable from existing in a space of moral issues that have to do with identity and 
how one ought to be. The horizons within which we live our lives and make sense of 
them include strong qualitative discriminations, creating a link between identity and 
orientation in a moral space. Thus, he says:
My identity is defined by the commitments and identification which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. (Taylor, 1989, p. 27)

By extension, then, we can say that every cultural decision we make also is a reflection of moral value. Indeed, the prior discussions of freedom, truth, and the self could be, at least to some extent, subsumed under the heading of morality in that they reflect moral orientations, or a sense of the good.

**Introduction to the discourses**

In considering the elite and mass discourses, the four concerns discussed above form a common foundation that begs further examination. As suggested previously, the assumptions underlying these concerns are not necessarily explicit and require further consideration to better understand the relationships among elite and mass culture, society, and individual lives.

How one understands what it means to be human, how society functions, whether and what truths are universal, and how best to achieve justice and equality, frame one’s understanding of elite and mass culture. Cmiel (1990) illustrates this point in his book about the struggle between classical rhetorical speech and popular (and expert) speech in the nineteenth century. He discusses a tension between elitism and populism that is similar to—or perhaps another manifestation of—that which underscores the elite and mass discourses.

At the core of the theories of rhetorical eloquence and liberal education was a conflict between understanding culture as a superior way of life or as a social barrier. Was civil language truly eloquent or was it a badge of
class? To what extent was the interest in language a genuine quest for clarity and to what degree was it a search for easily recognizable cues with which to set off a social elite? (Cmiel, 1990, p. 37)

In a similar way, Evyard (1997) suggests that the current debates over elite and mass culture can be grouped around two paradigms: the democratization of culture versus cultural democracy. These two paradigms basically align with what I am calling the elite and mass discourses, respectively. According to Evyard, the aim of the democratization of culture is to disseminate major cultural works to an audience that does not necessarily have the financial means or education to otherwise have access. This, for example, historically has been the French governmental policy. The success of such a policy would be indicated by a demographic attendance structure for elite cultural events that matches the population, and failure would be indicated by a persistent gap in attendance figures between the have and have-nots. In contrast, Evyard says, cultural democracy is based on free individual choice where governmental policy is to not interfere with citizen-consumer preferences. In other words, it is a market-based policy such as has been the case historically in the United States.

My argument, then, is that a number of basic philosophical assumptions shape in different ways the elite and mass discourses. How one understands freedom, truth and knowledge, the self, and morality affect how one understands the roles and ramifications of cultural products, practices, and institutions.

The distinctions among these assumptions are illustrated in Table 1 (page 16), and they will be further unpacked in the following sections of this chapter. The first section deals with the elite discourse and the various assumptions about how elite
culture is good. The second section also addresses the elite discourse, but here focuses on how mass culture is bad. Similarly, the third and fourth sections correspond to the mass discourse and how mass culture is good and elite culture is bad, respectively.

**Elite discourse literature: Elite is good**

The assumption that elite culture is good can be traced from the Enlightenment to the present. In order to discuss this proposition in a fruitful manner, I have grouped the scholarly literature that addresses this idea into three basic - albeit overlapping - areas. These include the claims that: 1) culture, particularly in the form of the arts, represents a valid and vital form of truth and knowledge, specifically vis-à-vis science and technology; 2) elite culture contributes to the understanding of human possibilities; and 3) this kind of knowledge should be part of a classic liberal education for all citizens, which is necessary for the robust functioning of the public sphere and for true democracy.

**Represents valid and vital form of truth.** The argument that art represents a valid form of knowledge - and the beginnings of the modern notion of aesthetics - can be traced to Kant’s third critique\(^\text{15}\), which, in the wake of Descartes, attempted to unify pure reason and moral judgment through the notions of beauty and the sublime, conceptualizing aesthetics as a sense of community and a universal taste for what is good\(^\text{16}\). Bernstein (1992) posits that much of what we have come to recognize as the tradition of continental philosophy revolves around variations of Kant’s third critique:

\(^{15}\) Reference here is to the *Critique of Judgement*: see Kant (1790/1951).

\(^{16}\) Discussion of this can be found in Eagleton (1990), Gadamer (1960/1995), and Williams (1958).
[A]esthetic discourse contains concepts and terms of analysis, a
categorical framework, which, if freed from confinement in an
autonomous aesthetic domain, would open the possibility of
encountering a secular world empowered as a source of meaning beyond
the self or subject. Aesthetic judgement, the judgement of taste, intends a
cognition of what is significant or worthy in itself through the way it
resonates for us; sublimity intends an experience of emphatic otherness
or alterity irreducible to truth-only cognitive or moral reason: genius
intends an acting beyond the meaning-giving powers of the subjective
will; the sensus communis intends a conception of community whose
mutualities and attunements condition and orient what aesthetic
judgement judges and creative genius creates. (Bernstein, 1992, p. 9.
italics original)

Bowie (1990) discusses how the German Idealists and Romantics who followed
Kant continued the struggle to overcome the Cartesian dualism of mind and body.
cognition and sensation, subject and object, theory and practice. They argued that art
has a way of saying what cannot be put into words.17

Subject and object can be united, but only via a medium which relies on
intuition and not on concepts. The story of the subject from Fichte
onwards repeatedly shows that the attempt to objectify our relationship
to ourselves and nature in philosophy must be a failure. The turn to art
becomes an attempt to say the unsayable. (Bowie, 1990, p. 80)

Art, then, became associated with a kind of truth, a way of knowing, that is different
from – but equally important to or more so than – the logical positivism of science.18

According to Nietzsche (1872/1992), art is the only means by which we are able
to grapple with fundamental questions about human existence. It is only through art
that we are able to cope with the human world.

17 Much later, Langer (1953) also addressed what she called the “ineffability” art: and see Meyer
18 See also Coleridge (1818/1936) and Shelley (1840).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Elite Discourse</th>
<th>Mass Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite is Good</td>
<td>Represents valid and vital form of truth</td>
<td>Mass is Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to the understanding of human possibilities</td>
<td>Represents freedom of choice</td>
<td>Builds community through shared knowledge and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to democracy when part of the education and lives of citizens</td>
<td>Provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Mass is Bad</th>
<th>Elite is Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dulls the mind and spirit</td>
<td>Creates undemocratic separation of social classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes</td>
<td>Assumes self-righteous stance in presuming the need to civilize the masses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrupts elite culture</td>
<td>Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively affects democracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.* Typology of critiques of culture according to elite and mass discourses.
[Art] alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity. (Nietzsche, 1872/1992, p. 60)

In a similar way, Gadamer (1960/1995) talks about how aesthetics represents the essence of experience. Works of art, he says, possess a unique synthesizing power such that:

What rends [the spectator] from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being. (Gadamer. 1960/1995, p. 128)

Marcuse (1978) as well elaborates on the power of art to reveal a kind of truth that remains unavailable to humans through other means.

Art breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature, and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle. Subjects and objects encounter the appearance of that autonomy which is denied them in their society. The encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging language and images which make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life. (Marcuse, 1978, pp. 72-73)

As suggested by Nietzsche and the others above, art is understood within the elite discourse as having the capacity to connect us to something greater than ourselves. This often is discussed in aesthetics as the sublime19 or as transcendence, a unity of all of things. In psychology, Maslow (1970) refers to such moments of rapture and awe as “peak experiences” and notes that there is a spiritual quality – which may be tied to aesthetic as well as religious contexts.

19 According to Kant (1790/1951) the sublime is something that is great beyond all comparison: it is “the mere ability to think which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense” (p. 89).
Charles Taylor (1989) has compared such intense aesthetic experiences to an epiphany, that “brings us into the presence of something which is otherwise inaccessible, and which is of the highest moral or spiritual significance; a manifestation, moreover, which also defines or completes something, even as it reveals” (Taylor. 1989. p. 419). And Dewey, in his book *Art as Experience*, describes this same phenomenon as follows:

A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to a larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live. This fact, I think, is the explanation of that feeling of exquisite intelligibility and clarity we have in the presence of an object that is experienced with aesthetic intensity. It explains also the religious feeling that accompanies intense aesthetic perception. We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. I can see no psychological ground for such properties of an experience save that, somehow, the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience. This whole is then felt as an expansion of ourselves... Where egotism is not made the measure of reality and value, we are citizens of this vast world beyond ourselves, and any intense realization of its presence with and in us brings a peculiarly satisfying sense of unity in itself and with ourselves. (Dewey, 1934/1980. p. 195)

The Romantic movement in the arts, which began around the time of the French Revolution, was in large part a response to the excessive rationality and growing industrialization of the nineteenth century.

Romantic art defined itself in its opposition to Enlightenment ideas. Disenchanted with the veneration of human reason, the Romantics rejected the ideal of a monolithic truth stemming from rational science... [and] Romanticism emerged as a project which could supplant science as the most viable means for generating explanations about the world and human existence. (Palmer. 1998. p. 345)
During the Romantic period, "Art came to stand for a special kind of truth, 'imaginative truth,' and artist for a special kind of person," says Williams (1960, p. xv).

[Artists] came to see themselves as agents of the "revolution for life," in their capacity as bearers of the creative imagination... The emphasis on a general common humanity was evidently necessary in a period in which a new kind of society was coming to think of man as merely a specialized instrument of production. The emphasis on love and relationship was necessary not only within the immediate suffering but against the aggressive individualism and the primarily economic relationships which the new society embodied. (Williams, 1960, p. 42)

This humanistic struggle for a broader definition of knowledge continues today. Among those pursuing this line of argument at present are Gardner (1983), who asserts that humans have "multiple intelligences" – not one basic intelligence as quantified in IQ scores, and Damasio (1999, 1994), a neurologist who says that the body and emotions not only do not interfere with rationality but are essential to good decision-making.

Similarly, Boyer says, words and numbers aren't sufficient to understand the richness of our world. We must engage another set of symbols in order to both fully learn ourselves and also to teach others.

For the most intimate, most profoundly moving universal experiences, we created a more subtle, more sensitive set of symbols – a richer language we call the arts. Music, dance, and the visual arts transmitted most effectively the heritage of a people and expressed most profoundly the deepest human joys and sorrows. (Boyer, 1985, p. 8)

In his sequel to the landmark arts education report Coming to Our Senses, Fowler (1989) laments the increased emphasis on student achievement tests and the low priority of the arts in the education of young people.

The public as well as many teachers and educational administrators view the main business of schooling as essentially developing the mind and
the power to reason. At the same time, they see the arts as mindless, nonacademic fare, more related to the hand than the head. They associate the arts with entertainment and play, academic subjects with the serious business of life and work. On the practical side, school in the minds of parents is vocational preparation. This helps explain why the public continues to maintain one set of values for the arts in society and another for the arts in education. When it comes to the serious business of education, they have other priorities. (Fowler, 1989, p. 5)

Fowler's justification for the importance of the arts in education resonates with the spirit of Romanticism.20

Our new rationale for the arts recognizes that in today's technological world humaneness still depends upon being in touch with our emotions. The arts provide that access. The consequences of neglecting the affective realm could be catastrophic—a society of numbing sameness, predictability, standardization, and detached indifference. To our increasingly impersonal and automated surroundings, the arts offer a welcome and necessary antidote. (Fowler, 1989, p. 10)

Finally, there is within the literature an argument for the arts as a particular kind of truth or knowledge that is uniquely and universally human. Dissanayake (2000) posits in a neo-Kantian vein, for example, that while there are, indeed, some culturally learned responses to beauty, these rest upon a universal predisposition of humans to elaborate and to respond to the elaborations of others.

In their more elevated forms, aesthetic experiences transcend simple short-term self-interest, making us aware of our embeddedness or participation in an expanded frame of reference that is larger than ourselves. (Dissanayake, 2000, p. 208)

Similarly, Shepard and Wicke (1997) theorize that while music’s meaning is in part socially created, that meaning is built upon a universal human capacity to respond to the quality and complexity of musical sounds.

20 Additionally, as an aside, I think it is important to mention that there recently have been arguments for inclusion of the arts in school because of their instrumental value in fostering competencies in other domains. One well-publicized example is the so-called Mozart Effect (Campbell 2000, 1997), based on research that shows a correlation between standardized test results and listening to classical music. This is seen as an ill-conceived idea by some (e.g., Brademas, 1995; Greene, 1995), who believe the arts should be supported on their own merits.
Through syntactical processes involving timbre and inflection as well as pitch and duration, each musical movement gathers up within itself the condition of the universe of which it forms a part, and reveals that condition in a manner unique to itself. Each musical moment thereby constitutes a particular phasing or charging of that universe which simultaneously has folded within it timbre and inflectional elements of direct material relevance to individual states of awareness. (Shepard and Wicke. 1997, p. 169)

**Contributes to the understanding of human possibilities.** The second thematic area in the elite discourse literature is discussion of the unique qualities of elite culture that contribute to our understanding of human possibilities, thus enhancing quality of life through self-development, self-expression, and attunement with the experiential moment. One potentially useful way of conceptualizing this area of the literature is to look at elite culture as a means of helping us to connect our inner selves and our outer worlds.

The elite discourse literature talks about the arts as a means of facilitating for humans a connection to the intensity of the experiential moment. Humanistic anthropologist Robert Plant Armstrong (1971) has referred to this phenomenon as the “affecting presence” of some works of art that results from specific, intentional human actions.

These objects and happenings in any given culture are accepted by those native to that culture as being purposefully concerned with potency, emotions, values, and states of being or experience – all, in a clear sense, powers. (Armstrong, 1971, pp. 3-4)

Within the broader philosophical world, this attunement with the experiential moment often is associated with phenomenology and the notion of the lived body. It is through the lived body that one perceives things, understands others, and has a
relationship to the world\(^{21}\). The lived body, then, is in comportment with a given situation and has a mode of understanding that is prior to all scientific explanations.

What Ströker (1987) describes as an “attuned space” – what in the Heideggerian sense might be called a “mood space” – refers to experiential space such that the lived body is affectively immersed in the mood of a given moment.

\[\text{Attuned space is not “outside” me. It “surrounds” me, it is about me – this is its mode of givenness. But I am not in it in the same way as things are in it. Through my experience, I am spatial on the basis of my possibility of being an experiencing being that is an expressive, motile, living being. Attuned space is with me as an accomplishment of my attuned being, relating to it in mutual conditioning and fulfillment – this is its mode of being. (Ströker, 1987, p. 45)}\]

As it relates to cultural experiences, attuned space is a powerful atmospheric space where elements such as movement, color, form, and size take on added importance, and music plays a uniquely significant role.

From a phenomenological point of view, both the artist and the audience member can be experientially immersed in the moment. With performance events, this immersion might be simultaneous and sympathetic. Modern dance pioneer Mary Wigman (1933/1996) describes the power of attunement with the experiential moment from this performance perspective:

\[\text{The primary concern of the creative dancer should be that his audience not think of the dance objectively, or look at it from an aloof and intellectual point of view, in other words, separate itself from the very life of the dancer’s experiences; the audience should allow the dance to affect it emotionally and without reserve. It should allow the rhythm, the music, the very movement of the dancer’s body to stimulate the same feeling and emotional mood within itself, as this mood and emotional condition has stimulated the dancer. It is only then that the audience will feel a strong emotional kinship with the dancer and will live through the vital experiences beyond the dance creation. Shock, ecstasy, joy.}\]

\(^{21}\) This section has been informed by Gadamer (1960/1991), Merleau-Ponty (1996), O’Neill (1989) and Pilotta (1990).
melancholy, grief, gaiety, the dance can express all of these emotions through movement. But the expression without the inner experience in the dance is valueless. (Wigman, 1933/1996, p. 366)

This passage also addresses the potential connection through elite culture to the realm of human possibilities. In other words, elite culture can potentially facilitate for humans their assumed-to-be-inherent capacities for self-expression and personal growth. As suggested above, the importance of the imagination and the development of our understanding of humans as expressive, creative beings are manifestations of the Romantic period. According to Bellah et al (1985) one of the strongest aspects of liberal theory is the assumption of a human desire for an expanded understanding of the possibilities of the self. For the expressive individual, they say, freedom is above all the freedom to express oneself. Walt Whitman is offered as the classic example of such an individual.

For Whitman, success had little to do with material acquisition. A life rich in experience, open to all kinds of people, luxuriating in the sensual as well as the intellectual, above all a life of strong feeling was what he perceived as a successful life. Whitman identified the self with other people, with places, with nature, ultimately with the universe. The expansive and deeply feeling self become the very source of life. (Bellah, et al. 1985, p. 34)

Similarly, Heller (1992) says that unlike fame and fortune, a rich emotional life cannot be taken away and is inherently more valuable.

Money is alienated and alienable, so is political power or fame. But the wealth of emotional density is inalienable. In terms of this vision, there is a dirty, alienated and inferior kind of wealth, and there is one which is shining, non-alienated – the real one. (Heller, 1992, p. 225)

---

22 See, for example, Taylor (1989); Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton (1985); and Williams (1960).
It could be argued that this expressive view of the human influenced Marx's concept of alienation and his interest in freeing the laborer from work that robbed him of creativity. Such a notion of alienation is "based on the distinction between existence and essence, on the fact that man's existence is alienated from his essence, that in reality he is not what he potentially is, or, to put it differently, that he is not what he ought to be, and that he ought to be that which he could be." (Fromm, 1992, p. 47) As Heller (1972), points out, Marx sought in communism a higher social form premised on the full and free development of each individual. This implies what has more recently in psychology been referred to as self-actualization.

The idea that human beings have an inherent desire to lead an expressive, emotionally rewarding life and to be the best they can be is an important underlying assumption in the elite discourse. Riccio (1993) argues that Matthew Arnold's mid-nineteenth century book *Culture and Anarchy* (1869/1994) greatly influenced both his native England as well as the United States in their conceptions of culture in this regard. Arnold underlines the importance of striving toward the "perfect" self over the "everyday" or "ordinary" self. By his definition, (elite) culture is "the best which has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold, 1869/1994, p. 5).

[Culture is] a study of perfection, and of harmonious perfection, general perfection, and perfection which consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances. (Arnold, 1869/1994, p. 33).

Arnold's argument for elite culture assumes the capacity of the arts to transform our experience, to emancipate, uplift, and enlighten -- to pursue what he calls "sweetness and light."
The pursuit of perfection, then, is the pursuit of sweetness and light. He who works for sweetness works in the end for light also; he who works for light works in the end for sweetness also. But he who works for sweetness and light united, works to make reason and the will of God prevail. He who works for machinery, he who works for hatred, works only for confusion. Culture looks beyond machinery, culture hates hatred; culture has but one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light... [W]e must have a broad basis, must have sweetness and light for as many as possible. Again and again I have insisted how those are the happy moments of humanity, how those are the marking epochs of a people's life, how those are the flowering times for literature and art and all the creative powers of genius, when there is a national glow of life and thought, when the whole of society is in the fullest measure permeated by thought, sensitive to beauty, intelligent and alive. Only it must be real thought and real beauty; real sweetness and real light.... [Culture] does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgments and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make all live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, and use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely - to be nourished and not bound by them. This is the social idea; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. (Arnold, 1869/1994, pp. 47-48)

\textbf{Contributes to democracy.} Given the contribution that elite culture can make to our understanding of humanity and to the growth and development of every individual, then, it is argued within the elite discourse that this kind of knowledge should be part of a classic liberal education of all citizens. What's more, it is argued, such an education is necessary for the robust functioning of the public sphere and, thus, for the implementation of true democracy.

According to Eagleton (1990) and others\textsuperscript{23}, (elite) culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries became tied to the ideal of "cultivating the human"\textsuperscript{24} Heller (1999) suggests that this concept is related to the notion of the public sphere.

which is embedded in Enlightenment philosophy. It follows that in order for citizens to

\textsuperscript{23} See also Gadamer (1960/1995) and Williams (1958).

\textsuperscript{24} See, for example, Schiller (1775/1967) and Mill (1859/1962).
be able to fully discuss and exchange opinions on a wide range of topics, there is need for an education that is broad both in terms of its academic content and in terms of its distribution. Similarly, Dewey, at the turn of the twentieth century, argued that in order to achieve equality among all people in democratic society, there must be an egalitarian distribution of knowledge.

In recent years this idea of a broad education as central to democracy has again gained credence. Nussbaum (1997) has argued that there are three capacities, above all, that are essential to the cultivation of humanity in today's world. First is the capacity to live what Socrates called "the examined life": second is an ability for people to see themselves not just as citizens of some region or group but, above all, "as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10); and third is possession of a "narrative imagination," which allows one to understand the world from another's point of view. It is through a classical liberal education that one develops these capacities. Nussbaum says. Furthermore, she argues in her most recent book, the arts have a particular role in this educational process.

Recognizing this role of the arts [to cross social barriers through empathy] has one more substantial public consequence. It means acknowledging that the arts serve a vital political function, even when their content is not expressly political – for they cultivate imaginative abilities that are central to political life. This would give us special reasons for supporting the arts, and for giving artistic expression a high degree of protection from the repression that so often threatens it. (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 433)

Jorgensen (1995) also has argued that perhaps the most successful way to ensure

---

a place for the arts in our schools is to justify it politically as a means of addressing ideas of freedom, democracy, and community. Chapman articulates the issue in an especially strongly worded query:

In a culture so dependent on the arts of impression management, image making, and aesthetic persuasion, is it in the public interest for sophisticated artistic skills to be deployed by a few, in ways not fathomed by the many? Who benefits most when naiveté about the arts is accepted as a perfectly normal outcome of K-12 education? (Chapman, 2000, p. 28)

Finally, it is argued, as a result of this broad education and awareness of humanity – i.e., because elite culture cultivates the capacity for self-reflection – it fosters freedom and emancipation. The cultured person, Feldman (1970) says, is not necessarily the one who has visited museums, attended concerts, and traveled around the world. Rather, the cultured person is one for whom the arts represent a means for leading a richer spiritual existence than would be otherwise possible.

The cultured person, then, is free in a special sense of the term. His inner life – his life of mind and feeling – is free selectively dependent on what the world has to offer. He is not always in the position of reacting to the estimations and interpretations of others: he is not obliged to run as fast as he can in order to “keep up” with fashionable, or slightly unfashionable, opinions. He has the option of finding delight where it has not been found, of revising his judgment of the value of things whenever he wishes....The greatest asset of a cultivated person is his ability to perceive the wholeness of life in particular fragments of it – fragments such as art provides. The habit of searching for the largest possible meaning of a work of art is not currently fashionable since it is thought to divert energies away from pure and unalloyed sensation. But all human beings are possessed by a drive toward large and comprehensive meanings. (Feldman, 1970, pp. 75-78)

Thus, elite culture is associated with a richness of life and an interest and engagement in the social and political world.

26 Others who argue for the arts’ ability to educate democratic citizens include Patriat (1999), Schwartz (1997), and Scott (1998).
In a related way, Cornwell (1990) and Putnam (1996) have suggested that there is a correlation between participation in the arts and participation in the political process. And summing up many of these claims, the American Assembly (Arthurs and Hodson, 1998) argued the public purpose of the arts as 1) helping to build national identity as well as supporting American pluralism, 2) contributing to the livability of our communities, 3) helping to form an educated and aware citizenry, and 4) encouraging individual creativity and spirit.

**Elite discourse literature: Mass is bad**

From the elite discourse perspective, then, mass culture is bad because it results in the opposite condition. Specifically, mass culture is bad because it: 1) dulls the mind and spirit, robbing people of the opportunity for self-reflection and spiritual or emotional depth. 2) dehumanizes through the processes of homogenization, reification, and stereotypes. 3) corrupts elite culture, and as a result 4) negatively affects the public sphere and true democracy. Probably the best-known critique of mass culture is in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Horkheimer and Adorno (1947/1988), which characterizes the “culture industry,” or entertainment industry, as illustrative of the instrumental rationality of modernity in which production is standardized and leads to a kind of consumption that also is standardized, routine, and passive.\(^27\)

Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again. But at the same

---

\(^{27}\) As an aside here, the reader might recall that an associate of Horkheimer and Adorno’s in the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin (1936/1992), was optimistic about the effects of mass culture, specifically film, in the era between the two world wars. This optimism, unfortunately, proved unrealistic in the face of fascism. (See also Lunn, 1990.)
time mechanization has such power over a man’s leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/1988, p. 137)

The arguments that follow further elucidate this basic position.

**Dulls the mind and spirit.** First of all, mass culture is seen within the elite discourse as dulling the mind and spirit. Van den Haag (1957) discusses the effects of a mass society in obliterating people’s emotional capacities and ability to think critically.

All mass media in the end alienate people from personal experience and though appearing to offset it, intensify their moral isolation from each other, from reality and from themselves. One may turn to the mass media when lonely or bored. But mass media, once they become a habit, impair the capacity for meaningful experience.... The habit feeds on itself, establishing a vicious circle as addictions do.... Even the most profound of experiences, articulated too often on the same level, is reduced to a cliché.... [The media] lessen people's capacity to experience life itself. (Van den Haag, 1957, p. 529)

Similarly, Bottum (2000) recently argued that society has elevated background music to too high a post, resulting in the “soundtracking” of America and the abandonment of real thought and feeling for superficial emotion.

Mass culture, it is argued, robs people of the opportunity for self-reflection and spiritual depth, leaving their lives increasingly unfulfilled and meaningless.

The total effect of mass culture is to distract people from lives which are so boring that they generate obsession with escape. Yet because mass culture creates addiction to prefabricated experience, most people are deprived of the remaining possibilities of autonomous growth and enrichment, and their lives become ever more boring and unfulfilled. (Van den Haag, 1959, p. 60)

Rosenberg similarly describes the meaninglessness created by mass culture.
Contemporary man commonly finds that his life has been emptied of meaning, that it has been trivialized. He is alienated from his past, from his work, from his community, and possibly from himself – although this “self” is hard to locate. (Rosenberg, 1957, p. 7)

And Lasch (1978) addresses this phenomenon in his study of our contemporary narcissistic society.

In a society in which the dream of success has been drained of any meaning beyond itself, men have nothing against which to measure their achievements except the achievements of others. Self-approval depends on public recognition and acclaim, and the quality of this approval has undergone important changes in its own right. The good opinion of friends and neighbors, which formerly informed a man that he had lived a useful life, rested on appreciation of his accomplishments. Today men seek the kind of approval that applauds not their actions but their personal attributes. They wish to be not so much esteemed as admired. They crave not fame but the glamour and excitement of celebrity. (Lasch, 1978, p. 59)

Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes. In a second argument, the elite discourse says that mass culture dehumanizes through homogenization, by making everything and everyone the same, and through the process of reification, whereby even personal relationships become objectified for their exchange values. Among the post-war critics of mass culture was Bernard Rosenberg, who warns of its perils.

If men are freed from manual labor and from the struggle with nature, what will they do? Cultivate their minds? Improve their sensibilities? Heighten their understanding? Deepen and broaden themselves? ... Before man can transcend himself he is being dehumanized. Before he can elevate his mind, it is being deadened. Freedom is placed before him and snatched away. The rich and varied life he might lead is standardized. This breeds anxiety, and the vicious circle begins anew, for as we are objects of manipulation, our anxiety is exploitable. The mass grows; we are more alike than ever; and feel a deeper sense of entrapment and loneliness. (Rosenberg, 1957, pp. 4-5)

---

28 For an expansion of this argument see Lukacs (1971).
These concerns about homogenization and manipulation also are pursued by 


Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows. Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished products is removed...

[I]t is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumers' needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger... A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself... It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system. (Horkheimer & Adorno. 1947/1988, p. 121)

Now into the next century, these concerns are still salient. Barber (2001) says it's difficult these days to find any cultural product that doesn't reek of power and politics. And behind all of the examples of tasteless, over-the-top, unethical, disgusting culture is corporate power.

In a pluralistic world, giving people what they want might not seem so manipulative, but in a world where the advertisers are the educators, and the merchandisers are the pedagogues, it's hard to tell the difference between pandering to tastes and shaping them. It is not so much taste as it is variety and pluralism that have been the real victims of a totalizing market society. Markets are today what authoritarian states and despotic religions once were. Except when the priest ran everything and religion permeated every sector of society we called it theocracy and knew there was no freedom, and when the mandarins ran everything and politics permeated every sector of society we called it totalitarianism and understood that individualism suffered, whereas when businessmen run everything and markets permeate every sector of society we call it liberty and insist that this is how individuals flourish. (Barber. 2001. pp. 56-57)
In corollary, this observation first published in 1947 could not be more pertinent had it been stated this morning:

The most intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an utterly abstract notion: personality scarcely signifies anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odor or emotions. The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/1988. p. 167)

Indeed, the arguments have not really changed. Recently Lane (1998) reversed his prior stance and began to agree that the modern mass consumer society undermines the well-being of individuals. The absence of solidity in human relationships with family and friends leads to a lack of meaning and unhappiness, he says.

Some, like Georg Simmel, hold that the market has created a "cold society" whose rationality undermines the emotional warmth necessary for friendship. Marx, Lukacs, Fromm, and Marcuse believe in commodification theories: in market economies people are treated as commodities from which to extract as many utilities as possible. In the late 1970s and again in 1991 I argued against the view that markets had this effect on human relations. New evidence has now changed my mind on this issue. (Lane, 1998, p. 228)

Among this new evidence, Lane says, is the continued decline in people's trust of one another, the continued crowding out of social time by television viewing, and the continued need for individual control as social support breaks down (Lane, 1998).

Corrupts elite culture. A third argument within the elite discourse is that mass culture corrupts elite culture. Perhaps the best-known proponent of this line of argument is Dwight Macdonald (1974, 1957).

The objection to middlebrow, or petty-bourgeois, culture is that it vitiates serious art and thought by reducing it to a democratic-philistine pabulum, dull and tasteless because it is manufactured for a hypothetical "common man" who is assumed (I think wrongly) to be even dumber.
than the entrepreneurs who condescendingly "give the public what it wants." Compromise is the essence of midcult, and compromise is fatal to excellence in such matters. (Macdonald, 1974, p. 174)

Macdonald's contemporary, Clement Greenberg, called this diluted form of mass-produced culture "kitsch."

To fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide. Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money — not even their time. (Greenberg, 1939/1961, p. 10)

Marcuse speaks of this phenomenon as well, noting that mass culture swallows up elite culture and transforms it into commodity form.

Today's novel feature is the flattening out of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted another dimension of reality. This liquidation of two-dimensional culture takes place not through the denial and rejection of the "cultural values," but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale. In fact, they serve as instruments of social cohesion... If mass communications blend together harmoniously, and often unnoticeably, art, politics, religion, and philosophy with commercials, they bring these realms of culture to their common denominator — the commodity form. The music of the soul is also the music of salesmanship. Exchange value, not truth, counts. On it centers the rationality of the status quo, and all alien rationality is bent to it. (Marcuse, 1964, p. 57)

And Arendt (1959) suggests that elite culture must be protected from this cannibalization by mass culture's capitalist orientation, which understands no value but exchange.
Thus, the functionalization of the world which occurs in both society and mass society deprives the world of culture as well as beauty. Culture can be safe only with those who love the world for its own sake, who know that without the beauty of man-made, worldly things which we call works of art, without the radiant glory in which potential imperishability is made manifest to the world and in the world, all human life would be futile and no greatness could endure. (Arendt. 1959. p. 52)

**Negatively affects democracy.** Finally, because of these negative effects of mass culture on the lives of individuals, this in turn diminishes the potential for civic discourse and democracy. Putnam (1996) says that an important precondition for deliberative democracy is an adequate stock of “social capital,” those features of social life such as networks, norms, and trust that allow people to work together more effectively toward shared objectives. By a variety of measures, however, social capital in America has been decreasing. Controlling for other factors, Putnam says, he has determined the cause of this decrease.

I have discovered only one prominent suspect against whom circumstantial [and some incriminating] evidence has turned up... The culprit is television. (Putnam. 1996. p. 281)

Television – and other personal media – have privatized leisure time, according to Putnam, and thus people aren’t as active in social groups and community activities. This trend, in turn, threatens democracy.

A second threat by mass culture to democracy is the concern raised by political economists regarding the growing concentration of media outlets in the hands of a very limited number of multinational corporations. Such a situation greatly limits the flow of information not only because of homogenization but also, as McChesney (1997, 2000) argues, because these corporations will inevitably operate in a way that promotes their own interests over those of the citizenry.
Taylor (1995) suggests that because such media concentrations greatly limit the channels available for democratic discussion, there is an increased likelihood that citizens will feel their interests are being systematically ignored or neglected. When this happens, he warns, citizens are likely to transfer their political energies to special-interest groups. Such a society then becomes more focused on rights and on judicial battles than on building broad-based citizen action toward meaningful programs that address the common good.

**Elite discourse summary**

In summary, then, the elite discourse says that elite culture is good because it represents a valid and vital form of truth and knowledge; it contributes to the understanding of human possibilities; and when it is part of the basic education and lives of all citizens it contributes to the robust functioning of the public sphere and true democracy. On the flip side, mass culture is bad because it dulls the mind and spirit, robbing people of the opportunity for self-reflection and spiritual or emotional depth; it dehumanizes through the processes of homogenization, reification, and stereotypes; it corrupts elite culture; and it negatively affects the public sphere and true democracy.

**Mass discourse literature: Mass is good**

This brings us to the literature that represents the mass discourse, which asserts that mass culture is good and elite is bad. From the mass discourse perspective, mass culture is good for three reasons. First, it represents the basic democratic value of
freedom of choice. Second, it helps to build community by providing fundamental shared knowledge and experiences. And third, it provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression.

Represents freedom of choice. Those who defend mass culture argue that the critiques of it are groundless, that mass culture harms neither society nor the people who prefer it, and that the differences between elite and mass (high and low) culture are simply a matter of taste. Thus, while mass culture tastes are different from elite culture tastes, they nonetheless represent equally valid choices.

Jensen (1993) argues that culture is the intentional result of human activity and that the critiques of mass culture, in particular those of the media, are baseless.

The media are not, to my mind, alien technologies, but human-made forms that are designed to be of cultural significance. The media are made-to-mean, both in their form and content, as part of a more general social and cultural process of living in the world. They are not outside forces. They are not unitary in their influence, and they are not intrinsically corrupt or corrupting. (Jensen, 1993, p. 179)

Critics of mass culture, she argues, say that people are not to blame for the corruption of mass culture and that an ideal democracy is still possible, yet they must assume that people have barbaric tendencies that need to be refined and cultivated. They must assume also that elite culture has the power to heal or redeem and that information and education are tools for wise decision-making that can tame or civilize irrational tendencies. Such assumptions are misguided, she says.

We may never be able to escape the desire to prescribe “good beliefs and values” for groups other than ourselves, but we can at least recognize how dependent those values are on our own self-interested assumptions. (Jensen, 1993, p. 187)
Valuable social change, Jensen suggests, “comes not from expert voices, or more information, or uplifting art, or better education, but rather from participatory, pluralistic conversation.” (Jenson, 1993, p. 180)

Gans (1999, 1985) also defends mass culture, noting that it “reflects and expresses the aesthetic and other wants of many people” (Gans, 1999, xi).

The popular arts are, on the whole, user-oriented and exist to satisfy audience values and wishes. This is perhaps the major reason for the antagonism of high culture toward the popular arts and the tone of the mass culture critique. High culture needs an audience as much as popular culture, but it is fearful that the audience will be wooed away by a user-oriented culture or that it will demand what might be called its democratic-cultural right to be considered in the creative process of high culture. (Gans, 1999, p. 76)

Lewis, too, notes that the people, through their preferences in the marketplace, have by and large accepted mass culture and rejected elite culture. He points out the failure of elite culture, specifically the nonprofit arts sector, to address itself to the consumer or user.

