Where have all the mothers gone?: Soap opera's replaying of the Oedipal story

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150 word abstract:

Despite recent arguments for the empowering, resistent or feminist content of the soap opera for women viewers, we argue that the dominant tendency is for the American daytime soap opera to re-present a traditional conception of women's psychological development. We explore parallels between the soap opera and both fairy tales and therapy: fairy tales and soaps use analogous permutations of characters and themes to socialize women to the oedipal paradigm; therapy and soaps both articulate relations of (male) dominance and (female) dependence through the situation of contact and their thematic framing. We develop the connections between soap narratives and the commonly accepted, psychoanalytically informed view of women's psyche through the detailed analysis of a recurrent narrative element in soaps -- that of the 'bad' and/or missing mother of young women heroines (in contrast with the mothering of sons) in *The Young and The Restless*. Our conclusions emphasise the repressive over the liberating aspects of the soap opera.

The psychological world of the soap opera

Soap opera, one of the most researched television genres, has been found to supply their women viewers with advice for coping with daily problems of mothering husbands and children (Herzog, 1944; Arnheim, 1943; Katzman, 1972; Turow, 1974). Such analyses focus on the 'realistic' rather than the 'melodramatic' aspect of the genre. While occasionally social problems such as abortion or AIDS are included, it is in a highly personalised fashion. For the American soap operas, with which we are primarily concerned here (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992), the genre is primarily melodramatic (Feuer, 1984), enacting a fantasy world of changing mates, prohibited loves, and the constant vanishing and reappearing of long-lost or newly discovered family members. As Ang (1985) argued, soaps follow a logic of emotional rather than literal realism. A restricted repertoire of narratives is repeatedly enacted by different permutations of the characters. The atmosphere is as if out of time and out of society; a hermetic world. Yet the soap opera is more popular than ever -- the genre with the highest ratings in Britain, heavily viewed throughout Europe, the staple fare of American daytime schedules, and increasingly available around the world with the growth of terrestrial and satellite broadcasting. Rather than being viewed casually, soap opera viewers are highly involved, with loyal fans who discuss episodes with friends, record missed episodes, take lunchtime breaks according to the time of broadcast, and make use of telephone agencies with daily updates (e.g. Ang, 1985; Brown, 1990; Geraghty, 1990; Hobson, 1982). Little empirical evidence has yet been gathered to examine the socializing role of the soap opera for its viewers, although suggestive findings can be seen in Liebes and Katz (1990), Pingree (1979), and Press (1991).

We will address the widespread and considerable constancy in the appeal of the soap opera through a series of interconnected arguments which can be summarised thus. In their conventional content, soaps continue where fairy tales for children leave off, using similar habit-forming contexts to drive home the message -- socializing women to the oedipal paradigm through the different permutations of characters and variations on basic narrative themes. The messages children gain from fairy tales are also those addressed more explicitly through therapy. We suggest that soaps act not unlike psychotherapy sessions as diffusers of psychological accepted wisdom. We identify the structural similarities between soap and therapy in the way that each articulates relations of (male) dominance and (female) dependence through both the situation of contact and their thematic framing.

In order to explore the connection between the narratives of soaps and the psychoanalytically informed, broadly accepted view of women's psyche, the major focus of the paper is an analysis of a recurrent narrative element in soaps -- that of the 'bad' and/or missing mother. This motif is often told as the disappearance, at an early stage, of the mothers of the young women heroines, sometimes followed by a no less unfortunate reappearance once the daughter has grown up. To understand the ideology underlying the asymmetrical mothering of sons and daughters in soaps, we relate psychoanalytic theories of the mother-daughter relationship to the ways in which the soap opera re-presents a traditional conception of women's psychological development, as revealed through missing mother narratives analysed in *The Young and The Restless*.

In our conclusions, we consider the possibilities within the genre for liberating as well as repressive responses to soap opera on the part of women viewers. Our argument that part of the appeal of the soap opera can be explained by tracing how the genre tends to reproduce, popularise, and value psychoanalytic accounts of women's relations with others, does not imply approval of such images or theories; nor do we mean to imply that all the meanings of soaps are captured by such theories, for part of the appeal of the genre also lies in its

ambivalences and openness and hence in the potential for alternative audience responses.

Our analysis is based on the soap opera texts, informed by our previous research on the soap opera viewer (Liebes and Katz, 1990; Livingstone, 1990), although we do not present research on audience interpretations here. Audience research argues for meaning as a process of negotiation between text and reader. Texts attempt to position viewers in a certain, typically hegemonic, manner (see Hall's 'preferred reading', 1980); the hegemonic readings of women's popular culture have been examined by Modleski (1982) and Radway (1984). Through the act of interpretation, viewers attempt to use the openness or polysemy of the text to negotiate readings which satisfy their own purposes and accord with their own experience; while these are sometimes oppositional or subversive in nature (Brown, 1990), they more often accept the normative meanings offered to them (Morley, 1980, making referential readings which, while shifting between modes of fantasising, moralising, etc., nonetheless are not critical of the ideological positioning of the text (Liebes and Katz, 1990). Active viewers, making multiple readings, are not necessarily oppositional or critical of the text (Livingstone, 1990). At present, audience research is in danger of replacing textual analysis by studies of audience response without asking what viewers are responding to. A related danger is that of simplifying our understanding of the text while complexifying our understanding of audiences. Of course, this was a vital move several years ago, when audiences were neglected in favour of texts. Now the time is come for both texts and audiences to be analysed in parallel and in the light of a knowledge of the other, without assuming either complete heterogeneity or homogeneity in audience readings. Only through such an approach can a more sophisticated study of the socializing and cultural impacts of soap opera be undertaken (Liebes and Livingstone, 1994).

Soaps as fairy tales for grown up girls

> "[It] clearly does not refer to the outer world, although it may begin realistically enough and have everyday features woven into it. The unrealistic nature of these tales ... is an important device, because it makes it obvious that the fairy tale's concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner processes taking place in an individual" (Bettelheim, 1976, p.25).