[I]t is easy to see how the dominant cultural aesthetics of the subsidized sector have contributed to their failure to market themselves successfully. The aesthetics of the subsidized arts revolve around the producer, the artist, and the intrinsic value of the product. Cultural production is not seen as a process of commodity exchange at all. The value of the product is seen to be inscribed within it, something that we may or may not have the cultural competence to recognize. The needs of the consumer are ignored until the last possible moment, when it becomes necessary to sell what has been produced. (Lewis, 1990, p. 141)

Builds community through shared knowledge and experiences. In a second way, mass culture is seen as being good by contributing to community-building. The mass
media in particular are seen as a means of building common knowledge and experience, whereby there is a wide pool of shared information and perspectives from which people draw their understandings of themselves and their world.  

[Media-based socialization] activities may help unify the society and increase social cohesion by providing a broad base of common social norms, values, and collective experiences to be shared by its members. (Wright. 1999. p. 56-57)  

Thornburn (1987) argues that television has functioned in American lives as a means of sharing stories that convey the wisdom of the community. And similarly, Campbell discusses the capacity for movies to provide shared cultural experiences.  

At the cultural level, commercial U.S. films function as consensus narratives, a term that describes cultural products that become popular and command wide attention. For all their limitations, class Hollywood movies, as consensus narratives, provide shared cultural experiences, operating across different times and cultures. In this sense, movies are part of a long narrative tradition [from Homer to Dickens]. Consensus narratives – whether they are dramas, romances, westerns, or mysteries – speak to central myths and values in an accessible language that often bridges global boundaries. (Campbell. 1998. p. 209)  

Provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression. And finally, mass culture is seen as being good in that it provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression. In short, Vorderer (2001) suggests, the mass media are all about entertainment.  

So, what exactly is entertainment? It’s an experience that helps media users to cope with their everyday life. For some, it’s pleasure seeking in boring situations or compensation in burdening situations; for others it’s compensation in a depriving situation, fulfillment of needs in unsatisfactory situations, and self-enhancement or even self-realization.

---

29 In the functional-use approaches to media, there usually is a separate function mentioned of media as a means of gathering information related to the events of one’s community and the world. I am including this notion in the community-building category because of its inherent social nature.

38
when they are – for whatever reason – ready for it. In any case, it’s playing and it helps to cope with life. It’s what media users seek very often, and to their own advantage. (Vorderer, 2001, p. 258)

Frith (1996) notes that the entertainment aspects of mass media often are talked about in a dismissive way.

“Entertainment” is a term that always seems to be used with a hint of disdain: entertainment is always only entertainment. There are two implicit contrasts involved here. One rests on an aesthetic judgment: entertainment (fun, of the moment, trivial) is being contrasted to art (serious, transcendent, profound). The other on a political judgment: entertainment (insignificant, escapist) is being contrasted with news. with reality, with truth. (Frith. 1996, p. 160)

But these distinctions are inappropriate and unfair, he argues.

Consumption is not the same thing as discrimination. and one of the more foolish consequences of the spurious distinction between art and entertainment (or between high and low culture) is the suggestion that to be entertained is to suspend all moral or aesthetic judgement. (Frith. 1996, p. 170)

**Mass culture discourse: Elite is bad**

From the mass culture perspective, elite culture is bad because it is. by definition. “elitist.” There are three aspects of this issue that appear in the literature. Elite culture, it is argued: 1) creates and maintains an undemocratic distinction and separation between social classes. 2) assumes a self-righteous stance in presuming the need to convert or transform the “masses,” and 3) develops and maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations.

**Creates undemocratic separation of social classes.** There is a long-standing concern about elite culture as inherently non-democratic. The historical redefinition and removal of the fine and performing arts from the raucous domain of the general public
to quasi-sacred museums and theatres created by the wealthy and well-educated elites of society is well documented. Niquette and Buxton (1997), for example, show how the exhibition complex of the late nineteenth century represented a process of exclusion and differentiation, despite the rhetoric of inclusion. This process, they note, has had long-lasting ramifications:

Perhaps more revealing than current audience studies, historical research on the subtle mechanisms of exclusion sheds light on the present lack of interest by the popular classes in museum visits. (Niquette and Buxton. 1997, p. 108)

Lewis (1990) focuses on the continuation today of this apparent gap between the rhetoric of inclusion and the actual practice of exclusion.

The gap between the goals of our arts and cultural institutions and their achievements is their undoing. The true nature of their aesthetic value system is hidden beneath the rhetoric of art for all. It is a pretence, unconsciously sustained by the influential “arts” lobby – by marching under the banner of universal access we are able to pretend to ourselves and everyone else that these contradictions do not exist. What is so extraordinary is that politicians and people from both the left and the right have been confused and intimidated by this myth for so long. (Lewis, 1990, p. 23)

As Levine relates, the transformation of the arts in the late nineteenth century included a new “sacralization,” an understanding that they should be attended to with reverence and seriousness, which also continues to this day.

The symphony hall, opera house, and museum were never declared off limits to anyone. Admission to art museums was inexpensive and often free, and tickets to concerts, opera, and what became known as “legitimate” drama, while sometimes dear, were nonetheless available. But after the turn of the century there was one price that had to be paid: these cultural products had to be accepted on the terms proffered by those who controlled the cultural institutions. (Levine, 1988, p. 231)

Additionally, as David (1999) notes, notions of elitism have been perpetuated over the years as stories of exclusive social events and obscure exhibitions have discouraged participation of the general public.

Prosterman (1995), in her book on aesthetics in county fairs, argues that elites in a very narrow conceptualization have hoarded the notion of what constitutes art. According to elite definitions, art is contemplative and nonfunctional; it is removed from everyday life and is created through acts of genius, she says.

This is one kind of aesthetic but only one. It seems as though individuals with influence in the “arts” regard it as though it is the only one. The danger of this attitude is that it excludes all other endeavors from being considered “artistic.” These judgments are not only culture bound but class and era bound. (Prosterman, 1995, p. 185)

Assumes a self-righteous stance. Second, the mass discourse argues that elite culture assumes a self-righteous and dominating stance in presuming the need to convert or transform the “masses.” As discussed previously, elite culture in the nineteenth century was aligned with the notion of “cultivating the human.” and cultural institutions were oriented to the improvement and enlightenment of the citizenry. Cultural institutions, Bennett (1995) says, were seen as a place distinct from carnivals and fairs where civilized behavior might be emulated and learned. Thus, he states, by the mid-to-late nineteenth century, cultural institutions – especially museums – were as important to the mental and moral health of the people as were public sanitation systems and streetlights.

Museums might help lift the level of popular taste and design; they might diminish the appeal of the tavern, thus increasing the sobriety and industriousness of the populace; they might help prevent riot and sedition. Whichever the use, the embroilment of the institutions and
practice of high culture entailed a profound transformation in their conception and in their relation to the exercise of social and political power. (Bennett, 1995, p. 21)

Jensen (1995, 1993) criticizes those who have consistently thought about modern life in such a way that elite culture becomes a vehicle of democracy and a way to make people better. Elite intellectuals are simply attempting to make the masses more like them – an assumption that presumes such a transformation is desirable, she says.

A century and a half of cultural conversation is a self-serving logic that anoints intellectuals and disdains everyone else, based on an unexamined premise – the social powers of art. (Jensen, 1995, p. 374)

This presumption of superiority is related to a third aspect of the mass discourse argument that elite culture is bad, that elite culture institutions (especially museums) maintain systems of arbitrary truths that create and perpetuate stereotypes and misrepresentations.

Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations. Bennett (1995) notes that in the nineteenth century museums, in particular, became the means for a public democratic education not only about art but also about the physical environment. the history of man, and Western and other cultures. Thus, museums came to be seen – and are still seen – as authoritative sources of knowledge\(^{31}\). But, critics argue, such knowledge is always presented from a given perspective, and others may see things differently\(^{32}\). As Vergo (1989) explains. every acquisition, every exhibition, creates a certain construct of history.

Whether we like it or not, every acquisition (and indeed disposal). every juxtaposition or arrangement of an object or work of art. together with

\(^{31}\) For excellent discussions of this issue, see Roberts (1997) and Karp and Lavine (1991).

\(^{32}\) Bal (1996) refers to this authoritative discourse within natural science and history museums as “truth-speak.”
other objects or works of art, within the context of a temporary exhibition or museum display means placing a certain construction upon history, be it the history of the distant or more recent past, of our own culture or someone else's, of mankind in general or a particular aspect of human endeavor. (Vergo, 1989, pp. 2-3)

This issue is perhaps best illustrated with the relatively recent debate over the Enola Gay exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution. At root was the question of how the moral character of the two nations – the United States and Japan – was represented, and should be represented, in the exhibition. The concern about representation is an important issue within elite culture institutions, particularly museums. In the feminist arena, for example, Duncan (1998) argues that the entire history of modern art is a built structure that privileges White males.

Much of the concern about museum displays today has to do with the exploitation of non-Western cultures. Clifford points out the difficulty of Western cultures in trying to represent others.

The emergence of tribal museums and cultural centers makes possible an effective repatriation and circulation of objects long considered to be unambiguously “property” by metropolitan collectors and curators. The idea of majority institutions such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Museum of the American Indian representing Native American cultures to the nation as a whole is increasingly questionable. So is the very existence of elaborate, enormously valuable, non-circulating collections. (Clifford, 1991, p. 242)

Scholars such as Clifford (1988) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) also point out that

---

33 See Thelen (1995) for an overview of this controversial issue.
the cultural artifacts and historical objects displayed in museums are problematic because they are taken out of context. Museum presentations can never be the same as experiencing a culture itself, they note.

In short, then, the mass discourse argues that elite culture has become associated with status-consciousness, imperialism, and patriarchy – all of which are fundamentally anti-democratic.

**Mass discourse summary**

To recapitulate briefly, the mass discourse says that mass culture is good and elite culture is bad. Mass culture is good because it represents the basic democratic value of freedom of choice, it builds community by providing a common base for shared knowledge and experiences, and it provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression. Elite culture, on the other hand, is bad because it creates an undemocratic separation of social classes, assumes a self-righteous stance in presuming the need to civilize the masses, and maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations.

**Discontinuities between the two discourses**

There are a number of trajectories that can be traced out here that illustrate the discontinuities between these two opposing views. One, of course, is the difference in outcomes. As positive outcomes, the elite discourse sees elite culture as enriching lives and connecting humanity while the mass discourse sees mass culture as providing increased opportunity for popular choices. A corollary is the difference in negative
outcomes, with the elite discourse viewing mass culture as dehumanizing and alienating, while the mass discourse views elite culture as elitist and anti-democratic.

The elite discourse understands art to represent and reflect universal truths related not only to beauty but also to humanity. Within the mass discourse, such notions of universal truth are eschewed as subjective measures of taste that make elite culture different from, but not better than, mass culture. This question of universal truth is related as well to assumptions about sources of knowledge and empowerment.

The elite discourse represents a top-down approach in its belief that people should be broadly educated; they need to be taught about their cultural heritage as well as how to understand and evaluate works of art. Power and knowledge reside at the societal or institutional level and are transferred to the citizenry through education. In contrast, the mass discourse is bottom-up in its assumption that people inherently have what they need to make evaluations and choices regarding culture. Here, power and knowledge are assumed to reside in the individual from the beginning.

The elite and mass discourses reflect as well differences in their understandings of equality in relation to culture. The elite discourse sees the arts in terms of equality of outcome; that is, everyone should have access — not only physical access but also social and intellectual access — to the benefits of the arts.

The mass discourse sees the arts in terms of equality of opportunity; that is, everyone should have physical access and the right to participate in the arts if he or she chooses. But, what this perspective underlines is that one should have the right to choose otherwise as well.

---

36 This point is discussed in particular by Evrard (1997).
And finally, these differences culminate in opposing stances regarding cultural policy. The elite discourse views elite culture as a public good. That every citizen should have physical, social, and intellectual access to the arts is a necessity for full participation in a robust public sphere and a strong democracy.

No, suggests the mass discourse, the arts are not a public good; government support of the arts represents special treatment for the interests of the elite. Elite culture should be subject to the marketplace the same as mass culture.

From this discussion we can see that it is necessary to develop a way to be able to look at both sides of the coin, to consider both good and bad outcomes, for what is clearly a continuum of cultural products and experiences that ranges from elite to mass culture. I would suggest that one useful way to do this is to look at how “good” and “bad” are conceptualized in terms of audience freedoms and constraints. This will be the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF ELITE AND MASS CULTURE LITERATURES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE AUDIENCE

The previous chapter reviewed the literatures of the elite and mass discourses and their respective assumptions about elite and mass culture as good or bad. As discussed, within the elite discourse, elite culture is seen as good and mass culture is bad; while in the mass discourse, mass culture is seen as good and elite culture is bad. If we look more closely at the two discourses, we can see that culture – of whatever kind – in both the elite and the mass discourses is considered good when it provides us the freedom to experience things that are normatively agreed to be good – such as truth, self-expression, community, choice, and democracy. In turn, culture is considered bad when it imposes constraints that prevent us from experiencing the good. This suggests that it would be useful, then, to look more carefully at the mass and elite culture literatures from the perspective of the audience and to consider how they conceptualize both the audience and the potential roles and impacts of culture.

In this chapter I will be discussing more specifically the research and scholarly literatures of mass and elite culture in this regard. The focus here will be on how various academic thrusts conceptualize the audience and how these different framings in turn affect our understandings of both people and culture, particularly relative to
issues of constraint and freedom, structure and agency. Before beginning, however, I think it would be fruitful to introduce these various perspectives with a brief discussion of social theory and current conceptualizations of this tension.

**A brief discussion of constraints and freedoms**

A basic review of the social theory literature is beyond the scope of this document, however a limited foray does seem necessary to provide at least a basic framework for considering how constraints and freedoms might be theorized. I therefore have chosen to discuss briefly the work of two contemporary social theorists, Habermas and Giddens, because their work is especially relevant and useful in conceptualizing this issue.

Habermas (1987, 1984) talks about two levels of society, which he calls "lifeworld" and "system." At the level of the lifeworld, communicative action is situated in patterns of socialization and social communication, governed by consensual norms, and enforced by conventional sanctions; at the system level, however, instrumental action is situated in social structures and governed by technical rules and strategies. These two levels, he says, represent two different perspectives that have dominated social theory for some time.

No matter whether one starts with Mead from basic concepts of social interaction or with Durkheim from basic concepts of collective representation, in either case society is conceived from the perspective of acting subjects as the lifeworld of a social group. In contrast, from the observer's perspective of someone not involved, society can be conceived only as a system of actions such that each action has a functional significance according to its contribution to the maintenance of the system. (Habermas, 1987, p. 117, italics original)
The problem of modernity in Habermas's view is that the broader communicative rationality that is tied to the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld has been disrupted by increasingly complex social systems that are based on purposive rationality and driven by economic and administrative steering mechanisms. In essence, then, Habermas combines the structural, system-oriented perspectives of Marx and Weber with the intersubjective, practice-oriented views of Mead and Durkheim in order to consider the entire continuum of social interaction - which is based on communication.

Only with the conceptual framework of communicative action do we gain a perspective from which the process of societal rationalization appears as contradictory from the start. The contradiction arises between, on the one hand, a rationalization of everyday communication that is tied to the structures of intersubjectivity of the lifeworld, in which language counts as the genuine and irreplaceable medium of reaching understanding, and on the other hand, the growing complexity of subsystems of purposive-rational action, in which actions are coordinated through steering media such as money and power. (Habermas, 1984, p. 342)

This tension between what Habermas calls lifeworld and system, between everyday interpersonal relations and increasingly complex social systems based on purposive rationality and coordinated by money and power, is addressed by Giddens as well.

Giddens (1991) posits that there are three related sets of elements that give the modern world its peculiar dynamic character37. These are the separation of time and space, the disembedding of social institutions through abstract and expert systems, and the routinization of institutional reflexivity. Although they often are talked about in different terms or different ways, these elements underlie much of the literature that addresses the constraining effects of culture.

37 The modern world, according to Giddens (1991, p. 8), is a "runaway world" - not only is the pace of social change much faster than in any prior system, but the scope of change and the profoundness with which it affects previous social practices are extraordinary.
Giddens talks about the separation of time and space in general as making possible global relations, but he also discusses how because of this separation of time and space the mass media create collage effects that result in unities of thought. This phenomenon is part of an increasingly complex system of signification that captures stories and images from various contexts and re-presents them in mediated form. This process occurs because of modern cultural systems, and it is reflected both in the literature on representation and diversity as well as in the mass media literature on the effects of technology.

The disembedding of social institutions that Giddens refers to is not dissimilar from what Habermas (1987) calls the "uncoupling of system and lifeworld." Both describe how the institutional framework of capitalist society – including the proclivity for continued progress through what Giddens calls institutional reflexivity – sets up the conditions for rationalization that result in systems created around expertise and actions based strictly on utility. This uncoupling also might be seen as resulting in homogenization, through the drive for efficient mass production; in reification, whereby people take instrumental, exchange-value stances toward each other; and in personal meaninglessness, due to what Giddens (1991) calls the "sequestration of experience." or what Taylor (1989) calls the separation of individuals from the moral resources necessary to live a full life. These themes also are evident in the literature of this chapter.

Giddens (1984) argues that what is generally seen in social theory as a dualism between subject and social object – i.e., between the individual as an independent actor

---

and as being acted upon by social systems – needs to be reconceptualized as a duality of structure where structure is created and maintained by the actions of individuals across time and space.

Structure, as recursively organized sets of rules and resources, is out of time and space, save in its instantiations and coordination as memory traces, and is marked by an “absence of the subject.” The social systems in which structure is recursively implicated, on the contrary, comprise the situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and space. Analyzing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction. (Giddens, 1984, p. 25)

Structure, then, according to Giddens, should not be equated just with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling. The key to understanding this dualism, Giddens suggests, has to do with human consciousness in two forms. The first is practical consciousness, which involves an individual’s daily routines and habits. The second, discursive consciousness, is the ability to put things into words.

The concept of routinization, as grounded in practical consciousness, is an important aspect of the theory of structuration. Routinization suggests regular actions that one doesn’t need to think about because they are based on the known rules and tactics that constitute and reconstitute everyday life across time and space.

Routine is integral both to the continuity of the personality of the agent, as he or she moves along the paths of daily activities, and to the institutions of society, which are such only through their continued reproduction. An examination of routinization, I shall claim, provides us with a master key to explicating the characteristic forms of relation.

---

39 Berger (1995, p. 149) also reminds us that social structure is not inherently bad. Even though people “do seem like relatively passive role players much of the time,” he says, “it’s what we call social order and are grateful for it more often than not.”
between the basic security system on the one hand and the reflexively constituted processes inherent in the episodic character of encounters on the other. (Giddens, 1984, p. 60)

Thus the other kind of consciousness, discursive consciousness, which relies upon self-reflection, allows one to examine his or her habits and routines. In doing so, Giddens suggests, the individual is in the position to potentially make a change to everyday routine.

It is the specifically reflexive form of the knowledgeable ability of human agents that is most deeply involved in the recursive ordering of social practices. Continuity of practices presumes reflexivity, but reflexivity in turn is possible only because of the continuity of practices that makes them distinctively "the same" across space and time. "Reflexivity" hence should be understood not merely as "self-consciousness" but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life. To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons (including lying about them). (Giddens, 1984, p. 3)

The duality of structure, then, can be seen in power relations in the following way.

Power within social systems which enjoy some continuity over time and space presumes regularized relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectivities in contexts of social interaction. But all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors. This is what I call the dialectic of control in social systems. (Giddens, 1984, p. 16)

Agency then is seen by Giddens as the capability to exercise some sort of power to make a difference in a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. The implication here is that this intrinsic agency often is not tapped because of habit and because of trust in expert systems and institutions.

The difficulty in addressing the notion of social structure as both constraining and enabling, or freeing, is evident in the literature of the elite and mass discourses.
The remainder of this chapter will review this literature with special attention to how different academic thrusts address the capacity for agency and the impacts of constraints to varying degrees.

**Overview of the typology**

In order to discuss the various academic thrusts in the literature, I have organized them into what I see as six distinct areas in the study of people's interactions with cultural products, practices, and institutions. In line with the discussion of the previous chapter, within each of these thrusts also are underlying assumptions about the moral values of the phenomena being studied.

The typology that follows outlines the six main thrusts in both the direct and indirect study of cultural audiences. Along one vector is the distinction that appears in the literature discussed in Chapter Two, with the elite discourse including those studies that assume, at least by implication, that elite culture is good and mass culture is bad — and the mass discourse including those studies that assume the opposite. Along the other vector of the typology is a distinction in how the audience is conceptualized in the literature, from which I have extracted three different conceptualizations: audience as implied, audience as aggregate, and audience as situated interpreters.

In discussing literature that focuses on audience as implied, I mean that which employs a broad conception of the public or citizenry where audience characteristics are generalized and are assumed to remain relatively stable across time and space. This
category incorporates much of the literature discussed in the previous chapter, where assumptions about the audience are made without any formal analysis of the audience itself.

By audience as aggregate, I am referring to literature that seeks to construct a picture of an audience by describing various attributes such as attitudes, demographics, or lifestyle characteristics (e.g., consumption habits) that also remain relatively stable across time and place. This literature uses these attributes as predictors of participation in or attitudes toward elite or mass culture. For the most part, this category incorporates what we generally would consider to be mainstream social science research.

Finally, audience as situated interpreters refers to literature that conceptualizes audience members as making sense of various situations in different ways according to a complex structure of temporal and spatial relations. This body of research is typically described as qualitative in contrast to the quantitative orientation of the category above.

For purposes of mapping the literature, Table 2 (next page) represents these six thrusts. Of course, I must acknowledge that any attempt to classify in this manner is bound to exaggerate some aspects and to minimize others. Nonetheless, my objective here is to present a general map, indicating the various patterns that have emerged in my analysis of the literature. For the sake of clarity, the following sections will discuss these three audience conceptualizations separately, with each conceptualization presented in four cells consistent with the rationale of Chapter Two.
The two disparate discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The three different conceptualizations of audience</th>
<th>Elite Discourse</th>
<th>Mass Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience as Implied</strong></td>
<td>Elite is Good</td>
<td>Mass is Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humanistic philosophy</td>
<td>Popular culture literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arts education literature</td>
<td>Media studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass is Bad</td>
<td>Elite is Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critiques of mass culture</td>
<td>Museum text analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass media text analyses</td>
<td>Critical social history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political economy of media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience as Aggregate</strong></td>
<td>Elite is Good</td>
<td>Mass is Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social science surveys</td>
<td>Social science surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass is Bad</td>
<td>Elite is Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media effects research</td>
<td>Sociology of culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience as Situated Interpreters</strong></td>
<td>Elite is Good</td>
<td>Mass is Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contextualized museum studies</td>
<td>Media ethnography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass is Bad</td>
<td>Elite is Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural studies reception analyses</td>
<td>Critical anthropology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Typology of the various thrusts in the elite and mass discourses according to audience conceptualization and literature source.
Audience as Implied

As already suggested, the literature in this category doesn't directly study audiences at all but rather assumes certain audience effects. Table 3 (page 56) shows the typology of this audience conceptualization and the discourse communities that make up each cell. Within the elite discourse, the claim that elite is good is represented by much of the literature in the arts and humanities, and the claim that mass is bad includes general critiques of mass culture, such as those prominent in the 1940s and 50s, as well as more recent work in political economy and text analysis.

Within the mass discourse, the literature that posits mass is good come mostly from popular culture and media studies, and that which suggests elite is bad is represented by text analyses of museums and critical social histories of elite culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Elite Discourse</th>
<th>Mass Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite is Good</td>
<td>Humanistic philosophy</td>
<td>Mass is Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arts education literature</td>
<td>Popular culture literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Media studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Mass is Bad</th>
<th>Elite is Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critiques of mass culture</td>
<td>Museum text analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass media text analyses</td>
<td>Critical social history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political economy of media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Typology of audience as implied literature according to elite and mass discourses.
**Elite is good.** The humanistic philosophy and arts education literature that falls into this category assumes agency, a capacity for action. The individual is free to enjoy the pleasures of elite culture without constraint, and this is beneficial not only to the person but also to society at large. To recapitulate the summary of positive effects from Chapter Two, elite culture is good because it: 1) represents a valid and vital form of truth, 2) contributes to the understanding of human possibilities, and 3) contributes to democracy when it is part of the education and lives of all citizens.

Additionally, if one considers the literature from the concept of constraints, elite culture can be seen as mitigating the negative effects of social systems. Thus, while Giddens suggests that everyday routine can constrain, this literature speaks of the ability of elite culture – particularly artistic experience – to lift us out of the everyday. Elite culture, then, can be seen as freeing or releasing us from the constraint of habit, which in turn opens up the potential for us to see things in new ways.

Elite culture also is understood in this literature to enhance the quality of life by connecting us to humanity, to ourselves, and to emotion, which provides the means for self-expression and personal growth. This, then, can be seen as giving meaning to – or reminding us of the meaning in – our lives, thus mitigating the alienating effects of the modern world. And finally, by contributing to democracy, elite culture can be seen as undermining the possibility of tyranny. Because this literature is covered extensively in Chapter Two, it will not be discussed at length in this section.

**Mass is Bad.** The literature in the bottom left-hand cell of this typology includes the mass culture critiques discussed in the previous chapter. This work focuses on how
mass culture contributes to constraints — i.e., inhibits agency — by dulling the mind and spirit; dehumanizing through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes; corrupting elite culture; and negatively affecting democracy.

In addition to the general critiques of mass culture discussed previously, there is a substantial body of relatively recent work that addresses the constraining effects of the media in particular. At the risk of oversimplifying what is a vast and complex area of the literature, I would say that this work is developed, to greater and lesser degrees, from Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. The common point of concern in each case is power of a dominating group to control systems of representation that have to do with class, race, and gender.

Eco once suggested that the whole of culture should be studied as a communicative phenomenon based on systems of signification (Eco. 1976. p. 22). In a world filled with images — images disconnected in time and space from their original contexts — this argument appears more valid than ever before. Images need to be interpreted by audiences, and the scholars in this group are concerned about who creates these images, who controls them, and how they function for individuals and within the socio-political order of society.

McLuhan, of course, was one of the early critics of television and advertising, warning of the ease with which mass media could be used to mislead the public. Ewan (1976), also, in his ground-breaking book on advertising and consumer culture, talks about how advertising has successfully — and dangerously — tied human happiness to the possession of material goods.

— See, for example, McLuhan (1964, 1951, 1947).
The linking of the marketplace to utopian ideals, to political and social freedom, to material well-being, and to the realization of fantasy represents the spectacle of liberation emanating from the bowels of domination and denial. (Ewan, 1976, p. 200)

Despite these warnings, advertising continues successfully to convince us that products can satisfy our needs, and its effectiveness is because of the media's capacities for signification. Barthes (1972) refers to this signification process both as myth and ideology and says it works so well because it naturalizes what we see. It "factizes" a particular interpretation by making it natural or self-evident. It works on us without our realizing it. As Kilbourne (1999) notes:

The fact is that much of advertising's power comes from this belief that advertising does not affect us. The most effective kind of propaganda is that which is not recognized as propaganda. Because we think advertising is silly and trivial, we are less on guard, less critical, than we might otherwise be. (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 27)

The emphasis on commodities and what they can do for us also helps to create and reinforce an environment where people are looked at as objects and reified. People, too, become commodities, valued for their utility, including the pleasure they can give. This theme has been particularly prominent with regard to the portrayal of women in the media.

Mulvey (1973) was among the first to call attention to the issue of the "male gaze" in the mass media.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotiv of
erotic spectacle: from pinups to striptease, from Ziefeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to, and signifies male desire. (Mulvey, 1973, p. 366)

Women are consistently seen in the media as sex objects, where an artificial standard of beauty is the only worthy attribute.

She is thin, generally tall and long-legged, and, above all, she is young. All "beautiful" women in advertisements (including minority women), regardless of product or audience, conform to this norm. Women are constantly exhorted to emulate this ideal, to feel ashamed and guilty if they fail, and to feel that their desirability and lovability are contingent upon physical perfection... Desperate to conform to an ideal and impossible standard, many women go to great lengths to manipulate and change their faces and bodies. A woman is conditioned to view her face as a mask and her body as an object, as things separate from and more important than her real self, constantly in need of alteration, improvement, and disguise. She is made to feel dissatisfied with and ashamed of herself, whether she tries to achieve "the look" or not. (Kilbourne, 1995, p. 122)

Because the function of women is to be possessed by men, the stereotype of women in the media also represents them as weak, dependent, and not terribly bright.

In addition to problematic images of women in the media, there is a longstanding concern about how people of color are portrayed. Gray (1995), for example, notes that, on one hand, the Black underclass is represented in the media as a social menace that must be contained and, on the other hand, successful African Americans such as Bill Cosby and Oprah Winfrey are shown in a way that confirms the ideal of openness and pluralism of society.

Media representations of black success and failure and the processes that produce them are ideological to the extent that the assumptions that organize the media discourses shift our understanding of racial inequality

---

41 For additional examples of feminist media criticism see Haskell (1973/1999), Hass (1995), Ouellette (1999), and Rapping (1999).
away from structured social processes to matters of individual choice. Such ideological representations appear natural and universal rather than as the result of social and political struggles over power. (Gray, 1995, p.431)

Critics are more forthright than ever in their warnings about the negative impacts of the media, especially advertising. It’s difficult to imagine a more strongly worded argument than Jhally (2000) puts forth in a recent book:

I wish to make a simple claim: twentieth-century advertising is the most powerful and sustained system of propaganda in human history, and its cumulative cultural effects, unless quickly checked, will be responsible for destroying the world as we know it. As it achieves this it will be responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of non-western peoples and will prevent the peoples of the world from achieving true happiness. Simply stated, our survival as a species is dependent upon minimizing the threat from advertising and the commercial culture that has spawned it. (Jhally, 2000, p. 27)

Jhally alludes here to the issue of globalization, which is tied to concerns of post-colonialism and the increasing role of multinational corporations in the media industry. This latter concern is the focus of scholars in the area of political economy43 whose work documents the growing threat to democracy.

A spectre now haunts the world: a global commercial media system dominated by a small number of superpowerful, mostly USA-based transnational media corporations. It is a system that works to advance the cause of the global market and promote commercial values, while denigrating journalism and culture not conducive to the immediate bottom line or long-term corporate interests. It is a disaster for anything but the most superficial notion of democracy – a democracy where, to paraphrase John Jay’s maxim, those who own the world ought to govern it. (McChesney, 2000, p. 59)

Mass is good. Again, much of the literature that pertains to the mass-is-good cell is discussed in the previous chapter. This work suggests that mass culture is good

43 See, for example, Colista & Leshner (1998); Polic & Gandy (1993); Roach (1997); Schiller (1998); and Wasko, Mosco & Pendakur (1993).
because it represents freedom of choice, it helps build community through shared knowledge and experience, and it provides opportunities for relaxation, self-expression, and pleasure.

Among media scholars the focus here often is on mass communication as a means of public ritual. This work includes scholarly analyses of social discourses such as that of Dayan & Katz (1992), who look at media events as festive viewing occasions that fall into the categories of contests, conquests, and coronations. Such events, they suggest, help to build community through shared experiences.

The occasional media event transforms [normal] domestic atomization. It transforms the home into a public space. It connects networks of interacting individuals, from house to house, across very large territories. While highly selective — and biased — in what is shown, television brings inside what cannot be seen otherwise. We refer not just to events that are physically inaccessible, but to events that take place primarily, sometimes, exclusively, in the air. Most of the great political Conquests (Sadat, the moon, the Pope), or political Contests (Watergate, the presidential debates) are far out of sight of on-the-spot audiences but well within the reach of television homes. (Dayan & Katz. 1992. p. 128)

Another example is the discourse analysis of Fiske (1996) that offers at least the possibility that the mass media might contribute to civic discussion.

The more America becomes divided along its multiple axes of social difference, of which race, ethnicity, gender, class, and age are only some of the most salient, the more frequently media events and figures that dramatize these fault lines will occur, the more intensely they will grab the American imagination, and the more bitter will be the struggles to inflect them in one direction or another. A media event is significant because of the inevitability of its recurrence and the clarity it gives to murky anxieties and political differences. It is significant because it serves as a public arena wherein the American people engage in urgent political debate and in sometimes effective political action. (Fiske. 1996. p. 263)
Ellis also suggests that television serves to support a community of common knowledge and experience; and in the process, it offers viewers freedom of choice as well:

[Television] exists as a facility which is used by its audiences according to the pattern of their domestic lives and to their desires for what they think television has to offer. Television constantly offers: viewers take up the offer only when they feel like it... Television's special domestic status means that it is given a low level of attention much of the time; but it is the same low level of attention which is given to much else (and most other people) in the domestic space as well. (Ellis. 1999, p. 68)

And, of course, as discussed in Chapter Two, the media are intrinsically rewarding in that they provide opportunities for relaxation, for self-expression, and for general pleasure and enjoyment.

Elite is bad. The bottom right-hand cell in this typology includes both histories and textual readings of elite institutions. As discussed in the previous chapter, this group includes a number of useful social histories of elite institutions that document the mechanisms of exclusion that operated over the years. Because this literature is covered fairly extensively in Chapter Two, a few representative illustrations will suffice here. Berger (1972), for example, was among the first scholars to cast a critical eye toward the venerable institution of fine art:

Oil paintings often depict things. Things which in reality are buyable. To have a thing painted and put on a canvas is not unlike buying it and putting it in your house. If you buy a painting you buy also the look of the thing it represents. This analogy between possessing and the way of seeing which is incorporated in oil painting, is a factor usually ignored by art experts and historians. (Berger, 1972, p. 83. italics original)

And DiMaggio talks about the cultural history of Boston:

---

44 See Chapter Two for additional discussion of the social histories of elite culture.

63
In Boston, representatives of a commercial and industrial upper class established an art museum and a symphony orchestra at the same time they were creating private schools, social clubs, and other institutions that enabled them to maintain a bounded collective life and a distinctive cultural style. Both the museum and the orchestra began as ostensibly institutions providing a range of offerings. As they became more secure, they retained cultural experts who—supported by wealthy patrons—defined canons of “serious” works, expelling others from the collections and repertoire, respectively. In the course of doing so, they established conventions of public demeanor emphasizing restraints and respect, and restricted the public that had access to high culture to the upper and upper-middle class. (DiMaggio. 2000. p. 41)

This group also includes a growing body of work that deals with issues of representation that have emerged from a primarily anthropological perspective. As an example here, Bal (1996) offers a textual critique of the American Museum of Natural History:

Within the framework of the mimetic success of the realism in the Hall of Asian Mammals, the transition from this cultured “nature” to culture as nature—from mammals to peoples—is inherently problematic. The most obvious problem is the juxtaposition of animals and human foreign cultures. (Bal, 1996, p. 22)

**Criticisms of the audience-as-implied literature.** There are two main difficulties with the literature that falls into the audience-as-implied category. One concern is that because the audience is implied, effects are only presumed to occur. The work therefore lacks straightforward empirical evidence.

The second difficulty is the polarization of audience conceptualizations: either individuals are understood to have agency and the ability to freely interact with cultural products and institutions to beneficial effect, or they are understood to be constrained and acted upon by cultural structures to negative effect. Said another way, either the

---

audience is seen as having agency – and culture is enabling – or the audience is seen as not having agency – and culture is constraining. Individuals are not seen as sometimes having agency and sometimes not, nor is culture seen as being sometimes enabling and sometimes not.

**Audience as Aggregate**

It is important to reiterate at the outset that the literature that treats audience as aggregate is work that comes out of mainstream social science research. As such, the literature presumes a value-neutral stance, a position of conscious objectivity regarding the moral value of the phenomena studied. Despite disclaimers, I believe the work that falls into the audience-as-aggregate category still can be discerned as deriving from either the elite (elite is good, mass is bad) or mass (elite is bad, mass is good) discourse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elite Discourse</th>
<th>Mass Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td>Elite is Good</td>
<td>Mass is Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social science surveys</td>
<td>Social science surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bad</strong></td>
<td>Mass is Bad</td>
<td>Elite is Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media effects research</td>
<td>Sociology of culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Typology of audience as aggregate literature according to elite and mass discourses.

65
Elite is good. This cell of the typology represents the dominant body of literature that focuses directly on arts audiences. It is comprised of survey research regarding attitudes and attendance or participation along with psychologically oriented visitor studies of museums. This work is primarily administrative in nature, oriented to helping arts institutions better understand their audiences so they can not only maintain what they have but can increase their sizes by attracting people who are similar. Like the previously discussed elite-is-good literature, the assumption here is that audiences are free to engage in the benefits of culture.

The general demographic profile that emerges from these various studies invariably reveals the typical arts attendee as a Caucasian, older female with above average education and above average income. Additionally there is some indication that prior arts education and exposure positively affects subsequent participation. But the fundamental question here must be: If the arts are so good, as suggested previously, then why isn’t everyone participating? These studies fail to answer important questions about those who participate – and especially about those who don’t. There is within the nonprofit arts world an increasing recognition that the public needs to be more involved, and at the same time there are increasing data that suggest a significant

---

46 See, for example, American Council for the Arts (1996); Andreasen (1990); Cherbo (1995); DiMaggio (1996); DiMaggio & Ostrower (1998, 1992); Love (1995); Peterson, Hull, & Kern (1998); Peterson; Kern, & Hull (1999); Peterson, Sherkat, Balfe, & Meyersohn (1996); and Robinson & Filicko (2000)

47 This research is intended for the most part to evaluate exhibition displays or visitors' information needs, such as the studies by Boisvert & Slez (1994) and Booth (1998), Harvey (1995), Klein (1993), Sandifer (1997), Tunnicliffe (2000, 1997), and Tulley (1991).


proportion of Americans think the arts have no relevance to their lives. Demographic and attitudinal surveys seem unable to fully address the situation; they fail to fully penetrate the question of constraints.

Arts audiences, it appears, are far too complex to be understood through demographics alone, and audience studies have shown little predictability between audience demographics or attitudes and participation. Furthermore, such studies don’t provide insight into the average citizen’s cultural life or how the arts figure in the broader context of everyday activities. To illustrate this difficulty, when asked in the National Endowment for the Arts’ most recent survey why they did not participate in more arts events, respondents cited lack of time, lack of companions, lack of suitable events, and inaccessibility to events (NEA, 1998). But such responses really illuminate very little, since we know from years of mass culture research that audiences make time, find companions, identify events, and even leap formidable obstacles if a cultural offering is important in some way.

Using data from the 1982 survey of Public Participation in the Arts, Andreasen (1990) outlines a hierarchical model of audience development from uninterested to highly committed, where the first step is moving from disinterest to interest and the second step is trial. From this model he makes recommendations about where arts institutions should focus their audience development efforts.

The strongest differences in the entire process are between the first two stages. Those who express no interest in the arts are dramatically

50 See Larson (1997) and NEA (1999).
52 A growing body of literature on arts involvement documents the need to understand people’s personal connections to the arts (see, e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995; Falk, 1999; Gurian, 1999; Hooper-Greenhill, 1995; Leichter & Spock, 1999; McLean, 1999; Perin, 1992; and Roberts. 1997).
different from those who have even the most minimal interest. More importantly, these differences are so pronounced that people at Stage 1 should, from an efficiency standpoint, be given very low priority in future audience development programs. Their socioeconomic characteristics are just not like those at any other stage in the process. (Andreasen, 1990, p. 37)

Such a strategy seems to miss the mark if the goal is to more broadly involve the general public in the arts. As one critical theatre scholar observes:

The [current] use of empirical research by cultural institutions assures, it seems, the maintenance of the existing relationship between mainstream production and the small percentage of the population who attend. (Bennett, 1990, p. 95)

There is at present, then, an increasing recognition that the traditional survey research that has dominated elite culture institutions is inadequate to fully penetrate the complex relationships between audiences (and especially non-audiences) and elite culture. It fails to fully account for the possibility of audience constraints — constraints that in many cases have been created by cultural institutions themselves.

Two interesting studies have been conducted recently that begin to probe more deeply into some of these issues. One study by Gainer (1993a, 1993b) suggests that while gender does not directly affect attendance at performing arts events, it may do so indirectly in two ways. One way is through childhood experiences with the arts, whereby girls more frequently receive arts education and exposure, which in turn affects adult participation. A second way is through the general difference in socialization of boys and girls, whereby construction of feminine identity leads to the development of those personality traits and predispositions that would make the particular emotional and expressive attributes of the performing arts more personally relevant.

68

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
In a second study of interest, Freeman & Bania (1995) compared orchestra concert attendance between Black and Caucasian residents of a suburban community that has a relatively large attendance rate and found that despite their similar socio-economic and education levels, the disparity in participation between these two groups was significant. One possible explanation the researchers offer is the issue of "surplus visibility," which is to say that African Americans may avoid places like concert halls where they feel they are on display because they are not expected to be there. There may be some additional support for this hypothesis in the 1997 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, which found that participants in the arts via media were more evenly distributed by race, age, income, and educational level than were participants who attended live arts events (NEA, 1999).

These two studies point to the need to dig more deeply, to look more carefully at the role of culture in people's actual lives. The primary difficulty with this research methodology overall, then, seems to be a failure to adequately theorize the audience vis-à-vis potential constraints and freedoms.

Mass is bad. The audience-as-aggregate literature that assumes the possibility, if not the likelihood, that mass culture is bad, is extensive and comes out of the media effects and persuasion tradition. There are many excellent histories of the mass communication field and it is unnecessary, therefore, to restate that tradition here. Suffice it to say that there has been from the beginning a great deal of attention paid to mass media and their potential effects. Of particular importance have been the uses of mass media for training purposes starting in World War I. the seemingly astounding

---

53 Recent histories include, for example, Rogers (1994) and Schramm (1997).
impacts of radio and film in World War II, the incredible rise of mass media in the ensuing years, the globalization of popular culture and media technologies, and so forth.

The mass culture critiques of the 1940s and 50s that were discussed above were concerned about the negative effects of mass media and mass culture generally and were, in large part, in opposition to the mostly quantitative, administrative research that developed in the United States with Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and others. Thus, for example, critical scholars such as Horkheimer and Adorno critiqued this instrumentality and emphasized how such mass-produced cultural products could cause homogenization, reification, and so forth.

Lazarsfeld and his colleagues, of course, had conducted research that suggested the United States was a stable society of diverse social groups and institutions in which mass communications had only limited influence on public opinion. Interestingly, Lunn (1990) argues that Horkheimer and Adorno were closer to Lazarsfeld in their position on the effects of the media than often is supposed, but this congruity is disguised by their respective framings of the problem. When Lazarsfeld addressed questions of media impact on audiences, he emphasized that its power was limited in that it only reinforced existing values and beliefs. But this notion of reinforcement matches up with Horkheimer and Adorno’s view of ideology as an anchoring of societal structures. Thus, the critical theorists and the liberal-pluralists constructed “rival accounts of an allegedly harmonious society governed by technocratic elites and

54 I would include here such work as Klapper (1960), Lasswell (1948), and Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet (1948). For an overview of this work see Schramm & Roberts (1971).

55 See Lazarsfeld & Merton (1948/1971).
strongly supported by functionally passive consumer "citizens" (Lunn, 1990, p. 65). These rival accounts continue with administrative and other liberal-based research positioned against both the mass culture critiques discussed above and other empirical research on media effects as discussed below.

The historical emphasis on effects calls into relief the question of the nature of the audience vis-à-vis societal structures. Do the media act upon us in undesirable ways? Among the empirical researchers who answer this question affirmatively are those working in dependency theory, cultivation theory, agenda-setting, and framing. Following many years of research on the effects of television, for example, Gerbner concludes:

We have found that the cultural tidal wave that is television cultivates viewer conceptions of reality, and shifts political orientations, and - vocal claims to the contrary - generates conformity and intolerance of differences. (Gerbner, 1998, p. 372)

Here, then, is empirical evidence to support some of the arguments of the audience-as-implied literature. Kubey (1996) also has accumulated years of results related to television viewing and argues that viewers easily develop habits of dependence.

I prefer to use the work "dependence" precisely because the word "addiction" is misleading. But I do believe that many people in our culture have developed a psychological dependence on television. To be sure, "dependence" by no means must imply lack of "activity." Still, few active audience proponents are prepared to accept that a significant proportion of the viewing audience has developed entrenched viewing habits. (Kubey, 1996, p. 191)

---

56 Another way of looking at this is that it represents the dualism of structure discussed by Giddens above.
57 See below for discussion of this research thrust.
58 See Ball-Rokeach (1976), Gerbner (1998), McCombs & Shaw (1972), and Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder (1982), respectively.
I would suggest that even studies that conclude the media have no negative
effects – or limited effects – fall into this cell because their work is set up to test the
mass-culture-is-bad hypothesis. In other words, while it is hoped that individual agency
might prevail, these researchers have operated out of a framework of constraints that
presumes the possibility of dominating social structures anchored by the mass media.

Mass is good. The audience-as-aggregate literature that assumes that mass
culture is good, or at least not inherently bad, includes both traditional demographic
research such as that used by media programmers and advertisers59 and studies that look
at media with an implicit stance of defense; that is, those that presume an active
audience free to decide what is of value and to discard or ignore what is not. In this
latter group I would include those who work in the uses and gratifications arena60 and
others whose focus is similarly on the functional effects of mass media, including
entertainment media61.

Zillman & Bryant (1994), for example, have conducted behavioral studies
regarding people’s active selection of entertainment programs that excite or calm them.
depending on the mood required.

[ ]regardless of how media analysts might elect to characterize the
effects in question, the fact remains that much entertainment is
consumed to alter moods, affects, and emotions in the specified fashion:
moreover, the fact remains that the desired effects come about with
considerable regularity. De facto, then, the consumption of much
entertainment has beneficial consequences. It is adaptive, recreational,
457-458)

59 For a recent overview of this area see Webster, Phalen & Lichty (2000).
60 See Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch (1974); Palmgreen (1984); and Rubin (1994).
61 See in particular Tannenbaum (1980) and Zillman & Bryant (1994).
Elite is bad. The lower right-hand cell of this typology is comprised of studies in the sociology of culture. This is work that looks at audiences in relation to the production of elite culture as the result of patterned practices. This work is most strongly associated with Bourdieu (1984)\textsuperscript{62} and addresses for the most part issues of taste, status, and lifestyle. Those who affiliate themselves with arts institutions, this work suggests, possess the necessary "cultural capital"\textsuperscript{63} most often acquired informally through class-based socialization. Thus, in their study of European museums, Bourdieu and Darbel (1990, p. 37) eloquently state the disparity between those with cultural capital and those lacking:

If it is indisputable that society offers to all the pure possibility of taking advantage of the works on display in museums, it remains the case that only some have the real possibility of doing so. (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1990, p. 37)

Again, although those conducting this research consider it to be value-neutral, I have placed it in the elite-is-bad cell of the mass discourse because it directly focuses on questions of class and implicitly critiques elite culture. In keeping with Giddens, this work emphasizes lifestyle habits, or habitus, which Bourdieu calls a "structured and structuring structure."

The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification (principum divisionis) of these practices. It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of lifestyles, is constituted. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 405)

---

\textsuperscript{62} This category now includes a large number of sociologists of art including, for example, Balfe (1993), DiMaggio & Mohr (1985), Hall & Blau (1987), and Peterson (1997, 1992).

\textsuperscript{63} Bourdieu (1984, 1993)
One criticism of the methodology of Bourdieu and others in the sociology of culture is that even though it is concerned with the social practices of individuals (which implies movement and change over time), it is difficult to see how individual agency has much impact on societal structures beyond continually reproducing them⁶⁴.

Specifically, sociology cannot account for the ways in which cultural forms and practices do not simply reflect an already given social world but, rather, play a constitutive role in the construction of that world. (Bowler, 1994, p. 248)

Another concern is that this method, which only looks at power issues and factors of class and capital, can't account for the intrinsic values of beauty and awe in art. nor can it explain value in terms of past memories and family connections⁶⁵.

**Criticisms of the audience-as-aggregate literature.** The overall criticism of the audience-as-aggregate conceptualization, then, is that it casts individuals in a static, unchanging framework. Thus, individuals are seen as always acting (or reacting) in the same way across time and space based on their demographic profiles, their lifestyles, their consumption habits, and so forth.

**Audience as Situated Interpreters**

The conceptualization of audience as situated interpreters engages most directly the issue of structure and agency, and it is fair to say that at present the work in this area

---

⁶⁴ Among those who make this point are Barker & Brooks (1998), Bowler (1994) and Guillory (1997).
⁶⁵ See, for example, Berard (1999) and Pearce (1995).
is focused on the intersection between structural constraints and the potential free interpreting activities of audiences as agents. Because of this attention, the literature in this category is especially relevant to my research.

**Elite is good.** There are relatively few studies of elite culture audiences that fall into the audience-as-situated-interpreters category, and those that do come out of the museum world. These studies differ from the museum studies discussed previously in that they maintain an interpretive focus rather than demographics or lifestyle\(^\text{66}\). Of particular interest to the researchers in these studies are the various meanings that audience members create or attach to the exhibitions, artworks, or overall museum visit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elite Discourse</th>
<th>Mass Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bad</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite is Good</td>
<td>Mass is Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualized museum studies</td>
<td>Cultural studies reception analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elite Discourse</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mass Discourse</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite is Good</td>
<td>Mass is Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media ethnography</td>
<td>Critical anthropology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.** Typology of audience as situated interpreters literature according to elite and mass discourses.

---

Falk & Dierking (2000, 1992) offer a model of the museum experience in which they suggest there are three overlapping and constantly changing contexts: personal, sociocultural, and physical. The dominant motivation for humans is meaning-making, they say, and this need plays out for visitors in the museum setting in many ways.

Why visitors come, with whom they visit and for what reasons, what they already know, what their interests are, what their prior museum experiences are, and what subsequent reinforcing events occur in their lives play as great a role in learning — if not a greater one — as anything that happens inside the museum. (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 8)

Science and history museums are more likely than art museums to engage in this kind of situated audience research and to change the way they do things in order to draw new visitors in and to engage them appropriately, according to Hooper-Greenhill (1995).

Many non-art museums are developing ways to enable people to enter an active process of exploration and discovery that has the potential of becoming personally meaningful to them, recognizing that it is only when experiences are personally meaningful that they are truly valued. Most art museums limit the mode of learning to looking and reading, a physically passive yet intellectually demanding form of learning. (Hooper-Greenhill, 1995, p. 155)

She suggests that all museums need to shift their policy priorities from objects to people.

This work, then, begins to address the relationships between audiences and elite culture (specifically museums) across time and space. It takes into account individuals' personal histories, social interactions, the physical space of the experience, and so forth. The problem, however, is opposite that of the audience-as-aggregate category: the data now are so specific that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to generalize results from one situation to another. Additionally, it taps only those who already are part of the
museum audience and therefore misses non-participants entirely. It fails to consider the structural constraints – those barriers that keep people from ever entering the museum doors.

**Mass is bad.** The literature that falls into this cell in the typology is represented by the audience-reception work of cultural studies, which is interested in the relationships between institutional or societal structures and audiences, particularly with regard to how messages are encoded and decoded. Stuart Hall, one of the founders of the cultural studies tradition, employs Gramsci’s notion of hegemony to considerably enlarge the whole concept of domination and the encoding-decoding relationship.

[Gramsci] redefines the whole notion of power so as to give full weight to its non-coercive aspects... Above all he allows us to begin to grasp the central role which the superstructures, the state and civil associations, politics and ideology, play in securing and cementing societies “structured in dominance” and in actively conforming the whole of social, ethical, mental and moral life in their overall tendencies to the requirements of the productive system. (Hall, 1977. p. 334)

Hall’s well-known encoding/decoding model of the mass media (Hall, 1980) posits three hypothetical positions of audience decoding: 1) the dominant-hegemonic position, where the audience member is operating inside the dominant code of the media; 2) the negotiated position, where he or she uses a mix of adaptive and oppositional elements to decode, and 3) the oppositional position, where the audience member interprets the message within an alternative frame of reference.

Hall discusses in semiotic terms how invisible, and therefore insidious, the production and reception of media messages is in modern society. He also refers to the role of habit in the continued reproduction of the process.

---

67 Work on both sides of the Atlantic has been produced by such researchers as Delgalo (1998), DeNora (1999), Fiske (1987), and Radway (1987). See also Liebes and Curran (1998).
The operation of naturalized codes reveals not the transparency and "naturalness" of language but the depth, the habituation and the near-universality of the codes in use. They produce apparently "natural" recognitions. This has the (ideological) effect of concealing the practices of coding which are present. But we must not be fooled by appearances. Actually, what naturalized codes demonstrate is the degree of habituation produced when there is a fundamental alignment and reciprocity — and achieved equivalence — between the encoding and decoding sites of an exchange of meanings. (Hall, 1980, p. 132)

Morley (1980) was the first to test Hall's model, but the results of his study failed to demonstrate the full force of hegemony. And so within the literature of cultural studies there continues an ongoing tension between structural or system effects and the autonomy or agency of individuals. Morley (1992) has said this intersection between structure and agency:

...rests on an ability to understand how social actors themselves define and understand their own communication practices — their decisions, their choices, and the consequences of both for their daily lives and their subsequent actions — as well as on the ability of the researcher to bring into the analysis (and even offer his or her subjects) the benefits of more structural considerations... (p. 183)

Among those political economists and other mass media critics, above, whose emphases have been on system effects, there is now a long tradition of theoretical and empirical work that documents the hegemonic impacts on audiences. As previously mentioned, however, this work is somewhat problematic because of the lack of evidence supporting straightforward relationships.

On the free interpreting agent side of this equation, there is a strong call for focusing on how agents intersect with media messages, technologies, and structures without being eclipsed by them. There are a number of names for this intersection.

---

68 One of the most recent examples Miller & Philo (2001).
69 This work is discussed in conjunction with the audience-as-implied literature above.
70 Among those questioning this are Hagen & Wasko, (2000) and Morley & Silverstone (1990).
depending on whose theoretic model is used for the framing. In the tradition of Hall and the Birmingham School\textsuperscript{71}, these intersections might be labeled negotiation or opposition. In the work of Fiske\textsuperscript{72}, interpretive resistance would be the more likely term; and in the work of Latin American cultural studies\textsuperscript{73}, perhaps it is mediation. Whatever one calls it, this model has yielded a number of books and articles providing both theoretical advances and empirical work\textsuperscript{74}.

What is emerging as an agreement is a need to bridge the gap between structural analyses of cultural products and theoretically informed reception analysis\textsuperscript{75}. Such research begins with the recognition, as Giddens states above, that social and cultural structures are both constraining and enabling.

They “determine” action by privileging certain possibilities while closing others off. At the same time, they are continually reproduced and altered by the ways that choices are understood and worked through on the ground. (Murdock, 1997, p. 190)

It is this juncture that is my focus; however, in order to reconceptualize what is going on when audiences and cultural institutions meet, it would be helpful to enlarge our theoretical understanding of both constraints and freedoms.

The important point for my purposes is that within the critical theory tradition that frames the mass-culture-is-bad literature, the conception of cultural products as used by audiences for enabling or freeing purposes has been wholly absent. In

\textsuperscript{71} See, for example, Hall (1980) and Morley (1993, 1980).
\textsuperscript{73} Examples of work in Latin America include Beltran (1980) and Martin Barbero (2000).
\textsuperscript{74} The literature here includes Hagen & Wasko (2000); Garner (1999); Sellnow (1999); Liebes & Curran (1998); Waisbord (1998); and Bachen (1996).
\textsuperscript{75} Among those who make this point are Meehan (1999); Kellner (1997); Morley (1993); and Murdock (1997).
corollary, within the liberal theory tradition that frames the mass-culture-is-good literature, the conception of cultural products as imposing constraints has been equally absent.

Part of the difficulty arises from the nature of the struggle of critical scholars in challenging administrative research models based on free-market liberalism. Such models have the curious feature of simultaneously assuming audience freedoms and beneficial impacts from cultural products while, in fact, seeking instrumental control. This has proceeded for the most part a-theoretically without sufficient grounding in social theory. In challenging this, critical approaches have been strongly rooted in a theory of domination, which then framed tightly the search for audience interpretations. Interpretations became a reflection of this restricted theorizing, and concomitantly the methods by which audiences have been observed, interviewed, and analyzed have been influenced by the same framework. In effect, there has been a propensity in audience reception studies of the media to go looking only for domination or resistance and to ignore other possible theoretic framings. Nonetheless, there exists a soft but persistent voice that is calling for a broader theoretic framework in order to better understand people’s experiences when they interact with cultural products and institutions.  

Mass is good. Although they could arguably be situated with the mass is bad literature, above, I would place in the upper right-hand cell of this typology a number of media-oriented ethnographic studies that focus on the uses of mass culture products and

[76 Examples of those calling for broader frameworks including Lembo & Tucker (1990); Nelson (1989); Thornburn (1987); and Young (2000).]
technologies within the structures of everyday living and social contexts.\textsuperscript{77} I place these in the mass-culture-is-okay framework, not because I think these researchers agree with this stance so much as they have accepted its ubiquity to point where they appear to bracket off their concerns. In an effort to move away from the ideological model of cultural studies, these researchers\textsuperscript{78} also seem to have abandoned the potentially useful aspects of that model.

As such, this approach still falls short of what is needed to fully understand what happens when audiences and cultural products and institutions interact, and it fails completely to provide any guidance for social change. Thus, I would have to agree with Osterud (2000, p. 128), who argues that there remains an unfortunate tendency to reduce cultural analyses of audience reception to the study of people's habits of media consumption, offering little improvement over the uses and gratifications approach that Hall (1980) was opposing when he developed his encoding/decoding model.

\textbf{Elite is bad.} There do not at present appear to be any studies that clearly fall into the bottom right-hand cell of this typography: that is, within the elite-is-bad position of the audience-as-situated interpreters framework. There are, however, several examples of literature that will be discussed here because, first, this is the closest fit for them in this typology and, second, they offer important insights about ways to break out of the difficulty of the structure-agency polarity.


\textsuperscript{78} Among the advocates of this ethnographic trajectory are Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998), who suggest that studying practices can move researchers beyond the domination/resistance paradigm. These authors argue that looking at contemporary media-saturated life through a lens of spectacle and performance offers a much better way of understanding contemporary approaches than the earlier behavioral and ideological models.
One small body of work that is relevant here is ethnographic museum studies that emphasize the discursive struggles of representation. A second small body of work is that by Keil and Feld (1994). Although they often discuss both popular culture in the sense of ethnic and folk varieties and also mass culture in terms of recorded performances, these researchers tend not to be cited in popular or cultural studies but rather in musicological and anthropological discourses. What is particularly attractive to me about this work is that it addresses both the possibility of a "pure" aesthetic experience and also ramifications of the commodification of aesthetics - across the spectrum of mass and elite (and folk) culture. Thus, there is acknowledgement in this literature, as in the others of this group, of the intersection of structure and agency.

It is clear in this literature that the expressive process, the aesthetic experience, is of significant human importance. The dance and music of many tribal cultures, for example, is intimately connected with daily life. When society shifts its focus from these cultural processes to cultural products, it changes the nature of its social linkages. Feld (1994) underscores the importance of process in aesthetic interaction:

The focus is always on a relationship, not on a thing or entity: in the case of human expressive modalities, it is on the relationship between the origin and action of sensations, the character of interpretations and consequences. Communication in this sense is no longer ontologically reified as a transmission or force; it can only exist relationally, in between, at unions and intersections... It is interactive, residing in dialectic relations between form and content, stream and information, code and message, culture and behavior, production and reception, construction and interpretation. (Feld, 1994, p. 78)

As soon as an aesthetic expression is perceived as product rather than process, it becomes a communication medium – a thing that mediates meaning and extends human

---

79 Examples here include work by Katriel (1993) and Dicks (2000).
The dialectic here is between aesthetic experience and commodification or, as Keil and Feld (1994) state it, between participation and mediation. The producer-consumer polarity in contemporary Western society results in more and more attention paid to artistic products and less to artistic processes. This, of course, is in contrast to many non-Western cultures where music and other artworks are created and then moved beyond in the next creative process. The distinction is at least in part because of differing judgments of the value of experience as opposed to so-called objective or scientific knowledge.

The elevation of the intellect and the exultation of abstract logic, as well as the devaluing of experience (we will know, we must find out, regardless of the cost in experience) and of the less conscious mental processes, are in fact revealed not only in the nature of western classic music itself [and the other arts] but also in the common attitudes to it. In the first place art, being essentially experience, and having as much to do with intuitive and emotional life as with the intellect, has been relegated to a marginal position in our society. (Small, 1977, p. 81)

This marginality is unfortunate. Small says, because aesthetic experience is a means of connecting us with the totality of human life, which a concentration on conscious mental activity denies.

The distinction between mediation and participation, product and process is an important one, although we risk the false opposition that all aesthetic expression is good and all aesthetic products (commodities) are bad. The line at present, it seems, cannot be drawn any more easily between expression and commodity than between elite and mass culture.

---

80 See Dant (1999) for an excellent discussion of material culture.
**Criticisms of the audience-as-situated literature.** Although it has acknowledged the importance of context and the need to find a way to mediate between structure and agency, the audience-as-situated literature does not yet seem to have accomplished this difficult task. Thus, to a large degree, it still reflects the two basic sociological stances.

**Discussion**

The review of the literature above regarding the audiences of elite and mass culture shows the range of methodologies employed and the inherent difficulty in developing any kind of coherent understanding of people's engagements with the continuum of elite to mass culture. What is needed, I would suggest, is a methodology that allows us to consider not only how both elite and mass culture can have good and bad effects, but also how individual agents both are acted upon and in turn act on societal structures.

Considering all the literature reviewed above, two basic themes seem to emerge with regard to this concern. Although some of these have been mentioned, it is fruitful I think, to summarize them in one place. Those literatures that have what I've called the (elite or mass) culture-is-good category are rooted in a set of fundamental liberal assumptions that focus on free will choices of individuals. Implicit in this set of assumptions is the understanding that the arts, and aesthetic experiences in general, have the capacity to uplift and enlighten. Similarly, mass culture (specifically the mass media) is assumed to be available for the beneficial use of individuals, who have the capacity to make free and rational choices about the array of possibilities.
Those literatures that have what I've called a (mass or elite) culture-is-bad orientation are informed by a critical set of assumptions that focus on the social structures that constrain the free will choices of individuals. Because the emphasis here is on power and status, these become the only measures for evaluating one's engagement with mass or elite culture. The potential for an artistic experience to uplift or enlighten, or a mass media experience to be similarly beneficial, is simply beyond the scope of consideration; it's irrelevant to the concern of the critical project.

Thus, what I see as methodologically useful at this point is a perspective that takes into equal consideration the potential for cultural practices, products, and institutions to both enable and constrain the capacity for individuals to seek what is normatively defined as the good.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, the present study is situated within an important metatheoretical contest among those who study and write about mass and elite culture. This contest involves issues of structure and agency, freedom and constraint that have dominated social theory for some time. On one side, society is looked at from the level of the system, where instrumental action is situated in social structures and governed by technical rules and strategies. On the other side, society is looked at from the level of acting subjects in what Habermas (1987, 1984) calls the lifeworld. Additionally, this study is situated across two distinct discourses – elite culture and mass culture – which, while needing comparative measures, are currently polarized.

One way out of this difficulty is to consider a methodological approach that allows us to both: 1) talk about two seemingly incommensurable discourses at the same time, and 2) take into consideration the interaction between free interpreting individuals and the societal forces that constrain them. Because this study focuses on the question of cultural meaning-making, a theoretic that addresses this meaning-making dynamic is
crucial. Such a theoretic must attend to how individuals make meaning or sense of their interactions with cultural products and institutions as well as what the outcomes of these interactions are and how such outcomes might be altered.

The review of the literature related to mass and elite cultures and their audiences in the last chapter reveals a difficulty in bridging this gap between structure and agency because of the tendency to envision human beings as relatively unable to change due to demographics, socio-economic conditions, psychological states or traits, habitual behaviors, or innate passivity. Even ethnographic studies that demonstrate resistance to cultural hegemony in particular contexts fail to illuminate the structure-agency question because it is difficult to see how their results might lead to broader generalizations about such behaviors. What is needed, then, is a theoretic that makes the meaning-making process apparent, both in terms of the relationship between structure and agency and also in terms of outcome – good or bad.

**Sense-Making Methodology**

Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology, developed in another context specifically for bridging gaps between institutions mandated to serve and their elusive audiences, offers a useful way to address these issues. By conceptualizing communication as process rather than product, as verb rather than noun, Dervin has developed a theoretic that captures the dynamics of meaning-making in the material context of the everyday

---

81 Sense-Making has been in development since 1972 and has been used by scores of researchers to study the audiences of libraries, information systems, social service and educational systems, and so forth. For an overview of Sense-Making, see Dervin (1999).
world. From this perspective, one’s behavior\textsuperscript{82} is seen as proceeding by steps through time and space, and Dervin suggests that in order to best study the communication process we should look to the gaps between those steps\textsuperscript{83}.

The Sense-Making Methodology is a coherent set of theoretical conceptualizations or assumptions that can be used to guide the study and theorization of communication in a variety of contexts. Perhaps the two most fundamental assumptions are the ones mentioned above that present the human subject as an embodied being moving across time-space and the focus on the “gappy” nature of reality. Dervin’s notion of the gap is informed by what Carter (1980) calls discontinuity. Dervin explains it this way:

Sense-Making assumes that the quest of human beings to fix the real faces a never-ending riddle. The real is always potentially subject to multiple interpretations, due to changes in reality across space, changes across time, differences in how humans see reality arising from their differing anchorings in time-space; and differences in how humans construct interpretive bridges over a gappy reality. (Dervin. 1999)

By characterizing humans as moving across time and space and by paying attention to the gap, Sense-Making is able to concentrate on the conditions that foster flexibility and change as well as those that foster rigidity. In other words, by utilizing the Sense-Making Methodology, it is possible to attend specifically to the position in time-space where structure and agency meet.

If we consider again the discussion of social theory in the last chapter, we see that this methodology is a useful complement to Giddens’ theory of structuration.

\textsuperscript{82} This term is used in its broadest sense to mean not only observable actions but also thoughts, ideas, emotions, confusions, sensations, and so forth.

\textsuperscript{83} The reader is referred as well to Dervin (1993).
Giddens suggests that the key to understanding the dualism of structural constraint has to do with two forms of human consciousness. One form is practical consciousness, which might be thought of as regular routines and habits that one does without thinking about them. The second form is discursive consciousness, which relies on self-reflection and allows one to examine – and change – these routines and habits. In Sense-Making terms, then, the gap is the point of consciousness – either practical or discursive – where one finds either the rigidity of habit or the flexibility of self-reflection.

The assumption here is that individuals are capable of reflecting on their actions, thoughts, and feelings and, if asked, to explain why they acted, thought, and felt the way they did. This is to say that in Sense-Making, another assumption is that ordinary human beings also are theorists. Of course, as Giddens points out, explanations about behavior can equate to lying, and for this reason one of the important aspects of any method guided by Sense-Making is to develop and ensure trust between the researcher and the subject.

This issue is addressed in Sense-Making through a methodological circling of the informant's reality and the repeated use of triangulation. These both help to develop trust with the informant and also serve to tease out contradictions in the informant's responses. In other words, Sense-Making suggests that it is useful to treat these contradictions not as lies but rather as different dialectical states to be addressed and grappled with.

Sense-Making mandates that the researcher's position be humbled in such a way that the subject is free to interpret and to theorize in his or her own way, without the
imposition of another's world. In addition, as suggested above, given the inherent discontinuity of reality, this methodology attempts to circle the phenomenon in question by seeking multiple connections between the subject and the situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bridge:</th>
<th>Outcomes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* ideas, cognitions, thoughts</td>
<td>* helps. hurts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* attitudes, beliefs, values</td>
<td>* (dys) functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* feelings, emotions, intuitions</td>
<td>* consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* memories, stories, narratives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation:</th>
<th>Verbs:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* history</td>
<td>* sense-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* experience</td>
<td>* sense-unmaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* past horizon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* present horizon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* constraints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* barriers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gap:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* questions, confusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* muddles, riddles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* angst</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. The Sense-Making metaphor that shows how one moves across time-space, faces gaps, builds bridges, and evaluates uses of the bridges. (Adapted from Dervin & Frenette, 2001)

Dervin has illustrated this communication-as-process concept through the Sense-Making metaphor (see Figure 1 above). In this metaphor an individual is conceptualized as moving along a path and each step involving a new, as yet unexperienced, moment in time and space. Hence, each new step involves the potential for facing a "new" (in the time-space sense) gap or discontinuity for which the sense-maker is mandated to construct a bridge. The bridge can be garnered from old bridges, drawn from outside resource, and/or created entirely new. Thus, the individual steps
through time and space, defining and bridging gaps, and then continuing. In the present study, where we are interested in making visible the meaning-making or sense-making process of people’s interactions (rigidities and flexibilities) with elite and mass culture, this theoretic is a particularly appropriate tool.

Situation in this case refers to a person’s particular cultural experience. The gap is a barrier faced (e.g., the need to relate that experience to one’s understanding of oneself or one’s understanding of society), and the bridge is that person’s response to the gap – his or her construction of meaning – in terms of thoughts, feelings, ideas, confusions, and so forth. Finally, outcome is the consequence in terms of helps or hinderances, good things or bad.

Approach to interviewing

In light of the desire to examine not just the situation (with regard to mass or elite culture) but also the bridge (in terms of structure-agency issues) and the outcome (whether good or bad), an interviewing approach was chosen that could access: 1) cultural experiences that individuals perceive to be particularly meaningful (i.e., those that offer the richest potential for analysis), 2) individuals’ thoughts and feelings about those experiences, 3) individuals’ ideas about how their experiences relate to societal power structures, and 4) in what ways the outcomes were helpful or hurtful. Additionally, this method encouraged self-reflection and the elaboration of connections between cultural experiences and other life experiences as well as between understandings of self and society.
Because of the particular interest in people's thoughts and feelings, which are not readily available through observation, and because of a desire to tap into those cultural experiences that held the most meaning for people over the course of their lifetime, it was decided to use a series of interviews conducted by the informants themselves (i.e., self-interviews) as the primary method of data collection. These structured, yet open-ended, interviews were developed based on the Sense-Making Methodology. Considerable pedagogical effort was put into ensuring that the self-interviews were of good quality.