While the genre of soap opera has its own distinctive features (Allen, 1985; Livingstone, 1990), we suggest here that in addressing women's problems of relationship, parenting, identity and sexuality, the soap opera continues the themes that were developed in children's genres, particularly the fairy tale. In terms of narrative structure it is easy to classify fairy tales as concerned with action and adventure (Propp, 1968) and soaps as concerned with emotions and relationships, fairy tales as "closed" narratives and soaps as "open" ones. While undoubtedly many differences between the genres exist, significant similarities have gone hitherto unrecognised. Dilemmas of identity, emotional anxieties, and other personal conflicts do not all reach resolution at the end of childhood. Thus, once grown up women have left behind the period when they may legitimately listen to fairy tales, other forms of popular culture are needed to provide a space where they may deal with these existential problems. Bettelheim argues that "the fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds *his own* solutions, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about him and his inner conflicts at this moment in his life" (1976, p.25). The literature on the active listener and viewer of soap opera similarly started with the idea of how the viewer puts the texts to psychological use, contemplating what the soap says about her inner conflicts (Herzog, 1943). We suggest below that structurally and

psychologically the two genres share a number of important attributes.

Narrative structure: As regards the context of reception: both fairy tales and soaps tend to form a daily habit, both are repetitive and expected to remain so by their audiences in order to meet the continuing agenda of psychological anxieties in the viewer. Just as fairy tales "state the existential dilemma briefly and pointedly" (Bettelheim, 1976, p.8) so as to not confuse matters for the child, soaps consist of a sequence of extremely short scenes, each making a single narrative statement (a boyfriend has left, the mother has reappeared, etc.). Children prefer their favorite tales (selected from a well known, relatively limited repertoire) endlessly retold verbatim. Soaps also repeat the same formulae -- centered around the key crises of birth, identity, love, separation, loss -- albeit with different characters or with the same characters over time. Similarly, reception studies show that readers of romance and soap opera insist on strict adherence to the conventions of the genre and are intolerant of deviations (Hobson, 1982; Radway, 1984).

Characterization: As in the fairy tale, soap characters are typical rather than unique. The main subjects of the soap, whose perspective is adopted by the viewer, are young pretty women and boyishly handsome men, similar in age to the heros and heroines of fairy tales. While other staple types populate the soaps (the reliable father-figure, the grandparental matriarch or patriarch of the soap), the object position, that of the "other", is taken by evil schemers who try to penetrate and destroy the family. These are often the bad, long-time missing mother (e.g. Alexis Carrington of *Dynasty*, Jill Abbott in *The Young and The Restless*). In the fairy tale too the mother is frequently missing: Snow-white and Cinderella's problems start with their wicked step mother; in other tales the heroine's adventure begins when the mother dies. The characters in soap are not as black and white as in fairy tales, for adults prefer more complexity in characterization and because the narrative extends over years. Yet they too personify the oppositional poles of key dualities -- good/bad, kind/selfish, powerful/weak (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992; Livingstone, 1987). As in fairy tales, evil is as omnipresent as virtue, and the struggle between evil and virtue as personified in the characters is vital and endless.

The fifty minute hour: soaps and therapies

If soap opera addresses, though not necessarily resolves, women's emotional agenda of fears and anxieties, we can also make a broader parallel between soap opera and therapy. At the risk of sounding disrespectful, we argue that soaps and therapies may be regarded as two genres of popular culture (White, 1992), addressed mainly to women, with a somewhat similar situation of contact, and rules of playing the game. Both are constant features of a working day -- an instalment in a private story, a liminal moment contained within well-defined limits which interrupts the drudgery of mundane chores; both are voluntarily chosen to serve a symbolic rather than an instrumental function. In both situations, there is a similar focus on childhood experiences, parents, sexual identity, relationships, communication problems, dreams and fears, and so forth. While soap opera is seen by many as harmful to women, seducing them into an escapist habit of reality avoidance, for critics of psychoanalysis, the 'working out' of the real or imagined traumas, and the sometimes lifelong dependence on the therapist, also offers no endpoint, no cure, no escape, indeed may be seen as enslaving (Masson, 1990). While of course, the differences between soap and therapy are many, we explore below some little recognised parallels.

The constitutive rules: The frameworks of both soap and therapy involve a fixed, daily, time slot, extending for a typical 50 minute period. In both cases, it may be argued, the show

goes on regardless of the client's attendance, and there is a price to pay for breaking the rules. In the case of therapy, a fee is still due, and the missed session itself becomes something to be accounted for in the ongoing narrative. Similarly in soap operas, catching up on missed episodes is built into the repetitive structures of the narrative (Modleski, 1982), and there are penalties in terms of lost involvement and not being able to participate in conversations about the soap opera[i]. The patient/viewer herself is, of course, free to quit or to choose another therapist or another soap, only to discover that these too abide by the same rules, and while patients and viewers do leave, both therapy and soap are structured to try and prevent this.

Therapy and soap as gendered forms: The situations both of therapy and soap viewing, with their unequal division of power, are gendered, with the patient or viewer typically being a woman, and the therapist/producer, though often a woman, speaking with the voice of dominant patriarchy. In the case of psychoanalysis (Lakoff and Coyne, 1993; Masson, 1990), the theory is anchored in patriarchy: women are assumed to be inferior biologically, and therefore psychologically and morally; passivity and receptivity are appropriate rather than problematic responses (Scheman, 1988). Opposition to the analyst's interpretation is doomed, being incorporated into the theoretical framework as instances of psychological resistance. In spite of the massive feminist criticism of the psychoanalytic understanding of women's sexuality, the basic premises are still mostly accepted even by more feminist psychologies of gender (e.g. Benjamin, 1990; Chodorow, 1978).