The interviews focused on cultural experiences selected by the respondent in which he or she reconstructed the particular product or event in his or her own terms, recalling all thoughts and feelings, confusions, helps and hurts, and connections to societal power structures. The Sense-Making triangulation, a method of circling one's experiences, was designed to prompt self-reflection so that in the process of doing their interviews, respondents were given the opportunity to affirm, clarify, and elaborate upon their own earlier sense-making and to continue to develop their own understandings about the experience and what it meant for them.

In an effort to further tap into the question of structural or system constraints, respondents were asked specifically to theorize about connections between the cultural product or event and power structures. And in order to more fully explicate the sense-making process, they were asked to theorize about the relationship between the cultural product or event and issues of identity.
Three different Sense-Making approaches to interviewing regarding cultural experiences were used: 1) the Media Event Interview, 2) the Cultural Product Interview, and 3) the Cultural Life-line.

For the Media Event Interviews, students were exposed to a series of weekly in-class events highlighting either mass culture (e.g., a Jerry Springer show, a series of music videos, a selection of television advertisements) or elite culture (e.g., a slide show of Van Gogh paintings, a recording of Pachelbel’s canon, a videotaped performance of modern dance). They were asked to respond in a self-interview to such questions as: What happened to/for you as a result of seeing/hearing this? What thoughts, conclusions? Feelings, emotions? How does this relate to your life and experience?

For the Cultural Product Interviews, students conducted self-interviews focusing on experiences with specific elite or mass culture products that were self-chosen, except in one class where one art exhibition and one movie were imposed. Students were asked to describe the conditions leading up to and during their exposure to the cultural product and to describe the product. They were probed to list their cognitive, emotional, and physical responses – their questions, confusions, feelings, ideas, ways of being helped or hindered – what they saw as positive or negative outcomes, and how they saw this product or experience related to society and power structures. And they then triangulated each response in terms of connections, helps and hinderances, in their lives and in society.

For the Cultural Life-line, students were asked to recall and list over a series of weeks – considering their entire life histories with elite and mass culture products and

---

84 Examples of these three instruments can be found in Appendices A, B, and C, respectively.

93

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
institutions – those cultural experiences that were in some way significant or meaningful at the time. They attached these experiences to specific chronological ages and evaluated each in terms of its positive and negative effects both then and now.

**Data sources**

In order to gather a large pool of data efficiently, this study used as its informant pool students, mostly seniors, enrolled in four different courses in a large Midwest public university.\(^85\) The first three classes were each conducted similarly, focusing on deconstructing elite and mass culture, with a pedagogical form that involved students in a series of weekly activities that provided material for class discussions. Each course had approximately forty-five students enrolled. For these three classes data sources were the Media Event Interviews and Cultural Product Interviews.

A fourth course was designed to teach interviewing methods and was therefore more limited in its relevant activity. In this class, however, the twenty-one students were asked to do a limited number of cultural product self-interviews, as described above, as well as a cultural life-line.\(^86\) The data sources, as shown in Table 6 (next page) were these various written documents completed by the students in these four classes.

The approach to data collection in the three primary classes involved an intensive ten-week pedagogical intervention in which these students were involved in repeated exposures and recollections of exposures to elite and mass culture products and

---

\(^{85}\) The interviews were regular class assignments and students were asked to sign permission forms allowing their interviews to be used in research. Exemption from Human Subjects Review was granted by the university.

\(^{86}\) The cultural life-line activity was a component of the third course as well.

94
engaged in continuing self-examinations and class discussions about these. The purpose of these classes was avowedly to engage the students in a conscientizing process (Freire, 1970) in order to help them become more critically self-reflexive in their analyses of their engagements with culture. Every aspect of the class experience and, hence, the data collection, was informed by the use of the Sense-Making Methodology which guided both self-examinations and class discussions. Thus, for example, students were asked to dig for their own responses — cognitive, emotional, and physical — to cultural products/experiences and to connect these to the material conditions of their own lives as well as to their understandings of the forces of power in society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>n =</th>
<th># of media interviews completed per student</th>
<th># of product interviews completed per student</th>
<th># of cultural life-lines completed per student</th>
<th>Total # of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>672 Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>616 Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63 Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>405 Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n = 152</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1756 Total Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Data sources from four classes and including self-interviews of media events, elite and mass culture products, and cultural life-lines.
Data analysis

The intent of the data analysis in this study was to bring together both inductive analysis based on the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and deductive analysis based on the Sense-Making Methodology. The Sense-Making metaphor was used as a deductive analytic tool to assist the search for inductive patterns by directing specific attention to gaps and bridges. The deductive categories of outcomes found in the critiques of culture in Chapter Two also were compared with those themes that emerged from the data through inductive analysis. In this way the interviews were used both to inform and to challenge the prior assumptions.

In keeping with the theoretical framework of the Sense-Making Methodology my analyses were guided by attention to general issues of structure, issues of agency, and issues of mediation. This methodology was chosen because of its capacity to transcend a polarized set of literatures. Thus, these issues were explicitly built into the following research questions, and these guided the subsequent analyses:

1) How does structure influence people’s sense-making of their experiences with elite and mass culture?

2) How does agency fit into people’s sense-making of their experiences with elite and mass culture?

3) How do people’s sense-making experiences with elite and mass culture mediate contradictions between structure and agency?

4) When seen through the framework of the three questions above, how does the portrait of people’s sense-making of elite and mass culture line up with the themes of the current literatures in the elite and mass discourses?
The first step in analysis of the data involved a careful reading of all the interviews, taking only limited notes in an effort to remain open to the emergence of possible themes. Following this reading, a memo was developed recording the researcher’s initial impressions of patterns of any kind that appeared in the data. These included patterns such as particular trends in the self-selection of cultural experiences, similar struggles related to identity issues, common expressions or ideas mentioned throughout, and so forth.

In subsequent passes through the data these initial impressions were used to guide the development of a set of thematic categories with which the data were loosely coded using a computerized bibliographic tool, ProCite. Each interview was logged according to respondent number and the name of the particular cultural experience. Memos regarding unique characteristic of interviews were recorded along with quoted passages where the response supported or disputed theoretical premises about elite and mass culture found in the literature. In addition, each interview was coded according to a list of keywords that corresponded to the list of thematic categories. Throughout the process keywords were added, deleted, and changed to best fit the data.

Through this modified grounded-theory approach, distinct patterns or themes began to emerge in the data. These themes were then examined in relationship to the conceptual and theoretical premises discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this study. In some cases the data suggested areas of the literature review that should be adjusted in order to better address findings central to the purposes of this study. The following three chapters focus on the major themes that emerged in the data and consider how these relate to questions of structure and agency across a continuum of elite to mass culture.
CHAPTER 5
CONSTRAINING AND IMPOSING CAPACITIES OF ELITE AND
MASS CULTURE

This is the first of three chapter of analysis in this document. The purpose of this chapter is to begin to address the overall question of how people make sense of their experiences with elite and mass culture by considering how culture imposes constraints on individuals. The full analysis of this question will be presented across three chapters, with the second of the three addressing how culture frees and enables individuals, and the third chapter presenting four case studies that provide the opportunity to consider both constraints and freedoms across the continuum of elite to mass culture and also across the time and space of each individual’s life.

As previously discussed, this study focuses on a particular segment of society, mostly middle class college students at a large public university, all of whom are in their twenties. As such, it provides the opportunity to better understand this generation of young adults who are still negotiating their identities and whose developmental experiences are still very close at hand.

I view these students’ experiences with elite and mass culture much like Paul Willis saw labor power in his famous study of British working class students (Willis, 1977) in that it is an important pivot, a primary mode of connecting with the world. To take Willis’s description, it is “the way par excellence of articulating the innermost self.”
with external reality. It is in fact the dialectic of the self to the self through the concrete world” (Willis, 1977, p. 2). In my research, it is through the subjects’ personal descriptions of experiences related to mass and elite culture that it is possible to see and to study these self-to-self dialectics that manifest themselves as innumerable identity struggles, as ongoing attempts to come to terms with the relationship between the self and others. These struggles permeate the interviews to such a degree that it would be impossible to ignore them, and they relate to a broad range of societal norms, expectations, and stereotypes.

In the remainder of this chapter I will be discussing these struggles as they emerged in the data. I will be using as my guide the seven culture-is-bad claims made in Chapter Two. These claims are repeated in Table 7 (next page) along with a summary of the degree to which the data offer support.

**Dulls the mind and spirit**

One of the major arguments in the critiques of mass culture is that mass culture has a narcotizing effect on the human spirit. There is no particular evidence in this study to either support or reject the notion that either mass or elite culture dulls the mind and spirit. This is not to say that the claim is invalid, just that the issue did not surface in the data of this particular study.

**Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes**

In contrast to the above claim, there was an overwhelming amount of evidence to support the argument that mass culture, in particular, dehumanizes through
homogenization, reification, and stereotypes. Not surprisingly, I suppose, given their early adult years and the importance of gender in the construction of one's identity, the amount of data regarding gender roles in this study was overwhelming. In addition, respondents spoke of stereotypes and misrepresentations regarding race and ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elite Discourse</th>
<th>Mass Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass is Bad</td>
<td>Elite is Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dulls the mind and spirit: No support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes: Much support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrupts elite culture: No support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively affects democracy: No support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates undemocratic separation of social classes: Much support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes self-righteous stance in presuming the need to civilize the masses: Weak support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations: Weak support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Claims of how elite and mass culture are bad and the degree to which the data support them.

Regarding gender role constraints, respondents talked about mass media and body type, skinny girls, macho men, objectification, and so forth; and they talked about their perceptions of masculine and feminine activities. Because of the large and varied amount of data related to gender roles, I have further broken this section down thematically according to a general discussion of women as objects of the gaze, including the examination of a specific mass cultural product in relation to gender roles.
and then a general discussion of masculine and feminine stereotypes in both mass and elite culture. These discussions will then be followed by issues of representation regarding race and ethnicity.

Women as Objects of the Gaze. As discussed in Chapter Three, the presentation in the media of women as functioning in society to bring pleasure to the men who look at them, is referred in the feminist literature as women as objects of the male gaze. This literature also suggests that because of this objectification by the media, women come to think of themselves as objects, with their outward appearance being their only valuable attribute. Additionally, the literature points out, by becoming objects, women also become less than human.

In this study women were much more likely than men to mention the objectification of women in cultural products. And, not surprisingly, almost all cases of this involved mass culture rather than elite culture. One likely factor here is the limited involvement of respondents with elite culture in contrast to the media-saturated environments in which they live every day. One of the few examples that came from elite culture comments on Mozart’s “Magic Flute,” and even then one might argue that the particulars of this production were indirectly influenced by mass culture.

*The men in the play were not at all sexy in the feathered outfits and green tights, but many of the women were sleek, and the Lady of the Night in particular was wearing a sexy low-cut sequin-beaded dress... Once again women are objectified in a medium that is supposed to be high art and dignified.* (R020, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

In contrast to elite culture, mention of this objectification of women was widespread in discussions of mass culture experiences. The women in this study repeatedly commented on how the media portray women’s bodies in a consistent way.
creating a definition of beauty that focuses on an unattainable thinness, stylish hair, and makeup. The continual presentation of media images that show what is desirable in a woman— and what is not— results in a constant pressure for self-evaluation:

After flipping through a magazine I think about the clothes I saw and how people's hair was done and what their makeup looked like. I begin to think about what I could change about myself. I need to lose a few pounds, and maybe I should do something different with my hair and makeup, or only if my hair was longer. (R103. Caucasian. female, early 20s)

[In watching MTV] I was stuck between thinking I should be happy with who I am and yet still trying to be those girls in the videos. I would often tell myself that I should be happy with who I was and focus on what I was and had, instead of what I wasn't and didn't have. But, at the same time, I was still deep down wanting to look like those women in the videos... All through elementary school my best friend was the one everyone thought was so cute and petite. And time after time she was selected to be in the school plays, to demonstrate something in front of the class, or selected to be in special music classes and always got privileges that no one else seemed to get. It was clear to me by the time I reached my teens that attractive people had an advantage over others. (R002. Caucasian. female, middle 20s)

It has been a challenge for me to avoid comparing myself to other people, or girls, since I was little. I would readily buy into what I saw ... I, like most other girls, thought that the way to completely having my own image, being free from the constraints of my own limitations, was to imitate what I saw. This is not freedom but slavery. It restricts me to find my value in being like someone that everyone admires. (R118. Caucasian. female. middle 20s)

Media represent to the general public an ideal — and everyday women such as myself feel we are expected to look that way to be considered sexy. It is an unhealthy standard in my opinion. (R006. Caucasian. female, middle 20s)

Indeed, many of the respondents told how they and their friends bought into these media representations to the point of developing eating disorders that threatened their health:
I had an eating disorder in high school. Although I know what the ads are telling me is wrong, I still fall into the trap... I don't think it's fair to make me feel as though I am worthless unless I'm skinny. I wish that men would stop expecting these things of us. (R082, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

It disgusts me how women must always alter themselves to become a certain way - a way that gratifies men. The way the media have created and produced negative images of women, it's no wonder so many of my friends are dieting, starving themselves... I have a negative view and low self-esteem, although I am healthy and it has been four years since my anorexia. I still have to face the horrors of what I had to go through and the way I felt. (R114, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

After a while my friends dressed like the girls on the show ("Beverly Hills 90210") and even started to act like them as well. What was "un-cool" on the show became "un-cool" for my friends... It makes me mad to think that out of my five closest friends from high school, three of them have been hospitalized for one eating disorder or another. The show had a huge effect in developing an "image" of a woman in a certain way. (R034, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

In many ways the Miss America pageant seems to epitomize the superficial beauty standard with which the women in this study struggled. It was mentioned as an early television experience that sent a clear message to its young viewers - a message that now is strongly resisted by many:

I now think that the Miss America Pageant is one of the most disgusting, bulimia-inducing, sex talent shows ever aired on network television. Of course, back then, my views were a little different. I thought it was glamorous and exciting... I found the Miss America Pageants to push you to pick a favorite and cheer for someone. This was fun and let me know what everyone thought was more important or attractive about a young woman - long legs, big boobs, a great voice, or a thoughtful personality... I was already a little competitive because of my sisters, but this show made me feel like I had to be the prettiest, most talented, hot little mama or I would not win at life, or at least a man. (R093, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

I would always imagine that I was one of [the contestants] and pick out my favorite who I wanted to look like... I was never a pretty girl in school and was always teased by the boys about how I was a "dog." The
images that I was watching were really doing a lot more damage than 
good for me... I guess that made me feel like I was worthless if I didn't 
have the looks. It didn't matter what was inside... I didn't realize the 
true problem of all this until just recently. It just makes me feel like I've 
been brainwashed for so many years without realizing where those low 
self-esteem feelings came from (or what contributed to them). (R094, 
Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Not all respondents eschewed the standards of beauty prescribed in the media 
and imitated throughout society. The process of hegemony is demonstrated in the 
pattern of "partial penetration" in the data, whereby respondents have become aware of 
the media's effects at one level, but remain unable to fully unmask the situation:

*I have been in two beauty pageants and plan on entering one the end of 
this year... I view myself as an attractive person. I feel wearing makeup 
and working out makes me feel better and not for others. I have friends 
that are more concerned with what boys think than what they think about 
themselves and this upsets me.* (R091, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

*I saw the Maybeline commercial last night for the first time and now I 
want to try it. Not because of what the models look like, but because they 
say it stays on with moisture - pretty girly. huh? I guess I do pay more 
attention to ads then I thought I did - only certain ads though. I think. 
(R018, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Before leaving the general discussion of women as objects of the male gaze, 
there is another issue to address that emerged from the interview data in this study. As 
suggested above, many women felt that they were forced - not only by "society" at 
large but often specifically by "men" - to conform to these standards of beauty 
represented in the mass media. In this study the men, in turn, had two relevant 
responses. On one hand, some men took exception to being lumped into the 
stereotypical view of men as interested only in sex and superficial beauty:

*Mtv is a way to visually show stereotypes, and the male in this music 
video is a perfect example of this type of stereotyping... Not all men treat
women as objects. Some men have respect for women, however if women believe that all men act the way that the ones in the videos do it becomes hard to prove that respect. (R163, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

Other men in the study were truly puzzled why women would (seemingly) willingly subject themselves to standards portrayed in the media – and even to perpetuate those portrayals through active participation in the media’s representations.

[M]ost of the well-rated music videos are those of men with women playing a minor role as sex symbols to capture male viewers. Ninety percent of this show has videos that portray a male figure with lots of money, nice cars, and huge houses and at the same time has numerous females around partially dressed and dancing provocatively. Do the women on these videos want to be seen or portrayed in that light? I have had friends who have worked in these videos as dancers and they are certainly not happy with the level of respect they get from people in their environment. I understand that most of these women are in these videos for the money. However, why are they accepting these roles and expect the same level of respect as other women get from society?... I am still puzzled as to whether what these women are doing is wrong and if they deserve the same level of respect that other women get who are not involved in such roles. (R035, Black, male, middle 20s)

I wonder why women continue to subject themselves sexually. if we are trying to move toward a society that should be equal and genderless... I view Victoria’s Secret as distasteful and an exploitation of women. This will continue to go on as long as we continue to accept it. (R088, Asian, male, early 20s)

This last quote brings us to the analysis of a single product that generated a good deal of discussion from respondents about the objectification of women in mass cultural products.

**Single Product Analysis: Victoria’s Secret.** The pattern of responses in relation to this notion of women as objects of the gaze is perhaps best illustrated in the following analysis of a single cultural product, the webcast of a Victoria’s Secret fashion show, which was shown in each of the three main undergraduate classes from which data were
collected. The discussion that follows immediate, then, represents only a subset of the overall data. It includes only interviews about the fashion show from those respondents who viewed it during class.

For some respondents, both female and male, the fashion show was accepted at face value as the presentation of undergarments – necessary items of clothing that can be aesthetically appealing as well as functional. The company behind the show was viewed as doing good business in a smart way, sensitive to the needs of women:

My girlfriend loves Victoria's Secret; so do I. I see it as beautiful and expressive. Victoria's Secret helps all women feel sexy. I think that wearing the products they see being displayed so sensually gives them the same confidence and sense of sensuality. (R089, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

I think it's a marketing dream come true! Well, this is the world of fashion shows, and I don't see what's different between this one and others except that other fashion shows may show less or just the same amount of skin... I think it's just part of the fashion world – the only way I think it relates to my life is that I do buy things from Victoria's Secret. (R041, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

The women were all obviously extremely beautiful. I think that the fashion show was a success and I really do not see anything wrong with it. The female body is awesome and amazing and I think that this show revealed that. (R037, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

A second group of respondents was comprised of women who acknowledged – but dismissed – concerns about the product's potential contribution to the objectification of women:

Maybe I am supporting something that is looked at as degrading to women, but I like their bras and panties. I think they sell beautiful things, and who cares if they are on beautiful people? In regards to underwear, I buy pretty things so that "I" feel pretty. Nobody really sees them but me, and it make me feel good. (R121, Caucasian, female, early 20s)
I thought the entire show was beautiful. The set, the clothes, and the models were all beautiful. I liked how the models didn't have seductive looks on their faces and how most of the outfits were entertaining not slutty. After watching all of the beautiful women with perfect bodies I only want to look more like that. But only because I think it's beautiful – not anyone else... They are beautiful women wearing beautiful clothes – who doesn't admire beautiful things? Good for them – lucky for them. (R018, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

I was in awe of the beauty of the entire production. Every aspect was flawless from the models to the music to the garments to the successful creation of a fantasy. I was so impressed by the show that I wanted to go buy their products and feel attractive. The show allows you to recognize how truly beautiful a woman's body is and how graceful women's movements can be... I felt excited to be a woman. The women were so beautiful and flawless it made me feel proud to be a woman. The association between fantasy and the products excited me because I was a woman and they were created especially for me. Women are often represented in relation to men and what men consider attractive. However, this show focused on the women and fantasies created by the producers of the show, who were mostly women. I try very hard not to be defined by what a man thinks of me. I try to focus on what makes me feel good and beautiful. This show excited me because the women were stunning and the whole fantasy made me dream of being a beautiful angel... I like to shop and buy things that make me feel pretty or better about myself. Maybe this isn't the best way to improve my self-esteem, but it works so I don't see anything wrong with it. If shopping at Victoria's Secret makes me happy, I think that I should do it whenever I want. Women are the center of attention in the show: not women with men, just women. It was refreshing to see women in the limelight. The focus was on their beauty, and the beauty of the products, not their relation to men... I like to feel sexy and desirable. Of course I want men to be attracted to me, but I do not like to be defined by how they view me. I define myself and that definition does not include my relation to a man. (R179, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Finally, there is the group of both women and men who viewed this fashion show in a fully oppositional manner. They argued that women were duped into thinking that these products – and this event – represent feminist ideals while, in fact, they undermine such ideals by continuing to reinforce the objectification of women:
Having only women model this lingerie inadvertently sends the message to society that it is the woman’s job to be subservient to her boyfriend or husband by becoming an object of his desire and by placing the responsibility on women for the enticement of sexual feelings in these male individuals. [By wearing such lingerie,] women are perpetuating the role placed on the physical appearance of women. They are essentially saying that they agree with the role given to them by popular culture based solely on their attractiveness and beauty... On one side, women feel desirable and attractive which gives them more confidence. But on the other side, women are conforming to these negative stereotypes of the importance of beauty in women. Either way, women seem to lose out in the end. (R182, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

I see fashion shows as art as opposed to pornographic; nevertheless, this event does support the same ideals that magazines like “Playboy” have supported for years. I feel that in this case art has come into the same arena that “Playboy” has occupied. (R005, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

Who is the audience they’re aiming at? Men have the most access to the Internet [where this was shown]. Yet women buy most lingerie. Is it to have men pressure women into buying this stuff? I love the psychology of the “getting ready” [before the fashion show begins]. It lets “him” [the viewer] into “her” [the model’s] bedroom to watch her get ready for him. (R020, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Masculine and Feminine Stereotypes. As the discussion above suggests, tied to the concept of women as objects of the male gaze are stereotypical ideas of the “normal” social roles and behaviors of men and women. Again, as discussed in the literature of Chapter Three, these stereotypes are reinforced through their continual presentation in the mass media. They seem to be present to a lesser degree – or perhaps more likely because of their lesser exposure among respondents – in elite culture. Respondents often talked in their interviews about stereotypes of how men and women should act, with men being strong and women being weak and dependent. They also
talked about how masculine and feminine attributes are attached to various cultural products in both mass and elite culture, and they delved into the particular problem of homosexuality.

The respondents in this study noted that the perpetuation of these stereotypes of male and female roles could be found both in mass and elite culture, from traditional fairy tales such as “Cinderella,” “Snow White,” and the “Nutcracker” to contemporary film and television. These first three examples relate to mass culture products.

I know how happy I was when my boyfriend and I got together. He seemed to be my prince on the white horse who rode in suddenly and swept me off my feet. I wanted to have a happy ever ending as Cinderella did. I wanted the fairy godmother to make me a beautiful dress and find my prince. (R100, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

My mother always wanted me to grow up and get a husband and live happily ever after. Like it was the easiest and most natural thing in the world... It is so engrained in our culture that women should be perfect and beautiful... Why couldn't my mom tell me that no matter how I looked that I was good enough as I was. Why did they make me dress in dresses and tell me to always have to be a proper little princess? (R121, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

[In the television show “Saved by the Bell”] Kelly was the beautiful one that all the guys chased, and really dumb. Lisa was only concerned with money and shopping, and she was very materialistic. Then there was Jessie, the smart one, who unfortunately was considered the unattractive one. These were the role models offered to girls. You could not be smart and pretty. (R082, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

And then is a very similar example from elite culture:

I know that this ballet emphasized romanticized ideas about relationships with men that affected me in my later years with boyfriends, my father, and about my gender role in them as well. Looking back, I still enjoy the ballet very much, however. I think that it instilled the idea that I should rely on men to rescue me. I seriously have had issues coming to terms with this in the past few years. So I see how this cultural product has served me badly in terms of what I fantasized about compared to reality. (R164, Caucasian, female, early 20s)
The affirmation of masculine and negation of feminine. Far more important in the data than the representation of male and female stereotypes was discussion (often oblique) of the assumption of the superiority of masculine characteristics and the resultant negation of all that is feminine. Thus, as one respondent incisively noted in his self-interview on "Something About Mary":

This movie says the perfect woman is really a beautiful man. (R017. Caucasian, male, middle 20s)

The affirmation of the masculine image in society is sharply contrasted with anything that might be considered "effeminate," and for male respondents particularly this issue was the source of a good deal of struggle. Although this issue is suggested in the literature of Chapter Three, it is rarely if ever addressed in a straightforward manner. Nonetheless, the data show that this significantly constrains the social, emotional, and intellectual freedom of these young adults.

In this study, the greatest struggle in this area was with regard to elite culture.

There were a few respondents who talked about the need to avoid what were perceived as female-oriented mass culture products, such as "chick flicks."

I didn't want to be seen or made fun of for being soft. I didn't want Luke or any other guy to find out that I wanted to see a "chick flick." When you're in high school, especially, there is an image that you need to have. It isn't soft and cuddly or lovey-dovey. that's for sure. Especially in my high school. (R010, Caucasian, male, middle 20s)

There were many, many incidences of this phenomenon with regard to elite culture. However, the idea that emotion — except perhaps when it appears as anger or violence — is socially understood to be a feminine quality and that the arts, especially theater and
ballet, are seen as effeminate, was a theme that emerged with great strength in the data.

The males in this study indicated that even as young boys they understood very clearly what society expected of them:

*I was able to look at the men on stage and, for the first time, internalize the idea that other boys and men had been feeding me: that men who dance and dress in tights and puffy shirts are sissies... I was preoccupied with the idea that watching ballet was not something that "cool people" did, so I was unable to appreciate the ballet for what it was – a great show performed by very talented artists.* (R127. Caucasian, male, early 20s)

*I wanted to fit the mold of my friends in grade school so while I was sitting at this ballet performance I was not thinking of the ballet dancers or what they were doing, but of what my friends were talking about and what they thought about... If we break out we fear we’ll be shunned, laughed at, made fun of, or we might lose some of the friends we have conformed our beliefs and our selves to get.* (R107. Caucasian, male, early 20s)

Thus, elite culture overall was seen as “not cool” among these respondents. For the males, the association with elite culture was definitely sanctioned in a negative way, and even for the girls – because the arts are seen as effeminate and therefore inferior – they were not something one wanted to be associated with. As a result, even when respondents did enjoy an elite culture experience, they dared not admit it. Both male and female respondents in this study repeatedly talked about secretly enjoying various elite culture experiences even while outwardly rebuking them:

*How come opera isn’t more popular? I was used to being exposed to movies, rock and roll, even plays, but no one seemed to watch opera. I certainly knew nothing about it... I was wondering who would actually attend another opera with me. Where I could even find an opera. Would people think I was a dork? I mean, could you really be cool and fourteen and go to the opera?... No one has to know I like opera. I can pretend like it was lame when I get back to school. It can just be private.* (R020. Caucasian, female, middle 20s)
I found that this event opened my eyes to the theater. Before this I could only refer to the theater as something I saw on television. It was a great experience... Culturally it is taboo for men to enjoy things that may be “artsy.” My mother forcing me to go allowed me to go and not feel that I was violating my masculinity... If I were to go to my teammates in the locker room and tell them about the great time I had at the play, I would be laughed out of the place. (R019, Caucasian, male, middle 20s)

The music in “Cats” surprised me because it was so different from what I normally like, yet I liked it anyway... After watching “Cats,” I couldn’t talk about it with my friends for fear of being made fun of. The funny thing is, I’m sure they would have liked it also. (R112, male, Caucasian, early 20s)

Sometimes respondents were unable to mask their interest or enjoyment in cultural activities and were consequently subjected to the ridicule of their peers. Both men and women in this study talked at length about their participation in musical groups in school and the marginalization they experienced:

I had been playing the flute ever since second grade because my mom wanted me to. She had been involved in band when she was younger, so she expected her children to be exposed to music, too. After I graduated from eighth grade it was my decision whether or not I continued playing flute. In grade school I was teased and called a nerd because I was in band. and I wasn’t sure if I wanted that to continue through high school. Well, the teasing did not stop, and it was complete hell for me. In fact, there was an even bigger stereotype placed upon students who were in concert band. Music was perceived by the school as being a personal interest for those people without friends. Peer pressure reached the highest peak during my years in high school, and I had to choose between what I wanted and what my friends wanted... It was as if I had a label on my head that said “Band Geek.” I think there is the same stereotype in society. Maybe it is not as great, but I do not think musicians are given the respect they deserve for the talent they have... The students who were in band with me became my best friends and we always hung out together... Every morning I dreaded coming to school because I did not want to face the discrimination against those of us who were in band. It was difficult to handle. Not many students openly stated that they disliked people in band, but they would give us this look that said, “You’re not cool to hang around with.” (R026, Caucasian, female, early 20s)
I remember listening to dad play his old wooden clarinet at home. He wasn't a professional musician or well known for playing the clarinet, but in my eyes he was the best and only live musician that I have ever seen up close... When I told dad that I wanted to play the clarinet, he discouraged me by telling me that a lot more girls play the clarinet than boys do. At the time, I did not understand why he didn't want me to play the same instrument he did... I believe dad told me that I shouldn't play the clarinet because he was probably picked on when he was younger. As I look back, I'm glad I didn't play the clarinet. I only knew of one male that played the clarinet in my seven years of being in band. Unfortunately, he was picked on, but not half as bad as the male flute player... Even though I played an instrument that I thought of as being "cool" it did not make me cool. I was picked on because I played an instrument... I loved to play the saxophone because it calmed me and made me feel proud to demonstrate my talent. The only thing that I did not like about the saxophone had nothing to do with playing it. I was embarrassed to carry my saxophone to and from school. In middle school I rode a city bus to and from school. Kids that rode on the city bus were not as disciplined as they were on school busses. My saxophone case acted as a huge neon sign that read, "Nerd on Board! Show no Mercy." (R153, Asian, male, middle 20s)

The problem with homosexuality. When the logic of the superiority of masculinity is fully carried out one can see that the ultimate taboo becomes the male homosexual – a man who chooses to associate with the effeminate. In this sense, to be a gay man is to assume a social position even lower than that of a woman. It should be no surprise, then, that men in this study often expressed their fears of appearing gay to others, and both males and females talked about the negative stereotypes associated with homosexuality (i.e., with non-heterosexuality). This issue was discussed in conjunction both with elite culture, as in the first two examples here, and with mass culture, as in the third example:

I was uneasy at first when I enjoyed a couple of the songs, and more comfortable when I disliked other songs. I think this is partly due to the fact that I have trained myself to associate musicals with being feminine and I may have been ashamed to identify that I enjoyed a couple of the songs... I would be lying if I said that I was never concerned that

113
someone might think I was gay if I enjoyed a musical or some other form of elite culture that isn't considered "manly." I am embarrassed that I can still be so insecure and judgmental. (R038, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

My uncle's boyfriend was an artist and a curator of an art museum. So when my class was going to the art museum to visit, my family had to let him know so that he gave special attention to us. I did not want him to notice me because I thought it was embarrassing to be associated with this type of culture. While at the museum he was introduced as a friend of the family and he took us on a tour. Some students in my class were interested but they were the smart ones so I didn't want to act like them. My brother was in my class, too, so we both stuck together in ignoring my uncle's friend... I always associated art at museums with boring culture, so I did not want to learn about it. Also, my uncle is gay so I was afraid that other students might realize this when his boyfriend was giving us a tour of the museum. Males in elite art are often associated with homosexuality... I think that society taught me that homosexuality is wrong and also that a man involved in elite art culture means he's gay. But as I grew up I disassociated these two... I was a product of this reinforcement. I think a lot of it was my father's fault, too. It was his brother who was gay and my father dismisses him for it. So at family gatherings he never really talked with his brother. But when we talked about him and his boyfriend my father made fun of the fact that he worked at a museum. (R025, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Rude jokes and comments making fun of gays often show men how not to act. This sometimes makes heterosexual men feel that they have to over-exaggerate their masculine identity for fear of being called a "homo." (R106, Black, male, early 20s)

Of course, these experiences were all the more difficult for respondents when they were themselves gay or lesbian.

The Bette Midler song "From a Distance" had just come out, and my best friend and I went to [a local store] to pick out CDs. It helps to remember this event because I remember what my best friend's mother's reaction was. I knew I was different for picking out a female singer, but it was also Bette Midler, and the mother made a derogatory comment on the situation. People stereotype. I know that her reaction was negative because I had bought something that only homosexuals buy. (R169, Caucasian, male, early 20s)
Whenever my dad's relatives would come into town all of his family members would get together. And during some point of their visits they would tell jokes. Many of the jokes were very degrading to women or gay people... It made me feel that there was something wrong with women and gay people because of all of these jokes. At the time I was not aware that I was gay, but as a woman I still felt very degraded... I internalized the meanings from the jokes and felt very inferior as a woman. Later in life, when I began struggling with my own sexuality, I then felt I was wrong or bad because of these jokes from my childhood... Doing this self-interview was hard because it made me realize how close-minded my father still is. As much as I have tried to say things to stop him from continuing to reinforce those stereotypes, he still has his small-town, conservative beliefs constructed from society. My parents do not know that I am gay. It was hard enough for me to feel powerful as a woman and proclaim to them that I am a feminist. (R084. Caucasian, female, early 20s)

**Stereotypes of race and ethnicity.** Respondents in this study also wrestled with issues of race and ethnicity through their experiences with elite and mass culture. Minorities of both genders talked about the lack of others like them in what was presented on stage or in the media as well as in the audience and among the participants. Two examples of this concern follow, first in relation to elite culture, and second in relation to mass culture.

*When I started [ballet lessons] I was three years old and I was the only child of a minority race in the class... At the time, I could not see that there was an issue behind the fact that there were no African-American children in the class. Now I see that there is a plain distinction between races in elite culture... The fact that not many minorities have access to elite culture while growing up is a problem in America. Also, not many underprivileged families can afford to show their children examples of elite culture like ballet lessons.* (R083. Black, female, early 20s)

*I would flip through page and page and not see a single person that looked like me in the magazine. At the time I went to an all-White school, and I was the only non-White student there too. I was trying to figure out who I was and whether there were a lot more people like me. However, I didn't see anyone who didn't have blonde hair and blue eyes in the magazine. I felt rather isolated, and my need to fit in grew with each page I flipped.* (R159, Asian, female, early 20s)
When people of color in this study did see racial and ethnic diversity presented in cultural products, they still were confronted with stereotypes and other misrepresentations. On this point, respondents' comments were restricted to mass culture experiences – again, probably, reflecting more their lack of exposure to elite culture than the lack of stereotypes there.

Growing up in a predominately White town in the Midwest, there aren't too many role models for Asians. Television, sports, radio all portrayed Asians in the same typical manner: speaks broken English, really intelligent, studies hard, non-athletic, knows karate or some martial arts... It's hard establishing an identity if you can't figure out your own race. I visited Cambodia a couple of years ago thinking that I would fit in more and feel more unity. I was wrong. No one dressed like me. I felt like I was a giant among dwarfs. I didn't talk the language, so I was further isolated. It's kind of funny, but I feel like here I'm segregated because of my skin color, but in Cambodia I felt segregated because of my culture. (R111. Asian, male, early 20s)

Tall, White, beautiful, we all know the stereotype. [Model] Tyra Banks looks not a lot like the African American females today, but does look like the typical, "perfect" White female but in Black skin. (R083. Black, female, early 20s)

I really hated the fact that there were no Black characters [on this television show] and the small parts there were with Blacks had cops involved for crimes. When I would go into the store the sales lady would follow me around and some White friends that I had at the time thought that these things were not true. On the other hand, if they would think there was some sort of crime or something, they would ask. "Was the person Black?" The fact that they would think anything negative had to involve a Black person was upsetting. (R011. Black, female, early 20s)

I was aware that MacGyver, my super-hero, didn't look like anyone in my family. However, the villains on his show at that time did look like my family members. I was starting wonder if we (Asians) were evil people. (R159, female, Asian, early 20s)

One striking contrast to this trend that was brought up and discussed in depth by African-American respondents was the "Cosby Show":

116
At the time I felt like this was a picture of a new image on television for Black America. The feeling that I got was that Hollywood finally realized that there were many faces to Black culture, not just pimps and hoes which I rarely ever saw. (R098, Black, male, middle 20s)

This show truly motivated me to perform well in school and to work hard in trying to achieve my goals... As a result of watching this show, I firmly believed Black Americans could be professionals and have happy marriages to one another. These factors were often absent from other shows, which is why I was so taken by this particular show... I began to appreciate that the show didn't focus on race all of the time. I, for one at age 22, am tired of being the spokesperson for people of color. I have grown tired of people assuming that I am consumed by thoughts about race and am looking for someone to blame. (R162, Black, female, early 20s)

I became very proud of the fact that there was this type of Black family portrayed, because it helped to destroy the notion that Blacks have nothing and are nothing. (R143/R181, Black, female, early 20s)

Corrupts elite culture

Again, there was very little mention of this issue related either to elite or mass culture among respondents. What little there was is discussed briefly in the next chapter, as it surfaced in relation to a mostly enabling experience. In the context of listening to a piece of classical music, there was mention of how the positive effects of the music were mitigated by the fact that it had been overused in commercials and other media offerings.

Negatively affects democracy

There was no evidence in this study to either support or refute the claim that either mass or elite culture negatively affects democracy.
Creates undemocratic separation of social classes

There was a great deal of evidence in this study, however, that elitism in all its manifestations imposes tremendous constraints on individuals with regard to their experiences in elite culture. Because discussion of social class with regard to mass culture products was minimal, if present at all, in the data, this section will focus entirely on class in relation to elite culture. The respondents’ interviews are rife with discussions of feeling inadequate in elite culture environments – of not being trusted, not being good enough or smart enough or rich enough:

My question at the time was: Why does a place that is open to the public seem to want nothing to do with the public? I have asked this question many times throughout my life and it is often the fear that if someone like me (middle class, young) can enjoy this art then it must not be as special. (R033. Caucasian, male, early 20s)

I was offended by the intensity of the surrounding audience staring at my brother and his friend. They were not bothering anyone, but yet I could see people pointing and whispering just because they looked different. I guess as far as the genre of ballet is concerned, my alternative-looking brother is perhaps not the standard audience member, but he was not distracting anyone and was pretty intent on watching the ballet. I could see how certain types of elite culture can often be exclusionary, which is sad because there may be a lot to gain from experiencing these things. But when you feel as though you are being judged, it is not so easy to view something in an unbiased way. (R034. Caucasian, female, early 20s)

[The guard] was following me: I remember thinking that if an older couple were strolling through the museum decked out in jewels they would probably feel comfortable locking them in there alone. The museum itself is very elitist, so the workers are conditioned to expect that clientele and get worried when someone out of the ordinary to their environment dare try and enjoy it as well. (R031. Caucasian, female. early 20s)
Respondents, thus, perceived arts patrons to be snobs and hypocrites, and clearly they felt uncomfortable in elite culture settings. Many respondents, as a result, distanced themselves from the cultural elite and arts institutions.

"At the art museum" some people were looking at me with snooty looks, like I was just a kid and shouldn’t be there. I think I let people like that get to me too much and it turns me off to different elite cultural products because of the negative stigma of snobby, wealthy people being the only ones to have the right to enjoy elite culture. (R094, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

To me the fact that symphony attendees go to the symphony for the wrong reasons makes a mockery of the musicians whether they know it or not. Which in a way is symbolic of how people of power make a mockery of a lot of people without them knowing it. It is ironic that those who attend elite functions are supposed to be classy. (R031, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

I feel negative feelings toward the elite culture not because of this experience but because the elite culture is so segregated from everyday people in our society. I think money is the biggest barrier between our classes, and those with more of it are using it to make the rest of the people feel inadequate. I don’t like the idea that these people with all the money get to have the culturally rich experiences, too. (R117, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

The majority of the people that went [to the opera] were well-to-do-individuals. I noticed there were many people also conducting casual business there. I realized that there were many ways in which elite culture interacted with one another... I wanted to fit into this society that I felt such an outsider to. I realized that there was a whole different culture and there were many benefits in understanding how this society worked... I felt insecure when I saw the type of people that were there to see the opera. I felt I did not belong... It is all about society and how well each person can put on a show of how much money they have. There was this I-am-better-than-you attitude about the whole thing. Many of the people there would look at their reflection in any mirror that they could. (R023, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)
A second response that emerged in this study was resistance to these notions of elitism and exclusion. Respondents in this case attempted to debunk ideas that elite culture is only for the wealthy or the well educated – and to clarify that they were not “elitist” if they in turn enjoyed the arts.

_Our society has always looked at this art form as an elite thing, but I am testament that regardless of status in society one could appreciate [classical] music. Music appreciation has nothing to do with societal status and is not only a thing for the elite. I am somewhat tired of so many people not showing their true appreciation for music. Well this type at least, because they are often thought that they have to be of a certain status in society to embrace this type of music._ (R035. Black, male, early 20s)

_I am not an elitist, rather, I enjoy the music for its sincerity._ (R088. Asian, male, early 20s)

_I feel uplifted and thrilled watching the dancers perform... This has taught me that elite culture is distinguished as elite not because of where it takes place, but what it does to your mind... Elite culture does not make you a better person, but it may put you closer to your feelings. Popular culture does not make you dumb or ignorant, but it does little to achieve abstract thought._ (R184. Caucasian, female, early 20s)

_Even though many people make the misconception about museums thinking that they are places where rich, snooty, or alternative/weird people hang out, they are wrong. Museums are open to the public. They are there to help educate people of all classes._ (R109. Caucasian, female, early 20s)

**Assumes self-righteous stance in presuming the need to civilize the masses**

There was no evidence of this issue in the data to either support or refute the claim that elite culture assumes a self-righteous stance in presuming the need to civilize the masses.
Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentation

This issue did not emerge with any strength in the data; however, there were suggestions by a few informants that questions of quality and meaning in modern art, especially, were arbitrary.

No one in the art community has come out and told the truth about what they think. In a review I read, an art critic beat around the bush by stating very abstract things about the paintings. He never came out and said they were a bunch of scribbles on paper. (ROM, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Additional evidence

Finally, there emerged in the data a category of constraint that was not mentioned in the literature. This issue deals with the moral rightness or appropriateness of what is presented in the content of cultural products, especially regarding the mass media. This is seen as imposing or constraining in the sense that it misrepresents what respondents know to be true or real. While this question has been implicit to some degree in the sections above, the discussions of morality are so prevalent in this study that I would be remiss to not address the theme in some depth.

There was relatively little mention of moral concern with regard to elite culture among the respondents – again, as likely because of the level of experience with elite as opposed to mass culture as because of the actual content of elite versus mass culture products. As an example of this in elite culture, however, one respondent had this to say about a show of abstract art:

I was offended by the pictures of the female and the male with the large penis. I do not appreciate being depicted as a woman in an inferior role because it transcends generations and little girls growing up will see those kinds of images and feel they are inferior. It made me more aware
of how much women are depicted in such ridiculous ways so often. This man is getting credit for sick pictures. I was unable to appreciate any more of his work. (R002, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Much, much more often, respondents in this study expressed their disgust and disappointment with television programs and films, noting that the messages these media products send and the lessons they teach are detrimental to the well-being of both individuals and society as a whole. Despite their disapproval, respondents expressed resignation and said they felt powerless to alter the situation in any way.

I now hate the Springer show even more because it made me realize my lack of control and even my lack of voice. I am relatively powerless and it sucks. I feel very strongly that many things shown on TV, including the “Jerry Springer Show,” are detrimental to the well-being of viewers. I think they send the wrong messages and can really mess people up in their attempt to match the media’s ideals. The makers of such shows need to take the well-being of the public into consideration. (R168, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

The individuals on the show [“Survivor”] pretty much have to become accommodating to each other and get along, while still realizing that each person is out to get the other in the end... Like it is in the show, money is the main driving force in society. The pursuit of money itself is almost a game to most people. Also like in the show, people in the real world will do almost anything for money... I think the show can be hurtful if people do not realize that it is still a show. The purpose behind it is to make money for the television station and advertisers. (R148, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

The way the media and the show “Cheers” made drinking seem so right and natural leads children to start drinking... Seeing the characters drink and be good buddies made me want the same feeling in my life. I viewed myself as the party director, one who everybody likes and wants to drink with... By trying to be a cool adult like the guys on “Cheers,” I ruined two good years of my teenage life... The media make drinking seem so cool and so common it’s no wonder kids want to try it. I was like everyone else and I tried to be mature and start drinking. If I wasn’t bombarded with “cool” images of drinking all my life, maybe a TV show wouldn’t have had such an effect on me. (R120, Caucasian, male, early 20s)
It's funny that we're all taught "equality" from grade school up. I always thought that was how it was, but I'm being shown something completely different on TV. If you don't compete, you'll always be a loser or someone without significance. (R094. Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Because respondents in this study were in a college class that encouraged critical thinking they may have been more attuned to moral questions than without this environment. There was evidence of this more critical orientation by many respondents who were self-reflexive in their interviews.

I didn't want to see this movie because I did not think I would find it funny. I did laugh at some scenes, though, and I later wondered why... There seems to be a trend in our society to fight against "political correctness" by attacking the things we are not "supposed" to laugh at. The movie made jokes out of some sensitive issues, like people with disabilities... This movie represents my generation. It was wildly successful...[But] It is a sad state when this movie can represent a generation. (R013. Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Before writing this commentary I was reading over my self-interview and noticed my view of things had changed from enjoying the show, to critiquing the show, then to almost bashing the show. I guess it takes analyzing something you're listening to or watching, seeing how it influences society, and then your life, and then I ask myself the question: Why do I listen to this trash? The answer, which is also a question: I don't know. I wish I did have the answers. A simple answer is that it passes time, but there are so many other CDs and stations I can listen to in the morning other than Howard Stern. (R125. Caucasian, female, early 20s)

It hurt that I had such a lack of discipline for what content I was viewing and supporting... This show is funny but inappropriate. I just have to ask myself what is more important and what do I want to be associated with. (R038, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

My objections and struggles stem from the fact that women [in these music videos] are completely viewed for their bodies... I have watched music videos very passively in the past. Today was the first time I have taken the educated approach. Though I felt very enlightened by my insight, I know I will never be able to watch a music video passively again. (R025, Caucasian, female, early 20s)
Summary and discussion

There is ample evidence in this chapter that respondents in this study struggled in an ongoing way with constraints imposed both by elite and by mass culture systems. These constraints took a variety of different forms, sometimes similar and sometimes different in effect between elite and mass culture experiences.

The remainder of this chapter will summarize briefly the ways that both elite and mass culture are thought in the literature to be bad and how these compare with what respondents said in this study. To reiterate briefly, the conceptualization of bad that is being used here corresponds to implications in the literature that a particular cultural experience is bad because it reflects ways that societal systems impose upon or constrain the freedom of individuals. Following, then, is a discussion of the data in relation to the ways cited in the literature that culture imposes upon or constrains individuals.

Dulls the mind and spirit. There is no particular evidence in this study to either support or reject the notion that either mass or elite culture dulls the mind and spirit.

Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes. In contrast to the claim above, there was an enormous amount of relevant data in the study regarding these claims. Female respondents talked in their interviews about the pressure they felt to live up to an impossible ideal of thinness and beauty as portrayed in the media as well as the persistence in the media of the stereotype of women as less smart, less capable, and more dependent than men. Male respondents, in turn, were loath to admit any vulnerabilities or show any emotions lest they not live up to the macho
stereotypes of men portrayed in the media. And both men and women described the negative stereotypes associated with homosexuality as portrayed in the media and in jokes.

This gender role issue was further played out in the associations of elite culture with feminine (and therefore undesirable) characteristics. In striking contrast to the dearth of literature addressing this issue, respondents in this study spoke repeatedly of how it was not cool to play a musical instrument, to enjoy Broadway musicals, to go to museums, and so forth.

Respondents in this study also wrestled with media representations of race and ethnicity. Minorities of both genders discussed how there were relatively few people who looked like them in the media, and when there were minorities on television and in movies they often were cast in stereotypical roles and otherwise misrepresented.

The issue of stereotypes and misrepresentations in elite culture did not emerge strongly in this data, however that is not necessarily because it does not exist. Rather, it seems more likely that it is because of the relative infrequency of elite culture experiences in relation to mass culture.

**Corrupts elite culture.** There was only weak evidence (discussed in the next chapter) that mass culture corrupts elite culture.

**Negatively affects democracy.** There was no evidence in this study to support or deny the claim that mass culture negatively affects democracy. Again, this is not to say that the claim is invalid, just that the concern did not emerge in the data.

**Creates undemocratic separation of social classes.** Respondents in this study talked at length about how the negative associations related to elitism were reinforced
by arts institutions and arts patrons, themselves. There was much discussion of how
people felt unwanted and inadequate in elite culture settings. They gave examples of
being surveilled by museum guards, stared at in the audiences of performances, and
generally being treated with less than full respect.

Assumes self-righteous stance in presuming the need to civilize the masses. No
evidence emerged to support this claim.

Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations. There was only
weak evidence to support this claim, and it was found in the form of respondents
questioning the quality of what was put before them as so-called modern art.
CHAPTER 6
FREEING AND RELEASING CAPACITIES OF ELITE AND MASS CULTURE

This is the second of three chapters of analysis intended to consider how people make sense of their experiences with elite and mass culture. Following the last chapter's analysis of constraining and imposing capacities, this chapter will focus on the freeing and releasing capacities of both elite and mass culture. In keeping with the analysis of the previous chapter, I will be using as a guide the six culture-is-good claims that are found in the literature of Chapter Two. Table 9 (next page) lists these six claims and summarizes the degree to which the data in this study support or refute them.

Represents a valid and vital form of truth

One theme that is found both in the literature and also comes out in respondent's interviews was the notion that cultural experiences at times can offer humans a glimpse of something that is recognized as an abstract but nonetheless valid form of truth. There were two ways that this emerged from the data in this study: one form of truth was described as beauty and the other fits the descriptions in the literature of transcendence or the sublime. In each case, there were mentions both with regard to elite and to mass culture, although the mass culture references were very few indeed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elite Discourse</th>
<th>Mass Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elite is Good</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mass is Good</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represents valid and vital form of truth:</td>
<td>Represents freedom of choice:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Much support</em></td>
<td><em>No support</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to the understanding of human</td>
<td>Builds community through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possibilities:</td>
<td>shared knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Much support</em></td>
<td>and experiences:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to democracy when part of the</td>
<td><em>Much support</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education and lives of citizens:</td>
<td>Provides opportunities for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relaxation, pleasure,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and self-expression:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Much support</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Claims of how elite and mass culture are good and the degree to which the data support them.

**Beauty.** There were numerous times in this study when respondents spoke of a given cultural experience as beautiful, and in each case their descriptions suggested that this experience was something particularly special – often mentioning perfection or purity. With regard to elite culture, beauty was discussed in connection with both the visual and performing arts. Following are four examples of respondents’ descriptions from different art forms within the elite culture realm:

*It portrayed such artistic ability and beauty, and for so many musicians to be able to be in sync to create such harmony is so beautiful. I need more purity, peace, and soothing music like this in my life. I forget about the beautiful sounds of violins and musical instruments because the music I usually listen to does not use these – it was very refreshing. (R114, Caucasian, female, early 20s)*

*My emotions were running on high. I was in awe of how the performers’ voices and motions just flowed with the music of the orchestra. I lived it.*
I could not grasp how so many things could be pulled together to make something so beautiful. (R109, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

I am not an art critic, but I thought the paintings were beautiful. They showed people and the surroundings of the world at their purest. (R128, Black, male, early 20s)

I felt a total thrill. The music and the dancing were so incredibly beautiful that I just got lost in them; it was very peaceful, too... It seemed to be the epitome of beauty and grace. the images and the sound combined to produce a magical feeling. (R158, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

In this study, respondents’ only mass culture reference to beauty beyond the notion of a beautiful body was related to the Victoria’s Secret fashion show. And here, of course, beautiful bodies were the primary focus, even if the event created around them was also aesthetically pleasing.

I thought the entire show was beautiful. The set, the clothes, and the models were all beautiful. (R018, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Transcendence. Some respondents described experiencing a highly intense, yet abstract sense of unity that transcended everyday material existence. Their descriptions matched what is discussed in the literature as transcendence or the sublime. These experiences were clearly qualitatively different for respondents, who spoke of them in terms of a sense of connectedness with all humanity or with the universe. It is important to acknowledge that this transcendence occurred for respondents with both mass and elite culture, even though it was much more likely to occur with the latter.

This first example is in relation to a visit to the Louvre in France, and is representative of the way respondents’ talked about some elite culture experiences.

It is rare that you can walk into a building and be impressed at the surroundings. It’s the feeling of greatness in the room. There is just something in the air that you don’t feel every day. The Louvre had that
aura... The art seemed to transcend its cultural text and speak to me from a universal point of view... We are all human. We are all united by the mere fact of the same species. We all experience pain and sorrow and can relate to beauty and art in some way no matter what our background is. (R156, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

The second example is in relation to a mass culture experience. At first, the source for this transcendent experience might be surprising, but if one thinks about it, this passage might well explain a lot of the following of the rock group the Grateful Dead:

I wondered why there was such intense energy that followed the music and the people. It was as if this was the feeling I was searching for my whole life and for the first time ever I completely got it... I felt that this is how the world should work: unity among all, everyone working together united under music of inspiring words and spiritual sounds. This was how I wanted to live my life. I felt so loved and gave so much love to this band and the wonderful people that followed it. My life from this point on was and always will be centered around music. (R023, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

In these descriptions, the notion of community was abstracted in such a way that respondents saw themselves as part of a larger holistic order. Much more frequent in the data was a very concrete consideration of community, which is discussed later.

**Contributes to the understanding of human possibilities**

Although they didn't necessarily refer to their experiences in these terms, many respondents described their engagements with elite and mass culture in ways that fit the literature with regard to quality of life issues and the understanding of human possibilities. The following sections discuss these findings related to self-development, self-expression, and attunement with the experiential moment.

**Self-Development.** One theme that emerged from the data that was somewhat unexpected was respondents' insistence on the importance of being a “well-rounded”
individual. This ideal, of course, is present in the elite discourse literature as discussed in Chapter Two. Still, the extent to which this concept was initiated in the interviews was surprising. Respondents mentioned not only that their parents and teachers encouraged them to be well-rounded, but many also indicated that they clearly valued this idea as well. As one might expect, the idea of well-roundedness was related to trying or experiencing only elite culture. There were no references to well-roundedness with respect to mass culture in this study.

One of my high school teachers was so determined to make students in the inner city more well-rounded that whenever a "high" culture event came to the city we had to go, and by me being one of his students. I definitely had to go. (R007. Black, female. early 20s)

If I had not continued to be exposed to art I might not be as well-rounded a person as I am today. (R017. Caucasian. male. middle 20s)

[Watching the "Nutcracker"] I forgot about everything else that was going on in my life for two hours: I was completely immersed in the performance... I would be a happier person if I did this more often. I would feel more complete and well-rounded. (R037. Caucasian. female. early 20s)

Self-Expression. Respondents in this study referred to times when their experiences with elite or mass culture allowed them to see new possibilities, to express themselves, and to be creative. This matches up with the literature of both the elite and mass discourses and an assumed-to-be-inherent capacity for self-expression and creativity. In this study, there were far more mentions of self-expression and creativity in relation to elite culture, as exemplified below.

[Looking at] art always made me feel more comfortable with myself. It really "drives home" the fact that everyone is an individual and that it can be okay, even celebrated, to be different and unique. (R089. Caucasian. male. early 20s)
This event (Alvin Ailey) awakened my inner soul that was once so in tune with dancing, and brought out many emotions. I think dance is such a beautiful expression of art... I used to take many dance classes while I was growing up. Even now, it feels so good to dance. I feel absolutely alive!... It makes me want to get back into dancing. (R084, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

The play showed me another side of myself. (R005, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

After my [jazz band] solo, I heard the audience cheering for me. The feeling was amazing and I felt like I was floating on a cloud. Afterwards, my dad met up with me in the school hallway. My parents were recently divorced and I lived with my mom and younger brother. I was angry with my dad because I didn’t see him much after the divorce but still missed and loved him very much. When I saw my dad, he told me how proud he was of me. I gave him a hug and I stood in front of him speechless because I didn’t know what to say. I was filled with all kinds of mixed emotions. I told him that I needed to hear that from him and I gave him another hug. He drove me home and we had a nice heart to heart talk on the way. The solo helped me express my feelings both musically and verbally. (R153, Asian, male, middle 20s)

I remember being able to identify with Frankenstein’s hurt and blunder by being rejected by society... [S]o many of my friends who have read the book (who are homosexuals) said that they can relate to what Frankenstein went through to find true love. (R169, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

I was a sophomore in high school and was in my first of three years of participating in the symphonic choir, the premier choir in my school. We were regarded as one of the top choirs in the whole state, and much was expected from our group... By this time in my life I had become an avid fan of classical choral music. Something about the combination of several quality voices in harmony or unison had a profound affect on my soul. Music touched me to my very core... Performing songs written over 300 years before I was born was a connection to our past that exhilarated me... I was able to discover one of my life’s passions. I had always been an athlete and was in love with sports. This was just another love for me to add to my life, making me a well-rounded person. I saw there was more to life than just sports. Sitting in the crowd listening to the various choirs from around the state, I was able to hear diversity within music unlike any I had heard before. The wonderful harmonies sent chills down my spine and I knew I was in love... When I
was singing, I was able to express myself in a way that I had never known prior to my great love of music. (R127, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

The example that follows is illustrative of the blurring of boundaries in the sense that because the reference is to playing a musical instrument, it lies closer to an elite culture experience. However, since the instrument is a guitar, it is more likely that the context is rock music, a mass culture phenomenon. Whichever category one might place it, the effect is the same:

It was my very early high school years when I became enraptured with playing the guitar. Its impact was a feeling of something that was missing in my life that was suddenly replaced, it completely changed my life... It helped me get acquainted with my inner and subconscious self. It helped me explore my deepest emotions. It also helped me cope with the stresses of the teenage years. (R141/R174, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

Atunement with the experiential moment. Just as the literature discusses the power of works of art to connect or speak to us and the phenomenological concept of immersion in the moment, respondents in this study described many situations with both elite and mass culture where they were intensely attuned to the experience.

In mass culture, respondents most often talked about this kind of intense experience in connection with popular music, especially live concerts.

At the concert I was on my feet the entire time. I was dancing and singing my heart out. I loved it! The adrenaline rushed through my body... The affect of music on the soul is very powerful. Growing up, music always calmed me down or picked me up when I needed it. Music was my place to run away to and helped me get through my days as a child. (R083, Black, female, early 20s)

The songs and the crowd excitement had made me begin to think about the power of music. This was the first time that any experience had made me move in ways that I did not think were possible. I was opened to a new way of expressing the way that I was feeling. I began to realize...
that music could convey thoughts and feelings in a much more eloquent way than speaking. I told myself that I wanted to express my feelings in the same manner. This began my obsession with music. (R016, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

My heart was racing and I could feel the music deep in my heart and all through my body. She is a wonderful artist that can really do that for me. Not many concerts that I’ve been to make me feel this strongly... When I’m sad or stressed I pull one of her CDs out and just sit back and take a break to listen and enjoy her. Sometimes when I need to do this, it takes me back to the concert and I feel the power of it all. It is therapeutic to go back there. (R094, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Respondents mentioned many more examples of this phenomenon when discussing their elite culture experiences. Many found it easy to get “caught up” in live stage productions, particularly Broadway musicals.

Actually sitting in the theater and watching the play live made the emotions seem so much more real. The emotions of the actors as well as the emotions I felt seemed much deeper than anything I had seen or felt from movies. (R002, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

The whole experience was something I will never forget... The music was so powerful and true that you could feel it inside. At the close of the final scene, tears were rolling down my face. I found myself with my mouth hanging wide open in amazement. The musical had me so engrossed that my surroundings were invisible. (R006, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Respondents also found themselves immersed in the experiential moment while listening to classical music. Often this was completely unexpected.

In this case, the music that was played caught my attention in such a way that I got this tunnel vision and I noticed nothing else besides the sounds. Nothing has ever caught my attention that quickly before. (R185, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

When the music played I found myself enjoying it. That wasn’t supposed to happen. The music moved me. It played with my emotions. It took me to highs and lows... After the performance I understood the power of
music... This even helped to unlock a part of myself that I may have never found if it wasn't for my parents. (R113, Caucasian, male, middle 20s)

This captivation also was expressed by respondents in relation to visual art experiences.

I had the idea that the Mona Lisa could see me with her fixed eyes... When I saw the Mona Lisa, my attention was quickly drawn to her eyes. Even though I was very confused with the painting's meaning, I felt like she was making eye contact with me. I like the feeling of being protected. and the Mona Lisa had this effect on me. (R026, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Some works of art just seem to affect some people more than others. There are a few paintings in that museum that I can just stare at. I wonder if the artist knew it would have this effect, too: if I somehow can connect with the artist and that is why I am so enthralled? (R024, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

At first I was just wandering around, then I began to notice particulars about certain pieces and I started looking closer. I found myself standing and staring at certain pieces for long periods of time. (R175, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Many respondents were deeply moved by the work of Van Gogh, which was presented in a series of approximately thirty slides as one of the in-class experiences.

I enjoyed the use of colors. It made me want to really get to know VanGogh... I see how much beauty can come from emotion. (R025, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

I felt like every little stroke of color, every little shade, every little sketch or mark wanted to be something, wanted to represent a person and how that person is feeling in the painting. (R010, Caucasian, male, middle 20s)

His work moves me: it makes me smile - from my soul or something. It is almost weird that a painting can have that much control over my senses and my emotions, but at the same time I believe it is awesome that VanGogh holds that power. (R018, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
At the beginning of the slide show I was unimpressed with the portraits of individuals. After seeing a couple, the rest all looked alike, some of which could have been drawn by a mediocre elementary student, and I would not have known... However, when the picture of a woman sitting in the dark by a window was shown, something came over me. To me, this is a picture with a story, and it was easy to admire the talent in the painting. (R102, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

**Contributes to democracy when part of the education and lives of citizens**

There was no evidence in this study to either support or refute this claim the elite culture contributes to democracy when it is part of the education and lives of citizens. As with similar claims, of course, this is not to say the claim is not valid, just that there was not evidence here.

**Represents freedom of choice**

Again, there was no evidence in this study regarding this claim that mass culture represents freedom of choice. It might be a reasonable claim, but it was not mentioned by any of the informants.

**Builds community through shared knowledge and experiences**

One of the most often mentioned enabling outcomes in respondents’ discussions of experiences with elite and mass culture was the building of community – spending time with others, sharing thoughts and feelings, providing mutual care and support. Experiencing cultural products with family members was extremely important to
respondents, and they talked about a range of contexts from one-time events to daily or weekly rituals of watching specific television programs to annual traditions of elite culture outings.

The ways in which respondents discussed these experiences does not greatly differ between mass culture and elite culture. These first three examples are related to elite culture events:

*At the time, I felt like my parents, my brother, and myself were drifting apart. My adventures and knowledge did not interest them. I was seeing all of these things, and they could not see my perspective. This [outdoor symphony pops concert] was the time where I feel our relationships became better and we became more attuned to each other's lives. I got to share much needed time reflecting on the relationships in my life. My brother and I bonded especially well at this event, and I sensed a strong joyous feeling when we were packing to go home... I remember wondering when we could go back again for some time afterward. I have a picture that was taken at the event on my fireplace mantel, and so I am reminded of the time quite often. Each time I look at the picture, I am affected by a wanting to phone my brother or parents.*  

(R149. Caucasian/Native American, male. early 20s)

*Every Christmas my family would attend "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. The idea going to the show was to put my brother and me in the Christmas spirit. The whole experience was a tradition. My family and I attended the play every Christmas. My mother made us dress up in our new Christmas outfits... The play taught me the value of spending time with the family. I found the experience to be very helpful. I still wish we went to the play every year.*  

(R028. Caucasian, female. early 20s)

*My first trip to an art museum was quite the event for my mother and I. It was in the late spring and I was in fourth grade. We spent the entire morning wandering slowly around the museum... It was a weekday morning and she had let me stay home from school to go with her: there weren't very many other people there so it was kind of like our own little world to explore. She told me all about the paintings and artists she knew (mostly the popular ones that we now complain about being on everything from coasters to sneakers) and the ones she didn't know we just looked at and talked about their colors and scenes and shapes. Sometimes we would just stand there and look in silence for a while... I*  

137

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
felt special. Getting to skip school to spend this day alone with my mom to do something I enjoyed made me feel like she cared about just me for the day. (R158, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

And these two examples discuss regularly viewed television shows.

My family and I would watch the “Muppet Show” every week together. I was always excited about the show because the whole family got together and we all enjoyed it... The show was a bonding time for my family. It was a family ritual... I wish that my family would have never outgrown the show. (R086, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

“The Price is Right” was my favorite show at the time [about age five] because I would get to spend time with my grandfather. We would spend the morning outside working in the garden or pasture and then go inside everyday in enough time to see the start of our television show. We would sit and play our own little games during the show. Afterwards we would eat lunch and then return to work outdoors... I was always so excited to spend time with grandpa. He was the only man throughout my entire life who never took advantage of me, touched me in a bad way. He was always nice to me and truly loved me for who I was. (R177, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Respondents also reported experiencing mass culture events – but only rarely elite culture – with friends, which led to a greater sense of enjoyment or pleasure in the event itself.

Every summer my friends and I attended a Jimmy Buffet concert in a southeastern city... The whole experience was very fun. My friends and I would wear Hawaiian outfits with long grass skirts and bikini tops. Before the concert we would party outside the concert in the parking lot by drinking and listening to Jimmy Buffet music... Overall, the event brought my friends and I together. (R028, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

People talk about things they have in common. “Seinfeld” was a show that everyone watched and enjoyed, so everyone would have something to say about it in conversation... I miss this show. I would look forward to it. Watching re-runs is not the same. (R006, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

I enjoyed the music of Lenny Kravitz, he was performing near where I lived, so a friend and I attended the concert... Not only was I entertained and enjoyed the music, I felt a sense of community... The concert was
more than just entertainment and that was due to Lenny Kravitz. He personalized the event and attempted to spread a message... As cheesy as this may sound, I could see and feel the positive energy he created through the concert. (R013, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

Provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression

The word relaxation was mentioned quite often in relation both to elite and to mass culture. Respondents talked about relaxation as an escape from the everyday routine or from current problems and concerns or, alternatively, to escape to a place that was novel and exciting.

One of the few mentions of relaxation as escape in elite culture was in reference to a Broadway production of “The Lion King.”

*This show can control the audience’s emotions if they can suspend their disbelief and see the show instead of just watching it... I go to the theater to be taken from my own life/problems and thrust into another world. This play was a perfect representation of what I need when I go to the theater. I got to be in the Serengeti for a brief moment in time, among the animals.* (R015, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Most often respondents employed this usage of relaxation in their discussions of mass culture products, especially television and movies.

*Although I was not as impressed with the movie as I thought I was going to be, I was excited to see what new creatures and characters would be in the movie. I [could] escape to another world for a little while.* (R006, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

*I don’t really question things like television shows. I watch television to relax after a long day; it’s like I shut off my brain when I turn the television on. I work so hard at school, and I have two jobs that I work. I must say that it is nice to be able to sit down and not think of anything at all. Relaxing lowers my level of stress and keeps me from having an aneurysm every day. I guess that’s what the television producers want. To create an environment where no thinking is necessary: the television can make all your decisions for you – what to wear, where to eat, and what products to buy.* (R089, Caucasian, male, early 20s)
[T]he movie helped me by making me laugh. It produced an outlet for two hours. I could escape reality and just laugh. My life is pretty stressful, so getting away from things for a while is good for me. Laughter can help get you in a good mood and forget about your problems – at least for a while. (R014, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

As though they were embarrassed about their cultural choices, many respondents also rationalized watching stupid television programs or movies.

Laughing is something that makes everyone feel good. Laughter releases endorphins into the brain, which are the body's natural anti-depressant. (R042, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

This movie was one that I would describe as being stupid funny... It was very funny. I love comedy movies. I can sit there and just laugh and laugh. I have never been in a situation where laughter was a bad thing. Everybody in society needs laughter. It is just like the old saying, "laughter is the best medicine." In other words, laughter is good for everybody. (R090, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

Every week I tune into the latest episode of "The Real World," which is aired on MTV. I usually watch the show with my roommates or my boyfriend. It is a time when we can all kick back and relax. We always seem to find humor in watching some else's life... I do sometimes, as a woman, feel offended when I watch the show. Why? Because sometimes MTV picks the worst possible women to represent us. A lot of the time they pick dumb, naughty, slutty girls who are constantly sleeping around or putting their foot in their mouth. Or they pick women who think that they are the most intelligent, drop-dead gorgeous, going to be the most successful actress/model when they get their big break, kind of women... I do not feel helped after I watch this show. I only watch it for entertainment purposes. [It helps] a person sit back and unwind, gives people a chance to escape from reality and life. MTV picks these people as their cast for reason. It is not for them to be role models but instead to entertain. (R109, Caucasian, female, early 20s)
Additional evidence

**Issues of morality.** Just as respondents in the previous chapter expressed moral contempt for the content of some films and television, they also talked at length about positive role models and good moral lessons that were presented elsewhere within both mass and elite culture.

Respondents in this study talked less about the positive moral content of elite culture products, just as they spoke less often about the negative moral content of these. This seems likely for two reasons: one is that because much of elite culture is relatively abstract, it doesn’t as easily lend itself to concrete moral messages; the second is that for the most part respondents simply don’t experience the quantities of elite culture that they do of mass culture. Two representative examples of this in elite culture, however, come from stage plays:

*The play really hit an emotion for me because I could relate... I knew that things change but the issue is how you deal with that change. In the play you had characters who dealt with it in a good way and others who didn’t. I wanted to be the one who deals with it in the best way I could...The universal life lesson is very important: you realize who are the important people in your life and who really cares for you.* (R041, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

*This play brought about a lot of changes in me and made me have a different outlook on life. It made me want to form a closer bond with my community by making contributions to those less fortunate than myself... Seeing this made me want to do more research on my heritage and do more to try to bring about unity among African American people... It made me want to become active in my community.* (R007, Black, female, early 20s)

There were many mentions by respondents of how mass culture enabled them or encouraged them to do good deeds and to value the importance of kindness and respect.
The movie ["Star Wars"] brought out a lot of creativity in me and developed a desire to do good deeds for the world. I was always trying to help others when I was young, especially animals that resembled Chewbacca. Adults, children, and animals were all aided by my good will. (R149, Caucasian/Native American, male, early 20s)

I always looked up to Oprah and thought that she carried with her the gift of relaying very important messages... This show gave me a sense of wanting to know more and get more involved with society. It always showed some example of someone somewhere making a difference and by seeing this I was encouraged to believe in people. (R145, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Both males and females in this study pointed out the particular importance of such children’s television programs as "Sesame Street," "Care Bears," and "Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood" in helping them to learn how to treat other people, especially those who were different in some way.