In most genres of popular culture, including soaps, we are dealing with patriarchal texts which assume passive women viewers (Arnheim, 1943; Katzman, 1972; Turow, 1974). The feminist effort to endow a subversive potential to the soap (Ang, 1985; Brown, 1990; Brunsdon, 1993; Geraghty, 1990) has shown some opportunities for oppositional readings against the grain. Studies of viewers show that their interpretations, while these can be diverse and oppositional, are nonetheless heavily constrained by a broadly hegemonic framework (Livingstone, 1990; Liebes and Katz, 1990) -- most statements are referential, accepting the dilemmas faced by the characters and elaborating on their motivations rather than challenging them, enjoying the emphasis on appearance, romance, relationships, and so forth.

Terms of mediation: At a first glance therapy seems the more tightly controlled text. The therapist is discreet in order to make the act of mediation less salient and so to naturalize the interpretation. The mediation of the physically absent producer of a soap opera is even less obtrusive and is scarcely ever acknowledged by the viewer. After all, the viewer, unlike the patient, has not identified herself as having a problem relevant to her activity of viewing soap opera. Yet the problems portrayed (e.g. unrequited love, sibling rivalry, clinging mother) and the patterns of dealing with them (through the hopes, dreams, and forever-reversible actions of the heroines) are designed to address the viewers' own concerns.

Psychoanalytic film theory would conceive of the therapist as taking up the position of the camera, which is regarded as the focus of identification for film viewers (Flitterman-Lewis, 1987; Houston, 1985), while the patient is constructed as the object of the masculine gaze (Mulvey, 1975)[ii]. In soap opera, women also learn to see themselves through the eyes of men as the soaps fetishize women's glamorous appearance and focus on woman as spectacle (especially in weddings); consequently women are portrayed as competitive and self-hating. Incidentally, the theory of the male gaze is problematic when the hero is female: in the soap opera, the daughter/viewer are constructed as subject of the male (producer's) gaze, but the daughter's gaze further constructs the mother as other. Similarly, Bottigheimer (1987) argues, against Bettelheim, that fairy tales with male and female hero(in)es must be interpreted differently.

The subject position of women in soaps, as in therapy, is as child rather than adult. We have noted elsewhere that one rarely sees any babies in American soaps (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992), maybe because this would construe mother as self rather than mother as other. As the mothers generally are older, and have adult children, viewers are encouraged to identify with the daughter[iii] not the parent. The experience of viewing soap therefore prioritizes the therapeutic focus on the child's (viewer's) fears and fantasies in an alien world where grown-ups have the power and control. This relates to the soap's (and therapy's) fascination with secrets, particularly secrets concerning prohibited sexual relations (the third party listening outside the door or the interruption of the telephone imitates the shock and thrill of the child listening outside the parents' bedroom door). The interpretive frame used in soaps, as in psychoanalysis, assumes that the only kind of love is sexual love. Nothing is innocent, all events and acts have sexual readings (both soaps and psychoanalysis are criticised for seeing sex in everything). Soaps express the desire to return to the time before the loss of innocence by reliving the shock of discovery and of abandonment.

Where have all the mothers gone?

Mother/daughter relationships in popular culture: We have argued above that soaps and therapies can be seen as expressions of hegemonic popular culture, both of which socialize women to their dependency on men. Both constitute a daily fix, administered to women by therapists and producers, with soap's audience representing more lower class women, although certainly both men and middle class women also view[iv]. Both promote similar patriarchal messages, comforting to viewers who, in the intimacy of the situation of contact, preserve the illusion that they are being individually addressed and listened to. The soap presents fairy-tale like narratives, complete with the networks of primary attachments and the psychological attributes needed for experimenting with the limited number of options for feminine emotional development available to women. Of the various recurring narratives in soaps, we examine the central motif of the disappearance of the mothers of the young women heroines.

In foregrounding this theme, the soap opera draws on the earlier genre of the Hollywood melodrama (Feuer, 1984; Partington, 1991), in which the mother/daughter relationship has been downplayed in favor of that of the mother and son (see Cavell, 1981; Scheman, 1988; Walters, 1992). Scheman (1988) argues that the absent mother story promotes the argument that mother/daughter separation is a necessary step for growing up, that is, for falling in love. In the 1940s, the popularization of psychoanalytic theory together with women's entry into the work force provided the context for the appearance in film of the bad and often missing mother who is held responsible for her daughter's neuroses (for example, *Stella Dallas*, the symbol of self-sacrifice in favor of the daughter, and *Mildred Peirce*, who struggles against her daughter; Walters, 1992). From the Hollywood melodrama to the 1990s soap opera, the psychoanalytic theme is re-enacted: a daughter is painfully separated from her mother but emerges from suffering into a feminine sexual identity, proved by her desire for a man and celebrated through the wedding.

Mother/daughter relationships in soap opera: When charting the kinship structures in soap operas, one relationship that stands out by its frequent absence is that of the mother/daughter relationship (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992). Although mothering is still considered the most important role for women and it plays a major part in the daily lives of many viewers, whether as mothers and/or daughters, soap opera heroines are often motherless. How can this be explained? Instead of bringing up their own daughters, mothers abandon them to uncaring, sometimes cruel, step mothers, other female relatives, or awkward fathers, in order

to wield power in the world outside or to engage in new romance. The disappearing mothers -- deserted, escaped, or dead -- are often wholeheartedly hated and "bad" but are sometimes longed for and idealized. Their eventual possible reappearance facilitates a narrative pattern of either rejection and competition or of symbiosis and victimization.

Mother/daughter relationships in psychanalysis: mother as other

As Moscovici (1984) has shown, through the popularizing function of the mass media, psychoanalytic theory has filtered through into ordinary understanding (see also White, 1992). As a consequence, commonly held assumptions about identity, sexuality, the family, and relationships, as reinforced and legitimated through popular culture, are heavily influenced by ideas from psychoanalysis -- the Oedipal story, the unconscious, the crucial role of motherhood, and the significance of dreams. We suggest that the soap opera, along with other genres of popular culture (White, 1992), is implicitly informed by such ordinary understandings. Its narratives provide a convenient site for the playing out of traumas, for expressing the ways in which they are repressed or denied, and for representing the dreams and aspirations to which they give birth. Soap operas portray a cycle of longing for ideal relationships, crashing into a reality of destructive ones, only in order to start a new quest for a perfect, unachievable love.

Before offering our analysis of a soap opera narrative, let us consider in more detail the psychoanalytic theory which has filtered into the soap opera and popular culture more generally, resulting in the repeated absence or problematic presence of mother/daughter relationships in the texts. To what traumatic psychological processes do these texts refer and what emotional resonances or commonsense assumptions do they encourage or legitimate in their viewers?

In the psychoanalytic scheme, the mother\daughter relationship is part of the oedipal struggle, conceived as part of a biologically determined psychology in which the penis reigns as the symbol of power (Freud, 1988; Mitchell, 1986). Girls, on discovering their lack, blame their mother for condemning them to remain powerless, like her, and turn to the father, first with the hope of becoming like him (by having a penis), and then with the hope of having a baby. While feminists do not accept that girls feel physically castrated, they do accept that girls attach cardinal symbolic importance to the penis which, in Benjamin's (1990) words, they regard as an "emblem of the father who will help them to individuate". But fathers withdraw from their daughters, seeing them as "a sweet adorable thing, a nascent sex object", and so girls are pushed back to the mother, angry about the father's non-recognition, and, "unprotected by the phallic sign of gender difference, unsupported by an alternative relationship, they relinquish their entitlement for desire" (Benjamin, 1990).

A crucial issue for psychoanalytic theories is that of separation from the mother as the basis for individuation (Bowlby, 1965). While boys emerge out of the oedipal stage completely separate from their mothers, for girls there is no such automatic process: "women must...confront the paradoxical requirement to simultaneously separate from and identify with the mother" (Benjamin, 1990, p.121). Moreover, as Chodorow (1978) has shown, mothers are ambivalent about passing on their own unsatisfactory gender identity to their daughters and are therefore less clear about the drawing the boundaries between themselves and their daughters: they keep their daughters both more attached and less nurtured than their sons.

Consequently, a conflict between daughter and mother, leading to total separation (literal and symbolic), becomes seen as necessary and crucial to the daughter's growing up -- "a

wrenching experience" involving "a renunciation of her belief in her mothers' power, and her hope for her own" (Benjamin, 1990) has to be suffered in order to get to "the other side" of men and marriage. A continuing mother/daughter bond is the sign for immaturity in the daughter and of clinging, possessiveness or overprotectiveness in the mother (Benjamin, 1990). Thus, the mother is culturally posited as "the other", as regressive, archaic, and irrational, in opposition to the progressive, oedipal, rational father (and husband). Rich (1977) accuses patriarchy for making the mother/daughter relationship into a form of repression which alienates women from their own bodies. The mother's victimization passes on to her daughter and many daughters are angry at their mothers' passive submission to their lot. Women cannot respect themselves or their mothers in a society which humiliates them. Many of the pleasures which women find in soap opera implicitly serve to socialize them to the subject positioning for women central to this psychoanalytic account, furthering the patriarchal relations between men and women which Chodorow and others describe, without providing space for oppositional voices or alternative accounts of these relations and identities.

Missing mothers in soap opera narratives

Analyzing the text of The Young and The Restless: Proceeding inductively from an analysis of a randomly selected series of episodes from *The Young and the Restless*, we examined the soap's treatment of the mothering of young women in comparison to the mothering of young men. *The Young and The Restless* fits the category of true soap opera (Cantor and Pingree, 1983). Produced since 1973 for CBS, it is targeted at housewives, with an emphasis on dialogue rather than visual content. Our analysis, presented below, was checked against episodes and storylines from a range of other, mainly American, daytime soap operas such as *Guiding Light*, *As The World Turns*, *General Hospital*, *One Life to Live*, and primetime soaps such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* and the Australian soap opera *Neighbours*. As the number of episodes analyzed increased, the picture inevitably became more complex, yet the underlying theme became clearer, with different soaps and different storylines within each soap serving to better ground our analysis. The frequent absence of the mother provides a significant clue, demonstrating that the soap opera is not a "realistic" genre. It is exactly the unnaturalness of this pattern that signals a culturally significant representation: through missing mother narratives soaps express popular resonances of the convoluted emotional path of the mother/daughter relationship[v].

Two storylines alternate throughout the selected episodes of *The Young and The Restless*: our examples are drawn mainly from the former. (1) Nina Webster is on the point of marriage to Phillip Chancellor, who is the father of her baby (Phillip Jr.). Phillip's adoptive parents who raised him, the infertile Catherine and Rex, are making arrangements for the wedding. His returned biological mother, Jill Abbott, attempts to prevent it by paying Chase, a former lover of Nina, to seduce Nina. Danny (Rex's son) and Cricket (Phillip's ex-girlfriend) support Nina and Phillip over their planned wedding, and eventually Nina and Phillip are married. (2) Paul Williams is having an affair with Cassandra Rollins, who, initially unknown to Paul, is married to his business associate, George Rollins. Paul's mother persuades him to end the affair, but before Paul can tell Cassandra, George dies, apparently murdered. Paul's father is the detective who investigates George's death, following the alert by George's niece and Paul's friend, Brittany. Suspicion that Paul has killed George grows; we later discover it was suicide, designed to incriminate Paul.