I feel good that my exposure to Latinos and Blacks came from this show ["Sesame Street"] because it seems to have given me a positive affect toward these minority groups rather than a negative affect toward these groups. (R169, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

I saw that the Care Bears were always trying to do good deeds and make little kids happy. They were always helping people and trying to solve problems to overcome some force of evil, which made me want to like the Care Bears. They had a positive impact on me because they made me want to do well. There were valuable lessons to be learned from the Care Bears, which was significant in shaping my ability to know right from wrong. (R150, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

"Sesame Street" always had fun games and different ways to make me think about learning. I loved the crazy games that made you practice left and right. I loved the songs that helped me learn the alphabet. And most importantly I loved the puppet characters and the lessons that they taught you about sharing, friendship, and many other things. I remember taking my stuffed Bert and Ernie dolls and reviewing the lessons that were on Sesame Street that day. I would act like I was their teacher. (R109, Caucasian, female, early 20s)
Relaxation as peace. A second theme that emerged from the data but wasn't in the literature, was the notion of relaxation as inner peace. As discussed above, the word relaxation was mentioned quite often in relation both to elite and to mass culture. As I looked more carefully at respondents' discussions, however, I came to realize that the concept of relaxation was used in two distinctly different ways throughout the interviews. In addition to the use of the term relaxation to mean escape, as discussed previously, there also was a second kind of relaxation that was of an entirely different magnitude. This form of relaxation was equated with inner peace and serenity. Rather than talking about escape, respondents in these situations referred to relaxation in connection with inward reflection and resolution. Relaxation in this sense, then, looked very much like the experience of transcendence discussed above. And the mentions of relaxation as peace in this study were found only in reference to elite culture experiences.

When the music started I was dumb-founded. I didn't know that the instruments and people could make such lovely sounds. During the symphony this peaceful calmness came over me... I think this was the first time that I felt peace come over me since the death of my father. At this moment I think I realized that music was somehow going to be my outlet for stress... Up until this point I don't think I felt much calm in my life. Every night I was haunted by nightmares and fear of death. I was gloomy all the time. This helped me tremendously because even though it was for a short time, I once again knew what I was missing in life. I was missing the calmness and peace. By this point I was sick of feeling blue every day, and it was nice to know that I could be calm and happy once again. (R159, Asian, female, early 20s)

Although walking around the art museum was fun and I was really enjoying it, I couldn't figure out why this particular photograph [by Ansel Adams] jumped out at me and appealed to me so much. It wasn't like I was from an even remotely similar environment and missed it or anything like that, it just took my breath away... I felt peace and wonder. I was just starting to get into the rat race that seems to be the rest of
life... To just stand there looking at this beautiful picture of nothing but nature seemed so real and so calming... It taught me a new way to look at art, not just with the eyes. I have learned to stop and just look at nothing but what I want to take in and let myself run with whatever I first feel and see where it takes me. (R158, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

I never relax, never. I am usually the worst off when I have nothing to do. I can't even really sit down and watch a half-hour television show. By really getting into this book I was able to read the book and relax my mind... This book allowed me the opportunity to sit down and be at total peace with myself while I read. I need more of these leisurely activities. A by-product of reading was complete relaxation for my mind. It kind of allowed me to clear my thoughts and be able to put certain things in perspective. (R185, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

This [museum visit] was the kind of experience that will stick in my memory for a long time – because it was so exciting, exhilarating, emotional, and meaningful. Those feelings of inner peace and tranquility are what most of us strive for – and to experience those, even for a short time, is unforgettable. (R046, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

[This reading of “The Leaves of Grass”] was a time for relaxation and introspection. It was a very personal time between the text and those listening. I think it was more personal and emotional to listen to it being read to you than actually reading it for yourself... I remember having a range of emotions and feelings throughout the readings. “Leaves of Grass” made me extremely introspective about my life, religion, and politics... I felt relaxed and my mind was free when I listened to the readings. I could think about things more clearly. (R180, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

**Single Product Analysis: Pachelbel**

The potential for a cultural product to result in positive, freeing and enabling effects is perhaps best illustrated in the following analysis of a single cultural product. Pachelbel’s famous Canon in D, a recording of which was presented as an in-class experience in each of the three main undergraduate courses from which data were collected. Analysis of the pattern of responses to this experience provides another means of coming to grips with how respondents in this study found meaning in a
specific cultural product. The discussion here represents the analysis of only a subset of the overall data. It includes only the interviews about the Pachelbel Canon from those respondents who listened to it during class.

Overwhelmingly, respondents talked about the experience in terms of the kind of peace, relaxation, and transcendence that are discussed above.

*I felt so peaceful; it cleared my mind of all chaotic thoughts. It was inspirational and made me feel positive, peace, and relaxed... I always turn to music for my moods or for expression. This music touches my soul and spirit that relates to my religion; it reminds me of when I am at church and away from the rest of a chaotic, disorderly society. I am glad to have more peaceful, positive things in my life that give me the power to search deeply into my authentic self, which few things allow me to do in society. I think of myself as being able to seek out the beauty and real self inside of me.* (R114, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

*This music is so powerful. Immediately when the music began the room got quiet, peaceful, and nearly serene... It calms me and really brings out a number of honest emotions.* (R009, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

*This music brought relaxation to my mind and body all at the same time... The music just soothes my soul because all the chaos that’s been involved in my life has really created a very disturbed person within. It brings a silence to a bunch of noise going on inside me.* (R128, Black, male, early 20s)

*The song was so soothing and relaxing that it seemed to make all of my headaches go away... The expression “listen with your heart” applied at the moment. It was so enjoyable and it aroused so many emotions. I felt like I had a total body massage without one hand touching me... My life gets so demanding sometimes that I need to take a time out and hold on to moments like that. Just listening to the beautiful melody. It made me feel determined and motivated to get up and do what I had to get done.* (R096, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

*This piece is very smooth, it is happy, it is about the ease and happiness of life... I feel free, like the sun is shining and I am whipping quickly across the waterfront on a small boat contemplating the meaning of life... I have had a bad day until now: normally I am a very happy go lucky kind of person. I do not let my emotions change with the wind.*
I am reminded, on such a bad day as this, that life is simple and flowing, one movement plays easily into the next. I see life differently due to this music. (R036, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

Respondents were caught up in the emotion of the experience as discussed previously. They referred to the raw emotion, to the intensity of the experience, to what Armstrong (1971) calls the “affective presence,” of the music.

I was captivated by the music... The music struck in me emotions of joy and sadness. If I were to cry during the music it would not be because I felt bad, but rather because I enjoyed it. (R005, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

It was very emotional but in a happy kind of way. In fact this piece was so enjoyable that it almost made me cry – a happy cry that is, like one would cry at a wedding. This music was very elegant and if I were to only have one word to describe it, it would be beautiful. (R001, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Tears welled up in my eyes for some reason and I can’t seem to place the memory with the music. The power of music to produce such overwhelming emotion leads me to conclude that music is like no other. A whole movie’s worth of words does not make me feel like the music does. (R093, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

I forgot to think about anything at all. I basically just felt. The canon is the kind of music the represents how much a person can be moved to certain emotions. There is a magical power to it. It filled me with calm and with a sense beyond everyday life, a sense of eternity. (R118, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

I now understand why this song always makes my mother cry. It is just so beautiful... My eyes became teary a few times while listening and my struggle would probably be whether or not I would react this way out of sadness because we now live three hours away from each other – or of happiness due to the realization that I do not make it home often enough and how much she means to me. (R031, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

As suggested in this last quote, many of the respondents connected this music to memories of the past. They recalled associations of other positive community-building experiences – specifically weddings and graduations – when they had heard this music.

146
When the music began I felt at peace with myself and the world around me. It seemed like nothing else mattered beyond being alive and happy. Then, as I reflected on it as a graduation tune, it made me want to write a letter and tell everyone who has ever made a difference in my life how much they mean to me. It really got me in a reflective mindset about my relationships with my family and friends. (R025, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

This makes me think of my friends. When I heard this at high school graduation for the first time, I had a friend record it for me because I wanted to always remember my friends — some I would never see again, some who went away to college and started their adult lives. (R011, Black, female, early 20s)

The first time I remember hearing this song was at my sister’s wedding. I remember it gave me goose bumps because I was extremely happy for her as well as scared and a little scared because she was leaving home. (R175, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

In a few cases, respondents noted how this beautiful music has been overused and commercialized, diminishing its capacities. This observation is in line with the mass culture critiques of Chapter Two that argue that mass culture corrupts elite culture.

Listening to the piece stirs up many thoughts and emotions. I instantly thought of weddings and formal ceremonies, as well as television ads for diamonds and at least one funeral parlor... Putting such a lovely piece of music in an advertisement is almost criminal, because you are “recycling” a classical piece and adapting it to fit material possessions, which I don’t believe it was originally intended for. The real meaning of the song got lost somewhere with the recycling. (R157, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)

This piece reminds me of every wedding that I have ever been to... I relate this piece to my own life through that I love the song but hate the meaning behind it. I am very anti-marriage right now in my life and this song has a strong bond to every wedding ceremony. (R028, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

It made me think of all the other wonderful things that are used too often for advertising and money-making tools. I was hurt to see others that had no positive feelings for the music because it had been used so much. There are too many wonderful things available to us that we take for...
granted and overexpose. Society has a way of taking everything wonderful and using it to make money, to sell their product. (R175, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

And finally, many respondents said they had never or not often had this kind of intense, peaceful, or transformative experience. Many either expressed a commitment to go out and find a recording so that they could listen to this music again or talked in subsequent interviews about how this in-class experience inspired them to seek out other similar classical music experiences.

Many aspects of life I find to be constraining – designed to or resulting in the lessening of possibilities in the way we think. Music is one of the rare things that does not have this effect... I tend to listen to more modern music like rock and techno but classical music connects to me in a different way and facilitates different emotions than other forms of music. Classical music is much more relaxing than most other music I listen to... After class I got myself a CD with classical music. (R155, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

This song made me step back from my very hectic life and reflect. The music helped me to relax for a few minutes and made me think that there is more to life than work, schedules, deadlines, and nightlife. I found myself lost within the music and thought about my past. I do not know why, but I think that it was very therapeutic. I have zero background in classical music, but I have to admit that I enjoyed this experience very much. (R027, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

After listening to this song, I realized that I really enjoyed it, so I went out and listened to more of Pachelbel's music... I found that the music caused me to feel very strong emotions and feelings. It is difficult to describe the exact feelings that I had while I listened to the music. (R030, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

My thoughts soon transformed into emotion and I found myself fighting off tears of joy in order to avoid any possible classroom embarrassment. Listening to the song allowed me to realize its true beauty and purpose to provide audiences with listening and emotional pleasure... I realized that the song was more than a form of entertainment, it was a piece of artwork. Instead of making me want to get up and dance, the song gave me a moment to think to myself. It seems that our society as a whole should take some time to just reflect on their lives. Nowadays, people
seem too busy to take time to be happy. I can honestly admit that I am guilty of doing the same thing. I did not seem to realize it until I listened to the song in class... I find it next to impossible to be able to think about a pop song in such depth as I did with the Pachelbel piece. (R153. Asian. male. middle 20s).

Summary and discussion

There is abundant evidence in this chapter that respondents in this study experienced a variety of freeing and enabling capacities with both mass and elite culture. In a manner similar to that employed in the previous chapter, the following section will consider the ways that both elite and mass culture are thought in the literature to be good – in the sense of facilitating freedom or ability – and how these compare with what respondents reported in this study.

Represents a valid and vital form of truth. Respondents in this study offered a number of examples of culture – especially elite culture – as enabling them to experience such universal truths as beauty and a spiritual sort of transcendence. In each of these cases, they talked about their experience as qualitatively different from other cultural experiences. They spoke of beauty in terms of purity or perfection. and their sublime or transcendent experiences were equated with an abstract sense of unity or harmony with the world. Although this kind of experience was not necessarily limited to elite culture, in this study the likelihood of it occurring was considerably greater with elite than with mass culture.

Contributes to the understanding of human possibilities. A second kind of cultural experience that respondents in this study discussed was related to the understanding of human possibilities through self-expression, self-development, or
attunement with the experiential moment. There were a surprising number of references to the idea of being well-rounded, specifically in relation to experiencing elite culture events. The characteristic of well-roundedness was not really related to the quality of experience *per se*, but its mention does support the idea of self-development and the elite discourse ideal of a broad education or preparation for adult citizenship.

Although their descriptions suggested a somewhat less abstract, and perhaps somewhat less intense, experience than culture as a form of truth, respondents' discussions of self-expression and attunement with the experiential moment also were qualitatively different than other enabling cultural experiences in this study. Respondents mentioned occasions when they were able to express themselves and their feelings by, for example, playing a musical instrument or dancing. They also talked about getting absorbed in paintings, Broadway musicals, and both classical and popular music. When it came to discussing emotional intensity and the idea of getting caught up in a cultural experience (i.e., attunement with the experiential moment), respondents referred to both elite and mass culture.

Before continuing on, this seems to be an appropriate place to consider three questions related to the quality of the experiences discussed above. The first question is whether there is a qualitative difference in respondents' experiences between live and mediated works or events. The second question is whether there is a qualitative difference between active participation and spectatorship (or listenership). And the third question is whether there is a qualitative difference in experience depending upon prior cultural exposure or training.
With regard to the first question, about live versus mediated experience, this study seems to suggest that – as one might expect – the intensity of experience probably is likely to be greater when the work or event is not mediated. As an example, one respondent says he was very impressed by a group of paintings at a museum and so purchased some prints of them to hang at home.

*They hung there for about three months before I realized that the prints couldn't capture the emotion and meaning of the originals, so I took them down.* (R030, Caucasian, Male, born 1974)

Additionally, in this study those experiences that were described to be particularly intense were more often live performances or unmediated works of art. Nonetheless, in the case of music, especially, there was evidence in this study that even in recorded form, these experiences can be quite emotionally intense for respondents.

In the second question regarding whether there is a qualitative difference between active participation and spectatorship, the answer suggested by the data is a qualified yes. However, this appears to be because the experiences are, for the most part, not the same. As Barthes (1977) once noted, listening to music and playing music are two completely different art forms. In these data, the idea of self-expression was more often mentioned in relation to active participation while attunement and transcendence were more often related to spectatorship. Thus, while they are largely dissimilar experiences, one does not appear to be inherently better, more enabling, or more valued than the other.

And finally, the third question, whether there is a qualitative difference in experience depending upon prior cultural exposure or training, seems to be supported in this study but is not conclusive. The data collected for this study did not include
comprehensive background information regarding cultural socialization but many respondents who reported particularly intense experiences also indicated early exposure or training in their interviews.

**Contributes to democracy when part of the education and lives of citizens.** There was no evidence in this study with regard to this claim.

**Represents freedom of choice.** Again, there was no mention of this claim by informants in this study.

**Builds community through shared knowledge and experience.** In keeping with mass discourse literature, there were a number of cultural experiences – both mass and elite – that were considered by respondents as enabling because they permitted social connections with family and friends. As with the concept of being well-rounded above, this kind of experience is qualitatively different because it is based in concrete material relations. The cultural experiences or events mentioned in this case are essentially interchangeable: the reason they are meaningful to respondents is not because of any inherent quality in the experience itself but rather because they provide an opportunity for social interaction.

**Provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression.** The term relaxation was invoked by respondents many times in their descriptions of the freeing or enabling capacities of mass and elite culture. Respondents’ frequent mention of relaxation as escape could arguably be used to support the mass culture critiques found in the literature. The reader will recall, for example, the words of Van den Haag:

> The total effect of mass culture is to distract people from lives which are so boring that they generate obsession with escape. Yet because mass culture creates addiction to prefabricated experience, most people are
deprived of the remaining possibilities of autonomous growth and enrichment, and their lives become ever more boring and unfulfilled. (Van den Haag, 1959, p. 60)

What’s more, in this study, the concept of relaxation as escape was mentioned almost exclusively in connection with mass culture experiences.

The use of the term relaxation as inner peace appears in the data to be relatively similar in quality of experience to the discussions of beauty and transcendence. And for what it’s worth, in this study, the conceptualization of relaxation as peace and serenity was used almost exclusively in elite culture settings.
CHAPTER 7
FOUR CASE STUDIES

In order to further consider the complexities in cultural reception among individuals, I have chosen four informants to look at more closely through case studies. The informants were selected because of the richness of their interviews and the insight these interviews offer to the understanding of people's engagements with material culture.

By considering multiple cultural experiences of a single person it is possible to gain a clearer sense of the context in which these experiences take place. And across the four respondents we can see how issues of race, class, family life, gender, and sexual orientation come into play – as well as how these individuals are able on occasion to transcend these constraints.

In prior chapters I have referred to respondents by number in order to fully protect their identities and to convey the breadth of responses throughout. In this chapter I have assigned pseudonyms to the four individuals in order to assist the reader. I believe the assignment of names helps to personalize the respondents' stories and lends a greater coherency to the four cases.
Case Study #1: Adam

The first case study is based on Respondent 097 (R097), whom I shall call Adam. He is a Caucasian male in his middle twenties. At the time he was growing up, his father was a lawyer and his mother was a nurse.

Return of the Jedi. As a youth, Adam recalled, he had all the “Star Wars” action figures. He talked in his interview about the third movie released in the series, which is called “Return of the Jedi.”

I can remember only asking for “Star Wars” stuff for birthdays and Christmas. I felt like I knew the characters and needed to see the movie to make them “come to life.” I was too young to enjoy the first two episodes of “Star Wars,” but now I was around eight and old enough to understand. I went to see this movie with both of my real parents (which was a first) and was allowed to ask one of my friends to go. I brought along my favorite “Star Wars” figurines so I could compare them to the “real” thing. It felt like it was a perfect night.

Adam said the plot “revolves around a dark force that is destroying a galaxy and a rebel force trying to stop this destruction. The special effects are amazing, the story is in depth, and the characters are familiar.” He made a number of observations, and as he proceeded through the interview, Adam realized that what on the surface was a very happy occasion also was embedded in a complex social arrangement, which “made the movie both important and bittersweet.” He reflected on the movie and the circumstances surrounding it:

The uglier the creature the more evil or feared it was. The more evil the creature was the more powerful it became... I remember “role playing” after this movie. I always wanted to be a bad guy. Darth Vader was my favorite... Are all creatures that are not beautiful or cute either evil or idiotic? I felt like a “creature” when I was young. I was fat, stuttered and had buckteeth. I felt less than human. As I grew my looks improved. The better you look, the better you are.
This movie seemed to bring parents and children together. I know that most of my friends went to this movie with their parents. I didn’t usually get to go to movies with my parents, but for some reason they let me go to this one... I wondered why I wasn’t allowed to go to more movies with mom and dad. I thought that all movies had to be basically the same, they just chose not to take me with them. I always have felt left out of family affairs. It made me very curious and question why? I felt unwanted. I still do... It was upsetting that there had to be a “special occasion” to have a happy family outing.

Movies are like parents, they tell us what is good or bad and right or wrong. My morals and ideals came more from movies than parental guidance. I know what society feels is acceptable. I have not really gotten a clearly defined answer of “right” or “wrong.” Movies can give answers. I allow media products to shape my life rather than my parents. After all, the media (movies) were there for me when my parents weren’t.

Art Gallery. The first elite culture experience Adam talked about was a sixth grade field trip to the local art gallery. “I wasn’t very excited about going to the exhibit,” he said. “I was excited about getting out of a whole day of classes.” In his description of the cultural product itself, Adam said, “It seemed like the exhibit was abstract. I remember one of the largest pieces was a replica of a high school bathroom. I didn’t know much about art at the time but was interested in why and how people defined such things as art.”

In most of his interview, Adam focused on an issue other than the artwork itself. He talked instead about sexual orientation and his recollection of being “fascinated with the tour guide.”

A very attractive college student led the tour. He had some of his work displayed in the exhibit. I was embarrassed because a lot of my classmates were being obnoxious and because I found this guy so attractive... Until that point I had believed that “faggots” were bad and a freak of nature that would burn in hell. My mother is very religious; she told me that she would die (literally) if one of her kids were “funny.”
I told her [I was gay] when I was 23; she did not die. Children are taught at an early age what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to live. The most harmful part is that a definition of all the bad things that would happen if they do “bad” things is given to them. There were some obvious homosexuals at the exhibit. My classmates would make rude comments about and to them. I think the work lost some of its meaning by the class’s preoccupation with sexuality. I didn’t want to say anything bad about the people there, but I did just to fit in.

This was the first time he really thought about his own sexuality, Adam said.

I always knew I was different but I didn’t know why... I’ve never been into “normal” activities. I was a cheerleader instead of a football player. I was in the poetry club instead of a member of the basketball team. All of these things got me labeled as a homosexual, which I denied... If you are an artist, you automatically have to be gay. A lot of different occupations give you labels: gay, straight, feminine, masculine; they all have a place in different professions. Men are supposed to do manly things, women are supposed to do womanly things. In my experience art is stereotyped as feminine. I don’t think I am a feminine guy but all the things I love are labeled as feminine.

Adam struggled with such labels and was confused about who determined them. He related this to art in noting that “you need to be open-minded to see messages in art (hidden and not).”

We are led to believe what is popular is true. Until recently a lot of issues have gone unanswered due to lack of information and fear. I expect a lot from people; I don’t think an open mind is too much to expect. I’ve seen what art could do for people and vowed that I would not be as ignorant as my obnoxious roommates. People need to strive to better themselves. If you refuse to adjust any or all of your opinions you may be robbing yourself and others of an enjoyable experience.

When my classmates were making fun of the art students I could tell that my mother [who was a chaperone that day] was wondering why I wasn’t joining in. I think she knew I was gay but chose not to believe it. Making a child feel like a freak is a very dangerous thing. I was lucky. I always knew that I was important even if I liked boys. I didn’t get that thought from my parents. I got it by educating myself.

I can no longer go back to my small hometown without being harassed. Are things really changing? People in class say that views are changing...
and people are more accepting. I wish those who say this could spend a
day in my life and see just how open and receptive people are. Nobody
can say what is true because that truth only applies to that person. The
only truth I know is that liberation existed in my life after I stopped lying
to myself and started facing my life.

MTV. As a young teen Adam often watched MTV. He described the conditions
that led to him watching the popular cable channel.

I didn’t really relate to a lot of the programs that were on television.
MTV seemed to always have “teen issues” along with news (the news
that mattered to me) and the latest fads in fashion and music. I’ve loved
music and MTV made it a legitimate part of television. Sometimes the
way an artist looked or acted was more important than how he/she sang.
My mother didn’t approve of music videos or the programs on MTV. She
believed most of the topics and videos were sexual in nature. I can
remember turning down the volume during Madonna videos so she
wouldn’t know what was on. My brothers were both much older than I
was and too “mature” for MTV. Watching MTV was taboo in my
household and made me feel like I was doing something wrong every
time I turned it on; that’s probably why I liked it so much.

At the time I felt offended that adults found MTV unimportant and
“evil.” I felt like I was doing something immoral... I developed a real
love for videos that had socially unacceptable topics. Madonna was
especially impressive. I have always been a sexual person and MTV
gave me a chance to live out my sexuality without actually being sexually
active... I needed guidance. What I didn’t get from authority figures I
got from television. It was very beneficial in making me feel more
comfortable with myself. [It made] me feel more educated about
different aspects of different people’s lives.

While mostly helpful, Adam said that sometimes the MTV programs compounded
problems by reinforcing existing assumptions or prejudices, such as with
homosexuality.

Sometimes MTV would find a “stereotypical” gay man and promote him
as the norm. He would be extremely feminine, flamboyant, and maybe
even HIV-positive. People often assume that these things apply to me
even though none of them do. Every show that is “gay” related is on the
same track. The most flamboyant and outrageous are focused on making
it seem like all gays are “abnormal.” I don’t fit the popular stereotype. I
sometimes feel I don’t fit a gay or straight category. Is there an “other”? 
The Scarlet Letter. During his first year in college Adam took a theatre class and chose as one of his requirements to see a production of “The Scarlet Letter.” Unfortunately, he had the flu and was not feeling well. In addition, he said, he “didn’t like feeling like I was the least educated person in the auditorium.”

It made me realize that the arts are an important part of this society and to deny them is to lose a vital part of a good education. The less educated we are about any subject the less power we have. If we just go through life doing “normal” day-to-day activities it becomes hard to understand elite culture... I feel that when I was less educated (before college) I just went with the flow. Today I question authority and ask why things “are the way they are.”

With productions like this we leave our everyday lives and connect the situations with our own trials and torments. Sometimes we get answers; sometimes we come to realizations... I wished I had been going to theatrical productions for years. I could have enjoyed this part of our culture and shared my experiences with others. It made me calm down, relax, and enjoy life. Theatre made me forget that I hated my roommate, hated [this city], and had a minimum wage, dead-end job... I never expected to be moved by something like this: it was an unexpected treat.

Talking about this production in his interview also led Adam to draw connections between his personal interests, social stereotypes, and sexual orientation.

If you are male and artistic it is sometimes assumed that you are gay. I don’t mind this assumption but find it an unnecessary stereotype that keeps many “would be” theatre lovers away from it. I don’t consider my sexual preference as a determining factor for my love of the arts. I would rather be called “gay” than not participate in something because of fear.

Adam concluded this interview with an eloquent commentary in which he talked about his feelings of identification with the protagonist of the story. He elaborated as well on the concept of stereotypes and labeling. A portion of this commentary follows:

I have shared a “letter” with Hester Prynne. When I “came out” to my family I was branded as the “gay one.” I felt like everywhere I went people could not see through the “gay label.” I think the reason “The Scarlet Letter” has stuck with me through so many years is because I
knew when I did finally reveal my sexual preference I would be dealing with many of the same issues. Every week the class discusses what ideas are “real” to them; most of the time I do not agree. In Hester’s society she had been deemed an adulterer, not by God but a group of people that decided what she was doing deserved humiliation and punishment. It is only human nature to think that a certain “truth” exists for all of us. I believe that modern society gives different letters to all the “bad” attributes of human existence. F for fat, Q for queer, U for ugly, S for stupid. Labels do not have to be neatly sewn pieces of cloth attached to our clothes; our minds do the labeling quite nicely.

**Rent.** Adam and a friend went to see a touring production of the Broadway musical “Rent.” He admitted, “I am not a huge fan of musicals and wondered if I was going to be able to sit through the whole thing without being bored or becoming restless.” He needn’t have been concerned. “The music and stage were interesting and kept my attention the whole night,” he said.

The musical revolved around young adults having some (not all) of the same problems I am dealing with. I could hear some of the crowd gasp when two men sang a love song to each other and then embraced in a kiss... The girls in front of us kept saying “are they fags?” about the performers.

In his interview Adam wondered how a musical that is so controversial could become so popular. He offered this answer:

The reason “Rent” has become so popular is because of the music and the message, not to mention the talented performers with amazing voices. It takes convincing to make “unimportant” topics important. “Rent” depicts everyday life. It doesn’t hold back to save some people from being offended. People see that this does happen and is real. I put my lifestyle on the line everyday for criticism. “Rent” makes something important like homosexuality seem everyday and natural. It made my life feel normal and appreciated.

“Rent” made people that usually just hear or see certain topics on the news see them as something real... All the talk of the homeless, dying, and sick is fine but until someone does something meaningful about it what does it really matter... We all know that these things are happening but nothing seems to change. The years just roll by with no signs of hope
or change... I walk by donation boxes and don't think twice about them. I have so much but am never thankful... It takes an award-winning musical to make AIDS an important issue. Even though I am gay I think (thought) that people with the disease were dirty and didn't matter...

[The production] opened my heart and soul.

**Scream 3.** Adam talked about this recent horror movie. He had seen the previous two movies in this series and eagerly awaited this one.

I have always adored horror films. When I watched the first "Scream" I knew that someone had finally put real thought and effort into making a "scary movie" that would last. This "Scream" was no different. I felt as one with the audience; we all knew when to laugh, when to jump, and what the little hidden puns meant. This movie gave my friends and I something to talk about for a couple of hours... This was a smart ["Beverly Hills 90210"] type of movie targeted to a younger audience. Some of the stuff is a little over the top, but it is all done to make fun of the seriousness of everyday life. I'm glad to be a part of a movie that was clearly made for my generation... My generation does matter and people want to know what we think and what we are doing. The movie helped me realize my individual importance. No matter what I do my actions will matter to someone. Maybe my life isn't empty and shallow.

This commentary is interesting. I think, because Adam expressed here how pleased he was that the entertainment industry was paying attention to what he liked: that he was part of something important. But, of course, he missed the point that the entertainment industry is interested in him and his generation only because of their disposable income waiting to be spent on movies such as this. At any rate, as he proceeded through his interview he became increasingly reflexive. His closing commentary reflected a newly awakened consciousness about the movie.

*I found in doing this interview that I too have become “hardened.” Why was I only concerned with what was being said about the lives of my peers by studio executives and not concerned about the violence and horror this movie represents? This realization did not come until late in the interview when I had to ask myself, “Do I even remember who got killed, how, and why?” The answer is that I don’t remember how it happened or why, nor do I care. People are expected to view violence as
part of our everyday life. When I described this movie to my mother I
told her that it was really smart and funny. When she asked if it was
bloody and scary I said “not really.” Looking back I realize that my
statement was not true. It was bloody, it did have violence, and I didn’t
even notice it... Maybe the reason we are becoming desensitized toward
acts of violence or other emotionally related acts is because we know (or
have been taught) that this is a “part of life” or maybe we are becoming
numb because of talk shows like [Jerry] Springer or movies like
“Scream 3” that focus on sensationalism instead of pain.

Case Study #2: Brian

This is Respondent 105 (R105), whom I am calling Brian. He is a Caucasian
male in his middle twenties. When he was growing up, Brian’s father was in retail sales
and his mother was a decorator. They were divorced when he was quite young.

GI Joe Action Figures. Brian said that as a boy of five or six he was “obsessed”
with G.I. Joe and had not only the action figures but also all “the gear.” including a
motorized battle tank, special guns, and accessories.

All of my friends and I would take our G.I. Joes to school and make forts
and military bases out of dirt and sticks just like in the advertisements.

He speculated on what the attraction to these toys was at the time.

I think I liked the orderliness of the toys and the way I could set them up
in an orderly manner to imitate the action that they would do if they were
real. The toys would allow me to create a little world, all of which I was
in control, and could change or keep the same at any time. They made
me stable myself, as I grew up in an unstable home with a life that
changed all the time. I was moved from my dad’s to my mother’s [house]
every other weekend.

With the simulation of war machines and the internal aggression I had
from my home life, I loved the simulation of war that I could produce.
The world of G.I. Joe action figures was one where the good guys always
won, and I liked that.

Art Lessons. Brian said he showed a lot of artistic talent as a child, drawing
landscapes and still life by the age of five and people and animals “with great accuracy”
by the age of seven. He received a scholarship to take classes at an art school, and his parents enrolled him thinking it would allow him to further develop his talent. He described the conditions of his exposure:

"Every Saturday morning I would have to wake up and miss Saturday cartoons to go to [the art school]. There I was exposed to art by instruction, and this was not how I had learned to produce art. It was a great experience and I enjoyed all the art media that were available to me, but I was very unsure of learning art by instruction since I had taught myself how to produce art. I learned how to produce works of art on a structured curriculum. I believe this hurt me as a young and talented artist because I was no longer drawing or painting what I wanted to paint, but what someone else wanted me to.

The lessons had their pluses and minuses.

I never liked my teacher at [the art school] until I went to art classes in high school. There I excelled in the arts and crafts programs and won many prizes for work I had done. It was then that I realized the importance of the instruction that I had received [earlier]... Because of the intense attitude given by the instructor about art and its importance in our lives as artists, she drove me to not like art like I had when I was learning at my own pace and making what I wanted to. I now understand why I did not draw or paint for a number of years after attending. I did not enjoy the competitiveness I found in an art school because it takes away from the true joy and personal experience received from the producing of art. I am someone who likes to make myself happy with my art, not other people, because I know the meaning of the art and they don't. If that makes me selfish, then so be it.

The negative outcome of going to [art school] was that my confidence in the art I had done prior to the instruction I received there was hindered and I feel that there is a gap in the progression of my art because of this. My parents had been divorced since I was two, and art was a good escape from the problems that came with divorce. I feel that because of the gap and setback in my art as a child due to the [art school] instruction, I had a harder time dealing with the problems from the divorce. When I enrolled in art classes at the high school and when my friends started to notice and praise my work. I really started to fill in that gap left from my childhood... By expressing myself through art I was able to embrace who I was and my importance within society. I learned to use the instruction to my advantage and make some great art that emulated my deepest emotions. I guess it is the basics that allowed me to
unleash the artist inside of me. It was a mixture of my old style as a child and the education I received at the art school that allowed me to develop this greater understanding of myself and the art I was producing and why.

Saxophone. Brian said he first began playing saxophone in the sixth grade because his best friend at the time was a good sax player and he wanted to try it, too.

I took a few lessons before entering middle school band and liked the type of music I was learning. When I got to band I found a less enthusiastic feeling for the sax because of the songs we had to play... I love music and how music makes me feel. My love for music like Pink Floyd and Jimmy Buffett comes from my father and through his conditioning I have developed a taste for music. My lessons allowed me to gain a greater understanding of what bands like Pink Floyd were trying to convey through music. That understanding drew me closer to the music that I liked. I didn't enjoy learning any of the music that we had to play in school band. I had no interest in it because it was unfamiliar to me and it was overall boring to play and horrible to listen to.

Still, Brian said, he stuck with the saxophone for a number of years because he really did like learning to play it.

The sax as a "power tool" allowed me to play songs that made me feel a specific way and that is a pleasurable experience... The beautiful sounds that the sax makes personally seduce me and allow me to feel in ways I never have before - good and bad. When I would play music in my lessons I could play anything that I wanted to and this made the experience all the better. When I played for school I felt limited in what I could feel and I hated it.

The saxophone was useful in several ways. It represented a "type of therapy" that helped Brian to cope with the difficulties of his parents' divorce and the problems of growing up.

Being able to harness the power of an instrument takes a great deal of patience and dedication. These two attributes are hard to find in a teenager and the sax was able to help me adapt these attributes to my life as I was growing up. The complexity of the keys and the brass relate in a funny way to the complexity of my life. To be able to control the sax as a
complex instrument gave me confidence in controlling the complexities within my life at the time. With my parents being divorced I had a hard childhood growing up with a normal family. The sax was able to help me figure out how to control the difficult things in life.

As a teenager who had Mr. Brady as a father figure (because I could always count on him being fair when I had trouble and on time when I needed an adult there) I found pleasure in creating worlds for me, myself, and I... I think music is the basis of pure and raw emotion expressed in a productive manner. The sax helped me in understanding this.

**Brady Bunch.** Brian watched reruns of the television show “The Brady Bunch” every day after school before he had to go to sports practices.