Witches and bitches: The parallel between fairy tale witch and soap opera 'bitch' (often a stepmother in both fairy tale and soap) may be seen through Bettelheim's analysis of Hansel

and Gretel. The child's (viewer's) fears that her parents will desert her because of her own badness are expressed through projection, resulting in a belief that the (step)mother has become unloving and selfish. Bettelheim offers a similar analysis of Cinderella, showing how sibling rivalry results from the child's fear of rejection by the parents, while the vileness of the stepmother and stepsisters reassures the child that she or he has value despite feelings of worthlessness. As most adult women have been socialized into feelings of guilt and inadequacy, the evil characters in the soaps may similarly express these anxieties, and maybe serve to reassure.

Like the fairy tale, the soap opera teaches that one must move forwards rather than turning back, and that one must rely on peers rather than parents (although sibling relations are often treacherous), as seen in predominance of horizontal rather than cross-generational links between characters in the soap kinship structures (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992). Having constructed the (step)mother as other, often as bitch, the soaps (and fairy tales) offer some images of women's active resistance (Gretel pushes the witch into the oven). Yet the soap teases rather than reassures, as the lack of resolution in soaps means that the viewer is never sure whether the witch will return (Houston, 1985).

Mothers and patrilineage: The missing mother in soap opera supports the broadly patriarchal framework which is concerned with lineage, inheritance, and definitions of the family boundaries (Liebes and Katz, 1990)[vi]. Women in soap operas, as elsewhere, join the husband's family on marriage (and bear rather more baby sons than daughters). For Cavell (1981), the focus on patrilineage perpetuates the myth that women are created by, and belong to, men. Male characters (especially the rich ones) more often have one or both parents present while young women often come from unknown backgrounds and must rely on peers or in-laws. In *The Young and The Restless*, Nina lacks a mother and is about to gain two mother-in-laws, one of whom is very unsupportive. Consequently, adult daughters and male babies have different concerns about their parentage: the adult daughter is concerned for her identity (understood through relations with the mother) and so asks, 'who (or where) is my real mother?'; the patriarchal community is concerned to ask of the male baby, 'who is his real father?'.

Relations with the mother: Gilligan (1993) argues that "since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation" (p.8). Soaps explore the negotiation of identity for both genders by having mothers, typically, present for sons and absent for daughters. Thus women struggle with femininity in soaps -- as explored through the missing mother and the problem of merged ego boundaries between mother and daughter (Chodorow, 1978), while men struggle with masculinity -- as explored through their relations and conflicts with their sometimes multiple present/real/good mothers or mother-figures.

Mothers of sons: In our episodes from *The Young and The Restless*, the three mothers all look after their sons. Paul has a good and real mother to lean on, as well as two grown up women concerned for him (Cassandra and Brittany). Phillip has two mothers organizing his life -- a bad (i.e. sexual) but 'real' (i.e. biological) mother and a good (i.e. caring), but less 'real' (i.e. adoptive) one. The narratives illustrate the dangers for sons of intimacy with women. Both men are deeply attached to and respectful of their mothers. As Paul says to his mother: "I listen to you. Even though I don't necessarily agree with what you're saying. Because you're my mother and because I have an awful lot of respect for you". Phillip expresses no anger at his mother's disappearance and is grateful to her, ironically, for returning and organising his wedding. Yet, this respect for the mother leads us to question the maturity and manliness of

both men: one sacrifices his lover for his mother[vii], one fails to suspect his mother's treachery over his wedding. Phillip has believed Jill when she says:

> "See, you have to understand something about mothers, about this mother. I only want what's best for you. And for that reason it may sometimes seem that I intrude on your life a little bit, become too involved, maybe a touch manipulative. But it's only that I care so much for you".

Mothers of daughters: In general, we know little of the mothers of central female compared to those of male characters[viii]. The three main 'daughter' characters in this soap opera, Nina, Cricket, and Brittany, have no apparent mothers. We already know that Cricket was abandoned by her mother[ix], we learn in the present episode that Nina too was rejected by her mother when young (consider also Pam and Sue Ellen in *Dallas*, Phoebe in *Neighbours*). They have had to find men to care for them: Brittany lives with her uncle George; Cricket has Danny, and Nina is choosing a husband from Phillip and Chase (similarly, Jim Robinson, whose wife Anne died, brings up Lucy in *Neighbours*).

Mothers of daughters in soaps are rarely good, real and present: rather different combinations of these characteristics are combined in any one mother-figure: they are good or bad (frequently colour-coded blonde and brunette, as in fairy tales), they are real (i.e. biological mothers) or unreal (i.e. foster or adoptive mothers, or other relatives, especially aunts, and sometimes mistakenly supposed to be 'real' by the daughters) and they are present or absent (disappearing and reappearing for long periods at a time). The absence of real, good and present mother poses problems for their daughters: who is the real mother, whom can she trust, will she disappear, can she be forgiven, will one reproduce her problems? The soap opera thus represents the daughter's perennial complaint against the mother: "you were never there for me when I was growing up", her 'absence' in the soap opera being literal, emotional or moral[x].

When Danny and Cricket suggest bringing her mother to the wedding, Nina gives a passionate rejection of the bad mother:

> "Danny, I don't want to seem ungrateful, but my mother is the last person I'd want to see at my wedding...Even if I knew how to get hold of her, I wouldn't bother. She couldn't care less...Look, I know I sound terrible, but I can't help the way I feel. I can't just forgive and forget...You know, I was just a kid when she shoved me out the door and said 'Good luck, you're on your own'. From then on, I blocked that part of my life out of my mind. I just decided I didn't have a family, you know?".

In the soap opera, opposed aspects of the mother remain separate and in conflict, appearing and disappearing and thereby continuing the unchanging narrative. One aim of therapy is to help the daughter perceive the complexity of her mother with both good and bad aspects, and to resolve her own ambivalence towards her mother. The soap opera provides a therapeutic space for women to face their anxieties about being valued or deserted, but the viewer is never impelled to overcome the splitting of the mother or to recognise (and possibly challenge) their desire for the father and for romance. While the absent mother allows the viewer (in the subject position of daughter) to enjoy a sense of freedom and a separate identity independent of her mother (which Chodorow, 1978, argues is elusive in reality), the return of the soap mother tests this autonomy. At this point the daughter is often shown to fail as the mother returns to manipulate or undermine the daughter's life[xi].

Motherhood versus romance: We have argued elsewhere (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992) that soap opera presents the relations between women's roles -- as mother, lover and career women -- as conflictual. The pre-wedding scenes in *The Young and The Restless* present two opposed images of the woman as mother which differently prioritize motherhood and romance by personifying a contradiction between the real mother and the good mother. The struggle between Jill and Catherine dramatises the difficulties for women in being both caring and sexual, selfless and self-independent. Jill, the biological mother is a younger, sexual, glamorous, dynamic brunette, while Catherine, the adoptive mother is older, quiet, rather faded. Jill, having had her illegitimate son, Phillip, then abandoned him to engage in a series of romantic affairs. She returns to prevent his marriage and so re-establish her powerful bond with her now-adult, attractive son. The good mother is shown as weak, barely understanding what is going on -- a position the viewer can identify with. For example, Jill ridicules Catherine to Rex: "Oh Rex, you must admit she does watch over you like a mother-hen. The poor woman must be terribly insecure", at which point she adjusts his tie flirtatiously. The women are seen competing for the same man: Jill says to Rex, "how does it feel to be standing next to a real woman?", and describes Catherine as "too old for him".

As Nina and Phillip also have a baby son, the concerns over motherhood continue into the next generation: will Nina mother baby Phillip Jr. as Catherine did his father or will she choose to abandon his welfare and follow the path of Jill and of her own mother. Paradoxically, Jill tries to push Nina towards her own position -- the romance with the rogue (Chase) -- but for the wrong reasons, out of her own motherly concern for Phillip (for she considers Nina not worthy of him). The conversation between Nina and Chase on the eve of the wedding directly contrasts motherhood and romance as a woman's goal:

Nina: I've got a baby to think about.

Chase: Well, babies grow up, Nina, and then what?

Nina: To what am I supposed to do? A child needs his father. I can't just keep thinking about myself and good times.

Chase: Would you listen to what you are saying? You are marrying Phillip to give your child a father.

Nina: What's wrong with that?

Chase: I will tell you what's wrong with that. What happens when the kid grows up and goes off to school? What are you left with? Just you and Phillip. And then you are going to realize that that guy you're married to to be a father to your baby is not your best friend, is not your lover. Can you really spend the rest of your life with the guy?...You want excitement and passion, not just a father for your baby. Come on, just admit it.

In reaching her decision, Nina fantasies about life with Phillip and with Chase through two dream sequences which contrast security/motherhood and romance. Viewers know that both dreams are flawed: Nina doesn't love Phillip, Chase doesn't love Nina. The twin fantasies reflect the split woman: with Phillip, Nina fantasises being the loving, secure, domestic mother; with Chase, the baby has disappeared and Nina can indulge her selfish, romantic, sexual self. Viewers hear the above scene from a position of knowledge regarding Chase's dishonest motives and so they are drawn to favour the security offered by Phillip, flirting with the idea of romance while acknowledging its impossibility. After an inner struggle, Nina opts for security and for becoming a good/real/present mother. The subject position of the viewer is Nina's: we are invited to worry for her that Jill will triumph over Catherine and disrupt her marriage, and we know that in the never-ending soap, marriages don't last (it is not accidental that the story of Nina and Phillip's marriage is alternated with that of Paul and Cassandra's adultery). While the

mothers are concerned with the male line -- husband, son and grandson[xii], the viewer is concerned for the daughter in the middle, Nina, and cares little for Phillip or the baby.

The consequences of missing mothers for grown-up daughters: The motherless women are portrayed as still suffering from their loss, offering a voice to the continuing pain and anger felt by viewers as daughters towards their own mothers. The soap daughters are shown to need further nurturing, and the conventions of the soap (and of the culture more broadly) prescribe that they seek this through relations with men. However, as men rarely offer sufficient, sustained nurturing (Chodorow, 1978), women continually desire new romance: their vulnerability makes them appear immoral. In addition to seeking dependency relations with men, women in soap sustain competitive rather than nurturing relationships with women: the suggestion is that women have weak identities, lack power, cannot trust each other, and do not respect each other (Benjamin, 1990; Chodorow, 1978). In the narratives, empathetic relations between women are continually undermined through women's primary concerns with men. For example, when Cricket and Danny help plan her wedding, far from assuming their caring concern for her, Nina suspects a conspiracy and reacts with hostility: "what are you whispering about?" (indeed Nina is surrounded by female conspiracies, as Jill has paid Chase to prevent the wedding and as Cricket is a previous lover of Phillip).

Through these narratives, the soap opera offers viewers several psychological theories. The first concerns the power of childhood experiences: the absence of the mother affects the daughter in her subsequent relationships, forever recycling the original trauma. The second is that feminine maturity is achieved only through marriage (for the viewer knows that the exciting, sexy image of adventure and romance with Chase cannot be sustained). Nina has been transformed by her meeting with Phillip from an insufferable, material girl to a mature, self-aware woman: if she accepts selfless femininity with a safe and reliable man, she need never be alone again, a need which had been betrayed in childhood when her mother deserted her. As the first theory has a built-in recycling of narratives, it can be sustained, but the genre both promotes and undermines the second theory: while the ideal of marriage is continually held out for women, it cannot be sustained (the soap must go on, and, as Chodorow argues, men cannot succeed in the nurturing role). A third theory is also relevant here, namely that repressed desires will resurface at a later time, in a disruptive fashion.

For example, Cricket and Danny discuss Nina's unhappy childhood but are optimistic because "now she's got her man, her life is going to be roses from now on". Yet the viewer is uncertain: can Nina provide the stability for her child that she herself lacked, or will she be swayed into romance with Chase or future lovers? As she already has a child, she 'should' sacrifice her own romantic desires. But repressed desires will, the viewer knows, erupt at some point to destroy the hoped-for future stability.