*I liked this show for its entertainment value. It was not all that funny, but I did like the fact that I never had to do much work in figuring out the plots of each story. I also liked it because I could relate to the Brady boys. All lived with their father after a divorce. As I watched the show I would wish that my father was as understanding of me as Mr. Brady was of his boys. It also upset me to see how much time Mr. Brady was able to spend with the boys... The morals that the show used to teach its young audience were narrated by the father and he was always fair and never mean when he had to lay down the law.*

Brian said he was angry and jealous that his life was not like the Brady boys’. He also was hurt that the show didn’t address the real issues of divorce. In looking back on the situation, Brian expressed concern about the false representation of life the media often portray. “The Brady Bunch” was guilty of misrepresenting the lives of broken families:

*Showing the American people that it is okay to be divorced because there will not be any aftermath is wrong. But it is at the same time a powerful message to the American people. I do not know the statistics, but I am sure the divorce rate rose in the years that the Brady Bunch was first aired and in subsequent years during the re-runs.*

**Dave Matthews Band.** The first time Brian heard the music of the Dave Matthews Band was during his freshman year in college. He was with some of his best friends as well as some new friends.
I was listening to the music so intently that I ignored everyone else in the room for the whole night. I kept playing the disc over and over again. You would have thought that everyone would have been upset at my new obsession, but everyone was just as content listening to the disc over and over again as well. To this day, six years later, I still do not go a day without listening to at least one of the songs if not the whole disc.

Brian wondered why he was so “addicted” to this music and why the feeling was “almost like a drug” that relaxed him every time he listened to it. It’s not the lyrics, he said – most of the time he didn’t understand them anyway.

It is the feeling and emotion that emanates from music that attracts all of us to music. This music is relaxing yet different every time you listen to it, and this makes it so great to listen to all the time. I enjoy a good addiction when it is something other than drugs and alcohol. Going through college and working a full-time job at the same time is very stressful. This music is my relaxation in my day. It helps me to clear my head of all the stress in my life and concentrate on the emotion that I get from it.

He recalled how this music helped him through a difficult time and how it was part of the fabric of his life.

The girls that I hung out with my freshman year that I first listened to Dave with were killed in a car accident that same year in Pennsylvania. The Dave Matthews Band was my connection to them still and that helped me deal with their deaths. Every time I listen to the Dave Matthews Band I am reminded of what I used to have. I loved one of the girls very much and had a great relationship with her. It hurt to listen to Dave but it also allowed me not to let go. A few years later I started dating another amazing girl who loves the Dave Matthews Band just as much as I do, and with his last album she and I have many songs that relate to one another.

Brian said he had a therapeutic relationship with music – especially this music.

Not only do I look to the music to remind me of the past and to help me relax during the present, but I listen to it for inspiration for the future. I had gone to psychologists before and this is the best answer for anyone who needs a little help with their life. I think all music can be a form of inspirational therapy. It allows you to open up and let out feelings that would otherwise be rejected in a time of truly needing them. Because I
take things so seriously sometimes I am always looking for a form of relaxation. I found these three things: 1) snowboarding, 2) running, 3) music... There is nothing better than getting that chill of goose bumps when driving down the street on a sunny warm spring day with the top down on my Jeep and listening to the Dave Matthews Band. I lose myself in the endless emotion that filters through my body. I think the goose bumps are all that emotion trying to explode out of me.

Michelangelo. Brian explained that a year ago he had traveled to Italy, and while in Florence he went to a gallery where he saw "The Holy Family with Saint John as a Child," by Michelangelo. As an art history minor in college, he had studied much of the well-known art from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries, and this trip gave him an opportunity to see many of those works firsthand. He said, though, that he had neither seen nor studied this particular work before.

As I was in the gallery, I had been amazed at the collection of art that I was being exposed to, but it was after I had been looking at "The Birth of Venus" (1485) by Sandro Botticelli that I saw Michelangelo's work. It was the shape of the painting that first attracted me, but after I had looked at the painting for a minute the colors seemed to make the figures in the painting come alive... It is the colors and the overwhelming and powerful presence within the style of the painting that captures the attention of the viewer. With this power the painting has the ability to speak to the ones who believe and the power to transform the nonbelievers into faithful devotees of God.

For Brian the form and the content of this work came together in a way that resulted in the kind of transcendent experience discussed in the previous chapter. And in this case, because the content was religious, viewing this artwork truly became a religious experience.

It is not until I had studied history of art that I started to believe the word of God. It is not that I totally did not believe, but I was skeptical when I was younger, and after studying these works that are all so heavily infested with religion did I start to believe in the messages within the paintings. [This] was a religious experience, one of overwhelming
power... If more people had been affected by this or other paintings like this one, then we may have more artists in the world. For someone to have seen this painting the way I did, they would understand the power behind it and how that power can have the ability to change individuals for the better. It is the painting's ability to take the viewer inside the painting and show the true meaning to that individual and what it should mean to the individual because everyone will interpret it and gain something different from it...

Brian explained how this encounter with art was a life-altering experience.

It was the intent of Michelangelo to grab his audience like this so he could convey his message. It worked for me. I had a rough time the first couple of years in college. I had gotten mixed up in drugs and was close to becoming, if not already, an alcoholic because of the fraternity that I had joined. It was after I had gotten out where I needed a better sense of direction in my life. I am now more humble in my work but at the same time a better artist because of the inspiration I got. It was able to make me realize that I was in need of help from the ones that truly loved me the most.

I had a hard time when I was younger and this painting and the way I was affected by it helped me to understand what was truly important for my well-being. I now realize that I never want to become a bum. I want to influence people around me just as Michelangelo has done with his artwork. I am inspired to become a better person, a good father, a good husband, etc. - all because of the hour I spent with this painting.

Van Gogh. Brian spoke in a relatively sophisticated way about the slides of Van Gogh’s artwork that were shown in class. He related the artist’s work to the material conditions of his life.

He [Van Gogh] frantically painted his subjects, and through this he embraced the idea and ideal of Impressionist painting... The beauty within the structured confusion of his brush strokes is how I relate to my experience. With a divorced family life one finds structure between two households and then the confusion in trying to understand the beliefs and morals of each household. Applying both morals to my life made me crazy and maybe Van Gogh expressed his confusion at his life by structuring his mess of brush stokes.
Case Study #3: Michael

Respondent 106 (R106), to whom I am referring as Michael, is an African American male in his mid-twenties. His father was absent when he was growing up and he lived with his sister and mother, who was a postal worker.

**Nutcracker.** Like many school children, Michael was taken to see “The Nutcracker” ballet when he was in elementary school. He said that it was an opportunity for the students to be exposed to high culture, but he wanted to go only because it got him out of school.

*I could never relate to those people prancing on stage in their tight pants. I would just sit and try to get the girl that I liked to pay me some attention or make fun of someone by saying he was one of the dancers on stage. The only interesting thing to me was the theatre itself. The beautifully colored carpet, the gold-colored ornaments, and the paintings on the walls were what I admired.**

Michael talked in some detail about his discomfort during the performance. He simply could not relate to this event. It made him feel inferior and like there was something wrong with him.

*I can always remember feeling like I was poor and would never be able to do what the rich people do or go where they go. Not until I was older did I find out that I did not have to like what rich people liked. I was doing just fine with my life and now I think that a lot of “elite culture” is crap. People with money want to run the show. They think that just because they like something that it is important and the rest of the world should be exposed.*

*While watching these ballets, I always felt smaller when it was over. Smaller because I was poor, Black, and that when the trip was over, the bus would be dropping me off in the ghetto... My teachers (all white and whom at the time I thought were rich) very much enjoyed the show. That made me feel like something was wrong with me.*

*During that time I decided to reject elite culture and even rebel against it. Although I did not know it at the time, I started my path on accepting*
who I was and accepting the environment around me... Becoming a “Pro Black” ten-year-old I had a lot of inspiration that was accompanied without knowledge or direction. Sometimes voicing my opinion or openly referring to white people as “the man” kind of got me in trouble at school and at home.

At the time I felt very offended, and I still do today. The fact that my school system would take inner-city children to things which they cannot relate to and make them feel as outsiders. When attending this kind of stuff, I could almost hear “the man” saying, “My life is better than yours.” I have always wondered why we didn’t see anything that reflected myself as an African American. My school was predominately Black, but it was as if that side of me was being swept under the rug... I knew that the intent of these field trips was to expose us to high culture and that high culture did not include Black people. I now understand that a lot of what I was exposed to was the Euro-centric view of elite culture and as I got older I have gained an Afro-centric point of view that increases my confidence in my heritage.

Michael’s interview is especially interesting because on one hand he talked at length about the barriers of race and class, and on the other hand he invoked uncritically the hegemony of gender roles in society.

_I have eventually come to the conclusion that contemporary dance in elite culture is just not my thing. Though the dancers are powerful and graceful, it just seems all too feminine to me. I can remember that when I was in high school there was this guy who danced and sang opera. He was actually an intelligent individual, too. He also played on the football team as a wide receiver. But no matter what he did I never could respect him as a masculine male. It wasn’t like he was gay, but no one could respect him that way. I guess this is kind of why I still don’t like that type of stuff._

**Eddie Murphy.** Michael said that comedy was “an important release,” and he enjoyed “laughing as a stress reliever.” His favorite comedian was Eddie Murphy, especially the early Eddie Murphy on “Saturday Night Live” and in the stand-up specials “Raw” and “Delirious.” He first saw “Raw” on video at a friend’s house when he was only ten or eleven.
At the time my friends and I could not even understand all that he was talking about, but we loved to hear him cuss. Curse words were still taboo to us and he used enough for all of us. It was his movies that my friend and I would just sit down and watch all day and never get tired.

Comedy helped Michael bond with his friends and taught him socially acceptable behavior.

In lots of ways comedy and jokes taught me how I was not supposed to act. I grew up in a house full of women (single mom and sister) that I spent a lot of my time with. I thought that maybe some of the mannerisms I had learned at home would look funny to others. After all, I did not want to be called a sissy.

Eddie Murphy often made fun of homosexuals. In his comedy he portrayed them as the butt-shaking, head-bobbing fairies that you so often see mocked. I do not believe that homosexuality is right, but it's not right to make fun of them. Rude jokes and comments making fun of gays often show men how not to act. This sometimes makes heterosexual men feel that they have to over exaggerate their masculine identity for fear of being called a "homo."

I want to be viewed as a man's man: strong, muscular, football player, future husband, and provider. I want my woman to know that I am the leader and she will submit her duties as a wife to me (not her whole personality and life) because she has faith in my abilities as a man/husband/father.

Michael said that because he did not have a father around when he was growing up, he learned how to be a man by watching television.

Stage Play. At some point in his college career, Michael and his girlfriend went to see a play that was put on by a Black cast from a large Midwestern city. He was looking forward to seeing it.

Every year Black plays come to town and every year I wanted to see them. This year I would finally get to see one... I have for so long gone to see stuff that had no Black people in it and I wanted to see something more representative of where I come from.

Unfortunately, he said, "The play was terrible."
First off the music was too loud; it hurt both our ears, but no one else seemed to mind. We thought that it was just us. The acting was terrible along with the plot. The only good thing was the music. These people really had good voices and they sang some great songs. To me, I would have rather gone to church on Sunday and [heard] singing and songs just as good for free. My girlfriend and I just sat there looking at each other, not wanting to say that the play was terrible for fear of hurting one another's feelings.

Michael discussed his effort to resolve why this play seemed to him so terrible yet everyone else in the theatre was having a good time.

Being enrolled in college made me wonder about the education of the majority of the people in the theater. This play sucked big time. I looked around and I saw a few others who had confused looks on their faces that were similar to mine. I then noticed the way people were dressed. I know that the way people dress is not a true indicator of people's intelligence, but I (and my girlfriend) noticed a few things. Most everyone (male and female) was wearing a suit of some kind. I noticed a lot of cheap suits, cheap shoes, and a lot of stuff that was just a fashion "no." Then I looked for the people who had on nicer stuff. I can tell whether a man's suit is expensive or not, but anyway I did not see very many. I began to wonder if this is the beginning of me losing touch with my culture. I know it is wrong to say, but I see clothing as an indicator of money. And from that, I used money as an indicator of education (college). Are people with less education satisfied with less?

He then shared his struggles regarding race and class and his fear of "selling out" in the process of receiving a college education.

When I was young I used to hear about Black people "selling out" after they went to college. This means to trade your Black culture in and exchange it for White culture. I began to wonder if I would be labeled in this category by the time I graduated. The entire time I am watching this play I am not having a good time. I wondered if what I had been exposed to in college led me on a different path... A lot of time when I go home I cannot relate to everyone as well. A lot of my friends (who have not gone to college) tell me that I am beginning to act White. Sometimes I cannot understand some of the slang words because they change so frequently... I do want my education, but I do not want to lose a piece of culture.

He then reflected on his attitudes and questioned the assumptions he had made.
In judging everyone there by their clothing I realize that I was being a bit foolish. Money is not an indicator of education, and it was wrong for me to think that most of the people there were not educated because they liked the play. I was being an @#!hole... I then began to realize what everyone was talking about when they said people sold out. I had almost become one (a sell-out) without even realizing it.

In his concluding commentary Michael explored these issues of race and class in greater depth.

I know that this self-interview has turned from talking about a play to a whole other topic. But for me this issue is very important. The feeling of alienation that I began to feel when I entered college had a real serious impact on my life. In the African American community the issue of a Black man "selling out" is an often-debated topic. I often hear about the scenario of a Black man forgetting where he came from and then marrying a White woman. What makes it unusual for me is that I am a product of interracial marriage. My father is Black and my mother is White. It's not a fact that I try to hide but no one ever knows unless I tell them. My appearance is truly that of a full-blooded African American. Another strange thing is that when my parents got divorced I went to live with my White mother. I think it was because of the fact that we lived in a Black neighborhood that I came out the way I did.

In a lot of ways it was an advantage for me having a White mother and living in the "ghetto." My mother is the epitome of a White person as perceived in the Black community. She was very naive and it wasn't until the Rodney King trial that she finally believed that Blacks were harassed by the police. "You're White." I used to tell her. "Of course you've never been pulled over. That's why you don't know about it." She now has come a long way in her sympathy for Black people. But it was an advantage for me because from her I was able to get a better understanding of how White people view Blacks, especially on certain issues. Granted, one person is a small sample, but a lot of the times it was just the little things. Being raised by a White mom and living in an all Black neighborhood gave me a sense of balance.

Now that I am coming close to graduation, it's time for me to get a job. The scary thing is that most all the people doing the hiring are White. So to impress them and get myself a job I must try to find common ground. This is the dilemma that most Black people who go to college have. It feels almost as if you have to transform yourself to White. That's why I am aspiring to run my own business. Some may wonder what's wrong with that because, after all, I am half White. Well, believe me, no one
treats me as if I am White nor will I ever be accepted as a White person. I think that my eyes have been opened to a whole new way in which to view myself, but will I be accepted in the White community or rejected by the Black? ... People who are not educated do not know what I go through, and I am not too sure White people believe it.

Glass Exhibition. Michael said that he was required for a college class to go a local museum and look at this exhibition of work by a well-known glass artist. “As always,” he said, he didn’t really want to go see something of this nature, but it was a requirement, so he went. He remembered that he had been to this same museum for a class trip when he was in kindergarten and had not been back since. Additionally, he was not looking forward to spending time in the museum because it was a beautiful day outside. Given this context, Michael’s subsequent discussion of the work is all the more intriguing.

The artist’s work was incredible. I had never seen such magnificent glass sculptures of that magnitude. These glass sculptures were enormous. Some of them stretched from the ceiling to the floor. While observing these pieces I was amazed at the creativity and skill involved in making one of the almost half-ton works. Never before had I enjoyed something like this so much. I was blown away. For the class assignment we were asked to write a two-page paper about one sculpture of our choice. I chose one that had a lot of colors in it. While observing it for almost twenty minutes, the piece seemed to come alive. It is best described as though someone poured a bucket of ocean water from the ceiling, and you are looking at it. Although I didn’t tell anyone, I really wanted to go back and see the exhibit again.

Michael was able to connect this experience back to his youth and how his interests were directed away from art as he grew older.

When I was a young child I was a really good drawer. I was even in an elementary school which had advanced courses in art. When I got older I got away from drawing and painting because I wanted to play sports.
[The exhibition] was kind of useful because it made me reflect and see where I began to stray from my artistic talent. I now see this clearly so I will understand how to deal with my children in this area.

He talked about how his artistic ability and interest were stifled.

I am still seeking for a way to express my spirituality and my own self through an artistic format. I am still unsuccessful. I lost my artistic ability when I went into the sixth grade. At that time I was enrolled in a strict alternative school which emphasized academics. While there, artwork and drawing was not encouraged (nor permitted during class). Coming from an artistic elementary school this was like putting a muzzle on my hands. I now found that I could not express myself. After a while I began to stop drawing at all together. I believe that was a crucial time for my artistic development that was taken away.

This museum experience renewed Michael’s interest in art and he wondered what role education played in his interest and appreciation of the arts – and how it is connected to class.

Art has never been able to capture my imagination like it does now... Was it because I was for the most part not “educated”? Educated in the sense that between elementary school and college I had not been taught how to appreciate art. Now that I am in my fifth year of college I have taken a number of classes on art and art appreciation. Could it be that if the rest of the world were taught to appreciate art there would be much better art to view? It seems that right now art appreciation is reserved for the educated and the elite class. In a way I feel like I’ve been trained to appreciate art by the same elite culture that pays for my education. Sometimes I feel that I cannot relate to my former self because my mind has been shaped by the university to think a certain way. I wonder if I even really like some stuff or do I just like it because it fits into what I have been taught is nice... I feel that if I had not become an educated man that I would not have the same appreciation for art that I do now. It shows me that I need to educate myself apart from what the university teaches me so that I will not become one of the manipulated zombie masses. In a way I want everyone to get an education. I feel that an intellectually stimulated mind will have a greater acceptance and liking for the arts. I feel that I must go out into the world and experience as much as I can because I don’t know fully what I like and don’t like.

Michael described his experience with this work of art in spiritual terms.
I am still amazed that this work had such an impact on me... Looking at this work helped me understand the passion that goes into art. Before I usually saw artists and thought they were just corny. I can now look at them and have admiration for the ability to create a work that you can't put into words. This work is truly elite culture. The works seem to have an air of holiness to them almost like they were something you'd only see in church. I wish someday to see this artist and his works again. I had one of the most inspirational times of my college experience. It was if I grew spiritually in that one hour.

In his concluding commentary for this interview, Michael again connected back to his youth and summarized the importance of this more recent experience.

Going to the museum was a great experience for me and a turning point for my life. Like I stated before, I had not been to the museum since I was a child. It showed me that there is another world out there that I have yet to discover, the world of art. When I was little (about age 8 or 9) I would go to the public library and look at books of art. At that time I did not understand that you had to use oil paints to do certain things. As a young-minded child I was looking at books of Renoir, Picasso, and Monet. And I was trying to draw their paintings with a No. 2 pencil and some crayons. Needless to say, it did not work. At the time my young mind did not even know the caliber of the artist or the painting. I was a child and I could not distinguish one piece from another. They were all the same to me. I did not look at them and wonder what the artist was trying to portray. Whatever was on the canvas was what I saw. I did not notice how the strokes were laid out nor did I know the history of the artists.

This is the way that I feel much of society views art. The only thing they see is what's on the canvas. Like children they do not distinguish what the painter or sculptor is trying to say. It's just there to them; either it's pretty or it's not. As an educated person, part of my education required that I take a few courses in art. Because of this I am now able to look at a piece and be captured by the imagination and creativity of the artist. I wish that every single person had an appreciation for the arts.

In this instance elite culture has had a great effect on me. Finally I have come to the conclusion that everyone should enjoy art. I also feel that the only way to enjoy art in a spiritual sense is to become a more intelligent person. In this way a person is able to understand his/her role in the piece and how it truly affects their minds. I feel that most people, especially if they have not come from an elite background, will never get art if they do not try to.
**Redman Concert.** Michael was a big fan of rap and hip-hop and was as “excited as a little boy” to hear Redman in concert. He said that he had knee surgery just two days before but that didn’t stop him from going to hear one of his favorite rappers. He talked about the importance of rap and hip-hop (he used the terms interchangeably) music to him.

*I love rap music. I love it because anyone who has skills can do it. Because of that, the heroes are people who could very well be your next-door neighbor. Rap gives individuals a way to express and relate their surroundings, questions or confusions, in a way that raises people’s consciousness and awareness of young people’s problems. Many outside the African American community do not understand the power of rap music. If anyone wants to know how society is viewed by young Black males, they should listen to what these artists are saying in their music.*

*There is a very conscious level of understanding in rap. It’s almost the way slaves would sing songs like “Wade on the Water.” The slave masters thought that they were just singing when, in fact, they were telling all individuals who could hear how to escape. That’s hip-hop to me, telling individuals who can hear that there is another way out of poverty and the lies that the devil tells (Satan, not the White man).*

Michael said that listening to rap music brought him closer to people of his generation and raised his consciousness of everyday life. It helped him to be a better person.

*I remember listening to an album that had a lot of spiritual content in it. The rapper was explaining how the devil will lie to us and make us think we don’t need God. The music behind his voice was like a marching theme and it was some real powerful stuff. I did not turn my life over solely because of that, but it did get me thinking. The rapper described a lot of what I was doing and thinking. The funny thing was that I didn’t even realize he was talking about me until I did some self-reflecting.*

Michael acknowledged that some rap does degrade women, promote drugs, and convey other negative messages. Although he used to listen to that type of rap, he said he doesn’t any more.
I would sometimes be led to believe that some of these rappers really knew what they were talking about and I was often led astray... Thanks to rappers like Redman I have had the opportunity to gain freedom from mental slavery. I have also been inspired to educate myself outside what I learn in college.

Finally, Michael talked about the spread of rap and hip-hop outside of the African American community.

More and more White middle class American youth are craving rap music. The trend is that Black rappers would cater to this market and come up with more mainstream dancing type of songs. Will Smith, "Big Will," is a prime example of this kind of rapper. Every year he drops an album and every year he goes platinum. Every year he wins best rapper or best rap song or album of the year. What's funny is that I do not know any Black people with a Will Smith CD. This is a prime example of the buying power of this new (non-Black) market. Being a Black male and having a Will Smith CD is a joke. My friends and I will make fun of each other by saying something like "you probably listen to your Big Willie-style CD in the car." That's like a Black person in the '60s listening to Pat Boone instead of Little Richard. I think that everyone should listen to the reality rap that focuses on everyday life.

Springer. Finally, Michael talked about a segment of the "Jerry Springer Show" that was presented in class as one of the media events. What is particularly interesting about his comments is that in contrast to most of the respondents who said they felt the show was totally unbelievable, Michael offered an alternative perspective.

When watching "Springer" guests I feel that I am much better off than those people and I am much more appreciative of having a college education. It also makes me feel bad because where I am from I see many Springer episodes daily and I know for sure that the things on his show happen daily whether or not it's staged.
Case Study #4: Jennifer

Respondent 183 (R183) is a Caucasian female in her middle twenties, whom I am calling Jennifer. While she was growing up her mother was a social worker and her father was in real estate. They divorced when she was ten or eleven years old.

Ballet Lessons. Her mother enrolled her in ballet classes when Jennifer was five years old. She explained her enthusiasm for the activity and how helpful it has been throughout her life.

I remember feeling beautiful, graceful, excited, joyous, and curious. I felt full of life when I went to dance classes. The night before a ballet class, I couldn’t sleep. I would be dressed and ready in my ballet outfit hours before I was to leave the house for my class. My grandmother died of cancer around the same time I started taking ballet. I can look back on my ballet classes now and realize how much of a stress relief they were for me at that time.

Looking back on myself now. I realize how empowering dance has been throughout my life. I have used it to deal with stress, to celebrate, to relieve anger and frustrations, to feel in control, to feel joy, and to have spirituality. I was able to get a sense of my own body and its movements, which turned out to be very empowering for me.

Nonetheless. Jennifer expressed confusion about the body image issue that is associated with ballet dancers. While ballet had been a positive experience for her, she realized that it can create problematic standards as well.

I think that ballet can set an unrealistic body image for young girls. I’ve realized that if a girl doesn’t have the ideal type of body for this style of dance, she will be discouraged from continuing to train. I’ve known and heard of other dancers who have become bulimic and/or anorexic in order to maintain the strict physical standards set for ballet dancers. The physical standards set for ballet dancers that often lead to eating disorders and a poor body image are almost identical to the beauty standards set by the media. These unrealistic physical standards. I feel, are often a way of keeping women from feeling empowered in our society.
Dance for Jennifer was empowerment, but she was acutely aware of the thin line between what she experienced as a unity of body and spirit and the tendency to divide this whole that results in others' objectification of women's bodies.

*I see so many images of women in the media being exploited, raped, or physically abused. I have had people come into my life who have wanted to treat my body as a commodity. For example, I had a professor try to get me to pose nude for one of his Internet web sites. He called me just about every day trying to persuade me to do this, even though I had told him that I was not interested. I have had friends who have been raped or were sexually molested when they were children. When I take all of this into consideration, I am overcome with rage and powerlessness. I feel that when I dance, I have control over what this society would like me not to feel control over. That this is my own body. I feel above all the mixed messages that society bombards me with when I dance. Nobody can touch me when I am in my element.*

Jennifer talked freely about the feelings she has had about dance throughout her life. She described how she had experienced both the materially oriented benefits as well as the kind of transcendence discussed in the previous chapter.

*From the time I began dancing, I usually have felt an overwhelming sense of joy. I grew up going to church, but I rarely ever feel spirituality like I do when I dance.*

*When I have gone through periods in my life when I haven't danced, I am greatly affected. When I lack this form of expression in my life, my body feels unhealthy, my relationships turn sour, and I can't think as clearly. I have tears in my eyes right now thinking about how positive dance has been for me throughout my life.*

*Nintendo.* Jennifer recalled how when Nintendo first came out everyone she went to school with knew about it, and “everyone was begging for one for Christmas.” Her brother was one of the lucky kids to get one of the video game systems for Christmas the year it hit the mainstream. She explained:
Hand-eye coordination was essential. We would stare at the TV all day long in attempts to beat the games we were playing. Because my family was one of the first families to own a Nintendo, we always had other kids from the neighborhood banging on our door. We used to have groups of kids at our house playing video games.

Jennifer said that she was confused by the male orientation of video games. She wondered why her parents bought Nintendo specifically for her brother and not for both of them and why all the characters in the games were male.

I thought I had to act tough like the boys to be cool. Video games seemed like a more masculine thing to do. I had to work to beat the boys I was playing, to prove a point. I thought it wasn’t as cool to have “girly” characteristics... I think I was taught that if you wanted to have fun you had to act like boys.

And, she said, she did have fun playing Nintendo, especially since she could do this activity by herself if her friends weren’t around. When she was playing Nintendo she felt “excited, engaged, challenged, privileged, competitive.”

All of these emotions were usually present when I sat down to play video games. There is a reason why so many kids love to play them. These feelings kept me coming back.

All in all, while Nintendo did have some negative qualities, it mostly represented a positive experience for Jennifer. It was fun. and she had a lot of good memories thinking back to those days of her childhood.

Feminine Hygiene Commercials. Jennifer talked about her embarrassment growing up when feminine hygiene commercials would come on television.

I thought the commercials were extremely offensive because of how uncomfortable they made me feel... My past experiences leading up to these TV commercials led me to believe that I should feel ashamed of my body. I was quite young when I began feeling embarrassed by these commercials. Looking back, I am surprised at how quickly society influenced me into shame. A friend of mine argued that these commercials were useful because they let us women know what products
to buy. They allowed us to be more informed consumers. At the age of eleven, I totally disagreed. I knew I could figure it out for myself.

As long as we are told and then believe that we should alienate ourselves from our own bodies by these large corporations, we will be victims of their set power structures. Why are words like “hygiene” and “sanitary” – which imply that a woman’s body is unclean – acceptable in our society? Why do I have to sit through commercials that tell me to be ashamed?

She struggled with the discrepancy in treatment of men’s and women’s bodies in society.

Why should I have to feel embarrassed about my body while the male body is put on a pedestal? Women are the ones with the miraculous bodies – able to carry life within them. And society wants to tell me the male body is better, while I should be ashamed of mine? I don’t think so.

Jennifer says she was resolving this problem for herself by realizing that these large corporations exist for the sole purpose of profiting off women’s reproductive bodies.

I don’t have to be ashamed of my body, or spend my money on the products from those large corporations. The more I accept my reproductive body, and my monthly period, the more I feel comfortable within myself... I am so much more in touch with my inner voice now. I listen to myself – not society – on how I should respond to my body’s needs. I am so much more loving and accepting of my body. All because I learned to see the reality.

Morreau. Jennifer worked with a world-renowned movement artist (known here as Morreau) and also saw him perform as part of a residency program at her university. She was “amazed,” “overwhelmed,” and “humbled.” Jennifer clearly had several transcendent experiences as a participant and audience member throughout this series of events.

I talked about this experience with everyone who was willing to listen. I grew because I was able to work with Morreau. Several times I was moved to tears because the experience was so incredible. He taught us one of his pieces ... where he represented good and evil with either side
of his body using his hands. The piece was set to a Russian choir, which actually sounded like monks. Morreau’s piece illustrated the fight between good and evil and, in the end, good wins. If I had never experienced spirituality before, I did the day I was able to do the piece with him. I felt like I was praying — the work was so beautiful. I was moved.

She described watching Morreau perform one of his classic pieces, which was filled with a lifetime of rich knowledge.

*I was in tears and joined the audience for a standing ovation after Morreau had finished and took his bow. He said to only produce [movement] pieces about things in life that cannot be explained in words. I can’t put into words what I learned from watching him perform this piece, but I can say that I gained a sense of resolution to my current issues with today’s society. There are universal truths to every human being, and he taught me to not overlook them.*

She discussed at length issues related to the quality of artistic experience, the commodification of aesthetics for purposes of profit, and her ethical stance as a performing artist. She echoed the historic arguments of critical scholars such as Adorno from a personal point of view.

*I hope I’m fighting the good fight here. I didn’t go into acting for the best seat at the finest restaurants. I feel I am part of the revolution of artists fed up with the main stream. I have too often been asked why I don’t consider doing film. People will tell me that film is where I’ll get the money. I’m in it for the love, not the money, thank you. I know I would have to compromise my work so much more in the film industry. I say this because the current portrayals of women in Hollywood disgust me.*

In connection with this residency experience, Jennifer talked about the power of art and its role in her own life.

*Morreau understands humanity on a genius level, and his faith in the human spirit transcends the norm. He helped me see the beauty of the human race.*

*Morreau said [performance] is not done correctly unless you take their...*
breath away... The power to move an audience makes me feel immortal and invincible. Women are often taught to feel powerless, and I have discovered the ultimate way of empowering myself. I experience a super-high just about every time I step off the stage – it's a buzz! ... A live audience is a gift.

Discussion

By looking at these four different case studies, we can better see how cultural experiences are understood in the context of the lifespan of a single, albeit young, person. In each case, how these respondents made sense of their experiences – both elite and mass – was framed to large degree by a single struggle for each informant: sexual orientation (Adam), divorce (Brian), race (Michael), or gender (Jennifer). In keeping with the prior analysis chapters, the following section will consider the ways that both elite and mass culture are both enabling and constraining in the lives of these respondents.

Represents valid and vital truth. In these case studies, three of the four respondents clearly described what we would call transcendent, or peak, experiences with works of art. For Brian, this occurred when he viewed the Michelangelo painting, which became, literally, a religious experience for him. Michael also had a transcendent experience in a museum – this time with a large-scale glass sculpture, which he described as coming alive before his eyes. And Jennifer experienced transcendence at least once – possibly multiple times – during her residency with the movement artist Morreau.

Of the four individuals, Adam is the only one who doesn’t talk about any of his experiences in terms of spirituality or transcendence. We know from their interviews
that Brian, Michael, and Jennifer all had arts backgrounds, specifically education or training, at a fairly young age. Adam is the only one who seems not to have had any particular education in the arts; throughout his interviews he mentions only the art gallery field trip and the introductory theater course for which he saw "The Scarlet Letter." One question that is suggested is whether the early exposure to the arts was what made the qualitative difference in experience possible for Brian, Michael, and Jennifer. While there is not enough information to draw any conclusions here, these data do suggest the possibility of some correlation.

**Contributes to the understanding of human possibilities.** In regard to the concept of self-expression, again three of the four informants discussed how they used elite culture as an active means of expression: Brian and Michael drew and created visual artworks. Brian also played the saxophone, and Jennifer danced. Given Adam's statements about how much he was moved in watching the productions of "The Scarlet Letter" and "Rent," it is probably safe to suggest that he as well as the other three had elite culture experiences in which they felt attunement with the experiential moment. Brian's discussion of the Dave Matthews Band also seems to fall into this category.

Consideration of the notion of self-actualization offers an interesting insight in looking at these case studies. Both Michael and Jennifer talked about their struggles to remain true to their authentic selves, to resist "selling out" to the pressures of the system. For Michael, the concern was in remaining true to his ethnic heritage, and he talked about his difficulty in balancing this with his desire for an education and his interest in career success. For Jennifer, the issue was in remaining true to her art and not compromising her work for the sake of money or glamour.
Contributes to democracy. None of these cases really offers any evidence that supports or refutes the elite discourse claim about contributions to democracy.

Represents freedom of choice. Similarly, there is nothing in these four interviews that addresses the fundamental democratic value of freedom of choice.

Builds community through shared knowledge and experiences. In contrast, all four respondents talked of their cultural experiences in social or community terms. Adam, for example, spoke of how “Rent” helped him to see that the problems of people around him were relevant to his own life, and “MTV” gave him information that was important to his generation and connected him with what was happening in the lives of other people his age. Brian spoke of how he and his friends shared a love for the music of the Dave Matthews Band, while Michael relayed in a similar way that he and his friends enjoyed rap music. And finally, Jennifer talked about playing Nintendo with her brother as well as with friends and neighbors.

Provides opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression. Again, there are examples across all four respondents’ interviews related to their experiences with mass and elite culture that support the claim that cultural products provide opportunities for relaxation, pleasure, and self-expression. Movies, music, and stage plays seem particularly well suited to fulfilling this function.

Dulls the mind and spirit. Evidence for this claim is generally lacking throughout these case studies, with one important exception: Adam’s discussion of the movie “Scream.” When he first talked about it, Adam said this was a smart, funny film
that made him feel like he and his generation were important. It was only as he thought about it more, in the process of doing his Sense-Making interview, that he began to consider how he had become desensitized to all the violence represented in it.

Dehumanizes through homogenization, reification, and stereotypes. Again, three of the four respondents talked at length about this concern – in particular the related notion of stereotypes. Adam focused on the problem of how homosexuality is represented in the media and throughout society, Michael was concerned with issues of race and discrimination, and Jennifer numerous times addressed the problem of gender stereotypes. In comparison, Brian came close to this issue only when he spoke about "The Brady Bunch" and his concern that this portrayal of broken families as happy and well-adjusted was misleading.

The case study approach here offers the potential for revealing interesting contradictions, and this can be seen in looking at the hegemony of representation in this instance. In Michael's case, for example, he strongly resists the view of Blacks portrayed in the dominant culture, but when he talks about the "other" with regard to women and gay men, he seems unaware of any alternative to the dominant view. Although we don't see evidence of this kind of contradiction in the other informants' responses, that doesn't deny the possibility in other cases.

Corrupts elite culture. This topic was not addressed in these interviews, except by Jennifer, and even then only indirectly. She stated in her interview regarding the movement artist residency in which she participated that she was part of a revolution of artists fed up with the trend whereby individuals take their talents to the most lucrative
(and glamorous) venues – television and film. She noted how the portrayals of women in Hollywood disgusted her, and how working in the Hollywood (i.e., mass media) environment would require her to compromise her artistry.