Marriage as (temporary) resolution: The wedding in soap opera provides a focal event which triggers a range of traumas and conflicts. Old alignments must be renegotiated and everyone redefines their positions. The wedding makes apparent the kinship network which connects them all: it is also, therefore, a moment in which the primacy of patriarchal themes are re-established over any matriarchal or subversive messages in the soap opera (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992).

The wedding is also an emotional focus, drawing out the feelings of all -- competition, seduction, hatred, love, jealousy. The effect is heightened by a classic tension over whether or not the bride will appear. In our example from *The Young and The Restless*, during this prolonged moment of uncertainty, Chase seduces Nina, Jill seduces Rex, Catherine denies that the baby is Nina's, and some of the wedding guests relive their own weddings. Weddings, then,

provide a vehicle for replaying past and future traumas, for making visible identities and relationships, for expressing emotions. While conventionally, a wedding is a positive outcome, evidencing emotional maturity and the achievement of appropriate sexual and gender identity, in soaps this outcome is only temporary. As the viewers know, while marriages form the goal of soap relationships, they nearly always break down, repeatedly demonstrating immaturity, problematic identity, and emotional conflict of the characters.

Conclusions

We have drawn on the psychoanalytic paradigm not in order to assert its usefulness in accounting for mother\daughter relationships but to analyze the soaps as telling a cultural story which ensnares women. Through dissemination and legitimation in popular culture, we suggest that psychoanalysis informs and supports the patriarchal framework through which women understand themselves. This cultural narrative is made visible through its relentless repetitiveness, despite many variations and permutations, throughout the genre of soap opera[xiii].

Never-ending repetition: While the soap opera appears open in its never-ending narratives -- all digressions, no final conclusions, nonetheless each new narrative recycles the same underlying conservative message concerning women's psychic problems. The dominant impression is of repetition -- of missing mothers, dependence on men, self-destructiveness in women, failure of romantic and nurturing relationships, impermanence of marriage, self-sacrificial good mother versus the egoistic bad mother, etc, with no hope of escape or alternative resolutions. The soap cannot emerge from its world of fantasy and so the viewer cannot get to work on the nitty gritty of achievable relationships. To sustain the drama the soap must stay within the fantasy. There is no therapeutic end-point, only another crisis for another day, and the promise of happiness is always deferred or betrayed (Cavell, 1981). In this respect, the lack of resolutions celebrated in the feminist literature as openness, as potentially subversive and empowering (e.g. Nochimson, 1992; Seiter, 1981), becomes negative (as indeed, the early critics of soaps argued).

Fathers and daughters, mothers and daughters: The mother-daughter relationship in soap opera is continually downplayed in comparison with the father-daughter relationship. While mothers represent regression to narcissism and infantilism, fathers represent acceptance of femininity and the achievement of a mature gender identity. Here the soap opera continues the socialization of little girls in the fairy tale: Hansel and Gretel vanquish both stepmother and witch and return to their father; Cinderella and the Sleeping Beauty triumph over their female adversaries and marry the handsome prince. The daughter often must undergo her own journey, but the goal is always a man, he completes the woman and the story. According to psychoanalysis, this resolution offers the opportunity for the child/viewer to face her fears of loss or inadequacy and to accept the (patriarchal) solution open to her.

Therapeutic explorations of the self: Within this overall restrictive framework, it can also be argued that while therapy is available only to the rich, soap opera may provide therapy for the poor. It provides a sense of exclusivity and space to express one's fantasies, and although the genre encourages women to make use of those fantasies prescribed to women by the culture, it allows for some recognition of and engagement with their desires and anxieties. For example, in soaps, the continual coupling, uncoupling, aligning and disappearing allows an exploration of the social definition of self, as problematically both separate and yet connected. As Hoggart (1957) noted, the period before marriage represents a temporary freedom for women, before they settle down to the routine scraping ignored by American soaps. The soap

opera maximises this period of freedom in women's lives through the cycle of marriage and remarriage (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992), and it recognises the fallacy of 'happy ever after'. However, it explores the processes of separating and connecting, with their momentary freedoms and attendant emotions, but fails to offer any specific sense of self. The genre treats relationships as a game of 'musical chairs'. in the soap opera, relations among women are treacherous rather than supportive, relations between women and men remain selfless for women and selfish for men, and all relationships lack content -- it is the fact of relationship which is significant, rather than the exploration of ways of relating which permit the construction of satisfactory or problematic identities. Thus the soaps maintain a paradox, recognising and yet never fulfilling women's need for a sense of self.

The viewers' experience: We suggest that women view the soap opera on two levels. On one level, the soap opera viewer is active (Hobson, 1982; Liebes and Katz, 1990; Livingstone, 1990): she talks of becoming involved in the characters lives, of following and predicting the narratives, of speculating about the details of relationships, of drawing analogies with their own lives, etc. The fascination is that of the minutiae of relationship development (she did such and such, and then he said this, and then she...) through which Gilligan (1993) suggests that women negotiate their connectedness to each other and hence generate a contextualized, relational sense of self. This aspect of viewing is concerned with the 'realism' of soaps, and with a playful pleasure in their narratives and characters.

But this is not to contradict viewing on a more unconscious level in which viewers may respond also to the repetitive socialising messages of women's dependence on men, of their location in the personal sphere, their unreliability (they may disappear at any time) and their uncertain relations with others (treacherous relations with women, temporary relations with men)[xiv]. While the active level of viewing allows the viewer to adopt a variety of subject positions -- engaging in parasocial interaction with diverse characters in a complex kinship network, on the more unconscious level, the viewer is expected to take for granted being constructed as the daughter, dealing with the mother as other, and yet accept the legitimate prioritization of motherhood over romance and career.

For example, the soap opera uses dramatic irony (for example, when Danny calls Nina, torn between Phillip and Chase, 'the happiest girl in the world') to draw in the viewer tightly, heightening the tension, flattering them that they know more than the characters. This enticement of the 'active viewer' generate the intimacy which is central to the therapeutic, maybe emancipatory, function of the viewing experience. But this intimacy also encourages acceptance of the soap's normative framing of the characters' (and viewers') dilemmas; indeed this acceptance is required if viewers are to share the pleasurable emotions -- tension and relief -- of the narrative.

Women's voices in the soap opera: Gilligan (1993) argues that women, experiencing their self-identity crisis later than men (in adolescence rather than early childhood), articulate the crisis of identity development and authentic voice for both genders. One might then expect women's popular culture to express these crises. And indeed, if as Gilligan argues, men learn to leave out women, while women learn to leave out themselves, the soap opera is liberating for putting women's experience and struggles center stage. Soaps both promote traditional ideals of femininity and counter these by expressing and legitimating women's desires. We have argued that mothers of daughters in soaps are rarely present, real and good, yet this makes visible the contradiction inherent in this triple expectation of mothers: to be good, woman must be absent (selfless), to be real, she must be good and bad (not split). Narratives of the missing mother explore the consequences of women's disappearances and reappearances; when absent, women

see how their men and family become fickle, when present, they are rejected as selfish.

However, the lesson to be learnt by women viewers is not hopeful. Men -- via romance -- dominate the whole scheme of things, even if their roles in the narrative are secondary. The narratives tell of woman's place in the male narrative and of the consequences for her of acceptance or resistance of that position. The texts are not closed, spaces exist for women's authentic voice and for women to explore central emotional issues (Livingstone, 1990; Liebes and Katz, 1990). However, in the soap opera, all that women can ultimately do is to repeat the same mistakes over and again, all is subordinated to the never-ending desire for identity through relationships with men, and conflicts can never be finally resolved as they must remain to perpetuate the narrative for another day.

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Endnotes

i...For example, a Russian immigrant in Israel notes that without watching Dallas regularly, one cannot take part in conversation the next day and thus one has no chance of becoming an Israeli (Liebes and Katz, 1990). The same is said to be true of The Young and The Restless in Trinidad (Miller, 1992).

ii...There is a problem in the theory of the male gaze when the hero is female: in the soap opera, the daughter and viewer are constructed as subject of the male (producer's) gaze, but her gaze further constructs the mother as other. Similarly, Bottigheimer (1987) argues against Bettelheim's analysis of fairy tales that fairy tales with male heros must be interpreted differently from those with female heroines--the two are not equivalent.

iii...This is not true in the British soap operas, where babies are highly visible, and so the subject position is that of adult woman as mother, facing the difficulties of balancing the needs of herself, her family, and her career (Liebes and Livingstone, 1992).

iv..Audience ratings show consistently that soap operas are watched significantly more often by women than men and by lower class than by middle class viewers (Livingstone, 1990).

v...Baudrillard argues that disappearance is the major trait of our times, signifying the end of history, of progress, of grand narrative (Bauman, 1992, p.49).

vi...For example, in *Guiding Light*, one episode alternates between three stories centering on (patriarchal) fathers (Hampton Speakes' attempt to control the sexual activities of his daughter Catherine, Alan Michael Spalding's concern for his unborn child--assumed to be a son and heir, and Michelle's caring for her sick father, Ed Bauer, explicitly taking the place of her absent mother at the cost of school attendance).

vii..One might say that he fails to resolve the Oedipal situation he faces by transferring his love for his mother to a sexual partner.

viii...To give examples from one other soap opera, in *General Hospital*, we know the mothers of Dr. Tom Harding, Dr. Alan Quartermain and his sons A.J. and Jason. While Leila Quartermain's daughter Tracy is present, Lucy Coe has no mother, having been brought up by her aunt Charlene, Dr. Monica Quartermain, Felicia Jones, Honor Domain, Simone Harding and others have no visible mothers. Further, as Lucy's aunt supports her sons more than her niece, as Monica's mother-in-law is not particularly supportive of her, as Tracy's mother is continually critical of her, in none of these cases is any positive mother-daughter relationship portrayed, in contrast to the relationships between mothers and sons.

Cricket's mother later reappears, a prostitute who contracts Aids: in this example and many
ers, the theme of punishment for 'bad' mothers is strong.

Split conceptions of mothers circulate in the culture more generally: a study of real life
her/daughter relationships reveals similarly dichotomous discourses of adult daughters regarding
r mothers (Henwood, 1993) -- as bad, overprotective, neglectful.

xi...For example, in *General Hospital*, Dr. Monica Quartermain abandoned her daughter to an orphanage some 25 years ago and repressed any memory of her existence. Eventually the daughter reappears to form a good relationship with her mother, but this serves to break up the mother's marriage. A few years later the daughter drowns. In *One Life To Live*, Vicky Buchanan abandons her daughter Megan under pressure from her father. When Megan returns as an adult, she expresses her anger to her mother, but later dies in an accident.

xii...This is a common theme in soap opera. For example, Miss Ellie in *Dallas* and Alexis Carrington in *Dynasty* have similar worries (Liebes and Katz, 1990).

xiii...Storylines which parallel that analyzed here from *The Young and The Restless* abound in soap opera. For example, in recent episodes of *Neighbours* (5/11/93, BBC1), Phoebe and Steve decide to get married so as to provide a family for their future baby (she is 7 months pregnant). Phoebe declares that she will not invite her mother, who abandoned her as a baby, to the wedding.

.While much audience research on the soap opera has been conducted to date, researchers have ıte been so concerned to explore divergent or oppositional readings that viewers' responses to underlying hegemonic aspects of the genre have been neglected. Our present analysis would ;est that future audience research should examine more closely the relation between normative oppositional aspects of viewers' interpretations (although see Livingstone, 1990; Radway, 4).