**Negatively affects democracy.** Just as above there was no support for the claim that elite culture positively affects democracy, there is no direct evidence in these four cases that mass culture negatively affects democracy.

**Creates undemocratic separation of social classes.** Concern about the elitism of the arts emerged with some force in Michael’s discussion of the “Nutcracker” in particular. He spoke of how he felt he and his inner-city classmates were taken to this event so that they could be made to feel inferior and like outsiders. This issue took on added dimension when in his discussion of the play put on by an all-Black cast, he found himself judging the people in the audience as not well educated based on how they were dressed and the fact that they seemed to enjoy a play that was terrible. This double-standard of a sort represented an ongoing struggle with social class issues.

**Assumes a self-righteous stance in presuming the need to civilize the masses.** Here again, this notion of civilizing the masses is closely tied to the elitism issue above, and of the four case studies, this concern is seen only in Michael’s interviews. He commented with respect to the “Nutcracker” that people with money want to run the show, and just because they think something is important, everyone else has to be exposed to it, too. Perhaps even beyond the issue of civilization generally. Michael’s comments took on a post-colonial flavor in that he resented rich people forcing him to learn about European-based culture when the culture he was most interested in came from Africa.
Maintains systems of arbitrary truths and misrepresentations. Except, perhaps, in the oblique manner described just above, none of these four respondents really offered any evidence to support the mass discourse claim that elite culture maintains arbitrary truths and misrepresentations.

Summary

Thus, to briefly summarize the findings in this chapter, it is clear that across a given respondent’s interviews, there were both good and bad – constraining and enabling – effects of both elite and mass culture. Even when considering a given cultural product or event, there often were both good and bad outcomes, such as with “Scream,” art lessons, rap music, and Nintendo. By using a case study approach to analysis, it was possible to better see and understand the context in which these various experiences were situated and interpreted.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS

For this final chapter, I will be for the first time rising above the basic typology that was outlined in Chapters Two and Three and which served as the guiding framework for the three analysis chapters. Instead, I will be returning to the four research questions put forth in the methodology chapter in order to guide discussion from here on out. As previously noted, these questions reflect the capacity of the Sense-Making Methodology to attend to issues of structure, agency, and mediation and thus to transcend the polarized set of literatures that make up the elite and mass discourses. Here, then, are the questions from Chapter Four that now will guide discussion of the conclusions of this study:

1. How does structure influence people's sense-making of their experiences with elite and mass culture?

2. How does agency fit into people's sense-making of their experiences with elite and mass culture?

3. How do people's sense-making experiences with elite and mass culture mediate contradictions between structure and agency?

4. When seen through the framework of the three questions above, how does the portrait of people's sense-making of elite and mass culture line up with the themes of the current literatures in elite and mass discourses?
Upon discussion of these four questions, the final section will then reconsider people’s real sense-making experiences and assess the need to rise above the current polarizations of the elite and mass discourses.

**Research Question #1**

The first question that this study asked was “How does structure influence people’s sense-making of their experiences with elite and mass culture?” The short answer, this study suggests, is that structure influences people in that they often make sense of their cultural experiences the way they are “supposed” to. That is, they make sense of their experiences in elite and mass culture as they are socialized or acculturated to do, as the media, their peers, and family tell them. This answer is in keeping with the structurally oriented critical research and scholarship that argues for the domination of demographics, life style, and media messages. People make sense of cultural experiences as they are taught to do so and, especially important, as they are in the habit of doing so.

In this study respondents talked at length about constraints of stereotypes related to race, gender, and sexual orientation. Concerns related to the imposing constraints of representation in the media – and to a lesser extent in the arts – was an important theme that emerged from the data. The following excerpts illustrate this issue and how it is manifested in the concrete reality of respondents’ lives:

> Media represent to the general public an ideal – and everyday women such as myself feel we are expected to look that way to be considered sexy. (R006, Caucasian, female, middle 20s)
I was able to look at the men on stage and, for the first time, internalize the idea that other boys and men had been feeding me: that men who dance and dress in tights and puffy shirts are sissies. (R127, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

I was aware that MacGyver, my super-hero, didn't look like anyone in my family. However, the villains on his show at that time did look like my family members. I was starting to wonder if we (Asians) were evil people. (R159, Asian, female, early 20s)

I always associated art museums with boring culture, so I did not want to learn about it. Also, my uncle is gay, so I was afraid that other students might realize this when his boyfriend was giving us a tour of the museum. Males in elite art are often associated with homosexuality. (R025, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

The association of the arts with feminine qualities, and the general affirmation of the male and negation of the female in society, manifested itself as a significant constraint for many respondents:

I was uneasy at first when I enjoyed a couple of the songs, and more comfortable when I disliked other songs. I think this is partly due to the fact that I have trained myself to associate musicals with being feminine and I may have been ashamed to identify with a couple of the songs. (R038, White, male, early 20s)

Peer pressure reached the highest peak during my years in high school, and I had to choose between what I wanted and what my friends wanted... It was as if I had a label on my head that said "Band Geek." (R026, White, female, early 20s)

The class constraint in this study was translated here as elitism and surfaced only in relation to elite culture. In addition to stereotypes in the media that represented arts institutions and their patrons as elitist, many respondents in this study offered first-hand experience of being made to feel inferior and unworthy to participate in and enjoy elite culture. Here, again, this constraint was expressed in very material terms:
I was offended by the intensity of the surrounding audience staring at my brother and his friend. They were not bothering anyone, but yet I could see people pointing and whispering just because they looked different. (R034, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

[At the museum] some people were looking at me with snooty looks, like I was just a kid and shouldn't be there. I think I let people like that get to me too much and it turns me off to different elite cultural products because of the negative stigma of snobby, wealthy people being the only ones to have the right to enjoy elite culture. (R094. Caucasian, female, early 20s)

And, finally, there emerged in the data a constraint related to the general moral content of cultural products that was not present in the elite and mass discourse literatures. This phenomenon most often surfaced in discussions related to mass culture experiences.

By trying to be a cool adult like the guys on “Cheers,” I ruined two good years of my teenage life... The media make drinking seem so cool and so common it’s no wonder kids want to try it. (R120. White, male, early 20s)

It’s funny that we’re all taught “equality” from grade school up. I always thought that was how it was, but I’m being shown something completely different on TV. If you don’t compete, you’ll always be a loser or someone without significance. (R094. White, female, early 20s)

Research Question #2

The second question that this study asked was “How does agency fit into people’s sense-making of their experiences with elite and mass culture?” Again, the short answer this study suggests is that, indeed, sometimes individuals experience culture in a way that is freeing or enabling. In other words, this study offers a number of examples where informants exhibited agency or the ability to respond to a cultural
situation in a way that opened up future possibilities. There is ample evidence here, then, that supports the liberal theory claims of both the elite and mass discourses.

What is of particular interest regarding the freeing or enabling outcomes in this study, however, is the clear qualitative differences that emerged in respondents' discussions of their cultural experiences. The differences appear to be not so much between elite and mass culture \textit{per se}, but rather between what might be described as material versus immaterial\textsuperscript{87} experiences. Used in this way, material refers to cultural experiences that are concretely situated in material reality, while immaterial refers to those that are more abstract and based on raw emotion or spirituality. There is significant evidence in the data of a distinct qualitative difference between these two levels of experience. Respondents experienced both mass and elite culture at the material level, while experience at the immaterial level was far more likely to occur within elite culture than mass culture. Additionally, it should be pointed out, there was no such qualitative distinction with regard to the constraints discussed in Question #1 – all constraints were experienced at the material level, regardless of their association with elite or mass culture.

\textbf{Material experiences with culture.} As stated above, for some cultural experiences where the outcome was good (i.e., freeing or enabling), there was no discernable difference between elite and mass culture at the material level of experience. So, for example, when respondents spoke of experiences contributing to community-building, their references were to the concrete, material conditions of

\textsuperscript{87} I use the term immaterial here realizing that it is inadequate to describe the phenomenon in question, but lacking any better alternative.
existence. There was no difference between elite and mass culture events because these occasions merely served as an opportunity for social interaction; they were, in some sense, interchangeable.

"The Muppet Show" was a bonding time for my family. It was a family ritual. (R086, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

Every Christmas my family would attend "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. The idea going to the show was to put my brother and me in the Christmas spirit. The whole experience was a tradition. (R028, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Similarly, when respondents talked about the experience of elite culture as helping them to become more well-rounded, the enabling aspect of the experience was grounded in the material objective of variety.

One example of the qualitative difference in the way respondents talked about their experiences with elite and mass culture emerged in a very interesting way: two different uses of the word relaxation. One way that relaxation was discussed was in terms of “relaxation as escape.” Respondents’ descriptions of this quality of relaxing experience were, as above, very much based in the conditions of their everyday lives.

I watch television to relax after a long day: it’s like I shut off my brain when I turn the television on. I work so hard at school, and I have two jobs that I work. I must say that it is nice to be able to sit down and not think of anything at all. (R089, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

The movie helped me by making me laugh. It produced an outlet for two hours. I could escape reality and just laugh. My life is pretty stressful, so getting away from things for a while is good for me. (R014, Caucasian, female, early 20s)
While this description of relaxation as escape was far more prevalent in respondents' discussions of mass culture experience, it also could be found with respect to some elite culture experiences.

Immaterial experiences with culture. The second usage of relaxation in discussion by respondents in this study referred to a qualitatively different kind of experience than the kind above. In their references to this kind of relaxation, respondents spoke of it in terms of peacefulness and renewal. Descriptions of this kind of relaxation were more abstract and often referred to the notion of raw emotion or to inner peace and serenity.

During the symphony this peaceful calmness came over me... I think it was the first time that peace came over me since the death of my father. (R 159, Asian, female, early 20s)

[The classical music] was so soothing and relaxing that it seemed to make all of my headaches go away... The expression "listen with your heart" applied at the moment. It was so enjoyable and it aroused so many emotions. I felt like I had a total body massage without one hand touching me. (R096, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

At the immaterial level of experience for respondents in this study, there were no constraints, only freeing and enabling capacities. In addition to relaxation as peace and renewal, there were numerous descriptions of respondents' highly intense experiences related to universal truths such as beauty and transcendence. And while there was not an a priori distinction between elite and mass culture, the likelihood of this kind of qualitatively different experience was significantly greater within elite culture.

[The music] was very emotional but in a happy kind of way. In fact this piece was so enjoyable that it almost made me cry – a happy cry that is.
like one would cry at a wedding. This music was very elegant and if I were to only have one word to describe it, it would be beautiful. (R001, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

The art seemed to transcend its cultural text and speak to me from a universal point of view... We are all human. We are all united by the mere fact of the same species. We all experience pain and sorrow and can relate to beauty and art in some way no matter what our background is. (R156, Caucasian, male, early 20s)

At a somewhat less abstracted (less immaterial) level of experience in this study, were enabling experiences related to self-expression and experiential attunement. The degree of difference expressed between these levels was considerably less than the difference between material and immaterial. The distinction seems to mirror that in the elite discourse literature of Chapter Two between art as a valid and vital form of truth (i.e., beauty and transcendence) and art as contributing to the understanding of human possibilities through self-expression, self-development, and experiential attunement. While, again, these enabling capacities were more likely in the data to be found in conjunction with elite culture experiences, there were some mass culture references, particularly with regard to experiential attunement and the intense emotional impacts of popular music.

It was my very early high school years when I became enraptured with playing the guitar... It helped me get acquainted with my inner and subconscious self. It helped me explore my deepest emotions. (R141/R174, White, male, early 20s)

At the close of the final scene, tears were rolling down my face. I found myself with my mouth hanging wide open in amazement. The musical had me so engrossed that my surroundings were invisible. (R006, White, female, middle 20s)
Research Question #3

The third question that this study asked was “How do people’s sense-making experiences with elite and mass culture mediate contradictions between structure and agency?” As discussed above, there is evidence in this study that respondents often were imposed upon by structural constraints to interpret their cultural experiences in certain ways. There also is evidence in this study that at times the respondents acted freely in their interpretations of cultural experiences. Thus, both the critical theory and liberal theory claims are supported in part.

However, as this study indicates, respondents often neither experienced culture as freeing or enabling nor according to their socialization. In other words, they clearly struggled to establish a feasible framework of understanding. There is, for example, evidence in the previous chapter that how these particular four respondents made sense of their experiences – both elite and mass – was framed to large degree by a single struggle for each: sexual orientation for Adam, divorce for Brian, race for Michael, and gender for Jennifer.

In addition this study suggests that when individuals did not respond to cultural situations as they were socialized or acculturated there was some kind of intervention – what I would call “critical intervention” – that caused the respondent to break with, override, or at least struggle with the so-called natural or expected response. This study suggests at least three possible intervening factors that have the potential to mediate the relationship between lifestyle or socialization and actual experience. These include:
1) engagement with someone, such as a parent or teacher, who fostered critical thinking; or 2) some experience or incident that empowered the respondent’s own voice; and 3) in the case of elite culture, early positive exposure or experiences.

So, for example, in this study, with images that were seen as objectifying women, many female respondents struggled between interpreting messages in dominant ways and resisting them. This may have been because they somehow knew intuitively that the view presented was inaccurate; they had previously felt they were treated as an object and therefore knew from experience that this view was a deceit; or they had been made aware of the issue by parents, peers, or other critical voices (including the class that served as the base for this study) and were sensitized to the possibility of alternative interpretations. Similarly, with other stereotyping related to race, class, and gender roles, individuals would be likely to go along with the dominant message unless they had reason not to, such as prior personal experience that taught them the dominant view was not accurate or some critical voice that called their attention to the possibility for other framings.

The images that I was watching were really doing a lot more damage than good for me... I guess that made me feel like I was worthless if I didn’t have the looks. It didn’t matter what was inside... I didn’t realize the true problem of this until just recently. It makes me feel like I’ve been brainwashed for so many years without realizing where those low self-esteem feelings came from (or what contributed to them). (R094, White, female, early 20s)

I really hated the fact that there were no black characters [on this television show] and the small parts there were with Blacks had cops involved for crimes. When I would go into the store the sales lady would follow me around and some white friends that I had at the time thought that these things were not true. On the other hand, if they would think there was some sort of crime or something, they would ask. "Was the
The fact that they would think anything negative had to involve a Black person was upsetting. (R011, Black, female, early 20s)

I found that this event opened my eyes to the theater... Culturally it is taboo for men to enjoy things that may be "arty." My mother forcing me to go allowed me to go and not feel that I was violating my masculinity. (R019, White, male, middle 20s)

We also see in this study that the dominant view of elite culture as exclusionary often is reinforced by personal experience. Indeed, there are so many negative constraints and overwhelming barriers to the arts discussed by respondents, one might ask why anyone in their right mind would ever want to be involved in elite culture? Respondents in this study revealed how they had little if any exposure to the arts, even in school. They noted from personal experience that the arts seem to be for snobs and people who think they’re better than everyone else; there are peer pressures and media stereotypes that say the arts are effeminate and not cool; one has to make a real effort to seek out elite culture, whereas mass culture is pervasive; and arts events are not only assumed to be boring but they’re expensive to attend.

Yet, as above, we see in this study that despite the incredible pressure to go along with the dominant notion of the arts as effeminate, not cool, and exclusionary, there is significant evidence that many respondents resisted this view. Why? The reason some people make the effort to overcome the dominant view, this study suggests, is that elite culture has the potential to offer a meaningful, possibly transforming, experience that is personally rewarding. There are numerous examples in this study where respondents said they were caught off-guard or drawn into an elite culture experience in a way that was surprising to them. Respondents said, for example:
When the music started I was dumb-founded. I didn’t know that the instruments and people could make such lovely sounds. (R159, Asian, female, early 20s)

At first I was just wandering around [the museum], then I began to notice particulars about certain pieces and I started looking closer. I found myself standing and staring at certain pieces for long periods of time. (R175, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

When the music played I found myself enjoying it. That wasn’t supposed to happen. The music moved me. It played with my emotions. It took me to highs and lows. (R113, Caucasian, male, middle 20s)

Although walking around the art museum was fun and I was really enjoying it, I couldn’t figure out why this particular photograph jumped out at me and appealed to me so much... I felt peace and wonder... To just stand there looking at this beautiful picture of nothing but nature seemed so real and so calming. (R158, Caucasian, female, early 20s)

Elite culture in particular it seems, then, has a capacity to interrupt the normal routine of individuals. Thus, for some respondents in this study, a work of art was so compelling that it forced the individual to break from his or her normal habit, or routine acceptance of the dominant view, and to experience culture in a way that empowered his or her own voice or perspective in opposition to that dominant view.

Research Question #4

The fourth question that this study asked was “When seen through the framework of the three questions above, how does the portrait of people’s sense-making of elite and mass culture line up with the themes of the current literatures in the elite and mass discourses?” As suggested above, some of the literature of the elite and mass discourses matches up some of the time with the way respondents in this study made sense of their elite and mass culture experiences. However, overall, the highly
polarized nature of the literature outlined in Chapters Two and Three remains inadequate to account for the complexity and contradiction found in the data of this study.

In the two single-product analyses in this study, for example, we see a complexity of response that does not easily fall into either the elite or mass discourses.

The first two examples are from the in-class presentation of Pachelbel’s Canon:

*I now understand why this song always makes my mother cry. It is just so beautiful... My eyes became teary a few times while listening and my struggle would probably be whether or not I would react this way out of sadness because we now live three hours away from each other – or of happiness due to the realization that I do not make it home often enough and how much she means to me.* (R031. White, female, early 20s)

*This piece reminds me of every wedding that I have ever been to... I relate this piece to my own life through that I love the song but hate the meaning behind it. I am very anti-marriage right now in my life and this song has a strong bond to every wedding ceremony.* (R028. White, female, early 20s).

And the second two examples are from the in-class viewing of the Victoria’s Secret fashion show:

*Maybe I am supporting something that is looked at as degrading to women, but I like their bras and panties. I think they sell beautiful things, and who cares if they are on beautiful people?* (R121. White, female, early 20s)

*On one side, women feel desirable and attractive which gives them more confidence, but on the other side, women are conforming to these negative stereotypes of the importance of beauty in women. Either way, women seem to lose out in the end.* (R182, White, male, early 20s)
Another excellent illustration of the complexity of responses in this study is offered by case study informant Jennifer\textsuperscript{88}, who discussed the potential for both constraining and enabling capacities in dance. First, she noted how dance was enabling:

\textit{Looking back on myself now, I realize how empowering dance has been throughout my life. I have used it to deal with stress, to celebrate, to relieve anger and frustrations, to feel in control, to feel joy, and to have spirituality. I was able to get a sense of my own body and its movements, which turned out to be very empowering for me.}

Then she acknowledged that while dance had been a positive experience for her, the possibility of constraint also was a clear and present danger:

\textit{The physical standards set for ballet dancers that often lead to eating disorders and a poor body image are almost identical to the beauty standards set by the media. These unrealistic physical standards, I feel, are often a way of keeping women from feeling empowered in our society.}

And finally, this example by case study informant Michael\textsuperscript{89}, who having just had a transcendent experience with a work of visual art, then contemplates how the structures of education and class create a fundamental tension for his understanding of the role of art in his life.

Art has never been able to capture my imagination like it does now... Was it because I was for the most part not "educated"? Educated in the sense that between elementary school and college I had not been taught how to appreciate art. Now that I am in my fifth year of college I have taken a number of classes on art and art appreciation. Could it be that if the rest of the world were taught to appreciate art there would be much better art to view? It seems that right now art appreciation is reserved for the educated and the elite class. In a way I feel like I’ve been trained to appreciate art by the same elite culture that pays for my education. Sometimes I feel that I cannot relate to my former self because my mind has been shaped by the university to think a certain way. I wonder if I even really like some stuff or do I just like it because it fits into what I

\textsuperscript{88} Jennifer is Respondent 183 (R183, Caucasian, female, middle 20s).

\textsuperscript{89} Michael is Respondent 106 (R106, Black, male, middle 20s).
have been taught is nice... I feel that if I had not become an educated man that I would not have the same appreciation for art that I do now. It shows me that I need to educate myself apart from what the university teaches me so that I will not become one of the manipulated zombie masses. In a way I want everyone to get an education. I feel that an intellectually stimulated mind will have a greater acceptance and liking for the arts. I feel that I must go out into the world and experience as much as I can because I don’t know fully what I like and don’t like.

**Finale as Prelude**

We can see from the discussion above that in this study no single respondent and the interpretation of no single product were static across time and space. Neither were most cultural experiences all good nor all bad. Rather, this study reveals that an extraordinary play of forces – structure and agency as well as the hypothesized positive and negative values found in the elite and mass discourse literatures – were present together as individuals made sense of their cultural experiences.

What is clear in this study is that to understand how individuals really make sense of cultural experiences demands freeing oneself of the polarities of the prior literature. In order to truly consider individuals’ experiences we must rise above the over-simplified assumptions that mass culture is bad and elite culture is good – or alternatively that elite culture is bad and mass culture is good. We also must overcome the traditional conceptualizations of human beings as either having the capacity to act freely as rational agents or as being acted upon by the structural constraints into which the individual is socialized or acculturated. Whether one transcends the elite and mass discourses by using the Sense-Making Methodology, as in this study, or by whatever methodology it is done, the need to do so is clear.
This study is only a beginning and much remains to be done. With regard to future research and scholarship, there still are many unanswered questions and a number of theoretical issues that have been insufficiently addressed in the document at hand. Among those concerns that should be considered more fully in subsequent work are the following:

- How does one conceptualize “structure” such that it does not evolve into a highly abstract term as one moves through the literature and into data analysis? In other words, how does one deal with the notion of structure as one moves from theory to practice?

- How does one more thoroughly conceptualize the explicit choice of the terms “mass culture” and “popular culture” such that these relate more specifically to the conceptualization of structure and appropriately address the implicit set of assumptions regarding modernity and its value?

- How does one conceptualize the contemporary media environment, given its pervasiveness and the extent to which it merges mass with elite culture? How does one reconcile modern and postmodern theories of the media?

- How does one conceptualize democracy such that it is more effectively addressed analytically within the context of everyday life?

- How does one conceptualize aesthetic experience vis-à-vis conceptualizations of structure, of play, of freedom, and of “something more”?

- And finally, how can we actually talk about the polarizations in the literature without ourselves falling into the struggle between?

These are by no means easy issues to resolve, but by continuing to grapple conceptually with the contradictions of various theoretical points of view and by testing these ideas against empirical data such as those presented in this study, we can begin to unravel the complex relationships between audiences, cultural products and institutions, and society as a whole.
APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE OF INSTRUMENT USED FOR DATA SOURCE 1
STUDENT SENSE-MAKING SELF-INTERVIEWS FOCUSING ON
IN-CLASS MEDIA EVENTS
©Brenda Dervin, 1999, 2002

1. WHAT HAPPENED FOR YOU?
   * thoughts, conclusions
   * feelings, emotions
   * objections, struggles

2. HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO YOUR LIFE AND YOUR EXPERIENCE?

3. HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO YOUR VIEW OF YOURSELF?
APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF INSTRUMENT USED FOR DATA SOURCE 2
STUDENT SENSE-MAKING SELF-INTERVIEWS FOCUSING ON
A SINGLE CULTURE PRODUCT/EVENT OR GENRE
©Brenda Dervin, 1999, 2002

SECTION 1: SELECTION OF CULTURAL PRODUCT/EVENT
1. NAME OF CULTURAL PRODUCT/EVENT: What specific cultural product/event
   was this?

2. SCALE: would you label this cultural product/event as
   elite : ___1___:___2___:___3___:___4___:___5___:___6___:___7___: popular

3. EXPLANATION: What is it about the cultural product/event that leads you to
   evaluate it on the scale as you did above?

4. CONDITIONS OF EXPOSURE - LEADING UP: Thinking back to when you were
   exposed to this cultural product/event. describe the conditions that led to your exposure.

5. CONDITIONS OF EXPOSURE - DURING: Describe as well conditions that stand
   out in your mind during the exposure.

6. DESCRIPTION OF CULTURAL PRODUCT/EVENT: Describe the cultural
   product as if you were answering a question from a friend who asked “what’s it about?”
   or “what’s it like?”

TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING RESULTS:
1. NAME OF CULTURAL PRODUCT/EVENT:
2. SCALE:
3. EXPLANATION:
4. CONDITIONS OF EXPOSURE-LEADING UP TO:
5. CONDITIONS OF EXPOSURE-DURING:
6. DESCRIPTION OF CULTURAL PRODUCT/EVENT:

207
SECTION 2: SENSE-MAKING ELEMENTS
DID BEING EXPOSED TO THIS CULTURAL PRODUCT/EVENT LEAD YOU TO...
Each of the items below could lead to more than one answer. Some will lead to none. List these separately as, for example, 7.1, 7.2, etc. Each of the different answers to items #7 to #14 is called a Sense-Making element.

7. QUESTIONS, CONFUSIONS, MUDDLES:
What were these?
7.1
7.2
etc.

8. EMOTIONS, FEELINGS:
What were these?
8.1
8.2
etc.

9. CONCLUSIONS, IDEAS, THOUGHTS:
What were these?
9.1
9.2
etc.

10. FEELINGS OF BEING HURT, HINDERED, OR OFFENDED:
What were these?
10.1
10.2
etc.

11. FEELINGS OF BEING HELPED OR FACILITATED:
What were these?
11.1
11.2
etc.

12. SEEING NEGATIVE OUTCOMES:
What were these?
12.1
12.2
etc.

13. SEEING POSITIVE OUTCOMES:
What were these?
13.1
13.2
etc.

14. THOUGHTS ABOUT HOW THIS CULTURAL PRODUCT RELATES TO SOCIETY AND POWER STRUCTURES?
What were these?
14.1
14.2
etc.

15. CHANGES IN HOW SEE THIS CULTURAL PRODUCT/EVENT OVER TIME?
What were these?
15.1
15.2
etc.

TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING RESULTS:
As shown above, but the # of elements in items 7 through 15 can vary from none to any number depending on the interviewee.

SECTION 3: TRIANGULATING ELEMENTS
Each element listed above is to be “triangulated” (as discussed in class) by answering the following questions about it. THERE WILL BE REDUNDANCIES HERE and part of the skill in learning to use the Sense-Making interview approach is to both understand the necessity of the redundancy, and at the same time to learn how to manage it without imposing on the interviewee and without loosing its communicative value. In typing up the interview (or its transcription from audio tape), when something is repetitive, you can simply note in the space that the answer was offered earlier (e.g. “explained in item ___ above)

THE TRIANGULATION QUESTIONS:
a. CONNECT TO LIFE: How did the element connect to your life? Your past experiences?
b. HELPFUL/USEFUL: Was it [the element] helpful or useful in some way? How?
c. HURTFUL/HINDERING/NOT USEFUL: Was it [the element] hurtful or hindering in any way? How?
d. RESOLVED, ANSWERED: Was it [the element] ever resolved/lessened/answered? How?
e. CONNECT TO SOCIETY, POWER STRUCTURES: How did it [the element] connect to society and its power structures?
f. ASPECTS OF CULTURAL PRODUCT THAT RELATE: What specific aspects of the cultural product relate to this Sense-Making element (question, confusion, muddle) and its triangulation?
g. CONNECT TO VIEW SELF: How do your answers for a-f above connect to your view(s) of yourself?

TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING TRIANGULATION OF ELEMENTS:
   a. CONNECT TO LIFE:
   b. HELPFUL/USEFUL:
   c. HURTFUL/HINDERING/NOT USEFUL:
   d. RESOLVED, ANSWERED:
   e. CONNECT TO SOCIETY, POWER STRUCTURES:
   f. ASPECTS OF CULTURAL PRODUCT THAT RELATE:
   g. CONNECT TO VIEW SELF:

SECTION 4: WHO WAS INTERVIEWED & THEIR LOCATION IN TIME-SPACE

DESCRIBE PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED IN TERMS OF:
   a. SELF OR OTHER: Was interviewee self or someone else?
   b. IF OTHER: Relationship to self?
   c. WHERE RESIDE: In what residential zip code interviewee resides?
   d. YEARS EDUCATION: How many years education?
   e. ETHNIC HERITAGE: How interviewee describes own ethnic heritage?
   f. YEAR BORN: In what year was interviewee born?
   g. GENDER: Male or Female
   h. MARITAL STATUS: married, divorced, separated, single
   i. HAVE CHILDREN: no, or yes (if yes, how many?)
   j. KIND OF JOB: What kind of job does interviewee have? Working at what kind of place? (e.g. secretary for a small printing plant)
   k. KIND OF JOB(S) PARENTS HAD WHILE GROWING UP: What kind of jobs did he/she/they have? Working at what kind of places?

TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING RESULTS:
   a. SELF OR OTHER:
   b. IF OTHER:
   c. WHERE RESIDE:
   d. YEARS EDUCATION:
   e. ETHNIC HERITAGE:
   f. YEAR BORN:
   g. GENDER:
   h. MARITAL STATUS:
   i. CHILDREN:
   j. WORKS AT:
   k. PARENTS WORK DURING CHILDHOOD:
APPENDIX C

EXAMPLE OF INSTRUMENT USED FOR DATA SOURCE 3
STUDENT SENSE-MAKING SELF-INTERVIEWS FOCUSING ON
THEIR CULTURAL LIFE-LINES
©Brenda Dervin, 1999, 2002

SECTION 1: CULTURAL PRODUCTS/EVENTS LIFE-LINE
Following the format below, think back over your life and attach to your life-line your recollection of popular and elite cultural products or events which in some way were significant at that time in your life.

DEFINITIONS TO HELP WITH YOUR TASK:

What is an elite versus popular cultural product/event?  The division between elite and popular cultural products/events is subject in part to each person’s interpretation, and to the specific moments in time when the judgments are being made. Jazz was once widely considered pop culture but now some folks consider it elite. Opera was once very much a pop cultural event but now most folks consider it elite. You need to make your own determination. When thinking about products and events be sure to consider:

* concerts, records, tapes, cds
* paintings, sculptures, exhibits
* dance performances, recitals
* plays, theatrical performances
* books, magazines, web sites, television, radio, movies, live performances
* single products/events or a series which are connected in your mind
* your own involvement in arts, crafts, band, orchestra, theater, etc.

What does significant in my life mean?  Again, you must judge for yourself. Significant can be good and/or bad in some way — because something pleased or supported or informed or helped you somehow….or because it intruded on you, misinformed you, disturbed you, or hurt you in some way.

FORMAT FOR DISPLAYING LIFE-LINE with example of display:
Each cultural product/event needs to be attached to a specific chronological age. For remembering purposes you could start with age, calendar year, or even grade in school and then translate it into calendar age for reporting.
If a cultural product/event applies to a period of time (i.e. a number of years), put it down for roughly the first time at which it was "significant" to you. Notice, too, that

- Each product/event is given a unique number combining the age at which you listed it and then a numbering indicating whether it was the first one listed for that age, or second, and so on.
- Each product/event is also evaluated in terms of its positive versus negative impacts then (as you recall feeling then) versus now (as you evaluate it from this vantage point).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>CULTURAL PRODUCTS/EVENTS</th>
<th>IMPACT</th>
<th>THEN</th>
<th>NOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Radio show – Shadow</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Radio show – Stella Dallas</td>
<td>+ -</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Classical music on radio</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Play – Arsenic and Old Lace</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Books – Nancy Drew series</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Nallet</td>
<td>+ -</td>
<td>+ -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Figure ice skating performance</td>
<td>+ -</td>
<td>+ -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

etc. through entire life-line

**SECTION 2: TRIANGULATING EACH CULTURAL PRODUCT/EVENT**

Each cultural product/event is then triangulated using the series of questions below.

Thinking back to that time and how you felt, reacted, were at the time of your first exposure to this cultural product/event:

a. IMPACT: What was the impact (role, importance, significance) of this cultural product/event in your life at that time?
b. HELP: Did it help you (inform, please, facilitate you) in any way? How?  
c. HINDER: Did it hinder you (disturb, intrude, displease you) in any way?  
  How?  
d. SELF THEN: What would you say its connection was to how you thought about yourself at that time?  
e. SOCIETY THEN: What would you say its connection was to how you thought about society at that time?  
f. CONCLUSIONS, IDEAS THEN: Did the cultural product/event lead you to any conclusions, or ideas at that time? What?
g. EMOTIONS, FEELINGS: Did it lead you to any feelings, emotions? 
   What?

h. QUESTIONS, CONFUSIONS: How about questions, confusions? What?

i. CHARACTERISTICS OF PRODUCT/EVENT: Thinking back, what were 
   the particular characteristics of the product/event that stood out for you?

j. TIME RANGE: Until what age would you say this product/event continued 
   to play a "significant" role for you?

k. CHANGES: Looking at your answers above how would you say they would 
   change if you were answering from your vantage point today instead of 
   when you first experienced this cultural product/event?

l. ON THIS SCALE, would you label this cultural product/event as 
   elite: ___1___:___2___:___3___:___4___:___5___:___6___:___7___: popular 

y. EXPLANATION: what is it about the cultural product/event that leads you 
   to evaluate it on the scale as you did above?

TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING TRIANGULATION RESULTS:
   a. IMPACT:
   b. HELP:
   c. HINDER:
   d. SELF:
   e. SOCIETY:
   f. CONCLUSIONS/IDEAS:
   g. EMOTIONS/FEELINGS:
   h. QUESTIONS/CONFUSIONS:
   i. CHARACTERISTICS:
   j. TIME RANGE:
   k. CHANGES:
   l. SCALE:
   m. EXPLANATION

SECTION 3: WHO WAS INTERVIEWED & THEIR LOCATION IN TIME- 
SPACE

DESCRIPT PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED IN TERMS OF:
   l. SELF OR OTHER: Was interviewee self or someone else?
   m. IF OTHER: Relationship to self?
   n. WHERE RESIDE: In what residential zip code interviewee resides?
   o. YEARS EDUCATION: How many years education?
   p. ETHNIC HERITAGE: How interviewee describes own ethnic heritage?
   q. YEAR BORN: In what year was interviewee born?
   r. GENDER: Male or Female
   s. MARITAL STATUS: married, divorced, separated, single
   t. HAVE CHILDREN: no, or yes (if yes, how many?)

213
u. KIND OF JOB: What kind of job does interviewee have? Working at what kind of place? (e.g. secretary for a small printing plant)

v. KIND OF JOB(S) PARENTS HAD WHILE GROWING UP: What kind of jobs did he/she/they have? Working at what kind of places?

TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING RESULTS:

k. SELF OR OTHER:
l. IF OTHER:
m. WHERE RESIDE:
n. YEARS EDUCATION:
o. ETHNIC HERITAGE:
p. YEAR BORN:
q. GENDER:
r. MARITAL STATUS:
s. CHILDREN:
t. WORKS AT:
u. PARENTS WORK DURING CHILDHOOD:


215


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


hooks, b. (1999). Spike Lee doing Malcolm X. In J. Hanson, & D. J. Maxcy (Eds.). Sources: Notable selections in mass media (pp. 314-322). Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill.


Izraeli, D. N. (1993). They have eyes and see not: Gender politics in the Diaspora museum. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 17(4), 515-523.


225


226

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


229


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


Wright, C. R. (1999). The nature and functions of mass communication. In J. Hanson, & D. J. Maxcy (Eds.), *Sources: Notable selections in mass media* (pp. 50-59). Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill.
